

Cross-Cultural Perspectives from the Director



Seeing the Roses through the Thorns

My target is clearly in focus. You are there, in our vast global harvest field, feeling the frustration, irritation, and pain of a spiritual thorn in your side or splinter in your finger. I have prayed for you and desperately want to encourage you. Thorns and splinters are a barbed branch of our personal, spiritual, and ministerial growth process.

Like any field, thorns come with the territory. So, what will we do with these prickly problems? It's basic. Identify the problem for what it is. Turn to the Word. Turn to prayer. Look to God. His grace is sufficient.

Another missionary—Paul—experienced what we often feel. He contentedly stated, “There was given me a thorn (a splinter) in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to rack and buffet and harass me...” (2 Corinthians 12:10, *AMP*). Another translation said, “Since I know it is all for Christ’s good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (*NLT*).

Paul’s thorn—a messenger of Satan—was designed to discourage, derail, and destroy him. Its intent was to hinder his work, annihilate his influence, and stunt the growth of the church. He prayed God would remove this impediment. Satan does his best to pull us down. But, we are not ignorant of his tactics (2 Corinthians 2:11). The ironic thing is, he succeeds yet fails: he pushes us to our knees. Prayer is the best remedy for any

trouble. It gives us fresh perspective. It puts the proverbial ball in God's court. Paul accepted his thorn as a gift. Great success causes great retaliation. Opposition to the gospel is reason for encouragement and evidence that the Spirit of God is at work. The devil fights feverishly to preserve his falling and failing kingdom.

What are your thorns? The list for missionaries could be lengthy. Unfortunately, some thorns are not just things, but people. I'll leave it to you to fill in the blank: My thorn in the flesh is: _____.

Paul recognized problems for what they were and also saw his own shortcomings. He proceeded despite both disclosures. It takes God's grace to deal with sharp situations without becoming cynical, negative, fearful, vindictive or revengeful. His limitations cut him down to size and built him up to deeper dependence on our able God. Under the pinch of pain, before yelling, "Ouch!" look for the positive. Accept problems as gifts that make you better; instead of curses that make you bitter. Thorns strengthen, stretch, perfect, clarify motives, and check our commitment level. So please don't be tempted to pull out your white handkerchief and start waving it while shouting, "I surrender. I give up. Take me home! Or send me somewhere else!"

Faced with trouble, some grow wings; others buy crutches. Some see lemonade; others a lemon. Some see roses; others only thorns.

May the Lord help us to see the roses through the thorns.