

Jesus' healing power in Nazareth could not take effect because of the people's lack of faith. The Gospel informs us that Jesus could not work any miracles there; he just cured some of the sick.

Why some and why not all? Because some may have been too full of themselves. Hence Paul's celebration that when we are weak, empty of ourselves, God will work his miracles.

It's the most dreaded question of the job interview, and when the time comes, you can't seem to push the words out of your mouth. "Tell me," the interviewer asks, "what's your greatest weakness?"

How do you answer that question? If you don't come up with something, you sound arrogant, but if you come clean with your weakness, they might not hire you.

Job search websites describes a variety of strategies for answering that question. One approach is to disguise your weakness as strength or minimize it: "I tend to be overly task oriented but have learned the value of working as a team to do so."

Another strategy is to share a real weakness, but make sure it is completely irrelevant to the position. If you're applying for an accounting position, for example, you don't want to admit that you're not a detail person.

Revealing our weaknesses is one of the last things in the world we want to do, whether we're looking for a job, pursuing a relationship, or just talking to friends. We don't like to admit our weaknesses to ourselves, let alone to other people. That's why we stack our résumés with degrees earned, awards received, and professional accomplishments.

There's no heading for "Weaknesses and Liabilities" on most résumés. If you're placing an add on match.com, you're probably not going to lead with, "I'm looking for a relationship that will last longer than my previous five marriages."

But who are we kidding? We know we have weaknesses, and so does everyone else. After all, we're only jars of clay. We're not stainless-steel pots that never scratch, rust, or dent.

We're ordinary, fragile, imperfect vessels that happen to be carrying within us a treasure called the life of Christ. As long as we have that life within us, we are unbreakable, even in the face of hardship, heartache, and need. Every clay pot comes with weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and imperfections.

Paul figured out something that a lot of Christians never understand: you will learn a whole lot more about God in the thorns of life.

Did you notice that God tells Paul that the thorn was given to him, but Paul calls it a messenger of Satan?

The truth is that often the very same event is used by God to strengthen you, and by Satan to tempt you. The very things the Devil uses to tempt you and to cause you to fall, God simultaneously uses to strengthen you to show himself as powerful in you.

Paul's request that it be removed credits God with the power to remove it, but the denial of the request helps Paul understand the paradoxical relationship of power and weakness.

However, the good news is that Jesus affirms that all of our suffering will be accompanied by the grace of endurance. God's grace is totally sufficient for all of our thorns, problems and troubles. He says when you're weak, when you need it, he'll give it to you. He will give us the appropriate grace to face what we need.

For example, God doesn't give martyrs' grace to secretaries. They don't need it. He gives secretaries secretaries' grace. But you let that secretary become a martyr and God will give her martyrs' grace.

Paul shows us that whatever we go through in life, our thorns can shape who we are. I'm convinced that Paul would never have been Paul without that thorn in his side.

You take someone who's had fortunate circumstances at every turn in life, however energetic he may be in his service to others, there are things he could never in his life do that Helen Keller could.

Paul owned his weakness and allowed God turned it into a strength. Weaknesses can keep us dependent on Christ and allow him to shine through us in ways he couldn't if we were always healthy and strong.

When we are lonely or insecure, for example, we are more likely to turn to Christ to find that security. It's perfectly natural for someone who's been healed of a disease to stand and give thanks, but it's amazing to hear someone give thanks in the midst of disease.

God allowed this thorn in order to protect Paul from pride and to bring greater glory to God's name and accomplish a greater purpose. What might be your thorn?

Sometimes God allows suffering into our lives in order to accomplish some greater good—something we may never understand in this life. Now, obviously we should all first ask for God's healing and ask others to pray for us, as did Paul.

And yet, despite all those prayers, sometimes when we ask God to take something away, God says, "Not yet." He will eventually heal and restore and deliver; if not in this life, then in the life to come.

We will all experience moments when, after persistent and believing prayer, it becomes evident that God is doing something we can't understand and wouldn't choose. We should recognize that God has a greater purpose in mind. Then we will discover that God's grace is sufficient for

anything we may experience. And in that, we shall find the peace and strength that Paul discovered and be better for it.