

2 Corinthians 12:7-10
Epiphany 6; February 13, 2022

Why? I wonder if that is the most asked question in the world? Even though it is a question that can be asked about many different things, I bet we have all asked that question. This past week, I heard a little story about a parakeet. His name was Chippy. His owner was cleaning out his cage with a vacuum cleaner. As he was cleaning out the bottom of his cage, his phone rang. He got distracted as he reached down to answer it. You can almost guess what happened next. The hose got a little too close to Chippy, and then he heard the sound of “thump.”

The owner knew what he had accidentally done. He threw the phone aside, and tore open the bag on the vacuum cleaner. There was Chippy, covered with dust and gasping for air. He took Chippy to the bathroom to wash him off. But it was taking too long for the water to get warm, so he washed Chippy with the cold water. Chippy sat on the sink shivering in the cold. So, his owner reached for the blow dryer to dry him off and warm him up. It was a big day for Chippy.

The next day a friend called on the phone and asked: *“How is Chippy doing?”* The man answered, *“Chippy doesn’t sing anymore. He just kind of sits there and stares.”* The story isn’t real, but the feelings are. We have all gone through times that we know how Chippy feels. There are times that we are singing along in life, and then we get sucked up, smothered, washed out and blown away. Sometimes, we know exactly how Chippy feels. Then we come along and asked that question of God: *“Why?”* When you look at the words of our text, I think, Paul is asking that question as well: *“Why?”* Therefore, let us look at these words of Paul and see how God’s Grace is Found in Thorns.

Satan tries to use those *“thorns”* to get us to question God’s love. **“Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.”** What are those *“thorns?”* Thorns may be some kind of trial that simply doesn’t seem to go away. They can be those things can be painful. Think of all the things that the Apostle Paul had gone through. He had been shipwrecked, beaten, tossed into prison, gone without food or water. Yet, this **“thorn”** here seems to be something different than all the other things that he had experienced. Whatever this thorn was, it seemed to get the best of him at times. It seemed to be something that just kept on jabbing him. Satan wanted Paul to doubt God’s love.

People have tried to figure out what this **“thorn”** was because Paul doesn’t tell us. Some have suggested that it may have been some kind of temptation that got the best of him at times. Others, have said that it may have been a physical ailment that just got the best of him. Some, have suggested that it might have been his sight that was going. In his letter to the Galatians, he might have hinted at that when he wrote: **“I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.”** (Gal. 4:15) and **“See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!”** (Gal. 6:11) For a man who loved to read and to write, imagine how difficult it would be for him to do that as he carried out his work. Maybe? The bottom line is that we just don’t know. Whatever it was, he felt like it was evil coming from Satan himself to keep him from carrying out his work like he wanted to do.

So, what do we do with evil? That’s a big *“why”* question, isn’t it? We know what God’s Word tells us. We know that God is in control of all things. We know that God does not create evil. We know that evil is the absence of God’s goodness. Yet, what happens when evil happens to ME? It becomes harder to see God’s purpose in allowing thorns to come into our life. God doesn’t tell us all the feelings that Paul must have had with this thorn in his life. But it must have been significant for him to tell us that he had **“pleaded with the Lord to take it away.”** We can just imagine what Paul must have said in those prayers. *“I can be a better missionary without this thorn. I’ll be able to travel further. I can write more letters.”* I’m sure he had a lot more good reasons to ask God to remove this thorn. But God said: **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”**

Satan not only wants us to doubt God’s love, he wants us to doubt God’s forgiveness. He wants us to think that maybe when those thorns are there in our lives that maybe God is paying us back for something we had done against him. God doesn’t tell us that Paul felt this way, but one can only imagine that he may have. After all, he had tried with all his strength to destroy the Christian Church earlier in his life. It’s a thought that passes through the minds of Christians today as they look at the thorn in their lives and ask the question: *“Why? Maybe God is simply paying me back for all the*

bad things I did. God could never love someone like me, could he? If God operated that way, we would all be in trouble, wouldn't we?

God wants us to know that he may use thorns for his purposes. Paul could see that in his life. In the verses right before our text Paul writes: ¹ **I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord.** ² **I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows.** ³ **And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—** ⁴ **was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.”** We don't even know what Paul is even meaning in these words. But if there was ever a person that could have boasted in what he had seen, it could have been Paul. Yet, Paul says: **“Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh.”** Even in allowing a thorn in Paul's life, he was allowing it to keep his prophet safe.

God may use thorns to protect us. The thought crossed my mind this week: *Why do roses have thorns? (Maybe, it's an upcoming Valentine's Day thing.)* So, I googled around. The best that I could come up with is that *“it is believed that roses have thorns to protect them from being eaten by animals who might be attracted to them due to their sweet fragrance.”* Makes sense to me. If that makes sense about roses, just imagine what that means for God's love for us.

God's answer to the *why* question: **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”** If you doubt that, just look at Jesus and the cross. See the pain he endured all for us. There we see that we are stronger by relying on God's strengths in our weaknesses and thorns of our life. May God grant that we trust these words of God. Amen.