

MAGNOLIA MINDS: Living with thorns

By Austin Woodward



Woodward

What kind of thorns are pricking you? Probably a weird question if you're not a gardener (and maybe it still is a weird question, but stick with me... pun not intended).

When we get thorns, we obviously want to remove them as quickly as possible. Consider the question above in light of what the Apostle Paul says 2 Corinthians 12:7, where he mentions he has "a thorn in flesh; a messenger from Satan." We never find out about this specific thorn, but we do know that Paul doesn't waste it.

Yes, he does try to pull out the thorn by asking three times for the Lord to remove it (2 Corinthians 12:8). He did not want this thing that was causing him so much torment, but the Lord didn't answer his plea. At least, not in the way Paul initially requested.

The Lord responds to Paul (2 Cor. 12: 9) and tells him, "My grace is sufficient for my power is made perfect in weakness," as the Lord apparently leaves the thorn in place.

This passage of Scripture has been on my mind a lot lately as I deal with my personal thorn: depression. I was diagnosed in 2018 and to keep a long story short, it was painful. Through

the Lord giving people great minds to counsel and to develop antidepressants, I have learned to live with this thorn.

Now, understand some days are still harder than others. There are nights that, like Paul, I have begged the Lord to take it away but in His sovereignty, it remains.

Why? In 2 Corinthians 1:8-9, Paul recounts a time of being "overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure." Paul felt so much anguish that he "expected to die," but says all that was happening to him so he would "stop leaning on [himself] and instead lean on God who raises the dead."

For at least a year and a half, I leaned on myself in my battle with depression. It only made things significantly worse. It wasn't until I turned to the Lord with it that He helped me by guiding me to the right doctors and counselors and most importantly, the Christian community that I had spent so much time avoiding.

I learned all this early on, but recently the Lord has taught me something new about my thorn: I have it to help others. If you have experienced depression or know someone who has, then you know it's something the suffering individual feels they are battling alone.

"I learned all this early on, but recently the Lord has taught me something new about my thorn: I have it to help others."

However, when you meet someone who has had victories in the battle, it's an overwhelming relief because you know you don't have to be alone in the dark. It happened that way for me and now that I have become comfortable publicly sharing this side of my testimony, I have had dozens of people come open up to me, seeking help.

This is why I believe and am thankful for my thorn. Though it

still stings at times, it has become an incredible tool for me to point others closer to Jesus – the One whose work on the cross destroyed sin and death (2 Corinthians 5:21), and the One who will make all things new (Revelation 21:5).

So again I'll propose the question: What thorns are pricking you? By all means, pray for them to be removed but if the Lord chooses them to remain, then use them for His glory. Your "light momentary affliction is preparing for [you] an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17)."

The Lord may just be using your temporary thorn to point others to salvation only found in Him.

Woodward is a member of Broadmoor Church, Madison. He may be contacted at maw@sonvalley.net.