


Joyful Life Bible Studies

II CORINTHIANS 12:1-10

Lesson 19

FIRST DAY: Review and Overview

1. Share a way the study or lecture on II Corinthians 11:16-33 has enriched, encouraged or inspired you.
2. Blessings await us in our study of II Corinthians 12:1-10 this week. Be prepared for both intrigue and inspiration. Throughout the centuries Christians have poured over these verses to understand them and embrace the comfort they receive from them. These fascinating verses are the climax of Paul's defense of his apostleship. Read the following paragraphs and write a brief comment about the contents of each:
 - a. II Corinthians 12:1-6
 - b. II Corinthians 12:7-10
3. Begin your in-depth study this week by writing a prayer asking the Lord for a greater desire to know and understand His Word. Ask Him also to help you experience more of His grace as you appropriate what you learn to your life. Write your prayer here.

*Your grace is enough.
Your grace is enough for me.*
-selected 

SECOND DAY: Read II Corinthians 12:1-4

1. Paul was always the reluctant *boaster*. *It's not my style* (to boast) might be a way of paraphrasing II Corinthians 12:1a. The word *expedient* in this verse means *profitable* or *advantageous*. There was nothing to be gained by boasting but the circumstances in Corinth compelled Paul to talk about himself and his personal experiences. What subject did Paul introduce in verse 1?
 - a. *Visions* and *revelations* refer to his divine encounters with the Lord: *visions* to what Paul saw; *revelations* to what he heard; both were directly from the Lord. Briefly summarize a few of Paul's *visions* and *revelations* from the following verses:
 - (1.) Acts 9:4,5
 - (2.) Acts 18:9,10
 - (3.) Acts 23:11
 - (4.) I Corinthians 11:23a
 - (5.) Galatians 1:11,12
2. Read II Corinthians 12:2-4 and answer the following questions:
 - a. When did Paul say this event took place?
 - b. We learn from verse 7 that Paul was the *man*. In verses 2-4 Paul did not use the personal pronoun "I" but rather referred to himself in the third person. Why do you think he did this?
 - c. How would you explain the phrase *whether in the body ... or out of the body, I cannot tell*?
 - (1.) Who did know?
 - d. What happened to him according to the last phrase of verse 2 and the first phrase of verse 4?

Advanced Students: Research *the third heaven/paradise* and write a brief explanation of these terms.

3. If you could interview Paul about this experience, what one question would you ask him?

THIRD DAY: Read II Corinthians 12:4-6

1. Think about the extraordinary experience Paul described in II Corinthians 12:4. What happened when *he was caught up into paradise?* verse 4b
 - a. What phrase in II Corinthians 12:7a describes these *unspeakable* (inexpressible) *words*? Use other versions if possible.
 - b. Imagine for a moment what Paul was privileged to hear and see when he was *caught up into paradise/the third heaven*. He might have had this experience in mind when he wrote I Corinthians 13:12. What did he communicate in this verse?

Advanced Students: Research the meaning of the phrase, *not lawful to utter* (II Corinthians 12:4) and record your findings.

2. Although Paul's experience (II Corinthians 12:2-4) cannot be positively linked to a recorded event in scripture, many believe it may have taken place when Paul was in Lystra. Read Acts 14:19,20 and describe what happened.
3. Paul could have turned this experience into great advantage for himself but he refused to use it to exalt himself or to impress people. Circle the phrase in the following verses that reveals what Paul did instead: *That experience is something worth boasting about, but I am not going to do it. I am going to boast only about my weaknesses. I have plenty to boast about and would be no fool in doing it, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it. I don't want anyone to think more highly of me than what they can actually see in my life and my message, even though I have received wonderful revelations from God.* II Corinthians 12:5,7a NLT
 - a. Underline or highlight the reason for his decision.
4. Link II Corinthians 11:30 with II Corinthians 12:5. What do you see?
 - a. How is Paul a role model for you?

*I have made up my mind not to boast of anything personal,
except of what may be called my weaknesses.*
II Corinthians 12:5b Phillips

FOURTH DAY: Read II Corinthians 12:7,8

1. *The Ministry of the Thorn* is one Bible scholar's title for II Corinthians 12:7-10. We will learn many priceless lessons from these verses. Meditate on verse 7 as you write it here phrase by phrase.

a. The first and last phrase of verse 7 reveals the divine purpose for Paul's *thorn in the flesh*. Realizing that all Christians are subject to pride, what must we do to avoid its dangers and pitfalls?

b. If Paul had been *exalted above measure*, what might have happened to his ministry?

2. We do not know what Paul's *thorn in the flesh* was because he did not identify it. Whatever it was, it was a chronic and debilitating problem. The pain caused by this *thorn* was not a minor irritation or annoyance. In II Corinthians 12:7 the root word used for *thorn* describes a *tent stake*. Notice that Paul said this *thorn* was *given* to him. Observe another interesting statement concerning Paul's *thorn* by filling in the missing words from verse 7:

the _____ of _____ to _____ me,

a. The word *buffet* in this context suggests *striking repeatedly* or *battering*. Other versions use the word *harass* or *torment*. Why do you think the enemy was not successful in hindering Paul in the work of the Lord?

3. Suffering comes to all of us, although not necessarily as a *thorn in the flesh*. God uses suffering as a tool to build godly character in us. Our response to suffering will determine whether or not it will be eternally profitable. The pressure of the *thorn* drove Paul closer to the Lord. No matter what the cause of our suffering, it is meant to do the same in our lives. How have you experienced this? Share with your group, if not too personal.

4. What did Paul do about his *thorn in the flesh*? Answer from II Corinthians 12:8.

a. *Besought* in the KJV has been translated *begged*. Paul *begged* the Lord *three times* to remove the *thorn* but the Lord did not remove it. What lessons can we learn from this for our lives?

FIFTH DAY: Read II Corinthians 12:9,10

1. II Corinthians 12:9 is one of the most powerful and practical verses in the New Testament. Read this verse slowly two or three times. The Lord did not answer Paul the way he had hoped or expected. Print the Lord's answer to Paul's prayer from verse 9a. Selah – pause and think about this.
 - a. Claim the truth of verse 9a for yourself by writing your name over the word *thee* or *you*.
 - b. What comforting instruction does Hebrews 4:15,16 give concerning *grace*?
 - c. How does verse 9a and Hebrews 4:15,16 speak to you today about your weaknesses, pressures and problems?
 - d. Consider the phrase in verse 9a NLT: *My power works best in your weakness*. Cite a personal example of this.
2. Paul revealed no anger, disappointment or bitterness in response to the Lord's answer to his prayer. Record Paul's inspiring response from the following verses:
 - a. II Corinthians 12:9b
 - b. II Corinthians 12:10
 - c. In what way do these verses both encourage and challenge you?
3. Notice the phrase *for Christ's sake* in II Corinthians 12:10. With this in mind review II Corinthians 4:17,18. How might Paul's perspective on suffering have enabled him to respond as he did?

SIXTH DAY: Review II Corinthians 12:1-10


1. With II Corinthians 12:1-10 in mind record one thought or insight about:
 - a. prayer
 - b. grace
 - c. the power of Christ

2. What have you learned about Paul's *thorn in the flesh* that you can apply to your life?

3. How has Paul's example in this week's study inspired you?

4. Once again write the principle from II Corinthians 12:9a that we need to embrace in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.
 - a. By appropriating God's sufficient grace you are enabled to go through suffering with confidence, peace and assurance. How should this affect those around you?

5. Share a way you have been comforted or encouraged through your lesson this week.

*Through many dangers, toils, and snares
I have already come;
'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.
-selected *