

Humility

Lessons from Apostle Paul

A Bible Study for Women

When we compare ourselves to Jesus
He will help us to see,
In order to please Him,
we must say, "Lord, humble me".

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Welcome to a investigative Bible Study on humility. Humility is a trait we will never reach in totality on earth, but we should always strive for because in doing so we learn more about our great God and see ourselves compared to Him. The more we grow in our knowledge of God and seek to apply His truths to our life, God by His grace transforms us more into the image of Christ thus, making us more pleasing to Him and us more humble.

We will take an in depth look into 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 using the Observation-Interpretation-Application Method. Over the course of 7 lessons, we will prayerfully see from Paul's inspired vantage point, what the Word of God says about humility and why we should pursue it.

Here is an outline of the lessons as we study 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Lesson 1: Historical Background - A look into the culture, history, politics, author, and audience.

Lesson 2: Genre - What type of literature and why was it written.

Lesson 3: Literary Context - How our passage of study fits into the chapter, book, and overall theme of the Bible.

Lesson 4: Block Diagram - What we can conclude from how the words of our passage relate to each other and learn of the author's intent from the structure of the words and phrases.

Lesson 5: Word Study - Take an in depth look into the word 'exalting' from verse 7.

Lesson 6: The Big Picture - Interpretation of the text. What is the meaning of the passage?

Lesson 7: Application - How should I apply the passage to my life? How should I respond?



Lesson 1 - Historical Background

Author's Background: The Apostle Paul.

Bible References: 2 Corinthians 11:22; Philippians 3:4-5, 3:5; Romans 11:1; Galatians 1:21; Acts 9:1-22; 22:1-21, 26:5, ; Galatians 1:13-14, 22-23

The Apostle Paul did not start out as an Apostle by any means. He was born a short while after Jesus was born, around the year 5 A.D; even though the exact year is debated. Jesus was born approximately around the year 4 A.D. He was born in Tarsus, which a little over 350 miles north of Jerusalem. Paul was born under the name Saul from the tribe of Benjamin, which means Paul was a Jew. We don't know anything about his mother, but we know his father was a Pharisee. He was also a Roman citizen by birthright. It is not for certain how Paul inherited his Roman citizenship, but it was passed down to Paul from his father.

It was customary for Jewish boys to learn a trade and Paul learned to be a tentmaker. When he was a teenager, he traveled to Jerusalem to study

Scripture under the teaching of Gamaliel. As Paul grew in knowledge, he eventually became a Pharisee just like his father.

We first hear of Paul in Acts chapter 6. Paul was a young man, maybe around 30 years old. He was connected to the martyrdom of Stephen and continued to greatly persecute anyone who claimed to be a follower of Christ. He through men and women in prison and even cast his vote for many to be put to death. He thought he was doing the work of the Lord. He had great zeal.

Soon after Paul started persecuting the Christians, God saved him. Paul was on the road to Damascus to deliver a letter of reasons to bring more persecution to Christians from the High Priest in Jerusalem. Paul traveled even to foreign cities (Acts 26:11) to persecute Christians and that is exactly why he was traveling to Damascus.

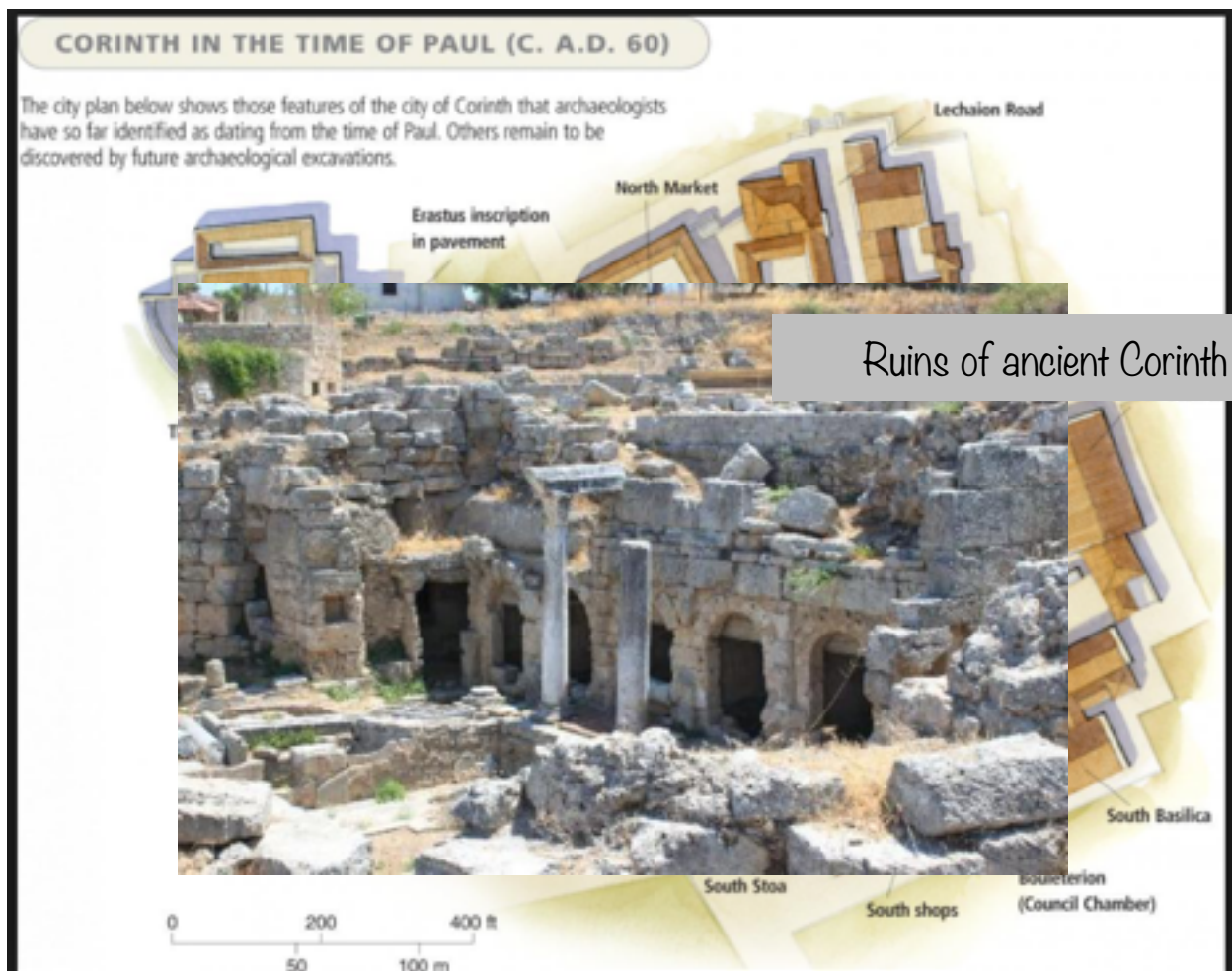
But God stopped Paul in his tracks and knocked him down off his high horse (literally). Paul was blinded by a bright light and Jesus spoke to Paul and told Paul he was persecuting Him. I'm sure that was a big shock to Paul because He thought he was helping God, but instead he was persecuting God. Paul was led into the city of Damascus blinded and fasted for 3 days. During that time, God saved him. After 3 days, Barnabus, who was sent by God, restored his sight and from then on, Paul had a zeal for Christ, His truth, and His church that could never be shaken.

Author Background – Paul of 2 Corinthians

Paul deeply loved the church at Corinth. It troubled him to the point where he couldn't even minister briefly (2 Corinthians 2:12-13). After 2 visits to Corinth, he hears about people personally attacking his apostleship. In 2 Corinthians, Paul reveals to us his heart. He gives us a glimpse of how he feels and what he is going through. Paul's main reason for writing 2 Corinthians is to defend his apostolic authority and ministry. If someone really wants to learn of Paul's heart, they should read 2 Corinthians. In my opinion, this is Paul's most personal letter, meaning it is the most about him as a person and Apostle of Jesus Christ.

Author Background – Date and Place of Writing 2 Corinthians

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in approximately the year 55-56 A.D., which was around a year since he wrote the first letter to the Corinthians. So there was not a lot of time between the two letters to the Corinthians. And it was about 6 years since he first preached there. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in Macedonia; most likely in Philippi. Paul met Titus there and Titus gave him a



Ruins of ancient Corinth

glad report about corrections that had been made in the Corinthian church.

Audience Background – The City of Corinth

Corinth was a very important city in ancient Greece. The city was located on a very narrow isthmus connecting Greece with Peloponnesus. The city of Corinth really began to develop as a commercial city in the 8th century B.C. Corinth was a part of many conflicts with Greece and was destroyed in the year 146 B.C. And the city was restored again by Julius Caesar in the year 46 B.C. It's location made it central for trade between the east and the west. In Paul's day, the busy metro city was a little over a hundred years old. There was lots of trading and shopping happening in Corinth. And in the middle of

the many shops stood the Bema, which was a raised platform for speakers and benches for people to sit and listen. This is most likely the place where Paul addressed Gallio (Acts 18).

Audience Background – The Religions of Corinth



During Paul's day, many people of Corinth worshipped Greek gods. One famous god was Apollo. There was a massive Temple of Apollo, which is the Greek god of light that had 38 columns, 7 of which remain today. There was also a shrine to Apollo. There were also other shrines to the gods of Poseidon, Hermes, Hercules, and Athena. There were also many other Temples dedicated to false gods such as the god of healing. And with the cult of Greek goddess Aphrodite, which is the goddess of love and sex, there was much sexual immorality going on in Corinth. In the Temple of Aphrodite, people would commit all kinds of sexually immoral acts with each other including prostitution.

Audience Background – The Christians in Corinth

Paul first visited Corinth on his second missionary journey. With the bold preaching of Paul, God worked in the lives of many and there was the first church established in Corinth. Silas, Timothy, Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos also help start the first Corinthian church. The church was made up of very new Christians from Jewish and Pagan backgrounds. There was much gross immoral sin in the old lives of the new converts, and even though they were now saved, they were still surrounded by the same old sins they had been delivered from. That was for sure hard for the new church. The church was strong, but still had its troubles. The church had sexual immorality and many divisions in the church. There were three men; Stephanas, Fortunatas, and Achaicus from the Corinthian Church that visited Paul in Ephesus to tell him about the many problems that arose after he established the church there. Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Christians was written to deal with the many problems they were having and to encourage them in their faith. Paul visited the church briefly when he found out they had not resolved their problems (2 Corinthians 1:15, 2:1). Later, Paul receives a great and wonderful report about the Corinthian church from Titus and that leads him to write the second letter to the Corinthian believers. Even though there were some things that were starting to improve with the Corinthians, there were a lot of attacks against Paul himself and his apostolic authority.

Culture Background – Christian Persecution

During the time of Paul, Christians faced persecution from many directions. One main attack came from within; the Jews themselves. The Jews persecuted the Christians because the Christians believed that Jesus Christ was the risen Savior. This really angered the Jews and led to much persecution from Jewish leaders including Paul before he became a Christian. The Christians also faced persecution from Rome. One may wonder why Rome cared who the Christians worshipped, but they did. During the time of Roman Emperors, there was a state religion where the people worshipped the Emperor as the messiah or deity. Because they were loyal to Christ alone and would not worship the Emperor of Rome, Rome was angry with the Christians. And at this time, Corinth was a Roman colony. Some examples of the persecution Christians faced during this time was verbal abuse, seizure of property, beatings, murder plots, stoning, unjust arrests and imprisonments, exile, and execution.

What is remarkable and a little ironic is just how much zeal Paul had for persecuting Christians and then was persecuted himself! Paul played a major

role in the persecution of the early church. He thought that was what God wanted and was trying to keep the Jewish faith pure by getting rid of the followers of Christ. When God saved Paul, he still kept his zeal; this time he was zealous for Christ. And instead of being filled with anger and hate, he was filled with love and compassion. Paul suffered a lot and experienced much persecution at the hands of the very men he was once joined with the same goal. But Paul remained faithful to Christ and to the preaching of God's Word.

Historical Situation – Claudius, the Roman Emperor

During the time of Paul and the Corinthian church, Claudius was the Emperor of the Roman Empire, which included the city of Corinth. Paul's first two missionary trips were during the reign of Claudius. Claudius became Roman Emperor in 41 A.D. with the help of a good word from Herod Agrippa. He returned the favor to Herod Agrippa by enlarging his territory. And after Agrippa's death, Claudius gave his brother the leadership of the Temple in Jerusalem. Claudius was pretty mild in terms of leadership, but he got wind of a disturbance with the Jews in Rome over Christ. This caused Claudius to banish the Christians during the middle of his reign about the year 49 A.D. He did eventually allow the Jews to return to Rome at the end of his reign in 54 A.D.

His personal life was filled with scandal. He was always dominated by his wives, which included his niece Agrippina. He married Agrippina who brought her son Nero from a previous relationship. Claudius also already had a son, Britannicus. Agrippina of course wanted her son Nero to be the next Emperor, so she came up with a plan. According to Roman historians, Agrippina poisoned her husband Claudius. His death led the way for her son Nero to be the next Emperor. To secure his throne and authority, Emperor Nero reportedly murdered his brother Britannicus and his mother Agrippina.

Reflection Questions:

Look up the conversion of Paul the Apostle (Acts 9) and answer the following questions:

1. Why was Paul on the road to Damascus?
2. Who appeared to him and what did He say?
3. What physically happened to Paul?

4. What spiritually happened to Paul?
5. Explain the difference in his zeal before and after conversion?
6. What did God prophesy to Paul about Paul's ministry?

Look back at the information about Corinth and answer the following questions:

1. What were some sin issues that were going on in the city of Corinth?
2. The church was comprised of what types of people?
3. Can you name an idol worshipped in Corinth and how they worshipped that idol in the Temple?
4. Who was the leader of the Roman Empire and how were all people supposed to view the Emperor?
5. Do you think it would have been hard to be a new Christian in Corinth?
6. How is Corinth similar to America?
7. How is Corinth different from America?
8. What are some idols that are all around you that could be temptations to turn away from God? What are some things in America that can make it really hard to live the life of a Christian?

Lesson 2: Genre

Type of Literary Genre

God moved the authors of the Bible to write His Words. The Bible is God breathed, which makes it divine. But the Bible also has a human side, which we can see in the literary genres. Let's first define our terms. Literary means a written work and genre means a category. So literary genre means a type of written work. The literary work of 2 Corinthians is an epistle, which means a letter.

DIVISION OF NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS				
BIOGRAPHY	HISTORY	LETTERS		PROPHECY
Matthew	Acts	Romans	Titus	Revelation
Mark		1 Corinthians	Philemon	
Luke		2 Corinthians	Hebrews	
John		Galatians	James	
		Ephesians	1 Peter	
		Philippians	2 Peter	
		Colossians	1 John	
		1 Thessalonians	2 John	
		2 Thessalonians	3 John	
		1 Timothy	Jude	
		2 Timothy		

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There are 19 letters in the New Testament and Paul wrote 13 of them. Letters were written to whole churches, as in the case of 2 Corinthians, or to individual people. Letters were the main way in which communication was done in the early church. There was no internet or fax service. And personal visits were limited due to hardships of travel, weather, and constant persecution.

Letters or epistles have a general flow to them, which begins with the opening. In the opening, the author addresses himself as the author and greets his audience. In Paul's letters, he includes a thanksgiving. He tells his audience why he is thankful to God for them. Then comes the body of the letter. This tells exactly why the author was writing this particular letter. And finally, the author closes the letter with a closing benediction. And letters that were written to a church were meant to be read to the entire church body. This would most likely happen at their regular worship gatherings.

The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Christians of the city of Corinth. But how do we know 2 Corinthians is a letter and not another literary genre like poetry or a historical narrative? For that we have to go back to the beginning of 2 Corinthians. If we look at the first chapter, the letter starts off with an introduction. Paul begins by saying who is writing, which is himself and Timothy. And then he states who he is writing to, which is the church in Corinth. And then Paul gives a greeting to the church at Corinth. A question arises of why Paul wrote a second letter to the church at Corinth. Well, for starters, epistles or letters that were written in the Bible were written to a specific audience and for a specific reason. Paul's reason for writing the second canonical letter to the church at Corinth was to mainly defend his Apostleship. And if you notice, the beginning of the letter to the Corinthians, Paul uses the title of Apostle of Jesus Christ. He did not begin all his letters this way. The only letters where he did were 1 and 2nd Corinthians and Colossians. He began with his title of Apostle for the church to recognize his leadership over them given by God.

And with this genre of a letter written by Paul, you really can see the human side of Paul. There was a lot of people in the Corinthian church who were doubting his leadership and Apostolic calling by God. This could have come from the unresolved issues Paul had with the church. Paul defends his Apostleship from the angle of his so-called "weaknesses". Paul centers on the power and strength of Jesus Christ. Because of the transformation that has taken place in Paul's life, he can regard his "weaknesses" as strengths that actually are an aid to his ministry. We will learn more about his weaknesses as we dive deeper into our selected passage.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is the genre of 2 Corinthians?
2. What in the book helps us to know the genre?
3. Why did Paul write 2 Corinthians?
4. What are some aspects of this letter that make it unique compared to the other letters from Paul?

Lesson 3: Literary Context

The major theme of 2 Corinthians was a defense of Paul's apostolic authority and his ministry. He also wrote the church about collecting money for the saints in Jerusalem and how to respond to a repentant offender, but no doubt the major effort went to Paul defending his apostleship. Paul tells the church about his struggles and hardships as an Apostle, but always points them back to the power behind his ministry, which is the work Jesus Christ.

So with that in mind, let's finally dig into our passage of 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Paul is one who had great reasons for being spiritual prideful, but he wasn't. Why is that? And what can we learn from God's Word through His Apostle Paul?

Let's start with verse 7 of our passage. It begins with a conjunction of 'because', which means Paul is about to give a reason for something that he previously said. Because of what, we ask? 'Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations'. Well we have to go back to the beginning of the chapter to find out of what great revelations Paul speaks. Starting in verse 1 of chapter 12, Paul says, if he must boast to prove himself to be a real Apostle sent from God, he will just for the sake of argument. He then proceeds to tell the Corinthian church about how he was caught up to the third heaven and received visions and revelations from Jesus Christ Himself. This most likely refers to the skies above our planet and not actually in Heaven where God dwells. Paul speaks of himself in the third person as to not be the one boasting in himself. He says if he were to boast, he would rather boast about his weaknesses. Paul told the church details of how Jesus Christ revealed His Words to him because he was defending his ministry and authority. There was clearly no one in the church that could honestly say they were taken up into the atmosphere and had God Himself reveal His Word to them through visions. This was Paul's first point of his defense.

Key Word: 'Boast'. The Greek definition of boasting that Paul uses in chapter 12 means to glory, exult, or take pride. Paul says he will not exult himself even though he has truthful reasons to be prideful about his ministry. Paul does not want anyone to give him praise about himself. He wants all glory to go to God.

Key Word: 'Weaknesses'. The Greek definition of weaknesses in chapter 12 means an incapacity or a limitation. Instead of Paul defending his Apostolic by boasting about his great revelations from Christ, he is instead 'boasting'

about his limitations and incapacities. Wow! What an illustration of humility.

How can the Apostle Paul be so humble when he is known all over the world and had Christ directly reveal His Word to him? Surely he is at least tempted to be a little prideful, right? Here is where the next point of defense comes from Paul. It is inferred that he has reason to boast. So Paul tells the church what keeps him from exalting himself; a thorn in the flesh.

Figure of Speech: 'Thorn in the flesh'. First, we must define what 'thorn' means in this passage. 'thorn' in this passage means anything pointy or sharp that could include a plant, but not limited to a plant. This is different from the word 'thorn' from the crown of thorns that was placed on Jesus's head. The definition of the word 'thorn' in the crown of thorns was a prickly plant. So does Paul literally have something sharp poking him in the side to keep him humble? Or does he have a physical ailment keeping him humble? No, he does not. There is nothing in Scripture to support the thorn being a physical ailment. He is using a figure of speech. But where did he get this figure of speech? From the Old Testament.

Allusions from the O. T. of the phrase 'thorn in the flesh': In Numbers 33:55, God warns the people of Israel that if they don't drive the people out of the promised land, they will be as a prink in their eye or a thorn on their side and they will cause them trouble in their land. God uses the word 'as'. God is not saying the people will be a physical ailment of any kind, but using a simile to compare them to something that is bothersome. The people will be a bother to the Israelites like a thorn would be bothersome if it were stuck in your side. Paul is saying that something is bothersome to him to keep him humble. But what is bothering Paul? It is really hard to think very highly of yourself when you don't even have the power to stop something from bothering you. So what was bothering Paul so badly?

Allusions from the O.T. of the phrase 'messenger of Satan': God does not bring or cause evil spirits to torment people, but He does allow Satan or his messengers to torment people. In Job 2:6 God allowed Satan to torment Job. In 1 Samuel 16:14 God allowed an evil spirit to torment Saul. Paul did allude to the O.T. when he talked about what was keeping him humble. God does indeed allow Satan and his demons or messengers to torment people. But in every case, God is in control and has a plan and reason for His children being

tormented. And in the case of Paul, it was to keep him from exalting himself.

And was the messenger just a bother or something much worse? Paul uses the word ‘torment’, which means to literally beat or strike with a fist or to be harshly treated. This was clearly not a little annoying health problem or someone being mean to Paul. This was much worse. Satan knew the huge ministry Paul had been given by God and absolutely wanted to stop him. So Satan sent a messenger to torment Paul. This is most likely talking about a demon and not any type of physical ailment. Paul could never be possessed by a demon because he was under the power of the Holy Spirit, but he could certainly be tormented by one. Martin Luther who sparked the Reformation talked about being tormented by a demon as well. Martin Luther said, “Satan would gladly kill me if he could. Every moment he is pressing me, is treading on my heels. Yet what he wishes will not be done, but what God wills.” Being tormented by a demon would most certainly keep one from exalting himself. It would truly make you realize your inability and lack of power.

Paul then using a transition of ‘concerning this’. So everything Paul has told the church about himself, he now tells them he asked God to take the thorn away. This also helps us to be humble. Paul knows he is not able to remove the thorn, but God is able.

God then tells Paul, His grace is all he needs. Grace means God’s favor and blessings. And the phrase ‘power is perfected in weakness’ means God’s miraculous power is accomplished when we are limited, incapable, or down right helpless. God wants us to depend on Him and not ourselves for we can do nothing apart from Him. If Paul keeps his “boasting” in his helplessness, that will keep the focus on Christ’s power and not his own. The more we realize we have no power and that everything in our ministry or life is because of Christ, we will have no reason to exalt ourselves.

So what is left for Paul to boast about? He tells us in verse 10. Paul is satisfied with his limitations and helplessness. Paul realizes he is nothing but a mere vessel that God is using to accomplish His will. Paul lists the things that no one would ever boast about; things that are not pleasant but bring much pain and suffering. Why then is he ok with things that bring shame and pain? It is for the sake of Christ. Everything Paul is going through is because he is a follower of Christ. That brings him much contentment. Just

to know that God is using me for His will and that He is in control and has a perfect plan for His glory and your good should always bring contentment.

Merism parallelism phrase ‘when I am weak, then I am strong’: How can Paul be weak and strong at the same time? Paul clues us in to what he is saying in the next chapter. In 2 Corinthians 13:4, Paul says Christ died because of our sins or weaknesses, yet He lives because of the power of God. He then goes on to say we are also weak, but we will live with Christ because God directed His power toward us. So once again, it’s not us, but God. We have no power, no reason to be prideful. Paul is strong because of Christ and His power. Paul also says in Galatians 2:20 that Christ lives in him and the life he lives is by faith in Christ.

Paul knows he is who he is because of the work of Christ, so all glory goes to Him alone. Paul can take no credit and will boast in nothing but his limitations and helplessness. Everything Paul has accomplished in his ministry is because of the power of Christ. That is what keeps him humble.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is the major theme of 2 Corinthians?
2. What is a figure of speech from our passage of study?
3. Name one O.T. allusion from our passage of study?
4. What does Paul mean by the word ‘weaknesses’?
5. Why does Paul have reason to boast?
6. What does he choose to “boast” about and why?
7. What did God do to keep Paul from exalting himself?
8. How is God’s power perfected in our weaknesses?
9. What should you “boast” about your life?
10. How do you think you can guard yourself against exalting yourself?

Lesson 4: Block Diagram of the Passage

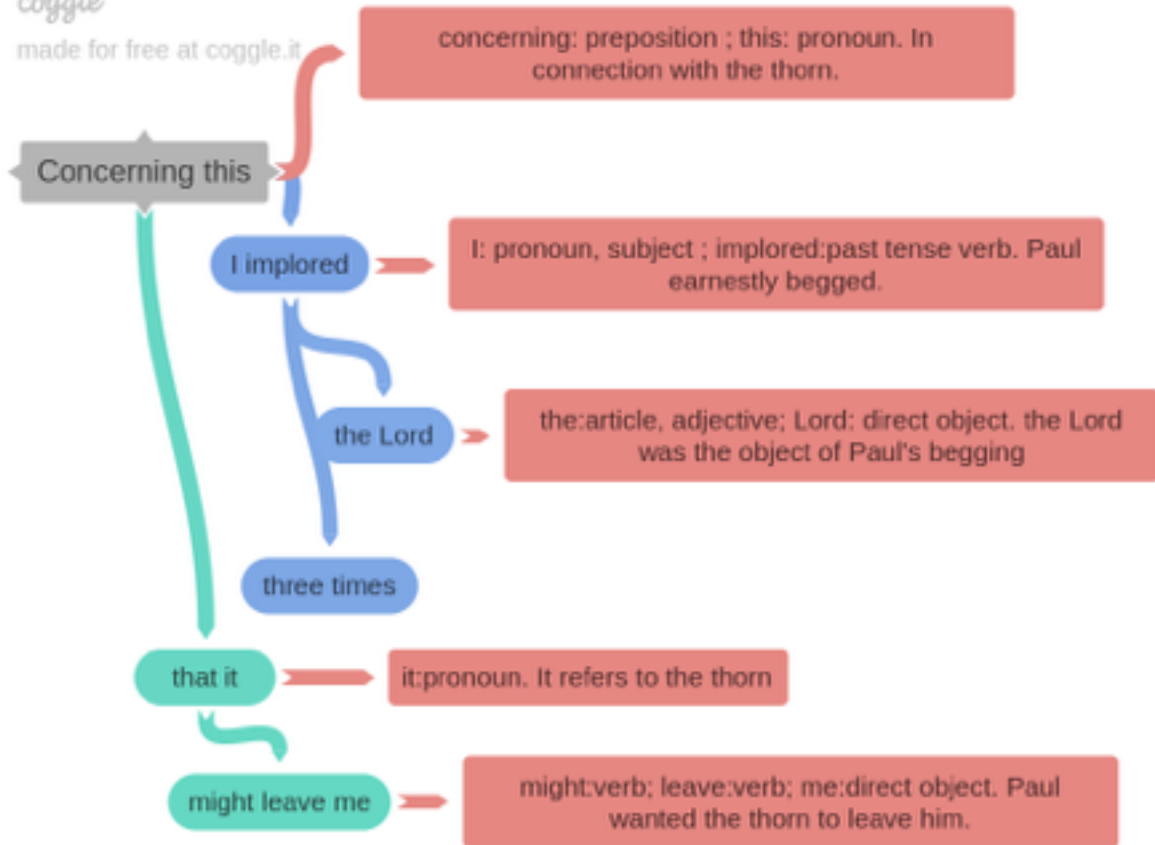
2 Corinthians 12:7



2 Corinthians 12:8

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2 Corinthians 12:9-10

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Block Diagram Reflection Questions:

1. What did Paul mean with the word 'because' in the beginning of verse 7?
2. What word in the passage is 'torment' related to in verse 7?
3. What do you notice about the word 'keep' in verse 7 and why is that significant?
4. What is the phrase 'concerning this' connected to in verse 8?
5. What do we learn about the word 'implored' in verse 8 and how does it help us understand the impact of the 'thorn in the flesh'?
6. What is Paul content with in verse 10 and why?
7. What are some adversities you have faced in your life and how did you respond?
8. What can we learn from Paul about why we should be content?
9. What are some things in our lives that help us to be humble? (think about your "weaknesses")
10. How should we view our weaknesses?
11. How should we respond to adversity?

Lesson 5: Word Study 'exalting' taken from verse 7

Passage: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Word Study – 'exalting' found in verse 7

Basic Analysis-

Exalting

Original Language: Greek

ὑπεραίρω

Basic Greek definition:

Exalt oneself

Part of speech:

Verb, present, passive, subjective, first person, singular, finite verb

Sense:

To be over-exalted- to be or become exalted beyond what is appropriate. To be overly proud, to be puffed up with pride, to feel overly self-confident

Modern English Definition:

Verb

hold (someone or something) in very high regard; think or speak very highly of.

Diachronic Analysis: How this word was used in other literature of history

Lemma:

ὑπεραίρω

Exalt oneself, surpass

Definition:

Lift or raise up over, surpass, lift over

2 Maccabees 5:22-24.

The phrase 'He lorded it over' found in verse 23 is the same root word for exalting. It means here to 'lift up over'.

²² He left governors to oppress the people: at Jerusalem, Philip, by birth a Phrygian and in character more barbarous than the man who appointed him; ²³ and at Gerizim, Andronicus; and besides these Menelaus, who lorded it over his compatriots worse than the others did. In his malice toward the Jewish citizens, ²⁴ Antiochus sent Apollonius, the captain of the Mysians, with an army of twenty-two thousand, and commanded him to kill all the grown men and to sell the women and boys as slaves

[The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. \(1989\). \(2 Mac 5:22-24\). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.](#)

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 48:13

The phrase 'too great' is the same root as exalting, but in a different sense. Means to surpass.

Nothing was too great for him, and in death his body prophesied.

Synchronic Analysis:

How the current time limit the meaning?

Exalting

In Paul's time, this word is used to refer to someone lifting up himself and being overly proud and boastful.

Biblical – Theological Analysis:

This particular word 'exalting' is used in only two places in the N.T.

2 Corinthians 12:7

In relation to Paul

7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from **exalting myself**, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!

2 Thessalonians 2:4

In relation to the Antichrist

3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and **exalts himself** above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

Contextual Analysis:

We learn that in the N.T. Paul is the only author to use this particular word 'exalting'. It is not a positive word by any means. God desires Paul to be kept from exalting himself. And as we learn in 2 Thessalonians, the Antichrist will indeed exalt himself.

Paul uses this word to give the idea of someone being overly prideful from themselves. This is not someone else giving you praise, but you yourself lifting up yourself. This is a personal word that describes a person that puts themselves as their own god. Exalting yourself is something we should all be on guard against.

God knew that Paul had very good reason to be prideful. And to help protect him from that sin, He allowed him to be tormented by a messenger from Satan. Well how could being tormented keep Paul from exalting himself? Torment is opposite of praise. If you are being tormented physically or mentally, it would be very hard to be prideful. But if everyone around you was praising you and lifting you up all the time, it would be very easy to be prideful.

The messenger from Satan and the people who were coming against his ministry were all apart of God's will in protecting Paul from exalting himself.

Let's go back to the beginning of sinfully exalting oneself. This horrible pride is found in none other than Satan himself.

Ezekiel 28:12-18

Vs. 17a "Your heart was **lifted up** because of your beauty;
You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.

Isaiah 14:12-15

"How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground,
You who weakened the nations!
For you have said in your heart:
'I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
On the farthest sides of the north;
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High.'
Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol,
To the lowest depths of the Pit.

Job 41:34

He beholds every high *thing*;
He is king over all the **children of pride.**'

Proverbs 16:18

Pride goes before destruction,
And a **haughty spirit** before a fall.

Proverbs 11:2

When **pride** comes, then comes shame;
But with the humble *is* wisdom.

Obadiah 1:3-4

The **pride of your heart** has deceived you,
You who dwell in the clefts of the rock,
Whose habitation is high;
You who say in your heart, "Who will bring me down to the ground?"
Though you ascend *as* high as the eagle,

And though you set your nest among the stars,
From there I will bring you down," says the LORD.

What is the main idea? Exalting your own self is pride. And you exalt yourself when you attribute your accomplishments, ministry, skills, abilities, gifts, and the such as coming from you. We must understand and accept that those things all come from God alone. So He alone is worthy to be exalted. Pride is sin. The beginning of pride is found in Satan. Pride is a sin because you are exalting yourself above God. You are giving yourself praises and boasting in your own self. God is the only One we should exalt. He deserves the glory, honor, and praise for everything. As Paul says, the only thing we can "boast" about are our sins, our failures, our inability. When we recognize that God gets the glory and not ourselves then we can begin to understand humility. Humility is the opposite of pride. The fact that I am breathing, living, and accomplishing anything for His Kingdom is because of the power of God in my life. Giving God the glory in everything will help protect us from exalting ourselves. Humility in the context of our study means a lowliness of mind or self-abasement. Let's look at some verses of Paul's humility and how he exalts God.

Scripture

9 For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 1 Corinthians 15:9
Even though Paul did more than any other Apostle and had a huge ministry, he saw himself as the **least of Apostles**.

8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, Ephesians 3:8
Even though Paul had revelations from Christ Himself (only a few people in all history can say that), he saw himself as **least among all Christians**.

15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*. 1 Timothy 1:15

Even though God saved him and gave him a new life, he saw himself as **least among all sinners**.

4 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. **5** Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 2 Corinthians 3:4-5

Paul recognized and accepted that he is only adequate or acceptable because of Christ. His confidence is through Christ toward God.

14 But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Galatians 6:14

If Paul should boast about anything, it will be Christ and His work on the cross.

“You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, **19** serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; Acts 20:18-19 Paul served the Lord with all lowliness of mind.

When we compare ourselves to other people or when we credit ourselves for our accomplishments we can easily fall into the trap of pride. When we compare ourselves to God and give the credit to Him, we can begin to see ourselves for who we really are and grow in humility. We are nothing but a vessel that God may choose to use if He so pleases for His glory. We can do nothing apart from the power of God in our lives. That includes everything from breathing, tying your shoes, to your ministry in the church. That right thinking should bring about an attitude of true humility. We should be constantly growing in humility all the days of our lives. It is a constant struggle because pride is all around us. It is very easy to think too highly of yourself or to have someone else think too highly of you. Guard yourself against pride with the Word of God. Keep the truths of God’s Word at the forefront of your thoughts and heart.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is the basic Greek definition of the word ‘exalt’?

2. Where are the only places this word is used in the N.T. and who are they referring to?
3. How does the word 'exalt' and 'pride' relate?
4. Why should we guard ourselves against being prideful?
5. What is the opposite of pride?
6. Why should we not praise or exalt ourselves?
7. Where did the sin of exalting oneself and pride begin?
8. How did Paul display his humility? (think 'least')
9. Who should we exalt and why?
10. How can we fall into the sin of pride?
11. How can we begin to have an attitude of humility?

Lesson #6 - The Big Picture
 Passage: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Passage Analysis:

Verse:	Phrase or Word	What Does it Mean?
Verse 7	Because	'Since' Paul has had great revelations. Paul earlier in the same chapter details how Christ Himself revealed to Him when he was caught up to the third heaven.
	Of the surpassing greatness	Greater than great. Paul is not talking about a basic vision or dream, but visions that were greater than a normal vision or revelation. Beyond how God normally revealed to the Apostles or people.
	Revelations	The revelations (plural) were beyond great. Christ uncovered truth only to Paul.
	For this reason	Because God revealed truth to Paul that He did not reveal to anyone else. This is how God justified Himself.
	To keep me	God had to protect Paul.
	From exalting myself	It is natural for us to desire to boast or life up ourselves. This is not unique to Paul only.
	There was given me	Past tense. God already allowed.
	A thorn in the flesh	This is a figure of speech. Paul experienced this while he was in in the flesh,

		meaning here on earth for his entire life.
	To torment me	Torment came from the messenger, not from God. Torment is a verb. This was something the messenger did and Paul experienced it.
	To keep me from exalting myself.	Paul ends the way he began. He is telling us what and why God did what He did.

Verse	Phrase or Word	What Does it Mean?
8	Concerning this	This is in connection with the thorn in the flesh
	I implored the Lord	Paul earnestly begged God
	Three times	Paul did not stop at the first time, nor the second time. He asked and God told him no. So he asked again two more times. This shows it was more than a little bother or pesky aggravation.
	That it might leave me	It refers to the thorn in the flesh. Paul wanted the torment from the messenger from Satan to leave him alone.

Verse	Phrase or Word	What Does it Mean?
9	And He	The 'and' connects the conversation between Paul and God.
	Has said to me	In the present tense. God spoke directly to Paul. He answered his prayers.
	My grace is sufficient	Grace belongs to God and He is telling Paul His grace is enough.
	For you	Paul is the object of God's grace.
	For power is perfected	Grace is enough because God's power is completed.
	In weakness	Weakness is Paul's inabilities and limitations. Paul's

		weaknesses God's means for His power being perfected.
	Most gladly, therefore,	Because of God's power being perfected, Paul is most glad
	I will rather boast	Paul says he will not would. This is not debated in Paul's mind.
	About my weaknesses	Paul's limitations and inabilities
	So that the power of Christ may dwell in me	Paul's limitations are the only way the power of Christ is going to dwell in Paul.

Verse	Phrase or Word	What Does it Mean?
10	Therefore	Because of Christ's power dwelling in him,
	I am well content	Paul is totally satisfied
	With weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties	Paul is satisfied with all of these things that people would normally be discontent with.
	For Christ's sake	Paul knows he is experiencing all these things because he is proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.
	For when I am weak	The 'for' is connecting his weaknesses with the power of Christ. When Paul is limited
	Then I am strong	Then and only then is the power of Christ dwelling and perfected in Paul.

Passage Analysis:

In this passage, Paul is explaining why he was given the thorn in his flesh, which was to keep him from exalting himself. God wanted to keep him from exalting himself because of the greatness of the revelations from Christ Himself. Paul then says he asked God to take the thorn away three times. This means it was very serious to Paul. Then he tells the readers how God replied. God said His grace is all Paul needs to live the Christian life because God's power is completed in our limitations. When we don't exalt ourselves, we are recognizing our limitations and inabilities. Paul knows he is not capable of removing the thorn in his flesh. Paul knows that because he recognizes and accepts his limitations, God's power is able to dwell in him and His power is completed or perfected because Paul is not exalting himself. That's why Paul is happy to boast about his inabilities because that is part of God's means for God's power to dwell in Paul. So Paul concludes by telling the readers that he is happily satisfied about all the things that would normally make someone sad, miserable, and depressed. Paul is content with weaknesses because he knows he does not have the power to remove the thorn in the flesh. He is content with insults, which is what he was getting from people who were challenging his ministry and Apostolic authority. Paul was distressed with hunger, getting shipwrecked, and the like. Some examples of the persecution he faced was stoning, being thrown in jail, and people disowning him and plotting to kill him. His difficulties had to deal with traveling hardships, bad weather, getting sick, and much more. Paul is ok with all of those things because he knows he is going through all those things because of Christ. When Paul is limited in himself, then he is strong because it is the strength of Jesus Christ alive and active dwelling inside Paul and God's power is being perfected through Paul's life.

The Main Point: Do Not Exalt Yourself So Christ's Power Can Dwell in You! Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11:1, to follow in his pattern of life as he follows Christ. Paul says that he was given a thorn in his flesh to keep him from exalting himself. Paul is telling us just as he told his original readers that it is not good to exalt yourself. When you exalt yourself, you are taking the place of God in your life and in a sense becoming your own god. We also learn from this passage that we have no reason to even exalt ourselves in the first place. It is God's power at work in our lives. It is because of His grace we are even able to live the Christian life. Everything great in my life is because of God, so He gets the glory. So we are

to be totally fine with our limitations and inabilities because it is in those things that God's power is being perfected.

Just imagine for a moment that you were a "super Christian". You never got upset, you always remembered to pray and study your Bible, you never worried about anything, no one bothered you or disliked you, and you got all your prayers answered right away. Would you be tempted to exalt yourself? You probably would a little. But what if you fail in your life. You lose your temper, you get jealous, you forget to read your Bible sometimes, your mind drifts when you pray, someone had a problem with the class you just taught, and there were prayers that God answered with a 'no'. Those are the real moments of life that should help us to recognize our inabilities and limitations. I am not a super Christian. In fact, I'm quite weak. It is in my weaknesses that God allows me to see His strength and power and grace. So I can say along with Paul, that I am content with my weaknesses. Because I know that God shares His glory with no one and that means there is only room for one to be exalted. Only God should be exalted.

I know that my weaknesses are not the same as Paul's, but we are all tempted to exalt ourselves regardless of our life and accomplishments. If I am to be like Paul and ultimately like Jesus Christ, I have to be humble. I have to see myself as nothing compared to God. I have no power and God has all power. It is because of God I live and not myself. I cannot control anything from when and how I was born all the way to when and how I will die.

Humility is not something that we can easily grasp in our hearts or totally achieve in our lives. But we keep pressing toward the goal of humility and by God's grace, we get closer everyday.

Problems:

There have been many interpretations of the thorn in the flesh. Just what was it? Let's look at some of the many commentaries on the phrase 'thorn in the flesh'.

Many explanations have been offered about the identity of Paul's "thorn in the flesh." If the best translation is "in the flesh," referring to the physical flesh, the thorn may refer to some physical infirmity such as epilepsy, malaria, or bad eyesight. An eye ailment seems to be supported by Galatians 4:13-15. If the translation is "for the flesh," referring to our lower nature, the thorn may refer to some painful experience that was spiritual in nature, such as temptation or the opposition of the Jews.

Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers (Eds.). (1995). In *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Here are my thoughts: We learned in lesson 3 about the allusion to the O.T. passage concerning the thorn in the flesh. God warned the Israelites that if they did not drive the people out of the promise land, they will be as a thorn in their side (Numbers 33:55). Nothing in the text alludes to the fact of the thorn being a literal physical ailment.

Thorn in the flesh—(2 Cor. 12:7–10). Many interpretations have been given of this passage. (1.) Roman Catholic writers think that it denotes suggestions to impiety.

(2.) Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers interpret the expression as denoting temptation to unbelief.

(3.) Others suppose the expression refers to “a pain in the ear or head,” epileptic fits, or, in general, to some severe physical infirmity, which was a hindrance to the apostle in his work (comp. 1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor. 10:10; 11:30; Gal. 4:13, 14; 6:17). With a great amount of probability, it has been alleged that his malady was defect of sight, consequent on the dazzling light which shone around him at his conversion, acute ophthalmia. This would account for the statements in Gal. 4:14; 2 Cor. 10:10; also Acts 23:5, and for his generally making use of the help of an amanuensis (comp. Rom. 16:22, etc.).

(4.) Another view which has been maintained is that this “thorn” consisted in an infirmity of temper, to which he occasionally gave way, and which interfered with his success (comp. Acts 15:39; 23:2–5). If we consider the fact, “which the experience of God’s saints in all ages has conclusively established, of the difficulty of subduing an infirmity of temper, as well as the pain, remorse, and humiliation such an infirmity is wont to cause to those who groan under it, we may be inclined to believe that not the least probable hypothesis concerning the ‘thorn’ or ‘stake’ in the flesh is that the loving heart of the apostle bewailed as his sorest trial the misfortune that, by impatience in word, he had often wounded those for whom he would willingly have given his life” (Lias’s Second Cor., Introd.).

Easton, M. G. (1893). In *Easton's Bible dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

Here are my thoughts: How can Paul be ‘tormented’ by the messenger of Satan with unbelief like the Reformers suggests? Nothing in the text supports Paul’s thorn being unbelief. Paul was very sure of what he believed and Who he believed in. I do not agree with the thorn being Paul’s temper either. he was tormented by a messenger of Satan. Paul does not use verbiage of torment of Satan to refer to his or anyone’s sins.

THORN IN THE FLESH Greek word *skolops* occurred in classical Greek as a stake or sharp wooden shaft used to impale. In Hellenistic Greek the variations “thorn” and “splinter” are found. The majority of references in the LXX, the NT, and papyri are translated as thorn, splinter, or sliver. Origen’s theological opponents Ceisus and Eustathius used *skolops* as a derogatory reference to the cross.

Because false teachers in Corinth claimed receiving divine revelation, Paul shared his vision of the “third heaven” as miraculous evidence of his apostolic calling. Paul’s revelation was balanced by a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7). During this era physical ailments were a constant problem. As a result, most patristic writers perceived Paul’s affliction as either a painful, chronic physical problem or ongoing persecution.

In the Middle Ages the “thorn” was taken as carnal temptation. The Vulgate encouraged the perception of the thorn as a sexual temptation. In the Reformation Luther and Calvin rejected the idea of sexual temptation. Calvin interpreted the “thorn in the flesh” as a variety of physical and spiritual temptations. Luther interpreted the thorn as physical illness.

Four modern theories concern Paul’s thorn in the flesh. The most common theory is some sort of recurring physical illness, possibly malaria, based on a perceived relationship to Paul’s bodily illness of Gal. 4:13. Some hold that Paul suffered from an eye disease (*ophthalmia*), pointing to Gal. 4:13–15, where Paul confirmed that the Galatians would have given him, if possible, their eyes. Further, in Gal. 6:11 Paul indicates he wrote in large script, which is logical for a person with eye trouble. A third common theory was sorrow and pain because of Jewish unbelief (Rom. 9:1–3). A fourth theory is that of a “messenger of Satan,” rather than a physical ailment, given as a redemptive judgment of God on Paul for the purpose of humility.

Other theories were hysteria, hypochondria, gallstones, gout, rheumatism, sciatica, gastritis, leprosy, lice, deafness, dental infection, neurasthenia, a speech impediment, and remorse for persecuting the Church.

Cox, S. L. (2003). [Thorn in the Flesh](#). In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 1592). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

Here are my thoughts: If 'thorn' in the Middle ages meant carnal temptation, that does not mean that 'thorn' meant the same thing in Paul's day. Word do indeed change meaning over time. We have to guard against this when we study Scripture. We could end up getting the interpretation wrong when with the fallacy of anachronism.

The phrase 'messenger of Satan to torment me' does not allow for not taking it literally. The text and grammar supports the idea of some sort of messenger of Satan to torment Paul allowed by God to keep him humble. And as we have learned in lesson 3, God has allowed in the past, demons to torment people. It is not a far fetched idea by any means.

Even though many people have their own theories on what was Paul's thorn in his flesh, it doesn't distract from the clear main point in this passage, which is not exalting yourself, but Christ instead. That is Paul's main point. We don't have to make big fuss over what the thorn was because it is not the most important part of the message Paul is trying to get across. Whatever it was, God used it to keep Paul humble. And Paul had to be humble for Christ to be exalted in his life.

How the Main Point Links Back to Bigger Context:

This passage about Paul's weakness and Christ's power links back to the bigger context of the second letter to the Corinthians. The main topic of 2 Corinthians was Paul defending his apostolic ministry and authority. He tells the church in Corinth that he has much reason to boast in himself, but he doesn't. Paul boasts in Christ and the work of Christ in his life. For Paul, it is all about God's glory. Everything he does is because of Christ. Even though he is the least of Apostles in his mind, he is still a great Apostle doing great things for Christ. Paul wants the church to really get that point. The church has to take Paul seriously and with authority given by God. That is why Paul tells them about how God caught him up in the heavens and revealed to Paul. Paul lets them know that even though he can go around boasting and exalting himself because of what God is doing in his life, he will not. Paul says he will only boasts in his weaknesses so that the power of Christ may dwell in him.

I picture exalting ourselves like a balloon. Our exalting ourselves is the air in the balloon and the balloon itself represents us. If we fill our balloon with the “air” of exalting ourselves, then there is no room for Christ. Paul is an Apostle because of Christ. Paul’s world-wide ministry is a work of Christ’s power. Paul’s transformation in his own life is a work of God’s grace. Paul’s success is because of God’s grace. The inspired letters he wrote are God’s holy inerrant Words. Paul has divine authority because of Christ. Those are all the things that are filling up Paul’s balloon. There is no room left in Paul’s balloon for him to exalt himself. Paul knows that if he exalted himself, Christ could not reign in his life the way God willed. So God protected Paul from the temptation of exalting himself by not removing the thorn in his flesh. God wanted to make sure Paul relied on His power and strength and not his own. Paul got God’s point. The question is, do we?

Reflection Questions:

1. According to Paul, why was he given the thorn in his flesh?
2. Based on the text, what can we learn about what the ‘thorn’ could have been?
3. What are some different views on what the ‘thorn’ in Paul’s flesh?
4. What is your view?
5. What is the main point of this passage?
6. What could hinder Christ from being exalted in Paul’s life?
7. What can we learn about ourselves concerning Christ being exalted?
8. How does Paul choose to “defend” his apostolic authority and ministry?

Lesson #7 – Application

Passage: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

We have spent many lessons observing the passage. We have studied Paul's background and all that was going on in his life when he was writing this particular passage. We have also looked at the background of the Corinthian church, which was the original audience of our passage of study. We have broken down the text looking at Old Testament allusions, original Greek definitions, word studies, and much more. Our goal was to get a really good understanding of what the text says. That is the goal of observation. What is God saying through the inspired author? This is not an easy task, but it profits us much when we take the time to observe the Word of God.

After we learn what God says through His Word, we then studied, what does God mean through His Word. We learned what Paul was getting across to us when we looked at the Big Picture lesson. That is when we broke down the passage and learned what the passage means in relation to the chapter, book, and ultimate plan of God. We have learned that we can sometimes get interpretation wrong. We must rely on the Holy Spirit because He inspired Paul when Paul wrote this passage He illuminates His Words to us when we study.

Our goal of this study was to really seek to understand humility. What does it mean to be humble? And how do I grow in my humility? I chose a passage on humility from the Apostle Paul because he was a great example of true humility. Paul was world famous, wrote more books than any other one author, Christ Himself revealed to him, and he was one of only 12 Apostles. Can you imagine all that fame and being able to stay humble? It is was not easy and does not come naturally. That is why God gave Paul a thorn in his flesh, which was to keep him humble.

Now we get into what this passage means for us today. Every Word of God is applicable to us in some way. It may be a direct command or a principle, but every Word is profitable to us. How do we apply this passage concerning the humility of Paul? How do we personally become a humble person? In the world we live in, pride is all around us. Everyone seems to want fame and popularity. People use things like social media to be their own paparazzi. We as a people crave and love accomplishments and achievements. We want

to be recognized by someone else for what we have done. We also will recognize ourselves by letting the world know what we have done.

Pride is the opposite of humility. And we have learned that pride is what got Satan kicked out of Heaven and what will characterize the Antichrist. When we elevate ourselves above God, that is pride. When we credit things to ourselves that should be credited to God, that's pride. When we seek our own interests and not those of God, that's pride. When we are not content with the life we have, that's a form of pride. When we elevate ourselves instead of elevating God, that is also pride. The focus of a prideful person is themselves. The focus of a humble person is God.

We are going to seek to grow in the area of humility by these four application principles that we can glean from our passage of study. They are:

- 1) Give credit to God.
- 2) Seek God's interests.
- 3) Don't think too high of yourself.
- 4) Be content with your life.

Let's start with the first application, which is to give credit to God. We see this in 2 Corinthians 12:9a "And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

God told Paul that His grace was all he needed to live his life. Grace is God's love and favor we do not deserve. God's grace is His power that enables us to live the Christian life. We can do nothing apart from God. Therefore, God gets all the credit. We can take credit for our sin, but everything else we owe to God.

Have you ever thought to yourself "I did really good on this test in school", or "I just taught a really good lesson"? Those are temptations for pride. We must guard against pride. One way to do this is to give credit where credit is due. We could change our words by saying "God, thank you for allowing me to do well in school. You granted my brain the ability to learn, grasp, understand, and retain the information I'm learning. Please use the knowledge that you have given me and grant me wisdom that I may live a life pleasing to you." Do you see the difference? Pride will focus on ourselves but humility will focus on God. This is not something that comes naturally, but we must discipline ourselves daily and crucify our flesh to guard ourselves against pride.

Let's look at some verses about why we should give credit to God. Let's worship Him for Who He and what He has done.

2 Corinthians 8:9

Philippians 2:5-11

Romans 1:1

When we focus on God and what He has done, that will help us to give Him credit for what He has done in and through our lives. It will also help us to become a more humble person as we grow in our knowledge and understanding of our great God.

The second application point is to seek God's interests. This comes from 2 Corinthians 12:10 "for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." One thing that kept Paul humble is he always sought the interest of God. Everything he did in ministry was ultimately about God's glory and the expansion of God's kingdom. Paul lived for the sake of Christ. It was all about Christ and His will and His plans and His message. Paul was not concerned about himself and his personal goals, but that of Christ alone. Let's look at some verses that really help us to see how Paul sought the interests of God.

Acts 20:24

2 Corinthians 4:5

Philippians 1:20-21

2 Corinthians 4:7

So how do we seek God's interests? Well we don't wait to hear God audibly speak to us that's for sure. We discover God's interests by studying His Word. The more we seek God through His Word, the more we will see His will and what He desires. And the more that we grow in our relationship with God, the more we will start to desire what God desires. That is what we should pray for; to desire what God desires and to hate what God hates. If you are unsure of what God wants you to do specifically, pray about it. And study His Word concerning His revealed will, promises, and commands.

Then you can write down what you have a passion for, what you like doing, and your life context for starters. If you are a believer, God has something special just for you to be busy doing until He returns. If you combine your life and passions with the Word of God, you can get a sense of what you could be doing for God's glory. A life wasted is a life concerned with their own personal interests. A life a real success is a life spent seeking God's interests and His glory. At the end of my life, it is not going to matter much if I ever accomplished anything or if the world knew my name for my great deeds. But what will matter is if I had a relationship with God and what God did through my life. Will He look at my life and be able to say, "Well done My

good and faithful servant”? That is my ultimate goal; to seek God’s interests and not my own and for God to be pleased and get the glory out of my life. I pray that as I seek God’s interests, I will grow in humility.

The third application point is to not think too high of yourself. This comes from 2 Corinthians 12:9b “Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”

We learned that weaknesses in this passage is talking about Paul’s inabilities or his limitations. Our limitations or inabilities are the areas of life where we fall short of God’s standards. We learn in Romans 3:23 that we all fail to meet God’s standards in one way or another. Look at how Paul acknowledged his inabilities and limitations:

Romans 7:14-25

It is not an easy thing to acknowledge your own sin or imperfections. We naturally tend to write them off as not being sins or blame someone else for our sins. Paul said he will rather boast in about his imperfections than in the success of his ministry or what God is doing in his life. Paul did not think too high of himself if he continually acknowledged his sins and imperfections.

When we fail to acknowledge our sins, we can be sure to be tempted to think too high of ourselves. But if we were to really sit down and think about the many sins and imperfections we have in our lives, it would be very hard to still be a prideful person. Let’s look at some verses that talk about not thinking too highly of ourselves:

Romans 12:3

1 Corinthians 4:7

When is the last time you confessed your sins? Do you even view your sins as worthy of a spiritual death or do you see yourself as not that bad? Regular confession of sin should be a part of the life of a Christian. When we really look at our real selves and compare us to God Almighty, we will have absolutely no reason to think too high of ourselves.

Make confession of sin a regular part of your life. Pray that you hate your sins the way God hates sins. And after you confess, seek to grow in that area of your life by the grace of God. If we want God to work in our lives by His mighty power, then we need to seek to eliminate pride and cultivate humility. Acknowledging and repenting of our sin is one way in which we can hope to not think too high of ourselves and prayerfully grow in humility.

Our fourth and final application point is to be content with your life. This comes from 2 Corinthians 12:10 “Therefore I am well content with weaknesses,

with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Let's look back at the previous chapter in 2 Corinthians to see some of the things Paul went through in his life.

2 Corinthians 11:23-30

Paul was not saying he was happy with his sins and all the bad things that were happening in his life. As we also see in our passage, Paul begged the Lord to take away the thorn in his flesh. Paul did not want all those negative things to happen in his life, but he was saying that he is satisfied. He is not satisfied with his weaknesses, but he was satisfied with his relationship with Christ and the work of Christ in his life. Being satisfied means acknowledging God's will and submitting to His will.

If God allows you to have a "thorn in your flesh" or to be persecuted, if you trust that God is working His perfect plan in your life, you will be satisfied. Again, not happy with the weaknesses, but satisfied with God. Every weakness we have or every insult or persecution is an opportunity for us to live out our trust in God. Being content will allow you to go through a very difficult situation easier. You will be at peace in your inner man. God allows everything that happens in our lives to happen for a reason. Do you trust God?

God's power and plan for your life can best be displayed in a humble person. It is not about us, but about God. When we focus on God and not focus on exalting ourselves, we can imitate Paul and he imitates Christ and grow in true humility.

I am sure we have all seen a Christian go through a hard time with great contentment and peace. We have probably wondered how they could display such peace when their world is falling apart around them. They have true contentment that could only come from God.

So if or when you go through a hard time in your life, focus on God. Know that He has a perfect plan and is working it out for your good and His glory. The unexpected surprises of life are opportunities for us to live out what we say we believe. Do you trust God?

Let's look at some verses on contentment:

Philippians 4:11-13

Romans 8:28

Romans 12:2

Proverbs 13:30

Final Reflection Questions:

1. What are some areas of your life you have given credit to yourself and not God?
2. How can you redirect your focus by giving credit back to God?
3. How have you in your life sought your own interests?
4. How can you redirect your focus by seeking God's interests?
5. How have you thought too highly of yourself?
6. How can you guard against thinking too highly of yourself?
7. What are some areas of your life in which you are not fully content?
8. What is a biblical outlook on contentment?
9. How was Paul able to be content?
10. Why should we be content with our lives? (Note: Paul would have loved for the thorn and other adversities to go away, but it was not God's will. How are we to be content with our lives when God's will is not the same as our will?)
11. Why should we pursue humility?