

Day 1

 Please pray for holy guidance and insight before you begin today's study.

Paul Considers His Thorn a Blessing

¹I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord.

Q1. ***I must go on boasting***: Does the Apostle Paul like to boast about himself?

Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

 ***Visions and revelations from the Lord***: “If his adversaries falsely claimed to have received their teaching directly from God through visions and revelations, Paul could claim that this was truly so in his case. But he mentions this here to show that the supreme height to which he was raised through these ecstatic experiences was counterbalanced by the humbling depth of a particular affliction he was given to bear (see v 7), so that he should continue to glory not in self but only in the ‘God of all grace’ (1 Peter 5:10).” [©1991, *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible*, published by Zondervan, Inc., Grand Rapids, MI 49530. All rights reserved. Page 1703]

²I 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. ³And I know that this man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows — ⁴was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

Q2. (Verse 2) ***I know a man in Christ***: To whom might Paul be referring?

 (Verse 2) ***Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know***: “Paul is sure of this remarkable experience, but he is unsure whether this rapture (being ‘caught up’) was one that included the body or one that took place in separation from the body.” [©1991, *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible*, published by Zondervan, Inc., Grand Rapids, MI 49530. All rights reserved. Page 1703]

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Q3. (Verse 2) *I know a man in Christ*: Why might Paul be referring to himself in the third person?
(Hint: has he been accused of boasting?)

 (Verse 2) *A man in Christ . . . was caught up to the third heaven . . . Paradise*: “The third heaven designates a place beyond the immediate heaven of the earth’s atmosphere and beyond the further heaven of outer space and its constellations into the presence of God Himself. Thus, the risen and glorified Lord is said to have passed ‘*through the heavens*’ (Hebrews 4:14 ↓), and now, having “*ascended higher than all the heavens*” (Ephesians 4:10 ↓), to be ‘*exalted above the heavens*’ (Hebrews 7:26 ↓). The term ‘Paradise’ is synonymous with the third heaven, where those believers who have died are even now ‘*at home with the Lord*’ (5:8 ↓; cf. “*with Christ*” Philippians 1:23 ↓). The nature of the inexpressible things that Paul heard remains unknown to us because this is something Paul was not permitted to tell. It was an experience that must have given incalculable strength to his apostleship, which involved him in such constant and extreme suffering. Moreover, as this experience was not self-induced, it afforded him no room for self-glorification.” [©1991, *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible*, published by Zondervan, Inc., Grand Rapids, MI 49530. All rights reserved. Page 1703]

Hebrews 4:14 [NIV-1984]

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Ephesians 4:10 [NIV-1984]

He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.

Hebrews 7:26 [NIV-1984]

Such a high priest meets our need — one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

2 Corinthians 5:8 [NIV-1984]

We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Philippians 1:23 [NIV-1984]

I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far

 (Verse 2) *A man in Christ* who fourteen years ago: “On what occasion or where this occurred, or why he concealed the remarkable fact so long, and why there is no other allusion to it, is unknown; and conjecture is useless. If this Epistle was written, as is commonly supposed, about the year 58 AD, then this occurrence must have happened about the year 44 AD. This was several years after his conversion . . .” [©1834, *Notes on the Bible* by Albert Barnes. https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_corinthians/12-2.htm]

 (Verse 2) *To the third heaven*: “The Jews sometimes speak of seven heavens, and Muhammed has borrowed this idea from the Jews. But the Bible speaks of but three heavens, and among the Jews in the apostolic ages [generally, the 1st century when the Apostles lived] also the heavens were divided into three:

- (1) “The aerial, including the clouds and the atmosphere, the heavens above us, until we come to the stars.
- (2) “The starry heavens, the heavens in which the sun, moon, and stars appear to be situated.
- (3) “The heavens beyond the stars. That heaven was supposed to be the residence of God, of angels, and of holy spirits. It was this upper heaven, the dwelling-place of God, to which Paul was taken, and whose wonders he was permitted to behold — this region where God dwelt; where Christ was seated at the right hand of the Father, and where the spirits of the just were assembled.” [©1834, *Notes on the Bible* by Albert Barnes. https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_corinthians/12-2.htm]

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- Q4. (Verse 4) ***He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell:*** Do we know of another instance in which a disciple was prevented from describing what he saw and experienced?

Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

Revelation 10:4 [NIV-1984]

And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down."

- Q5. (Verse 4) ***He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell:*** Why might God have prevented the Apostle Paul from describing what he saw and heard and experienced? Would Paul's observations have given credibility to his witness, to the reality of Heaven, and to the Lord Christ Jesus?

Why prevent a description?

Would observation given credibility?

Day 2

 Please pray for holy guidance and insight before you begin today's study.

⁵ I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. ⁶ Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.

- Q6. (Verse 5) ***I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses:*** If Paul boasts about his weaknesses, Who is Paul indirectly crediting for his successful ministry? Why?

Who?

Why?

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Q7. (Verse 6) *If I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool . . . truth:* What might be an example of a foolish boast? (Hint: a lie to boost oneself publicly; puffery)

⁷To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

Q8. *To keep me from becoming conceited:* Is “conceit” a basic human characteristic?
Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

 *To keep me from becoming conceited:* “Lest I should be spiritually proud; lest I should become self-confident and vain, and suppose that I was a special favorite of Heaven. If Paul was in danger of spiritual pride, who is not? If it was necessary for God to adopt some special measures to keep him humble, we are not to be surprised that the same thing should occur in other cases. There is abundant reason to believe that Paul was naturally a proud man. He was by nature self-confident; trusting in his own talents and attainments, and eminently ambitious. When he became a Christian, therefore, one of his besetting sins would be pride; and as he had been especially favored in his call to the apostleship; in his success as a preacher; in the standing which he had among the other apostles, and in the revelations imparted to him, there was also special danger that he would become self-confident and proud of his attainments. There is no danger that more constantly besets Christians, and even eminent Christians, than pride. There is no sin that is more subtle, insinuating, deceptive; none that lurks more constantly around the heart and that finds a more ready entrance, than pride.” [©1834, Notes on the Bible by Albert Barnes. https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_corinthians/12-7.htm]

Q9. *To keep me from becoming conceited:* If “conceit” is a human characteristic, what word has a similar meaning and is related to self-importance and narcissism? [©Copyright © 2003-2025 Farlex, Inc. <https://www.freethesaurus.com/conceit>]

 P R E

Q10. *To keep me from becoming conceited:* Is “conceit” a human trait to which the Apostle Paul might be attracted? How so?

Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

How so?

Lesson 14: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Q11. *[I] was given . . . a thorn*: What might this “thorn” have been?

 *[I] was given . . . a thorn*: “The word used here (σκόλοψ skolops) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It means properly anything pointed or sharp, e. g., a stake or palisade. . . or the point of a hook. . . All that can be known of this is, that it was some infirmity of the flesh, some bodily affliction or calamity, that was like the continual piercing of the flesh with a thorn (Galatians 4:13 ↓); and that it was something that was designed to prevent spiritual pride. It is not indeed an improbable supposition that it was something that could be seen by others, and that thus tended to humble him when with them.” [©1834, Notes on the Bible by Albert Barnes. https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_corinthians/12-7.htm]

Galatians 4:13 [English Standard Version (ESV)]

¹³ You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, ¹⁴ and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

Q12. *A thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan*: Is it possible (is it Biblical) that God allowed Satan to place a “thorn in my flesh”?

Job 2:6-7 [NIV-1984]

⁶ The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.”

⁷ So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head.

Luke 13:16 [NIV-1984]

Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”

 Verses 8 and 9 discuss Paul’s “thorn” and his prayers for healing. The questions that follow delve into your personal prayer life. If you are participating in a discussion group, please share your answers only if you feel comfortable in doing so. Your answers to these questions will provide, hopefully, a spirited discussion as we students discuss God’s gracious answer or His silence to our urgent, heartfelt prayers.

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Day 3

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⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Q13. (Verse 8) Did the Apostle Paul ever heal anyone?

Acts 14:8-10 [NIV-1984]

⁸ In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, "Stand up on your feet!"

At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

Acts 19:3-7 [NIV-1984]

¹ While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

³ So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

⁴ Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

Acts 19:11-12 [NIV-1984]

¹¹ God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

Acts 20:7-12 [NIV-1984]

⁷ On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. ⁸ There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. ⁹ Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead.

¹⁰ Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be

Lesson 14: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

alarmed," he said. "He's alive!"

¹¹ Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. ¹² The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

Acts 28:1, 7-9 [NIV-1984]

¹ Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. . . .

⁷ There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. ⁸ His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him.

⁹ When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured.

Q14. Why did Christ Jesus ignore Paul's prayers for healing?

Q15. Should we pray for physical healings in ourselves? In others?

Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

Philippians 4:6-7 [NIV-1984]

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

James 5:13-15 [NIV-1984]

¹³ Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

¹⁴ Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

Q16. If we, who believe, pray for healing and the person is not healed; what should be our response?

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 [NIV-1984]

[These verses are repeated from above. They should be memorized.]

¹⁶ Be joyful always; ¹⁷ pray continually; ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

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Day 4

 Please pray for holy guidance and insight before you begin today's study.

Q17. If we, who believe, pray for healing and the healing does not occur, is it because our prayers were not bold enough? Not frequent enough? Not fervent enough? Not worded correctly? Or is it our faith — it is not strong enough? Thoughts?

Prayers were not enough? Thoughts?

Faith was not enough? Thoughts?

James 5:16 [NIV-1984]

Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous [Believer] is powerful and effective.

Q18. Have you (or someone you know) ever prayed for something and God seemingly ignored your prayer?

Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

Q19. [Personal] If God seemingly ignored your prayer, did that 'neglect' affect your prayer-life? Did it affect your faith?

Prayer-life? Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

Faith? Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

John 9:31 [International Children's Bible (ICB)]

We all know that God does not listen to sinners. But God listens to anyone who worships and obeys him.

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Q20. [Personal] If God answered your prayer with “No.”, what was the motivation for your prayer? Was the outcome of your prayer for God’s glory, or your comfort? As you think — really think — about the events between then and now, can you identify any blessings that may have occurred from God’s “No.”?

Motivation?

Outcome?

Any blessings?

 The following excerpt from the Book of Genesis illustrates the prayer-like conversation between Abraham and the Lord, who, this commentator believes, was the preincarnate Lord Jesus (preincarnate means before He was born into this world). While the back-and-forth conversation might seem a bit silly to us today, this example demonstrates the Lord’s incredible patience with us humans, as well as His willingness to carefully listen to our prayers, entreaties, and petitions.

Genesis 18:20, 23^b-32 [International Children’s Bible (ICB)]

²⁰ Then the Lord said, “I have heard many things against the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. They are very evil. . . .

^{22^b} But Abraham stood there before the Lord. ²³ Then Abraham approached the Lord.

Abraham asked, “Lord, do you plan to destroy the good persons along with the evil persons? ²⁴ What if there are 50 good people in that city? Will you still destroy it? Surely you will save the city for the 50 good people living there. ²⁵ Surely you will not destroy the good people along with the evil people. Then the good people and the evil people would be treated the same. You are the judge of all the earth. Won’t you do what is right?”

²⁶ Then the Lord said, “If I find 50 good people in the city of Sodom, I will save the whole city because of them.”

²⁷ Then Abraham said, “I am only dust and ashes. Yet I have been brave to speak to the Lord. ²⁸ What if there are only 45 good people in the city? Will you destroy the whole city for the lack of 5 good people?”

The Lord said, “If I find 45 good people there, I will not destroy the city.”

²⁹ Again Abraham said to the Lord, “If you find only 40 good people there, will you destroy the city?”

The Lord said, “If I find 40 good people, I will not destroy the city.”

³⁰ Then Abraham said, “Lord, please don’t be angry with me. Let me ask you this. If you find only 30 good people in the city, will you destroy it?”

The Lord said, “If I find 30 good people there, I will not destroy the city.”

³¹ Then Abraham said, “I have been brave to speak to the Lord. But what if there are 20 good people in the city?”

The Lord answered, “If I find 20 good people there, I will not destroy the city.”

³² Then Abraham said, “Lord, please don’t be angry with me. Let me bother you this one last time. What if you find 10 good people there?”

The Lord said, “If I find 10 good people there, I will not destroy it.”

³³ When the Lord finished speaking to Abraham, he left. And Abraham returned home.

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Q21. As Believers pray for essentially the same outcome, does God value numbers — the number of people praying (e.g., the size of the prayer chain, or chains)? Or the requestor's popularity — the more Believers praying for the requestor's petition the greater the likelihood God will hear and fulfill the prayer request?

Numbers? Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

Popularity? Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

Romans 8:26-27 [NIV-1984]

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Romans 8:28 [NIV-1984]

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:34 [NIV-1984]

Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Hebrews 7:25 [NIV-1984]

Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

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Day 5

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Q22. Does God want to make us comfortable in this world? Or is His motive to bring us to faith in Him? In His Son? To refine our faith? Okay, I believe, then why do I still suffer? (Hint: examine verses 9 & 10)

Comfortable? Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

Faith in Him? Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

To refine our faith? Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

Believer still suffers? Why?

John 16:33 [International Children's Bible (ICB)]

"I told you these things so that you can have peace in me. In this world you will have trouble. But be brave! I have defeated the world!"

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 [NIV-1984]

[These verses are repeated from above. They should be memorized.]

¹⁶Be joyful always; ¹⁷pray continually; ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Q23. God answered Paul's fervent prayers for healing with "No". If God can seemingly ignore the prayers from a great man-of-God like Paul, does that reduce the hurt you might harbor against God for a "No" He gave you?

Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

Q24. Do you pray for others? (Intercessional prayers?)

Yes? No? (Why did you circle that answer?)

1 Timothy 2:1, 3-6 [NIV-1984]

¹ I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone...

³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time.

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Matthew 17:14-21 [NIV-1984]

¹⁴ When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him.

¹⁵ "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. ¹⁶ I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him."

¹⁷ "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me."

¹⁸ Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment.

¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

²⁰ He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed [a very small seed, but the plant grows taller than a man], you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. ²¹ This kind can come out only by prayer [and fasting]." [See also Mark 9:14-29]

 The mountain is symbolic for any insurmountable obstacle — the “mountain” in my life. We should pray and give thanks for all things, all circumstances. What we are currently experiencing may seem insurmountable, but God has our best interests at heart; see Romans 8:28 (↓).

Romans 8:28 [NIV-1984]

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Deuteronomy 7:9-10 [NIV-1984]

⁹ Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. ¹⁰ But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction; he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him.

Psalms 103:11 [International Children's Bible (ICB)]

As high as the sky is above the earth, so great is his love for those who respect him.

Psalms 145:18-21 [NIV-1984]

¹⁸ The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. ¹⁹ He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. ²⁰ The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. ²¹ My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.

1 Corinthians 2:9-11 [NIV-1984]

⁹ However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" [Isaiah 64:4] — ¹⁰ but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. ¹¹ The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

James 1:12 [NIV-1984]

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

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¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Q25. ***For when I am weak, then I am strong***: How can Paul truthfully make this statement?

When is he weak?

When is he strong?

Conclusion?

Day 6

 Please pray for holy guidance and insight before you begin today's study.

Q26. (Personal) How would you describe your prayer-life?

Q27. (Personal) How would you describe your prayers?

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