

A Ministry of Suffering

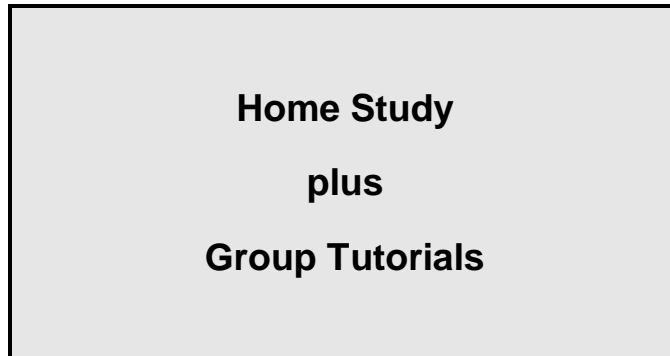


Foundations

***A Sample Lesson From:
Discover Christian Living (1)
The Letters of Paul***

Introduction


Our Open Learning courses are designed to help you learn by means of:



Home Study

Each Block has **four sessions**. For convenience, each of these sessions has been broken down into two **lessons** so that, if you have about $\frac{3}{4}$ hr to spare (very roughly), you can complete one lesson. These lessons require you to read and interact with the course material as well as with your Bible.

The sample lesson is **programmed** to help you check your progress as you work through. To get the maximum benefit it is important that you use the course in the way it that was intended:

1. Read section 1 (often referred to by the technical term 'frame' 1).
2. Make the response required, if there is one.
3. Check that your answer corresponds with the feedback given in the 'feedback' section at the end. (Wherever feedback is given, it is marked with a raven.) 
4. Proceed to section 2.

Note that the **course** is programmed—**you** are **not** being programmed! The aim of programming is that:

1. you can check frequently that you have understood the material presented;
2. you are stimulated to active and critical thinking;
3. you reinforce what you learn and are better able to remember it.

Sometimes, discussion frames are given. These are clearly indicated by a heading 'For Discussion' and box. Here you should answer the question in your words and come to the tutorial prepared to discuss the question as indicated.

At the end of each lesson, we encourage you to spend some time in reflection on how what you have learnt applies to you in the situation where God has placed you.

Group Meeting

At the end of each block of home study, you will meet in your tutorial group where you will have the opportunity to discuss points of interest that have arisen and think through with others how your learning may be applied. You will also normally be given a five-minute quiz.

The group tutorials give the opportunity for you to clarify ideas and to share your own thoughts and to listen to the ideas of others. The process of learning from the Bible in a group is an essential part of the programme. It is here that you are able to think through areas of application and to pray and support each other in your studies.

2 Corinthians 10-13: A Ministry of Suffering

block 5 session 4 lesson b

Preparing for today's lesson:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray that God will give you insight as we draw to the end of this course. • Remember to keep a notebook handy to note down any questions or issues for discussion.
Objectives	<p>At the end of this lesson you will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. give the purpose and the result of Paul's "thorn", and write out from memory 2 Corinthians 12:9; 2. state two ways in which Paul showed his concern for his Corinthian converts.

a. An unexpected answer to prayer

1. In our final lesson of this course, we shall look more closely at the suffering Paul personally endured in his ministry and how God enabled him in his weakness to keep going.

Recall that Paul suffered in many ways: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. If you can put these together as part of your picture of Paul you will be in a good position to understand what he says in his letters, and why he says it.

We shall now turn to one particular cause of suffering. It is recorded in 2 Cor 12:7, what is it?



2. We do not know what precisely this thorn was, although many people have made many guesses. Here are some suggestions. Read through

2 Cor 12:1-10 and the notes below, and then see which you think is the most likely.


Literally the expression means “a thorn or stake for the flesh”. The expression might well be based on Num 33:55, where it is said that the Canaanites may become “barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides”.

- a. A bodily ailment of some sort.
- b. A defect in his eyes (see Gal 4:13-15; 6:11).
- c. Persecution from a particular individual (e.g. Alexander the coppersmith, 2 Tim 4:14).
- d. His wife.
- e. Temptation to sin.
- f. Epilepsy.
- g. Other?

 *Go on to the next frame.*


3. For Discussion

All the above (except d., 1 Cor 7:7!) have been championed by various writers. I think c. and e. are definitely wrong and that a. must be true: but what sort of ailment?



4. We may not know the exact nature of Paul’s thorn in the flesh, but we do know the purpose of it, and you will find it in verse 7. Explain the reason in your own words.



5. How did Paul react to this “thorn” (v8)? _____ 

6. And what is the Lord’s answer in 2 Cor 12:9 to Paul? Write it out - at least the main part of it:

“My grace _____

You may recall that Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane was somewhat similar (Mt 26:38-44). How was it similar and how different?



7. **For Discussion**

What conclusions should we draw for ourselves, if any, concerning how to pray and what to expect?

8. Note that the word for ‘rest upon me’ (v.9) literally means “may pitch his tent on me”, the idea of Christ’s power dwelling on Paul.

In 2 Cor 5:1-4 what was Paul saying about the earthly tent of his body? .



9. But in the Old Testament, tent or tabernacle is used in a very different way. What does Ex 40:34-35 tell us?



10. So, putting the thoughts of these last two frames together, can you, in your own words, explain what Paul is saying in 2 Cor 12:9?



11. For Discussion

Think about the last frame and consider to what degree this teaching is reflected in your local church. Where is the emphasis in relation to Christian ministry? Is it on power or suffering, or between the two? Jot down your thoughts below.



b. Paul and the Corinthian church

12. And so we come to the end of your study in Corinthians, and we end where we began on the subject of Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians. How would you describe Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians as demonstrated by 1 Corinthians?



13. However in 2 Corinthians we can end on a happier note, for Paul addresses the Corinthians with names that express his concern for them, and he also tells them that he loves them. Look up the following verses in 2 Corinthians and write down three ways in which he addresses them.

1:8; 8:1; 13:11 _____

6:13; 12:14 _____

7:1; 12:19 _____



14. And now five words or phrases that emphasise his love for them.

2:4 _____

6:11 _____

6:12 _____

11:11 _____

12:15 _____



c. Review

15. a. What did Paul discover because of his ‘thorn in the flesh’?

b. How would you describe Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians?

c. How would you describe Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians?

d. And a final revision question, write out from memory 2 Corinthians 12:9.



Reflecting on Today’s Lesson

As before, note down in your notebook anything from today’s lesson:

- that you want to discuss in your tutorial;
- that is significant for your own personal faith;
- that is significant for explaining 2 Corinthians to others.

Spend some time in prayer asking God to help you apply what you have learnt.

**Feedback:****block 5 session 4b**

4b.1	a. thorn in the flesh (a messenger of Satan)
4b.3	b. seems to fit the evidence that we have, especially if we think in terms of something that might produce revulsion - perhaps some sort of discharge (cf. Lv 15:2) You are, of course, free to disagree, and to discuss it in your tutorial.
4b.4	So that he would not become too spiritually elated, conceited about all his wonderful out-of-the body experiences.
4b.5	Three times he begged God to remove it.
4b.6	See 2 Cor 12:9: Jesus prayed three times; the request wasn't granted; Jesus used "If it be possible..." and volunteered to go through with it if necessary; Paul had a promise of grace. You may have thought of other things.
4b.8	It felt as if it were about to collapse (or similar).
4b.9	God's glory used to rest on the Israelites' tent of meeting in their journeyings in the wilderness.
4b.10	Your words. E.g. God allowed the thorn to remain in order that he might experience the grace and power of God as all sufficient, overshadowing as it were the weakness of his own body with the mighty glory and power of Christ, protecting Paul's tiny one-man tent with God's mighty marquee of grace.
4b.11	Your answer. I think we could do with a more positive attitude to both power and suffering!
4b.12	As very difficult; the various reports and letters Paul received and wrote indicate he had to be very stern indeed with them, and he was very sad about this state of affairs.
4b.13	brothers : my children : dear friends
4b.14	the depth of love he has for them: opened his heart wide to them : not withholding affection : God knows he loves them. : If he has demonstrated his love so greatly in not being a financial burden to them surely they won't love him the less for that.
4b.15	Check your answers for yourself.

This study forms part of an Open Learning programme based on local study groups for anyone who:

- wishes to grow in knowledge of God and understanding of the Christian faith;
- is committed to systematic, disciplined and in-depth personal study;
- is ready to learn from others in small discussion groups;
- is willing to make use of God-given gifts for mission and ministry in the local church.

The programme is designed to be accessible to those who have no previous theological study as well as to those who want to engage with the Bible at a deeper level. The courses are suitable for those who feel called to involvement in different avenues of ministry and mission in the local church as well as those who want to work out how to live more effectively as Christians in daily life whether at home or in workplace and society.

For More information, contact:

***Open Learning, Trinity College
Stoke Hill, Stoke Bishop
BRISTOL BS9 1JP***

Tel 0117 968 2803



Learning churches... growing churches