

Group discussion *Each number below includes questions that relate to the scripture. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better. Save time for “the big question.”*

Read II Corinthians 12:7-10 aloud.

1. Why does Paul say he was given a thorn in the flesh (7)?

How could gifts from God make a person conceited?

What has been a “thorn in the flesh” for you – something painful that made you better?

What do you think Paul’s thorn in the flesh was?

We have no idea. Maybe a physical ailment or maybe constant opposition. Whatever it was, it limited and humbled Paul.

2. If the thorn in the flesh served to humble Paul, why did he ask God to remove it?

Why do you think God ignored Paul’s pleas?

Was he really ignored?

What was God’s answer to Paul’s request?

What has been a similar situation for you, where God has given something different from what you requested?

3. Verses 9 & 10 make unusual statements about human weakness glorifying Christ. How is that different from our approach to life?

How do you feel when your weaknesses are on display?

Do you agree with Paul? Which brings Christ greater glory – a struggler or a believer who has it all together?

When do our weaknesses reveal Christ’s glory and when do they bring shame on Christ?

4. When have you been disappointed with God for not giving what you requested, but you were thankful later?

When have you been disappointed with God for not giving what you requested, and you are still trying to understand the situation?

5. What is prayer? How is it more than downloading our wish list to God?

What are some elements of prayer besides requests?

What has helped you to grow in your prayers?

† **The million-dollar question** *If you ask only one question, let this be it. Allow at least 20 minutes. Go around the circle and give each person an opportunity to answer. It’s okay if they pass, but at least they get a chance to respond.*

Imagine a group member was struggling with unanswered prayers. How could we as a group respond?

What should we say or not say?

What should we do or not do?

Resources

Bible notes

If you read this text in context (which will always help your preparation), you will find confusing material. Apparently some members of the church in Corinth called Paul a second-rate apostle. In II Cor. 10-12:14, Paul defends the authenticity of his calling and his work, so he talks more about himself than he does in other letters.

We have no idea about the identity of Paul's thorn in the flesh. Many theories, no certainties.

Prayer ideas

Do a chain prayer, where each person says a word or phrase that completes the sentence:

We thank you for...

We await your help with...

We praise you because...

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Bring art supplies to the meeting. Paper & crayons are simplest, but you could go more elaborate.

Draw a picture of a prayer that God request that God did not give you. You might need to pair up kids & adults.

Share the unanswered prayers with one another.

How did you feel when your prayer did not turn out like you hoped?

Read II Corinthians 12:7-10 aloud.

What did Paul do when God did not answer his prayer request?



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LIFE Group Guide

II Corinthians 12 – Unanswered prayers

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme: what to do when God does not answer your prayers as you had hoped.

Kevin is involved in a sermon series about difficult questions. That should make for lively conversation in your LIFE group this week.

Leadership tip: Engage the head and the heart. Usually the Bible study portion will bring out good thoughts. But for a small group to go deeper, people need to share their feelings. (Notice this is not a “lesson” you teach, but a “guide” to help members experience community.) Pray for and encourage open and honest sharing.

Relate *Use a few to introduce the theme, check everyone's spiritual pulse, and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage through these questions.*

- ❖ Gimme five... ways to serve an egg?
- ❖ Play Garth Brooks' song, “Unanswered Prayers.” Find it at... <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2156161706585783232#>
- ❖ If you were to add a verse to the song “Unanswered Prayers,” what would be the topic?
- ❖ When have you seen one of your heroes cry?