

Youth Teaching Resources

July 8, 2018



Season After Pentecost: The Perils of Pauline ... Thinking (May 27-July 8)

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 (RCL 8:7-15) – “Motivating Generosity”

2 Corinthians 12:1-10 – “Heavenly Secrets and Earthly Thorns”

A Prophetic Interlude (July 15-July 22)

Amos 7:7-15 – “Walking the Line”

Jeremiah 23:1-6 – “Bad Shepherds and Good”

Not Your Ordinary Rabbi (July 29-August 26)

John 6:1-21 – “He Did What?”

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Find links and videos related to this lesson.

Heavenly Secrets and Earthly Thorns

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

PARENT PREP

We don't want our students to be braggadocios. We want our students to be humble. We want our students to stand out, but not make too big of a deal about it. We want them to be the best, or the best they can be, but not tell the world about it. That is until they need to; on college essays, applications for jobs, when trying out for a position. So how are we to tell the world about how good we are without telling the world how good we are? Of course, the best way would be for someone else to tell the world about us. But if that doesn't work, tell the world about who you are but don't do it as a comparison to someone else. Be proud of who you are, instead of proud of who are not.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Before the session begins, create slips of paper with different categories on each paper. You may want to choose categories that your students know about: best band, best athlete of all time, best social media platform, etc. Begin the session by creating small group of two or three people and have them draw a slip of paper that you created before the session started. Allow them to come up with the answer to their category and then bring the group back together to discuss using questions like the following:

- 1) Who did you choose as the best in your category? Was it close? Who were some of the other people chosen? How did you choose?
- 2) Who would add to another group's best?
- 3) How confident do you think the people you listed are? Do you think they go beyond confident and are cocky?
- 4) Is it wrong to be cocky?
- 5) How do you balance being cocky with being confident?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony's commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

Information *continued*

- 1) Why did Paul need to defend himself?
- 2) What had his opponents claimed and how did Paul respond to these claims?
- 3) What is the third level of Heaven that Paul mentions? Why is this important?
- 4) What was Paul's "thorn in the flesh"? Who gave this thorn to Paul? Does it matter? Explain.
- 5) How is weakness a sign of communion with God?
- 6) What did Paul's weakness force him to do?

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the "Digging Deeper" portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) Why did Paul write multiple letters to the same church?
- 2) What is the importance of Paul being "caught up" to the third heaven?
- 3) What thorns of the flesh may have Paul suffered from? Does it matter to us?
- 4) Why would Paul pray to remove his thorn in the flesh if it made his relationship with God better?

You may also want your group to discuss "The Hardest Question" if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as "The Hardest Question": When do we learn best?

Transformation

Conclude your session by showing the clip "You Sound Like You're Bragging" from *Listen Up Phillip*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize it to the best of your ability and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) Do you think Phillip was bragging? Explain.
- 2) Did she seem frustrated by his bragging?
- 3) Do you think it is appropriate to brag? Explain.
- 4) How can you brag on yourself without sounding cocky?
- 5) How does Paul's discussion about weakness making him stronger relate to bragging? Should you brag about your weakness?
- 6) If you are a person of faith, should you brag?

Close with a prayer thanking God for the humility that we have through our weaknesses.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The text—The Revised Common Lectionary text for the day begins at v. 2, but there’s no good reason to skip verse one, which sets up what comes next: so we won’t.

A “severe letter”—Paul’s correspondence with the church at Corinth mentions more than two letters, and what we call 1 Corinthians was not the first one: 1 Cor. 5:9 speaks of a “previous letter” Paul had written. A few scholars think parts of that letter may have been retained in 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1, which seems out of place, though most think those verses were added later by someone other than Paul.

At some point, while he was working in Ephesus, individual members of the church from Corinth (“Chloe’s people,” 1:11) contacted Paul, perhaps through personal visits, telling him of problems in the congregation. Paul also received at least one letter from the church requesting his advice (7:1).

In response, Paul wrote what we now call 1 Corinthians. Unfortunately, the letter was not well received, leading Paul to make a visit to the church that he called painful (2 Cor. 2:1). After returning to Ephesus, he wrote another letter that he described as tearful and difficult (2 Cor. 2:3-9; 7:12), and had Titus deliver it to the church. Some scholars think this “severe letter” may be partially preserved in 2 Corinthians 10-13, which is sterner in tone than the preceding chapters.

Getting caught up—Paul’s insistence that he (or the person in Christ he claimed to know) had been “caught up to the third heaven” indicates that he did not do anything to deserve or bring about the heavenly transport. He didn’t “pray until he got through,” have hands laid on him, or engage in intentional ecstatic activities in hopes of being spiritual enraptured. This leaves the initiative entirely in God’s hands: Paul’s transport or vision was a gift of grace, not due to his own efforts.

To speak, or not to speak—Paul said he would not speak of what he had seen in “the third heaven,” lest he be seen as trying to impress others with his spiritual credentials. This echoes his earlier statement that he spoke in tongues as a private exercise (“more than you all”), but declined to do so in public because the practice did not edify the community, but would only draw attention to himself (1 Cor. 14:14-19). His authority was not based on secret revelations or impressive speech, but on the life he lived before them.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Paul’s “thorn”—Paul’s reference to having received a “thorn in the flesh” may be drawn from the Greek translation of Psalm 32:4, which has the poet speaking of how God’s hand had become heavy, so that “I was tormented with bodily suffering while a thorn was stuck in me.” The Greek translation follows a different tradition from the Hebrew text, which speaks of God’s hand being heavy so that “my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.”

When Paul quoted from the Old Testament, it was generally from the Greek translation, typically called the “Septuagint.”

Our thorns—John T. McFadden has noted that Paul’s reticence about naming his “thorn” can be for our benefit: “But for those of us who read this text many years later, Paul’s omission allows us to filter it through our own thorns.” Paul found that his affliction kept him from getting overly proud of his heavenly visions.

“Without the thorn, Paul could have easily fallen into the trap that ensnared the super-apostles, diverted from his urgent mission by narcissistic fascination with his experiences and the sense of self-importance they bring.” (John T. McFadden, in *Feasting on the Word, Year B*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 3 of Accordance electronic ed. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009], paragraph 14541.)

Strength in weakness—Peter S. Hawkins offers a memorable take on Paul’s claim to have found strength in weakness after God chose not to remove his “thorn in the flesh.” The negative result “. . . does not mean that his prayer goes unanswered, but only that the kind of deliverance he longs for will not be given; the thorn will not be extracted. Instead, Christ will be with him in his pain, will transform a solitary agony into infused strength. Whether in a vision or only in the still, small voice of prayer, the Lord says to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

(Peter S. Hawkins, in *Feasting on the Word, Year B*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 3 of Accordance electronic ed. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009], paragraph 14563.)

Three times—Paul said he prayed three times for God to remove his affliction – do you think this is an intentional parallel to Jesus praying three times in the garden for God to remove the “cup” of affliction from him? In both cases, what was the result?

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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When do we learn best?

Under what circumstances do you learn best? We might think of any number of conditions. Some people learn best in quiet solitude, while others prefer to learn in company with others. Some are auditory learners who like lectures, while others are more visual and crave visual stimulation. Many people are kinesthetic learners, preferring an active, “hands-on” learning environment.

No matter what our preferred learning style, we all have one thing in common when it comes to learning: we learn best when we realize that we don’t know everything already. Perhaps you have known people who preferred their preconceived notions to an open-minded engagement with new ideas. Maybe you’ve tried to teach something to a child who resisted your careful instruction, thinking they already know all they need to know.

We learn best when we recognize our lack in any given area: only then can we gain the strength that comes with new learning. Paul contended that one of his greatest lessons came from recognizing his weakness. Only then could he learn to depend less on himself and more on God – and in that, he found the strength he needed.