



God has placed each part in the body just as he wanted it to be.

— 1 Corinthians 12:18 (NIRV)



Adult Bible Study: Part 4

This is our final session on the Bible and disability. We began by establishing that the Old Testament often presented disease and disability as being retribution, or punishment, for an individual's sin, that the Levitical laws were geared toward the prevention of disease, and that the Hebrew worldview looked to God and his Messiah to bring healing to them. We also studied a passage that, at first glance, seemed to be very degrading to persons with disabilities, but discovered that it was specific to a small percentage of the Hebrew people, that it spoke to the priest's ability to perform his function, and that the appearance of perfection foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Revisit Leviticus 21.

"I would never put words in Christ's mouth, but it seems to me that he was saying, 'I love you. I have compassion for you. I can help you with your burdens; but the ultimate thing I can do for you is forgive you. That is what I am all about. It is my perfect gift to you.'" —Sandra

As we moved to the New Testament, everything changed. Jesus' emphasis was on healing, not prevention. He demonstrated power over every type of disease and disability, even those that were manifestations of demonic possession. He never refused a request for healing, and in many cases healed individuals who had not asked for relief, showing his compassion. He would often use a healing event as a teaching moment, especially when dealing with the religious leaders. Jesus also dispelled the notion that disease and disability were directly related to sinful acts, attributing them instead to the presence and power of sin and the devil in this world. He lifted burdens with his acts of healing, just as his death on the cross would lift the world's burden of sin.

Miracles of healing continued after Jesus' ascension. As the apostle's began to preach the Gospel, their presence was often accompanied by healing events, and in some cases a healing presented the opportunity to share their story. Just as importantly, the accounts of Jesus' power to heal became a part of their proclamation, as the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection became the standard formula.

See Acts 3.

Read **Acts 10:34–43**. This occurs immediately after God revealed his plan for the Gentiles to Peter.

1. What truths does Peter affirm about healing? How are Jesus' miracles used by Peter? What is the "ultimate" miracle?

Even the Apostle Paul was given the power to heal (see Acts 28:7–9), a fact that is ripe with irony, as we shall soon see.

Adult Bible Study: Part 4

Ironic and significant:
Paul had a physical burden
that went uncured and yet he
is given the power through
Christ to lift others' burdens.

Discuss the difference
between empathy and pity.

Read **2 Corinthians 12:6–10**.

2. How is Paul's "thorn" consistent with other disabilities that we have studied? What is the result of Paul's thorn?

Discuss how Paul was made strong in his weakness.

How are we made strong in our weaknesses?

It is impossible to know exactly what Paul's thorn was. However, we can be fairly certain that it was a physical disability and that it was at times debilitating. There are some additional hints in his letter to the Galatians.

Read **Galatians 4:12–14**.

Here Paul refers to a "bodily ailment" that caused him to remain among these congregations.

3. How did Paul describe this ailment?

Have you ever faced a bodily ailment that held you back from something? What were Paul's expectations because of this ailment? What were your expectations because of your ailment?

Read **2 Corinthians 10:10**.

4. What further light might this shed on Paul's disability?

Paul was one of the greatest men of God that ever lived, and God chose to allow him to live with a disability that could interfere with the work that he had been called to do. The passage in Galatians tells us that he was acutely aware of the effect that his appearance could have. However, Paul was certain that his thorn was not sent by God, but that it was a "messenger of Satan." Rather than see it as an impairment, he was able to embrace it in his instruction to others.

How does society define:
President Roosevelt, Stevie Wonder, Helen Keller, Phil Keaggy, President Ronald Reagan, Marlee Matlin, Joni Eareckson-Tada?

Did your group discuss each person's accomplishments first or did you ask, "What's wrong with that person?" Why?

Read **1 Corinthians 12:12–26**.

5. How might Paul's personal experience with disability have shaped what is written here?

Paul had spent considerable time in Corinth (see Acts 18), how would knowing of Paul's disability affect you as a Corinthian hearer of his letter?

Reopen your discussion on **2 Corinthians 12: 6–10**.

Adult Bible Study: Part 4

6. Does this passage add anything to your understanding of Paul's view of weakness?

Paul tells us that the Body of Christ, the Church, is a collection of “differently-abled” individuals. No one is more important than another; no one is without a place. There are no “handicapped” within the Body, only those whose function is critical to the health and well-being of the Christian Church. It is recommended that this Bible class follow up this study by visiting and discussing the *Meant to Be Terminology Worksheet*.

OPTIONAL: Look up the history of the word “handicapped.” How do you feel about using this term now?