

2 Corinthians

God's Glory and God's Grace

7. Revelations and Suffering

2 Corinthians 12.1-10

To start with:

- Either:** What's the strangest spiritual experience that you've known or heard about? [This could be a vision, or prophecy, or a healing, or something else!]
- Or:** How do you react to claims of supernatural experiences or revelations?

Reading the Passage:

Note to Leaders: *Paul has just been giving his 'spiritual CV' to the Corinthians, reminding them that he's just as qualified as the other apostles who are staking claim to the church that he set up and cares about deeply - he has been 'boasting' about his trials as an apostle.*

Read 2 Corinthians 12.1-4

1. If Paul was around today, what one question would you ask him about his experience? Do you think you would have believed Paul or not? [**Note to Leaders:** 'Third Heaven' most likely means just the highest heaven, or the place where God dwells, as opposed to the sky or space.]
2. Do accounts of supernatural events like this tend to encourage or discourage your faith? Why?

Read v.5-6

In Ancient Greek and Roman culture, boasting in what you were good at was commonplace and encouraged - being modest was unheard of (especially for men) and frowned upon by society.

3. What effect do you think Paul's refusal to boast, and especially to boast in his weaknesses, would have had on the Corinthians?
4. What do you think it means practically to be 'modest' about our own spiritual experiences or those of people we know? How does this work alongside testimony which we are encouraged to give? How are these things helpful/ unhelpful for the faith of others?

Finally, read v7-10.

Note to Leaders: *What Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' was, no-one knows for certain, but it was most likely a recurring illness or a physical disability. Other theories include a spiritual oppression, or perhaps a particular person who harassed Paul severely!*

5. a) What is your initial reaction to Paul's story? What kind of emotions does it bring up?
 - b) The idea of God choosing not to heal someone might sit uncomfortably with us. However, how does Paul see this in a positive light? How do you respond to that?
6. Paul says that God's power is 'made perfect in our weakness'; how do you understand that, and how could this encourage both individuals in the church and the church as a whole?

Respond and Pray

- In small groups, write a list together of the things you feel are your spiritual or physical 'weaknesses.' Then alongside, make a list of the ways in which God could use these 'weaknesses' to further his kingdom, to bring him glory, or to bless others.
- Pray in those small groups about the 'weaknesses' that were brought up, that God would use them for his glory, and that we might rely on his power and strength when our own fails us.

