

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**A Little Boasting****2 Corinthians 11:16—12:10**

“But [the Lord] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” 2 Corinthians 12:9

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 11:16–33.

1. Paul writes in Galatians 6:14, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” yet in this passage he self-consciously boasts “not...as the Lord would, but as a fool” (vs. 17). Why does Paul feel driven to boast in this way, and what effect do you think he wants his boasting to have? (10:12; 11:2–5, 12–15; cf. Prov. 26:5)
2. How have the boastful “super-apostles” (11:5) been treating the flock in Corinth? (vs. 20) In contrast, how does Paul treat the Corinthians? (1:24; 4:5; 6:11–12) What qualities should be evident in those who would be leaders in the church? (1 Tim. 3:2–3; Mt. 20:25–28)
3. What kind of heart and beliefs lie behind behavior like the false apostles’? What kind of heart and beliefs lie behind behavior like Paul’s?
4. How are you tempted to “boast[] in the way the world does” (vs. 18)—whether aloud or to yourself—about your faith, your church, your pastor? How have worldly standards of success shaped your expectations of your church, your pastor, and other believers? What “image” do you want them, or yourself, to project to the world?

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 11:21b–33.

5. It is easy for us at such a distance to read and discuss Paul’s list of hardships in a blasé way. List several kinds of hardship faced by Paul. Choose two or three items, and imagine what it must have been like to experience them.
6. What compels Paul to preach, despite these costs? (1 Cor. 9:16–17; 2 Cor. 5:10–11)
7. Was Paul surprised to encounter so much trouble? (Acts 9:15–16)
8. After such a long list of physical hardships and dangers, verse 28 may seem anticlimactic. Look up some of the following passages, and describe “the pressure of [Paul’s] concern for all the churches”: 1:6; 2:4; 7:3; 12:20–21; Gal. 4:19–20; Phil. 4:2–3; Col. 2:1–5; 1 Thess. 2:17–18; 3:5; 1 Tim. 1:18–20; Titus 1:10–11.

9. Paul gives his exit from Damascus a privileged position in his list. Contrast the way Paul (Saul) left Damascus to the way he set out for it. (Acts 9:1–2, 22–25)

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 12:1–6.

10. Paul has had a number of visions that have given him direction and encouragement (e.g., Acts 9:12; 16:9–10; 18:9–10; 22:17–21), but this one, which he writes about only here, is truly extraordinary. Given what we have read in chapter 11 about Paul’s experiences as a minister of the gospel, why do you think he was the recipient of such a “surpassingly great” (vs. 7) vision?
11. Paul himself does not generally write about his visions, and even here he does so reluctantly. What clues in the text show Paul’s humble reluctance?
12. On what basis would Paul rather be judged? (vs. 6b)

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–10.

13. Why was Paul given this “thorn in [his] flesh” (vs. 7)?
14. Paul does not spell out just what form the “thorn” takes. In what way do you think the impact of this passage is greater this way, than if he had told us the exact nature of his struggle?
15. Paul did not ask for this thorn, and prayed repeatedly for it to be removed. What answer does he receive from the Lord Jesus?
16. For what things was God’s grace sufficient in Paul’s life? Will it be sufficient for yours?

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–10.

17. What kinds of weakness does God prize? (Mt. 5:3–11)
18. What do we lose when we seek to be strong and not weak? (1 Cor. 1:17; 2:4–5) What can we—like Paul—gain when we boast in our weakness? (vs. 9b)
19. How can you boast in your weakness?
20. Commentator Homer A. Kent writes, “Our Christian faith today [like the Corinthians’] depends on the validity of the apostle’s testimony. The reader will do well to study carefully Paul’s

explanation, and let it strengthen his confidence in the apostleship of Paul.” Consider how this week’s passage strengthens your confidence in both Paul the messenger and his message.