

Ice Breaker (in groups of 2 or 3 for larger groups)

What is the worst gift you've ever received or given?

Talk About it!

Part 1

2 Corinthians 12:1-4 NLT

1 This boasting will do no good, but I must go on. I will reluctantly tell about visions and revelations from the Lord. 2 I was caught up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether I was in my body or out of my body, I don't know—only God knows. 3 Yes, only God knows whether I was in my body or outside my body. But I do know 4 that I was caught up to paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be expressed in words, things no human is allowed to tell.

Discuss:

- A. How have you experienced God's goodness and blessing through revelation or spiritual vision?
- B. How can we 'keep the baby' and 'throw out the bathwater' with regard to supernatural revelations and visions?

Part 2

2 Corinthians 12:5-7a NLT

5 That experience is worth boasting about, but I'm not going to do it. I will boast only about my weaknesses. 6 If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it, because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message, 7 even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God...

Discuss:

- A. What does it look like to 'boast in weakness' and what value could there be in that?
- B. How have you seen a person be personally vulnerable or transparent in a healthy way that helped you?

Part 3

2 Corinthians 12:7-9a NLT

7 even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. 8 Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. 9 Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.

Discuss:

- A. Why didn't God take away Paul's 'thorn in the flesh'?
- B. What are some other reasons He might not take away our pain and difficulties?

Part 4

2 Corinthians 12:7-9a NLT (again)

7 even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.

8 Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. 9 Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.

1 Peter 5:10 NLT

10 In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.

Discuss:

- A. How do you react when God appears to be silent in answer to your urgent request?
- B. How do you feel about God’s promise in verse 9 and in 1 Peter? Why doesn’t God simply take the hurt away immediately every time?
- C. Is there currently a pain or difficulty in your life that is causing you to “plead” with God?
- D. Paul’s response to the “thorn in the flesh” was to plead with God to take it away – what do you think about that?

Part 5

Discuss:

- A. Have you ever had a “thorn in the flesh” that God would not take away? What was it and why do you think He let it remain in your life?
- B. Share about something positive in your life today that is a direct result of God allowing you to experience pain and suffering.

Part 6

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NLT

9 Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. 10 That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Zechariah 4:6 NLT

6 Then he said to me, “This is what the Lord says to Zerubbabel: It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

Discuss:

The gift of strength can be hidden in times of weakness and dependency.

- A. Talk about how you’ve seen the strength of God in a person’s weakness.
- B. Share about a time when the strength of Christ was present in your weakness.