

**Pray for your time together in God's Word!**

**Read the passage out loud as a group.** Option: Give the group 5 minutes to look at the passage by themselves.

**This Week's Passage**

**Scripture Reference**

2 Corinthians 11:16-33

*New International Version (NIV)*

<sup>16</sup> I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then tolerate me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. <sup>17</sup> In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. <sup>18</sup> Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. <sup>19</sup> You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! <sup>20</sup> In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face. <sup>21</sup> To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!

Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. <sup>22</sup> Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. <sup>23</sup> Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, <sup>26</sup> I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. <sup>27</sup> I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. <sup>28</sup> Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. <sup>29</sup> Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

<sup>30</sup> If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. <sup>31</sup> The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. <sup>32</sup> In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. <sup>33</sup> But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

**Discussion**

**Ask the Group:** What about this passage stood out to you?

*Leaders' Note: This question gives your group the opportunity to explore their own ideas before leading them to specific discussion. Caution: Do not let this turn into a debate about personal understandings—keep it more on the “observation” level.*

**Ask the Group:** How would you define boasting?

*Leaders' Note - from dictionary.com:*

- 1) *to speak with exaggeration and excessive pride, especially about oneself.*
- 2) *to be proud in the possession of.*

**Ask the Group:** In vv. 16 - 21, what reason does Paul give for his boasting?

*Leaders' Note: Ref. Proverbs 26:5*

*Possible Answers: to defend his ministry by resorting to the "foolish" behavior of the "super-apostles" that the Corinthians apparently accepted*

- **Ask the Group:** What has Paul already boasted about in this letter and how is this different than the false apostles?  
*Leaders' Note: Ref. 1:12, 9:2, 10:8, 11:10*
- **Ask the Group:** How is this boasting different from the false apostles?  
*Possible Answers: Paul's boasts were centered on loving the Corinthians whereas the boasts of the false apostles were focused on themselves. In vs. 17 he considers self-confident boasting to be foolish, and in vs. 18 decries "boasting in the way the world does" as foolish.*

**Ask the Group:** In vv. 19 – 21, Paul uses irony; this literary tool seems to come across sarcastically. When do you think it is appropriate to use sarcasm to make a point?

*Possible Answers: out of a heart of love, when they did not seem responsive to clear common sense.*

- **Ask the Group:** How do you determine when you've "crossed the line"?  
*Possible Answer: when your heart changes from trying to help someone to trying to hurt them or make yourself look good (self-focus).*

**Ask the Group:** Why do the Corinthians (or people in general) put up with the types of leaders described in vv. 19 - 20?

*Possible Answer: because they want to be like them and so they don't see the negatives.*

- **Ask the Group:** How do we guard against this foolish influence?  
*Possible Answers: surrounding ourselves with biblical community that "spurs each other on" (Hebrews 3:13), elders who actively seek God, etc.*
- **Ask the Group:** What protection does God offer us from foolish influence?  
*Possible Answers: the Holy Spirit, consistent study of God's Word, etc.*

**Ask the Group:** In vv. 21b – 29, Paul compares himself and his experiences to these "super apostles," mostly highlighting what people would often consider failures and weaknesses. Why doesn't Paul boast about his accomplishments or successes instead?

*Possible Answers: Paul considered his weaknesses and shames as most relating to Christ, his weaknesses highlight Christ's strengths. By listing out all weaknesses, Paul proves he's not hiding anything (v. 31).*

**Ask the Group:** In vv. 23 - 33, what different types of hardships and failures does Paul describe?

*Leaders' Note: for context of vs. 32 – 33, see Acts 9:9b – 26. Perhaps Paul included this last tidbit of a seemingly cowardly (or at least non-glorifying) escape to further highlight his non-self-confident boasting in his weaknesses and to further back up his statement made in vs. 31 of truth and disclosure.*

*Possible Answers: beatings, imprisonments, lack of food/clothing/shelter, shipwreck, burning concern for his converts (v. 28-29)*

- **Ask the Group:** What does the hardship described in v. 28-29 say about Paul's love for the Corinthians?  
*Possible Answers: his love and concern for their growth in Christ so great that it weighs on him- very much like a parent's love for their child.*
- **Ask the Group:** How can we emulate this love?

### **Gospel Application**

**Ask the Group (small or large):** Are there times when you think it is acceptable to boast?

- **Ask the Group (small or large):** Is there something in your life that you need to stop boasting about, in that it does not build up others or glorify Christ?
- **Ask the Group (small or large):** Is there something in your life that you can or should boast about this week?

**Ask the Group (small or large):** Who in your life has sacrificed greatly for your spiritual and/or general well-being?

- **Ask the Group (small or large):** What can you do to thank that person?

*Suggestion: Send this application question and challenge out during the week to encourage your group.*

Last Week's Application: (Discuss if time)

**Ask the Group (small or large):** What false messages do you encounter in your life?

- **Ask the Group:** This week, how can you resist the false messages and remain devoted to Christ?

**Ask the Group (small or large):** What does it look like for you to stand up for the true gospel?

- **Ask the Group:** How can you stand up for the true gospel this week?