

## Discussion Questions

### Preparation

Looking back, can you identify a prayer that you thought God left unanswered but later you discovered God did answer it but in an unexpected way? Talk about it. How did God use it to your benefit?

### Passage

*I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses.*

*Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he 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. II Corinthians 12:2-5, 7-9*

1. Share your plan for "21 Days of Prayer with Fasting." How is the praying going? If you are fasting, share is the fasting going? Is it easier or harder than you expected? Is this your first attempt at daily prayer or fasting? What have you learned so far about yourself? Have you gained any insights or direction for your life or the life of the church?
2. Debate whether or not God answered the prayer of the navigator.
3. Share another time when God answered a prayer but in an unexpected way.
4. Discuss the three foundational beliefs that undergird prayer: God is able. God is willing. God is omniscient – He knows what's best for us and will answer our prayers in a way that he sees fit.
5. Have you ever had a "thorn in the flesh?" What was it? How did you pray about it? How did God answer your prayer? How has God used it in your life?
6. Is there anything that you have been persistently praying for and God has yet to answer that prayer? What could God be telling you with a non-answer? Have you considered the possibility that God has already answered your prayer but you haven't been able to recognize it because you've been expecting him to answer it according to your request?
7. What would happen if you accepted your situation and moved on with your life? How could God use it to shape your life for the good?

## II Corinthians 12:2-5, 7-9

8. Read Luke 18:7. Is this a formulaic prayer? Will God always bring justice? If not, then how are we to understand verses like this one and John 16:24? How do we make sense of these teachings with the teaching that God is also omniscient and knows how best to answer our requests?
9. Talk about the examples in scripture where God allowed hardships in people's lives to shape them for future service, ministry or hardships? They are: Mary, Moses, Joseph, Peter, Amos, and Paul. Can you think of other examples?

Joseph may have had the hardest time with the trials he faced. First, he was convicted of a crime he did not commit and ended up sitting in jail unjustly for a decade. Could you have remained faithful to God under those circumstances? Could you have emerged from prison with the wisdom and insight Joseph had, prepared to lead a nation through an economic crisis and rise to power?

10. What would happen in your life if you allowed the hardships you have faced to sharpen your character and abilities, instead of allowing them to cripple you and hold you down?
11. Discuss this statement: *"Your greatest ministry will arise from your greatest weakness."*
12. Reflect on this poem:

*I asked for strength that I might achieve;  
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.  
I asked for health that I might do greater things;  
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.  
I asked for riches that I might be happy;  
I was given poverty that I might be wise.  
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;  
I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.  
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;  
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.  
I got nothing that I had asked for,  
but everything that I had hoped for.  
Almost despite myself my unspoken prayers were answered;  
I am, among all men, most richly blessed. ~from the journal of an unknown Confederate soldier*

13. Discuss: *"Our God is the God of the thorn. The God of the storm. The God of the Third Day."*