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Sommario/riassunto	Recent scholars have tended to interpret 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 as an attempt to belittle ecstatic experiences, such as Paul's ascent to paradise, in favor of suffering in the service of the gospel. This study offers an alternative. An analysis of ascent traditions in the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds investigates ascent as both a literary motif and a religious practice. This analysis probes several issues relevant to 2 Cor 12:1-10, including dynamics of ascent and suffering. The study turns next to religious experiences Paul believes he and his communities have undergone. A pattern emerges in which extraordinary experiences provide the basis for suffering and service. Moreover, Paul expects his communities to have had experiences similar to, if less dramatic than, his ascent to heaven. The author

argues that in its context in 2 Corinthians, Paul's ascent should be understood as an encounter with Christ that transcends human language and endows Paul with divine power, which must be refined through suffering. With the help of four premodern interpreters, the study further explores the theological relevance of Paul's ascent. For Paul, mystical encounter with Christ forms the precondition for suffering and service because it enables self-transcending love for God and neighbors.
