

Home Group Study
The Book of 2 Corinthians
“Finding Strength in Weakness”
Introduction - 2 Corinthians

The second letter of Paul to the Corinthians is probably the least known of all his letters. It has sometimes been called “Paul's unknown letter.” It represents the most personal letter written by the apostle's pen. In our First Corinthians study we looked at the church at Corinth. We noted that this letter is very instructive for today because the church in California is very much like the church that was in Corinth. In our last study we even referred to this letter as “First Californians.” But in Second Corinthians we are looking at Paul; he is the one in focus as he lays himself open and reveals himself to the church. This is a very personal letter from the heart of this mighty apostle. Here we see him more clearly, perhaps, than anywhere else in Scripture. We call this Second Corinthians, but it should, perhaps, be called Fourth Corinthians, because it is the last of four letters that Paul wrote to the church there. Two of these letters have not been preserved for us.

Paul began the church in Corinth somewhere around 52 or 53 A.D. He stayed there for about a year and a half; then he went to Ephesus, where he remained for a few weeks, and then he went on a quick trip to Jerusalem, returning again to Ephesus. While he was at Ephesus, he wrote a letter to the church at Corinth which is lost to us. It is referred to in First Corinthians 5:9, where Paul says he wrote to warn them about following a worldly lifestyle. In response to that letter, the Corinthians wrote back to him with many questions. They sent their letter by the hands of three young men who are mentioned in First Corinthians. In reply to that letter, Paul wrote what we now call First Corinthians. In it he tried to answer their questions, exhorting them and instructing them in how to walk in power and in peace; and he tried to correct many problem areas in the church. Evidently that letter did not accomplish all that Paul intended. There was a bad reaction to it, and in this second letter we learn that he made a quick trip back to Corinth. How long that took we do not know. Paul calls it a *“painful”* visit. He had come with a rather sharp, severe rebuke to them, but again he did not accomplish his purpose; again there was a great deal of negative reaction. So when he returned to Ephesus, he sent another brief letter, in the hands of Titus, to Corinth to see if he could help them. Now Titus was gone a long time. Transportation and communication were very slow and difficult in those days. Paul, waiting in Ephesus, grew very anxious to hear what was

happening in the church there. He became so troubled that he left Ephesus and went to Troas and then up into Macedonia to meet Titus. There in Macedonia, probably in the city of Philippi, he and Titus came together. Titus brought him a much more encouraging word about the church, and in response to that, out of thanksgiving, Paul wrote what we now call Second Corinthians, although it was really the fourth of a series of letters. This letter is in direct contrast to the tone of 1 Corinthians, for it is intensely personal and filled with the deep emotions of the dedicated apostle. If 1 Corinthians “takes the roof off” the church at Corinth and lets us look in, then 2 Corinthians “opens the heart” of Paul and lets us see his love and concern for the work of the Lord. In the first letter, Paul is the instructor, answering questions and setting matters right; in this second letter he is the loving pastor, the minister of Christ, pouring out his life that his spiritual children might be perfected in the faith. No letter in the New Testament reveals the true character of the Christian ministry as does this one. No letter says so much about Christian giving, suffering, or spiritual triumph.

Overview on the City of Corinth

- A major city of Greece situated on the Cape of Corinth between the Ionian Sea and the Aegean Sea.
- In New Testament times, perhaps the most celebrated city of the Roman Empire, second only to Rome.
- Less than 100 years old at the time of Paul.
- A “planned” city rebuilt from ashes by the Roman emperors.
- A transportation hub for both land and sea travel. Though not a seaport, its location on a cape linked two seaports and two bays. To save time and avoid potential disasters of sailing around Greece, shippers transported passengers and their goods across the cape and reloaded them onto ships on the other side.
- Greece’s leading commercial center for trade, agriculture, and industry.
- Host city to numerous athletic events, gladiatorial contests, theater productions, and the Isthmian Games, one of four major athletic festivals of the Greeks.

- A major center for pagan religions. More than twelve temples have been excavated at Corinth, including the magnificent temple of Apollo, with its 38 Doric columns 24 feet high. The temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love, employed at least 1,000 temple prostitutes. The city had a widespread reputation for gross immorality.
- A city of diverse peoples and cultures, including Greeks, Roman colonists (mostly retired army veterans and freedmen), and Jews, some of whom migrated there during persecution under the emperor Claudius (Acts 18:1).

Author

Paul, the Apostle

DATE: A.D. 56-57

There is an indication that the Epistle was written almost immediately after hearing of the church's repentance (2 Cor. 7:2-16). The letter was probably written from the province of Macedonia, more specifically from the city of Philippi.

To Whom it is Written

"The church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia" (2 Cor. 1:1).

Purpose

Paul had several purposes in mind when he wrote this letter:

1. To commend the church for disciplining the offender (1 Cor. 5), and to encourage them to forgive and receive him (2 Cor. 2:6-11).
2. To explain why he had apparently "changed his plans" and not visited them as he had promised (1 Cor. 16:3-7, 2 Cor. 1:15-22).
3. To answer those in the church who were questioning his apostolic authority (2 Cor. 10-12).

4. To answer those who accused him of wrong motives (2 Cor. 4:1-2).
5. To encourage the church to share in the offering for the Jerusalem saints (2 Cor. 8-9).
6. To prepare them for his planned visit (2 Cor. 13).

FAVORITE VERSES IN 2 CORINTHIANS

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”	2 Cor. 3:17
“We have this treasure in earthen vessels.”	2 Cor. 4:7
“Persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”	2 Cor. 4:9
“We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen The things which are not seen are eternal. ”	2 Cor. 4:18
“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”	2 Cor. 5:7
“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”	2 Cor. 5:17
“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”	2 Cor. 6:14
“For God loves a cheerful giver.”	2 Cor. 9:7
“A thorn in the flesh.”	2 Cor. 12:7

Special Features

Second Corinthians is “The Most Personal of Paul’s Epistles.” It opens up his life for all to see. It shows that he was human, just like all other men; he experienced joy and pain, victories and setbacks.

Home Group Study
The Book of 2 Corinthians
“Finding Strength in Weakness”
Lesson One - 2 Corinthians 1:1-11
“Our Comforting God”

One of the key words in this letter is comfort or encouragement. The Greek word means to encourage, strengthen, cheer, and to be called to one's side to help. It is the same word Jesus used in John 14:16 for the Spirit, the Comforter (Paraclete). What a joy it is to know that God stands at our side to help whenever we go through troubles. Each member of the Trinity is a comforter: the Father (2 Cor. 1:3), and the Son and Spirit (John 14:16). God is the God of all comfort, just as He is the God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10). There is comfort and grace for every situation! In spite of all the trials he experienced, Paul was able (by the grace of God) to write a letter saturated with encouragement.

What was Paul's secret of victory when he was experiencing pressures and trials? **His secret was God.** When you find yourself discouraged and ready to quit, get your attention off of yourself and focus it on God. Out of his own difficult experience, Paul tells us how we can find encouragement in God.

But this comfort that we receive from God is not simply for our personal relief; it is shared with us that we might be able to help others. Paul went through tribulation that he might be able to minister to others. God prepares us for what He is preparing for us. We cannot lead others where we have not been ourselves.

The mathematics of God's mercy is wonderful! As the trials abound, the comfort of God abounds as well! Where sin abounds, so does grace (See Rom. 5:20). Paul used this word “abound” often in 2 Corinthians. We as Christians ought to be willing to endure trials, since we know they bring spiritual good to us personally and blessings to others as we share God's comfort with them.

It takes a great soul to admit failure. Paul bares his heart here and shares with the believers the troubles he endured in Asia. He wrote this not to win their sympathy, but to teach them the lesson he learned to **trust God alone.** In 2 Cor. 7:5 he indicates that there were troubles without and within; so perhaps it was physical weakness and danger as well as spiritual concern for the infant church at Corinth. Paul is quick to acknowledge the helpful prayer

of his friends. He states that his deliverance in answer to prayer will cause many to praise God and give Him the glory He deserves.

We have come a long way in our Christian lives when we learn to put faith in God alone and not in self, circumstances, or men. The believer who fears the Lord and lives to please Him enjoys peace and confidence even in the midst of trouble. What a great lesson to learn and apply to our lives!

Read 2 Cor. 1:1-4. Pray and answer the following questions:

Just when life is difficult, when our relationships are strained, when our abilities are questioned, when health and security are threatened, God makes Himself known in a powerful and comforting way. In this letter we discover that one of the supreme greatnesses of Christianity is that it does not seek a supernatural escape from the difficulties of life. Instead it offers a supernatural use for them. Troubles become triumphs as God makes Himself know in our weakness.

1. Why do you think Paul began his letter by praising God?
2. In what three ways does Paul describe God and His actions toward us? (See verses 3-4)
3. In verse 4, Paul wrote that God “*comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.*” In what ways have you experienced God’s comfort in a difficult situation?
4. What example have you seen of the principle that those who have suffered a particular affliction are best able to help others in similar circumstances?

Read 2 Cor. 1:5-7. Pray and answer the following questions:

God uses suffering to stir up other believers. A person who suffers often becomes self-centered and begins to feel sorry for himself. He sometimes begins to feel self-pity and apathy and wants special attention. He may even become bitter. A believer must never let this happen. This is what these two verses are all about. Note that both the affliction and the comfort are for the same purposes. God uses both suffering and comfort in a believer to stir four things in other believers: 1. God uses suffering to stir comfort in others who suffer. 2. God uses suffering to stir salvation. A person cannot trust God today and not trust Him tomorrow. When a believer sees another believer being comforted through some suffering, they are stirred to continue in the faith. They are stirred to continue on in the way of salvation no matter how great the suffering might be. 3. God uses suffering to stir endurance. When we suffer and allow God to comfort us, others are encouraged to endure through their sufferings. 4. God uses suffering to stir sharing among believers.

5. How can you help other Christians who are suffering?

6. In verse 7, the apostle wrote “*you share in suffering; you will also share God's comfort.*” Do you think Christians today can really share in one another’s suffering and comforts? If yes, how? If no, why not?

7. What is the connection between the suffering of Christ and the comfort of Christ? (See verses 5-6)

8. How have other Christians helped you through difficult circumstances?

Read 2 Cor. 1:8-11. Pray and answer the following questions:

God uses suffering to teach prayer and thanksgiving. This is a great lesson on suffering and prayer: the prayers of believers “*help*” us. Paul definitely says that the prayers of others helped him. Prayer causes God to move in our behalf and to deliver us through our suffering. And when we are

Home Group Study
The Book of 2 Corinthians
“Finding Strength in Weakness”
Lesson Two - 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:17
“Always Yes in Christ”

In his book, *Profiles in Courage*, John F. Kennedy wrote, “Great crises produce great men and great deeds of courage.” While it is true that a crisis helps to make a person, it is also true that a crisis helps to reveal what a person is made of. Pilate faced a great crisis, but his handling of it did not give him either courage or greatness.

In this very personal letter, Paul opened his heart to the Corinthians (and to us) and revealed the trials he had experienced. To begin with, he had been severely criticized by some of the people in Corinth because he had changed his plans and apparently not kept his promise. When Christians misunderstand each other, the wounds can go very deep. Then, there was the problem of opposition to his apostolic authority in the church. One of the members had to be disciplined, and this gave Paul great sorrow. Finally, there were the difficult circumstances Paul had to endure in Asia (2 Cor. 1:8-11), a trial so severe that he despaired of life. What kept Paul from failing? Other people, facing these same crises, would have collapsed! Yet Paul not only triumphed over the circumstances, but out of them produced a great letter that even today is helping God’s people experience victory.

In chapter 1, Paul’s theme was abundant comfort; here in chapter 2 it’s abundant love. “*Love never fails*” (1 Cor. 13:8). Where there is love, there is always the burden to see others enjoy the very best. How many times pastors weep over disobedient Christians. Yet God honored Paul’s tears and worked in the church so that sin was put away.

Chapter 2 also takes us back to 1 Cor. 5, where Paul had admonished the church to discipline the man who was living in open sin. Here Paul states that the offender did not cause Paul alone trouble and sorrow: he had brought trouble to the whole church! He had instructed them to call the church together and dismiss this man from the fellowship. This act of discipline would then bring him to a place of sorrow and repentance. Well, they had done this, but then they went to the opposite extreme! The man had evidenced sorrow for sin, but the church was not willing to receive him back after his confession! If Satan can accuse us of sin and discourage us with our past failures, he will rob us of our joy and usefulness to Christ. If God

forgives a person of sin, we also must forgive that person. (Eph 4:32, Rom. 8:31-39)

Read 2 Cor. 1:12-14. Pray and answer the following questions:

1. What accusations does Paul seem to be answering in verses 12-14?

2. What does he want the Corinthians to understand about his motives, his actions and his letters?

3. In light of Paul's experience, how should you seek to discern God's will for your daily plans?

Read 2 Cor. 1:15-24. Pray and answer the following questions:

Often our attempts to affirm each other backfire. Such was Paul's experience with the Corinthians. They regarded his change in travel plans and his tough love as a mixed signal, a yes and no. Paul had already made two visits to Corinth, the first to found the church and another painful visit to deal with a serious discipline problem. The latter visit, combined with a difficult letter, resulted in an almost complete breakdown in Paul's relationship with the Corinthians. Paul had promised to visit them again, twice in fact, first as he made his way back. But he changed his plans, delaying his visit and deciding to visit only once. Paul points the Corinthians to the ultimate ground of our affirmation: the eternal "Yes" spoken to us by God's Word.

4. Paul's change of travel plans has aroused criticism from the Corinthians. What warning may this be to us about our tendency to question the motives of fellow Christians?

5. In verses 18-22 what does Paul want them to understand about God, about His promises, and about what God does for Christian believers?

6. In what sense has Christ been the “**Yes**” of God’s promise to you?
7. Both the Corinthian believers and Paul share God’s gift of the Holy Spirit. (See vs. 21, 22). How does his description “*anointed us is God*”, and “*sealed us and given us the Spirit*” help you understand this gift?

Read 2 Cor. 2:1-17. Pray and answer the following questions:

In this study, Paul continues to defend his ministry and claim a special relationship with these young Christians. With illustrations of fragrance, letters and freedom, he contrasts the fading glory of God’s old covenant with Israel and the lasting splendor of the new covenant in Christ.

8. In vs. 5-11 Paul refers to the discipline of a member of the church, possibly because of a gross sexual sin. How does Paul’s handling of this problem affirm his love not only for the Corinthians but also for the man who had sinned?
9. What does Paul’s example tell us about the role older Christians should play in the lives of younger believers?
10. What do you think Paul means in saying we are “*The aroma of death*” to some and “*The fragrance of Christ*” to others?
11. How could you better represent Christ to the unbelievers you know?
12. How did some people of Paul’s day misuse the Word of God?

Journaling

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. (If you are married, pray together with your spouse, and share your thoughts) Write your insights down for review and group discussion.

“YES IN CHRIST”

Look up the following scriptures of promise God has given His people. These promises are those that find their way in your life as you follow Christ.

- To be with us forever (Genesis 28:15, Matthew 28:20)
- To accept us on the basis of faith rather than performance (Galatians 2:15-16, 1 Timothy 1:5)
- To bless all the nations and to include all peoples in the family of God (Genesis 18:18, 22:18, Galatians 3:8-9, Revelation 7:9)
- To give a place on earth and ultimately to renew all creation (Genesis 15:18, Revelation 21:5)
- To make a new covenant that will institute a universal every-member ministry (Jeremiah 31:31-34; 1 Peter 2:9-10)
- To turn adversity into victory (Jeremiah 29:11-14; Romans 8:28)
- To deal finally with evil (Revelation 19:11-21)

Make these promises your own and thank God for them!

Home Group Study
The Book of 2 Corinthians
“Finding Strength in Weakness”
Lesson Three - 2 Corinthians 3:1-18
“Every Member Ministry”

“I don’t need letters of recommendation!” says Paul. “You Christians at Corinth are my letters, written on hearts, not on stones!” “*By their fruits you will know them*” (Matt. 7:20). A person’s life and ministry may be seen in his or her work. Paul pictures himself as God’s secretary, writing the Word into the lives of God’s people. What an amazing truth: every Christian is an epistle of Christ being read by all men!

When Paul says, “The letter kills,” he is not talking about the “letter” of God’s Word as opposed to its “spirit.” Often we hear confused people say, “It is wrong to follow the letter of the Bible; we must follow the spirit of it.” Keep in mind that by “the letter,” Paul means the Old Testament law. In this chapter, he uses different phrases when referring to the Old Testament law: the letter (vs. 6); ministry of death (vs. 7); ministry of condemnation (vs. 9).

Certainly there was glory to the Old Testament ministry. Glory filled the temple; the glory of God hovered over the people in the wilderness. The temple and its ceremonies, and the very giving of the Law to Moses, all had glory attached to them. But it was a fading glory, not a lasting glory. Paul cites the experience of Moses from Ex. 34:29-35. Moses had been in God’s presence, and His glory was reflected on his face. But Moses knew that this glory would fade, so he wore a veil over his face whenever talking to the people, lest they see the glory fade and lose confidence in his ministry. God never meant for the glory of the Old Covenant to remain; it was to fade away before the abounding glory of the Gospel.

Paul makes a spiritual application of Moses’ veil. He states that there is still a veil over the hearts of the Jews when they read the Old Testament, and this veil keeps them from seeing Christ. The Old Testament will always be a locked book to the heart that knows not Christ. Jesus removed that veil when He rent the veil of the temple and fulfilled the Old Testament types and prophecies.

Truly our position in Christ is a glorious one! The ministry of grace is far superior to Judaism or any other religion, even though the New Testament Christian has none of the ceremonies or visible trappings that belonged to the Law. Ours is a glorious ministry, and its glory will never fade.

Read 2 Cor. 3:1-6. Pray and answer the following questions:

Christianity is essentially a lay movement. Every person in Christ is a minister, a priest, a prince or princess in the kingdom of God. This every-member ministry takes place not only in the church but in the home, workplace and out in society. One would not think that every Christian is a minister while visiting the average church or watching church on T.V. or the internet. Too often we get the impression that ministry is for the theologically trained, the ordained, or the polished. In this section Paul tells us why all believers are called for ministry in Christ.

1. In contrast to those who boasted about their letters of recommendation, Paul says the Corinthians are his letter. What sort of letter are they?

2. How do you respond to the idea that you may be the only letter from Christ that some people ever read?

3. Paul recognizes two dangers in service to God: becoming self-sufficient or being paralyzed by false humility. How can you avoid each of these traps?

4. According to Paul, how does our ministry under the new covenant contrast with ministry under the old. (See vs. 3-6, Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Read 2 Cor. 3:7-16. Pray and answer the following questions:

In this section, Paul continues to defend his ministry and claim a special relationship with these young Christians. With illustrations of fragrance, letters and freedom, he contrasts the fading glory of God's old covenant with Israel and the lasting splendor of the new covenant in Christ.

5. How does Paul demonstrate that ministry under the new covenant is more glorious than ministry under the old?

6. In verses 12-16 how does the veil which Moses wore help explain the failure by many Jews of Paul's day to understand that the old covenant was fading away to be replaced by the more glorious and lasting new covenant?

7. What must people do to have the veil that covers their hearts taken away?

8. What blessings come to the person who "turns to the Lord"?

Read 2 Cor. 3:17-18. Pray and answer the following questions:

The new covenant brings liberty through the Lord Jesus Christ. Note that the Lord is identified as the Spirit: "*the Lord is that Spirit.*" This does not mean that the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the same Person. They are two different Persons, but they are one in their Godhead and Deity. Jesus Christ is one with the Spirit in the same way He is one with God the Father: one in mind, spirit, being, nature, and essence. Therefore, they are one in will, purpose, and work.

9. Verse 17 may refer to the Jews being set free from the bondage of the law, but how may it also apply to Gentiles who became Christians?

10. How can the knowledge of the hope you have in Jesus Christ increase your boldness?

11. How have you experienced the Spirit's freedom in your personal life?

12. In what ways do you struggle to allow the Holy Spirit to control your life?

Home Group Study
The Book of 2 Corinthians
“Finding Strength in Weakness”
Lesson Four - 2 Corinthians 4-5:10
“Courage for the Conflict”

The key theme of this section is repeated in 2 Corinthians 4:1 and 4:16: “We faint not!” Literally, Paul said, “We do not lose heart!” There were certainly plenty of reasons for discouragement in Paul’s situation, yet the great apostle did not quit. What was it that kept him from fainting in the conflicts of life? **He knew what he possessed in Jesus Christ!** Instead of complaining about what he did not have, Paul rejoiced in what he did have; and you and I can do the same thing.

Why would Paul keep on preaching, with all the dangers and toils involved, if he were not sincere? A man with lesser motives, or a less spiritual view of the ministry, would have given up long ago. Paul looked upon his ministry as a stewardship: God gave it to him, and God also gave him strength to continue and not faint. The Gospel was too glorious for Paul to give up! It was too great a privilege for him to be a minister of the Gospel to risk falling by the wayside.

If Paul were out for personal gain, as they said, then why did he suffer so much? The man who compromises the Word of God will not suffer; men will welcome him and honor him. But people were abusing Paul, rejecting him, and making life difficult for him. They were treating him the way men treated Christ. Paul’s willingness to suffer for Christ is one of the greatest proofs of his sincerity as a servant of God.

2 Corinthians 5

In this chapter, Paul is still discussing his ministry, answering the accusations of his enemies. He points out that his ministry is serious, not careless; that he works from honest motives and not fleshly desires. But Paul is not selfish; his Christian service is motivated by more than a hope for the future. He seeks to please Christ and be acceptable to Him right now. Paul wanted to be found “*well-pleasing*” to Christ (vs. 9). Knowing that his works would some day be revealed and tested, Paul wanted to live the kind of life that pleased and honored Christ.

Read 2 Cor. 4:1-6. Pray and answer the following questions:

If you know what it feels like to be falsely accused or misunderstand you can identify with Paul. He has been comforted by God and encouraged by some of the events in Corinth, but his stress level is still high. In this section, Paul gives us a glimpse of the perspective on himself and his circumstances that sustained him, and offers promise to sustain us.

1. Paul knows that through God's mercy he serves the new covenant made in Christ. What practical application does this have on his attitudes and the methods he uses?
2. If 2 Cor. 4:1-6 was the only written record you had of the Bible, what would you know about our Lord ?
3. It seems clear from verses 3-4 that not everyone believed who heard Paul preach. What do the unbelievers fail to see and why?

Read 2 Cor. 4:7-15. Pray and answer the following questions:

To have God's glory in the heart and privilege of sharing it through the gospel is a priceless treasure. The container for the treasure is "jars of clay", which God's servants are. As humans, we are earthen vessels, plain old clay pots (2 Cor. 4:7). We may cover our human frame with fancy clothes, surround it with glittering possessions, transport it in fancy cars, or rest it on a seat of power, but in the end, we are still just human beings. Certainly we have dignity and value in God's sight, but as believers we hold something of greater value, the treasure of Christ's grace and light! As a child picks a fragrant bouquet of wildflowers for her mother and places them in an old mayonnaise jar for a vase, what does the mother pay attention to? What delights her heart? The flowers or the mayonnaise jar? Our value as vessels lies in the unmatched beauty and splendor of what we hold, not in our shape or color. Faith must not be anchored in the brilliance of humans but in the power of God.

4. What is the **treasure** that Paul is referring to?

5. What is the point of putting the treasure in easily broken “jars of clay” instead of enduring, costly bronze vases?

6. From verses 7-15 how would Paul answer the person who say’s “Christianity is a crutch”?

Read 2 Cor 4:16-18. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul refers to his afflictions as light. Light? He was stoned, beaten, shipwrecked, thrown out on the open sea, cast into dungeons. “No problem, he says.” “Those light afflictions are doing some heavyweight work on us.” Oh, to have the eyesight of Paul. To see whatever it is that we endure presently as light compared to the weight of God’s glory.

7. How did Paul encourage the Corinthians to carry on despite difficulty?

8. What helps you to focus on what is “unseen” and “eternal” rather than being consumed by the “seen” and “temporary”?

9. How does God help us through difficult times?

Read 2 Cor. 5:1-10. Pray and answer the following questions:

Like a jar of clay, Paul gladly carries the precious treasure of the message of Christ. Under crushing affliction he fixes his eyes on what is unseen and the eternal rather than his circumstances. In this section, Paul continues to explain what motivates him to tell everyone about Christ. As an ambassador sent with a most important message, Paul delivers the message and strongly encourages us to respond appropriately to God.

10. Paul continues the thoughts begun in 4:16-18 about a Christian's future. What do you learn about the "earthly tent", and our "heavenly dwelling" in verses 1-5?

11. What comfort or satisfaction can we conclude from knowing that the Holy Spirit guarantees our future in heaven?

12. How does this passage give us hope for believers who have passed away?

13. How should we view death?

"Cheap Pots"

A Corinthian woman would not have placed any importance on a clay pot. They were cheap and ugly (the pots, not the Corinthian women). Fancy containers might have been displayed on a shelf, but clay pots were kept out of sight. And so, in our service to Christ, our desire should not be to be on display and admired by others. Christ is the treasure. He should be the One who acquires everyone's attention. Meanwhile, we can be in the cabinet under the sink with the rest of the supplies. God's design for this "precious treasure" in "perishable containers" is simply this: The power of God is revealed. Humans don't deserve any credit, or attention. Paul says, God is the one who deserves the glory. We are just wimps and weaklings, but God's strength gets us up and moves us forward.

Journaling

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. (If you are married, pray together with your spouse, and share your thoughts) Write your insights down for review and group discussion.

Home Group Study
The Book of 2 Corinthians
“Finding Strength in Weakness”
Lesson Five - 2 Corinthians 5:11-21
“Motive for Ministry”

What we believe and how we behave must always go together. Paul usually connected duty and doctrine, because what God has done for us must motivate us to do something for God. Paul has moved from explanation to application, and his theme is motivation for ministry. His enemies had accused him of using the ministry of the Gospel for his own selfish purposes, when in reality they were the ones who were “merchandising” the Gospel. What is the ministry of the Christian? To persuade sinners to be reconciled to God. We must never force people to trust Christ, or force them by some deceitful approach. “Our message needs to be true, our motives pure, and our conduct absolutely genuine.” The Christian worker must have the right motive for ministry as well as the right message. In this section, Paul stated three acceptable motives for ministry.

His Concern to Please Christ (5:11-13)

The Greek word for “appear” in vs. 10 means more than “stand” or “show up.” It carries the idea of being revealed; “*for we shall all be shown as we are*” is the meaning. There will be no pretending at that judgment; our character and works will be revealed as they are, and the appropriate rewards will be given. But the true servant of God is careful even today to have an open life, evident to both God and men.

His Constraint of Love (5:14-17)

Paul had been accused of being mad (see Acts 26:24) since he went to such extremes to win men to Christ. But the controlling power of his life was the love of Christ. This does not mean Paul’s love for Christ, although certainly that was there. It means rather the love Christ had for Paul. The apostle was so overwhelmed by Jesus’ love for him that to serve and honor Christ became the controlling motive of his life.

His Commission from God (5:18-21)

We have seen three motives that controlled Paul’s life and ministry: his confidence of heaven, his concern to please Christ, and his constraint of love. There was a fourth motive: Paul’s commission from God. Paul was an

ambassador for Christ! His message was one of peace: God had paid the price for sin; God was not at war with sinners; sinners could now believe and be saved. What a tremendous message!

Read 2 Cor. 5:11-15. Pray and answer the following questions:

The description of the ministry sustained by Paul touched on the work of Christ, the work of the Spirit, and the work of the Father. He also spoke of the eternal viewpoint required for the ministry to be carried out effectively. He now turned to the heart of that ministry, the message.

1. How do Christians sometimes take pride in ministries that give them attention and popularity?
2. What does Paul want them to know about Christ's death and how this ought to affect their lives?
3. Why was Paul concerned about justifying his ministry to the Christians at Corinth?
4. What motivated Paul in his ministry?

Read 2 Cor. 5:16-20. Pray and answer the following questions:

In this section Paul defends himself by showing his face and declaring himself defended in the gospel but defenseless in himself. He now invites us to look into his heart and see how utterly convinced he is about the gospels message of reconciliation.

5. In describing his message, here in verses 18-20, Paul uses the words reconciliation and reconciled five times. What has Christ done to make reconciliation possible?

6. What does it mean to be reconciled to God?

7. Remember a time and the way you felt when you were reconciled to someone you had wronged, misunderstood or ignored. How does that help you appreciate God taking the initiative to reconcile us to himself?

8. Review verse 17. When you became a new creation in Christ, what old things disappeared from your life and what new things arrived?

Read 2 Cor. 5:20-21. Pray and answer the following questions:

9. Ambassadors, as representatives of their country carry important messages, often to bring reconciliation. In what sense are all Christians to be Christ's ambassadors?

10. How does being Christ's ambassador affect your attitudes and actions as well as your message?

11. What does verse 21 add to your understanding of what God has done in Christ "*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us*"?

12. From this chapter, what would you say Paul understands his mission and message to be?

Here's a great word from Jon Courson

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” 2 Cor. 5:21

As Jesus hung on the cross, a spear was thrust into Him, drawing forth water and blood, and opening His side so that we might, positionally, enter in. Jesus opened the way for us through the rending of His own flesh. That is why we can tell anyone and everyone that they, too, can be tucked away in Christ; that when God looks at them, He will see only the righteousness of His Son; that they can have a fresh start as a new creation. What a fabulous truth! May the fear of the Lord motivate us. May the love of Christ constrain us. May the joy of service thrill us. May we, like Paul, say, “No matter what problems we face or what challenges come our way, it’s an unbelievable privilege to be an ambassador of the King.”

Journaling

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. (If you are married, pray together with your spouse, and share your thoughts) Write your insights down for review and group discussion.

Home Group Study
The Book of 2 Corinthians
“Finding Strength in Weakness”
Lesson Six - 2 Corinthians 6-7
“Heart to Heart”

These two chapters bring to a heartfelt conclusion Paul’s explanation of his ministry. He has told his readers that, in spite of trials, his was a triumphant ministry, and a glorious ministry, and that he could not ever think of quitting. His enemies had accused him of using the ministry for personal gain, but he had proved his ministry to be sincere and based on faith in God.

As you read 2 Corinthians, you get the strong impression that the church did not really appreciate Paul and the work he had done among them. They should have been defending Paul and not forcing him to defend himself. While we encourage their desire to practice Christian love, we want to remind them that even Christian love must exercise discernment (Phil. 1:9-11).

Chapter 7

“Open wide your hearts to us!” (2 Cor. 6:13) *“Receive us!”* (2 Cor. 7:2)
“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3) If the Corinthians would only cleanse their lives and their church fellowship, God would receive them and they could again have close fellowship with Paul. The emphasis in this section is on the way God encouraged Paul after he had experienced such great trials in Asia and Troas. The church had received Titus; now they should receive Paul. Paul asked them to trust him, for he had never done anything to wrong them. As we examine our own lives, we must determine to be a part of the answer and not a part of the problem. We must show appreciation, practice separation, and encourage reconciliation if God is to use us to restore broken relationships.

Read 2 Cor. 6:1-13 Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul’s aim in life is to please the Lord who died for him. He sees himself as an ambassador urging people to accept the reconciliation God offers through Jesus’ death. Christ in His death became a sin offering for us so that through union with Him we could come into right standing with God and share His righteousness. This section reveals Paul’s deep longing for the Corinthians

to love and trust him again. But his desire for acceptance doesn't prevent his confronting them on necessary issues. He demonstrates how the people we love have the greatest power to bring us pain or comfort.

1. What would it mean for the Corinthians, or for us today, to receive the grace of God in vain?
2. What does this passage say about the cost of being Christ's disciple? (See 6:4-10)
3. How do you think Paul was able to keep an attitude of sincere love for people when so many opposed him?
4. What can we learn from Paul's relationship with the Corinthians that can help us deal with friends who frustrate us?

Read 2 Cor. 6:14-18. Pray and answer the following questions:

In this section Paul inserts a warning on the dangers of associating with unbelievers in certain kinds of relationships. Certainly, Paul is not suggesting that a Christian cut off his relationship with the unsaved world. Here he is cautioning against situations in which a believer and a nonbeliever share a binding commitment that cannot be easily terminated. Paul gives an analogy of two incompatible animals being yoked together. His readers would have known that a mule and an ox wouldn't be hitched together because their natures were mismatched. Similarly, whether in a marriage or certain business relationships, the perspectives of a Christian will be so opposite to those of an unbeliever with a worldly outlook that the two people would be unable to pull in the same direction.

5. Why is it wrong and dangerous for Christians to be bound together with unbelievers?

6. How did Paul balance encouragement with warnings in this section?

7. What does it mean to be, “*The temple of the living God*” (vs. 16)

8. Why is it important for Christians to be separate from non-Christian influences?

Read 2 Cor. 7:1-16. Pray and answer the following questions:

This is the passage that covers the great revival that took place in Corinth. All the hurt that Paul had suffered from the Corinthians and all the hours of prayer that he had offered up in their behalf bore great fruit. The church repented. And God sent His Spirit of revival upon them. This is a great passage on the components involved in revival.

9. What can we learn from the relationship between Paul and Titus?

10. When have you ever been confronted by a friend regarding a spiritual matter?

11. How should we respond when someone points out a wrong in our lives?

12. What can we learn from this section about dealing with Christians who have fallen away from the faith?

Welcome to Stressful Living

For many people in the world today, tension, conflict, weariness, and suffering have become commonplace. Nevertheless, some offer the vain hope that life's troubles can be done away with, that we can somehow get to the point where things will always be great. They suggest that faith in Christ will deliver us into a state of serenity and ease and bring prosperity, health, and constant pleasure. However, that was neither the experience nor the teaching of early Christians such as Paul, James, or Peter, and certainly not of Jesus. Paul described the life of a servant of God in terms of tribulation, distress, tumult, and sleeplessness (2 Cor. 6:4–5). But he also linked these stress producers with rich treasures that money cannot buy: purity, kindness, sincere love, honor, good report, joy, and the possession of all things. So as long as we live as God's people on this earth, we can expect a connection between trouble and hope. That connection is never pleasant, but our troubles can bring about lasting benefits.

Journaling

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. (If you are married, pray together with your spouse, and share your thoughts) Write your insights down for review and group discussion.

Home Group Study
The Book of 2 Corinthians
“Finding Strength in Weakness”
Lesson Seven - 2 Corinthians 8
“Gracious Giving”

Chapter 8 deals with the missionary offering Paul was receiving for the believers in Judea. In the early days of the church these Jewish believers had given up everything and had “*all things in common*” (Acts 4:32-37). It was a taste of the kingdom God promised to Israel. But when Israel was set aside and the church brought onto the scene, this communion died away, leaving these saints in great need. It was to them Paul was taking this offering. While this chapter focuses primarily on a special missionary relief offering, it helps us grasp some of the principles and promises of Christian giving.

Spiritual giving is biblical giving. If Christians do not bring tithes and offerings to the local church, then their hearts are not in the ministry of the local church. Individual giving other than to the local church is certainly allowed, for Paul received help from many individuals (2 Tim. 1:16-18) but our first obligation is to the church where we fellowship and serve.

Christian giving does not depend on material circumstances so much as spiritual convictions. The believers in Macedonia were poor and going through suffering; yet because they loved Christ, they wanted to share in the offering. They did not say, “We must keep this for ourselves!” They were willing to give that others might be helped. They looked upon their giving as a grace. Christian giving flows from the heart, the spontaneous expression of love to Christ for His full and free salvation.

Paul was anxious that nobody accuse him of misusing these missionary funds, so he had the churches appoint three messengers to handle the money. They were Titus (vs. 16-17), another brother (vs. 18-19), and a third associate (vs. 22). This is a good business practice. It is sad to see churches and Christian organizations handle funds in an unbusinesslike manner. All money should be receipted and recorded. No Christian or local church should send money to works that are not financially sound. The fact that “there is a need” is not reason enough for giving; there must be proof that the money is handled honestly and spent wisely. We are not obligated to pay a debt we never incurred.

Read 2 Cor. 8:1-6. Pray and answer the following questions:

Many people consider chapter 8-9 of 2 Corinthians as one of the best teaching on the principles of financial stewardship. In this sense, stewardship is Christianese for “how you handle your money.” You wouldn’t think that the subject of money would be an issue in a discussion of finding your place in God’s plan. But it really is. Not because money matters to God (because it doesn’t), He already owns everything, He doesn’t need your or my money (contrary to what many Christian fundraisers would have you believe). He can accomplish whatever He wants with or without money. But God knows that money is important to us. And if we are seriously interested in following His plan for our life, we must have a proper attitude about it.

1. Out of what circumstances did the Macedonian Christians give?
2. What attitude did the Macedonians have in their giving?
3. What three things did the Macedonian Christians do that impressed Paul? (8:3-5)
4. How have your views on giving changed over the years?

Read 2 Cor. 8:7-15. Pray and answer the following questions:

Almost anyone can “love” people by speaking words. But when it comes time to express that love by lending a helping hand or writing a check, one can quickly determine the sincerity of a person’s love for others. That was Paul’s point in 2 Cor. 8. To illustrate it, he used the ultimate model of tangible love, Jesus Christ. Christ became poor in order to make us rich.

5. Why is Jesus the ultimate example of sacrificial giving?

6. How can the fact that Christ became poor on your behalf, and was later exalted by God, motivate you to follow His example?

7. How can the example of the Macedonian church challenge those who have little money to give?

8. What prevents people from giving a fair portion of their money to the Lord for His work?

Read 2 Cor. 8:16-24. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul had already endured some unjust personal criticism for apparently using ministry as a guide to get rich. None of this was true, but it nonetheless was damaging to his reputation. And the reputation of the Christian always reflects on the reputation of Christ in the eyes of unbelievers and immature Christians. That's what Paul is worried about. He doesn't want anyone to have questions about the financial integrity of the offering collected for the saints in Jerusalem. These guidelines are great instruction for churches and ministries today. Paul now reveals a plan of accountability consisting of a delegation of men which will be responsible for the offering.

9. Why did Paul take extra care to do what was right in the eyes of others?

10. Describe the team that Paul is sending to the Corinthians.

11. Which of their qualities do you appreciate the most?

12. In what ways should we try to avoid criticism with the way we carry out our Christian responsibilities?

Journaling

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. (If you are married, pray together with your spouse, and share your thoughts) Write your insights down for review and group discussion.

Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the first fruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine. Prov. 3:9-10 NKJV

Home Group Study
The Book of 2 Corinthians
“Finding Strength in Weakness”
Lesson Eight - 2 Corinthians 9
“Sowing and Harvesting”

It seems strange that we Christians need encouragements to give, when God has given so much to us. God had enriched the Corinthians in a wonderful way, and yet they were hesitant to share what they had with others. They were not familiar with grace giving, so Paul had to explain it to them.

Paul now shares the promises that we can claim if we are faithful in our giving to God. This chapter presents giving as a blessing, not as a legal obligation that burdens people. If giving is difficult for a Christian, then there is something wrong with their heart.

In 2 Cor. 8:1-5, Paul used the churches of Macedonia as examples to encourage the Corinthians, and now he uses the Corinthians as an encouragement to the churches of Macedonia! Christians ought to be an encouragement to one another. Paul had been “boasting” to others of the generosity of the church at Corinth (8:24), and now he wants to make sure that the Corinthians do not embarrass him. He knew they had readiness of mind and were willing and anxious to share in the missionary offering, but he wanted to remind them just the same.

Paul uses an agricultural principle here to illustrate his point. *“He who sows bountifully will reap bountifully.”* To sow bountifully means to “sow with blessing” and to reap bountifully means to “reap with blessing.” God will be no man’s debtor; He is faithful to bless when we are faithful to obey. Chapter 9 closes with a word of praise. He has been writing about giving, and his heart has been so filled with God’s goodness to him that he shouts, *“Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!”* This gift is, of course, is the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, and His gift of eternal life.

Read 2 Cor. 9:1-5. Pray and answer the following questions:

In chapter 8, Paul reminded the Corinthians of the collection they had began a year earlier and urged them to follow the example of generosity in the Macedonian churches. He introduced the committee, appointed by these churches, who will deliver the collection to the Christians in Jerusalem. In

this study, you will discover principles of giving that produce joy and thanksgiving in both the giver and the receiver.

1. Why doesn't Paul write in further detail about the needs of the Jerusalem Christians?
2. What effect has the Corinthians promised gift had on the Macedonians?
3. What attitude did Paul want the Corinthians to have regarding their gift?
4. What is wrong with giving gifts grudgingly?

Read 2 Cor. 9:6-9. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul wanted the Corinthians to give generously toward a fund-raising project to help needy Christians. He linked generosity with spiritual benefits: the more one gives, the more one benefits (2 Cor. 9:6–11). This principle goes beyond financial giving. At work, for example, you may donate toward the local charity. But when a coworker asks for some of your time to talk about a problem, what is your response? Do you give your attention generously or grudgingly? When your boss gives you a special assignment, do you give the project just enough attention to get it over with, or do you jump in wholeheartedly with energy and creativity? What about your time and emotional energy after hours? When your spouse or children need you, do you make yourself available generously or grudgingly? Do you give a fair contribution of yourself to assignments that you've volunteered for, or just a token effort? We are constant recipients of God's generous grace. He promises that if we will give of ourselves, He'll enable us to have an abundance of resources for the work to which He has called us.

5. How should we give? Why?

6. What promise does God give to believers who do give generously?

7. Why does God give us more than we need?

8. How do our needs differ from our wants?

Read 2 Cor. 9:10-15. Pray and answer the following questions:

Think about Paul's principles of giving, such as; we should give because God and Christ gave. We should give because God will see that our needs will be supplied in excess. We should give cheerfully, even out of poverty. We should give in proportion to our means. We should give because it is an act of thanksgiving and worship to God and will produce thanksgiving in those who receive.

9. Find as many results of the Corinthians generous giving as you can in verses 11-14?

10. Some people teach that giving money to the Lord's work results in getting more money for yourself. What does Paul say about the benefits of personal gain from giving? (vs. 6-11)

11. If Paul were writing to our local churches today, what principles in this chapter do you think he would include in his letter? Why?

12. What could you do this week to encourage a Christian friend to be a cheerful giver?

The Cheerful Giver

“So let each one gives as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver” 2 Cor. 9:7

The giver who pleases God gives deliberately, not grudgingly and not from compulsion. It is absolutely crucial to note one thing: God does not accept the gift of a person who does not want to give. God expects four things of the person who gives:

1. The giver must give as he purposes in his heart. This does not mean that people are not to be encouraged to give or that they cannot be stirred to give.
2. The giver must not give grudgingly: not out of sorrow, not with reluctance or regret. If the giver is going to be mulling over his gift and regretting that he had given it, his gift is unacceptable to God.
3. The giver must not give out of necessity. A person’s gift is not acceptable to God when he is forced to give.
4. The giver must give cheerfully if he wishes God to accept his gift. The word “cheerful” (hilaron) means joyful.

Journaling

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. (If you are married, pray together with your spouse, and share your thoughts) Write your insights down for review and group discussion.

Home Group Study
The Book of 2 Corinthians
“Finding Strength in Weakness”
Lesson Nine - 2 Corinthians 10
“Meekness or Weakness”

This section of 2 Corinthians presents Paul’s proof of his apostleship. In this chapter he answers the accusations of his enemies at Corinth. As we read his reply, we can discover the lies they were telling about Paul: that he was not a true apostle since he lacked credentials from the Jerusalem church; that his motives were insincere; that his physical presence was so weak that he deserved no respect; that his letters were bold but he would never back them up in person; and that his promises could not be depended upon.

Keep in mind that Paul was not defending himself in this chapter; he was defending his apostolic office and, therefore, the message he preached. These lies were being spread by the false teachers who had visited Corinth and won over part of the church to their false doctrine.

The Corinthians loved to glory in men. Even though they were preaching a false doctrine (11:4) and taking advantage of the Christians (11:18-20), they were welcomed by the church and honored above Paul, who had founded the church and risked his life for it. “Paul is so weak!” these teachers said, as they lorded it over the church. “Follow us, because we display real power!”

Simply because Paul did not use carnal methods and apply the power of a “strong personality,” the believers thought he was a weakling! His weapons were spiritual, not fleshly. Like all of us, Paul “walked in the flesh” (that is, had all the weaknesses of the body), but he did not war after the flesh by depending on fleshly wisdom, human abilities, or physical ability.

The person who judges by appearance always lives to give a good appearance. Paul lived to please God and never tried to be a man-pleaser. He was confident of his calling and credentials from the Lord, and that was all that mattered.

As you review this chapter, you will note several important lessons all of us should learn for being effective workers in the service of Christ:

1. Don’t be influenced by physical matters.
2. The most lasting work is done when we use spiritual weapons and tools.
3. Don’t judge before the time (1 Cor.4:5).

Read 2 Cor. 10:1-6. Pray and answer the following questions:

Though many of the Corinthians responded well to Paul's instructions, some leaders continued to slander and accuse him of being bold in letters but weak in person. In this chapter Paul answers their charges, demonstrating both gentleness and boldness, and puts boasting and weakness in a new perspective.

1. Paul appeals to the Corinthians not on the basis of his credentials but on the basis of the meekness and gentleness of Christ. What does this indicate about the way in which he hopes to deal with them?
2. Paul says he is not waging war "*according to the flesh.*" How did the spiritual warfare that Paul fought, and the spiritual weapons that he used, differ from ordinary warfare and weapons?

Read 2 Cor. 10:7-11. Pray and answer the following questions:

Sometimes when things seem to be getting better we hear that the situation is worse than we thought. While Paul was writing this letter, he got fresh news that some outside leaders, some so called super apostles, had abused his rightful place. The tone of the letter becomes more assertive and passionate. Now Paul engages in spiritual warfare with principalities, powers and persons who not only oppose Paul but Christ Himself.

3. How does Paul counter the claim and charge made in verses 7-11?
4. How did Paul respond to the accusations against him?
5. Why do people often look only on the surface of things?

6. How can looking only on the surface mislead us?

7. What surface judgments do you tend to make?

Read 2 Cor. 10:12-18. Pray and answer the following questions:

While serving God in the church and world, people encounter subtle resistance and, sometimes outright opposition. The Christian life is not a playground but a battleground! Paul wants to make peace, not simply keep the peace by covering over the problem. In this study we have much to learn from Paul's pastoral heart.

8. Why is it foolish to measure ourselves by ourselves or to measure ourselves by each other?

9. Why does Paul consider it all right for him to boast about the Corinthian Christians?

10. As the Corinthians grow in faith, what effect can they have on the spread of the good news of Jesus?

11. Paul always had in mind the people who have never heard the gospel. What blesses you about his motivation from Romans 1:14-16?

Journaling

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. (If you are married, pray together with your spouse, and share your thoughts) Write your insights down for review and group discussion.

Here's a personal prayer we might apply to our lives:

Lord Jesus, grant that we may show Your gentleness and meekness toward our fellow Christians. Teach us how to bring all our thoughts and impulses into obedience to You. Help us to build our arguments against false ideas on the foundation of Your truth. Teach us how to build other Christians up, not tear them down. Give us the kind of concern Paul had for sharing the gospel with those who have never heard it. For Your sake. Amen

Home Group Study
The Book of 2 Corinthians
“Finding Strength in Weakness”
Lesson Ten - 2 Corinthians 11
“Father Knows Best”

If you were a Christian minister, how would you go about convincing the people in your congregation that you really loved them?

This was the problem Paul faced as he wrote this epistle. If he reminded the people of the work he did among them, they would only reply, “Paul is bragging!” If he said nothing about his ministry at Corinth, the Judaizers would say, “See, we told you Paul didn’t accomplish anything!”

So what did Paul do? He was led by the Spirit of God to use a beautiful image, a comparison that was certain to reach the hearts of the believers at Corinth. He compared himself to a “spiritual father” caring for his family. He had used this image before to remind the Corinthians that, as a “father” he had begotten them through the Gospel, and that he could discipline them if he felt it was necessary. They were his beloved spiritual children, and he wanted the very best for them.

There is a difference between jealousy and envy. Envy is of the flesh and is selfish; jealousy is based on love and seeks the welfare of others. It is right for a husband to be jealous over his wife or for a pastor to be jealous over his church. Paul compares the local church to a bride, just as in Eph. 5:22-33 he compared the church as a whole as Christ’s bride. Both examples are valid. Paul’s desire was to keep the church pure, free from false doctrine and worldly living. In the Old Testament, going after false gods is compared to adultery; in the New Testament, worldliness is called adultery.

Paul’s chief credentials of apostolic ministry were the wounds on his body that he received in serving Christ. Keep in mind that Paul wrote these things before the events in Acts, and that most of the items on this list are not even mentioned in Acts! And the great apostle would never have mentioned them at all were it not for the fact that he was defending the Gospel. It is an interesting fact that Paul claims that his suffering, not the praise of men, was the best proof he had for declaring his apostleship. When selecting a spiritual leader, look for the scars.

Likewise, we must have an unselfish and generous attitude toward the church. We should not have the attitude “How much can I get?” but rather “How much can I give?” We should be willing to sacrifice so that the church might grow for the glory of God.

Read 2 Cor. 11:1-15. Pray and answer the following questions:

Here in chapter 11 of Second Corinthians, the Apostle Paul is dealing with probably the most powerful tool; the most dangerous threat to a church the devil has “infiltration.” This attack from the enemy is designed to destroy the church from within by teachers who are veering off from the truth. This is still the most dangerous threat to a church today. As you drive through any of our American cities you find church buildings on almost every corner. It would seem that Christianity is the dominant faith in this land of ours and that the church is a powerful moving force in our society. Yet, as you well know, many of those church buildings are empty; many of them have a mere handful of people coming to services that are dull or all together absence of real vitality. It is clear that the churches represented by those buildings are long gone as an effective force in our society. So the question is, what happened? Well, most of them were destroyed from within by the satanic process of infiltration, by people who came in and gradually began to teach a false gospel. That is what was happening here at Corinth, and that is what is threatening many of our churches today. In chapter 11, where we are going to look at the tactics the apostle employs to counteract this threat to the church at Corinth.

1. What qualities do you think should characterize a minister of Christ?
2. How does godly jealousy differ from worldly envy?
3. Why do you think Paul’s decision to “preach the gospel of God free of charge” was so important in defending his ministry? (See vs. 7-12)
4. What help do Paul’s warning in this chapter give you in discerning which spiritual leaders today are deceitful false teachers? (Note Jesus’ warning in Matt. 7:15-23)

Read 2 Cor. 11:16-21. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul has promised that he would deal firmly with the disobedient who had been trying to undermine his authority. Also he has reminded the Corinthians that he was the one who first brought the gospel of Christ to them. Meekness or boasting can sound like madness. As Paul defends himself against the so called “super- apostles” in Corinth, see how he uses both meekness and boasting to answer the charges against him.

5. How do you think Church leadership should handle rivalry and competition in the body?

6. What does it mean to boast in the Lord?

7. If Paul must engage in boasting, he boasts about his “weakness.” We tend to think that our power and success not our weakness brings honor to God. In what sense is your weakness a reason to be thankful to God?

8. How can our boasting be glorifying to the Lord?

Read 2 Cor. 11:22-33. Pray and answer the following questions:

The minister must be more than a minister. He must go well beyond ministering and laboring and suffering. The minister must do far more than most people. Paul says that he was more of a minister than the false leaders and teachers. He was able to make such a claim because he went well beyond in laboring and sacrificing for Christ.

9. Why does Paul offer a service record of his suffering? (See vs. 23-29)

Home Group Study
The Book of 2 Corinthians
“Finding Strength in Weakness”
Lesson Eleven - 2 Corinthians 12
“Power Through Weakness”

While we often extract parts of this chapter for devotional purpose, we must keep in mind Paul’s part in answering his critics and proving his apostolic calling. In the previous chapter, he had decided to recount those things that showed his infirmities, that Christ might receive the glory. We find in this chapter four proofs of Paul’s apostleship.

His Revelations from Christ (12:1-6)

The “man” Paul is talking about here is, of course, himself. Imagine being able to keep a thrilling experience like this secret for fourteen years! (Imagine, too, bearing suffering silently for fourteen years!) Certainly Paul was given divine revelations that no other man saw or heard. He was God’s chosen instrument to reveal to the world the greatness of God’s grace. What Paul heard from God, we do not know. Paul himself said nothing about this experience lest any Christian start honoring him more than he deserved. What humility!

The Thorn in His Flesh (12:7-10)

We do not know what this thorn was, but the best suggestion is an eye ailment. Paul was supernaturally blinded when converted, and it is possible that some weakness remained even in later years. Galatians 4:15 and 6:11 “*with what large letters*” suggest eye trouble. This would have been a trial to Paul both physically and emotionally, and could honestly be called a thorn in the flesh. Whatever the thorn was, it was a burden to him, and it brought pain. He asked to have it removed.

His Apostolic Signs (12:11-18)

Paul is not exalting himself when he claims to be second to none of the apostles; he is simply defending his office. Note that Paul lists several “signs” that proved his apostleship, starting with patience! We expect him to mention miracles and wonders, but not patience! Yet it was Paul’s steadfast endurance under trial that gave evidence that he was divinely called and commissioned.

His Courage in Dealing with Sin (12:19-21)

“When I come to you, you will see how weak I am!” writes Paul. “I would rather you start cleaning up the church now,” he advises. “If you wait for me to do it, you’ll see how humble I can be in the hands of the Lord!” When the hireling sees the wolf coming, he runs away, but the true shepherd stays and protects the sheep. Paul was not about to run away. He even went so far as to name the sins that were rampant in the church. “A little leaven” had indeed leavened the whole lump.

Read 2 Cor. 12:1-6. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul has warned the Corinthians against deceitful leaders who have come to the church claiming to be apostles superior to him. In loving concern for the church, Paul validates himself by a description of his suffering in the ministry of Christ. In this study, Paul exercises great restraint in responding to the false apostles accusations. He gives us a glimpse into his struggles with weakness, God’s unexpected answer to his prayers, and the secret to his strength.

1. Paul describes his experience of being caught up to paradise by referring to “a man in Christ.” Though Paul considers it unprofitable to boast about it, what experience does he describe to the Corinthians?
2. What are some weaknesses or afflictions that you find difficult to live with?
3. What can we learn from Paul’s example about dealing with physical discomfort or hardship?
4. How should we be accountable to one another? Why?

Read 2 Cor. 12:7-11. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul had experienced the spiritual power of Christ. God had given him deep and intimate spiritual experiences. There was the danger that he might begin to think too highly of himself; therefore, God gave Paul a “thorn in the flesh.” Paul needed a “thorn” to keep him ever mindful that he was no better than other men. He was totally dependent upon God despite many unbelievable spiritual experiences.

5. Why did Paul have a “thorn”?
6. Who was responsible for giving Paul a “thorn in the flesh”?
7. What was Paul’s response to his “thorn”?
8. What purpose can suffering serve?
9. How does the Christian perspective on power and weakness differ from that of the world?

Read 2 Cor. 12:12-21. Pray and answer the following questions:

Our world prizes strength, the physical strength of athletes, the financial strength of companies, the political strength of office-holders, and the military strength of armies. But Paul put a new twist on the notion of strength: weakness can make a person strong.

10. What role do you think signs, wonders, and miracles should play in the church today?

Home Group Study
The Book of 2 Corinthians
“Finding Strength in Weakness”
Lesson Twelve - 2 Corinthians 13
“Examine Yourselves”

As Paul brought his letter to a close, his great love for the Corinthians constrained him to make one last appeal. He did not want his third visit to their church to be another painful experience for them and for him. He had opened his heart to them, explained his ministry, answered their accusations, and urged them to submit to the Word of God and obey the Lord. What more could he say or do? In this closing section of the letter, Paul used several approaches in his attempt to motivate the Corinthians toward obedience and submission.

His statement in vs. 4 is interesting. In His death, Christ seemed to reveal weakness; but His resurrection revealed the power of God. In his previous visit, Paul showed seeming weakness as he served; this next visit would be different. There are times when we show His power in us by our seeming weakness; there are other times when we must be severe through the power of God. Paul’s thorn in the flesh experience is an example of being “weak in Him” yet living by the power of God.

The Corinthians were spending a great deal of time examining Paul; now it was time they examined themselves. “Are you even in the faith?” asked Paul. “Are you truly saved?” Every believer must prove his or her faith; no one can tell others whether or not they are born again.

In vs. 8, Paul is not suggesting that there is no way to oppose the truth. Satan certainly opposes the truth with his lies, and people are more prone to believe his lies than they are to believe God’s truth! Paul is saying that the repentance of the Corinthians would be in accordance to the Word of God. Since they would be obeying the truth, Paul could do nothing against them in terms of judging sin or disciplining the offenders. He himself did not want anything other than the truth in the church at Corinth.

Paul closes with one of the greatest of the Bible blessing, the blessing of the Trinity (vs. 14). The “grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” takes us back to Bethlehem, where He became poor for us (2 Cor. 8:9); “the love of God” takes us to Calvary, where God the Father gave His Son; and “the communion of the Holy Spirit” takes us to Pentecost, where the Spirit

baptized all believers into the body of Christ. How fitting this blessing was for this divided, unspiritual church!

Read 2 Cor. 13:1-4. Pray and answer the following questions:

This is the final section of Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. He has done all he can to lead the false teachers, the critics, and those who are in sin to repent and turn back to the Lord. Paul asks once more that they respond to his loving appeal. His prayers for them and his desire not to tear them down but build them up, and to set a model for Christian leadership in each generation. His final words include a warning, a prayer, a challenge, and a blessing.

1. What can the Corinthians expect from Paul's third visit?
2. What proof can Paul give that Christ is really speaking through him?
3. How is gentleness (meekness) misunderstood as weakness in our world today?
4. Verse 4 sums up the whole book. Why does the cross represent the heart of what Paul has been saying to the Corinthians?

Read 2 Cor. 13:5-10. Pray and answer the following questions:

In many of Paul's letters, his closing passages are filled with personal comments and greetings to individuals. That's not the case in these following passages. Although Paul knows the Corinthians by name, he keeps his comments short and generic.

5. Instead of examining Paul, what should the Christians be doing? How should this affect their attitudes and behavior?
6. What does this passage reveal about Paul's concern for the Corinthians' spiritual welfare and regard for his own reputation?
7. For what purpose had God given authority to Paul?
8. How is Paul's attitude one more example of the use of authority to build up rather than tear down?

Read 2 Cor. 13:11-14. Pray and answer the following questions:

9. In what specific ways does Paul pray that the brethren will be built up?
10. How is this prayer encouraging to you?
11. If you are unsure about your position in Christ, what can you do about it in light of this chapter?

Spiritual Authority

If you exercise leadership among other believers, you'll want to carefully study Paul's comment about his authority (2 Cor. 13:10). Like many of us, Paul liked to be in charge, and he felt frustrated when people failed to follow his lead, as the Corinthians had. As an apostle, he had spiritual authority over them, which at times led him to deal severely with them. But it's

