

“Worth It”
2 Corinthians Devotional Series
April 27/28-June 8/9

It’s not uncommon for Christians to ask, “Is all of this really worth it?” The church in Corinth was asking the same question. Paul, an apostle and the founder of their church, wrote the letter we now know as the book of 2 Corinthians to encourage the Corinthians that everything he had been doing, everything he was going to be doing and everything the church would be doing would, indeed, be worth it. Paul’s message is one that proclaims that the good news of Jesus, the Gospel, would make all their persecution, struggles and disappointment worth it. During this series, our weekly devotionals are designed so that you can read Paul’s letter in its entirety. After all, if someone sent you a letter, you’d never just read the beginning! We challenge you to read, get curious and study 2 Corinthians with us for the next seven weeks.

A few encouragements:

- If you’re new to daily devotionals, try and find a quiet place to spend 15-20 minutes each day. If you miss a day, don’t quit! Just pick it up again the following day. Find a space where you’ll be comfortable, open in prayer, asking God to help you know Him more and reflect on what you read throughout the day.
- If you don’t have a Bible, here are some recommendations:
 - Stop by the Connection Center – we’ll give you a free Bible if you need one!
 - Check out BibleGateway.com or download a Bible app on your phone. Stick to the New International Version (NIV) or English Standard Version (ESV) translations.
- Consider doing some of your devotionals with someone else – your family or significant other, a friend or an accountability partner.

New to studying the Bible? No problem! We’ve added some helpful questions for each daily reading – remember that there aren’t always “right” answers to questions and sometimes, questions are what help us dig deeper into the text. You can use the questions provided and three easy steps as it helps:

- 1. Observe:** What sticks out to you in the passage? Is there anything repeated? Anything emphasized? Do you notice any comparisons and contrasts? What verbs (action words) are there? How does the passage connect with the passages before it? Are there key sentences to pay attention to that start with “Therefore”, “But”, or “So that”?
- 2. Ask Questions:** Spend some time asking questions about your observations – “Why did Paul say...” or “What’s the significance of...” are great starters! When you’ve spend time asking and pondering about your questions, make sure you ask, “What did Paul intend to communicate to the Corinthians?”
- 3. Apply:** Once you feel like you understand what Paul was saying to the Corinthians, then ask yourself, “What does that mean for me?” How might God be speaking to you in the

passage? Is there a command you need to obey? A truth you need to believe? An action you might need to take?

Helpful Background:

Remember that 2 Corinthians wasn't written to you. You are reading a letter that was sent from a church planter (Paul) who knew the congregation deeply – he knew their struggles, their hang-ups, their complaints and their endearing qualities. When we read the letter, we have to remember that is the relationship we are looking at. One of Paul's main purposes of the letter was to let them know that even though they were apart, it would be worth it to continue living out their faith. He had sent previous letters that were hard letters to write and to read. It became easy for the Corinthians to look elsewhere for support or believe other teachings and Paul implores them to not abandon the Gospel. He warns them about the suffering they will endure, the false teachers they will come up against and he implores them to be obedient to his teachings because he is a true apostle. Make note of the times that Paul continues to come back to this theme of "worth it" – in all his writing, he continues remind the Corinthians of the Gospel and his commitment to it.

April 27/28

Week One: Worth it to Write – 2 Corinthians 1:1-2

April 29 – 1:1-7

*1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:
2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all
comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any
affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as we share abundantly
in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.^[a] 6 If we are afflicted, it is
for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience
when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. 7 Our hope for you is unshaken, for we
know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.*

Where does Paul's authority come from? Why might that matter to Paul? To the Corinthians?

What do you find repeated on this passage? What do we learn about who God is and what He does?

Why do you think Paul speaks so much about suffering? What encouragement is he offering in verse 7?

What do you think the Corinthians can expect from the rest of his letter?

April 30 – 1:8-11

*8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers,^[b] of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were
so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had
received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the*

dead. ¹⁰ He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. ¹¹ You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

When have you felt at the end of your rope? How did you make it through that season?

What did Paul gain during his suffering?

What does it look like to rely on God? What do you think deliverance looks like? How is prayer part of relying on God?

May 1 – 1:12-14

¹² For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity^[a] and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you. ¹³ For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand— ¹⁴ just as you did partially understand us—that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.

What is Paul boasting in?

What is the difference between godly sincerity and earthly wisdom? Why do you think Paul is emphasizing his approach to them?

Why do you think Paul emphasized understanding? Why would it matter that the Corinthians know he is speaking plainly to them?

May 2 -- 1:15-24

¹⁵ Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace. ¹⁶ I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. ¹⁷ Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time? ¹⁸ As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. ²⁰ For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.^[a] ²³ But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. ²⁴ Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

Paul had planned to visit the Corinthians at a certain time but his plans needed to change so some accused him of being unreliable. Why does it matter that the Corinthians found him reliable?

As Christians, why does our reliability matter? How can we show others our heart even in the midst of their disappointment with us? Why do you think Paul emphasizes the faithfulness of God in the midst of this?

How does Paul show that God is reliable? How can we trust or guarantee that God will be faithful? What is our response to God’s faithfulness?

May 3 – 2:1-4

2 For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. 2 For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? 3 And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. 4 For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

Why do you think it's important for Paul to name his intentions and feelings? How would knowing this help the Corinthians receive his letter? How would it help the Corinthians stay focused on Paul and his preaching instead of other people or other ideas?

At the end of this week of reading, what do we know about Paul's intentions? Why do you think he worked so hard for the Corinthians to trust his letter? What might be important about his message?

How might we acquire Paul's steadfastness as we share with others?

May 4/5

Week Two: Worth it to Comfort – 2 Corinthians 1:3-2:11

May 6 – 2:5-11

5 Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. 6 For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, 7 so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. 9 For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. 10 Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, 11 so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

After Paul names his intentions and credibility, why do you think the first thing he writes about is forgiveness?

Why do you think Paul tells the Corinthians to both forgive and comfort the man who had done wrong? What's the difference between forgiving and comforting? Why might both be necessary? Why does Paul appeal that their forgiveness come with restored relationship?

How might Satan manipulate situations where there is a lack of forgiveness or lack of restored relationship? How is forgiveness and restoration a solution?

Are you aware of Satan's designs (or strategies)? How do you fight against them?

May 7 -- 2:12-17

12 When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, 13 my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. 15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, 16 to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? 17 For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

Why do you think Paul compares knowledge of Christ to a fragrance or aroma? What do you think he's trying to communicate with this analogy?

What kind of strength does the aroma have? How does Paul show humility in being part of such a great plan?

How does your life show the aroma of Christ? Do you understand the significance and weight of this role?

May 8 – 3:1-6

3 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? 2 You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. 3 And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

4 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, 6 who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

What purpose does a letter of recommendation serve? What does it mean that Paul would compare the Corinthians to letters of recommendation? Why would a living person give a better recommendation than a letter? What would that show the world about who God is?

Why do you think Paul then emphasizes that their sufficiency is from God? What does it mean that they are ministers of a new covenant (referring to Jesus' life, death and resurrection)? Why do you think he emphasizes the Spirit?

May 9 – 3:7-18

7 Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? 9 For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. 10 Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. 11 For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. 12 Since we have such a hope, we are very

bold, ¹³ not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ But when one^[a] turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord^[a] is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,^[a] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.^[a] For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Why do you think Paul keeps talking about “glory”? What is different about glory before Jesus (when Moses was alive) and after Jesus (when the Spirit is with us)?

What kind of hope do the Corinthians have? Why is the hope of the new covenant better?

How does the new covenant give freedom or liberty? What does it mean for you to have freedom of access to God? How have you been transformed because of your access to God? What comfort is that to you?

May 10 – 4:1-6

⁴ Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God,^[a] we do not lose heart. ² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice^[b] cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants^[c] for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Paul, in response to what has come previously says, “Therefore, we do not give up.” Why do you think Paul thinks it’s worth it to continue?

Why do you think Paul is so concerned with sharing the truth? What might be uncomfortable or difficult about sharing the gospel plainly? Why would it be worth it to communicate such truth, “for Jesus’ sake”?

What do you notice about the contrast of light and dark? What is Paul communicating? How can we know light has shone in our hearts?

May 11/12

Week Three: Worth it to Wither – 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

May 13 – 4:7-12

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.¹¹ For we who live are always being given over

to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

What is the treasure Paul is referring to? (Hint: check back in verses 1-6!)

Why would God give such a powerful treasure to humans, mere earthly vessels?

Why does Paul put up with, and ask others to put up with, such suffering? (v.10) If someone believed a Christian life should be free of suffering, how would they make sense of this passage? Why would Jesus' death be made known in our weakness?

How would such suffering and hardship show a true minister of the gospel?

May 14 – 4:13-18

¹³ Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. ¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self^[a] is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

What is the spirit of faith? What encouragement does it offer about Jesus be raised?

Why does Paul think it is worth it to continue sharing the treasure/good news?

Why does Paul compare and contrast outwardly and inwardly language? How have you encountered being renewed inwardly? How have you seen God's grace extend to more people because of that?

What does it mean that the unseen is eternal? Where is Paul encouraging our perspective to be? Where is your perspective?

May 15 – 5:1-5

¹ For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³ if indeed by putting it on^[a] we may not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

When have you found yourself groaning for God's renewal of all things to take place? What kind of human experiences is Paul referring to?

How does the Spirit give us a deposit/guarantee of the renewal that is coming?

How might this change the Corinthian's view of death and suffering? How might it change your view?

May 16 – 5:6-10

6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

What do you believe about the future? How does what you believe about the future affect your life today?

How does Paul's belief about the future allow him to have a positive attitude in the midst of current sufferings?

Do you look forward to leaving this earth and being with God one day? Why or why not?

Why do you think Paul mentions judgment? How would that change the way the Corinthians live their lives? How could they have good courage when talking about eventual judgment?

May 17 5:11-13

11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. 12 We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

What might fear of the Lord have to do with the previous text? What do you think it means to fear the Lord? Why do you think Paul's fear moves him to action, persuading others?

Why do you think people in Corinth might have accused Paul of being crazy? (v.13) What does that tell you about Paul's commitment to the good news? Paul's commitment to fearing God? How might it change the way you view your life and purpose?

May 18/19

Week Four: Worth it to Reconcile – 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:13

May 20 – 5:14-17

14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. 16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. ^[b] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Paul says the love of Christ compels us to live for Jesus. Why do you think Jesus' sacrifice demands this kind of response? What implications does your life not being your own have?

What does it mean to not regard or think of someone according to flesh? How does the love of Christ change the way you see people in your life?

What does it mean to be a new creation? What hope is in the statement, "the new has come"? What does that mean for your life today?

May 21 – 5:18-21

18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling^[a] the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

What is your experience with reconciliation? Do you find yourself eager to restore relationships with others? Do you find yourself resisting restoration?

What does it mean that Christ reconciled (restored relationship) with us?

Do you think you are called to be a minister? Have you often thought ministry is for church pastors and staff? If we're called to be ministers of reconciliation, what implications does that have for your life?

To be righteous is to be in right standing with God. What would it mean then to become the righteousness of God? How would that be part of the ministry of reconciliation?

May 22 – 6:1-10

6 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.² For he says,

*"In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you."*

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. 3 We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, 4 but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities,⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; 6 by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; 7 by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8 through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed;¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

What does it mean to receive the grace of God in vain? If we counted God's grace as useless/vain, how would that impact the ministry we are called to? How can you make sure you don't take God's goodness for granted?

What do you notice about Paul's list of things they praised themselves for in verses 4-8? How do you think they can commend both suffering and goodness? What does that say about what it means to follow Jesus faithfully?

As a follower of Jesus, when have you been treated as an imposter? How do we reconcile what the world thinks of us with who God has called us to be? What direction do verses 9-10 give you?

May 23 – 6:11-13

11 We have spoken freely to you,^[a] Corinthians; our heart is wide open. 12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. 13 In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

Paul's exhortation for Christ's love to compel service and reconciliation turns toward himself here – he makes a plea for them to have affection for him and his leadership once again. (Remember, they were skeptical about his letter and credibility.)

When have you experienced the withdrawal of affection of someone close to you? Is there someone in your life you have withheld affection from?

Do you need to open your heart to the idea of reconciliation? Is there someone you might need to appeal to widen their hearts? Who might God be calling you to reconcile with?

May 24 – 6:14-7:1

14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial?^[b] Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

*"I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.*

*17 Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing;
then I will welcome you,*

*18 and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty."*

7 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body^[a] and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

A yoke is a device used for joining together oxen and has since turned into the idea of being joined, linked or united. Why does Paul warn about being yoked with unbelievers? What contrasts does Paul list about believers and unbelievers?

Paul calls them to a high standard – believers are made for a grand relationship with the Living God. What do verses 16-18 say about our relationship with God? Why would Paul work so hard to make sure that relationship isn't threatened? Why is his response to God's promise that we should aspire to be holy (set apart)?

So what does it mean to be unequally yoked with unbelievers? How can we share the love of Christ without letting our relationship with God be at risk?

May 25/26

Week Five: Worth it to Repent – 2 Corinthians 7:2-16

May 27 – 7:2-7

² Make room in your hearts^[2] for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. ³ I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. ⁴ I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.

⁵ For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. ⁶ But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.

What do you notice about Paul's experiences versus his reaction to those experiences? How is Paul able to live with such affliction and respond to the Corinthians with so much joy? What does verse 6 tell us about Paul's priorities and perspectives?

What gave Paul joy in the midst of his distress? How do you find joy in the midst of distress? To whom might you look to find joy in the midst of distress?

May 28 – 7:8-15

⁸ For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. ⁹ As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.

¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. ¹¹ For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. ¹² So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong,

but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. ¹³ Therefore we are comforted.

And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. ¹⁴ For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true. ¹⁵ And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. ¹⁶ I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.

One of Paul's previous letters called out sin that was happening throughout the Corinthian church – it was necessary, but it brought pain, hard conversations and hard decisions. When has turning towards God, or repenting, felt difficult for you? When has it been difficult for you, like Paul, to confront someone else? How does verse 11 name that it is worth it?

Verse 13 says that in the midst of correction, confrontation and repentance, they are comforted. How is it possible that comfort can come from that?

Paul names that the Corinthians have been consistently obedient – obedient in response to his letter, obedient in response to Titus, and he is confident they will be obedient in response to this letter. Why is obedience of such great importance to Paul? Why is it of great importance to Christians?

May 29 – 8:1-10

⁸ We want you to know, brothers,^[a] about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor^[b] of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you^[c]—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. ¹⁰ And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it.

In verse 2, Paul says that in the midst of affliction and poverty, churches have given generously and joyfully. Why do you think he shares this anecdote with the church in Corinth? What is surprising about the anecdote?

The Macedonian church gave according to their means, beyond their means, and on their own – what model does that set for the church in Corinth? For us?

Why wouldn't Paul command (verse 8) the Corinthians to give? Why does he instead, give examples of the Macedonian church and the life of Jesus? What might that inspire the Corinthians to do? How might it inspire us to give?

May 30 – 8:11-24

11 So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. 12 For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness¹⁴ your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. 15 As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

16 But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you.¹⁷ For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going^[a] to you of his own accord. 18 With him we are sending^[a] the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. 19 And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. 20 We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us,²¹ for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. 22 And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers^[a] of the churches, the glory of Christ. 24 So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

What guidelines for giving does Paul give in verses 11-15? Do you have a readiness or willingness to give? Why or why not? What do you have that might be available to give? What do you think Paul means about fairness in relation to generosity?

What do verses 16-24 tell us about stewardship of money? What might Paul mean by honorable in the Lord's sight versus man? What stewardship is honored by the Lord but not by man in our lives?

Paul has boasted about the Corinthians' capacity to be good givers. Do you think all Christians should be perceived that way? What advantage would verse 24 have on our lives?

May 31 – 9:1-15

9 Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints,² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. 3 But I am sending^[a] the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. 4 Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. 5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift^[a] you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.^[a]

6 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully^[a] will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency^[a] in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 9 As it is written,

*"He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever."*

10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. 12 For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 13 By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, 14 while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. 15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Paul is using a bit of reverse psychology here – “I don’t even need to tell you to give – you are already willing and I’ve already bragged about you!” Do you think Paul is being tongue and cheek, a bit sarcastic in verses 1-6? If Paul chose to speak this way, do you think the Corinthians’ were actually being good givers? What kind of standard has Paul set up for them? How would they be motivated to give?

After all of Paul’s appeals to give generously, he finally tells them what the result will be. What does he say will happen in verses 6-15 if we give generously? Why do you think generosity is tied to the gospel in verses 13-15?

Thinking back on the last few days of text, is there an invitation God is extending? Is there a way you might need to turn back to God, repenting of the ways you think about generosity and giving? What might need to change in your life?

Jun 1/2

Week Six – Worth it to Respond

June 3 – 10:1-11

10 I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!— 2 I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, 6 being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

7 Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ’s, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ’s, so also are we. 8 For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. 9 I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. 10 For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.” 11 Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present.

Why do you think Paul emphasizes his meekness and humility? How can Paul be both meek and bold with the Corinthians? What do you think it would mean to walk according to the flesh?

What do you think it means to destroy lofty intellectual arguments? What does it mean to take every thought captive to obey Christ? What does that mean we measure our intellect against? Do

you tend to rely on your own understanding and intellect or do you rely on Christ's affirmation and teaching? What is the cost of disobedience?

What does Paul say about authority in verses 7-11? Why does Paul encourage the Corinthians to remember that they are all in Christ? Why is it important that Paul emphasizes his authority to build up instead of destroy? Why does Paul proclaim he will be the same in writing as in person (v.11)? How would that inspire obedience?

June 4 – 10:12-18

¹² Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

¹³ But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. ¹⁴ For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. ¹⁵ We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, ¹⁶ so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. ¹⁷ "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

What does Paul say about comparison? Why does comparison with others lead to a lack of wisdom or understanding?

What is the right measure Paul gives? Why does he encourage measuring only to their sphere/area of influence? Why is he working so hard to help the church focus on their ministry instead of what is happening elsewhere? Why does he encourage them to boast in the Lord instead of themselves?

What does God say about you? How can you let that testify about yourself?

June 5 – 11:1-11

¹¹ I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! ² For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. ³ But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴ For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. ⁵ Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. ⁶ Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

⁷ Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge? ⁸ I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve

you.⁹ And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.¹⁰ As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia.¹¹ And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

Why is Paul telling the Corinthians to bear with him? Why does he think what others consider foolish will be worth it? Why is he concerned that the Corinthians might be led astray?

What is the difference between godly/divine jealousy and human jealousy? Why is he using an analogy of a protective husband? What is Paul expressing to the Corinthians? Why would it help the Corinthians trust his teaching instead of other false teachers?

What warnings does Paul give about other teachers' motivations? Why should teaching be free of charge? Why does Paul use such strong language about money, proclaiming his priority of the message instead of funds? What other dangerous teachers might have existed at the time?

June 6 – 11:12-21

¹² And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do.¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

¹⁶ I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little.¹⁷ What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would^[a] but as a fool.¹⁸ Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast.¹⁹ For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves!²⁰ For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.²¹ To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

How can people who claim to be apostles of Christ actually be servants of Satan? Why do you think instead of calling out the false teachers, Paul boasts in his own message? When have you been swayed by impressive credentials, words or displays of power? Why is Paul's solution to boast about foolishness?

What would be considered "foolish" about concern for the integrity of a message than Paul's needs or displays of power? What kind of play on words is Paul using with the term "fool"? If so many false teachers were being bold in their greatness, why does Paul answer with sarcastic boldness in foolishness? What point is he trying to name?

June 7 – 11:21-33

But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that.²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I.²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.²⁴ Five times I received at the hands

of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, ²⁸ in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³² At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

What kind of credentials is Paul claiming for himself? What do you think the original audience would have thought of that list? How do his hard experiences add to his credentials? What is he attempting to communicate about his role and why the Corinthians should trust him?

Sometimes we think that following Jesus shouldn't include suffering or that if there is suffering, we must be doing something wrong. What does Paul communicate about suffering here? How is he responding to claims that he is weak or not a good teacher?

June 8/9

Week Seven: Worth it to Confront

June 10 – 12:1-6

¹² I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³ And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— ⁴ and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. ⁵ On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses— ⁶ though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me

Paul had many experiences of visions and revelations that colors his words here. To read more about these, check out the book of Acts. (Specifically, Acts 16:9-10, 18:9-11, 22:6-11, 26:12-20, and 27:23-25). When people have such big stories of encountering God, how can it change our perspective of them? Why is Paul urging them to not focus on those experiences?

Paul talks about a third heaven or paradise (the current cultural way they understood sky and heaven) – he's expressing one of the visions he encountered and how he restrains himself from boasting about them. Why would he restrain himself? Why would it be foolish to boast about his experiences?

June 11 – 12:7-10

. 7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations,^[a] a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 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 of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Despite Paul's extraordinary experiences with God, he talks about a thorn – something that has afflicted him or caused him trouble. What does his say about this affliction? Why does God not get rid of what is troubling Paul?

What is interesting about Paul's response to his difficulties? What about Paul's response might we be called to imitate? Is it crazy to boast in suffering? Crazy to be content with suffering? What does this mean for our life and the suffering we encounter?

Sometimes we think that if we just have enough faith, we will be delivered from hard things. How does what Paul is writing speak against that? When have you pleaded with the Lord for relief? How might God be inviting you to respond?

June 12 – 12:11-18

11 I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. 12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. 13 For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong! 14 Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. 15 I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? 16 But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. 17 Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? 18 I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

Since the Corinthians were being led astray by false teachers, Paul explained that he was forced to boast about his authority and intent to make sure they followed the right path. Why do you think he acknowledges this irony and asks for forgiveness? What does that say about who Paul is and his intentions?

Paul tells the Corinthians that he is coming to visit them in person for a third time. What does he say his intentions are? How would the Corinthians have received this news? How does he explain that he is a true, godly minister in his writing?

June 13 – 12:19-13:4

¹⁹ Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. ²⁰ For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. ²¹ I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.

***13** This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ² I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them— ³ since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. ⁴ For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.*

Paul calls the Corinthians to repent, turn back to God from their sinful ways before he visits them. Why do you think he exhorts them in this manner? How would it be for their upbuilding or edification (verse 19)? What role does Paul have in helping the Corinthians look more like Jesus and how is he fulfilling that role here? Who in your life helps you look more like Jesus? How do you respond to them?

Paul claims that he will come with the power of Christ when he comes. What do you think that means? Why would the Corinthians be looking for such a thing? Why do you think this letter speaks so much about weakness and power, foolishness and wisdom? What does it mean to be weak in Christ? How have you considered yourself to be weak in Christ? Why might it be worth it to be weak?

June 14 – 13:5-14

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! ⁶ I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. ⁷ But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. ⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. ¹⁰ For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

¹¹ Finally, brothers,^[a] rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another,^[b] agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All the saints greet you.

¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Why should the Corinthians examine and test themselves? What would it mean to fail the test? What would it mean for us to test that Jesus Christ is in us? The Corinthians continued to test Paul but

implores them to test themselves – why do you think he tells them to shift their perspective? When have you been quick to test others without testing yourself?

Why do you think Paul ends his letter encouraging restoration and comfort? What does that say about his goal of the letter? How would testing help them restore and comfort one another?

How has Paul's letter explained that following Jesus is worth it?