

MeadowBrook Church | Fall 2026

lifeGROUP

Life together for the Kingdom of God



2 Corinthians

FROM ONE DEGREE OF GLORY TO ANOTHER



MeadowBrook CHURCH

*MeadowBrook seeks to **CONNECT** people to Christ and His church, **GROW** them as disciples to be disciplers, and equip them to **SERVE** through missions, ministry, and worship, all to **GLORIFY** God.*

Christ Centered | Community Driven | Kingdom Focused

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 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. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 ESV)

Paul's *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* is perhaps his most emotionally transparent epistle, he speaks of God's help in trials he has faced, including the harsh opposition coming from within the Corinthian church itself. Through it all, Paul settled into the eternal things of God, the sanctifying work of the Spirit, and the sufficient grace of God in the midst of his weaknesses. As a result, Paul was empowered to persevere and to love the church that desperately needed his guidance in the wisdom of Christ.

My prayer for this curriculum is that we too would heed his warnings and follow his example that we might know the abundant comfort of Christ in every season and in every trial.



Hunter Hindsman

Life Groups and Associate Pastor

Special thanks to Chad Kitchens, Brent McCain, Heather Clough, Taylor Hindsman, and Sarah Yarbrough for contributing to this curriculum in either their writing or editing. *If you are interested in writing or editing in the future, email hunter@mbchurch.com today.*

Table of Contents

Pg.	Lesson	Reference	Date	Author*
04	<i>The God of All Comfort</i>	2 Cor 1:1–11	Aug 09	H. Hindsman
07	<i>Of Mice and Men</i>	2 Cor 1:12–2:4	Aug 16	H. Hindsman
10	<i>Good News</i>	2 Cor 1:19–22	Aug 23	H. Hindsman
13	<i>The Power of the Church's Ministry</i>	2 Cor 2:5–3:11	Aug 30	H. Hindsman
16	<i>Unveiled Faces</i>	2 Cor 3:12–18	Sep 06	B. McCain
19	<i>The Light of the Gospel</i>	2 Cor 4:1–6	Sep 13	B. McCain
22	<i>Affliction to Adoration</i>	2 Cor 4:7–18	Sep 20	H. Hindsman
25	<i>Memento Mori</i>	2 Cor 5:1–10	Sep 27	H. Hindsman
28	<i>Compelled</i>	2 Cor 5:11–16	Oct 04	H. Hindsman
31	<i>New Life in Christ</i>	2 Cor 5:17–6:10	Oct 11	H. Hindsman
34	<i>The Pursuit of Holiness</i>	2 Cor 6:11–7:16	Oct 18	C. Kitchens
37	<i>Gospel Generosity, Part One</i>	2 Cor 8:1–24	Oct 25	C. Kitchens
40	<i>Gospel Generosity, Part Two</i>	2 Cor 9:1–15	Nov 01	H. Hindsman
43	<i>Serving Like Jesus</i>	2 Cor 10:1–18	Nov 08	H. Hindsman
46	<i>Dealing with False Teachers</i>	2 Cor 11:1–15	Nov 15	H. Hindsman
49	<i>Christ's Sufficient Presence</i>	2 Cor 11:16–12:10	Nov 22	H. Hindsman
52	<i>Principles for Gospel Ministry</i>	2 Cor 12:11–13:10	Nov 29	H. Hindsman

*All lessons are edited for content and compiled by Hunter Hindsman

The God of All Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:1–11 | August 09, 2026

What is the most comfortable piece of clothing you own?

Additional Passages:

- Genesis 12:1–3;
- John 16:33;
- Acts 14:19–23, 19:21–41;
- 1 Peter 5:12–19;
- Psalm 119:50;
- Isaiah 48:10

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: God is the Father of compassion who comforts us in all of our affliction.

Major Application: Comfort others with the same comfort you received from God.

Key Passage: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 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.* (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 ESV)

Background to 2 Corinthians: Will the real apostles please stand up?

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 Corinthians 1:1 ESV)

*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. Indeed, I consider that **I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles.*** (2 Corinthians 11:4-5 ESV)

The greatest threats to the fledgling church in its early centuries were not as much state opposition but internal corruption through false teaching. From the Judaizers to Marcion, who denied the Old Testament, to the Gnostics with their false gospels, to the Arians and semi-Arians who denied the full divinity of the Son of God, false teaching sought to gain a stronghold in churches to lead people astray.

Things were no different in Corinth. False apostles proclaimed a different gospel—whether these were Judaizer holdouts or early expressions of Jewish Gnosticism, we do not know for certain. Regardless, we know that they put their overconfidence in the flesh and embraced the so-called wisdom of Job's friends, who interpreted God's favor in terms of earthly prosperity (cf. 2 Cor 11:1–12:10).

However, Paul makes clear in his opening address that the Corinthians were on an island. Paul is a true apostle of Christ by God's will, not his own, and he writes them with all the saints in the entirety of the region. In other words, to reject Paul's authority is to disconnect oneself from the church of Jesus Christ altogether.

Sadly, echoes of this reside today. Many pit Jesus against Paul, questioning the divine authority of Paul's letters in favor of the red letters. However, such is a fool's endeavor. The same Spirit that inspired Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John inspired Paul. Each recorded the Word of God in what they wrote, and the message of the epistles is the same message of the gospels, of the entire Scriptures.

Comforted to Comfort

Rather than giving thanks for the Corinthians—whom Paul does not quite know where they stand—Paul gives thanks to God in vv. 3–4. These form the key verses of this lesson, and they ought to frame how we navigate the various trials in our lives. So, let's break them down.

First, Paul identifies who God is. He is addressing the first person of the Trinity, the eternal Father of the divine Son—the Son who took on flesh for us and our salvation as our Christ. Jesus would take away the sins of the people and reveal the glory of the Father—for it is only in Christ that one could draw near to God. While Paul is concerned with properly relating the persons of the Godhead, he is just as focused on showing us the nature of the Godhead. (Remember, since there is only one God, that is one divine nature, the divine attributes that belong to God also belong to God the Son and God the Spirit). And this God is the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. Every mercy, every comfort, indeed, every good and perfect gift comes down from above from the Father of lights in whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

God comes alongside us to comfort us in our affliction because it is who he is. He freely acts in accordance with his infinitely good character.

Second, Paul states a truth for the saints of God: God comforts us in all our affliction. David Garland has some helpful insight on the type of comfort being discussed here:

“For English speakers, the word comfort may connote emotional relief and a sense of well-being, physical ease, satisfaction, and freedom from pain and anxiety. Many in our culture worship at the cult of comfort in a self-centered search for ease, but it lasts for only a moment and never fully satisfies. Watson comments that the word “comfort ... has gone soft” in modern English. In the time of Wycliffe, it was “closely connected with its root, the Latin fortis, which means brave, strong, courageous.” The comfort Paul has in mind has nothing to do with a languorous feeling of contentment. It is not some tranquilizing dose of grace that only dulls pains but a stiffening agent that fortifies one in heart, mind, and soul. Comfort relates to encouragement, help, and exhortation. God's comfort strengthens weak knees and sustains sagging spirits so that one faces the troubles of life with unbending resolve and unending assurance. . . . God may not always remove the afflictions that come our way, but God always comforts by giving us the fortitude to face them.”

The comfort God gives may not feel like the most comfortable piece of clothing in your wardrobe, but it is sufficient for you as it was for Paul. And, as with Paul, God's power is made perfect in our weakness.

Third, Paul communicates a responsibility. God's comfort does, in fact, come with some strings attached. Namely, he expects the mercy he gives to be extended from us to others. We who have received God's comfort are to come alongside others in order to comfort them. In fact, it is often through the comforting presence of another saint of God that God in turn comforts us. In receiving such a ministry from God, we have a duty to comfort others with the very comfort we have received. In a world of suffering, Christians know and give the comfort of God.

What does a ministry of comfort look like on a practical day-to-day basis?

Why is it helpful to separate the reality of God's comfort from our subjective feelings of comfort?

Take some time to discuss David Garland's quote. What stands out to you?

Affliction and comfort are realities downstream of our union with Christ.

“Some ministers today unhelpfully raise the hopes of their people by promising them immediate health and prosperity, as their due portion from God. These promises appear to be tailor-made for a society whose need for instant gratification is unprecedented in history. Paul, by contrast, soberly refers to his readers’ sufferings, and he promises, not immediate healing and success, but God’s comfort which they will experience as they patiently endure.” – Paul Barnett.

Paul connects the reality of Christians suffering and their hope of ultimate comfort to their union with Christ. In other words, Paul gently reminds us that those who are united to Christ will share in His experiences—the good and the bad. Yet oftentimes, we recognize that we are united to the one who was the man of sorrows, scorned by his own people, rejected, betrayed, mocked, and crucified. Yet we are shocked and given over to despair—even questioning God’s love for us—when something does not go our way as we had hoped. Christians share in the cross of Christ, but we also share in the comfort and glory of Christ.

More than that ultimate reality, our suffering has purpose in the meantime. Our affliction endured in faith inspires other Christians to persevere and even draws people to Christ through evangelism. Our seasons of comfort are extended so that we might be a source of comfort to those who endure the same trials we experience. Trials are inescapable in this life, but they’re never meaningless—both in this life and in eternity. Remember that, and don’t squander the opportunity to be a light in the midst of the darkness of the trial.

Keep in mind, however, such a ministry is impossible in the strength of your flesh. Paul reflects on a recent trial of his (perhaps the riot at Ephesus or perhaps another trial altogether). In his reflection, Paul acknowledged that the trial also had a sanctifying purpose in his own heart:

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. 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. (2 Corinthians 1:9-10 ESV)

God used the trial to make Paul rely on God and trust in his ultimate purposes. This was not a naïve belief that everything was going to be okay, but a confident hope that, even in death, God would deliver him in the resurrection. Indeed, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

I prefer the CSB’s rendition of vv. 10–11, which read:

He has delivered us from such a terrible death, and he will deliver us. We have put our hope in him that he will deliver us again while you join in helping us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gift that came to us through the prayers of many. (2 Corinthians 1:10-11 CSB)

It’s a good reminder for us of the power of prayer. God, in his infinite wisdom, has purposed to bring about his will through and not apart from the prayers of the people. Thus, while prayer does not bring about any change in God, it does bring about change in God’s creation as we pray for God’s kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Because answered prayers are an unmerited grace rather than a debt owed to us, witnessing them naturally moves our hearts to worship. Sometimes, it leads to expressions of worship for the very first time in salvation. Prayer is powerful and effective. By God’s design, it works together with the divine will to bring about God’s purposes on earth. Let us make regular use of so great a gift for the good of others and the glory of God.

Of Mice and Men

2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4 | August 16, 2025

How well do you react to changes in plans?

Additional Passages:

- Leviticus 19:1–18;
- Jeremiah 9:23–24;
- Matthew 5:21–48;
- James 1:17–18, 4:13–17;
- 2 Timothy 2:8–13;
- 1 Corinthians 5:3, 16:1–7

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: God's grace empowers his people to reflect his character.

Major Application: Reflect the holiness of God.

Key Passage:

For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you. (2 Corinthians 1:12 ESV)

The Background: Sometimes the Lord wills for our plans to change.

“The best-laid schemes of mice and men

Go oft awry,

And leave us nothing but grief and pain,

For promised joy!” – Excerpt from “To a Mouse” by Robert Burns, English Translation

You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

(James 4:14–15 ESV)

For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.

(1 Corinthians 16:7 ESV)

All of us have experienced the frustration of plans changing, of recognizing that our desires do not match what the Lord has willed. As Paul transitions to one of the main subjects of his letter—a defense of his apostleship—he finds himself in just one of those situations. At the end of his first epistle, Paul expressed his desire to come to the Corinthians again—if the Lord permitted such a visit—but as 2 Corinthians reveals, the Lord had not yet permitted such a visit.

Paul's missed visit was not a result of poor character, hypocrisy, or any other sinful reason rumored in Corinth. The reason was actually quite simple: he wanted his next visit to be joyful, rather than in the corrective spirit of his first letter. However, because the Corinthians had not yet fully accepted his rebuke, he chose to delay.

However, John Gill explained, Paul “would not come with sorrow and heaviness, bewailing their sins not repented of, and by sharp reproofs and censures, which in such a case would be necessary, be the cause of grief and trouble to them; wherefore he determined to wait their repentance and amendment before he came again.” Paul loved the Corinthians and wanted to enjoy his time with them in peace, not come in confrontation. So, in his prudence, he delayed, trusting that the Spirit would do the work he alone could do. In other words, he still held out hope for a joyful visit, which in fact proved to be the case. Before returning to Judea, Paul did, in fact, winter in Corinth and penned Romas in the very location where the Corinthian Church gathered: the house of Gaius, whom Paul baptized personally (1 Cor 1:14).

So, Paul changed his plans, but his desire for the ultimate good of the Corinthians had not. While his opponents disparaged his good name and sought to capitalize on this change by further dividing the church—as Satan would desire—Paul reflected on God's character, providing a model for the church to follow then and now. For as David Garland noted,

“Paul, however, does not vent his hurt feelings in this letter for being scorned by them. The problem he seeks to correct is rooted in the false measures they have adopted to measure apostles and spirituality. . . . Paul does not desire personal vindication or to rehabilitate his reputation for personal integrity as if he were only a discredited politician. Rather, if they understand him and his sufficiency as God's apostle, then they will also understand better the nature of the cross and how all followers of Christ should live that out.”

In Paul, we see a minister reflecting the character of God in his actions, empowered by grace, established by God, and sealed by the Spirit. The remainder of the points will be exploring this theme for our own upbuilding and application.

So, here's a brief timeline, adapted from the ESV Study Bible:

- Paul makes his first visit to Corinth and plants the church in Corinth with Aquila, Priscilla, Silas, and Timothy, and ministers among them for 18 months. (Acts 18:1–17; ~ AD 51)
- Paul writes 1 Corinthians while in Ephesus (Acts 19:10, 1 Cor 16:5; ~ AD 53–55)
- Paul does not visit on the way to Macedonia as he wished (2 Cor 1:16a)
- Paul writes 2 Corinthians before leaving Macedonia, still desiring to visit on his way to Judea (Acts 20:1, 2 Cor 1:16b, 12:14; ~AD 55–6)
- Paul spends some time in Corinth on his way back to Judea and writes Romans (Acts 20:2–3, Rom 16:23, 1 Cor 1:14; ~ AD 57)

Note: Some commentaries posit an unrecorded second, brief visit with an extra lost letter written based on recent readings of 2 Cor 2:1–4; however, that is not the position I take in this lesson. I follow John Gill, John Calvin, and Matthew Henry in the belief that, although Paul could point out three specific times he desired to come to them (2 Cor 12:14), Paul was only able to make two physical visits to Corinth: first in Acts 18 and second in Acts 20:2, which was when he picked up the offering for the churches in Jerusalem. And the letter in question is simply 1 Corinthians, with the issue of discipline being 1 Corinthians 5. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 2:1 refer to the fact that Paul “had come once by an Epistle, by means of which he had severely pained them. Hence, so long as they had not repented, he was unwilling to come to them, lest he should be constrained to grieve them again, when present with them, for he chose rather to give them longer time for repentance” (Calvin, cf. 1 Cor 5:3). I only bring this up because the context informs the way one understands Paul's words and must be addressed, but it does not even hardly rise to the level of a third order belief. I think this position makes the most sense based on the biblical data we have and is the least speculative and reliant on constructed contexts for which we have no historical evidence. However, it is not essential by any means to any of the doctrines or major applications of this lesson.

The Doctrine: According to the richness of his grace, God establishes his people in Christ and fills us with his Spirit.

In the middle of his defense, Paul reminds them of the glory of the gospel he had proclaimed in Corinth just a few years prior. And here we get to the crux of the issue. Paul's opponents certainly hated Paul, but what they really hated was the true gospel. The gospel Paul proclaimed, not merely Paul himself, was the real target of the attacks from these so-called "super apostles." And Paul wrote of this good news in vv. 19–22.

Next week, we will spend a whole lesson breaking down this important passage. For now, however, it suffices to point out that Paul's opponents sought, in some manner, to bring the Corinthians under the Old Covenant when God had ushered them into the New Covenant in Christ, sealing them by the Holy Spirit of God. He was helping them see that these "super apostles" were seeking to uproot what God had established and, as a result, would certainly fail.

The Application: The grace of God empowers sincere ministry that blesses others

When Paul speaks of his boast, he's not being arrogant but revealing the source of his confidence, likely alluding to Jeremiah 9:23–24, which reads:

²³ Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD." (Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV)

The two charges laid against Paul seem to be that he was insincere and forked-tongued—as evidenced by the many trials God was inflicting on him. Such a man, others seemed to argue, could not actually be the apostle approved by God. However, Paul knew the charges carried no water. He laid his head down at night with a clear conscience, knowing he was walking in sincere holiness—not by his power, not by his wisdom, but by the grace of God. Paul remained confident in his integrity with the sure hope that there would be mutual rejoicing and honoring of one another between Paul and the Corinthian church—a hope he wanted the still-unrepentant Corinthian church to lay hold of more fully. Paul did not desire to come harshly to the Corinthians, but to be a source of blessing, encouragement, and joy.

How does Paul's model inspire us today?

First, he does not pit grace against holiness but sees holiness naturally growing out of the soil that is God's grace. God's grace is not a license to sin but the power to be holy as God is holy. In other words, Paul's active pursuit of holiness and the discipline it required were evidence that he was walking by the Spirit and not according to the flesh.

Second, those who have experienced grace desire for others to experience grace. Paul had written an entire, lengthy epistle that had still gone unheeded. Opponents were actively decrying his character among the Corinthians—and they were entertaining it as actually being the case! Paul neither backed down from his calls for repentance nor did he begin to oppose them as enemies. He wanted to extend grace to them. We would do well to reflect the merciful and gracious heart of God toward others as Paul did.

Third, we ought to reflect the faithfulness of Christ. Even when his plans changed, Paul was faithful to his call from God and to the people he loved. Like Paul, our love for the saints of God needs to be unwavering. We ought not try to lord ourselves over anyone, but labor together as servants and partners who work with each other for our mutual joy and faith. False teaching only leads to tragedy. He wanted them to stand firm in the blessed faith that was, once and for all, delivered to the saints. Even when his temporary plans needed to shift—which happens—his faithfulness toward the Corinthians did not budge, even in the midst of opposition. May we reflect such steadfast love in our own ministries as we imitate Christ toward others.

Why do people, at times, see the concepts of grace and a disciplined pursuit of holiness as opposed to one another?

Good News

2 Corinthians 1:19–22 | August 23, 2026

What good news have you received lately?

Additional Passages:

- Hebrews 1:1–4;
- Ephesians 1–2;
- John 5:39–40;
- Romans 8;
- 1 Corinthians 15;
- Joel 2:28–32;
- 2 Peter 1:3–8;
- 1 John 2:27

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: God establishes his people in Christ and seals them by his Spirit.

Major Application: Live in the hope of Christ for his glory.

Key Passage:

And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.
(2 Corinthians 1:21-22 ESV)

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. (2 Corinthians 1:19-22 ESV)

In this passage, Paul puts forth some of the central aspects of the gospel message and its implications for our lives. In doing so, he grounds and surrounds the human response with the work of God, starting and finishing with God. Let's take time to take a close look at this verse, connecting it to the broader message of the Scriptures that we might grow in our faith and expression of Christlikeness.

The Christian gospel ultimately is a person: Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ...

Apart from Jesus, there is no gospel. While Jesus teaches a sure and steadfast philosophy or way of life, the Christian gospel is not centered on the life we live. The Christian gospel is centered on the identity of and work of Christ.

First, notice how Paul referred to Jesus: the Son of God. It is not enough to simply believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Many throughout history and today are happy to refer to Jesus as the Christ or the Messiah, but that does not do Jesus justice. He is the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages. Jesus is God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, and of the exact same divine nature as the Father. Jesus is the same “what” as the Father. He is God. And Jesus is a distinct “who” from the Father; he is with God. Through the eternal Son and Word of God, all things were made, and this Word became fully human for us and our salvation. Thus, Mary did not give birth to a mere human, but to God the Son. A mere man did not shed his blood on the cross, but God shed his blood for us.

For, in becoming fully human, the divine nature was united with human nature in one divine person, named Jesus, who is called Immanuel, God with us. Thus, every attribute of God belongs to Jesus, and every quality of what it means to be human (apart from sin) also belongs to Jesus. According to his divinity, Jesus was the eternal Son of God. This same Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit, was born at a specific time to the virgin Mary as the offspring of David, the Christ of God. As the Christ, he fulfilled God’s purposes of redemption, first, through his full and active obedience to God on our behalf, through his death for our sins on the cross. Second, through his resurrection unto life unending, and thirdly, through his ascension, in which he entered into the heavenly holy of holies as our great high priest and sat down on his throne as the one who had accomplished everything.

Apart from who Jesus is and from what he has done, there is no salvation. There is no abundant life. There is no hope for the future. Jesus is the gospel, and it’s Jesus we proclaim.

Christians share the gospel with others.

whom we proclaimed among you...

Paul, Silas (the same person as Silvanus), and Timothy had each been transformed by the gospel and thus proclaimed Christ to others. While they certainly did so in a more formal capacity to broader audiences, their proclamation of the gospel was not unique to their office. The early church grew over time through the witness of the saints. The historian, Alan Kreider, has referred to the growth of Christianity in ancient Rome as a patient ferment. In the subsequent centuries, this spread did not occur rapidly or through large evangelistic campaigns, but through the patient witness of Christians to those closest to their children and neighbors. Faithfulness to the Great Commission looks less like tent revivals and more like family devotions, praying with your children, and having spiritual conversations that lift up Christ in your circles of influence.

The gospel delivers on its promises 100% of the time.

...was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes...

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. (John 6:37 ESV)

The gospel comes to us with Christ’s declaration from the cross that “it is finished.” There’s no guesswork with the Christian gospel. Those in Christ have eternal life, and no one can snatch them from the hand of Christ and the Father. Christianity is not Islam, which offers no security, no peace, even to Mohammad himself. Christianity teaches that Jesus accomplished all and gives all. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved, and the promise is for our children and us, for those far and near. The gospel alone delivers on its promises. We can rest in what the Lord of the Sabbath has accomplished for us.

Christ is the message of the Scriptures from beginning to end.

For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.

³⁹ *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,* ⁴⁰ *yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. (John 5:39-40 ESV)*

The Old Testament is not Jewish Scripture, but Christian Scripture. It proclaims Christ crucified just like the New Testament. As we will see in 2 Corinthians, those who fail to lay hold of Christ in the Old Testament still have the veil of Moses blocking their view. Every promise finds its yes in Christ, the Second Adam and true Israel.

Neither the Israelite people nor the Gentiles are the ones in whom the promises of God come to be fulfilled. They find their fulfillment in Christ. He alone merited the blessing of obedience; all others fell short of the glory of God. He alone receives the affirmation of approval. He alone receives the kingdom from the Father.

Now, by his grace, he shares with every saint united to him through faith—from the beginning of time to its end—the blessing of his obedience, the joy of the Father’s affirmation and of his sonship, and the blessedness of the Kingdom, both now and in the future. Everything is wrapped up and received through our union with Christ.

So, when we read the Old Testament, we should not only work hard to understand the historical context and its Old Covenant implications, but we should work even harder to understand how the passage portrays Christ, trains us for the life of righteousness through faith, and stirs us to hope in the fullness of God’s purposes coming to pass.

Christians live in the hope of Christ for the glory of God.

That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

Paul’s phrase might seem a little odd to us at first glance, for what does it mean to utter an “amen” through someone? “Amen” is not merely the closing words of a prayer but a declaration of one’s belief in the truthfulness of some claim and one’s desire for that claim to come to pass. “Amen” is a declaration of firm hope that believes what has been promised will come to pass.

So, Christians who are recipients of God’s promises in Christ express their hope through Christ. We live constantly in light of the hope we have in Christ. We believe God’s promises, expect them to come to pass in Christ, and live accordingly. This life of hope, in and through Christ, brings glory to the Father who loves his Son. Our hope keeps our eyes fixed on that which is above, fixed on eternity.

God establishes his people—as one people—in Christ.

And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ...

God does not establish us as isolated individuals, but together with all the saints of God. We are one people in Christ. Church is not an afterthought to the Christian life, but one of its central components. Faithful Christian living is an impossibility in the life of the corporate gathering of the saints. Those who are in Christ are also members of the bride of Christ. To love one is to love the other, and vice versa.

The forces that seek to divide the church—sins of pride, gossip, self-promotion, disobedience, passivity, false teaching, and anything that disrupts the unity of the faith and the saints—work against the establishing work of God. Such foolish efforts are doomed to fail in the long run, for the gates of hell will not prevail against the church of Jesus Christ. But they can still wreak havoc in the meantime and must be opposed with diligent and gracious effort.

God seals his people with the Spirit as a guarantee of what is to come.

*and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit
in our hearts as a guarantee.*

Lastly, God and Christ sent the Spirit to indwell and anoint the people of God with divine power, teaching them all things and making them partakers of the divine nature. The Holy Spirit seals us for the day in which we will lay hold of our eternal inheritance, and he gives foretastes of the coming kingdom in the divine manner of life he empowers us to live as we are renewed in our minds and transformed according to the image of Christ. Thus, the ministry of the Spirit transforms our present way of life, with the greatest aspect of his ministry still to come in glorification.

Paul preached a gospel of good news that proclaimed the Son of God, who revealed the glory of the Father as he secured our salvation through his death. His opponents hated that gospel because it robbed them of their means of exploiting others. But Paul kept the main thing in focus. He wanted to remind the Corinthians that they were established by the Father, united to Christ, and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Such a glorious gospel put to shame whatever was being offered—more so demanded—by the false gospel being entertained.

The Power of the Church's Ministry

2 Corinthians 2:5–3:11 | August 30, 2025

What is one way you've benefited from the ministry of the church (at MeadowBrook or elsewhere)?

Additional Passages:

- Exodus 34:29–35;
- Matthew 18:1–35;
- 1 Corinthians 5:1–13;
- 2 Timothy 4:1–5;
- Ephesians 4:31–32;
- Psalm 51

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: God makes the church's ministry effective and glorious.

Major Application: Carry out ministry in the power of the Spirit.

Key Passage:

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. (2 Corinthians 2:17 ESV)

The ministry of the church changes lives. (2:5–11, 15)

“Community life offers more blessings than can be fully and easily enumerated. It is more advantageous than the solitary life both for preserving the goods bestowed on us by God and for warding off the external attacks of the Enemy.” – Basil of Caesarea

At this point in his letter, Paul transitions from his change of plans to a new point of business: the restoration of a previously backslidden but now repentant believer. Specifically, this is a believer who had church discipline exercised against him in that he was barred from the taking the Lord's Supper and delivered “to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:5). I follow many such as Chrysostom and John Gill who take this man to be the same individual Paul identified in 1 Cor. 5 as the most natural reading, and I believe it's a beautiful picture of the restorative grace of God. While there's some debate on his identity, the identity of the man in question does not ultimately affect the truths to be derived from this passage. For, whoever it is, they are someone who endured church discipline, repented, and now was to be welcomed back into the fold in the fullness of forgiveness.

In our previous lesson on 1 Corinthians 5, I highlighted that even though church discipline might seem harsh at first blush, it's ultimately an expression of love that wills the good of another with the end goal being the transformation and restoration of a brother or sister in Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 2, we see the transforming work of the church's ministry of church discipline. The pain brought about by this individual's sin affected Paul and the entire congregation, but his repentance indicated that the time for discipline had come to an end. God worked through this painful process to transform this individual. And this is a big deal. The easy thing to do would be to leave the sin unaddressed, but that would have been bad for all involved. To their credit—one of the few things we can emphasize—the Corinthians did the hard work of discipline, and it was for the good of that believer and for the church.

Now, the church was to perceive that transformation, no longer hold his past failure over his head, forgive him, and reaffirm their love for him. He belonged to those to whom the gospel ministry of the church was a fragrance of life unto life. Paul understands that Satan's goal is for the church to remain divided and lose its emphasis on the grace of God, so Paul wants to get ahead of such temptations. The discipline had done its work, and it was time to move forward.

This passage is a reminder of the business we are in at MeadowBrook, the business of seeing lives transformed by the gospel. Whether it's unbelievers coming to faith for the first time or people progressing in sanctification through the ministry of the body of Christ, we get to be front-row witnesses to the life-transforming ministry God does in and through the church. In our giving, in our prayers, in our labors of ministry, and in the hard conversations we have to have from time to time, transformation is the goal. To see lives transformed by the Spirit through Christ unto the glory of God is why we do what we do. God is still in the business of transforming people through the church's ministry and collective pursuit of holiness. May we be faithful to put our hand to the plow even when the ministry might be tough for us.

The Triune God makes the church's ministry effective and glorious. (2:12–3:11)

Whether our plans come to fruition or not, God leads his church in triumph.

After his digression into the need to restore the believer who had been disciplined, Paul briefly returns to why he went to Macedonia. And this was because in Troas, he did not find Titus as he had expected. While he was concerned for Titus, the point in bringing up Titus was primarily to communicate his concern for the Corinthians. Titus was sent to Corinth, and Paul was awaiting his report—one that ultimately refreshed his spirit (2 Cor 7:6). Paul Barnett, in his commentary, points out that, "Paul was so preoccupied with the Corinthians and their likely attitudes to the letter that he had no peace of mind. Although the reason he gives for this restlessness is that he did not find his brother Titus there, he means us to understand that concern for the Corinthians was the chief source of his anxiety."

Troas appeared to be the plan A rendezvous point, and Macedonia the plan B. So, Paul—even though he had a ministry opportunity—prioritized the well-being of the Corinthians and moved to Macedonia, delaying the visit to Corinth so that he could visit in the right spirit. Paul's plans had changed, but Paul recognized that God's victory procession was still ongoing, for he wrote, 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. (2 Corinthians 2:14 ESV)

The triumphal procession is the image of the Roman military parade in which generals would lead a procession of their soldiers and their captives in a celebration of their victory. Paul makes use of that image to ensure the point is not lost. From a worldly perspective, Paul's change of plans, his concern at Titus's absence, and his leaving behind a ministry opportunity could look like a loss. Yet, it's not our plans, nor leadership, that advances the gospel, but God's. We are led by God in the triumph of Christ's secure victory, such that even in moments of human weakness, restlessness, and plans that do not materialize. To the world, the ministry of the church often looks like the opposite of triumph, but the good news of victory goes forth nevertheless.

This is a good reminder for us who love to have a good plan. Because plans, more often than not, are just that: plans. Something always tends to disrupt. Ministry is no different. But the effectiveness of our ministry does not rise and fall on the success of our planning, but on God, who always leads his church in spiritual victory, spreading the fragrance of Christ in our plans that come to fruition and in the ones that never materialize as we envisioned. Each circumstance is an opportunity for the gospel to go forth.

The results of our ministry are up to God.

The Roman Triumph consisted of the general and the winning soldiers, but it also consisted of the survivors among the losers. The exact same fragrance of the incense and sacrifices being offered in the parade was smelled by the winners and losers alike. To one group, it was a joyous aroma and a marker of their victory; to the other, it was a bitter reminder of their loss and now captivity. In drawing attention to this parade imagery, Paul is by no means approving it but using a common cultural image to communicate the effects of the gospel.

Christ secured his victory, and his sacrificial offering of himself emits a pleasing aroma unto God. And for all those who have repented of their sins and trusted in Christ, washing their filthy robes in the blood of the lamb, the news of his victory is a pleasing aroma of their new life in Christ that will only result in fuller expressions of life. However, for those who oppose Christ, the fragrance is a reminder of their sinfulness and inability to be satisfied in their current pursuits. Even though the gospel has not changed at all, it's not a sweet aroma to them; it's an aroma of death that will only result in greater expressions of death—like captive generals smelling the incense as they are being marched to their execution.

One thing to note, however, is that whether it is a fragrance of life unto life or death unto death is not up to the church. It's not like they did something better with one group than they did with another. No, they simply proclaim the gospel and engage in ongoing gospel ministry. The victorious God who leads them secures the results. We are called to simply be faithful to proclaim the gospel, knowing that to many it will be a stench but, by God's grace, to many others it will be a life-giving aroma that transforms everything about them.

Our sufficiency in ministry is from God, carried out in God's power and unto God's glory

Paul asks who is sufficient for such a ministry, with the implied answer: "No one"—an implication he makes explicit in just a few verses. The sufficiency for gospel ministry is from God (2 Cor 3:4–6). Paul is no mere peddler of the gospel, a common rhetorician trying to make it by the skill of his ability to garner a following through flattery and manipulation.

No! By God's grace, Paul—along with every true minister of Christ—is a man of sincerity. His concern is the truth of God's Word, not the approval of man. He did not choose to be a minister of the gospel of his own accord but rather was commissioned by God to be his minister the day he was saved. The same is true for us. Every Christian is commissioned by God to be a minister of the gospel in some fashion. And like Paul, we carry out this ministry before the face of God who rewards those who serve him, and we carry out this ministry in Christ by the power of the Spirit who is at work within us.

Your competency in ministry is never from you; it's from God, through God, unto the glory of God.

The Corinthians were entertaining returning to the Old Covenant, but the Old Covenant in itself did not produce life. It produced life inasmuch as it pointed to Christ, the one who is the resurrection and the life. In other words, the New Covenant was always the source of life even in the days of the Old Testament saints who looked forward in faith to the coming Christ. The power was never in the blood of bulls and goats, but in the blood of Christ.

The Old Testament—from its inception—was planned to pass away. All has been fulfilled, so any attempt to bring oneself back under the regulations of the Old Covenant—or anything other than the gospel of Jesus Christ—for the sake of one's justification or sanctification would simply be legalism that kills.

Certain heretical movements, such as the Hebrew Roots movement, would love to see Christians subjected again to the futility of legalism. The path to holiness is not found in keeping Jewish feasts; it's not found in circumcision; it's not found in eating according to the Old Testament diet laws; it's not found in anything derived from our best efforts; it's found in Jesus Christ and the inner workings of the Holy Spirit. The New Covenant, not the Old, is what makes people holy, yielding a glory that is eternal. The letter of legalism—that which refuses to see Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament—kills; it's the Spirit that gives life.

Therefore, we need to be those who seek to minister in the Spirit of God, crucifying the flesh and putting on Christ as we spread the fragrance of Jesus's victory wherever we go.

Unveiled Faces

2 Corinthians 3:12–18 | September 06, 2026

If married, at your wedding, did you/your wife cover her face with a veil? If not married, which would you choose?

Additional Passages:

- John 5:39–40;
- Hebrews 3:3–6;
- Luke 24:13–35;
- Psalm 119:18;
- Exodus 34:29–35;
- Isaiah 25:6–8;
- Ephesians 1:17–21;
- 1 John 2:20–27

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: The Spirit opens our eyes to the truth of the Scriptures that we might be transformed.

Major Application: “Treat the Scriptures of God as the face of God; melt in its presence.” – Augustine

Key Passage: *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

Boldly proclaim Christ from the Scriptures.

In the confidence that Paul's New Covenant ministry is from God and carried in the power of God, he is bold to preach Christ from all the Scriptures to any with whom he comes in contact. Christ crucified is the message of the Old and New Testaments, and it ought to be the message on our lips to those around us.

We share in this New Covenant ministry, and we are the city on the hill that cannot be hidden. Yet, far too often, we veil that which should not be veiled. God has given us varying degrees of influence in our families, in our schools, and in our communities. We ought to be bold in our verbal and living testimony of the beauty of Christ and the power of his gospel. Let us not cover the lamp of the gospel but shine it brightly wherever we might go.

Write down the name of one person (or more) for whom you'd like to begin praying and with whom you'd like to share the gospel: _____

Read the Bible as Jesus did.

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me. (John 5:39 ESV)

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27 ESV)

In the gospels, one thing becomes clear: the majority of Jews in Jesus's day did not understand the Scriptures at all. Not only did they miss the weightier matters of the law, such that Jesus would say of them, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!"* (Matthew 23:23-24 ESV) And not only did those who followed the Sadducees miss the power of God in their denial of the Old Testament's hope of the resurrection, such that Jesus would say of them: *"You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God."* (Matthew 22:29 ESV), they missed that the Scriptures were about Jesus and the need to be born again of the Holy Spirit, which is why Jesus expressed shock at Nicodemus's lack of understanding, saying to him: *"Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"* (John 3:10 ESV) It's also why Paul condemned his fellow Jews, saying, *For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him.* (Acts 13:27 ESV)

The point then is simple: From Genesis to Revelation, the Scriptures testify of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is not Jewish Scripture, but Christian Scripture. If we miss Christ in our reading, then we miss what God intended. Justin Martyr pointed this out in the second century to a Jew named Trypho who rejected the Christian understanding of the Old Testament:

"[The Christian message consists of] the words as David sang them, as Isaiah announced them as good news, as Zacharias proclaimed them, and as Moses wrote them. Aren't you acquainted with them, Trypho? You should be, for they are contained in your Scriptures, or rather not yours, but ours. For we believe and obey them, whereas you, though you read them, do not grasp their spirit."

Paul reflects on this tragic reality when he speaks of the veil remaining unlifted on his countrymen according to the flesh. John Owen rightly pointed out the twofold nature of this veil. The first veil was the obscurity of the truths of the gospel latent in the Old Testament's types and shadows removed by the work of Christ and the Spirit's inspiration of the New Covenant. The second veil was the unregenerate heart of the non-believer. By the Spirit's work of regeneration, the believer became empowered by their renewed mind "to discern the wonderful mysteries of God," and the believer was made by the Spirit's work into the type of person who humbly brings themselves under the authority of the Word, conforming themselves to it.

So, practically, how can we read the Bible like Jesus did?

Understand the historical, grammatical, literary, and geographical context.

Sometimes this is referred to as the nuts and bolts of reading the Bible. Jesus understood the context of the Scriptures perfectly and never doubted their truthfulness. We likewise need to be good students of the Word who pay close attention to the details of the passage in light of the genre of Scripture we are reading and in light of what's going on at the time.

Read the text in light of the whole story that centers on Christ.

When we approach any book, we need to read it from the perspective of the entire canon. In short, we need to always be asking, "where do we see Christ in this passage?" For to miss Christ is to put the veil that God removed back on. So, how can we see Christ in the Scriptures? Here are a few ways:

1. Understand how specific prophecies come to fulfillment in Christ's first and second comings.

All the promises of God find their yes in Christ, and we can make the connections to Christ through prophecy. Some of these refer to what Christ does in his first coming, some to his second, and many to both, but in different respects (spiritually today, physically in the future). In this way, the prophetic fulfillment functions like a trifocal lens, with some immediate application in the time it was written, some physical or spiritual fulfillment in the age of the church, and some ultimate fulfillment in the fullness of Christ's heavenly kingdom.

2. Understand how the shadows point to Christ.

Every office, every feast, and every ceremonial law points to Christ. Think of Christ as casting a shadow back into the Old Testament. At the time, the outlines were noticeable, but hard to get a grasp of the whole picture. Today, from our current perspective in the light, we can see clearly what might have been more obscure to previous generations. Reading the Old Testament in this way helps us to better understand what Christ has done and is doing for us. In other words, the more we learn about priestly ministry in the Old Testament, the more we learn about what it means for Christ to be our Great High Priest. The point about grappling with the nuts and bolts of Leviticus's original context, then, is not an end in itself but a means of understanding Christ better. In this way, a beautiful back-and-forth occurs. As we grow in our understanding of the Old Testament, we grow in our understanding of the New, which helps us to, in turn, better understand the Old.

3. Look for similar patterns and terms in the narrative that reflect God's big story of what he's doing in the world.

Throughout the Old Testament, we have story after story that, in one way or another, reflects the grand story of what God is doing in the world. Jesus pointed this out to Nicodemus in his use of Numbers 21:4–9. At first read, one might not recognize that this story is ultimately about the salvation God would provide through Christ, who would be lifted up on a tree as the bronze serpent was. But that's the exact connection Jesus makes for Nicodemus (cf. John 3:14–15). Here there's both a similarity of the narrative and picture (the serpent on the post would've been in the shape of a cross) but also in how the concept of "tree" unfolds throughout Scripture.

Discern and apply the weightier matters of the Law.

Certain obligations of the Old Testament are no longer binding on the believer, but others are. We are to understand the weightier matters of the law as that which reflects the eternal Law of God and is embodied in the person of Christ. As Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 10, there's an example—sometimes positive, sometimes negative—for us to learn and apply today as we live out the holy nature we have been given in Christ.

Be stirred to ultimate hope.

Lastly, we ought to read the Old Testament Scriptures with the same forward-looking faith the patriarchs had. Our understanding of the Scriptures should stir us to hope in the coming Kingdom. Like Abraham, we need to let the Scriptures fix our gaze on the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:10 ESV)

In sum, I believe if we want to read the Bible as Jesus and the Apostles did, we simply need to ask the four questions that head every Life Group lesson:

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

Through the Spirit-empowered understanding of Scriptures, the Spirit transforms his people into the glorious image of Christ.

When the Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts that we might behold the wonderful things of God's Word, we are changed, increasingly set free from sin's power in our lives as he makes us look more and more like Christ. Through this spiritual understanding of the Scriptures that centers on Christ, we begin to shine with a beautiful glory, in a way similar to Moses.

In short, those who experience the Spirit's teaching ministry through the right understanding of the Scriptures shine with an unfading glory that fully enjoys the freedom to be found in Christ. May we reflect such glory in Etowah County and beyond.

The Light of the Gospel

2 Corinthians 4:1–6 | September 13, 2026

Tell a story of when it was dark and the darkness led to either fear or some minor injury. How would light have changed things?

Additional Passages:

- Genesis 1:2–3
- Romans 1:21–25
- 2 Peter 1:16–19
- Acts 9:3–5
- John 8:12
- 2 Timothy 1:8–14

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: The Gospel is not a product but a cosmic act of new creation through the truth of God shining the light of Christ into the darkest of hearts.

Major Application: Simply and faithfully present the unaltered truth of the Gospel that glorifies Christ to others, trusting him with the results.

Key Passage: *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.* (2 Corinthians 4:6, ESV)

The Temptation of Pragmatism

When we look at modern culture, we are often confronted with the philosophy of pragmatism—the belief that “whatever works must be right.” Pragmatism dictates that we simply do what draws a crowd. In the city of Corinth, a group of false teachers were the ultimate pragmatists. They judged ministry by outward success, eloquence, and outward appearance—checkboxes that Paul did not tick. Because Paul suffered and refused to put on a show, they claimed his ministry was a failure.

In these six verses, Paul dismantles the temporary results-driven view of faith, anchoring the believer entirely in the glory of Christ. As the climax of the previous chapters, chapter 4 serves to bring in all of what Paul has been building up to this point. In these next verses, Paul highlights the glories of how God’s methods for moving His mission forward and His purposes have their ultimate goal in bringing Truth in “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

The Gospel advances according to God’s mercy, not human cunning. (vv. 1–2)

In these first two verses, Paul connects the theology of chapters one, two, and three to the gritty reality of new covenant ministry. What fueled Paul’s endurance in this ministry was simply the mercy of God.

Paul knows he did not earn this gift through an impressive resume, a “recommendation letter” from some earthly authority, or even his hard work. His ministry was given to him by the gracious will of God. Apart from this mercy, Paul would lose heart when things got tough, giving in to cowardice when the pressure mounts. However, such was not the case. Instead, God supplied the strength of heart to rest in God’s purpose and endure whatever he faced in the course of obedience.

This resulted in a ministry that completely renounced “disgraceful, underhanded ways,” rejected the political maneuvering of the world, and absolutely refused to “tamper with God’s word.” As he had already stated, *they were not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God [those who spoke] in Christ.*

This is the opposite impulse of pragmatism. Pragmatists weary themselves maneuvering in underhanded ways and manipulating the message to elicit and guarantee a desired outcome. The result being their focus is exclusively on results observable by the human eye and the neglect of the health for the inner man. On their best days, the pragmatist may desire for hearts to be transformed, but the trust to allow God to sovereignly work through the truth of his Word on his timetable is strikingly absent.

Paul rejected this approach, opting instead to minister openly and truthfully in an appeal to the consciences of mankind. Paul knows sin has seared our consciences and that Satan has deceived many with his lie, such that God’s original design in creation has been marred by sin. However, he also knows that the image of God has not been eradicated—which includes one’s conscience. Broken as we may be, we still have the moral receptor of a conscience that can perceive God’s moral order in creation and make right judgments according to reason. In other words, humans are naturally equipped by God to spot the phonies—and Paul refused to be one. It doesn’t take the illumination of the Spirit to spot the snake oil salesmen of the world. Paul knew his work would stand the test of scrutiny, and he was content to simply bring the truth of the glory of Christ by the Word of God to every conscience, leaving the heavy lifting of giving spiritual life to God. The life promised in the new covenant could never come from human cunning or disgraceful, underhanded means; the gospel would only advance by the mercy of God.

What does pragmatism look like today?

Because of sin, conscience is not enough; we need God to open our eyes. (vv. 3–4)

Paul extended the theology of unbelief beyond the blindness of unbelieving Jews and out to the entire unbelieving world, anticipating the pragmatist’s objection that: “If you are speaking the truth so plainly to their conscience, why isn’t it working on everyone? Why do some respond while others do not? And if the message is so good, why is it being rejected?” In the pragmatist’s mind, it is assumed that if the audience doesn’t buy the product, the salesman must have failed in delivery or content. However, Paul destroyed that assumption. The problem is not the message, nor is it the messenger; the problem is that the mind remains blinded by sin and Satan’s deception.

However, we must be careful not to view God and Satan as two equal powers arm-wrestling for souls. Satan does not have the power to forcibly hijack an incomplicit mind. As Paul explains in Romans 1, this spiritual blindness is voluntary. Humanity exchanged the truth about God for a lie, choosing to worship created things rather than the Creator. By willingly submitting to lesser gods, humanity handed the keys of their minds to the enemy. Satan’s blindness is parasitic as it feeds entirely on human rebellion. Unbelievers do not reject Christ because the presentation wasn’t clever enough. They reject Him because they have willfully submitted to a lesser master, voluntarily fastening a veil securely over their own minds so they cannot perceive Christ’s true beauty. For as John 3 states, *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.* (John 3:19 ESV)

What are some ways people are blinded by the god of this world today?

We take the position of the servant as we preach Christ as Lord. (v. 5)

Knowing that human charisma is not enough to open the eyes of the blind, Paul removes himself from the center of the frame. The false teachers in Corinth preached themselves; Paul preached Christ. They wanted to be the heroes of the story in order to elevate their own status, but Paul made himself a servant to the Corinthians. Paul was not in it for the applause; he knew that was just the waiter delivering the King's meal. He wasn't the chef nor he did not have license to change it along the way, his charge was to present the meal exactly as the King prepared it. He was to proclaim Christ as Lord to others—and that is what he did.

How does voluntarily adopting the mindset of a 'servant' actually bring us freedom instead of holding us back? How does that differ from the culture of the day?

By God's grace, he opens the eyes of the blind—indeed, he's the only one who can. (v. 6)

Paul can confidently step out of the spotlight, because it is God who looks into the darkness of our rebellion and says "let there be light." As with the very beginning of creation, at God's command, the light of Christ displaces the darkness of our sin. This miraculous work of grace cannot be manufactured by human means. Salvation is the act of a gracious God who desired to bring those dead in their sins to new life in Christ—and Paul would know, for this is his testimony!

As a Pharisee, Paul was spiritually blind, but zealous for God. On the road to Damascus, Christ met Paul and a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, literally drove him to the dirt. There, Paul met the same glorious Christ that Isaiah saw on the throne, that Ezekiel saw in the chariot of fire, that Daniel saw by the river, and that the Apostle John would later see on Patmos. On the road, Paul saw the glory of God in the face of the resurrected Jesus. The veil was ripped away from his mind as the light of the glory of Christ poured into his heart, changing him for eternity. True transformation comes seeing the face of Christ with the eyes of faith.

How have you seen God step into a completely dark heart and through His Word powerfully command His light to shine?"

So as we close our time in these first six verses, we are faced with a choice about what kind of message we are going to proclaim. The "super-apostles" of Paul's day—much like the pragmatic culture we live in today—demanded a religion of outward glory through a varnished message. They wanted polish, power, a flawless exterior, and influential words that proved how impressive they were, while manipulating the message of the Truth to serve themselves. In contrast, Paul invites his readers into something far more profound and infinitely more freeing. He invites them to step out of the spotlight and take their rightful place as servants. Salvation does not depend on spiritual brilliance, meticulously massaged words, eloquence, or even a church's clever marketing.

Salvation depends entirely on the God's gracious illumination of the darkness of our rebellious hearts. And because he does the saving, he gets all the glory. The result is that those who obediently share the truth of the glory of Christ are completely freed from the exhausting burden of trying to perfectly package the gospel or live with the guilt of thinking they have failed when someone rejects it. The servant's only job is to faithfully proclaim the truth, trusting that the Creator will turn on the lights in his glorious timing according to his sovereign purpose.

Affliction to Adoration

2 Corinthians 4:7–18 | September 20, 2026

Can you name a time in which pain was part of a larger process that was worth it (even if it did not feel like it in the moment)?

Additional Passages:

- Genesis 2:7;
- Psalm 116;
- 2 Corinthians 1:8-10; 2:17;
- Romans 5:1–11; 8:18–30
- James 1:2–4;

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: In the trials, God sustains us in our weakness and transforms afflictions into something eternally glorious.

Major Application: Endure present affliction with joy through such knowledge.

Key Passage: 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.* (2 Corinthians 4:12–14, ESV)

We are jars of clay, chosen to carry the treasure of glory.

Knowing first-hand the power of the light of Christ in his own life, Paul dismantles the potential of pride within his ministry. Alluding to Genesis 2:7, Paul reminds us all of the reality that we are simply dirt. As common jars of clay, we have no grounds for arrogant views of ourselves.

For a Corinthian at this time, such a statement would be a serious pause moment. The city of Corinth was a vast city of wealth and prestige. Located between two seaports in the Roman province of Achaia, Corinth was replete with wealth, trade, imported goods. The skyline was framed with massive temples to both Roman and Greek deities and there was great influence from the cultures and gods of travelers passing through this economic metropolis, resulting in their wealth and influence permeating almost all of life in the city. Just like today, prosperity in ancient times symbolized power and influence, something to be sought and paraded in honor and satisfaction of oneself. The idea of being called cheap pottery would have been a shock to be sure, perhaps even offensive. To put it in today's terms, one could say that the glorious message of the gospel is being carried around the world in plain ole brown paper sacks, also known as the Church.

Yet, Paul's main point is not to denigrate, but to glory in the mercy of Christ. For, Jesus Christ—the eternal Son of God who reigns over the entire universe—has decided that to bring the treasures of his gospel to the world in a plain, base, and weak dirt pots. Paul had no interest in playing the game of his opponents who, in their self-exaltation, focused external glory, self-recognition, and the preference of outward projections of strength. Paul was content to be the vessel of clay, for he knew the treasure was not him, but Christ and his gospel. For through God's design, these jars of clay and plain ole brown paper sacks are bringing the world hope by the power of the Spirit through the power and glory of the Gospel of Christ.

How does this perspective of being “jars of clay” or even brown paper sacks change your view of evangelism?

The Weak Vessel is Held Together by Supernatural Strength

Paul goes on to give his readers a series of the intense stresses that he has endured. These are not simply troubles that made life uncomfortable for Paul, but were real life-threatening crises that assaulted him physically, mentally, and spiritually. As a reminder, reread Paul's words from 2 Corinthians 1:8-10:

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, 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.
(2 Corinthians 1:8–10, ESV)

Listen to his words: “burdened beyond strength”; “despaired of life itself”; “sentence of death”. Paul is describing real events he did not think he would live through, leaving him at his wits end. But that was God's point. Even in his darkest moments, God was there, and Paul continued to trust in his purposes. Whether salvation came at that time or one day in the resurrection, Paul placed set his hope upon God.

Paul admits that even though he is a fragile vessel by God's design, God safeguards the integrity of this dirt pot in which he carries the Gospel. He tells his readers that though he is “afflicted in every way”, he is not crushed, not given up to ultimate despair, not forsaken, and not destroyed. He is preserved by God, even under the greatest of pressure.

And why does God preserve him? Because through the strength of God, Paul glorifies Christ through living out and displaying his union to Christ in his suffering. Christ-like ministry is by design a sacrificial continuation of the life of Christ. As Isaiah foretold, Jesus is the perfect suffering servant, and we reflect him in our ministry, becoming little suffering servants who imitate our King. Christ, in his incarnation, veiled the light of his glory in taking on the limitations of human flesh without sinning and in perfect communion with the Father. Paul's strove to follow suit, bringing his light to the world via an unimpressive dirt pot as he relied on the strength God supplies so that through his suffering others might live.

How does the model of Christ help us? Why are we intimidated by it at times? How can we better rely on God's strength?

In the midst of affliction, we must hold fast to our confession.

Verses 13 and 14 reveal the core power behind Paul's perseverance: the hope and faith of Christianity. In these verses, Paul quotes Psalm 116, which is part of a collection of traditional psalms sung during Passover and likely by Jesus on the night before his crucifixion. Paul took the same "spirit" of the psalmist and applied it to his own life. Psalm 116—like many of the psalms—holds together affliction and faith, trials and trust, heartache and worship. The portion quoted by Paul, Psalm 116:10, reflects the psalmist's outward confession of suffering while simultaneously expressing his trust in God. It is a beautiful song of "distress and anguish" (Psalm 116:3) that leads the psalmist to "call on the Name of the LORD" (Psalm 116:13), driving him to "offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Psalm 116:17), and ultimately culminating in a shout of "Praise the LORD!". (Psalm 116:19)

And based on this grouping of psalms and their historical significance, Paul also has this confidence because he knows Israel's past, their present circumstances, their promised future, and the God who is faithful in all three. He can look to God's faithfulness in the exodus, he can look to God's faithfulness in his present circumstances, and he can look forward with hope to the future knowing that Christ will carry him again, even bringing him back from the dead and into the presence of God.

How do we maintain hope in tough seasons?

We must view our affliction in light of eternity.

The conclusion of this chapter sums up Paul's hope. While he's wasting away outwardly, that's not what occupies his gaze. The affliction, though painful in the moment, is light when cast in weight of eternity. Paul perceives with the eyes of faith that the immovable weight of God is so overwhelming that nothing he will ever endure can compare to what awaits him in the presence of the glory of Christ. As horrific as our trials may be, they are momentary. There's an expiration date to them, and God is at work in and through them that his grace might abound to us and to others through us.

So, Paul did not lose heart. In light of such truths, even though the suffering wrecked his outer "jar of clay", his inner self was being renewed each day. Notice Paul did not say that the inner self grows brighter each day but is being renewed. Paul expressed that he knows that each day depletes his reserves, especially in regard to his body. What has been lost physically in his bodily suffering might not be regained in this life, but he was confident that he would regain the inward strength needed each day through the hope of looking forward to the glory of Christ. God would provide the daily bread in the new mercies of each morning.

What is an eternal perspective and why is it important?

Memento Mori

2 Corinthians 5:1–10 | September 27, 2026

What is something you were afraid of as a child?

Additional Passages:

- 1 Chronicles 6:32;
- Psalm 90;
- Ecclesiastes 7:1–20;
- Isaiah 65:17–25;
- Luke 4:1–40, 16:19–31;
- 1 Corinthians 3:10–15;
- Hebrews 12:18–29

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: We have a kingdom from God that cannot be shaken, and it is not of this world.

Major Application: Remember death and be of good courage in the hope of Christ.

Key Passage: *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 Corinthians 5:1 ESV)

memento mori – Remember death.

“For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19b ESV)

“Death and dying aren’t the same — the process of dying is still something to be lived.” – Ben Sasse

Our society works hard to not be confronted with the reality of death—a luxury not afforded to most generations of human history. However, hiding from the reality of death is not the path of wisdom, *for the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.* (Ecclesiastes 7:4 ESV) Remembering the reality of our future death—even if we are the blessed generation alive when Christ returns—helps us to make the best use of our lives in the present.

Preparing to die well, then, will be the focus of today’s lesson, for unless Christ comes back first, we will die, and we want to be those who can face our death with same confidence Paul possessed:

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.
(2 Timothy 4:6-8 ESV)

The Truth that Makes Dying Well All Possible: We have an eternal home from God.

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 Corinthians 5:1 ESV)

In relating the present state to the final state of the believer, Paul connects the transition from the Tabernacle to the Temple in the history of Israel (1 Chron 6:32) by means of typology to the transition from life in this world to life in the new heavens and the new earth, a.k.a. Heaven. This imagery helps us to think rightly about both life in the tent and life in the eternal house of God, which simply is life with God in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:22).

Both indicated God's dwelling with his people. The ministry in the Tabernacle, though temporary and laborious to maintain, still enjoyed God's presence. The Temple possessed a greater glory and a more permanent structure, yet it too still centered around the presence of the Lord's glory with the people of God. The point being this imagery helps us to keep the right perspective about life in the tent and life in our eternal home. Life in the tent is not to be despised that we miss the opportunity live today in the presence of God, and the glory of life in the eternal home does not center on the streets of gold but on the perfect enjoyment of the Triune God in bodies and a perfect creation unstained by sin—indeed, incapable of having anything accursed entering it. In other words, the hope of Heaven is captured in the promise: *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."* (Revelation 21:3 ESV)

Now, Paul's main point is simple: in the same way that the tent of the tabernacle—its good and bad aspects—faded in the presence of the joy of the Temple, the tent of this earthly home fades in the glory of the heavenly home we already possess. Paul does not simply view our eternal dwelling place as something exclusively in the future, but as something we possess already—albeit partially—in the present day by the indwelling of the Spirit who is our guarantee. This one truth changes everything, enabling us to live and die well as we enjoy God's presence today and long for the full revelation of our eternal home.

So, how can we prepare to die well?

1. Long for Heaven.

"The grace of the New Testament [is] entrusted to us to make us learn to seek another happiness, which we now possess by faith, but then we shall behold it. . . . We now live in hope, but then we shall enjoy reality." – Augustine

Christians are a homesick people—and this world is not our home. As the Israelites longed for the promised land in the wilderness and for Jerusalem in Babylon, Christians long for their eternal home with God in Heaven. The posture of our heart is that of Job's, who in the midst of his heartbreak expressed his longing for his faith to be made sight, saying:

²⁶ And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, ²⁷ whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me! (Job 19:26-27 ESV)

Possessing the hope of Heaven in a world broken by sin led Job's heart to faint within him and Paul to groan for his mortality to be swallowed up by life.

Now, to long for Heaven is not a form of naïve escapism. Christians should not live with our heads in the clouds in our efforts to avoid the responsibilities or hardships of this world. Rather, it's simply the placement of our treasure in the right location. In our effort to be faithful in this present time, we guard our hearts against being overly in love with a world that's passing away. As Randy has said before, "the affection of your heart will shape the direction of your life." Ironically, a heart devoted to the heavenly kingdom is actually equipped to do the most good in the earthly kingdom. And those who long for this present world are the least equipped to face death.

2. Be of good courage.

The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of what is to come. He, in other words, is God's downpayment of the full reward he has promised his people in Christ. As such, all the physical realities of Heaven for which we long, we now enjoy spiritually.

Spiritually, God dwells with us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and we have been resurrected to live in fellowship with God's priestly people founded on the proclamation of the apostles (New Jerusalem) and to live in the supernatural power God supplies for his people to reflect his character in this life. While all of this is unseen to the eye, this glorious reality for the disciple of Jesus leads us to be confident in our present state "away from the Lord," for we walk by faith, not by sight.

Our trembling in the face of death is not overcome by worldly bravado but by the invisible hope we possess. This courage does not come from the flesh, but from the Spirit who has been given to us. We are not passive; rather, in the Spirit, we actively seek to live out the courage that has been given to us, for God did not give us a Spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and self-control (2 Tim. 1:7).

3. Know what happens when you die.

Sometimes knowledge is the best antidote to fear. The simple knowledge gained by turning on the lights dispels the fear of the dark. For the Christian, knowing that there is no monster under the deathbed helps us to die well in faith. So, what happens when we die?

Paul says plainly here that to be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Lazarus's soul was immediately ushered into Paradise by angels. So, at the moment of our death, we are spiritually present with the Lord in Heaven as it is today. Heaven as it is today is not the final Heaven, which is described in Revelation 21–22. Heaven as it is today is part of what is called the intermediate state, or the state between one's death and resurrection.

While there are a lot of questions regarding the intermediate state, there are a few key truths to hold onto:

- Our souls are conscious in the intermediate state, meaning our souls do not "sleep" as our bodies "sleep."
- For those in Christ, life in the intermediate state is in the presence of our resurrected Lord and is better than life in this broken world.
- Life in heaven as it is today is not the hope of the Christian. The hope of the Christian is for the intermediate state to come to an end with the resurrection of the body and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth, in which God eternally dwells with his people.

Thus, even though we grieve death for the curse that it is, Christ's victory transforms the experience of death into the first step of our victory over death. In heaven, Christ's own resurrected body serves as a perpetual reminder for the saints in heaven of the resurrection that is coming for them and their triumph over death.

4. Focus on pleasing Christ, not avoiding death.

Therefore, in light of the above realities, Christians need to be different than the world in their attitudes toward death. The world spends significant time, effort, and income to avoid the reality of death—a foolish pursuit. Death comes for us all; we ought to steward this life well as we primarily focus on pleasing Christ and not on avoiding death. Each of us will appear before the judgment (Bema) seat of Christ—not to be condemned, for our names are written in the Lamb's book of life, but to be rewarded for the deeds done in faith in the body. Thus, we must ask ourselves: Am I faithful? Am I living for the Kingdom, or am I living in the shadow of the fear of death? What does the way I spend my money and time indicate? Am I living for the heavenly kingdom or the one that's passing away?

For, we must remember two things as we prepare for death. The first is this:

⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. (Romans 14:7-9 ESV)

And the second is this:

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:26 ESV)

May we prepare to die well by purposing to live well by faith in the courage of the Spirit unto the glory and approval of Christ our Lord!

Compelled

2 Corinthians 5:11–16 | October 04, 2026

What are some of the things that motivate you?

Additional Passages:

- Mark 3:20–21;
- Acts 26:12–32;
- Galatians 1:1–24;
- Proverbs 1:1–8;
- John 13;

“Paul makes no account of himself, but has this one object in view — that he may serve God and the Church.” – John Calvin

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What’s going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: Our affections compel us one way or the other.

Major Application: Labor in the fear of the Lord not for the approval of man.

Key Passage: *For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 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.*
(2 Corinthians 5:14-15 ESV)

A Few Contextual Reminders:

- Paul is dealing with false teachers who apparently operate on a mechanistic view of God’s favor, meaning that they believe suffering and weakness to be a mark of God’s disapproval and earthly prosperity and power to be a mark of God’s approval. In this chapter, Paul refers to this way of thinking as considering people according to the flesh.
- Paul has communicated in Chapters 2–4 that Christ leads his people in a triumphal procession, despite outward appearances to the contrary, and that even though we waste away outwardly (aka physically/bodily), the greater reality is the inner renewal of the Spirit and the eternal reward that is coming.
- Paul has just discussed that death is not the end for the Christian and has emphasized the judgment seat of Christ before which believers must go.

What compels you: the love of Christ or the Approval of Man?

Everyone is familiar with the Nike ad campaign, “Just Do It.” In 2025, Nike launched a new campaign that played on their famous tagline, asking the simple question: why do it? In the ad, the narrator asks,

“Why do it? Why would you make it harder on yourself? Why chance it? Why put it on the line? With so much at stake. With so much room to fail. Why risk it? Why would you dare? Seriously, why?! You could give everything you have and still lose.”

The ad does not actually answer the question but challenges the listener to consider what would happen if they did not do it. Fear of regret seems to be the motivation they are driving home.

Christians need to step back from time to time and reflect as well on the “why?”. Why do we live as we live? We do we take up our cross daily and follow after Jesus? Why do we put to death the sinful desires of the flesh rather than gratify them? Why do we labor to grow in the habits of holiness infused into us by the working of the Spirit? Seriously, why? Paul gives two answers this question: the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ—both of which contrast with impulses of the flesh.

Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.

Paul knew his labors were before the face of God, and his reverential awe and knowledge that he’d give an account to the Almighty motivated him. This fear was not a fear of condemnation that labored to merit God’s favor. The love of God drove out such fears, for Paul knew his righteousness was based solely on Christ’s merit and there was no condemnation for those in Christ. Nevertheless, the fear of the Lord led Paul down the path of wisdom that desired to hear from his Savior’s lips, “well done, good and faithful servant.” This fear of the Lord is to be contrasted with the fear and approval of man. In short, Paul cared more about what God thought of his actions than what others thought of his actions.

Paul was confident he was in line with God’s will, and that was enough—even though his love and affection for the Corinthians led him to desire that their opinion of him agreed with God’s thoughts. On the one hand, this is a very human moment in which Paul desires to have his love for the Corinthians reciprocated—as anyone would with those they loved. On the other hand, this reveals Paul’s pastoral heart for the Corinthians who were looking at things according to the flesh, rather than according to the heart. Paul knew he’d be ok without their approval, but he desired their affection *for their sake*.

Even if Paul appeared to be crazy—as Jesus’s family thought he was for teaching the things he was teaching about the Kingdom (cf. Mark 3:20–21)—it was not to make a name for himself as some eccentric teacher; it was a labor for God’s glory. If he was reckoned to be of sound mind, it was not so that he’d be thought of as some great philosopher of his time, but it was for the good of the church. As John Calvin commented, “Paul fears not the opinion of men, so that he is prepared for being reckoned either sane or insane, provided only he transacts faithfully the affairs of God and the Church.”

In your current stage of life, what are some specific situations in which the fear of man counters the fear of the Lord?

In your current stage of life, what are some things that are just basic Christian obedience that seem crazy to the world?

For the love of Christ controls us...

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. (John 13:34 ESV)

The second motivation was the love of Christ. As Christians filled with the Holy Spirit, we are infused with the very love of Christ by the Spirit’s sanctifying grace so that we can love others with a supernatural love. This goes beyond the love for one’s neighbor as one naturally loves oneself (i.e., provides for the basic needs for survival and flourishing). We do not love ultimately for their sake or for our sake but for the sake of God such that Christ’s love by means of the Spirit wells up within believers and flows toward others.

For, Christians are united with Christ in his crucifixion. We have died to ourselves so that we might live for our Lord who loves us. Now, the love of the flesh—gratifying the appetites of our passions and pursuing the ease of comfort above all else—is incompatible with the love of Christ. Either will win out, but neither can be operative at the same time. One of the two loves will compel us. And when the love of Christ compels us, we truly fulfill our intended nature that was created to love our neighbor as ourselves and even go beyond it in a beautiful display of the beauty of Christ.

The love of Christ does not just move us to live sacrificially; it fundamentally reorients our perspective of others. Christians just think about people differently. We do not regard people with the mindset of the flesh, who give love based on what they receive in return.

Jesus rebuked this way of thinking when he said, *“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.”* (Luke 6:32 ESV)

Our love is not guided by such worldly standards, for we perceive that the world’s way of categorizing people cannot account for the transformed perspective brought about by the gospel. The world identifies people in a myriad of ways: race, gender, status, job, income, past sins, etc.—and then moves toward them accordingly. In contrast, Christians look beyond the outward appearances to the person created in the image of God and, with respect to Christians, to the heart that has been transformed by Christ—and we love them with the love of Christ.

What are some specific situations in which the love of the flesh counters the love of Christ?

Read and discuss the following passages, reflecting on some of the ways the world categorizes people and how we ought to be different:

- Galatians 3:27-29
- James 2:1-4
- Ephesians 2:14-16
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

For those desiring to be married, how does this affect our pursuit of a spouse?

For those married, how does this affect the way we view and treat our spouse?

For those with children, how does this affect our parenting?

For those in the workforce, how does this affect the way we view our co-workers, employers, or employees?

“Those who formerly delighted in sexual immorality, now cling to temperance alone. Those who used to employ magic arts, now devote themselves to the good and unbegotten God. We who loved to acquire money and possessions above all else, now bear the burdens we have together and share with all those in need. We who hated and destroyed one another and did not associate with those who did not belong to the same tribe by custom or kin, now, after the manifestation of Christ, have become those who live together as friends and pray for our enemies even as we try to persuade those who unjustly hate us so that they would live according to Christ’s fine commands and arrive with us at the joyful hope of being in the presence of God, the Lord of all.” – Justin Martyr

“What is the mark of those who eat the bread and drink the cup of Christ? That they keep in perpetual remembrance him who died for us and rose again. What is the mark of those who keep such remembrance? That they live not for themselves but for him who died for them and rose again. What is the mark of a Christian? That his justice abound in all things more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, according to the rule of the doctrine which has been handed down in the Lord’s gospel. What is the mark of the Christian? That they love one another as Christ has loved us. What is the mark of the Christian? To set the Lord always in his sight. What is the mark of the Christian? To watch daily and hourly and stand prepared in that state of perfection [maturity/completeness] which is pleasing to God, knowing that at what hour he thinks not, the Lord will come.” – Basil of Caesarea

New Life in Christ

2 Corinthians 5:17–6:10 | October 11, 2026

Have you ever done a remodel?
What was that like?

Additional Passages:

- Isaiah 43:16–21;
- Leviticus 16;
- Genesis 22;
- Matthew 25:14–30, 28:18–20;
- Revelation 19–22;

“To wash away our sins He was crucified, suffering what we who were sinful should have suffered, as our sacrifice and ransom.”

– Eusebius of Caesarea

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What’s going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: Christ is making all things new.

Major Application: Be faithful ambassadors of Christ’s kingdom.

Key Passage: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)

Christ is making us and all things new (5:17–19).

Regeneration

“We believe that, in order to be saved, sinners must be regenerated, or born again; that regeneration consists in giving a holy disposition to the mind; that it is effected in a manner above our comprehension by the power of the Holy Spirit, in connection with divine truth, so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel; and that its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance, and faith, and newness of life.” – New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith (1833)

One of the key truths of the gospel is that those who trust in Christ become new creations in him. The old has passed away, crucified with Christ, and we are spiritually resurrected to walk in the newness of life. So, what does this mean, and what are the implications for us today?

Being conceived in original sin, we were born with corrupted natures bent toward sin. We thought the wrong way, desired the wrong things, and our emotions were disordered, such that we were often tossed to and fro by our passions. Yet, when we were born again from above by the grace of God, the Spirit supplied a new nature to us, supernaturally making us partakers of the divine nature. That is, the Spirit of God heals and elevates to supernatural heights that which sin had broken. Christ, through his Spirit, renewed our minds, reformed our wills, and gave us new habits of righteousness so that we could control and properly direct our emotions in holiness.

Yet, we still live in what Paul calls our body of death. The problem is not the body itself, but the lingering corruption of sin. Despite these lingering ill effects, however, we remain new creations able to live in the glorious reality of our new natures.

This means you can be set free from the sin to which you were once addicted. Your destructive habits of greed, anger, pride, fear, envy, laziness, or lust no longer have to be in the driver's seat. You can live—and by the Spirit's grace—will live according to the holiness of your new nature.

The full revelation of our glorious new nature will not come until the resurrection, but it's a present-day reality of which we need to remind ourselves. The gospel has the power to transform; we are new creations in Christ Jesus, being transfigured by the renewal brought about by Christ's wisdom revealed in the Scriptures from one degree of glory to another.

Cosmic Reconciliation

The restoration of Christ is not merely on the individual level but touches the whole of creation and all nations. GK Beale has argued persuasively that “reconciliation in Christ is Paul's way of explaining that Isaiah's promises of restoration from the alienation of exile have begun to be fulfilled by the atonement and forgiveness of sins in Christ.” All nations are grafted into the one vine, such that the church, consisting of Jew and Gentile, is the continuation of true Israel in the New Covenant. It is as Paul wrote elsewhere,

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22 ESV)

This restoration is global, touching people from every tribe, tongue, and nation (cf. Revelation 7) and extending to creation itself. The reconciliation accomplished by Christ is holistic, such that even creation itself *waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* (Romans 8:19 ESV)

Such a perspective on reconciliation protects against the temptation to navel-gaze or to have overly privatized or retreatist understandings of our salvation. God's grace transforms us from the inside out, and then we go into the world as salt and light, a force for spiritual and earthly good no matter the cost.

Christ has made us ambassadors of his kingdom (5:20–6:2).

As ambassadors for Christ, we proclaim Christ to those around us. In fact, by the power of the Spirit, God himself makes his appeal to others through us as we affectionately implore people to repent and believe the good news that God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Christ, we might become the righteousness of God and endure to the end in the grace of God. Evangelism is not advanced Christianity, but basic Christianity. It is our formal duty as ambassadors that we ought to intentionally pursue—especially with the children in our own households and community.

Now, reflect with me a little more on what it means to be an ambassador. If you are an ambassador for the United States in a foreign country, you live among a different people. Officially, you speak for the interests of the home country, but, unofficially, you reflect the United States in all that you do, for you still operate—and stand out—as an American.

The same is true for us being ambassadors for Christ. In addition to being new creatures in Christ who are reconciled to God and his church by the blood of Christ, we are also citizens of the heavenly kingdom. We are strangers in a foreign land, operating as Christ's ambassadors. Our official mandate is to proclaim the gospel and make disciples, but we don't flip the switch. Everything we do, we do as ambassadors who belong to the kingdom of Christ.

This does not remove us from the ordinary or the mundane, but it does transform our purpose. We regard nothing according to the flesh. We approach work or, if you're a student, your school as ambassadors for Christ—and I don't limit the application of this principle to just sharing Christ with your co-workers or classmates. Yes, share Christ with them, but show your heavenly citizenship by doing a good job at work, laboring for the glory of Christ rather than the approval of man.

When you're doing the dishes and laundry for the thousandth time this month or answering a million questions or helping with homework or patiently bringing them up in the way of the Lord without knowing if anything is sticking, do so as an ambassador of Christ without grumbling, modeling contentment and faith for your kids.

As you enter into retirement years, remember that you never retire from being an ambassador for Christ. Do not pull back from kingdom ministry in the season of life when you have the most to offer.

If you're struggling with feelings of meaninglessness or insignificance, or perhaps you're just worn down by what you perceive as mundane, remember that the gospel has the power to transform your purpose. In Christ, you have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. And in Christ's kingdom, you have been elected to a lifetime term as Christ's ambassador.

Ambassadors reflect the Character of the King (6:3–10).

By way of describing his own ministry, Paul describes how all of Christ's ambassadors are to live. Simply put, Christ's ambassadors reflect Christ, their king.

1. Christ's ambassadors endure hatred from the world (cf. 1 Pet 2:21–25).

Due to the world's hatred, our hardships may look different than Paul's. Most Christians, even in Paul's day, did. Many times, our convictions will lead to more social or business costs for us and perhaps even our children due to ostracization. Your child may lose a starting position because of your conviction to gather with God's people for Lord's Day Worship as commanded by God to do. You may miss out on certain business deals due to your refusal to participate in certain socially acceptable, yet still sinful, practices. Examples abound, but ambassadors for Christ are called to endure hardships in this world for their faith rather than compromise to avoid them.

2. Christ's ambassadors are empowered by the Spirit to live holy lives (cf. Matt 4, Heb 4:15)

Consider the following characteristics Paul includes:

Purity – Knowledge (of the truth) – Patience – Kindness – Genuine love – True in speech

These characteristics only come by the power of God working through the indwelling Holy Spirit, but they are also virtues we are to strive for in thought and deed. All of us fall short in these areas, but that is no excuse to persist in them. As Peter said, the time is past that suffices for sin. Now, we are to keep in step with the Spirit, sowing with each action, each choice, each temptation resisted to the character of the Spirit so that we might reap the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

3. Christ's ambassadors equip themselves with the weapons of righteousness, not the world (cf. Matt 26:51–53, Mic 4:1–5, John 18:33–40).

Like Christ, our kingdom is not of this world. The kingdom of Christ advances by the weapons of righteousness—namely by the power of the Word of God and the prayers of the people of God. We do not advance the Kingdom through force. Christianity is not Islam. Christianity does not rely on politics. Christians need to guard their hearts against picking up weapons of unrighteousness in their supposed zeal to advance God's cause. In other words, we need to learn from Peter cutting off that guy's ear in Gethsemane and hear Jesus's rebuke to Peter and his words to Pilate.

4. Christ's ambassadors fixate on the eternal and unseen realities (cf. Heb 12:1–2; Col 3:1–4).

Lastly, Christ's ambassadors move their eyes from their temporal circumstances to their mighty King leading them in a triumphal procession. They fixate on the unseen realities that are above, where Christ is seated on his throne. Only when our perspective is fixated where it needs to be can we say with Paul:

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.
(2 Corinthians 6:8b–10 ESV)

The Pursuit of Holiness

2 Corinthians 6:11–7:16 | October 18, 2026

What is your favorite depiction of close friendships (i.e. Sherlock and Watson, the four hobbits, etc.) and why?

Additional Passages:

- Leviticus 19:1–19, 26:11–12;
- Isaiah 52:11;
- Ezekiel 37;
- Romans 13:8–14;
- Ephesians 4:1–6;
- 1 Corinthians 6, 8, & 10;
- Galatians 5:9

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: Sin hinders love, which is the fulfillment of the Law.

Major Application: Pursue holiness of body and soul.

Key Passage: *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*
(2 Corinthians 7:1 ESV)

The section of Scripture examined in this lesson is intentionally broad so that we can have the broader context. For Paul brings his initial defense, begun in chapter 2, of his love for the Corinthians to its conclusion in this chapter, revisiting the issue of his travel changes. Paul drives home his final statement, if you will, through his use of the Old Testament in 6:11–7:3, with 6:14–7:1 getting at the root of the issue of unrequited love highlighted in 6:11–13. The return to the travel narrative in 7:4–16 serves as an epilogue of sorts to the argument he has been developing that reaffirms Paul's love for the Corinthians and his genuine hope for their positive response to his letter. So, in this lesson, I first cover the context and expectation for their genuine repentance before getting to the root of the issue addressed in 6:14–7:1.

Broader Context: Riffs in Love (6:11–13, 7:4–16)

As we have discussed, likely due to the influence of the false teachers in their midst, the Corinthians were waffling in their love for Paul. Paul is about to transition to explicitly exposing and condemning these “super apostles” in the second half of the letter, but his primary concern is restoring the bond of love with the Corinthian church. With affection, Paul brings the issue to a head: the issue is not a lack of love on Paul's part, but the Corinthians' part. They are the ones who need to widen their hearts. They had not written Paul off entirely, but they were not where they needed to be either.

However, Paul does not write as someone despairing of ever being loved again. He has full confidence that they will repent, and this comes out when he revisits his travel narrative in verse 4. Paul says explicitly that he takes pride—the godly pride—in the Corinthians (even still!).

In fact, the comfort Paul referred to in chapter one came to him from God in part through the Corinthians. In Macedonia—which was already a difficult journey due to Paul’s decision not to visit the Corinthians—Paul faced external and internal turmoil.

But God comforted Paul through Titus’s return and his report of the Corinthians (vv. 7:7–9). They did respond positively to 1 Corinthians, but not completely—as will be discussed. They grieved their sin of ignoring the man who was engaging in inappropriate relations with his stepmother, and they executed church discipline against him such that he ended up repenting as well (see the lesson on 2 Cor 2:5–3:11). Paul took no sadistic pleasure in causing grief to the Corinthians, but he did rejoice that his commitment to the truth led to the godly grief that leads to genuine repentance. Paul’s primary concern was not actually the earthly relationships, for either the one who sinned or the one who was sinned against, but the entire congregation’s holiness. He desired for the entire congregation—including both parties—to be earnestly committed to the apostolic teaching before the face of God as indicated by their support of Paul, the true apostle, and their rejection of the false apostles.

Titus reinvigorated Paul’s spirit, and he was refreshed by how Titus was treated. Because the Corinthians treated Titus as Paul had claimed they would, Paul was assured of their genuine faith, despite their sin. This assurance gave Paul renewed confidence that this second letter would lead to their full repentance—which would then yield the unity of love Paul desired. For as David Garland reminds us, “Paul is not interested in restoring good relations with those whose lives are not right with God simply for the sake of peace and harmony. He will not back down in proclaiming God’s absolute demand for ethical purity.” So, with this context and expectation in mind, let’s get to the root of the issue that Paul centers on in 6:14–7:1.

Sin hinders love.

⁸ *Owe no one anything, except to love each other; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.* ⁹ *For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* ¹⁰ *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* (Romans 13:8-10 ESV)

A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

The root problem of the love problem was ultimately a sin problem; the Corinthians had responded favorably to part of 1 Corinthians but not all of it. Due to the influence of false teachers, who were likely putting forth some expression of early Jewish Gnosticism that emphasized religious rituals to the neglect of practical holiness, the Corinthians had not addressed their embrace of the sinful culture in which they lived.

1 Corinthians 6 addressed issues of sexual immorality and perhaps their continued engagement in the widespread practice of temple prostitution. 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 addressed the practice of syncretic worship through their participation in idolatrous feasts. These feasts would occur at idol temples and celebrations, at trade guild meetings and at people’s homes. Now, this might not sound like much to us, but the Christian’s commitment to holiness in these areas would carry significant ramifications. Specifically, Christians would lose their civic standing as they repudiated festivals and temples that were a big part of their culture. Christians would lose business and income due to their refusal to participate in the guilds’ idolatry, and they would become social pariahs the moment they “disrespected” their hosts by refusing to eat something given to them that was proclaimed to be offered to some deity.

In short, commitment to Paul’s message came with a significant social and financial cost—which was inconceivable for a group of teachers who taught that God’s favor was expressed in terms of earthly prosperity. And since the false apostles were proclaiming a false message that supposedly allowed one to have their cake and eat it too, the Corinthians faltered in their commitment to holiness and thus faltered in their affection for Paul and ultimately Christ.

Paul readdresses this issue in 6:14–16. Believers were not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. While this principle has broad application to many types of relationships we might enter into as believers, such as marriage, close friendships, and business partnerships, Paul’s specific application was to how believers were to engage the culture around them and the false teachers in their midst.

For as Garland rightly comments, “Those who bear Christ’s yoke (Matt 11:30) cannot share it with those who deny Christ. Those who harness themselves together with unbelievers will soon find themselves plowing Satan’s fields.” The Corinthians were to remove the false teachers from their midst and cease their fence-straddling with their idolatrous culture. For righteousness cannot partner with lawlessness, light cannot partner with darkness, Christ cannot partner with Satan (Belial is another Jewish term for Satan that means worthless, ESV Study Bible), Christians cannot yoke together with non-Christians for they follow different lords, and the temple of God (the church) cannot partner with idols. In a word, the Corinthians were to be holy, set apart from the ungodliness that surrounded them.

Why is it important to drive down to the root of the issue rather than focusing on just the consequences? How does that change the way we approach conflict, parenting, friendships, etc.?

Where are Christians tempted to straddle the fence with the culture today?

Identity drives practice.

It’s important to note Paul’s argument. He is not saying “you need to become God’s Temple and thus be holy.” Paul is saying, “You already are God’s temple; thus you need to be holy.” The Corinthians’ new identity in Christ, established by the grace of God through their faith, was to be the root of their pursuit.

The restoration of God’s people as prophesied in Ezekiel 37 had already occurred. True Israel, consisting of Jew and Gentile, had new life in God and were the Temple. No longer was the Temple a place but a people: the Church of the Living God. By God’s grace, God has already begun to dwell with his people through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The promise of Leviticus 26:11–12 no longer referred to the tabernacle but to our very hearts. And because of this, as the Tabernacle and Temple were to be ceremonially clean, set apart to the Lord, we as God’s living Temple were to be pure and set apart to the Lord.

Our identity in Christ drives our practices. Our pursuit of holiness is a grace-empowered pursuit of those who already possess the holiness of Christ. Our pursuit is not a pursuit to lay hold of something that does not belong to us, but to mature into something that is ours already.

What are additional true statements about our new identity in Christ that are relevant?

Grace does not eradicate human effort.

The gracious reality of being made new by God and given the holiness of Christ does not mean that we have no responsibility. The opposite is true. We are to eagerly and actively pursue the holiness God calls us to. We are to cleanse ourselves of unholy practices—outward and inward—and to bring the holiness given to us by God through the power of the Spirit to maturity as we walk in the fear of the Lord. Paul’s words here are simple: the promises of God do not lead to lazy pursuits of holiness; we are to work hard to be holy. We crucify the flesh and cultivate the new habits of righteousness given to us by God as we sow to the Spirit in each act of repentance and obedience.

Why is it a temptation to abuse grace by being lazy in holiness?

Grieve your sin and repent, for this is the path of life.

The difference between godly grief and worldly grief is simple: worldly grief only grieves getting caught and the negative consequences of sin; godly grief grieves the sin itself, for it recognizes the horror of being out of step with God. Worldly grief can produce some external change, but only godly grief can produce genuine repentance and obedience that is the defining mark of sanctification—or our present experience of God’s gracious salvation through which we are being conformed to Christ.

So, the path forward for the Corinthians is the same path forward for us today. Stop straddling the fence with the sinfulness of our culture; know who you are in Christ and let such gracious promises stir you to a fervent pursuit of holiness that flows from a godly grief over one’s persistent sinfulness.

Gospel Generosity, Part One

2 Corinthians 8 | October 25, 2026

Has there ever been a time in your life when you were struggling and another Christian generously came to your aid? In that moment, what did that teach you about the gospel?

Additional Passages:

- Acts 20:35
- Phil. 2:5–8
- Malachi 3:10
- 1 Timothy 6:17-19

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: A calling to genuine Christian generosity is a calling to live sacrificially for the sake of the kingdom.

Major Application: Trust in the kind provision of God and live generously.

Key Passage: *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... So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.* (2 Corinthians 8:9 & 24 ESV)

In 1808, Cotton Mather recognized a pressing need among the churches of Boston, Massachusetts: a greater pursuit of holiness. In an attempt to counter the perceived rise of debauchery, he established “holy societies.” Much like our Life Groups at MeadowBrook, these societies were intentionally designed to cultivate a deeper love for Christ and his Church.

Mather desired these holy societies to consider themselves as bound up in one “bundle of love.” In other words, for Mather, community was created, developed, and celebrated through the understanding that those in Christ are fundamentally bound to one another in love.

This love, however, is specific and twofold. First, their love was to be oriented toward Christ, for whenever they gathered, they did so to love Christ more. Second, their love for Christ was to be demonstrated to his body, such that those who truly love Christ reveal their love for him by loving his body. One of the clearest ways we manifest our love for Christ to his body is through our generosity to the body. In other words, as we give all of ourselves to Christ, we will also give all of ourselves to his body.

Today, as we consider Paul's words to the Corinthian Church, Mather's holy societies provide a helpful model of these truths applied. For genuine Christian generosity is most often revealed in supporting others in our Life Groups, progressing the ministry of our local Church, and providing aid to the global Church as we advance the gospel to all the nations.

Further, as we will see in Paul's encouragement, the generosity of our time and resources reveals much about that in which we take comfort. Therefore, a calling to gospel-shaped generosity is a calling to live sacrificially for the sake of the kingdom. With that in mind, let us observe five aspects of our generosity as seen in 2 Corinthians 8. To conclude, we will consider three simple applications of the text that will, with the Lord's help, guide us into greater generosity.

Our generosity reveals our treasure.

Paul opens this chapter with a remarkable statement regarding the churches of Macedonia. Recounting to the Corinthian church about a "severe test of affliction," likely referring to mounting persecution, Paul tells his readers that the Macedonians, though in the moment were extremely poor, were just as abundantly joyful, which led to a "wealth of generosity." What an amazing thought! Though they had nothing, they recognized that they had everything in Christ, and because of that blessed reality, they were free to serve and care for their fellow brothers and sisters in the faith. Indeed, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. (cf. Eph. 1:3)

However financially destitute they were, though, we see that the Macedonian churches treasured Christ, and the advancement of his gospel throughout the surrounding area via the other local churches. The Macedonian believers did not count financial gain as anything. Rather, their treasure was found in Christ, which moved them to care for their fellow believers. They greatly desired to partake in the "relief of the saints."

What is one way we can provide relief to fellow believers, whether it is financial or by other means?

Our generosity portrays the gospel.

Continuing his exhortation to the Corinthian believers to be generous, Paul provides a theological grounding for generosity in the gospel. Indeed, we are not called to be generous for generosity's sake. Rather, as Paul contends, generosity portrays the gospel of Jesus Christ. In verse 9, Paul states, *"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."* This sentence alone could be its own Life Group lesson, but it suffices to say that we do not practice generosity in order to that we obtain favor with the Lord.

Rather, we are called simply to exercise in the same generosity that we have received from our Lord. We have been shown tremendous generosity in that our sins have been forgiven, taken from us, and erased. How could we possibly turn a blind eye to a fellow believer in need? In our generous living, we have the blessed privilege of proclaiming the gospel to both our brothers and sisters in the faith, as well as those who do not yet know the Lord.

Our generosity requires endurance.

Because generosity portrays the gospel, we should not expect it to be a "one and done" activity. Christ does not show us grace once and expect us to live out of that singularly disbursed grace. Rather, Christ gives us grace that is sufficient for the day. Christ endures our lingering sinful desires and meets us daily with fresh grace. Therefore, as Paul argues in verses 10–13, generosity requires endurance. He reminded the Corinthian believers that they had started a year ago to engage in the relief of the saints, so now he calls them to finish strong. Indeed, our completion reveals our true desire. Where the Corinthian church might have been tempted to step away from providing relief to other believers, and thus build up their own wealth (according to v. 14, they had an abundance of wealth), Paul reminds them that the gospel shapes not only how we view our relationship with God but also with each other. By the blood of Christ, we have been reconciled to one another, for he is our peace. (cf. Eph. 2: 14) Therefore, as Christ endures in showing us daily sufficient grace, we are to daily show sufficient generosity for the family of Christ.

Our generosity is a means of God's provision.

At this point, a genuine question might arise: Instead of sacrificially giving of our own resources, should we not simply trust the Lord to provide by a more miraculous means? Indeed, in times of hardship, we often look for spare change under the seat cushion, hoping that something will miraculously pop up. And while the Lord does delight from time to time to move mightily in ways that show his providential goodness, the NT is abundantly clear that the Lord greatly delights in using his people as the means to care for his people.

Paul cites Exodus 16:18, where Moses recounts how the Israelites collected manna and quail while they wandered in the desert. God indeed miraculously provided the means of filling for his people, but they still had to pick it up. Even today, the Lord provides for his people through wages and compensation. Where some in the church might make a large wage, others might make a smaller one. The Lord calls all of us to a wide array of ways in which we can serve him in vocation. Not all ways are as lucrative as others. Therefore, the Lord has uniquely tasked those who have much to aid those who have little. However, this does not absolve those with little of their duty to aid others, as Paul reminded them at the beginning of the chapter, with the Macedonian churches, who experienced deep poverty. Rather, as we trust that the Lord will provide, we ought to expect that in many ways the Lord will provide through his people for his people in unique, gospel-shaped ways.

Our generosity reveals our love for Christ and his Church.

The latter portion of chapter 8 is given as a commendation of Titus. As we know, Paul loves Titus deeply, viewing him as his “true child in a common faith.” (cf. Ti 1:4) In many ways, Titus embodies for the Corinthian church, and us today, what a generous life looks like, revealing one's love for Christ and his Church. Titus traveled to Corinth sacrificially, but in a broader sense, he sought to live his life with the same fervor as Paul. Titus, then, saw himself as an avenue of God's gospel to the world. In his life and travels, Titus displayed not only his love for Christ but also for Christ's church. Titus greatly desired to see the saints thrive across the land in the local expressions of the Church, but he was also faithful to take the gospel to places where the Church was not yet present.

Like Titus, we cannot neglect the mission of the Global Church, which seeks to make disciples of all nations, as commissioned by our Lord. Our generosity, no matter how big or small, is a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives that testifies to our true love for Christ. And as Hunter reminded us some time ago, “We cannot love [Christ], without being devoted to [his] body.”

Application

To conclude, let's consider three brief applications that will help us solidify this text in our lives. First, may we be like Jesus, who shows generosity by showing grace. Our knee-jerk reaction to those suffering in hardship should not be accusation or questioning. Rather, it should be compassion and grace, just as our Lord shows tremendous grace and compassion to us. Second, seek out tangible ways in which you can be a conduit of God's provision to his people here at MeadowBrook. This could include giving your time, like helping a Life Group member move into a new home, or even sponsoring a young adult, either in part or in full, who desires to grow spiritually through one of our big events throughout the year, such as Dwell Retreat and Cross Con. Remember, God delights to use his people to minister to his people. Third, do not neglect the mission of the global Church. At MeadowBrook, we are deeply committed to supporting and even funding missionaries who go to the hard places for the sake of the gospel. Your generosity in prayer, travel, and financial support all display the gospel's rootedness in your life.

If you would like to contribute to the ministry of MeadowBrook through regular giving, scan the QR code below with your phone to be taken directly to our giving page.



Gospel Generosity, Part Two

2 Corinthians 9 | November 01, 2026

What is an action that someone does that shows you that they care for you?

Additional Passages:

- Galatians 6:7–10
- Acts 4:32–35
- Philippians 4:15–19
- Proverbs 11:24–25

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: The grace of God shown to us in Christ moves us to show that same gracious generosity to others.

Major Application: Consider it a blessed opportunity from the Lord to be generous to brothers and sisters in need.

Key Passage: *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7 ESV)*

While last week's lesson dealt with generosity broadly as a beautiful expression of the gospel-derived love we share for one another within the body of Christ, this week's lesson will more directly examine the background of Paul's encouragement to the Corinthians and his desire that they give to the suffering believers in Jerusalem.

A large part of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles dealt with bridging the gap between them and their ethnically Jewish brothers and sisters. We find this relational reconciliation discussed in several places, including Ephesians 2:14, where Paul explains that Christ, who is our peace, removes the divisions we once had with both God and each other. Therefore, it is through the lens of the gospel, not mere morality or worldly charity, that Paul wants his readers to understand generosity. In other words, Paul wants to make clear to his readers that we are not merely generous for generosity's sake, but ultimately to display the gospel's reconciling power!

With that ministerial context in mind, it makes sense that an offering would be sought for the Jerusalem Christians, since, in Acts 11, a famine was prophesied and eventually came to pass. Paul understood that a portion of his ministry to the Gentiles would be given to helping them practically love their Jewish brothers and sisters through financial support during the famine and persecution.

To that end, Paul encourages the Corinthian church to set aside an offering on the first day of the week that he intended to receive when he visited. (cf. 1 Co 16) However, there was a change of plans that he discusses in chapter 1 of 2 Corinthians, leading him to send a delegation. Upon encouraging his Corinthian readers to give faithfully to the relief of the Jerusalem saints, Paul now explains further why he is sending the delegation and provides a strong theological principle for why generosity is so paramount in experiential Christianity. Consider the following observations:

Paul has full confidence that the Corinthian church will be faithful in giving to the cause.

Upon an initial reading of Chapter 9:1–5, one might feel as though Paul is strong-arming the Corinthian church into giving to the cause. If we misunderstand Paul, we might think he is being passive-aggressive or manipulative. Upon a closer reading, however, we see that Paul's argument is not one of manipulation, but of confidence. In other words, Paul sends the delegation to receive the collection, not out of fear that they would not contribute to the cause, but out of confidence that they are willing and ready to do so since they have been among those leading the charge.

In chapter 8, Paul mentions the Macedonian believers, who, though destitute, still gave in abundance to the cause. Here in verse 4, Paul highlights them again, telling the Corinthians of how much he has celebrated their desired charity. Paul makes clear in verse 4 that he is not calling into question the character of the Corinthian believers; instead, he is highlighting his own boasting as the cause of potential humiliation. Therefore, he champions the Corinthians' desire to give, assuring them that he has their full confidence that they will continue leading out.

Paul is not soliciting their generosity, but eliciting it.

In a similar vein, it is important that we draw out an important implication of verses 3 and 5—namely that Paul is not soliciting an exaction from the Corinthian church, but is eliciting generosity for the sake of the brotherhood. He is not forcing them to comply with his request, but is strategically encouraging them through the gospel to do so. Dane Ortlund is helpful here, noting the comparison Paul has consistently drawn between generosity and the gospel. He writes, “God in the gospel did not force us into newness of life but wooed us with loving welcome and embrace. Paul likewise encourages the Corinthians to prepare the funds as a ‘gift.’”

Gospel-shaped generosity ought never to be forced. Thankfully, at MeadowBrook, our people sense the joy that is found in generosity, knowing that it is a picture of the gospel. For we know that the gospel does not simply shape our view of God but also of our money, time, and relationships. Indeed, the gospel radically alters every aspect of our lives.

The principle of generosity: we reap what we sow.

With Paul's last major appeal to the Corinthians presented, he now provides a grounding principle that can be clearly applied to us today. Drawing off Proverbs 11:24–25, Paul posits the principle in verses 6–7: “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” Notice, Paul does not raise the question, “Will we sow?” Rather, he rightly assumes that we all sow. Therefore, it is not a matter of if, but how. Will our sowing be cold and calculated, like an exaction, only giving what is required, or will our sowing be bountiful, liberally sowing to the glory of God?

Once my father retired, he planted a vegetable garden. During college, I (Chad) would often help him till and seed it. While we ensured the garden rows were neat and tidy, we liberally sowed the produce seeds throughout the rows. We never knew which seed would take root, or where it would grow best. However, we knew that the more seed we sowed, the greater the probability it was that we would reap a larger harvest. In other words, we expected that our reaping would match our sowing. Here, Paul is simply pastorally reminding his readers that God has supplied the seed. Therefore, we are free to sow as abundantly as possible, knowing that God will provide. The undercurrent of Paul's principle is a simple question: what is the nature of your sowing?

It is important to simply note that Paul does not have in mind a quid pro quo concept of sowing, as in the prosperity gospel. Paul does not intend to convince his readers that if they sow financially into the kingdom work of caring for the Christians in Jerusalem, they will be rewarded with financial abundance of their own. While the Lord at times does graciously provide financial blessings to those who give, the true harvest, as Ortlund reminds us, is a deeper sense of communion with the Lord. Indeed, as we seek to sow more abundantly and practice a ridiculous gospel-shaped generosity, we, in many ways, are forced to trust the good providing hand of the Lord. That trust thrusts us deeper into dependence upon the Good Shepherd who provides exactly what we need, exactly how we need it, and exactly when we need it, for our Good Shepherd is the sovereign, wise, and good God of the Scriptures who gives good gifts and who never changes. (cf. Jas 1:17)

Before concluding his principal argument, Paul reminds the Corinthians, and us, that God loves a cheerful giver. God delights in those who display his bountiful sowing in their life by bountifully sowing in others. I am reminded of the sinful woman in Luke 7, of whom Jesus forgives her many sins. If you recall that passage, she greets Jesus at the door with tears and ointment. Jesus sees the magnitude of her love and forgives her. But he speaks a strong warning to those with him, “he who is forgiven little, loves little.” Ortlund’s quote at the beginning of the lesson captures this story and our concept of generosity well. He writes, “Grace without giving is fraudulent and no real grace at all.” Those who have been forgiven much will find themselves moved by the Spirit to be all the more generous. May we realize just how forgiven we have been in Christ!

At the end of the day, we must remember that we have been shown infinite grace in Christ. We rebelled against a holy God, and for that, we deserve death and condemnation. However, God showed his great love for us in that while we were still sinners, he sent Christ to die for us. In Christ, God has shown us great generosity. If we believe that, we have a firm foundation to trust that he, as Paul reminds the Corinthian believers, will supply seed for our sowing and bread for our harvest. In other words, if we believe the gospel for eternity, we can also believe it for today. God will provide. Therefore, we can be grace-filled, gospel-shaped, generous followers of Jesus.

If you would like to contribute to the ministry of MeadowBrook through regular giving, scan the QR code below with your phone to be taken directly to our giving page.



Serving Like Jesus

2 Corinthians 10:1–18 | November 08, 2026

Which characteristic of Jesus's ministry most stands out to you?

Additional Passages:

- Jeremiah 9:23–24, 24:4–7;
- Matthew 11:28–30;
- Mark 10:45;
- See Lesson.

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: We ought to reflect Christ as we engage in holistic ministry.

Major Application: Edify others with all integrity and humility.

Key Passage: *For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.* (2 Corinthians 10:4 ESV)

After readdressing his appeal for funds to support the Jerusalem church, Paul turns his attention back to his ministry. Specifically, he addresses criticism that calls his integrity into question and reveals the worldly reasoning employed by his critics. He will challenge a particular unnamed individual or small group of critics within the church (10:7–11) before turning his attention to the false teachers seeking to woo the Corinthians (10:12–12:21). As David Garland notes, “Paul defends his reputation and his deportment (demeanor), but it is more to save the community from fools and a false gospel than to save his reputation.”

Paul makes clear that he is the one imitating and operating under the authority of Christ, not his critics or these apostles, who operated according to worldly wisdom and pride. While certain elements of Paul's defense are pertinent to him specifically and vocational ministers more broadly, there are principles highlighted by Paul that ought to mark the ministry of every soldier led by Christ in triumphal procession.

Reflect the demeanor of Christ in your ministry (vv. 1–3).

But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace. (Psalm 37:11 ESV)

The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah 29:19 ESV)

²⁸ *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* ³⁰ *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* (Matthew 11:28–30 ESV)

At this point in the letter, Paul reiterates that he's not seeking to lord his authority over the Corinthian church out of some form of selfish ambition. Rather, he is imitating the meekness and gentleness of Christ. He's heard the criticism—that he's some “paper apostle” who can pop off from a distance but is weak in person. His desire, however, is not to come in the boldness of a rebuke nor to demonstrate his boldness for boldness's sake. In his meekness and gentleness, Paul desired the righteousness that produces peace, not conflict.

Today, there's a strong streak in conservative culture that no longer values meekness. We need to be guarded against such a movement. The way of Christ has always been the way of meekness. Meekness refuses to place the anger of man, which does not produce the righteousness of God, in the driver's seat of one's soul. Thomas Aquinas rightly described meekness as the virtue by which one “moderates anger according to right reason.” Here, we see Paul demonstrating this. He is rightly grieved over the Corinthians' failures, possessing a righteous anger of sorts, but he is not giving way to the passions of the flesh. Paul is not a doormat, unwilling to oppose wickedness when needed, but neither is he a hothead seeking to exact vengeance in defense of his honor.

Christians today should be the same. We cannot be those who give way to sinful anger and seek to take the vengeance that belongs to the Lord into our own hands. In the world's foolish eyes, it may look like we're losing some battles we'd like to win, but we do not think on the timeframe of the world. We think in terms of eternity. We are to be meek, properly moderating our anger according to the wisdom of God, as we boldly stand for truth with all gentleness.

For as Paul wrote to Timothy at the end of his life, ²⁴ *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,* ²⁵ *correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,* ²⁶ *and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.* (2 Timothy 2:24-26 ESV)

What are examples of the errors about meekness of both extremes? Why is meekness hard? Why is it important?

Our warfare is spiritual, intellectual, and practical.

¹⁰ *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.* ¹¹ *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.* ¹² *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

¹³ *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.* (Ephesians 6:10-13 ESV)

Even though Christians labor in these earthly bodies, we do not wage war according to the kingdom of this world—materially or philosophically. What that means is the gospel ministry of the church does not advance through physical domination, political mechanization, powerful rhetoric, impressive technologies, human cunning, more pizza parties, or anything that belongs to creation, either good or bad. The gospel ministry of the church advances by the Spirit of God working through the Word of God, the prayers of the people of God, and the supernatural gifting of the Church that embodies the fruit of the Spirit.

While the peaceful gospel ministry of the church might look weak in the eyes of some, it's actually the only thing full of the divine power that brings spiritually dead individuals to new life in Christ, translating them from the dominion of darkness to the kingdom of light. The Church's ministry is fundamentally spiritual, rooted in the Word of God.

The spiritual nature of our ministry does not negate the intellectual or practical elements. Right now, spirituality is super popular in our culture, but it's a vapid spirituality that negates the importance of doctrine and holiness according to the moral law of God.

There's nothing spiritual about ignorance of the key doctrines of our faith. It's imperative that we defend the integrity of the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of the union of two natures in the one divine person, Jesus Christ, the doctrine of Christ's substitutionary death that bore the penalty of our sin, the doctrine of justification by faith, the doctrines of grace in our salvation, the doctrine of heaven and hell, and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and his ministry in and through the church.

And if we are to do so, we are going to have to devote ourselves to the intellectual study and correct arrangement of the Scriptures into a unified confession (such as the BFM 2000). We cannot be content with things just being over our heads. We must, by the Spirit's help, lift our heads as we study the Word of God in our effort to love God with all our minds. We are to take every thought captive so that we are not led astray by falsehood but equipped to dismantle the lies of the enemy with the truth of the Scriptures.

This spiritual and intellectual pursuit yields a practical pursuit of righteousness that seeks to preserve the purity of the church. Personally, we crucify the flesh and put on Christ. Corporately, we do not allow sin and falsehood to go unaddressed in the congregation, and willing to discipline the repeatedly unrepentant if necessary (Matt 18). Our spiritual and intellectual pursuits must bear the fruit of practical holiness. If it's not translating into growth in Christlikeness, something is off.

Which aspect is most difficult for you? How can we grow in each area?

Don't get past the joy of your conversion.

After Paul challenged the critic in Corinth, declaring that he too belonged to Christ, Paul talks a little about how he might come across as boasting too much about his authority and that he's ok with it. This might strike us as strange, given that Paul is talking about boasting, but once we understand what is going on, it becomes clearer and a principle we too ought to keep in mind. In Acts 22, 26, and in Galatians 1, Paul rooted his apostolic authority in the Damascus Road experience. Thus, when Paul speaks of boasting freely about his authority, I think Paul Barnett is right in his claim that "Paul is simply stating that the Damascus Road commission is the basis for all he does in ministry and he is not ashamed of it."

Apparently, Paul talked a lot about the experience—and why wouldn't he?! It's where the Lord met him and transformed him according to his grace. For, as Paul said in Galatians, ¹² *For I did not receive [the gospel] from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ...* ¹⁵ *But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ...* ¹⁶ *was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone;* (Galatians 1:12, 15-16 ESV) Paul's "boasting" was not sinful boasting that Jeremiah condemned (Jer 9:23-24), but an overflow of joy that just could not get past the grace of God he received in his conversion.

We need to be reminded of this. Some of us have grown cold in our devotion to the Lord, and part of the reason is that we have forgotten the joy of our initial reception of God's transforming grace. We need to boast in the Lord, rejoicing that we were once dead in our sins but are now living transformed. This is not a boast in our strength or wisdom, but in the God who, being rich in mercy, brought us from death to life in Christ. We need to remember the joy of our conversion.

Edify others with all integrity and humility.

Lastly, Paul was given this ministry for the good of others. His purpose was simple: he gave the entirety of himself to building up the Church with the Word of God as he lived it out himself. He was not in it for the money; he was not saying one thing while doing another. He was not getting caught up in the vanity of comparing the fruit of his ministry with that of others. He was no self-promoter, but a humble servant of Christ who sought the good of others.

We need to do likewise:

- Purpose to build up the body of Christ with your gifts, free from any spirit of jealousy. If you're comparing the scope of your ministry to the scope of someone else's in some sort of competition, you're acting like a fool.
- Live out what you teach. There's always going to be some measure of disconnect, but we must never be ok with telling people "do as I say, not as I do."
- Rest in the Lord's commendation. Self-promotion is vanity, a chasing after the wind. For even if you get the commendation from others, it means nothing. Only the approval of the Lord matters. Spend your life seeking to do his will in the spirit of John the Baptist, who decreased so that Christ might increase.

Dealing with False Teachers

2 Corinthians 11:1–15 | November 15, 2026

What's the most common way to ruin a good steak?

Additional Passages:

- Genesis 2:20–3:12, 25:29–34;
- Hosea 1–3;
- Deuteronomy 6:1–15;
- Jeremiah 3;
- John 10:1–21;
- Jude 1–21;
- 2 Timothy 3:1–17;
- Revelation 19:20–21

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: The Church is the bride of Christ.

Major Application: Beware of and reject other suitors who would deceive you.

Key Passage: *For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.* (2 Corinthians 11:2 ESV)

false teaching (n.) – false teaching denies a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith delivered once and for all to the saints that is confessed in accordance with the proper interpretation of the Scripture.

False teaching goes beyond simply being in error on a particular point of exegesis—even something as important as defining the proper recipients of baptism or the precise relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation or one's millennial views. In such disagreements, certainly one party is wrong, but that does not mean they are not Christian. With false teaching, their error amounts to a denial of the gospel and thus the historic Christian faith. In other words, false teaching is not what separates Baptists and Presbyterians, but what separates Christians and non-Christians.

From the earliest days of the church, false teaching sought to dismantle the truth under the false pretense of defending it. The Judaizers undercut the gospel and the cross of Christ under the guise of greater respect for the Law of God. The Docetists undercut Christ's true humanity—and thus our salvation—under the guise of greater respect for the deity of Christ. The Modalists undercut the Trinity and the personhood of the Son and the Spirit under the guise of a deeper commitment to monotheism. The Arians undercut the divinity of the Son under the guise of respecting the Father... And on and on it goes today.

Today, prosperity preachers claim to be recovering the true teaching of the kingdom and the power of the Spirit. Works-based justification continues to threaten the church and its devotion to the free offer of salvation in Christ Jesus. Many teachers, like John Mark Comer, in their supposed defense of the personal character of God, hold to heterodox views on God and the cross, such as denying God's unchangeableness or denying the penal substitutionary atonement.

A supposed love for one's neighbor has led all sorts of people to affirm all kinds of sexual degeneracy in the name of compassion, and many mold their Christian convictions to their political goals in the name of justice. And I could go on with examples. Worst of all, these false teachers twist the Scriptures to their own ends.

Paul exposed the reality of false teaching in 2 Corinthians 11, giving the church throughout the centuries a blueprint to follow. Today's lesson will examine these matters, focusing first on the truth about false teaching and then turning to the believer's response to it.

Know the truth about false teaching.

1. False teaching dishonors Christ, the bridegroom (vv. 2–3).

The church is the betrothed of Christ, awaiting the full consummation of their wedding at his return, and to embrace false teaching is spiritual adultery. This adultery dishonors the bridegroom by going after shameful suitors who care little for them. Like Gomer departing from Hosea, such people dishonor their husband, Christ—and end up worse off. The most significant breach of accepting false teaching is the dishonor it does to Christ, who gave himself up for his church.

2. False teaching dishonors those who hold to it (vv. 2–3).

Those who embrace false teaching repeat Eve's error, Esau's foolish exchange of his birthright for a bowl of soup, or Achan's foolish plundering of Jericho. In each of these narratives, the individuals mentioned exchange something glorious for something shameful, harming themselves in the process. Randy and I, along with the other pastors at MeadowBrook, don't often bring up false teaching out of an ego-driven pursuit of proving that we're right about a topic, but because we love Christ and we love you. We've seen firsthand the pastoral harm caused by false teaching, and we desire better for you.

The good shepherd leads us to good pastures in his word; it's the false teachers who are *hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.* (Jude 1:12-13 ESV)

The dishonor brought to Christ should be enough to avoid false teaching, but the harm it brings to those who corrupt themselves with false teaching ought to also keep us from straying into such severe error.

3. False teaching dishonors those who have invested time and resources in you (vv. 4–11).

It's a painful thing to watch someone whom you've invested years of financial and emotional resources into training up in the way of Christ depart the faith. False teaching, among other things, dishonors those who have made such investments. When tempted with false gospels and unbiblical worldviews, we ought to at least consider those who have invested so much into making us into the people we are today, rather than despising them.

4. False teaching is inherently deceptive (vv. 12–14).

If false teaching did not mix in some truth or manipulate some noble desire to wicked ends, hardly anyone would believe it. But even Satan himself presents as an angel of light (and likely has done so in the cases of Islam and Mormonism, both of which claim revelation from an angel). It's not enough for someone to quote a Bible verse to justify their claims. People can rip verses out of their historical, canonical, and theological context to craft a picture of Christianity that bears no resemblance to the truth. People must rightly handle the word of truth, not simply throw a verse up on a TV beside them on stage to justify their position. We must be on guard.

5. False teaching ends in disaster (v. 15).

False teaching ends in eternal judgment. The false teachers and their followers will not stand in the judgment but will be like the chaff blown away by the wind. Know their end, and thus, mark and avoid them in this life.

Deal with false teaching the right way.

Cultivate a godly jealousy for confessing the truth (v. 2). A godly jealousy is not the reactive passion of flesh, often described as being “green.” Such a fleshly jealousy is not controlled by reason or our wills, but the reactive impulses of bodily emotion—which are not reliable guides for action and can often lead us into trouble many times.

A godly jealousy is not emotionless, but a proper zeal directed by a renewed reason resulting in action that seeks to maintain some object of genuine love and protect it from harm. A wife is right to be jealous for the love of her husband and will act in ways to protect and maintain what rightfully belongs to her from rival suitors (cf. 1 Cor 7). In fact, a failure to demonstrate godly jealousy in such a situation would be a failure in love.

The same is the case for those entrusted with the care of souls—a responsibility in which both pastors and the entire body of Christ share. We ought to develop a godly jealousy for confessing the truth such that when we see someone wander into error, we intervene as Paul did. We say something. We meet with them. We plead with them not to throw away the glory they have in Christ for a life of sin or a life given to falsehood. We love them.

Don’t put up with it (v. 4). A major part of the Corinthian error was that they simply tolerated the false teachers. They may not have believed everything they were saying, but they gave them an audience in their church. At MeadowBrook, we are vigilant to protect the platform and even go to great lengths to produce our own Life Group material. In other words, we strive to be a church that does not put up with false teachers. However, this does not mean that we are not still at risk of putting up with false teachers.

What does that look like today? Well, we put up with false teachers in the books we read, the music we listen to, and the reels/TikToks we watch. And oftentimes—but not always—it’s the most popular ones that can be problematic. While not every one of these is heretic, some are and others, at the very least, are dangerous and possess significant issues to avoid:

- Books: Sarah Young, Paula White, Jonathan Cahn, John Mark Comer, Doug Wilson, and any book about spending time in heaven and coming back.
- Music: Hillsong, Bethel, Elevation, Jesus Culture, among others.
- Reels/TikToks/YouTube: Mark Driscoll, Paul Drees, Brandon Robertson, Andrew Tate, and Roman Catholic and Orthodox Apologists. (Just in general, TikTok and YouTube should not be primary sources for your beliefs about God.)

Love those enticed by it enough to say something (v. 11). Our posture toward those enticed by false teaching ought not to be one of intellectual snobbery, but one of grace, compassion, and love. Our desire is to win them to the truth, not drive them further into error. Genuine love for the other person will lead you to not remain silent, and genuine love for the truth will lead you to correct them in gentleness and respect. People who are jerks “for the truth” reveal they care little about the body of Christ or the truth we confess, and people who, “in their love” for someone, affirm someone in their sin likewise reveal the lack of love they have for that individual. As the body of Christ, we must be those who speak the truth to one another in love. (Remember, Facebook or Twitter comment sections are not the place to carry this out).

Promote the truth (v. 12). Lastly, we ought to devote most of our effort to promoting the truth of Christ. Our main focus is there. Those who devote most of their attention to correcting errors run the risk of giving way to the root of bitterness and the anger of man, which does not produce the righteousness of God. Our main vocation is to promote the truth wherever we go, correcting false teaching firmly and boldly as it arises. For the greatest weapon against the dominion of the enemy is simply the truth of the sword of the Spirit wielded by those who are praying in the Spirit.

Christ's Sufficient Presence

2 Corinthians 11:16–12:10 | November 22, 2026

What's one 'weakness' that the Lord has used to shape you?

Additional Passages:

- Jeremiah 9:23–24
- Philippians 3:4–11
- Isaiah 40:29–31
- John 15:1–11

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: Christ's presence makes us strong.

Major Application: Depend on Christ's presence.

Key Passage: *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.* (2 Corinthians 12:9 ESV)

Over the last two weeks, we have seen Paul address his frustrations regarding so-called "super-apostles" who intend to preach a different gospel than the true gospel of Jesus Christ. It is remarkable that, for all the strife that the Corinthian church has put Paul through, he loves these people. Indeed, his love for them puts into practice his teaching that the church is founded on the love of God shown to them in the grace of Christ Jesus, their Lord. This is yet another reminder that the true gospel of Jesus Christ is an all-encompassing gospel. It not only reorients our relationship with the Lord from brokenness to union, but also reframes how we view each other. Because of the gospel, we can live in genuine unity with one another.

Because this all-encompassing gospel is being threatened among the believers in Corinth, Paul speaks strongly against those who "commend themselves" (cf. 2 Co 10: 12), who "proclaim another Jesus" (cf. 2 Co 12:4), and call themselves "super-apostles." (2 Co 11:5). This week, we pick up in Paul's defense of his apostolic ministry against that of the "super-apostles." Shockingly, Paul seems to play the same "boasting" game that the super-apostles like to play. However, Paul intends to play by a very different set of rules.

Rather than boasting in his strengths, Paul points his beloved brothers and sisters to his trials and weaknesses. In doing so, Paul reveals the absolute absurdity of boasting in general, and of boasting in our strengths in particular. For Paul, we have nothing apart from Christ. Therefore, it is bizarre to him that anyone would seek to commend themselves in the ministry of the gospel.

It is not only bizarre for a minister of the gospel to boast in their talents, abilities, and charisma; it is anti-theological to call of Christ. Rather, all believers ought not look to their strength as their grounds for boasting, but their weaknesses. For, Christ's abiding presence reshapes our weaknesses and makes us strong by the power of the gospel. In light of that reality, let's now consider two key ideas and one big application.

Paul's weakness and suffering is a feature, not a bug.

The "super-apostles" infecting the Corinthian church with false doctrine and a false gospel boasted of their earthly achievements, such as being skilled orators (cf. 2 Co 11:6) and exercising authority over the people (2 Co 11:7). In verse 16, Paul makes it clear that he finds this boasting foolish, but to get through to his audience he requests that they let him play the fool and "boast a little" as well. It is evident that Paul does not feel comfortable with this approach, for elsewhere in his letters he has called for gentleness in speech. Here, he is much firmer, and his comments drip with consternation at the use of this "boasting" tactic. Such consternation leads him to remind his audience that such boasting and behavior is out of step with the gentle and lowly character of their Lord (cf. 2 Co 11:17; Matt 11:29)

Nevertheless, Paul continues with this tactic, taking three key steps. First, Paul addresses similarities between himself and these "super-apostles." Like them, he is a Hebrew, an Israelite, and an offspring of Abraham. (cf. 11:22–23) For Paul, these commonalities actually serve to dethrone their super-apostleship, for they are no different in these respects from a true apostle.

This is where Paul takes the decisive step in dismantling his enemies' boasting. In Paul's second step, he raises the question, "Are they servants of Christ?" and immediately answers, "I am a better one." What a wild statement from the Apostle Paul! Even Paul realizes how crazy he sounds, but we ought to consider why Paul believes this rather accurate assessment of himself. Paul can rightly say that he is a better servant of Christ specifically because of the various trials he has encountered throughout his ministry.

One commentator notes that Paul cites twenty-eight individual hardships that he has faced for the sake of the gospel. Throughout his ministry, Paul has been about one thing: advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Though his life has been filled with trials for one reason or another, Paul's point in citing these hardships is to affirm exactly what the Corinthian believers were being tempted to believe by the super-apostles, that Paul was weak. In many ways, Paul is saying that the super-apostles are correct in asserting that he is weak, because he is. However, for Paul, that is exactly the point! His weaknesses are a feature of the ministry of Christ in this life; not a bug in the system revealing that something is wrong.

Paul's main point in 11:16–33 is that true Christians recognize just how weak and dependent they are on Christ. We are wise not to be lured in by false charm or smooth talk of Satan's "deceitful workmen." (cf. 2 Co 11:13–15) Rather, faithful followers of Christ are to be cared for by those who embody the gentleness and lowliness of our Lord—the Lord who humbled himself and took on the weakness of human flesh for us and our salvation (cf. Phil 2:5–11).

Christ's abiding presence is enough to carry us through any trial.

While Paul dismantles the super-apostles' arguments in his second step, he takes a third step that ultimately solidifies his point. Chapter 12 opens with Paul recounting an occurrence that took place fourteen years prior to writing this letter. Moreover, this occurrence is so remarkable that Paul struggles to communicate it. It is so glorious and amazing that he struggles to even associate himself with it, opting to speak in third person about himself. Paul tells his audience that he was "caught up to the third heaven," that is the place where God dwells (1st heaven = Sky; 2nd heaven = space). There, Paul heard things that cannot be uttered by humans. Though he does not know whether it was a physical teleportation or a vision akin to Isaiah 6, he asserts that it truly did happen on the grounds that God knows how it happened.

Paul's third step, then, is to show how utterly different his experience with the Lord has been from these so-called super-apostles. These "false apostles," as Paul calls them in 11:13, have no leg to stand on, for they do not have an experience like his. Therefore, if Paul were to boast about that which happened in the flesh, he would have sufficient ground to stand on in order to do so. However, Paul does not boast in light of this splendid occurrence. Rather, he chooses to boast in his weaknesses. (cf 2 Co 2:5)

Paul understands that this experience was a gift from the Lord that, in many ways, affirms his apostolic ministry. Paul also understands that this gift could be his greatest curse, as it could lead him to become conceited. These revelations were indeed surpassing in greatness, and gave him sufficient ground to boast if he ever wanted to. However, we have already seen that Paul understands fleshly boasting to be antithetical to the gospel ministry.

Therefore, in order to keep Paul humble in the Lord, a thorn was given to Paul. Amazingly, we see Paul characterize the thorn as a “messenger of Satan,” designed to harass him into humility. Paul gives no indication of the nature of the thorn. We do not know if it was an illness, disability, or a persistent sin problem. However, Dane Ortlund asserts that Paul does not give specifics for the very reason of maximum applicability. In other words, Paul does not want to specify the nature of the thorn so as not to hinder his audience from applying the comforting message he is about to provide. Whether it was an illness, disability, or a persistent sin problem, the application remains true: Christ’s grace is sufficient to get you through the pain.

When we think of a thorn, we typically think of those of a small rosebush, but as Ortlund notes, the Greek word Paul uses, skolops, could easily allude to something like a wooden stake. Therefore, whatever this thorn was, it was painful. However painful it was, though, Paul understood that Christ’s grace was that much more comforting. But frankly, what does that mean? Here, Paul is likely not referring to the objective, forgiving grace that could be seen in places like Romans 3:24. Rather, as Ortlund notes, Paul is using the term grace “more broadly as shorthand for the presence of God.” In other words, Christ’s grace is sufficient because his presence is sufficient! Though we go through many a trial in this life, we have been united to Christ. One of the implications of that blessed reality is that Christ is with us, for he lives in us! (cf Gal 2:20) Moreover, it is Christ’s life that energizes us and moves us forward in faithfulness even when the trials mount.

Though Paul only saw two options, removal of the thorn and freedom to go about his life, or the thorn remaining and him be physically or spiritually crippled, Christ offered Paul a third option, namely that he would leave the thorn, but give Paul grace to endure. What a comforting truth it is that the Lord, though he has the capability to take away all thorns, he often chooses to leave them to produce holiness in our lives as we live with the pain. In leaving the thorn, however, he also gives sufficient grace to both endure the pain and empower us to walk in holiness.

Application: Embrace the joy of being dependent upon Christ’s gracious presence.

The marvelous truth above leads us to our application for today: Embrace the joy of being dependent upon Christ’s gracious presence. Realizing that we are not as autonomous as we like to think often sends shockwaves of anxiety throughout our souls. Such a realization means that we actually control very little about our lives, including the pain and trials that we so often experience. Nevertheless, Christ’s comfort to Paul amid the thorn is his same comfort for us amid our own trials. His gracious presence is enough. Though recognizing our dependence can be the scariest thing we could possibly do, it is also the most freeing and comforting. For we know that the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, the same God who never changes, is the same God who will never leave nor forsake us. Because of that amazing truth, we, like Paul, can allow the trials we experience to bring forth holiness in our lives, such that we are conformed to the image of our Savior and Lord. In so doing, we will find tremendous joy for our souls. Embrace that joy today!

Principles of Gospel Ministry

2 Corinthians 12:11–13:14 | November 29, 2026

What is an area of ministry that is important to you?

Additional Passages:

- Matthew 13:52, 14:13–21;
- Ephesians 4:11–14;
- 1 Peter 4:8–11;
- Lamentations 3:40;
- 2 Timothy 2:1–13;
- Romans 12:1–8

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

T. Tell Others about It

- Who needs to be encouraged with these truths this week?

Big Truth: Every Christian is a minister of God.

Major Application: Gladly, spend and be spent for the souls of others.

Key Passage: *I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.* (2 Corinthians 12:15a ESV)

Every saint of God is a minister of God.

Ministry is not something reserved for those paid to do it, it is not something exclusive to those who are ordained as either pastors or deacons, nor is it limited to Life Group leaders. Every saint of God is a minister of God, called to be equipped for his heavenly ministry. A saint is not some higher order of Christian, but every individual who has been born again through their repentance and faith in Jesus as both Christ and Lord is made a saint by the blood and righteousness of Christ. If you are in Christ, you are a saint of the Most High God and a servant devoted to his kingdom work in the home, in the church, and in the community at large. For as Paul wrote elsewhere:

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (Ephesians 4:11-14 ESV)

The pastors are the equippers for the saints who together engage in the work of ministry for the upbuilding of the body of Christ. We all have our places of ministry in accordance with our spiritual giftedness. We do not determine our capacity, giftedness, or reach of our ministry; God does. We are called to be faithful stewards of the ministry entrusted to us in a given season.

As we draw to the conclusion of Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth, he again defends the legitimacy of his ministry by emphasizing its godly character. I'd like to glean from this section principles for gospel ministry that can be applied to our areas of influence, whether that be as small as a couple of young children in the home or as large as a large number of people. Again, we need not concern ourselves with the extent of our ministry, only our faithfulness in what has been entrusted to us. At the end of the day, our ministry is made effective by the grace of Christ, the love of the Father, and the fellowship we have with the Holy Spirit.

1. Patiently live by and teach the truth (v. 12:12).

Paul was patient with the Corinthian church. He could have written them off, but chose not to. Instead of dismissing them, he wrote them not one but two lengthy letters, sent one of his most faithful companions, Titus, to them, and was still planning to visit them again in person. He demonstrated the truthfulness of his gospel message through the signs given to him as an apostle (a special demonstration of power to legitimize the transition from the Old to the New Covenant). Then, and continuing onward, Paul dealt with them with the utmost patience, drawing their eyes back to the truth in both what he said and how he lived.

We should do the same. It's easy to grow impatient in ministry, but such is an impulse of the flesh, not the fruit of the Spirit. As we live by the Spirit and seek to minister to those we love the most, we ought to patiently point them back to the truth, especially when they are at their most difficult.

2. Gladly, spend and be spent for the souls of others (v. 12:15).

Paul gave his life to his gospel ministry for the sake of the Corinthians in both what he planned and what he did not—and he did so with joy. Ministry is hard work, but it's joyful work that, when done in the Spirit, is the yoke of Christ that is easy and the burden that is light. By the grace of God, the Spirit empowers his ministers to give all for the sake of others, experiencing a joyful fulfillment in the process.

Rather than being overly guarded and self-seeking, we need to be those who die to self, those who seek to put others before ourselves, and those who spend and are spent for the souls of others. The Lord will provide the strength such that as we toil, we can do so knowing as Paul knew: For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. (Colossians 1:29 ESV)

What hinders this in us?

3. Carry out your ministry in the sight of God (v. 12:19).

Paul spoke in Christ before God. His primary aim was not pleasing man, but God who sees all. For as Paul has already written in this epistle:

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. (2 Corinthians 5:9-10 ESV)

If what motivates us to do our ministry is being seen by others, we will have a burdensome time doing ministry, striving after the ever-fleeting approval of man. We must be content to minister in the power of God, trusting him to produce the results—whether we see the fruit of our labor or not—and knowing that he will reward our faithfulness at the return of Christ, which is enough.

4. Prioritize the building up of the church in holiness (vv. 12:19–21).

Paul did not care as much about the worldly markers of success—the numbers, the acknowledgment as some great visionary or rhetorician, or political success—he cared about the holiness of the body of Christ and put his efforts there. His main concern was not that the Corinthian church was running low, but that they were still living in the old passions of the flesh.

We ought to be given to the same priorities, which means we are constantly focusing on the transformation of the heart, which comes by the Spirit, not merely the external matters. This does not mean we do not focus at all on external things, but that we are vigilant to make the building up of the church in holiness our top concern.

5. Exercise your ministry in the power of God (vv. 13:1–4).

Paul emphasized the need for the charges against him to have multiple witnesses, because he knew they held no water. He had been carrying out his ministry in the power of God, and an examination of his work would prove that. Unlike those who were laboring in the flesh for wood, hay, and stubble, Paul knew Christ himself was speaking through him according to the power of God. So, although he might be weak according to the flesh, Paul was living and ministering by the power of God.

We likewise need to be those who minister according to Christ's power, not our own. But what does that look like? Simply, it means we rely on the wisdom of the Word over our opinions derived from experience, and we seek the Lord in prayer to give growth to the seeds we've planted and watered. We exercise our ministry in the power of God when we live according to the virtues of the Spirit as we promote and rely upon God's word working in conjunction with prayer.

6. Examine yourself (vv. 13:5–8).

Paul was not like the Wizard of Oz, who, upon close examination, was nothing more than a fraud. No, he did not mind being examined, for he knew he'd stand the test. But he was not as sure about the Corinthians, so he encouraged them to examine themselves.

For, as Jeremiah said, The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9 ESV). No one really operates under the belief that they are doing things completely wrong. We are experts at justifying ourselves and our actions—no matter how heinous they might be. We cannot just assume that we are in the right in our ministry, but must regularly examine ourselves and our ministry to make sure it is standing up to the test.

Here are some questions to ask yourselves:

- Is my doctrine orthodox? (Confessions like the BFM 2000 or the Nicene Creed are helpful summaries of the Scripture's teaching that have broad acceptance in the church such that they can be helpful guides to us in better understanding the Scriptures).
- Is there unconfessed sin in my life?
- Am I seeking the Lord in my ministry?
- Am I seeking the transformation of the heart or the modification of behavior?
- Am I regularly asking, 'What does the Bible say about this?'
- Would those closest to me have the same answers about me that I do?

It's not healthy to always be in a state of self-scrutiny, but we must, at regular intervals, examine ourselves and our ministry in our home, church, and community to see if we are doing things in the right manner according to God's power at work in us.

7. Delight in and pray for the restoration of others (vv. 13:9–10).

Finally, we again see Paul's heart on display. Paul did not delight in tearing down; he delighted in building up and saw confrontation as the means to his true goal: the upbuilding of the body of Christ. The restoration of the Corinthians was his chief goal and what he prayed for.

With us, it's the same; we cannot be those who delight in tearing down for the sake of tearing down. Our ministry aim is not to expose error and confront sin; it's the maturity of the body of Christ. We expose error and confront sin because we desire the best for those to whom we minister. We want to gain brothers and sisters who are walking in the truth. In other words, we love others as Christ has loved us. May Christ's love characterize our ministry such that we might delight to see those we love walking in the truth!

H. E. A. R. T. Journal

¹¹ Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another; 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. (2 Corinthians 13:11-14 ESV)

Do a H.E.A.R.T. Journal (See the box in the top right at the beginning of lesson) for Paul's closing remarks and discuss how his remarks sum up what he was saying in this epistle.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



MeadowBrook
CHURCH

2525 Rainbow Dr. Gadsden, AL, 35901 | (256) 442-3550 | mbchurch.com
