

## 2 CORINTHIANS



# For the Sake of the Gospel

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# Introduction

In 2 Corinthians, Paul opens his heart to the church in ancient Corinth, defending his apostleship not for his own reputation, but so that the gospel of Christ will not be hindered. He reminds believers that ministry is not about outward impressiveness, but about the power of God working through weak vessels. Paul's suffering, his integrity, and his sacrificial service all flow from one central reality: *the love of Christ controls us* (2 Cor. 5:14).

Paul declares that God, in Christ, has reconciled us to Himself and entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–19). Every hardship, every act of generosity, every defense of truth is for the sake of the gospel—that others might see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The letter crescendos with the reminder that our sufficiency is from God, our boast is in Christ alone, and our hope is the all-sufficient grace of the risen Lord who says: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness."*

For Paul, and us, the message is clear: We endure, speak, give, and live—only for the sake of the gospel, that Jesus may be magnified in all things.

# Helpful Details

**Author & Date:** Written by the Apostle Paul around AD 55–56 after his “painful visit” to Corinth and writing a “severe letter” (2 Cor. 2:1–4).

**Relationship with Christians in Corinth:** The Corinthian church had been influenced by “super-apostles” who challenged Paul’s authority, criticized his sufferings, and promoted a distorted gospel.

**Purpose:** Paul writes to defend his apostolic ministry, call the church back to loyalty to Christ, encourage generosity for the Jerusalem saints, and confront false teaching.

**Tone:** The most personal and emotional of Paul’s letters—both pastoral and apologetic, mixing deep affection with firm correction.

**Letters to Corinth:** Scholars believe there were at least four letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthians. By God’s design, only two of these were preserved as Scripture (1 and 2 Corinthians). Refer to the table on the following page.

## Letters to Corinth

Letter #	Description	Status
1	"Previous letter" (1 Cor. 5:9)	Unavailable
2	1 Corinthians	In the NT
3	"Severe letter" (2 Cor. 2:4)	Unavailable
4	2 Corinthians	In the NT

## Recommended Reading

[Free Online Commentary](#) by The Gospel Coalition

[Articles and Devotionals](#) by Ligonier Ministries

[Introductory Commentary](#) by Colin Kruse

[Advanced Commentary](#) by George Guthrie

# 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

## MAIN POINT

Our suffering is part of, not contrary to, God's will for our lives.

## GROUP INTRO

Do you thrive in chaos or calm — and how do you react when the opposite shows up?

## TEXT

1. Read verses 1-4. What does Paul mean when he describes God as “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,” and what does this tell us about our God?

*Leader help: Paul's showing that God is the source of true mercy and lasting comfort. “Comfort” here doesn't mean “life without trouble,” but “God's strengthening presence in the middle of suffering,” which is what we need. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us, we receive both mercy for our sins and comfort in suffering. This reminds us that the gospel isn't just about being forgiven—it's also about knowing the God who meets us in our weakness with His tender care (see also John 14:16-18).*

2. Read verses 5-7. Why does Paul say that *his* suffering leads to comfort and encouragement for the Corinthians?

*Leader help: When God comforts us in hardship, it's not just for us—it's so we can comfort others too. Just as Christ suffered and was raised, believers share in both His sufferings and His comfort. This means that pain is never wasted; God uses it to strengthen His people, sometimes in ways we are not even aware of. The church is called to bear each other's burdens, so the fellowship of Christ's sufferings becomes a lived reality (see Philippians 3:10).*

3. Read verses 8-11. Here, Paul provides a model for enduring suffering. In your own words, how would you say Paul got through severely trying times?

*Leader help: (1) He's genuine and honest; he doesn't sugarcoat or minimize his suffering, nor does he respond to it with the trivial strategies we sometimes utilize when life sucks (i.e., "At least you still have..."; "You'll be fine, time heals all wounds"; "God works all things together for good!").*

*(2) He logically connects some dots, realizing that his suffering is revealing something that's been true all along, but we often forget: we're not made to live by our strength, but by God's strength.*

*(3) He remembers the gospel: suffering, pain, and evil don't have the last word because God raises the dead, beginning with Jesus. He realizes that God will ultimately deliver His people from all suffering one day when Jesus returns.*

*(4) He asks for prayer instead of suffering alone.*



## APPLICATION

1. If you're willing, tell us about a time when you suffered and God gave you comfort. How did He do this, and what did you learn about Him?
2. Let's imagine you're talking with a Christian who's suffering. Using this passage, how would you comfort them? Now imagine you're talking to an unbeliever who's suffering. How would you use this passage to offer the hope and comfort of the gospel?
3. Listen to the following statements and decide which one more closely aligns with your initial response to suffering. Then discuss how this week's passage challenges both mindsets:

*"I believe that Jesus suffered so that we don't have to suffer anymore. I don't understand why my life is so hard and why bad things keep happening to me now that I'm following Jesus."*

*"I hate it when people tell me that God won't give me more than I can handle. I feel like I'm constantly at a place that I can't handle."*





## PRAYER

Pray for a deeper reliance on God in times of trial, and admit to the Lord how you've not trusted Him in suffering or difficulties.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Proverbs 3:5-6***

Ask God for the power and wisdom to comfort others with the comfort we have received.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Galatians 6:2***

Pray for God to give you a deep, steadfast hope in Him.

***Passage to guide your prayers: 1 Peter 1:3***

# 2 Corinthians 1:12-22

## MAIN POINT

Paul's change of plans isn't evidence of faithlessness; it spotlights that his life and word are anchored in the God whose promises are fulfilled in Christ.

## GROUP INTRO


What's one area of your life where you're trying to become more consistent?

## TEXT

1. Read verses 12-17. Why does Paul need to defend his integrity, and what does he point to as evidence of his integrity?

*Leader help: Paul defends himself against accusations of being unreliable (verse 17) because he had planned to visit the Corinthians, but decided not to in order not to cause them pain (see Chapter 2). Paul likely felt compelled to offer a defense (1) Because he didn't want the gospel he had proclaimed to the Corinthians to be undermined, and (2) He didn't want the church to distrust him so that he could continue caring for them.*

*Paul defends himself by pointing to the way he lived—sincerely, transparently, and dependent on God's grace, not worldly wisdom.*

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2. Read verses 17-22, where Paul points the Corinthians to God's faithfulness as revealed in the gospel. According to these verses, what role does each Person of the Trinity play in proving God's faithfulness?

*Leader help: The Father makes promises and establishes or anchors His people through faith in Jesus, a union that cannot be broken, thus making good on all the promises in Scripture.*

*The Son is the willing, prophesied vessel through which the Father fulfills His promises.*

*The Spirit seals all of God's people, protecting, indwelling, and keeping them, guaranteeing their place with God in the new creation.*

3. Reread verses 18-20. How does Paul summarize his, Silvanus's, and Timothy's ministry to the Corinthians? Does God still want the church to do this today?

*Leader help: Their ministry is summarized as proclaiming Jesus Christ, and this is still God's desire for His church. Christopher Wright summarizes this in his book, *The Mission of God's People*, like this: "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for His church in the world, as that God has a church for His mission in the world." That mission is to save sinners through the proclamation of the gospel.*

## APPLICATION

1. Paul's integrity was a key component of his gospel witness. What are some areas of your life where consistency, honesty, or simplicity could better reflect Christ to others?
2. What specific promises of God have been most challenging to hold to/believe in the last six months? Why?
3. In this passage, Paul states that all the Corinthian Christians have been anointed by God and sealed by the Spirit. How might our church be changed for the better if we refused to put certain people or talents on a pedestal?

## PRAYER

Ask God to help you live with transparency and godly sincerity so your life backs up your witness.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Proverbs 10:9***

Praise God that His promises never fail and ask Him to strengthen your trust in His Word.

***Passage to guide your prayers: 2 Peter 3:9***

Thank God for sealing you with the Spirit, and ask for renewed confidence that He will keep you until the end.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Philippians 1:6***

## 2 Corinthians 1:23 - 2:11

### MAIN POINT

Forgiveness benefits all parties; it's for the sinner, the offended party, the church, and the advancement of the Gospel.

### GROUP INTRO

What book, movie, or personal experience (aside from becoming a Christian) has shaped how you think about forgiveness?

### TEXT

1. Read 2 Corinthians 1:23 - 2:4. What does Paul mean when he says he didn't want to "lord it over" the Corinthians' faith but work with them for their joy?

*Leader help: Paul clarifies that Christian spiritual authority is not about control but service. He saw himself as a co-worker helping them stand firm in Christ, not as a master over their faith. This reflects the gospel-shaped model of leadership: Christ Himself came not to be served but to serve (see Mark 10:45 and Heb.12:2).*

2. Read verses 3-4 again. How does Paul's description of his earlier letter reveal his genuine love for this church?

*Leader help: Paul's words remind the Corinthians that correction was not cold or detached—it cost him deeply. His tears prove his love was genuine. This reveals the heart of gospel-centered correction: it seeks restoration, not humiliation, just as God's discipline flows from His fatherly love (see Heb. 12:5–6).*

3. Read verses 5-11. Paul wants the church to forgive someone who has sinned (likely the man from 1 Cor. 5:1-5). What reasons does he give for why they should do this?

*Leader help: The shame of his sin being made public is enough, it is not good for this person to be overwhelmed by sorrow, it is what God is calling for, it flows from the gospel, and it thwarts Satan's plans.*

4. Why would a lack of forgiveness play into the devil's schemes?

*Leader help: Withholding forgiveness gives Satan an opening to divide and destroy the community through bitterness, self-righteousness, and mercilessness. Forgiveness restores unity and displays the gospel. The cross of Christ disarms Satan (Col. 2:13–15), so the church must live out that victory by practicing reconciliation.*

## APPLICATION

1. Paul was willing to set aside his plans for the sake of the Corinthians. What's one way you can lay aside your own preferences this week to seek another believer's good?
2. Have you ever had to speak the hard truth to someone out of love? How can Paul's example help us approach such situations with both honesty and tenderness?
3. Paul warns that unforgiveness can give Satan an advantage. Who in your life do you need to forgive, and what truths from this passage can empower you to do so?

## PRAYER

Ask God to help you, like Paul, put others' spiritual joy ahead of your own comfort.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Philippians 2:4***

Ask God for both courage and compassion in relationships that require loving correction.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Ephesians 4:15***

Thank God for His forgiveness and ask Him to free you from bitterness so you can extend grace to others.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Ephesians 4:32***

# 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

## MAIN POINT

God declares who Christ is through the presence and testimony of His people.

## GROUP INTRO


Think of someone you know whose presence feels like a breath of fresh air—what do they do that makes them life-giving to you?

## TEXT

1. Read verses 12-13. Here, Paul shows that it's not only preaching that matters to faithful pastors. Why is Paul troubled?

*Leader help: Titus had been asked to carry Paul's previous letter to the Corinthians, but Paul hadn't heard from Titus yet, so he didn't know how the Corinthians had responded to his teachings. So, even though he's in Troas—a port city that could be a very fruitful place for preaching the gospel and seeing many people trust in Jesus, not just in the local area but across the ancient world—Paul's not at peace. For faithful pastors, preaching isn't the only priority—pastoral care and concern for the church's well-being are also essential.*



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2. In Paul's time, Roman generals would hold victory parades, during which they led captive soldiers and leaders through the streets, signifying their triumph. Knowing this, read verses 14-17. What's the significance of Paul writing that Christ "always leads us in triumphal procession"?

*Leader help: Paul's basically saying that Christians belong to Jesus—He has "captured" us from the grip of the devil and our slavery to sin, and He leads us, always, in a victorious procession. This also means that suffering, defeat, sin, and setbacks don't make us failures; the already-accomplished victory of our Lord defines us, and we are His prized possession, tasked with spreading the glory of His victory through our proclamation of the gospel.*

3. Re-read verses 14-17. Here, Paul may be drawing on imagery from the Old Testament, where God says that sacrifices were a "pleasing aroma" to Him, aka, sacrifices signified God's acceptance. What, then, does Paul mean when he says that believers themselves are the "aroma of Christ," and how does this connect to the Bible's big story?

*Leader help: Our lives, shaped by union with Christ, are evidence of His total victory, spreading the knowledge of His victory everywhere. To the elect, this aroma is sweet, as it testifies to God's redeeming work; to those who reject Jesus, it is the smell of death, reminding them of God's holiness and judgment.*



## APPLICATION

1. Are you someone who places more emphasis on getting the gospel right and sharing it, or on caring for people's emotions and practical needs? Let's discuss practical ways we can help one another be more balanced—caring about proclaiming the gospel faithfully while caring for one another.
2. Paul describes us as the aroma of Christ "to God." How might remembering that your life is first offered to God—not just to people—reshape the way you pursue holiness and evangelism?
3. Paul viewed his whole life as being a part of "Christ's triumphal procession." How would your outlook on sin, suffering, setbacks, or disappointments change if you saw it all as part of Christ's victory march rather than personal defeat?



## PRAYER

Ask God for discernment in knowing when to move forward in ministry and when to pause for care.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Colossians 3:15***

Praise God that you are carried in Christ's victory, and ask for faith to live in light of His triumph.

***Passage to guide your prayers: 1 Corinthians 15:57***

Ask God to make your life the aroma of Christ, drawing others to Him through your words and actions.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Colossians 4:3***

## 2 Corinthians 3

### MAIN POINT

Trying harder doesn't transform us, but beholding God's glory in the gospel does, and our transformation demonstrates God's goodness to a perishing world.

### GROUP INTRO

How do you know when you're doing something in your own strength vs. by the Spirit's power? Are there any signs of self-reliance that you've been able to spot?

### TEXT

1. Read verses 1-6. What is Paul contrasting when he references "letter" and the "Spirit" in verse 6?

*Leader help: He contrasts the old covenant, written on stone tablets (see Exodus 20 and 34), with the new covenant, "written" on human hearts by the Spirit (i.e., the Spirit transforms us internally so that we want to obey God and are empowered to obey Him). The "letter" refers to the Mosaic law that, while good and holy, exposes sin and condemns sinners because we're unable to obey it perfectly. The "Spirit," by contrast, brings life through the work of Christ, applying His finished, perfect work of redemption to us and empowering us to live as new creations.*

2. Read verses 7-11. Why does Paul call the old covenant a “ministry of condemnation” and the new covenant a “ministry of righteousness”?


*Leader help: The old covenant brought condemnation because it revealed God’s holiness, but provided power for obedience, no heart transformation, and no final sacrifice to remove the power of sin in us. The old covenant was glorious in its time, but it was a fading glory meant to point us forward to Christ, who fulfilled the Law in its entirety. The new covenant, centered in Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice, brings justification and righteousness that lasts forever. See also Hebrews 10:10, 14.*

3. Read verses 12-18. How exactly do Christians today, who cannot visibly see God, behold the glory of the Lord?

*Leader help: We “see” or “behold” God’s glory by faith, attentively, prayerfully, and with child-like trust, hearing and receiving the message of the gospel and acting on the fact that God really does love us, not because we deserve it, but because He freely and sovereignly chose us. In Christ, the “veil” of unbelief is removed, and we look forward to the day when our faith will be sight and we’ll visibly see Jesus.*

## **APPLICATION**

1. In what ways are you tempted to live as though God’s acceptance of you still depends on keeping rules, rather than resting in Christ’s finished work?

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2. God makes it clear in Exodus 33:19 and 34:4-7 that His “goodness” is His glory. In other words, when God reveals His glory, He’s showing His love, grace, mercy, patience, and justice. What are some practical ways to help one another behold this glory daily?
  3. Paul says that the old covenant “kills” because it brings condemnation without transforming grace. How can we, in this Community Group, keep the balance between resting in Jesus’s finished redemption and obeying Christ’s commands, such as “go and make disciples”?

## PRAYER

Praise God for revealing His glory to you.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Exodus 33:19***

Worship God for aspects of His glory that have really impacted you: steadfast love, patience, grace, justice, etc.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Psalm 86:4-5***

Confess the self-reliance or trust in your own obedience that you’ve been living out.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Romans 3:20***

# 2 Corinthians 4

## MAIN POINT

All of our hardships are not wasted; they display the power of Christ and pave the way for eternal glory.

## GROUP INTRO


Tell us about a time when you've seen God redeem a period of your life that felt like it would only end in damage or harm.

## TEXT

1. Read verses 1 and 16-18. Paul bookends this chapter with the phrase "we do not lose heart." What are some ways Paul would've been tempted to lose heart, and how was he able to endure?

*Leader help: Paul experienced internal struggles, including regret over his past, a longing to escape suffering (see 2 Cor. 12:7-8), worry about those he led, and the pain of betrayal and loneliness. He also experienced satanic attacks, persecution, physical pain, terrifying accidents (in the form of shipwrecks), relational losses, and ongoing conflicts with others in the church. But he endured because his ministry was empowered by God, not sustained by himself. The power to do this was something he received, not achieved, as a gift from God, given through the Spirit, whom he had by trusting in Jesus. The same power is available to all of us.*



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2. Read verses 1-6. Who is Paul referencing when he mentions “the god of this world,” and what does he mean that this being has “blinded the minds of the unbelievers”?

*Leader help: Satan, called here “the god of this world,” works to prevent people from seeing “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God,” mainly by encouraging a deeper entrenchment in sin through temptation and suffering. Spiritual blindness isn’t just intellectual unbelief; it’s a desire to rebel against God that’s rooted in our sinful nature. Yet Paul emphasizes that the gospel itself is light, revealing Christ’s glory. Just as God spoke light into darkness at creation (v. 6), He must sovereignly shine this light into our sinful hearts to reconcile us to Himself and save us from our sin.*

3. Read verses 7-15. Here, if we’re willing to listen, Paul reorients our view of weakness and suffering. What are some of the good things that God brings through our weakness and suffering?

*Leader help: Through our fragile, broken bodies (the jars of clay), God holds out His treasure (the gospel) and displays His power, prompting people to abandon the delusions of self-reliance, salvation by works, and atheism and instead seek Him and His power. Our suffering also prepares us for eternal glory by emptying us of our destructive self-focus and desire to prove our worth. God is continually showing us that it’s not about us, our power, our obedience, and our goodness, but about His love for us while we were still sinners, and His commitment to our eternal good.*





## APPLICATION

1. The world around us believes that suffering has no purpose and should therefore be avoided at all costs. How can looking to your future as a Christian help you view suffering differently?
2. How can we help our church be a place where people don't feel compelled to hide, deny, or diminish their weaknesses and suffering? What would be some beautiful results of us ridding our church of shaming, legalism, and self-righteousness?
3. Effective evangelism isn't about having all of the answers (unbelievers are spiritually blinded, not stupid), but about presenting the gospel. Let's discuss how to share the simple good news of Jesus. How do we do this? What must we say?

## PRAYER

Ask God to breathe new hope into those suffering.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Romans 8:18***

Pray that God would free unbelievers from their spiritual blindness.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Acts 26:18***

Ask God to give you strength to endure.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Isaiah 40:30-31***

## 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

### MAIN POINT

The point of life is not to fear death, minimize suffering, or please people, but to please Jesus and confidently honor Him in all things.

### GROUP INTRO

Describe a time when you served in a role that felt hidden or thankless, but ended up positively shaping your character.

### TEXT

1. In this section, Paul compares life in our broken bodies to a “tent” and eternal life with Christ to a “building from God,” “a house not made with hands,” and “our heavenly dwelling.” With this in mind, read verses 1-5, then answer this question: How does Paul want these Christians to view suffering and death?

*Leader help: Because Christians have the Holy Spirit within them (who is kind of like God's down payment on our future eternity with Him), and because we know Jesus has resurrected from the dead and secured our spot in a “heavenly dwelling,” Christians don't need to fear the future or death. These truths also shape our view of life here and now: our suffering and burdens are real; therefore, there's a place for our “groaning,” as we have a deep, internal desire to be with God and finally be free from sin.*

2. Read verses 6-8. The phrase “of good courage” means “boldly confident.” What’s the source of Paul’s confidence? Is this an example of spiritual arrogance or something else entirely?

*Leader help: Paul and his co-authors are confident in God because of what He has accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. His confidence has nothing to do with himself and his abilities—as he makes very clear throughout 2 Corinthians—but in God and His promises, which He has guaranteed through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.*

3. Read verses 9-10. At first, this sounds as if Christians “get in” God’s kingdom through grace, but are “kept in” by their personal obedience. However, immediately after this, Paul makes it clear that Christians' sins are not counted against them (verses 18-21). How, then, does Paul want the reality of future judgment to impact these Christians?

*Leader help: Rather than causing them doubt or fear of the future, Paul is reminding the Corinthians that how they live out their faith in this world really does matter. Their eternal life with Christ is not in question, nor is the salvation God has gifted to them fragile or dependent in any way upon their obedience. Yet a life anchored in the gospel and secure in God’s love will manifest in a desire to please Jesus, and faith-filled actions will follow that desire.*

## APPLICATION

1. Take a moment to think about how you try to make your life secure, easy, and comfortable<sup>1</sup>. Are you living as if this world is a camping spot (it's temporary, and you're good with living beneath your means), or are you living as if this world is your home (you've got to have all you want, and avoiding suffering for Christ)? How has this impacted your discipleship?
2. There are two future promises of the Christian faith, Resurrection and Return:
  - A. Resurrection - Being made alive again in a body that never grows old or gets sick; a return to the physical and spiritual eternal life that we glimpsed in Genesis 1-2.
  - B. Return - Jesus' return to earth to reign over it as the second Adam.

Do you currently look forward to these two things? Why or why not?

3. How do we live in the rest Christ offers<sup>2</sup> while also aiming to please Him?

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<sup>1</sup> This could include spending more than you have on things you don't need, constantly seeking distractions/entertainment/escape, obsessing over health or appearance, addictive behaviors tied to porn, alcohol, drugs, sex, or eating, excessive traveling or seeking new experiences, and more.

<sup>2</sup> See Matt. 11:28-30 and John 6:37.



## PRAYER

Praise Jesus for the guarantee of a future with Him in a pain-free resurrected body.

***Passage to guide your prayers: 1 Corinthians 15:20-21***

Confess any selfishness, greed, sinful fear, or faithlessness that's led you to put comfort and ease above pleasing Christ.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Luke 16:13***

Ask God to give you a renewed passion for Him and His mission to save sinners, motivated by the gospel, and anchored in resurrection hope.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Colossians 3:23-24***

# 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

## MAIN POINT

The love of Christ controls Christians, and we are ambassadors of His reconciliation.

## GROUP INTRO

What identity have you carried that God is replacing with His love for you?

## TEXT

1. Remember that 2 Corinthians was written partly as a response to false apostles who questioned Paul's authority and validity, thus undermining the gospel he taught. Now, read verses 11-15. How do "the fear of the Lord" and "the love of Christ" help Paul keep evangelizing and loving in the face of false accusations?

*Leader help: Paul isn't allowing others to dictate what he does or doesn't do; instead, he's motivated by his awe of God and the love that Christ has for him. Instead of trying to please people, he's focused on making Jesus known. As one theologian puts it: "The love of Christ, as expressed in the gospel, has taken hold of Paul, puts limits on his actions, and moves him in specific directions, constraining his course of actions in the world [...] he is a man under orders and cannot cavalierly set his own agendas in life and mission."<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> George H. Guthrie, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 2 Corinthians, pg. 304.

2. Read verses 14-15. If Christ “died for all,” why don’t all people receive eternal life?

*Leader help: Theologian Fred Zaspel writes the following: “Many have assumed that the ‘all’ in this statement indicates universal atonement. But notice the statement in full:*

*Christ died for ‘all.’*

*This same ‘all’ died with Christ in His death.*

*As a consequence, this same ‘all’ live in Christ and for Christ.”<sup>4</sup>*

*In other words, the “all” in these verses means “all those who have trusted in Jesus and live for Him instead of themselves,” which is what it means to repent and believe the gospel.*


3. Read verses 16-17. What does it mean to “regard someone according to the flesh,” and why is this an act that isn’t in line with the gospel?

*Leader help: Before Paul met Jesus, he persecuted Christians because he considered Jesus a fraud (see Acts 9:1-5). This was a sinful, worldly way of evaluating Jesus and His disciples. This is what Paul means here. Whenever we evaluate other Christians the way the sinful, unbelieving world would evaluate them, we’re not honoring the fact that they’ve been made new by Jesus, and that they’re His beloved.*

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<sup>4</sup> Fred Zaspel, “For Whom Did Christ Die?” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/for-whom-did-christ-die/?queryID=77a998a43ae62c0880daf2ca548afdeb>



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4. In this passage, an ambassador is someone who “represents another in an official capacity [...] The all-powerful God sends His ambassadors, seeking reconciliation with those whom He has created but who lack a relationship with Him.”<sup>5</sup> Read verses 16-21. What’s the message that Christian ambassadors bring to those around them?

*Leader help: Our message is one of reconciliation: we exhort people to admit their sinfulness and turn to the One whom they have rejected in their sin, God. In turning to God through faith in Jesus, they can be reconciled to the God whom they’ve sinned against, because Jesus was treated as if He were a sinner so that, through faith in Him, sinners could be declared righteous in God’s sight.*


## APPLICATION

1. If you’re a Christian, you’re one of Christ’s ambassadors. What currently prevents you from acting as His ambassador and giving His message to those around you?
2. In the church, and with other believers, how are you tempted to evaluate or assess others “according to the flesh”? How does this harm the local church?

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<sup>5</sup> Guthrie, pg. 311.



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3. Our attempts to be right with God through our own efforts, obedience, right-thinking, or religious commitment undermine the sacrifice of Jesus. To help one another be more deeply anchored in the gospel, take turns reading the following passages: Romans 3:21-25; Romans 5:6-11; Galatians 1:3-5; Galatians 2:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11.

## PRAYER

Ask God for a reverent fear of Him that leads to bold proclamation of His message.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Acts 4:29-31***

Thank Jesus for His transforming love.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Ezekiel 36:26-27***

Confess the specific ways you've lived for yourself instead of for God and others.

***Passage to guide your prayers: James 4:17***

## 2 Corinthians 6:1 - 7:1

### MAIN POINT

God's ministry of reconciliation is carried out by Christians who, in the presence and power of God, must say "yes" to holiness and "no" to idolatry and sin, through all the ups and downs of life.

### GROUP INTRO

Are you a 'try everything on the menu' person or a 'same order every time' kind of person? Why?


### TEXT

1. Read 2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2. What does "receiving the grace of God in vain" look like in someone's life, and how were the Corinthians tempted to do this?

*Leader help: It looks like professing faith without the transformation that comes with genuine faith (James 2:17)<sup>6</sup>. If we reject the gospel at any point, we've basically "received the grace of God in vain." Paul reminds these Christians that salvation is both urgent and readily available ("now is the favorable time"). They were tempted to reject Paul and the gospel he taught them, which meant they were tempted to abandon the true gospel. Paul calls them to instead return to Jesus and reject the false apostles.*

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<sup>6</sup> It's essential to recognize that each person's transformation can appear vastly different, depending on their family of origin, physiological/biological realities, temperament, and the duration of their Christian journey, among other factors. But a true disciple will be making strides toward holiness over time.

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2. Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-13. Why does Paul list his sufferings, endurance, and character, and what does this teach us about real gospel-centered ministry?


*Leader help: Paul is defending his ministry by showing that it's marked not by worldly power, but by holiness, the Holy Spirit, and total dependence on God's power. The paradoxes of verses 8-10 reveal the "cross-shaped" reality of gospel-centered ministry, which isn't built upon personality, comfort, and self-serving platforms, but upon the same kinds of sacrificial acts and generosity demonstrated by Jesus Himself.*

3. Read 2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1. Here, Paul commands the Corinthians not to commit themselves in relationships or partnerships with structures of society, groups, or individuals that are dedicated to anti-Christian ethics or religious beliefs.<sup>7</sup> What is Paul's reason for commanding them to "not be unequally yoked with unbelievers"?

*Leader help is on the next page.*

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<sup>7</sup> Examples of these relationships or partnerships include: a Christian marrying or pursuing a dating relationship with an unbeliever or someone of a different faith, a Christian volunteering for or partnering with organizations like Planned Parenthood, Christians working at places like strip clubs or having a business partnership with someone whose focus is profit at any cost, Christians aligning themselves entirely with political movements or personalities instead of Jesus alone, or participation in interfaith services or prayer gatherings where ideas such as "all paths lead to God" are promoted.



Leader help: Their fundamental identity, both as individuals and as a church, is “the temple of the living God.” The fact that they are the very “sanctuary” where God has chosen to dwell means that they are heading in a very distinct, Christ-centered direction, accompanied by all of Scripture’s calls to holiness. The word translated as “unequally yoked” pictures two different kinds of animals going in two different directions; our commitment to Christ means our direction in life, our values, and what we hold as most dear and meaningful simply will not mix well with someone who is opposed to Jesus in their ethics or beliefs.

Note 1: Paul is not saying we should have no contact or interaction with unbelievers, or that we should abandon them in favor of a monastic life. He says the complete opposite of this in his previous letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

Note 2: “Belial” is simply another name for the devil.

#### 4. Looking again at the same verses, how has God fulfilled the promises mentioned in verses 16-18?

Leader help: Through Jesus, God has dwelt among us and is now, through the Holy Spirit, gathering His people across history and throughout the world, adopting sinners by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. When God does this for someone, they are permanently reconciled to Him, with no one being able to snatch them from Him. We are, fundamentally, the “place” where God has freely chosen to dwell. Therefore, as we recognize God’s unfathomable grace and stand in awe of Him, God calls us to abandon the defiling thoughts, actions, words, and beliefs that used to mark our lives before we met Him.

## APPLICATION

1. In this passage, Paul argues that *now* is the right time to share the gospel with others. When we say we are looking for “the right time” to talk to people about Jesus, what are we looking for? Which of these conditions that we place around sharing the gospel aren’t necessary?
2. We all have areas of life where we’re either currently “unequally yoked with unbelievers” or are very tempted to do so. What drives your desire to partner with or pursue opportunities, romantic relationships, or organizations that are anchored in unbelief? How might more time with God, His people, and His Word help you?

*Leader help: See footnote seven on Page 36 for examples of the relevant types of relationships or partnerships. Having strong relationships with God through prayer and time in His Word, as well as with His people, will help “yoke” us in healthy, beautiful ways.*

3. Psalm 130:3-4 gives us a sense of the “fear” Paul mentions in 7:1. Tell us about a time when God’s love, mercy, forgiveness, or blessing toward you drove you to a greater awe of Him.



## PRAYER

Admit to God the ways you've compromised holiness in the last week. Ask Him to forgive you and reorient your desires.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Hebrews 12:28-29***

Ask God to root you more deeply in His love and grace, so that you may live daily as His temple.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Colossians 3:12-13***

Praise God for freely making you one of His children and choosing to welcome you as you are.

***Passage to guide your prayers: 1 John 3:1***