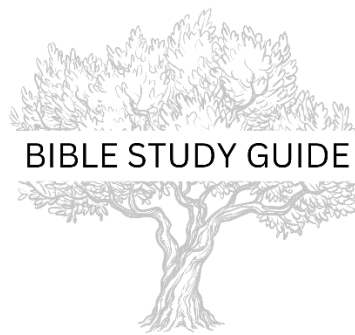




BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

A Study of 2 Corinthians
“Jesus is Worth It”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Weekly Small Group Checklist

Tips for Leading a Small Group

Small Group Icebreakers

Bible Study Lessons

1. Acts 2:42-27, "Christian Community" – Palo Duro Lounge
2. 2 Corinthians 1:1-14, "Comfort" – Rosebud Theater
3. 2 Corinthians 2:1-11, "Forgiveness"
4. 2 Corinthians 3:7-18, "New Covenant"
5. 2 Corinthians 4:1-18, "Our Humility, Christ's Glory"
6. 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, "Our Eternal Home"
7. 2 Corinthians 5:10-21, "The Main Thing"
8. 2 Corinthians 6:1-18, "Relationships"
9. 2 Corinthians 7:8-16, "Repentance & Reconciliation"
10. 2 Corinthians 8:1-12, 9:6-12, "Generosity"
11. 2 Corinthians 10:1-11, 11:1-6,13-15, "Authority"
12. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, "Suffering & Grace"

Weekly Small Group Checklist

Be consistent.

- Consistency is the key to success. Don't ever miss a week.
- Pray, seek God, and be in the Scripture consistently, not just when you prepare for small group.

Read and understand the scripture passage before your group meets.

- Use the commentary in the appendix if needed.

Recruit members to your group.

- Reach out and invite friends from high school, classes, work, etc.
- As you meet people on campus, take the initiative to invite them to your group and get their contact info.
- When BSM shares the contact info of an interested person with you, contact them IMMEDIATELY and invite them to your group.

Follow-up with every group member personally.

- Have a group-me (or similar) throughout the week to share updates & prayer requests.
- Send a personal text the day of small group to remind / encourage / invite.

Set up Gospel Appointments with every person who attends within 1-2 weeks.

- Get to know them; build a relationship.
- Share your story. Hear their story. Tell God's story.
- Guys contact guys; girls contact girls.

Touch base with your co-leader.

- Plan simple and fun icebreakers.
- Discuss group members.
- Plan an occasional social get together.

Icebreakers - Icebreakers help set a friendly and fun tone.

- Allow max time for small groups. Get to your meeting location and get started ASAP.
- Keep icebreakers & opening at TEN MINUTES MAX.
 - *"Do the math" - If you have 25 people in your group...*
- Rotate leaders to lead icebreakers and have them on a schedule.
- Create a list of icebreakers at the beginning of the semester to refer back to.
- Lots of ideas:
<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/help-others-grow/leading-small-groups/small-group-icebreakers.html>

Tips for Leading a Small Group

1. Keep in touch with your people: text, discord, tweet, fax, letters, lunch, dinner, parties.... Assign your co-leaders people to contact each week to send out reminders about Vertical and other events. If members miss a week, shoot them a text or give them a phone call letting them know they were missed.
2. Spend time in prayer with the leaders in your small group. Pray for students in your small group, yourself, humility, wisdom, and leadership.
3. Stay on topic. Focus on the Bible passage. Groups can quickly get off on tangents unless called back to their mission. If someone seems to sidetrack the group, you might simply say, "Yeah, that's a good thought. Let's get back to our verses now." Or, with a laugh, "We may be getting off track," then move on.
4. Be an active listener. Listen with loving concern to what others are saying. Make eye contact. Listen actively with nods and affirmations. Summarize what they say, so they know that they are being heard. Ask follow-up questions based on what people share. A good leader will not talk more than 20%-30% of the time.
5. Make it welcoming, relaxed, light hearted, and fun. People need to feel like they MATTER. Learn the names of everyone in the group. Greet them as they arrive, and immediately make them feel comfortable. Use icebreakers to get group members acquainted.
6. Encourage participation, not domination. If someone seems to dominate by talking too much, let the person finish then say, "That's good. What does someone else think about it?" Say, "That's great, what about someone who hasn't spoken up yet?" Even say, "What do you think, Mike?"
7. Be aware of Not-Yet-Christians in the group. Don't assume everyone is a Christian.
8. Split up into smaller groups on weeks when your group has more than 7-8 people.
9. Echo what's been said. Summarize key points. "That's a great point! Notice that ____ just said ____."
10. Frame questions using "why" and "how". Use open-ended, not yes-no questions.
11. Embrace the silence: Let people think. After asking a question, if no one responds in 10-15 seconds, you can ask, "Did everyone understand the question?" Then, rephrase the question. Avoid jumping in with an answer to "save" the group.
12. Make it applicable to the groups setting. Ask the group for take-aways from the discussion. Encourage accountability.
13. Be open about your own struggles. People listen to people they trust.
14. Encourage ownership. "This isn't MY group; it's OUR group." Let the group become somewhere they *belong*, not just a place they *go*. Give everyone a job. Let them minister to each other and help you brainstorm new ideas.
15. Preparation. Preparation. Preparation!!! Anticipate potential questions in the passage. If there is something that you do not understand, research it and then ask someone you trust to help you understand. Come to the group early, and be prepared to facilitate discussion by looking over the lesson in advance. Start on time so you can end on time.

Small Group Icebreakers

<https://www.cru.org/train-and-grow/help-others-grow/leading-small-groups/small-group-icebreakers.html>

Icebreakers encourage people to get to know each other. It is important that icebreakers be non-threatening. What is non-threatening to some group members could terrify others. Here are some suggested icebreakers. The first few are easiest and most helpful for a beginning group. Many of the later ideas are useful for building relationships in groups that have been together for a while.

1. Best/Worst

Have each person share their best and worst moments from the previous week. Try to steer the group away from school items. This icebreaker is an easy one to use at first and gives you good feedback concerning their life at the moment. Some veteran groups do this several times a year... the answers become more honest as you go.

2. Most Unique

Go around the room and have each person share something that makes them different from anyone in the group, like, "I've never left the state I was born in" or "I am one of 10 kids."

3. Two Truths and a Lie

Have each person make three statements about themselves: two true statements and one lie. For example, "I've never broken a bone. I have 5 sisters. I was born in Yugoslavia." The group tries to guess which statement is the lie.

4. Personal Scavenger Hunt

Take 5 minutes and find the following items in your wallet or purse: Something that . . .

- You've had a long time.
- You're proud of.
- Reveals a lot about you.
- Reminds you of a fun time.
- Concerns or worries you.

Have each person share the first item. Go around again on the second item, and again until you have gone through each one. Don't feel like you have to use the whole list because it will take too long.

5. Get To Know You Questions

- What do you do for fun?
- What would be your ideal vacation?
- What is the most memorable activity you did with your family as a child?
- What quality do you appreciate most in a friend?
- What is one characteristic you received from your parents that you want to keep, and one you wish you could change?
- What is a good thing happening in your life right now?
- What makes it good?
- If you knew you couldn't fail and money was no object, what would you like to do in the next 5 years?
- What would you like said at your funeral?
- When, if ever, did God become more than a word to you, and how did it happen?

6. Did You Know?

This is great for a group that doesn't know each other well. Find interesting facts about individual group members before the group meets. Try to discover information that sets each person apart from the others, such as "I have a tugboat named after me" or, "I once wrecked the same quarter panel of my car four times" or, "I have a twin."

Then make a sheet with one fact from each person and a blank beside this fact. Give everyone in the group a sheet and 5-7 minutes to find who goes in each blank. When they find the right person they must also learn one other fact about that person. At the end, introduce everyone in the group in the order on the list.

7. Chart Your Life

Thinking back as far as you can, draw a line graph to represent your life. Consider the high points, the low points, moments of inspiration, moments of despair, leveling off times, and where you are now. The line will probably be a mixture of straight, slanted, jagged and curved lines. After you've drawn it, share what it means to you with the group.

8. M&M's Game

Pass a bag of M&M's around and tell everyone to take a few. Then, before they eat them ask them to share something for every M&M. For example, something about their family for every red one, something about their plans for the future for every green one, etc.

9. Most Deprived

Buy a large bag of M&M's and give each person the same amount (try 10 M&M's). Start by stating something you've never done that you think everyone else has done (thus the name "Most Deprived"). For example, you might say, "I've never had a birthday party," or some other true statement about yourself that you think everyone else has surely done. Then, everyone who has had a birthday party pays you an M&M. You pay everyone who has not had a party. Keep playing until everyone has a turn or until someone runs out of M&M's. Obviously the idea is to come up with the most M&M's and be most deprived (this activity takes longer).

10. You Write the Question

Give each person a 3x5 card. You pick the topic and let them write the questions. For example, you choose "friendship" as a topic, and they each write out a question for anyone in the group to answer about friendship. For example, "What do you value most in a friend?" or, "Who was your best friend growing up and why?" Then pile all the cards face down in the middle of the group and let people draw. Topic ideas: jobs, life goals, funny stories, hobbies, family, fears, dating issues, significant relationships, relationship with God, etc.

11. My Life in Pictures

Bring a newspaper or magazine. have each person tear out a picture, article or anything they think tells something about themselves. If there's enough time they can make a collage that tells more about themselves.

12. House on Fire

Ask, "Your house is on fire, and everyone is safe. You have 30 seconds to run through the house and collect three or four articles you want to save. What would you grab? Why?" After everyone has done this, the group can discuss what they learned about the things they value.

13. Make Believe

If you could go anywhere in the world now, where would you go and why? If you could talk to anyone in the world, who would it be? Why? If you could talk to any person who has died, who would you talk to and why? If you could wish one thing to come true about your upcoming summer, what would it be?

14. Deserted Island

Ask, "You've been exiled to a deserted island for a year. You are told you may take three things you want, apart from the essentials. What would you take and why?"

15. Heroes

Ask each member to name three people, past or present, they admire. Why? Or, ask them if they could interview anyone in history, who would that be and why? What one or two questions would you want to ask?

Acts 2:42-47

“Christian Community”

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

LAUNCH

Everyone: Share your name, major, and why you decided to come to Bible study tonight.

Who is someone who has been a big influence in your life in the last year? Why?

EXPLORE – Read and discuss Acts 2:42-47

1. *“Devoted to the apostles’ teaching...”* v 42 - Why do you think it’s important to study the Bible regularly? What are different ways you can grow in your understanding of the Bible?
2. *“Devoted to fellowship and breaking of bread...”* v 42 - Are you more likely to treat church as something you *attend* or as a family you are *part* of? Why?
3. *“Devoted to prayer...”* v 42 - It’s been said that “Prayer is our most important spiritual work.” What does that mean to you?
4. *“Filled with awe...”* v 43 - When you attend church or Bible study, are you more likely to just go through the motions or are you “filled with awe”? Why?
5. *“Together... giving to anyone ...”* v 44-45 - Are you more of a giver, a spender, or a saver? How would you like to be more generous toward others this week?
6. *“Met together and ate together daily...”* v 46 - Should your closest friends also be serious followers of Christ? Why or why not?
7. *“Praising God; Favored by people...”* v 47 – What is the reputation of Christians at our campus? What can we do to improve it?
8. *“God added daily to their number...”* v 47 - Why is it so easy for a group to focus inward rather than outward? What can we do to strike the right balance?
9. *“Those being saved.”* v 47 - What would you like to get out of this group this semester?

SMALL GROUP TIPS

- Divide into groups of 4-6 people.
- Everyone participates, no one dominates.
- Focus on what the BIBLE says, not just opinions.
- Don't be satisfied with surface level discussion; dig as deep as possible!
- Lively discussion is encouraged! It's great to disagree, but don't criticize.
- Share freely and keep your answers concise.
- Focus on applying the Bible to your everyday life.

APPLICATION

What is one personal, practical application from this week’s lesson? Make a commitment:

“This week, I will _____.”

TO CLOSE: Split into same gender groups of 2-3 people. Share a personal prayer request, and pray for one another. You can choose one person to pray, or everyone can offer prayer.

2 Corinthians 1:1-14

“Comfort”

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. ⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. ⁶ If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. ⁷ And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

⁸ We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, ¹¹ as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

¹² Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace. ¹³ For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, ¹⁴ as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁵ Because I was confident of this, I wanted to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. ¹⁶ I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. ¹⁷ Was I fickle when I intended to do this? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say both “Yes, yes” and “No, no”?

¹⁸ But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him it has always been “Yes.” ²⁰ For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. ²¹ Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, ²² set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

²³ I call God as my witness—and I stake my life on it—that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. ²⁴ Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.

LAUNCH

What is your favorite “comfort food”? When are you most likely to crave it?

CONTEXT

Paul visited Corinth, a major city located in modern Turkey, on his second missionary journey and founded the church there (Acts 18). Afterward he wrote 1 Corinthians to deal with divisions in the church. Soon after that, he made a “painful” (2:1) visit to the church. Paul planned a third visit, but instead wrote 2 Corinthians. Finally, Acts 20:2 records that Paul made one final visit to the church after writing 2 Corinthians.

SMALL GROUP TIPS

- Divide into groups of 4-6 people.
- Everyone participates, no one dominates.
- Focus on what the BIBLE says, not just opinions.
- Don't be satisfied with surface level discussion; dig as deep as possible!
- Lively discussion is encouraged! It's great to disagree, but don't criticize.
- Share freely and keep your answers concise.
- Focus on applying the Bible to your everyday life.

EXPLORE

1. Look at verses 3-7. Paul often begins his letters with a prayer in which he lays out the main theme of the letter. *Comfort* is mentioned multiple times in these five verses. What is the relationship between God's ability to comfort us and our ability to comfort others?
2. When have you seen someone go through hardship and then later be able to comfort someone going through the same thing?
3. Paul gives us a window into the extent of his recent suffering. How does he ask the church to respond?
4. According to Paul, what are some of the positive things that can result when we look to God during life's trials?
5. Think back over your biggest trial. What got you through?
6. What are the primary ways that God brings comfort to his hurting children?
7. Many people in the midst of difficulty become negative and start complaining. Not Paul. How do you think he maintained his hopeful outlook?
8. How can a person change his or her attitude in the midst of suffering and use it to grow in faith?
9. What aspects of this chapter speak to you as you think about your own areas of suffering?

APPLICATION

What is one personal, practical application from this week's lesson? Make a commitment:

“This week, I will _____.”

TO CLOSE: Split into same gender groups of 2-3 people. Share a personal prayer request, and pray for one another. You can choose one person to pray, or everyone can offer prayer.

2 Corinthians 2:1-11

“Forgiveness”

¹ So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. ² For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? ³ I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. ⁴ For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

⁵ If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. ⁶ The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. ⁷ Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. ⁹ Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. ¹⁰ Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, ¹¹ in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

Matthew 18:15-17

¹⁵ “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

Ephesians 4:25-27

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold.

LAUNCH

When you were a small child and got in trouble, what type of punishments did you least want to receive? What punishments didn’t really persuade you at all?

CONTEXT

In verses 5-11, a member of the Corinthian church had been caught up in serious sin, and the church was forced to remove him. We’re not told what the issue is; he could be the man in serious sexual sin (1 Cor 5) or someone influenced by false teachers described later in 2 Corinthians. Either way the church was forced to kick him out, and now that he has repented, Paul tells them to receive him back in.

EXPLORE

1. What was Paul’s motivation for writing a painful letter to the church rather than visiting them? (v1-4)
Put yourself in the church’s shoes. Why might this cause them to distrust Paul?
2. Why is it so difficult to hear criticism of yourself? How do you usually respond when you are unfairly accused or your character is questioned?
3. Why do you think Paul had such a deep, almost “stubborn” love and relentless concern for a church that caused him so much grief?
4. In verses 5-8, Paul discusses the man caught in sin who was removed from the church. Now that he has repented, how does Paul want the church to behave toward this man?
5. What is the purpose of church discipline? Read Jesus’s teaching on in Matthew 18:15-17.
6. Have you ever seen a church use church discipline? Was it done well or poorly? What is your personal role in church discipline?
7. How would you respond to someone who says, “I reject Christianity because all Christians are hypocrites.”?
8. Why are both a willingness to deal with sin and a willingness to forgive necessary? What is the right balance?
9. Read verses 10-11 and also Ephesians 4:25-27. Why do you think that un-forgiveness is one of Satan’s schemes?
10. Do you have someone you need to forgive or someone who you may need to confront? (*Share, but don’t be specific.*)

APPLICATION

What is one personal, practical application from this week’s lesson? Make a commitment:

“This week, I will _____.”

SMALL GROUP TIPS

- Divide into groups of 4-6 people.
- Everyone participates, no one dominates.
- Focus on what the BIBLE says, not just opinions.
- Don't be satisfied with surface level discussion; dig as deep as possible!
- Lively discussion is encouraged! It's great to disagree, but don't criticize.
- Share freely and keep your answers concise.
- Focus on applying the Bible to your everyday life.

TO CLOSE: Split into same gender groups of 2-3 people. Share a personal prayer request, and pray for one another. You can choose one person to pray, or everyone can offer prayer.

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

“New Covenant”

⁷ Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, ⁸ will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? ⁹ If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! ¹⁰ For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. ¹¹ And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

¹² Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴ But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

LAUNCH

What is one way that your best friend has rubbed off on you or influenced you?

CONTEXT

Paul is referencing the Old Testament story in Exodus 34 where God gave Moses the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai. When Moses came down the mountain, his face was radiating light because he had been in the presence of God. This terrified the Israelites so Moses would wear a veil until his face stopped shining. Paul's point is that the 10 Commandments (or the Law) were glorious, but Jesus is even more glorious. The Law couldn't save us, but Jesus can save. Morality and good works can't save us; Jesus is the only savior. The Law was fading, but Jesus's presence never leaves us.

SMALL GROUP TIPS

- Divide into groups of 4-6 people.
- Everyone participates, no one dominates.
- Focus on what the BIBLE says, not just opinions.
- Don't be satisfied with surface level discussion; dig as deep as possible!
- Lively discussion is encouraged! It's great to disagree, but don't criticize.
- Share freely and keep your answers concise.
- Focus on applying the Bible to your everyday life.

EXPLORE

1. How does Paul compare and contrast the old covenant (the Law or the 10 commandments) and the new covenant (salvation through Jesus)? Discuss as many as possible.
2. Why does Paul say he is so bold in his ministry? (v 12) What can we learn from his example?
3. What is the Gospel? (Have 2-3 people give their best definition.)
4. What can the message of the gospel do for us? (v 9, 18)
5. Why can we be confident about the message of Christ, even if few people believe it?
6. What are the various ways in which college students respond to the gospel message?
7. How can we be bold with the Gospel and sensitive at the same time?
8. What doubts or fears hold you back from boldly sharing Christ with others?
9. What habits would make you more confident to represent Christ?
10. Who is someone you'd like to share Christ with or minister to this week?

APPLICATION

What is one personal, practical application from this week's lesson? Make a commitment:

"This week, I will _____."

TO CLOSE: Split into same gender groups of 2-3 people.

Share a personal prayer request, and pray for one another.

You can choose one person to pray, or everyone can offer prayer.

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

“Our Humility, Christ’s Glory”

¹ Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. ⁶ For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

¹³ It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. ¹⁵ All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. ¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

LAUNCH

When you’re exchanging Christmas gifts, how important is it to you to have nice wrapping paper, bows, ribbons, etc? Why?

EXPLORE

1. In verses 1-6, Paul is subtly contrasting the way he does ministry with the way his opponents – the false teachers – do theirs. What can you deduce about these false teachers from verses 1-6?
2. In verses 1-6, what are the right ways to do ministry in a dark world? List as many as you can see.
3. What points does Paul make using the image of light and darkness in verses 4-6?
4. What are some ways that people today are blinded by the world so they can’t see Christ?
5. What does it mean to have this treasure (the Gospel) in jars of clay (imperfect people)?
6. From verses 7-12, what are the right ways to do ministry? List as many as you can see.
7. In a world that is obsessed with image, it’s tempting to pretend or be inauthentic. Why is honesty essential for those who serve God?
8. Paul obviously lived a life full of trouble and hardship (see 1 Corinthians 4:9-13). Why would God allow such difficulty for one of his most faithful servants?
9. In verses 13-18, Paul lays out God’s plan for our future: we will be resurrected from the dead and be in God’s presence. How should this future effect how we feel about our current lives?
10. What things tend to cause you the most worry or stress in your life? How does the promise of eternity with God help fight that worry?

SMALL GROUP TIPS

- Divide into groups of 4-5 people.
- Everyone participates, no one dominates.
- Focus on what the BIBLE says, not just opinions.
- Don't be satisfied with surface level discussion; dig as deep as possible!
- Lively discussion is encouraged! It's great to disagree, but don't criticize.
- Share freely and keep your answers concise.
- Focus on applying the Bible to your everyday life.

APPLICATION

What is one personal, practical application from this week’s lesson?

Make a commitment:

“This week, I will _____.”

TO CLOSE: Split into same gender groups of 2-3 people.

Share a personal prayer request, and pray for one another.

You can choose one person to pray, or everyone can offer prayer.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

"Our Eternal Home"

¹ For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. ² Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, ³ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

LAUNCH

If you could build your "dream house", what features would it have?

CONTEXT

While some Christians would say, "When we die, our souls go to heaven.", the Bible teaches something slightly different. In order to be human, we must have a physical body. Therefore, our hope is that even though our bodies will die, God will give us resurrected, renewed, eternal, physical bodies – just like Jesus has received. Praise God that, in Christ, we do not need to fear death!

SMALL GROUP TIPS

- Divide into groups of 4-6 people.
- Everyone participates, no one dominates.
- Focus on what the BIBLE says, not just opinions.
- Don't be satisfied with surface level discussion: dig as deep as possible!
- Lively discussion is encouraged! It's great to disagree, but don't criticize.
- Share freely and keep your answers concise.
- Focus on applying the Bible to your everyday life.

EXPLORE

1. What do verses 1-5 teach about what happens after we die? List as many as possible.
2. How does Paul feel about the prospect of his own death? What can we learn from him?
3. Does the average college student today think about life after death more or less than people in the ancient world? Why or why not?
4. What do verses 6-10 teach about what happens after we die?
5. How should the final judgment influence how we live now?
6. What does living by faith look like as opposed to living by sight or living by doubt (5:7)?
7. What motivates Paul more: the desire to see the Lord or the fear of judgment? Which motivates you more? Why?
8. What do you most look forward to in heaven? (*God's presence, no more suffering, evil destroyed...*) Why?
9. Whom would you most like to tell about the promise that in Christ we can live forever?
10. Paul shares a powerful vision for our life after death. In all honesty, how well do you share his enthusiasm? How could we increase our passion to see the Lord?

APPLICATION

What is one personal, practical application from this week's lesson? Make a commitment:

"This week, I will _____."

TO CLOSE: Split into same gender groups of 2-3 people.

Share a personal prayer request, and pray for one another.

You can choose one person to pray, or everyone can offer prayer.

2 Corinthians 5:10-21

“The Main Thing”

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. ¹¹ Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. ¹² We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. ¹³ If we are “out of our mind,” as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

¹⁴ For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

LAUNCH

If you could be appointed to be an ambassador to any country, what would it be? Why?

EXPLORE

1. In verses 10-11, what is Paul’s motive for evangelism? How about in verse 14? Which of these is the strongest motivation for you and why?
2. In verse 13, what criticism do Paul’s opponents make about his zeal for ministry? What similar kinds of criticisms to opponents of Christianity make today?
3. What do these verses teach about Christ’s accomplishments on the cross? (See 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21) List and discuss as many as possible. Which seems most powerful to you?
4. In verse 16, what does it mean to regard someone from a “worldly point of view”? How might we regard others Christians in a worldly way? How might we regard non-Christians in a worldly way?
5. What do these verses teach that God accomplishes through us as his ambassadors? (see 11,18,20) What could we do to be even better ambassadors for Christ?
6. Read verse 17. What do you think it means to become a “new creation”?
7. Read verse 18. What do you think it means to be “reconciled to God”? Why do we need to be reconciled to God?
8. Verse 21 has been described as the most succinct statement of the Gospel in the Bible. How would you put it in your own words?
9. What approach do you prefer for explaining the Gospel to your unbelieving friends?
10. C.S. Lewis says, “The people who do the most in this world are those who think the most of the next world.” What can we do to grow in our eternal perspective?

SMALL GROUP TIPS

- Divide into groups of 4-5 people.
- Everyone participates, no one dominates.
- Focus on what the BIBLE says, not just opinions.
- Don’t be satisfied with surface level discussion; dig as deep as possible!
- Lively discussion is encouraged! It’s great to disagree, but don’t criticize.
- Share freely and keep your answers concise.
- Focus on applying the Bible to your everyday life.

APPLICATION

What is one personal, practical application from this week’s lesson? Make a commitment:

“This week, I will _____.”

CLOSING

Split into same gender groups of 2-3 people.

Share a personal prayer request, and pray for one another.

You can choose one person to pray, or everyone can offer prayer.

2 Corinthians 6:1-18

“Relationships”

¹ As God’s co-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. ² For he says, “In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation. ³ We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. ⁴ Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; ⁵ in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; ⁶ in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; ⁷ in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; ⁸ through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; ⁹ known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

¹¹ We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. ¹² We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. ¹³ As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.

¹⁴ Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? ¹⁵ What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

¹⁷ Therefore, “Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” ¹⁸ And, “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”

LAUNCH

Whom to you consider a great Christian leader today? Why?

CONTEXT

Having relationships is essential to being human. In 2 Corinthians 6, Paul explores two specific types of relationships: 1) the relationship of Christians to church leadership and the relationship of Christians to unbelievers. Allow the Scripture to challenge your pre-conceived notions in these two areas.

EXPLORE

Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-13 – Our relationship with church leaders

1. How would you summarize verses 1-13?
2. To defend his ministry, Paul could have appealed to his radical conversion, seeing Jesus face to face, his special revelations, his miracles – but he doesn’t. What do you find most convincing about the evidence presented here instead?
3. For pastors and ministers, by what standards should we judge a successful ministry?
4. Pastors and ministers face many criticisms today. How can you honor the Christian pastors and ministers in your life this week?
5. Notice the balance between victory and suffering in verses 4-10. There is a tendency for Christians today to talk about our faith as simply a matter of comfort, joy, celebration, and the Lord providing all our needs. What are dangers of this kind of shallowness instead of the truth Paul depicts in this passage?
6. In what ways does being honest about the struggles and celebrations of life help you open your heart to others?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 – Our relationship with non-Christians

7. A “yoke” is a type of harness that connects two creatures and forces them to go the same direction. What are the various kinds of relationships where people are “yoked” together?
8. Remember last week, Paul taught that Christians are to be loving ambassadors to non-Christians. Now he uses strong language in 6:14-16 to discuss the dangers of being “yoked” with non-Christians. Why do you think he shifts gears like this?
9. What are potential dangers of a Christian dating or marrying a non-Christian?
10. What are potential dangers of a Christian forming a business partnership with a non-Christian?
11. What are potential dangers of a Christian living along with non-Christians in a dorm, apartment, Greek house, etc?
12. Regarding the relationships you are now in, what steps can you take to ensure that you don’t compromise your Christian commitment?

Final thought: “Separation from the world involves more than keeping our distance from sin. It involves staying close to God and his people!”

APPLICATION

What is one personal, practical application from this week’s lesson? Make a commitment:

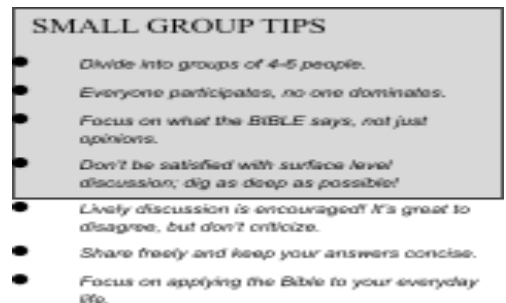
“This week, I will _____.”

CLOSING

Split into same gender groups of 2-3 people.

Share a personal prayer request, and pray for one another.

You can choose one person to pray, or everyone can offer prayer.



2)

2 Corinthians 7:8-16

“Repentance & Reconciliation”

⁸ Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—⁹ yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. ¹⁰ Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. ¹¹ See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. ¹² So even though I wrote to you, it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. ¹³ By all this we are encouraged.

In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you. ¹⁴ I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well. ¹⁵ And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling. ¹⁶ I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.

LAUNCH

What is the hardest part about living with other people? What is the best part?

CONTEXT

Previously, the Corinthians were rebelling against Paul’s authority. They were unwilling to discipline certain members who were committing grievous sin. This led Paul to write a harsh letter calling on them to repent. Now the tables have turned. Paul has learned from Titus that they are anxious about whether he is still angry. (See 2 Cor 7:6-7.) This leads Paul to write some profound reflections on sadness, repentance and reconciliation.

SMALL GROUP TIPS

- Divide into groups of 4-5 people.
- Everyone participates, no one dominates.
- Focus on what the BIBLE says, not just opinions.
- Don't be satisfied with surface level discussion; dig as deep as possible!
- Lively discussion is encouraged! It's great to disagree, but don't criticize.
- Share freely and keep your answers concise.
- Focus on applying the Bible to your everyday life.

EXPLORE

1. In verses 8-9, how did Paul’s feelings toward the Corinthian church change? Why did they change?
2. Read 10-11. What do you think is the difference between Godly sorry and worldly sorrow?
3. One definition of worldly sorrow is being sorry for the consequences of your sin, but not for the sin itself. Can you think of some examples of this?
4. Have you ever been confronted by someone who loved you and confronted you well? What did they do right in that situation?
5. How do you decide when it is more loving to confront someone with their sin than ignore it?
6. What attitudes are needed to make loving confrontation different than being judgmental? How do you see those attitudes in Paul?
7. Would you share a time when Godly sorrow motivated you to make a real change in your life? How do you feel about that change now?
8. Why do we get defensive when people criticize us, even when we know they’re right?
9. Take a look at “A PATH TO RESOLVING CONFLICT” in the box to the right. Which pieces of practical wisdom do you like the most or find most helpful?
10. Bill Bright says that confession should be as natural to a Christian as breathing. Because we continually commit sin, we continually confess sin (exhale) and acknowledge God’s forgiveness (inhale). What do you like or find helpful about this concept?

APPLICATION

What is one personal, practical application from this week’s lesson? Make a commitment: “This week, I will _____.”

TO CLOSE: Split into same gender groups of 2-3 people.

Share a personal prayer request, and pray for one another.

You can choose one person to pray, or everyone can offer prayer.

A PATH TO RESOLVING CONFLICT

- Before you confront, examine the offense. Determine if it requires confrontation.
- The goal must always be reconciliation and restoration. Never to punish or retaliate.
- Consider your contribution to the conflict first.
- Remember this person is your brother or sister, not your enemy.
- Approach confrontation carefully – with the right timing and focus. Speak the truth in love.
- We're able to seek forgiveness and reconciliation because Jesus has offered us both.

2 Corinthians 8:1-12, 9:6-12

“Generosity”

2 Corinthians 8:1-12

¹ And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. ⁵ And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. ⁶ So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷ But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

⁸ I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

¹⁰ And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. ¹¹ Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. ¹² For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

2 Corinthians 9:6-12

⁶ Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written:

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever.”

¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

¹² This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

LAUNCH

What would be the first thing you would want to do if you won \$1 million?

CONTEXT

During Paul’s third missionary journey in 53-58 AD (Acts 18-21), he collected money for the impoverished believers in Jerusalem. The churches in Macedonia gave even more than Paul expected even though they were themselves poor. Paul shares their example with the church in Corinth in order to encourage the Corinthians to also give generously to God’s work.

EXPLORE

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-12.

1. Look verse by verse at 8:1-12. What principles about generosity do you see here?
2. How is Jesus an example of giving (8:9)? How does His sacrifice motivate us to give?
3. Who has been an example of sacrificial giving or generosity that you have seen?
4. What principle is in verse 12? If the amount is not important, then what is important?
5. What else besides money can you offer to God as a sacrifice?
What do you feel you should be offering to God that you currently are not?
6. What holds you back from giving generously to God’s work? Where do you feel God might be calling you to be a generous and cheerful giver?

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-12

7. How would you summarize 9:6-12? What are its main points?
8. What does it say is the benefit of generous financial giving?
(See verses 8, 10, 11, 12. Hint: It’s not financial.)
What is the danger in giving money to get financial blessing in return?
9. Read 9:7. Why is it important to give cheerfully rather than reluctantly?
10. How do you determine what churches, ministries, or missionaries to support and how much to give?
11. What advice would you give to a Christian who acknowledged, “I know I need to be giving to the Lord’s work, but how do I start when I’ve got so many bills and loans already?”
12. In what ways does giving demonstrate that we have faith in God?

APPLICATION

What is one personal, practical application from this week’s lesson? Make a commitment:

“This week, I will _____.”

CLOSING

Split into same gender groups of 2-3 people. Share a personal prayer request, and pray for one another.

You can choose one person to pray, or everyone can offer prayer.

2 Corinthians 10:1-11, 11:1-6, 13-15

“Authority”

1 Corinthians 10:1-11

¹ By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” toward you when away! ² I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. ³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. ⁶ And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete. ⁷ You are judging by appearances. If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do. ⁸ So even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it. ⁹ I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. ¹⁰ For some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.” ¹¹ Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present.

1 Corinthians 11:1-6, 13-15

¹ I hope you will put up with me in a little foolishness. Yes, please put up with me! ² I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. ³ But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴ For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. ⁵ I do not think I am in the least inferior to those “super-apostles.” ⁶ I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way...

¹³ For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

LAUNCH

Is “authority” more of a positive or negative word to you? Why?

CONTEXT

Some scholars believe that chapters 10-13 are actually an exert from the “painful letter” that Paul wrote between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians to confront sin in the church. Others believe that was always a part of 2 Corinthians. Either way, Paul is answering critics who sought to discredit and malign him. Paul was an Apostle – commissioned by Jesus himself, given authority, and filled with God’s spirit. When they attacked Paul’s authority, they were actually attacking God’s authority – in the say way that people today who attack the Bible are attacking God’s authority in their lives.

EXPLORE

Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-11 and 1 Corinthians 11:1-6, 13-15

1. Looking through the passage, what can you learn about Paul’s opponents? What were they saying? Who were they claiming to be? List every attribute about them you can find. (See chapter 10, verses 1,2,9,10,11, chapter 11, verses, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13,15.)
2. What are modern day examples of these kinds of opponents – people who claim to be experts on the Bible but attack it’s credibility?
3. In 10:3-8, what is Paul’s strategy for countering false teachers? Practically, how can we use his strategy today?
4. Verse 10:5 is the heart of Paul’s strategy. What are times you need to “take captive every though and make it obedient to Christ”? How do we do this?
5. Can you think of a time when wrong thinking resulted in wrong choices in your life? How about when right thinking led to wise choices?
6. How would it change your life if you developed this discipline of arresting and examining your thoughts?
7. Why do you think people are drawn to those who speak with authority, even when those people are wrong?
8. Paul asserts that, underneath the surface of things, our enemy - the devil - has a foothold in the church (see 10:4 11:3,14). How can Satan get a foothold in a church or in an individual Christian’s life?
9. Paul is no longer alive, but his writings live on. He wrote 13 books of the Bible, and many people today attack the credibility of the Bible in the same way they attacked Paul. How can a Christian grow their confidence in the Bible’s authority? How can we defend the Bible’s credibility?

APPLICATION

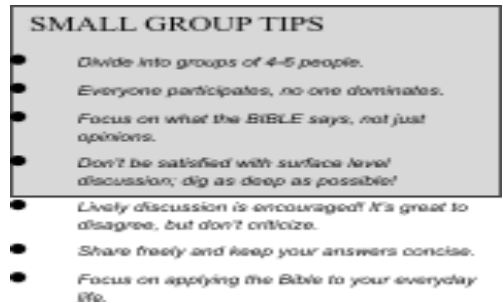
What is one personal, practical application from this week’s lesson? Make a commitment:

“This week, I will _____.”

CLOSING

Split into same gender groups of 2-3 people. Share a personal prayer request, and pray for one another.

You can choose one person to pray, or everyone can offer prayer.



2 Corinthians 12:1-10

“Suffering & Grace”

¹ I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. ³ And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—⁴ was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. ⁵ I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. ⁶ Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, ⁷ or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

LAUNCH

If you could change one thing about your life right now, what would it be?

CONTEXT

2 Corinthians 12 is a fascinating passage where Paul shares one of his greatest experiences and one of his greatest struggles. Verses 2-5 use a rhetorical device (“I know a man”) where Paul refers to himself in the 3rd person in order to show humility. However, we’re meant to understand that Paul himself is the man who visited heaven. In 7-8, he describes his intense physical suffering (“a thorn in my flesh”). Here he shares some of the most profound thoughts ever offered on suffering.

SMALL GROUP TIPS

- Divide into groups of 4-5 people.
- Everyone participates, no one dominates.
- Focus on what the BIBLE says, not just opinions.
- Don't be satisfied with surface level discussion; dig as deep as possible!
- Lively discussion is encouraged! It's great to disagree, but don't criticize.
- Share freely and keep your answers concise.
- Focus on applying the Bible to your everyday life.

EXPLORE

1. Up to this point, how has Paul argued for the authenticity of his apostleship? Why would he now include verses 1-4?
2. Why do you think Paul would share his experience of visiting heaven in such a humble manner? What can we learn from this?
3. How can you tell when you are becoming too proud – spiritually or otherwise?
4. Paul moves from boasting to describing the “thorn” in the flesh in verses 6-10. There has been much speculation about what this was, but we have no idea of what sort. What have you heard it might be?
5. What things did God want Paul to learn through his suffering? (see verses 7-10)
6. Where did the thorn come from (12:7)? Is all suffering caused by Satan? What else can cause suffering?
7. Have you ever had a “thorn in the flesh” that God refused to remove? If so, how have you been made stronger through it?
8. How is Paul’s attitude different from common, worldly “positive thinking” that we see taught today?
9. In what practical ways can you rely on God’s grace when you are limited by weakness and hardships?
10. What can you do the next time you face a frustrating weakness or difficulty?

APPLICATION

What is one personal, practical application from this week’s lesson? Make a commitment:

“This week, I will _____.”

CLOSING

Split into same gender groups of 2-3 people.

Share a personal prayer request, and pray for one another.

You can choose one person to pray, or everyone can offer prayer.