

ALL THINGS NEW

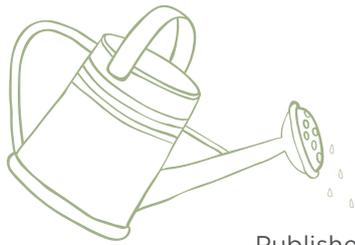
A STUDY ON 2 CORINTHIANS
FOR TEEN GIRLS

KELLY MINTER

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LifeWay | Girls





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Meet the Author

KELLY MINTER IS AN AUTHOR, SPEAKER, AND SONGWRITER. SHE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT WOMEN DISCOVERING JESUS THROUGH THE PAGES OF SCRIPTURE, SO WHETHER IT'S THROUGH STUDY, SONG, OR THE SPOKEN WORD, KELLY'S DESIRE IS TO AUTHENTICALLY EXPRESS CHRIST TO THE WOMEN AND GIRLS OF THIS GENERATION. SHE HAS FOUND DEEP HOPE AND HEALING THROUGH THE BIBLE'S TRUTHS, MAKING HER MESSAGE PERSONAL AND RELATIONAL.

No Other Gods, the first installment of The Living Room Series, helps women unveil the false gods in their lives for the ultimate purpose of discovering freedom in the one, true God. *Ruth: Loss, Love & Legacy* follows the redemptive story of Ruth, displaying God's providence and purpose even in the most trying circumstances. *Nehemiah: A Heart That Can Break* is an unforgettable journey into the missional heart of God. *What Love Is: The Letters of 1, 2, 3 John* look at the words of the Beloved Disciple regarding life in Christ. All studies are presented in the same Living Room Series format (studies can be done in any order). Kelly also released her first memoir, *Wherever The River Runs: How A Forgotten People Renewed My Hope In The Gospel*, about her life-changing journeys to the Amazon jungle.

Kelly writes extensively and speaks at women's conferences and events around the country. She has her own event called Cultivate: A Women's Gathering Around The Word. This biblically based and stylistically simple event is for women of all ages. Kelly also partners closely with Justice and Mercy International, an organization that cares for the vulnerable and forgotten in the Amazon and Moldova. Kelly's music includes *Loss, Love & Legacy*, which complements her Ruth study, and the worshipful *Finer Day*, and *Hymns & Hallelujahs*. To view more about Kelly's studies, books, music, and calendar, visit www.kellyminter.com.



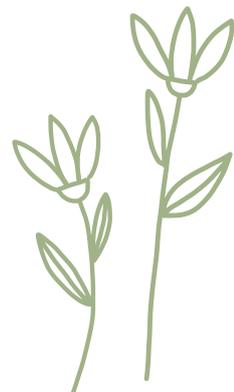


ABOUT THE STUDY



This eight-session resource will guide girls through the Letter of 2 Corinthians. They will complete five days of homework each week and then you will meet to discuss it as a group. The final session includes a Leader Guide that will serve as a helpful tool as you walk through this study with a group of girls.

Our prayer is that the girls in your group will learn about the church at Corinth and how Paul ministered to them, but more importantly, that they will be challenged to grow and live in light of 2 Corinthians. Girls will see how Christ can use our weaknesses for His glory and gain a firsthand understanding of how if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation.



❧ A NOTE FROM KELLY ❧

If you'd asked me at the beginning of writing this study why I wanted to spend a year in 2 Corinthians, I would have pointed to all those wonderful passages like the thorn in the flesh, Christ's power in our weakness, the heavenly bodies we will one day receive, God's comfort in suffering, and a whole two chapters on generosity and the poor. These passages worked as anchors for my soul during the calm and storms of life. I grew up on the truth of these beloved texts.

One of the earliest spiritual metaphors I learned was from 2 Corinthians, where Paul talked about carrying the treasures of knowing Jesus as if in fragile jars of clay. This has been especially meaningful to me, because I've always longed to be a more steadfast Christian—someone who has it together. But, honestly? I still don't have it together. I simply can't get away from this. But after meditating on Paul's words, I'm reminded I don't have to: "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10b).

Maybe more than anything, it is the weakness and honesty with which Paul wrote that has moved me. Scholars have often described 2 Corinthians as Paul's most personal letter, and this may be one of the reasons I never tire of returning to its pages. It is a passionate, pleading, even provocative letter at times, where Paul exposed his outstretched heart to a community of somewhat inconsistent believers who frankly didn't seem to care for him as much as he cared for them. Paul's heartbreak over their failures and enthusiasm over their restoration remind us of how relational the ministry of the gospel is. I just don't ever want to forget that if I lose my heart for people, then I've lost the purpose of ministry.

Speaking of ministry, if your only experience with the Christian faith has been rule-bound and oppressive, well then, might I invite you to the new covenant version? Paul spent valuable ink explaining that, since the coming of Christ, the way we minister to others is more gracious, humble, powerful, Spirit-filled, life-giving, and freeing than we ever imagined. He seemed to sum the whole thing up in one word: glorious.

So that is how I began—eager to write about all the things I knew I loved about 2 Corinthians. Yet, after having immersed myself in the text, I discovered it was all the passages less familiar to me that have so surprised and changed me. My hope is that you too might rediscover a letter you thought you already knew. And if you've never done a Bible study before, all the more reason for you to explore its pages. One of the great anchors of Paul's letter is that Christianity isn't for the religious elite—I promise, the Corinthians will do a great job of backing this up. I warmly invite you, mature believer or new explorer, on a journey through this ancient letter.

The old has passed away, behold the new has come.



HOW TO USE



Review & Begin

As you prepare each week, spend time in prayer. Then, review the homework from the previous session, and highlight anything noteworthy to share with the girls in your group. For the first session, we ask for you to review the Session 1 introduction, found on pages 9-11. After reading the introduction, take notes as you skim the Group Guide. Then, begin the five days of homework.

Homework Instructions

If you have a busy week, you might need to double-up and complete two days to get ahead. Scripture should be the main focus, so if girls are pressed for time, suggest they first read through the passage of Scripture listed for that session. Within the homework, there are questions based on the Scripture passage, as well as application questions which are labeled Personal Reflection and Personal Response. Record your responses in the book or in your own journal.

Group Guide Instructions

The two-page Group Guide is included after each session's introduction. It is designed and formatted as a tool to review the homework from the previous session and introduce the current session and homework for the week to come.



HOW TO JOURNAL



There will be several things girls will be asked to answer or journal about throughout the study. Be creative with this and allow them to express their own forms of creativity, whether that be through drawing or Scripture doodling. You will want to consider providing paper, colored pencils and pens, or other craft supplies.

Encourage girls to bring a journal of their own where they can write or draw their thoughts, ideas, and responses to Scripture. The margins of this book are also designed to give girls a space to answer questions and record their thoughts as they journey through the Letter of 2 Corinthians.



SESSION 1

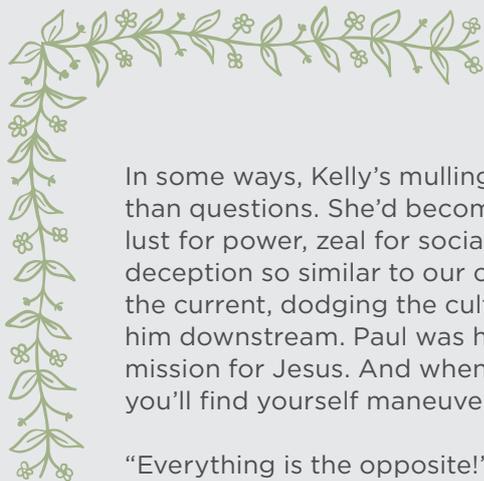
THE CHURCH IN A CITY

2 Corinthians 1:1-2:11

My friend Kelly is a singer/songwriter growing up in the thick of country music land. I'd asked Kelly to be part of a group that would work through the *All Things New* homework and provide feedback. She obliged and provided great insight.

At the end of our study, Kelly asked if we could meet to discuss 2 Corinthians. We jotted a date on the calendar because you don't have to ask me twice to meet you for coffee, conversation, and Corinthians. That's almost too much goodness for one morning.





In some ways, Kelly’s mulling over 2 Corinthians yielded more revelation than questions. She’d become acquainted with the problems in Corinth—its lust for power, zeal for social status, affinity for pleasure, vulnerability to deception so similar to our own—and noticed Paul’s message went against the current, dodging the culture and all of its values as they rushed past him downstream. Paul was headed to a different destination. He was on mission for Jesus. And when your mission is different from the world’s, you’ll find yourself maneuvering through the oncoming crowds.

“Everything is the opposite!” Kelly said, lifting her tea in the air. “I mean everything Paul says, is like, the exact opposite of what we’re told we’re supposed to live for.” (Toss in the flash and fame of the music industry, and the opposites become polar.)

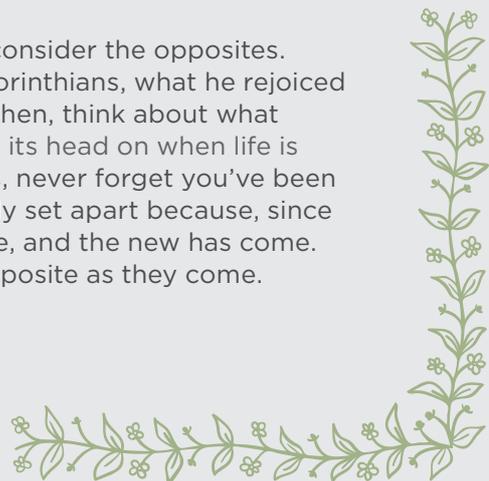
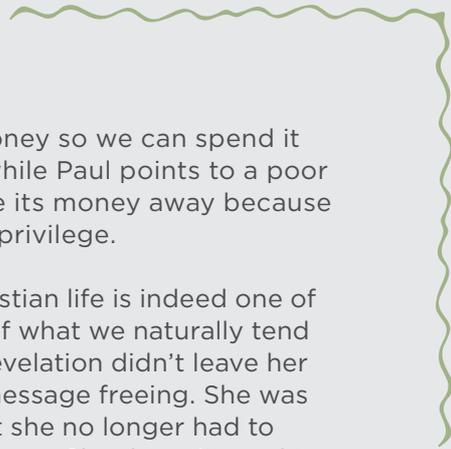
I knew what Kelly meant. After nearly a year in this letter, I too felt the inescapable tension between Paul’s life and the life of ease and comfort. But don’t get all squirmy on me. Paul champions the paradoxical life of a believer with unfathomable love. Now that we’ve got that straight, here are just a few of the opposites:

- Our celebrity industry prizes youth, beauty, and in many ways perfection, while Paul writes about boasting in our weaknesses so Christ can receive the glory.
- We’re taught to have razor-sharp competence so we can claw our way to the top of our schools and communities, but Paul says our competence makes us better ministers.
- When someone offends us, we close off our hearts so as not to be invaded again. However, when the church bruised Paul, he returned with his heart open wide.
- When we finally get a little authority handed to us we think it’s meant for bossing everyone around, but could it be our authority is for building people up and working for their joy? Paul thought so.

- Our instincts tell us to hang onto our money so we can spend it on ourselves and have plenty for later, while Paul points to a poor church in Macedonia that wanted to give its money away because they saw it not as a duty but, get this, a privilege.

No doubt Kelly was onto something. The Christian life is indeed one of paradox. What Jesus holds dear is opposite of what we naturally tend to cling to. What struck me was that Kelly's revelation didn't leave her discouraged, but relieved. She found Paul's message freeing. She was happy to know she could still write songs, but she no longer had to perform for the ever-changing approval of others. She doesn't need to concern herself with keeping in step with the latest trends when being commended by Jesus is the highest praise—all that satisfies. And it won't matter if her life lands her on the grandest stage in NYC or in a small country church; however the Lord wants to use her gift will be her joy. And whomever the Lord brings across her path will be her ministry. Yep, 2 Corinthians is a letter of opposites. It's a letter about the adventurous faith of hanging all of our hope on God. It's about an abiding peace at the ocean floor of our souls that oddly doesn't roll in after a manicure or upon receiving acceptance to an Ivy League college. Instead of having to earn or buy our peace, peace comes when our sins are no longer counted against us because God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to take our sins upon Himself. Paul called this reconciliation.

As you work your way through 2 Corinthians, consider the opposites. Note the way Paul unconditionally loved the Corinthians, what he rejoiced in, who he trusted, and what he called home. Then, think about what the world loves, celebrates, hopes in, and rests its head on when life is tough. As you consider the striking differences, never forget you've been empowered to live beautifully and unashamedly set apart because, since Jesus' death and resurrection, the old has gone, and the new has come. And last time I checked, old and new are as opposite as they come.





Group Guide (Week 1)

Welcome to the first group session for *All Things New!* This time will be more of a general introduction to the study and the Letter of 2 Corinthians, as well as a time for you to get to know those in your group. There are so many rich truths for us to explore in 2 Corinthians, so let's dive in!

Prepare

Read the introduction on the previous three pages prior to your group's first meeting. Circle, highlight, or underline anything that sticks out to you in the introduction or in the passage of Scripture. Pray that God would use this study to draw you closer to Himself and to help you to hide His Word in your heart.

Review & Discuss

Review the introduction again together as a group, and then discuss the following questions.

What do you hope to gain from this study and from being a part of this group?

What do you know about Corinth or the Letter of 2 Corinthians?

Consider the diverse culture of your school or community. Discuss this as a group, as well as what the diverse culture of Corinth may have been like.

According to Paul, what is *reconciliation* (2 Cor. 5:18-19)? Explain this in your own words.



List some opposites or oxymorons that come to mind (jumbo shrimp, short wait, tiny elephant, true myth, worthless gold, etc.).

What were some of the opposites in Paul's life when compared with a life of ease? How did these things set Paul apart as a follower of Christ?

In what ways is your life set apart for Christ? What are some practical things you can do this week to live for Him in your home and at school?

Jot down one thing you have learned so far, either from the introduction or from these questions and your group's discussion. Also record one question you have.

Journal

Think about your expectations for what you would like to gain from this study and jot them down. Journal your goals and what time commitment you are making to be a part of a group as you complete the next seven weeks of this study.

Take Action

Complete the following five days of homework before the next group meeting. Take notes and highlight anything that you might want to share with the group during the next time you meet.

- **Memorize:** 2 Corinthians 1:5-6

DAY 1

A Seemingly Unlikely Place for a Church (2 Cor. 1:1-2)

Whenever I visit a city I've never been to before I research it online. Something about seeing the actual landscape of a place, eating at its restaurants, and strolling its well-known streets makes me want to better understand its history and happenings. Of course, I also want to know what stars live there. The same is true when I start studying a book of the Bible. Learning about context and historical placement is vital to gaining a more accurate understanding of the book at hand.

Before we dive into 2 Corinthians, let's set the stage. Paul first visited Corinth and established the church there in A.D. 50-51. We learn from 1 Corinthians 5:9 that he wrote an instructive letter that is now lost. After hearing about significant problems in the church, Paul wrote the letter we know as 1 Corinthians around A.D. 53/54. After that letter he wrote what is referred to as the "sorrowful letter," also presumed to be lost. This brings us to 2 Corinthians, which Paul wrote in response to hearing that the church had experienced a few victories along with some failures that needed to be addressed. We'll get to know more about these issues in the days ahead, issues that will feel surprisingly familiar to us 2,000 years later.

CORINTHIAN CHRONOLOGY:

- AD 50-51**
Paul establishes church in Corinth
- AD 52**
Writes instructive letter. (1 Cor. 5:9) This letter is lost.
- AD 53-54**
Writes 1 Corinthians.
- AD 54**
Makes "sorrowful visit" to Corinth.
- AD 54**
Writes "painful letter" (2 Cor. 2:3-4). This letter is lost.
- AD 54**
Writes 2 Corinthians
- AD 56**
Makes final visit to Corinth

Let's read 2 Corinthians 1:1-2 as we begin this journey together.

Paul was writing to the church at Corinth. Think about the most culturally electric city you've ever visited. You may have taken in a play or a movie, or doused your senses with ancient paintings or relics while strolling through museums. If you're like my sister, Katie, you spotted a celebrity—she finds them everywhere she goes. Bright lights and garish signs, taxi horns and symphonies, violence and class, rich and poor and everyone in between, trying to find their way in this place we've known since nearly the beginning of time: the city.

You could make the argument that first century Corinth was the citiest of cities.

When Paul arrived, Corinth was at the pinnacle of its development. A commercial epicenter of Southern Greece, perched on an isthmus (think Seattle and Google it for a photo) that brimmed with tourists and trade due to its two harbors, Lechaenum and Cenchreae. Corinth was thriving, wealthy, and steeped in a blend of Roman and Greek culture. The ancient city of Corinth boasted everything you could ever want. But, as we know, having access to everything we could ever want doesn't always end up being what we thought we wanted.

The richness of Corinth's culture had its downsides, as do our own modern day cities: prostitution, slavery, foreign pagan practices, poverty, and sexual perversion of all kinds. False gods were everywhere. The temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and life, was a central shrine in Corinth. As one scholar put it, Corinth was the "Vanity Fair" of Rome.¹

Turn to Acts 18:1-11 and read about Paul's first visit to Corinth. We'll gather some basic facts, so think from the perspective of a reporter.

What couple did Paul live with? What country did they move from?

What type of work did Paul initially do to support himself?

Cut Hair

Fish

Make Tents

All of the above

What two people groups did he teach in the synagogues?



"One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."
Acts 18:9-10

According to verse 8, what happened to many of the Corinthians Paul taught?

In Acts 18:9-10, where did the Lord tell Paul He had many people?

This is a comforting and encouraging word for wherever we find ourselves living.

If the gospel of Jesus transformed Corinth's prostitutes, religious, wealthy, pagans, farmers, merchants, athletes, slaves, and synagogue leaders (like the one you just read about in Acts 18), then the good news of Jesus Christ can transform the people of our cities today. Though I'm tempted at times to think that God's people are only found in religious settings, God had His people in Corinth—in the city—just like God has you and me in the cultural settings we live in.

Read the opening lines of 1 Corinthians 1:1-2. Paul gave an additional description of the believers in Corinth.

If he were writing to a group of monks or nuns you might think, *okay, they have a good shot at this holiness, sanctification, and purity thing*. But people in the middle of a place like Corinth, with no prior history of Christianity, being seen in God's eyes as holy? (See margin for definition.) Second Corinthians reminds us that God's church shines most brightly in the darkness rather than in already lit sanctuaries.

Personal Reflection: What about your culture makes it difficult for you to live a holy life?

In the days ahead we'll see how Paul pursued God's people with unrivaled fervor. They were a struggling church, filled with individuals who had bought into the trends and passions of the environment they lived in. I can relate to this. If I'm not alert and aware, I can easily slip into accepting the popular beliefs of the day.

We'll dig much deeper into Scripture in the coming days, but today I want you to understand the context for what we'll be studying. I'm excited to journey with you as we examine together what some have called Paul's most personal letter.

Girls, you are not alone. I think Paul said it best in his opening words, we're in this "together with all the saints."



Hagiazo:
to make
holy, (i.e.
ceremonially)
purify or
consecrate;
hallow, be
holy, sanctify

DAY 2

The God of All Comfort (2 Cor. 1:3-11)

I once held the idea that if I followed the principles laid out for me in Scripture, if I loved God and made wise, biblical choices, then I would be blessed with some version of a really good life, void of heartbreak or catastrophe. Somewhere deep down I knew that following God didn't guarantee this premium package, this safeness—I'd seen godly people suffer. But I also felt that if I did my part, then God would be obligated to do His: build me the kind of life we covet here in America and protect me from pain. This seemed like a reasonable expectation.

For the record, I do believe obedience yields blessing and that God delights in giving us gifts, often in response to our following Him. But what I missed during all those years of pining after what made me feel good, and attempting to protect myself from whatever I feared "coming upon me" (in the words of Job), was really quite simple: Suffering is part of the blessing.

The thought of suffering shouldn't frighten us because God is especially present in our suffering, but we also shouldn't set out for a life of pain or martyrdom in Jesus' name. We've been around the woe-is-me people, dressed in their Forever 21 sackcloth, who make us want to roll our eyes in frustration. Bottom line, we shouldn't fear suffering, but we don't need to be searching for it either.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11.

Paul praised God as the Father of _____ and the God of all _____ (v. 3).

You've already noted that Paul opened his letter to the Corinthians by addressing two of God's characteristics that meet us in our afflictions (trouble or tribulations). Notice the impact of Paul's phrase in verse 3, "Father of compassion." Paul didn't say that God is a merciful Father, though He is, rather Paul said He's the Father of compassion. This is a shift for the person who sees God as someone who occasionally taps into His kind side.

Let's consider the original language of the word *mercies* (*compassion*). The Greek word for mercies is *oiktirmos* and is used only five times in the New Testament. This word means "bowels in which compassion resides, a heart of compassion, emotions, longings, manifestations of pity,"³ or "the inward parts."⁴ When we look at the definition of this word we get a strong sense of feeling. According



to Scripture, I want you to hear today what the Lord feels for you.

Flip back to 2 Corinthians 1:5. In this passage Paul stated that Christ's sufferings overflow into our lives. What do you think this means?

When Paul talks about the sufferings of Christ spilling over into our lives, part of what I think he was talking about is that believers will suffer certain things because they are living in obedience to Christ. Many Christians are suffering severe persecution around the world while others are mocked in lesser, but still painful, ways for their faith. Maybe you were passed over for an office in a club, endured ridicule from friends, or were betrayed or abandoned because of your belief in Jesus. When we suffer, we're uniquely associating with Jesus. Paul realized there is a certain fellowship that we have with Jesus during times of suffering, a distinct way that we identify with Him.

Personal Reflection: How have you become more deeply acquainted with Jesus as a result of sharing with Him in His sufferings?

I've yet to meet a person who enjoys suffering, but I've met many who've grown closer to Jesus during suffering. There are certain parts of Jesus you just can't know on a path of ease, and once you've tasted that closeness with Him, you won't trade it for the smooth course. In addition to experiencing a special fellowship with Jesus (Phil. 3:10), Paul revealed another reason suffering brings blessing.

Whenever Christ's sufferings overflow into our lives, what overflows out of us (v. 5)? This is so awesome to me.

In Brazil there's a natural phenomenon called *The Meeting of the Waters* where the Rio Negro and Rio Solimões meet. This meeting place forms what Brazilians consider as the official starting point of the Amazon River. The Rio Negro looks like a river of Coke; the Rio Solimões appears to be flowing with coffee and cream. When you sail on this part of the Amazon, you float down one grand body of water made up of two very distinct rivers. Even though the Rio Negro and Rio Solimões don't appear to mix for several miles, they are one. And as Christ's sufferings and comfort can also seem incongruent, you will never have one without the other—Christ's sufferings and His comfort flow together.

In verse 9, what reason did Paul give for having gone through these hardships?

According to verse 10, where did all of Paul's hope lie?

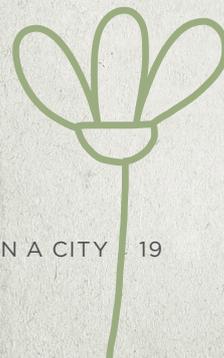
One of the most beautiful declarations in Scripture is found in verse 4. When we experience trials, it's often hard to see outside of our pain. But we find great purpose in our sufferings when we realize our experiences will serve as unique comforts to others going through similar pain.

If we want to be able to comfort others with the comfort we've received from God, then we need to be comfort-able. What I mean is that I've experienced times in my life when I didn't want to be comforted or didn't know how to be—when I was just plain mad. If we find ourselves in situations where we are unable to be comforted or encouraged, there is a problem. Receiving comfort requires humility before the Lord, open hands that say we need our Savior.

Personal Response: In what ways/areas do you need to be comforted? What's keeping you from pouring out your heart to the Lord and receiving His comfort today?

Paul was pushed beyond the end of himself—far beyond his ability to endure. I'm in no way claiming I've experienced sufferings at the same level as Paul's, but countless times I've come to the point when I realized I didn't have what it took to fix my situation. But far more importantly than simply coming to the end of myself, I came to God—the one who raises the dead.

As the rivers Negro and Solimões flow as one, Christ's suffering and His comfort run together in our lives, side by side. As Christians, we never have to suffer without Christ's comfort, and I believe there are certain comforts we will never know apart from His suffering. If you are going through a trial, maybe one far beyond your ability to endure, draw on God's comfort—the comfort that runs straight through the person of Jesus and into your life. He promises comfort in measure to your pain. And when you meet with God's consolation, you'll be eager to bind up the wounds of another person who experiences similar pain because God's comfort is overflowing in nature. You'll have more than enough comfort to share.



DAY 3

A Change of Plans (2 Cor. 1:12-24)

So, one of my mom's most common phrases in response to my badgering her about something I wanted to do was, "We'll see." It took me twenty years to realize this was code for, "The answer is 99% no way, kiddo," I was always hopeful. I use "We'll see" with my nieces and nephews all the time. It's a great way to remain honest, yet uncommitted, especially if you might need to change your plans.

As we go along, we'll discover that Paul was anything but a "we'll see" kind of guy. His yes was yes and his no was no, but this didn't mean Paul never had to change his plans. In today's reading, Paul explained to the Corinthians why he didn't visit them when he originally intended. We'll also get an idea about how the Corinthians felt about this.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12-24.

If there's one thing about studying 2 Corinthians that's challenged me personally, it's that Paul didn't shy away from dealing with difficulty in relationships. We'll get into this further, but the Corinthians had some issues with Paul—his not showing up when he said he would being one of them. But before Paul jumped into an explanation of his actions, he first established his heart toward them.

Revisit verse 12. What three things characterized the actions of Paul and his friends toward the Corinthians? Circle them.

| | | | |
|-----------|-------------------|------------|----------|
| Kindness | Holiness (purity) | Gentleness | Power |
| Sincerity | Humility | Grace | Strength |

Before we move too far into the heart of this passage, let's take a look at where we are on the timeline (see p. 14) of Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church.

According to verses 15-16, what were Paul's initial travel plans?

The church had not responded well to 1 Corinthians. Paul's ministry partner, Timothy, had visited the Corinthians after Paul wrote that letter and reported significant problems—moral issues, corrupted beliefs, and relational factions to name a few. As a result, Paul sailed from Ephesus to Corinth to deal with the Corinthians in person, which he referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:1-2 as a "sorrowful visit."

During this difficult visit, Paul probably told them that he'd see them again on his trip from Macedonia back to Judea.⁵ However, when the Corinthians continued to attack him, it's reasonable to assume he made the decision to not return for a while. You can probably relate to trying to work out a difficult relationship, whether in person or through a letter. Paul had tried both and wasn't having much success.

Today's text reveals that the Corinthians questioned Paul's motives for not coming. Although he loved them dearly, a band of opponents stirred up the Corinthian church, casting doubt about the true and sincere nature of Paul's devotion. I personally cannot stand being misunderstood, especially in a situation where I've bent over backward, sacrificed, stood up, or gone out on a limb for someone. I'm not saying this happens to me often, but when it does, I wrestle with two basic decisions: First, do I trust the Lord with my reputation, resting in a clear conscience before Him (1:12)? Second, can I continue to love those who have accused me?

Personal Reflection: What is your default reaction when you're misunderstood or falsely accused?

Paul wasn't into mixing his *yes's* and *no's*, saying one thing but doing another. According to verses 18-19, why was his ministry to the Corinthians straightforward and trustworthy?

It's usually not meant as a compliment when someone tells you you're being defensive about something. We may think the only godly response is to remain silent and never explain ourselves. (Prov. 9:8 says not to "rebuke a mocker.") However, sometimes explaining our actions is not only appropriate, but also vital to the relationship. So, how do you know if you should defend yourself or not? Here's a litmus test I use: If defending myself is motivated by self-protection and characterized by pride, anger, fear, or self-righteousness, it's most likely from my flesh. On the other hand, if defending myself is motivated by love for the other person and characterized by clarity, humility, kindness, and sincerity, it's from the Spirit. We'll note throughout this letter that Paul was clearly defending himself, not for self-defense's sake, but for the love of the Corinthians.

What reason did Paul give for not having gone to Corinth (v. 23)?

Whether we serve as leaders at our schools and churches, or even if we don't hold other positions of authority, we could solve a multitude of problems if we worked for the joy of those we oversee.

In other words, if we're motivated by power, significance, others' opinions, money, or self-worth, then our leadership is not based on God's love. The people we serve can tell if we're leading them out of self-interest or for their joy.

In a world that can feel so unsure, Paul reminds us the anchor of our souls is this: God is sure and faithful (v. 18). Do you see what he's saying? God is not careless. He doesn't trick us by mixing messages. He is faithful. We may know this, but have we allowed the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God to settle into our hearts? And do we believe everything that truly matters is "yes" in Jesus Christ? Fill in the following phrases based on what you've learned today.

Because God is faithful, He will _____.

Because God is faithful, I will _____.



DAY 4

Sincere and Straightforward (2 Cor. 1:12-24)

Today we will dig deeper into the text we studied yesterday. I had to camp out here a little longer because this text holds so much wisdom for us, especially we highly relational young women who can occasionally be passive-aggressive, insincere, or codependent—or is it just me? (It's probably just me.) First, let's revisit the word "sincerity" in verse 12. Remember how Paul explained to the Corinthians that postponing his trip came out of a sincere heart, not because Paul's heart was perfect, but because the sincere love he had for the Corinthians was from God—something he specifically wanted them to know.

I want you to see something really interesting about Paul's use of the word "sincerity" in an earlier letter.

Turn back to 1 Corinthians 5:6-8. What metaphor did Paul use to describe the difference between purity and sincerity versus malice and wickedness?

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a festival the Israelites celebrate in remembrance of their deliverance out of Egypt. Ridding their houses of yeast was symbolic of their purity before God. All these years later, Paul reminded the church in Corinth that a much more dangerous yeast needed to be removed—the one in their hearts. This leaven of malice and evil was spilling into conversations, spreading into relationships, and poisoning their community. As when yeast enters a batch of dough and spreads its effect throughout, so does the sin we allow to fester in our thoughts and hearts. Paul was urging them, and us, to rid ourselves of evil and live with sincerity! (This was way before the gluten-free muffin—Paul was so ahead of his time.)

Sincerity is somewhat of a lost quality in our time—it is overrun by manipulation, shading the truth, passive-aggressive responses, lying, and flattery. How much richer could the body of Christ be if we were pure and sincere toward one another, as well as to those in the world?

Paul detailed more specifically what sincerity looks like. Revisit 2 Corinthians 1:17-20. What two, small, single-syllable words did Paul emphasize in this text?

In verse 17, what did Paul say he did not do “in the same breath” (or simultaneously)?

What does it appear the Corinthians were accusing Paul of being?

- Wishy-washy**
- Fickle**
- Shady**
- All of the above**

We may not purposefully tell people yes when we really mean no, or say no when we really mean yes, but all of us have a way of doing exactly this in subtle ways. We say things like, “No really, I’m fine,” while giving someone the silent treatment. We claim we’ve forgiven someone, but then punish that person by withholding friendship. Or maybe we make a commitment to something but carry it out annoyed—essentially saying yes with a huge no in our hearts. Or we do the opposite—we say no with our words while every other part of our lives is saying yes to what we should be resisting.

Personal Reflection: Are you in a situation where your yes is not really your yes, or your no is not really your no? If so, prayerfully commit to straightening out your yeses and noes in this situation.

If we stopped here we’d have a helpful lesson in integrity and forthrightness. But I’m so grateful Paul didn’t stop here because today’s study is about so much more than merely upping our integrity meter. Go with me here.

Who had Paul and his friends been preaching about to the Corinthians (v. 19)? The _____ of God,

Do you see that this is not merely a message about trying to do better, but is all about the person of Jesus? But Paul goes even further.

All the promises that God has made are _____ in Christ (v. 20).

The Christian faith is not merely about achieving moral standards for the sake of being really good people. Paul had already spent much of his life trying to be a good person by achieving a stellar Jewish education, being a member of the Pharisees, being trained



by a top rabbi, and executing self-righteousness flawlessly. But he realized all of his “goodness” amounted to nothing but a dung heap. That’s literally how he put it.

As Paul defended his actions to the Corinthians, his point was that being wishy-washy or untrustworthy toward them would go against the essence of the message that God is faithful. He cannot lie. He cannot go back on His Word. He made a covenant promise to redeem His children, and every promise included in that is “yes” in Jesus. If God is not fickle with his yeses and noes, well, then Paul shouldn’t be either.

I wonder if one of the reasons we’re not always sincere or straightforward in our relationships is because we’re not grounded in the “yes” of Christ. I know I’ve waffled, flip-flopped, and gone back on my word at times because I wanted to make my life work the way I wanted it to. Sticking to a “yes” or “no” may have threatened that pursuit. But when I’m able to trust God’s faithfulness, allowing that and His character to rule over my life, I don’t have to be manipulative or insincere.

Personal Response: As we close today’s study, what’s been the most convicting part for you? If you can connect it to a specific phrase or verse from our text, jot down the phrase or verse alongside what you’ve learned.



“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”
(Phil. 3:7–8)

DAY 5

Not to be Outwitted (2 Cor. 2:1-11)

In the first part of today's reading, we'll encounter a situation every one of us has faced: Disappointing people we depend on to make us happy. In other words, when we have to confront a friend we love and enjoy—someone we like to go to Starbucks with—and we know this confrontation will make our friend upset or mad, then who will we have to text and grab a frappé with? We've all dealt with this dilemma, which is one of the reasons I love the way Paul addressed the scenario in 2 Corinthians.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:1-4.

Summarize why Paul decided to stay in Ephesus.

For what specific purpose did Paul say he wrote this letter (v. 4)?

One of the reasons we avoid confronting sin in another person's life is that we've made happiness the chief goal of our relationships—our own or the other person's. But true love shoots for holiness, which is not, as we may fear, stiff or boring. Holiness is the foundation on which thriving relationships find their footing. Whatever sin Paul addressed in the lives of the Corinthians—sin that was eating them alive (some of which we'll find out in more detail)—he wasn't confronting them to hurt them but to let them know how deeply he cared! Perhaps one of the greatest ways we fail to love people is when we say or do nothing while they struggle, all because we don't want to stir things up.

According to verse 4, Paul did not write for the sake of causing _____.

Paul wrote to express his love. In the original language, Paul grammatically positioned the word *love* in a way the Corinthians couldn't miss. Not only did he emphasize how greatly he loved them, but he also wanted them to know it. Who hasn't felt this way about someone we've so desperately wanted to see healed, restored, or delivered? We love them but they may not know it, and we want them to know it.

You may have someone in your life you long to see free from sin. I wonder if this person interprets your desire as being motivated by something other than love? Even if you've approached them in humility, mercy and kindness, do you think they view you as a killjoy or holier-than-thou? Explain.

Personal Response: Pause and pray that this loved one will receive your concern and correction as love.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.

Before we get into the details of who this person might be, whom did he grieve and cause pain (v. 5)?

Why did Paul advise the church to forgive and _____ him (v. 7)? Fill in the blank and respond.

Some believe this offender is the man Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 who had committed incest. Other scholars disagree because the details don't seem to match. What we do know is that this specific person had attacked Paul personally, which in turn affected the whole church community. This man's offense seems to be the focal point of a lot of the heartbreak Paul experienced with the Corinthians. Whatever the man's offense, it was significant.

In response to Paul's directive, the Corinthian church had taken some sort of disciplinary action toward this man. They probably removed the man from fellowship for a time, but in this passage Paul called for his restoration. The discipline had been effective and it was time to restore him to the community.

Personal Response: You've already noted that Paul urged the church to forgive and comfort this person. In verse 8 Paul told them to reaffirm their love for this man. What do you think this reaffirmation of love looked like and why was this extra step necessary?

We're about to focus on one of the most powerful words in all of *Christendom* a word mentioned several times in verse 10. Jot it down in the margin.



In verse 11, what reason did Paul give for offering forgiveness?

Personal Response: Why do you think forgiveness protects us from being taken advantage of, or outwitted, by Satan? Give this some thought. If it helps you to think in opposite terms, how does not forgiving allow Satan a foothold in our relationships?