



## Living in the World as Citizens of the Kingdom 2 Corinthians Chapters 1-6

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Review

## Before you begin..

We are excited that you have chosen to delve into 2 Corinthians. We hope that you will hear Jesus speaking whether you are studying alone or in a small group. Each study will take you into a passage of Luke verse by verse so you will need a Bible such as NASV, NIV, NKJ, NLT, or NRSV to understand it. Paraphrases such as the Message or the Amplified Bible will be difficult to use with the style of this book.

If you are using this resource in a group, you will find it helpful to work through each chapter **before** you meet together. Pray as you read it alone and write down your thoughts on the questions, encouragements and challenges. This will help in your discussions and will mean that you not only study the Word but receive it personally. If you are using this resource in a group it is very important to read the word aloud, both for the whole passage and for individual verses in the questions.

This resource has been designed so that you can use it with or without the talks, but if you are not using the talks it will be important to go through the introductions before you read the Scripture passage for that session.

Receiving the word as a group also includes prayer. It is good to pray at the start, asking the Holy Spirit to speak the word to your hearts and help you to understand and receive it. If you are in a group, here is a way of praying that encourages response to the word as well as supporting each other in our needs.

As you move into sharing and prayer time you may need to split a larger group into small groups of 3 or 4. This gives an opportunity for people to share openly and the time to pray individually for each one. You can respond to Scripture and share your prayer requests by asking each other these three questions:

1. What is Jesus saying to you from His Word?
2. How is He asking you to apply it with the help of the Holy Spirit?
3. How can we pray for you today

After you have asked these questions, have one person pray for the one who has shared. Make sure you pray for what she has shared in answer to all three questions; this way you will be praying scripture for one another and praying for spiritual as well as physical needs Then ask the questions to the next woman in the group.

*For more information and ideas on running small groups, we have written a great resource called "Living in the overflow" which is available through the Titus Women website.*

# Introduction

## Knowing Where We Belong

“There’s no place like home.” “Home is where the heart is.” These are common sayings, but often as believers we are confused about where we belong. If you don’t know where home is, then you don’t really know who you are or how you should think and feel about the place you are now. Have you ever gone somewhere not really knowing how long you are going to stay? I have. You don’t know whether to unpack your bags, whether to buy some things you would like to have with you. You don’t know whether to put your energy into making friends there or whether to remain self-sufficient. It is a complicated state of feeling without roots. As someone who has lived long term in different continents around the world, I am often asked the question “where is home for you?” Of course those who ask just want to know where I grew up, but I always think twice when answering it. If home is where you really belong, where you are truly known, and where you long to be, then I cannot answer with a country or a city.

When we accept Jesus as Savior, he saves us from being ordinary people, living in this world until we die. God leads us out of the kingdom of darkness and leads us into the Kingdom of his Son (Colossians 1:13). That Kingdom stretches far beyond this world and is not contained by what is visible to us. We are no longer just children of ordinary families because “to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he [Jesus] gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). The Father’s love for you changes everything. Home has changed, our family roots have changed, and when we believe who we are to God as His beloved adopted children, born of the Spirit, our hearts are transformed. What we possess, where we came from, what we are good at, what we have achieved, and what kind of earthly family we have are no longer the end of all we are. So Romans 8:17 says, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.” As children of the King, we are co-heirs with Christ of all eternity! By God’s grace we have a royal inheritance to look forward to. So how does that work out in our day to day, ordinary lives? How do we live out the truth of who God says we are in Christ? So often we surround ourselves with the things, the people, and the desires of this temporary world as though this is all there is and we are as at home here as everyone else.

Doesn’t surviving and getting by seem to take up all our time and energy sometimes? Don’t you just feel like sometimes you need a break from the daily tasks and challenges of living, like shopping and eating, looking after health and your family’s health, keeping place to live and fulfilling all your different roles as a daughter, sister, partner, mother, friend and neighbour or room mate, maybe a grandmother. How can we live in this world that is so daily while setting our hearts on what lasts forever, what we cannot easily see? How can we live as people who belong to Jesus the King instead of the Kingdom of this world? Jesus said “If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world” (John 15:19). If he has chosen us out of the world, why are we so good and just living as though the world is our home? There was another part at the end of

that promise that we will be heirs of eternity with Christ: “if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:17). We would love our new identity to include all victory and no struggle, all comfort and no pain, but that is not what we are promised. Jesus also said “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”( John 16:33).

The church in Corinth, who received this letter first, experienced many of the same challenges we do in their culture, where money, pleasure, knowledge, and status in this world was everything. They lived in a place where every kind of god was worshipped, and living to please yourself was the usual way. Living in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit led to a radical difference in their hearts, their behavior, and how they treated non-believers. But it was not easy, and 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians show us there were conflicts, confusion, and misunderstandings within the church as well as challenges from outside.

As you will see, 2 Corinthians paints gritty, real-life pictures of precisely what Jesus says: we will have trouble here, but we can live for the one who has ultimately overcome the world and look forward to being home with Jesus for eternity. Again and again you will see that living between the struggle and the glory, living today with our eyes on eternity, is not only about me but also about how Jesus, the suffering Savior, gives himself to the world.

## 1. Receiving the Truth

I heard a story of a rich woman who gets her food by searching through dumpsters for the waste thrown out by high quality food stores. Is that not a good picture of how we live as believers sometimes? I'm not talking about money here but hope. We have a hope in Christ for eternity and we are beloved heirs of the King of Kings. Yet often we are living as though we are nobodies and we have nothing – no hope, no promise of a future with Christ. We sometimes live in a desperate state, trying to control every detail of our lives and fearing everything that may threaten our idea of what this life should be like. We put our energy into surviving and storing up resources as though we have no God who loves us and no promise of eternity. We do not live in the truth that God has given us His own Spirit of life, life in Him, for His glory. It's as though Jesus has given us Himself as the all satisfying bread of life and we are still searching through rubbish in dumpsters to find food.

Like us, the Christians in Corinth were surrounded by all kinds of ideas about death and eternity. You can find almost any understanding of what happens after death if you look far enough—from reincarnation as something else on earth to becoming a star in heaven. Some feel they can communicate with spirits of the dead; others feel that the spirit of a dead person is changing their personality, somehow living again through them. In our own mixed up way, most people want to believe there is something beyond death, and the ideas that sound easiest become popular. Like the Corinthians, we get so confused and swayed by the thoughts and feelings of our culture. Many thought the body was earthly and therefore bad, so they expected death would allow them to be a free soul, without a body forever. They also thought that if their body was not important, they could do whatever they liked with it now and it would have no consequences for eternity. For others, there was no expectation of life after death, so they made it their goal to live for every good experience and gratify their every desire today. But the abundant life Jesus offers us is much more than any of these ideas. He has made the way for us to live in his eternal kingdom in this life and to share in the power of his resurrection. This is not about an afterlife that starts when we die but rather as we come to the cross and say "Jesus I want to die to myself, I give you my all", right then the Savior leads us into life with Him. We can touch the eternal and receive his presence in us and with us. He himself will live in us by the Holy Spirit so we can live for him, honoring him with our bodies now (1 Corinthians 6:12-20). Then, if we are his own, he promises a transformation: a new body that will not wear out for all eternity—a spiritual, glorious body, fit for living in his presence.

This is our hope, not that we must somehow go on and on in these weary bodies that break down, and not that we will be just invisible souls floating around in Heaven, but that we will be raised with Christ in a resurrection body of our own (1 Corinthians 15:35-56). It is an amazing truth that is radically different from anything the magazines, internet, and movies show us. If we really take hold of it, our perspective on everyday life will change. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to unravel the truth from all the other tangled ideas we have absorbed and to draw us to fix our hope upon his promises as we read his Word.

So we start with the foundation in 1 Corinthians, at the only place to receive this life—the empty tomb of Jesus.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–26.

1. Look again at verses 12 and 13. What is the relationship in these verses between Jesus being raised from the dead and our resurrection from the dead?
2. In what ways do our popular understandings of life after death and the ideas of our culture separate our hope for life beyond death from the cross and resurrection of Jesus? Give examples.
3. There is another consequence if Jesus did not really rise from the dead. Read verse 17. What does this verse say it means for us as believers now if Jesus is not risen?
4. In what ways does the church sometimes lose focus on the cross and resurrection of Jesus as our only place to receive forgiveness, hope, and meaningful faith? Where do we look instead?
5. Read verses 19 and 20. Jesus is the first fruits for a bigger harvest of his people who will be raised from death, but often we live as though this is not really true for us. What does verse 19 say about our hope?
6. Why do we get so discouraged in our faith if we only really believe what God can do for us in this life? When have you experienced this?
7. If our death came because we have all sinned since Adam, then eternal life comes because Jesus conquered sin and death for us. Read verses 23 and 24. What do these verses say is God's plan for us and for the authorities of this world when Jesus comes again?
8. Read verses 25 and 26. What do they show you of the power and authority of Jesus over everything that seems to control the world now?
9. How does the powerful truth of this passage contrast with our day-to-day mindset, and how does this touch you today?

## 2. Relying on the Father of Compassion

When Jesus died a real death on the cross, lay in a real grave, and broke free in real victory, the world was changed forever. There is nothing in our hope or faith that can stand without that foundation. This dynamic truth changes everything that we are now, and we become forgiven, risen people with a living hope in the living Jesus. When we give ourselves to him, he gives us the Kingdom. We no longer belong to a dying world but to a risen King who will reign for eternity with every other power or authority crushed under His feet.

A man was explaining why he stopped believing in Jesus. He said the thing that confused him was that as he read the Bible, he saw all the amazing promises about a new hope: living and praying for what matters in eternity and the certainty of risen life with God forever that would be far more wonderful than anything we can imagine now. He wanted to live in that truth, but when he spent time with Christians he felt that every prayer was merely trying for a better life now. Everyone he met seemed to be so fearful of death that they would do everything to avoid it and put their hope in anything possible to eke out their life here on earth. They didn't even seem to be about praying for others in their community to meet Jesus, lord of eternity. Their worship, prayers, and testimonies seemed to be all about just making circumstances a little better for themselves, rather than knowing and trusting the mighty, loving, saving God of all eternity. Sadly, the gap between the God he saw in Scripture and the ordinariness of the Christians around him led him to give up on Christianity. Have you ever felt that gap between what you read and what actually goes on amongst believers?

The promise of resurrection with Jesus is not for the day we die but for every day we live. Paul tells the Corinthian believers in his first letter, "And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world"(1 Corinthians 15:19 NLT). See, the kind of confused understanding the man experienced in the church not only keeps us from looking to eternity, it stops us from truly knowing, worshipping, or trusting God and from seeing his heart for the world now. Not only that, but as we begin the second letter to the Corinthians, we see the reality that we are not excused from any kind of suffering in this life. However, we have a God who can intervene to rescue, sustain, heal, and restore us in it, a God who hears prayers, and a God of comfort who comes to give us himself in the midst of it. Paul begins his letter by describing himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God"(verse 1). He knows the risen Jesus has sent him as his witness and as a leader with authority. Yet he has suffered incredible struggle and pain, often precisely because he is doing the will of God. All around the world there are people today who know that the choice to believe in Jesus or to share him with others will bring with it challenges, suffering, and even death or imprisonment. Yet they are ready to suffer for the truth of their eternal Savior out of total love for him and a solid hope that this life is not all there is.

The readers in Corinth are called "the church of God" and "Saints." That just means they are believers, God's own people, chosen out of the world—and that is who we are. The awesome truths and promises of God in this letter are for us as his people, but the struggles described here will also be ours in some

way. As you read on, you will see there is never a hint that suffering is only for non-believers or for believers who have walked out of God's will. Ask Jesus to open your heart to his presence so that you will see him as he is and set your hope on him alone.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

1. In verse 3, how does Paul praise God? What words does he use to describe him?
2. In what ways do we often see God differently from the titles in verse 3, pull away from him in tough times, or look for comfort in other things? Give examples.
3. Read verse 4. If we receive from the God of comfort in our suffering, what does verse 4 say about how the Holy Spirit can work through us for others?
4. How does this encourage you to give the Father of Compassion your past and present experiences of struggle?
5. Read verses 8 and 9. When they felt overwhelmed on their dangerous journey in Asia, how does he say the experience changed their hearts?
6. In what ways can times of facing our own weakness and vulnerability change us to trust in the God of life and death instead of relying on ourselves?
7. Read verse 10-11. What does verse 11 say about the power and importance of prayer in these situations of danger and suffering?
8. How does this passage encourage and challenge you to pray for others you know and others around the world who are experiencing terrible suffering or persecution?
9. In what ways can we pray differently for ourselves and for others so that we not only ask for change in circumstances, but we meet with the God of comfort and the Father of compassion?

### 3. Trusting the “Yes” of God’s Promises

In the place of suffering and struggle, we get to receive comfort from the Father of compassion. The comfort Scripture talks about is not about denying there is a problem or looking for something good in the situation. It is not something we work up in ourselves. It is not about looking on the bright side or forcing ourselves to see the glass as half full. These promises speak of a much deeper reality that does not depend on your personality or the power of positive thinking. In fact, if you try too hard in those ways, you might just miss the God who wants to meet you in the wounds of your past and the pain of the present. Sometimes we miss the rich blessing of knowing Him deeper in that place of being out of control; of trusting him for who he is, beyond the circumstances.

The truth is he is the God of comfort, and he wants you to invite him to meet you in every struggle. He is the Father of compassion who asks you rest in his embrace. Paul knew this—he had certainly been through enough to have met him and received from him. When we say to God, “Yes it is tough. this situation is awful, and you know it is, so I depend on you Jesus. I need you to carry me, hold me up, and tend to my wounds. Give me strength to face it,” then we receive his comfort. He gives us himself and something in us changes us forever. We realize our weakness and his mighty power; we are forced to rely on him as the Lord of Life when we see that we have no control. Right there, we see his heart of compassion for us and we can never be the same. In that place of resting in his embrace, we begin to hear his heartbeat for others and offer them comfort out of what we have received from God. What seemed to be a waste can become a blessing to us and to others.

Have you ever been telling someone how you feel when they begin to recount their own similar struggle and leave the conversation there? We’ve all been there, and at the end of it you are left standing alone in your same struggle. That is not giving the comfort we have received from God. Sharing the comfort from him may include us telling some of our story, but it will always draw others to throw themselves on Jesus, not on us, our experience, or any one solution or strategy. Knowing the Father heart of compassion will always draw us to pray for people and pray with people with a listening heart, believing that he is with them, he knows them, and he will work, both in the circumstances and in their hearts.

The church needs to be a place that echoes God’s heartbeat for his beloved people. But churches can be messy places where our own personal purposes get tangled up with God’s presence, and our own complicated emotions and personalities overshadow his character. Even his truth can be blurred by our own agendas. As Paul writes this letter, he is aware of the hearer’s response, both to his erratic travel schedule and to his ministry, especially the uncomfortable truths he had to teach in his first letter to the Corinthians. Listen closely as these words point us away from our changeable, uncertain, very human world towards the only dependable one.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12–22.

1. Look at verse 12. What does this verse say we can depend on instead of our own personality or ideas to shape how we live towards believers and the world?
2. Look at verse 14. What does this verse say to you about praying for your relationships to be right with believers before Jesus, in eternity?
3. Read at verses 18 and 19 again. In what ways does the world see a distorted, shaky “yes, no” faith and a Jesus who is not dependable when they look at believers now? Give examples.
4. Look at verse 20 again. How do these words inspire you to trust in Jesus as the “Yes” to all of the promises God ever made in Scripture?
5. In what ways do we sometimes trust in what we want Jesus to **do** in our changeable circumstances rather than putting our hope in Jesus **himself** as God’s unchangeable “yes”?
6. If we stake our lives on this Jesus, who fulfills all of God’s word to us for eternity instead of relying on ourselves or other things in this world, how will it change our thoughts and actions?
7. Read verses 21 and 22. How does verse 21 show you where Paul gets his willingness and endurance to serve?
8. Look at verse 22. How can it change your mindset if you understand the Holy Spirit makes you God’s own **for eternity** and receive Him as the promise of all God will give you?

#### *4. Going as the Aroma of Christ*

When we put our trust in the Jesus who is yes to God’s promises, we depend on God’s grace instead of our own wisdom and what the world tells us is important. All of God’s purposes for all of us for all time

and eternity were brought about through Jesus Christ. In his life, death, and resurrection, we see God's saving plan to rescue us and bring us back to himself forever. We need to allow him to become the center of our lives and the window through which we view the whole world. When we receive him like that, the Holy Spirit can come in, live in us, and seal us as God's own. Not only are we his own for now, but this is a deposit, a tiny glimpse of the awesome reality that we will be with him forever. But many of us look for Jesus in the world's idea of success and happiness. We look for him to be the "yes" to the world's empty promises and not God's promises. We read that verse "no matter how many promises the world and my heart has made, they are yes in Christ". It's a subtle twist but it causes us to believe in Jesus so that He can give me what I want. I say, "Jesus, I should have what normal people have, surely I deserve this." In doing so, our hearts are filled with our self-will, not his Spirit. We bend and wobble in a cardboard-cutout imitation of real faith, keeping Jesus on the sidelines. He cannot be the one to make us stand firm if we don't give ourselves completely to him.

In Paul, we see a heart that is completely surrendered and transformed by Jesus. The Holy Spirit turned Paul around from persecuting Jesus' followers to being willing to die and suffer for Jesus. All that he had known in the Jewish, Old Testament faith was fulfilled in Jesus. He found the unwavering "yes" to God's word in Christ. As he gave his life to take this message everywhere, whatever the cost, there were messy relationships, hurt feelings, and anguish in his heart because he really cared how people responded and lived out the truth of Jesus. He was staking his life on Jesus and not what was easy—the comfort, popularity, and success we all crave. How often do we really see this heart of sacrifice and this passion to see others come to know Jesus? Is it only for a few super-spiritual types? You and I look at Paul and say, "I could never be like that," and we miss the point. He was not "like that," but he allowed Jesus to fill his heart with the very heart of God, to fill his thoughts with the mind of Christ so that the Holy Spirit lived God's passionate commitment to the world through Paul. Jesus wants to do the same in you. It will not look exactly the same because God wants to put his heart in you as a unique person. However, that laying down of *me* and allowing Jesus to breath his life into us is what God desires for all of us.

When the Romans won a victory, they would hold a parade to give glory to the Emperor and to the gods they thought had given them victory. The people in the parade were not boasting of their own success—they were mostly those who had been taken captive and were no longer on the opposing side. As you read today, you will see that image of the victory procession. It is God who gets the glory because he has won the victory, not us. We are those who are not on the opposing side anymore but have allowed Jesus to take us for his own. This picture of the parade is all about lifting up the King and not about lifting up ourselves. It is a picture of him as the champion and the victory of the cross for all time for our sake; not us parading our own successes. Read carefully the description of the perfume of incense that is burned where there is real sacrifice and worship. Ask Jesus to save this image on your heart and draw you into this beautiful lifestyle.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:23–24 and 2:1–17

1. Look at 2:4–5. How do you see the heart of passionate commitment we need for others in these verses?

2. Read verses 10 and 11. Who does verse 11 say is involved when we do not forgive other believers? How does this verse describe his desire to keep us from being together in love?
3. Look at verse 14. How does Paul feel about the truth that Jesus leads us in his victory parade?
4. If Christ wins us, what does verse 14b say he will do through us?
5. If the aroma comes from sacrifice and worship for Jesus, what kind of heart and lifestyle gives off the aroma of Christ? When have you seen this in your community?
6. What are the attitudes and actions that cause us to give off a smell of ourselves or the world instead of the fragrance of Christ?
7. Read verses 15 and 16. How does this verse explain why some people will experience the aroma of Christ as a bad smell? How do you feel about this truth?
8. What are the places and who are the people who need you to carry the fragrance of Jesus to them?
9. How does Jesus need to humble your heart and give you his love and passion so that you can take his fragrance, not the smell of you?

## 5. Living as a Letter from Christ

As we walk behind Jesus in his parade as the champion and victor of all time, we are living as his presence in the world. From the church to the supermarket, from the prayer meeting to the doctor's office, wherever we are and whatever we feel like, Jesus can draw people to see him. In the image of this procession of triumph, the ones who have been won are not waving to the crowd and cheered as superstars, but walk in humility while the One who won them gets all the praise. The aroma of Christ is not the same as the sweet smell of success. He will often be seen in the very times when we are suffering and vulnerable. The aroma of his presence comes from a heart laid down in worship, willing to sacrifice whatever it takes to do his will. It is not just about saying the right words or talking about Jesus. It is not an air freshener that we can pump only when we choose, but a long lingering fragrance of the Holy Spirit transforming my heart so that there is less of me and more of him. We can only carry the aroma of Christ if we spend time with him in his word and in prayer. The smell will be obvious whether we planned it or not. It needs to be a consistent presence of the beauty of Jesus in me, not an occasional squirt of a strong perfume. It should be there when I go to the mall as much as when I go on the mission project. This fragrance may not always bring us popularity, and it may be an offensive smell to those who do not want to know him.

The life of Paul as an example of this truth shows us a picture of suffering and cost, persecution and tough endurance born out of a passion to know Jesus and to offer him to everyone everywhere. For Paul, there was no greater joy than living for Jesus because Jesus died, rose, and is living for us. His willingness to do whatever it took so that the life-giving truth of the Savior could be spread around the world led him to endure every kind of struggle, humiliation, imprisonment, and eventually death. So is that really that what it means to be in the triumphal procession of Jesus? Isn't the victory procession meant to be all smiles and woops? Isn't it meant to be a happy parade with lots of candy and people cheering for us? Well no, you will not always be cheered and celebrated, but yes it is the greatest joy—this is the procession that leads us into eternity. As we walk in the truth of Jesus as our champion, the one who has beaten death, we receive his love and life; live for him, not for ourselves, and go with him to the finish in heaven. Scripture promises over and over that God sees all that we do for Him and our reward will be in eternity. There we will be cheered and applauded for keeping on believing, hoping, loving others and refusing to leave Jesus. That is the certain hope of everyone who has ever been prepared to be laughed at, looked down upon, misunderstood, or treated badly for Jesus' sake. When we are willing to take God at his word, in blessing and in sacrifice, the aroma of Christ is spread in our words and actions: in how we relate to God and in how we treat other people. Jesus was the one who gave up everything in total sacrifice to bring us back to him, so the aroma of Jesus does not smell like self-gratification or self-promotion. It is released in our passion to follow Jesus into eternity and our refusal to make personal comfort our only goal now.

The next passage about being a letter from Christ stands on the new promise, or covenant, that has been won for us through Jesus: God does not give us a law written on paper or stone, but he writes his

word on our hearts by the Holy Spirit in us. (See Ezekiel 36:26-27.) With his new heart in us, we can be released from the condemnation of our inability to live the law and revived to new life with a desire to love him. Ask Jesus to show you his good purpose for you as we look at another picture of the promise and presence of the his Spirit in our lives.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1-6

1. Look again at verses 1 and 2. What does Paul say is the reason he does not need a paper letter of recommendation?
2. Read verse 3. If we are a letter, what does this verse say about whose letter we are?
3. Who does verse 3 say does the writing of this letter?
4. In what ways are we often striving to write the letter about Jesus from **us** instead of welcoming the Holy Spirit to write the letter in us from **Christ**?
5. How does this concept of Christ writing on you by the Holy Spirit and sending you as a letter to the world, encourage you and challenge you today?
6. Read verses 4 and 5. In these verses, how does Paul show us the key to believing Jesus wants to write the letter instead of trusting in our own ability?
7. In what ways do we start to put our confidence in ourselves and think ourselves adequate to share Jesus with others when we stop praying?
8. Look at verse 6. How does this passage change the way you see the work of the Holy Spirit in you to give the new covenant life, not just law, to you and those around you?

## 6. Reflecting His Glory

The image of us as a letter from Christ challenges me and thrills me at the same time. Jesus is wanting and waiting to show himself to the world in every place and circumstance, to every person. If I let the Holy Spirit write on my heart, constantly spending heart-to-heart time in his presence, he will reveal his presence in the hardest moments and in the best times. But sometimes we get it mixed up, and we end up desperately trying to write the letter ourselves. When we do that, the letter ends up being about me, not Christ. Sometimes we think people only read the letter when we deliberately hand it to them, as we speak about Jesus. Of course he will work in those conversations, but people will keep reading at the times when we think we have closed up the envelope. Like when the person in front of you is too slow at the checkout, or when your family member has just let you down or hurt you...again. At those times the open letter is being read when you are not looking. We get anxious that the letter can only show Jesus when everything is going smoothly, and yet the letter is often most open and easily read when we are faced with crises or disappointments. In those times, the letter can read, "Jesus is greater, he is with us, his love endures, he is more than just success, and he is Lord over life and death." The Jesus who suffered for us powerfully reveals his character in our suffering.

Now we are led to another image of who we are as believers. Paul says that the Spirit gives life, but the written law brought death. Despite what we might like and what our culture tells us is normal, he is not saying that God's law, his word, is outdated or doesn't apply today. What he is explaining is that the law, on its own, showed every way we fall short of God's ways and therefore could not save us. This was the old covenant, the love binding commitment between God and the people of Israel that He would be their own God and they would be His own people. The people could offer animal sacrifices to ask God to forgive their sin but the Law in itself could not save them. However, because Jesus has taken our condemnation on himself to save us, the Holy Spirit comes to write the law, God's way of life, on our heart. So Jesus says at the Passover meal in [Luke 22:20](#) "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. The cross is the sacrifice that brings us back into committed relationship or covenant with God so that now we can be His precious people, led out of death and led into life with him.

The Spirit bursts into our hearts to fill us with a desire to love him and give us his power to live out the Word. The Spirit does not lead us to reject God's Word, but to hunger for it and receive it in the deepest hidden places of our hearts and minds. This is the extraordinary promise of the New Covenant that we are able to be part of. In the giving of our whole heart, with every dark corner and every twist and crack, over to Jesus for the Holy Spirit to transform, we get to be touched by his glory. It will look different in every surrendered life but as we saw in the image of us as the fragrance or the letter from Christ, the glory will be His own.

When Moses was given the Law, as we read in Exodus, he encountered this glory in such a way that it made his face shine. He had to cover it with a veil because it was too much for the people of Israel. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart to the explosive possibility of living in his presence and looking to the One who longs to draw you into his incredible brightness.



Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

1. Read verse 7. Even though the law brought death because we could not keep it, how does verse 7 describe how the law on stone came to Moses?
2. Look at verses 8 and 9. What do these verses promise about the way God transforms our hearts by his Spirit to put us right with him?
3. In what ways do we live far beneath the amazing glory of the Holy Spirit's power in us to transform us? Why do we struggle to believe it is for us or receive Him in this way?
4. Read verses 12 and 13. If we welcome this glorious ministry of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, what do these verses say about how we will openly live our faith for all to see?
5. Read verses 14 and 16. Who is the only one who can take the veil away for each of us so that we can know God?
6. Read verse 17. What does this verse say will be there where the Holy Spirit is present?
7. Look at verse 18. What change does it say the freedom to see God without a veil will lead us into if we choose to gaze on him like a mirror and welcome the work of the Spirit?
8. How do all these images of glory inspire you to pray more and open your heart more to the work of God's spirit?

## 7. Shining with His light

If we fix our eyes on God's glory, then we will be changed. If you use a mirror to reflect the light of the sun, the intensity of heat starts a fire. But the mirror has to be angled towards the sun. It has no power to start a fire and change the surroundings on its own. Have you ever felt like you are definitely not being touched by God's glory in your humdrum, day-to-day thoughts and reactions and personality? Have you ever felt just fed up of yourself? This image in 2 Corinthians 3 is full of meaning for all of us. First, because Jesus has taken the veil away by his death and resurrection, there is no veil between you and God. This is a promise for you, not just a few special people.

This freedom to know God and receive from him is brought to you by the Holy Spirit. Wherever he is present, God's freedom will be there. So by his power, we can choose to tilt that mirror away from self and towards the glory of God. Where his glory is reflected nothing can remain the same. The Holy Spirit brings light and warmth to our lives, and we are transformed right into the messiest corners of our minds and hearts. It is not about a one-time event, but a lifetime of asking the Spirit to keep that mirror of our hearts tilted towards him.

Like plants, who need the sun to survive, when we are only focused on self, however hard we try, we will wither; we will not be changed. Sometimes we think it is about us trying harder, doing better, getting it right, and telling the truth about Jesus; then God's glory shines through us. This is a subtle misunderstanding that the enemy often whispers to us, and our independent hearts agree. This Scripture says no, it is the opposite way round. Our role is to keep our hearts and minds fixed on Jesus, not just learning about him, but meeting with him. As we come to him in the freedom of the Holy Spirit we see his glory and we are changed from the inside out. We do this in our worship, reading the Word, and in prayer (by ourselves and with other believers). In John 8:12 Jesus says 'I am the light of the world' But in Matthew 5:14 he also tells us "you are the light of the world". Have you ever wondered how both those statements can be true at the same time? The answer is His work in us. We can't be the light of the world unless we know the light of the world. As we gaze on him, bow down to him, listen to him, talk to him, receive from him, his light fills us and we desire to reflect his glory to the people around us. It will not always come through looking great and doing everything right, but through us showing our eyes are fixed on him, not on ourselves or everyone else and what the world tells us really matters. That is how he can start fires among the people who see: not just us trying to be good, but the glory of God exploding through our ordinariness.

The glory of God, the light and the warmth, were never meant to be just for us to enjoy on our own. Sometimes we live our faith as though it were an individual sunlamp, just for me. God wants us to enjoy him, but a private faith is not the real truth, just as an electric sun lamp is not the same as the real sun. Ask Jesus to touch you with his passion for the world as you read today.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1- 6

1. Look at verse 2 again. In what ways do we need to be careful to speak the real truth of God's word without trying to alter it or try to make it more like people want to hear?
2. Read verses 3 and 4. What does verse 3 say about why many people cannot see the truth about Jesus?
3. If Satan is involved, what does it show us about why we must always pray for unbelievers along with sharing the truth about Jesus?
4. Look again at the end of verse 4. How have you experienced yourself or seen others gradually seeing the light that reveals Jesus, not just as an important man but as the image of God himself?
5. Look at verse 5. What does this verse say about the attitude of our heart in sharing Jesus with others? How does this touch you today?
6. How does praying for non- believers help us to make our message, and however they respond, all about Jesus, not about ourselves?
7. Read verse 6. How does this verse describe what God does in our hearts to draw us to see the God of glory in the face of Jesus?

How does this passage encourage you and challenge you to pray for His light to shine on those you know and people around the world, who do not know him?

## 8. Carrying His Treasure

Why would the same God who commanded his light to shine out of darkness at the foundation of the world bother to shine his light in my heart? Who am I to hold the knowledge of the Glory of God within me? How could he want me to understand his character fully revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, the exact image of God? It seems outrageous and yet wonderful. Only the God of grace who passionately longs to draw us into his love would ever be willing to do all this through giving me himself, his own Spirit to work in my heart. It is all from him, and we cannot take any credit, even for believing.

This incredible truth cannot be expressed in words, and the only appropriate response is awe and utter worship: the kind where we fall at his feet and give him the throne of our hearts. Yet often, we live under the illusion that we are in control of our faith, or that we did well to believe in Jesus. The reality is that we needed the light to shine to free us from the blindness the enemy had planned. By ourselves, we cannot heal the eyes of our hearts, and therefore we need to pray for everyone we know not just to hear about Jesus but for the light of knowing the glory of God in Jesus to shine into their hearts.

Our culture often uses the language of darkness to talk about poverty, sickness, suffering, and traumatic situations—our outward circumstances. But the Scripture talks about Jesus himself as our light, the only one who can free us from the blindness in our hearts towards him. So in the most terrible, desperate circumstances, the one who has received the knowledge of the glory of Jesus is living with his light in them. On the other hand, the brightest star with the most comfortable lifestyle and the greatest talent and opportunities to do good can be living in thick darkness, blinded by the god of this world. Light for his people is not dependent on health, abilities, or circumstances. The darkness is real, but those who have Jesus within them have an eternal light that cannot be snatched away, even in death.

So if we are carrying this incredible glory, the light of knowing God in Jesus, then what will our lives look like? If Jesus, the Light of the World, is living in our hearts, then how will we carry this eternal, mighty presence? Will we suddenly be invincible, untouchable, super-powered beings? The passage today holds the answer. The clay pots or jars, the earthen vessels that you will read about here, are not ornate vases, beautifully molded and painted with rich colors. They are cheap, plain, common, and fragile containers used for holding ordinary things of everyday life. They are still used in places like Africa, and often not turned on a potter's wheel. They are uneven and misshapen, easily cracked. The image this passage gives is more like a cardboard shoebox or a cheap, cracked plastic container, and yet this is what these verses say will house that radiant glory. However we feel it is not about us but about Jesus in us. Thank the Lord he puts his glory in fragile containers like us!

Ask Jesus to open your mind to this life-changing truth and show you how to be a clay pot filled with his treasure.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

1. Read verse 7. Why would we like our frail, ordinary lives to be changed into something stronger and more impressive than a jar of clay if we carry the light of Jesus?
2. In verse 7, how does carrying the glorious treasure of knowing Jesus in fragile, ordinary lives help people see God, not us?
3. How have you seen the glory of God shining through his people in times of struggle or vulnerability?
4. Look at verses 8 and 9. What is the Apostle's testimony in these verses of the power of Christ in their persecution and struggle? How does this touch you?
5. Read verses 10 and 11. If we always carry around the death or suffering of Jesus in our lives, what do these verses promise about the resurrection life of Jesus?
6. What does verse 16 say about the life God breathes into our hearts, even in the midst of suffering?
7. Look at verse 17. What is the comforting comparison between our temporary struggles now and the weight of what will last forever?
8. Read verse 18. What does this verse say about what we can see now and how we need to fix our hearts on what the things of eternity?
9. How does praying and reading the Word open our eyes to the invisible things that will last forever?
10. How has this passage challenged you and encouraged you in your understanding of how we live knowing Jesus and carrying his presence to the world in this unpredictable life?

9. *Camping with Our Eyes on Home.*

The promises of God for eternity are real today. When we are living in the daily realities of meeting deadlines and expectations, paying the bills, getting on with difficult people, dealing with health issues, or coping with losses and trauma, it is easy to get our eyes off the eternity that Jesus has won for us. We become so focused on the immediate needs that we stop looking at what Jesus is longing to do in our hearts to prepare us to be with him forever. We also lose sight of his desire to show the people around us the truth of who they are to God and Jesus, the Savior who will long to take hold of their lives and carry them into eternity.

The massive promises of the 2 Corinthians 4:7-18 are precisely for people like us. This is a totally upside-down way of looking at our lives and God's heart for us. It is like seeing the world and ourselves on a real visit instead of looking at a photo. When people look at us, we want them to see the power of Jesus, not to be impressed with our life. The fragile, ordinary lives of his people are the container he uses to show them his glory. It is often through our wounds, weakness, pain, and struggle that he shows we are never abandoned or hopeless, because Jesus is with us and he is our strength. It is not just that He shows His glory and risen life through us *despite* our weakness but that Jesus reveals Himself *in* our weakness, maybe *because* of our struggles. Not only that, but what feels like a heavy burden now is just a moment and is light compared to the incredible weight of glory God has stored up for us forever. So what seems important, what we see with our eyes, is not what will last. The Holy Spirit can lead us to set our minds on the things that are important to God, the things of his Kingdom that will never end if we get close enough to look through his eyes.

We would all like the life of Jesus to be shown in our doing things well, having the best, never dealing with pain or problems, but these images say the opposite. For everyone who has ever been told the lie, "If you are suffering you must not be living for Jesus," these promises are life and truth. Maybe it's never been spoken, maybe it's just a whisper from the enemy, but every one of these truths destroy that lie that lingers in the back of our minds. Often we believe "in this place of struggle God is far from me," or "The Holy Spirit can't work in me or through me because I am broken, weak, messed up." According to this word, you are precisely the kind of cracked vessel that God wants to use to show his power to the world. He is with you, and you can share in the suffering of Jesus who died as you suffer yourself. Right there, as you stand in him no matter what, people will see the risen life of Jesus. And all around the world, those who risk their dignity, their safety, and even their lives for the love of Jesus have proven these promises to be true. They don't just believe, they stake their lives on these truths. They know Jesus in the deepest ways and shine with His unquenchable life in their living and their dying.

Why does Paul keep referring to the "body" in these scriptures? The understandings and philosophies of Corinth were not too different to our culture today. The body was seen as earthly and unspiritual therefore they thought God could not be involved with our bodies. They believed you could do what you liked with your body and it would not have any consequences for your spiritual life or for eternity.

So how do we live as clay pots, carrying the eternal treasure? How do we set our hearts on what we cannot see, the real things that will last forever? How will this radical attitude affect our thinking about

what we do and what we have for today? Ask Jesus to break into your instincts to see this world as your permanent home and whisper the truth in your heart: "Compared to eternity with Jesus, this life is just camping."

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

1. Look at verse 1. What are this life and our bodies compared to in this verse?
2. In verse 1, how is eternity described as our home, and who has given it to us?
3. In what ways do we act as though this body, our life now, is our real, permanent home? What are the thoughts and actions that show we don't set our heart on any other home?
4. Look at verses 2-3. In what ways does this life feel like groaning in tents, longing for home?
5. Read verse 5. Since Jesus has swallowed up death in his resurrection life, what does this verse tell us God has given us as the guarantee of his victory, the "down payment" on our future home?
6. Look at verses 7 and 9. If we trust the promises of Jesus for eternity, not only what we see, what will be our priority and desire?
7. Read verse 10. In what ways do we like to think of Jesus as our champion, rescuer, and friend, but struggle to think of him as eternal Judge?
8. Think about this passage. If you see Jesus as the only Judge, who offers the mercy of eternal, abundant life, a home in heaven, how will it change the way you think and pray about your circumstances and the people you know?

## 10. Loving as Ambassadors of the Cross

As believers, we so easily forget who we are. As people who are set free we are no longer “only human” but filled with the Spirit who transforms us to be the daughters of God, royal heirs of the King. We are more than our background, our present circumstances, or our future achievements. We belong to the God who is Lord over all time, the one who was there before time began and will be there to wrap up time at the end of this world. He promised He is building us a heavenly home with His own hands. It is nothing that we can prepare for ourselves. Whatever terrible pain and struggle we go through here, it is light and lasts a moment compared to the weight of glory God has prepared for us forever.

Yet while we are here in this tent, this vulnerable body, blown by every storm of circumstances and sickness, Jesus is with us. He has lived in a tent like ours and understands how wearisome it can be. He holds us up, He keeps the pegs in, and He lives with us in the tent. Jesus is our sustainer, our healer, and the giver of life who we can depend on now. He even draws us into His death so that we can receive His risen life in our hearts and show it to the world. But many of us wonder why the tent is not prettier or more stable. Have you ever been camping with someone who does not fully understand it is only temporary? We get frustrated and disappointed when we feel things are not how they should be here, not like home. We feel this “tent” should be more solid, no wind blowing through, no noise of rain, no nasty insects. We conclude that maybe Jesus is not Lord, He is not good, or He is not able to make this tent more comfortable, enjoyable, and durable. And Jesus wants to whisper again, “I love you. I have made you a home with me forever—this is just camping.”

When we set our hearts on every experience and possession that our culture tells us we deserve, when we live as though this is all we will ever have, then we are trying to make what should be camping our permanent home. Our understanding of medicine and health strategies can woo us into thinking that we can make this body last. But ultimately we can only look after it while we are here temporarily, and we cannot stop it wearing out. We can pray and Jesus will meet us in extraordinary ways, but eventually death will come. This world, this tent, will never bless us continually, never give us perfect rest like the amazing paradise that Jesus has won for us. Sometimes we feel like we can't trust Him for Heaven because life now seems so tough and painful. Jesus grieves with us in our frustration and agrees with our sadness, weeping at the hurts, mess, and injustice of the world with more sorrow than we could ever feel ourselves. So we need to put our whole selves into His hands and pray continually “Fill me with the truth of eternity, help me to trust you, and lead me to live for the real things that last forever. Holy Spirit, fix my eyes on the hope of coming home to you.”

1 Corinthians 15 describes this same reality: we can share in the resurrection life of Jesus with a new forever body that will be fit for eternity. And so we choose to trust the Jesus who will not just keep us going on life support, but the risen Jesus who will raise us up with Him. If we really believe and invite the Holy Spirit to give us a new heart, then our desire will be to please Him whatever our circumstances and to revere Jesus as the one who sees and will be our Judge. This is such an uncomfortable picture for us, but the Judge is also the Savior who pleads mercy and already took our verdict of guilty on Himself.

Living with an understanding of Jesus as eternal judge frees us from trying to do what will always please everyone around us. When we don't think of Jesus as the one who sees us we worry about how others think of us. The reality is that whatever anyone else may say about us we are ultimately accountable to Jesus, not them. He is the one who has real authority and will work in us to do what is right and good. We can trust Him as the righteous judge who not only hears the facts but has been with us in every moment of our lives and has experienced many of the same temptations himself. He knows everything we give to Him, every thought we invite Him to lead us in, every sacrifice, every commitment to Him and he will not forget any of them. There is a peace in grasping that. Out of love for Jesus, we can move from always asking ourselves "Does this please me?" to praying "Jesus, does this please you?" Our trust that He will save us for eternity draws us deeper into His desires for us in our lives now.

So what is the truth that drives us and shapes our present life in this world? How do we live along side those who don't know the Jesus, the merciful judge? What will be our passion and our song? Ask Jesus to take you by the hand and lead you to the cross as you read this incredible description of life in the flow of His saving love.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-20

1. Read verse 11. How does a reverent fear of the God who sees and will judge lead to an urgency to share Jesus with others?
2. Look at verse 14. What does this verse say about the truth of the cross and what compels us or drives us to tell others?
3. Read verse 15. How does this verse say Jesus' death and resurrection for us radically change who we live for? How does this touch you?
4. How is this focus in verse 15 on Jesus instead of self totally different to what we are used to hearing and thinking about our lives?
5. Look at verses 16 and 17. In the new creation of new life in Jesus, how does verse 16 say He will change our hearts towards other people? How does this verse challenge you today?
6. Read verses 18 and 19. What do these verses say about how Jesus brought us back to God and carried our sin at the cross?
7. How is this message of forgiveness at the cross changing us from God's enemies into His friends different to the message we sometimes give to non-believers?

Read verse 20. To be an ambassador representing the King of kings is an honor and a responsibility. What is our passionate message in verse 20, and how do you feel about carrying it?

## 11. Showing Christ in Everything

If an outsider walked into our churches, listened to our songs, looked at our buildings, watched how we pray and how we interact with each other and the communities we live in, what would they see? What would they think was our hope? What would they hear as our message? Over and over the New Testament says that the center of all this should be the cross and resurrection. Is that what would be seen? Chapter 5 gives us amazing words to set our faith right where we have lost focus and where the truth has been blurred. Verses 14 and 15 blast apart the many subtle ways we have missed the real cross. The power of cross to save us from sin is also the power to save us from ourselves. Because Christ has died and risen for us, we get to die to self and live for more than just ourselves and our thoughts and desires. We get to live for Jesus who died for us and beat death for us. We can be controlled by His love instead of just being driven by our inward fears, insecurities, experiences, selfish needs, and distorted perspectives. With His Holy Spirit in us, we can live for Jesus here, and that means we get to live with Him forever, where there will be no more death or pain or suffering. Is that good news or what?

The cross of Jesus is for you and me, and when we give our hearts to Him there, God is delighted to forgive us so that we change from being His enemies to being His friends. He is thrilled to save us into His eternal embrace. But the place of His embrace is the place where we receive His heart for every one we will ever meet. From the awkward relative to the overbearing co-worker, from our own dear friends to the farthest stranger across the world, the Spirit opens our hearts to see everyone in the light of the cross. In the new creation we look beyond appearances and how we experience them to how God sees them. His heart for them leads us to offer the message of the cross. We go representing the King, not just to tell them His words but to reveal His heart in our love for them. The Holy Spirit sends us in the mercy of Christ to tell the truth that they can know Him and receive His love. That there is a way back to God, and that way is Jesus. This is not an easy message to share, and our culture wants us to say, "You can go whatever way you like, believe what you want, and you'll be fine." But that is not the message of the cross, and we forget who we are as ambassadors of the King who wore a crown of thorns whenever we change the message. There was no other way for us to be reconciled to God, no other way to break the rebellion that causes us to refuse Him as King. Only through the King becoming a citizen of our world, giving Himself over to death, could we be free from death, living apart from the life giver.

As we have already heard in this letter, the message is more than just words. The power of the cross in our life will also reflect the sacrifice and the pain of the cross. So the cross is not just what we say, but what we live; the cross-shaped life. It looks like the love that is risky and costly. It looks like choosing to believe and do things God's way when no one around you respects or wants that. It looks like trusting and praying even through the toughest storms of life. It looks like praying for open hearts and pleading with others to be reconciled to God when you might be rejected or mocked because of it. This is what Jesus gives us the power to do through His Spirit in us when we live, not for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again for us. It's not "cool," and it may not look exactly like the dreams and life-goals our culture encourages us to set for ourselves. But what Jesus has dreamed for you is far deeper and more

meaningful than you can imagine and reaches beyond any goal you could think up, right into eternal glory. The joy of knowing Him and hearing His heart for the world is greater than any kick you get or any fun the world will offer you. The Cross is our hope for eternity, the message we offer the world and the shape of our lifestyle. In the following words you will see the cross-shaped life that can only be lived in through the Holy Spirit. As you read today, ask Jesus draw you into His call to a life of sharing in the power of the cross.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 and 6:1-10

1. Look again at 5:21. What was God prepared for Jesus to become, and what does it mean we can become in this merciful exchange?
2. This verse says that because Jesus took on our hearts of sin, we get be filled with His heart, his character. What does this mean for our relationship with God and how we show Him in our lives?
3. Read chap 6:1-2. What is the urgent need expressed in this verse to respond fully to God's incredible grace to us?
4. In what ways do we receive God's grace "in vain" and miss the "day of salvation", for ourselves or others ,without realizing it?
5. Look at verses 4 and 5. What have the apostles been prepared to go through as servants of God to make sure the message is spread? How does this inspire you?
6. If we are to be the righteousness of God it will show in all situations. Read verse 6. What does it say are the outward signs of a heart surrendered to Jesus, even in the struggle?
7. Look at verse 7. What does God gives His servants in this verse? How does this challenge you and encourage you to live for Jesus in every situation and season of life?
8. Read verse 10. What is the promise in this verse for those willing to bear the sorrow and the cost of the cross-shaped life?

What are the ideas, misunderstandings, and worries that keep you from living the rich life in this passage that Jesus wants for you?

## 12. Being a Temple of the Living God

The difference between the me-shaped life and the cross-shaped life is Jesus. Without Him, we are not free to grasp His grace fully and respond to the saving power of His love. There are those who will sacrifice for a cause, and there are those who endure anything to reach a goal. We hear stories of incredible perseverance, rescue or survival. Sometimes their names are remembered and we celebrate their extraordinary personalities and their unquenchable spirit. But this is not about personality, sheer determination, or a strong spirit. In fact, our determination needs to be to listen to Jesus, not just achieve our goal. As we do that, we do not fight for ourselves; rather, He fights for us. The power comes from Him, not us, and it is the Holy Spirit that shows, not our strong spirit. The name that we want to be remembered is not our own but the name of Jesus.

The amazing thing about this beautiful, cross-shaped life is that it is for anyone, but it will not look the same for everyone. It is not a “one size fits all” lifestyle. Jesus takes us as we are, and if we give Him our skills, our personality, our interests, our experiences, our past wounds and our weaknesses, He can craft them into a glorious life in Him. He may call you to go to a far flung place and share the love and compassion of Jesus there, but equally we are asked to live this radical life amongst our relatives and neighbors, in our schools and workplaces, and in our friendships and marriages. The point is that we need to constantly pray, “It’s all about you Jesus, not about me, and I am willing to do whatever you ask me, whatever the cost. I am not able, but you are able” Whether you feel creative and bold or practical and timid, Jesus *in you* can lead you to live in His power and His passionate care for a world who need to see Him.

If have given ourselves to Jesus in that way, 2 Corinthians 6 says His fruit in us will be kindness, patience, purity, and genuine love, even in the toughest times of struggle. If you have ever seen that in someone, you will know what a joy it is to be around them. God wants to give us His power, His character of righteousness, and the truth to share with the world. These are the weapons we carry and they are given by Him, not worked up by us. For Paul and the apostles, this meant opposition and often being misunderstood or rejected by people they hoped would listen. They did not have nice homes, but travelled from place to place with no certainty of their basic needs being met. Many people around the world live sacrificially like this and yet they are rich. This is the person who might have nothing in the world’s eyes, but in God’s eyes they have everything, both now and for eternity. They may carry deep sorrow, both for their own pain and the brokenness of the world, but they can rejoice because their certain hope is in God—not just their circumstances or the world.

What does it mean for us to have that certain hope? Sometimes we feel that if this world is so messed up and filled with so much pain, how can we trust Jesus? The Jesus of Scripture intervenes in the brokenness and meets us in it, but He does not promise a life with no more suffering until we are in Heaven in His presence. With Him and only with Him, there is no more pain or darkness or death for eternity, and the full power of the cross will transform heaven and earth and destroy Satan forever. There He will wipe our tears away Himself (Revelation 21: 2-7). So if we trust in that Jesus, we are not

living a faith which is dependent on everything working out as we hoped. Instead, we trust in God Himself, and our hearts are set on eternity. We need to pray continually, expecting Jesus to meet us in every circumstance, heal us, carry us, fight for us, show Himself to us, and grow us in the midst of it. Sometimes He will take away the struggles in miraculous ways, but other times we will need to look at His heart for us, not just the visible outcomes. He loves you, and your heart is safe with Him for eternity so then, you can rest in His embrace for today.

But how do we live out this kind of life when the world is so near? If the world sees us looking for satisfaction in everything they already worship, how will they see Jesus? How can we be ambassadors and the fragrance of Christ if we sound and smell like everyone else? How do we live radical, cross-shaped lives, passionately involved in the world without our lives becoming world-shaped? The distractions and temptations come from every direction, in the church as well as the world. Satan adds his whispers in the mixed up thoughts of our own minds and hearts. The next passage says we are the “temple of the living God”, clean and separate” Does that mean we have to be disconnected, dull, disinterested in the people of the world? No; if we are His temple, filled with His presence then we carry the presence of God out to the world. If we have the Holy Spirit of Christ in us then we must be the most connected, the most engaged people, the most compassionate people on earth because we love with the love of Jesus Himself. So how do we live as a temple of the living God? Of course it starts with giving Him all of our hearts, our minds, our personality, our past, our present and our future. We come with all that we are and all that we have to the cross; we give it all to Jesus and we welcome Him to live in us and rule in us by the Holy Spirit.

This last passage gives us more images of who we are if we have laid down self and given Christ the first place in our hearts. You are not “only human”. You are light, not darkness. You have been given the highest honour to be royal Sons and daughters of the Father. If we understand who we are, it will change how we live. Ask the Lord to help you receive the truth of your identity in Him, and allow Him to lead you as one of His beloved, covenant people in His light, His presence, and His Father heart.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:11-18

1. Look at verses 12 and 13. Paul is asking the Corinthians to open wide their hearts to the ministry and message the apostles bring, but they are opening their hearts wide to other things. What is the difference taking Jesus' love into the world and being so influenced that we think like the world and close our hearts to the truth of the word of God?
2. Read verse 14 again. What is the strong warning in this verse about our relationships with unbelievers, and how does it describe the difference between us and the world?

3. Verse 14 is not saying keep far away from unbelievers but in what ways do we get dragged along, “yoked,” and become partners with unbelievers and the world in our relationships and in what we take into our hearts and minds? Give examples.
  
4. Look at verse 15. How do the shocking words about Satan (Belial) and Christ speak to us about who we are in relation to the world?
  
5. Read verse 16. These words are from the love binding covenant God gave to His people in the Old Testament, and they describe us as a temple filled with His holy presence. What does verse 16 say to you about God’s promise to be with you and live in you?
  
6. Look at verse 18. What does it (also a quote from the Old Testament) tell you about God’s good parent heart for you and who you are now if you are his? How does this touch you?
  
7. Read verse 17 and Chapter 7 verse 1. If we are His own covenant people, His children, His temple, those who have reverence for a Holy God, then how do these verses describe what He wants to do in our hearts in how we relate to the world?
  
8. What are the things that can “contaminate” our minds, hearts, and behaviors if we forget who we are and open ourselves up to everything around us? Give examples that are relevant to you.
  
9. How does the call to be clean and pure as God’s special people affect how we become a letter from Christ and His ambassadors and the fragrance of him to non-believers?

# Review

As you come to the end of this series, I encourage you to go back and read the Scriptures again, asking Jesus to speak all that He wants to say to your mind and heart through the Holy Spirit.

Here are some questions to help you review all that Jesus is saying through 2 Corinthians:

1. What do you hear about God's love for you?
2. What do you hear about the cross?
3. What do you hear about the victory of Jesus over death and your hope for resurrection?
4. How does a hope for eternal life change your perspective on this life?
5. What do you hear about the connection between our suffering and the death of Christ?
6. How does sharing the suffering of Jesus lead us into the life of Jesus?
7. How does God touch us with His glory?
8. What are the images of His presence in our lives?
9. What are the descriptions in these passages that show how we take His truth and love to the world?
10. What do these passages say to you about the Holy Spirit?
11. How have these scriptures changed your perspective on struggle and all that Jesus wants to be to you and through you in those times?
12. How have these scriptures helped you to think about where you put your hope?
13. How has 2 Corinthians challenged you and encouraged you to give everything to Jesus and trust His good will for you?

Ask Jesus to minister His truth where you are confused or wrestling with doubt

Look at the lies about suffering that come from our hearts and the enemy.

Often we do not realize they are buried at the back of our minds, but they can block us from knowing the God of comfort and prevent us from relying on Jesus or showing Him to the world. Often they are deep echoes in our hearts that we are not even aware of. Sometimes they are things that have been taught or spoken to us by other people and Satan adds His whispers. Pray that Jesus will show you any that you are believing. As you read the truth of Scripture next to it, ask Him to heal you and set you free from whatever has caused you to think that way. Take time to read the Scriptures and memorize those that are particularly for you.

### Lies about suffering

### Truth from 2nd Corinthians

This means that God does not love you, if He did your life would be more like you dreamed.	2 Cor 5:14 "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> 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."
Struggles like this do not happen to spiritual people, people with strong faith.	2 Cor 5:1 "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. <sup>2</sup> Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling..."
God does not see your struggles or hear your cry.	2 Cor 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles.....
You are weak, you are no use to God	2 Cor 12:9 "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."
You are too broken, you cannot help other people.	2 Cor 1:3 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."
You are an embarrassment to Jesus, you cannot show His glory.	2 Cor 4:7 "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup> We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body."
If everything is so tough now, how can live for Jesus or trust for Heaven?	2 Cor 5:7 "For we live by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup> So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it."
Jesus is not in control—see how good people suffer, and those who do what they want get away with it.	2 Cor 5: 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."

## Lies about suffering

## Truth from 2 Corinthians

You have to carry this, just get on with it.	2 Cor 6:18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."
This part of your life is wasted.	2 Cor 4:16 "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."
People who know Jesus don't have struggles like this; they are successful people.	2 Cor 3:5 "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God."
You are not blessed, so why would anyone see Jesus because of you?	2 Cor 4:5 "For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (NASB)
Christians must live in success and celebration; suffering or anguish is sinful.	2 Cor 1: 5 "For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ."
You are a mess. This pain and struggle is all you are now.	2 Cor 2:14 "But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere."
These circumstances are in control of your life.	2 Cor 1:20 "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. <sup>21</sup> Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, <sup>22</sup> set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."