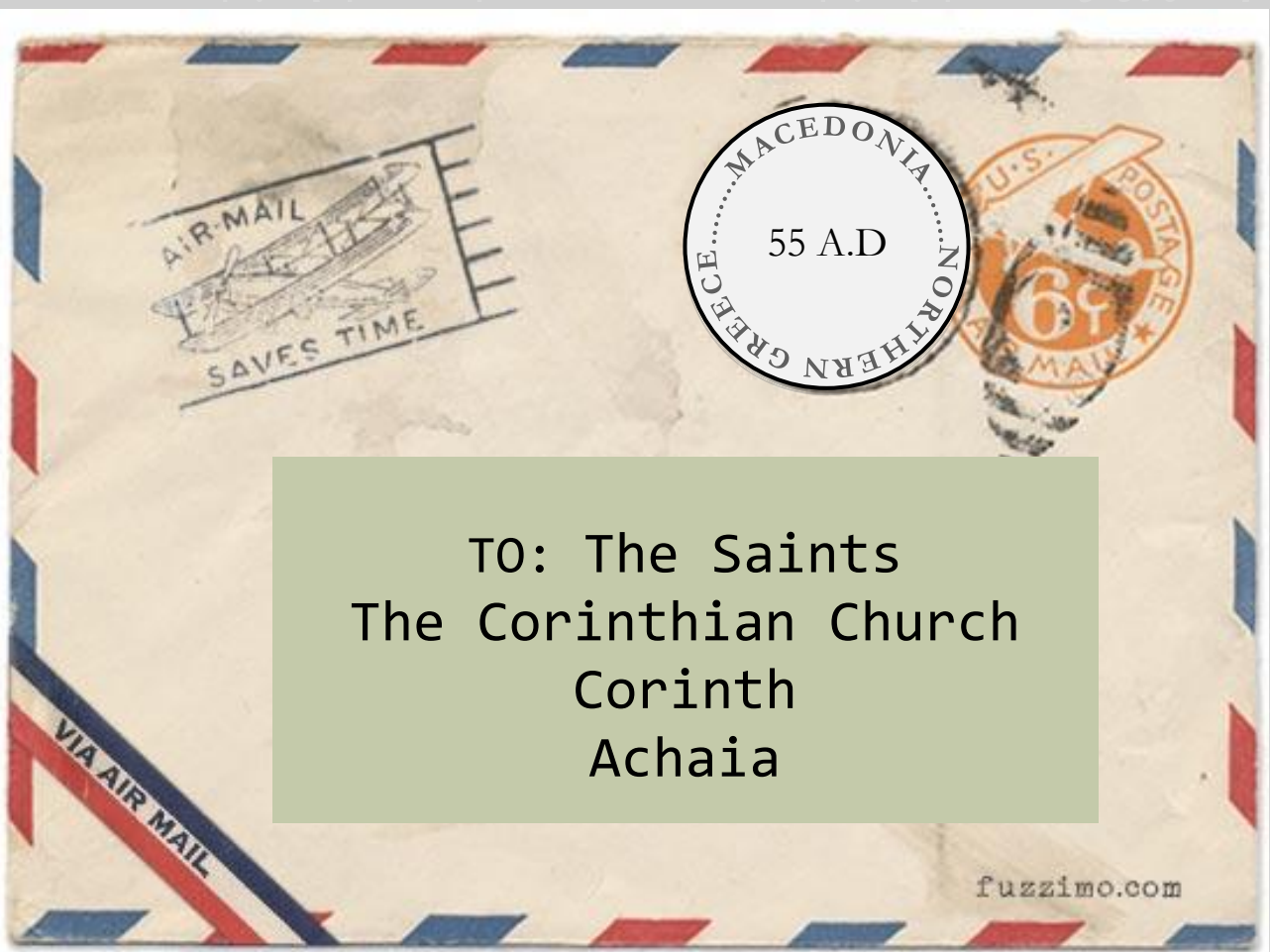


# 2 CORINTHIANS

Paul Drops A Line...



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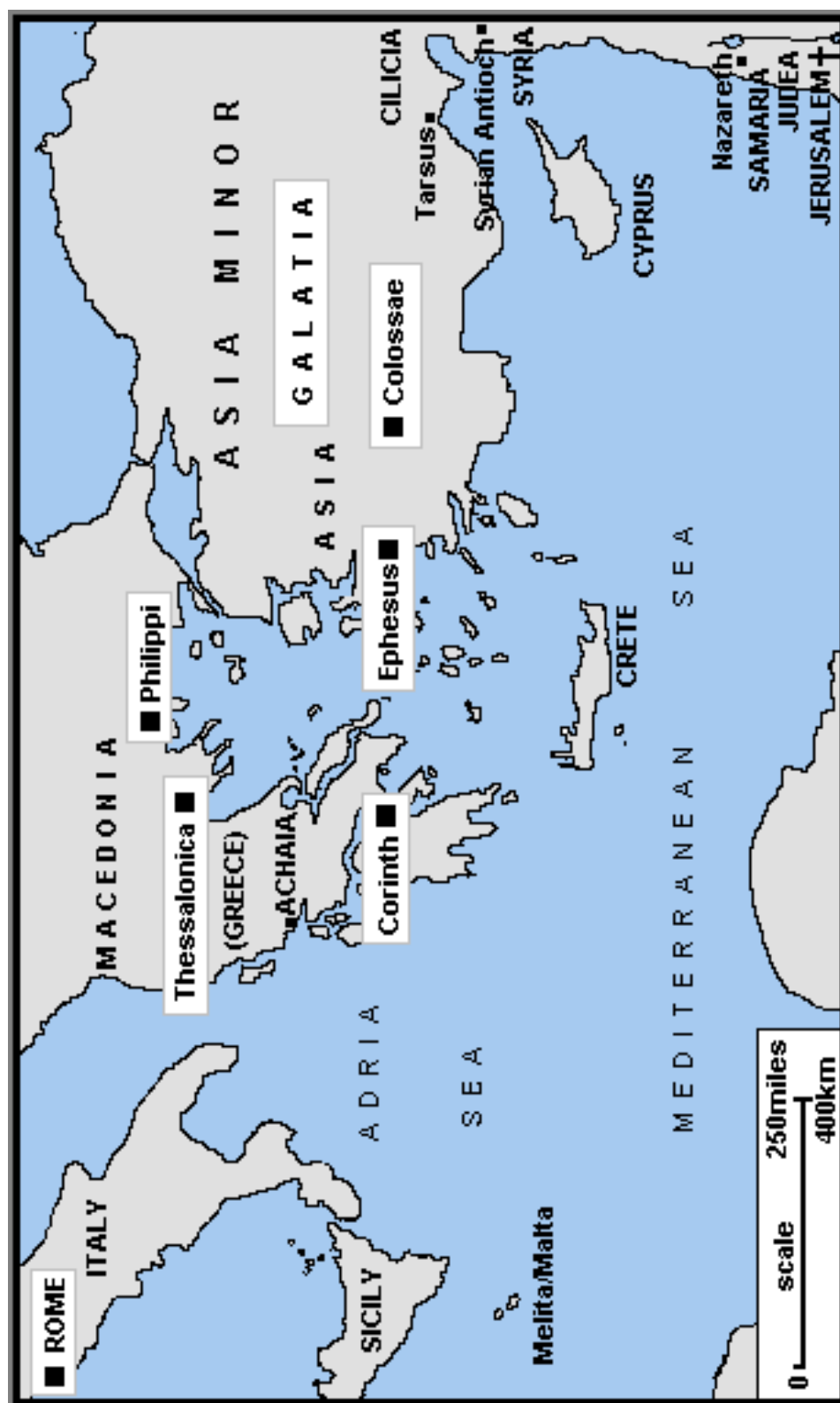


**2 CORINTHIANS  
PAUL DROPS A LINE...**

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**\*All Scriptures have been taken from the New International Version ® 1984**



## **2 CORINTHIANS**

### **THE CORINTH OF PAUL'S TIME**

In Paul's time, the bustling city of Corinth, which had been one of the largest in Ancient Greece, was now a Roman colony. The official language of this mountainous peninsula, in the region of Achaia, was Latin, though Greek was widely spoken. Situated on the narrow isthmus that connected the Peloponnese with the mainland of Greece, jutting out into the Mediterranean Sea, Corinth lay strategically at the crossroads of two important trade routes through Asia and Europe. The city and its people prospered greatly by charging taxes levied on goods that passed through its shipping channels. Because of this, ancient Corinth was a wealthy, commercially important city, whose prosperity was reflected in the city's magnificent architecture, temples, fountains, theatres, baths and infrastructure, including paved roads.

Luxury, materialism, indulgence and decadence were an unfortunate by-product of this wealth, with many native to Corinth worshipping pleasure and prosperity. Corinth was known for its arts, drama and skilled craftsmen. Many foreigners would come to Corinth, trading goods and gathering at the marketplace (Agora).

Steeped in mythology, it also became a hub for the worship of the old Greco-Roman gods, including Aphrodite and Apollo, who both had large temples in the city of Corinth, and idol worship was rampant amongst Corinth's philosophy-loving inhabitants.

### **PAUL'S BACKGROUND WITH THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH**

Paul's relationship with the Corinthian Christians spanned a period of several years (c.AD 50-57).

Paul actually visited the city on 3 separate occasions, as well as sending representatives on his behalf. Members of the church at Corinth also visited Paul while he was in Ephesus, (1Cor 1:11, 16:17) on one occasion even bringing him a letter from their church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 7:1).

In Acts 18 we read of Paul's first visit to Corinth. As was his custom, he spent time in the Jewish synagogues reasoning with the Jews and sharing with them the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He spent '*some time*' there, staying with fellow-tent-makers and fellow believers Aquila and Priscilla. His message was rejected, on the whole, by the Jews in Corinth, so Paul turned his attention to preaching the gospel to the

Gentiles, many of whom believed and were baptised. It was this group of believers that formed the foundation of the Corinthian church, established through Paul's preaching and leadership.

Paul had rising feelings of trepidation during this initial visit to Corinth, perhaps due to the abuse and opposition he faced from the Jews (Acts 18:6) but we are told in Acts 18:9-11 that the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision, saying: *"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."*

Following this, we are told, Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half.

Three or four years later, Paul made a second visit to Corinth (2 Corinthians 13:2) where it seems he was required to assist in a disciplinary matter within the congregation there. He described this visit as "painful" (2:1) a situation he didn't want to repeat several years later.

In AD 56 or 57, Paul headed to Corinth one last time (13:1) and stayed for a period of around three months. It was during this time that Paul wrote his letter to the Romans. (Acts 20:2-3)

The letter to the Corinthians we are now undertaking to study was penned by Paul, from Macedonia, in the north of Greece, and was written in between his 2nd and 3rd visits to the city of Corinth. It is one of four letters he is believed to have written to the church there, only two of which have survived (1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians - written about 2 years apart).

We know the Corinthian believers were close to Paul's heart (2:4) but we also know their relationship with Paul was at times strained. In 2 Corinthians 6:11-13, Paul speaks of the fact that he has not withheld his affection from the Corinthians, although he feels that they have withheld theirs from him. He implores them to *"open wide their hearts also"*. One of Paul's lost letters, (referred to in 2:1-4) is referred to as his 'severe' letter and though Paul expresses regret at its severity (7:8) he is thrilled to hear from visiting Titus, that it has led to repentance and a change in behaviour in the Corinthian church.

1 Corinthians, similarly, is primarily a letter of rebuke, addressing behavioural issues that had caused divisions amongst the believers, such as sexual immorality and lawsuits amongst the brethren.

2 Corinthians has a different tone to that of Paul's earlier correspondence, however, and seems more emotional than his first letter, almost autobiographical in nature. He outlines his love for his 'flock', seeing himself as a kind of spiritual father to the Christians there,

jealous for their affection and wanting to urge them towards godly living, discernment and maturity. (6:11-13, 11:2-3, 13:11).

In 2 Corinthians we will see that Paul is forced to defend himself and his credentials against suggestions he is not a true apostle. He has also been accused of being unreliable, untrustworthy and an unimpressive speaker. Apart from refuting his critics, Paul also wants to encourage the church after reports from Titus that they have responded favourably to his letter of rebuke (2:6, 9, 12-14, 7:5-16). Further, he exhorts them to contribute to the collection for the saints in Jerusalem, as promised, and prepare them for his impending visit.

2 Corinthians is an important pastoral letter that we are privileged to be able to read and study. We will learn how God's power is made perfect in our weakness and be inspired by Paul's driving passion to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the lost, despite the many obstacles thrown his way; his great suffering and sacrifice. As we see Paul's real-life evangelism, love, care and discipleship of his people and his concern for God's truth to be taught, we can be encouraged to follow his example and live as '*Christ's ambassadors*' (5:20) in this broken world of ours.

## **STUDY ONE: 2 Corinthians 1:1-2:11: The God Who Comforts**

What does the word "*comfort*" mean to you? Does it conjure up ideas of big soft pillows, slippers, pyjamas and a warm drink, fireside? Perhaps you think of it as freedom from physical pain? The Oxford dictionary provides these definitions:

*comfort: state of physical ease and freedom from pain or constraint;*

*1.1 (comforts) Things that contribute to physical ease and well-being;*

*1.2 Prosperity and the pleasant lifestyle secured by it;*

*2 The easing or alleviation of a person's feelings of grief or distress: eg. a few words of comfort.*

Paul speaks of comfort 9 times in the first 7 verses of Chapter 1. Let's see what sort of comfort Paul is referring to.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-2:11**

Think of a time when you, (or a close friend) have experienced a time of suffering or hardship. What brought you comfort at that time?

2. From this passage and your knowledge of the Gospel, what brings you the most comfort in your Christian life? (See **v1:21-22** and **4:16-18**)



3. From verses **1:8-9a** (**Read also 2 Cor 11:23-28**) we see that Paul has suffered intensely for the gospel. (a) How is it possible for Paul to have God's peace and comfort at times of such great hardship, grief and pain? (b) Is this possible for us also?

4. What reasons does Paul give for his suffering?

5. What are the results of his suffering (a) for Paul himself and (b) for the Corinthian believers?

6. **Read verses 1:21-22** again (see also **2 Cor 5:5** and **Eph 1:11-14**). Do you think we can be certain of our salvation? Why?

7. What are Paul's priorities for the church at Corinth? (See **1:13-14, 1:23-2:4**)

8. In **verses 1:4-5** Paul writes...*"we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God"*.

Can you think of a way you can bring God's comfort to someone who may really need it right now?

**MEMORY VERSE:** Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles. 2 Corinthians 1:3

## **PRAYER POINTS**

## STUDY TWO: 2 Corinthians 2:12-3:18: Glory That Lasts

## Read 2 Corinthians 2:12-3:18

1. In **2:14**, Paul says God uses us "*...to spread everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him*". What does this mean?

2. Do you feel that you are spreading the *aroma of Christ* amongst your non-Christian friends and family? What makes this hard?

3. The Word of God divides people into two groups (**v15-16**). To one group it is the fragrance of life and to the other it is the smell of death.  
(a) What part do we play in bringing people to Christ?  
(b) What part does God play?

4. What words of encouragement does Paul give us in this passage regarding sharing our faith with others?

**Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 (also quoted in Heb 8:8-13)**

It was always God's intention to bring in a new covenant, through his Son.

4. How does the new covenant differ from the old covenant?

Jesus says in **Matthew 5:17**: "*do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them*".

Look at **3:12-16** and also read **Hebrews 8:13**.

5. In light of these passages and the above quote from Jesus; discuss in what ways, if any, as Christians, are we still bound by Old Testament Law? What place does it have in the life of a Christian?

Just as Moses reflected the Lord's glory (**Exodus 34:29-35**) Paul tells us that we too are reflecting the Lord's glory. (**3:18**)

6. How do you reflect God's glory? How do you see God's glory reflected in the lives of others?

**MEMORY VERSE:** And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18

## **PRAYER POINTS**

## **STUDY THREE: 2 Corinthians 4:1-5:10: Treasures In Clay Jars**

### **Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-5:10**

Back in Chapter 2, Paul referred to those who *"peddle the word of God for profit"* (**2:17**) and contrasted them with his own ministry, in Christ, spoken with sincerity. In Chapter 4 now, Paul gives us an insight into what his critics were accusing him of.

1. What accusations is Paul refuting and what is his defence against those who seek to discredit him? (**v1-6**)

2. Paul says *"we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord..."* (**v5**)

What examples have you seen of people "preaching themselves" rather than the truth of the Gospel?

3. What does it mean to be a "jar of clay"? (**v7**) (See also **4:16**)



4. (a) What is the "treasure" and (b) Why does God choose such an ordinary vessel for something so precious?

5. From verses **4:1-5:6**, what do Christ's followers have to look forward to in the future?

6. A billboard erected outside a church, encouraging passers-by to come to church to be amazed by the miraculous, read: "Seeing Is Believing!" From this passage, how would you respond to this slogan? (**5:6-9** and **4:18**)

Sometimes we are tempted to want heaven on earth. We want all our sicknesses healed, our relationships to be perfect and for all our problems to be fixed in this life; right here, right now.

7. How can this be a dangerous view?

8. How does Paul's view of this life (at home in the body -**v6**) affect his view of the life to come (at home with the Lord - **v8**) and his attitude to his suffering?

**MEMORY VERSE:** Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.  
2 Corinthians 4:16

**PRAYER POINTS**

## **STUDY FOUR: 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:13: Christ's Ambassadors**

Paul turns in this passage to the subject of "reconciliation", which the Oxford dictionary defines as:

reconciliation

NOUN

1. *The restoration of friendly relations; a total and objective removal of hostility.*
2. *The action of making one view or belief compatible with another:*

### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:13**

1. (a) What is the 'message of reconciliation' (v19) ie. Which two parties are being reconciled and why?

(b) How has this been achieved? (**2 Cor 5:17-19**. Also Read **Col 1:19-23**)

2. Paul tells us that if anyone is in Christ they are a '*new creation*' (**v17**) How is Paul's life testament to this? (See also **Acts 9:1-22**)

3. What does it mean to you to be a new creation, in Christ?

4. What is the motivation behind Paul's ministry?

5. How do we conduct ourselves so as not to receive God's grace in vain?  
(**6:1**)

An ambassador is chosen to act as a representative for his or her home country/organisation. They are responsible for understanding the culture in which they live as an ambassador but they must also work to keep the best interests of their home country/organisation in mind, expressing the views and standpoints of their home country/organisation in a cultural setting other than their own. Ambassadors are true liaisons.\*

6. 2 Corinthians calls us Christ's ambassadors and God's fellow workers.  
(**5:20, 6:1**) What does it mean to you to be Christ's ambassador?

7. Do you feel you are a good ambassador for Christ and the Gospel?  
Why or why not?

**MEMORY VERSE:** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

*\*careers.stateuniversity.com*

## **PRAYER POINTS**

## **STUDY FIVE: 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:16: Believers In An Unbelieving World**

Before their conversion to Christianity, many of the Corinthian believers would have partaken in pagan temple worship. Apart from the large temples of Apollo and Aphrodite, there were six other temples in Corinth, dedicated to Greek gods and goddesses. There was a temptation for these new converts to revert back to pagan temple worship or to partake in meals and banquets, with their unbelieving friends, dedicated to one of the pagan gods.

Paul is urging the Christians to make a clean break from this, to remain set apart and distinctive from their non-Christian contemporaries. It is in this context that he writes: *do not be yoked together with unbelievers* (6:14). This verse is based on Deuteronomy 22:10 which forbids the yoking together of an ox and donkey for ploughing. Effective ploughing cannot be done using unevenly yoked animals.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:16**

1. What does it mean to be 'yoked' with an unbeliever?

2. What might be the consequences of such a yoking?

Paul's close friend and fellow-missionary, Titus, had hand-delivered a letter to the Corinthian church - a letter now lost. This letter is known as the 'severe' letter, delivered after Paul's "*painful visit*" (2:1-4), and

served up a serious rebuke to the Corinthians. Despite the content of the letter, Titus now brings news of joy to his friend Paul.

3. What is the difference between *godly sorrow* and *worldly sorrow*? What is the outcome of each? (**7:6-13**)

4. Why do you think Paul wrote such a severe letter? What does it say about the Apostle?

5. Has a rebuke ever led you to godly sorrow? How?

6. If you have time, read **Psalms 51** and **Mark 14:72**, for biblical examples of godly sorrow.

**Pray** that God will show you where you need to repent and that the Holy Spirit will work in you to enable your godly sorrow to lead to a changed life; one more like Jesus.

**MEMORY VERSE:** Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.  
2 Corinthians 7:10

## **PRAYER POINTS**



## **STUDY SIX: 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15: Cheerful Giving**

A decade before Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian church, when he and Barnabas were on the brink of beginning their missionary travels, in obedience to Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:18 "*go and make disciples of all nations*", they had formed an agreement with their fellow-disciples Peter, James and John in Jerusalem. It was decided that Paul and Barnabas would journey further afield to the Gentile cities to preach the gospel, while Peter, James and John would remain in Jerusalem to continue bringing the good news about Jesus to the Jews. (Acts 1:8-9) This missionary agreement, or pact, between the disciples had one condition attached; that whenever Gentile churches were established, they should "*remember the poor*" in Jerusalem and give financially to the Christians back there - to the hub and origin of the Christian message. (Gal 2:7-10)

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15**

1. Describe the attitude of the Macedonian church in their giving. **(8:1-5)**
2. What principles for giving does Paul set out in this passage? Give examples of what to do and what not to do in relation to giving.

3. **Turn back to 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.** Paul sets out a systematic way for the Corinthian believers to give. It seems that a year on, they have become less regular and committed to the collection. **(8:10-12)**  
Do you have a systematic way of giving to God's work? How do you decide what to give?

4. *"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously". (9:7)*

Some claim that giving generously to Christian ministry will necessarily result in financial reward for the giver. Do you agree? What will the generous giver reap? **(See 9:6-15)**

5. Do you give reluctantly or under compulsion?

(a) What makes it hard to be a cheerful giver?

(b) From 2 Corinthians Chapters 8 & 9, what can motivate you to be a cheerful giver?

The breadth of what Christ has done in us and for us should compel us to give. The magnitude of his grace should change our hearts when it comes to being generous and prevent us from having a 'left-overs' mentality. The Lord Jesus gave us his life and everything he has and certainly didn't give us the left-overs. He became poor so we'd become 'rich', sharing in his righteousness and being reconciled to him.

**Pray** you will be a cheerful giver of, not only money but all the resources God has given you.

**MEMORY VERSE:** Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7

## **PRAYER POINTS**

## STUDY SEVEN: 2 Corinthians 10:1-11:15: Defence Against The Dark Arts

In these chapters, Paul is answering the many criticisms of his opponents, some so-called "super apostles", who are questioning even the very nature of Paul's credibility as an apostle. They have come from Judea and their ministry is centred on power and prestige; marked by eloquent speech, visions, revelations and mighty works, as signs of true apostleship. They have infiltrated the Corinthian church and won people over to their side. Paul is now forced to vigorously defend his credentials, re-establish his authority and expose their false teaching.

## Read 2 Corinthians 10-1-11:15

1. What are the criticisms being directed at Paul?
2. How does Paul defend himself against his critics?
3. (a) What can you discover about the "super apostles" from these chapters?  
(b) What does Paul think of them? (11:13-15)

4. What does it mean to *take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ*? (10:5) How do we do this?

5. How might your mind be led astray from your *sincere and pure devotion to Christ*? (11:3) What dangers for us, does Paul flag here?

Paul is urging the Corinthians to be discerning when it comes to what they are being taught and wants to ensure they are sticking to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 11:3-4)

**Read 2 Tim 4:2-4 and 1 Cor 14:29**

6. How can we guard ourselves against being enticed by, or fooled into following, false teaching?

**Pray** you will be on guard against false teaching and against those preaching a different Jesus to the one Paul preached or a different gospel to the Gospel of Truth.

**MEMORY VERSE:** Let him who boasts boast in the Lord. For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends. 2 Corinthians 10:17-18

## **PRAYER POINTS**

## **STUDY EIGHT: 2 Corinthians 11:16-12:21: Boasting In Weakness**

Though boasting about yourself is most un-Australian and the slightest whiff we get of someone big-noting themselves causes us to cringe or accuse the boastful one as big-headed, it was not uncommon in the ancient world. In the culture of Paul's day, it was customary to boast of your achievements, whether they be military, political or otherwise - done without even a hint of embarrassment. People would try to outdo one another and great long lists of achievements were depicted in household murals or written about in epic detail.

It is with this in mind that we need to come to Paul's discussion of boasting. If he is to be judged by the criteria of his opponents, he is left with no alternative but to boast a little himself. (11:18) Since those in the Corinthian church are being swayed by the boasting of others, Paul presents his own 'achievements' to his readers, though we will see that his boasting is markedly different.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:16-12:21**

1. Why do you think Paul goes to such lengths to prove his Jewish pedigree? (11:21b-22)

2. *"If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness"* (11:30) Why would Paul boast of his weaknesses? (v9) How is Paul's boasting different to that of his opponents?

Chapter 12:1-5 refers to a *vision or revelation* Paul himself has experienced, fourteen years earlier, though he refers to himself in the third person. The details are few but the nature of the vision is spectacular. Paul doesn't mention this experience elsewhere.

3. Why might Paul have chosen to be so brief in his description of this incredible revelation he has received?

There is much speculation about what the 'thorn' in Paul's flesh was. Some suggest it was persecution, others sensual temptation, a speech impediment, an optic disorder or even depression. Whatever it was, it hampered Paul's efficiency and frustrated and tormented him. Perhaps the fact that it remains anonymous is a blessing to us.

4. Why do you think God did not remove the 'thorn' in Paul's flesh despite his repeated prayers? (**12:7-10**)

5. Do you have a 'thorn' in your side? How would these verses encourage you to endure if things weren't changing despite your prayers? (**12:7-10**)



6. Is there any place for boasting in the life of a believer?  
(**Gal 6:14, Jer 9:23-24, 1 Cor 1:31**)

7. "*My grace is sufficient for you*" (12:8) How is God's grace sufficient for you?

8. What do these verses reveal about Paul's feelings for the Corinthians?  
(**12:14-19**)

**Pray** that you will persevere in your faith despite hardships and that God may use you in your weakness to display his glory.

**MEMORY VERSE:** My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9

## **PRAYER POINTS**

## **STUDY NINE: 2 Corinthians 13:1-14: Encouragement and Exhortation**

### **Read 2 Corinthians 13:1-14**

1. **v4** tells us Christ was *crucified in weakness*. In your own words, explain what this means (also read **Phil 2:6-8**).

2. How do we *examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith*? (13:5-6) Read also **Rom 10:9-13, Eph 2:8-10, Jn 15:8**

3. Paul sees that God has given him authority over the Corinthian church. How should he exercise this authority? (**v10**)

4. Paul prays for the Corinthian believers' perfection (*restoration*) in **v9** and in **v11** exhorts them to *aim for perfection*.

(a) Is this a realistic goal?

(b) How is it possible for us as sinners, to aim for perfection in our Christian lives? (Also see **Jn 8:31**, **2 Cor 3:18** and **Acts 26:20**)

5. Look back over the studies you have done this term. Write down the main lessons you have learnt through your study of 2 Corinthians.

What new things has God revealed to you?

What has encouraged you?

What has convicted you?

What is something you can put into practice in your Christian life as a result of these studies?

**Pray** you will not immediately forget what you have studied, like the man who looks in the mirror and then immediately forgets what he looks like. Instead, pray you will listen to the word and do what it says, putting all you have learnt into practice, all the while spurring one another on towards love and good deeds. (Jas 22-24, Heb 10:24)

**MEMORY VERSE:** Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. 2 Corinthians 13:11

## **PRAYER POINTS**



