

2 CORINTHIANS



My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:9

STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

(9 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINATION APPLICATION

BIBLE STUDIES

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THE SMALL PRINT

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Co

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Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading group discussions, but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials provide you with the passage so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Also, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought, and help you reflect on what the passage meant, both at the time it was written, and also what it means for us now.

I would encourage you to make good use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are, however, only “tools” – they are there to help you, and not to restrict you, or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages, and if the questions or notes don't help you, simply don't use them!

I have also included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

*Steve McClure
Spring 2019*

INTRODUCING 2 CORINTHIANS

Corinth was a very important and cosmopolitan city. It was intellectually alert, materially prosperous, but morally bankrupt. It was a prestigious centre from which the gospel could radiate out to the surrounding districts. In Corinth there was a large floating population, with merchants and travellers staying a few days and then going their way. Preaching would be sure of being circulated widely.

Paul visited Corinth on his second missionary journey as recorded in Acts 18:1-18 and visits again on his third journey retraced his steps in some of the cities he had previously visited including Corinth. During his first stint in Corinth Paul met a couple there by the name of Priscilla & Aquila (See also 1 Corinthians 16:19, Romans 16:3 & 2 Timothy 4:19). He lived and worked with them until Silas and Timothy joined him and he was then able to devote all of his time to preaching. Paul spent over a year in Corinth before sailing for Syria en-route to Ephesus. Priscilla & Aquila went with Paul and he left them working in Ephesus after a short stay. There in Ephesus encountered a learned man from Alexandria called Apollos. There he had been teaching Christianity but he only knew John's baptism. Priscilla and Aquila explained to him the way of God more adequately (Acts 18:24-26). Apollos is eager to travel to Achaia (18:27) and is encouraged to do so by the brothers. Corinth was one of the major cities in Achaia and Apollos is soon working there (19:1). In Corinth Apollos proved from the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ but while his message was the same as Paul's his style would have been quite different (2:2-4, Acts 18:24-28). The difference in presentation was enough to cause a certain partisanship with some of the Corinthians. We see the evidence of Apollos work in Corinth through his frequent mentions in 1 Corinthians (1:12, 3:4-6, 3:22, 4:6 & 16:12).

A large part of Paul's first letter is given to dealing with problems in the church, and questions from the Corinthians. Chloe's household brought news of factions within the church (1:11). It seems the church had written Paul a letter (7:1), presumably brought by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:17). The situation was serious and Paul decided to send Timothy to them (4:17, 16:10-11) even before he had finished the letter. The situation worsened although the nature of this serious dispute is unclear. When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians (probably a year or so after he had written 1 Corinthians), he had clearly made a visit in addition to the one when he visited the church but this was likely to have been after 1 Corinthians (4:19). Thus Paul's knowledge of recent affairs at Corinth would have been from Chloe's household (1 Cor 1:11-18) and from the letter the church wrote to him (1 Cor 7:1). The second visit was clearly painful. It's likely therefore that the situation implied in 1 Corinthians deteriorated after receipt of the letter and thus the painful visit became necessary. The situation remained unresolved and so Paul wrote another letter, a severe and costly letter (2 Cor 2:4, 7:8). If unsuccessful this letter (probably lost) would probably have caused a final breakdown between Paul and the church. Titus had taken the letter and he returned via Macedonia and Troas. Paul impatient to know how the letter had been received went to Troas but didn't find Titus there. Paul then crossed to Macedonia (2 Cor 2:12-13) and Titus met him with the news that all was well (2 Cor 7:6-7). Out of his great joy and relief Paul wrote 2 Corinthians and almost certainly visited the church soon afterwards.

Like Paul's first letter his second letter is also packed with teaching on a whole range of issues: below I whet your appetite for some of these which are fleshed out in the studies to follow:

(1) Strength in Weakness: I have entitled this study series "Strength in Weakness" because I think that this is the stand out theme in the letter. Right from the beginning we hear from Paul's own story

about them (that is Paul and Timothy) being *under great pressure* and despairing of life itself (1:8-9). Just look at the following words from chapter 4 which begins and with Paul saying “*therefore we do not lose heart*” (v1 & 16) and where Paul describes us as jars of clay:

⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 4:7-10

Life for Paul never seems to be easy. He and Timothy face a huge amount of opposition for their work in the gospel. Paul sees the nature of their weakness and the trials that they faced as something that shows the pointed them to God and caused them to trust in Him. Paul would rather suffer than to see any stumbling block in someone else’s path (6:1-10). Perhaps the most well-known passage in 2 Corinthians is 12:7-10 in which Paul talks about the thorn in his flesh. It is described as a messenger of Satan sent to torment him. He pleaded with God to take it away but instead God told him that His Grace was sufficient and His power is made perfect in weakness.

... ‘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. 12:9

(2) Defending his ministry (esp. chapters 10-13): It seemed that this place of weakness was exactly where God wanted Paul. One of the purposes of writing was to defend his ministry against the so called super apostles (10:5) who were seeking to diminish his authority. Paul had planted the church in Corinth but now he was facing criticism because he did not match up to their expectations of leadership. Paul addresses the assertion that he was inferior to the super-apostles (11:5), an untrained speaker (11:6) and says that some might say “*His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing*” (10:10). In his defence rather than boast in his weakness Paul actually boasts in his weakness and in the things had suffered for Christ. In 11:30 he says “*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.*” The things he boasts about are being in prison, flogged, shipwrecked, beaten with rods 3 times, whipped, pelted with stones, hungry, cold & naked, going without sleep and being constantly in danger (11:23-27).

(3) Cheerful Giving (chapters 8-9): Thirdly Paul devotes two whole chapters to what he calls the grace of giving. Specifically he wants to ensure that they complete the collection they had promised for the poor Christians at Jerusalem. In many ways this is one of the richest passages in the New Testament about Giving. Paul begins here by citing the Macedonian believers who “*In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity*”...and “*gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability*” (8:2-3).

(4) Practical Matters: Paul wrote to share his joy that they had responded well to what is known as his painful letter (e.g. 7:8-13). He sought to explain the change in his plans to visit them (1:12-2:4) and to forgive a member of the church who had really messed up (2:5-11). Finally he also wanted to prepare them for his visit to them (13:1-10).

To God be the Glory,

Steve McClure, Spring 2019

INTRODUCTION: Paul introduces God as the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. Life had been pretty tough for Paul but he sees it as an opportunity to be comforted so that in time he could comfort others. Paul also addresses his change travel plans which had been a great disappointment: yes he had not been able to visit but it was not on account of a lack of desire on his part.

SETTING THE SCENE (v1-2): What are some of the hardest things that you have experienced, and looking back have they been times of growth in your relationship with God or not? Looking at v1-2 how does Paul introduce himself and greet the church to which he was writing?

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GOD OF ALL COMFORT (v3-7): How do difficult times affect your desire to praise God? What do you think causes Paul to describe God as the *Father of Compassion* and *God of all Comfort*? In what ways do you think that our experience of God's comfort enables us to comfort others who are suffering?

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How do you respond to Paul's perspective that he shares in the sufferings of Christ (v5) and both their distress and their comfort was for the sake of the Corinthians (v6)? What do you think gives Paul this *firm hope* (v7) for the Corinthians?

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THE SENTENCE OF DEATH (v8-11): Why is Paul so eager that they not be uninformed about the troubles that they had faced in Asia (v8)? What do you think enabled Paul to have the kind of perspective on trouble and suffering that he expresses here (esp. v9)? What has God been doing in your life that has caused you to rely on God? (v9)

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In v10-11 Paul indicates his hope that God will bring deliverance as the Corinthian's help them by their prayers: how do you understand the role of prayer in bringing about God's purposes? How might we intercede on behalf of others to bring about God's deliverance in their lives also?

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CHANGE OF PLANS (v12-18): What might Paul's opponents in Corinth have been saying about him that causes Paul to defend his conduct, integrity, sincerity and wisdom (v12-15)? What do his words suggest about how the Corinthians viewed his change of plans (v16-17)? Specifically how does he show them that he was still committed to helping them?

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YES IN CHRIST (v19-22): Paul turns the focus from his travel to plans to God's faithfulness in keeping His promises: to what extent have you experienced this faithfulness in your own life? What promises does Paul mention here to make his case that God's promises are always *yes in Christ* (v20)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What particularly impresses you about Paul's concern for the Corinthians, his willingness to suffer for their sake and his desire to visit them? In what ways has this chapter help you to understand the importance of our sufferings in pointing us to Christ and enabling us to help others who are struggling also?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Pray that you too would have a similar perspective to how perceivers hardship and suffering: namely to cause them to rely on God and as an opportunity to share with others. Pray too that your own promises would mirror God's which Paul says are all *Yes in Christ*.

MEMORY VERSES: 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

STUDY 2 – 2 CORINTHIANS 1:23-3:18 – TRANSFORMING GLORY

INTRODUCTION: This second study continues focuses on Paul's change in travel plans as well as a case of discipline in the Corinthian church. Paul then turns his pen towards the New Covenant: distinguishing it from the Old Covenant and thinking through some of its implications for us.

SETTING THE SCENE: What would society regard as *glory*? Paul talks a lot here about glory: in what ways is a Biblical view of glory similar and/or different to the definition you have come up with?

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TO SPARE THEM (1:23-23): Paul continues to explain why he did not visit them (look back to 1:12-22): how did Paul *spare* them by not returning to Corinth (something he was willing to stake his life on (v23)? In what ways do we see Paul's desire to work with them for their *joy* and their *faith* (v2)?

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LOVE AND CONCERN (2:1-4): Instead of visiting Paul wrote to them (the sorrowful letter): what impresses you here about Paul's concern for them (v1-3) and the clear pain for Paul in writing (v4)? What is your experience of *speaking the truth in love* (Eph 4:15)? Why is it both difficult but necessary?

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CHURCH DISCIPLINE (2:5-11): How does Paul treatment of the matter of Church discipline in Corinth (maybe the sexual sin from 1 Cor 5:1) show his love for the offender and the Corinthians? Why is Paul so eager that they now forgive the man and show him comfort (v5-7)? How does Paul understand Satan's schemes and why might this forgiveness prevent Satan from outwitting them (v8-11)?

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THE AROMA OF CHRIST (2:12-17): What's your reaction to the tension Paul describes between an *open door* (v12) and him not having *peace of mind* (v13)? In what ways does God tend to guide you? How do you understand Paul description as *captives in Christ's triumphal procession* (14a)?

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Paul describes us as the *pleasing aroma of Christ* (v14b-15): how do you understand the contrast between being the *aroma that brings death* to some while the *aroma that brings life* to others (v16)? Why is Paul's question (*who is equal to such a task*) both a challenge and an encouragement (v17)?
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LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION (3:1-6): What are letters of recommendation and in what ways were the Corinthians that letter, *known and read by everyone* (v1-3)? How is that also true for us? Paul answers his question in 2:16: what difference does it make for us to know that our competence comes not from ourselves but from God? What does it look like to be a minister of the New Covenant (v6)?
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GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT (3:7-18): How does Paul distinguish ministry under the New Covenant from that of the Old Covenant (v7-11, See also Jeremiah 31:31-34)? What response does Paul demand as a result of this glorious hope (v12)? How does this *boldness* contrast to Moses having to wear a veil? What is the process and goal of our lives under the new covenant (v18)?
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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: In what ways does this chapter inspire and encourage you to give your lives for the sake of others? Reflect back on your own journey of faith and the way that God has led you to this point: how has He (and still is He) transforming you into His image
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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share together about the transformation God is working out in your own life and ask God to continue the work through to completion. Pray that your life would be the aroma of Christ to those around you and that your lives would have an impact where you are at.

MEMORY VERSE: 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

STUDY 3 – 2 CORINTHIANS 4 – TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY

INTRODUCTION: Having talked about the glories of the New Covenant Paul now goes on to exhort the Corinthians not to lose heart. He describes some of the realities of life here and now and explains to them how God reveals His power in their weakness.

SETTING THE SCENE: Why do we (and society at large) have such a dim view of weakness? What might the positive side to weakness be and what blessings flow from it?

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A MORE GLORIOUS COVENANT (v1-4): Paul says that through God's mercy they have this ministry (v1): why does this cause him not to *lose heart* (v1)? In what ways does your sense of calling encourage you in your ministry? Why does Paul feel the need to defend their handling of the Word of God that they have set forth plainly?

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Paul says the gospel is veiled to those who are perishing (v3): how does the *god of this age* blind the minds of unbelievers (v4a)? What is the *light* of the gospel and how does it display the *glory of Christ*, the *image of God* (4b)? In your own life what was it that God used to lift the veil over your mind?

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KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S GLORY (v5-6): Why is it significant that Paul preaches Christ rather than themselves (v5)? How does God make *His light shine in our hearts* and what is the *light of the knowledge of God's glory* (v6)? In what ways have we seen this glory in the face of Christ?

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TREASURES IN JARS OF CLAY (v7): Often the word *but* signifies a key transition in Paul's writings: why is it so important here? What is Paul communicating through the illustration of a jar of clay? Specifically why is it so vital that we see that this all surpassing power (v6) is from God not ourselves?

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SUFFERING AND FAITH (v8-15): In what ways does Paul contrast their weakness in proclaiming the gospel (v8-12) with glory of the gospel itself (v1-7)? How might *the life of Jesus* be revealed in our bodies (v10)? How would you summarise what Paul is trying to say in v13-15?

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MOMENTARY TROUBLES (v16-18): Twice Paul has said we do not lose heart (v1 & 16): why should what Paul says in these verses encourage us *not to lose heart*? How does Paul see the distinction between wasting away outwardly while being renewed inwardly?

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To what extent would you describe Paul's troubles as light and momentary? How great must these eternal glories be in order for this to be true? How can we fix our eyes on the unseen (eternal) rather than the seen (temporary)? Why is it so hard to do this in practice?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: Life is tough and we feel weak: why does God want to make it abundantly clear that He is at work through us rather than the other way round? In what ways have your own troubles and hardships served to bring glory to God and caused you to trust Him more deeply?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God for His all surpassing power at work in and through you. Ask God to help you keep your eyes fixed on Him and the unseen reality of faith. Ask God to help you not to lose heart but to be motivated by the calling He has laid on your life.

MEMORY VERSES: 2 CORINTHIANS 4:17-18

STUDY 4 – 2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-6:2 – AMBASSADORS IN CHRIST

INTRODUCTION: We live in the tension between life now and our hope for the future: Paul describes how we groan for our new bodies and says we live by faith not by sight. He also helps us see that we have each been made ambassadors for Christ and been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation

SETTING THE SCENE: We live in a world where pain, suffering and death are a reality: to you think that those around us face up to or deny these realities? How often do you think about our hope beyond this life? To what extent would you describe yourself as living expectantly for that hope?

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OUR DESTINY (5:1-4): Paul describes our bodies as *tents* and our eternal hope in terms of a *building from God*: what is Paul seeking to communicate through these things (v1)? How does this idea that we have an *eternal house in heaven* encourage you (See John 14:2)?

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To what extent can you identify with Paul's suggestion that we groan for our heavenly dwelling (v3-4)? How does the picture of being clothed (and unclothed) help show the limitations of our current bodies and our hope for the future? How do these verses help us see that we are more than our bodies?

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OUR CONFIDENCE (5:5-8): For what *purpose* has God *fashioned us* and what might this *fashioning* look like (4:17-18)? How do you understand the truth that God has given us the Spirit as a *deposit* and *guarantee* (v5b)? How have you experienced this? How would you contrast living *by faith*, rather than *by sight* (v7)? Do you prefer to be *away from the body* or *home with the Lord* and why (v6 & 8)?

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OUR PURPOSE AND MESSAGE (5:9-10): In what ways does Paul say that these truths should motivate us to please God in whatever situation we find ourselves in? What impact does having to appear before the judgement seat of Christ, have on the way you live now?

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DEFENDING HIS MINISTRY (5:11-15): How does Paul's belief about the future (v1-10) motivate him to persuade others (v11)? What does he mean by saying he was giving them an opportunity to take pride in them (v12)? How does Paul answer those who take pride in what is seen (v12b) and those who say he is out of his mind (v13)? In what ways does Christ's love compel you?

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MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION (5:16-20): Paul uses the words *reconciliation* and *reconciled* five times in v18-20: how do you understand what Christ has done to achieve our reconciliation (also v14b-15)? What is an ambassador and in what ways is God making His appeal through us (v20a)? Why does Paul implore the Corinthians (already believers) to be reconciled to God (v20b)?

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MADE SIN FOR US (5:21-6:2): What amazes you about what Paul says about Jesus being made sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God (v21)? What would it look like to *receive God's grace in vain* (6:1) and what is the significance that today is the day of salvation (6:2)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: This passage contains many incredible truths: in what ways do these things encourage you to live and serve in the light of the hope we have in Christ?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God for the glorious hope that awaits us. Ask God to help you to lead expectant and hopeful lives in the present that please Him in every way. Pray too that you would be effective ambassadors for Christ, committed to sharing His message of reconciliation.

MEMORY VERSE: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

STUDY 5 – 2 CORINTHIANS 6:3-7:16 – SORROW AND REPENTANCE

INTRODUCTION: Paul has shown a huge willingness to reveal his own suffering and weakness but the Corinthian's were not so forthcoming. Paul now urges them to open up their hearts. He is encouraged by their response to his sorrowful letter and by the reports from Titus' visit to see them.

SETTING THE SCENE: What is your experience of responding in sorrow to something that has happened in your life? What good (or not so good) things have resulted?

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HARDSHIPS (6:3-10): Why might putting obstacles before others have discredited his ministry (v3)? How would you distinguish Paul's sufferings between physical, emotional or spiritual hardships (v4-10)? Why do you think Paul shares these things at this point?

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OPEN HEARTS (6:11-13): What do you understand by Paul's insistence that though they had *opened their hearts* towards them, the Corinthians had *withheld* theirs? What does it look like to *open* and *withhold* our hearts and our affection to others? Why does it matter?

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DO NOT BE YOKED (6:14-17): Paul instructs the Corinthians not to be *yoked together* with believers (v14): What do you think it means to be yoked together (see Deuteronomy 22:10)? What kinds of relationships might Paul have had in mind here? On what basis does Paul then say why they should avoid being yoked with such people (6:14-17)? How might this principle apply to us today?

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PROMISES (6:17b-7:1): Paul then quotes promises from the Old Testament about being *received* and God being a Father to His children: in what ways are these promises relevant to the choices Paul is talking about here (v18)? How might these promises motivate us to purify ourselves (7:1)?

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APPEAL (7:2-7): Paul again urges the Corinthians to make room in their hearts for them (v2): what does he mean and on what basis does he make this plea (v2-3)? How was Paul comforted when he received news from Titus (v6)? What made him so encouraged, joyful and proud about them (v4)?

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THE SEVERE LETTER (7:8-12): In the context of Paul's *sorrowful letter* (v8), Paul compares godly and worldly sorrow (v8-10): how does Paul distinguish the produce of such sorrow (v10-11)? What is the difference between sorrow and repentance? What impresses you about this concern for them?

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ENCOURAGED (7:13-16): How does Paul describe the impact that the Corinthians had on Titus (e.g. refreshment, affection and confidence)? What do you think it would look like for them to have responded in obedience and received Titus with fear and trembling?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: In what ways has this most personal section encouraged you as you deal with difficult things in your own life? What difficult choices do you need to make in the days and weeks ahead in order to purify yourselves and respond with godly sorrow?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God that His heart is open and warm towards you even when you are distant from Him. Ask Him to help you to make the hard choices required as a result of this chapter and to help you respond to them with godly sorrow and repentance.

MEMORY VERSE: 2 CORINTHIANS 7:10

STUDY 6 – 2 CORINTHIANS 8-9 – SACRIFICIAL GIVING

INTRODUCTION: Paul was raising money for the Christians in Jerusalem, many of whom had lost homes for their faith. The Corinthians however had not given anything, denying themselves the joy of giving (8:7). Paul had even boasted to the Macedonians about what they were going to give (9:2-3).

SETTING THE SCENE: Why do you think that financial matters are such difficult things for us to open up about? These chapters are focused on our giving: what would be society's view of the importance of giving and how might it contrast with a Christian worldview?

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THE MACEDONIAN EXAMPLE (8:1-5): Paul begins by sharing the example of giving of the Macedonian churches: why does Paul see this in terms of the grace given to them (v1)? What makes these Macedonians such a challenging example of giving? To what extent would you see giving as the *privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people* (v4)? What holds you back from giving like this?

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EXCEL IN THE GRACE OF GIVING (8:6-9): What might it look like to *excel in the grace of giving* (v7) and what is the connection between grace and giving? What might have held the Corinthians back from doing so? How does the example of Jesus' sacrificial giving (v9) help reinforce Paul's point here?

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WILLINGNESS AND EQUALITY (8:10-15): Paul was raising money for the poor Christians in Jerusalem: why does Paul say that in order to be acceptable they must give willingly and in accordance to what they have (v10-12)? How do you understand Paul stated goal of equality (v13-15) and what are the implications of this principle for us today?

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ON RECEIVING TITUS (8:16-24): How does Paul want them to receive Titus when he comes to them? What steps does Paul take here to assure them of the safe transfer of their gift to its intended recipients? Why were Titus and the unnamed *brother* (v18) perfect candidates to collect the gift?

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BE READY TO GIVE (9:1-5): In what ways is giving a service (v1 & 12)? What is the difference between a *generous gift* and one *grudgingly given* (v5b)? Why does Paul emphasise his boasting about them in this matter and his eagerness that neither they (nor the Corinthians) be ashamed of such confidence (v2-3)? What do you imagine would be involved in arranging such a gift?

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THE BLESSINGS OF GIVING (9:6-15): What blessing does our giving produce both in us (9:6-11) and in others (9:12-14)? How can we grow in this area and give more *willingly* and *cheerfully* (the Greek word is the root of our English word hilarious)? How do you decide in our hearts what to give and what steps will help you to carry through on such those decisions without reluctance or compulsion?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: Paul has written passionately in these chapters to encourage the Corinthians to give: how would you sum up the principles that he has laid down here for our giving? How would you compare and contrast your own giving with those principles?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God for the privilege of sharing in such service for others. Thank God for the abounding grace that He has lavished on you and ask Him to help you carry through with your own giving in a way that is generous, cheerful, willing and sacrificial.

MEMORY VERSE: 2 CORINTHIANS 8:9

STUDY 7 – 2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11:15 – SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

INTRODUCTION: This passage concerns Paul's defence of his ministry in the light of some so called *super apostles* who had been challenging Paul's authority. Paul also engages in spiritual warfare with principalities, powers and those who oppose not only Paul but Christ himself.

SETTING THE SCENE: New leaders in Corinth were challenging Paul's authority in Corinth: how would the world define leadership and what difference (if any) would there be to the definition of leadership within the church? What aspects would you add to include an aspect of spiritual leadership?

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WEAPONS (10:1-6): How do you understand Paul's appeal to them that he would not need to be as bold with them as he expects (v1-2a)? What does Paul mean by living *according to the standards of this world* (v2) and *waging war as the world does* (v2-3)?

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What types of *weapons* and *strategies* do you think that Paul has in mind here (v4) and how do they differ to those of the world (see also Eph 6:10-17)? What do you think he means by his instruction to take *captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ* (v5)? How does this work in practice?

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APPEARANCES (10:7-11): What does it mean to judge by appearances (v7) and what are the implications of doing so? What do these verses imply about the arguments Paul's opponents were using against him (esp. v10)? What instead does Paul point to and boast about here (v8, 11)?

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BOASTING (10:12-18): Paul talks here about the right (v12) and wrong (v13-16) measures of ministry: how do you understand the distinction between the two? In what ways does Paul hope that the sphere of their activity would increase (v15)? How would you define your own sphere of activity or ministry? What does it mean to *boast in the Lord* (v17) and how might we win the Lord's commendation (v18)?

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JEALOUSY (11:1-4): How do you understand Paul's passion for the Corinthians expressed in his godly jealousy and betrothal to Christ (v1-2)? Why was he so concerned that their minds might be led astray (v3) from their devotion to Christ? How can we also help others to remain committed to Christ?

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HUMILITY (11:5-9): Bearing in mind v10, what other criticisms do you think the *super-apostles* were using here to discredit Paul (v5-6)? How did Paul demonstrate humility in how he worked to ensure that he was able to serve them free of charge (v7-9)? In what way do Paul's weaknesses serve as an encourage for us as we also seek to serve God?

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MASQUERADING (11:10-16): Paul says is working to cut the ground from these would be apostles (v10-12): how do you understand Paul's description of them as false, deceitful and masquerading (v13)? In what way were they also servants masquerading as *servants of righteousness*?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What do we learn in this passage about Paul and in particular about the comparison between Paul and his opponents in Corinth? How would you sum up what Paul has to say here about the spiritual battle that we are fighting again all who oppose Christ?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God for those leaders who are committed to helping us to walk closely with Jesus rather than pursuing their own agendas. Ask God to help you wage war with the weapons He provides and cut the ground from all who would oppose Christ and His gospel.

MEMORY VERSE: 2 CORINTHIANS 10:5

STUDY 8 – 2 CORINTHIANS 11:16-12:10 – THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD’S GRACE

INTRODUCTION: Paul continues to contrast his own leadership with that of the so-called super Apostles (11:16-33). We find Paul boasting in his suffering and weakness and demonstrating how God uses them to bring him to God (12:1-10). We cannot cope on our own but we can learn from Paul in seeing that God’s grace is more than sufficient in all that we face: when we are weak we are strong!

SETTING THE SCENE: What value statements does the world make regarding weakness and suffering? What efforts do we take to ensure that we are not weak but strong? What is your experience of weakness and suffering: what did God teach you through these times/experiences?

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WHY BOAST (11:16-29): In contrast to Paul’s observations of the super apostles (see 11:1-15), what does Paul boast about as the characteristics of his own ministry? What is the point Paul is trying to make through the use of all the comparative questions he asks in these verse?

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BOASTING IN WEAKNESS (11:30-33): In what ways do you respond to Paul’s assertion here that if he does boast it will be in things that show his weakness (v30)? How does the example about being lowered in a basket from the walls of Damascus illustrate this in Paul’s life?

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EXPERIENCING GOD (12:1-7a): How does Paul explain his experience of being caught up to paradise? What is your reaction to the manner (esp. his use of the third person) and the extent (e.g. inexpressible things) to which Paul writes about this experience? Do you think we should share the spiritual experiences that God gives to each of us? Why or why not?

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THORN IN THE FLESH (12:7b): We are not sure what Paul's *thorn in the flesh* was: ideas range from eye disease (Acts 9:9, Gal 4:15), defective speech to his ever present opponents. What do we know about the bitter reality that Paul faced and why was it given? What was its task and why did he need it?

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Why is pride so opposed to grace (see James 4:6)? What can we infer about how the thorn affected Paul? Who was it that gave the thorn to Paul? How does Paul view the parts played by God and Satan in relation to this thorn?

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MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT (12:8-10): What can we learn from Paul's persistent prayer for this thorn to be removed? How would you summarise God's response to Paul's repeated plea and in what sense did Paul find God's answer sufficient for his needs? To what extent can you identify with Paul coming to a place of acceptance that weakness was actually strength and God's grace was sufficient?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: In what ways can you envision God taking something painful, difficult or even evil / destructive in your life and using it to serve His purposes in your life? What steps can you take now to develop a framework for how you see life that will serve you when times are hard?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God that God is able to meet us where we are at and that His grace is sufficient for all that life brings our way. Share your experience (past or current) of experiencing that God's grace is enough even through times of struggle. Think about how you can encourage a friend with this message of hope and trust in the grace of God.

MEMORY VERSE: 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

INTRODUCTION: After founding the church in Corinth Paul spent 18 months in Corinth (Acts 18:11). Paul then makes a painful visit (referred to in 2:1 & 13:2) and now here in chapters 12-13 we read that Paul is preparing for a third visit, probably soon after this letter. Paul raises a series of concerns in this passage as well as a passionate call to examine ourselves and give ourselves for the sake of others.

SETTING THE SCENE: What impresses you about those who work tirelessly to strengthen, help and build up others up? Why is such ministry so counter-cultural? What steps would you say we need to take to develop a heart for people and the determination to work that out in practice?

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FOOLISH BOASTING (12:11-13): These verses conclude Paul's foolish boasting (10:1-12:13): how has he shown that he is not inferior to these co-called super-apostles (v11-12) and that the Corinthians were not inferior to the other churches (v13a)? Why does Paul feel the need to ask for forgiveness regarding the fact that he had not been a burden to them (v13b)?

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NOT A BURDEN (12:14-18): In contrast to how Paul worked elsewhere why was it so important to Paul that he was not a *burden* (v14, 16) to them? How do you respond to Paul's passion for them and his willing to sacrifice everything for their sake? Paul implies that some had accused him of being a crafty fellow: what might have been their argument and how does Paul dismiss it (v16-18)?

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REPENTANCE (12:19-21): Why might they have thought that Paul was just making excuses and how does Paul demonstrate that instead they have been speaking in the *sight of Christ* (v19)? What were Paul's fears about what he might find when he visited (v20-21)? How does the sin of others grieve you and what steps might we take to help others to repent from such sin?

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A THIRD VISIT (13:1-4): What were the Corinthians to expect from Paul's visit (v1) and how does he want them to prepare for his coming? In what ways does what Paul says in v4 sum up the thrust of what has been saying to the Corinthians throughout this letter?

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EXAMINE YOURSELVES (13:5-10): Paul asks them to examine themselves to see whether they are *in the faith* (v5): how can we be sure that we belong to Christ? What is this *test* that Paul speaks of in these verses and what makes Paul confident that they had not failed it (v6-8)? How does Paul demonstrate his desire to *build up* rather than to *tear down* in verses 9-10?

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IN CONCLUSION (13:11-15): Paul gives a number of instructions by way of conclusion: why would these things have been significant in the Corinthian context (NB: compare v9b with v11a)? How do you understand Paul's meaning behind the familiar prayer he prays over the Corinthians in v14?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What steps can you take to examine yourselves and to do all we can to encourage and pray for one another? Looking back over the whole of 2 Corinthians what have been the key lessons that God has been teaching you?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God that though we are weak we by God's power live in Him. Ask God to give you assurance that you know Him and to help you work in such a way that others are strengthened, encouraged and built up. Pray that God would help you put all these things into practice.

MEMORY VERSE: 2 CORINTHIANS 13:14

MEMORY VERSES

STUDY 1: 2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-22 – GOD’S COMFORT AND PROMISES

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. **2 Corinthians 1:3-4**

STUDY 2: 2 CORINTHIANS 1:23-3:18 – TRANSFORMING GLORY

¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
2 Corinthians 3:18

STUDY 3: 2 CORINTHIANS 4 – TREASURED AMBASSADORS

¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. **2 Corinthians 4:17-18**

STUDY 4: 2 CORINTHIANS – 5:1-6:2 – AMBASSADORS IN CHRIST

⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!
2 Corinthians 5:17

STUDY 4: 2 CORINTHIANS – 6:3-7:16 – SORROW AND REPENTANCE

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

STUDY 5: 2 CORINTHIANS 8-9 – SACRIFICIAL GIVING

⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. **2 Corinthians 8:9**

STUDY 6: 2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11:15 – SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. **2 Corinthians 10:5**

STUDY 7: 2 CORINTHIANS 11:16-12:10 – THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD’S GRACE

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. **2 Corinthians 12:9**

STUDY 8: 2 CORINTHIANS 12:11-13:14 – FINAL CONCERNS AND WARNINGS

¹⁴ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **2 Corinthians 13:14**