

# Living the Message

OPEN THE BIBLE *Make the Connection*



## March 2016 2 Corinthians Discussion Guide

### March Dates to Note:

### MEETING WILL BE HELD:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Person to Contact with Questions: \_\_\_\_\_

### PASTOR'S INTRODUCTION TO 2 Corinthians:

- Monday, March 7, 7:00 p.m., Room 482-86, Mpls Campus

### BEFORE YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

#### 1. Read 2 Corinthians.

- a. We suggest you read through "2 Corinthians: Theme and Purpose" on page 4 and "Who or What Is . . . ?" on page 5 before you begin your reading.
- b. Use the "To Guide Your Reading" section on pages 6 - 8 to help you think through what you read, paying particular attention to the questions in boldface.

#### 2. **If possible, attend, listen to, or watch the DVD of the Pastor's Introduction to 2 Corinthians.**

#### 3. **Read and recite this month's memory verse often! It is:**

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! – 2 Corinthians 5:17*

Our goal and prayer is that you will walk away from each study having had at least one important insight that informs your faith and your knowledge of God's Word. In other words, we hope you will discover a "message" just for you!

## **AT YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING**

### **Welcome**

Welcome to the March meeting of your *Living the Message* Bible discovery group. In order to keep to your agreed-upon time frame, place a clock where it is clearly visible or ask someone to be “timekeeper” and let the group know when 15 minutes remain for discussion and closing.

### **Opening Prayer**

Pause to quiet your hearts and minds with a few moments of silent prayer. Then have someone open with his or her own prayer or pray the following together:

*Dear Lord, Building your church is a joyous, but often difficult task. As we follow Paul's pain, hope, and teachings in this letter, grant insight and wisdom for how we today can strengthen and increase not only Mount Olivet Church, but the church at large through the faithful sharing of the gospel and the generous giving of the time, talents, and treasure with which you have entrusted us. Amen.*

### **This Month's Memory Verse**

Recite this month's memory verse (including the book, chapter, and verse) together as a group.

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! – 2 Corinthians 5:17*

### **Getting Under Way**

Choose one aspect of yourself or your life that you would like to “pass away” and be replaced by a “new creation.” Explain your choice.

### **Setting the Scene**

Before beginning discussion, invite your small group facilitator and anyone else who attended, listened to, or saw the DVD of the Pastor's introduction to 2 Corinthians to share what they learned.

### **Discuss Together**

Go to “To Guide Your Reading” on pages 6 – 8. Discuss together the questions in boldface and/or others of the questions that particularly struck members of your group. Remember, a good discussion on fewer questions is better than rushing through all the questions. If you wish, ask if any of the questions (boldface or not) were of particular interest to someone and begin there.

**Following your discussion, go to “For Next Month” on the next page for reminders about your next meeting and closing prayer.**

## **FOR NEXT MONTH**

**Our next meeting will be in April:**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Person to Contact with Questions: \_\_\_\_\_

**April's Reading Assignment:** Hosea

**April's Memory Verse:**

*But as for you, return to your God,  
hold fast to love and justice,  
and wait continually for your God. – Hosea 12:6*

**Save the date! Next Pastor's Introductions:**

- Monday, April 4, 7:00 p.m., Gronseth Fellowship Hall, West Campus

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Gather requests for prayers, encouraging both things for which God's help and guidance is needed and things for which people are grateful. If someone is comfortable doing so, ask that person to pray aloud a prayer bringing these concerns to God, or take time for silent prayer during which these concerns can be brought to God. End with a prayer of your own, by reciting the Lord's Prayer, or by praying the following together:

*Dear Lord, You have blessed us with this time together. We are grateful for it and all the many blessings that fill our lives, most especially the gift of salvation that is ours through you. As we go our separate ways, watch over us and for whatever needs we carry with us, fill us with the assurance of your provision at all times and in all things. In your blessed name we pray, Amen.*

## **FOLLOWING YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING**

**Ponder**

*Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? – 2 Corinthians 13:5a*

## 2 Corinthians Theme & Purpose

In this letter to the church he founded in Corinth, the Apostle Paul is a man of many moods and purposes. Seeking to rebuild what has become a strained relationship, Paul at times is defensive and at others conciliatory. Jumping between topics, well-reasoned arguments mix with pleas for affection and criticism of his opponents. This lack of continuity causes many scholars to conclude that the letter is actually a combination of two or more letters to the church around this time.

We learn early in the letter that Paul has decided against a planned visit, not wanting to cause further pain (1:23—2:4). Paul's own pain is evident in his reference to an earlier letter that he wrote "out of much distress and anguish of heart" that they would know the "abundant love I have for you." (This earlier letter is not 1 Corinthians, however.)

Humbly, Paul assures the community of his affection and reiterates his devotion to them. Sharing his own hardships, he also defends himself against criticisms—including his right to be called an apostle—and encourages them to remain true to the gospel that he preached.

Aware of his readers' sufferings, Paul reminds them that the glory of God, then, exists alongside the afflictions they endure. It is in their suffering that they are transformed "from one degree of glory to another" (3:18), as they participate not only in the life of Christ, but his death (4:7-15).

A frequent topic in the letter—appearing in almost every chapter—is boasting. Paul boasts of his and Timothy's own testimony and remarks on how they and the community can boast in each other (1:12-14). He boasts about the church to whom he writes (7:4, 14; 8:24). He boasts of his own experiences, but admits that in doing so he "speaks as a fool" (11:21). Boasting of his own weakness, he gives credit for his accomplishments to Christ's power within him (12:9). With all this talk of boasting, Paul avoids possible accusations of pride through careful guidelines of when and how to boast, including that anyone who boasts should "boast in the Lord" (10:17).

Paul also takes time in the letter to remind the Corinthian believers of their promises to support the churches in and around Jerusalem (chapters 8 & 9). In doing so, he makes two theological arguments: 1) God will provide the means for such generosity and 2) the very act of sharing what we have with those in need is a way of thanking God for what has been provided.

Whatever the topic or issue, Paul comes at it not "according to human standards," but in terms of God's reconciling work in Christ. Theologian Mary Hinkle Shore writes that Paul's words in 5:19 are indeed one of the "simplest, most elegant statements of the Christian gospel":

*...In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.*

Hinkle Shore goes on to explain that "in Paul's thought, sin is a power that enslaves humans and is intent on separating them from God. God, in Christ, breaks the hold that sin has on humans and reconciles humanity to God's self."

The letter as a whole is a fascinating insight into the work Paul did in the early church, the challenges he faced, and the gospel truths he worked so hard to instill and maintain.

*Content on this page draws from [www.enterthebible.org](http://www.enterthebible.org)'s summary and overview of 2 Corinthians written by New Testament scholar Dr. Mary Hinkle Shore, and is used with permission.*

## Who or What Is . . . ?

**Apostle** Based on a Greek word meaning, “one who is sent forth.” At one time, the term applied only to those who were appointed by Jesus himself, and was limited to the twelve disciples. There are, however, four lists of the apostles, no two of which perfectly coincide (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; and Acts 1:13). Traditionally, the twelve are identified as Simon Peter; Andrew, his brother; James, the son of Zebedee, called also "the greater" John, his brother; Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; Matthew, or Levi; Simon the Canaanite; L;ebbeus, surnamed Thaddeus, also called Judas or Jude; James, "the less," the son of Alphaeus; and Judas Iscariot. The last betrayed Jesus, then hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-8), and Matthias was chosen in his place (Acts 1:15-26).

The term *apostle* is simply not that clear-cut. Paul calls himself an apostle, arguing that he qualifies for the title because Jesus appeared as a light from heaven on the road to Damascus and appointed him as such. In the early church, the term also was extended to others who were considered to have a divine mission or calling, such as Barnabas (Acts 14:14); Silas and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6); Apollos and Cephas (1 Corinthians 4:9), Andronicus and Junia (Romans 6:7). In Hebrews 3:1, the term is used for Jesus himself.

**Corinth.** Approximately 48 miles southwest of Athens, Corinth was on a primary Mediterranean trade route, which brought many influences—good and bad—to the city. The gods and goddesses of many religions were worshiped in the city, including the Temple of Apollo honoring Aphrodite, the goddess of love, lust, and fertility. At one time, more than 1,000 sacred (priestess) prostitutes were employed at the temple to accommodate men whose beliefs included that sex with a temple prostitute led to fertility personally and for their crops. Though not a university city, Corinth was literate, very wealthy, and placed high value on wisdom. At the same time, the Greek Epicurean “eat, drink and fornicate” philosophy was so prevalent that the Greek verb “to Corinthianize” came to mean “to practice sexual immorality.”

**Saul/Paul.** A Pharisee, and thus a strict adherent of Mosaic law, Paul converted to Christianity when Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Before Acts 13, he is referred to as Saul, but after Acts 13:9, he always is called Paul.

**Third heaven.** Commenting on Paul’s reference to a “third heaven” and “Paradise” (12:2, 4) Dr. Mary Hinkle Shore writes that “in Jewish and Christian writings of the time, ‘heaven’ and ‘paradise’ both describe a place above the earth where God reigns and where God’s people are safe from harm. Other New Testament writings also speak of layers of heaven or of ‘heavens’ in the plural. (See, for example, Luke 21:26, Ephesians 4:10; Hebrews 1:10; 4:14.) As Revelation 2:7 describes ‘paradise,’ it is a garden, comparable to the garden of Eden. Paul is claiming to have been granted a vision of this place while he was yet alive, on earth.”

**Thorn in the flesh.** In 12:7, Paul speaks of a “thorn in the flesh” tempering his elation at being given a glimpse of life in heaven. Though he does not explain what exactly this “thorn” was, his words "in the flesh" have caused speculation that this is a physical ailment. That he writes of appealing for relief from this "thorn" multiple times has led to further speculation that he is speaking of a chronic condition.

## To Guide Your Reading

Use the following questions to guide your reading and personal reflection, jotting down your thoughts in the space between each question. For those who wish, we have suggested a three-week schedule to help you in your reading and reflection.

**Questions in boldface are the ones we suggest you consider at your small group meeting.** Groups are free, however, to focus on whatever questions are of most interest and concern to the group. Let the Spirit lead!

### **Week 1: 2 Corinthians 1:1—4:15**

Paul greets the Corinthians, gives thanks (1: 1-11), and strives to make peace with his opponents (1:12 – 4:15).

1. In 1:8-11, Paul speaks of the severe affliction he and Timothy experienced in Asia. Does Paul's statement in 1:9 fit with your view of how God works in our lives?
2. In what way does Christ say "yes" to all of God's promises? (1:20)
3. Paul uses the image of veiled/unveiled faces and minds in 3:12-18. How does this image help to explain the work of the Holy Spirit?
4. **In what way are we as Christ's followers "clay jars"?** (4:1-15)



