

Series on the Book of
2 Corinthians

Term 3
2019



ST PAUL'S
CASTLE HILL

Study One

Power in Weakness: An Overview of 2 Corinthians

For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him in our dealing with you.

- 2 Corinthians 13:4

Helpful Resources for Small Groups and Leaders

1. Nancy Guthrie talking with George Guthrie about how to teach the book of 2 Corinthians:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/help-me-teach-the-bible/george-guthrie-on-2-corinthians/>

2. An 8-minute video by The Bible Project giving an overview of 2 Corinthians:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lfPK2vfC54>

3. Discover the Basics of the Book of 2 Corinthians with text and photos curated from The ESV Study Bible:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/2-corinthians/#overview>

Background

Today we begin a new series in the book of 2 Corinthians. Spend some time reacquainting yourself with the story of Paul's interactions with the Corinthians so far by discussing the following questions.

1. Read **Acts 18:8-11**. Since Paul had been literally run out of three cities – Philippi (Acts 16:39), Thessalonica (Acts 17:10), and Berea (Acts 17:13-14) – what effect do you think this vision (in Acts 18) would have had?

2. Read **1 Corinthians 4:15-21**. What was Paul's relationship with the Corinthians like? What do these verses reveal about their history, the way they view Paul, and the way Paul sees his role with them?

Watch

With your group, watch The Bible Project video on 2 Corinthians:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lfPK2vfC54>

Discuss

3. What do you think motivated Paul to write this letter?

4. Why did the Corinthians reject Paul, and why was the rejection of Paul so significant? Paul spends a great deal of time defending his apostolic calling (2 Cor. 10, 11). It seems that he is eager to prove his authority. Why do you think this is?

Going Deeper

5. We have titled this series "Power in Weakness" (see 2 Cor. 13:4) because there is a strong emphasis throughout this letter on both suffering and the Spirit's power displayed in weakness. How can this be seen in Paul's life and ministry?

6. Do you have experience of this in your own life (the Spirit's power displayed in weakness)?

7. Paul's letter was a response to a personal crisis used by God to not only bless the Corinthian church, but the church world-wide. Have there been times in your life when a painful season has led to something fruitful?

8. Paul spends two chapters (chapters 8 and 9) discussing the generosity of the Macedonians; a generosity that arose out of a response to the graciousness of God. How has God shown his graciousness to you, and do you feel compelled by God's graciousness toward you to act in certain ways? How does this play out in your life?

Making it stick

9. As we embark on this new series, what are you hoping that God will teach you? Take a moment to consider if there is an area in your life where you need to be challenged and where potential growth could take place. Write down a prayer to God and, if you feel comfortable, share with the group the area of your life you would like to see growth.

Small Group Challenge

With Mission 2020 approaching write down the names of four people you want to be actively sharing your life/faith with. Pray as a group for these people, that opportunities will arise to have gospel conversations and to invite them to church or a Mission 2020 event.

Study Two

Power in Weakness: Power to Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

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, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

- 2 Corinthians 1:3

Take a moment to discuss this week's sermon. What was something that challenged you?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

1. How does Paul describe our Father? How does this make you feel?
2. Why does Paul say God comforts us when we suffer?
3. What does Paul say he also shares with Christ? Why did he think God allowed this to happen to him?
4. What had Paul been going through that led him to write these things?
5. What did Paul see resulted from going through such difficulties?

Going Deeper

8. Read **Acts 9:15-16**, **Acts 13:44-48** and **Colossians 1:24-25**. Why does Paul uniquely share in the sufferings of the Christ?

Making it Stick

9. Share with the group something that you are currently going through that God might be using to help you rely on him more, as The One who raises the dead.
10. How does Paul's understanding of the purpose of suffering and comfort challenge you? How might this effect the way you relate to others in your Small Group, in our church, and with those you relate to in our wider community?

A Prayer for Comfort

O Father of mercies and God of all comfort, our only help in time of need: We humbly request that you relieve those among us and among our families and friends who are in great need of your compassion and comfort. Look upon us with eyes of mercy; comfort us with a sense of your goodness; preserve us from the temptations of the enemy; and give us patience under our affliction. In your good timing, restore us to health, and enable us to live our lives in awe of your glory; and grant that finally we may dwell with you in life everlasting; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

[Modified from The Book of Common Prayer]

Study Three

Power in Weakness: Power to Have Integrity

Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace.

- 2 Corinthians 1:12

Background

In our previous study, we saw that Paul had recently been through a particularly difficult time. This may have included the events of **Acts 19:28-31**, where Paul was caught up in a violent riot. Because of this, Paul had not visited the Corinthian church as he had originally communicated.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:13

1. How did Paul feel he had acted towards the Corinthians despite his change of plans?
2. How did the Corinthians feel Paul had acted?
3. How does Paul defend himself? What do you think Paul means by this?
4. What did Paul do instead of visitinG? What was his motivation in doing this?
5. What did Paul urge the Corinthians to do next? What was his motivation in urging this?

Going Deeper

6. Paul reflects that he has acted in integrity, love and forgiveness. What role has Christ played in motivating him to do so throughout this passage?
7. How has the Spirit enabled him to stand firm throughout this difficult time?
8. "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ". How does this shape the way you understand God relates to you?

Making it Stick

9. In what areas does your conscience testify that you have not acted with total integrity and sincerity? How might you seek to address this?
10. Paul is motivated to act with love and forgiveness in the conflict between himself and the Corinthians. In what situations in your life do you need to let someone know the depth of your love for them or extend forgiveness? This coming Sunday (18th August) we will be sharing communion together as a church. Take some time now to consider if there are any relationships you need to mend. Is there someone you need to reconcile with, or extend forgiveness to, or rather ask forgiveness of?

Dear Merciful Lord,

Thank you for your gift of forgiveness. Your only Son loved us so much that he was willing to endure the Cross so that we could be forgiven. In spite of our faults and failures, your mercy flows to us like a river. For this we are so grateful. In response, your Word tells us to clothe ourselves "with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony." (Col. 3:14) Help us to demonstrate unconditional love today, even to those who hurt us. Help us to let the peace which comes from Christ rule in our hearts (Col. 3:15). And may the confidence of Christ in our hearts, guide us into the freedom of forgiveness. We praise you for the work you are doing in our lives, teaching and perfecting our faith. May you mould us into a people who forgive freely as you have so freely forgiven us. In Jesus Name, Amen

Study Four

Power in Weakness: Power to Reveal

2 Corinthians 2:14-4:6

Thanks be to God, who [...] uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.
- 2 Corinthians 2:14

Background

In our previous study we saw that Paul had acted in integrity, love and forgiveness towards the Corinthians because he had experienced these same things through our Lord Jesus Christ. Having defended why he changed his travel plans he now goes on to defend the bigger question of his character that this has raised in the mind of the Corinthians.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-4:6

1. What metaphor did Paul use to explain the results of his apostolic ministry?
2. What recommendation did he produce to account for the fruits of his ministry?
3. What enabled Paul to speak of Christ with such confidence and boldness?
4. What did Paul understand caused different responses to his message?
5. How then did Paul go about his ministry? What did and didn't he do?

Going Deeper

6. Paul draws heavily in this passage from Exodus 34. How does he liken Moses' experience with our own in preaching Christ?

Making it Stick

7. How does Paul's analogy of perfume and stench affect your attitude to sharing Jesus with others?
8. Who exists as a reference to how you have gone about your ministry and life? Praise God that you function as a letter of recommendation for someone else's ministry!
9. How do the sources of Paul's confidence and boldness (from question 3 above) encourage you in your witness for Christ?
10. How does the way Paul went about his ministry (see question 4 above) challenge you? What do you need to do less and more of?

A Prayer for boldness

As Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10). Lord, no matter what it takes, increase our desire to see your will be done in our lives and your kingdom come on this earth. Squash out the fears that hold us back from living a life devoted to you and smash the idols that so easily distract us from your purposes. Increase our boldness to declare the gospel to those who you have placed in our life and give us courage as we go out into the world as your ambassadors this week. Have mercy on us, open up opportunities for gospel conversations and give us the words to say to help people see your goodness, your majesty and your splendour. In Jesus name, Amen

Study Five

Power in Weakness: Power to Engage in God's Mission

2 Corinthians 5:9-10

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 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.

- 2 Corinthians 5:9-10

Reflection

Take a moment to discuss this week's sermon. What were you challenged by?

Discuss

1. Read **2 Corinthians 5:9-10**. In these verses, Paul says that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. What do you think that will look like?

2. Is Judgement something tyou think about very often? Why or why not? Is it something we should spend time thinking about?

3. Paul Barnett writes, "One day each of us will stand before the judgement seat of the Lord and all that we are and have been will be visible. Paul took this very seriously for he immediately writes, 'Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.' A healthy fear of judgement is a true motive in every believer as he serves the Lord in the gospel". Does God's judgment motivate you to serve God, and in what way?

4. How does the thought of each person having to appear before God motivate you to share the gospel? Or, is it not something you think much about?

5. Charles Spurgeon once wrote, "If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for." How does this resonate with you? Do you pray for your non-Christian friends and family with urgency like that? What do you think are the best ways to witness to friends and family?

Check-in

6. At the beginning of this series you were encouraged to write down the names of four people that you would be praying for and actively seeking to have gospel conversations with. Take some time to chat and see how you are all going in this mission.

7. Next week is Evangelism Sunday (25th August). Perhaps you could pray that God would open the door to invite these people to church to hear the gospel preached clearly. Take a moment now to pray for these opportunities and for these people.

Making it stick

8. There are thousands of people in the Hills area who need to receive Jesus' mercy and to be spared his judgement. As a small group spend some time thinking about how you could share the good news of Jesus' mercy with your family, friends and neighbours? What might your Small Group Mission Strategy look like?

9. We have link missionaries that we support and pray for at St Paul's. Spend some time praying for these missionaries who are on the field sharing the gospel every day. Perhaps choose a missionary partner to write to as a small group, encouraging them in their work. You might choose a family or couple to have as your ongoing small group link missionaries.

- Josh and Naomi: South-East Asia
- Brendan and Karina: South-East Asia
- Graeme and Susan: Outback Queensland
- Josh and Fiona: Transition from South-East Asia to Australia
- Rod and Abby Bishop: International teams Australia

For more information about any of the above missionaries, or ideas on how to write to them or where to receive their prayer letters, please contact Paul Lucas or Jo Gibbs.

Study Six

Power in Weakness: Power in the Unseen

2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.

- 2 Corinthians 4:16-17

Background

In the previous passage Paul used a number of powerful metaphors. He explained that people respond to the gospel as either perfume or stench depending on whether the Lord has enlightened their mind. He showed the legitimacy of his ministry because the Corinthians acted as his references, for they had understood and accepted Christ as Lord. Having defended the power of the Lord working in his ministry he now turns to how and why he perseveres despite experiencing overwhelming difficulties.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

1. What does the metaphor of 'treasure in jars of clay' actually mean? What does Paul believe the treasure is? What is the 'jar of clay'?
2. Why did Paul say the Lord works in this way?
3. Why didn't Paul lose heart, despite being hard-pressed, crushed, persecuted and struck down?
4. What then did Paul long for? How confident was he that he would obtain this?
5. What motivated Paul to continue in gospel ministry despite experiencing such substantial difficulties?

Going Deeper

6. Reread **2 Corinthians 5:1-8** carefully to explore what Paul's metaphor means. What exactly is the tent and the home of which he speaks? How does this challenge your understanding of the hope that we have as Christians?

Making it Stick

7. How does Paul's apostolic experience of 'carrying around in our bodies the death of Christ' honestly make you feel? As a Christian how do you feel about going through struggles so that the Lord's power might be seen in your weakness?
8. How might what inspires Paul to continue in gospel ministry (see question 3 above) inspire you to do the same?
9. What would you honestly prefer: being at home with the Lord or at home in the body? What might you practically do to help you fix your eyes on what is unseen, not on what is seen?
10. What would you say your goals in life are? How do these align with Paul's goal in **2 Corinthians 5:9-10**?

PRAYER

Father, help us to fix our eyes on Jesus “the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Who, for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). May we be a people who continue to look to the Son each and every day, and, as we do,

Study Seven

Power in Weakness: Power to be Ambassadors

2 Corinthians 5:11-7:1

God reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. For God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

- 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

Background

In the previous study we saw that Paul persevered in ministry despite significant setbacks because of his belief in the resurrection. Paul focused not on what is seen but on what is unseen: since his hope was to receive a transformed, glorious body his goal was to use his current body to please the Lord. In this week's passage Paul showed how his ministry did this.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-7:1

1. What two things motivated Paul's ministry?
2. What things did Paul believe that led him to beg people to turn to Christ?
3. How did Paul act as a servant of God through his extraordinary experiences?
4. Since Paul didn't want to cause anyone to stumble or to do anything that might discredit his ministry, what did he then call on the Corinthians to do?

Going Deeper

5. What is the 'fear of the Lord'? Follow someone's bible footnotes or bible app cross-references to explore what this means.
6. Look up the passages quoted by Paul in 6:16-18. What do the passages originally mean? How does this increase our understanding of what Paul is calling the church to do?

Making it Stick

7. How should Paul's motivations (question 1 above) challenge us to engage in gospel ministry?
8. Paul argues that in Christ we have been recreated. Where can you see this in your life? How true do you believe and / or feel this to be?
9. Paul made himself very vulnerable as he shared with the Corinthians how Christ's power was seen in his weaknesses. How do you feel about doing this with your family, your Small Group, or those to whom you are an ambassador for Christ?
10. Paul concludes this passage with a call to holiness. As Christ's representatives what areas of your life do you need to purify?

Take a quiet moment to pray about these things before God.

Study Eight

Power in Weakness: Power in Repentance

2 Corinthians 7:2-16

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation.

- 2 Corinthians 7:8-10

Background

In **2 Corinthians 4-7**, Paul reflected that both the suffering and glory of the gospel were seen in him as God powerfully used his weaknesses and hardships to bring people to faith as he declared the glory of Christ. The Corinthians struggled to see this because they thought all true gospel ministry must be successful all the time! In this week's passage, Paul writes about how his previous confrontation with the Corinthians over this and other matters has now led to them being reconciled.

Read **2 Corinthians 7:2-16**

1. How did Paul feel about the Corinthians?
2. How did Paul feel as he came into Macedonia? What changed this for him?
3. What effect had Paul's previous letter had on the Corinthians?
4. How did Paul feel after Titus visited the church and reported back?

Going Deeper

5. Why did Paul feel "harassed at every turn" as he entered Macedonia? Read **Acts 19:23-20:1** and discuss the effect that these events would have had on Paul and might have on you if you had gone through something similar.
6. Why had Paul's previous letter caused the Corinthians such sorrow? Read **1 Corinthians 4:18-5:5** and reread **2 Corinthians 2:1-9** to find what Paul had written about. What issues do these passages raise for you?

Making it Stick

7. Paul speaks very strongly about his feelings for those he has led to faith: "I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you". Are there people at church with whom you have a similarly deep relationship? Praise the Lord for them!
8. Once again we see in Paul that following Christ is not always pure happiness and joy. How does this encourage you? What conflicts and fears are you experiencing at the moment?
9. Paul confronted the Corinthians over sin in their lives and they dealt with it. How would you feel if someone at church did the same to you? How can we challenge one another about sin in a helpful way?

10. Finally in this passage, we see Paul received encouragement and refreshment after hearing a ministry report about the Corinthian church from Titus. How does church refresh you? What might we do ensure we similarly feel delighted and encouraged after meeting together?

Finish by reading **Psalm 51** and let it lead you into a time of prayer and repentance.

Study Nine

Power in Weakness: Power to be Generous

2 Corinthians 8-9

Since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 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 8:7-9

Background

In the previous study we saw that Paul had confronted the Corinthians over sin in their midst and this caused them to sorrow, repent and deal with the sin. Having once again been reconciled to Paul he now challenged them to prepare for his visit by readying themselves to take up a collection, as they had previously expressed a desire to help others in this way.

Read 2 Corinthians 8-9

1. What do you find most striking about the generosity of the Macedonian church?
2. How does Paul motivate the Corinthians to give generously?
3. What measures did Paul put into place so that everything about the collection would be above reproach?
4. Why does Paul reason that God gives us good things?
5. Why does Paul ultimately care so much about God's people being generous?

Going Deeper

6. Read **Romans 15:25-27** and **1 Corinthians 16:1-4**. What further light do these passages shed on this collection?
7. Paul quotes and alludes to a number of Old Testament passages in these chapters. Time permitting, look up **Proverbs 22:1-9**, **Psalms 112** and **Isaiah 55:1-11**. How have these passages shaped Paul's advice on giving?

Making it Stick

8. Would you consider yourself a generous person? Would others consider you to be so? How might the gospel of our Lord Jesus challenge you in this area?
9. There are some very memorable verses in these chapters. Which do you find particularly encouraging? Which do you find personally challenging?
10. What practical advice from the passages you've looked at tonight might you put in place in your life?

Next week is Compassion Sunday (22nd September). Use this week to pray and ask God to prepare you to be generous to those whom we support in our global outreach through the work of Compassion.

A Prayer for Generosity

Lord, please teach us to be generous (not simply generous within our means, but extravagantly generous). Help us to recognise all the graces you have poured upon our lives, including life itself. Open our eyes and enlarge our hearts so that we can see that everything we have in this life is from you and for you. And as we reflect on the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ, may that compel us to be outrageously generous just as he was in giving his life. Help us to use our whole life and all our resources to serve you and grow your kingdom. Amen

Study Ten

Power in Weakness: Power to be Fully Armed

2 Corinthians 10:1-11:15

Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does; the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 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 10:3-5

Background

In this next chapter Paul reveals how the rift between him and the Corinthian church had become so bad. Since Paul had earlier refused to be paid for his ministry, he obviously wasn't a real minister. Add to that Paul was now asking for money for others and the Corinthians felt he was being very inconsistent! Paul cuts to the heart of these attacks about money and shows the underlying issue is actually a failure to truly understand & live up to the truths of the gospel.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-11:15

1. What were people saying about Paul to attack him?
2. Paul defended himself by saying he was bold, but in a different way than expected. In what way was Paul boldly fighting? What weapons did he use, & what did he fight with them?
3. Paul was willing for his ministry to be judged as long as it was done by the correct standard. What did he propose this was? See also **Acts 9:15**, **Romans 15:15-20** & **Galatians 2:7** if needed.
4. What did Paul show was his real concern about these attacks?
5. After outlining how he was being attacked about money, what does Paul say was the real underlying issue?

Going Deeper

6. Paul uses the spiritual warfare metaphor elsewhere in his writings. Investigate what he means by it by reading **Romans 13:12**, **Ephesians 6:10-20** and **1 Thessalonians 5:8**.

7. Why was this money issue such a problem for the Corinthians? Read **1 Corinthians 9:1-18** to shed further light on it.

Making it Stick

8. How are you faring in the battle for your mind? What practical advice can you offer to assist others to make every thought captive to Christ?

9. How do you judge the success of ministry? Is this a gospel-centred standard or a worldly one?

10. **2 Corinthians 11:4** is a chilling verse, and all the more so because we can easily be seduced by different gospels too. Do you honestly prefer a gospel of suffering, or one of success? Would you follow Jesus into suffering, or do you prefer comfort?

Study Eleven

Power in Weakness: Power to Boast

2 Corinthians 11:16-12:13

The Lord 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. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Background

In the previous study, we saw that Paul accused the Corinthians of judging by appearances (10:7) because they now followed those who used their own standard to judge success (10:12). In this passage, Paul ironically uses their standards of success to boast, but as he does so he turns everything upside down to show how ridiculous such boasting really is!

Read 2 Corinthians 11:16-12:13

1. How had Paul differed from the "super-apostles" in the way he related to the Corinthians?
2. What do you find most astounding in Paul's 'letter of recommendation'?
3. What spiritual experiences had Paul had that he was hesitant to speak of in case he did sound like he was boasting?
4. How had the Lord kept Paul from legitimately boasting?
5. Why was Paul ultimately willing to boast momentarily, even if in doing so he felt he was forced to use illegitimate worldly weapons?

Going Deeper

6. Why had Paul experienced so much suffering? Read **1 Corinthians 4:1-16** to see why Paul argued this was necessary for apostles... and even for Christians!
7. Paul was not a stranger to amazing spiritual experiences. However, rather than boasting of them like the "super-apostles" he had a different attitude; what was it?

Making it Stick

8. Paul's list of suffering is humbling, especially when he ends it with "besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches". Spend some time praying for those who lead you in the Lord, for they experience this same pressure.
9. How does Paul's attitude to amazing spiritual experiences challenge contemporary views about them? How does it address your own desire for such things?
10. How do you honestly feel about Paul's ultimately unsuccessful pleading in prayer? What 'thorns' do you feel you have been given? How might Paul's view of gospel life help us distinguish between 'thorns in the flesh given to torment us' and the Christ-like life of suffering?

Study Twelve

Power in Weakness: Power to Live the Cross Shaped Life

2 Corinthians 12:14-13:14

Christ was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him. Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?

- 2 Corinthians 13:4-5

Background

Having boasted of his weaknesses so that the power of the Lord might be seen more clearly in his life Paul now concludes his letter by speaking of what the Corinthians can expect from him when he arrives to visit them.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:14-13:14

1. What did Paul want to assure the Corinthians would and would not happen when he visited?
2. What did he think he might find when he visited?
3. How did Paul say he would deal with this?
4. What did he urge the Corinthians to do before he arrived?
5. What was Paul striving for in 13:11-14, and how did he write this would be possible?

Making it Stick

6. Paul saw himself as a father to the Corinthian church because he had raised them in the faith. Who are your 'fathers' in the faith? Who are you 'fathering'? Pray for those who would 'very gladly spend everything for you, including themselves', and ask that you would have the same sacrificial love for those you lead.
7. When he visited Paul expected to find a church community broken by sin. What sins do you think our church community needs to repent of? Examine and test yourselves; of the sins Paul lists, what might you be guilty of?
8. How does Paul say we can live differently in **verse 4**? Turn this into a prayer!
9. Paul wanted the church to be a place where broken relationships were restored and people were encouraged, united in their thinking and living at peace with one another. What practical things might you need to introduce to your Small Group to make it this sort of place?
10. Paul concludes by reflecting that only God's presence can transform our community to become generous, kind, loving, peaceful and united. Conclude our series by praising our triune God for who he is, and calling on him to transform the Hills through Mission 2020.

Study Thirteen

Power in Weakness: Power to be transformed

*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?
- 2 Corinthians 13:5*

Background

Now that we come to **2 Corinthians 13:5**, let's take up Paul's challenge to examine and test ourselves. As a church, we talk a lot about the Vital Signs (a way to gage how we are travelling spiritually). For this final study we want to take the opportunity to undergo a "Spiritual Health Check" both individually and as a small group.

Read and Reflect

Read **Colossians 2:6-7** and **John 15:1-8**.

1. When we become Christians, we enter into a relationship with God that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, will cause us to grow. Why is growing and maturing vital to our faith? What does it mean if we are not growing?
2. Do you "examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith"? If so how?

Let's get specific

We need to be intentional if we truly want to grow and mature in our faith. We need to take daily steps and continually ask God for help grow us in His ways. To help us grow and mature this year, let's consider the six St Paul's vital signs and set goals to foster growth (Be specific, honest & willing to commit to these goals).

Found People Find People

Write down the names of the four people you have been praying for throughout this series. How are you going in your gospel conversations? If you haven't had any gospel conversations or extended an invitation to church, what have been some of the roadblocks? Is there anything your Bible Study can be doing to support you in this mission? What is your goal in relation to this vital sign for the next 6 months?

God's People Gather

Realistically, how often do you attend church and your small group? Can you commit to attend small group at least 7 times a term and church 40/52 Sundays? What would help you to achieve this goal? What makes it difficult for you?

We, of course, don't simply want to attend but we want to be engaged in the body as we gather. In what ways are you contributing to Sunday Services (e.g. prayers, bible reading, integration team, actively meeting new people) or Bible Study (leading a study once a term, stepping up as the Care Facilitator, coordinating a prayer chain)? Is there something you could be doing to meaningfully participate in church and small group gatherings?

Called People Follow

How are you going in your personal relationship with Jesus? We have research that suggests if we can read and reflect on God's Word at least 4 times a week there is a high chance for positive change in our lives.

Can you set yourself some personal spiritual goals (e.g. read and meditate on God's Word at least 4 times a week; not simply read the bible but spend time in active reflection [REAP]; read a Christian book or commentary alongside your devotions; join the St Paul's prayer network or start using the Prayermate app; seek out someone to read the Bible with or to keep you accountable in your own devotions)?

What makes it hard to engage with these things?

Saved People Serve

What ministries are you currently serving in? Are you still serving well in this ministry? If you have been in this ministry for many years, is it time to take a small break and recharge? If you are not serving, is there a ministry that you would like to know more about (to help you do this can you attend a training session at Team Night, or contact a member of staff)? If you don't know where to serve, perhaps ask your small group to help you discern a good fit for you. We are all members of the one body and each and everyone of us has something to contribute (though some may be in a season where this is not possible).

Forgiven people Give

We learnt in the 2 Corinthians series that when we grasp the magnitude of God's extravagant grace like the Macedonians (2 Cor 8), we are compelled to be generous to God. Take a moment to consider whether you are truly generous to God with your money, time and talents? Set yourself some generosity goals (e.g. Are you tithing 10% or more? Is God prompting you to increase your giving at St Paul's so that we can make Jesus' name famous around the world?)

What do you think is the most prevalent attitude towards money in the Hills? In what ways can Christians be different? This does not mean having no money! But perhaps a certain attitude is called for.

Growing People Change

We want to grow in these areas for God's glory. We seek for our lives to be more Christlike and fruitful so that we can be part of God's mission in strengthening his church and drawing in those who do not yet know Him. As a small group, how are you going collectively in this mission, are there signs of growth? Are there any new goals you could set or areas you could ask God to help you with? (i.e. could you potentially open up your group to some new people? Could you train up a co-leader with the intention of forming another group? Could your Bible Study commit to actively seeking out new people on a Sunday? Could you think of ways to serve your community? Could you assign prayer pairs or triplets who will commit to be praying for each other throughout the week?

What practical steps do you need to take to start growing in these areas? – pick one to take that step this week/tomorrow if possible?

PRAYER

"In their hearts, humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps" (Proverbs 16:9). God, we know that growth comes by grace and it is you alone who is our resource (2 Peter 1:3-9) so as we bring these goals and plans before you and ask that you will guide us and give us all that we need to live them out for your glory and for your kingdom. Grow us to be a people who look more like Jesus each and every day, preparing us for the day when we meet you face-to-