



2 CORINTHIANS - SMALL GROUP SERIES

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Week 1: 2 Corinthians 1-3

Big Ideas: Grace & peace; God's comfort in times of trouble; Being strong in Christ; Forgiveness; and the New Covenant.

INTRODUCTION

2 Corinthians is Paul's second letter in the Bible to the church at Corinth, which he started on a missionary journey (Acts 18).

Upon getting a report of some problems at the church in Corinth, he wrote a letter to them addressing those issues (1 Corinthians).

Many in the church rejected his teaching in 1 Corinthians, as well as his authority.

Paul then visited them in person and followed up that visit with a second letter to Corinthians: 2 Corinthians.

After his letter, most, but not all, of the church realized what they had done and admitted they were wrong.

Paul assured them of his love and commitment towards them.

Notes to Youth Leader:

- *All Bible references in this series are from the NCV version unless otherwise noted. Feel free to use whatever version of the Bible best works for you and your group.*
- *This series contains A LOT of content. Go at your own pace. You don't need to cover everything. Focus on parts of the lesson that hit home with your students.*

2 CORINTHIANS 1-3

Say: Alright, let's get started!

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-2:

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am an apostle because that is what God wanted. Also, from Timothy our brother in Christ. To the church of God in Corinth, and to all of God's people everywhere in Southern Greece: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Say: Paul often opens a letter by saying “grace” and “peace” to the church he’s addressing. You might even hear church leaders start or end a message by saying that.

Let’s dive a little deeper into the meaning of these words.

Grace is a gift, favor or kindness brought to someone by Jesus Christ. It’s a reminder of how Jesus freely gave Himself away to people. He is constantly focused on His love for others. His heart is always leaning towards acceptance, compassion, and understanding.

Not only is this true for everyone, but it’s also true for you. Above all else, Jesus accepts you for who you are. As-is. He genuinely loves you and wants to be in a close relationship with you.

Ask:

- If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be? Explain.
- Do you struggle with accepting yourself as-is? Why or why not?
- Do you sometimes question that God accepts you as-is, just the way you are? Why or why not?

Say: The word **peace** is rooted in the Jewish understanding of wholeness: All the essential parts of something are joined together, and everything is the way it is intended to be.

The idea here is that your life is made whole or complete through a relationship with Jesus. Because of Jesus, you can experience peace in the chaos of life. Through Christ, you are made whole and complete, despite the problems you face.

Whether you know it or not, deep down you are searching for something. You might try to find it in approval from others, being great at something (school, sports, etc.), or one of a hundred other ways.

But what you want is peace. Wholeness. A sense that everything is the way that it should be in your relationship with God. And it is Jesus who brings us this peace.

Ask:

- What’s one thing in your life right now that is a source of stress or anxiety?
- Do you think it’s really possible to experience “peace” in a stressful or anxious situation? Why or why not?
- What do you think of the idea of Jesus bringing you a sense of wholeness or completeness? Confusing? Make sense? Agree? Disagree? Explain.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort. He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us. We share in the many sufferings of Christ. In the same way, much comfort comes to us through Christ. If we have troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation, and if we have comfort, you also have comfort. This helps you to accept patiently the same sufferings we have. Our hope for you is strong, knowing that you share in our sufferings and also in the comfort we receive.

Brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the trouble we suffered in Asia. We had great burdens there that were beyond our own strength. We even gave up hope of living. Truly, in our own hearts, we believed we would die. But this happened so we would not trust in ourselves but in God, who raises people from the dead. God saved us from these great dangers of death, and he will continue to save us. We have put our hope in him, and he will save us again. And you can help us with your prayers. Then many people will give thanks for us—that God blessed us because of their many prayers.

Say:

We don't know what happened in Asia, exactly, though it likely involved opposition to the gospel of Jesus in some way. Paul spent some time in Ephesus, which was in the region of Asia. It's possible that the event happened there. Whatever happened, it brought Paul to his knees. He experienced a good amount of difficulty throughout his life. And so did the Corinthians.

Paul is encouraging the Corinth church because they were going through a tough time. There was a division in the church over following Paul's teachings. There were some people following Paul, and some were following other teachers who recently showed up on the scene.

He's reminding them that God comforts them in times of trouble.

His words ring true for you today.

Are you facing problems or difficulties of some kind? If you are, God is there to comfort you. But what exactly does that mean?

Have you ever been going through a tough situation where someone was present with you in your pain? That person didn't fix the problem, but maybe he or she gave you 100% attention, listened to you, and even felt your pain.

If someone has ever shown up for you like that, you felt comforted by his or her presence. You had a deep sense that you weren't alone with your problems.

This is how God shows up for us in our troubles. When we open our hearts to Him, He shows up. He comforts us. He also empowers us to comfort others when they're going through tough times.

- Has someone ever comforted you in a time of trouble? What happened? How did his or her presence comfort you?
- Have you ever been comforted by God while experiencing a difficult situation? If so, explain.
- Is the idea of God comforting you too abstract for you to comprehend? Why or why not?

Now, we move on to **2 Corinthians 1:12-23; 2:1-4**.

Here's a summary of what happens.

Although he promised to visit Corinth again, Paul had backed out twice. He is admitting there's tension between him and the church. He is clearing the air and continues an open and honest relationship with them.

He canceled his visits because he did not want to be too harsh on the Corinthians again. He hoped that when he did come again, he would bring joy and encouragement.

Paul's authority and teachings had been questioned by many in the church.

He had hoped that his openness and honesty would help them trust him again and follow his teachings.

He also affirms his love for the people in the Corinth church.

Towards the end of this section, there is a passage that really sticks out.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:21-22:

Remember, God is the One who makes you and us strong in Christ. God made us his chosen people. He put his mark on us to show that we are his, and he put his Spirit in our hearts to be a guarantee for all he has promised.

Say: In these verses, he's reminding the Corinthians—and us—of some important truths.

First, God makes us strong in Christ. The word *strong* means secure, established, or guaranteed. He roots us in our relationship with Jesus.

Second, he reminds us that we're God's chosen people. God has a purpose and plan for your life. You matter to Him. You're also called to be an example to everyone of what it means to follow Jesus. That's a big part of why you're here on Earth... to do good in the world.

The way that you know God has a purpose and plan for your life is that He put his mark on you: the Holy Spirit.

Like a farmer "brands" his cattle, God "brands" you and me. It's how you know that you are His. That brand is the Holy Spirit.

Ask:

- Do you wrestle with the idea that God has a plan and purpose for your life? Why or why not?

Say: As we move into chapter 2, Paul writes about forgiveness.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11:

Someone there among you has caused sadness, not to me, but to all of you. I mean he caused sadness to all in some way. (I do not want to make it sound worse than it really is.) The punishment that most of you gave him is enough for him. But now you should forgive him and comfort him to keep him from having too much sadness and giving up completely. So, I beg you to show that you love him. I wrote you to test you and to see if you obey in everything. If you forgive someone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if I had anything to forgive—I forgave it for you, as if Christ were with me. I did this so that Satan would not win anything from us, because we know very well what Satan's plans are.

Say: We are unsure who the person was in this passage. In other translations of the Bible, he was referred to as the "sinner." Some Bible scholars believe this man sinned by insulting Paul to his face during one of his visits, questioning his authority and teachings.

Paul is talking about forgiveness and showing love and grace to those that do you wrong.

If you're anything like me, you know that forgiveness is the best path to take, but sometimes it is a struggle putting it into action when someone hurts you.

You might find it helpful to look at forgiveness as simply letting go of the anger, bitterness, or resentment you have towards the other person. You're choosing to move on and no longer continue to suffer the hurt they caused you.

It's less about letting them off the hook and more about freeing yourself from the pain or suffering they caused you.

Ask:

- Is forgiving others easy or difficult for you? Explain.
- When was the last time you forgave someone? Explain what happened. How did you feel after?

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-15:

But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's victory parade. God uses us to spread his knowledge everywhere like a sweet-smelling perfume. Our offering to God is this: We are the sweet smell of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are being lost.

Say: There were several different sacrifices and offerings that Israel presented to God as a form of worship in old testament times. One of them was the Burnt Offering, which was a freewill offering given to God out of love and not out of duty.

It was something of great value because it was given to God freely and with great joy. It is a sacrificial offering that shows deep loving respect for God and a passion to carry out His will, no matter what the cost.

Paul is saying that now YOU are the burnt offering. When you live like Jesus (ex: living out God's purpose for your life, forgiving others, etc.), you bring something sweet into people's lives around you. And that something sweet is the very real presence of God in your life.

Wow. How amazing is that!?!?

Ask:

- Have you ever been affected positively by others living like Jesus? If so, what happened?

Now, we end this lesson by looking at chapter 3.

I'm going to summarize what Paul says here.

Note to Leader: If you prefer, read the entire chapter to the group.

Because of the teachers who were gaining popularity in the Corinth church, some people wanted Paul to prove his authority and validity of his teachings (letter of introduction or recommendation). He replies that they are his proof.

God's spirit has written his letter of recommendation on their hearts. He introduces a concept about the New Covenant and then goes into comparing the Old and New Covenants.

In the Old Covenant, there was: God - MOSES - Israel. Moses was the bridge between the relationship between God and Israel.

In the New Covenant, there is God - JESUS and THE SPIRIT - You.

Jesus and the Spirit are the bridge between you and God. Through Jesus, we have direct access to God.

The Old Covenant pointed to the truth but failed to empower us to live it out.

The New Covenant says that through Jesus you have direct access to God. And through the Spirit, you're empowered to live like Jesus. Jesus saves. The Spirit transforms.

Ask:

- What is confusing to you about the Old or New Covenant?

End the lesson by asking for prayer requests and taking a moment to pray together for each other.