



2 CORINTHIANS - SMALL GROUP SERIES

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Week 4: 2 Corinthians 10-13

Big Ideas: Encouragement; being faithful in suffering; representing Jesus; God's power; weakness is true strength.

INTRODUCTION

Last week, we looked at 2 Corinthians 8-9 and the beginning of chapter 10. This week we'll finish the rest of the book.

In chapters 10-12, Paul addresses the remaining people who have rejected him and writes about his main source of the conflict with the Corinthian church: the false teachers who promoted themselves and bashed Paul.

In chapter 13, he wraps up the letter with a sober warning.

Let's jump right in.

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 that best works for you and your group.*

2 CORINTHIANS 10-13

Read 2 Corinthians 10:7-8:

You must look at the facts before you. If you feel sure that you belong to Christ, you must remember that we belong to Christ just as you do. It is true that we brag freely about the authority the Lord gave us. But this authority is to build you up, not to tear you down. So, I will not be ashamed.

Say: Paul is about to brag on himself to make the case to the Corinthian church that his teaching and authority are real.

But he wants to make it clear that his authority comes from Jesus, and it is meant to build others up, not tear down.

As opposed to the false teachers who were bashing Paul, and their authority didn't come from Jesus.

Ask:

- Has someone ever put you down? How did it make you feel? Explain.
- Has someone ever encouraged you when you were down? Explain.
- Is there someone in your life that needs encouragement right now? If so, who and why?

Read 2 Corinthians 10:12-18:

We do not dare to compare ourselves with those who think they are very important. They use themselves to measure themselves, and they judge themselves by what they themselves are. This shows that they know nothing. But we will not brag about things outside the work that was given us to do. We will limit our bragging to the work that God gave us, and this includes our work with you. We are not bragging too much, as we would be if we had not already come to you. But we have come to you with the Good News of Christ. We limit our bragging to the work that is ours, not what others have done. We hope that as your faith continues to grow, you will help our work to grow much larger. We want to tell the Good News in the areas beyond your city. We do not want to brag about work that has already been done in another person's area. But "If people want to brag, they should brag only about the Lord. "It is not those who say they are good who are accepted but those the Lord thinks are good.

Say: The false teachers spoke on their own authority, not the authority of Jesus.

Paul showed his authority and teaching to the Corinth church by the work he did with them and the actions he took while with them in person.

So, what does all this have to do with us today?

We might not be an apostle like Paul, but the way we live our lives and the actions we take are very powerful.

We are representing Jesus to those around us by how we live. When we choose to forgive, love, or accept others, we're representing Jesus to them.

Our job is to stay open to God's love and guidance by looking for what God is doing in our lives and those around us.

And to lean into grace, peace, compassion, love, etc.

Ask:

- Is there someone in your life who is a really good example of representing Jesus to you? If so, who is that person? And what characteristics of that person represent Jesus to you?
- In what ways would you like to represent Jesus to others?

Say: In chapter 11 Paul goes on to defend himself some more. This time, he focuses on the suffering he has experienced while serving Jesus.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-29:

Are they serving Christ? I am serving him more. (I am crazy to talk like this.) I have worked much harder than they. I have been in prison more often. I have been hurt more in beatings. I have been near death many times. Five times the Jews have given me their punishment of thirty-nine lashes with a whip. Three different times I was beaten with rods. One time I was almost stoned to death. Three times I was in ships that wrecked, and one of those times I spent a night and a day in the sea. I have gone on many travels and have been in danger from rivers, thieves, my own people, the Jews, and those who are not Jews. I have been in danger in cities, in places where no one lives, and on the sea. And I have been in danger with false Christians. I have done hard and tiring work, and many times I did not sleep. I have been hungry and thirsty, and many times I have been without food. I have been cold and without clothes. Besides all this, there is on me every day the load of my concern for all the churches. I feel weak every time someone is weak, and I feel upset every time someone is led into sin.

Say: Wow! Paul has certainly experienced a lot of suffering because of his missionary work.

The difficulties he faced are more proof that his teachings and authority come from Jesus.

Despite all this trouble, Paul continues to pursue Jesus and do his work. He continues to be faithful, press on with humility, and lean on God's strength.

But I would like to take down Paul from the pedestal we put him on in this passage. On the surface, he looks superhuman.

Five times he was whipped 39 times. He was beaten with rods, nearly stoned to death, constantly in danger as he traveled, without food or water, and so on.

All this happened to him because of following Jesus' call on his life.

Do you think there were times he doubted Jesus or his calling? Did he experience fear, hopelessness, despair, pain, loss, anger, etc.? Do you think in those really low moments he might have wanted to quit?

I think those are great questions to ask. After all, he's human.

We can only guess the answers to those questions. What we do know is that he continued to lean on God's strength and comfort through all the difficulties he faced.

Life is often unfair. People we love die. Others who are supposed to care for us hurt us. Close friends betray us. Bad things happen to good people.

One thing is clear in this passage and throughout the entire Bible: Life will be difficult. There's not anything we can do to avoid that truth. When one problem goes away, often another one comes to replace it.

We might not have it as tough as Paul did. But we will have difficulties come up throughout life.

Accepting that truth is the first step. That way we're not blindsided when life hits us hard.

The way Paul handled these difficulties is a really great example to us. He gives us hope because he was able to lean on God's strength and power. He shows us that it really is possible to endure through adversity.

Ask:

- Let's review what happened to Paul: Five times he was whipped 39 times. He was beaten with rods, nearly stoned to death, constantly in danger as he traveled, without food or water, and so on.
- How would you have felt if you were Paul?
- Would you have questioned God or your calling? Why or why not?
- What problems or difficulties are you experiencing right now? What emotions come up?
- Do you find it sometimes hard to follow Jesus? Why or why not?

Read 2 Corinthians 11:30:

If I must brag, I will brag about the things that show I am weak.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10:

So that I would not become too proud of the wonderful things that were shown to me, a painful physical problem was given to me. This problem was a messenger from Satan, sent to beat me and keep me from being too proud. I begged the Lord three times to take this problem away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, my power is made perfect in you." So, I am very happy to brag about my weaknesses. Then Christ's power can live in me. For this reason, I am happy when I have weaknesses, insults, hard times, sufferings, and all kinds of troubles for Christ. Because when I am weak, then I am truly strong.

Say: Wow! Such a powerful passage!

“My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, my power is made perfect in you.”

God totally flips our understanding of weakness. We often shy away from our weaknesses and gravitate towards our strengths.

We have a difficult time confronting our shortcomings, failures, struggles, and mistakes.

We often avoid facing the things about ourselves that we don't like because they make us feel bad about ourselves.

We find it difficult to face our problems.

Paul is saying that weakness is actually strength.

We're most aware of the need to rely on God's strength in times of weakness. That's when we're most open to God's help.

It's an opportunity to see God do something amazing in our lives.

And, like Paul, we can even get to the point of being happy when difficulty comes our way because we know it's an opportunity for God to show up in our lives.

Ask:

- How would you define weakness?
- Before reading this passage, how did you view weakness? Has it changed? Why or why not?
- How would you define strength?
- How do those in your life view strength? How do they view weakness?
- Do you think weakness can actually be strength? Explain.

Say: For the rest of chapter 12, Paul goes on to explain that when he was with the Corinthian church, he performed signs, wonders, and miracles. This is further proof that he's the real deal.

Then, he goes on to remind them that he never asked them to financially support him while he was with them. He was there to serve, with no strings attached.

And in chapter 13, Paul talks about coming a third time to visit them.

He reminds them of God's power in their lives.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:3-4:

You want proof that Christ is speaking through me. My proof is that he is not weak among you, but he is powerful. It is true that he was weak when he was killed on the

cross, but he lives now by God's power. It is true that we are weak in Christ, but for you we will be alive in Christ by God's power.

Say: Paul is reminding them of God's power in their lives.

And he ends the book with a final farewell.

Ask:

- What was the #1 thing that stuck out to you the most during this series on 2 Corinthians?