

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

Over the years, I've found my life changing and my faith deepening as I meet with our heavenly Father in His word. This has been especially true as I've been writing these devotionals and having to live what I write.

I long for you to be able to say the same as you read through this letter.

As I've gotten to know Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John through their letters, I'm overwhelmed by how they were changed by knowing and walking with their Lord. How much they must have longed for us to know Him as they did.

As John wrote in 1 John 2:3-6, he wants us to walk as Jesus did and believed that it was absolutely possible to do so. So how did Jesus walk? That's one secret our Father shares with us.

Blessings on your time as we take another walk with the Father,

Margie Martin

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In case you're a little confused about the timing of Paul's visits and letters to the Corinthians, let's see if this scenario helps:

1. Paul first visits Corinth around 52 A.D. and starts the church. He lives there for about 1½ years and then leaves for Ephesus.
2. About 5 years later, he hears that the Corinthian believers aren't living their faith, so he sends them a harsh letter (referenced in 1 Corinthians 5:9).
3. They send back a list of questions.
4. He writes what we have as 1 Corinthians to answer their questions and encourage them to continue in the faith.
5. Their response to this letter isn't good.
6. Paul visits them, and their response still isn't good.
7. After he leaves, he sends a brief letter to them with Titus.

Now Paul is in Troas (the region surrounding the city of Troy), waiting for Titus to come with news of their response to his third letter. Troas is in the northwest section of Asia Minor on the coast. One night Paul has a vision that he should go to Macedonia, which is directly west of Troas, across the sea in what is now Greece. Even though he has had success in Troas, he leaves for Macedonia where Titus meets him with news of the Corinthians' response. This waiting time is covered in 2 Corinthians 1:1–2:13.

While in Macedonia, Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians that we're going to be looking at and sends it with Titus and two other brethren sometime during A.D. 57.



New Testament World

As you spend time in this letter, please take the time to talk with our Father about what He's showing you so you're not just gathering information. As you pray, you can use the space on each page to journal your thoughts or write Him a note.

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2 Corinthians 1:1-3

“To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia.”

I've sat here for the longest time staring at this greeting, wondering what was so impressive in it that I would want to write about it. I didn't see any descriptive words; nothing stood out. Then I realized that the significance of this greeting was in its *lack* of extras. It's cut and dried. It's like saying, "Hey" like we do in the South—just a friendly greeting. But this greeting of Paul's is so different from all his other greetings that it made me think that perhaps *this letter* will be entirely different.

Paul had written the letter to the Corinthians that we've just finished and sent it to them with Titus (his go-to guy for difficult situations). They didn't respond well, so he made a quick trip to see them and then followed up with a brief letter, which we don't have, that he again sent with Titus. He's had to wait months for a response, and this waiting has taken a toll on him (as we'll see in this letter).

How Paul's heart must have been breaking over the Corinthians' response to him and to the truth he's been sharing with them. As a church that he had started and stayed with for a while, he had so much time and effort invested in them, like a parent with a wayward child. What if they walked away from the Lord because they didn't want to adjust their lives to Him? What will become of them if they make this choice? Have you ever felt anguish like this over someone?

As Paul is waiting, he begins writing this letter that we're starting to read. Titus finally returns with good news, and Paul can finally relax, feeling the exhaustion that comes when tension drains away.

Have you been involved in a tense situation lately? Perhaps you had to live with this tension for a long time. But when the issues get resolved, you may find yourself emotionally spent. Perhaps you're on the verge of depression.

I think our tendency with stress is either to give into the emotions or ignore them. Which is your normal response? Have you found this way to be a healthy way to live? If not, what would be a better way to manage the stress and tension that come from not knowing how a conflict will turn out?

It'll be interesting to see how Paul handles himself in this type of circumstance. Perhaps his response will help us.

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2 Corinthians 1:3-11

“Praise be to the Lord and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort . . .”

So the answer to yesterday’s question is *to give praise*. My question , then, is what did Paul *do* while waiting and struggling with depression to get him to this conclusion? I think he got to know the character of God in new and deeper ways, and he chose to concentrate on God’s character instead of on his circumstances. So, what were Paul’s circumstances?

Troubles	Suffering as Jesus did	Distress
Hardships	Under great pressure	Beyond ability to endure
Wanting to die	Feeling sentence of death	Deadly attacks

These circumstances go way beyond what I’ve ever experienced; how about you? But because of today’s verse, I long to know what Paul learned about God while he walked through this valley of circumstances.

The God of Jesus Christ: When I was a young Christian, one of our pastors often referred to *the God of the Scriptures, rather than the god of our minds*. Do you let God define Himself, or do you try to fit Him into your own view of life?

The Father of Jesus Christ: Do you know God as a close, loving Father, or are you keeping Him at arm’s length—on the throne, but distant?

The Father of Compassion: Who do you think Jesus went to when He was frustrated with His disciples, angry with the Pharisees, brokenhearted over what He saw, and delighted over choices of faith?

The God of All Comfort: Who else knows our pain and still wants to hear all we have to say? Who else is able to bring good out of bad and life out of death? Who else is able to turn sorrow into joy?

If we never walk *through* the issues of life that come our way, we’ll never get to know this side of God that Paul experienced while waiting. He’ll be distant and powerful, not close by and compassionate. If we ignore the pain or wallow in it, we’ll never get to know His compassion and comfort. And if we don’t get to know Him, we won’t be able to help those around us who need to know Him as He is.

Is this relationship with God one you’d like to develop but don’t know how? It’s done through *seeking* Him in His Word; it’s through *reading* Scripture out loud so we can hear ourselves affirm what’s real; it’s through *choosing* to believe truth rather than play with lies; and it’s through *thanking* God for who He is *apart from* what’s happening and *within* what’s happening. Where are you in this process?

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2 Corinthians 1:12-14

“Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God’s grace [all of God’s resources made available at Christ’s expense].”

As I was reading these sentences, my mind flashed back to last Sunday night when I reacted with the world’s wisdom:

I shouldn’t be treated this way!

instead of responding according to God’s grace:

Lord, I think her insecurity and lack of self-worth prompted her harsh words to me. How can I love her in her areas of weakness?

Every day we have hundreds of opportunities to respond to others’ comments (whether challenging or just normal) and actions (selfish or just everyday). At each opportunity we have the choice of responding according to the world’s wisdom:

“It feels good.”

“I want *it* (or *her* or *him*).”

“I don’t deserve to be treated this way.”

or according to God’s grace:

- God anointed us.
- God set His seal of ownership on us.
- God put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Instead of getting so upset, what would happen if we viewed circumstances as opportunities to show God’s grace at work? Of course responding this way means we’ll have to die to our own pride, to a too high or too low estimation of ourselves, and to our own rights. Dying is painful, but not as painful as Jesus’ dying on the cross. Just as Jesus’ death resulted in resurrection life, when we die to the way we’ve always been, the result is grace offered to others, changed lives for us, and glory for God.

How about watching yourself today, seeing how you respond to what life brings. Choose who you will honor and value. Our own honor is fleeting and, if we are painfully honest, really isn’t ours. But glory to God lasts forever and is absolutely deserved.

Ready to watch and choose?

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2 Corinthians 1:15-22

“Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, ‘Yes, yes’ and ‘No, no’?”

Have you ever been on the receiving end of someone committing to time with you and then changing the plans when something better comes along? Perhaps you're the one who's always changing plans (or not committing until the last moment), and you've never thought about how your choices affect others. Have you ever realized that how you follow through on a commitment demonstrates the quality of God's character shining through you?

One of the truths in Christianity that's challenged me is that as I grow in Christ, my character should look more and more like Jesus', because He lives in me through the Holy Spirit.

- As He is kind, I am to be kind.
- As He is consistent, I am to be consistent.
- As He gave up His rights, I am to give up mine.
- As He is unwavering, I am to be firm in my beliefs.
- As He is compassionate, I am to be compassionate.
- As He is patient, I am to be patient.
- As He is _____, I am to be _____.
(fill in the blanks)

How did you fill in the last statement? What part of God's character does He want to be developing in you? How others mistreat you will help you answer these questions. For example, I get upset when people change their plans with me at the last minute, so God's faithfulness and consistency are important to me. Over the years I've become more and more faithful and consistent because I've appreciated these qualities in God. I've learned how His patience and long-suffering (having a long fuse) are important for me to work on because these are His responses to me when I want to arrange life around what is pleasant and easy for me.

What characteristics of God have you learned to appreciate because of others' sin patterns that drive you crazy? What do you appreciate about God as He responds to your sin patterns?

Looking at ourselves and others in this way gives us the opportunity to glory in who God is and provides us with the chance to worship Him instead of being critical of others and nursing hurt feelings.

Time to rethink some relationships and conflicts?

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2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4

“For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.”

If you’ve already read through Paul’s other letter to the Corinthians with me, you’ve probably wondered (as I have) how he could write such hard-to-hear words, what his motives were, and what he was feeling as he wrote.

As I’ve taught business writing classes over the years, I’ve found that a key to writing well is to predetermine what tone to use—how I want to come across to my reader. Writers don’t have the benefit of facial expressions, voice inflection, or hand movements, so they have to be very clear with their tone. They can choose to be argumentative, compassionate, challenging, kind, formal, or conversational. The options are endless.

So in this section we hear from Paul how he was feeling when he wrote his hard-to-hear words to these struggling believers:

- Extremely concerned with their choices
- Close to being overwhelmed with his concern for them
- In tears
- *Feeling* his depth of love for them

Have you ever felt disciplined by the Lord the way the Corinthians were through Paul’s words? If Paul is this concerned with the Corinthians, can you imagine how concerned God is with you? Or perhaps you think you need to say some hard words to another believer trapped in a sin pattern; do your motives line up with Paul’s? If not, you probably have some work to do before you say anything.

In this section, we’ve been looking at God’s standards of holiness and sincerity for us. Do these standards encourage you to change how you want to be or how you want to approach a fellow Christian? They do for me.

Paul also says in this section that when one believer has to say some hard words to another, the one who is *causing* the grief is the one to *bring* the joy. This joy can happen only if the one being spoken to deals with the sin, turns 180°, and then lets the one saying the hard words know what has happened. What humility that takes; no wonder it’s so hard to do!

So, where are you? Do you need to change some motives or your approach? Are you predetermining your tone of voice before speaking? Are you listening to yourself so you can hear how others hear you? Do you need to humble yourself? Growth begins with honesty.

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 2:5-13

“And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”

I'm guessing that the person Paul is forgiving is the one he wrote about in 1 Corinthians 5. In that chapter, Paul challenged the church to do the right thing, they did it, the punishment had its desired effect, the sinning believer repented, and Satan was defeated. Now Paul tells them to forgive this brother, comfort him so he's not overwhelmed with sorrow, and reaffirm their love for him.

But look at Paul's warning: if we don't extend forgiveness, Satan will win. He plays the game better than we do, not because of what the other person does or doesn't do, but because of what we *won't* do.

So let's explore what happens when we choose to hold on to hurts and refuse to forgive. These situations happen all the time; I'm in the middle of one right now, and I bet you are too (or will be tomorrow). What are Satan's schemes?

- Satan is an accuser of the brethren (us). Not only does he accuse us to ourselves and to God, but he also *accuses us* to each other.
- Satan tells us that we *don't deserve* to be treated this way.
- Satan tells us we *can't* forgive another person.
- Satan tells us that the situation will *never* change.
- Satan keeps us from seeing what in *us* needs to change.

Any of these schemes sound familiar? What schemes can you add to the list? Tomorrow we're going to look at how we can keep Satan from winning.

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2 Corinthians 2:5-13 (continued)

“And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”

Now that we've identified some of Satan's schemes, what can we do so Satan won't outwit us?

1. Humble ourselves.
2. Choose love.
3. Give the other person another chance—and another and another—because Jesus keeps giving us new chances to walk with Him.
4. Remember: our goal is to bring glory to God, not to ourselves.
5. Remember: resurrection power is strong enough to change us, change another, and change situations. We only know today; Jesus knows tomorrow.

So, where are you in this process:

Do you need to confront someone?

Have you just been confronted?

Is it time to forgive?

Every step in the process holds the possibility of redemption or rejection—it's always a choice of *holding on to* or *letting go*.

I've made my choice and am experiencing healing, freedom, and peace. Is this what you want? If so, which choice are you going to make?

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2 Corinthians 2:12-3:6

“He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant.”

The truth in 2 Corinthians 2:14-6:13 is probably more familiar to me than any other part of Scripture because it was the cornerstone of the teaching I received as a young Christian. *The new covenant*—just these words bring a flood of memories to my mind. My challenge now is to see these familiar words through fresh eyes. Here’s our chart:

Old Covenant

Circumstances determine our emotional well-being.

We are our own fragrance, and we smell like death because we’re depending on ourselves.

We try to be equal to the task of reflecting God and good enough to be acceptable to Him.

We use God’s Word for our own benefit.

We depend on other’s opinions and recommendations.

Truth is external to who we are, written on tablets and in ink. (emphasis is on what we *do*)

Our confidence comes from our own abilities and efforts, so we always have to keep trying.

Results in death that plays out in guilt, stress, discouragement, depression, and anxiety.

New Covenant

Always triumphant in Christ, regardless of the circumstances.

Knowing Jesus creates in us a fragrance everywhere we go:

- To those who refuse to know God, we smell like death.
- To those who are being saved, we are the fragrance of life.

In no way are we equal to reflecting God or being good enough to be acceptable

We speak sincerely in God’s presence (no mixed motives), as those sent from God.

The quality of life of those we spend time with displays the quality of our walk with Jesus.

Truth is written on our hearts; shows in our attitudes and motives, and seen in our actions

Our confidence comes from God.

Results in life through the Spirit that never gives up and never gives in.

Recently a man asked me what *ministry* meant. I realize now that my answer should have reflected *who* we’re representing rather than what we do. How are you doing as a minister of the new covenant, the new way of living with Christ? How competently are you living the Spirit’s life? Paul’s promise is that *as we live with Jesus, we will become competent to live as examples of Him and givers of life through the Spirit*. How are you doing with this challenge?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Do you go to church on Sundays to get a dose of spirituality but find it hard to maintain that devotion and commitment during the week? All too often we leave church after being with God and His people, revved up and ready to go, our faces bright, confident of being able to live this way the rest of the week. We try to maintain the energy and say the words, but inside we’re feeling fake and don’t know what to do about it.

This is exactly what happened to Moses. In Exodus 34:29-35, we read that his face was radiant after being with God. The radiance was too bright for the people, so Moses put on a veil for their sake. Paul tells us that Moses kept this veil on even after the radiance faded because he wanted to project a super-spiritual appearance. Can you relate to his pride? Have you ever found yourself projecting a spirituality that’s based on appearances rather than on what’s true inside? Paul, though, says that those who know Jesus have another option. He says to:

- Humble ourselves and remove the veil of pride and superficial appearances.
- Reflect on the Lord’s glory—look regularly at Him in His Word, think about Him, talk about Him, talk to Him, and listen to Him.
- Look at, think about, talk about, talk to, and listen to Him, again and again.

As we look at Him we will become like Him. Sound impossible? Well, think of what we look at on TV and in the movies and how these images become our reality. Teenagers look at each other and start to look like each other. Children look at their parents and then act like them—whether good or bad.

So how do we get off this spiritual roller coaster? It starts with doing what you and I are doing right now. We look at and reflect on Jesus—day after day, moment by moment. And as we look at, respond to, and are being changed (transformed) into His likeness, we’ll find that the lows aren’t as low, don’t last as long, and become fewer and fewer. The highs go deeper and quieter as we value Jesus and not just the experience. The Spirit does His job, and the world benefits.

Ready to get off the spiritual roller coaster?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 4:1-6

“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of his knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

I never took physics class, but I remember my mom saying that everything boils down to physics. I don't understand light and darkness, but I've been told that it's impossible for light to shine *out of* darkness, that light has to be there in some form for it to take away or even diminish the intensity of darkness.

What is darkness? It's where we:

Stumble and fall; have no structure or navigational aids; are fearful and isolated; see no beauty, distance, or nearness; and can't live for very long.

In this verse Paul takes us back to Genesis 1 where Moses wrote that the earth was formless, had nothing on it or in it (void), and darkness was over the surface of the deep. The Spirit was hovering over the waters— ready to go to work at God's command. And God said, *“Let there [on earth] be light,”* and light happened.

From the laws of physics, darkness will always be darkness. It has no hope or possibility of ever getting lighter. Such are our dark hearts. But did you notice in the Genesis account that God and the Spirit weren't in darkness? Only the earth was. God gave the command, the Spirit acted, and heaven infiltrated earth. God said some more “Let there be's,” and more happened that couldn't have happened unless He spoke.

What does this have to do with our own hearts and the hearts of those we care about? Paul is saying that each human heart is as dark as earth was before creation and that nothing we can do can change this situation— not our words to our loved ones, not the books we send them, and not the sermons we ask them to read or listen to. He's saying that only when God acts (and He so loves to act) can the light of Christ shine in our hearts.

Paul's also saying that just as at creation, God has a plan that He put into action at the cross, and He's always at work through the Spirit. We never know when or how He's going to work. So we say the words, give the books, and send the sermons, but we *know* that it's not up to us to make a change in another person's life—it's only the Spirit at work who can have an effect. Changed lives are miracles that only God can perform.

Does this truth remove any pressure for you? Does it encourage you to be more involved in what the Spirit is doing so you can see God's power at work? I sure hope so. Heaven is still infiltrating earth.

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 4:7-12

"We are <i>hard pressed on every side</i>	→	<i>but not crushed</i>
<i>perplexed</i>	→	<i>but not in despair</i>
<i>persecuted</i>	→	<i>but not abandoned</i>
<i>struck down</i>	→	<i>but not destroyed."</i>

I had an emotional meltdown yesterday. When this happens, I cry; you may rant and rave. After talking (and crying) for a couple of hours with my husband, I slept for the next 12. This morning as I was getting ready for the day, I began wondering why yesterday had happened when it did, I wondered what today's section would bring, and I wondered if the two would fit together.

Sure enough; I realized that while I felt pressed in on every side, I wasn't crushed. I knew that God was going to bring good out of the circumstances. I knew that He was allowing so many issues to come together at one time so I couldn't ignore them, so I'd reach out to Him, and so I'd let Him change me for His glory.

So why do we have to go through these times of being squeezed in on every side, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down? Paul says it's because these are the only times that God's treasure, His unsurpassing power, can be seen *in* us. For when an everyday jar of clay (our bodies) holds something so amazing, we're not:

crushed in despair abandoned destroyed

Others can see the difference and be drawn to what they need. So here's the normal Christian life: being given over to these hard situations so Christ's life can be seen in us. Life and death working at the same time.

What are you going through these days? Are you experiencing the *normal* Christian life? Yes, we do have times of relief, especially as we learn to stop struggling sooner. But perhaps we should welcome these *hard* times, because then God's power can be seen—and isn't that what we really want?

Are you being tempted to give into the pressures of life and the depression that follows? Aren't you glad Jesus didn't give in and that Paul didn't give in? Won't those around you (and after you) be glad that you're not giving in?

Is it time to be honest with someone you trust the way I had to with my husband? Then ask God for His vision, hear what He and those around you are saying, and respond with trust. This way of living isn't simple or easy, but it is possible. When we live the truth of this section, real life happens—for us and those around us. The choice is up to us. Ready to humble yourself and choose life?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 4:13-15

“All this is for your benefit so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.”

Have you been astounded by God’s timing recently? Last week I cashed in the change my husband stores in a jar in his closet. That amount of money paid for—to the dollar—the cost of a wonderful (expensive) anniversary dinner, including the tip. What a gift from our heavenly Father.

If I hadn’t been to church this last Sunday, today’s verse would have been like any other. During the sermon our pastor defined grace as God *giving us what we need when we need it to do what He’s called us to do*. I’ve always defined grace as God’s resources at Christ’s expense. Now my full definition of grace is:

God’s resources at Christ’s expense so we can do what God wants us to do when He wants us to do it. Then we can be:

Patient instead of blowing our top

Truthful instead of humoring another

Kind instead of saying cutting words

Loving instead of being angry or critical

A *one-person* man or woman instead of flirting

_____ instead of _____

Grace comes when we die to ourselves and let Jesus Christ live through us by the Spirit. Paul says that the result of people letting grace work in their lives is more and more people being reached for Jesus and their giving of thanks overflowing so the glory of God is seen.

Do you ever feel that nothing spiritual is happening around you or in you? I think Paul would ask, “When was the last time you had the choice of doing what you wanted to and responding the way you normally do OR stopping yourself, humbling yourself, and depending on God’s life in you for your response?” Are you having trouble thinking of such a situation? How about asking your spouse, a parent, a child, a co-worker, or even Jesus?

Paul is telling us that as we let grace work in our lives, we’ll see it reaching more and more people, causing thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Looks like a lot is at stake. In every circumstance, we have the choice of hampering the process or helping it along.

What choices are you going to make today?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

Have you ever been around someone who’s had such a zeal for thrills that they’re always getting hurt, but they keep on trying new things? When he or she gets into their 30s and 40s, however, the body starts pushing back with aches and pains, stiffness, and arthritis. The glory days seem to be one’s youth, and it’s hard to grow up when we think that thrills are what we should be pursuing.

Then we have Paul, whose aches and pains and stiffness come from the hardships he endured for the sake of the kingdom (for us). (The list of what he went through is in chapters 6 and 11.) He also talks about an eye problem and a thorn in the flesh (physical problems) that God wouldn’t take away but instead used to keep Paul depending on Him. (Could you imagine Paul not under the authority of Jesus Christ?) Here’s the contrast:

Thrill-Seekers

Their glory days are in the past.
Their bodies are letting them down.

God-Seekers

Their glory days are ahead of them.
Whatever hardships they endure only help them long for and appreciate an eternal glory that is currently unseen.

Which type of a person are you, a thrill-seeker or a God-seeker? C.S. Lewis wrote that this life is like learning how to ride a pony so in heaven we can ride a stallion. Do you think of eternity with this type of contrast in mind?

More than likely you’re already a God-seeker because you’ve been reading through Paul’s letters with me. But if you’re a thrill-seeker and want to switch your mentality, I bet you’re wondering where to start. Please don’t try to take your former way of living into your walk with the Father. He *may* choose to take you into a dangerous environment. But I bet before he does that, He’ll have you face the challenge from yesterday’s section: walking by grace moment by moment, walking by faith and not by sight, giving up rights for His sake. For all of us, though, the challenge is to see life through the lens of eternity.

What’s going on in your life today that’s fighting with you to keep your eyes earth-bound: illness, family problems, conflicts? Are you ready to have a new perspective, God’s perspective? Seeing a life change, even our own, is the best thrill of all!

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

earthly tent vs. heavenly dwelling.

What an interesting contrast Paul describes in today's section: *tent vs. dwelling*. Even if you haven't been camping, the idea of a tent probably brings to mind some of these descriptions:

temporary	challenging	concern over weather
flimsy	dirty	get-away times
lack of conveniences	primitive	lots of work

A dwelling, however, brings to mind permanence, home, stability, safety, solid, comfortable, long-term, clean, controllable, systems to make life easier. While you may love to rough-it, don't you also love to come home, get cleaned up, relax for awhile, and sleep in a comfortable bed?

Paul gives us some other insights as he compares our earthly bodies to tents and our eternal bodies to dwellings:

Earthly Tents

- Can be destroyed
- Built by human hands
- We groan, longing for more
- Naked, burdened, dissatisfied
- Mortal

Heavenly Dwellings

- Eternal, permanent
- Created by God
- The *more* that we long for
- Clothed, free, love how we are
- No end in sight

No matter how attractive we are, whether we're in great physical shape, or if we're high on the corporate ladder, when we're by ourselves and are honest, we all face the truth of our earthly tents, don't we? So if we're in our tents *but don't want to be*, and want to be in our heavenly dwellings *but aren't*, what do we do? Paul says that God's answer to this dilemma is His gift of the Spirit who lives in us, the promise *now* of the life to come, a *deposit* that guarantees our heavenly dwelling. But what are we to do while we wait? Paul says to be confident in what is to be, to walk by faith and not by sight, to make it our goal to please the Lord whether we're here or there.

Does living this way *now* make a difference *then*? Absolutely! Paul says that all believers will have a final evaluation time with Christ. And wouldn't you want this review time to cover all the times you've been confident in the truth you've been given, when you've walked by faith, and when you've chosen to please Him? If you've confessed the other times, they're done with; please, put them behind you too.

I want to spend days, months, years, reviewing with Him at this final evaluation time what He's been doing through me while I walked by faith, letting the Spirit do His work. How about you? If you want to thoroughly enjoy this time also, what choices do you need to be making, starting today?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 5:11-15

“Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.”

How do you respond to the idea of *fearing the Lord* as a motivator? I think this is one of the most misunderstood phrases in the Bible. With all of the scary movies we’re exposed to, we tend to think of fear as something to be avoided. When we say we’re afraid of _____ (fill in the blank), our emphasis is usually on the emotion and not on what causes the fear.

But Paul uses the phrase *fearing the Lord* in the context of our final evaluation time with Christ at His judgment seat. Paul tells us that we’ll receive what we’re due for what we’ve done in the body, whether good or bad. So our fear of God rests on the fact that Jesus Christ can’t be conned; He knows what we’ve done and why. Nothing is hidden from Him. But our fear of the Lord also rests on the truth that Jesus loved us so much that He died so that our sin problem would be dealt with and we could share in His life.

What do we do, then, with Someone who loves us completely and is also in charge of evaluating us? This is Someone we respect, honor, let be involved in our lives, get direction from, be honest with, check in with, talk with, hang out with, don’t con, don’t mess with, and don’t ignore. This is Someone who allows us to be honest, humble, and loving with those around us because we want to please Him and not ourselves.

Since Jesus has set us free from ourselves, we respect, honor, and fear Him; and we long for others to know Him and experience Him in the same way. When we see family and friends concentrating on themselves and what they want, we long for them to be free, and we can’t help but speak out. Will they listen? That’s up to them, but we’re compelled to persuade.

Where are you in this picture? Is someone trying to persuade you but you don’t want to listen? Do you really want to ignore Jesus speaking through your friend? Or are you feeling blahness in your spiritual life, concentrating on the here-and-now without thinking about eternal consequences? Does your definition of fear need to be redefined to include either His love or His sovereignty?

Tell Jesus what you’re feeling and what you want, which is probably what He wants for you too. Listen to what He has to say. Then look for the next step to take that is just in front of you—it’ll probably be a way to serve someone else. Take that step, and then the next one you see. Keep *talking* to Him, *listening* to Him, *looking* for the next step, and *taking* it. *Talk, listen, look, take.*

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2

“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.”

What an interesting question Paul poses for us: *how do we regard, view, define, see Christ?* Do we see Him from a worldly point of view so that He’s:

- Another man, just as human as we are?
- A doer of good deeds?
- Someone we can dismiss or ignore?
- A teacher of a challenging way of life that’s impossible for us to live in today’s world?

Or do we regard Him as He is, as He’s been described in Scripture?

How would you answer this question? How do your speech, your thought life, and your lifestyle answer this question?

If we see Him as He is, Paul says we’ll see the following truths in our lives:

- We’re a brand new person, the same but totally new and different.
- We’re reconciled to Christ; the war is over, and we do life His way; the tension is gone, and the walls are down.
- We share this opportunity with others as we live out this freedom.
- We’re Christ’s ambassador in this foreign land called earth; this isn’t our home any longer; we shouldn’t feel comfortable with all that’s around us.
- We’ve made, and daily make, the choice to live Christ’s way because He’s dealt with our sin issue so we can agree with Him.

It’s so easy to *know* that all of this is true, and even talk about it with others, but not *make* it true for ourselves. But Paul says that “Now is the time of God’s favor. Now is the day of salvation.” God’s grace is waiting to be used in all areas of our lives.

Do you have an area where you’re living from a worldly point of view? Are you willing to ask those close to you to be honest about any areas they see in you?

Now—today—don’t receive the grace of God in vain.

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 6:3-13

“ . . . open wide your hearts also.”

As I read through Paul’s experiences in this chapter, all of which happened because he was following Christ, I realized that my life for the sake of the gospel has been easy. How about you? What difficulties has the Father asked you to endure for Him and because of what He’s doing in the lives of those around you?

Most of our pain—physical and emotional—comes from our own bad decisions and stupid, selfish choices. One of our pastors used to say that you could be a Christian and still be a jerk. But some pain, some hardships, some persecutions have a different source and purpose. I live with some daily discomfort, and at times pain, because of the writing and computer work needed for creating these devotionals, but in no way does my discomfort match what Paul went through.

It’s interesting to me that through all of these challenges, what Paul wants the Corinthians to know is that he opened his heart wide to them, and he wants them to do the same with him—and with each other.

Now, what does it mean to *open wide your heart*? What does that image suggest to you? If someone opens his or her heart, I have the sense that nothing is hidden, love flows to others, nothing is held back, all is available. Motives are open for inspection, life with the Father is seen by all, sin is dealt with quickly, bad attitudes are quickly brought to the surface, and healthy choices are made. Concern for others is paramount because the person’s own needs and longings are filled by the Lord.

And Paul says he’s opened his heart wide.

How about you? Is your heart open to Jesus Christ and to others? The description we’ve just read has certainly convicted me of how often I don’t open my heart to others or to the Father. I keep thoughts closed in, forgetting that He already knows all that I’m thinking and feeling, and keeping others at a distance.

How about you? Paul is telling us that opening our hearts is a choice. We don’t have to wait for our feelings to be right or for the circumstances to be perfect. Because of all that Christ has done and is doing for us, and because of who He is, let’s respond by opening ourselves to Him and to those He brings along. Are you willing?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

“As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’”

For years whenever I looked at this section all I saw was that we weren't to marry unbelievers or be in contractual relationships with them. After a while I started to understand that we should avoid these situations because they kept us from having wide-open hearts with God and each other. Today I saw that what God wants is to live with us and among us so we can be known as His people.

As part of a singles ministry years ago, I was in a team relationship with a man who had walked with the Lord for years. At one point I asked him how he viewed God. His answer was that He saw God as the Creator of the universe, the powerful one to whom we owe all. When I asked him about the Fatherhood of God, he admitted that he hadn't explored this concept and wasn't interested in exploring it. No wonder we were having conflict in how we cared for those around us; we weren't in harmony as to how we saw the Father.

Another time I started dating a man I met at a Bible study but soon realized that his view of living the Christian life was totally different than mine. His view of God was as a distant and aloof being who really didn't want to be involved in a person's day-to-day existence. And he was an aloof man. Just because we met at a Bible study didn't mean that we saw the Father in the same way.

I realized that neither man was someone I should be yoked with in the way two oxen are yoked together to accomplish one job. We would constantly be struggling against each other, wanting to go in different directions.

What has become important to me in relationships that are close and binding is for both of us to:

- Have the same view of God—that He wants to live with and among us.
- Purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit.
- Perfect personal holiness because of our reverence for God.
- Love unbelievers as God does and be available to Him for their sake.
- Be open with other believers, willing to have a wide-open heart that is humble, compassionate, and truthful.

If you're having conflict in a close relationship, what from today's section has touched your heart or made you uncomfortable?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 7:2-13

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

We've come full circle with Paul's concern over the Corinthian believers: in 1 Corinthians we read of his anguish over their choices, then we saw his struggle with depression as he waited for Titus to come, and now we feel his relief as Titus gives him the news of their response to God.

How we long to keep loved ones (and ourselves) from times of sorrow. We choose to keep quiet rather than say what's true because we don't want to hurt them. We try to remove their pain because we care for them. But in these times, are we dealing with godly sorrow or with worldly sorrow?

What do *you* do when God shows you that your ways of thinking, your habits, and your strongholds are keeping you from being free? Do you agree with Him or do you hold on to your position? I think a prerequisite for this freedom is *humility*: a willingness to embrace truth, see ourselves through God's eyes, and live out Christ's life in us instead of living the way we always have. Does this definition ring true with you?

Let's look at what came from the Corinthians' godly sorrow:

<i>Repentance</i>	made a 180° turn in attitudes and actions
<i>Salvation</i>	a life that God intended for them to live
<i>No regret</i>	no bad taste in their mouths when it was over, the result more than made up for the process
<i>Earnestness</i>	to live out Christ's life
<i>Eagerness</i>	to clear themselves by having a godly reputation
<i>Indignation</i>	over sin
<i>Alarm</i>	over a wrong path they were taking
<i>Longing</i>	for the life God intended and made available
<i>Concern</i>	for themselves, each other, Paul, and believers elsewhere
<i>Readiness</i>	to see justice done, " <i>now is the time of God's favor</i> "
<i>Proof</i>	showed themselves to be innocent; separated themselves from the problem

Where do you find yourself in this scenario? Do you need to speak to someone to clear the air? Has someone spoken to you but you're defensive, unwilling to humble yourself? What if Jesus hadn't been willing to speak truth, if He hadn't been willing to humble Himself to the point of death for us? Maybe the steps you need to take will further God's kingdom in your life and in those around you.

Are the benefits of godly sorrow evident in how you're living today?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 7:13-16

“And his [Titus’] affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling.”

Did you notice all of the results that came from the Corinthians receiving Paul’s hard-to-hear words with humility?

- | | |
|-------|---|
| Paul | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encouragement• No embarrassment over boasting about them• Complete confidence |
| Titus | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Happiness• Spirit being refreshed (what a wonderful description)• Affection has grown• Thoroughly welcomed as an honored guest |

As I’ve been writing in this section, a friend has been telling me about an attempt at reconciliation that she’s been making. While I didn’t hear the conflict personally and don’t know the other players in the drama, what I did hear was that the *other* woman hasn’t been able to see her own part in the conflict. Without humility on both sides, resolution and reconciliation won’t be possible.

How I had longed to hear that this woman, and the others who were at the meeting, being encouraged, happy, refreshed, boasting about each other because of Jesus’ life in each one, affectionate, and honored because of their times together. Instead, all are experiencing hostility and separation. My own heart is heavy because the other woman was so closed in her heart.

I think the Father’s heart is grieving over this situation as well. I have complete confidence that He can still bring good out of this situation and that He isn’t done with these dear women. But in the mean time, His children are hurting, especially my friend.

How do you deal with conflict? I’m anticipating a difficult conversation myself with a friend in a couple of days, and I’m so glad to have had this time to think about the importance of humility. I want to enjoy all of the results that Paul and Titus experienced because of the Corinthians’ response to Paul’s letter.

I bet you want the same results, but are you willing to go through the steps to get them? Where do you need to start?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

“Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by our completion of it, according to your means.”

How does your thinking toward financially giving to God’s work on earth match up with Paul’s description of how the Macedonians (including the Philippians and Thessalonians) gave to him? Paul commends the Corinthians for their faith, speech, knowledge, complete earnestness, and love for him, but also challenges them to learn from the Macedonians. The Macedonians were experiencing a “most severe trial” and extreme poverty, but instead of withdrawing and hoarding, they chose to love and give. What do you think their thinking process was so they could respond in this way and make use of the grace of giving God had provided?

The challenge that I noticed comes from the two sentences we’re looking at today:

finish what I start.

Some people have no problem staying faithful to a commitment, while others start out strong—usually because of an emotional appeal—and then get distracted. I’m in the first category because I’m a systematic person, but I found a challenge in Paul’s words that I need to pay attention to.

It’s easy for me to create systems, but I can too easily depend on a system without involving my heart. I can write our giving checks in the same way and at the same time that I pay our bills. I can go to a small group study week after week because it’s on my calendar and slowly become distant from those in the group. I can do the weekly grocery shopping and forget that I’m serving my family as I shop and forget to thank God for the resources He allows us to manage for the sake of His kingdom. My list could go on and on.

Paul, however, has continued to have the *eager willingness* that I had when I first became a Christian, when I join a new community group, and when I first got married. I’m seeing that this phrase *eager willingness* is to describe how I am to *finish what I start*. The specific area that’s come to mind as I’ve been writing is a commitment I made to the Lord after the tragedy on 9/11. At our church’s memorial service, the names and family situations of those who had lost husbands and wives, fathers and mothers were flashed on the screen. We were to choose one family and pray for them at each holiday throughout the year. Periodically I remember to pray for Maureen Driscoll and her three children; now I want to *eagerly* pray for them at every holiday and on every 9/11 anniversary.

In what areas do you want to *eagerly finish well*? What game plan can you put in place to do so?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5

"I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you."

Have you ever had someone around you who has your heart toward something—a goal or a group of people? Isn't it wonderful to have such a partner?

I had that experienced this morning as I met with a young woman who's raising support so she can be involved with high school girls full-time. As she talked about wanting these students to grow in their walk with the Father, she shared her longing for them to be in Scripture so they could have first-hand knowledge of Him instead of just hearing what someone else had discovered. My heart warmed as I realized we had the same heart toward others, even though we were years apart in age.

This experience helped me to understand the closeness and trust Paul must have had with Titus. This young man is known as Paul's go-to guy because he was the one Paul sent into difficult situations. What confidence Paul must have had that Titus would speak and act the way Paul would when approaching believers who were trying different lifestyles.

What's interesting to me in our verse is that God is the one who gave Titus and Paul the same concern. Titus was so intent on following his Lord that God was able to direct his heart toward those who needed him.

A few questions come to mind that we can think through together:

- Does God so have our hearts that we're available to Him?
- Are we trustworthy enough as Christians that a leader we respect could send us somewhere in his or her place?
- Do we realize that working with other believers is mandatory if we have a kingdom mindset, and that we're not meant to be on our own?
- Do we allow God to be in charge of others' lives, or do we inwardly demand that they should think as we do and have our priorities?

Which of these questions do you need to work through today?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

“sow generously . . . reap generously . . . abound . . . abound . . . increase . . . enlarge . . . made rich in every way so you can be made generous . . . your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God . . . overflowing . . . generosity in sharing . . . surpassing grace . . . indescribable gift.”

Do you get the sense of *generosity, abundance, and freedom in giving* from this section? I sure do! And I bet this way of living comes from the Corinthians opening wide their hearts. (Remember 2 Corinthians 6:3-13?)

It seems to me that some people come into adulthood being generous while others are more measured, systematic, careful, and, may I say, stingy. My husband is the first type, and I'm the second. I know my style comes from how I was raised, but my sister was raised in the same household, and she's much more generous and always has been. So my background isn't totally responsible for my cautiousness—it's part of who I am.

But God (those wonderful words) wants me to be like Him. So while He wants me to be a good steward of the resources He's entrusted to me (time, money, possessions, spiritual gifts) and be wise in what I do, I think He also wants me to be like Him by being generous and giving. So if you're like me, let's see how God wants us to give. If you're my counterpart, perhaps God wants you to be a better steward, to be more careful, and to be a better planner.

Here are my observations about my condition:

- How I receive from God determines how I give.
- God loves a heart that is so grateful for new life that it overflows with cheerfulness.
- God will provide all that I need, so I can concentrate on what He has for me to do.
- God is responsible for the *outcome* of what I do; this outcome (harvest) will be for His glory.
- He will make me rich only if He can trust me to be generous.
- My generosity will result in others giving thanks to God as their needs are met.
- Others will see that my generosity comes from obedience to God and so will praise God.
- Love will flow between us (*their hearts will go out to you*).

Oh my, for my own sake and for the sake of the kingdom, I need to, want to, reflect my heavenly Father in how I give of myself. And I bet you do too. What next steps are you going to make?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 10:1-6

“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.”

You probably noticed the difference in Paul’s style of writing as you started reading this section. Bible scholars have a couple of thoughts:

1. These last four chapters (no, Paul didn’t write in chapter and verse; they were added later) were a section of Paul’s “harsh” letter that he had written the Corinthians, which Titus had delivered. They *heard* what Paul had to say and changed their hearts, which changed their actions. Titus brought Paul this news, and we have Paul’s response in this letter.
2. Paul wrote this long letter to the Corinthians while he was working, speaking, and traveling rather than writing the whole letter in one sitting. At this point in the letter, he’s addressing a specific group of people who are challenging his authority as an apostle and making personal stabs at him, not the whole church.

I think I concur with the second view for the reason behind the change in tone and abrupt change in subject matter.



Today’s verse is one that’s been foundational in my Christian life since my first year as a Christian. When a sister in the Lord, Linda Broesamle, pointed it out to me, her conclusion was, “We can’t always be responsible for what comes into our minds, but we can decide how long it stays there.”

Another practical truth I heard that year was from the father of a friend (thanks, Suzanne). Dr. Brandt was a Christian psychologist, and he said that we can use our background as an excuse for who we are and what we do until we become a Christian. After that, if our past controls us, it’s because we let it. Jesus’ life in us through the Holy Spirit is stronger and more powerful than our past [and, I would add, how we used to think].

Tomorrow we’ll look more closely at this verse, but for now, how do you respond to these challenges from Linda and Dr. Brandt about how we think?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 10:1-6

“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.”

What arguments and pretensions do you hear around you that don't match up with what you know about God? Here are a few you might recognize:

- This is just the way I am. This is the way men/women are. Men are from Mars; women are from Venus (sound like a book title?)
- My kids whine, argue, complain, _____ (fill in the blank), and they're driving me crazy.
- I'm too busy to spend time with God.
- God helps him who helps himself
- If only he (she, they) would change, my life would be fine.

It's summer for me, and my women's group is on break. So I decided to do a study on Job by Chuck Swindoll that a dear friend had given me.

Often when I hear people talk, I try to figure out what they know about God; do they think of Him as loving, just, and available, OR harsh, moody, and distant? As I'm going through the “encouragements” from Job's friends, I'm amazed at how much I see myself in what they say. They're trying to fix Job's situation without really knowing what was going on behind the scenes. They've tried to fit God into some nice, neat boxes. They lack the patience required for the long haul. They're more concerned with quick, easy answers than with Job.

My *first* challenge from today's verse is to keep getting to know God for who He really is: His character (which never changes), what He values (which never changes), and how He operates (which is always changing—remember, there's only been one burning bush that didn't burn up).

My *second* challenge is to “hear” the arguments and pretensions around me and not make them mine. How? By capturing every thought—isolating it, looking at it, evaluating it—and choosing to keep it or dismiss it based on my knowledge of God.

Is this easy? No, it's hard and it's exhausting. Is it worth it? Absolutely, it's the only way to be the person Jesus wants us to be.

How does this verse challenge you? Do you need to *hear* your own arguments and pretensions? Do you need to *see* God for who He says He is? Do you need to *get into the battle* instead of going with the flow?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 10:7-18

“For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.”

It's so easy to be critical of others, isn't it? I found myself being critical of a singer and his opening song this morning at church—he was singing an Aerosmith song and looked the part. (We go to a seeker-friendly church that *invites* people to the service through the first song.) But as he led the rest of the worship time, I resonated with his heart as he sang.

Let's look at what happens when we're critical of another. Paul was facing harsh criticism in these last chapters; perhaps his conclusions will help us. When we're critical of others, we:

1. Determine the standards of acceptable behavior.
2. Evaluate how others meet or fail these standards.
3. Look for inconsistencies in others but not in ourselves.
4. Are negative toward others rather than complimentary.
5. Boast about our own good points, and rationalize our weak areas.
6. Refuse to bring God Himself and what He wants into the picture.

Recognize yourself in this list? I sure do. Notice how this list also describes Paul's attackers? How do you think their charges affected the Corinthians (and how our criticalness affects those around us)?

- They probably stopped valuing what Paul had taught them and how he had lived while with them.
- They probably took the side of those who were being negative because negativity is a hard force to counter.
- They probably stopped living lives of faith and concentrated instead on surface issues.

What Paul reminds them of, and what really counts, is *God's* opinion. He has the right to set the standards because He's God and He's perfect. We just try to usurp His role and end up destroying our own lives in the process. But God knows our thoughts, motives, and actions. As we walk with Him in humility and dependence, He's able to change us and then work through us to reach those we care about.

In this life we can know that our heavenly Father is proud of us. As Eric Little said in the movie *Chariots of Fire*, "I can feel His pleasure." I bet you've felt God's pleasure when you've given up your rights and walked in harmony with Him in a difficult area of life.

How would you complete this sentence: When I _____, I can feel His pleasure. Feels good, doesn't it?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 11:1-6

"I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ."

Have you noticed how often Paul uses the pictures of weddings and marriages to describe our relationship with Christ? It's wonderful to see a father walk a beloved daughter down the aisle to present her to a waiting groom. While most eyes are on the bride, though, I love to look at the groom and see the love, expectation, and joy on his face. While she usually looks around at her friends and family members, he has eyes only for her.

And Paul says our groom is Christ.

We could easily talk about how we humans distort this picture through our fights, lack of trying, and divorce, but I'd like to concentrate instead on God's view of our marriage to His Son. Here are some observations:

- God is the matchmaker who introduced us to our groom.
- God is the counselor who prepared us to be a bride.
- God is the parent who gives his blessing on the union.
- God is the father who walks the bride down the aisle.
- God is the minister who officiates at the wedding.
- God is the one who announces the marriage to the witnesses who then stand up and cheer.

And the bride? She has stayed pure for her groom. She hasn't listened to other men who weave a good line but really want to use and then leave her. Instead, when she's heard their lies, she's taken them to her promised one and listened to his input. She's stayed devoted to her promised one instead of being passive and letting life happen to her.

Paul is telling us in this section that how we live *now* determines how we'll be presented to Christ when He comes for us. How are you preparing yourself for this wedding day as you choose what you'll think about, what you talk about, and how you'll treat those around you?

We're to be a beautiful bride, looking only at our Groom—not allowing ourselves to be compromised or deceived by the promises of the world or by our enemy.

How are the preparations going for your royal wedding?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 11:7-15

“And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia [Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica] supplied what I needed.

One of today’s marketing principles is that we value what we pay for. Therefore, the more we have to pay for something, the more we value it.

I had to deal with this principle when we were trying to determine the price for my first devotional. I searched the Christian bookstores, evaluating what they had and how they priced their books. I was uncomfortable going to the high end of the market until one day when a friend asked me if my book was valuable. If I thought it was (and I did), and people value what they have to pay for, then I needed to price my book accordingly.

When I read this section I was amazed at how Paul didn’t live by this principle. If ever someone’s life and words have been valuable, it is Paul’s. How fortunate these Corinthians were to have him in their lives. But he never charged them or counted on them to take care of his needs. And from what he says in this section, he’s proud of this position and has taken it on purpose.

So why wouldn’t Paul want to charge for his teaching; why would he rather work as a tentmaker to support himself? I think he:

- Didn’t want them (or us) to think they’ve earned God’s free gift of grace. While it’s free to us, it cost Jesus everything to make it available.
- Knew that when we pay for something, we have the right to evaluate the value of the item.
- Knew that humility comes with receiving a gift rather than paying for it.

I’m having to ask myself some hard-to-answer questions today: how much do I value God’s gift of life through His Son, and how much do I appreciate what Jesus did to make this gift available? All too often I take this gift for granted and just keep on doing what I’m doing. Oh Lord, I’m so sorry.

How do you think about and respond to this gift? Do you let it affect how you think and live, and how you interact with other Christians, your spouse (if married), your parents and siblings, co-workers, and neighbors?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 11:16-33

“Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast . . . If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”

Every other time I've looked at this section, I've concentrated on what Paul went through for our benefit. Today, though, I'm overwhelmed by the contrast he's setting up about boasting. Let's look at what he says:

World's Way of Boasting

Fools do it
Self-confidence

Emphasize strengths and accomplishments

Willing to put up with others who exploit, enslave, take advantage of them, slap them in the face

Proud of background, heritage, and experiences.

Talk about themselves all the time

Boasting in the Face of God

Appear as fools to the wise of this world
Confidence comes from what Jesus did on the cross

Proud of what shows our weaknesses so God can be seen

Example is Jesus who endured, spoke truth, and trusted His Father for the outcome

Proud of what shows weaknesses so God can be seen

Talk about Jesus and His offer of a new life.

When we share our lives with others, it's so easy to talk about what we do for God, isn't it? But isn't this really boasting, puffing ourselves up, rather than giving honor to the One who really deserves it?

For us to come to faith and then continue to walk by faith, we must see God for who He really is and not put Him into boxes of our own making. We have to realize that kingdom life can never be achieved by human effort. The change in our hearts happens at such a deep level that only God can reach that depth. For us to get out of the way and let Him work through us, we have to be convinced that it's our weaknesses that He chooses to work through. It's through our weaknesses that we see His power, love, and availability. And it's through our weaknesses that those around us can see God at work and choose to walk with Him themselves.

Paul says that he started thinking this way when he had to be lowered over the wall in a basket and run for his life because he had so riled up the people in Damascus that the Jews wanted to kill him. (Acts 9:19-31)

What circumstances has God used to break through your sense of self-importance? How would boasting about these circumstances and how God broke through your pride and self-sufficiency change how you live?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

“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.”

While I have had highs with Jesus and lows in this life, none of them compare to Paul’s experiences. But I can identify with how Paul must have felt when he had to be lowered over the wall and run for his life (yesterday’s section). I’m sure you’ve also had times when God has shown you that your thinking and conclusions not only have been wrong, but also have been self-serving and self-applauding. Let me share a couple of times I’ve had recently that might help you understand what I’m talking about.

When I was doing Henry Blackstone’s study *Knowing God* with a group, he made a comment that any insights we had gleaned from Scripture were not because of our own hard work, scholarship, or spirituality, but they were insights that God had *chosen* to share with us. With that one sentence, 30 years of spiritual pride had to fly out the window. What replaced it, however, was an amazing sense of humility and thankfulness.

This summer as I was reading through a study on Job by Chuck Swindoll, I was hit again. As he described Job’s friends’ attempts to be spiritual friends, I saw how their attitudes and words almost destroyed Job. Countless conversations over the years with my own friends began to float in front of my eyes. I saw how my words coming from a prideful heart had discouraged instead of encouraged them.

Have you had insights like these too? How should we respond to these, at times, overwhelming memories? How can we keep on going when all we see is failure and hurt? Here’s what has helped me:

- Like Paul, we need to be thankful for these insights, because without them we’d keep on making the same mistakes.
- As humility replaces pride, we have the privilege of seeing Christ’s power at work in us and through us because He can now trust us with more responsibility.
- We need to keep remembering these times and counting on Christ to work.
Remembering and counting on.

What are you remembering and who are you counting on? What’s on your remembering tapes, and who do you find yourself counting on when you’re discouraged and saddened by your own behaviors? Jesus wants to work through us, and this remembering and counting on Him encourages us to let Him do what He’s so good at doing—bringing life out of death.

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 12:11-21

“... and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.”

Our middle son, Brian, has just started a job as a youth pastor at a small but ready to grow church in Florida. For years he's interned in youth departments of various churches, and he's just finished a one-year program in Biblical studies. He knows a lot and has experienced a lot, but now that he's the *main man*, he'll be creating his own principles of ministry.

As I've thought about his situation, I've realized that I also need to create *my* principles of ministry. How about you? If ministry is how we're involved in others' lives, either to lead them to Christ or encourage them in their life with Him, I think it would be good to have a plan. As I read this section, I've noticed that Paul talks about how he does ministry; let's look at *his* principles of ministry:

- He knew his worth as compared to other believers—he wasn't inferior or superior to them.
- His actions were to bring honor to God, not attention to himself.
- He never gave up; perseverance was important to him because Jesus never gave up.
- He never burdened those he was involved with—he counted on God to provide for his needs.
- His goal was to present men and women who were mature in their walk of faith; he wasn't concerned with what he got out of the relationships.
- As a spiritual parent, he was willing to spend himself and be spent for the benefit of his spiritual children; no holding back.
- He never exploited others for his personal well being or gain.
- His close associates had the same philosophy of ministry; his lifestyle could be modeled and duplicated.
- All that he said—and how he said it—was done in the presence of God, so he never has to defend himself.
- His goal was to strengthen others' faith and walk.
- His standard of behavior for himself, his associates, and his spiritual children was spiritual maturity as seen through their attitudes and actions.
- He was willing to be and do whatever God wanted for the benefit of others' spiritual growth.

How does your life match up to Paul's principles? I concur. The principle I'm going to work on is to strengthen others' walk of faith. Where are you going to start?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 13:1-10

“He [Christ] is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. 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 to serve you.

A few moths ago I heard the statement that while we have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, it isn’t to be a private one. I thought of this observation while reading this section, because Paul is telling the Corinthians that nothing they do is done in secret. Everyone knows everything.

Do you live this way—living as though everyone knows everything— or do you try to keep your inner life hidden?

As a new Christian I met once a week with a woman older in her spiritual maturity while she was actually younger in age. As we ate breakfast we shared what Jesus was doing in our lives, what He was revealing in us, and how we needed to change. This weekly meeting with Julie went on for three years. She modeled a life of nothing being hidden.

These days when talking with others, I usually find that we have monologues rather than dialogues; rarely do we break through the surface or invite input, and we usually try to tell the other person what to do based on our own successes. What are your conversations like?

If it’s true that we’re to have a personal and public relationship with Christ, as I believe it is, how do we *collectively* return to what Paul has described as being the body of Christ, the bride of Christ? I think it starts with today’s verse. We need to:

- Be weak in ourselves, depend on God’s power, live with Christ (He doesn’t live with us), and be other-orientated.
- Examine and test ourselves, having Christ as the standard.
- Deal with sin in our thoughts and actions—sin as it is described in Scripture, not by our society.
- Be open with others about what Christ is doing in our lives so they can be encouraged and served
- Listen to others’ sharing, and learn from Christ through them.

Where are you in this process? What is the Lord laying on your heart that He wants for you as you read these words? What actions are you going to start or stop taking?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 13:11-14

"Finally, brothers [and sisters], good-by."

Are these final words as sad to you as they are to me? I'm sorry to be leaving these rich times with Paul. If you've read through both of the devotionals based on Paul's letters with me, I'm sure you're a different person; I know I am.

But with any good-by, a speaker's mind races over many thoughts, and then he speaks about what weighs most on his mind. So, let's look at what Paul wants the men and women in Corinth (and us) to remember.

Aim for perfection: No, we're not perfect, but He wants us to *aim* for perfection, to look toward it, which means we're looking at Jesus. Yes, we're going to miss the mark because we're human, but that shouldn't be our intention because of our selfishness or pride. And when we do miss the mark, we're to own up to what we've done, and move in the other direction.

Listen to my appeal: We can choose what we listen to. I heard this week that teenagers are losing their hearing because the volume of their iPods is too high. Are we listening to the appeal of the world and to our enemy's accusations without evaluating what we hear, or do we hear our Lord speak through His servants in Scripture?

Be of one mind: Do we always correct another person's thinking, or do we strive to agree with each other whenever possible? Do we major in minor details? Are we of one mind with Christ?

Live in peace: Do we give each other a break, or do we nit pick? Are we so at war with God that we fight with others?

And the God of love and peace will be with you: Do we want to know the God of love and peace so we can know God's love and peace? Then we need to:

Aim for perfection

Listen to Paul's appeal

Be of one mind

Live in peace

Does one of these four commands (or all of them) strike an area you need to work on? Hooray! I don't think any of us wants to stay the way we are. For me it's *being of one mind*. All too often I want others to be of *my mind*. How about if you and I set up a game plan with God as to how *He* wants us to proceed? What would yours look like?

Walking With the Father Through 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 13:11-14

"Finally, brothers [and sisters], good-by." [a final thought]

As I was writing yesterday, I was struck by Paul's personality in contrast to what he was saying. Paul is the epitome of a Type A, Driver. In the flesh he was driven, controlling, and single-minded. He was the type of person who could drive others crazy. But he was also just the right person—after being transformed by the cross and resurrection life of Jesus Christ—to take the gospel into new places to new people. Who else but a driven person could take the opposition he encountered and keep on going.

Do you know men and women who have this type of personality? I do, lots of them. What are their values? Usually they include self-reliance, self-success, being on top, and their own prestige. But these aren't the values we looked at yesterday, are they?

God was able (with Paul's cooperation) to take his God-given personality, transform it, and end up with a man who reflected the life of Jesus Christ. And if God could do it with a man like Paul, He can do it with us, especially if we're cooperating.

What had Paul learned about the Godhead that helped him to cooperate? I think we see it in the last sentence of this letter.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ: the life of Christ Himself and all that it entails—His love, patience, faithfulness, perseverance, wisdom, endurance—available for us to use as He leads.

The love of God: the all-powerful, all-knowing, no-limits-can-stop God of all creation actually *loves* us. He cares about us, is committed to us, is available to us, and woos us into a deep relationship with Himself that we can't even begin to conceive.

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit: The Spirit wants to hang out with us; have meals with us; share life with us; take us into the Father's presence at a moment's notice; encourage, comfort, exhort, convict, and motivate us.

Be with you all: you, me, and all believers who have been, who are, and who will be.

Today is my birthday, and as I look back over the last year and anticipate the next, I'm so glad of the gift of God's grace, love, fellowship, and Fatherhood through His Son. What more of a birthday present could I ask for? What is your final thought?
