

**Books of the Bible Series**  
**II Corinthians**

7-2-23

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I wonder if you have ever been really comforted? REALLY REALLY comforted? When I was little, if I got a fever, my mom would dip a rag into ice water and lay it on my forehead and it felt amazing. It was like the fever went away. Mom's cold compresses were a foretaste of heaven for me: it was more than the rag, though. It was that my mom was present with me, sitting by me, singing and feeling sad for me: she was there.

In II Corinthians, Paul begins by reminding the Corinthians (and us) that God is compassionate: he is mom at our bedside.

I love this sermon series each summer and I confess that it was my fault that we are doing this. We were talking one day about how this generation is illiterate with respect to the Bible: it's been fun to learn the basics of each book. But it's tremendously hard to write a sermon on one whole book.

**II Cor 1:3**

**3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5**

When my son Derek was ill and in the hospital, I pleaded with the Lord to spare his life. Others came to visit and God spoke to me in their presence: God let me know that whether Derek lived or died, my son belonged to Him. After that, I wasn't afraid any longer and I actually felt that if God took Derek, it was OK. I was comforted in the deep knowledge that my son belonged to Jesus: this was amazing and *real* comfort. I could walk in this peace: **it was God sitting at my bedside.**

God's invitation is to become recipients of His comfort. This is beautiful: When it happens, we wallow in it. Of course, then we ALWAYS want it: but ***Paul says that we are to take the comfort we receive and offer it to others.*** There is a bigger purpose in God's comfort! Our job, then, is to take it and offer it to others. We are to be the ones offering cold compresses to others. But this can be difficult because ***we might feel we need comfort ourselves at these times.*** We could get upset that no one is paying attention to us and harbor bitterness: "no one notices me!" Paul tells us to offer the comfort we DON'T have and offer it anyways to others. **The Gospel most often invites us to offer what we DO NOT have.** For example, if you want a friend, BE a friend. If

you want to be pursued and be cared for by someone, offer this to them. My dad died when I was 16, yet I've had the opportunity to offer fatherhood to others, not knowing what that even looks like. It's in this doing that God comes alongside me. Reflect on the comfort you've received and make it your ambition to offer it to others.

**Chapter 2-7** Reconciliation. To set the stage, Paul and the Corinth are in conflict: Paul didn't come visit when he said he would. He had good excuses and previously had chastised them for mishandling a situation involving immorality. There were factions who followed different leaders; hard and disrespectful things were said. In this situation, Paul calls for reconciliation.

### **II Cor 2:1-4**

**1** So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. **2** For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? **3** I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. **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

Paul asserts that what he said and did was not motivated by anger **but by love**. This is hard for us: if someone is angry with us, it's easy to assume the worst of motives: 'they don't love me.' In a conflict with my spouse, I assume she doesn't love me any more. We assume from a word, a look, or a frown, really anything could cause us to doubt we are loved.

The first step to reconcile is to acknowledge hurt: failing to do this stuffs the anger and resentment and the problem will not be solved. In II Corinthians, Paul models this by acknowledging his hurt: reconciliation begins with this. But it's risky because it may result in further hurt. It might be seen as weakness or cause the death of a relationship. Sometimes we think it's not worth the trouble. "I'll just unfriend you, ghost you, and move on." We do this a lot: we extricate people from our lives because it's too much hassle. But Paul doesn't do this: he understands that reconciliation is a calling. Sometimes we stuff what's happened inside and respond in anger and rage, both unhealthy solutions. Paul invites us to examine ourselves to see whether we are motivated by love or not.

Two weeks ago, I preached at Oasis church and we talked about this: are there tears in your eyes when you seek truth? Are you sad or are you getting even? We should confess our sin and apologize and ask for forgiveness with reconciliation as the goal. It's our responsibility to do this. Reconciliation leads to freedom in Christ: from the tyranny of unforgiveness and broken relationships and gives us freedom to offer comfort to one another.

### **II Cor 2:18**

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

As we look to Him, we become transformed! Are you looking to Jesus, contemplating His glory, and the amazing things He has done?

### **II Cor 4:7-12**

**7** But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. **8** We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; **9** persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. **10** We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. **11** For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. **12** So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

Paul says we have a treasure, this Gospel, in jars of clay: we are fragile and breakable and easily cracked. This is so we will recognize that God's power is at work in us: it's not about power. You can see how this unfolded last week in Michael's sermon. They had no respect for Paul and instead respected those who had status and power and held high positions. But God's kingdom is an upside down kingdom: we are not to lose heart, even in our struggles.

### **II Cor 4: 16-18**

**16** Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. **17** For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. **18** So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

I know all about outwardly wasting away: it's not fun getting old. I don't recommend it. Things hurt! A few months ago, I was full of self-pity and I realized I didn't like my life any more. I am partially deaf in one ear and recently, I had a virus that further decreased my balance. I have been partially blind since birth, my left eye crosses my right eye. I'm old, I stumble, I'm unbalanced, I'm partially deaf and blind. "Jesus, why are we doing this?" But then I look around and there are others who suffer as well. And SO DO YOU, even if you are young. Eric Cepin is the age now that I was when we started this church. He now realizes why I couldn't do some things back then. Inwardly, however, we are being renewed and becoming more like Jesus. Paul calls these troubles "light and momentary."

We're being made new in Christ: God has reconciled himself to us through Jesus.

### **II Cor 5:17-21**

**17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:[a] The old has gone, the new is here! **18** All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: **19** that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. **20** We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. **21** God made him who had no sin to be sin[b] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God

Again, notice something cool about this: as it was with comfort, so it is with reconciliation. God reconciles us and then invites us to be reconcilers. We are to be what Martin Luther called Little Christs. We point to this: we are in this world pointing to God's mighty work. But we can't do this if we are reconciled. If we are fighting amongst ourselves, what are we offering the world around us? Our job is to bring reconciliation between us and God and then between us and others. We must work on our irreconcilable differences.

In the old days, you had to have a good reason for divorce. At some point, no fault divorce emerged. How about "everyone's fault" divorce. Irreconcilable differences is an assault on the gospel: it's a falsehood. Our differences are not irreconcilable: if we believe that this is the way things are, we deny the gospel, of what God CAN do. It doesn't mean he will do it but that is what we strive for and long for. To work on these differences, we must confess our sin, submit to Christ, turn from evil ourselves, and walk in the light of life. Our repentance is the essence of the gospel. This only happens when we are truly sorry for our sin.

We fall short, of course. This is also the essence of the gospel. We don't get it right; it's hard. If we realize that, then we begin to taste the path of sorrow and repentance. I

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We are not to rest in our sorrow and have self pity: true sorrow from God is a reminder to take hold of our reconciliation again and walk in it. You must remember you're a dearly loved child of

God. In fact, say this in the mirror every day: “You are a dearly loved child of God.” You aren’t a bum, a mistake, someone who can never get it right, a slob, or hopeless: you are a dearly loved child of God. You can regret your sin but living in it is not what you are invited into. You aren’t to stay in this place of “never getting it right.” We’ve been made free! We should live like this: *don’t wallow in your sin.*

My mother had a phrase that took me a long time to understand. She would say “(Person X) is always hanging black crepe paper.” Way back in Pella, IO when someone died, you would hang black crepe paper on the door to let people know you were grieving and sad. We do this: We are always hanging black crepe paper when we say things like “I can never get it right!” No, we must walk in freedom befitting of someone saved and reconciled to God.

**II Cor 8 and 9** have a theme of generosity *which is what flows out of reconciliation*. This flows from a grateful heart:

### **II Cor 9:6-9**

**6** Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. **7** Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. **8** And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. **9** As it is written:

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;  
their righteousness endures forever.

One of the joys of living as a reconciled believer is the opportunities to be generous and to give: if you are stingy, you will reap sparingly and vice versa. The correlation between what you do and what God has given you is interesting: Paul looks for a quality in the body of Christ. There should be a certain kind of equality: if you are wealthy, you should give so other’s needs are met. He wants churches to take offerings for each other and when they are in need, offerings will be taken for them. It’s not a permanent arrangement: you aren’t always poor or wealthy.

I’m likely to buy someone’s meal when I eat with them: I’ve been doing it for a long time. The reason is kind of weird: I used to go to lunch with a friend every week in Phoenix, but then I lost my job and I was too broke and I couldn’t afford to go out. This friend, however, would call and want to go out and I couldn’t reciprocate. He then said he wanted to buy my lunch because he valued our relationship and he said he wasn’t always going to quit buying until I got to the place where I could afford to buy. So he did this for a long time until I got a job and got back on my feet. But he still bought my lunch and told me that one day, I could buy meals. So now I will get a lot of lunch invitations!

Paul ends with some warnings:

### **II Cor 11:14-15**

**14** And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. **15** It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

You must know how convincing Satan is: it's an act but he looks good and sounds good. He would just as soon kill you; he has no conscience. I told a young pastor once that Satan would kill his child: he told me even Hitler had a conscience but Satan doesn't. Satan would just destroy you if he could but he masquerades as something different. Be aware of his desire to undo reconciliation. What do we fight with? We are weak! In the kingdom of God, weakness is an attribute: in our weakness Christ's power is revealed.

### **II Cor 12: 8-10**

**12: 8** Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. **9** But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. **10** 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.

You are not strong: Christ is strong in you! He has destroyed the work of Satan and is the one can lead you in resistances. Whatever you struggle with, God gives you grace. Wayne's mother was on dialysis and I said I couldn't never do that. Wayne told me, "Rod, God's not asking you to do this; he's asking my mom to do it."

### **II Cor 13:11-14**

**11** Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

**12** Greet one another with a holy kiss. **13** All God's people here send their greetings.

**14** May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Live in peace! This starts with rejoicing with what God has done: reconciling us to ourselves, bringing comfort and reconciliation.

Questions:

Q: How can we differentiate between God asking us to work on our strengths (spiritual gifts) vs our weaknesses?

A: We are to **always** act in humility. Everything is a gift from God: we walk in humility knowing that our strengths are also gifts from God. But in our true weakness: As a boy, I was called Rod “no mercy” Hagan in karate class. Then later, I took a spiritual gifts test and found I had no mercy. This was a weakness but somewhere God has given me tears and love for people. When we planted this church, Eric even said I had the gift of mercy! It is a fine line: we walk in both strengths and weaknesses; neither is our own.

Q: When lies are being said, how should we respond?

A: Paul wants us to speak the truth: we want to fix it and agree they are lying. When we seek reconciliation, we aren't assured of it. We don't know if the person will respond. We can try to manipulate but that is not our calling. Whenever you speak the truth, don't do it in anger! Just LOVE them: Paul told the Corinthians that he loved them; his true motive was love. It wasn't up to him to change them.