



JESUS is KEY



Our mission is to build a community of grace
committed to making disciples of Jesus.

Our vision is to be a faithful, adventurous and compassionate
church with an expanding influence on communities, cities
and nations with the hope and love of God.

WELCOME

Welcome to our ministry for 2018. More importantly, welcome to your LifeGroup.

It is my hope and prayer that as we journey together through the first half of 2 Corinthians, each of us will be built up personally in our faith, and at the same time challenged with how to live a life of perseverance for the gospel.

Why study 2 Corinthians?

This letter from the apostle Paul provides rich comfort and hope for believers today. God's way of measuring success and significance is entirely different from the world's way. More and more we have discovered in our own culture that the church is publicly marginalised because it is seen as silly, or it is persecuted because it is seen as threatening, or it is simply ignored because it is seen as irrelevant.

Judged by the world's standards of influence, at times the church seems powerless. Yet viewed with heaven's eyes, it is often precisely in such times

of adversity that the Spirit is alive and well and the gospel is advancing. This we pray will be the situation for us at FAC, in the Illawarra and beyond.

In November 2015 we launched our 2020 Vision Book, taking the theme in 2017, "Seek First the Kingdom" and now in 2018, "Jesus is King." In starting this year studying 2 Corinthians, may it be that we truly grasp the significance of what it means for Jesus to be key to everything, and why this impacts how we live our life.

Personal Note: I continue to be thankful to God for all He has done in and through our ministry, for the team He has brought together and for the many people who make us the family of God. I give thanks to Peter Clark for spending time once again to write this study for us.

Blessings,



Ian Barnett
Senior Minister

JESUS IS OUR STRENGTH | 2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-11

Pray: As we start this study, pray you might have the ability to live with trust in the midst of adversity.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Overview: What stands out from the beginning of this letter is that the Apostle Paul writes with the authority of God Himself. As an apostle, he not only represented his own will but the will of God and the character of Christ. To reject his authority is to reject the One who authorised his mission.

In vs.3-7, we are given a key to the theme, perspective and purpose of this letter. While Paul has sought to define his ministry and his call, he

also talked more about comfort than any other NT writer. Why? Perhaps it was because for Paul, his comfort did not come from the absence of pain and suffering, but from the presence and strength that comes from Christ. The measure of God's comfort is equal to the measure of Paul's and our suffering. The result is that others are able to be comforted to the same degree.

1. Describe what it was like when you last felt under great pressure. What happened?

2. What is involved in Paul's "grace and peace" greeting? How would this serve as a description of the Gospel?

3. What do you learn about the nature of the "church" from v.1? What does that mean for us?

4. What is the relationship between God comforting us, and our ability to comfort others?

5. What pressures do you think Paul may have been experiencing to cause him to despair of life itself? (Refer Acts 19:23-41)

6. Where did Paul's distress lead him? (v.9) How do you respond to pressures that seem to be beyond your ability to cope?

7. Re-read vs.10-11. What is the place of prayer in Paul's life? Where does prayer fit in your life?

8. A key principle of Paul's letter to the Corinthians is found in 12:9-10. What does this mean for you?

Prayer: God of all comfort, even if at times it feels like it, thank you that you do not abandon us in our sufferings, but graciously give us comfort in Jesus. In our distress, strengthen us to pray and rely on you to get through. May you use the comfort you bring us, to bring that same comfort to those around us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

STUDY TWO

JESUS IS GOD'S "YES" | 2 CORINTHIANS 1:12-2:4

Pray: Remind us God as we look into your Word today, that Jesus IS everything and is the ANSWER to everything.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4

Overview: Paul always made it abundantly clear who the source of his commitment and confidence is. All God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God is the guarantee that believers will see every promise of God fully completed.

We need to remember that the Bible is not about us, but about God.

When we are challenged with major life decisions, the question is not, "*What do I need to do and how can God help me?*" but "*What are God's promises and how does He want to work in and through me and any given situation to bring His promises to life?*" Our focus is to be fully on the Lord Jesus.

1. Is there something in your life that you are really proud of?

2. Paul is showing pride here. (v.12) What is he proud of? Is that ok?

3. There are two ways we can be guided here. (v.12) What are they? How can we break away from being influenced by "worldly wisdom"?

4. It seems as though vs.15-17 was what Paul was being criticised about. How does Paul answer this criticism? (1:23-2:2)

5. How does Jesus being the “Yes” answer to all of God’s promises help Paul’s argument? How does it relate to Paul “standing firm” and being “trustworthy”? (v.21)

6. Share with others the joy and fruit of having the Spirit of God in your heart. (vs.22)

7. Search the passage again, and explore what Paul’s example teaches you about relating to others.

Prayer: God of all comfort, even if it feels like it, thank you that you do not abandon us in our sufferings, but graciously give us comfort in Jesus. In our distress, strengthen us to pray and rely on you to get through. May you use the comfort you bring us, to bring that same comfort to those around us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

JESUS IS OUR FORGIVER | 2 CORINTHIANS 2:5-11

Pray: That today as we study your Word, the reality of our forgiveness would impact on us afresh.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Overview: Once again we see how the Bible deals with real life situations. Paul addresses a church discipline issue, and no, we do not know the specifics. However, the offence must have involved some slander against himself and his relationship with the Corinthians. Most people it would appear sided with the slanderer, but later the majority had repented (2:4; 7:8-13) and now they are grieving with the apostle because of this person's influence over them. The outcome?

Punishment, which would have meant exclusion from any fellowship. Paul knows the power of forgiveness, which he himself has received from Christ. He calls on the church community to forgive, comfort and reaffirm their love for that individual. If we fail to forgive, then the door opens wide for Satan. Yes, there is going to be discipline within the body of Christ, but there must always be forgiveness. While we may be good with discipline, we may not be so good with forgiveness.

1. This passage challenges us about what it means to be a part of a church community. (v.5) What does it mean for you? What are the good things about being part of a church community? Is there a down side?

2. This person who had offended against the church community had been punished. (v.6) What was the punishment? Who decided it? If punishment is needed, how does this happen in our context?

3. Paul was writing and saying “enough” to the punishment. What did Paul now urge the congregation to do? To what extent are these actions what we should always be doing - even to non-offenders?

4. How difficult is it for you to forgive others? Are there things you have not forgiven in others?

5. Paul seems to speak of Satan as being present in the Corinthian Church. (v.11) What does it mean when Paul says, “we are not unaware of his schemes”? (v.11) Do you think he has any “schemes” going here at FAC? Think prayerfully about how he might include you in any “scheme”.

Prayer: Loving God, despite the depth of our sin, thank you for going all the way to the cross to secure the forgiveness we do not deserve. Keep us mindful of the spiritual reality of Satan’s work, and let the love and forgiveness you have shown us permeate into every way we relate to others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

JESUS IS OUR TRIUMPH | 2 CORINTHIANS 2:12-3:6

Pray: That as we come together to study what God has to say to us from scripture, we would be intent on supporting and encouraging each other.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:12-3:6

Overview: Paul returns to his theme of hardship and opposition, but these pale in comparison to his confidence in Christ. Is this the same for us?

Paul uses images from both the military and the marketplace. In all things, God leads His people in triumph in Christ. When a victorious Roman army returned home, the captives marched in parade with

the conquerors. The flowers along the road smelled life-giving for the victors but represented the aroma of death for the vanquished.

Paul's convictions about his own ministry should produce soul searching in Christians today. Are we like Paul growing in our trust in God's sovereignty over the circumstances of our life?

1. Until Titus returns with good news, Paul has "no peace of mind". (v.13) What does this tell us about Paul's concern for the church? See 7:6ff.

2. Paul speaks about being in a "triumphal procession". (v.14) Does your Christian life always/ever feel like a triumphal procession? Share with others what the Psalms might have to say to you.

3. The Gospel message produces conflicting reactions. (vs.15-16) Paul describes them as differing “aromas”. How could you spread the “aroma of Christ” to those around?

4. What do you think might have been happening in Corinth? (vs. 2:17-3:1) Does that happen anywhere today?

5. In 3:1-6, Paul begins a description of “new covenant”. How does that “new covenant” ministry differ from the “old covenant” ministry?

6. This passage talks of “competent” ministry. How do we measure what a “competent” ministry is? How does v.6 add to our understanding? “...for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

Prayer: Thank you that despite who we are, where we are from and what we have done, you make us competent ministers of the gospel by your Holy Spirit in our lives. Give us the perspective of Paul, who recognised that his life was to represent Christ and the gospel, and give us the energy and grace to face the reactions we receive. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

JESUS IS OUR HOPE | 2 CORINTHIANS 3:7-18

Pray: Lord Jesus, help us today to understand your Word and to put it into practice in our lives.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Overview: Here we see the difference between the Old and the New Covenants. Moses needed a veil to cover his face, first to protect others from seeing God's glory on it, then to hide the fact that the glory was disappearing.

However, Paul was free to preach the gospel, knowing that the revelation of God's glory; the gospel of Jesus Christ, did not have to be veiled. As followers of Christ, we do not have to put on a spiritual show hiding our sin and trying to look more

pious and godly than we really are. Nor are we called to live with resignation, passively accepting our sinful desires and actions as if there was nothing we could do about them.

No! We can live with bold hope because God is in the process of transforming us. We are called more and more to a life of freedom, with an increasing desire to be changed more and more into the image of Christ.

1. Can you remember a time when you suddenly understood something that had once confused you?

2. Skip ahead and look at 4:1. What in this verse today encourages Paul not to lose heart?

3. How does Paul contrast the Old and New Covenants? (refer vs.3-6)
Compare Exodus 34:27-35 and Jeremiah 32:31-34 with Romans 3:19-24.
Why was it necessary for the Old Covenant of Moses to be replaced
with the everlasting covenant of Christ?

4. What are the practical results of this new covenant? (vs.16-18)

5. Who or what were the circumstances that helped clear the “fog” which
veiled your mind regarding an understanding of Christ?

6. Share what changes or transformations you are aware of in your life
since you “turned to the Lord”. (v.16)

**Prayer: Gracious God, thank you that you are the one who lifts the veil,
enabling us to see the truth of your gospel! Thank you for doing what
we could not do on our own. As we keep looking into it, may the gospel
increase in radiance out of our lives, as we increase in confidence and
boldness to share with others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

JESUS IS OUR ANCHOR | 2 CORINTHIANS 4:1-18

Pray: Lord, as we bring our weaknesses to you, turn them into strengths as we rely on you to do in our lives, what we cannot do ourselves.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

Overview: Just as Paul was not thrown by his suffering because he served the God of all comfort, he was not shocked by his own weaknesses either. Once again, we see that his focus was not on himself or his circumstances but on Jesus Christ and on his own role as Jesus' servant.

Regardless of circumstances, Paul was but a clay jar through whom God would display His (God's) all-surpassing power.

This is a chapter to make you stop and be amazed. Why? Because the weight of our problems are nothing compared to the glory that lies before us. Being Christian means a different way of thinking and living. No matter what we believe we give up - time, resources, preferred lifestyles, even our lives, it all pales in comparison to what God has given us and will grant us.

1. When it comes to living your Christian life and witnessing for Christ, do you feel like a "Dandelion" or an "old Oak"? When you are discouraged, are there Bible verses or a chorus that helps?

2. What does Paul say about how he was given his ministry? (vs.1-6)
What effect does this have on how he conducts his ministry? (vs.2-5)

3. In vs.1-6, what can we learn about sharing our faith? What is important to include? What does Paul say about the lack of response?

4. Is it true that there are times when we all feel a level of personal weakness and inadequacy? Does that keep you from serving God? How does/should vs.6 help you with this?

5.What truths keep Paul going in spite of all the hardships he experiences? Why does God allow Paul to go through them?

6. What does it mean for us when Paul refers to “outwardly” wasting away, and “inwardly” being renewed?

7. How do vs.7-12 and vs.16-18 help you cope with your present difficulties and anxieties?

Prayer: We thank you that you raised Jesus from the dead, and that you will raise us up too. Help us to not lose heart or be ashamed to speak about it. Rather, help us to fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. No matter what we are going through or the state of our own jars of clay, may Christ be revealed in us, and may more and more people in our community bring thanksgiving to Jesus! In Jesus’ name, Amen.

JESUS IS OUR GOAL | 2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10

Pray: Lord as we are reminded of the hope of heaven, fill us with joy to live our lives for you.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Overview: Compared to the solid heavenly home that awaits us, Paul sees the Christian's body as a frail tent. Throughout history, believers have struggled in these "tents". Rather than death being the ultimate threat to life, our lives one day will be "swallowed up by life". (v.4)

In light of this more solid and glorious life to come after death, Paul had only one goal; to please God. Yes, we are called to "live by faith and not by sight" (vs.7) but

the greatest challenge we often experience in this life is struggling with the question, "Is there more?" Is there an eternity, let alone a judgment at its entrance point; at the door of heaven?

The impact of knowing something like this should change us. Knowing the reality of the future should motivate us to live a life not for the present, but for the Lord.

1. The Gospel singer sings, "This world is not my home I'm just a passing through..." To what extent is this thought a reality for you? Refer to vs.5:1 & 4:18.

2. Verses 4:16-5:10 divide history into the present and future ages. What jumps out at you in these verses?

3. What does Paul mean by using the word “meanwhile” in vs.2? Do you “groan” or “sigh” waiting impatiently for your “glorious spiritual body”? (1 Corinthians 15:42-49)? Paul describes this as putting on clothes and not being naked. (vs.2-4)

4. How might our present (mortal) existence be “swallowed up in life”? (v.4) Do you find that an encouraging image? (NB: it is usually death that swallows up life, not the other way around. Refer 4:10)

5. What is your reaction to vs.5? What effect does it have on your Christian living?

6. What is it that motivates Paul as he lives his life? What motivates you?

Prayer: Eternal God, show us each day how to live for the future in the present. Having been reminded in this passage of the judgment to come and the heavenly guarantee for believers, may that truth shake us to the core of how we live for you. We pray that our lives may please you and that we will be a witness of these truths to others who do not know you yet. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

JESUS IS GOD'S PEACE TREATY | 2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-6:2

Pray: Lord God, today as we study your Word, help us to see afresh what you have done for us.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2

Overview: Paul was sent to proclaim that in Jesus, God had established a peace treaty with His enemies. What is stunning, is that God's way of establishing peace is far more radical than human treaties. The treaty being offered involved Christ dying on behalf of everyone else. The conflict is over! Now we die to ourselves and live as new creatures in Christ.

to God in Christ is a sovereign act of restoration. The gospel is God's action in Christ to make us right with God, not just by accepting us, but also by transforming us. This gives us the privilege of being ambassadors, with the task of offering God's grace to others. Reconciliation is available to all.

Without a doubt, what is on view is Jesus' death. To be reconciled

1. If you were an Ambassador for Australia, what would you be doing day in and day out? Paul says that, "we are therefore Christ's ambassadors". (v.20) What does that mean for us?

2. Paul and his associates know what it is to "fear the Lord", which motivates them to "persuade men". (v.11) Do you have this same motivation? (vs. 5:10-11 & 14)

3. There is a great theological theme in these verses; "substitution". (vs.14 & 21) Can you describe in your own words, what this means? What does it mean for you personally?

4. Another great theme in the NT is the description of us being “in Christ”. (v.17) We see the outworking of it described. What does being “in Christ” actually look like? How is your life different now that you are “in Christ”?

5. What does it mean for us to have the “ministry of reconciliation” given to us? (v.18)

6. Paul urges the Corinthians “not to receive God’s grace in vain”. (vs.6:1) What might someone’s life look like who has received “God’s grace in vain”?

7. There are very compelling reasons in this passage for people to accept God’s salvation. What are they? Do you need to accept this salvation “now”; “today”? (vs.6:2)

Prayer: Eternal God, show us each day how to live for the future in the present. Having been reminded in this passage of the judgment to come and the heavenly guarantee for believers, may that truth shake us to the core of how we live for you. We pray that our lives may please you and that we will be a witness of these truths to others who do not know you yet. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

JESUS IS OUR EVERYTHING | 2 CORINTHIANS 6:3-13

Pray: Lord, open our spiritual eyes so we might really see your grace and mercy coming through the Scriptures today.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-13

Overview: As we conclude the first half of 2 Corinthians, we see the apostle Paul providing an outstanding summary of his love for his people. He uses a father image to describe this profound relationship. His heart for them seems to burst with a father's love and even jealousy. As a result he is also asking them to "*open wide their hearts*" (v.13) and return his love. Paul's defence has three main points.

Firstly, each of us is called to live for others as we participate in the life of Christ. (5:15)

Secondly, this means we will be willing to suffer for others. The suffering of the righteous is distinguished by the transforming and sustaining power of God's presence in our lives. The people God calls to suffer are called to mission.

Finally, a genuine love looks for a genuine response.

1. Paul has exhorted his readers "not to accept the grace of God in vain". (vs.1) Now he insists that his own conduct does not hinder anyone's acceptance of God's grace. (v.4) Are there aspects of your life and character that God (and you) are working on? In what ways are you a "work in progress"?

2. Re-read the passage and search the verses. How do we get a glimpse of what the real test of faith is?

3. What is Paul asking the Corinthians – and us – to do in vs.11-14? Refer also 3:2-3 and 4:15.

4. How do you assess if a ministry is successful or not? What does a successful ministry look like? How does your view compare to vs.4-10? If Paul was a member of FAC, would we consider him a “success”? Why or why not? Do you have a successful ministry?

5. From Paul's example, are there things you would like to include in the way you live?

Prayer: Eternal God, show us each day how to live for the future in the present. Having been reminded in this passage of the judgment to come and the heavenly guarantee for believers, may that truth shake us to the core of how we live for you. We pray that our lives may please you and that we will be a witness of these truths to others who do not know you yet. In Jesus' name, Amen.



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