

Love-driven Ministry



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Cor. 1:3–14, 2 Cor. 2:17, 2 Cor. 4:2, 1 Cor. 16:5–7, 2 Cor. 7:5–13, 2 Cor. 2:5–17.

Memory Text: “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you” (2 Corinthians 2:4, NKJV).

The apostle Paul didn't always have it so easy. Besides jail and the life-threatening situations he faced, Paul also wrote: “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:24–28, NKJV).

What we see in his letters to the Corinthians is some of the “deep concern” that Paul had for this church. Yet, amid it all, his love for them never failed, just as Christ's love for us never fails us. In fact, it was from Jesus that Paul learned to love the churches in a way that reflects the love that Jesus has for us (2 Cor. 5:14; see 1 Cor. 11:1).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 29.

Thanksgiving

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–7. What is the reason for Paul’s attitude of thanksgiving here?

Paul’s thankfulness focuses on the comfort that God provides for those who are suffering. In this passage, the verb *parakaleō* (to comfort) and the noun *paraklēsis* (comfort) occur together ten times. This represents one third of all occurrences of these words in 2 Corinthians (29 times). God is portrayed as the “Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation” (2 Cor. 1:3, 4, NKJV).

The comfort one receives from God is not to be kept for oneself (2 Cor. 1:4, 5). Only the afflicted heart that became the recipient of God’s consolation is able to impart comfort effectively to those in affliction, too.

Paul could comfort others because he himself, in his sufferings, received comfort from God. “If we are afflicted, it is for *your* consolation and salvation. . . . Or if we are comforted, it is for *your* consolation and salvation” (2 Cor. 1:6, NKJV; *emphasis supplied*). This is love!

What is Paul expressing thanks for in 2 Corinthians 1:8–11?

Paul speaks of trouble “beyond measure, above strength” that made him and his fellow workers fear that the end had come to them (2 Cor. 1:8). For a moment, they thought the resurrection was their only hope. However, God delivered them, and the scenario changed (2 Cor. 1:10). From the fear of death (2 Cor. 1:8), they rise to an implicit hope that God would deliver them once again (2 Cor. 1:10). God’s victories in the past give us confidence that He will do the same in the future. God uses afflictions to teach us to trust in Him. Hardships can lead us to spiritual maturity, at least to the extent that we allow them to draw us closer to God. Paul’s thanksgiving also displays the power of intercessory prayer and the gratitude we experience because of God’s deliverance (2 Cor. 1:11).

What have you found helpful in dealing with the suffering that, one way or another, we all face?

Simplicity and Sincerity

Yesterday, we learned that Paul's love for the Corinthians was made manifest in that he comforted them in their hardships, just as he received comfort from God in his (*2 Cor. 1:1–11*). Today, we will see that his love for them was also displayed through the integrity that he and his fellow workers manifested toward the church members in Corinth.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12–14 in the light of 2 Corinthians 2:17 and 2 Corinthians 4:2. How does Paul's sincerity reveal his love for the Corinthians?

Second Corinthians 1:12–14 introduces the thesis Paul will develop in the rest of the letter. His integrity and apostleship have been questioned by some in Corinth. They thought Paul had a vacillating and indecisive character, which was not fitting for the apostolic ministry. In response, Paul stresses that he and his colleagues behaved with the utmost integrity toward them.

Two words portray the conduct of Paul and his associates: simplicity and sincerity (*2 Cor. 1:12*). The term “simplicity” comes from the Greek word *haplotēs*. It is applied here to express personal integrity in speech or behavior; in short, it reveals the purity of motives (*Eph. 6:5, Col. 3:22*). In turn, the term “sincerity” (from the Greek *eilikrineia*) also points to integrity and purity of motives.

The Corinthians should not have doubted the clarity of Paul's intentions. He makes it clear that his simplicity and sincerity have their origin in God. This idea is well captured by the New English Translation Bible, which mentions “pure motives and sincerity *which are from God*” (*2 Cor. 1:12, emphasis supplied*). In the same verse, Paul further asserts that these ministerial qualities are given to us “by the grace of God.”

It seems Paul's opponents misinterpreted his words, in previous written communications (*2 Cor. 1:13, 14*). Paul guarantees that his intentions were clear and understandable. He was sure that the uprightness of his words, intentions, and actions would be made clear “in the day of the Lord Jesus” (*2 Cor. 1:14, NKJV*).

What has been your own experience with having your motives or intentions, however well-meaning and sincere, questioned or challenged? What should that tell you about how careful you should be when questioning someone else's motives?

Changing Plans for Love

We saw that some in Corinth doubted Paul's intentions and love. Today, we will look into one particular reason: his changing travel plans (*2 Cor. 1:15–2:4*).

Read 1 Corinthians 16:5–7. What was Paul's original travel plan?

Paul had been in Corinth before. According to 1 Corinthians 16:5, 6, he planned to pass through Macedonia on his way back to Corinth and, perhaps, stay in Corinth for the winter. From Corinth, he would go to Judea with the offering collected for the poor in Jerusalem not only in Macedonia, but also in Achaia, Galatia, and Asia. However, he changed his plans because of a bad report brought by Timothy from Corinth (*1 Cor. 4:17, 1 Cor. 16:10, 2 Cor. 1:1*).

Paul intended to go straight from Ephesus to Corinth and there address the issues reported by Timothy. The new itinerary would be Ephesus—Corinth—Macedonia—Corinth—Judea (*2 Cor. 1:15, 16*). He went from Ephesus to Corinth, but then he returned to Ephesus. His plans changed. He didn't go back to Corinth as planned, at least not immediately, because his latest visit did not go well. So, he returned to Ephesus and wrote to them instead. He would rather send a letter than risk worsening things with another visit (*2 Cor. 2:1, 3*).

Paul's intentions on the last visit were misinterpreted. Some in Corinth said that he was unreliable and that he did not love them enough (*2 Cor. 1:17*). In his response to the accusations, he moved the Corinthians' eyes to the gospel of Christ. He was faithful to his intentions to visit the Corinthians at the best opportunity, just as God had been faithful in fulfilling His promises to them through Christ (*2 Cor. 1:18–22*).

"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (*2 Cor. 1:20, NKJV*).

Thus, his response was not a confusing mixture of "yes" or "no" dependent on the circumstances, as they said, but was "always Yes," just as God's work in Christ is "always Yes" (*2 Cor. 1:19, ESV*).

Therefore, the reason Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians instead of visiting them was his sincere love for them, not the opposite (*2 Cor. 2:4*). Another visit right after the painful visit would bring them further pain, not the joy he intended to cause with his presence (*2 Cor. 1:24, 2 Cor. 2:3*). How easily his good intentions were misinterpreted.

Forgiveness and Reaffirmation of Love

Rather than visiting the Corinthians a second time, Paul, after returning to Ephesus, sent what became known as “the severe letter” (see *2 Cor. 2:3, 4; 2 Cor. 7:8, 12*).

Read 2 Corinthians 7:5–13. What was the result of what he wrote to them, and what was Paul’s reaction because of that result?

Paul and Titus met later in Macedonia, where Paul heard from Titus the excellent news that his strong words had caused positive results, which brought much joy to the apostle’s heart. If before, some in Corinth positioned themselves against Paul, now the church sided with him. How important it is to support our leaders. As church members, we can make their work much easier than it is.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5–11. What is the central idea here?

This passage has to do with a case of church discipline. Scholars debate whether the offender here is the incestuous man of 1 Corinthians 5:1–5 or someone else, a person who influenced others in the church in their accusation that Paul had been inconsistent and inconsiderate of them in his traveling decisions. The context seems to favor the second option. In any case, the most important teaching of the passage regards how the church should deal with a person in sin.

This passage teaches that the purpose of church discipline is restoration through forgiveness and through reaffirmation of love for the sinner (*2 Cor. 2:6–8, 10*). The passage also hints that church discipline may be painful, but it is necessary. That is, however well-intentioned they may be, and wanting to be “grace”-oriented, some churches might never confront or deal with blatant or even public sin. On the other hand, others can be very rigid, unforgiving, and harsh. Sin needs to be dealt with, but in love. Thus, Paul could exhort the church to reaffirm its love for the offender (*2 Cor. 2:8*) because he himself loved the church (*2 Cor. 2:4*)!

The church in Corinth could love the offender (*2 Cor. 2:8*) because it was itself the object of God’s love through Paul’s love. What does this teach us about love?

Triumph in Christ

Read 2 Corinthians 2:12, 13. Where did Paul go after writing “the severe letter” to them? What did he do there?

Paul’s heart was uneasy while waiting for Titus (2 Cor. 7:5, 6). Despite that uneasiness, he couldn’t stop talking about Jesus (2 Cor. 2:12). He loved Jesus so much. At that point, he didn’t yet know the results of his letter. He was anxious to see Titus and hear about the reaction of the Corinthians.

The work of Paul at Troas was successful, but “he could not remain there long. ‘The care of all the churches,’ and particularly of the church at Corinth, rested heavily on his heart. He had hoped to meet Titus at Troas and to learn from him how the words of counsel and reproof sent to the Corinthian brethren had been received, but in this he was disappointed. ‘I had no rest in my spirit,’ he wrote concerning this experience, ‘because I found not Titus my brother.’ He therefore left Troas and crossed over to Macedonia, where, at Philippi he met Timothy.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 323.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14–17. What was Paul’s reaction upon meeting Titus in Macedonia and hearing about the positive response of the Corinthians?

In a burst of joy, Paul affirms that God “always leads us in triumph in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14, *NKJV*). What a marvelous statement! A heart filled with the presence of Christ spreads “the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” (2 Cor. 2:14, *NKJV*).

Paul rejoices in Christ because the painful letter bore the fruit he intended to harvest (2 Cor. 7:5–9). This is a great victory. Meanwhile, in 2 Corinthians 2:17, Paul reaffirms his sincerity as an apostle of Christ (2 Cor. 2:17, 2 Cor. 1:12). According to this passage, what distinguishes a faithful servant of Christ from a false minister is that while the latter peddles the gospel for self-interest, the former preaches the Word of God in wholehearted love for Christ.

What motivates you in all that you do, especially when you do it in the name of Jesus?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Message Heeded,” pp. 323–334, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Those who have borne the greatest sorrows are frequently the ones who carry the greatest comfort to others, bringing sunshine wherever they go. Such ones have been chastened and sweetened by their afflictions; they did not lose confidence in God when trouble assailed them, but clung closer to His protecting love. Such ones are living proof of the tender care of God.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 122.

“A consecrated Christian life is ever shedding light and comfort and peace. It is characterized by purity, tact, simplicity, and usefulness. It is controlled by that unselfish love that sanctifies the influence. It is full of Christ, and leaves a track of light wherever its possessor may go.”—*God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 122.

“The apostle Paul found it necessary to reprove wrong in the church, but he did not lose his self-control in reproving error. He anxiously explains the reason of his action. How carefully he wrought so as to leave the impression that he was a friend of the erring! He made them understand that it cost him pain to give them pain. He left the impression upon their minds that his interest was identified with theirs.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1094.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In 2 Corinthians 2:1–14, Paul affirms his integrity in ministry. Why is this ministerial quality so crucial?
- 2 What does the fact that Paul changed his traveling plan tell us about the necessity of flexibility in Christian ministry? Why is it important to be open to change when needed?
- 3 Paul faced anguish and anxiety in his ministry. This clearly shows that church leaders are human beings who are as exposed to distress as any other people. What can church members do in order to ease their work?
- 4 Paul refers to his restlessness (2 Cor. 2:13) right before mentioning his triumph in Christ (2 Cor. 2:14). How could he talk about his weakness and strength at the same time? How can we?

Mission Begins Young

By KATHIE LICHTENWALTER

“Even though as a boy I’d read all of Eric B. Hare’s* stories, I don’t think it ever occurred to me that I could be a missionary myself,” says Myron Iseminger, a missionary serving in Lebanon.

In the late 1970s, Myron’s sister declared she was taking a year off to volunteer as an English teacher in Japan. After a year in college as a theology major, Myron proposed his own volunteer experience to the Middle East. It was a decision that would steer the rest of his life.

“I thought it would be really neat to experience the Bible lands,” Myron says. “Besides, I thought it would give me some helpful ministerial experience. But I received much more. That year, my worldview began changing. I saw another culture, another way of thinking. I went to my students’ homes and listened to their stories, saw their personal grief. I began understanding life from another person’s perspective. I realized it’s easy to judge groups of people until you meet them one-on-one and come to love them.” Myron began sensing the call to long-term service for God overseas.

At the time, cross-cultural pastors didn’t appear to be in high demand, but Myron concluded if the world church budgeted funds for mission, finance officers would be needed to manage those funds. When he returned to college, he added a second major in business. It was another critical turn that would determine the direction of his life.

The advice a church leader shared with Myron also weighed on his mind: if you want to serve in a foreign country, make sure the woman you marry shares that same vision! Myron’s wife, Candace, had never been outside the United States when they married. “But she was willing,” Myron says. Together, they waited for a job opportunity overseas.

One day, a General Conference officer told Myron there was an opening in the Middle East for a treasurer. Soon, Myron and Candace were settling into an apartment in the Egypt Field office. It was hard work but rewarding. “I enjoyed being on the frontline of mission,” Myron says. “I liked contributing where there were limited resources. I enjoyed seeing the difference I could make, even though it was challenging.”

Myron would later serve in a variety of church offices.

It all seemed impossible to a little boy captivated by Eric B. Hare’s stories, but he can testify, “If we’re open to wherever God needs us, He works out our life direction much better than we could ever plan it.”

* Eric B. Hare was a Seventh-day Adventist missionary and prolific author.

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