

Small Group Materials, 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4

Pray for your time together in God's Word!

Read the passage out loud as a group. Option: Give the group 5 minutes to look at the passage by themselves.

This Week's Passage

Scripture Reference

23 I call God as my witness—and I stake my life on it—that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. 24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.

2 Corinthians 2

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.

Discussion

Leader's Note: This letter was written after a time of painful confrontation. Paul visited the church in Corinth after his previous letter (1 Corinthians) to the Corinthians that spoke against division did not have his desired effect. His confrontation of their teachings was a "painful visit" (2 Cor. 2:1), and he was attacked by one of the opposing leaders (2:5-8, 10; 7:12). Why he left is uncertain, but we do know from the beginning of 2 Corinthians that he wanted to spare them the pain of another confrontation (1:16). So he wrote them another letter that was delivered by Titus. Called the "tearful letter", Paul wrote it to assure them of his love, but also to communicate the standards he expected. This letter has probably been lost, but is referred to throughout 2 Corinthians. Later Titus returned to Paul to communicate the good news of change in Corinth as a result of his "tearful letter". While Paul had been worried his message had been ill received, he joyed in their change of heart (7:6-8, 10). His response was the letter we call 2 Corinthians, which seems to "breathe an atmosphere of bruised relations that have recently eased" (Introduction, pg.425). (Taken from An Introduction to the New Testament: 1 and 2 Corinthians, pg. 423-425)

Ask the Group: What about this passage stood out to you?

Leaders' Note: This question gives your group the opportunity to explore their own ideas before leading them to specific discussion. Caution: Do not let this turn into a debate about personal understandings—keep it more on the "observation" level.

Ask the Group: In verse 23, what reason does Paul give for not returning to Corinth?

Possible Answers: So as not to grieve the Corinthians as he did on his earlier visit, to

“spare” them, etc.

Optional Transition: Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians after he had previously confronted them about sin in their lives, both personally and in previous letters. Even though Paul had a painful visit, the way he talks with them doesn't reflect pain, but care.

Ask the Group: What does it look like for someone to communicate correction through love? OR Have you ever had someone correct you through love?

Possible Answers: Lead them to Scripture, take into account personality (blunt vs. gentle), thinking about environment, sharing your heart—not just a saying they’re “wrong”, taking the time to explain, etc.

Ask the Group: What phrases communicate Paul's care for the Corinthians?

Possible Answers: “We work with you for your joy” v. 24; “For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad” v. 2; “I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy” v. 3; “For I wrote...not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you” v. 4; etc.

- **Ask the Group:** What are some ways that you’ve offered or received care within the body of Christ?

Possible Answers: Close friend confronting you when you’re in sin, small group supporting someone when they’re ill, praying with those who are struggling, following up with people when they’ve shared something big or small, etc.

Ask the Group: Paul focuses on joy even though he is writing to them out of “great distress.” Why does Paul say in v.24 that “we work with you for your joy” instead of “lord[ing]” it over their faith?

Possible Answer: Instead of saying they're beneath the leaders or aren't doing the right things to prove their faith, he focuses on the benefit of getting better, that correction can be a loving thing, where you focus on the joy of serving and becoming more like Christ, etc.

Ask the Group: What is the relationship between Paul feeling “great distress and anguish of heart” and “the depth of love” for the Corinthians in v. 4?

Possible Answer: He communicates love by empathizing with their pain (v. 2-3), he is willing to risk the strain in relationship for their benefit, etc.

- **Ask the Group:** When do we feel anguish and love at the same time?

Possible Answers: Disciplining a child, confronting a friend or family member, working through a difficult situation with someone close, etc.

Application

Ask the Group (small or large): What is YOUR response when someone communicates correction through love to you?

- **Ask the Group (small or large):** Based on what we talked about today, do you need to change your response to correction?
 - How will you do so this week?

Ask the Group (small or large): How can you communicate to the people around you this week that you are on their side and that you are working for their joy?

Suggestion: Send this application question and challenge out during the week to encourage your group.

Last Week's Application: (Discuss if time)

Ask the Group (small or large): In what areas of your life do you struggle to follow Christ because of what other people expect from you?

- How can you take steps towards obedience to Christ in those areas this week?

Ask the Group (small or large): This week, what does it look like for you to live as someone who has been set apart for God (anointed), belongs to God (seal of ownership), and has a guarantee of Christ's promises (Spirit in our heart)?