



PREPARATION

- > *Spend the week studying 2 Corinthians 2:1-4 and 12-17. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.*
- > **Determine** which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > **Pray** for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their receptivity to God's Word.
- > **Focus on the Main Point.** *No matter what battle we find ourselves in God is able and willing to give us the victory through Jesus Christ.*

INTRODUCTION

What is the greatest celebration you have ever taken part in? What were you celebrating? How did you celebrate?

Why do we place such value on celebrating accomplishments and milestones in our lives?

Whether it's winning the championship game, a 25th or 50th wedding anniversary, or even a significant career achievement, we take time to celebrate extraordinary accomplishments and blessings. We celebrate because we recognize the worth and value of what we celebrate. But how often do we take time to celebrate the victory Christ has given us over our battle with sin? If we're honest, we too often see our redemption as something commonplace, but Christ's victory over the sin in our lives should be a source of continuous celebration. Through Christ's strength we will conquer every battle against sin because it is a war He has already won.

LEARN

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 CORINTHIANS 2:1-4.

What did Paul mean when he referred to his "painful visit" (v. 1)? What was the nature of Paul's relationship with the church at Corinth?

What affect did the strain in Paul's relationship with the Corinthians have on him? How did he respond to it?

Why is relational strain particularly painful? Have you ever been hurt and worried by sin in the life of someone you cared about? What was that experience like?

How can we lean into the victory of Jesus over sin when we are beset with worry and self doubt?

Among all the churches Paul wrote to, the church at Corinth seems to have been Paul's problem child. Plagued with infighting, rejection of Paul's apostolic authority, and the continual influence of false teachers, Paul's ministry and credibility was continually undermined. For any of us, personal attacks can often be the hardest to weather. Paul worried about the Corinthians and his relationship with them because he loved them deeply. However, perpetual worry is sin that Christ has given us victory to overcome, which Paul addressed later in this chapter.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 CORINTHIANS 2:12-17.

Because of their opposition to him, Paul wrote a "severe" letter to the church at Corinth which he gave to Titus to deliver (2 Cor. 7:8). After waiting to hear with no response, Paul left Troas and went to Macedonia. Once there he met Titus and found the church had responded well.

In the verses directly preceding these, Paul said the opposition he faced in Corinth came from Satan. What types of tactics does Satan use to disturb our peace in Christ?

Read 1 Peter 5:8. How is Satan described in this verse? How can we rest in the reality that Jesus always gives us the victory with an enemy like the Devil?

Satan is always pleased when God's people are divided and unforgiving. These were the tactics the Devil used to disrupt the peace of the church at Corinth, and he uses these same tactics today. Dissention and disunity can be some of the most difficult problems to deal with in the local church. But Jesus has called us to unity and peace. Through Jesus we have victory over the schemes of the Devil.

What did Paul mean when he wrote Christ leads us in a triumphal procession (v. 14)? What type of imagery was Paul using?

How are followers of Christ an army? What is our mission, and how do we encourage each other on the march to victory?

How did Paul's hurts and struggles in Corinth make their renewal that much more sweet for him?

What made Paul different than the false teachers in Corinth? What makes the gospel distinguishable from false teaching?

In 2 Corinthians 2:14, Paul used the metaphor of the extravagant victory parades held by conquering Roman generals to describe the victory we have in Christ. Brothers and sisters in Christ link arms and march forward obeying Christ's commands and attributing our every victory to His victory in our lives. Paul uses the illustration of a pleasing aroma to distinguish between God-centered and man-centered teaching. The advantage a Christian has proclaiming the gospel is that the message is from God and our victory is secured.

LIVE

One of the ways we can support each other in the battle against sin is to be aware of the struggles of those in our small group. How much value do we place on confessing and praying over each other's sin struggles? What might God do if we prioritized this practice?

What victories has God given you in your battles against sin? Share these testimonies of God's grace as an encouragement to the small group.

LEAD

Do you know another brother or sister who is struggling with doubts or problems? How can you lead them to see Christ's victory in their lives?

What specific area of life do you most struggle to trust Christ in? What tangible steps could you take this week to release this area to Christ?

PRAY

Praise God for His victory over sin and death. Ask that God would make His victory real in your life. As you encounter problems in this life know that Jesus has already won the battle against sin, self doubt, our problems, and the Devil. Pray that you might rest in the promise that Christ always supplies the victory.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

1. How will you live in Christ's victory this week?
2. Memorize 2 Corinthians 2:14.

COMMENTARY

2 CORINTHIANS 2:1-4

2:1. Returning to his main idea, Paul elaborated further on 1:23. He determined not to make another painful visit. The pain of rebuke is necessary at times in Christian relationships but not always appropriate, even when sin and error persist in the church. Paul practiced what he told the Colossians: "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Col. 4:6).

2:2. Not only did Paul change his plans to spare the Corinthians, but he did it also for his own sake. He feared that if he grieved the Corinthians further, he would have no one left to make him glad. Paul needed to be encouraged and strengthened by the church, and he depended on the Corinthians' love. He did not need grief from the Corinthians added to his other difficulties.

2:3. Paul anticipated a potential question. If he needed to be encouraged by the Corinthians, why did he write so many harsh rebukes in his letter to them? Paul responded that he wrote to deal with problems from a distance so that when he came he would not be distressed by the church at Corinth. Their proper role in Paul's life was to make him rejoice. He had written previously about problems so that his face-to-face meetings could be positive. Once the Corinthians submitted to his written corrections, Paul had confidence they would all share his joy.

2:4. Paul insisted that he wrote his letter of correction out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears. He did not like rebuking the Corinthians. He grieved for the harm they did themselves. The apostle wrote about difficult things so they could know the depth of his love for them.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:12-17

2:12. In autobiographical style, Paul began with the fact that his commitment to preaching the gospel of Christ had compelled him to go to Troas (cf. Acts 16:9-10), a city in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) about ten miles south of Troy. Paul had been there on his second missionary journey. From there he determined to go to Macedonia, where he began churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and perhaps Athens. Therefore, on his third missionary journey Paul's preaching was well received in the churches he had previously established in Macedonia. This is why he said that the Lord had opened a door for him.

An open door does not mean (as it often does in modern parlance) an open opportunity. Rather, the metaphor indicates that God blessed the legitimate efforts of his people with remarkable success.

2:13. In spite of his success in Troas, Paul had no peace of mind because his brother Titus had not met him there. Paul was as close as a brother to Titus; he even sent this particular letter to the Corinthians through Titus. But Paul's love for Titus was not the cause of his concern. He was concerned about his relationship with the Corinthians. Titus had gone to Corinth to organize the collection for poverty-stricken Jerusalem. He was to report, among other things, the feelings of the Corinthians toward Paul. Not knowing how the Corinthians felt about him, Paul bypassed Corinth and waited for Titus in Macedonia.

2:14a. Paul had been disappointed in Troas and Macedonia, but through it all God had been good to him. He began this acknowledgment of divine goodness with thanksgiving: But thanks be to God.

2:14b-16a. Paul delighted in God's care for him. He expressed this joy with the metaphor of a victory parade. Paul was convinced that God always leads believers in triumphal procession in Christ. Paul drew upon the triumphal parades that were known throughout the Roman world. Prisoners of war were marched through the streets as fragrant perfumes filled the air. At the end of each parade, many prisoners were executed. For this reason, the smells of the parade were sweet to the victors, but they were the smell of death to the defeated.

Paul saw several similarities between these victory parades and his own ministry. (1) He and those with him were members of the victorious army led by Christ, as were the rest of the apostles. (2) Their gospel preaching spread everywhere ... the knowledge or acknowledgment of God as the victor. Similarly, Roman victory parades spread knowledge about victories and caused people to acknowledge the victors. (3) Paul said that he and the apostles were like the perfumes of the victory parades. They became to (the honor of) God like the aroma of Christ, or more specifically, like the aroma accompanying Christ's victory. Both the victors of this spiritual gospel war (those who are being saved) and the defeated (those who are perishing) smelled their aroma. (4) This aroma of Christ, however, affected each group differently. To Christ's enemies, Paul and those with him were the smell of death, but to those following Christ they were the fragrance of life.

This metaphor contrasted Christian and non-Christian reactions to evangelists. To Christians, Paul and his company presented reminders of the wonders of salvation. For non-Christians, they raised the terror of divine judgment. No one could ignore them because their fragrance was spreading throughout the world.

2:16b. As Paul contemplated his analogy between Roman victory parades and his gospel ministry, he was overwhelmed. He exclaimed, Who is equal to such a task? The answer he implied was that no one was worthy of playing such an important role in human history and in the kingdom of God. It was astounding that God appointed humans to this role.

2:17. Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that he did not view his ministry as an ordinary job. He did not peddle the word of God for profit. He distinguished himself and those who worked with him from so many others who had reduced their ministries to mere occupations. Unlike the gospel peddlers, Paul and his company spoke before God with sincerity. Paul still lingered on the accusation of insincerity and duplicity he had addressed in the preceding section. He could not have been insincere because he looked upon his ministry so highly. Instead, he served as one sent from God, considering his task a sacred privilege. The fact that he did not accept payment for his preaching further demonstrated his sincerity.