

[A Devotional Study *on* Having a Passion for God]

LORD,
Give Me
a Heart
for You



KAY ARTHUR

LORD,
GIVE ME A HEART
FOR YOU

A DEVOTIONAL STUDY
on HAVING *a* PASSION *for* GOD

K A Y
A R T H U R



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CONTENTS

	Introduction	vii
Chapter 1	<i>When the Pressure Is Great, the Stress Is Overwhelming</i> Finding God's Comfort in Affliction	1
Chapter 2	<i>When Relationships Are Fragmented</i> Resolving Conflicts	33
Chapter 3	<i>When I Feel Inadequate</i> Finding Adequacy in Christ	57
Chapter 4	<i>What Happens When I Die?</i> Standing at the Judgment Seat of Christ	87
Chapter 5	<i>When I'm Broken by My Sin</i> Suffering and Separation That Bring Holiness	121
Chapter 6	<i>When I'm in Need... When I Have Plenty</i> Understanding the Ministry of Giving	149
Chapter 7	<i>When the Warfare Is Great</i> Confronting the Enemy	175
Chapter 8	<i>When God Won't Take Away "The Thorn"</i> The Power of Weakness	203
	Second Corinthians	235
	Study Resources	263

INTRODUCTION

O h, to love God so very, very much, so much that every “whatever” in our lives would be for His sake and His alone—whatever pressure, whatever trial, whatever task. All would be leading us to have a heart for God—to be one whose sole passion is to please God.

I know, Beloved, that you probably picked up this book because that is your desire as well as mine.

For years I have longed to write a study—another “Lord” book or a Precept course—on the anatomy of a heart for God. What does a heart for God look like when lived out in flesh and blood in the daily circumstances of life? This is what I wanted to know, to study, to learn, and to live. And the perfect book from Scripture that seemed to demonstrate this was 2 Corinthians. Finally the day came, and I knew that God would have us study the subject in the form of another “Lord” book rather than a Precept course, for a “Lord” book allows more room for me to also pour out my heart, to share the things the Lord has taught, while at the same time helping you discover for yourself the wonderful truths of God’s Word.

This has been such an incredible spiritual journey for me. Now you have in your hands the tangible result of it, and I am thrilled. Thrilled and honored! Thrilled that you want to have a heart for God and honored that I would have the privilege of walking with you through 2 Corinthians, Acts, and other portions of Scripture that will help you understand what it’s like to have a heart like His.

I think this will be another revolutionary study in your life, precious one, for Paul reveals himself in this book of 2 Corinthians in a way that he does nowhere else. His vulnerability will touch your heart as you realize how much this great man of God is just like you in his battles, his fears, and his conflicts, as he deals with the inevitable pressures of seeking to serve God in a world opposed to God and among believers who don’t always exemplify Jesus Christ.

It is my passion that whether you study this on your own or in a

group, your heart will touch God's heart in such a way that it will beat in unison with His from this day forward. In 2 Chronicles 16:9, we learn that the eyes of God are looking for a man or a woman whose heart is fully His, that He might show Himself strong on that person's behalf. May His eyes fall on you! That is my prayer.

Now if there's a possibility that you are going to use this as a group study, you will want to read "Guidelines for Group Use" in the "Study Resources" section at the back of this book, where you'll find other valuable tools to enhance this study.

Also if you would like to develop your skills in handling the Word of God more accurately or in leading others in group studies designed to minister to people of all ages *at any level of commitment* while respecting the restraints on their time, Precept Ministries International can provide the training and materials. For more information, simply call our toll-free number (1-800-763-8280) and let one of our staff members help you. It would be their pleasure. We're known as "The Inductive Study People: everybody, everywhere, any time, any place, any language, any age. One message: the Bible. One method: inductive." We have numerous types of inductive studies, from forty-minute Bible studies that have no homework to others that average fifteen minutes of homework per day to others that require an hour of study per day. We have studies for children, teens, and adults. Please don't hesitate to call us. We exist to serve you.

Finally, let me share my vision—it's the possibility of a new avenue of ministry for you, Beloved of God...

*A new beginning—
An avenue of ministry—
A sense of doing something that has eternal value*

These are three things I think are so important for you and for me. There's so much to learn, to know, to experience, to do—and we never want to lose sight of that. To do so would be to miss what God has for us. To fall short of the tremendous potential of our lives—a potential that is ours because we are His, because we are children of the Creator of the

Universe, indwelt by His divine Spirit and given the mind of Christ. You and I, Beloved, are God's workmanship gifted by the Spirit of God and created in Christ Jesus unto good works that would absolutely stagger our minds if we were to see them before they ever happened.

And what has God put into your hands? What are you holding and reading right now? Is it an accident? A coincidence? No! You are holding a devotional study that first and foremost will be the beginning of a new depth of understanding about God and all that He is for you.

God is going to speak to you because, through this book, you're going to come face to face with the living Word of God—the Word that not only discerns the thoughts and intentions of your heart, but becomes the means of throwing His light on the direction your life is taking so you can know with absolute confidence where you are headed. If you listen to what He says—and by that I mean ordering your life accordingly—then there is, in a sense, a new beginning...of understanding, of purpose. A new level of Christlikeness is attained. You will be, as Paul would say, pressing on and attaining that for which Jesus Christ laid hold of you.

Which brings me to my next point—an avenue of ministry. What you have learned, God intends for you to share. I have a vision, and you, Beloved, are part of that vision. Our Lord's commission in Matthew 28 was that we make disciples of all men—that we teach them to observe all that He has commanded us. Acts 1 tells us that when we are saved and receive the Holy Spirit we become His witnesses—yet the question is often, "How?"

Here is the how. This "Lord" book contains truths every human being needs to know and to apply to his or her life. These are precepts for life; through them we will gain understanding and, as the psalmist says, "hate every false way" (Psalm 119:104). We hate it because it is false rather than true, and it is truth that sets us apart, sets us free.

So what is my vision for you, my friend? It is that you go to the Lord in prayer and ask Him to direct you to at least one other person—but preferably at least ten—and that you, along with them, study this book together. You may not be a teacher, but you can be the group's facilitator. You can take the questions you'll find at the end of each chapter and use

them to stimulate a discussion among those whom the Lord has brought together in answer to your prayer. These are those who will be part of your crown of rejoicing in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. As you watch them learn and grow in the knowledge of God and of His Word, you will experience the humbling joy of knowing that you have been used of God. That what you have done has eternal value. That your life and God-given gifts have not been wasted. That your work will live on—that the grace of God poured out on you was not poured out in vain, for you have labored in the strength of His grace.

So as you facilitate a group using this book, you need to watch for and encourage others in your group to do as you have done—to take what they have learned and impart it to another as you did with them. Think of the multiplication that will happen! Do you realize, Beloved, that this is the way we can reach our neighborhoods, our communities, our nation, and beyond? Think of the transformation that will take place among all those people today who are so interested in “the spiritual” but won’t step inside a church. Think—just think!—what is going to happen!

The time is now. The hour is short, so stop and pray right now, Beloved, and ask God what He would have you to do. He will show you, because He is God and because such prayers are in accordance with His will. As you step out and begin, just know that if you will step out in faith, God will give you an avenue of ministry, person by person or group by group, that will not only stagger your mind but absolutely delight your soul.

I cannot wait to hear what God does in and through you, my friend.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large loops and a long, sweeping tail that curves back under the name.

RESOLVING CONFLICTS

— D A Y O N E —

Relationships are the single most important thing in our lives. Money, fame, notoriety—apart from solid healthy relationships with others—are devastatingly empty achievements that cruelly imprison the soul in solitary confinement. Shut up alone, where there's no one to talk to except a self that cares about no one else except itself. What horrific companionship!

When I even sense there might be the slightest schism between myself and another, my mind has trouble focusing on anything else. Rehearsals of conversations and incidents, remembrances of a look, questions about how and what and when and why—all these bombard my mind.

I can be teaching from the platform, talking to a person on the phone, meeting with my peers, dealing with the business issues of the day with the office staff, taking a shower, putting on my makeup, talking to family, preparing dinner for Jack and myself and all the time be haunted by the crack—real or unreal—in a relationship.

Nothing brings peace or quietness in my inner man until I do what I can to resolve it. To find out the whys and wherefores, to explain, to lay the matter to rest. And until then there's no real peace in my soul. The praise of others, the plaudits of a task well done—even the affirmation of other relationships doesn't bring rest to my soul.

You would think at my age, at this period of my life in Christ, I would be able to handle it better—but I can't until I do what I can to resolve it. Can you relate, my friend? Or are you able to throw those things off—to put them out of sight and out of mind?

I wish I were able to do that...

How well I understand Paul's torment—his eagerness to hear from the Corinthians that all was well between them, his desire to explain, to resolve their differences. As I said in the preceding week's study, it helps to know that others have been where you've been—and to learn from how they dealt with it.

That's what we'll see this week as we study 2 Corinthians 1:12–2:17: handling broken relationships and people broken by their sin.

Some in the church at Corinth were openly opposed to Paul. They simply didn't like him, and they let it be known. Everything he did was suspect, and the slightest supposed failure became justification for their stance. It wasn't easy for Paul. Of all the churches he established, none caused him greater distress or demanded more of him than the church at Corinth. And yet the very thing that caused him such pain and torment is being used of God to bring instruction by example to those who are dealing with difficult relationships and the issue of forgiving and comforting those who have wounded you deeply yet eventually came to their senses.

I think at this point, Beloved, it will help for us to stop listening to me and see what I'm talking about in 2 Corinthians 1:12-18. Read through this portion of Paul's letter in the back of this book. As you do, this time color-code the following:

- Mark every reference to Paul (or to Paul and his companions, which means you would mark every *we* and *us* that refers to them). You might want to color these references blue.
- Mark every reference to the Corinthians in orange or another color of your choosing.
- Underline occurrences of *I wrote* and *we wrote*.
- Mark *proud confidence* in a distinctive way. Later you'll mark *boasting* the same way, as this is the literal meaning of this word in verse 12. You could box it in green and color it pink on the inside. (By the way, I simply make these suggestions because some like more guidance on how to mark.)

- Also mark every reference or indication of time, because sequence is going to be important in untangling this schism between Paul and the Corinthians.
- Put a circle around *understand*—after all, it’s an important word when it comes to good relationships!

When you finish, review what you learned by marking these words. What do you learn about Paul? about the Corinthians? In what areas does Paul seem to be justifying himself? Think about it, and we’ll look at this tomorrow.

– D A Y T W O –

The misunderstanding that wedged itself between Paul and the Corinthians so consumed Paul that this and a resultant explanation of his ministry became the subject of the first seven chapters of this epistle. Only in chapters 8 and 9 does he turn to another issue, the issue of giving. Then in chapters 10 through 13 Paul goes back to their relationship, and this time he has to talk to them quite strongly regarding the authenticity of his apostolic authority—which some doubted.

In all this, you and I are going to discover some awesome biblical truths and at the same time touch on so many issues that hit us today right where we live and struggle in our quest for a heart for God.

Now what was the fracas in Corinth about? Some in the church had gotten the ears of the others (isn’t that often the way it is in many churches?) and were telling them, in essence, “If you read any of Paul’s letters, you’d better read between the lines because Paul doesn’t say what he means or mean what he says. Just look! He said he was coming here to Corinth, but he didn’t!”

That’s why Paul wrote, “We write nothing else to you than what you read and understand” (1:13). In other words: “Don’t read between the lines. My words say exactly what I mean and can be understood by simply taking them at face value.”

The Corinthians don’t have to be ashamed of Paul. In fact, Paul,

Silas, and Timothy are their reason to be proud (1:14). Paul and the others can literally boast that they didn't conduct themselves in fleshly wisdom toward the Corinthians. Rather, they had behaved in holiness and godly sincerity—in the grace of God before others and before the Corinthians (1:12).

The whole issue Paul's detractors were using against him was that Paul didn't keep his word and come to Corinth, as he had written that he was going to do.

And they were right. Paul didn't come as he said he was going to. But is that sufficient cause to demean the man? That's the question. And it's a question that must be investigated.

How quick our flesh is...

to believe the worst, or even to relish it!

to attribute bad motives rather than good motives!

to assume rather than investigate!

to look only at what a person does or looks like or acts like and miss that person's heart.

to say, "They'll never change. There's no hope."

Have you been there, Beloved—on either end? The judging or the being judged?

The question is, Have you learned anything?

I've been on both ends. Fortunately, as I have grown in my quest for a heart for God, I've learned about the "wrong" end—unbiblical judging. That's the end I can control.

But what do I do when I'm the recipient of the judging? I'm learning the right response from Paul...as you will also, I pray. For I know, Beloved, how hard it is for you to be misunderstood, unjustly condemned, wrongly perceived.

So let's look at how Paul handled this situation and what it was about him that enabled him to deal with it in such a way that he kept a clear conscience before God.

First of all, Paul faced the issue and dealt with it factually. He admitted that he did intend "at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing" (verse 15). He was going to pass their way "into Mace-

donia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea” (verse 16).

When Paul wrote this, the Corinthians believed his intention was to come to them from Ephesus. If this is so, then trace on the map¹ on the next page the journey Paul would have taken. Take him all the way back to Judea. If he was going to Judea he would have sailed into the port of Caesarea, which was the only port in Judea at that time.

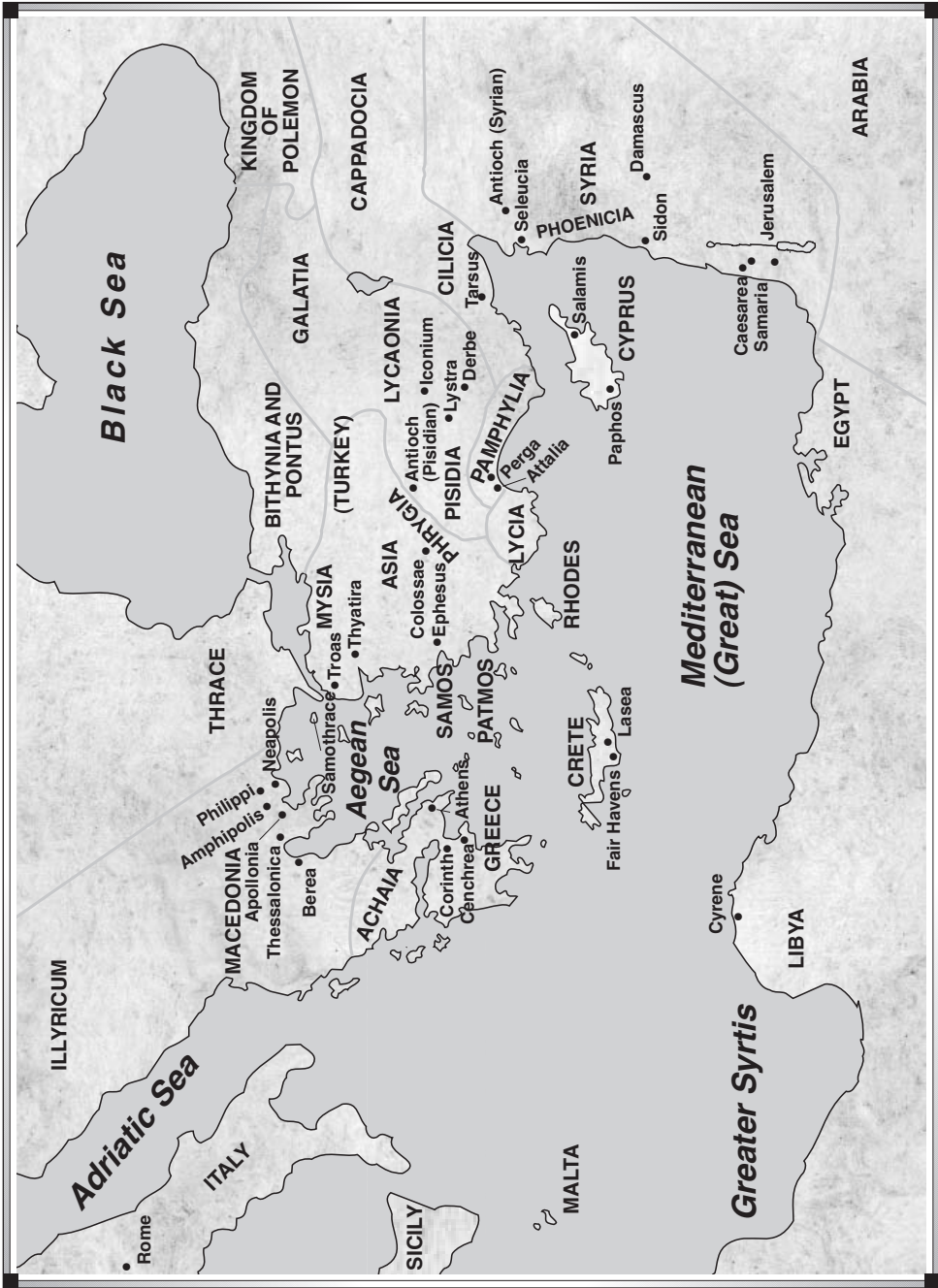
When Paul wrote the letter we call 1 Corinthians, what did Paul tell them regarding his plans to visit them? Read 1 Corinthians 16:5-9 and record your insights below.

Does this sound like a different plan from the one in 2 Corinthians? How?

Did you notice the distances Paul would have traveled? Is this why he changed his plans? Or did he write the Corinthians lightly, saying that this was what he was going to do without any intention of ever doing it? Or with the intention of doing it only if it seemed suitable at the moment?

Read through 2 Corinthians 1:15–2:4 and mark the text as you did yesterday. Only this time also mark...

- the word *affliction*.
- every reference to *sorrow*. You might want to mark these like a downturned mouth and color them red.
- any reference to the emotions Paul experienced.



When you finish, list below what you see from the text about Paul's reason for not coming as he had planned.

What emotions did Paul experience in all this? List them below along with the verse number(s) that gave you this information.

We have some exciting, liberating things to see tomorrow. Things that if followed can bring peace to your soul in fractured relationships. Just be thankful, Beloved, that relationships are important to you.

— D A Y T H R E E —

The whole situation with the Corinthians was stressful, bringing great anguish to Paul's heart. The valiant apostle who sang while chained in a Philippian jail now wept as he sat at a table with quill in hand writing to the Corinthians. It seemed easier to suffer beatings and imprisonment for the furtherance of the gospel than a broken relationship with a church he had birthed through the gospel. He expected animosity from the world but not from those who professed to love and serve the same Savior.

What sustained Paul? What kept him from writing off those who sought to trouble him? What restrained him from using his invested authority as an apostle?

First and foremost, it was a clear conscience. This was what gave Paul "proud confidence." Oh, Beloved, there is nothing that will bring you greater peace and confidence in difficult situations than a conscience that is totally clear, absolutely transparent before God. Nothing hidden. No wrong, fleshly motives. No deceptive or manipulative responses or

behavior. But rather a Godlike sincerity. A holiness of behavior, knowing that you have done or will do whatever pleases the Father.

Homer Kent, in his commentary on 2 Corinthians, explains that the term translated “proud confidence”—*kauchesis* in Greek—

emphasizes the action rather than the contents, so the thought is, “Our act of boasting should be understood in this way.” Paul meant that when he and Timothy engaged in justifiable glorying regarding what God had been accomplishing through them, it followed the pattern which he next explained.... These faithful men could glory as they did because it was the testimony of their consciences that God had approved their conduct. The conscience is one’s inner consciousness regarding the rightness of his actions. When Christians are enlightened by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, and then walk in full harmony with that knowledge, their consciences will approve their actions.²

Paul’s decision to change his travel plans was not one of fleshly wisdom. In this the Corinthians ought to have been proud. The one who established their church was not a man of whom they had to be ashamed; he conducted himself like a man of God.

Paul was so confident in his character and conduct in this matter that he knew that “in the day of our Lord Jesus” (2 Corinthians 1:14) he would be proud of the Corinthians, and they would be proud of him. This was a day ever before Paul, as well it should be before us. For if we kept the day of Christ always in mind, it would act as a purification filter for all our thoughts, words, and deeds.

We’ll see later how Paul expounds on the details of that day in chapter 5; however, let’s take a few minutes and look at how Paul uses this phrase “in the day of Christ” in other places in his letters. Look up each reference listed here and record what you observe from the text.

1 Corinthians 1:8:

1 Corinthians 5:5:

Philippians 1:6:

Philippians 1:10:

Philippians 2:16:

Paul wanted the Corinthians to “understand until the end” (2 Corinthians 1:13). “The end” is the day of Christ, when our precious Lord returns for His church. It’s in this “day”—at this time—that we’ll give an account at the judgment seat of Christ of the stewardship of all that our God has bestowed upon us in grace. It was *in* this grace that Paul, Silas, and Timothy conducted themselves in the world and especially toward the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 1:12).

A heart that belongs to God always moves in grace, in graciousness, and in favor toward others. That’s the *second* thing you need to remember when you find yourself in divisive situations. Keep your conscience clear and move in grace. You are God’s representative, and He is the God of all grace.

Third, as God’s representative your yes must be yes—not yes and no. In other words you’re never to say “yes” while in your heart you have no intention of doing it—if that’s your thinking, then it’s “yes and no.” God’s Word is never yes and no, and ours should not be either. God’s yes is always and forever yes; He will never go back on His promises.

Do you realize what would happen in families if we didn’t vacillate

but said what we meant and followed up on our promises? What an example it would be to our children, and what confidence it would build in our relationships!

Yet, at this point, are you saying, “But, Kay, Paul didn’t do what he said he was going to do”?

You’re right, but there was another factor that came into play; a *fourth* thing we need to learn from Paul’s example. Paul didn’t go to Corinth as planned because it wouldn’t have been the best for the Corinthians. Listen to his words: “But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth” (1:23). Paul didn’t want to cause them more sorrow than he had already caused them, and if he came to Corinth that’s what he would have done, because they had failed and Paul had to correct them. Something was wrong, and it couldn’t be ignored or covered up.

Love—the agape kind that desires another’s highest good—doesn’t whitewash sin or allow wrong behavior to continue without confrontation. This is why confrontation—honest, gracious confrontation—is so essential to healthy relationships. A healthy relationship is one that is open. Things aren’t buried, covered up, ignored, or denied, because when they are, decay sets in—putrefaction.

Jan Silvius and I had a radio program, *Precept Live with Kay and Jan*, which aired every Sunday evening and put us into contact with people across the nation. I would guess that 90 percent of the issues we dealt with had to do with broken or damaged relationships. After years of counseling, Jan is so strong on the fact that, if you want a relationship with a person, it will take the participation of both parties as well as total honesty. No covering up. If the other person won’t do what is right, then you do what you can and move on. It’s kind of like what Jesus told the seventy when he sent them out: If they weren’t received, they were to shake the dust off their feet in condemnation against their resistance and move on.

There comes a time when you have to be willing to let go and give the “protagonist” time to decide whether or not they value the relationship enough to do what they need to do. Which is the *fifth* thing we need to remember. In 2 Corinthians 1:24 Paul wrote, “Not that we lord it over

your faith, but are workers with you for your joy.” You can do your part but you cannot force the other person to do his—at least not in a healthy relationship.

Paul was an apostle, he carried that authority, but it didn’t make him lord over others. Each of us has but one Lord—and it isn’t our pastor, but rather the Great Shepherd of the sheep. Our elders and our pastors are there to work with us and beside us in the process of maturity, but not to dictate to us.

Ray Stedman, a dear brother who before he went to be with the Lord established Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, and set up a plurality of teaching leaders there, said that in essence Paul was saying,

“Look, I’m not your boss. If I had come to Corinth the way I had originally planned, after having already paid you a painful visit, it’s very likely that my powerful personality, my strong will, my position as a respected apostle would have put such pressure upon you that you would have obeyed me—but without the conviction that I spoke for the Lord. So I did not come, in order that you might preserve freedom to do what God wants, not what I want.”

Paul sees himself as a fellow worker, standing alongside them, helping them to understand what God wants so they would enter into the joy of the Lord. But he is not their boss. Leaders in the church are not bosses. This is a common misconception. Many churches look to *the* pastor but you never see that term in Scripture. There are pastors, but never *the* pastor. Churches are not to look to the pastor for authority, for permission to exercise spiritual gifts.

We do not have to ask our pastor whether we can teach in our home or not. We do not have to go to the pastor to get permission to use our spiritual gifts. The pastor does not give them to us. The Lord does, and we are responsible to him for the exercise of the spiritual gifts, not to the pastor. The pastor is our helper; he is there to encourage us and to help us understand these gifts, how to recognize them, but we are not responsible to him for exercising them. He is responsible to his Lord to help us put them with others and to maintain unity within the church, but not

to govern what ministry we have. That comes from the Lord himself. He is the head of the church, the body. Peter says that elders are not to be “lord over God’s heritage” (1 Peter 5:3, KJV).³

Healthy relationships are not built on dictatorships. God is God and He is to be supremely obeyed. However, even our relationship with God isn’t that of a dictatorship—rather, it’s a familial relationship, a covenant relationship. We have a choice to make, a free will that we exercise. However, we do need to realize that while a sovereign God allows us to choose our way, we will be held responsible for that choice. We cannot choose the consequences. God, because He is God alone, does that.

Graciously, however, He lets us know what the consequences are before we make our choice. They’re written in the Word. How clearly this is seen in the book of Deuteronomy where God says to His covenant people, “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose.”⁴

So how did Paul handle the fact that, before God, he knew it was best not to go to Corinth as he had planned and said he would? Remember there were no telephones to pick up, no planes to hop. Travel was long and arduous. Therefore if “in person” was impossible, communication had to be by letter. A letter that he trusted would be read and understood for exactly what the words meant. We’ll look at that tomorrow.

And how, Beloved, should we bring this day to a close? First, we need to remember this is not a comprehensive study on dealing with difficult relationships; we’re dealing only with the text at hand. Second, it might be good to simply look at the points I’ve numbered for you in the text, and list them below. Then read through 2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4 and think on these things in the light of your relationships. Is there anything you’ve seen that you need to apply to your own life? If so, note it in some way, then talk to your God about it. He is the expert on relationships.

— D A Y F O U R —

Changing your plans is so much easier if it doesn't affect others, but when it does, you leave yourself wide open for criticism.

This is what Paul had to deal with, as do many in leadership positions. It goes with the territory. Although leaders may profess to believe in Jesus Christ and desire to serve Him, they don't always walk in the Spirit. When people who work under a leader are dissatisfied, disgruntled, given to griping, or they're not particularly pleased with the way the ministry or business or organization is being run, then any change in plans becomes grounds for complaint, an opportunity for accusations, an occasion for murmuring, and an opportunity to undermine the leadership.

It took real courage before the Lord for Paul to change his plans, and it cost him great anguish of soul. He loved the Corinthians and couldn't bear to bring more sorrow. So instead of visiting them, he wrote them. So where is that letter? And when was it written?

The letter is not to be found—it's lost, no longer in existence, because in His sovereignty God did not include it in the canon of Scripture. Yet we can understand something about the time of that letter and its chronological relationship to 1 and 2 Corinthians. So let's put the puzzle together so that you'll possibly better understand the occasion of 2 Corinthians and why Paul bares his soul in this epistle like he does nowhere else in any of his preserved epistles.

Let's begin by looking at the following brief passage from 1 Corinthians. As you read the text, underline the phrase, "I wrote."

▶ 1 CORINTHIANS 5:9-11

⁹ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;

¹⁰ I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.

¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

If you were numbering the letters Paul says he wrote to Corinth, where would you put 1 Corinthians in relationship to what you just observed?

Next read 2 Corinthians 2:1-4, which is printed out below and again mark the phrase “I wrote.” Also, box in the phrase, “I would not come to you in sorrow again.”

🔹 2 CORINTHIANS 2:1-4

¹ But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again.

² For if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful?

³ This is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all.

⁴ For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.

Now the question is this: Is what Paul wrote in these verses a reference to 1 Corinthians or to another letter now lost?

From the content of 1 Corinthians, which was a response to letters Paul had received from the house of Chloe regarding the divisions and

quarrels within the church,⁵ as well as a response to specific questions the church had written to him about,⁶ it appears that 1 Corinthians is not the letter Paul referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:3-4. Which means we now have a third letter in the mix, plus the letter we know as 2 Corinthians. Where does it fit? Write out your insight by putting these four letters—(a) our book of 1 Corinthians, (b) our book of 2 Corinthians, (c) the letter Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11, and (d) the letter he refers to in 2 Corinthians 2:3-4—in the order in which you think they were written.

Now let's see if we can piece together what happened. Although it may not be the most exciting thing you'll read, this is good information. It helps put Paul's relationship with the Corinthians in context, it broadens your knowledge, and it also helps you see just how much anguish this conflict caused Paul.

Here's an outline to follow as we look at the possible order of events:

1. Acts 18:1-17 records Paul's first visit to Corinth.
2. Paul wrote the letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5—a letter now lost—telling the Corinthians how they were to deal with immoral people who call themselves Christians. This we'll call Letter Number One.
3. The church wrote back to Paul with questions.⁷ This letter was apparently delivered to Paul by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus.⁸
4. Paul answered their questions and addressed the problems in Corinth with a letter preserved for us in the Word of God as 1 Corinthians (Letter Number Two). We believe it was written from Ephesus.⁹
5. Paul made a second trip to Corinth, in all probability on his third missionary journey. Although a visit to Corinth is not specifically noted in the account of this journey in Acts, we do read that Paul "came to Greece."¹⁰ This short visit seems to be alluded to in

2 Corinthians 2:1—“But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again.” This could not refer to Paul’s first visit to Corinth because that was not in sorrow. The sorrow came later, probably in the second visit, when opposition to Paul would have been aroused by those Paul referred to later in 2 Corinthians.

6. Paul then wrote what we’ll call Letter Number Three (since it was actually the third letter we know of that he wrote to the Corinthians). As we’ve seen, Letter Number Three is referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:3-4.

This is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.

Apparently Letter Number Three was taken by Titus to Corinth, a conclusion based on the following scriptures. Look up each one and see what you learn about Titus and the timing of Paul’s letters. As you read these verses, make sure you underline every time you see, “I wrote.”

2 Corinthians 7:6-8:

2 Corinthians 7:12-13:

2 Corinthians 12:14 (This is an important verse, as it tells you how many times Paul visited Corinth.):

2 Corinthians 12:18 (Notice the verb tenses in this verse.):

Then (and this is where you see the anguish of Paul's heart) read 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 as one sentence, not as two separate verses. (As you look at this sentence, check out Troas on the map again.) Note what opportunity in Troas Paul mentions in this passage—and what happened.

7. After Paul found Titus and received his wonderful report of the Corinthians' response to Letter Number Three, he took quill in hand again and wrote the letter we're now studying, the one chosen by our Father to be included in His Word as the book of 2 Corinthians.

And why did Paul have to write a letter like Letter Number Three that caused them so much sorrow? We'll see the reason as we continue our study, since the first seven chapters of 2 Corinthians deal with this whole situation.

As we bring this day to a close, Beloved, I want us to see another example in Paul of a heart for God:

Who was right—and yet sought out the hurt brothers and sisters?

And who moved first in reconciliation—

the one who was right or those who were wrong?

The one who was right!

Paul communicated to the sorrowful Corinthians through a letter delivered by Titus. It was really just like what His Lord taught His disciples on that day on the mount overlooking the Sea of Galilee: If they remember that their brother has something against them, then they're to leave their offering at the altar and first go and be reconciled to that brother.¹¹ This is why Paul bypassed the opportunity for ministry in Troas, took his leave of them, and went on to Macedonia looking for Titus; his relationship with the Corinthians was foremost in his heart.

And what about us, Beloved, when we know that another person has something against us? Just how important are they—in God’s eyes and in ours?

O Father, in 1 John 4 You tell us that herein is love, not that we first loved You, but that You loved us first and sent Your Son to us. May I, may my friend, have a heart like Yours; may we move toward others in love. For Jesus’ sake...and for the sake of others... Amen.

— D A Y F I V E —

Would you pray, “Lord, give me a heart for You,” if it meant you had to forgive someone who hurt you in one way or another? This is what we want to look at in our final day of study this week as we look at the rest of the second chapter in 2 Corinthians.

Read through 2 Corinthians 2:1-11 again today. Continue to mark every reference to *sorrow*, *love*, and *comfort*, as you did in 2 Corinthians 1. Also mark “I wrote” and any reference to *forgiveness* or *forgiving*.

When you finish, come back to this page and summarize in your own words the situation Paul is dealing with in these verses.

Now, even though you may have just written it out above, list below exactly what you observe from marking the verses on *forgiveness*. Number your insights: 1, 2, 3, etc.

Paul is very cautious in what he says—here again we see his heart for God. God’s heart is never to discourage a person so they can never recover. Rather, reconciliation and restoration are always on God’s heart. He is the God of all comfort, the God of all hope. His mercies are new every morning, and His compassions fail not.¹²

Consider verse 5:

But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you.

It seems that the guilty man who now needs assurance of forgiveness had attacked Paul in some way, and in attacking Paul he committed an offense against the Corinthians.

Yet the matter was over as far as Paul was concerned. The majority in the church at Corinth apparently punished the man according to the rule of church order, and the man received his punishment and learned from it. What the man did we aren’t told, and Paul isn’t about to rehash it. The man’s sorrow is great enough.

Isn’t that grace? To let it go, to not continue bringing it up? This shows a true heart for God as does Paul’s instruction that they’re to forgive the person and comfort him. Why? Hear again Paul’s heart: Paul doesn’t want this man to be “overwhelmed by excessive sorrow” (2:7). Excessive sorrow over sin can demoralize a person and cripple him emotionally so that he believes he can never hope to be used of God again in any capacity.

Some of the sweetest words in the world, no matter what language, are those that say, “I forgive you.” It’s really another way of saying, “I love you with the love of the Lord,” as we can see in Paul’s instructions to the Ephesians to “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God [have a heart like God’s] . . . and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”¹³

Paul imitated Christ and forgave this man, and the Corinthians were to do the same. And they were to do it in a tangible way—not just saying in their hearts or with their mouths that they would forgive. Rather they

were to comfort him. They were to reaffirm their love for him. In other words, to go to him and let him know that they really did love him with God's agape love that desires another's highest good.

When Paul wrote Letter Number Three, it was a letter that would put the Corinthians to the test to make sure this situation was dealt with in a way pleasing to the Lord and befitting those who call themselves His followers. Would they be obedient? We'll look at this more closely when we get to 2 Corinthians 7.

This whole issue of forgiveness was not, however, just for the sake of the man who needed forgiving, but for the church who also needed to forgive. Listen to Paul:

For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes. (2 Corinthians 2:9-11)

When we refuse to have a heart for the God who commands us to forgive, then we're open targets for Satan's schemes. His devices are to divide. To cut us off from one another that he might devour us in sorrow or bitterness and to cut us off from the blessing of God that comes when we forgive as God would have us forgive.

When we don't forgive, Beloved, rest assured Satan will take advantage of our disobedience and move in like a roaring lion. Not only that, but when we refuse to forgive—as God not only commands us to do but also modeled for us in our redemption—then God will not forgive us.

I know that sounds tough and maybe not like God, but those are the words of His Son Jesus Christ in Matthew 6:14-15. Listen:

For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Sometime, maybe later today, you might want to read Matthew 18:15-35. The conclusion—the point of Jesus’ illustration—is verse 35, so don’t miss it:

My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.

And in the parable Jesus gave, what happened to the one who wouldn’t forgive? He was turned over to the torturers! This is exactly what happens when we don’t forgive—we’re tortured! Forgiveness withheld does the greatest damage to the one who refuses to give it.

When you forgive, remember and rest assured, Beloved, that this does not release the offender from the offense; they still have to answer to God. But it does release the offended. Satan will have no foothold there, because you’re being so like God.

Well, my friend, what are you going to do with what you’ve learned this week? May I suggest that we lift up our hearts to God in prayer and ask Him to cleanse us with the washing of His Word, that we might be presented to Him someday without spot or blemish.

Before God, you might ask yourself the following questions (and perhaps write the names of those whom God brings to your mind). Ask God if there is...

- anyone you need to move toward in restoring or rebuilding a relationship.
- anyone to whom you promised something and didn’t fulfill it as you should.
- anyone you didn’t deal with graciously, as God would have you do.
- anyone whom you need to forgive.
- any place where the enemy has taken advantage of you because you haven’t moved in forgiveness toward another, although the offense was not directly against you.
- anyone you need to comfort because of excessive sorrow over sin.

Whatever God shows you, Beloved, act upon it. It will bring such cleansing and peace.

MEMORY VERSES

For if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful? This is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:2-4

SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. From what we see in 1 Corinthians 16:5-9 and 2 Corinthians 1:12-18, what seems to have happened between Paul and the Corinthians?
2. What was Paul's reason for not coming to Corinth as he had planned?
3. Last week we saw an emotion in Paul—fear—that may surprise us. In 2 Corinthians 1:15–2:4, what other emotions do you see Paul experiencing?
4. Why does Paul deal with forgiveness in 2 Corinthians 2:1-11?
5. What part does forgiveness have in our difficult relationships?
6. What does Ephesians 4:32–5:2 teach us about forgiveness? How are we to forgive?
7. According to Matthew 6:14-15, what is the result of unforgiveness? What does it produce in a person's life?

APPLICATION:

8. Paul had a clear conscience before God. From what you see in 1 Corinthians 1:8 and 5:5 and in Philippians 1:6,10 and 2:16, what can we keep in mind to help us keep a clear conscience before God?

9. Briefly discuss the points in this week's lesson that can help us deal with being misunderstood.
10. How can we handle difficult relationships that will show we have a heart for God?
11. Are you experiencing a difficult relationship that is breaking your heart? What can you do about it?
12. Why is it important for you to keep your word, instead of saying one thing and meaning another?
13. Do you know of any situations in which you have said that you forgive someone, but you have continued to bring up the issue that caused the sorrow? If you want a heart for God, what must you do about this?

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1. From *The New Inductive Study Bible* (Eugene, Oreg.: Harvest House, 2000), 1794.
 2. Homer A. Kent Jr., *A Heart Opened Wide* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1982), 38.
 3. Ray C. Stedman, *Expository Studies in 2 Corinthians: Power Out of Weakness* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1982), 25-26.
 4. Deuteronomy 30:19.
 5. 1 Corinthians 1:10-11.
 6. 1 Corinthians 7:1.
 7. 1 Corinthians 7:1.
 8. 1 Corinthians 16:17.
 9. 1 Corinthians 16:8.
 10. Acts 20:2.
 11. Matthew 5:23-24.
 12. Lamentations 3:22-23, KJV.
 13. Ephesians 4:32-5:2.



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