

Our Ministering God



2 Corinthians 1—7

INTEGRATED BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

How to the get best value out of these studies...

Welcome to a new series of New Testament studies focused on the book of 2 Corinthians.

If you're using these Guides in a Small Group, it is vital that you have done preparatory work *before* you get to your meeting. This will be of great benefit not only to you, but to the other members of your group.

If you're doing these studies individually, make sure you let someone know you are doing so, and arrange a time to meet with them when you've finished (or even before) to let them know how your life is being changed by God's Word.

If you're after good commentaries or resources to complement your looking into the bible, speak to your Small Group Leader or one of the staff, and we'll try to be as helpful as possible. Most people aren't going to spend lots of dollars on theological works, so we're constantly on the look - out for good quality titles that will result in money well spent.

Always surround your time looking into God's Word with **prayer**, asking God to change your heart and life so that you – with God's people – might become more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Some background

Paul spent 18 months in Corinth (AD 50-52) establishing the church. Some time in 55-56 he made another visit, a 'painful' one (2 Corinthians 2:1) to deal with an emergency problem. He came to them again in AD 56 or 57 (2 Corinthians 13:1, Acts 20:3).

He wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia in the north of Greece after the second visit, preparing them for his third and final visit.

It seems that there were in fact four letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, only two of which have survived (those that have not were written before and after our 1 Corinthians: see 1 Corinthians 5:9; 2 Corinthians 2:3-4, 7:8-12).

2 Corinthians was written to address issues that had arisen in the church in Paul's absence, namely:

1. It seems that some Corinthians did not acknowledge Paul as an apostle, which had placed ongoing strain on their relationship and their acceptance of his authority.
2. There had been a recent arrival of new Jewish 'ministers' or 'apostles' as they called themselves, but whom Paul does not name. They believed the Mosaic covenant still had force, and argued that they had mystic abilities and gifts which Paul did not.

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Study 1 – Our God Of Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Entree:

1. When do you need comfort?
2. How do you like to be comforted?

Main Course:

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

3. How often does Paul speak of comfort in these verses?
4. Draw a diagram of who comforts and how they do so in these verses.
5. What is Paul's response to being comforted? (2 Corinthians 1: 4-7)
6. Why did Paul have to face these troubles? (2 Corinthians 1: 9-10)

7. What role do the Corinthians have in Paul's time of trouble?
(2 Corinthians 1: 11)

Take Away Value:

8. How has God comforted you in your troubles? (consider both 'big' and 'small' troubles?)
9. Do you find it hard to rely on God for comfort? Where else are you tempted to seek comfort? Do you find it easier to seek out someone or something tangible rather than God?
10. Paul takes comfort in the prayers of the Corinthians and others (who are perhaps unknown to him). How can you pray practically for others:
- family
 - friends
 - those in ministry
 - the persecuted church
 - believers you will never know

Pray for these groups and for yourself, that you will trust in God for all your needs, especially in times of discomfort.

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Study 2 – I've Changed My Mind

2 Corinthians 1:12 - 2:13

Entrée:

1. When is it hard to see a friend? What might you do instead?
2. When do you think someone should be forgiven for their sin against another person?

Main Course:

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4

3. How does Paul claim he has acted towards the Corinthians? (2 Corinthians 1:12)
4. How have Paul's plans changed? (2 Corinthians 1:15-16)
5. Why did he change his plans? (2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4)
6. Paul states that all God's promises are 'yes' in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:18-20) [See also Luke 24:25, 44-47]. Consider some of God's promises and how Christ fulfils them (eg. Genesis 12:1-3, 2 Samuel 7:11b-16, Isaiah 53:4-12, Ezekiel 37:24-28).

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7. What have we been guaranteed, by having the Spirit as a deposit? (2 Corinthians 1: 21-22)

Aside: verse 3 - the letter Paul refers to here is not 1 Corinthians, but another which has not survived (he also refers to it in 2 Corinthians 7:8-13).

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-13

8. Paul urges the Corinthians to forgive someone who has sinned against them. What are his reasons for them to do so?

Take Away Value:

9. Think about your relationships - can you claim that you have conducted yourself with holiness and sincerity from God? (2 Corinthians 1:12). If not, confess to God and seek forgiveness from others if necessary. How might you need to change?
10. These days we are more likely to use the written word (email, text) to contact people rather than a personal visit. When is this helpful? How can it be unhelpful? How can it hinder or strengthen relationships?
11. How might Satan be at work to "outwit" us, if we do not forgive the sinner?

Pray for our relationships with one another. Pray that we will be wise in the way we communicate with each other, and forgiving when we have been wronged.

8 | **Study 3 – Out With The Old, In With The New**

2 Corinthians 2:14 - 3:18

Entrée:

- 1.If you asked someone for a letter of recommendation, what do you hope they would say about you?

Main Course:

- 2.In a number of places, Paul is combatting what new 'ministers' in Corinth are saying about his ministry. What are they saying about him? (eg. 2 Corinthians 2:17, 3:1)

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

- 3.How does Paul use the language of smell in this passage?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1-6

- 4.These new ministers seem to want letters of recommendation from the Corinthians. Paul, however, claims he does not need a letter. Why? What is his real letter of recommendation?

Paul then contrasts (a different) letter (ie. the letter of the law, the old covenant) with the new covenant (the Spirit). He now goes on to explain the difference.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

In this passage Paul refers to Moses. Read about this in Exodus 34:1-11, 29-35.

5. Why did Moses need to wear a veil in front of the Israelites?
6. What is the difference between the glory of Moses and the glory of the Spirit?
7. Why are some still veiled today?
8. How are we 'unveiled' and what happens to us then?

Take Away Value:

9. If a letter of recommendation were written about our Trinity gathering, what do you think it would say? What would you want it to say?
10. How would you know if your heart was still veiled?
11. What would be signs of being unveiled?

Pray that we can reflect the living God in our gathering. Pray that our unveiled hearts will reflect the Lord's glory, and that he will unveil those hearts that are still closed to the gospel.

10 | Study 4 – Who Is This Ministry About?

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

Entrée:

1. What's hard about ministry?
2. When are you tempted to give up?

Main Course:

3. 2 Corinthians 4: 1 "Therefore...this ministry".
Remind yourself from chapter 3 what Paul is referring to here.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

4. It seems that 'new ministers' in Corinth had accused Paul of a number of things. Using the table below, list the accusations and how Paul answers them.

Accusations against Paul	Paul's defence of his ministry

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5. Look at these verses again, taking note of all the language of sight (or lack of) and light (or darkness). Where does light come from? How can we see clearly?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

6. What do you think Paul means when he refers to 'treasure in jars of clay'?
7. How do our bodies reflect the death of Jesus as well as the life of Jesus? (2 Corinthians 4: 10-12)
8. Read Psalm 116. What does "I believed; therefore I have spoken" (verse 13) mean in the Psalm? How does Paul use it here?
9. Paul is very aware of his own mortality. What keeps him going in light of this?

Study 5 – **Where Is Your Home?** | 13

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Entrée:

1. When you go on holidays do you prefer to camp in a tent or stay in a house? Which would you prefer to live in permanently?

Main Course:

In Chapter 4 Paul wrote about how our earthly bodies are perishing. He continues that idea in Chapter 5.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

2. Why do we groan?
3. Why does Paul refer to earth as a tent, but heaven as a house?
4. Why has God made us? (verse 5)
5. How do we know this will happen? (verse 5)
6. How must we live while in our bodies? (verses 6-10) Why?

7. We know we have confidence in our salvation (if we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour). What then does verse 10 mean? Why do we face judgment? How do you feel about that?

Take Away Value:

8. Do you think of your life on earth as being temporary (like a camper) or permanent (like a resident)? What makes you think that way?
9. What in your life might you need to change to be reminded that we are only 'camping in tents' here on earth?
10. How do we please the Lord? (verse 9)
11. How do you feel knowing that God will evaluate what you have done in this world? Does this change your priorities at all?

Thank God that we have a home in heaven. Pray that we will remember that we are only camping on earth and that we will keep our eyes fixed on our eternal home.

Study 6 – Reconciliation | 15

2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2

Entrée:

1. What does reconciliation mean in Australian society today?

Main Course:

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2

2. What is Paul's motivation in his ministry? (v11,14)
Contrast this with Paul's motivations prior to his conversion (Acts 8:1-4, 9:1, Galatians 1:13).
3. List the ways Paul speaks of reconciliation in this passage.
4. What does it mean to be reconciled to God?
5. How are we reconciled to God?

6. How was this message of reconciliation very personal to Paul? (see Acts 9:1-31)

7. Read Isaiah 49:8-13. What is God promising here? What is Paul claiming when he uses these verses?

Take Away Value:

8. What does reconciliation mean to God?

9. How is your view of reconciliation different from that of the average Australian?

10. We are Christ's ambassadors (verse 20). How might you explain a Christian view of reconciliation to an average Australian (who believes reconciliation is only about indigenous issues)?

Pray that our fellow Australians will realise that reconciliation to God is more important than anything else and that they will seek to be reconciled to God through Christ.

Study 7 – Ups And Downs | 17

2 Corinthians 6:3-7:4

Entrée:

1. What are some of the highs and lows of the Christian life?

Main Course:

Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-13

2. What have been some of the highs and lows of Paul's ministry?
3. How has he responded to these?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

4. Why are we to be separated from unbelievers?
 - a. How does this fit with other parts of the bible (eg. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Mark 2:13-17)
5. What is the risk if we are 'yoked' with unbelievers?

6. Look up some of the promises of God quoted from the Old Testament (Leviticus 26:9-13, Ezekiel 37:24-28, Isaiah 52:8-11). Why does Paul quote these promises here?

Read 2 Corinthians 7:2-4

7. What does Paul want his relationship with the Corinthians to be like? (also 6:11-13)

Take Away Value:

8. How do you respond to the highs and lows of the Christian life? In which situations do you find it easier to turn to God? In which it is harder?

9. How can we practically live with purity in the world without shutting ourselves off from it?
 - a. What are some times you might choose not to be involved with unbelievers?

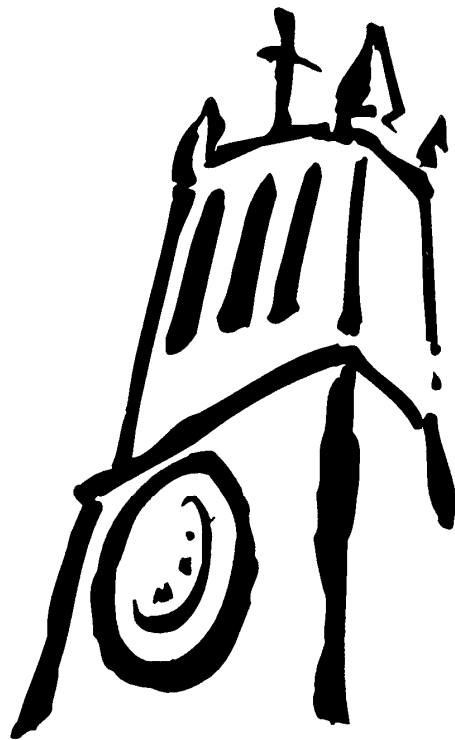
 - b. What are some times you might choose to be involved with unbelievers?

 - c. How will we know if we have made the wrong choice?

Pray that you will rely on God through both the ups and downs of life. Ask him to give you the wisdom to know when to be more or less involved with unbelievers.

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