



PACKET 3



UNFILTERED

REAL FAITH IN A FAKE WORLD

SMALL GROUP LESSONS

PACKET 3

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REAL FAITH IN A FAKE WORLD

When the Box Is Crushed

After decades in catering, I've seen it more times than I can count. A delivery shows up that we're depending on for an event, but the box is crushed, torn open, leaking, or damaged beyond use. When that happens, it's not just disappointing, it's a problem. Food that arrives damaged cannot be served. It's not fit for the purpose it was meant to fulfill. But that image has stayed with me for another reason. Because if we're honest, there are seasons when life feels like that delivery.

We show up bruised.

Worn down.

Carrying the marks of disappointment, loss, or suffering.

And we wonder, can God still use me when I feel this damaged?

In our text Paul gives us a surprising answer. When Paul defends his ministry, he doesn't point to comfort or success. He points to hardship. Beatings. Hunger. Sleepless nights. Pressure. For Paul, suffering didn't disqualify him from ministry, it authenticated it. Following Jesus did not make life easier, but it made it meaningful.

Faithful ministry is not neat and padded. It means loving people who don't yet have their lives together. It means navigating conflict instead of avoiding it. It means staying when things are uncomfortable rather than leaving when they stop meeting our preferences. Sometimes it means being misunderstood, overlooked, or stretched beyond what feels manageable.

And if we're honest, there are seasons when it leaves us feeling spent. Not burned out, but poured out. That doesn't mean something has gone wrong. It often means God is using us. The moments that cost us the most are often the ones God uses to shape lives, including our own. So when serving feels heavy, when relationships feel complicated, or when progress feels slow, we don't pull back. We stay faithful. We keep our hearts open. We trust that God is doing real work through ordinary obedience. That kind of faithfulness may not always feel impressive, but it carries eternal weight.

That matters for Village Bible Church. As we grow, reach new people, and step into harder places, the cost shows up in very real ways. It looks like longer conversations after services, not shorter ones. It looks like carrying someone else's crisis into your own already full week. It looks like volunteers serving again when they feel tired, small group leaders staying engaged when attendance is uneven, and parents choosing church over convenience when it would be easier to stay home.

My prayer for us is not that we would be protected from hardship, but that we would remain open-hearted, faithful, and courageous. May we be a church that God gladly uses, even when the box looks crushed.

ICEBREAKER

What's something that arrived damaged or defective, but you said, "I can make this work," and used it anyway?

READ IT

Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

EXPLORE IT

1. How does Paul describe his relationship to God in ministry?
2. What reason does Paul give for trying to "put no obstacle in anyone's way"?
3. How does Paul describe his ministry?
4. How does Paul describe his own heart toward the Corinthians?

APPLY IT

“Blowing in the Wind”

“... the first ten verses of this chapter are a continuation of the Apostle’s self-vindication from another point of view; they set forth his conduct and his experiences as God’s ambassador, and as a minister to whom has been entrusted the message of reconciliation. ... He is addressing weak believers, who were in danger of a lapse into heathen laxity, through making so poor an attempt to reach a Christian standard of holiness.”¹

5. In what ways can Christians slowly lower their standards or grow complacent without realizing it and how do we justify this?

6. How can we tell the difference between healthy rest and unhealthy spiritual complacency in our own lives?

¹Plummer, Alfred. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians. p. 189.

To receive the grace of God in vain means to deflect God's grace from its intended goals—in this case, the ongoing control of the love of Christ (5:14-15), the one who became sin for us (5:21). This concept involves much more than simple personal piety and appreciation of God's grace for internal needs. It broadens to include God's entire desire for world redemption.²

- 7. We often think of redemption as something God does for us rather than something He wants to do through us. How does Christ's example challenge us to carry the grace we've received into the lives of others and the world around us?**

"The Times are A-Changin'"

This exhortation receives scriptural support from Isaiah 49:8 (6:2). Paul quotes verbatim from the mainstream of the Greek Old Testament texts. He selects a passage whose context includes Isaiah's frustration in ministering to Israel (Isa. 49:4; perhaps a hint at Paul's own frustrations with the Corinthians?). Paul interprets and applies the passage spoken so long ago by the prophet: "Behold, now is 'the acceptable time.'"³

- 8. What is something you sense God calling you to address or step into right now, but you keep putting off for a "better time"?**

² Hughes, Robert B. Everyman's Bible Commentary – Second Corinthians. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1983.

³ *ibid*

The prophet promised that God would hear and help His people on a certain day. Paul applies this passage to his own day, a time when God was offering to aid His own. If God had chosen a time to bring aid, who was man to disregard the offer or be tardy in making full use of it? Indeed, it was the thought of receiving the grace of God in vain (6:1) that prompted Paul's mention of the Old Testament passage in the first place. Therefore, he urges his readers not to turn a deaf ear to God and ignore their redemption in Christ, or receive the grace of God in vain.⁴

- 9. If God's grace is available now, what does it look like to actually step into it rather than admire it from a distance?**

The Corinthians should not, and Paul tried not, to give any cause for others to stumble ("giving no reason for taking offense in anything") because of their "ministry" lest it "be discredited." Obviously we cannot prevent all criticism of our ministry, because there may be some who take offense without good reason. Still, we should do everything we can to make sure that we do not give anyone cause for justifiable criticism of us.⁵

- 10. What kinds of attitudes, behaviors, or inconsistencies can create obstacles that make the gospel harder for people to receive?**

⁴ ibid

⁵ Dr Constable's Notes on 2 Corinthians found @ <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/2corinthians.pdf>

“The Ballad of a Thin Man”

Paul is defending his ministry from critics, and he offers proof that his ministry is, in fact, valid. He says, “Here’s how you can know that my ministry is the real thing.” And what does he say? You’d expect Paul to complete his sentence — “we commend ourselves in every way” — by listing his successes. Instead, he lists his sufferings. In fact, he lists sufferings so severe that most of us would not survive even half of what he lists. Paul says that his suffering proves that his ministry is legitimate. Suffering is something every Christian should expect. Jesus suffered, and the call to follow Jesus is a call to suffer too.

There’s this lie out there that if we follow God, our lives will get better and we will suffer less. I’ve heard it out there, but I’ve also heard it right in this very church — that if I follow God, then he will bless me; that ever since I started to follow God, things have gone really well. It’s like we do our part, and God rewards us by making our life go well. The only problem: the Bible never teaches this. In fact, it teaches the opposite.⁶

- 11. What do you tend to interpret as a sign that God is pleased with you—and what do you interpret as a sign that something is wrong?**

- 12. How have you seen God at work in your life during a season that wasn’t what you hoped for?**

⁶ Sermon by Darryl Dash found @ <https://www.dashhouse.com/expect-suffering/>

“Handle with Care”

Paul invites the Corinthians to examine his life closely, knowing that real ministry cannot hide behind claims, because character is eventually exposed. He points to the manner of his ministry—marked by purity, relational knowledge of God, patience, kindness, Spirit-empowered living, and genuine love—as visible evidence that his message, motives, and life were clean and credible. His example presses an unavoidable question for every believer.⁷

- 13. For the people who know us best, does our everyday life make the gospel feel believable and appealing? Why or why not?**

“Not Alone Anymore”

Paul’s critics looked at his life and concluded that he was an imposter, as proven by his obscurity, his constant suffering, his seemingly constant chastening by God, his ministerial and relational disappointments, and his poverty, manifested by the fact that he had nothing. And yet he points to the paradoxical reality of genuineness: his being known by God, his enviable life, his profound perseverance, his joy, his enrichment of others and thus his truly enriched existence. He concludes this self-commendation, therefore, content to let his life speak for itself. His critics could say all they wanted, but his life was testament that he had been faithful and that his ministry had been favourable for the church at Corinth.⁸

- 14. Where are we tempted to judge faithfulness by outward markers rather than spiritual fruit?**

- 15. How can we regularly examine our lives before God and then trust Him to let our character, choices, and faithfulness speak for themselves over time?**

⁷ Study note by Author

⁸ Sermon by Doug Van Meter found @ <https://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/credentials-that-commend/>



Now as I pointed out last time, this passage identifies two opposing worlds. The terminology is clear. One of those worlds is marked by righteousness, light, Christ, believers, and the presence of God. The other is marked by lawlessness, darkness, Satan, unbelievers, and the presence of false gods. And these two worlds are utterly different and distinct, so much so that they are mutually exclusive.

They cannot work together in common partnership; they cannot fellowship together. They are not in harmony with one another. One is old; the other is new. One is earthly; the other is heavenly. One is deadly; the other is life giving. One is wicked; the other holy. One is built on lies; the other is all truth. One perishes and the other lives eternally.

Paul then is making it clear that believers can't live in both worlds. Certainly, John said this in his first epistle, 1 John, when he clearly identified this disparity between the two worlds with these familiar words, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Mutually exclusive worlds. You can't be in both at the same time.

Then in James we read in chapter 4 in verse 4, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God. Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." And later, in verse 8, he says, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded." People trying to live in two different worlds.

In Romans chapter 12, of course that very, very familiar passage that begins the exhortation part of Romans, "I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship, and do not be conformed to this world." Make a clean break.

When a person becomes a believer they are transported out of one world into another. And shuttling back and forth is absolutely unacceptable. And that is precisely what the Corinthians were trying to do. Having named the name of Christ, identified with Him, come into the church, they were still hanging on to their own idolatry, their old pagan ways.⁹

Imagine a boat sitting in the water - that's exactly where it's supposed to be. But the moment water starts getting inside the boat, it's in trouble. Christians are meant to live in the world. We work here, raise families here, build friendships here. But when the world's values, priorities, and loyalties start filling our hearts, that's when we begin to sink spiritually.

⁹ <https://www.gty.org/sermons/47-45/separating-from-unbelievers-part-2>

ICEBREAKER

What's one thing in your daily life (a habit, show, music, friend group) that energizes you spiritually... and one that sometimes drains or distracts you?

READ IT

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1

EXPLORE IT

1. What repeated contrasts do you notice in verses 14–16?
2. What do you think Paul means by being “unequally yoked”?
3. What kinds of partnerships do you think Paul primarily has in mind here?
4. In verses 16–18, what promises does God make to His people?
5. According to 7:1, what is the proper response to those promises?

9. How can Christians engage with unbelievers (sharing the gospel, working together, being good neighbors) without becoming “unequally yoked”? Where is the line between separation and isolation?

One of the difficult issues for every Christian to work through theologically and implement practically is the degree of separation from professing Christians and from the world. All Bible-believing Christians would acknowledge that Christians are called to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world, even as our Lord was (John 17:14-17). He Himself had that perfect blend of grace and truth which enabled Him to be the friend of sinners without becoming stained by their sin. And He has called us to be like Him. We are to be known by our love for our fellow Christians (John 13:35); yet we are to come out and be separate from evil persons and activities, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). We want to be known by what we witness *for*, not by what we witness against, and yet we must witness against certain things in order to witness for the Lord.

Historically, Christians have struggled to maintain this balance. Some, in their desire to reach out to the world, have become so much like the world that they have been swallowed up by it. Their accommodation has resulted in a diluted testimony and in great harm to themselves and to the church of Christ. Others, in their desire to maintain their holiness, have isolated themselves from the world. This often has resulted in a loss of witness to the world, misunderstanding among believers, and in spiritual pride among those who separate themselves from others.

Being sinful and fallible, we are always in danger of the peril of the pendulum. We need God’s balance and we need at all times to seek Him in His Word for guidance on these difficult matters. And we must be careful not to judge the motives of brothers who disagree with us on where to draw the line of separation, realizing that we all must answer to the Lord. We are all growing in our sensitivity to the Lord and in our understanding of these matters. We must grant our brothers the freedom to be where they are at in the growth process, while seeking to stimulate one another to further maturity.¹¹

10. Are there any relationships, influences, or environments in your life that are pulling you away from wholehearted devotion to Christ?

¹¹ <https://bible.org/article/separation-versus-cooperation-some-thoughts-limits-cooperation-other-christians-world>

11. Verse 7:1 talks about cleansing ourselves “from every defilement of body and spirit.” What might “defilement of the body” look like? What about “defilement of the spirit”?

12. Paul says we pursue holiness “in the fear of God.” How does a right view of God help us take holiness seriously?

13. Share a time when a close relationship or partnership (friendship, dating, work, etc.) pulled you in a direction that conflicted with your faith. What did you learn from it?

14. As “the temple of the living God,” how does that identity change the way you view your body, mind, time, and relationships? What one area might need more “cleansing” right now?

This passage is not saying, “Withdraw from the world.” It’s saying, “Remember who you belong to.”

You are:

The temple of the living God,

His people,

His sons and daughters,

Holiness isn’t about earning God’s love - it’s about living like the family you’re already part of.

15. **Challenge for the week: Ask God to show you one influence that is dulling your love for Christ — and take one concrete step this week to create a healthy distance from it.**

That might mean: changing a habit, reframing a relationship, setting a boundary, or removing a source of temptation.

UNFILTERED

REAL FAITH IN A FAKE WORLD

*Real Joy and
Real Repentance*

Everybody needs to repent. Whenever we hurt someone else, or we ourselves are hurt by our own actions, whenever we break a law, whenever we tell a lie, whenever we steal someone else's property or name, whenever we smear some other person's reputation we need to repent, because repentance means a change of mind, a change of attitude. This section of Second Corinthians, beginning with Verse 2 of Chapter 7, is a marvelous study on how to do that properly, how to heal and restore instead of making things worse, as many of us do when we try to bring about repentance. The opening paragraph gives the right approach, the right attitude, if you want to bring about repentance in another.

Notice that positive approach there. The apostle does not attack these people; he does not condemn them; he does not accuse them. He is very careful to do three things with these Corinthians. As you know, this letter was written after they had repented of a problem that Paul had been working on with them for a long time. He himself had gone to Corinth to try to clear this up, but had only made it worse, seemingly. Then he sent Titus there to see if he could help. While Titus was on his trip, Paul was greatly disturbed, as we will see in a moment, concerning these conditions in Corinth. But now Titus has returned and has given him good news that they have, indeed, changed their minds. There are still some things to work out, and Paul is writing now in that regard.¹²

ICEBREAKER

Think of an example where you were moving forward on something but later changed course completely (cooking, a planned purchase, schooling, etc.). What led you to pivot?

READ IT

Read 2 Corinthians 7:2-16

¹² Stedman, Ray. How to Repent. <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/2-corinthians/how-to-repent>

EXPLORE IT

1. As Paul seeks a restored relationship with the Corinthians, who did Paul say that he had wronged in verse 2?
2. In verse 5, what two problems did Paul face while in Macedonia? Then what brought him comfort in verses 6 and 7?
3. In verse 9, we see that the Corinthians' grief over Paul's very serious previous letter had a positive outcome. What was that outcome?
4. Where do godly grief and worldly grief each lead, according to verse 10?
5. Paul concludes the first major section of the letter with verse 16. What evidence is there for a restored relationship with the Corinthians?

APPLY IT

Joy from Friendship with Other Believers (7:2-7)

Verse 4 says, "I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy." *In saying this Paul is once again expressing the nature of true love, which allows him to rebuke the Corinthians freely if there is something they need to be rebuked for, and to do so as a friend. The opposite of this is when people go along with whatever is happening and pretend to be friendly to their face, when in fact what they are doing is far from praiseworthy and ought to be corrected.*¹³

6. Paul overflows with affection for these believers, despite the conflicts. What aspects of Christian relationships allow this kind of affection to persist?

¹³ Musculus, Wolfgang. Commentary on 2 Corinthians.

7. **Why can the presence of another believer like Titus be so comforting to a Christian going through afflictions, fighting, and fear?**
8. **Have you ever experienced that comfort from someone else? Who would you be willing to comfort with your presence?**

Joy from Grief that Leads to Repentance (7:8–13a)

Worldly regret is when you feel sorry for something you did because it starts to backfire on you and leads to humiliation or punishment. It's the reflex of a proud or fearful ego. Pride will always regret making a fool of itself. And fear will always regret acts that jeopardize comfort and safety. So feeling sorry for something we have done is in itself no sign of virtue. But godly regret is the reflex of a conscience that has wounded God's ego, not its own. Godly regret grieves that God's name has come into disrepute. The focus of godly regret is God.

A second way to distinguish worldly regret from godly regret is that godly regret is owing to God's Word putting its finger on sin in our lives. Worldly regret is owing not to God's Word but to the attitudes of men whose praise we don't want to lose. We can feel extremely sorry for something we have done if we detect that the people around us think it is stupid or silly or reprehensible. The word of man not God becomes the criterion of guilt.¹⁴

9. **Describe a time you experienced worldly regret. Did that experience bring much life change?**

¹⁴ Piper, John. The Good End of Godly Regret. 1984. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-good-end-of-godly-regret>

10. Describe a time you experienced godly regret. What was the outcome?

11. In verses 8-10, Paul describes their shared experience in a hard but redemptive conversation. When have you experienced a conversation like that?

What ingredients should characterize these kinds of conversations?

12. What would have to happen for you to be open to having a hard but restorative conversation in the future?

Joy from Restored Relationship (7:13b–16)

Having expressed his joy over the Corinthians' solidarity with him (7:2–7) and in their redemptive sorrow (vv. 8–13a), Paul now turns to express his joy over their embrace of Titus (vv. 13b–16). Not only is Paul himself comforted (v. 13a); he is gladdened even more at what Titus has experienced. This is the logic of the gospel at work in human relationships. Just as God's heart is to give (John 3:16–17), and Christ's central purpose is not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:44–45), the most sublime joys in Christian discipleship are found in pursuing the welfare of others. Whereas children on Christmas Eve have not yet grown up and thus look forward most to receiving gifts, parents look forward most to giving them (Acts 20:35). Paul has joy in his comfort over the Corinthians, but his deepest joy is found in Titus's joy.¹⁵

13. It's a beautiful thing to see those you love filled with God-honoring joy. Who is someone else whose joy brings you joy? What joys have you noticed recently in their life?

14. Why might the Corinthians' obedience increase Titus' affection for them?

15. Is there a relationship in your life that needs to be restored? What next step might God be calling you to, after studying this beautiful testimony of restoration possible in Christ?

¹⁵ Huges, R. Kent. *Preaching the Word, Article: More Beyond (2 Corinthians 5:1–10)*. 2012.

UNFILTERED

REAL FAITH IN A FAKE WORLD

The Heart of Generosity

“When it comes to giving, some people will stop at nothing!” Sadly, this statement is true. Numerous studies reveal that somewhere between 25 and 35 percent of Americans give nothing away to anyone. But lest we get too down on the old Red, White, and Blue, Americans give double what Canadians give and three to fifteen times as much as other wealthy, developed nations.

What about Christians? Among American Christians in 2017, giving was around 2.5 percent of income—which is rather good compared to the general population. But when we consider that Christians during the Great Depression were giving away 3.3 percent of their income, our 2.5 percent does not look so good. Evidently, having more does not mean that we are giving more. While the wealthy give the most in terms of amount, the greatest sacrifices are more often seen among those who have the least.

Consider one example. Omar is a man who has nothing in terms of worldly goods. Originally from Sudan, Omar was living in a refugee camp in Kenya. Most of the people in the camp had nothing to call their own, having had their homes and any possessions destroyed or abandoned as a result of war in their home country. Omar lived and ministered among them, making disciples, opening a church-planting training center, and starting more than a dozen churches among these destitute people. He approached David Nelms of The Timothy Initiative (TTI) about returning to Sudan to make disciples among his countrymen. David tried to warn him, telling him that the strongly Muslim country under Sharia law was not going to be happy about his making disciples there. In fact, it would be illegal. “I know,” Omar said. “They might kill you, Omar,” David told him. And with a big smile Omar replied, “I know.”

Omar went to Sudan with practically nothing. He settled in the Nuba mountains, a destitute, war-torn area, and started to share the message of Jesus. Over the next few years, he made hundreds of new disciples, who in turn started over 250 churches! Omar has been robbed, shot at, threatened, and persecuted in almost every way imaginable. But he and those with him are giving all for Jesus. Most of the people he serves do not make any money; they simply live off the land. Among those who are fortunate enough to have some kind of income, most make less than a dollar or two per day. Yet these Christians are caring for fifty orphans and sixty widows. When TTI challenged them to come up with some funds to plant more churches, they dug deep and produced \$217. This may not sound like much to most Westerners, but it is a massive amount for the Sudanese. David said that when he thinks about Omar, the one word that comes to mind is joy. Here is a man who has practically nothing, yet is giving everything he has and leading others to do the same; and the word that most comes to mind when thinking about him is joy. What sets joyful, generous givers apart from the general population? In a word, grace. Some people give only what is left over. But some people give all they have. Omar and his fellow Sudanese Christians are the latter type, and so were the Macedonians to whom Paul was ministering on his way to Corinth. Though separated by nearly two thousand years of history, the Macedonians and the Sudanese both exhibit extraordinary generosity in the midst of extreme poverty.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Casto, Trent. 2 Corinthians (Reformed Expository Commentary) (pp. 280-282). P&R Publishing, Kindle Edition.

ICEBREAKER

What do you think most reveals what a person truly values?

READ IT

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-24

EXPLORE IT

1. According to this passage, what attitudes or motivations does Paul highlight when he describes the Macedonians' generosity?
2. How does Paul describe generosity as an "act of grace," and what does that imply about its source?
3. What is the ultimate example of generosity that Paul points to in this passage?
4. What information does Paul provide about the other brothers traveling with Titus, and why does Paul include those details?

APPLY IT

Generosity Comes from the Heart

Conversations about generosity in the church often make people cringe because they can feel like a reach into our wallets rather than a reach into our hearts. Yet Scripture consistently presents generosity as a matter of the heart before it is ever a matter of the hands. A generous heart is not driven by pressure or guilt, but flows from a genuine desire to serve others and to submit to God. The Christian heart shouldn't simply be asking, "What do I get?" but "What can I give?"

As you read Paul's words to the Corinthians, pay attention to how he appeals to the heart behind generosity, emphasizing joy, willingness, and an earnest desire to participate in this act of grace.

- 5. Why do you think conversations about generosity in the church often create discomfort or defensiveness? What assumptions tend to sit beneath that reaction?**

- 6. How does the question "What can I give?" reshape the way we think about generosity?**

- 7. Paul says that the Macedonians gave out of their own affliction. How does Paul's description of their joy and eagerness challenge the assumption that generosity should only happen when it feels comfortable or convenient?**

Generosity Reciprocates Jesus' Example

“Notice how Paul always grounds everything he calls the Corinthians to do in the truth of the gospel. He says, in essence, ‘This is what God has done for you in Christ; now, therefore, here are some implications for what that should mean in your life.’ In this case, Christ impoverished himself beyond measure so that we could become rich beyond measure, and this in turn motivates us to give.

Look more closely at what Jesus actually did. Paul states, ‘He was rich’ (2 Cor. 8:9). This is not a reference to Jesus’ being materially rich on the earth. Rather, it is a reference to his position in heaven. God the Son existed long before he came to earth on the first Christmas. From eternity past, he lived in perfect fellowship and love with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He enjoyed all the glory, pleasures, and inestimable riches of heaven. Then ‘he became poor’ (v. 9). From a position of infinite wealth, Christ became poor by emptying himself of his glory (not his divinity) and coming to earth to become a servant of humanity. He impoverished himself by becoming part of a poor family, subjecting himself to the law, and enduring the temptations of Satan, as well as various sufferings in the flesh. He was betrayed by Judas, forsaken by his disciples, scorned and rejected by the world, condemned publicly by Pilate, and mocked by those who crucified him. He faced all the powers of hell and darkness and bore on the cross not only the physical torments but also the spiritual torments of the full wrath of God for our sins, becoming a curse in our place. The source of life gave up his life and was buried. He remained under the power of death for three days. That is how Jesus became poor. No one was ever richer than Jesus, and no one ever became poorer than Jesus. Why did he do this? Paul explains: ‘for your sake’ (v. 9). Jesus did it for you.”¹⁷

8. Why do you think Paul places this statement about Jesus in the middle of a conversation about generosity rather than treating it as a separate theological point?

9. In what ways can generosity become transactional in our thinking rather than a grateful response to grace? How does Paul’s framing in verse 9 challenge that?

¹⁷ Casto, Trent. 2 Corinthians (Reformed Expository Commentary) (pp. 296 -297). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

10. What might it look like for your generosity to be shaped more by what Christ has already given you than by what you feel you have to spare?

Generosity Requires Accountability

In this passage, Paul explains that generosity must be accompanied by wise and visible stewardship. As the churches give sacrificially to meet the needs of the Church, Paul does not treat those resources casually. Instead, he explains why Titus and the other brothers are involved, commending them as men of proven character who are trusted by the churches. Gifts given in grace deserve to be handled with integrity.

Paul also makes it clear that accountability serves two audiences. He speaks of doing what is honorable “not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man” (v. 21). In other words, faithfulness before God does not eliminate the need for transparency before people, so that generosity serves as a catalyst for the gospel rather than crippling it.

11. What concerns or questions naturally arise when you think about how generosity is handled within the church, and why do you think those concerns matter to people?

12. In what ways can accountability protect both the giver and the church?

13. How does generosity, when practiced with integrity and transparency, serve as a catalyst for the gospel?

Generosity is Tangible, not Theoretical

“The desire to give was a good thing, but without physically giving it was incomplete. In other words, good intentions are great, but they are not the same as true generosity. Alexander Maclaren wrote, ‘There is plenty of benevolence that never gets to be beneficence.’ There may be desire to do good, but if it does not turn into doing good, it’s no good! Goodwill is not the same as good deeds.”¹⁸

In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul will shift the conversation to the practical aspects of Christian generosity. Before we get there, take a moment to examine where your own heart is by reflecting on the following questions:

14. What fears, concerns, or assumptions tend to hold you back from practicing generosity?

15. When generosity feels difficult or costly, what do you find yourself protecting most (ie - security, control, comfort, or certainty)? What might that reveal about your heart?

¹⁸ Casto, Trent. 2 Corinthians (Reformed Expository Commentary) (p. 299). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.