



Real Faith in a Fake World

We live in a world that values appearances over realness—fakeness over authenticity. We decide who's "cool" based on what someone wears, how many followers they have, what car they drive, how popular they are, or how good they are at sports, school, or other activities. We want the world to see our best, even if that "best" isn't really us, but a version we've created to look perfect.

We do this all the time online, with TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat. Everyone is showing the best parts of their life, the perfect selfies and all smiles, the funny videos and their cool hangouts with friends. But behind the posts? Life is messy, awkward, and full of stuff **no one shows**.

We live in a world full of "curated lives," where being real and authentic is always a push and pull. It's one of the things we most want, but it's also one of the hardest things to experience. From social media to small talk at school, and even in our closest friendships, we show the world a filtered version of ourselves. And unfortunately, we don't just do this socially, we do it spiritually too.

We've become experts at using what in this series we'll call **spiritual filters**. Spiritual filters are the masks we put on to look stronger, happier, more faithful, more confident, and more put together than we really are. The world rewards appearance over reality, and it's easy to hide behind the version of ourselves we project.

But in *2 Corinthians*, the apostle Paul pulls back the curtain. Instead of pretending to have it all together, Paul is honest about weakness, fear, suffering, and his dependence on God. This letter isn't polished. It's personal. It's vulnerable—and that's exactly the point. Paul shows us what real faith looks like: faith that admits weakness, trusts God's strength, shows grace, and keeps going even when life is hard.

Unfiltered: Real Faith in a Fake World isn't just about studying Paul's words; it's an invitation to pull back the curtain in our own lives. To stop pretending. To tell the truth. To drop the act, trust the gospel, and live unfiltered lives. Real people, relying on real grace, following a real Savior.

Icebreaker

Share about a time when you pretended you knew what you were doing, only for it to blow up in your face.

Daily Devotions

Day 1 : Read It

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1–2:4.

Explore It

- 1. What titles does Paul give to God, and what does Paul say God does for His people?**
- 2. What hardships does Paul say he and his companions faced in Asia, and what does he say they learned through the experience?**
- 3. What does Paul say about the letters he has written and what he hopes the Corinthians will fully understand in 1:13–14?**
- 4. What specific actions in verses 21–22 does Paul say God has taken to establish believers in Christ, and what does He give them as a guarantee?**
- 5. As He opens up chapter 2, how does Paul describe the emotions with which he wrote his previous letter, and what was his purpose in writing it?**

Day 2 — Today's Theme: Identity Crisis

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1–2.

Last year, as we studied through the book of **1 Corinthians** in our small groups under the theme “*Firing on All Cylinders*,” we spent time unpacking Paul’s relationship with the church in Corinth. It’s been almost a year since we last walked through that book, so I don’t expect most of us to remember everything. Here’s a quick recap.

Paul planted the church in Corinth, a thriving city marked by wealth and influence. He spent about 18 months there establishing the church before leaving it in the care of local leaders. After Paul left, the Corinthians struggled with a wide range of issues: divisions, sexual immorality, lawsuits among believers, confusion over spiritual gifts, and more.

Paul’s relationship with this church was complicated, to say the least. Over the years, he wrote them **four letters** (two of which have been lost to history), giving us a window into just how messy and strained their interactions were.

Despite all the tension, accusations, and misunderstandings, Paul begins **2 Corinthians** not by scolding them, but by reminding them of who they are, God’s beloved children, called to reflect Christ in the world.

I want to make this clear right from the start: if you know that you are a sinner, and that nothing can pay for that sin except repentance and trust in Jesus Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, then you have a **new identity in Christ**. Nothing else ultimately defines you. The Bible says we belong to Him.

Paul opens his letter by reminding the church in Corinth who **he** is (an apostle of Jesus Christ) and who **they** are, as saints. In the Bible, the word “**saints**” is not reserved for a class of special or perfect Christians. The term comes from the Greek word **hagios**, which means “**holy**,” “**set apart**,” or “**belonging to God**.” So if you are a Christian, you are a saint!

Paul is helping them remember who they are, what God has done for them, and how they are called to live in light of the gospel. His letters remind us that even messy churches, messy people, and messy relationships can be redeemed when Christ is at the center.

As we step into **2 Corinthians**, it’s worth remembering that this story is not just about correction, but about restoration, joy, and the power of God’s identity-shaping work in our lives.

6. What is one thing you use to identify yourself? (athlete, sports fan, student, etc.)

7. What does it mean when Paul calls believers “saints”? What does this mean about you?

8. Paul reminds the Corinthians that their identity comes from God, not from their mistakes or what others think. How does knowing that God defines who you are through Jesus change the way you see yourself?

9. The world often defines worth by popularity, appearance, or success. How does the good news of Jesus remind us that our value doesn’t come from what the world says, but from what Jesus has done for us?

Day 3 — Today's Theme: The Comfort through the Fire

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–10.

When there's a massive forest fire, firefighters sometimes use a surprising strategy. Instead of water or fire extinguishers, they start another fire. It's called a **controlled burn**. By carefully burning a small area, they remove the fuel the big fire needs to keep spreading. It sounds wrong at first, but it works.

In a similar way, Paul shows us that God sometimes uses **pain, struggle, and affliction** in ways we would never expect. God doesn't cause suffering for no reason, but He can use it for good.

In this passage, Paul talks about a season of intense hardship. He says he was so overwhelmed that he thought he was going to die. We don't know exactly what happened to him in Asia, but we know this: it brought him to the **end of himself**. He had nothing left to rely on, not his strength, not his plans, not his confidence.

And that's where God met him.

Instead of removing the pain, God gave Paul something better—**true comfort**. Not comfort that comes from a place or a feeling, but comfort that comes from a **Person**: the Holy Spirit. God drew near to Paul in his suffering and taught him how to rely fully on Him.

That's the gospel connection. The same God who raised Jesus from the dead is the God who meets us in our pain, draws close to us, and gives us strength when we feel weak.

The truth is that God does use uncomfortable moments to grow our faith in ways we couldn't imagine.

10. The idea of a controlled burn sounds strange at first. Why do you think God sometimes allows uncomfortable or painful situations in our lives?

11. Paul says he was pushed beyond what he could handle on his own. Why do you think God sometimes brings us to the end of ourselves?

12. When you hear the word “comfort,” what do you usually think of? How is God’s comfort through the Holy Spirit different from those things?

13. How does knowing that God meets us in our struggles, not after they’re over, change the way you think about hard seasons in your life?

Day 4 — Today's Theme: The Power of Prayer

Read 2 Corinthians 1:11.

Marian was a typical student heading into end-of-semester finals. She stayed up late every night for a week, telling herself that losing a little sleep would give her more time to study. At first, it didn't seem like a big deal. But by midweek, things started to fall apart. She couldn't focus in class. She reread the same pages without remembering anything. She snapped at friends over small things. And on exam day, she blanked on material she actually knew the week before. What felt like "just an hour or two" each night slowly undermined everything she had worked for. Sleep matters more than we think. A little neglect here and there adds up.

Sadly, this is exactly how many of us treat prayer.

Paul doesn't casually mention prayer as an add-on. He presents it as the way God's power is experienced in the church. Prayer isn't just preparation for ministry, it **is** ministry! The health of the church doesn't rise or fall on talent, creativity, or strategy, but on prayer. Yet so often, we rely more on planning than praying.

Prayer is a mystery in many ways. God is all-powerful and doesn't need anything from us. Still, He chooses to involve us through prayer. Prayer isn't passive or weak; it is active dependence on God. God doesn't need our prayers to act, but He uses them to show His power through our weakness.

The simplest way to think about prayer is "**talking to God.**" It's not just sitting quietly or thinking about stuff—prayer is actually talking to Him. It's how you share what's going on in your heart: your worries, your joys, your questions, and even your mistakes. Prayer is also how you get to know God better and experience His presence in your life.

Here is 2 Corinthians 1:11, Paul reminds us that prayer is **POWERFUL!** That's why Paul says, "You must help us by prayer." He doesn't say "it would be cool if...." No, he says, "You must help!" The word he uses for *help* literally means helping carry a heavy load. Prayer isn't just saying, "I'll be thinking about you." It's like putting your shoulder under the weight when someone is stuck and can't move on their own.

This means we must commit to praying for one another. But here's the key: we can't carry each other's burdens if we don't know what they are. Prayer requires honesty, community, and a willingness to let others in.

Prayer is powerful, but only when we actually practice it!

14. Romans 12:12 tells us to be constant in prayer. What gets in the way of our praying the way we should?

15. How does knowing that prayer is talking directly to God—sharing your struggles, joys, and needs—change the way you see your own prayer life?

16. Paul says that prayer is a way we "help" others by carrying a heavy load with them. How does this change the way you think about praying for someone who is struggling?

17. Why do you think it's sometimes hard to ask others to pray for us? What does prayer require from us when it comes to honesty and community?

Day 5 — Today's Theme: Standing on Business

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12–24.

To live and work with others the way God calls us to, we need more than commands—we need a model. And Paul gives us one: *look to Christ*. The humility, unity, and selflessness he's been urging the Philippians to pursue all point back to Jesus. His mind, His posture isn't just one we admire. It's the one we're called to imitate.

And what did that look like? He emptied Himself. He took the form of a servant. He obeyed, even when it led to death. Jesus didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life for others.

Paul invites us to take the same posture: not clinging to position, not fighting for control, not needing to be noticed.

Instead, we are called to be humble, sacrificial, and obedient. **In a world where everyone wants to be a star, Jesus reminds us: real strength is choosing to be a servant.**

18. Why do you think Paul emphasizes his conscience before God rather than trying to prove himself with words or accomplishments? How does this change the way we think about integrity?

19. How do you respond when people question your choices, character, or faith? Do you feel pressure to impress, or can you let your actions match your words?

20. Paul's plans changed for practical reasons, but he stayed honest and faithful. How can we handle changes in our own plans while still keeping integrity and honoring God?

Day 6 — Today's Theme: Time to Grow

Read 2 Corinthians 2:1–4.

Starting something new can be overwhelming. Think about a new unit in school, maybe in math or science. At first, you have no idea what to expect. The lessons are confusing, the assignments seem impossible, and you're not sure how to get through them. It can feel discouraging, and you might even want to give up. (At least that was my experience in school.)

But as you keep working, slowly it begins to click. You start to understand how everything fits together. By the end, you can look back and see the progress you've made. The struggle wasn't wasted—it was part of the learning process. Growth takes time, patience, and persistence.

Paul experiences something similar in these verses. He wanted to be with the Corinthians to encourage them and help them grow, but circumstances forced him to delay his visit. That delay was painful. He didn't want them to feel abandoned or discouraged, and he felt the weight of their spiritual growth resting on his heart.

Paul's care and concern show something vital: real faith and love aren't just about immediate results or appearances—they require patience, perseverance, and sometimes enduring discomfort for the sake of others. Just like working through a tough school unit, growth in faith isn't always quick or easy. God sometimes allows delays, challenges, or uncomfortable seasons—not to punish us, but to shape our hearts, teach perseverance, and draw us closer to Him.

21. We all face delays. Maybe a test didn't go the way you hoped, a friendship is complicated, or a goal feels far away. Can you identify a situation like that in your life and how God might be using it to grow your character or faith?

22. Paul cared so much about the Corinthians that he was upset over a delayed visit. Think about yourself, your friends, teammates, or classmates. How can his example of patience and concern change the way you support or encourage the people around you?

23. What is one practical step you can take this week to make sure you are actively developing a real, authentic faith?