



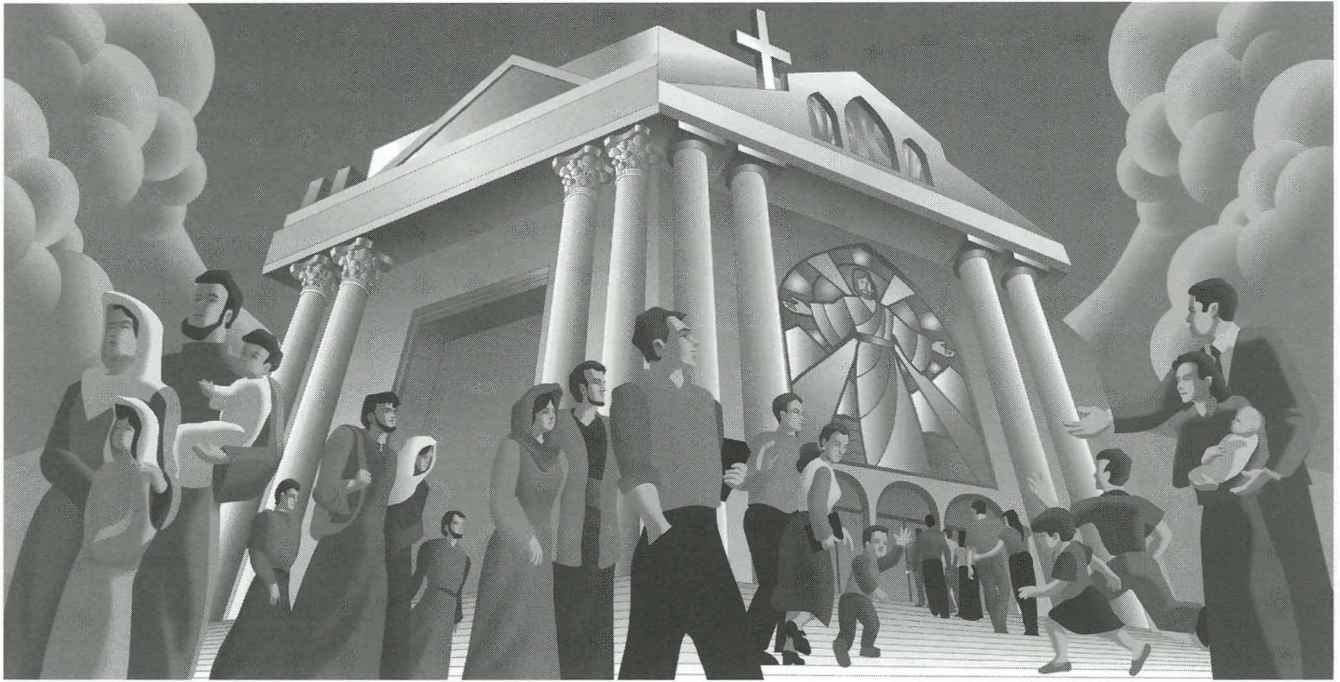
LifeLight

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4

2 Corinthians



LEADERS GUIDE



Pagan temples. Greek philosophy. A fractious, party spirit. These and other issues confronted Christ's Church in the city of Corinth. Continuing his apostolic care, and in anticipation of his impending visit, Paul sent them his second Spirit-inspired Pastoral Letter. Luther wrote, "In the first epistle, St. Paul rebuked the Corinthians severely for many things, pouring sharp wine into their wounds [Luke 10:34] and frightening them. But an apostle should be a preacher of comfort, to raise up terrified and fearful consciences, rather than to frighten them" (AE 35:383).

Depicted visually by people departing a pagan temple, leaving our former way of life is difficult. But Christ, through His cross and empty tomb, has set us free to be God's people. His Spirit "calls, gathers, and enlightens us" through the Gospel. Illustrated by the contemporary church building, we are God's new creation, because God has "reconciled us to Himself through Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:19).



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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership-team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 7.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership-team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;

- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 57.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (see p. 57);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion-leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the open-

ing of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.

2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin again!

Recommended Study Resources

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

Every Voice a Song Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

God's Comfort in Affliction

2 Corinthians 1:1–11

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

Paul found comfort in his afflictions from the God of all comfort, and Paul's own experience of this comfort overflowed into the comfort he passed along to the Christians of Corinth.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit, will

1. understand more fully the comfort we receive from God through the Gospel;
2. desire to share the comfort that overflows in our own lives as we are comforted by the God of all comfort; and
3. pass along to others in their sufferings the comfort with which we have been comforted by God.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 57.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 6.) Follow with the devotion.

Devotion

"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor Me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you" (John 16:1–4).

St. Paul begins his second letter to the Corinthians by helping them to face up to the reality of affliction. Suffering for the faith did not come as a surprise to Paul. Jesus had warned His disciples before His own suffering on the cross that they would most assuredly face opposition and persecution for the faith. And He had warned that Paul personally would face these things (Acts 9:15–16). Apparently, this same kind of persecution had fallen on the Corinthian Christians.

Today, Christians in this nation do not ordinarily face physical danger for their faith. Yet it is clear that overt ridicule and criticism of Christian beliefs are not only increasing, but many of our neighbors accept it, approve of it, and even join in! And who among us has not suffered an illness, the death of a loved one, or a disappointment without also facing the nagging question of whether our faith could endure it?

This week's lesson focuses on afflictions—personal ones and societal ones. We will see what our Lord has to say to us about all this. And, then, with Paul, who had more than his share of suffering, we will be enabled to respond, "Through Christ our comfort overflows."

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, in the midst of the suffering or affliction that I must endure, help me to see Your loving hands in the comfort that others provide to me in Your name. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

In the time of the apostles, when the Christian Gospel dawned upon the world with the brilliance of a clear sunrise and when the Church arose in the world with the freshness of a new day, all was peace and joy among believers. Right? Relationships between the apostles and those who became believers as a result of their message were always harmonious. Right? Wrong!

The picture of the Church in its earliest days that we find in Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–35, where believers enjoyed a rich fellowship and shared unselfishly their worldly resources with one another and when the Church grew at a fantastic rate, is certainly inspiring and heartening. But even in the early chapters of Acts we find misunderstanding and discord entering into the life of the Church, even among the apostles themselves! (Recall the quarrel between Paul and Barnabas over Mark recorded in Acts 15:36–41.) In his letters, Paul finds it necessary to call upon Christians to forgive one another and to bear with one another patiently (e.g., Ephesians 4:31–32).

And then we have the church in Corinth! If you have taken part in the LifeLight course on 1 Corinthians, you are well acquainted with the internal problems troubling that congregation. Not only did the believers there have disputes with one another, but Paul's relationship with them was strained severely. In 1 Corinthians, Paul deals one by one with a long list of problems at Corinth. That letter was part of an ongoing process of working through these issues, a process which included not only Paul's letters but also a series of visits by Paul's representatives and by Paul himself. In this course, we will learn more about Paul's ministry to the Christians of Corinth, a ministry in which Paul appropriately, skillfully, and patiently applied Law and Gospel.

Because of the particular problems that troubled the Corinthian congregation and because of the challenge to Paul's apostolic authority, this letter is the most autobiographical to come from the apostle to the Gentiles.

As an apostle Paul is a man in whom Christ speaks; he is the earthen vessel that conveys the treasure of the Christ. Paul is here fighting for his apostolate; that means, he is fighting for the Christ, for the apostolate is nothing less than the power and the presence of Christ

among men. Men will find the treasure in this earthen vessel, or they will not find it at all; they will behold the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ in the apostolate, or they will not behold it at all. There is nothing like this letter to bind the church to the apostolic Word of the New Testament. The Reformation's embattled emphasis on *Sola Scriptura* finds powerful justification in this embattled epistle.

Through conflict to triumph—Second Corinthians was born of conflict; and the triumph which Christ worked through it is not limited to the restoration of the Corinthian church of the first century. By it the church can triumph still.

2 Corinthians not only tells us a great deal about Paul, but it also helps us to understand the difficulties of a congregation bearing witness to the Gospel in a society that opposes it. Further, it shows how and why problems within a congregation must be dealt with in an evangelical and pastoral manner.

As we study this letter during the next nine weeks, we will consider it in three sections. In the first section (chapters 1–7), we will see how Paul deals with matters arising from his past relationship with the Christians of Corinth under the theme, "Paul's Authority and Ministry in Corinth." In the second section (chapters 8–9), we will see how Paul handles a present concern, the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. Then, in the third section (chapters 10–12), we will see how Paul prepares the Corinthians for an upcoming visit to them. As we begin now, let's review the setting in which this church found itself.

1 Circumstances Behind This Letter

A. The City of Corinth

Corinth was a major city on the Mediterranean Sea. It was located on a strip of land that connects the lower peninsula of Greece with southern Europe. This strip of land, the Isthmus, contributed its name to all other similar necks of land that separate two larger land masses; an isthmus is now any strip of land tying together two land masses and separating two seas. Its location provided Corinth with two ports, Cenchrea on the eastern sea and Lechaem on the western sea. Since ships

would have to sail a long way around the lower peninsula of Greece, goods would often instead be offloaded at one port, transported across the Isthmus to the other port, and loaded onto another vessel.

Its favorable location made Corinth a busy, prosperous city. It was a center of commerce, located at a crossroads, a place bustling with traders and travelers. At the time when Paul established the church there, the city of Corinth had a population of 250,000 free persons and 400,000 slaves. While there were many wealthy people in Corinth, the city also contained a substantial population of poor people—and it was from these that the church in Corinth was mostly—but not altogether—composed. (See 1 Corinthians 1:26.)

Corinth was a city of typical Greek culture. Established on a shelf 200 feet above sea level, it was bounded on the south by a towering rock (called the Acrocorinthus) 2,000 feet high. This rock had a summit extensive enough to permit a portion of the city to be built upon it. This area boasted structures even grander than those on the Acropolis of Athens. The city also boasted twelve temples, the most famous of which was the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. This temple prided itself on its thousand prostitutes. So pervasive was the low moral climate that the Greek verb “to Corinthianize” meant “to practice sexual immorality.”

B. The Church at Corinth

Paul founded the church at Corinth on his second missionary journey (AD 49–52). The story is told in Acts 18:1–18. Here Paul became acquainted with a Jewish Christian couple, Aquila and his wife Priscilla, with whom he stayed and with whom he worked. Later he was joined by Silas and Timothy. Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth, ministering to the people of God and becoming thoroughly acquainted with the membership and the problems of this important congregation.

During the third missionary journey, while Apollos ministered in Corinth, Paul spent his time in Asia Minor. While in Ephesus, Paul heard of problems in the Corinthian congregation, probably from the house of Chloe (about whom we have no other knowledge) and from others (1 Corinthians 1:11). In response, Paul wrote a letter that is now presumed to be lost (1 Corinthians 5:9). Sometime in AD 55, before the Jewish feast of Pentecost that took place in the spring, Paul wrote the letter from Ephesus that we know as 1 Corinthians. Timothy later returned from Corinth to Paul with a report

about how the church had received this letter.

Paul then made a second visit to Corinth (2 Corinthians 13:1–2), which he later described as “painful” (2 Corinthians 2:1). Paul had promised to return to Corinth yet again when he finished his work in Ephesus. He originally intended to visit both before and after a visit to Macedonia. However, the difficulties in Corinth necessitated a change of plans. Paul did travel northward to Macedonia by way of Troas, but before leaving Asia he wrote a letter which apparently was severe in its tone (2 Corinthians 2:4). This letter could have been 1 Corinthians, but more likely it was another letter that has not been preserved.

Paul later received a report from Titus that contained both good and bad news. The good news was that the church had listened to Paul and obeyed him regarding the man who had fornicated with his father’s wife (2 Corinthians 2:6; 7:7–16). The bad news was that not everyone had forgiven the offender (2 Corinthians 2:6), and that some still undermined Paul’s authority (2 Corinthians 1:17, 23).

C. The Writing of 2 Corinthians

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians sometime during his third missionary journey (AD 52–56). During this time, the apostle spent three years ministering to the people in Ephesus—almost directly across the Aegean Sea from Corinth. In order to prepare the congregation for his third visit to Corinth, Paul penned this letter from Macedonia in AD 55, before the onset of winter. (If we presume that two of Paul’s previous letters to Corinth have been lost, this letter would have been the fourth letter Paul wrote to this church.)

2 Salutation (1:1–2)

Paul greets the Corinthians in the typical letter-writing style of the day, but with his own personal touch. Since his apostolic authority has been questioned, Paul begins with a full-throated defense: he is an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God. His authority rests on the One whose he is and the One by whose will he carries out his apostolic office. He had used this kind of address before: “Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:1). Paul was not another common philosopher roaming from one city to another and taking whatever profit he might and leaving his pupils behind. He was also not to be confused with the traveling opportunists who wandered in

and out of Corinth. In this letter, Paul repeatedly will claim that his apostolic authority comes to him by the will of God, that he did not work among the Corinthians for his own profit, and that he did not come in his own power but in the power of the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

In spite of the many difficulties experienced by these people, which Paul will neither avoid nor condone, he still addresses the Corinthians congregation as “the church of God.” They are “saints” who have been made holy and are continually kept holy in Christ Jesus together with all who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are Christ’s holy people—people, to be sure, who have a great deal of the old sinful nature still at work in their midst, but the people of God nonetheless. Because they are God’s people, Paul the pastor will fully and freely apply both Law and Gospel to their situation.

So Paul greets them. His salutation involves a blessing that begins with the word *grace*. “Grace” means the divine favor of God, favor that is ours for the sake of Jesus Christ. To this *grace* he adds the word *peace*, the Hebrew greeting that includes a wish for health and wholeness. This kind of peace comes to us through our relationship to God by virtue of the covenant of His grace. This, in turn, brings healthy relationships between people. Grace and peace come from God our Father, who is our Father not only by creation, but also by salvation—He is our Father because He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father has made His grace and peace known.

Certainly we can be grateful for the truths expressed in these first two verses of this letter. We recognize that our wrongdoings and failings would disqualify us from belonging among the people of God. But God has extended His grace to each of us also through Jesus Christ, and, because this grace is available to us, we have peace with God. Because of Jesus, we belong among the saints who are holy to God and who by faith have received the righteousness of Christ as a gracious gift. Already in the salutation we hear the Gospel, the same Gospel Paul extends to this troublesome congregation at Corinth!

3 Comfort in Affliction (1:3–11)

Paul begins the content of his letter by giving praise to the Lord for comforting him in his affliction. He calls

God the “Father of mercies.” The word translated here as “mercies” (or “compassion”) describes the love of God in the face of misery; it is the word for God’s pity for those caught in a desperate situation. Paul also uses another word to refer to the way God has helped him. God is the “God of all comfort.” This word “comfort” or “consolation”—“paraclete” in the original Greek, is a name applied both to the Holy Spirit and to the Lord Jesus. The word in either its noun or verb form appears ten times in verses 3–7. This God comforts us in our affliction, our distress, our tribulation—any troublesome outward circumstances.

Paul speaks from experience. An unbroken chain of tribulations have fallen upon the apostle (v. 4). (Perhaps Paul has in mind the tribulations that he later details in 2 Corinthians 6:4–10 and 11:23–33.) The Lord has comforted Paul and continues to do so. As a result, Paul is able to comfort others who are also in tribulation. He shares with them the same comfort with which he himself is being comforted by God. Note the marvelous chain we find here: God comforts us in our affliction; and by being comforted in this way we are enabled to comfort one another.

Paul notes that the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives. This does *not* mean that we somehow suffer for our own sins and in this way have a share in saving ourselves. Rather, we share in the sufferings Christ experienced from the ungodly in this world—those sufferings that come to us because we are connected to Him. These are sufferings we bear for Christ’s sake. But just as we share in the sufferings Christ experienced, we also share in the abundant comfort that flows from Christ (v. 6). So Paul maintains that the Corinthians will benefit from his affliction, since the comfort he receives from Christ will flow over into the comfort Paul is able to share with them. If Paul is being comforted, it is also for the sake of their comfort and salvation.

This comes about as the Corinthians share in the same sufferings Paul experiences. Since they share in the sufferings, they also will share in the comfort. Paul uses the word *share* twice in verse 7. The Greek word is the word that we also may translate as “communion.” It means that we are partners. We take part in something with someone. The concept of such closeness, such *communion*, will become important later as this letter develops.

Paul does not write about ordinary afflictions (v. 8). When he refers to what was experienced in Asia, he no doubt is alluding to the riot which broke out in Ephesus as a result of his preaching. A silversmith named

Demetrius concluded that Paul's teaching would undermine the profits he and others derived from making small silver shrines to the goddess Artemis (Acts 19:23–41). Paul uses extremely expressive language as he explains the impact of the riot and its aftermath. Paul and those with him were heavily burdened by it—seemingly beyond their ability to withstand the pressure. They were at their wit's end. They despaired of coming out alive. But God had a purpose even in this. This conflict forced them to rely not on themselves, but "on God who raises the dead" (v. 10). As God had delivered them in the past, Paul was confident that God would continue to grant such deliverance in the future. Therefore, he and those with him set their hope on God.

On this basis, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to join in helping him through their prayers (v. 11). By supporting Paul and his colleagues in this way, the Corinthians will be helping the apostle bring to others the gift of God's grace in Christ that they themselves received. In turn, those who receive God's grace will thank God for the Corinthians and others whose prayers strengthened Paul and made it possible for him to keep on proclaiming the Gospel.

What a wonderful partnership we enjoy in the Gospel! We share with Christ and with one another the sufferings of those who remain faithful to God in an ungodly world. This, in itself, is a privilege—to join Christ in His suffering. But the benefits of that partnership go further still. We share also in the comfort, the consolation, that flows through Christ to us and through us to others. This comfort and consolation is anchored in—and leads us to—the eternal comfort and consolation of God's grace and peace in our Savior.

Conclusion

Paul begins 2 Corinthians on this encouraging note. With Spirit-inspired words, he now begins to bind up the still-painful wounds of this trouble-filled congregation. He will beckon them onward and upward along the bruising, stone-strewn pathway to the gates of God's glory. Let's follow!

Concluding Activities

Speak a brief prayer, perhaps asking God to bless leaders and participants as they journey together through this LifeLight course. Then make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 2.

The Ministry of Divine Triumph

2 Corinthians 1:12–2:17

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

Despite anxieties and pain as we serve Christ, we nevertheless participate in the divine triumph of the Gospel.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit, will

1. know that participation in the Church's Gospel ministry will involve pain as well as joy;
2. become more patient and trustful as God works through the Gospel; and
3. thank God for the wonderful privilege of having a place in the triumphant procession of the Gospel.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 59.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 6.) Follow with the devotion.

Devotion

"Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him" (2 Corinthians 2:5–8).

In this week's lesson you noted the circumstance of a crushed and broken man. It is possible that he is the same person described in 1 Corinthians, the man who had had sexual relations with his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5:1–3). Assuming that this is the same person, the Corinthian Christians had heeded Paul's strong words and had condemned the man and his actions. They had accused and chided him so severely that he now stood on the brink of despair. Apparently no one had thought to speak to him the words of forgiveness and of new life in Christ.

Thus, Paul showed his pastoral heart by asking the Corinthians to forgive, restore, and love him. In this, Paul was reflecting the loving heart of our Savior.

Yes, God hates sin and calls sinners to repentance. But God doesn't leave us there! In fact, the sharp "No!" of God's Law is always preparatory to what God wants to say even more clearly and emphatically—the clear Word Paul calls "God's Yes." That "Yes!" is as clear as a man hanging on a cross. It is as certain as Easter's empty tomb. It is God's "Yes!" spoken to every sinner: "Yes, I love you! Yes, you are My child and heir. Yes, the Holy Spirit lives in you. Yes, you are accepted and enabled. Yes!"

This is why Paul, in the name of Christ, could say, "Forgive and comfort him." And by God's grace, those words of "yes" are spoken to us and through us to other sinners. So, with Paul, we say, "Amen," for the glory of God.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You that through Jesus Christ You speak Your word of "Yes" to us, and help us to extend that word of grace, forgiveness, and acceptance to others. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Ministry can be painful. Christ's own ministry had been painful to Him. We think at once of the physical pain He suffered. He submitted Himself to an excruciating death—a slow, tortured death on the cross. But Christ also suffered anguish of soul. He cried out in that anguish as He suffered the wrenching separation from His Father. Remember His words? "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). The heavenly Father withdrew from His Son, the Sin-Bearer.

Christ's suffering did not begin on the cross. He felt the pain of disappointment when some would no longer follow Him because they had no stomach for His teaching, the truths that He patiently explained and that had finally dawned upon them clearly. We can hear the disappointment in His voice as He turned to His disciples and asked, "Do you want to go away as well?" (John 6:67). We hear the sadness in Jesus' voice when He wept over His people's rejection of Him, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! See, your house is left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:37–38).

Yes, the Savior knew pain of the heart as well as pain of the body. And so did His disciples and apostles. Paul knew bodily pain; he refers to it in 2 Corinthians 1:8–9 and talks about it at greater length in 6:3–10 and in 11:23–33. But Paul also knew heartache caused by those he loved. Much of our study this week has dealt with that heartache.

But, even in the pain of the body or heart, Paul exulted. He knew triumph. He rejoiced that God brings victory out of suffering, just as He had brought victory out of the suffering of Christ Himself. Paul concludes the section we studied this week by thanking God for giving him a part in the Lord's ministry of triumph. Let's look at that more closely for the next few minutes.

1 Paul's Conduct toward the Corinthians (1:12–14)

How frustrating it is to be misunderstood! How irritating it is to be misinterpreted! Yet Paul had to endure the malice of people who misinterpreted his letters and who read things into his life. Every one of these people

ought to have been able to see otherwise. In response to such spiteful behavior, Paul appealed to his conscience. Paul's boast, the testimony of his conscience, was that he had conducted himself in the world—in his public activities and especially toward the Corinthians in his private dealings with them—in a manner that could stand up to God's own scrutiny.

One phrase of verse 12 in the English Standard Version reads "with simplicity and godly sincerity that are from God." Paul means that he has served the Corinthian believers without hypocrisy, without ulterior motives. In the clear light of day, his actions will pass God's inspection, not because Paul had tried so hard to develop these godly attitudes in himself, but because the grace of God had been at work in him. The foundation for his "boast" is not fleshly ("worldly") wisdom, but rather, the grace of God.

In reference to his conduct, Paul not only appeals to the integrity of his conscience, but he also appeals to the Corinthians' firsthand knowledge of that conduct among them. Paul writes only what the Corinthians can observe in his life, which they can take at face value. They can test his words by their own personal experience with him. In verse 13, Paul inserts a play on words. We cannot easily translate this into English, but in Greek the words translated "read" and "understand" are very similar. Paul is writing about something the Corinthians can both read and understand; there is no need to try to read between the lines.

If some in Corinth were getting only part of the message about Paul, it was because false apostles among them had distorted his clear statements. Paul hopes that his readers will understand him fully and thoroughly. Then (v. 14), when the Lord comes again, the Corinthians will be able to point to Paul's work among them because he brought them the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins. At that time, too, Paul himself will be able to point to the Corinthians as evidence that he has fulfilled the commission God gave him, and, in view of that evidence, the Lord will say to Paul "well done."

What a joy to any pastor to be able to say what Paul has said in defending his ministry to the Corinthians! To be able to appeal to a clear conscience concerning work that has been marked with holiness and sincerity, work that can stand up to God's inspection! To be able to point to the faith and growth in grace of a faithful flock! What a blessing!

2 The “Sore Spot”—Paul’s Change in Travel Plans (1:15–22)

Paul knows that he has dealt faithfully and truly with the Corinthians—and thinks they know it, too, if they would but be honest with themselves. However, he faces the charge that he has been less than trustworthy. He now deals with that charge, that sore spot.

Some in Corinth had charged that Paul could not be trusted, that his word was not to be taken at face value. Here was the bone of contention: Originally, Paul had planned a single visit to the congregation (1 Corinthians 16:5). But then he had altered his plans to include a double visit, by which the Corinthians might benefit twice (v. 15). He had reached this decision as the result of careful deliberation, after weighing all of the possibilities. He planned to cross the Aegean Sea from Ephesus, landing directly at Corinth. After a brief stay in Corinth, he would go to Macedonia, and then return to Corinth so that the believers in Corinth could send him on his way to Judea with funds and supplies. Apparently, Paul had announced this double visit to the congregation, perhaps in a letter that we no longer have today, or perhaps by personal messenger.

Now, however, Paul had decided to revert to his original plan. Apparently, a serious situation in Macedonia demanded his immediate attention. There was “fighting without and fear within” (7:5). So his plans had been revised; he would first go to Macedonia and then to Corinth. Perhaps also Paul wanted to give the Corinthians time to work through their problems on their own so they might grow from the experience.

Whatever Paul’s reasons for the changes, the troublemakers at Corinth used the apostle’s change in plans as an opportunity to discredit Paul. They charged that he made his plans like a worldly man, prone to straddle the fence, trying to say yes and no at the same time (v. 17). But Paul was not double-tongued or irresponsible as they accused him of being—no more than the Gospel of Christ Paul had preached was untrustworthy. God does not vacillate when it comes to keeping His promises (v. 19). All the promises of God find their “yes,” their fulfillment and affirmation, in Christ. This is why the Church responds with an amen and gives glory to God.

Turning his detractor’s slander into an opportunity to accent the Gospel, Paul reminds the Corinthians that God gives a sure and certain salvation to all who are in Christ (vv. 21–22). Because of Christ (literally, the

Anointed One), God has anointed us, marked us as His own, and placed His own seal upon us.

The picture Paul paints here is one of Holy Baptism. In Baptism, God anointed us with the Holy Spirit, just as He anointed Jesus in His Baptism. Furthermore, in Baptism, God has claimed us as His very own people. The Holy Spirit has come to live in us. His presence in our hearts is God’s “guarantee,” His “deposit,” His “down payment,” His “pledge” that He will finish the work He has begun in us. The word refers to earnest money to indicate sincerity in following through on a contract. The Holy Spirit is God’s earnest money, the guarantee of His determination to carry through on the promises given to us.

What certainty and security God gives us in the Gospel of Christ!

3 The Reason for the Change (1:23–2:4)

After exposing the false charge that he was indecisive, Paul explains why he had changed his mind. He invokes God as his witness that he delayed his visit to them for the Corinthians’ good, to spare them. In giving this explanation, Paul displays a genuine pastoral concern. He is not “lording it over” the Corinthians. He does not wish to dominate them by the sheer weight of his authority. Paul desires to work with them for their joy because they stand before God on the basis of their faith. Paul wishes to encourage and strengthen that faith. Paul the pastor seeks to train his congregation to use God’s grace to stand on their own feet.

Paul could have used his apostolic authority and ordered the Corinthians to fall into line or else. This might have brought quicker results, but it might also have retarded their spiritual growth. Paul wanted the members of his congregation to grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, to become mature in their faith, to be responsible men and women in Christ.

Paul struggled with the decision to let them work out their own problem (v. 4). He wrote this letter “out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears.” He did not want to cause them pain. Rather, he wanted them to know his great love for them. Paul the pastor is here at work, with a compassion and love for the people entrusted to his care—a compassion and love he has himself experienced from Christ Jesus.

Pastors and other Christian leaders and counselors learn

the value of the same path taken by Paul. Oftentimes it seems easier to step in and make decisions *for* others. It looks more efficient and effective. But little or nothing will be learned by the one who is being “helped.” Wise counselors provide guidance; they teach the kind of skills that will please God. But they let those they help make their own decisions and accept responsibility for those decisions. In this way, the one who is being helped also will be better prepared to make future decisions.

4 Dealing with the Repentant Sinner (2:5–11)

Paul now takes up a situation that has disturbed the congregation and where the congregation needs additional encouragement to bring it to a good conclusion. While he does not identify the situation precisely, we have every reason to link this section with the case of incest that Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians 5:1–5. In that earlier letter, Paul expressed his dismay that the congregation had done nothing to discipline the offender. He directed the Corinthians to expel him from the church—just as Paul himself had already done as if he were among them. Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 2:5 that the whole congregation, not just Paul himself, had been hurt by the offense. Here we have the reminder that when one believer suffers, all suffer; when one part of the body suffers, the whole body experiences it.

But now this man has been brought to repentance, and it is not enough that the *majority* should extend forgiveness to him (v. 6). Rather, *all* must do this (v. 7). This must happen so that the repentant sinner does not become overwhelmed by excessive sorrow, so much sorrow that he is swallowed up and devoured by it. Forgiveness by all does not belittle the man’s sin; instead, it underlines the grace of God that is ours in Christ. When a sinner has been brought to his knees, we are not to give the sinner an extra kick. No! When one is struck by the terrors of conscience brought about by the Law, then we must proclaim the grace of God in Christ Jesus without any conditions.

Paul himself sets the example in dealing with the sinner, just as he had done before. When the sinner had been unrepentant, Paul had pronounced his judgment on him (1 Corinthians 5:1–5). This man was to be delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Now, however (v. 8), the congregation must solemnly confirm its love to the repentant brother.

The congregation is being put to a test. The question is not if they would obey Paul, but if they would act on the basis of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The man who, while unrepentant, had been given over to Satan is now to be snatched back and preserved from the devil. Our Lord does not want His children to become the victims of Satan; we are not (v. 11) to be outwitted or defrauded by him. Satan is to be taken seriously, because we are not ignorant of his designs, his plots against the people of God—including his schemes to cause sinners to despair of God’s grace!

We all need to learn this lesson well. We must not only be ready to condemn and expose sin so that those who are committing it see it for what it is, in all of its horror. But when sinners repent of their sin, we must also be ready and eager to restore them as dear brothers and sisters re-won for Christ and preserved for His kingdom. After all, Christ’s kingdom is entirely filled with reclaimed sinners—beginning with us!

5 God Provides the Triumph (2:12–17)

Paul had found relief from the extreme anxiety he had experienced about the church in Corinth. Beginning in 2:12, he tells us about how that happened. Apparently he had sent Titus to Corinth to see how the congregation was doing in all their struggles. He had arranged to meet Titus in Troas, where he would receive a full report. But when Paul arrived there, he did not find Titus. That made Paul uneasy! Corinth, after all, was a key city for the advance of the Gospel.

Thus, even though Paul found an open door for the Gospel in Troas, it would have to wait. He had to make the Corinthians aware of his deep concern for them, so he went to Macedonia. What happened there Paul recounts beginning in 7:5.

But even before telling us about the relief he received in Macedonia about the Corinthians, Paul breaks into fervent thanksgiving to the Lord for giving him a part in the triumphant advance of the Gospel. God, Paul says, always leads us in triumph in Christ (vv. 14–16). In these verses, Paul calls up an image from his own times. The “triumph” was the celebratory procession granted by a Roman Caesar to a victorious general. The smell of flowers and garlands and incense would fill the air. To the vanquished prisoners marched along in disgrace or carried along the route in cages, all these scents were the smell of death. But to the victors it was indeed a sweet aroma. In the same way, the Gospel is Christ’s triumph.

To those who are being saved, this Gospel is the fragrance of life leading to life!

Proclaiming the Gospel is a marvelous privilege—and an overwhelming task. Who is equal to it? We receive it only by God's grace. Yet, Paul notes (v. 17), some brashly take up the cause of the Gospel as if it were merchandise. They try to sell it at a profit. Paul and his coworkers were not "peddlers" of God's Word. The term refers to a huckster, even a shyster, one who deals in cheap merchandise, one who has the intention of making an unworthy profit, who handles his business deceitfully. Paul and his colleagues were not "peddlers." No, they were men whose actions would withstand the light of day, men sent by God, who with God's ever-present help speak the Word of Christ, in Christ's name.

Here is counsel for the Church today, and especially for those who hold the office of the public ministry. The Church must be above reproach. Our dealings must stand up under scrutiny. We are not hucksters of the Word of God; we are people who speak the very Word of Christ. Here on earth we will never reach perfection. Our motives and actions will never be completely pure this side of heaven. The evil one will continue to tempt and harass us. We will live together as God's people, warts and all.

But by God's grace, we listen to the Law of God, we repent of our sins, and we appropriate the full forgiveness and blessing of the Gospel for those sins. Then, and only then, are we fit to be those who speak to the world in the name of Christ.

Conclusion

Problems? Anxieties? Even pain? Yes, we still experience such things today, just as Paul himself did. Ministry has not become easier. But neither has it lost its share in God's triumph. We also take our place in God's victory parade, as the Gospel makes its way through the world into the hearts of those who will be saved. What a marvelous privilege is ours, also—a privilege that is worth the pain!

Concluding Activities

Speak a brief prayer, perhaps for the pastors and other church workers who serve the churches of the LifeLight participants. Then make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 3.