LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

2 Corinthians 2

A test of your love

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · November 15, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

2 Corinthians chapter 2. Open your Bibles there please. As we get into chapter 2, the Apostle Paul is still in the middle of talking to the Corinthians about why he changed his plans about coming to Corinth. It was just a real big issue. His change of plans had generated a fair amount of criticism from the I don't like Paul group, and there was apparently somebody that was behind it that was really kind of fanning the flames of this whole thing.

And so Paul felt the need to explain his reasons. We're going to start by reading verses 1 through 11. 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verses 1 through 11. Follow along as I read. It says, For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you.

For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? And I wrote as I did so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice. For I felt sure of all of you that my joy would be the joy of you all. For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you. 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. For this is why I wrote that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive.

Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ so that we would not be outwitted by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his designs. Let's stop there for now. Let me pray as we get into this. Father, we thank you. We thank you for your Word tonight.

We thank you, Father, for the wisdom that it brings. And we thank you for the grace that your Holy Spirit brings to us that we might lay hold of what you have for us tonight, the message that you have for us. Guide us, we pray. Direct us by your Spirit. Open our hearts.

Open our eyes. Open our ears. We ask this, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, as I said, Paul had promised originally two visits to the Corinthians, but after making his first visit, which was very painful, he decided not to come the second time.

And because of that, he came under severe attack, which is why he explains in verse 1 what his reasoning was. He said, I didn't want to come and just have another rotten visit. You know, rotten visits are terrible. And this visit had been bad, and he didn't want to repeat it. He wanted to see things get resolved so that when he did come to Corinth, he could have a good meeting with them.

And so he said, in fact, he says in verse 2, if all I do is come and cause you pain, then, you know, who's going to make me glad? Certainly not you, because you guys are going to be in pain. So instead of visiting them as he promised, he decided to write a letter. And he sent that letter by the hand of Titus, and it was a letter challenging the Corinthians to take action against whoever was the chief troublemaker and causing the most problems, the criticism and the division that went along with it. And he speaks of that letter beginning in verse 3.

Look with me in your Bible. He says, and I wrote as I did, and he wrote severely, so that when I came, I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you that my joy would be the joy of you all. And then he goes on to explain. Verse 4, he says, I wrote you out of much affliction, and anguish of heart, and with many tears. And he says, I didn't write to cause you pain, but I just wanted you to know how much I love you.

You know, this was a tough love letter that Paul had to write to the Corinthians, and he had to confront them, and he had to challenge them to take action against people that were causing divisions. And this is something that's very, very difficult for church leaders sometimes to talk about, because your heart as a pastor, as a leader is to protect the whole, the flock. And yet there are times when people just get weird, and they cause all kinds of drama. And that drama can just really take its toll on a fellowship. So, although, you know, a pastor is usually going to sit and try to just maybe see if that'll die down on its own.

If it doesn't, eventually, he may have to take action. Now, in the situation of the Corinthian church, Paul wasn't there. And, you know, we don't even know in his absence who was really kind of leading, necessarily. He obviously sent Titus to offer some pastoral guidance. But so here's, this is a hard situation.

Paul knows that there is division and criticism and backbiting going on in the church, but he's gone. And so all he can do at this point is just write a letter and kind of confront them about it and tell them what he thinks they ought to do. And from what we can gather, and you know, we've talked about this. We've talked about the fact that when you read these New Testament letters, it's like listening to one side of a phone conversation. So we have to gather what we can to understand what was going on.

And what we gather in this, in Paul's letter here, is that he wrote them a letter, again, sent by the hand of Titus to essentially challenge them to call out that person who was leveling all this criticism. And he challenged the church to not only rebuke this person, but to also bring about some kind of church discipline. And he now, as he goes on in verse 5, he speaks about the person who was behind all the criticism. Look what he says in verse 5. He says, now if anyone has caused pain, he's caused it not to me, but in some measure, not to put it too severely to all of you.

In other words, what Paul is saying there is, though the criticism had been aimed at him, and it was personal to Paul, Paul is saying, this has had a negative impact on all of you. It's affected all of you. And that's often, again, like I say, the way those things work. Often in the church, there might be a rift. Some people just decide they don't like the pastor anymore, or we don't like this person, or that person, or something.

And they start making a stink, and it kind of spreads. And that's often what happens. It can spread throughout the whole fellowship and begin to affect the whole body. And that's what he's kind of saying there. You know, he says, this person hasn't just pained me, it's pained all of you.

And so, again, apparently Paul challenged the fellowship to bring some form of church discipline, and they did comply. We're going to find out. You know, they complied. He's going to talk more about that in the coming chapters, but I want you to look now at what Paul says, knowing that they complied. Because Titus had brought back word, and he's going to talk about that later too.

Titus had brought back word. He said, hey, you challenged the church to do something about it? They did. They did it. And they did what you asked them to do.

So now Paul says in verse 6, 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. And he goes on to say, so I beg you to affirm your love for him. And I love this. I like this, because this is somebody who hurt Paul deeply.

It was a very personal attack on Paul's character, and Paul's heart, and Paul's ministry. And yet Paul is now encouraging them to love him, to reach out and love this guy. And he says, you know, we don't want to see this guy given to excessive sorrow because of the discipline that was brought by the majority. And then Paul goes on in verse 9 to say, you know, there was more here going on than just church discipline. Look what he says in verse 9.

He says, for this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. In other words, I wrote my letter, not just that you had learned to handle issues within the church, in the church, because the body of Christ needs to learn to handle issues. If you hear somebody gossiping, you need to handle it. You need to speak to that person. You need to say, wait a minute, that's gossip.

That's wrong, and that's for you to do. The body of Christ needs to be actively involved in dealing with these kinds of things. And Paul says, you know, I wrote this letter to see if you would do something about it because I wanted to test you. I wanted to see how willing you are to protect the integrity of the fellowship from these areas of difficulty and division that are rising up in your midst. And so he's telling them flat out, this was a test.

This is a test. Now, I don't know about you, but I always hated tests. Actually, I still hate tests. I hated them in school. The worst words I ever heard was the teacher say, take out your books, put them under your desk, take out a piece of paper and a pencil, and number it one to 10.

I was like, oh, Lord, I hated tests. I'm still not terribly fond of them as it relates to the tests that we receive even from the Lord. But they are a reality because God does test us. He doesn't tempt us, but he does test us. You might recall that Abraham was a man who underwent a very severe test.

Here's a man who was promised an heir from his own body, and he waited about 30 years for that promise to come to pass. And so here's Isaac, the son that Abraham just loves with all of his heart, and then God speaks to him. Let me put this on the screen from Genesis 22. Check this out. After these things, God, look at this, tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, he said, here I am.

He said, take your son, your only son, Isaac, look at this, look at this, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains on which I will tell you. Can you even imagine hearing those words? Can you even imagine? God saying, take your son, the son that you adore, and sacrifice him to me. I trust you know how that story goes.

The Lord was testing Abraham to see how obedient, and he went all the way. You know, God wouldn't obviously do that test today. That's not gonna happen. You'd be in jail before anything else really went down. But it was a test for Abraham.

It was a test that fit his time period in which he lived, and it was a test that God gave, even though it was painful. In the Psalms, check this out, David wrote, the Lord tests the righteous. Have you had a test going on in your life lately? You may not have even recognized it as such, but when we go through difficult seasons, when we go through situations where we're forced to make a decision about whether we're gonna walk with God, or whether we're gonna just blow him off, many times that's a test, a test from the Lord to see what you'll do. Check out what James says.

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. The key there is remaining steadfast under trial. Trials are hard. Like I said, I hate tests, I hate trials. I hate that kind of stuff, I really do.

When you're in, you get done with it, and you can talk about it freely, and you can tell people, wow, that was a rough one. Went through a tough situation. You know, the Lord was really testing my heart and stuff, and you can talk about it, but boy, when you're in the middle of it, ugh. So here's the question. Why does God test us?

Why does he do that? Is God trying to figure out what's in your heart? No, he knows what's in your heart. He sees your heart, he sees into your heart like you see through a pane of glass. He has no difficulty seeing what's in your heart.

God tests us so that we will know what's in our hearts. And once we figure that out, once it's revealed to us, we can then bring it to him. And I'll be honest with you. Sometimes we fail the test, you know? I'd love to think that all of us were just like Abraham, and we were completely and totally steadfast, whatever the issue, but that's just simply not the case.

We fail, we fail sometimes. But you know what? That failure is what often God uses to bring about the purpose of his will in our lives. You know, I think about Peter. Mister, I'm confident, you know, during the last supper, Jesus is saying, you know, you guys are all gonna desert me tonight.

And Peter said, Lord, you named me Rocky. I'm the rock. I ain't going anywhere. These guys, maybe, not me. And here's what Peter said.

I'm ready to die. Jesus said, well, the fact of the matter is, it's even gonna be a little worse with you. You're gonna deny you even know me three times. Before the sun rises, you'll have denied me three times. That's a painful trial that Peter went through.

Very, very painful, very challenging, very difficult. But it was critical. It was critical to Peter in his growth. Because, you know, up to that point, Peter had been, like I said, he'd been the guy who, you know, he'd shoot off his mouth at the drop of a pen. He'd make braggadocious claims about this and that and the other thing.

You remember what happened the night Jesus was arrested. All Peter, you know, did was cut off somebody's ear. He didn't even know how to handle a sword. And he was ready to fight. Jesus had to even clean up that mess.

But, you know, the Bible says that after Peter denied the Lord three times, it says he went away and he wept bitterly. Because, you see, Peter desperately needed to learn what kind of a man he really was. Because he had this elevated and rather inflated view of himself. I'm gonna, I'll die with you tonight. No, he wouldn't.

He wigged out. When a slave girl asked him if he was a follower of Jesus. No, I don't even know the guy. He lied to a servant girl. So, see, this is Peter.

This is the real Peter. He needed that test. You understand, Peter needed that test in order to become the man he was gonna be, which was gonna be a pillar in the church, along with the other apostles. He needed that test to learn the kind of a man he really was. And that's what we also need to learn.

That's what we also need when God allows testings and trials to come into our lives. Because he wants you and me to grow up into Jesus Christ, his son. That we would exemplify, or we would model what we see in him. And many times, that doesn't happen until we learn who we really are and how weak we really are. And that's what Peter had to learn that night.

You know, he saw himself as a big, strong rock. And he had to learn that he was a little, tiny pebble. But once he learned the lesson, he could go on and be Peter, the man that God intended him to be. So, when God tests us, and those testings reveal who we really are, we then humbly bring that back to the Lord, and we say, Lord, this is me. This is me.

I thought I was something better than this, but I'm not. And you knew that all along, and you loved me anyway, but I bring you this. I bring you what I am. I bring you who I am. And I ask you to make me into the person you want me to be, amen?

So important. Paul goes on in verse 10, he says, "'Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive.'" He says, "'I do so in the presence of Christ.'" And he says, this is why we're going to do this, guys. This is why we're going to forgive. This is why we're going to restore this person who has been so divine. and so hurtful, and so critical, and has caused so much damage.

Here's why we're going to do this, you guys, because we're not ignorant of the designs of Satan. That's why. You know, people people ask one of the more popular questions that Sue and I get is whether or not we should forgive if somebody, if the person who hurt us, hasn't repented. I think we even covered that maybe while we were here the other night, and as Paul says, we don't want to be outwitted by Satan. You don't want to hold back.

You know, listen, Satan's pretty smart, and he's got a lot of tricks in his arsenal that he can level against you and me, and we got to be so careful. Even when somebody's hurt us, we need to forgive. We need to bring it before the Lord. And if you can't, and I've had people say that to me, Pastor Paul, I cannot forgive this person, and I'm like, I know. Yeah, cool.

But God can do it in you and through you. Are you willing to let him do it? Are you willing to let him do that work in your heart of forgiveness for that person? See, that's really the issue. The issue isn't whether you can forgive or not.

God is never surprised when you have a hard time forgiving somebody who's hurt you. He's never sitting back going, well, what's the deal here? He knows exactly what's going on. The issue is, are you willing? Are you willing to come to the Lord and say, Father, this person hurt me deeply, and I know you've told me in your word that you want me to forgive, but I can't.

In my flesh, I can't do it. I don't have what it takes. But I know that you can do it in me and through me, and I'm willing to let you do that. Are you willing to pray that prayer? You might say, well, why should I?

Well, because we're not ignorant of Satan's designs. And we know what he can do to exploit unforgiveness. And it can easily become anger, and that can easily turn into bitterness, and bitterness will literally poison your life and those around you. It's one of the worst things. We do not want to be outwitted by the enemy, and we know that he's coming, you know, to take us out.

You know, Jesus said this about Satan. He said he was a murderer from the beginning. Did you ever hear that? You remember that? You remember him saying that?

He said Satan was a murderer from the beginning. You know what that tells you about Satan? He isn't just coming to give you a bad day. He's coming to murder you, and that means to destroy anything about you that he possibly can. Now, here's the deal.

If you're in Christ tonight, there's a... Satan can't just waltz into your life, okay, and do what he wants. But you can give him a foothold, and that's why Paul said elsewhere, don't give the devil a foothold. I always thought of a foothold in my mind. I thought of it like a stirrup on the side of a saddle.

You know, you don't want to let the enemy be able to put his foot in a stirrup of your own making so that he can swing his leg over your back and ride you for all your worth. You don't want to let that happen. So Paul says, don't give the devil a foothold. Don't give the devil a foothold. Well, how do you give the devil a foothold?

Well, I don't know. Unforgiveness is a great first step. You know, so why are we doing this? We're doing this because we understand there's an enemy who wants to take us out, and we're not going to play games here with words about, you know, well, but that person hasn't repented. How much do you care about, you know, the enemy's potential to wreak havoc in your life?

So, what we see in these verses is kind of a two-pronged approach from the Apostle Paul concerning issues of sin in the church. First, he reminds us that overt and clear violations of God's Word should never be ignored. That's the first thing he's kind of telling us. You can't ignore this stuff, right? And you certainly can't condone it.

If something's going on, you know, you don't ignore it and you don't condone it. But second thing that we learn here is that the goal of any action of discipline that we may bring as a church or that you may bring as an individual towards someone because of sin always has the goal of restoration. That's what we learn in these verses. The goal is not just to make somebody sad. The goal is that they'd be restored.

You know, there's a passage where Paul talks about turning someone over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, but he goes on to say that his soul might be saved. Even in a situation that is so radical that you would turn someone over to Satan, the goal is still restoration, salvation, you know. And remember, again, restoration is needed both for the individual's sake as well as to keep Satan from exploiting it. If a person is never restored, bitterness can easily enter into their heart, and this has happened. Let me show you what the writer of Hebrews says about this.

He says, See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God that no root of bitterness springs up. He says that it causes trouble. And by it, many become defiled. When somebody has a root of bitterness, it spreads, and many, many people can be hurt by that. Since we're talking about church discipline, can I just say something about church discipline to you?

In my years as a pastor, I have rarely, I have to tell you, found anything quite so difficult. I have rarely, I have to tell you, found anything quite so difficult as bringing church discipline. And here's why. What makes it so difficult is how badly the body of Christ has been fractured over the years. What I mean is when or if a church responds to someone who is caught in sin to the point where they refuse to repent, and they want to parade their sin in front of the body of Christ, and the leadership of the church decides they need to confront that person, and so forth, it's just too easy today for the person who is living in that sinful, unrepentant lifestyle to just leave and just go find another church where they can kind of blend in, you know, in the back of the room.

There's plenty of churches that are large enough that they can slip in through the back door and sit in the back and kind of keep a low profile, you know, and blend in. And I'm just not going to let anybody know anymore like I did with this other church. They rebuked me for it, so I'll just leave them, and I'll go over here where I can just kind of keep to myself and that sort of thing. And it happens. We had a gal in Ontario in our fellowship who had divorced her husband for what was unbiblical grounds.

I mean, grounds not, you know, given in the Word of God. She just divorced him because she didn't want to be with him anymore, and he was a nice guy. And so we sat her down, and we said, listen, remarrying is not an option for you. You need to understand that. And she sat and nodded, and then promptly went to another church where she could have a boyfriend and eventually remarry.

And that's just common. It just happens. So you see, church discipline has really lost its ability to be, frankly, all that effective, I'll be honest with you. Now, in Ontario, we did have an email group, and that helped a little bit. There was a group of that all of us kind of were part of an email group, at least the evangelical churches, most of them.

And if somebody left our fellowship because of reasons like that where they'd been confronted and they just left rather than responding to the, you know, the confrontation, we could email the other pastors in town and say, hey, just be aware. You know, this person is like living in sin or doing this or that or the other thing, causing division, whatever the thing is. And you need to know they might show up in your church. And that, you know, that helped from time to time. But again, it makes church discipline really challenging.

What frankly can be more effective is one-on-one sort of responses. For you as an individual in the body of Christ, if you're aware, you know somebody, you've gotten to know someone, and you find out that they're involved in some kind of sinful activity, and you talk to them about it, and they're just unwilling to change. They're like, no, I'm not going to do that. For you to make a decision personally, to perhaps withdraw from that person. You know, Paul talks about this.

He talks about, in 1 Corinthians, about somebody who's involved in sexual sin. He says, I'm telling you that if there's a brother or sister who's involved in sexual immorality, he says, don't even have lunch with that person. In other words, what he's telling them is you withdraw on a personal level so that they would understand there's a price to be paid. You begin to, you're gonna break relationships with people if you continue on in this, and ultimately, it's gonna work its way to your relationship with God. And that's the difficult part.

But you know, that can be very effective, frankly, for you to do that as an individual. And we do it because we love people, and we wanna see them restored. And we know that the wages of sin is death, and something's gonna die if they don't repent. Something is gonna die. Let's keep reading, verse 12.

Paul says, when I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though the door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I didn't find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. Stop there. This is where Paul explains to the Corinthians how much he cared about how they were gonna respond to this letter that he sent by the hand of Titus to the people there. And he tells them here in these couple of verses that even though God had opened a door for effective ministry in Troas, Paul just, he couldn't stay.

He was like, I just, I was getting eaten up with just worry about how you guys responded to my letter. And he was hoping that Titus was gonna meet him there. But when Titus didn't come, he decided to go to Macedonia to wait for Titus there and hope that he'd run into Titus. And so he's telling them here that he was tied in emotional knots about how they were gonna respond to this letter that he'd written, how they were gonna receive the exhortations. Now, Paul did find Titus in Macedonia, but he's not gonna tell you about it till chapter seven.

That's just Paul. And again, they know the story, so he doesn't have to fill in all the gaps right away. They know pretty much what essentially happened, but for now, Paul is just gonna hint at what kind of joy he felt in hearing from Titus. Look what he says in verse 14. But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession.

We'll talk about what that means. And through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God. He says, among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one, it's a fragrance from death to death.

Doesn't smell good. But to the other, it's a fragrance from life to life. And then he asked the question, who's sufficient for these things? For we are not like so many peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God in the sight of God, we speak in Christ. I find these verses very interesting.

Notice that Paul begins here in this section by saying thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession. And he's using imagery that would have been well known back in that day. But it's not, well, it's kind of known today. Back in those days, it was a common thing if a king went out and fought against a neighboring city, nation, or whatever, and conquered them, they would kind of have a parade. He'd bring his men in through the gate and the people would, it was a triumphal procession.

But he would also bring his enemies. He'd bring some of them alive and they would be shackled and they'd have to walk in front of the people as well. And it was a way of just kind of, you know, letting everybody know that he, you know, won. He beat the enemy. The closest thing we have to that is a ticker tape parade when the Super Bowl team, you know, wins, and they get to go through the city streets of whatever city they represent because they won the Super Bowl or something like that.

The question here that we want to ask though is why is Paul using this imagery? Especially in light of how things had been going because things had not been going all that well. I mean, there's all this criticism and rejection of him that's been going on in Corinth. He went to Ephesus and he basically got kicked out of that town. There was all this emotional turmoil in Troas as he's waiting for Titus and not seeing him.

And then all of the anxiety that he had in Macedonia while he's waiting for Titus to get there. And so forth. It doesn't sound like you'd be talking about a triumphal procession. So what is that all about? Well, what Paul is doing here, and this is important for all of us to see, is he is, he's speaking here of something that we're gonna see recurring as a theme in 2 Corinthians and frankly, through the Bible.

And that is this, the contrast between what looks like defeat in the life of a believer and the actual spiritual victory. Let me say that again. What Paul is doing is he's using imagery to show the contrast between what looks like defeat and what is, in fact, a victory. And that's the way Paul saw it. Yeah, he had gone through all these hardships, but he had done so only to find out that Titus got back, and again, he'll tell about this in chapter seven.

Titus got there and told him, the Corinthians love you. They heard what you said. And they did what you asked them to do. And they were so repentant and so ready to do what was right. And Paul heard those words, and it just, it was life to his heart.

And now he says, this looked like a defeat for a while, but look it, it's a victory. And that's the point. You know, guys, this is the same reality of the cross of Christ, for heaven's sakes. You know, what appeared on Friday to be the worst disaster in human history, turned out by Sunday to be the greatest victory in human history, with the resurrection of Jesus. Everybody was totally bummed from Friday evening until Sunday morning.

And even the men whom Jesus met as they were on the road to Damascus, they were all bummed out when Jesus started walking with them. What are you guys talking about? Oh, where have you been? We're talking about Jesus. Where have you been?

We're talking about the prophet from Nazareth, you know, that came and he did all kinds of miracles, but they killed him. What are we gonna do now? And Jesus is like, oh, how slow you are to believe the prophets. It was the greatest victory. You know, David expressed this in the Psalms.

Look at Psalm 30 up on the screen. This is so beautiful. It says, weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. Guys, that is the theme of the Bible. That's a theme that helps you unlock an understanding of God's word.

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes with the morning. This world that we live in today is full of fallen chaos, tragedy, pain, and difficulty, but joy will come in the morning. And what I mean by that is God has a plan to overturn it all and make all things new. And we're all going to understand that this was God's plan. Weeping endures for the night, but joy comes in the morning.

You know, even when a believer dies, it's the same pattern. We're all bummed, we all miss that person, but they're with the Lord, and they're full of joy, unspeakable joy. Notice Paul goes on to then speak of the fragrance of our lives in these verses. He says, through us, God spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. But this fragrance can take on a very different aroma, or maybe I should say odor, depending on how people respond to the gospel.

For those people whose hearts are open, you are the fragrance of life. For those who... If you reject the gospel and harden their heart, you are the fragrance of death. Not yours, theirs. And so it's a very sort of a different thing.

We know of nothing like that. Well, maybe we do. There's some things that, there's some aromas that people love, and some that make, same aroma that makes the same or different person sick, you know. But and this is kind of like that, you know. It smells incredible to some and horrible to others.

He says in verse 15, he says, it's all because we are the aroma of Christ. We are the aroma. We are the fragrance of Christ. Well, among those who are being saved. But among those who are perishing, it's quite a different sort of a deal.

And that's one of the reasons why you can walk into a room of people that you have absolutely no previous knowledge of, or they of you, and they can dislike you. Because you smell. You smell like death. But it's their death, not yours. Because they see in you Jesus.

And at the end of verse 16, then Paul, notice this, asks the question, who is sufficient for these things? The NIV says, who is equal to such a task? Well, Paul's going to answer this question in the next chapter. Who is equal to the task? You see what he's asking?

He's saying, you guys smell like Jesus. Who's equal to that? You know, who's equal to that? Let's peek ahead into the next chapter up on the screen. It's in 317, excuse me, 3.5.

He says, not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God. So there's the answer to the question. Who's equal to this? Me. None of us.

I am not equal to the task of going around and smelling like Jesus. That's just not something I'm worthy of. Our sufficiency is from God, right? He makes us sufficient. And then finally, Paul says in verse 17, for we are not like so many peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity.

He says, we've been commissioned by God. We're in the sight of God speaking the words of Christ. And, you know, in Paul's day, there was no lack of insincere men who would peddle the message for profit. And that's why he uses that term peddle, because a peddler goes around trying to make money with their wares. And what characterized these kind of people was their message and their motives.

And that is why Paul insisted that the church there in Corinth, that he would receive no money from them. Did you know that? Paul said, you can try to give me money, but I won't take it. He told, that's what he told them. In fact, he says, nobody is going to take this boast away from me.

I will not. Now, that doesn't mean Paul didn't accept resources from other churches. He did, but not the Corinthians, because he sensed that that might be a stumbling block to them. And so he was like, you

know, in fact, he's going to talk about this more in chapter 11. Let me get another preview of coming attractions.

On the screen, he says, I preached God's gospel to you free of charge, didn't ask for anything from you guys. In fact, he says, I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and I was in need, and believe me, there were times he was in need. And he says, I did not burden anyone. For the brothers who came from Macedonia, they supplied my need.

So I refrained. And he says, I will refrain from burdening you in any way. That means I will continue to refuse any support from you. And again, the reason isn't because Paul didn't think he was or should get that support. It was because he didn't want anything to hinder them receiving the gospel.

That was the bottom line. You know, it's kind of interesting, isn't it, that a focus on money continues to be a major warning sign of insincerity today, as well it should. I remember years ago, I flew down to, where did I go, Tulsa, Oklahoma. That's not just the Bible Belt, that's the buckle of the Bible Belt. And yet there are some wacko churches down there.

We went to a church, it was Victory something or other, and they took a, I think I told you guys this, they took an offering fairly early in the service and then went and counted it and came back and told everybody it wasn't enough. They were going to pass the plate again. They got up and told everybody, we counted the offering, it wasn't enough. So here, the plates are coming out again. Dig deeper this time.

And the guys who were with me, you know, in the service, they were rolling our eyes like, good grief. It just reeks, you know, of insincerity. And honestly, it's a danger. When I say it, we've got to remember, money's a danger. And it's not just a danger to people who are insincere.

It's a danger to people who are sincere. It's a danger to you. Money's a danger to you. You know, yeah. The Apostle Paul sounded a pretty severe warning about money, I like the way this is worded in the NIV.

I'm going to show you this on the screen. He says, you know this passage, godliness, he says, with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Oh, really?

Those who want to get rich, and this could be even a believer, fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root, not the root, but a root of all kinds of evil. And he says here, some people eager for money have

wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. Is it possible for a believer to wander from the faith because of money? That's what Paul said.

He said, some have wandered from the faith. You might have heard the story, a rich man died and somebody says, oh, wow, how much did he leave? And they said, everything. He left everything because you can't take anything with you. That's what Paul says here.

We brought nothing into the world, we can take nothing out of it. We need to learn to be content with what we have. So anyway, that's where we end chapter 2 with some kind of important exhortations there. So we're going to close in prayer, then we're going to have a final worship song, and then we'll encourage you guys to stick around and fellowship for a little bit. Father, thank You so much for Your Word.

Thank You for the insights and the wisdom that we gain from it. We just really pray for Your Holy Spirit to continue to speak to us as we fellowship and as we go from this place. Lord, help us to apply Your Word. We know, Lord, that being a hearer of the Word is not enough. We need to be doers of the Word.

And so, Father, I pray that we would really take to heart what we have heard in these verses tonight as we've looked at what 2 Corinthians chapter 2 is all about. We just really pray that You would help and guide us in our hearts to walk out Your Word, to live it out with fear and trembling. We thank You and praise You for Your incredible goodness toward us. Guide us, we pray, strengthen our hearts, and make us truly thankful. We ask it in the name of our Savior and our King, Jesus, amen.