If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

2 Corinthians 5:17
Volume One
20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition

Volume Two
25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition
Enjoy *The Best of *Today in the Word* in two volumes. Each book contains 12 issues of our readers’ favorite monthly devotionals. Deepen your knowledge of God’s Word as you delve into Old and New Testament, character, and topical studies. These *Today in the Word* favorites will encourage and challenge you on your spiritual journey.
As Christians, what should be our ambition in life? In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul says our ambition is to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord. But how will we know if we succeed? Paul tells us that we will know at the judgment seat: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

The judgment seat Paul refers to here is not to be confused with the Great White Throne judgment in Revelation 20. That judgment will be for unbelievers and will determine their eternal destiny. The judgment seat will be for believers, and though it will not determine our eternal destiny, it will determine our eternal reward.

What will this judgment be like? In 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul gives us five descriptors. First, he says this judgment is mandatory. We must all appear. No one will be able to escape or avoid this judgment. Second, this judgment is individual. You alone will stand before the judgment seat.

Third, this judgment exposes everything. The Greek word translated “appear” here means to expose. That which is done in secret will be revealed. Everything in your life—the godly and the ungodly—will be disclosed at the judgment seat. On that day, God will judge your deeds (2 Cor. 5:10), your thoughts (Luke 12:3), your words (Matt. 12:36), and your motives (Heb. 4:13). Everything will be uncovered and laid bare before the Lord.

Fourth, this judgment shows the value of our lives to Christ. The Greek word translated “bad” in 2 Corinthians 5:10 means worthless. The Lord will evaluate our life to determine its worth—or worthlessness—for Christ. Of course, God does not give this evaluation for His sake. He already knows everything about our lives. He does this for our sake because our hearts are deceitful, and we can wrongly assume that our lives have been pleasing to Him.

Lastly, on this judgment day the Lord will reward us based upon the way we lived our lives on earth. How will He reward us? The Bible mentions crowns that will be bestowed and authority in the kingdom that will be given, but the greatest reward will be hearing the Lord’s words of approval: “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Not everyone, however, will hear words of commendation. Some will suffer regret and shame over a life that was wasted (1 John 2:28).

One day we will be held accountable for building a life here on earth that was pleasing to the Lord. How do you want this day to go for you? The wise are those who constantly keep this day in front of them, because preparing for it requires seeking the Holy Spirit’s enabling power to do the right thing in the right way with the right motive each and every day of our lives here on earth.

1-800-356-6639
What is the gospel? In 2 Corinthians 5:19, the apostle Paul calls it a “message of reconciliation.” This simple description says much about our relationship with God and the nature of the work of Christ. Reconciliation presupposes alienation. The gospel message is addressed to those who are God’s enemies as a result of sin (Rom. 5:10). Sinfulness is more than choosing to engage in acts that are displeasing to God. Sin affects our very nature. It leaves us unwilling and unable to submit to God’s law (Rom. 8:7). Even when we agree that God’s law is holy, righteous, and good, the presence of sin robs us of the capacity to act according to this knowledge.

Sin creates a twofold problem for us. Internally it gives us a disposition that is not naturally inclined to seek God in the way He wants to be found. This is a universal condition, even among those who are religiously inclined: “As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God’ ” (Rom. 3:10–11). Sin also leaves us guilty before God both for the things we have done and the things we have left undone.

If we are to be reconciled to God, our sin must be forgiven and our nature must be changed. Paul’s assertion in 2 Corinthians 5:19 reveals that God’s remedy for dealing with this problem was Christ Himself. Jesus did far more than provide a good example of what righteousness looks like in human behavior. His death and resurrection are the means by which the impediment of sin is removed. God took the initiative, “reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them” (2 Cor. 5:19).

God did not lower His standard of righteousness and sweep our sins under the rug. Instead, He punished His Son in our place. This was the reason Jesus died on the cross. The law of God made the sacrificial death of Christ a divine necessity, occasioned by our sin. Jesus’ death and resurrection is the only remedy that can fully and finally remove both the power and the guilt of sin.

Colossians 1:21–23 describes Christ’s power to reconcile us to God: “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.”

To learn more about how Christ’s death reconciles us to God, read The Cross: The Vindication of God by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Banner of Truth).
In the August issue of *Today in the Word*, we asked you to send us stories of your encounters with Jesus. Thank you for your response! It was a joy to read your letters and emails, to marvel with you at the Lord’s presence in your life and His tender care of you, and in the process, to get to know some of you better—an experience we wanted to share with all our readers. We decided to start a series “Encounters with Jesus,” dedicated to your accounts of God at work in your life.

This month, we’d like you to meet Philip Hirschy, a retired high school physics teacher who started his career as an educator in 1948. Now in his late 80s, he is a veteran *Today in the Word* reader, a friend and supporter of our devotional since the day it started, and a faithful student of God’s Word.

The Bible says in Psalm 145:18, “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.” How near has been the Lord to Phil Hirschy? In 2004, speaking before his former students in Evans City, PA, at the 50th reunion of the class of ’54, he answered this question. He told his middle-aged former students that it’s a miracle he is standing before them, an 80-year-old man in good health. “But for the providence of a loving God, I would have been dead years ago—twice in Germany during World War II, and on at least three other occasions after the war.” He added that on all these occasions, a few inches and a few seconds were the difference between life and death. A few inches and a few seconds away—that’s also how close he felt Christ has been to him. In his letter to *Today in the Word*, Hirschy writes:

I’d like to recount a miracle that had its beginning over [63] years ago in Honnef, Germany. A few days after our unit crossed the Remagen Bridge, an artillery barrage zeroed in on our motor pool, and an 88-mm airburst laced me with shrapnel. The shrapnel missed my heart by ¼ of an inch. Rushed to a field hospital, I was operated on by a competent Army surgeon, then flown from Bonn to a hospital in England, and after a month of recuperation—to Crile General Army Hospital in Parma, Ohio. In September 1945, I was given an honorable medical discharge and began classes at Geneva College.

After 35 years of teaching physics in the local high school and 21 years of retirement, I was diagnosed with a blocked carotid artery. A pre-surgery X-ray revealed a piece of shrapnel just below my left lung. The doctor immediately canceled the MRI as too dangerous: the magnetic field could cause the metal in my lung to rip through and possibly kill me. At this point I remembered a field trip with my physics students years ago when we visited the nuclear lab operated jointly by the University of Pittsburgh and
2 Corinthians: Growing Pains in the Body of Christ

The genre of autobiography has endured since antiquity, giving us some of the most memorable books of world literature. Many personal biographies help us understand the times through the lens of the author’s life. *The Confessions of St. Augustine* unveil the life of Christians in fourth-century North Africa, while those of Rousseau portray life of eighteenth-century France. Elie Wiesel’s *Night* depicts the horror of the Holocaust through the writer’s ordeal at a Nazi concentration camp.

Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth, 2 Corinthians, though not a biography, offers the most personal and the most autobiographical glimpse into the Apostle’s life. When we read his credentials as the minister of the gospel, as well as his accounts of the trials and tribulations of his life, we also learn about his time, about the successes and the struggles of the church . . . and about ourselves.

This month in *Today in the Word*, we will look at what Paul has to say to the church in Corinth: forgiveness, the reconciling love of Christ, generosity, joy and sorrow, the glory and the light of the gospel. We will also look at the body of Christ today. Paul’s life, his passion for the church, and his love for Christ will help us better understand what it means to be a Christian in the twenty-first century.

Thank you for studying with us and for supporting *Today in the Word* and Moody’s ministries!
Letter writing in the ancient world was a common way for people to keep in touch. The apostle Paul was no exception; he regularly wrote to his church plants to answer questions, exhort his congregations, and encourage young Christians.

While 2 Corinthians does all of these things, Paul also had to combat some who were undermining his authority and accusing him of lying about returning to Corinth (see 1 Cor. 16:5). Paul’s letter addressed those concerns, first by proclaiming the legitimacy of his apostleship (v. 1), and then by explaining that his delay in coming was partly due to his sufferings in Asia. While bolstering his legitimacy as an apostle willing to suffer for Christ, Paul’s opening words also provide us with important truths about Christian suffering.

Suffering, Paul tells us, is part of our Christian experience (especially when suffering for Christ), but so too is comfort. For Christians, the two go hand in hand. Paul also reminds us that comfort often comes through the body of Christ: “Praise be to . . . the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble” (vv. 3–4). Paul’s understanding of the body of Christ is profound: we share in each other’s sufferings, and can offer God’s comfort to one another. In Christ, we are truly connected.

What is the comfort we offer to others? Simply put, it is the faithful reliance upon “the God of all comfort” (v. 3). Christian comfort is not a matter of stoic self-endurance, but a deep trust in the God who “raises the dead” (v. 9), who in Christ has delivered us from ultimate death, and upon whom “we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us” (v. 10). In short, our hope in Christ is the deepest comfort we have and can give to others.

Today is All Saints’ Day, when traditionally Christians recognize the “great cloud of witnesses” in Christ who surround us (Heb. 12:1). Take comfort in the example of the many faithful believers who have preceded you. Also pray for suffering Christians, asking God to fill them with the true comfort of Christ.

We invite you to pray for the Engineering Operations department. Al Campa, Thomas Drost, and Jaime Ixcaragua maintain Moody’s infrastructure in excellent condition. They will be grateful for your prayer support today.

Apply the Word

Pray with Us
The Trustworthy Character of God

One old adage says: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” According to this sentiment, no amount of taunting and insult can really cause us harm.

The truth is, attacks on our character do harm us, and Paul’s accusers deeply wounded him by spreading lies about his motives and sincerity. Paul continued his epistle by defending his character and explaining his change of plans.

First, he asserted his upright conduct. He could be trusted, he said, because his sincerity applied both to his actions toward the Corinthians and to his letter writing. But notice where Paul grounded his self-defense: not in himself, but in God. His “holiness and sincerity” were “from God,” and his actions relied not on worldly wisdom, but “on God’s grace” (1:12). God, not Paul, was the foundation of Paul’s trustworthiness.

That emphasis on God’s character emerges again in later verses. Although Paul’s plans did change, the message of the gospel of Christ, the very promises of God, did not. There is no ambiguity in Christ (“yes” and “no”), but a resounding “Yes!” If the Corinthians were to trust Paul, they should do so because of the steadfast faithfulness of God Himself. What makes Paul (or any Christian) stand firm, but God Himself, who anointed us, sealed us, and deposited His Spirit within us? Our character should be a reflection of God’s character.

Thus, Paul’s decision to write a letter rather than make a second painful visit, was made out of love for the Corinthians, not out of insincerity. This is the mark of a true minister of Christ—one whose conduct is driven not by personal interest, but by a strong love for the body of Christ.

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.
2 Corinthians 1:20

Apply the Word

Paul described a high standard for spiritual leaders of the church—to ground all conduct in the grace of God and be motivated by love for the body of Christ. Without God’s grace, no church would ever know spiritual growth. As your pastor prepares for Sunday worship tomorrow, pray for him that his character and ministry would reflect the character of God.

Pray with Us

As we continue to pray for Engineering Operations, please add Gerald Malozienc, John Fraats, and Joshua Woods to your prayer list. Their work may be behind the scenes, but it’s important for all departments and ministries on our Chicago campus.

Read: 2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4

Saturday, November 2

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Read: 2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4
Many people think personal insults deserve unrelenting retaliation. Whatever harm is done to you should be returned with equal or greater offense. In today’s passage, the apostle Paul describes a different way to react to insults.

The specific details are unknown, but someone in the Corinthian community had grieved the Apostle and the whole congregation. Paul had written his tearful letter to address the issue, and disciplinary action was taken by the community. But things did not end there. Paul’s current advice to the Corinthians outlines the appropriate Christian response to sin and personal offense.

First, Paul’s concern was not personal offense against him but rather the damage done within the community (v. 5). The strife within the body of Christ affords opportunity for Satan to gain a foothold.

Second, Paul’s concern was not about demanding unrelenting punishment but ultimately about restoration of the sinner. Discipline was necessary, and Paul’s earlier letter seemed to call for this (v. 9), but now Paul urged them to “forgive and comfort” and to “reaffirm your love for him” (vv. 7–8). Notice Paul’s communal, rather than personal, concern. Even Paul’s own granting of forgiveness was “for your sake” (v. 10).

It may not always be an easy course, but a faithful Christian response to sin and personal offense includes both discipline and forgiveness, with the ultimate goal being the restoration of the sinner and the healing of the entire community. Focus on personal offense alone loses sight of the importance of the community; and an over-emphasis on punishment leaves the community broken and the sinner without reconciliation.

Consider who in your church community has hurt you. Decide today to write or speak to that person, not for personal retaliation, but to offer forgiveness and love in order to bring restoration. It is not an easy task; ask God for the strength to do so.

Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of education, oversees Moody’s education branch on all Moody’s campuses: in Chicago, IL, in Plymouth, MI, and Spokane, WA. Please uphold Dr. Venugopal and his team in your prayers today.
Odor is a powerful thing. The faintest aroma can evoke powerful memories of a loved one or of a pleasant experience from long ago. Other times a stench can repel us, stomachs lurching in disgust.

In today’s reading, the apostle Paul likened the preaching of the gospel to the power of scent! God’s plans for proclaiming the gospel are not always ours. He opens doors in one place and moves us along to another at His will. But in all circumstances, Paul gave thanks that God chooses to use us “to spread the aroma of the knowledge of Him everywhere” (v. 14).

Four times Paul described the message of Christ as an “aroma.” Notice that most importantly, Scripture says that we are an aroma “to God” (v. 15). Our lives are likened to a sweet-smelling sacrifice (see Rom. 12:1). In fact, Paul is using a Greek word here that was found throughout the Greek translation of the Old Testament to describe the offerings presented to God. A life transformed by the gospel is nothing short of a pleasing aroma to Him.

God is not the only one who “smells” a life that preaches Christ; the entire world breathes in our gospel life. Not everyone feels the same way about this smell. To those who are perishing, we are the stench of death. To those who are being saved, we are the fragrance of life. There is no neutrality toward the gospel of Christ. Our task is to be faithful in proclaiming it.

Paul’s final words call us back to the challenge. “Who is equal to such a task?” Not those who preach for their own benefit, but only those who are grounded in Christ and His call. It is God’s work, not ours. We are simply the royal censer in the King’s hands.

Apply the Word

We are reminded that our lives are to be a pleasing aroma to God and a faithful proclamation of Christ to the world. Is there something you can do today that will spread the fragrance of God’s grace? Call someone who is lonely. Encourage them and ask God for an opportunity to share the gospel.

Pray with Us

We value the expertise and passion for teaching of our Undergraduate faculty! For the next three days, join us in prayer for the faculty in our Theology department. Today, please pray for John Clark, David Finkbeiner, and Marcus Johnson.
The Surpassing Glory of the Gospel

In the PBS program, *Antiques Roadshow*, expert appraisers analyze the authenticity and value of antique pieces brought by local residents. Often, the value of a piece is substantially higher if the owner has some sort of documentation about its origins or history. In the marketplace, written documentation bolsters authenticity.

Paul challenged such thinking when it comes to the Christian life. The Corinthians should need no letters of recommendation from Paul, or vice versa. Their own Spirit-filled lives were nothing short of a “letter from Christ” (v. 3). The Christian life is not engraved on stone or written with ink; it is life of the Spirit, written on the heart.

Paul had in mind Jeremiah 31:31-34, which speaks of God’s promise of a new covenant written on the people’s hearts. This leads Paul into a fuller comparison between the ministry of the old covenant, enacted with Israel, and the ministry of the promised new covenant under Christ. The old ministry under Moses “was engraved in letters on stone” (v. 7; see Ex. 34:29). Although glorious in its own right, the law brought death and condemnation and had a fading quality. The new covenant, however, is not written on an inanimate object but comes through the Spirit. And unlike the old covenant which kills, the new covenant brings life and righteousness. This new covenant under Christ will last, and its glory far surpasses the glory of the old.

Paul did not reject the old covenant as evil, only as lacking compared with the new. The Christian life is not about written codes and legalism that only produce condemnation. Rather, the righteousness of the Christian life comes from the Spirit of the new covenant written on our hearts.

Apply the Word

The Christian life should be like a living letter proclaiming the surpassing glory of the new covenant in Christ. Think of three people you will meet today and consider how your words or deeds might express Christ’s glory. Ask the Holy Spirit to prepare you to convey the righteousness and life that comes only in the gift of the new covenant.

Pray with Us

Please include in your prayers the Theology professors Bryan Litfin, Michael McDuffee, Sanjay Merchant, and Bryan O’Neal. And they ask you to pray for our students as they hear the powerful messages of Spiritual Enrichment Week that starts today.

For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory.

2 Corinthians 3:10
In some marriage ceremonies, a bride’s face will be hidden behind a veil until the moment when the veil is removed and the bride is revealed to her new husband. The removal of the veil symbolizes a fuller beholding and understanding.

The image of the veil played an important role in Paul’s continued discussion of the old and new covenants. Having affirmed the boldness of the new covenant gospel, Paul next contrasted that gospel boldness with the old covenant under Moses, who veiled his face after receiving the Ten Commandments on Sinai (see Ex. 34:29–35). That literal veil now works as a metaphor for a lack of understanding among the people when the old covenant is read.

The problem, however, was not Moses or the glory of the old covenant (fading though it was). Instead, the problem was the hardness of the people’s hearts to receive the true glory contained in it. So when the law was read, they were blinded to the reality of Christ’s fulfilling and surpassing glory brought with the new covenant. As Paul says, “Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts” (v. 15).

What is the solution to this veiling? Scripture is clear: “Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (v. 16). Only turning to Christ, through the power of the Spirit, will remove the veil and free us from the old law. Just as Moses removed the veil when he met with the Lord (Ex. 34:34), so too when we turn to the Lord He removes the veil from our hearts. Now unveiled, we behold the full glory of the Lord (in Christ), reflect His glory to the world, and are being transformed into His likeness by the Spirit.

But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.
2 Corinthians 3:16

Apply the Word

Paul’s message about the power of the gospel is primarily about a Spirit-transformed life. If we are Christ’s unveiled bride, beholding His unfading glory, how will that change us? List some areas of your life that still need to be conformed to Christ’s likeness, and ask the Spirit to continue His work in you, powerfully transforming you into the image of our Lord.

Pray with Us

As we conclude our prayers for the Theology faculty, would you remember Gregg Quiggle, David Rim, Richard Weber, and Kevin Zuber during your time with the Lord today? Pray that their teaching would always bring glory to God.
The Piercing Light of the Gospel

Browse through a bookstore or turn on the television and you may see “preachers” who distort the gospel with messages of self-help, prosperity, or endless good health. For many of these hucksters, their message is more about themselves than about Christ.

As seen already in our study, Paul himself was accused of being a self-promoting phony by some in Corinth, and in chapter 4 Paul returned to a defense of his own ministry. Here we learn some important principles about gospel ministry. First, Paul explained the manner of ministry: he did not use “secret and shameful” methods of deception and distortion (v. 2); instead, he preached the gospel plainly. True, some did not receive that message, but that was because the “god of this age” had blinded them to the truth (v. 4). Gospel proclamation should make God’s Word plain, trusting in the Spirit’s work; we do not need to manipulate or distort the message in order to win converts. Straightforward truthfulness about God’s Word is powerful in its own right.

Moreover, Paul’s message was not about himself. His goal was to make plain: “Jesus Christ is Lord” (v. 5). And importantly, it was grounded in personal experience. He spoke of the God who “made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ” (v. 6). Perhaps Paul had in mind his own conversion when “a light from heaven flashed around him” (Acts 9:3), and he met the risen Christ. Only when Paul had experienced the piercing light of the gospel in his own heart could he then take that message to the world. As one commentator puts it: “We can only preach to others the Christ we have met for ourselves.”

Apply the Word

To be true to the gospel message that “Jesus Christ is Lord,” we must first know the transforming salvation of Christ in our lives. If you have not made that personal commitment that Jesus is your Lord and Savior, make today that day. If you have, pray for God’s help to take that message of saving love to the world.

Pray with Us

As you come to the Lord in prayer today, ask Him to bless the ministry of Troy Fichter and Josie Scott, the staff of our athletic facility, the Solheim Center. They work hard serving our students and facilitating the sports outreach to the community.
In biblical times, clay jars were commonly used for mundane things like water, grains, or even trash. If such a pot broke, it was no great loss. Valuable treasures like gold, jewelry, or ointments, however, would be placed in expensive containers.

It is humbling to see that Scripture calls us “jars of clay” (v. 7). But that is what we are. In our present state, Christian life and ministry does not take away our brokenness. Like Paul, we experience perplexity, persecution, and pain. We know death and sorrow. Outwardly, our mortal bodies are “wasting away” (v. 16).

The difference between life with Christ and life without Christ is not the absence of such fragility; rather, unlike clay pots in most first-century homes, we have “treasure” inside. Our own weakness only highlights the power of God within us. The suffering we know is a witness both to the death of Christ in us, and to the life of Jesus “revealed in our mortal body” (v. 11). What we suffer, Christ suffers with us because He is in us. The humility of being clay pots also highlights the “all-surpassing power” of God within us (v. 7).

Finally, our clay-pot lives also point to a promise of hope for the future. What gives us confidence to proclaim Christ despite our continued brokenness? It is the reality that “the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus” (v. 14). Outwardly, our lives may know troubles, yet “inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (v. 16). In Christ, there awaits for us an “eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (v. 17). That is where our eyes should be fixed.

Apply the Word

In the song, “Your Hands,” singer-songwriter J. J. Heller captures the brokenness, pain, and weariness of “unanswered prayers and trouble I wish wasn’t there.” Yet recognizing Christ’s promise to “one day set all things right,” the refrain echoes the hope of today’s reading: “When my heart is breaking, I never leave Your hands.”

Pray with Us

Dr. Paul Nyquist, Moody’s president, invites you to lift up in prayer the students of Moody as they conclude Spiritual Enrichment Week. Let us praise God for blessing our students with this opportunity to deepen their walk with Jesus.
Longing is something we all know about. A deployed soldier longs to be reunited with family. A homesick child longs for her parents. An ailing patient longs for healing. And deep within us all, we long for the full satisfaction of God’s presence.

Scripture speaks of this longing by comparing our earthly, mortal existence with the promised heavenly one to come. Continuing his earlier discussion of our mortal bodies as jars of clay, Paul explained that we are presently in an “earthly tent” subject to destruction. But we naturally desire something more. With sighing and groaning, we long for our “eternal house in heaven” (v. 1).

The contrast here, however, is not between physical and nonphysical bodies but between an earthly, corruptible existence and a new, incorruptible state of being. Notice that the desire is not to be “unclothed” (that is, without a body), but to be “clothed” with a renewed body. The New Living Translation captures Paul’s point well: “we groan and sigh, but it’s not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life.”

This longing is what we have been made for. God created us for Himself—to know Him, love Him, and be in His presence. In our present state, we do not fully experience that purpose, but He has given us His Spirit as a down payment. For now we live by faith, but soon we will behold Him and be with Him fully. Until then, Scripture calls us to live out our heavenly promise even here in our present state, remembering what awaits us. That longing within us is there for a reason!

Apply the Word

What longings or dissatisfaction do you have in life? In one sense, every yearning we know is a shadow of the deeper desire to be renewed and in the presence of God. List some of your personal longings and then place them before God in prayer, asking Him to turn those earthly aches into a fuller longing for our eternal home with Him.

Pray with Us

The staff of Radio Moody asks you to pray for their service of reaching the Spanish-speaking community. Remember in prayer Elsa Mazon, Gerson Garcia, and Mercida Garcia-Rojas and ask God to impart His wisdom on their hearts as they spread His Word.
In A.D. 452, Attila the Hun advanced on Rome. As the people quailed and the emperor hesitated, one man stepped forward: an unarmed pastor named Leo met the barbarian Attila. Risking his own life, Leo took forward the peace of Christ and negotiated Rome’s safety.

What would compel a man to such sacrificial risk-taking? Perhaps Leo understood today’s Scripture about the motivating purpose of gospel ministry. The goal in proclaiming the gospel is not to commend ourselves to the world. In fact, the world might find us “out of our mind” (v. 13). But as Paul says, our focus should be not on what is seen but “what is in the heart” (v. 12). Gospel ministry does not make sense to the wisdom of the world; something hidden deep within us must be the driving force.

So what is that hidden driving force? Paul is clear: “Christ’s love compels us” (v. 14, ESV). Interpreters don’t all agree about what this means. One option is to see this as our love for Christ which motivates us. Because we love Him, we serve Him.

Another option, which seems better supported by the remaining context, is the idea that Christ’s love for us is so powerful that we are motivated to take that love to the world. Notice that twice Paul emphasizes that “Christ died for all.” It was Christ’s sacrificial action that becomes the motivator here.

Grounded in that knowledge, Paul explains that “those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (v. 15). What would motivate anyone to risk reputation, safety, even life, to take the message of Christ to the world? Only someone captured by the compelling love of Christ.

For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all.
2 Corinthians 5:14

Apply the Word

Around the world today, countless Christians are compelled by Christ’s love to take the message of Christ’s salvation to their neighbors. Many suffer severely for it. Would you commit each day this week to pray for those who suffer for Christ? Also pray for those who hear the gospel, that they would respond to the compelling love of Christ in faith.

Pray with Us

Please pray for senior vice president of Media, Greg Thornton, and all the work that he and his staff are doing to use modern media in the most efficient and creative ways for God’s kingdom. God empowers their efforts, and your prayer support is vital!
Today the word *reconciliation* can be used about anything from contradictory testimony to bank statements. The Latin word means “to reunite” and carries a relational tone. Whether between nations, people groups, family members, or former partners, at its most basic meaning the language of reconciliation involves personal relationships.

Used five different times by Paul, the idea of reconciliation is central to today’s reading. Reunion between God and humanity is fundamental to the gospel. The problem was our sin, which had broken that relationship with God. Yet now through Christ, there is reconciliation between God and humanity. Our sins are no longer counted against us because he “who had no sin [became] sin for us” (5:21). Instead of enmity with God, there is now restoration and new creation: “the old has gone, the new has come” (5:17).

Notice how this reconciliation came about. We did not initiate it or accomplish it. God reconciled us to Himself, not the other way around! And it was through Christ that we are reunited to God, not through our own efforts. As Paul himself summarizes, “All this is from God” (5:18). We certainly enjoy the benefits of this reconciliation, but it was God who made it happen.

Finally, what starts as a personal restoration ultimately leads to an outward ministry in the world. Because we are now reconciled to God in Christ, He has given us the ministry and message of reconciliation. We are “Christ’s ambassadors” (5:20), and now God uses us to appeal to the world: Be reconciled to God! Because we know the personal, reconciling love of God, we can turn to the world and say, “now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation” (6:2).

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**A Ministry of Reconciliation**

**God was reconciling the world to Himself . . . and has committed to us the message of reconciliation.**

*2 Corinthians 5:19*

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**Apply the Word**

Reconciliation applies not just to our relationship with God but to each other as well. Paul urges us to view each other as new creations in Christ. With which family member, friend, or sibling in Christ’s body do you need to be reconciled? Seek reconciliation in your personal relationships, remembering the effort that God has made to be reconciled to you.

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**Pray with Us**

Moody Radio’s Programming department pours their time and talent into making our radio ministry the most effective, inspiring, and useful for our listeners. Will you lift up to the Lord the work of Daniel Anderson, Maureen Ber, Mark Breta, and Daniel Craig?
In many urban environments, having “street cred” means you have earned a level of respect based on your experience of surviving difficult circumstances. Because you have endured hardships, you have genuine credibility among your peers.

In today’s reading, Paul outlined for the Corinthians his own ministry “street cred.” He wanted no stumbling block to impede either the gospel or their growth, and Paul’s long list of experience shows us what true ministry looks like: enduring through thick and thin. First, Paul knew sacrifice in the face of physical opposition and deprivation. He lists the external hardships he knew—beatings, imprisonments, even riots. We also know that Paul did not rely on the Corinthians for support (1 Cor. 9:12–15), but used his tent-making skills to make a living. This was likely in mind when Paul speaks here of “hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger” (v. 5). These are the kinds of sacrifices Paul made for the sake of the gospel.

Second, Paul encouraged them to examine his life. What did they see? Virtue and truthful speech. Paul demonstrated purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, and love. His speech was truthful and his life displayed righteousness. In other words, Paul’s life displayed the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). An important mark of true ministers of the gospel is their life.

Finally, Paul explained the paradox of his ministry. From an outward perspective, Paul was dishonored, slandered, and seen as dying, sorrowful, and impoverished. But according to Paul, the reality is something else. He was known by God, truly alive, joyful, and rich. Because of this inner hidden reality, Paul’s ministry was marked by openness of heart and genuine warmth for the Corinthians.

**Apply the Word**

How often do we take for granted the sacrifices and hardships our church leaders endure for the sake of the gospel and our spiritual growth? Today offer encouragement and gratitude by sending them a thoughtful note, calling them on the phone, or stopping by their office. They have given much. What will you give in return?

**Pray with Us**

We once again ask for your prayers for the staff of Moody Radio Programming. Please praise the Lord for Jon Gauger, Anita Lustrea, Lori Neff, and Melinda Schmidt and for the scope, both geographically and spiritually, that their ministry reaches.
Some things just do not belong together. You do not wear a wedding dress to the dirt races. You do not put a wolf in a sheep pen. And most people do not want pickles with ice cream or soda with milk.

What is true in our ordinary lives, Paul says is even truer when it comes to the spiritual life: “do not be yoked together with unbelievers” (6:14). The language of “yoked” is stronger than mere association; Paul’s use of expressions like “have in common,” “fellowship,” and “harmony” convey a deep connection. And using a string of contrasting opposites, he explained why Christians should not share in deep fellowship with unbelievers. There is no shared life between righteousness and wickedness, between light and dark, between Christ and Belial, or between the temple of God and idols.

Paul grounded these contrasts in the promises and declarations of God in Scripture. Throughout the Old Testament, God had called His people to Himself. He promised to be with them, to walk among them, and to be their Father. In turn, they would be His people, His sons and daughters (see Lev. 26:12–13; Isa. 52:11). We belong, not to the world, but to God.

Those promises of God lead to new life. Just as God relieved Israel from the “yoke” of Egyptian bondage and joined them to Himself, so now the body of Christ should have fellowship with His purity. The call is not to separate from living in the world, but to withdraw from the ways of the surrounding culture and to commit ourselves “body and spirit” to the ways of Christ. The call to holiness is a response to the saving work of God.

How well do you live out today’s call to purity? Is your mind influenced more by Hollywood or Scripture? Are your desires shaped more by advertisements or worship? To what lifestyle changes (big or small) might God be calling you that you would grow into fuller fellowship with Him?

In conclusion of our prayers for Moody Radio Programming, please include Mike Kellogg, Nathan McMillan, Dennis Nugent, and Yahir Vergara. May the programs they create and produce continue to inspire, comfort, teach, and encourage our listeners.
Joy in Godly Sorrow

Every parent knows the need for discipline in a child’s life. When a son or daughter has strayed, no parent wants to see their child continue in habits of destruction and disobedience. Discipline is applied, sometimes painfully so. The purpose is not the pain itself, but to instill sorrow over sin and to cultivate a heart that desires godly obedience.

Paul knew something of this parental challenge. Like a parent toward his Corinthian children, Paul loved them with an open heart, and would even “live or die with you” (v. 3). He had a genuine concern for them and took great pride in them. He valued their affection for him as well. But what in the Corinthian congregation brought Paul joy? It was the report from Titus about their sorrow! Why?

Besides seeing a congregation thrive in spiritual growth, nothing brings a pastor more joy than hearing about a congregation’s godly repentance over sin. Paul referred again to the “tearful letter” he had sent earlier (see 2 Cor. 2:4). That letter clearly caused sorrow, and Paul regretted it at first. But then he was made happy. Their sorrow had led to repentance as God intended.

“Worldly sorrow,” Paul says, “brings death” (v. 10). The world is sorry for getting caught or for the personal consequences sin brings, but there is no spiritual change. Godly sorrow, on the other hand, “brings repentance that leads to salvation.” True repentance over sin sees the wrong that has been done, knows true sorrow over the offense it brings to God, confesses that sin, and also desires to amend one’s life. Notice the Corinthian “readiness to see justice done” (v. 11). Sorrow over sin may be painful but it ultimately leads to life.

Apply the Word

Facing our sin is no fun, but it is absolutely essential to spiritual growth. Ask the Holy Spirit to shape your conscience as He wills. In sorrowful repentance, confess your sin to God with a desire to amend your life. Thankfully, God has promised to forgive our sins when we confess, and fill us with the strength we need to live for Him (1 John 1:9).

Pray with Us

The work of Dr. Thomas Shaw, vice president of Student and Enrollment Services, covers a wide range of services to our students. Your prayers will be an encouragement and a blessing for him and his staff in all the joys and challenges of their work responsibilities.
What is meant by the passage, “Seek the Lord while he may be found; ... Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them” (Isa. 55:6–7)?

These verses are a warning to those who, for whatever reason, put off a desire to find out the real meaning of life in order to pursue a passion for fulfillment in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. It is a battle all of us face when we decide which things are most important to us.

Within all of us is what the philosopher Pascal called a God-shaped vacuum, and we look for something that will fill that emptiness. We sense that hollowness and we try to fill it at first with things and then perhaps with significance, power, or fame. Some discover almost immediately that the things they can hold in their hand are not nearly as satisfying as the immaterial, spiritual things that they can’t hold.

Some are distracted in their quest by the immediacy of the world and the friendships surrounding them. They stop their pursuit of God and begin to reach out and grasp pleasure. God is no longer a priority. They have lost touch with God. Sadly, this can be a part of life even for those who serve in our churches. Once you have allowed your life to be overwhelmed by the interests of this world, it is hard to reestablish a thirst and priority for godly things. It is difficult for an old man to turn back to God after living a careless life or an easily distracted spiritual life. It is not that God is unwilling to seek him, but that such a man has become incapable of seeking for God. But if a man or woman truly seeks God, He will be found and He will pour out His mercy.

My pastor believes that when we die we’ll have different bodies, and we will not recognize each other in heaven.

Frankly, I find it hard to believe that when we die, we will know less than what we know now. I think, except for some momentary lapses, where we are trying to remember and recite several names at once in formal introductions, for the most part I can certainly remember the names of family, friends, and acquaintances. And I think when I get to heaven not only will I remember their names and they’ll remember mine, but we’ll recognize each other too. We’ll remember the rich conversations and circumstances of our lives.

King David said of his child who died shortly after birth, “I will go to him [referring to seeing the child after death], but he will not return to me [in this life]” (2 Sam. 12:23). In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus we find another evidence of recognition in the next life as well. The rich man was in torment in Hades, but he recognized that the beggar Lazarus was enjoying peace and comfort at the side of Abraham (Luke 16: 19–23). This story that our Savior told indicates that our memories will be intact in heaven. There’s no reason to believe that friendships begun on earth will not continue to grow when we are in glory.

Continued on next page
Q When Jesus ascended to be with the Father—what we call the Ascension—was it in a true bodily form?

A The resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ had to be in bodily form as both the evidence and demonstration of Jesus' victory over the power of death. Scriptural evidence is found throughout the Word. The facts of the Ascension are described in Acts 1:1–11. It was a bodily ascension visible to all.

There is no question that Christ arose from the dead with the same body that was impaled on the cross when He bore our sins on Calvary. His resurrected body was different in some ways than His body prior to death: He was capable of walking through walls and suddenly appearing in a place (see Luke 24 and John 20). He also had the capacity for eating fish that He prepared for His disciples on the beach, so He was certainly not a ghost or other immaterial apparition. His body was recognizable to His disciples, and He even invited Thomas to touch His scars to prove that it was really Him.

One day we too will be changed into a new and glorified body by the power of the resurrection. “When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory” (Col. 3:4). This will happen by the work of Jesus, who will “transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21; see also 1 Corinthians 15).

Q In the Transfiguration of Jesus, the disciples Peter, James, and John are with Christ when suddenly on the mountain they saw Elijah and Moses. My question is, how did they recognize Elijah and Moses when they lived and died years before they were born?

A Certainly one of the greatest of the miracles in the Gospels was the Transfiguration. Christ's clothes became dazzling white, whiter than the most brilliant of whites. And there suddenly appeared before the disciples the Old Testament saints Elijah and Moses who were talking with Jesus. Peter—never at a loss for words—interrupted the scene: “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were all so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” (Mark 9:5–7). No, Peter this is not a time for talking; it’s a time for listening!

The fact that the disciples could recognize these mighty Old Testament prophets was part of the miracle intended to unveil the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. The Father was pronouncing that Jesus was the Son, and the prophets—two of the most respected figures in Jewish history—were also bearing witness that this was the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior and Lord.
We were . . . delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by you. 2 Corinthians 7:13

As the youth group finished their painting job, the homeowners were encouraged by such service of love. In turn, the youth found encouragement from the wisdom and godly witness of the owners. And as the local church heard the reports from that week’s service projects, pastor and congregation alike had their spirits lifted.

Encouragement can be infectious. As we read yesterday, Paul found joy in seeing the Corinthians turn from their sin. Today we see that encouragement had spread to Titus as well. Having been sent by Paul to visit the Corinthians, possibly as a follow up to that earlier “tearful letter,” Titus found joy in this congregation. Apparently, Paul had spoken to Titus of the Corinthian church, and Titus’s visit had proven Paul’s assessment true. As Paul reported, “his spirit has been refreshed by all of you” (v. 13).

Titus’s affection for the Corinthians had grown because of the obedience he had seen in them. They had received Titus “with fear and trembling” (v. 15), which suggests they accepted Paul’s authority and were prepared to submit to it. And we know from yesterday’s passage that they had indeed responded favorably to Paul’s earlier admonitions. Titus had returned from his visit, but his memory of the Corinthian Christians continued to be a source of encouragement to him.

Think about the infectious character of encouragement. The encouragement Paul had known had spread now to Titus. With Titus returning to Paul, and reporting his own joy in the Corinthians, Paul’s delight had redoubled, causing him to exclaim: “I am glad I can have complete confidence in you” (v. 16).

Apply the Word

One way to encourage pastors is to be a source of encouragement to one another. What act of service can you perform, what broken relationship can you reconcile, what words of love can you speak, to spread the joy of Christian encouragement throughout the body of Christ?

Pray with Us

Would you join us in prayer for the Admissions department on Moody’s Chicago campus? We thank the Lord for the service of Charles Dresser, Janessa Davis, Jacqueline Haywood, and Amy Slennett as they review hundreds of applications every year.
The Grace of Giving

A local church was supporting a missionary in China, and their summer youth program helped raise funds. To spur on their giving, a challenge was set up: boys versus girls. Each night the tally was announced, sending the children back home eager to find ways to earn more money for their giving the next night.

Sometimes friendly competition is the motivation we need to dig a little deeper into our pockets. We do not know the specific details but there was clearly a need in Jerusalem, and Paul had appealed for help earlier to the Corinthians (see 1 Cor. 16:1–4). Paul was now reminding them of their desire to give, but also using the generosity of the Macedonian churches as a way to motivate the Corinthians a little further. Of course, friendly competition was not the only reason Paul encouraged the Corinthians to give.

Deep theological meaning underlies the act of giving. The Macedonians had urged Paul “for the privilege of sharing [koinonia] in this service to the Lord’s people” (v. 4). Koinonia is the Greek word that conveys the rich fellowship that exists in Christ between one congregation and another. Giving to the needs of another congregation is a tangible expression of love for the fellowship that already exists in Christ. Paul did not command them to give; rather, he encouraged them to “excel in this grace of giving” (v. 7).

That brings us to the ultimate reason for giving: the prior grace of God. Knowing that Christ became poor for us “so that you through his poverty might become rich” (v. 9), our lives in turn should spill out in abundant generosity toward others. Generosity to others is an act of thanksgiving and gratitude to God’s grace in our lives.

Apply the Word

How has God’s grace affected your habits of giving, not just money but time, energy, and resources? As you prepare for worship tomorrow (and have an opportunity for giving), ask God to remind you of His grace in your life, and think of ways you can respond with abundant generosity wherever He reveals the need.

Pray with Us

Again, we focus our prayers on the Admissions department. Ask for God’s guidance for the ministry of Christopher Toland, Hannah Tung, Ricardo Brown, and David Humphrey as they take care of the needs of Moody students on the Chicago campus.
“If you cannot finish the job, you should not have started it in the first place.” “A job worth doing is worth doing well.” “Well begun is only half done.” Aphorisms like these point to the wisdom of completing a job well. There’s no reward for leaving a task undone or finishing it without excellence.

Paul expressed similar sentiments in today’s reading. The Corinthians had expressed a desire to give to the church in Jerusalem and had even made a start, but Paul was encouraging them to finish what they had started. Eagerness to begin must be matched by its completion, and that includes the discipline of Christian giving.

But Paul did not just encourage their giving; he also reminded them about important principles of giving. First, the key was to give “according to your means” (v. 11). Perhaps some people hesitate because they cannot give as much as others. No matter, says Scripture; the point is not the amount but the willingness in giving. “If the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have” (v. 12).

Second, the goal of giving is not to make some go without while others find relief but “that there might be equality” (v. 13). Paul’s quotation of Exodus 16:18 is a reminder that this was God’s command to ancient Israel about collecting manna. Each person had enough for their needs, and they were instructed not to hoard it. Paul’s point yesterday about koinonia, the fellowship of Christ’s body (2 Cor. 8:4), emerges again here. There is one body, in full partnership; therefore, let the plenty of some supply what is needed for others. That is true koinonia.

A gospel song says, “I need you / You need me / We’re all a part of God’s family.” There are no lone ranger Christians in the body of Christ. Many of us have been blessed with resources that allow us to bless others. If your church has a Deacon’s Fund or Mercy Fund to help people in need, pray about making a contribution to demonstrate koinonia.

Today, Handel’s Messiah is performed at Moody. It gives the Today in the Word community an opportunity to pray for our students—those performing, working behind the scenes, and in the audience. May they grow in the grace and knowledge of God’s Son!
In today’s world, connecting with others is relatively easy. We shop and donate online, sending money thousands of miles away. Cell phones connect us with friends. Video technology allows us to see each other instantaneously. And airplanes transport us halfway around the world in less than a day.

Our passage today reminds us that it was much different in Paul’s day. Communication and travel were slow and sometimes dangerous, and it took many hands working together to send letters, make visits, or transport goods. The same was true when it came to churches supporting each other; it required the body of Christ working together in concert. That is the picture we are given by Paul.

First there was Titus, Paul’s “partner and co-worker” in the gospel (v. 23). Full of love for the Corinthians, Titus eagerly volunteered to travel to their city to gather the final collection. Paul sent two others with him. The first is described as one “who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel” (v. 18). The second “has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous” (v. 22). Their names were not given; what marked them was their love for the church and their eagerness to serve.

The Corinthians themselves also played an important part: their funds added the final piece to this “liberal gift” (v. 20) so cherished by Paul. Acting with integrity and honesty, the entire body of Christ worked generously and selflessly to offer support to hurting congregations in Jerusalem. But do not miss the ultimate purpose: it was not just to bring relief, but “to honor the Lord himself” (v. 19). When the faithful body of Christ is at work, the honor to Christ is achieved.

**Apply the Word**

In Paul’s earlier letter to Corinth, he reminded them (and us) that “you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Cor. 12:27). Whether big, small, or even anonymous, your place in the body of Christ is essential and valuable. Think of ways you might become more involved in serving the church; then take action this week.

**Pray with Us**

Dr. John Jelinek, VP and dean of Moody Theological Seminary, requests your prayers for the students of MTS and the lives that each student touches with their ministries. We pray their training at MTS would enhance their work for Christ!
In about six weeks, countless Americans will make New Year’s resolutions—to keep in touch with friends, to eat better, to lose weight. The number of gym memberships will soar in January as people resolve to make this year a healthier one. Unfortunately, by February very few will have continued either the gym membership or the exercising.

Sometimes eager desire alone is not enough; we need discipline to finish. Nevertheless, enthusiasm for the right thing is a good place to start, and the Corinthian Christians had begun with a strong enthusiasm for giving. Paul commended them for their promised “generous gift” (v. 5), and had boasted about them to other churches. In fact, their enthusiasm was so great that it inspired the churches in Macedonia to give as well.

Paul admits that there was no need for him to write to Corinth about their desire. But Paul recognized that desire sometimes needs more to turn it into action. In sending a delegation to Corinth ahead of himself, Paul was not correcting wrong behavior but providing opportunity to bring their original desire to full completion. Out of pastoral care, he sent a group in advance so that his boasting “should not prove hollow” (v. 3).

But there was another reason for Paul’s actions, and it had to do with our attitude in giving. Paul knew human nature; if their desire had in fact fallen short of full completion, his arrival would prompt not only embarrassment but quite possibly resentful giving. On the other hand, Paul’s emissaries could ensure that the Corinthian collection “will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given” (v. 5). Generosity in giving is an important mark of the body of Christ, but God wants our giving to be genuinely generous, not grudgingly offered.

**Apply the Word**

Perhaps this passage has sparked a desire in you to give generously in service to the church. Today’s passage encourages us to see that desire come to completion. Follow God’s leading to make a pledge to give generously, whether of your time or financial resources or other acts of service.

**Pray with Us**

Commit to prayer the staff of Moody’s Academic Records department: Katherine Bragg, Auctavia Cegers, Margaret Creech, and Bethanne Tremper. May God grant them peace, the spirit of teamwork, and attention to detail in their day-to-day service.

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Read: 2 Corinthians 9:1–5

**Tuesday, November 19**

*A Generous Work Completed*

> Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given. 2 Corinthians 9:5
Every farmer knows that in order to grow food, you must first buy seed and then be willing to disperse that seed generously into the ground. Without the willingness to part with the seed, there can be no harvesting of life-giving crops. It is a simple principle: you reap what you sow.

Paul applied this agricultural metaphor to the practice of giving: “To give is to sow.” As in farming, generous sowing results in generous reaping. Notice, though, that the generosity of sowing is marked by quality, not quantity. Paul did not specify an amount to be given. Instead, we are told to give as we want—cheerfully. The state of the heart matters, and cheerful giving in response to God’s grace means more than obligatory giving, no matter how large.

If sowing is a metaphor for giving, then what does it mean to reap? What kind of harvest might we expect for generous sowing? Perhaps surprisingly, Paul highlighted the spiritual harvest of generous giving: “God is able to make all grace abound to you” (v. 8, ESV). This grace—in all things, at all times—flows to you so that “you will abound in every good work” (v. 8).

Paul even drew on Psalm 112 to underscore his point. For those in the psalm who fear God and give generously—“their righteousness will endure forever” (v. 9; Ps. 112:9), Scripture encourages us that the all-supplying God will “enlarge the harvest of your righteousness” (v. 10). There is a spiritual blessing in giving generously. We do not give to be justified before God or to expect some material gain. But through the discipline of giving, God does supply us with grace to abound in godly living, which in turn brings thanksgiving to God.

Apply the Word

The spiritual discipline of consistent, cheerful, and generous giving is a challenge in our materialistic culture. God promises spiritual blessing if we will trust Him and sow generously. Find a friend or mentor who will hold you accountable to this spiritual discipline; then begin putting it into practice, trusting God to “make all grace abound to you” (v. 8).

Pray with Us

Keeping the Academic Records department in our prayers, please add these employees to your list: Melanie Monteclaro, George Mosher, and Tyrome Turner. As they work with students on a daily basis, may they always be examples of Christlike attitude.
Malawian pastor visited the United States and movingly sang “Amazing Grace” in the native language of Chichewa, offering his praise to God.

Just as the American gift prompted a response from the Malawian churches, so too Paul anticipated similar results from the Corinthian gifts. First, Christian giving results in thanksgiving to God. Because real needs are met, the recipients respond with an overflow of thanks to God. By giving generously to the Jerusalem churches, the Corinthians provided a living demonstration of their confession of faith. Although some in Jerusalem may have doubted the authenticity of Gentile inclusion into God’s people, the Corinthians’ generosity would prove their genuineness and would result in God being glorified.

In both of these results, Christian giving finds its ultimate purpose, which is not our glory but God’s. But there is an important result for us as well, for Christian giving further unites the body of Christ. Paul saw that the recipient churches would respond to the Corinthian gift by praying for them and growing in affection toward them. Sharing and generosity in the body of Christ enriches the fellowship of Christ’s church.

In the end, as Paul makes clear from the final verse of today’s reading, true Christian giving is nothing less than a tangible expression of thanksgiving for God’s initial gift to us in Christ. As one commentator puts it, this is “the divine gift that inspires all gifts.” Thanks be to God!

God’s initial gift to us should prompt our response of praise and thanksgiving to God. The Christmas season and gift-giving will soon be here. As you are making shopping lists and thinking about gifts for others, consider how you can give God the gift of praise throughout the rest of this year.
A cartoon strip shows two boys meeting on the sidewalk. One boy, holding a menacing dog by the leash, says, “Don’t worry, his bark is worse than his bite.” The other boy, looking worried, replies, “I think I’ll take his bark nonetheless.”

Apparently, some in the Corinthian church were making similar claims about Paul—that his bark was worse than his bite. Paul even referred to them in our passage: they attacked his authenticity, saying Paul was “bold” in letter but “timid” and “unimpressive” in person (vv. 1, 10). Some may have been claiming that Paul used manipulative scare tactics in his letters (v. 9), or even that Paul did not “belong to Christ as much” as they did (v. 7).

Paul met these serious accusations with pastoral sensitivity. Instead of lashing out or using violence, he appealed to them “by the humility and gentleness of Christ” (v. 1). Like a good shepherd, Paul knew that while force may sometimes be necessary (and he reminded them that he would be bold if required), most often gentle guidance was much more effective.

Perhaps most important, Paul offered a pastoral correction to their thinking. They were using the “standards of this world” (v. 2) and “judging by appearances” (v. 7). But Paul reminded them that our weapons in the Christian life are not like the world’s. Our goal is not to gain personal power or to appear wise to the world. Instead, our weapons “have divine power” (v. 4) to address matters of the mind and will. Paul urged the Corinthians (and us) to demolish arguments and pretense set against God, and to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (v. 5). This is the final goal of pastoral ministry: a congregation submitted to Christ.

**Apply the Word**

Scripture calls us to reorient our minds and wills in submission to Christ. Try spending a full day without the world’s bombarding messages from television and the Internet, and instead use that time to allow yourself to be shaped by reading a selection of psalms. You can also play Christian music throughout the day to help focus your spirit on the things of God.

**Pray with Us**

Judy Tollberg, Josh Reigel, and Erik Peterson play a key role in the content development at Moody Publishers. Would you pray for them thanking God for their ministry of spreading the Word in print and through digital media?
Boasting in the Lord

Clement was a late-first-century pastor in Rome. Best known for his letter written to the Christians in Corinth, Clement appealed directly to Paul’s earlier letters to their church. Clement knew the importance of Paul’s authority and his pastoral teaching.

Paul also had to remind the Corinthians of his pastoral importance, but the way that he did this raises the question: is there a place for Christian boasting? Today’s passage teaches that there is both foolish and godly boasting. Knowing the “proper limits” is the key (v. 13). Foolish boasting is simply self-commendation (v. 12). If our standard for what is good and holy is what we see in the mirror, we will always think we are wonderfully wise and godly. We miss opportunities for growth.

The fool also boasts about things outside his or her experience or tries to take credit for someone else’s work. Paul confined his boasting to “the field God has assigned us” (v. 13). He reminded his own congregation about God’s work through him, but did not commend himself to those he had never met. His letter to the Corinthians grew out of their relationship; it was not an example of Paul’s self-promotion. Likewise, while he desired to spread the gospel to regions beyond Corinth, Paul did not take credit for the gospel work in “another man’s territory” (v. 16).

Instead, the proper sphere of boasting is found in the Lord. Look at the fuller context of Paul’s quotation from Jeremiah. There, God warns that a wise man boasts about one’s relationship with God—not because of our accomplishments, but because of the kindness and righteousness of God (Jer. 9:24). This is the only wise boasting—to proclaim that we are known by our loving God.

Apply the Word

What do you take pride in? Possessions, intellectual gifts, relational abilities, or artistic expression? List them on a piece of paper, and then submit them back to God in prayer, recognizing that anything you have is a gift from Him. Ask the Lord to give you pleasure in your relationship with Jesus, and use whatever gifts you have to His glory and honor.

Pray with Us

Chief financial officer Ken Heulitt appreciates your prayers today for the continued provision for Moody’s ministries and good stewardship of Moody’s resources. Thank the Lord today for blessing this ministry over the years.
The “Fool” is a recurring character in Shakespeare’s plays. Often seen initially as silly and naïve, in the end the jester is the one who provides subtle wisdom and insight into the problem at hand. As the jester Touchstone says in As You Like It, “The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.”

In today’s passage, Paul asked the Corinthians to endure his “foolishness” a little more, but in truth, it was pastoral wisdom that Paul offered. The Corinthians had been infiltrated by self-proclaimed “super-apostles.” They preached a different gospel and disparaged Paul’s character and authority. Paul risked appearing foolish in order to raise the alarm for his congregation.

Paul was deeply concerned for the Corinthians, what he called his “divine jealousy” (v. 2). This was not personal defensiveness; Paul was worried about their relationship with the Lord. He has promised them as a pure bride to Christ, but was now concerned that they may be led astray from their “sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (v. 3). Notice what this implies. Our commitment to Christ is no fleeting attachment; it is marital—deep and permanent (cf. Eph. 5:32). What Paul saw in the wavering Corinthian commitment caused him concern.

Just as Eve was deceived by the serpent, so too the Corinthians were being led astray. They too easily put up with these “super-apostles” and accepted false Christs, false spirits, and false gospels. As we go through life, many things can distract and tempt us away from our Beloved. Scripture reminds us today that we must be vigilant to guard our relationship with Christ just as spouses should guard their marriage. We would be wise to heed these “foolish” words of Paul.

Perhaps you know a friend or family member who is subtly being led astray from their “sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (v. 3). It may make you uncomfortable, but will you risk appearing “foolish” by speaking to this person in love? Remind your loved ones that they are the bride of Christ, and recall them back to a deep and abiding relationship with the Lord.
Giving and receiving was an important element of social structures in Paul’s day. The wealthy expressed their power and status by becoming patrons to those in need. In turn, those who received such patronage were obligated to the wealthy patron. To refuse an offer of benefaction was not just impolite; it was a social rejection of friendship.

This cultural value may lie behind our text today. The Corinthians were upset that Paul did not receive their financial support. Clearly, Paul affirmed the right of a Christian pastor to congregational support (see 1 Cor. 9:3–12), and he did accept support from other congregations (see Phil. 4:15–16). But here we learn that Paul had refused support from the Corinthians. His opponents used this refusal to cast doubts upon Paul’s legitimacy and even his love for them.

Paul certainly would have understood the cultural norms in such a situation, and so he explained his motives. Above all, Paul wanted to demonstrate his love for the Corinthians. By ministering without pay, he was willing to demean himself “in order to elevate you” (v. 7). His refusal to accept support, even when he had real need while in Corinth, was not an act of pride or malice. He wanted them to know that his gospel ministry was not for quick financial profit but a genuine ministry of self-sacrifice for the sake of the gospel.

For Paul, his opponents’ failure to understand this indicated their real character. These men who gladly accepted, even demanded, financial support, were “false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ” (v. 13). Unfortunately, that was no surprise. Just as Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, so too his servants offer a pretense of righteousness when what they really desire is self-glory and profit.
Basting in Suffering

Ancient Greeks and Romans appreciated oratorical skills. One device often employed was the rhetoric of irony, in which the implicit meaning of a speech was the exact opposite of the explicit words. The power of irony was in its subtlety and cleverness rather than in its direct argumentation.

Paul used such rhetorical irony in our passage today. Wearing the mantle of the “fool” yet again, he engaged in an extended boast about himself. Since his opponents had promot-ed themselves in shameless and damaging ways, Paul too offered a little “self-confident boasting” (v. 17) of his own. What follows, however, is hardly the typical material for Greco-Roman boasting, and that is the irony that Paul uses in this passage.

After mentioning his Jewish pedigree and his role as servant of Christ, Paul launched into a list of experiences hardly considered triumphant or praiseworthy by the world’s standards. His opponents boasted of their wisdom, accomplishments, and eloquence; Paul highlighted his suffer-ings—imprisonment, floggings, beatings, shipwrecks, and stonings. He faced death and danger from rivers, bandits, Jews, and Gentiles. He experienced sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, cold, and nakedness. Above all, he was concerned about his congregations. To the world, this is a list of embarrassments; to Paul, it was a ré-súmé of glory.

As Paul himself said, “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness” (v. 30). Why? Because Paul knew that Christians do not weigh their worth by the world’s standards. His suffering demonstrated his commitment to Christ and was far more precious than any worldly boast. Chris-tians do not need the world’s praise; we appeal directly to “the God and Father of the Lord Jesus” (v. 31). His approval is all we need.

Apply the Word

Most American Christians know nothing about extreme suffering for the sake of the gospel. Many Christians around the world, however, face social ostracism, physical abuse, and even death for their commitment to Christ. Pray for the suffering church today, that they would remain faithful to our Lord and know the deep approval of our God.

Pray with Us

Jim Elliott, VP of Stewardship, is grateful for your prayers today for the growing partnership between Moody and our constituents, especially as we look forward to a bold future of serving Christ globally, reaching people across different cultures.
On playgrounds across the country, children brag about their superior abilities to run faster, swing higher, or jump further than anyone else. Demonstrations follow as children try to prove to their peers that they have superior strength.

There was a kind of childishness about Paul’s opponents as they boasted of their wisdom and spiritual experiences. Now Paul himself boasted about visions and revelations he had experienced fourteen years earlier. Caught up into paradise, Paul’s experience was so overwhelming that he could not even express what he heard. So why did Paul seemingly stoop to the level of his opponents and relate this ecstatic experience?

In fact, Paul’s point was to show the uselessness of such experiences in proving one’s apostleship. Notice that the details did not matter; he could not even express what he saw. And his use of the third person (“I know a man” [v. 2]) worked to distance himself from that event. His heavenly transportation may be fascinating, but for Paul such things pale in comparison to the true mark of apostleship: weakness.

God had sent a “thorn in [his] flesh” (v. 7) to keep Paul from pride. We know no details about it other than its ongoing, abusive reality. This thorn brought so much torment that Paul pleaded with God three times to have it removed. But Christ’s response was clear: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9).

In our weakness, we are dependent on Christ and prideful boasting is removed. God may grant us mountaintop experiences, but it’s our faithful dependence upon His grace in times of weakness that demonstrates Christ’s glory.

Apply the Word

Do you know someone who is struggling with physical or psychological suffering? Even as you pray for their healing, remind them of Christ’s words to Paul today. Their weakness can be an occasion to demonstrate the strength and power of God. As they deepen their dependence upon the Lord and His grace, the power of Christ can shine into the world.

Pray with Us

We are thankful for individuals, companies, and businesses that sponsor Moody Radio programs. We’d like to cover in prayer the service of Calvin Robinson in Sponsorship and Underwriting who ensures the connection between Moody Radio and its sponsors.
When settlers first came to America, many were looking for a better life not just for themselves but for their children as well. By risking dangerous sea journeys and then enduring the harsh conditions of the new world, countless immigrants sacrificed much—even their own lives—in order to give to their children an opportunity to flourish. Such is a parent’s love.

Paul expressed similar parental feelings for his Corinthian congregation. Having explained his apostolic legitimacy, he reminded the Corinthians once again of his choice not to receive financial support from them. Just as children should not have to support their parents but parents work hard to support their children, so Paul maintained that he would continue not to be a burden to them.

He insisted that all of his actions were driven by his love and concern for them. As Paul beautifully put it: “what I want is not your possessions but you” (v. 14). He was their spiritual father, willing to “spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well” (v. 15). Rather than exploiting the Corinthians, Paul demonstrated his sacrificial love for them (v. 19).

Having reminded them of his genuine parental love, Paul also demonstrated his parental and pastoral concern. He was preparing for his third visit and expressed worry that he might find sins of disunity in the body of Christ (such as quarreling, factions, and slander) and unrepentant sins of impurity among certain members (sexual sin and debauchery). Like a concerned parent, Paul wanted what was best for the Corinthians—their spiritual growth in holiness, not wallowing in sin. Whatever firmness Paul had used, it was always with the purpose of turning them from sin back to Christ and godly living.

On this Thanksgiving Day, we take time to express our gratitude for the many good gifts God has given us as individuals, families, and as a nation. We should also remember the individuals God has placed in our lives who have tirelessly given of themselves and have been God’s instruments for our spiritual growth.

As we celebrate Thanksgiving Day today, let’s come to the Lord in prayer, thanking Him for His limitless grace, love, and mercy. We’d also like to thank Him for you, Today in the Word readers, for your friendship and support.
Final Warnings

How many of us have heard the stern warning of a parent: “If I have to come over there, you’ll be sorry!”? When the child hears those words, he realizes that harsh discipline may be coming if his actions do not change.

Paul conveyed a similar message when he reminded the Corinthians of his coming visit, and he offered a warning as well. If needed, he would exercise his God-given authority to discipline both those in sin and the community that was tolerating it. They may have thought Paul was weak, but he reminded them that he lived in the crucified and risen Christ, who “lives by God’s power” (v. 4). If they wanted proof of Paul’s authority, he would give it to them in Christ—and that authority might entail stern discipline.

In light of this possible discipline, Paul urged the Corinthians to examine themselves, “whether you are in the faith.” They should consider that “Christ Jesus is in you” (v. 5), and live out that reality. The real proof of Christian life is not demonstrations of miraculous power, but rather is found in conforming one’s life to the gospel. Scripture highlights here the importance of a life that is examined in light of Scripture and the Spirit: do we live in obedience to the Christ we profess?

Finally, the purpose of discipline—if needed—was for their benefit, not just as a demonstration of authority. It was “to serve you” (v. 4). Paul understood his authority “for building you up, not for tearing you down” (v. 10). The proper use of spiritual authority is not to lord it over others or to create subservient followers. Spiritual authority is for building up others in Christ, and that was what Paul wanted for his congregation.

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith . . .
Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you?
2 Corinthians 13:5

Apply the Word

If you are in a position of spiritual authority—whether as a parent, church leader, or Sunday school teacher—reflect on how you use that position. Are you encouraging others? Or are you trying to assert your control over the people around you? Pray that God will use the message and example of Paul to shape you into a gentle, encouraging leader.

Pray with Us

Please add to your prayers the staff of Moody’s Legal department under the leadership of general counsel, Elizabeth Brown. As they contribute to all Moody ministries with their expertise in legal matters, we pray that God would bless their service.
The apostle Andrew is a beloved Bible character for many. When he discovered that Jesus was the Messiah, he immediately told his brother Peter (John 1:40–42). Later tradition claims that Andrew took the gospel as far as Russia and into Thrace, where he founded the church in Constantinople. Known for his zeal to preach the gospel, he was martyred upon an X-shaped cross.

Like Andrew, the apostle Paul also continued to proclaim the gospel in the face of objections. Even with all the accusations against Paul and the undermining of his authority, how does he end his epistle? With a generous appeal to rejoice, he addressed them as “brothers and sisters” (v. 11). There is no hint of resentment or withholding of affection. Instead, Paul joyfully affirmed their place with him in the body of Christ.

Notice Paul’s final admonitions. He encouraged their spiritual growth, urging them to heed his admonitions and “strive for full restoration” (v. 11) as the people of God who truly live for God. He encouraged them to express their unity by being “of one mind” and living “in peace” with each other (v. 11). They should “greet one another with a holy kiss” (v. 12), and affirm “the God of love and peace” in them and among them.

Most important, Paul’s closing benediction serves to remind us of the importance of the Trinitarian life. We need the “grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,” the “love of God,” and “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (v. 14). To be the church that affirms one another, grows in holiness, and lives in peace, we must find our life and strength in the triune God. Only in Him can we be the people of God He calls us to be.

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A Call to the Trinitarian Life

As this month’s study showed us, the church is far from perfect, but today we are called back to the source of Christian life: the triune God. As you reflect on the study this month, spend time in prayer asking the Lord to help you grow in the grace, love, and fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As we come to the end of our study of the book of 2 Corinthians this month, let’s thank the Father for His church, the body of Christ. Let us strive for the unity of faith through the Holy Spirit in our congregations.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
2 Corinthians 13:14
Carnegie Mellon University. During this visit, we walked through the powerful magnetic field of the 100-ton magnet of the Cyclotron. In operation, this magnet was energized by nearly half the electric load of the city of Butler, PA.

If the magnetic field of the MRI could have caused my death, why wasn't I killed by the thousand times more powerful Cyclotron field? Was it luck that I survived the shrapnel on the battlefield, escaping death by less than one inch, or that I was not killed many years later by the powerful magnet on the field trip? I don't think it was luck. I consider both incidents miracles, when God was watching over me. He is good!

Always a teacher, Phil Hirschy challenged his former students of the class of ’54. He would like to share with the Today in the Word readers some of the things he told his students—what the Lord showed him over his long and eventful life, a life of service and study of God’s Word:

- Take every day of your life as a gift from God and use it wisely.
- Never quit learning! It will help you stay young.
- Don't fear being too old to do the things you always wanted to do.
- Always endeavor to maintain a positive attitude and actively cultivate your sense of humor. As you age and your short-term memory fails and your body begins to exhibit the wear and tear of living, your attitude and a sense of humor will be a great asset to your quality of life.

As a good student of the Bible, he gives two of his favorite Bible verses to support his challenges: “Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about” (Phil. 4:8 TLB). “A cheerful heart does good like medicine, but a broken spirit makes one sick” (Prov. 17:22 TLB).

Dear readers! If you would like to send us your story to contribute to the series “Encounters with Jesus,” please mail it to Today in the Word, 820 N. LaSalle Blvd., Chicago, IL 60610, or email us at titw@moodycommunications.org.
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