



9 bible studies in

2 Corinthians

‘dealing with disappointment’



2 Corinthians... 'dealing with disappointment'

Some preliminary comments – with each question, sometimes there's a follow up question or two included at the same number. This is to just help draw it out a bit more. You may get it with the first one so don't panic if you end up saying the same thing in thinking about the follow up question and therefore just move on. Also, don't panic if you can't quite see what a question might be driving at. These questions are not the Bible. Feel free to move onto the next one. The questions are just an attempt to help us get into the passage/issue. Let the passage drive things at the end of the day. The questions are of course still meant to be a lead in to what could be very important with what God has in front of us here. So at least think about it before moving on. It's good to dwell for a bit and often, it then becomes a little more obvious, though it is hoped that the questions are not totally useless!

In terms of 2 Corinthians itself - this is all about Paul writing to get this Church back on track for the third time! (it seems Paul wrote a letter before 1 Corinthians — see 1 Cor 5:9-10)

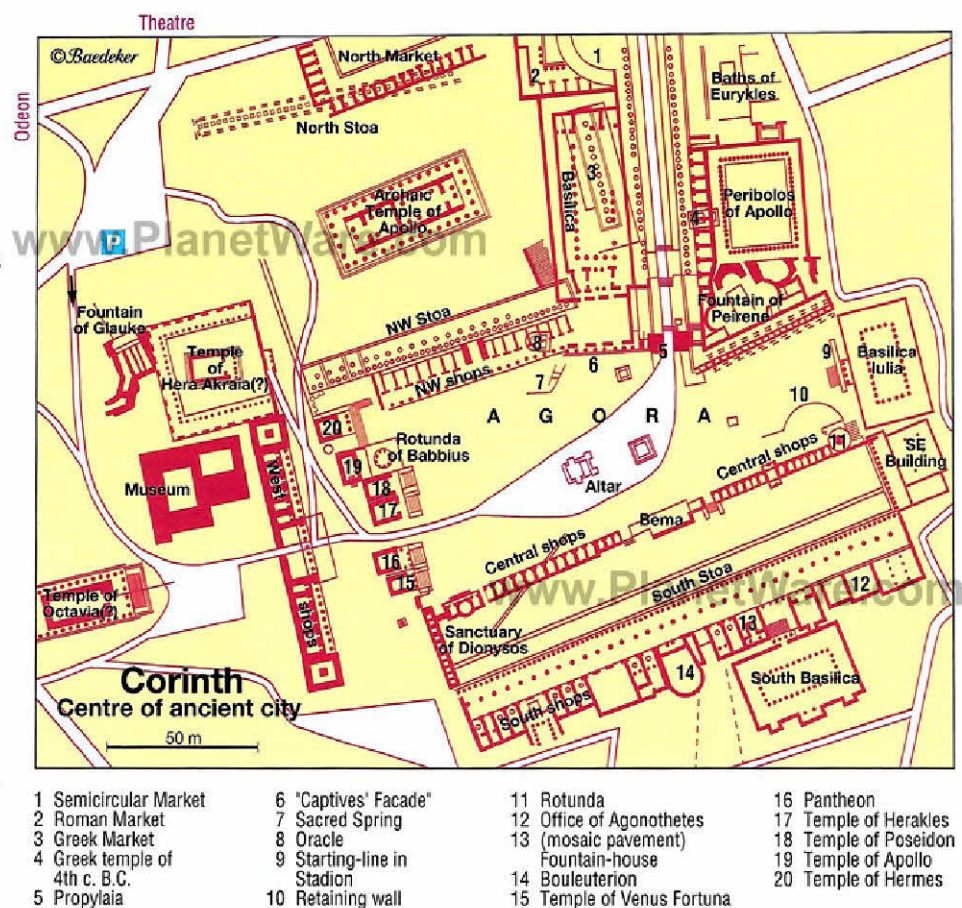
It must have been so hard for Paul to see major things still not right with this Church, especially when they had started out so well (see Acts 18) and there had been the two previous letters as well as a visit (see 2 Cor 12:14, 13:1).

From 1 Corinthians, we know Paul had spent 15 chapters urging and explaining how who we are in Jesus needs to match up more and more with what we are really like, how that gap needs to be taken seriously— 'sanctification'. But by 2 Corinthians, Paul is very disappointed to learn the gap, if anything, is **growing!**

But he doesn't give up as this 'second' letter shows.

And neither should we. Whether other Christians disappoint us from our own Church Family or from other Churches, or maybe even sometimes we disappoint ourselves, the good news (Gospel) of Jesus can overcome.

It's why Paul bothered with a third letter. It's why we should hang in there too!



ammunition for life



kick off

What sort of situations make you feel like giving up?



key verse

2 Cor 1:10...

"On him we have set our hope..."



big idea

Real comfort comes to our lives when our hope is in God.



investigate

read 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

1. How does Paul's beginning to the letter or greeting in v1-3 reveal humility and is perhaps a gentle reminder of one of the huge problems that was going on in 1 Corinthians? (see 1 Cor 1:10-17, 3:1-9)

2. How does God comfort us "in all our troubles"? (v4)

3. What is the focus in v4-7 that God often uses to help us overcome our hardships?

4. Was Paul just offering platitudes from a safe ivory tower? (v8-9) What sort of hardship had he experienced? (peek ahead to 6:1-10, Philipians 1:13, virtually the whole book of Acts from chapter 9 on!)

5. What was so liberating for Paul to discover when he made it through what he thought impossible to bear? (v10-11) What are we "delivered" from?

6. If you have time, briefly, what do these other parts of the Bible add...

Isaiah 40:1-11

John 10:11-18

Romans 8:28-39

Revelation 21:1-4



think & apply

7. Can we comfort others if we haven't been comforted by God? What are some of the key comforts that are missed if we don't bring God to the table?

8. Can you share an example of how a personal hardship was used by God to help comfort another person? Maybe it was a similar experience, but does it have to be?

9. What is the fundamental Gospel truth that we need to apply to not only our salvation in becoming a part of God's family but also in living that out through hardship?

10. Do you think the Corinthians had any inkling as they read this first part of the letter that they were actually a cause of some of the hardship Paul had gone through? Ponder the times we might be blissfully unaware of the negative impact we can have on others.



prayer points

Pray in response to this chapter...



through the week



read: 2 Cor 1:12-2:4

* * * Ordinary people following an extraordinary God * * *

the best plans of mice and men



kick off

What's it like when your carefully thought out plans come to nothing?



key verse

2 Cor 2:20... "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ"



big idea

It's God's agenda that matters, not ours.



investigate

read 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4

1. Why do you think Paul is justifying himself (and Timothy) in the first paragraph? (1:12-14) Any hint that maybe some of the Corinthians were disappointed in him?
2. Do you think some of the Corinthians were disappointed in Paul, especially when he couldn't make the visits as planned? (v15-17) Were they doubting Paul's integrity?
3. Does Paul take matters of integrity lightly? (v18-22) Why not?
4. Why did Paul have to change his planned visits — probably only making the one "painful visit"? (1:23-2:4 — some think this refers to the extended time Paul spent establishing the Church—see Acts 18, though this appeared to be a more positive time — difficulties at that time came more from outside the church rather than from within)
5. What do you think Paul's motives were for the change of plans? Were they justified?
6. If you have time, briefly, what do these other parts of the Bible add...

James 4:13-17

James 5:12

Colossians 3:15-17



think & apply

7. When is it justified to make changes to plans? Is there a difference between a promise and a plan?
8. Can you think of a time when your plans had to change for good reasons (like Paul)?
9. Have you ever got in the way of someone else's good plans (like these Corinthians)?
10. What (or who) is the key to setting the agenda? Give your own example of how that works?



prayer points

Pray in response to this chapter...



through the week



**read:
2 Cor 2:5-4:18**

* * * Ordinary people following an extraordinary God * * *

when someone lets you down



kick off

What should make Christian relationships different?



key verse

2 Cor 4:1...
“...since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart”



big idea

We can’t give into sin in our relationships.



investigate

read 2 Corinthians 2:5-4:18

1. Someone seems to have offended Paul according to 2:5 (possibly what 1 Cor 5 is about or something that happened on Paul’s “painful visit” of v1). How does Paul show the power of the Gospel in handling this? (2:5-11)

2. What is Paul’s overall goal? What does he hope to gain? (2:12-17)

3. Where does Paul’s confidence or assurance lie? (3:1-6)

4. How does the contrast between the old covenant (Moses) and the new covenant (Christ) give Paul such a boost even though things obviously haven’t always been going his way—particularly with these Corinthians!? (3:7-18)

5. How can Paul think that our weakness — the “jars of clay” in v7, “wasting away” of v16 — how can that be an encouragement as we face adversities such as those on view in chapter 4?

6. If you have time, briefly, what do these other parts of the Bible add...

Proverbs 15:1-11

John 13:34-35

Galatians 5:13-15

1 John 2:9-11

7. How do you feel when a fellow believer lets you down? How does the Gospel enable us to deal with it? How are we “outwitted by Satan” if we don’t let the Gospel shape our response?



think & apply

8. What kind of things will we be tempted to do if we don’t apply the Gospel to relationship breakdown? (revisit 4:2)

9. What have we got to remember when unbelievers let us down?

10. Why as believers do we act so surprised when troubles come our way?



prayer points

Pray in response to this chapter...



through the week

read:
2 Cor 5:1-6:2

* * * Ordinary people following an extraordinary God * * *

getting on with it



kick off

What helps you take your mind off things?



key verse

2 Corinthians 5:7...

"We live by faith, not by sight."



big idea

We have great things to do no matter what the circumstances.



investigate

read 2 Corinthians 5:1-6:2

1. What is Paul meaning with all this talk of groaning and nakedness? (5:2-4)
2. How does he motivate himself to get on with it despite the present inconvenience? (5:1-10)
3. What does he do that helps take his mind (or eyes) off the negative? (5:7-9)
4. How does Paul then fill out what it practically means, this "living by faith"? (5:11-6:2)
5. Who is the "we" in all these verses? Is it just Paul and Timothy or Paul and Timothy and the Corinthians or all believers? Are we all "Christ's ambassadors" (5:20)?
6. If you have time, briefly, what do these other parts of the Bible add...

Genesis 12:2-3

Matthew 5:13-16

1 Peter 2:4-12



think & apply

7. Can we wallow in self pity? Is there a time to just get on with it?
8. How do we sometimes mix the motives even though we might be doing things that in themselves are pleasing to God?
9. What difference would it make in your life if you "regarded no one from a worldly point of view" (5:16) when dealing with difficult people?
10. What's your end game? What kind of things get in the way with what Paul says it should be?



prayer points

Pray in response to this chapter...



through the week



read:
2 Cor 6-3-7:1

* * * Ordinary people following an extraordinary God * * *

the cost of commitment



kick off

If the Gospel is free, why does it have to cost us so much?



key verse

2 Corinthians 6:3...

"We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited."



big idea

We need to be prepared to put ourselves out for the sake of the Gospel.



investigate

read 2 Corinthians 6:3-7:1

1. Was Paul 'gilding the lily' in 6:3-10? Can you think of some of the instances in Paul's missionary work that fit with what he lists here? (just scan a few pages again of Acts)
2. How were the Corinthians demonstrating an unwillingness to put themselves out for the sake of the Gospel? (6:11-13)
3. What does it mean to be yoked with an unbeliever? (6:14-18) What's the problem?
4. How had the Corinthians become unhelpfully yoked? (think back to 1 Corinthians as well as what Paul has already canvassed so far in this second letter)
5. How do we "purify ourselves"? (7:1) How does "reverence for God" help massively in this?
6. If you have time, briefly, what do these other parts of the Bible add...

Leviticus 26:9-13

Deuteronomy 22:10

Matthew 11:28-30



think & apply

7. What kind of costs have you observed believers around you be prepared to pay?
8. What kind of costs have you observed believers being reluctant to pay? In other words, what kind of ways can we as Christians find ourselves yoked with unbelievers?
9. How do we still end up paying a price either way, and one which is far heavier if we balk at Jesus call on our lives?
10. What is God asking you to deal with in order to better serve Him?



prayer points

Pray in response to this chapter...



through the week

read:
2 Cor 7:2-16

* * * Ordinary people following an extraordinary God * * *

looking for the good



kick off

What's the normal 'knee jerk' reaction when someone annoys us?



key verse

2 Corinthians 7:3...
"I do not say this to condemn you..."



big idea

Our goal must be to restore one another in Christ.



investigate

read 2 Corinthians 7:2-16

1. Does v2 remind us of the ongoing issues Paul and his close associates (like Timothy) had with the Corinthian Church?

2. Are Paul's immediate words after raising these tensions surprising? (v3-4)

3. Do you get the feeling Paul tries to look for the positive when he can? (v5-7)

4. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul talks about "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) How does he put that into practice with these Corinthians in v8-13a? What were his motives for writing to them?

5. How is Paul so encouraging in the last paragraph of this section? (v13b-16) Why are the reports from Titus so helpful?

6. If you have time, briefly, what do these other parts of the Bible add...

1 Samuel 15

Proverbs 15:28-33

John 3:16-21

Ephesians 4:11-16



think & apply

7. Can we pretend when there are difficulties in relationships? What happens if we try and 'tip toe' around each other?

8. What's the difference between positive reinforcement and flattery?

9. How do you feel when someone who rightly has raised a matter with you is very quick to look for the good in you and encourage you when you are taking good steps forward?

10. Who have you encouraged lately? If we were quicker to do this, how would it help alleviate problems into the future?



prayer points

Pray in response to this chapter...



through the week



read: 2 Cor 8:1-9:15

* * * Ordinary people following an extraordinary God * * *

show me the money!



kick off

Is money the third thing we should never talk about, on top of religion and politics?



key verse

2 Corinthians 9:7...

"...God loves a cheerful giver."



big idea

We have been so richly blessed by God in Jesus. So everything we have is for His purposes.



investigate

read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15

1. Why do the Macedonians stand out as people who know God's grace? (8:1-7) Think about where the gift was going — see Acts 24:17. And why is it not so much the amount given that matters?
2. What is the core reason behind giving even of our money for the sake of the Gospel? (8:8-15) How does our attitude to handling money reveal where our trust ultimately lies? (thinking about the old story of the Israelites quoted by Paul in 8:15 is quite intuitive)
3. Why were Titus and his travelling companions such good examples of what God is looking for? (8:16-24)
4. Is there an underlying problem with the Corinthian attitude to giving? Do you think Paul is being subtle about this in chapter 9?
5. Is Paul kind of bribing them, especially v 11?
6. If you have time, briefly, what do these other parts of the Bible add...

Proverbs 11:23-30

Matthew 6:19-34

Luke 21:1-4

John 13:12-17



think & apply

7. If you don't have much money, do we therefore have not much to give? What value should we place on time and talent?

8. How do you work out giving "according to your means"? (8:11)

9. Do we give so we can get? How could this section be abused to promote what has been called the 'Prosperity Gospel' - where we trust God just so we can be very comfortable?

10. How do we work out what to give to? Is there a priority for God's people collectively to be doing something to show the reality of the Gospel? Why is it more effective when we pool our resources?



prayer points

Pray in response to this chapter...



through the week



read:
2 Cor 10:1-12:10

* * * Ordinary people following an extraordinary God * * *

letting off steam



kick off

How do you reconcile Jesus saying 'turn the other cheek' and yet he also overturned the tables in the Temple?



key verse

2 Corinthians 10:5...
"...we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"



big idea

There is a time for the sake of the gospel to speak plainly or forthrightly.



investigate

read 2 Corinthians 10:1– 18

1. Detect any sarcasm in 10:17 Is Paul getting a bit precious in chapter 10, too "boastful"?
2. What does Paul have to back up his strong words here? Is he contradicting his own argument in v 17?

read 2 Corinthians 11:1-33

3. What's at stake here? (v1-15) Does it warrant this very strong response of Paul?
4. Is there a method to Paul's 'madness' in the rest of chapter 11? How does his rampant "boasting" here show up the error of the Corinthian gang leaders?

read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

5. Is it Paul or someone else who is now the subject of the boasting of 12:1-10? How does Paul's 'argument' here further challenge those Corinthians who were boasting in the wrong things?

6. If you have time, briefly, what do these other parts of the Bible add...

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Mark 11:15-17

Galatians 2:11-16



think & apply

7. Is there a time for letting off steam? What do we need to be careful of when we do?

8. What kind of "other gospels" are out there in our circles that might require us to be fairly bold and forthright?

9. When have you rocked the boat for the sake of the Gospel? Compare when you have just been 'making waves'.

10. What does it mean to boast in our weaknesses? Are Christians meant to be pathetic?



prayer points

Pray in response to this chapter...



through the week



read:
2 Cor 12:11-13:14

* * * Ordinary people following an extraordinary God * * *

perseverance



kick off

Is there ever a time to cut your losses in relationships?



key verse

2 Corinthians 12:14...
“...children should not have to save up for their parents...”



big idea

Mature Christians will persevere in relationships.



investigate

read 2 Corinthians 12:11-13:14

1. How tempted do you think Paul must have been to have just ditched these Corinthians given the depth of hurt in 12:11-21? (note the reference to some as “super apostles” in 12:11 and the slander Paul responds to with sarcasm in 12:16-17 when it seems some were suggesting the collection to help the poor in 8:1-9:15 was a sham)

2. Why was Paul still going out of his way for these guys with a third visit? (12:14-15, 19)

3. What does it mean that Paul might be “humbled” by all this perseverance? (12:21)

4. How is Paul hardly preaching anything new here? (13:1-10) What is the real issue for these Corinthians to face up to or to “examine themselves” (13:5) about?

5. Does Paul’s “good-by” remind you of the issues at stake in the letter? (13:11-14) After reading the whole letter, do Paul’s last words like “perfection”, “appeal”, “peace”, “holy kiss”, “grace”, “love”, “fellowship” stand out?

6. If you have time, briefly, what do these other parts of the Bible add...

Romans 5:1-5

Philippians 2:17

Hebrews 10:32-39

Revelation 2:1-7



think & apply

7. Share how pride gets in the way of relationships, even, when we might be in the right.

8. How do mature Christians handle relationships differently to immature Christians?

9. If we ‘cut and run’ in the short term with relationships, do we limit the opportunity for Gospel learning? (think about how many opportunities Paul had to reinforce the Gospel because of his perseverance with these Corinthians)

10. Share an example where Gospel perseverance in a relationship was so worth it. How does it obviously help Churches and the Gospel if we persevere in these things?



prayer points

Pray in response to this chapter...



through the week



read a bit that particularly hit home

* * * Ordinary people following an extraordinary God * * *