



**May 2022**

# **Keeping the Faith**

**Readings, Reflections, Prayers**  
**2 Corinthians**

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“Jesus” by Stephen Pharis



## Monday, May 2: Acts 18:1-17

This month we will reflect on how we live as Easter people. We are people of the resurrection. We'll read 2 Corinthians, a letter in which Paul reflects on the blessings and the real-life challenges of following Jesus.

To put it in context, we'll review a bit about Corinth, the city to which Paul was writing. We first visit Corinth in Acts 18. Corinth is about 80 km from Athens, Greece. It was a bustling commercial, political, and religious (NOT Christian) city on the narrow strip of land that joins the Peloponnesian Peninsula to mainland Greece.

Corinth was settled as a Roman commercial port. As a trading centre it was a melting pot of every ethnic group in the Empire. Corinth was wealthy – from shipping, business, wine-making (and wine-consuming), and 1000+ prostitutes based in the temple of Aphrodite. Corinth was also "interesting." Greek philosopher, Aristophanes, coined the verb *"korinthiazomai,"* "to live like a Corinthian," as a term for a person with no moral inhibitions.

Paul was in Corinth for a year and a half. He didn't have an easy time. He got frustrated speaking to the Jews and moved on to non-Jews, Gentiles. Eventually some of the zealous Jews dragged Paul into court for *"persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to our law"* (Acts 18:13). The Roman proconsul, Gallio, refused to get involved in an internal Jewish dispute. The church in Corinth would have its own internal problems with conflict and ethical problems, reflecting the ethnically diverse, politically polarized, rough-and-tumble, hedonistic city in which it was located. How do you serve Jesus in such a crazy culture?

God tells Paul, *"Don't be afraid. Speak out. Don't be silent. For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me."* This is encouragement for us, too. Our city may not be as wild as Corinth. But we live in challenging times. We do serve a risen Saviour who is more than able to be with us, encourage us, and help us in hard places as well. Paul reminds us we may go through pain, problems, and challenges, but God is always with us. He never leaves us. He is faithful. He will get us through.

God spoke through Moses saying, *"Be strong and courageous. For the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you ..."* (Deuteronomy 31:6). That is good news for us today.

*O Lord Jesus, who came to be poor rather than rich,  
have mercy on all who are in need and want.  
Comfort them in all sorrows.  
Supply their needs.  
Raise up friends for them.  
Give them grace to learn of you.  
Help them always to put their trust in you.  
Have mercy, blessed Saviour, on all who are living in sin,  
who do not pray for themselves,  
and who do not care for their own souls.  
Turn them to yourself.  
Teach them to see the things that really matter.  
May I be of service any way I can to see your Kingdom come.  
Amen.*

The Narrow Way

## Tuesday, May 3: 1 Corinthians 1:1-10

We read 1 Corinthians from January to April. It's good to review a bit, so we can put 2 Corinthians in context.

After Paul left Corinth, he travelled through what is now Turkey (Acts 19). In Ephesus, he apparently wrote a letter to the church in Corinth, which we do not have (in 1 Corinthians 5:9, Paul refers to this lost letter). As well, the Corinthians have been in touch with Paul, asking some questions (1 Corinthians 7:1). They tell Paul know about some of the "issues" in the church (1 Corinthians 1:11). So, the letter we have, named 1 Corinthians, is probably 2 Corinthians (and what we call 2 Corinthians is really 4 Corinthians. It's complicated.

Let's simply remember this letter is part of an ongoing dialogue between Paul and his friends in the church in Corinth, dealing with questions they're asking and problems they're facing.

The church in Corinth has serious issues. There are nasty divisions, tough moral problems (not surprising in Corinth given its crazy culture), clear heresies, major doctrinal misunderstandings, polarizing issues regarding worship, problems with leadership ... and on and on. How does Paul begin? He reminds them

- They, the church, are *"God's church in Corinth ... called by God to be his own holy people."*
- They are *"made ... holy by means of Christ Jesus."*
- God has given them *"every spiritual gift (they) need."*
- They need unity: *"Agree with one another and live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose."*

God – Father, Son, and Spirit – is the One in control, here. He is the One who has created this church. He called it into being. He saves the people. He is making them more and more like Jesus. He has given His church all the gifts they need. That's good news for us, too. We are His church. He saves us. He makes us more and more like Jesus. He has gifted us. He will be with us, always.

Paul also emphasizes unity. For people of Jesus, unity is not optional. It is God's command. The Greek word for *"agree"* is the word which gives us the word *"symphony,"* meaning *"to sound together, primarily of musical instruments."* It could be translated into English as *"harmony."* Unity is not uniformity. As a symphony orchestra needs many different instruments, playing many different (but complementary) roles, the church needs many different people, playing many different (complementary) roles. The key to an orchestra is that everyone follows the conductor. And the key to church is that everyone follows our conductor – Jesus.

- We are *"God's church in Lethbridge ... called by God to be his own holy people."* We have been called into being by God. We are His church. We are His people. He is our Lord. We can trust ourselves and our church into His hands, knowing that, as we do so, we are in the best of hands.
- We are *"made holy by means of Christ Jesus."* The church in Corinth was far from holy – yet. But the Spirit of God was at work teaching them (through Paul and others), helping them become more and more like Jesus. We don't have nearly the issues Corinth had, but we can be confident that the Spirit is at work in our midst, too. Jesus is actively working among us.
- God has given us *"every spiritual gift (we) need."* If a church as problem-filled as Corinth is blessed by God, clearly He doesn't expect perfection before He blesses His church. The faithfulness of God, uniting us with Jesus, provides us with all the gifts we need to serve Him faithfully, too (1:9). Our challenge is to use our gifts for His glory, personally and corporately.
- We are to *"Agree with one another and live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose."* What does that mean to you?

We are His church, empowered by His Spirit, to be His people in the world. Praise Him.

*Today, I thank you for anything that happened to me  
that made me feel life is really and truly worth living.  
I thank you for all the laughter that was in today.  
I thank you for the life I have today, in Jesus.  
I thank you, too, for any moment when I saw the seriousness and the meaning of life.  
I thank you very specially for those I love, for those who love me,  
for all the difference it has made to me to know them,  
and for all the happiness it brings me to be with them.  
May I love them as you love me.  
Amen*

William Barclay (1907-1978)

### **Wednesday, May 4: 1 Corinthians 1:10-31**

The church in Corinth is splintered: some follow Apollos, some Paul, and some Cephas/Peter. They need unity:

*"Agree with one another and live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose"* (1 Corinthians 1:10). Paul emphasizes it's really all about Jesus. It's not about people. He wants the Corinthians talking about who **Jesus** is and what **Jesus** has done in their lives. If there is anyone worth talking about, it's not Apollos or Cephas or Paul – or themselves – but **Jesus**. Apollos, Cephas, Paul, you, me – none of us can change people's lives. But **Jesus** can. So we focus on **Him**.

People may wonder a bit about us when we speak about what Jesus has done in our lives and if we take our faith so seriously, we actually **live** our convictions. We choose to pull ourselves out of bed to go to church on nice May Sunday mornings that are perfect for sleeping in (although, if you've ever noticed, lots of people do get going early enough; they can get going for golf and picnics). We choose to care for people in need. We pray for those who suffer. We volunteer to help others. We choose to be honest, have integrity, be faithful, practice compassion, seek justice, forgive others, love mercy ...

To many people, our faith will seem incomprehensible, irrelevant, or even crazy. But we know it is the truth. It clarifies our values. It defines our relationships. It gives us hope. It gives us purpose. It just works. We can be confident knowing that we have the truth ... and the truth has set us free.

*Father, this day may bring some hard task to our lives  
or some hard trial to our love.  
We may grow weary, or sad, or feel hopeless.  
But, Father, our whole lives have been proof of your ongoing care.  
Bread has come for our bodies,  
thoughts to our minds,  
love to our hearts,  
and all of these from you.  
So help us, we pray,  
while we stand this morning on this side of all that this day may bring.  
Help us trust you this day.  
Please shine into the gloom in our minds.  
Stand by us in any trial of our love.  
Give us rest in your good time as we need.  
May this day be full of resurrection power.  
Draw us near to you.  
Make us more like you.  
And God, may we so trust you this day,  
that when the day is done, our faith shall be firmer than ever.  
When our last day comes and our work is done,  
We know we will be with you, forever,  
in the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

Richard Collyer (1823-1912)

## Thursday, May 5: 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Today we begin looking at 2 Corinthians. It is actually **4** Corinthians – we just don't have 1 and 3.

- 1 Corinthians (which we don't have), referred to in [1 Corinthians 5:9](#), was a letter Paul sent to the church in response to early enquiries.
- 2 Corinthians, which we call **1 Corinthians** because it's the first one we have.
- 3 Corinthians (which we don't have) apparently a harsh letter of rebuke (see [2 Corinthians 2:3-4](#)).
- 4 Corinthians, which we call **2 Corinthians** because it's the second one we actually have.

Confused? Don't worry about it. It doesn't really matter. Paul has lots to teach us ...

In between our 1 Corinthians and our 2 Corinthians, some troublemakers attacked Paul's credibility. They argued his poverty, physical suffering, and persistent persecution showed Paul was not actually God's servant at

all. If Paul were genuinely sent by God, he should be healthy, wealthy, and "successful." Sound familiar? There are teachers today who suggest that REAL Christians must be blessed financially, with good health, and popularity. Nothing bad will ever happen to them. If we're not being blessed like this, there must be unconfessed sin on our lives, we are not "true" Christians, or we don't have enough faith. It's our fault if everything isn't perfect. **WE** need more faith, **WE** need to try harder, **WE** must pray more. It's all up to **US**.

Paul's third (non-existing letter) was apparently a strong defence of Paul's authenticity. It sounds like Paul was blunt in it (see [2 Corinthians 2:3-4](#)). The Corinthians repented. 2 Corinthians is Paul's reply to news they had left the false teachers. People in Corinth were faithfully following God again.

Paul is very clear: if we follow Jesus faithfully, life may not always be easy. Yes, God may (on occasion) really bless us with health, opportunity, security, and other blessings. If that happens, it's not a reward for **our** good works or faith. It's just a blessing from **God**. Enjoy it. If we suffer hard times, it's certainly NOT a sign of God's disapproval. It's life in a fallen world. Jesus never promises a trouble-free life (John 16:33).

In fact:

- **"comfort"** (used 5 times in various forms in verses 1-11) does not come from "stuff." Our comfort comes from God. Jesus uses the same Greek word ( "*paraklesis*") to describe the Holy Spirit (the "Comforter/Advocate" in [John 14:16, 26](#); [15:26](#), and [16:7](#)). Literally, the Greek word means "to stand beside/with a person." Whatever we go through in life – bad or good – God is right there beside us as our Comforter. His constant presence is our comfort. His Spirit is our Comforter. We are never alone.
- **Even when the pressure seems overwhelming, God is a constant source of strength.** There is a purpose to suffering: "*As a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead*" (1:9). When we are pushed beyond our own ability to cope, we are forced to rely on God. When we genuinely trust God, we discover He faithfully gets us through.
- As well as pushing us to rely on God, **suffering gives us the opportunity to experience God's comfort, peace, and joy.** Sometimes we directly experience God's peace through His Spirit working deeply in our lives. Other times we experience God's presence through other people coming alongside us in our hard times. However we experience Him, God is always with us.
- As we experience God's comfort, then **we can comfort – come alongside – other people.** We can pass that blessing on to other people. We can be the answer to other people's prayers. Those of us who have been through pain are able to walk with others with empathy and compassion. As fellow strugglers we can be an incredible source of comfort to other people who suffer ...

Who do you know who needs a friend? Who needs someone to "come alongside"? How can you do that?

*Stay with me, Lord.  
Then I shall begin to shine as you shine,  
to be a light to others.  
The light, Jesus, will be all from you.  
None of it will be mine.  
No merit belongs to me.  
It will be you who shines through me upon others.  
Let me praise you, in the way which you love best,  
by shining on all those around me.  
Give light to them as well as to me.  
Bring light to them through me.  
Teach me to show forth your praise, your truth, your will.  
Make me preach you without preaching,  
not by words but by my example.  
Fill my heart, Lord, with overwhelming love for you.  
May your light shine though my love for you.  
Fill my heart, Lord, with love for all your people.  
May your light shine through everything I do and say.  
Amen.*

John Henry Newman (1801-1890)

## Friday, May 6: 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4

Sometimes avoiding conflict is the best thing to do. Paul had planned to visit Corinth twice (1:15) but didn't. He knew it would result in a fight with those opposing him (1:23, 2:1). The confrontation would be ugly.

The result, however, was Paul's enemies attacked his trustworthiness. How could you trust a person who broke his promises to come? Trust is critical in any relationship. When we have trust, things are wonderful. But when trust is broken, it is so difficult to rebuild trust. And a lack of trust affects everything ...

Paul emphasizes his conscience is clear. He hasn't done anything wrong. He knew that if he arrived in the midst of a conflict, things would only get worse. Instead, he chose to communicate by letter ( "*Our letters have been straightforward, and there is nothing written between the lines and nothing you can't understand*" 1:13). Sometimes in conflict situations, giving people space for a "time-out" to relax, calm down, and get some distance is important. It's amazing that after Paul has written such a glowing description of love – love within the church – to the people in Corinth (1 Corinthians 13), they clearly can be so **unloving**. Apparently the believers in Corinth needed to reread 1 Corinthians 13.

Again, Paul points them back to **Jesus**. It's not about personalities, popularity, and power. It's about what **God** has done among us in **Jesus** and through the **Holy Spirit**:

*"Jesus Christ, the Son of God, does not waver between "Yes" and "No." ... As God's ultimate "Yes," he always does what he says. For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding "Yes." And through Christ, our "Amen" (which means "Yes") ascends to God for his glory."* Paul goes on to remind them that, *"It is God who enables us, along with you, to stand firm for Christ. He has commissioned us, and he has identified us as his own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment that guarantees everything he has promised us"* (1:19-22). If we are going to stand firm in this crazy world, it will be in the power of Jesus.

The word Paul uses to describe the Holy Spirit (as a deposit, first installment, or down payment) is a business term. This is something the Corinthians would have been familiar with. When we believe, the Holy Spirit seals us as His own. A house is "ours," even before we fully pay off the mortgage. We belong to Jesus, even though we are still on earth. He holds the mortgage on our lives. One day, we will be "all" His, when we receive the fullness of God's promise to be with Him forever. We are His people. We belong to Him. We are secure in that saving relationship. No ifs, ands, or buts. In the meantime, we live in and are part of this world.

I am not about to walk away from my house – I have too much invested in it. We belong to Jesus – He has too much invested in us. He gave His life for us. We are bought by Jesus, for a price – the price of His own life. My house cannot decide it doesn't want to be mine anymore. Neither, Paul is saying, can we just walk away from Jesus. We are His. We belong to Him. He has bought us with His blood. The matter is settled.

You are saved by Jesus. You are safe in His hands. What does that mean for you?

*Lord, help us to see in your crucifixion and resurrection an example of how to endure  
and seemingly to die in the agony and conflict of daily life,  
so that we may live more fully and creatively.  
You accepted patiently and humbly the rebuffs of human life,  
as well as the tortures of your crucifixion and passion.  
Help us to accept the pains and conflicts that come to us each day  
as opportunities to grow as people and become more like you.  
Enable us to go through them patiently and bravely,  
trusting that you will support us.  
Make us realize that it is only by death of ourselves and our self-centered desires  
that we can come to live more fully.  
It is only by dying with you that we can rise with you.  
Amen*

Mother Teresa (1910-1997)

## Saturday, May 7: 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

What does forgiveness look like? Who should we forgive? How do we forgive?

In this passage, Paul deals directly with the person who is causing the dissension and ruckus in Corinth. The (unnamed) person had made Paul's second visit to Corinth very painful. To deal with the slander, division, and lies this person spread Paul wrote a blunt letter (which we don't have, 3 Corinthians in the timeline on Thursday, May 5). Because of this conflict, Paul delayed his return journey to Corinth (yesterday's reading). Paul doesn't name the person and doesn't go into all the gory details about the fellow's vindictive personal attacks (the morbid curiosity within us might like to hear them).

The majority of the church stood with Paul against this fellow's nastiness. They instituted whatever discipline Paul had suggested in the lost letter. What should happen next? Paul says, *"what's needed now is that you should forgive and console him, in case someone like that might be swallowed up by such abundant sorrow. Let me urge you, then, to reaffirm your love for him"*(2:7-8). Does that surprise you?

Paul goes on to talk about forgiveness: *"When I forgive whatever needs to be forgiven, I do so with Christ's authority for your benefit, so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes"*(2:10-11). Forgiveness is from God. Unforgiveness is evil. Jesus' command is that we do forgive others.

- Jesus concludes His "Lord's Prayer" (*"forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us"*) with the comment, *"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins"*(Matthew 6:14-15).
- When Peter asked, *"Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?"* Jesus replied, *"No, not seven times, but seventy times seven."*(Matthew 18:21-22). Jesus then tells a pointed parable emphasizing you need *"to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart"*(18:35).
- Jesus also says, *"If another believer sins, rebuke that person; then if there is repentance, forgive. Even if that person wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, you must forgive."*(Luke 7:3-4)

Can I forgive people who have hurt me? Lied about me? Paul is living proof we can put these hard-to-live-out principles into practice. What Satan would love us to do is to NOT forgive, to hold on to grudges, nurse our wounds, and seek revenge. Paul ways, we know what Satan is up to, so don't fall into that trap.

- When I hold on to a grudge, does it hurt the other person? Usually not. But it eats me up inside. It steals my joy. It makes me miserable. I lose sleep. It gives me ulcers. I suffer – not the other person.
- When I won't forgive someone, does it build up my family or church? Quite the opposite. We become divided. Unforgiveness is a cancer that eats away trust, good relationships, love, peace, and joy ...

Paul gives us a great example of open, honest communication about a problem. They talk about it. They resolve it. There was genuine – from your heart – forgiveness. Now they need to build one another up. They need to reaffirm their love for one another. This is mature Christian behaviour.

- How about me? Who do I need to forgive? How am I doing at it?
- Who do I hurt when I don't forgive? What is my lack of forgiveness doing to my health?

Lord, help me to forgive, to console, and to reaffirm my love ... Who do I need to encourage, today?

*Lord of the Universe, Master of All,  
look in love upon your people.  
Pour the healing oil of your compassion on a world that is wounded and dying.  
Send us out in search of the lost,  
to comfort the afflicted, to bind up the broken,  
And to free those trapped under the rubble of fallen dreams.  
Amen.*

Sheila Cassidy

## Sunday, May 8 (Mother's Day): 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

Wherever Paul goes he is always conscious that God is leading him. Isn't that interesting? Do you look at your life that way? We can get overly deterministic and suggest we have no free will, that God predetermines every little thing in our lives. I don't get that sense of fatalism from Paul. I do sense Paul sees every place he goes as an opportunity to experience God's grace and share God's love.

Paul uses the imagery of a Roman Emperor's victory procession to describe his life. It's an unfamiliar metaphor to us but was easy to understand in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. When the Emperor came back from a successful military campaign, he would lead a parade of his victorious troops, followed by the spoils of war, including captured prisoners – now slaves. These slaves would be paraded on display.

In Paul's description, who is the Emperor? God.

In the parade, who follows after? His slaves, including Paul ... and us. Paul often describes himself as God's servant/slave and even Jesus' prisoner. Paul is rejoicing at being a conquered slave, joyfully participating in Christ's victory celebration. That's an interesting way to look at life, isn't it? Jesus has conquered our stubborn independent wills – that's a good thing. He is our King. Now we are His slaves. But that's a great thing. We are freed from slavery to sin. We are free to serve a GREAT master, God. Our purpose is to serve Jesus.

- How does it make you feel that we are "*his captives ... led us along in Christ's triumphal procession*"?
- As His slave, "*he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere*"? How do you feel about that?

There is an aroma – a good aroma, from burning incense – that accompanies a triumphal procession. Smells are evocative. The smell of coffee, bread baking, meals cooking, flowers, and perfumes – these are smells we enjoy. They make us feel good. There are other smells we don't enjoy (sewage and rotten eggs come to mind). Paul describes how he and his message about Jesus is like wonderful incense scattered along the route.

But that aroma – the good news about Jesus – divides people.

- For those who love the emperor – God – it's a great aroma: forgiveness, love, life, and freedom.
- For those who reject God, anything that reminds them of Him is like the smell of death.

How do we "smell" to the world? Do they "smell" our love for Jesus? Are we an aroma of hope? Love? Joy? Forgiveness? Mercy? Compassion? Or do we just smell (you know what I mean 😊)?

*Glorious God, give me grace to change my life  
and to see, but not fear, death.  
Death, for those who know you, is the gateway to an eternal life of blessing.  
Good Lord, give me a humble, lowly,  
quiet, peaceable,  
patient, charitable,  
kind, tender,  
and loving mind,  
in all my words and all my thoughts, to be filled by your Holy Spirit.  
Good Lord, give me a full faith,  
a firm hope,  
a fervent charity,  
and a love for you that cannot be compared to my love for myself.  
Good Lord, give me a longing to be with you,  
not to avoid the misfortunes of this world  
or simply to be in that joyful place called heaven,  
give me that longing to be with you today and every day,  
simply because I love you.  
Amen*

Thomas More (1478-1535 [executed by Henry VIII])



## Monday, May 9: 2 Corinthians 3:1-6

Letters of recommendation are “interesting” sometimes. Consider this one:

*While working with Mr. Smith, I have always found him working studiously and sincerely at his table without gossiping with colleagues in the office. He seldom wastes his time on useless things. Given a job, he always finishes the given assignment in time. He is always deeply engrossed in his official work, and can never be found chitchatting in the canteen. He has absolutely no vanity in spite of his high accomplishment and profound knowledge of his field. I think he can easily be classed as outstanding, and should on no account be dispensed with. I strongly feel that Mr. Smith should be pushed to accept promotion, and a proposal to management be sent away as soon as possible.*

*Regards,  
Branch Manager*

### **A second note followed the report:**

*Mr. Smith was present when I was writing the report mailed to you today. Kindly read only the odd numbered lines for my true assessment of him.*

*Regards,  
Branch Manager*

Paul talks about letters of recommendation. He contrasts his motivations for ministry with that of the hucksters causing him grief. Paul’s detractors were anxious to prove their credibility, presumably trying to get letters of reference from somewhere. But letters mean nothing. Paul’s challenge is to look at results. Look at what God has done through Paul’s ministry (including the church in Corinth). How could anyone really question if God is at work in and through Paul’s life and ministry? God’s results, through Paul, speak for themselves.

Do people see the Spirit’s work in our lives? It may not be dramatic church planting success like Paul. But the Holy Spirit produces fruit in our lives. Paul writes that the Holy Spirit’s work in us results in *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23).

Do people see us growing in this kind of fruitfulness (we will never be perfect)? Look back at [1 Corinthians 13](#). Paul talks about virtues of patience and kindness. He speaks of not being jealous, boastful, proud, rude, self-centered, irritable, or unforgiving. Are you moving toward being more loving? More and more like Jesus?

*Lord, help me to be fully alive to your holy presence.  
Lord, may I never take the gift of freedom for granted.  
You gave me the great blessing of freedom of spirit.  
Fill my spirit with Your peace and Your joy.  
I am surrounded by your loving presence, Lord, but I am aware of my fragility and weakness.  
As I talk to Jesus may I also learn to be still and listen.  
I picture the gentleness in His eyes and the smile full of love as he gazes on me.  
I can be totally honest with Jesus as I tell Him of my worries and my cares.  
I will ask Him to help me to place myself fully in His care,  
to abandon myself to Him, knowing that He always wants what is best for me.  
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,  
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.  
Amen*

## Tuesday, May 10: 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Many early Christians, including several in Corinth, were Jewish converts. Many of these Jewish Christians felt every other Christian also had to become Jewish. This meant men must be circumcised and everyone must observe all the Old Testament feasts, laws, etc. The early church wrestled through this many times, notably at the Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15). It is quite likely that some of the opposition to Paul in Corinth was from people from this ultra-Jewish-Christian camp. Paul simply wasn't being Jewish enough. He was not requiring new believers to become Jewish as well as Christian.

Paul emphasizes the old Jewish "follow-the-law" approach to religion is dead. Legalism doesn't work. Trying to follow all the laws doesn't change your life. Knowing all the rules, you still can't save yourself. You can't "will" yourself to be perfect. You still do all the evil things everyone else does, you just feel more guilty about it. You are still separated from God by your sin. We all try to do what we know is right. But, at times, we all fall short. None of us is perfect.

Paul stands against this 'Back to Moses' approach. He wants to show the contrast between the old and new covenants. The old way didn't work. When Moses spent time with God, receiving the covenant, his face became radiant. God's holiness was too much for the Israelites. Moses had to wear a veil. People were separated from God. God's covenant with Moses just made people more acutely aware of their sin. But Moses could give them no way forward to overcome their problems. They had no hope.

Jesus' death changes everything. There is no longer any veil between ourselves and God (when Jesus died, the veil separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple was literally torn in two). Our sins are forgiven. We have a way forward. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit. We can know and talk with God directly.

We have real power – the power of God – to come completely into God's presence and to live as His Spirit leads us. *"But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord – who is the Spirit – makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image."* (3:16-18). Our lives can be genuinely transformed because we know Jesus.

- How has the Spirit changed you? How would you be different if He was not in your life?
- How is He continuing to work in your life and transform you?
- What parts of your life do you need to invite Him into, to renew, restore, and transform?

*As I begin this prayer, God is here.  
Around me, in my sensations, in my thoughts and deep within me.  
I pause for a moment.  
I become aware of God's life-giving presence.  
Your death on the cross has set me free.  
I can live joyously and freely without fear of sin or death.  
Dear Lord help me to be always aware of the important things in life.  
To care for those around me.  
To seek your presence in all I meet.  
Friends don't keep secrets from one another.  
As I pray, can I look at Jesus as my friend  
and share my innermost thoughts with him,  
trusting that He understands?  
Thank you, O my Father, for giving us your Son,  
And sending your Spirit until your work on Earth is done.  
Amen.*

## Wednesday, May 11: 2 Corinthians 4:1-7

Many people seem to have one of two (extreme) attitudes toward cars. Some people want the best car, keep it squeaky clean, accessorize it, baby it ... Their car (or pickup truck in southern Alberta) is their most prized

possession. To quote Shania Twain, "You're one of those guys who likes to shine his machine / You make me take off my shoes before you let me get in / I can't believe you kiss your car good night / C'mon, tell me, you must be jokin', right?" Or not. Their "ride" may seem to be more precious than other people are ...

For other people, their car is just a means of transportation – as long as it gets from A to B it's good. They don't wash it, change the oil, care if it's rusty, and run it into the ground. Their car is just a tool.

Paul is encouraging us to think about ourselves in our relationship with God. For some people, the people who are commending themselves and strutting about with their fine ideas, everything is about them. They know best. They're right. They want people to look at them and see how wonderful they are. They look down their noses at Paul as he was struggling to make it through, suffering all sorts of problems and persecutions. God really doesn't figure into the picture at all.

Paul, however, describes himself – and us – as "earthenware pots" – cars that will rust, break down, and ultimately fail. But what's important is what we can do. Through us God's light can shine in the world. It's not about us. It's all about Jesus. We are tools through whom God's glory, God's love, God's hope, God's message, God's healing, and God's light can shine. It's not about the car/pot. It's all about God.

Do we want people to look at us and say, "Wow. What an amazing person"? Or do we want to people to say, "Wow, what an amazing God."? OK, part of us might like the first option. But realistically, if there is anything amazing in our lives, it's only because of God's blessings to us. We are not self-made people. The talents, skills, education, opportunities, blessings we enjoy are ultimately all gifts from God.

Paul is reminding us that we will not last forever, rather like a car/pot. Our bodies break down (the older we get the more we realize that). We become more and more aware of our mortality and frailty. But that's OK. Jesus, who was raised from the dead, will raise us as well. He is also reminding us that though our physical health may fail, our spiritual health (spiritual maturity) can/should actually get healthier with age.

"Our great power is from God, not from ourselves" (4:7). Thank God, it's not up to us, in our power, to change the world. But God Spirit can change things. May God help us reflect on how we can share His love with the world around us.

*"I stand at the door and knock," says the Lord.  
What a wonderful privilege that the Lord of all creation desires to come to me.  
I welcome His presence.  
Guide me always to do your holy will knowing that your strength will carry me through.  
"Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.  
Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation." (Psalm 25:4-5).  
Jesus, You are always there waiting for me.  
Sometimes I get bogged down with the concerns of this life.  
Grant that I may be still more often.  
To know Your peace, Your calm.  
I invite you into my heart of hearts, Lord Jesus.  
Teach me.  
Amen.*

#### **Thursday, May 12: 2 Corinthians 4:8-18**

If we have enough faith, God will bless us financially, we'll enjoy physical well-being, and our relationships will be great. Guaranteed. Right? The Bible promises that, if we have faith in God, He will deliver security and prosperity. That's the deal. Right? After all, it is God's will for His people to be blessed. Right?

So ... if we're not experiencing financial blessings, good health, or wonderful relationships, then there must be unconfessed sin in our lives. Or we're not saying the right words. Or not supporting the right ministry.

How does this popular "prosperity gospel" square with today's reading?



In fact, much teaching in the Bible, especially the New Testament, suggests that those who love God, in fact, may face more trials and tribulations than those who do not follow His ways.

- Think about Jesus' life. He lived the life of an itinerant teacher, with no stable home. He faced abuse. Rejection. Betrayal. And He was ultimately unfairly tried, tortured, and executed. Hardly a "blessed" life by some popular media teachers' standards.
- Think about Paul. Like Jesus, he spent years travelling, without a regular home. He was abused and arrested numerous times (reread Acts). In the end, he will be executed as well.
- Eleven of Jesus' twelve apostles will be executed for their faith (only John dies a natural death).
- New Testament writings often talk about suffering for our faith (1 & 2 Peter, Hebrews 11).

Of course, we may have a wonderful, blessed life as followers of Jesus. That's great. Be thankful.

But we may have tough lives, even though we follow Jesus. That is not a sign of God's displeasure or a lack of faith. That's simply the life that God has allowed us to live.

Whether we live a relatively "easy" life or a "difficult" life, our call is to keep the faith. We are all called to life faithfully for God, in whatever our circumstances. And we are all called to share His love, in Word and in deed, as well as we can ...

*"Even if our outer humanity is decaying, our inner humanity is being renewed day by day. This slight momentary trouble of ours is working to produce a weight of glory, passing and surpassing everything, lasting forever, for we don't look at the things that can be seen, but at the things that can't be seen. After all, the things you can see are here today and gone tomorrow, but the things you can't see are everlasting" (4:16-18).*

*I pause for a moment and think of the love and the grace that God showers on me,  
creating me in his image and likeness, making me his temple ...  
If God were trying to tell me something, would I know?  
If God were reassuring me or challenging me, would I notice?  
I ask for the grace to be free of my own preoccupations.  
May I be open to what God may be saying to me.  
I need to take time out from my daily chores.  
I know that my body needs a rest.  
When I come into your presence, Lord,  
my heart and mind are refreshed, my spirits lifted.  
Dear Jesus, I can open up my heart to you.  
I can tell you everything that troubles me.  
I know you care about all the concerns in my life.  
Teach me to live in the knowledge that you who care for me today,  
will care for me tomorrow, and all the days of my life.  
Amen*

### **Friday, May 13: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 and Acts 1:1-11**

We live in the tension of living both fully in this world today and realizing we live for a future reality with God ...

Historically Christians have gravitated to one side of this reality or the other. Some Christians have emphasized our life here on earth so much that the reality of life with God can almost be forgotten. They may spend lots of (great) time and energy seeking to see the Kingdom of God come on earth as it is in heaven – caring for the poor, feeding the hungry, ministering to the sick, caring for the environment, etc. But they can become just another social action group working in the community with no spiritual referent. In the choice between either planning for heaven or caring for this world, they choose the world.

Other Christians have emphasized life in heaven so much that the reality of living for Jesus in this world can be forgotten. For these people, the gospel is all about going to heaven when you die. You want people to accept

Jesus as their Saviour, so they go to heaven. Life here really doesn't matter. They may say that, yes, we should live Christianly, but we do not really need to worry about things like poverty, homelessness, injustice, or creation care because things of this earth are passing away. Life now doesn't matter. It's all about heaven when you die. In the choice between either planning for heaven or caring for this world, they choose heaven.

*Jesus, however, models and teaches a **both/and** not an either/or.* We don't choose between EITHER desiring the Kingdom of God to come here on earth (doing great things now) OR knowing that the Kingdom will only come in its fullness hereafter (desiring people just come to know Jesus as their Saviour). We choose to **BOTH** pray and work towards the reality that God's Kingdom comes/His will is done on earth as it is in heaven **AND** pray and work towards helping all people know that in Jesus is forgiveness, salvation, and life now and hereafter. Integral mission, in which both Word and deed are critical, captures this idea.

One of my colleagues in Ontario writes, *"Integral mission happens when we actually see our neighbour, and love him/her. It is when we ask 'who is my neighbour' not exclusively (i.e. how many people am I actually obligated to love?) but inclusively (i.e. how may I bless those with whom I have contact) ... What does it mean to be compassionate and love my neighbour if my neighbour is (insert any vulnerable or marginalized person or group here... cognitively disabled, mentally ill, a pregnant teen, an alcoholic, homeless etc., or simply someone different – a minority, ethnic or religious)? Whether we are the majority or a minority ourselves, we are called to love our neighbour in visible, tangible ways whether my neighbour is Muslim, Christian, atheist, gay, homeless, poor, rich, educated or not, communist, liberal, conservative, or whatever. We are to be imitators of God, people who love as Christ loved us – sacrificially, and tangibly (Eph. 5:1-2).*

*"Christ advocated for the oppressed, aided the sinner, rebuked the self-righteous, and invited the weary to come and find rest. To live this out is the meaning of integral mission – to see my neighbour, recognize his struggle and pain, and to respond as Christ responded to his neighbour. When we actually see our neighbours as Christ sees them we can't help but feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, advocate for the marginalized, etc. – and it is only then that we will be truly faithful in our observance of Christ's call; 'Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world' (James 1:27)."*

As we think about Jesus' ascension today as well ([Acts 1:1-11](#)), we hear Jesus' call to be His witnesses in our local neighbourhood (Jerusalem), the broader community – both our comfort zone (Judaea) and people who may be different than us (Samaria), and to the ends of the world. Of course, not all of us are called to be missionaries to Antarctica or Alert ("the very ends of the earth"). But we can all find ways to love people in our own community ... We can share what Jesus means to us with our neighbours, family, friends.

How can I love my neighbour as myself in word and deed? How can I live with my eyes on my future with Christ, and my eyes, hands, feet, and mind also fully engaged in the real God-given opportunities of today?

*Let my heart rejoice and be glad in this time of prayer.  
Remind me often of the great blessings You have bestowed on me.  
"In these days, God taught me as a schoolteacher teaches a pupil" (Ignatius).  
I remind myself there are things God has to teach me yet.  
I ask for the grace to hear them and let them change me.  
Sometimes I wonder what I might say if I were to meet you in person Lord.  
I think I might say "Thank You Lord" for always being there for me.  
I know with certainty there were times when you carried me, Lord.  
When it was through your strength I got through the dark times in my life.  
I exist in a web of relationships - links to nature, people, God.  
I trace out these links, giving thanks for the life that flows through them.  
Some links are twisted or broken: I may feel regret, anger, disappointment.  
I pray for the gift of acceptance and forgiveness.  
Help me through this day, O Lord.  
Amen*

## Saturday, May 14: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

*"If I were setting up a religion, I would not choose an instrument of execution to be its central symbol. It doesn't matter whether it's an electric chair or a hangman's noose or a Roman cross ... these things just don't market well,"* Sam Chaise, former General Secretary of Canadian Baptist Ministries, wrote.

He goes on to write, *"From the time I was a little kid, I knew that 'Jesus died on the Cross to save me.' There was a child-like innocence in which I was able to receive that. But, year after year as I have grown older and lived more deeply into this reality, it doesn't get simpler or easier. It is actually getting more mysterious, puzzling, and awe-inspiring. I ask myself, 'How can the 2nd Person of the Trinity actually die and what did that do to God?' and there are no answers. Just awe.*

*"I also find the Cross more challenging and disturbing as I grow older, as I grapple with the reality that as a Christ-follower I am called to live the Way of the Cross. I am called to follow Jesus all the way, into the Cross and into death and through it into resurrection. Gulp. I like the resurrection piece. I just don't like the death thing that precedes it. Hey, I'm a guy who gets annoyed at an irrelevant superficial thing, like someone cutting me off in traffic. Obviously I am not very good at the 'dying to self' thing. (I'm glad God is patient with me.)*

*"One of the implications of the Cross is that powerlessness wins over power. Jesus reaches the pinnacle of redemptive activity when He dies and rises again. Jesus' teaching to 'turn the other cheek' is a practical application of this reality. If we actually believe that powerlessness wins (yeah, I know, I don't get it either — it's a mystery), then it changes how we use power and how we live. We do more than turn the other cheek: we serve the 'enemy.'*

*"Last month I came across an amazing example in CBM's work of people living this out. This story is from Rupen Das' blog — Rupen is our Field Staffperson in Lebanon, and is overseeing our work with refugees from Syria. Here's a part of his post from early February:*

*'There is a story of forgiveness and reconciliation that is being played out. It is a story of redemption that only God could have written. As Syrian refugees are flooding into Lebanon, some Lebanese pastors and churches are opening their doors and hearts to assist those who are terrified and have lost everything. They do this in the face of intense criticism from many Lebanese who have never forgotten the brutality of the 20-year Syrian occupation. There isn't a family who hasn't endured the repeated shelling by the Syrian army. Many recall family members who were killed or tortured. Yet the impact of these few pastors as they lead their churches in demonstrating forgiveness and reconciliation that is only possible through Christ is so profound, that I believe it will breathe new life into the Church in Lebanon. They are living out the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven ... forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us." Amen.'*

What does this ministry of reconciliation mean in your life? How can you practice it in your life, today?

*Loving God, I am just beginning to realize how much you love me.  
Your son, Jesus was humble and obedient.  
He fulfilled your will for him by becoming human and suffering with us.  
I ask you for the desire to become more humble  
so that my own life might also bear witness to you.  
I want to use the small sufferings I have in this world to give you glory.  
Please, Lord, guide my mind with your truth.  
Strengthen my life by the example of Jesus.  
Help me to be with Jesus in this week  
as he demonstrates again his total love for me.  
He died so that I would no longer  
be separated from you.  
Help me to feel how close you are  
and to live in union with you.  
Amen*



## Sunday, May 15: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Tertullian, the son of a Roman centurion, was a Christian priest in Carthage, North Africa (160-225 AD). He famously observed that, *"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."* He witnessed firsthand many of his friends die for their faith. And he saw the church grow through their faithful courage.

He also comments Christians are too "dainty" if they expect complete satisfaction in this world AND in the next (heaven). Christians, he says, are "fools," too, if they think this world can ever provide true fulfillment and joy. Tertullian did NOT advocate for people to suffer, but he was realistic. Bad things happens to good people.

Tertullian emphasized true fulfillment doesn't come from what we own or earthly comforts. He lived in a world where a very few people were shockingly wealthy while the vast majority barely survived. But wealthy people were often LESS happy than those with nothing. Some wealthy people were so paranoid they killed their family members and didn't trust their "friends." In contrast, many ordinary people were "wealthy" in rich family relationships and friendships. Christians, especially, found their real joy, value, and purpose in their relationship with God and the people closest to them. *"See how these Christians love one another,"* Tertullian commented, in stark contrast to the dog-eat-dog world around them. And that love – for God and one another – was far more valuable than the wealth of empires. He encouraged Christians to witness to their faith by their love, compassion, and acts of mercy and grace AS WELL AS sharing their faith in Word. Integral mission.

Paul is being honest with the people in Corinth, too. He is sharing personally about how difficult life is (in human terms) and yet how rewarding it can be (on God's terms). As Paul shares his sorrows and joys, he appeals to the Corinthians to open their hearts and welcome him. After all, being a Christian in Corinth isn't easy either. Paul's hope is that, as he shares his struggles with these folks, they will realize life can be hard. He wants them to know hardships can be "normal" life, especially for followers of Jesus. Paul wants his friends to be ready for anything. However, God is faithful. He always has been. He always will be. No one and nothing can separate them from God's love ([Romans 8:28-39](#)).

If someone is telling us that following Christ guarantees material blessings – wealth, health, and happiness in this life – they are selling us something (maybe their own book). They are not genuinely talking about life with Jesus. One of the (many) problems when people teach that Christians only receive physical blessings from God is people cannot cope with problems when they do come. Keep in mind that Jesus Himself suffered dreadfully. Paul had many hard experiences. Do you get the feeling that Paul regrets any of it? I don't. In fact, I get the sense Paul has had a full, meaningful, and rewarding life, despite the tough times. He has "nothing" and yet he has "everything" that really matters. He is fulfilled despite his hard life ("hard" as we define it).

*"Hope is patience with the lamp lit,"* wrote Tertullian in the dark days of persecution in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The lamp – the light – the Holy Spirit will get us through ...

*My loving Lord,  
it's so hard to love the world sometimes  
and to love it the way Jesus did seems impossible.  
Help me to be inspired by his love and guided by his example.  
Most of all, I need to accept that I can't do it alone,  
and that trying to make it on my own is an arrogance of self-centeredness.  
I need you, dear God, to give me support in this journey.  
Show me how to unlock my heart so that I am less selfish.  
In the same way you gave your Son, Jesus for me,  
in the same way the best of mothers give themselves for their child,  
help me to love others in your name.  
May your kingdom and your will be done in my life and through my life.  
Amen*

(Other quotes from Tertullian include: *"Out of the frying pan and into the fire."* *"Arguments about Scripture achieve nothing but a stomachache and a headache."* *"Christians are made, not born"* – emphasizing we learn to love God and follow God over a lifetime, through His Spirit's grace.)

## Monday, May 16: 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

In years past, when you travelled abroad, having a Canadian maple leaf on your backpack/luggage was a great thing. People loved Canadians. Canadians had a great international reputation. There were positive stereotypes about Canadians: polite, humble, conscientious, quiet, friendly, apologetic. For a variety of reasons, showing a maple leaf is less encouraged now. But that's a discussion for another time ...

As a Canadian, when I have travelled overseas, I have been very aware that the culture I'm in can be very different than home. The laws are different. The way people (especially drivers) behave is different. The unspoken "rules" are different. The attitudes of people are different.

Paul emphasizes Christians are a different culture, too. We are "resident aliens" in this place. Our values are different. Our morals are different. Our ethics are different. Our fundamental purpose in life is different. We need to be honest about our distinctiveness, with ourselves and others. Paul says it is like the difference between light and darkness / Jesus and the devil / God's temple and idols. Do we see our lives, as citizens of the Kingdom of God, as *that* different from people around us? Do we feel such a great contrast between what motivates us, shapes our lives, and underlies our values and actions with those of general society? If not, should we? In what ways should our faith make us different from the culture-at-large around us?

Paul challenges the Christians in Corinth that the foundation of their lives is different than that of non-Christians: their lives are based on their faith in Jesus. Hey culture is formed by His principles. Other people, when push comes to shove, base their lives on what matters most to themselves, personally. It's all about them. Their rights. Their priorities. Their wants. They have no higher purpose or higher authority.

Paul argues, we need to be careful getting into close partnerships with those whose belief systems, values, priorities, and ethics are fundamentally different than our own. He may be referring to business partnerships. He may be referring to marriages. He is probably referring to both of those and more ...

Paul would have seen firsthand the stress that comes in both marriages and business partnerships when one partner has faith in Jesus and one doesn't. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul wrestles with some of the challenges that come in marriages when one person believes and one doesn't. His strong advice is to marry someone who is "*in the Lord*" like you are (7:39), if possible; it makes things easier. This is NOT to say that marriage between two Christians is guaranteed to be smooth. A good marriage is always the result of hard work, lots of grace, much mercy, plenty of forgiveness, ample doses of self-giving/sacrificial love (a great sense of humour helps, too). A marriage between two Christians should have a common foundation – the love, grace, forgiveness, servanthood of Jesus. This is something a marriage with a non-Christian will not have.

While business relationships are obviously not as intimate as marriage, they still require common ethics and values. Two people, who share faith in God, should (hopefully) share common ethics as well.

Paul quotes a couple of Old Testament passages that are written about the coming Messiah ([Ezekiel 37:27](#), [Isaiah 52:11](#), [2 Samuel 7:14](#)). Paul applies them to all of us. Yes, Jesus fulfills these Scriptures. But we are now His body. We are ALL called to be like Jesus in our world. When people look at us, they should see (at least a little bit) of what Jesus would live like were He living in our town in 2022. That's challenging, isn't it? It challenges us to think about how distinctively we are called to live as His people.

2 Corinthians 7:1 is an appropriate conclusion to this section: "*With promises like these, let's make ourselves clean from everything that defiles us, outside and inside, and let's become completely holy in the fear (reverence/awe) of God*" (remember "our" chapters and verses were added centuries AFTER Paul wrote this letter. Paul just wrote a letter, like we would. Later editors added chapters and verses).

Take a moment to think about ...

- What are some of the ways we struggle to live for Jesus in our lives?
- How can you live in more holy ways, in reverent awe and a holy fear of God?

*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,  
 who is and was and who is to come.  
 Let us praise and exalt him, above all, forever.  
 Worthy are you, Lord, our God,  
 to receive praise, glory, honour and blessing.  
 Let us praise and exalt him, above all, forever.  
 Let us bless the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  
 Let us praise and exalt him, above all, forever.  
 Praise God, all you his servants,  
 and you that fear him, both small and great.  
 Let us praise and exalt him, above all, forever.  
 Let heaven and earth praise his glory,  
 and every creature that is in heaven,  
 and on earth, and under the earth.  
 Let us praise and exalt him, above all, forever.  
 Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,  
 as it was in the beginning, is now, and forever shall be.  
 Amen.*

Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

## **Tuesday, May 17: 2 Corinthians 7:1-16**

Keep in mind this is a letter – the fourth letter (see Thursday, May 5) from Paul to the church in Corinth. His third letter (which we don't have) apparently was blunt. It dealt with false accusations, personal attacks, and outright heresies that some teachers were promoting. Paul's letter – direct and painful as it was – had the desired effect. The Corinthians recognized the error of their ways (theologically) and began to rebuild their relationship with Paul (personally), too. They saw Paul's heart. He really loved them, cared for them, and wanted the best for them. And they saw Paul's passion for God, Jesus, the Spirit, and truth as well.

As we read this chapter, Paul talks about how painful it can be to work through challenges. It was very difficult for him to confront the Corinthians. It was hard for the Corinthians to be corrected. But honest communication was necessary. And ultimately both the truth AND their relationship won out. BOTH are important. The miracle of this chapter is that it is a win/win. The people rediscovered God's grace, mercy, and love – a win. And, they also valued their relationship with Paul so much, that they rekindled their love for him, too – a win.

***Do I "win" at following God's truth?*** None of us likes being corrected. We love to think we're always right. If we disagree, the other guy must be wrong. Maybe God is speaking to me? The writer of Hebrews says: *"Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin."*

*"And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, 'My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.'*

*"As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever? For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening – it's painful. But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way."*

*"So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. Mark out a straight path for your*



*feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong.”(Hebrews 12:1-13).*

**Do I “win” at keeping in good relationship with my brothers/sisters in Christ?** Or have I let things – even things I may feel passionate about – shatter a relationship? Paul is determined that nothing is going to separate him from either Christ OR Christ’s people. If you have an issue with a Christian brother or sister, what are you going to do about it? Being angry is not good enough. Walking away is not good enough. Avoiding the issue isn’t good enough. Getting even certainly is not good enough.

What DO we do? We pray about it. We take responsibility. We ask forgiveness for our part ( it always takes two to tango and to tangle). And we freely forgive – completely, absolutely, eternally. Will we do that?

*Lord Jesus Christ, alive and at large in the world,  
help me to follow and find you there today,  
in the places where I work, meet people,  
spend money, and make plans.  
Take me as a disciple of your Kingdom.  
Help me see through your eyes, and hear the questions you are asking.  
Help me to welcome all others with your trust and truth.  
Help me to change things that contradict God’s love,  
by the power of your cross and the freedom of your Spirit.  
Amen*

John V. Taylor

### **Wednesday, May 18: 2 Corinthians 8:1-15**

These days, Greece is facing tough economic times. Back in Paul’s day, northern Greece (Macedonia, including Philippi and Thessalonica) was in dire straits, too. But southern Greece (Corinth, Athens) were booming. So, while Corinth was enjoying robust trade and financial success, Macedonia was struggling economically. The Christians in Macedonia were brutally persecuted, too (in both Philippi and Thessalonica, Paul and his friends were treated harshly [Acts 16-17]. As you read Paul’s letters to those churches (Philippians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians), times are still hard. Christians in Jerusalem were having an even harder time – economically and in terms of persecution. Paul is taking up an offering to help out believers in Jerusalem.

The suffering Macedonians were incredibly generous: *“they are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity”*(8:2). Notice how eager these hard-pressed believers are to help. Isn’t that fantastic?

However, the wealthy Corinthians are stingy. It sounds like they started a collection with great fanfare, but their fundraising has been side-tracked (8:6). Paul (I suspect) wants to give them another angry blast, but he chooses instead to appeal to their faith and sense of compassion.

- He uses flattery: *“Since you excel in so many ways – in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us – I want you to excel also in ... giving.”*(8:7)
- He uses guilt: *“I am not commanding you to do this. But I am testing how genuine your love is by comparing it with the eagerness of the other churches.”*(8:8)
- He appeals to their faith: *“You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.”*(8:9)
- He comes alongside as a mentor: *“Here is my advice: I t would be good for you to finish what you started a year ago. Last year you were the first who wanted to give, and you were the first to begin doing it. Now you should finish what you started ...”*(8:10-11)

Paul gives some principles for giving:

- Give eagerly. It’s a privilege not an obligation or a burden (8:11-12). Do you think of giving that way?
- Give generously ( *“give according to what you have, not what you don’t have”*(8:11-12)). Don’t whine about how little you have compared to what you want or think you should have. Count your blessings.

Be thankful. And give accordingly. As we shall see, *"God loves a cheerful giver."*

- When you have enough, be generous. There may be a time when the tables are turned, and you can be thankful for the help others may give ( *"Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty and can share with you when you need it"* (8:13-15)).

It's curious that Paul doesn't have to encourage those who have the least (the Macedonians) to be generous. Yet he must work so hard to convince those who have the most (the Corinthians) to give at all.

What is God saying to you today?

*O God, Giver of Life, Bearer of Pain, Maker of Love,  
You are able to accept in me what I cannot even acknowledge.  
You are able to name in me what I cannot bear to speak of.  
You are able to hold in your memory what I have tried to forget.  
Reconcile me through your cross to yourself.  
Reconcile me to the people you have brought into my life.  
Reconcile me to all that you have created me to be.  
May I, myself, be made whole in Christ.  
Amen.*

Janet Morley

#### **Thursday, May 19: 2 Corinthians 8:16-24**

The people in charge of this offering are Titus, whom the Corinthians know and trust, and two others whom Paul doesn't name. Any time there is money involved, you want trustworthy people in charge. And you always want more than one person in charge (FYI, this is how our church finances are ALWAYS handled).

Jesus talks more about money than almost any other temptation. Paul talks about it often. Why? Because money (or more properly the LOVE of money) is a HUGE challenge to us, individually, and to us, corporately as a church. It would be so much easier in a world without money. But that isn't going to happen ...

At a personal level, our longing for money can sidetrack us from following Jesus. Money can become our real god, the thing that guides our decisions, fills our thoughts, and shapes our priorities. *"People who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the **love** of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows"* (1 Timothy 6:9-10). Money is not evil in itself; it's a neutral tool. But the **LOVE** of money can be a problem. We may think, *"I'm not rich; it's not my problem."* But those of us with modest means can be just as consumed by the love of money as those who have lots of resources. If we are losing sleep over, are stressed about, or overly worried about money ... if you think about money often ... you need to deal with that with the Lord.

At a church level, spats about money can derail the best of churches. Most church conflicts/fights/splits are not over important things – like our beliefs about God, Jesus, etc. – but about money and power. When we lose sight of our vision (to see God's Kingdom come and His will be done), when we take our eyes off Jesus, when we become focused on the dollars and cents ... we're in trouble.

It's not worth losing your joy, passion, love, and peace over money.

The real important things are that:

- In all ways, we bring honor to Christ (8:23), and
- At all times we show Jesus' love (8:24)
- Does my life bring honour to Jesus? Is He really the centre of my life and the One in whom I trust? Do I make my decisions based on His will and his leading?
- Do I model His love? Do I honour other Christians – even if I disagree with them about money issues? Can I forgive? Can I love unconditionally? Can I give of myself sacrificially?

*Let the healing grace of your love, O Lord, so transform me  
that I may play my part in the transfiguration of the world  
from a place of suffering, death and corruption  
to a realm of infinite light, joy, and love.  
Make me so obedient to your Spirit  
that my life may become a living prayer,  
and a witness to your unfailing presence.  
Amen.*

Martin Israel

### **Friday, May 20: 2 Corinthians 9:1-5**

John Steinbeck, in his Depression-era novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), writes, "If you're in trouble or hurt or need – go to poor people. They're the only ones that'll help – the only ones." Is his observation true? If so, isn't it a sad comment on human nature?

Paul is still talking about the offering for Christians in Jerusalem who were suffering. At a practical level, Paul is urging the Corinthian church to get their act together. He and his Macedonian friends are coming to collect the offering and he doesn't want the church in Corinth to be embarrassed (9:1-5).

Corinth as a city – and the Christian church in Corinth – is relatively wealthy compared to Macedonia (northern Greece) and the poor churches in that area (Thessalonica, Philippi). The poor Macedonians have been amazingly generous. Yet the wealthy Corinthians seemed to struggle with generosity.

Give Paul credit. He appeals to their noble natures, rather than just chastising them.

Here are some quotes on giving and generosity to ponder:

- *The only things we can keep are the things we freely give to God.* (C.S. Lewis)
- *Downsizing so that others might upgrade is Biblical, beautiful, and nearly unheard of.* (Francis Chan)
- *Live simply so others may simply live.* (Mother Teresa)
- *The measure of a life, after all, is not its duration, but its donation.* (Corrie Ten Boom)
- *The most obvious lesson in Christ's teaching is that there is no happiness in having or getting anything, but only in giving.* (Henry Drummond)
- *Christian giving is to be marked by self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness, not by self-congratulation.* (John Stott)

What is God saying to you?

*Oh Lord, in a world where many are lonely,  
I thank you for my friendships.  
In a world where many are captive,  
I thank you for my freedom.  
In a world where many are hungry,  
I thank you for your provision.  
But I pray that you will enlarge my sympathy, deepen my compassion,  
and give me a generous heart, in Jesus name.  
Amen.*

Terry Waite (kept in solitary confinement by Islamic Jihad, 1987-1991)

### **Saturday, May 21: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15**

God's economy functions differently than ours. We think that, if we save and save and save, we will be rich. In purely financial terms this may be true.

Paul wants us to think a bit differently. He uses an agricultural analogy: *"a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop"* (9:6). The farmer could have saved and saved and saved his seeds ... and have had lots of seeds. But instead, he sowed his seeds generously and received back an incredible blessing – not in terms of seeds, but in terms of something much, much better – a great crop.

Paul's point is that if we sow generously – with our time, talents, and finances – we will receive back an incredible blessing – not necessarily in terms of time, talents, and finances (what we sowed) – but in terms of something much, much, better ...

What might that "crop" that we receive back so richly be? Joy. Fulfillment. Relationships. Peace. Seeing the Kingdom of God grow. Knowing people's needs are met. Seeing people come to faith. Friends. Love ...

Some of the basic principles:

1. *"You must each decide in your heart how much to give."* There is no firm rule. The Old Testament norm was 10% of one's gross income. Many of us choose to follow that guideline. Many people are much more generous. Paul is encouraging us to give generously FIRST, then live on the rest ...
2. *"Don't give reluctantly"* (*"For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."* (Proverbs 22:8)). It is a joyful privilege to give.
3. *"Don't give in response to pressure."* We give, recognizing that all we have is a gift from God. God is the one who gives us the ability and opportunity to have an income. We are stewards of what He entrusts to us. So we give back to God from what is already God's. It's part of our joyful worship.
4. *"God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others ... For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous."* One of the obstacles to generosity may be that we don't really believe we can afford the money or the time – what is Paul's – God's promise? Do we trust God enough so that we can be generous?
5. *"When we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result from this ministry of giving — the financial needs of the believers will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God."* Generosity is such an incredible blessing to the one who receives it. And it is also a blessing to those who give, too. We have the satisfaction of knowing we are blessing others and building God's Kingdom.

*"Thank God for His gift which is too wonderful for words."* (9:15) What gift is Paul talking about? *"The surpassing grace God has given us"* (9:14). God has given us His amazing grace. *"This is the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich"* (2 Corinthians 8:9). We give ourselves back to God, in response to His grace to us.

*Oh Lord, give us yourself above all things.  
It is in your coming alone that we are enriched.  
It is in your coming that your true gifts come.  
Come, Lord, that we may share the gifts of your presence:  
come, Lord, with healing of the past, come and calm our memories,  
come with joy for the present, come and give life to our existence,  
come with hope for the future, come and give a sense of eternity,  
come with strength for our wills, come with power for our thoughts,  
come with love for our hearts, come and give passion to our souls.  
Come, Lord, give yourself above all things  
and help us to give ourselves to you.  
Amen.*

David Adam

**Sunday, May 22: 2 Corinthians 10:1-8**

"22 Things Happy People Do Differently" is a blog I came across a few years ago. It's interesting how many of

the author's points dovetail with Paul's advice to the Corinthians over the past few weeks. We'll consider 1-11 today. Tomorrow we'll look at 12-22. Think about each of these ideas ...

- 1. Don't hold grudges. Happy people understand it's better to forgive and forget than to let their negative feelings crowd out positive feelings. Holding a grudge has a lot of detrimental effects on your wellbeing, including increased depression, anxiety, and stress. Why let anyone who has wronged you have power over you? If you let go of your grudges, you'll gain a clear conscience and energy to enjoy the good things in life.*
- 2. Treat everyone with kindness. It has been scientifically proven that being kind makes you happier? Every time you perform a selfless act your brain produces serotonin, a hormone that eases tension and lifts your spirits. Treating people with love, dignity, and respect also allows you to build stronger relationships.*
- 3. See problems as challenges. The word "problem" is never part of a happy person's vocabulary. A problem is viewed as a drawback, a struggle, or an unstable situation while a challenge is viewed as something positive like an opportunity, a task, or a dare. Whenever you face an obstacle, try looking at it as a challenge.*
- 4. Express gratitude for what they already have. There's a popular saying that goes something like this: "The happiest people don't have the best of everything; they just make the best of everything they have." You will have a deeper sense of contentment if you count your blessings instead of yearning for what you don't have.*
- 5. Dream big. People who get into the habit of dreaming big are more likely to accomplish their goals than those who don't. If you dare to dream big, your mind will put itself in a focused and positive state.*
- 6. Don't sweat the small stuff. Happy people ask themselves, "Will this problem matter a year from now?" They understand that life's too short to get worked up over trivial situations. Letting things roll off your back will definitely put you at ease to enjoy the more important things in life.*
- 7. Speak well of others. Being nice feels better than being mean. As fun as gossiping is, it usually leaves you feeling guilty and resentful. Saying nice things about other people encourages you to think positive, non-judgmental thoughts.*
- 8. Never make excuses. Benjamin Franklin once said, "He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else." Happy people don't make excuses or blame others for their own failures in life. Instead, they own up to their mistakes and, by doing so, they proactively try to change for the better.*
- 9. Get absorbed into the present. Happy people don't dwell on the past or worry about the future. They savor the present. They get immersed in whatever they're doing at the moment. Stop and smell the roses.*
- 10. Wake up at the same time every morning. Have you noticed that a lot of successful people tend to be early risers? Waking up at the same time every morning stabilizes your circadian rhythm, increases productivity, and puts you in a calm and centered state.*
- 11. Avoid social comparison. Everyone works at his own pace, so why compare yourself to others? If you think you're better than someone else, you gain an unhealthy sense of superiority. If you think someone else is better than you, you end up feeling bad about yourself. You'll be happier if you focus on your own progress and praise others on theirs. (\*\*\*)see 2 Corinthians 10:12-18)*

What is God saying to you, today?

*Oh Christ, tirelessly you seek out those who are looking for you  
and who think that you are far away;  
teach us, at every moment, to place our spirits in your hands.  
While we are still looking for you, already you have found us.  
However poor our prayer,  
you hear us far more than we can imagine or believe.  
Amen.*

Roger of Taizé

## **Monday, May 23 (Victoria Day): 2 Corinthians 10:9-18**

Today we'll look at points 12-22 in the blog, "22 Things Happy People Do Differently" (we looked at 1-11



yesterday). It's interesting how many of the author's points dovetail with Paul's advice to the Corinthians:

*12. Choose friends wisely. Misery loves company. That's why it's important to surround yourself with optimistic people who will encourage you to achieve your goals. The more positive energy you have around you, the better you will feel about yourself.*

*13. Never seek approval from others. Happy people don't care what others think of them. They follow their own hearts without letting naysayers discourage them. They understand that it's impossible to please everyone. Listen to what people have to say, but never seek anyone's approval but your own.*

*14. Take the time to listen. Talk less; listen more. Listening keeps your mind open to others' wisdoms and outlooks on the world. The more you listen, the quieter your mind gets, and the more content you feel.*

*15. Nurture social relationships. A lonely person is a miserable person. Happy people understand how important it is to have strong, healthy relationships. Always take the time to see and talk to your family, friends, or significant other.*

*16. Meditate/pray. Praying silences your mind and helps you find inner peace. Happy people know how to silence their minds anywhere and anytime they need to calm their nerves.*

*17. Eat well. Junk food makes you sluggish, and it's difficult to be happy when you're in that kind of state. Everything you eat directly affects your body's ability to produce hormones, which will dictate your moods, energy, and mental focus. Be sure to eat foods that will keep your mind and body in good shape.*

*18. Exercise. Studies have shown that exercise raises happiness levels just as much as Zoloft does. Exercising also boosts your self-esteem and gives you a higher sense of self-accomplishment.*

*19. Live minimally. Happy people rarely keep clutter around the house because they know that extra belongings weigh them down and make them feel overwhelmed and stressed out. Some studies have concluded that Europeans are a lot happier than Americans are, which is interesting because they live in smaller homes, drive simpler cars, and own fewer items.*

*20. Tell the truth. Lying stresses you out, corrodes your self-esteem, and makes you unlikeable. The truth will set you free. Being honest improves your mental health and builds others' trust in you. Always be truthful, and never apologize for it.*

*21. Establish personal control. Happy people have the ability to choose their own destinies. They don't let others tell them how they should live their lives. Being in complete control of one's own life brings positive feelings and a great sense of self-worth.*

*22. Accept what cannot be changed. Once you accept that life is not fair, you'll be more at peace with yourself. Instead of obsessing over how unfair life is, focus on what you can control and change it for the better.*

What is God saying to you, today?

*O God, it is easy to love the whole word,  
but hard to love the person I work next to.  
O God, it is easy to campaign for world peace,  
but hard to contribute to the peace of my own home.  
O God, it is easy to be fascinated with some new truth,  
and miss you in the things I have known so long.  
O God it is easy to share my home and possessions with people I like.  
Teach me how to be generous to those I don't.  
Enable me today to say something or do something that will make a difference  
to the discouraged,  
to the inexperienced,  
to the despairing.  
Let no selfish concern with my own affairs shut me off from any today.  
For your love's sake.  
Amen.*

Rita Snowden

## Tuesday, May 24: 2 Corinthians 11:1-15

In Paul's day most marriages were arranged. The father-of-the-bride's job was to make sure she was there, at the wedding, in all her radiance and purity.

Paul is describing himself as the spiritual father-of-the-bride. The bride is the church in Corinth. The groom is Jesus. Paul's great desire is to present her, in all her radiance and purity, at her wedding with the groom, Jesus. So, as the father-of-the-bride, Paul is very protective of his daughter, the church. He wants her safe. He doesn't want her led astray. He doesn't want her running off after some other fly-by-night teacher. He wants to present her, *"with pure and undivided devotion"* to her husband-to-be, Jesus (11:2-3).

However, the church *"happily puts up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed"* (11:4). The bride-to-be is happily cavorting with all sorts of strange characters, who do not have her best interests in mind. These teachers are after whatever they can get. Then they'll dump her.

Paul is appealing for the church to recognize that his long, faithful love proves he really does love them. He genuinely does have their best interests in mind. Even though he may not seem as "sexy" as the hot, new, flashy teachers, he's faithful. In the words of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul's love for them is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful or proud or rude, does not demand its own way, is not irritable, and keeps no record of being wronged. Paul's love for them does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Paul's love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

We can get all excited about the latest YouTube sensation. The hottest new blogger. The superstar preacher. The charismatic motivational speaker. But Paul wants us to think about those people in our lives who are faithful in their love. Whose love for us is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful or proud or rude, does not demand its own way, is not irritable, and keeps no record of being wronged. Whose love for them does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Whose love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

These faithful saints in our lives – our lifelong friends, family, local pastors – may not be as "glamorous" as the YouTube preacher with millions of views, but they have invested their lives in **us**. They care for **us**. They know **us**. They genuinely love **us**.

Thank God for the faithful people He has brought into your life. Pray for them. Let them know you appreciate their care for you.

*Our heavenly Father,  
we commend to your mercy those for whom life does not spell freedom:  
prisoners of conscience,  
the homeless and handicapped,  
the sick in body and mind,  
the elderly who are confined to their homes,  
those who were enslaved by their passions,  
and those addicted to drugs.  
Grant that, whatever their outward circumstances,  
they may find inward freedom,  
through him who proclaimed released to captives, Jesus Christ our Savior.  
Amen.*

John Stott

## Wednesday, May 25: 2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Sometimes we feel **WE** have to save the world, raise perfect kids, always be right, have all the answers, make all the right decisions, have unlimited energy, do everything anyone ever asks of us, never say no, have no limitations ... and we just can't meet our own – or other people's expectations. Take a look at the "22 Things

Happy People Do Differently" from Sunday/Monday, again. It's not about us meeting other people's expectations. It's about us, doing our best with God, for God ... And, lo and behold, with God's help we can actually surprise ourselves and do some pretty astounding things.

*"If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am"* (11:30). Previously Paul quoted Jeremiah 9:24 – *"If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord"* (2 Corinthians 10:17). There is plenty of wisdom recognizing that we are not all-knowing, all-wise, all-right, all-perfect, or all-powerful ... We are who we are. We be the best we can be. We are humble, only human. We rely on the Lord. We're OK with that ...

William Carey went from England to India in 1792. He was the first of what we would now know as missionaries – people who move to another place to spread the gospel. He was not exceptionally gifted. He was not brilliant. He did have exceptional faith and obedience. He was faithful. He translated the Bible into Bengali, Sanskrit, and several other languages and dialects. His motto was *"Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God."* Notice it is God who is the one who ultimately does the great things – not us.

The other William Carey quote I appreciate is: *"I can plod. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything."* We often look for the glamorous, glitzy success stories and wish we could be like them. But the plodders often actually accomplish far more (remember the tortoise and hare?). And the foundations plodders build typically outlast all the flash and dash of the superstar.

Plod on ... in Christ.

*Can we really move mountains with a mustard seed of faith?  
It seems rather a difficult task.  
Could we maybe start with a molehill and work our way up gradually?  
But that's not the way it works, is it, Lord?  
So often you challenge us with the mountain  
when we feel so unprepared and unequipped for the task.  
It's then that we have to put self aside, and fear, and pride  
and cling tightly to your hand.  
It is only then that we really feel the warmth of your touch,  
the certainty of your love, and the power of your presence.  
It is only then that our faith begins to grow  
and we begin to see our real potential.  
Thank you, Heavenly Father  
for mountains and mustard seeds.  
Amen.*

John Birch

#### **Thursday, May 26: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10**

A few years ago, I had a dream. I very rarely remember my dreams, but I remembered this one. I very rarely write a journal, but I wrote this down. At 3:30 a.m., I wrote, *"I am still trembling(?), tingling(?), shaking(?) from the dream - probably the most vivid I have ever had – in which an angel showed up during a Sunday morning Scripture reading. I'm not sure if he spoke or was just there, but we all knew who he was. We saw him. And we felt him – or rather, we felt God's Presence. He was like a man, surrounded by light. And as the Scripture was read there was an authority like none of us had experienced before. I'm not sure if he actually spoke or if he just was. I couldn't breathe. How can you even begin to describe the awe, joy, wonder ...? There are no words."*

*"I am tingling from head to toe. It's like cold chills, but not cold. It's a sense of overwhelming awe. I come into the living room at 3 a.m. and I can barely handle the overwhelming sense of Presence (with a very capital "P"). Have mercy on me, for I am a sinful person. I do not know what to say or do, I am overwhelmed. I am, to use an old word, 'undone.'*

*"And as I debrief the dream with God – still shaking/trembling/overwhelmed/overawed – He reminds me that every Sunday not only angels are there, but Jesus - God - Himself is there. God is real, really here. Not*

*Someone we just talk ABOUT. He IS. More than that, He reminds me, 'I am with you always. I am with you always. I am with you always. You live every moment in my Presence.' Presence. Is. Now. At 3:30 a.m. There are no words."*

It was – obviously – a very powerful, very real dream. Rereading my journal, I'm still not sure what to make of it. But I can identify – perhaps a little bit – with Paul.

I can also identify – a little bit – with Paul because I live with chronic pain (technically "idiopathic facial pain" – kind of like a constant wasp-sting-like burning in my left temple). I'm not sure if, in my case, I was becoming too proud (it began in 1998.). The "why" doesn't really matter. What matters is it's there. Always. There have been days when I have not been sure I was going to be able to get out of bed or make it through the day. I have prayed about it far more than three times, but, like Paul, my pain continues. Others have prayed. Laid hands on me and prayed. Anointed with oil and prayed. No healing. *"My grace is all you need,"* God says. *"My power works best in weakness."*

I can echo Paul's words, *"When I am weak, then I am strong."* It is amazing how God can, indeed, get us through when we rely on His strength.

As I debriefed my dream, I felt God saying these words to me, *"You still feel my presence. You still tingle. You still tremble. I am with you always, Bruce. Though you feel me now, though you sense me now in physical, tangible ways, Bruce, I am with you always. Live in my presence. Love in my presence. Be in my presence. Bring my presence to the world around you. May people see my glory shining in you as they saw my glory shining in the face of Moses. And may the people you touch so shine as well, that the world may know that I am there among them. Now is the time to be Me, to be My presence, to be My face in this world. Go in My name, and be My people. Go in My name, and be My people. Go, in My name, and be My people."*

*Oh Jesus, king of the poor,  
shield this night those who are imprisoned without charge,  
those who have 'disappeared.'  
Cast the strength of your presence around those who groan in sorrow or pain.  
Protect those whose livelihoods are threatened.  
Encourage those forbidden to worship.  
Encompass your little ones gone hungry to sleep, cold and fitfully waking.  
Guide your witnesses for peace.  
Safeguard your workers for justice.  
Encircle us with your power, compass us with your grace,  
embrace your dying ones,  
support your weary ones, calm your frightened ones –  
and as the sun scatters the mist on the hills, bring us to a new dawn,  
when all shall freely sit at the table in your kingdom,  
rejoicing in a God who makes all things new.  
Amen.*

Kate McIlhagga

### **Friday, May 27: 2 Corinthians 12:11-21**

*"I am afraid that I will find quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorderly behavior ... And I will be grieved because many of you have not given up your old sins. You have not repented of your impurity, sexual immorality, and eagerness for lustful pleasure"* (12:20-21). The challenge we all have is actually TO LIVE the life to which we are called in Jesus. It is so easy to slip back into the old ways ... or not give up the old ways in the first place (and still happily point out others' shortcomings, ignoring our own.). But if *"we are Christ's ambassadors"* and *"God is making his appeal through us,"* and *"We speak for Christ when we plead, 'Come back to God.'"* (2 Corinthians 5:12), then our lives need to be consistent with that identity. We will not, of course, be perfect. But we will be intentionally working towards being more and more like Jesus ...

Have a look at the issues Paul identifies. It's easy to see these problems in other people's lives. It's harder to

spot them in ourselves. Look in your own heart. Do you recognize some of these impulses in your life:

- quarreling,
- jealousy,
- anger,
- selfishness,
- slander,
- gossip,
- arrogance,
- disorderly behavior,
- impurity,
- sexual immorality,
- eagerness for lustful pleasure

We could easily add to that list (as Paul does elsewhere): greed, drunkenness, wild parties, envy, idolatry, swearing, lewd entertainment (see Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:3-8).

How do you handle it when you feel those temptations? Are you able to identify them? Pray about them? With God's help, resist them? Let's be honest, some of these can be a real battle. But don't give up.

*"Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ ... Once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light. For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true ... Be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do ... Be filled with the Holy Spirit ... And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Ephesians 5:1-20)

*Dear God, it is hard for us not to be anxious.  
We worry about work and money,  
about the food and health,  
about weather and crops,  
about war and politics,  
about loving and being loved.  
Show us how Your perfect love casts out fear.  
And help us, out of that strength,  
To love you with our whole beings,  
and to love others as ourselves.  
May your love, shining through us,  
cast out fear.  
Amen.*

Monica Furlong

## **Saturday, May 28: 2 Corinthians 13**

The Corinthian church had been demanding proof of the validity of Paul's ministry (13:3).

Now Paul turns the tables on the Corinthians. It's not him who's under the spotlight, to be assessed as to his spiritual state. It's them. Look at some of the words he uses: *'testimony', 'witnesses', 'warning', 'proof', 'test', 'authority.'* This is legal language. It's language from the court room. In 13:1 Paul uses a legal guideline from the Old Testament to emphasize that it is them, not Paul, who are "on trial" (*"The facts of every case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses"*).

Paul is not afraid to exercise tough love in the church. But it is **love** that he continually demonstrates. He prays for their perfection (13:9), he wants to build them up, not tear them down (13:10), and he wants the God of love and peace to be with them (13:11). He always wants their best.



They have been examining Paul. Now it is time to examine themselves – not because Paul is visiting, but because Christ is in them (13:5). It's about **Jesus**, not Paul. It is possible to carry self-examination to extremes and become paralyzed in self-analysis. The people in Corinth are in no danger of that.

They are going to the other extreme, spending too much time judging others, like Paul. They need to stop criticizing others and examine their own hearts, lives, motives, and actions. Our human natures are great at recognizing other people's problems. We love to criticize everyone else. But we are not always good at honest self-reflection (Susan B. Anthony, who spearheaded the women's rights movement in the US in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, once said, "*I always distrust people who know so much about what God's wants them do to other people.*")

Paul urges us, in the Spirit of Christ, to spend time cleaning up our own lives ...

Really strong people (13:9) can be honest with God, themselves, and others that they are not perfect yet. Godly people are not satisfied with where they are, either. With God's help, they will work to deal with the issues they have in their lives. Other people's problems? Not their problems. They know they have things they need to deal with. God can deal with other people and their issues.

Really strong people do recognize that they need **God's help** to get their lives together. No amount of elbow grease and willpower alone will do it.

Paul prays that they will be strong:

- That we will become mature (13:9).
- That we will build one another up, not tear one another down (13:10).

*"Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet each other with Christian love. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."* (13:11-14)

What is God saying to you?

*O God, early in the morning I cry to you.  
Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts on you:  
I cannot do this alone.  
In me there is darkness, but with you there is light;  
I am lonely, but you do not leave me;  
I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;  
I am restless, but with you there is peace.  
In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;  
I do not understand your ways, but you know the way for me ...  
Enable me to live now  
That I may give a good answer for my faith now and always.  
Lord, whatever this day may bring,  
Your name be praised.  
Amen.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German pastor (1906-1945)  
written shortly before his execution in Flossenbürg concentration camp

## **Sunday, May 29: John 14**

Next Sunday is Pentecost (a Greek word, meaning "fiftieth"). It is the fiftieth day (seventh Sunday) after Easter. Pentecost commemorates the miraculous coming of the Holy Spirit on Jesus' disciples, fifty days after His resurrection (Acts 2, later this week).

In 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul has talked a lot about the Holy Spirit (31 times in 1 Corinthians, 12 times in 2 Corinthians). For the next week, we'll look at a few passages where Jesus talks about the Spirit. And we'll look

at the events of that first Pentecost Sunday, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection.

Before His crucifixion, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will come and fill His people. For the first disciples there was a waiting period between when Jesus ascended to heaven ([Acts 1:1-11](#)) and the coming of the Spirit (they did not know how long). Can you imagine? Jesus is gone, but the Spirit has not come yet? Would He come?

The disciples likely reminded themselves of words Jesus had said, words like these from John 14:

- *"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me."*
- *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."*
- *"If you love me, obey my commandments."*
- *"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth."*
- *"When the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you."*
- *"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."*
- *"I have told you these things before they happen so that when they do happen, you will believe."*

What words or phrases speak to you from John 14?

- **Read.** Listen deeply to what God is saying to you. Try to read slowly, attentively; gently listening to hear a word or phrase that is God's word for you this day.
- **"Ponder this in your heart."** Reflect on the Scripture. Turn it over in your mind. Memorize key phrases. "Ruminate" on it. Mull it over. What verse(s) speak to you?
- **Pray.** As God has spoken to you, personally, offer your life to God.
- **Rest.** Take a moment or two to thank God for transforming you through His word. Simply enjoy God's peace and presence.

*Blessed are you, O Lord,  
for you have nourished me from my youth  
and you provide for all your people and all creation..  
Fill our hearts with joy and gladness  
that we be able to remain faithful in all things.  
Help us to abound in every good work  
in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Through him be glory to you,  
honor, might, majesty, and dominion,  
forever and ever.  
Amen.*

Clementine Liturgy (1<sup>st</sup> Century)

### **Monday, May 30: John 15:1-17**

To experience the fullness of God – the presence and power of His Spirit—we have to "remain in" Jesus. What does that mean? Jesus uses the image of a vine, with its branches, to help us comprehend what our lives ought to look like in relationship with Him. We cannot try to be strong, independent, self-made rugged individualists. We need to be intimately connected with God. Branches that "go it alone" wither and die.

But branches that remain in the vine, and who submit to the pruner's knife when necessary, live and bear fruit. That is what the promise of the Holy Spirit means for each one of us; He is our connection to the vine. So ... how do we "remain in" Jesus? What does it look like in practice?

Jesus gives us some helpful advice: *"obey my commands."* Essentially He is encouraging us to follow the guidelines, principles, and instructions He has given us ... when we do that life goes well for us. When we don't remain in Jesus, when we "do our own thing," we have trouble.

Reflecting on "remaining in Christ," Tom Wright advises us, *"First, we must remain in the community that knows and loves him and celebrates him as its Lord. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian. We can't 'go it alone.' But we must also remain as people of prayer and worship in our intimate, private lives. We make sure to be in touch, in tune, with Jesus, knowing him and being known by him ..."*

*O come, Holy Spirit, inflame my heart,  
set it on fire with love.  
Burn away my self-centeredness  
so that I can love unselfishly.  
Breathe your life-giving breath into my soul  
so that I can live freely and joyously,  
unrestricted by self-consciousness,  
and may be ready to go wherever you may send me.  
Come like a gentle breeze  
and give me your still peace so I may be quiet  
and know the wonder of your presence  
and help diffuse it in the world.  
Never let me shut you out;  
never let me try to limit you to my capacity;  
act freely in me and through me,  
never leave me, O Lord and giver of life.  
Amen.*

Michael Hollings & Etta Gullick

## **Tuesday, May 31: John 15:18-27**

Living for Jesus is not always easy. Not only do we stumble and fail now and then, but people do not always like us. Why not? After all, we are people who teach about God's love and who try to live by maxims like, *"Love your neighbour as yourself"*? Are we not loveable people?

Jesus reminds us that He came teaching those same truths – and His own people killed Him for it. The reality is that in our world, "love" is not a popular theme. Certain aspects of "love" are very popular – sexuality, for instance. But self-giving love that seeks to bring justice, peace, and equality is not well-received by many people in our culture. Why not? Because many people have a lot to lose in the Kingdom of God if everyone were selfless and self-giving – economic profits, personal power and prestige, control and influence.

The kingdom of God introduces a radical reordering of society where the wealthy and powerful choose to "give up" some of their privilege to empower the poor and powerless.

Christians have ended slavery, introduced public education and healthcare, fought for minority rights, championed gender equality, and much, much more – all of which were very unpopular with many people at the time. Today as we care for the poor (soup kitchen, food banks, homeless shelter) and advocate for peace in our world and care for God's creation, we can still be unpopular with some people. But we still do it – because it's the right thing to do.

*"Where the Spirit is poured out on the church, it sweeps the believers along as though in a great river of obedience, praise, and mighty works. Empowered by the Spirit, the community can dare and hope great things, seeing visions, dreaming dreams, turning the world upside down ... Where the Spirit is at work, liberation is underway: good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, deliverance to the oppressed"* (Richard B. Hays).

The good news is that *"the Spirit of truth will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me"* – Jesus will be with us through His Holy Spirit. Praise God.

*God the Father, God beyond us, we adore you.  
 You are the depth of all that is. You are the ground of our being.  
 We can never grasp you, yet you grasp us;  
 the universe speaks of you to us, and your love comes to us through Jesus.  
 God the Son, God beside us, we adore you.  
 You are the perfection of humanity.  
 You have shown us what human life should be like.  
 In you we see divine love and human greatness combined.  
 God the Spirit, God around us, we adore you.  
 You draw us to Jesus and the Father.  
 You are power within us.  
 You give us abundant life and can make us the men and women we are meant to be.  
 Father, Son and Spirit – God beyond, beside and around us – we adore you.  
 Amen.*

Caryl Micklem

### Wednesday, June 1: John 16:1-16

What will the Holy Spirit do in our world? He will

- Demonstrate that the world is wrong in relation to **sin**. The world THINKS it is all right in how it operates – the law of the jungle (the strong survive) is the way to go; economic prosperity is the only measure of success; it's OK to trample others if they're in your way; the earth's resources are there to be exploited, morality is a matter of personal choice, etc., etc. BUT, the Spirit will help us see that these values are wrong; they are evil; they are sinful. The real guiding principle should be: "*Love each other as I have loved you*" (John 15:12). God's way calls us to obedience.
- Demonstrate the world is wrong in terms of **righteousness**. Jesus has shown us how to live wisely and rightly – a life characterized by obedience to God's laws and self-giving love. The proof that He was right is His resurrection. The world will tell us otherwise – we can pick and choose our own moral standards; no one should tell us how we should live our lives; personal self-actualization (whatever that might look like) is the highest value. Jesus has warned us that pursuing those ends will lead to self-destruction. God's way call us to holiness.
- Demonstrate that the world is wrong in terms of **judgment** or condemnation. The world has judged Jesus, His teachings and us – His followers – as wrong about the fundamentals of life. His teachings about love, compassion, justice, and servanthood are not popular; they do not shape the political or economic agenda. Those of us who live by them may be teased or even persecuted. But in the end, God's judgment will vindicate Jesus and His people. God calls us to perseverance.

We may live "at odds" with much of our culture, but that's OK. The Spirit will help us along the way ... and God will honour our faithfulness in the end.

*O Lord, help me to understand  
 that You ain't going to let nothing come my way  
 that You and me together can't handle.  
 Amen.*

attributed to an anonymous African Boy

### Thursday, June 2: John 16:17-33

*"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."*  
 That is good news for us.

Ok – it's not all good news. I do not appreciate hearing that I will have trials and sorrows in this life. I would much rather hear that my life will be all sweetness and light. (In a rather cynical moment in the movie, *The Princess Bride*, our hero, Wesley, tells his true love, Princess Buttercup – who he believes has been unfaithful to

him – *"Life is pain, your highness. Anyone who says differently is selling something."* There is some truth to his observation).

We will have trials and sorrows. But the good news is that we serve a God who has overcome the world. And He has given us His power and presence through the Holy Spirit.

- **Reading John 16.** Listen deeply to what God is saying to you. Try to read slowly, attentively; gently listening to hear a word or phrase that is God's word for you this day.
- **"Ponder this in your heart."** Reflect on the Scripture. Turn it over in your mind. Memorize key phrases. "Ruminate" on it. Mull it over. What verse(s) speak to you?
- **Pray.** As God has spoken to you, personally, offer your life to God.
- **Rest.** Take a moment or two to thank God for transforming you through His word. Simply enjoy God's peace and presence.

*Lord, here I am, out of breath, out of courage, and almost out of hope.  
Caught between the infinity of my desires and the limitations of my means,  
I'm tossed about, torn, pulled here and pulled there, confused, and exhausted.  
So, Lord, here I am, finally still, and finally ready to listen.  
You've seen how my dissatisfaction has made me suffer.  
You've seen how fear has led me astray in choosing my commitments.  
You've seen how I am afraid of doing too little.  
Lord, make me strong enough to do what I should do – calmly, simply,  
without wanting to do too much, without wanting to do it all myself.  
In other words, Lord, make me humble in my wish and my will to serve you and you alone.  
Help me above all to find you in my commitments, for you are the centre of my life.  
So, I have come before you, Lord, to rest and gather strength.  
Amen.*

Michael Quoist

### Friday, June 3: Acts 2:1-13

*"Pentecost (the coming of the Holy Spirit) is second only to Calvary in importance to the Christian, for Pentecost is the complement to Calvary. Without Pentecost, Calvary would have been ineffective to redeem lost mankind,"* writes J. Oswald Sanders. *"It required the dynamic of the Spirit as well as the sacrifice of the Saviour to bring the benefits of salvation to a waiting world, for all Christian experience revolves around the twin centres of Calvary and Pentecost. Calvary opened the fountain from which all the blessings of Pentecost flowed. Pentecost made available to men all that Calvary made possible. Had Pentecost been omitted from the Divine counsels, it would have been like perfecting a costly machine and then failing to supply it with the necessary motive power. Pentecost is the power-house of Christianity ..."*

There is a power and presence of God that becomes very real to us through the Holy Spirit.

Notice that as the Holy Spirit comes, He does not just come to a select few "chosen" ones. The tongues of fire appeared on all of them. This is wonderfully encouraging – each of us (who believe in Jesus) is blessed with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit ... not just a select few.

Henri Nouwen writes, *"The time of confusion, misunderstanding, unbelief and fear is over. God is no longer an outsider, an unpredictable guide or an enigmatic stranger. God is the Spirit of the risen Christ who lives within his disciples and fills them with new hope, courage and confidence."* We may take the presence of the Holy Spirit for granted – we know and sense God in our hearts, souls, and minds – that's our life. But think of how revolutionary that would have been for these first disciples who had never known God like that. God had become real to them in a profound personal – and corporate – way for the first time.

That is the reality with which we live, today. God is within us.

Pray for new hope, new courage, and new confidence ... filled with the Holy Spirit.



*Lord Jesus, you set my feet upon the way  
and sometimes where you lead I do not like or understand.  
Bless me with courage where the way is fraught with dread or danger.  
Bless me with graceful meetings where the way is lonely.  
Bless me with good companions where the way demands a common cause.  
Bless me with night vision where I travel in the dark.  
Bless me with keen hearing where I have no sight.  
To hear the reassuring sounds of fellow travelers.  
Bless me with humor – I cannot travel lightly weighed down with gravity.  
Bless me with humility to learn from those around me.  
Bless me with decisiveness where I must move with speed.  
Bless me with times of Sabbath, to stretch and rest and savour.  
Bless me with love, given and received.  
Above all, bless me with your presence, even when I know it in your absence.  
Bless me, lead me, love me, bring me home, bearing the Gospel of life.  
Amen.*

Kathy Galloway

### **Saturday, June 4: Acts 2:14-41**

An old Russian painting (right), illustrating "The Descent of the Holy Spirit," has the twelve apostles seated in a semi-circle, with the Holy Spirit coming to rest on each of them. In the centre, at the bottom, is a stiff human figure, surrounded by darkness. The artist's point? The Holy Spirit has come upon God's people to bring the good news of the Kingdom to a dark world (symbolized by the sad-looking man surrounded by blackness). Peter's sermon is such a message.

It is significant that the first action the Holy Spirit draws out of His people is to share the good news of Jesus with many, many people – through different languages (2:1-13) and through Peter's sermon. Pentecost is not the beautiful end of the salvation story, but the beginning of another wonderful story, the story of God's mission to go out into the world, make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands Jesus gave us (Matthew 28:19-20).

The Spirit sends us into the world to liberate those who live in darkness and the shadow of death.

The good news of Pentecost is that we have great news of the kingdom of God to share with the world. But, honestly, that's a bit overwhelming and rather frightening, isn't it. How can I do that???

The good news of Pentecost is also that it is not up to us to save the world.

- The Holy Spirit is at work within each one of us – giving us strength, wisdom, courage, hope, and encouragement. He will give us the words to say and actions to do ... if we listen to His voice.
- The Holy Spirit is also at work in our friends, family, co-workers, neighbours, etc., too. He is preparing them to hear His word.

David Bosch writes, *"The gift of the Spirit is the gift of becoming involved in mission, for mission is the direct consequence of the outpouring of the Spirit."* It's not all up to us. It's up to God ... working in us and in the world. Our task is to be open to His leading in our lives and in others. Pray that the Holy Spirit would empower you and speak to those you love ...



*O God,  
 You love justice and establish peace on earth.  
 We bring before you the disunity of today's world.  
 The absurd violence, and the many wars,  
 which are breaking the courage of the people of the world.  
 Militarism and armaments race, which are threatening life on the planet:  
 Human greed and injustice, which breed hatred and strife.  
 Send Your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.  
 Teach us to be compassionate towards the whole human family.  
 Strengthen the will of all those who fight for justice and for peace.  
 Lead all nations into the path of peace.  
 And give us all that peace in Jesus which the world cannot give.  
 Amen*

Masamba ma Mpolo & Mengi Kilandamoko, The Congo

### **Sunday, June 5: Acts 2:41-47**

It is no accident that the Holy Spirit came down on a group, not an individual. The story of Pentecost is of a community. John Donne writes: *"No man is an island. The church is universal, so are all her actions; all that she does belongs to all."* From the beginning, huddled in fear in the upper room, the first Christians prayed together, worshipped together, talked together, learned together and served together. We are called into communion with one another. We are called to be church with one another.

*"We live in a time of great loneliness and therefore we tend to think of community as a place where we can be vulnerable, where we can reveal ourselves fully, come to know others deeply and develop lasting, intimate relationships,"* writes Henri Nouwen. *"How much do we long for such a community. It is an ideal, very alive in our dreams but very elusive in the daily reality of our lives ..."*

*"Community is first and foremost a gift of the Holy Spirit, not built upon mutual compatibility, shared affection or common interests, but upon having received the same divine breath, having been given a heart set aflame by the same divine fire and having been embraced by the same divine love. It is the God-within who brings us into communion with each other and makes us one. It confronts us with our inability to heal our own brokenness with self-made solutions, and it consoles us with the revelation that God does indeed want to create among us the unity we most long for."*

Today's passage in Acts gives us a glimpse of life in a Holy-Spirit-led church. That's not to say that's it's all sweetness and light. Disagreements will happen. Later on in the book of Acts, Paul, Peter and James sharply disagree about the need to circumcise Christian converts. In that conflict, one of them did not try to trump the others by claiming to be more "Spirit-filled," nor did they make separate calls on the Holy Spirit. Instead, at the First Council of Jerusalem, they talked and listened to one another, and shared their experience; after all that they were able to say: *"It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ..."*

The Holy Spirit, working in us all, together, can bring us into authentic unity and lead us into the world to make a difference for Jesus. We strengthen our faith and love through relationship with one another and the Holy Spirit. Pray for our church.

*Spirit of Christ, stir me.  
 Spirit of Christ, move me.  
 Spirit of Christ, fill me.  
 Spirit of Christ, seal me.  
 Consecrate in me Your heart and will, O Heavenly Father.  
 Create in me a fountain of virtues.  
 Seal my soul as Your own,  
 that Your reflection in me may be a light for all to see.  
 Amen*