

Anglican Diocese of Ballarat

- JUNE 2023 -

**BIBLE READING**

*Challenge*



This year based on  
*2 Corinthians*



# Introduction

---

## The Rev'd Dr Mark Garner

*Fr Mark and his wife, Jill, lived for many years in the UK. He was ordained in the Scottish Episcopal Church, and in 2012 was appointed Head of a Church of England university college in London. When he retired in 2020, he and Jill came to Ballarat to be near their children and grandchildren. Fr Mark serves as one of the Associate Clergy at the Cathedral.*

## Before you start the daily readings

In these first three days, before the detailed reflections on each day's set passage begin, it will be a good idea to read the whole book at least once, if you can. If this is not possible, I suggest you try to read as much as you can of three key sections:

Thursday 1 <sup>st</sup> June	2 Corinthians 1:12—4:6
Friday 2 <sup>nd</sup> June	2 Corinthians 8:1—9:15
Saturday June 3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 Corinthians 10:1—13:10

## Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> June

Paul wrote this second letter to the Corinthians about 20 years after his conversion; he had spent most of the intervening years bringing the gospel to far-flung parts of the Roman Empire, including Corinth, where he stayed for a couple of years in the early 50s. The membership of the church probably represented a variety of religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. They had mostly been brought to faith by Paul, and when he felt called to move on to preach the gospel in other places, he and they kept in touch as best they could. The Corinthians had many uncertainties about their new faith, and after he left some incomers claiming apostolic authority played on their doubts and confusion by contradicting Paul's

teaching. Paul was deeply moved to help this troubled church, by talking to them at length. Because of the geographical distance now separating them, however, all he could do was to imagine their conversation, write down his side of it, and ask a friend to go to Corinth and read aloud in the church what he had written. How they would have loved social media! I suggest you try to relive a little of the Corinthians' experience by reading aloud the passage set for each day.

This letter gives us a rich and intimate insight into the sort of person Paul was, and how he saw his calling to bring the gospel of Jesus to the world. Between the opening greetings and the concluding good wishes, Paul reveals his inmost thoughts about three main themes:

- a. the crisis in his relationship with the Corinthians, and how it could be resolved;
- b. the Christian calling to give of one's money, time, and self in the service of others;
- c. an explanation and defence of Christian ministry as exemplified in Paul himself and several other individuals and churches.

2 Corinthians is not an easy read. It is rather disjointed; so much so that some scholars think it may be not one letter, but a compilation of several letters written at different times. The emotional nature of the writing is a bit disconcerting, too: sometimes it is warm and tender, at other times angry, sarcastic, or confrontational. If you can see beyond these potential obstacles, however, this is a very rewarding book, for a number of reasons. Some of these are explored in the next two days' notes; I pray you will also discover many for yourself.

## **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank you for the extraordinary life and profound teaching of the apostle Paul. As we reflect on his second letter to the Corinthians, help us to appreciate his personal qualities and his wonderful insight into the faith. During this month, may we be drawn closer to Our Lord Jesus as we hear you speaking to us through Paul's words and example. Amen

## **Questions to Consider**

There are several different views of Paul among Christians. To some he is the great example of church leadership, and an inspiring evangelist; to others, he is a serious (and at times ponderous) theologian. Some feel he is biased against women. What is your impression of him? Has anything you have read thus far in 2 Corinthians confirmed or modified your view of this intriguing man?

1. Why, do you think, does Paul concentrate on the three themes noted above?
2. Have any fresh ideas or new insights struck you in the first suggested reading passage (2 Corinthians 1:12—4:6)?
3. In what ways does Paul's means of expressing himself in 2 Corinthians sound more like a conversation than a theological treatise?

## Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> June

One reason why 2 Corinthians can be so engaging to read is that it is so very personal. As we listen in (as it were) to Paul's side of the conversation, we learn how his faith dominated and directed every part of his life, including his interactions with his fellow-Christians in Corinth. He seeks to serve them in the best way he can by seeking reconciliation when they fall out with one another and with him. Almost all of what he says to them, although it is prompted by particular things that those Corinthians said and did so long ago, is relevant to Christians today. Two examples are his warnings about committing sin (e.g., 6:11—7:4) and his stress on the central importance of giving to, and sharing with, other believers (chapters 8 and 9). Further, Paul describes in some detail the severe physical and mental sufferings he has been through. In addition to the punishing demands of his extensive travels, he was almost daily confronted by the hostility of Roman officials and much of the Jewish establishment to his spreading the faith (e.g., 11:21—29). Praise God we are not persecuted as he was, but we all suffer physically and mentally in other ways, and can learn from Paul's willingness to endure hardship and suffering for Jesus' sake (see 12:9—10).

In most of his letters, Paul focusses on laying out Christian doctrines and their implications for how Jesus' followers should live. In some places, he can come across as a bit impersonal and academic, but 2 Corinthians is very different. To be sure, it includes some theology and ethical guidance, but what is so clear in this letter is the personal passion that underpinned everything Paul preached and wrote, and which drove him to live life to the extreme. He was passionately devoted to Jesus. He was passionate about his friends in the many churches he helped to found. He had deep and meaningful relationships with fellow apostles: in this letter he says quite a lot about Titus, and mentions Timothy and Silvanus with affection. We can learn a lot about Paul's interactions with these men, and with other apostles, in Acts (where Silvanus is referred to by the shorter

version of his name, Silas). We also have his letters addressed to Titus and Timothy. These three accompanied Paul on missionary journeys at various times, and Silvanus may have acted as Paul's secretary, as he did for Peter. Legend has it he became the first Bishop of Corinth.

### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, thank you for showing us your love through friends and family members. Give us the grace to learn, like the Apostle Paul, that in serving the needs of others we are serving you. Fill our hearts with his spirit of self-giving love and self-sacrifice, and teach us to see you in all who suffer or are marginalised, so that we may serve them gladly for your sake, and to your praise and glory. Amen

### **Questions to Consider**

1. In what you have read in 2 Corinthians so far, have you felt encouraged, not only by what Paul states as Christian truth, but equally (or more so) by the example of how he lived life, including his dealings with other Christians?
2. Does a Christian who, like Paul, is very passionate about the faith inspire you, or do you find religious passion slightly embarrassing and disconcerting? Should we be more passionate about our faith? If so, in what ways?
3. Reflect on individuals who have played a significant role in your life of faith. In what ways has God revealed Himself to you through them?

## Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June

It is virtually impossible to understand every part of a letter like 2 Corinthians. It was written two millennia ago in a cultural context completely foreign to us. Paul and the Corinthian church had a close and long-standing relationship, which means that in this letter he assumes a great deal without spelling it out. So, for example, Paul's primary motivation for writing the letter was apparently a serious rift that had opened between him and them. He refers to it several times and it clearly affected him very seriously, but he gives very few details, so we can only speculate what caused that rift, and what forms it took. Paul's tone shifts rapidly: one moment he expresses frustration, even irritation, with them; the next moment he says how much he loves them. He says (in 1:23) that he avoided coming to Corinth on one occasion so as not to upset them.

A recurring feature in the letter is how Paul vigorously, and at great length, defends his ministry, on occasions so strongly that he excuses himself for sounding as though he is boasting (see 12:1). We can only assume that one or more individuals had openly criticised him in the church, and questioned his authority. We do not know who did this, or what was said. No amount of historical research over the centuries has cast light on these puzzles. Nonetheless, we can learn an important spiritual lesson from Paul's response. He does not gloss over the wrong done to him and his reputation, nor does he underplay his own possible mistakes in dealing with the church. But, throughout, his overriding concern is how he can show the Corinthians that he loves them in the Lord: everything he says and does is to be directed to that end. His explanations of the theological justification for what may seem rather commonplace events and situations must have been very helpful and encouraging to the Corinthians. They are certainly of great value for us.

When reading the passages throughout this month, it will be helpful to reflect on them with two complementary attitudes. One is to accept the fact that many things are mentioned, and sometimes



discussed in detail, which are totally obscure to us now. The other is to use your imagination, to think of the kind of thing that may be being referred to—for example, perhaps somebody in a church meeting viciously criticised Paul in a very offensive and personal way—and to enter into it in spirit. How would I feel if that happened to me? What could I learn from it? How might I show love to the person who did this? What can I learn from Paul’s approach; and so on.

### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, thank you for this remarkable and helpful book. Our circumstances are very different from those in which it was written, but human nature is constant, and your love for us all is changeless. Although there are many specific aspects of the letter we may not understand, help us to become like your servant Paul in the way we respond to the challenges and difficulties of life. We ask this for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Select one chapter from 2 Corinthians at random. Note any references to inexplicit and unexplained events or people. Create your own picture of what happened, what was said, by whom, and so on, and imagine you were involved. In such circumstances, how would you apply Paul’s comments to this imaginary situation?
2. In any part of the letter you have read so far, are there any times when Paul seems to be overreacting, overstating his case, etc.? Do you think of these as simply natural human reactions under stress, or is there a spiritual lesson to be learned from them?
3. You are about to begin reading and meditating in depth on short passages from this book. What are you most looking forward to? We have seen it is not an easy book: what challenges do you foresee, and how will you respond to them if they arise?

## **Prof. Jill Francis**

*Jill first worked in music education, ending up as Director of Music at Penleigh & Essendon Grammar School. Then she returned to student life at Melbourne University, completing a PhD in psychology in 1998. With her husband (Mark Garner) she spent 18 years in the UK doing research in applied health sciences. Jill is now Professor of Implementation Science in Melbourne University's Faculty of Medicine. She grew up in the Methodist (now Uniting) Church, during the years when its Eucharistic practice was based on Anglican liturgies. Jill continues musical involvement by singing in the Ballarat Cathedral choir and sometimes plays piano for Taizé services at 5pm on Sundays.*

## **Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> June**

### **2 Corinthians 1.1-7**

#### **'Pass it on'**

I'm no Bible scholar! But I pray that my thoughts and reactions, as a layperson, to these interesting passages of Scripture, may be useful to you during this month of Bible reading challenge.

This week's readings focus on relationships: between the members of the church at Corinth and (1) Paul; (2) with one another; and (3) with God.

Based on Mark's very helpful introductory notes, I think that the people of the church in Corinth had a different kind of challenge than the Jewish people who came together to make up early Christian groups. Jewish people had a depth of faith culture, with centuries of learning about how to be a faith community. By contrast, the people of Corinth were a diverse array of people who may have had nothing in common in terms of their approach to

living a life of faith together. No wonder they had difficulties learning how to be a community of believers! Paul's teaching and advice would have been vital to their learning.

In today's passage, after his standard greeting to the church in Corinth, Paul presents two key messages. The first message is that he (Paul) and Timothy and the people of the church are involved in sharing both bad and good experiences (both Christ's sufferings and God's help). I think he is trying to confirm their common identity as Christ's people – they belong together. The second message is that God's purpose is for the people of the church to pass on the help that they have received (He helps [or comforts] us ... so that we are able to help [or comfort] others; verse 4). This idea of passing help on runs counter to one of the most fundamental principles of human societies: the principle of reciprocity. In a fair society we usually return favours, reimburse what we owe, and repay kindness with kindness. This is like playing tennis – the ball goes back to the same person who sent it to us. Paul is perhaps saying: instead of reciprocating, think of help from God and others as being like a river: it is kept fresh by flowing away. We are blessed, loved and helped by God so that the blessings can flow through us to other people. In the coming week, as we have received so many blessings, let's pass on loving kindness to others.

### **Prayer**

Loving God, thank you for the constant help that flows from you. This week, please make me aware of the needs of others and strengthen me to pass on your love and blessings to them. Amen.

## Questions to Consider

1. How do I relate to others in the church community in a way that confirms our common identity as God's people?
2. If passing on God's blessing to others is part of being a faith community, what practical things can I do in the coming week to express my belonging to this community?

## Monday 5<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 1.8-11*

#### 'Enough is enough'

Amazingly, Paul describes his profound difficulties, which were threats to his very life, as opportunities to rely on God. Paul – the born leader, exceptionally intelligent and capable– welcomed the feeling of being out of his depth because he learnt all the more to trust in God. This past experience gives Paul confidence for the future (he saved [or delivered] us ... and will save us ... he will save us again; verse 10). What a blessing! It reminds me of one of my dearest and most comforting hymn verses, which starts:

"Through life and death, through sorrow and through sinning,

He shall suffice me, for he hath sufficed" (Frederic W.H. Myers).

In other words, we can be confident that God will help us enough in the future because God has helped us enough in the past. (And although God's generosity is boundless, actually we don't need more than enough.) Finally, note Paul's absolute confidence in the power of prayer to produce blessings (you help us by your prayers for us; verse 11).

## Prayer

Loving God, thank you that even when I feel inadequate in the face of difficulties or sorrows, I can rely on you to love and save me. You are my strength and my comfort. Keep me faithful in prayer so that your blessings may flow to others. Amen.

## Questions to Consider

1. Think back to some of the difficult experiences of your life, when the challenges felt beyond your capacity to manage. Looking back, can you discern strength or blessing that came from God? How did this experience influence your faith?
2. During the past week, in what circumstances have you been reminded that God's provision is enough for your needs?
3. Who needs your prayers today? Make a list and pray for them one by one.

## Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 1.12-14*

#### 'Be real'

In writing about his relationship with the church community in Corinth, how interesting that Paul contrasts their 'God-given frankness [or integrity] and sincerity' (i.e. honesty) with 'worldly wisdom' (verse 12). Worldly wisdom might advise us to sugar-coat our truth to make it more palatable to our listener, or to tell only part of our truth so as not to offend our listener. But Paul prefers authenticity – being real – which is also currently valued in today's society (although possibly more in hope than in action!). We tell our children and grandchildren that we love them just as they are; and we want them to be the very best version of themselves that they can be. Authenticity comes at a cost – Paul acknowledges that the people in Corinth understand his message 'only in part' and hopes that, in time, they will reach full understanding.

## Prayer

Loving God, please give me a gift of discernment so that I can be honest and authentic, and also loving and caring, in my dealings with other people. Amen.

## Questions to Consider

1. Think about some people in our church community who are honest and direct with you. How can you work to better understand and appreciate their perspective about what they are trying to achieve?
2. What are your greatest challenges in being honest with other people, which may result in misunderstandings? Write a prayer to ask for God's help in being authentic in your relationships. Read that prayer aloud several times today or tomorrow.

## Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 1.15-22*

#### **'Change your mind but not your heart'**

Reading this passage, I wonder whether there were some 'conspiracy theories' among the people of Corinth about Paul's plans. He was going to visit them, then changed his mind. Was he being manipulative? Threatening to check up on them? Keeping them guessing? Or did he simply making some initial travel plans and then consider a better way to visit Macedonia and then Judea, without imposing upon the people of Corinth? Whatever the details, one thing appears to concern Paul: that the Corinthian church people seemed to suspect that his motivation (his heart) was not true; that when he changed his mind, he was being devious.

Paul uses this sad situation to emphasise that, through Jesus, God's promises are consistent and positive (He is the "Yes" to all God's promises; verse 20).

## Prayer

Loving God, help me to think the best of other people, even though I may not understand their motives. Thank you for your constant 'Yes'; for keeping your promises to me. Amen.

## Questions to Consider

1. Probably many church communities are prone to conspiracy theories or undercurrents of mistrust or division. What practical things could you say or do to try to heal this tendency?
2. List the times, in the past year, when you have experienced God's 'Yes', through being aware of his goodness and blessing.

## Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 1.23-2.4*

#### **'Affirm one another'**

To me, a key part of this passage is verse 24: We are not trying to dictate to you what you must believe. Here, Paul is leading by example: 'dictating' what people must believe is not the way to build up the community of faith. Yet sometimes in our history as a Christian church, this is exactly what has happened. Division between different Christian groups is not part of God's will for his church. Rather, we could follow Paul's example in affirming our Christian sisters and brothers, even if their beliefs are a little different from ours: we know that you stand firm in the faith (verse 24).

Prayer: Loving God, help me to accept that, even if other people in my church community hold some different beliefs, they are still your loved children. Help me to appreciate that they stand firm in their faith and that we belong together as a Christian community.

## Questions to consider

1. How can you best affirm other people in your church community, even if you don't agree with all of their beliefs?
2. Obviously there is one belief that we all have in common: belief in the saving power of our loving God, through Jesus. What differences in other beliefs are you aware of among your church friends? How can you express to them your acceptance of these differences? How can you encourage them to stand firm in the faith?

## Friday 9<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 2.5-11*

#### **'Love one another'**

In these verses it seems that Paul is referring to a specific person who has behaved badly. And this person has already been punished by the group (verse 6). Now, says Paul, move on. Forgive, encourage and love this person. Otherwise, the person will be overwhelmed with sorrow and give up on faith (verse 11). This example is one of the most difficult for us to follow but perhaps one of the most important to us to take seriously. Yes, we need to be honest and let a person know if we feel their actions have been inappropriate, hurtful or damaging. But the next step – forgiving, encouraging, loving – is critically important to that person's faith and to the life of the church.



## Prayer

Loving God, thank you that you have forgiven me for failing you and that you love me whatever I do. Please help me this week to express forgiveness, encouragement and love to anyone in the church who, in my view, has behaved badly. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

## Questions to consider

1. Think of a time when you failed to live up to the standards that God asks of us, when participating in church activities. Did you feel forgiven and loved? If so, what was said or done to make you feel accepted? If not, what do you wish someone had said or done?
2. Think of a person who has 'fallen out' with our church community. What can you say or do to make that person feel forgiven and loved?

## Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 2.12-17*

#### 'Rely on God'

Well, sorry, but to me this passage seems to be all over the place! First, Paul explains his priorities: even though the work was opening up in Troas, he left because he couldn't find Titus and was worried about him. Second, we have this odd mixed image of being led by God, but being prisoners, and also being in a victory procession. Third, God is using us to diffuse the message of Christ everywhere like a sweet fragrance (or aroma; verse 14). Fourth, the message will be lifegiving to some but deadly to others. Fifth, we speak the message with sincerity rather than cheapening it by presenting it as mere merchandise to be traded for profit. All in the space of 6 verses! And who is Paul referring to when he says "we"? Himself, Timothy and Titus? Or the whole community of faith in Corinth? How can we (the community of faith in this Diocese) make sense of this panorama of vivid but mixed images?

I think that Paul may be expressing three things here: the astonishing complexity and pace of his life; the fact that not everyone will accept the message of Jesus; and the communication challenge that requires total genuineness. Again, Paul finds this so demanding that he must rely on God (Who then is capable of such a task? Verse 16).

### **Prayer**

Loving God, when the demands of living out my faith combine with all the other demands of life, it sometimes feels overwhelming. Thank you that I can rely on you to love and strengthen me. Please guide me towards the right priorities, Amen.

### **Questions to consider**

1. When the complexities of life seem overwhelming, how do you decide the right priorities? How does your faith influence that decision?
2. How do you react when someone who knows about your faith rejects the Christian message? What can you think and say so that this person might experience your faith as a sweet fragrance?
3. Which of this week's Bible passages stand out to you as shining examples of Paul's faith and commitment? How can you apply those examples in your own life?

## Keith Romanis

*Keith Romanis is the Assistant Chaplain and Chair of Religion, Philosophy & Ethics Faculty at Ballarat Grammar, he is a parishioner and chorister at the Cathedral Church of Christ the King and is studying for a Masters of Ministry at Charles Sturt University.*

## Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 3.1-6*

Paul in this section of his letter to the Christians in Corinth begins a series of reflections on what is valuable. He is contrasting things that human beings find valuable with that provided by the God of Creation, the “Spirit of the living God”. Human beings value formal letters of recommendation and imposing carved stone tablets, of accomplishments of human action. Instead, Paul says look to what is truly known to you: the relationships that he and his companions have built up, of the connections not of written contracts, but of covenants, deep relationships inspired and developed by God.

We all have worries about the values of the world – popularity, over-consumption, superficial appearances. But do we examine our own values, those things that we might place too high in our estimation?

On the other hand, what is something “written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God” that needs your time and attention?

### Questions to Consider

1. What is it that worries you about what the world values?
2. What is something of the world that you might value too highly? (It could be something as simple as the opinion of other people.)

3. What is something that you know to be “real”, to have true value that you could spend more time cultivating? Is it your garden? A neglected relationship? A cause that used to be dear to your heart? A local place that needs some TLC through an organisation such as Landcare?

### **Prayer**

Today, O God of all days,  
give me an experience of your heart.  
Draw me deep into your very being,  
into the core of your love for me, others, and the world.  
Give me a glimpse of others through your eyes:  
loving them, forgiving them,  
and delighting in the way they give glory to you through their very  
existence.  
Help me to discern your ways of love;  
so that I too might be a useful vessel of your love in the world.  
Amen.

## **Monday 12<sup>th</sup> June**

### *2 Corinthians 3.7-18*

In the second section of Chapter 3 of his letter, Paul is really warming to his theme. Don't worry about the things that used to be important! What has been made clear to us? What do we now know because Jesus has come to us, taught us, died for us and won the promise of eternal life for us?

This idea that Christ unveils God's plan, that he provides God's message to us, is as valuable now as it was 2000 years ago. If God's intervention into the world and the lives of human beings is to be taken seriously, what changes will that make in our lives? In our attitudes and our actions?

Because we know the history of Paul, we know the transformation the encounter with Jesus had in his life. He goes from comfort and prestige, having both a position of authority in the Jewish world and the privilege of Citizenship in the Roman world to an almost cinematic series of trials and tribulations. At the start of this letter, we have heard about Paul's recent sufferings: "for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself".

He gives it all up to follow Jesus. One of the remarkable things about Paul is that he takes up Jesus' forgiveness and instead of being crushed by who he was, he sets out to live the life God has offered him, of rejecting trappings of status and the feeling of lifting yourself up at the expense of others.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. What has being a Christian brought into your life?
2. Think about a Christian you admire, it could be someone famous such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu or Julian of Norwich or someone local, perhaps someone that you go to Church with. What is it that Jesus is teaching you about the direction of your life through them, about what you should value?

### **Prayer**

Eternal God whose glory surrounds us,  
guide us into deeper and deeper understanding of who you are,  
so that we might know your plans for us and that our lives might be transformed; through God our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.  
Amen.

## Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 4.1-12*

Paul is managing the expectations of the people in Corinth in this section of the letter. They want their Christian leaders to be impressive by the standards of this world – eloquent, attractive, dazzling in their own right. Paul pushes back “we do not proclaim ourselves, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord”. This continues Paul’s meditation on the things of this world and the things that come from God. This was an issue for Jesus as well, he doesn’t raise up an army to defeat the Romans, he doesn’t call down angels to smite his enemies or to suddenly right every wrong in the world; instead, he teaches truths that change the hearts of the people who listen, who then go into the world to co-create the Kingdom of God. To, in the words of the Lord’s Prayer, have God’s will be done on earth as in heaven, this idea of a New Creation is taken up later in the letter (Ch5).

The idea of treasure in clay jars is one of Paul’s most enduring metaphors. Calling us to reject the superficial, to see the truth at the heart of the matter. The message of Jesus which on the surface may look hard: Love your neighbour as yourself, forgive, show mercy, share what you have with everyone. But is true treasure, Paul is indeed speaking of his own appearance, but also the message of the Gospel here.

Despite the trials that Paul and his companions have endured, they are not discouraged. This small reflection on the purpose of suffering asks the people of Corinth to take a broad view, to see beyond what this world sees, beyond both the flashiness of people who want you to see, people’s public faces (such as the super-positive stories we post on social media) or the attention seeking of self-proclaimed gurus but also the day-to-day sufferings of this life.

## Questions to Consider

1. What is something that you value that is not shared widely?
2. What is something that you found hard or distasteful at first that came to be important to you?
3. Why doesn't God just come and "fix" everything? What is the value of working through human beings to create the Kingdom of God?

## Prayer

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.

Your Kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours.

Now and for ever. Amen.

## Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 4.13-18*

Paul has been building to this point, to the proclamation of the resurrection. He has been telling us that the messengers don't matter, the message does. That the things that are visible may not be as important as those things that are invisible. He quotes the Psalms to draw in Ancient Wisdom to support the unveiling that Jesus has brought. Psalm 116 uses imagery of speaking the truth, of responding to God by sharing your belief and expressing God's glory: "I believed and so I spoke" comes from the Psalm, and Paul tells us that he is doing the same thing, with the added understanding that Jesus' intervention into our world has brought him so Paul claims: "so we also believe and so we also speak."

Paul is telling us that Jesus has brought us an eternal truth, the hidden things will be made visible, the treasure of great value will be revealed to us and when we understand, when the veil is lifted, we like Paul will be compelled to tell of God's glory and respond fully to the resurrection.

### Questions to Consider

1. Paul in his letter so far has given lots of reasons why he would give up hope, why doesn't he?
2. Why do we sometimes find it hard to speak about God or of our hope in Jesus?
3. What is a little thing that we could do to make this easier?

**Prayer** (*derived from the hymn: "All my hope on God is founded"*)

God: all my hope on you is founded;  
It is through you that my trust renews.  
Through change and chance please guide me,  
only good and only true.  
God unknown,  
you alone  
call my heart to be your own.

Human pride and earthly glory,  
sword and crown betray your trust;  
what with care and toil you buildeth,  
tower and temple, fall to dust.  
But your power,  
hour by hour,  
is my temple and my tower.

Loving God, we give you thanks  
for the hope you give us in Jesus,  
now and forever. Amen.



## Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 5.1-10*

The way we carve up scripture into chapters and verses is good for scholars who want to be able to reference each line of the Bible, but it can create artificial barriers for us when we read our modern translations. You can see why the scholars have put a chapter break between 4:18 and 5:1 because Paul has come to a really good point when he sums up the value of the resurrection, but just because we move to Chapter 5 he has not given up on building his argument, he carries on describing the New Creation, the value of the new resurrected Heaven and Earth.

One of the things that we can get wrong about Paul's writing is the idea that he has a problem with physical things, wanting us to think instead of spiritual things. This can be a trap, because Paul is not rejecting the wonders of Creation, the beauty of God's universe, but is instead speaking of the constructs of ideas and values that are not from God, the metaphorical dwellings we construct, the focus on those things that distract us. So, not that bodies are bad, but instead of the hope of becoming a fully integrated person, full of the understanding of the glory of God, but also a fully integrated universe where heaven and earth come together in the eternal Kingdom of God.

#### **Questions to Consider**

1. What is something in your spiritual or religious life or practice helps you see the true nature of God? (Is it in the way that people show love, is it in the beauty of God's Creation? Is it in silent prayer or the gathering at the Eucharist table?)
2. Why do you think this idea, image or practice helps so much?

**Prayer** *(from the Chinook Psalter)*

The garden is rich with diversity  
With plants of a hundred families  
In the space between the trees  
With all the colours and fragrances.  
Basil, mint and lavender,  
Great Mystery keep my remembrance pure,  
Raspberry, Apple, Rose,  
Great Mystery fill my heart with love,  
Dill, anise, tansy,  
Holy winds blow in me.  
Rhododendron, zinnia,  
May my prayer be beautiful  
May my remembrance O Great Mystery  
Be as incense to thee  
In the sacred grove of eternity  
As I smell and remember  
The ancient forests of earth. Amen.

## Friday 16<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 5.11-21*

According to Paul, the world has been turned upside down, a world not focused on outwards appearances, on old expectations, but on matters of the heart. And what power has made these changes? "All this is from God". Paul outlines the logic trail that empowers him to speak of God's re-made world. Jesus come to human beings to reconcile us once and forever with the Living God who has given us all freedom from our sins and entrusted with the message to be passed on to all people of the possibility of an eternal connection to the God of all.

The image that Paul is sent by God, it's fine that you don't know him or that you are not impressed by his public appearances, because he is known to God and we are all known and loved by the God who made us and sent Jesus to save us.

Paul wants us to see not how humans see, but how Jesus sees, he is returning to his theme of not valuing what our society values, but what God values and values so much that he sent Jesus to us to teach us, bring us close to God and nothing short of making everything new again!

#### **Questions to Consider**

1. If you looked around you at the natural environment with Jesus' eyes what would you see? Would you be more called to care for it if you saw it more often from this perspective?
2. If you were to look at yourself with Jesus' eyes what would you see?

#### **Prayer**

Loving God, hold me in Your presence so that I can behold Your glory and see myself as I truly am. May I see something of You in me, and may I reflect something of Your glory to others. Amen.

## Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 6.1-13*

Reading between the lines of this second letter or Paul to the Church in Corinth we can see that he is exasperated by their unwillingness to see what for him is so obvious! If you accept what God is offering, a new life in this world and an opportunity to build God's Kingdom then it must make changes in you heart and your life!

Paul wants to show the people of Corinth the motivation that it has given him, the capacity to show great endurance in the face of great hardship and he tells them that this motivation have come in the form of gifts from God – strength, understanding, compassion and many more. The world that has been turned upside down has the capacity to provide joy in the face of sorrow, treasure in the face of lack, of great satisfaction where others might find disappointment.

The ending of this section of the letter reiterates that what God (and Paul by association) value is not what the world values. That we need to hear the message of God, brought to our world through Jesus and then allow that change our attitudes, our values, our hearts.

#### **Questions to Consider**

1. What are some of the struggles in your life, especially the ones that stop you connecting with God and other people?
2. In what ways does being honest about the struggles and trials, as well as the joys and celebrations, of the Christian life help you open your hearts to others?

#### **Prayer**

Loving God, thank you for the ministry of Paul, for the ministry of all those people who have pointed me to you. Help me to be open to new expressions of your love, to seeing beauty in the world around me and acting out of the hope of your eternal promises. Amen.

## The Rev'd Ben Hewitt

*I'm Ben, I've recently moved from Melbourne to Ballarat to start a new church - City on a Hill Ballarat. I've been ordained as an Anglican minister since 2019, I'm married to Suja, a local doctor, and together we have three wonderful kids. When I have some time to myself, I love to dabble in the kitchen, I'm a failing fisherman and I'm an armchair lover of sports of all sorts.*

## Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> June

### 2 Corinthians 6.14-18

One of the things we've enjoyed most since moving to Ballarat is an evening walk around Lake Wendouree, watching the sun sink down to the west. The sky smoulders with the most wonderful colours: a vibrant mingling of bright blues and yellows, chased towards the horizon by charcoals and navies. This mixing of light and darkness are spectacular!

However, here in 2 Corinthians 6 Paul is clear that in spiritual terms, no such mixing of light and darkness is possible. People can only be one, or the other. He uses a series of stark contrasts to make the same point - righteousness and wickedness (v. 14); light and darkness (v.14); Christ and Belial<sup>1</sup> (v.15); believer and unbeliever (v15); and finally the temple of God and idols (v. 16). Why? Paul's getting to the pointy end of his letter, calling the Corinthians back to him and the gospel he has been proclaiming. He's imploring them to turn away from the sub-par gospel being peddled by his opponents

---

<sup>1</sup>"Belial" is an Old Testament term derived from the words for "worthless". The name was connected to idols in the Old Testament and became connected with Satan in later Christian theology. Taken from *2 Corinthians For You*, Gary Millar, (The Good Book Company, 2020)

in Corinth. To turn that way is to turn towards darkness. The dangers are clear, the church's existence is under threat - light and darkness don't mix, they must choose one side or the other.

Paul's confident his side is right under God. "We", he says in verse 16, "are the temple of the living God". In other words, God has made his home in us, referring to himself and believers in the gospel of Jesus he has proclaimed. There can be no greater intimacy with God! He's pleading with them to hold on to Jesus, to stick with the gospel Paul has shared with them, so they don't fall for something that will pull them away from Jesus and into darkness. So one evening this week when you're enjoying a beautiful sunset in the west, why don't you thank God for His Light, His son Jesus. Pray too that in the power of His Holy Spirit, you'd stick to His path through life, with His word lighting our way.

### Questions to Consider

1. How often do we thank God for the joy of the gospel that Paul has been proclaiming? *1 Corinthians 15:3-5 is a great summary!*
2. Are we trying to mix 'light and darkness' in any area of our lives? Are there parts of our lives we can bring before God in confession and seek his strength as we start this new week?

### Prayer

Thank you God for making your home in us by your Spirit. Thank you that you guide our lives by your word, a lamp for our feet. Show me Lord where I've strayed from your way, where I'm dabbling in the darkness, and purify me that I would become more like Jesus this week in heart and mind.

## Monday 19<sup>th</sup> June

### 2 Corinthians 7.1-16

Can grief ever be good for us? My grandmother suffered from dementia in her last few years of life. It took such a hold that she spent her final two years in bed - her mind declined far quicker than her body. When death finally came, it wasn't *good*, but for my father it certainly came as *relief*. Can grief ever be good for us?

Paul thought so. He wrote the Corinthians a strongly-worded letter that brought them *godly* grief. They're grieved by the letter he wrote them (v.8), but this grief motivated action! It prompted their repentance (v9, v10). You see, whereas worldly grief produces death, godly grief "produces a repentance that lets to salvation without regret". What can Paul mean? When someone is bold enough to point out our shortcomings, indeed our sin, it will grieve us. Who likes to be exposed like that?! However, when we're willing to listen to that challenge, it will drive us to repentance, to cry out to God: 'Have mercy on us, wipe out our sins! Help us live the new life to your glory!'. Repentance is the very foundation of our relationship with Jesus, who did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. (Luke 5:31-32). When we become aware of our sin, we realise how deeply we need Jesus. *Some* grief can be good for us.

### Questions to Consider

1. When was the last time someone pointed out some aspect of sin in your life? How did you react? How might you react differently next time? *It's a good friend who'd be so bold!*
2. Is repentance part of the regular rhythm of your relationship with God? How could you make it more regularly so?

## Prayer

God of all mercy, we humbly admit that we need your help. We have wandered from your way. We have sinned in thought, word and deed, and have failed to do what is right. You alone can save us. Have mercy on us, wipe out our sins and teach us to forgive others. Bring forth in us the fruit of your Spirit that we may live the new life to your glory. This we ask in the name of Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

## Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 8.1-15*

In chapters 8 and 9 Paul turns his focus to money, and pens one of the most complete considerations of the subject in the New Testament. Yesterday repentance, today finances - Paul's not afraid to tackle thorny issues!

In these verses he is urging the Corinthians to 'excel' in their financial generosity (v. 7), to complete a collection begun the previous year in aid of other impoverished churches. He holds up two compelling models to encourage their generosity. Firstly, the Macedonians - churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. Their giving was truly sacrificial - they were in 'the midst of a very severe trial', and in 'extreme poverty' (v. 2) and yet gave beyond their ability (v. 3). So says Paul, model the Macedonians in their generosity! Secondly, Jesus is their model, and he too gave sacrificially. Verse 9 is worth quoting in full: *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."*

Jesus gave up his seat of power at the right hand of the Father, grew up the son of a tradesman, later lived with no fixed abode, and died a criminal's death. Why? So we might become rich. Are we giving sacrificially in response to his grace? Giving our time, talents and here especially, our treasures? When we grasp the generosity of His grace, it seems a small thing to give from what we have to supply the needs of others (v. 14).



## Questions to Consider

How often do you thank God for the riches he has lavished on us? Look around your life - where has He blessed you abundantly materially, relationally, spiritually?

What can stop us giving more generously? Where do we see others in need around us? What could we give to help them?

## Prayer

Almighty God and merciful Father, we give you hearty thanks for all your goodness and loving kindness to us and to all people. We bless you for our creation and preservation, and all the blessings of this life, but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. In light of your generous blessings to us, help us to be generous in blessing others. Amen.

## Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 8.16-24*

As a student in Dublin I worked in a newsagents under Patrick. Patrick was a loveable grump - probably fed up from years of employing students! The thing that sticks in my mind about Patrick was his accountability with money. At the end of every shift, he'd have the staff count the day's takings and then send us to the bank to deposit it - never him. He wanted to be whiter than white and above reproach when it came to trustworthiness with money. That matters to the apostle Paul too. In the second half of chapter 8, he is at pains to show the Corinthians he'll be careful with the money they raise for the churches in need.

Paul now commends to the church Titus, his chief delegate (v. 16-17, 23), a brother already renowned among all the churches (v. 18-19), and a third unnamed brother (v. 22). The money raised is going to be handled well - by trusted, earnest, proven and accountable men.

It is striking that after appealing for generosity from the Corinthians, Paul also assures them of the godly administration of the gift. Today, the church has done much damage to its own reputation and integrity. If trust is to be rebuilt in our communities, we have to deliver on our promises, and in more than our financial dealings. We have to do what we say. We have to be consistent. We have to be principled. This will be “what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man” (v. 21).

### **Questions to Consider**

What do people around you say about you? Are you a person of integrity? We all make mistakes, but typically are you someone who does what you say?

If you give money away, do you know where it goes? Does it get to the place you’ve been told it will? What can you do to hold organisations (including churches!) to account for their handling of money?

### **Prayer**

Lord help me to be a person of integrity. Prompt me to keep my word and to do what I say I’ll do. Use me to build trust in my community, however small, for the sake of your church and your name. Help me be above reproach when it comes to my finances, that I might bring honour to you. Amen.

## Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 9.1-8*

On the very, *very* rare occasions (!) that I got into trouble in my youth, my parents were never satisfied with a sassy sorry, said with sarcasm. "Now say it like you mean it!", would be their response. The act of apologising wasn't enough, they wanted my attitude to match my actions. God's as much concerned with our attitudes as our actions. When it comes to money, he calls us to be open handed and to give, but in the very next chapter we see He's just as interested in our attitude when we give. In fact, you could say he's more interested in the attitude than the amount!

Here's the apostle Paul in verse 7, crucial to this whole section on generosity: "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." How much we give financially is a matter of personal consideration; what Paul commends here is cheerful hearts in doing so. Remember the widow Jesus watched with his disciples at the temple? Her few coins were worth more than the large donations from others, because "she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on." (Mk. 12:44).

Sometimes sacrificial giving will hurt us, but if we're giving with gritted teeth it's time to reconsider our hearts. It's not the gift God loves, but the cheerful giver - He's more interested in attitude than amount.

#### **Questions to Consider**

1. When was the last time we reviewed our financial giving? How do we feel when the subject of money and giving it away comes up? What might that reveal about the attitude of our hearts?
2. How can we cultivate thankful hearts? Today's a good day to 'count your blessings' and give thanks to God for that we do have.

## Prayer

God of all goodness and grace, create in us a heart of joyful generosity. Receive the gifts we offer; and grant that our whole life may give you glory and praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 9.9-15*

My mother-in-law is Sri Lankan, and one of the national requirements of being Sri Lankan, it seems, is to provide abundantly when it comes to meal times. Dinner at her house is always a feast of many curries - even if we insist we've come for a simple meal and she shouldn't worry. I'm not complaining!

She's a great model to me of what Paul is calling the Corinthian church to - to be generous with all that God has generously given them. Even as we're called to give generously to others who are in need, we're reminded here that God will use our generosity for our good and His glory. He'll use our giving for a harvest of our righteousness (v. 10), and He will enrich us in every way so we will be generous in every way (v. 11).

All that we have can be used generously for the sake of others. A few dollars for a coffee for someone who need company more than caffeine. A warm meal around a warm table for someone new to town. A trolley full of shopping for someone doing it tough. It's good for us when we're generous to others—confirming and demonstrating our righteousness before God. Better still, it orientates our lives towards God and his glory, and what greater purpose can there be than that?! All this will bring an overflowing of thanksgiving to God (v. 12) and will glorify him (v.13).

## Questions to Consider

1. How could be generous to someone we know this week? What do we have that we can bless them with? How could we practice true hospitality and be generous to someone we don't know this week?
2. What is your driving motivation and purpose in life? Someone wise once said our chief end is to know God and glorify Him forever. What might be taking our focus off God and living for His glory at the moment?

## Prayer

God use my life to bring you much glory. Show me the things that are distracting me from that purpose now, and help me use them for your glory. Help me be generous to others today, and fill me with confidence that you're using it for my good too. Glory to you God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as in the beginning so now and forever. Amen.

## Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 10.1-11*

The age of the 'keyboard warrior' is at hand! In a world with more of life spent online, we've seen a rise in people saying unpleasant things about others - sometimes stinging criticism - all said from the safe distance of a keyboard. This can *really* hurt, and can seem like a cowardly option when your critic isn't willing to confront you face to face. Our last section of 2 Corinthians for the week is another passionate self-defence by Paul, challenging the Corinthian critique that he's a cowardly keyboard warrior. "Such people should realise," says Paul in verse 11, "that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present."

We've seen throughout June that Paul is not afraid to say the hard things to this church. We're so far from their context that we might read the letter and think of Paul as a coward, a constant critic, maybe

even a bully. However we need to see what he reminds the Corinthians of here - the authority the Lord gave him as an apostle and a church leader is for building them up not for than tearing them down (v. 8). He's writing for their good! We must remember that God has commissioned him for this task, and God has preserved his letter for the sake of all churches since. The things we're reading and wrestling with are to build *us* up, not to tear us down. Thank God for Paul, and for leaders in His church willing to say hard things for our good!

### Questions to Consider

1. Look back over the letter. Well done for getting this far! What have you found most difficult to stomach? What has challenged you most? Why do you think you feel that way?
2. Are there Christian leaders in your life who have been willing to challenge you on various aspects of life? Have they been willing to listen to your challenges of them? Thank God for these people and pray that as churches we'd sharpen one another in our godliness.

### Prayer

Thank you God for your word, including 2 Corinthians. As we read it, we ask you to teach us, rebuke us, correct us and train us in righteousness. Help us to live in its light, even when we find that challenging, so that we may be ready to serve you for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Bishop Garry Weatherill**

*I love serving God and the people of God as the Bishop of Ballarat. Previously I was Bishop of the vast bush diocese of Willochra in South Australia.*

*I love the Bible Reading Challenge because it's flexible and gives me the chance to see and understand how others read the Holy Scriptures. I learn something new every day.*

*Ironically, this year I have dealt with Paul struggling with false apostles – I was flabbergasted earlier this year when one of my episcopal colleagues called me a “false apostle” and so I have really engaged personally, viscerally, with this set of readings.*

## **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> June**

### **2 Corinthians 10.12-18**

This last part of 2 Corinthians is a bit like an email written in haste and then not sent the next morning. In the chapters 11, 12 and 13 we get a glimpse into the workings of Paul's mind. We see him as a conflicted character, almost obsessed with the task of preaching the gospel and encouraging new believers, but at the same time, anxious about the impact of other leaders who seem to be intruding on his territory. Although he doesn't want to get caught up in self defence, he actually spends a fair bit of time justifying his own ministry.

My old grandfather used to say “self praise is no recommendation”. He was a laconic old Aussie bushman, but he and Paul had the same idea. Boasting about our own achievements is of no use at all.

Paul is concerned that all his good work evangelising the Corinthian Church might be in jeopardy from new teaching that is being promoted by teachers who are full of self praise. He wants the

Corinthians to build on what they have already learned from Paul, and so further expand the kingdom in new directions. They should not be distracted from the good work God is already doing in them, by engaging in comparisons with others, or by being led astray by false teachers.

In the end, Paul says, what really matters is what God sees and commends. Self praise is no recommendation!

### **Prayer**

We praise you, Oh Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. There's a fine line between self justification, and giving an account of the faith that is in you. Can you think of a time when it has been appropriate for you to "boast" about your faith?
2. When we feel the need to compare ourselves with others we are usually indicating a level of self doubt or uncertainty. Is this what is happening with Paul? Do you sometimes recognise your own lack of confidence in talking about your faith?



## Monday 26<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 11.1-15*

#### **Paul on the offensive**

In today's reading, Paul doesn't hold anything back. He makes a full frontal attack on those he calls "false apostles, deceitful workers" and "Satan's ministers". And he wants the Corinthians to understand how deeply he feels the assaults of those false apostles, not for his own pride's sake, but because of the love he has for the Corinthian church.

He uses the imagery of marriage to explain the damage they cause to their intimacy with Christ, if the Corinthians follow a different gospel, or a different teaching from that which they have received from Paul.

He sounds almost petulant when he says "I think I am not in the least inferior to these super apostles". But he then explains that while he may not have great eloquence in his preaching, what he does offer is knowledge (ie truth) about Christ which he has shared freely.

Paul then changes direction and reminds the Corinthians that he has made no demands on them other than the call to follow Christ. He has relied on the gifts of other churches to supply his needs so that he can engage fully in ministry with the Corinthians (I robbed other churches in order to serve you.) This is highly emotive language and it is hard not to think that Paul is shaming the Corinthians into remembering the cost to other churches and to Paul himself, that they are squandering by following false apostles. And yet this is all done for the love Paul has for this church.

In the final part of this passage Paul is unambiguous about his attack on the false apostles and condemns them – their end will match their deeds.

## Prayer

Lord give us courage to speak the truth in love, and wisdom to follow the pattern of your life in all we say and do. Amen

## Questions to Consider

1. Are there times when you have felt undermined by others? How have you managed those feelings?
2. There is a sense of what the Midnight Oil song called Power and Passion in this passage. Are there faith issues about which you are really passionate?

## Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 11.16-33*

#### **Anything you can do, I can do better.**

We don't know the identities of the false apostles or deceitful workers, but today's reading helps us understand something about them. Paul's passionate defence of his ministry implies that the false apostles were trying to undermine his credibility as an apostle and so, in spite of his reluctance to do so, he recounts the innumerable deeds and experiences that authenticate his claim to be a true apostle. It is a pretty exhaustive (and exhausting) list! He even ends with what we would today call Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Yet all this "boasting" is set in the context of the foolishness of boasting. Paul uses the techniques of the false apostles, and so "boasts", but he only does so in the knowledge that he displays his own weakness when he boasts, and so reveals more fully the nature of God. This is a very sophisticated rhetorical technique. After a great deal of talk about himself. Paul still brings the focus in on the God of truth and justice.

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, your power is made perfect in weakness. Strengthen us to live transparent lives that point to your love and grace. Amen

## Questions to Consider

1. When have you caught yourself “boasting”? What does such behaviour say about your character?
2. Have you ever been conscious of suffering for your faith?

## Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> June

### *2 Corinthians 12.1-10*

#### **When I am weak, then I am strong**

Paul shifts gear again in these 10 verses.

Yesterday we heard of the amazing experiences and endurance that testified to his authenticity as an apostle. He “boasts” that he has as much, if not more credibility than the false apostles. And yet he recognises that “boasting” only makes sense if he is proclaiming God’s power in the face of human weakness, and so he boasts “in the Lord.”

Today Paul tells of an amazing spiritual revelation that is given to him of Paradise. He is not only a man of extraordinary action for God, he also has spiritual resources that are “exceptional”. Yet the revelation is poorly described and “thin” and Paul says that in order to stop his elation, to curb his spiritual hubris, God gives him a thorn in his flesh.

It is tempting to try and work out what the “thorn” might be – speech impediment, a difficult wife, some physical disability, perhaps a recurring illness like diverticulitis, or kidney stones, or diarrhoea. Whatever the “thorn” is matters less than its purpose, which is to remind Paul that God’s power is made perfect, made complete, in weakness. The reality revealed on the Cross, a Saviour who is stripped and crucified, is the ultimate demonstration of God’s

reversal of the way of the world. Therefore, Paul is content with weakness and humiliation because, “when I am weak, then I am strong.”

The turmoil of the previous two chapters is resolved as Paul argues his case and then reminds himself and his audience that this is all about God and not all about self.

### **Prayer**

Thank you, Jesus, that you did not cling to equality with God, but emptied yourself, taking the form of a slave. Help us to trust as you trusted and to find our strength in the midst of our weakness.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. What do you think Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” might have been? Why?
2. Can you think of a time in your own experience when you have recognised that when you are weak, then you are strong?

## **Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> June**

### *2 Corinthians 12.11-21*

**“I do not want what is yours, but you.”**

Now, Paul reasserts his role as the father, teacher and apostle of the Corinthian community. Even though they have stretched his faith even in himself, Paul realises that he is the one who is called to love, protect and nurture this community of faith. He is aware that their behaviour is sometimes aberrant, and that they are always tempted to a different or easier gospel, yet he is unfazed.

Apart from what can only be described as sarcasm where he asks for forgiveness for not having demanded more of them, Paul is clear that his love for the Corinthians is at the heart of all his ministry with them – “I will most gladly spend and be spent for you”.

He is preparing to come for a third visit to the Corinthian Church and he knows that both he and they, are bound to be disappointed in each other. But that can be no obstacle to true apostolicity and true discipleship. Paul reassures them that he is coming, not to trick or cajole or deceive them, but to draw them closer together and closer to God. Paul does not want their "stuff" their excuses or their boasting. He asks for something much more significant, he wants each member of the Corinthian church to be open to his love, to renew their love for each other and most of all, to be open to the love of God.

### **Prayer**

Loving God, help me to open my heart to you.

Help me to love myself and others as you love us.

Send your Holy Spirit to bind us together in loving service. Amen

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Paul does not shy away from the ethical demands of discipleship. How do our everyday lives impact our capacity to carry the Gospel hope?
2. For what or for whom are you prepared to "spend and be spent?"

## **Friday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

### *2 Corinthians 13*

#### **Prepare for a godly audit**

Paul is ready to visit the Corinthian Church for a third time and he wants them to be well prepared. So, he reminds them that there are proper processes for dealing with complaints within the community. He urges them also, to engage in some personal reflection – "test yourselves". The Church in our own time tries to balance the communal and the personal when it comes to faith. What is clear from Paul is that the personal and the community aspects of faith

belong together. Like a horse and carriage, you can't have one without the other.

Finally, as with most of the epistles, Paul concludes with some standard exhortations.

The concluding verse is the first time in the New Testament that we get the Trinitarian "grace". Scholars are not sure whether this is original or a later insertion, but it does bring this fascinating letter (or letters) of Paul to an appropriate conclusion.

### **Prayer**

Visit us, Lord, each new day. Give us eyes to see and minds to understand your presence in our hearts and in our world. Empower us by your Spirit to live for you and for each other and guide us through the mess of our lives to the safety of your love. Amen

### **Questions to Consider**

1. How do you audit your progress as a disciple? How do you "test yourself?"
2. Perhaps you might pray The Grace for all those who have travelled this Bible Reading Challenge together.

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit  
be with all of you.*





**Ministry  
Development**