

BASED UPON AUGUST 30, 2020'S SERMON

EMBRACE DIFFICULTIES



OLD MADE NEW

2 CORINTHIANS

PRAYER

The Apostle Paul has never been a stranger to boldly speaking the truth. In fact, today's passage has Paul so boldly that he is honest about his own hardships and frustrations. Yet, he points it back to God saying that it was for the sake of others that he has endured.

Paul's endurance had nothing to do with his own character or power. It had everything to do with the Holy Spirit's power that was being perfected in the apostle. As the Spirit indwells believers as a sign of salvation, He also empowers believers for a growing and maturing faith in every circumstance.

My hope and prayer for you is that you would not only consider the Spirit's power in your life but that you would also be honest with where you might be seeking to do ministry and life in your own strength. Those internal considerations are not always easy or fun, but they do provide opportunity for us to turn back to God so that we can endure in every situation.

Today I hope you find the urgency and endurance by the power of the Spirit so that you can receive the grace of God and share it with those in your domain.

- JF

Gracious God and most merciful Father, you have granted us the rich and precious jewel of your holy Word: Assist us with your Spirit, that the same Word may be written in our hearts to our everlasting comfort, to reform us, to renew us according to your own image, to build us up and edify us into the perfect dwelling place of your Christ, sanctifying and increasing in us all heavenly virtues; grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Prayer taken from the Book of Common Prayer

READ

2 Corinthians 6:1-10 | ESV

1 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

2 For he says, *"In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you."*
Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

3 We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry,

4 but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities,

5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger;

6 by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love;

7 by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left;

8 through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true;

9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed;

10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.



DISCUSS

Lead your group through the following discussion questions. Help them thoughtfully reflect and respond to God's direction.

1 | Urgency is a word that might come to mind as we read this passage of Scripture. The urgency in responding to God's call on our lives to be reconciled to Him and the urgency in sharing the ministry of reconciliation with others. Think of a time when you should have responded to someone or something with urgency but instead, were slow to act. Describe that situation and how it was detrimental to you and that situation for not being urgent.

2 | Paul implores the Corinthians not to receive God's grace in vain. Receiving God's grace in vain would mean not allowing it to have its intended result in our lives, thereby continuing in our sin. God's grace should enable us to begin developing an external mindset (understanding our ministry to others). What are ways that we sometimes receive God's grace in vain? How might that impact the way others view God and His grace? Is there a way to hold one another accountable in order to not receive God's grace in vain?

3 | In verse 3, Paul states that he and his co-laborers have not placed obstacles in the lives of people so that his ministry may be seen in a positive and God-honoring way. Reflect for a moment on the ministry that you have in your domain(s). Share with the group how you might be strengthening OR hindering that ministry by the attitudes or actions that you have engaged in.

4 | Verses 4 and 5 highlight three categorical experiences Paul had within his ministry. The first category shows trails of a general nature (*afflictions, hardships, calamities*), the second category shows sufferings inflicted by others (*beatings, imprisonments, riots*), and the final category shows hardships inflicted as a result of furthering the gospel (*labors, sleepless nights, hunger*). Paul then shows how his actions have responded to each of those categories (verses 6-7). Read the list of Paul's actions and share where you have seen growth in your own life. Then share where you would like to grow.

5 | Pastor Patrick asked a very important question -- "Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to work in your pain?" All that Paul is doing for the ministry can only be sustained by the Holy Spirit's power working within his pain and circumstances. Share a time (previously or currently) when the Spirit worked in your pain to not only sustain you but to empower you to endure.

6 | As observed in the fourth chapter of 2 Corinthians, there is a paradoxical nature to our faith. Paul continues that theme in verses 9 and 10. The apostle writes that he and his ministry partners are imposters yet true; unknown yet known; dying yet alive; punished yet not killed; sorrowful yet rejoicing; poor but making many rich; having nothing yet possessing everything. Consider your own circumstances and share with the group how your own life is a paradox with Christ. If you are unable to see any paradox, share what you feel burdened with and consider how God might work through that situation for His glory.

CONCLUSION

Prayer | Holy Spirit,

Thank You for indwelling us at the moment of faith and for abiding in us as we journey through this life. I ask that in those moments where we feel overwhelmed, hurt, confused, frustrated, and restless, that You, O Holy Comforter, would empower us to endure through the day. I pray that we would find endurance because of You so that we may love others well and share with them in all boldness the need to be reconciled to the Father through faith in Jesus by Your convicting understanding. I ask for Your help to receive God's grace, not in vain, but in godly richness. Amen.

Benediction | May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.