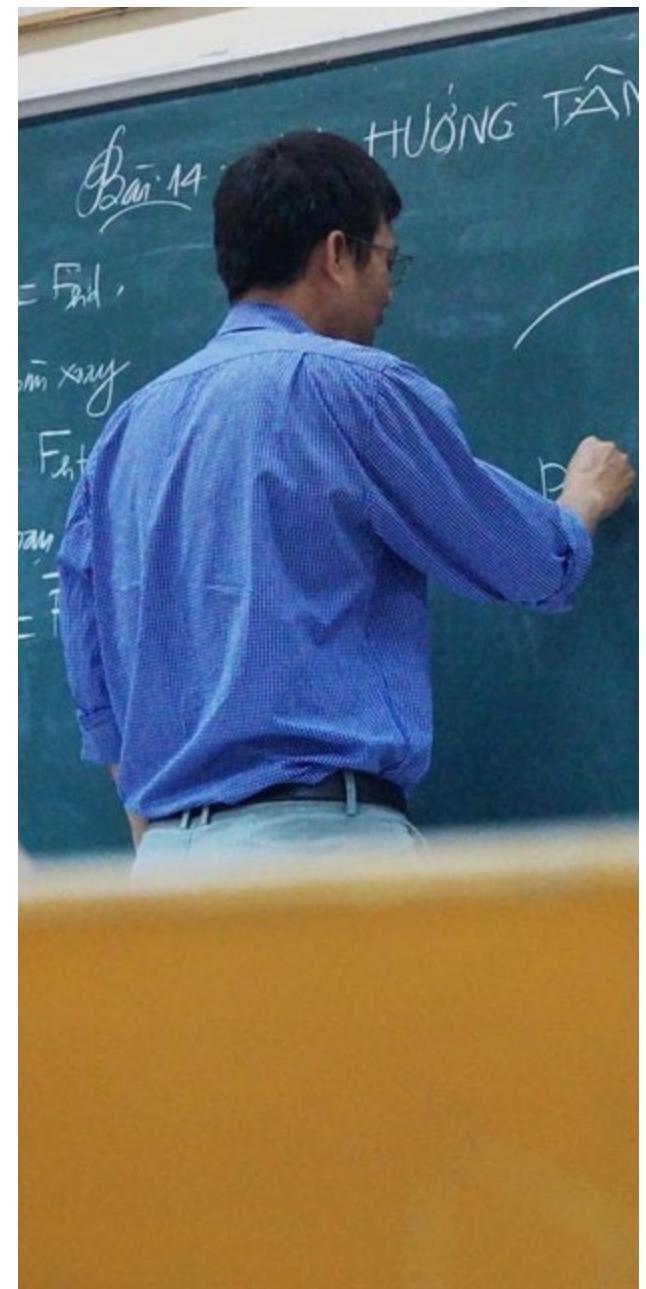




e a s t s i d e CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
Study Guide



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to When@Work...

...a series using 2 Corinthians as a guide to lead us on a journey about the intersection of Faith and Work. Our intention is to open up the dialogue about our work and our careers. Whether you work in the home or commute to Amazon in Seattle, this study will help open doors of what God has to say through the Apostle Paul about our relationships and our character When@Work. You have a mission to fulfill, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and it is not just to share the good news of Jesus. It's to live life, manage relationships and help redeem the curse placed on work during the Fall of Man.

We are using the Theology of Work online commentary to help steer our study and I think it best to let the opening remarks to 2 Corinthians set the stage for the next few weeks.

"1 Corinthians gives us unparalleled insight into the everyday life of a New Testament church, 2 Corinthians offers us a unique glimpse into the heart and soul of the apostle whose work founded and built that church. We see Paul at work, teaching and exemplifying transparency, joy, good relationships, sincerity, reputation, service, humility, leadership, performance and accountability, reconciliation, working with non-believers, encouragement, generosity, timely fulfillment of obligations, and the proper use of wealth.

These workplace topics arose because of the daily struggles and opportunities Paul encountered in his own work as an apostle. During the period leading up to the composition of 2 Corinthians, Paul faced any number of "disputes without and fears within," as he describes them (2 Cor. 7:5). These clearly left their mark on him, and the result is a letter like no other in the New Testament—intensely personal, exhibiting a full range of emotions from anguish and agitation to exuberance and confidence. As a result of this adversity, Paul became a more effective leader and worker. All those who want to learn how to be more effective in their work—and who are willing to trust God for the ability to do so—will find a practical model in Paul and his teachings in 2 Corinthians." - (*Theologyofwork.org*)

Paul's Interactions with the Church in Corinth (2 Corinthians)

"Paul established the church of Corinth during his first sojourn there (winter 49/50 through summer 51). Later he wrote one letter to the Corinthian church that no longer exists (it is mentioned in 1 Cor. 5:9) and one letter that does—our 1 Corinthians. He also visited the church three times (2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1). We know from Romans 16:1 that Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans during one of his stays in Corinth.

Nonetheless, Paul's relationship with the church in Corinth was strained. At one point he wrote them what has come to be known as the "severe letter"^[1] —that apparently was quite harsh (see 2 Cor. 2:4). He sent it off to the Corinthians with Titus in the hope it would bring about a change of heart among his antagonists in Corinth. The unresolved conflict with the church in Corinth made Paul restless as he waited to hear back from them (2 Cor. 1:12–13). When Titus finally arrived in the autumn of 55 he brought good news from Corinth. Paul's severe letter had, in fact, proven to be remarkably beneficial. The believers in Corinth who had been the cause of so much sorrow were truly grieved about the rupture in their relationship with Paul, and their sorrow had led to repentance (2 Cor. 7:8–16).

In response to that news, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, or more precisely the first seven chapters, to express his joy and gratitude both to God and to the Corinthians for the restored relationship between them. In these chapters he models the kind of transparency, joy, attention to relationships, integrity, reputation, service, dependence on God, ethical conduct, character, and encouragement that God calls all Christians to embody. Following this, in chapters 8 and 9, he turns to the topics of generosity and timely fulfillment of obligations as he exhorts the Corinthians to contribute to the relief of Christians in Jerusalem, which they had promised to do. In this section Paul highlights how our needs are met by God's generosity, not only so we lack nothing we need but also so we have plenty to share with others. In chapters 10 through 13 he describes the marks of godly leadership, apparently in response to disturbing news he received about so-called "super-apostles" who were leading some of the Corinthian church astray. Although we are not concerned here with church leadership per se, Paul's words in this section are directly applicable to all workplaces." - (*Theologyofwork.org*)

WEEK #2—Transparency & Humility

(2 Cor. 1:12-23, 2 Cor. 4:2, 2 Cor. 6:11)

Jessica Soltani and Haley Boyd

KEY VERSES

2 Corinthians 1:12-23, 4:2, 6:11

BIG IDEA

Successful work relationships are derived from transparency and humility.

COMMENTARY

Driving through a neighborhood at night, you can see little stories unfold through the windows, as the light illuminates what's inside. In one home, a family full of lively kids scrambles to get hands washed and plates on the table as they prepare for their warm cooked meal. In another, someone sits near the crackling fireplace, reading a book while a faithful dog sits by his side. Imagine if we lived our lives in this form of transparency, being so clear and open so that others see what's in our hearts, just by being around us. This is the kind of vulnerability and humility God calls us to in relationships—not just with friends, but with neighbors, coworkers, and everyone he draws near to us.

When working in ministry with the Corinthians, Paul exemplifies transparency and humility through his effort to clarify misunderstandings and communicate his intentions. He had promised to visit Corinth, but had not done so; doing quite the opposite, he backed out on visiting twice. These actions lead the Corinthians to believe that he had not been open and honest with them. To help clear up misconceptions, Paul explained that he didn't want to shame the Corinthians again and only delayed coming back so that when he did return, he would bring joy and affirmation instead of recrimination. He remained humble, making sure there were opportunities to give others credit for a job well done.

APPLICATION

It's easy to share your home when it looks like something from Good Housekeeping, but being transparent also means that people may see places like cluttered closets and behind the fridge. When at work, we'd prefer others to see happy family picture frames on an organized desk where we look all put together.

We are tempted to say what we think we want others to hear instead of the truth. We might also twist the truth or withhold information to get an edge above those around us. There might be concern that if we acknowledge making a mistake, we may miss promotions or face judgment and office gossip. What we don't often realize is that by being transparent, we become more real and approachable to those around us which in turn strengthens our opportunity to share our faith. People also love a good fixer upper story. Through our honesty and humility, they can see God as the light that illuminates greatness in us, in spite of our mess.

Here are some good “house rules” to follow, based on this week’s scripture:

- be holy (set apart for God) and sincere (1:12)
- rely on God's grace instead of earthly wisdom (1:12)
- be clear so others can understand you (1:13)
- clarify misunderstandings (1:15-18, 23-24)
- give God the credit he deserves (1:19-22)
- reject secrecy and shameful ways (4:2)
- be truthful, speak freely (4:2, 6:11)
- share your heart openly and honestly (6:11)

DISCUSSION/STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why was transparency so important to Paul's work with the Corinthian church? (1:12 1:24, 4:2)
2. Is it easy for you to be transparent with others while at work/working in the community?
3. Is it possible to be humble without being transparent, or vice versa?
4. Looking at the “house rules,” which one do you want to work on this week? Is there one that you can apply while at work that would truly make a difference?
5. In Chapter 6:11, Paul says, “We have opened wide our hearts to you.” To whom do you need to be more open in your work life?
6. Do you tend towards being more open or close-hearted? Why is that?

Week #3—The Priority of Relationships/Sincerity

(2 Cor. 2:12-16, 2 Cor. 2:17)

Seth Riley

BIG IDEA

Bringing the Fragrance of Christ to Those at Work (2 Cor. 2:12-17)

COMMENTARY

Louis Zamperini was a WWII POW, captured and tortured by Japanese soldiers. Though his eventual return home may have seemed the end of his involvement in Japan, his post-war return to the States was truncated by his conviction that God wanted him to return to Japan as a missionary. He confided, later in an interview, that “All the way over the Pacific Ocean, I was resentful, even when I arrived in Japan. This was God’s will, and I knew it. God doesn’t say we have to be happy in His will. He just says that we should be obedient to His will and joy will follow. So I was being obedient.”

God, at times, asks very difficult things of us. Even in the best of situations, working with others taxes and challenges the most patient person. Still, we have been called to be Christ’s presence in the world. Paul urges the church in Corinth to be a fragrance to those around them, no matter how difficult this is.

As Christians, we have the ability and responsibility to evoke, in others, their underlying longing for God simply by existing beside them as people who have pursued that longing. Many of us are tempted—or, are goaded—to go overboard and become “peddlers” of Christ-centered aphorisms, as Paul warns in verse 17. Somehow, strangely, it’s easier to quickly dump pat answers than to remain, long term, in a challenging situation. Frankly, this can be a lazy way out, a way to “deal with” our call to be a witness without fully embracing the discomfort and rigor that may come with it.

But Paul urges us to be epicenters of grace and to let that grace swirl out from us, like a fragrance. Sometimes, this requires preaching to others but, more often, it requires patient, prayerful devotion to those around us.

We must be careful about the impression we make on others. Paul warns the Corinthian believers that, handled poorly, this fragrance can become a fragrance of death. In today’s world, with so many people bitterly hurt by the church, this is a warning we must take seriously. It is a huge challenge—it is so easy to become frustrated, to give up, to act rashly—but our success, or failure, to this end can leave long-lasting repercussions.

APPLICATION

While directly telling others about Christ is a necessary part of our witness to the world, quite often the most effective ministry we can have is to live our lives in a way that reflects Christ’s work within us. By letting others see how Christ betters and completes us, we can create in-roads for the Spirit to work in their lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What sort of fragrance does your presence leave with others? Do you participate in the gossip and the grumblings or do you try your best, through Christ, to humbly and warmly rise above it? Do people feel uplifted and encouraged by your presence, or do you drag others down?
2. In what ways are your efforts falling short? What are some ways in which you can renew your efforts?
3. What if you knew, for absolute sure, that you were the only Christian the people you work with would ever meet? How would this shape your conduct?

Week #4—A Genuine Reputation

(2 Cor. 3:1-18)

Seth Riley

BIG IDEA

Our Truest Reputation

COMMENTARY

For most of us, our reputations can be one of the most stressful parts of our lives. We want to live up to the personas we present to others, and we want to make sure each of our strong points is noticed. We want to become accomplished and faultless, and thus respected, admired, and maybe even envied.

Unfortunately, this is true even when it crosses paths with the seemingly-selfless parts of us. We want to be noticed as generous, humble, caring. We want to make a difference. We want, we want, we want. Our reputations glimmer before us, like mirages, as resting spots where all of our insecurities, foibles, and shortcomings can be magically patched up into a perfected whole that everyone around us can agree on. Our ears burn for it: she is quite the leader. He is such a generous person.

The problem, of course, is that, if we're truly honest, we know it's all false if this is how we go about it. We all do things to make people think of us in a certain way, and the underpinnings of those actions are not always as selfless as we may hope they will appear to be. And, even then, our reputations are hard to cement—they are always undermined by our failings and by others' inability to make out our particular strengths. The best of persons can be surrounded by people who hate him/her, thus his/her reputation is (undeservedly but easily) trashed.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to realize that their accomplishments and their efforts toward crafting and honing their reputations were made nothing in the light of the Spirit's work in them. Even Moses, he claimed, whose face shone as he revealed the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, did not have access to the glory awaiting those of the New Covenant. For, in the New Covenant, we have been restored to God, and His glory becomes our glory, as heirs in His kingdom.

The 6th Century Byzantine theologian St. Maximus the Confessor once wrote that God's glory "is like the light from the stars. The stars do not shine in the day. When the greater and incomparable light of the sun appears, they are hidden and cannot be seen... With respect to God this is even more so..."

The stars' light, in other words, are overtaken by the greater light from the sun. The stars do still shine, but their glory is no match for the sun's, so we cannot see them.

So, there is no reason to over-worry and thus micro-manage our reputations. We are freed to humbly pursue excellence, diligence, dependability, and generosity—as spiritual disciplines, not as building blocks for a "good reputation"—trusting that the genuine reputation granted us, in Christ, will naturally emanate through us.

APPLICATION

Don't be too concerned about what other people think of you. Instead, focus on allowing God's glory to shine through you, and a good reputation will follow.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways could the positive aspects of your reputation (your generosity, your abilities as a leader, etc.) actually obscure your genuine reputation?
2. In 2 Corinthians 3:1, Paul unnerves us by chiding the pursuit of a good reputation. Given the potentially-delicate balance between selfish over-concern or a careless lack of concern, how can believers work toward excellence and dependability while also surrendering the selfish need for "a good reputation"?
3. Theologian John MacArthur pointed out that 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 functions, in a sense, as a mini-Hebrews. By comparing the glory given Moses, at the time of the founding of the Law, to the glory given us through Jesus' fulfillment of the Law, how does Paul envision our capacity to carry and embody Christ's glory?
4. Do you give much thought about your reputation in your workplace? How important is it and do you find yourself comfortable with your building an authentic reputation based on who you are in Christ or do you tend toward a reputation that is more of a façade? How can this change as we live out the words in 2 Cor. 3:17-18?

WEEK #5—Leading & Serving / Weakness as the Source of Strength

(2 Cor. 2:4, 2 Cor. 4)
Mitchell Boyd and Larry Smith

KEY VERSE

2 Cor. 2:4: For out of great distress and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears, not to make you sad, but to let you know the love that I have especially for you.

BIG IDEA

How we can live God's Mission When@Work through service and personal weakness.

COMMENTARY

A prominent figure who exemplifies turning weakness into strength was Moses. He was raised in an Egyptian family that persecuted Israel (God's people), fled from Egypt, encountered God, had a change of heart, and was used by God for His will. Through God's revelation of Himself to Moses, Moses believed and therefore spoke, not only leading Israel to safety and eventually the Promised Land (Exodus Ch. 2), but also writing the Torah. (Deuteronomy 1:1, 31:9 & :24)

CONTEXT

The Apostle Paul shares a similar character arc to Moses. Early in the Apostle Paul's life, when he was still Saul, he lived a life that directly opposed God and His people by actively persecuting them. On his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, Jesus appeared before Paul and converted him (Acts 9:1-19). Saul, renamed Paul, became a Christian leader. We can see that the character arc of the author of 2nd Corinthians also exemplifies how to overcome weakness through God. In Chapter 4 Verse 13, we are called to believe and therefore speak. Paul believed and therefore he spoke, writing 13 books of the New Testament to inspire and encourage the early church.

APPLICATION

In the second and fourth chapters of 2nd Corinthians, Paul eloquently describes how through God, we can use our weaknesses as a source of strength (2 Cor. 4:7-12). The key is that we need to take the focus off ourselves and place it on Him (2 Cor. 4:14-16) and recognize that the obstacles we face are temporary (2 Cor. 4:17).

Like Paul in his weakness, anybody can take a leadership role. Throughout this chapter, Paul describes how to use our weakness while also telling why we should.

Here's an extra glimpse of the beauty of the Bible. We noted earlier that Paul's character arc portrays using weakness as a source of strength. Focusing on this instance of Paul's ministry, Paul takes on the leadership role by serving others as he and his ministry were on trial. Paul chose to serve others amid his many sufferings and weaknesses. The world is too broken for us to escape suffering while serving. Do not choose to be a leader unless you are ready and willing to serve others.

As Paul constantly points back to Jesus as his source of true and lasting strength, so we too, must constantly point to Jesus as our source of strength.

QUESTIONS

1. As humans, we try to convince others that we are stronger, smarter, and more competent than we really are. Therefore, Paul's message of vulnerability may sound challenging to us. Are we transparent in the way we speak and go about our work, showing that the strength and vitality we project is not our own, but rather God's strength on display in our weakness? (1 Cor 10:31) (Col. 4:5-6)
2. Read 2 Cor. 4 and point out all the ways in which our human efforts, weaknesses and troubles are propped up by God's power and faithfulness? Could this be described as the Gospel being played out in our lives? Explain.
3. How can we be active and effective witnesses @ work without using uncomfortable, hard-sell techniques? (2 Cor. 2:15-17) (1 Peter 3:15)
4. How can we develop Christ like integrity on the job? How should we act toward our bosses, our peers, our employees? (Eph. 6:7) What common business practices should we avoid and what should we embrace? (Col 3:17)
5. Ask : "What activities can I start doing tomorrow to begin building up my ministry When @ Work?"
6. In what ways can we be vulnerable at work without jeopardizing our job security?

**WEEK #6—Performance & Accountability /
Assessing Performance**
(2 Cor. 5:1-15 & 2 Cor. 10-13)
Larry Smith

KEY VERSE

2 Cor 5:1-15; chs. 10-13

BIG IDEA

Our work has spiritual significance (–Patrick Klingaman). Therefore, our performance and our accountability When @ Work has spiritual, eternal significance.

COMMENTARY

God gave us work; as Dave Parker reminds us, it was a blessing until The Fall brought the curse. Yet, God's will for work remains centered in the blessing.

[In 2 Cor 5:10] Paul's message is clear enough: [Though we're saved by grace, (Eph 2:8-9)] how we live our lives matters to God. In workplace terms, our performance matters. Moreover, we will have to give an account to the Lord Jesus for all that we have done and left undone. In workplace terms, this is accountability. Performance and accountability are profoundly important to the Christian life, and we cannot dismiss them as secular concerns of no importance to God. God cares whether we are slacking off, neglecting our duties, not showing up for work, or going through the motions without genuine attention to our work.

This does not mean that God always agrees with what our work-places expect from us. God's idea of good performance may be different from that of our manager or supervisor. In particular, if meeting our boss's performance expectations requires unethical activities or harming others, then God's review of our performance will be different from our employer's. If your boss expects you to mislead customers or denigrate co-workers, for God's sake aim for a poor performance review from your boss and a good review from God. (-Theology of Work.org) (Acts 5:29)

CONTEXT

God cares about what we do at work, but also how we do it. (2 Cor 10:10,11; John 5:19, 13:11). Paul gives the church a clear model for performance, accountability and encouragement in 2 Cor 2:3-11, 5:1-15 and parts of chs. 10-13. In these chapters, Paul doesn't just give his resume' or simply "write the rules" and then criticize. He states (13:10) that his authority is for encouragement; for building up.

APPLICATION

When @ Work, my customers were wholesalers who worked with retailers; so these were long term relationships. On one new product introduction, the Vice President for Western USA and the Product Line VP called on me to handle the intro. One wholesaler relationship was a potential problem, which the Product VP suggested I circumvent by deception. I said I would take responsibility for the problem, but without deception. The Product VP insisted that the deceptive method was preferred; the Regional VP settled the difference by expressing confidence that I could resolve it "my own way." This blessing to me personally was extended by the Lord to my employer; the company experienced a very successful product launch.

In Gen 1:26, 27 God creates man and describes our earthly role as dominion; then in verse 28 He gives us His very first instruction: to "be fruitful..." Paul famously supported himself and his ministry @ Work...by tent-making ["tabernacle making"]. Tom Osborn is fruitful @ Work in Pike Market at his fruit and vegetable stall. He has become the undocumented pastor of the diverse congregation of unbelievers, cynics and self-absorbed at the Market, many of whom seek out his counsel and comfort because he is visible (performing & accountable) as a Jesus follower. (Matt 7:16)

QUESTIONS

1. How are we to be fruitful at work? Does this mean only producing products/ services/ revenue? Only witnessing the Gospel to others? Both? Something else?
2. Compare 2 Cor 11:5 & 12:7 with Romans 12:3. What attitude should we take When @ Work? What do 2 Cor 10:12, Rom 12:3 & 2 Cor 13:5 suggest to assess our own work? (2 Cor 10:18 through 12:5 may be reviewed for more context.)
3. Are you open to input? When @ Work, how do you usually respond to compliments? To suggestions? To criticism? How should we relate to others who have responded well to input When @ Work? (2 Cor 2:6-8; 12:14, 15a,18; 13:10)
4. For each verse in 2 Cor 13:1-13 a) Describe Paul's focus (performance, accountability, encouragement); b) Describe how we can do likewise When @ Work.

WEEK #7—Reconciling the Whole World

(2 Cor. 5:16-21)

Cheryl Starck

KEY VERSE

"In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting people's trespasses against them, and He has given us the message of reconciliation."

2 Corinthians 5:19

"He is the God of peace, and He has, on His part, prepared everything that is necessary for a perfect reconciliation. His glorious wisdom has devised a plan whereby, without violating His justice as the Judge of all the earth, and without tarnishing His perfect holiness, He can meet man upon the ground of mercy, and man can again become the friend of God." - C.H. Spurgeon

BIG IDEA

God's plan is to reconcile everyone to a right relationship with Himself.

CONTEXT

Paul's message of reconciliation is the same cohesive message God conveys through the entire bible. It begins in Genesis and isn't complete until the end of the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Paul manages to condense this precious message into six verses like an overstuffed suitcase. That sounds impossible but we need to remember Paul's background. It is easy to picture the Apostle Paul: the older, wise, extremely passionate church planter. Don't forget that he was Saul, a highly educated successful member of the Jewish ruling class. If anyone was qualified to sum up the scriptures, it was Paul. Now it's time to unpack this message slowly and carefully so that none of its precious contents get lost.

COMMENTARY

The message of reconciliation really begins in Genesis, where we read about creation and the fall of man. God creates the world and all that is in it and He loves it. He is pleased with all of it and especially pleased with the people he creates. This gives us a glimpse into the heart behind all that God does.

All of this breaks down when man begins to make choices. Tim Mackie, one of the creators of the Bible Project, sums up the nature of sin beautifully, "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represents a moral choice, one we all wrestle with on a daily basis...will we accept God's definition of what is good and evil or will we choose to define good and evil on our own terms?" We all end up making choices that are selfish and wrong, hurting ourselves, others and the world we live in.

We need to remember that regardless of our bad choices and the damaging results, God still loves us and the world He made. John 3:16,17 (NIV) says:

"For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."

This is what Paul is referring to in verse 21. It was God's plan from the beginning. He anticipated our problem, He came up with the plan and He accomplished the work of reconciling all of humanity to Himself. As Spurgeon reminds us, God's justice and holiness are satisfied with the plan.

APPLICATION

God chose us to be his messengers of reconciliation. (v19-20) We need to be fully prepared to clearly and effectively explain the message everywhere, including our work places. In order to be effective messengers, Paul makes it clear that we will need to change the way we view others. (v16) According to Mackie, Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to stop evaluating others on the basis of success, education and wealth and "instead view people through what God values: humility, weakness and the transforming power of the Spirit."

It might not be possible to openly discuss Jesus and the bible in your workplace, but you can be an instrument of reconciliation. Look for ways to improve customer and employee relationships. If there is a lot of conflict in your workplace, take an online conflict resolution class and become better equipped. The toughest thing to do may be to examine your attitude toward your co-workers, let go of any bitterness or resentment, and apologize for offenses. Be friendly and accepting of everyone at work.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What part of the sermon or study guide had the greatest impact on you? Were there any new ideas?
2. What do you think Paul means when he says in 2 Cor. 5:18-20 when he calls us Ambassadors for Christ with a ministry of reconciliation? How can this play out practically in your workplace?
3. Who in your work place may you need to view/treat differently? Be specific.
4. What is one way you can be an agent of reconciliation in your place of work?
5. What are the challenges (if any) with grasping the reality that you are a new creation in Christ?

WEEK #8—Working with Non-Believers & When Others Don't Believe

(2 Cor. 6:14-18)

Tom Osborn

BIG IDEA

One of the challenges Christians face in the world today is how to be engaged in order to be a light in the darkness around them, while at the same time protecting themselves from being influenced by the darkness. For most of us, this is never more relevant than when we think of our work situations. Paul gives us instruction in this passage on how we are to relate to the non-Christian we encounter in the workplace.

COMMENTARY

For too many believers, this passage has been used as a clarion call to flee from all relationships with the sinful world we find ourselves living in. This is unfortunate on many levels, because it is generally a misapplication of these verses. It also runs directly counter to Jesus' teaching about being salt and light in the world and making disciples as we are going about in the world.

In Matthew 7, Jesus instructs those who have God in their hearts to do everything they can to give evidence of His presence by the fruit of the lives they live. Our involvement with the world needs to be so that we can shine the light of Jesus into the darkness (Mt. 5:16). The caution of Paul here that must be heeded is that believers must be vigilant to not be influenced by the darkness in the spiritual realm. We must strive to influence the world around us while at the same time not being influenced by it. This is a daunting task, but one that all true Christ-followers are called to live out. Kenneth Chafin observes: "It will be a serious mistake if we assume that Paul was addressing a first-century problem that has no relevance for today. While contemporary paganism may be more sophisticated than that from which the Corinthians had come, it can be just as deadly in compromising the Christian and turning him away from his calling."

The idea of being unequally yoked goes back to Deuteronomy 22:10: "Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together." The ox and the donkey have distinctly different natures and abilities. When yoked together on a plow, it is virtually impossible for them to work together to plow a straight row. Believers must be extremely cautious when joining in partnership with non-believers because they have very different natures and it can be tremendously difficult for them to pull together in the same direction.

APPLICATION

As we strive to live holy lives, we must be careful that our separation from the world comes as a direct result of a deeper dedication to God. To do otherwise is to risk losing connection with the very ones we are called to reach. We read in Luke 7:34 that Jesus was accused of being "a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners.'" Let's live in this world in such a way that we might be accused of the same thing, while at the same time remaining holy and unstained by the world we are seeking to reach with the Gospel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you reconcile Jesus' teachings to go into all the world with Paul's teaching to avoid being unequally yoked with unbelievers?
2. Paul lists five rhetorical questions in this passage. Read them and then discuss their relevance to your work situation.
3. Since we serve God, who cares deeply about our relationships, in what practical ways can you make sure your relationships are being influenced by the Holy Spirit living within you?
4. As Christians, how do we take seriously the call to "come out from their midst and be separate" and still be available to be used by God to reach those around us with the Good News of Jesus? How can this play out in your workplace?
5. What are some ways you can encourage other believers to be careful in their relationships with non-believers while still maintaining a relationship that allows them to build a bridge they can cross with the Gospel?

WEEK #9—The Encouragement of Praise & Working for the Joy of Others

(2 Cor. 7:1-16 & 2 Cor. 1:24)

Zac Price

BIG IDEA

Through times of affliction we are called to bring...Encouragement, Praise and Joy! In just these short verses we see how Paul led the people of Corinth by showing them praise, encouragement and joy to everyone.

COMMENTARY

When I was 16 I got hired at Starbucks, and it was amazing. I loved the customer service side of things, loved getting to make coffee, but most of all I loved my manager. My manager's name was Jenn and she was an incredible leader. I remember one time I was working the front counter and a customer got frustrated and started to yell at me to hurry up. Once he received his drink he told me he wanted me to be fired. I was pretty upset and I started to get an asthma attack, so I went in the back and Jenn noticed me using my inhaler and saw that I was crying. She immediately gave me a hug and started to tell me how good I am doing and that everything was going to be okay. She is not a follower of Jesus, however she understood the importance of encouraging her employees and bringing them joy in hard times. She was the best at praising all of us, and made work fun and enjoyable even when a customer would yell at us. Jenn had pride in her employees and she would always make a point to highlight our efforts even in the tougher times which Paul calls times of affliction.

Paul is proudly telling the Church in Corinth that he has great pride for his team; they have not done anything wrong and they have been honest and hard working people. Even through tough times of affliction Paul is encouraging his team and telling them how great they are (1 Corinthians 7:2). Through these next passages of scripture it is clear that Paul demonstrates what it means to be an effective leader through encouragement, praise, and joy.

When it comes to When@Work (W@W) what type of leader are you going to be? What type of co-worker are you? We need to encourage, praise, and be joyful even in the toughest of times. What should we do when we see a coworker having a really bad day? What if we all brought joy in all circumstances and modeled what Paul is telling the Corinthians. Let's have pride about who we work with/for. Lets start being more like a Paul and start praising our co-workers through joy and encouragement. Just imagine how different our places of employment may be!

"Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith." – 2 Cor. 1:24

Even though he was an apostle with God-given authority, Paul brought joy to others by the way he led them—not lording it over them but working alongside them. This explains why he was such an effective leader and why the people associated with him became strong and reliable co-workers.

The essence of Christian work, Paul maintains, is nothing less than working alongside others to help them attain greater joy.

"He (Paul) does not shy away from giving praise where praise is due, and it seems that he is genuinely proud of the progress the believers in Corinth have made in spite of his tense relations with them. He notes his pride in them is well deserved, not a cheap trick of flattery". – Theologyofwork.org

Paul is saying well done in verse 4 because they did not do what most people would have done. They did no wrong, they showed no corruption, and they did not take advantage. Because of this Paul has great pride for the people and wants to share that in his letter. He puts them on the spotlight for doing the right thing through affliction. What would you do?

APPLICATION

Even through affliction, Paul makes a point to bring joy and praise. He encourages the people in Corinth and is seen as an amazing leader even until this day. Whether you are an executive at a company, a bus driver, a stay at home mom or dad, how do you approach something that causes pain or suffering? How do you respond when you see a coworker get yelled at? How to you overcome tough times while at work?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Paul have pride for his team?
2. What are some examples of affliction at your work? How can you bring joy, praise and encouragement in those moments?
3. Who in your life has been like a Paul/Jenn to you?
4. Which are you better at? Expressing joy, Praising others, or encouragement?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 1:24 and discuss what Paul Is trying to get across. Please share.
6. Go around and pray that when hard things happen at work, that we treat it as an opportunity to bring encourage, joy, and hope.

WEEK # 10—Generosity is Not Optional & Timely Fulfilment of Obligations

(2 Cor. 8:1-9 & 2 Cor. 8:10-12)

Steve Starck

KEY VERSE

“For you know the grace [or generosity] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, he became poor for your sakes, so that you by his poverty could become rich”. – 2 Corinthians 8:9

BIG IDEA

Putting our focus on those around us, instead of on ourselves, enables us to have a much greater kingdom impact.

CONTEXT

Paul is addressing an issue regarding the Jerusalem churches experiencing a time of need while the Corinthian church is experiencing a time of abundance. He had encouraged the Corinthians to give generously to support the believers in Judea. This was his practice in all the churches. (Galatians 2:10, Romans 15:25-31)

While the Corinthians had started eagerly, they had not yet completed what they had begun. Paul is calling them out. Even though other Gentile churches were suffering, they still had generously completed their gift. (v2-4)

COMMENTARY

Generosity is a virtue, an attitude we practice, as the Macedonian churches exemplified. (v5)

When living in an attitude of generosity, we are emulating Jesus' example to the world. (v9) His generous spirit resulted in our reconciliation with the Father and our admission into his glorious eternal kingdom – the same kingdom which he had willingly abandoned so that he could rescue us (see Philippians 2:5-8).

Generosity, however, is not based upon wealth (or lack thereof) but from an outgrowth of our abundant joy. Even those in extreme poverty can give generously. (v2) Whatever we do (or give) with the right attitude is acceptable. (v12) There is no one that is incapable of being generous with others in some way, we all have something we can share such as time, or encouragement or friendship.

From the Theology of Work Commentary:

“In the workplace, a generous spirit is the oil that makes things run smoothly on a number of levels. Employees who sense that their employers are

generous will be more willing to make sacrifices for their organizations when they become necessary. Workers who are generous with their co-workers will create a ready source of help for themselves and a more joyful and satisfying experience for everyone.

Generosity is not always a matter of money. To name only a few examples: Employers can be generous by taking time to mentor workers, providing a workplace of beauty, offering opportunities for training and development, genuinely listening to someone with a problem or complaint, or visiting an employee's family member in the hospital. Co-workers can offer generosity by helping others do their work better, making sure no one is left out socially, standing up for those who suffer misuse, offering true friendship, sharing praise, apologizing for offenses, and simply learning the names of workers who might otherwise be invisible to us.”

APPLICATION

Living with the attitude of generosity is going to challenge us in a couple of ways. First, we are likely to be challenged to be generous at precisely the worst time – when we feel we have little to share. How often is it when you're busy or overwhelmed someone asks you for help? We have to pre-purpose to practice generosity and give a kind answer when we are called upon in those moments, trusting that God will help us with the time or resources. Another way we are challenged is by keeping the commitments we made when being generous. When we commit in our generosity to something, our actions need to follow our words. All the spiritual gain from our generosity comes at the completion, not at the outset. (v10-12) so finishing well is important.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some ways that we can demonstrate generosity where we work, whether in the home or at a place of employment? What impact would that have on those around us? How might your work atmosphere change?
2. What are the heart issues that Paul is calling out? Do you struggle with the same?
3. How do we think about our interactions with those around us – are we asking the question “What can I get for myself?”, or the much better question, “What can I give from myself?”
4. When busy and someone interrupts asking for help, what is our first thought? What are some ways we can pre-purpose to be generous?
5. When we begin a task, are we diligent to complete it? What are some things that you might be procrastinating on? How can you get back your eagerness to complete them?

WEEK #11—Sharing the Wealth &

You Can't Out Give God

(2 Cor. 8:13-15 & 2 Cor. 9:1-15)

Brooke & Laura Quist

BIG IDEA

Generous giving should be an act of joyful love. This type of giving assists the receiver while providing blessings to the giver.

COMMENTARY & CONTEXT

2 Corinthians 8: 13-15 - Sharing the Wealth

Paul is addressing an issue regarding the Jerusalem Churches experiencing a time of need while the Corinthian (Gentile) Churches were experiencing a time of abundance. Paul was encouraging the Corinthian Churches to give generously to support believers in the Jerusalem Churches who were in need.

Paul explained that “it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need.” (2 Cor. 8:14). He further reminded the Corinthians that the time might come when their roles would be reversed, and they would be the receivers of the collections, “so that their abundance may be for your need.” (2 Cor. 8:14).

This principle that the richer should give their wealth to the poorer with a goal of achieving a balance of resources is challenging for many of us due to modern notions of individual self-reliance and a general rejection of political socialism. However, the situation Paul describes is a group of churches asking their members to voluntarily give money for distribution by another church for the benefit of its poor members. This is quite different than a state (i.e., government) program.

Thus, Paul’s purpose is not to create a social program but rather to ask those who have some measure of abundance whether they are truly ready to trust God, and put it at God’s service on behalf of the poor. In this manner, Paul states, “Show them the proof of your love” and “I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.”

2 Corinthians 9: 1-15 - Sowing Generously / Blessings of Giving

Paul encourages the Corinthians to give generously, as well as cheerfully. Specifically he states, “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.” In so urging, Paul understands that he must address a worldly fear of limited resources (e.g., If I give too much away, how will I meet my own needs). He explains that this is a false narrative, since God’s abundance does not have such limitations.

Moreover, Paul informs the Corinthians of the blessing that they will receive in return from God for their giving, whether those blessing be material (“You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.” 2 Cor. 9:11) or spiritual (“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.” 2 Cor. 9:9).

APPLICATION

In these passages, Paul lays out many compelling reasons to generously give to others in need of assistance. Additionally, Paul explains that giving is a statement of love. Finally, Paul points out that Jesus Christ modelled this behavior for us, “that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

We must be willing to be generous in the workplace, for example, with our time. We need to take the time to answer questions of coworkers and train coworkers when appropriate, even if we are not compensated for it. We should show caring and kindness in the workplace by giving our time and energy without thought to the “profitability” of our actions. We must stand strong against worldly pressures in the workplace, such as the fear of limited resources, fear of limited time, and stinginess with our time, while trusting that what we sow will reap benefits.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does it make you feel to hear Paul encourage the Corinthians to share their wealth with members of the Jerusalem church? Does it make you feel more or less comfortable that Paul says it is not a command, but rather a test of the sincerity of your love? Explain.
2. Is it the job of Christians to try to alleviate poverty in the world? If you said “no”, what about trying to alleviate poverty among your fellow Christians? Remember, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
3. When you hear Paul recite “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whomever sows generously will also reap generously,” do you believe God’s word? If so, why don’t we give more?
4. Are you generous in the workplace with your time and energy? Do you make yourself accessible to your coworkers? Does Christ’s generosity show through your “work persona” or not?
5. Do you give time to people in the workplace without thought to the immediate profitability or “workplace benefit” of your actions?



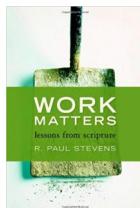
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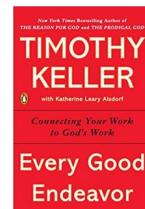


The vision of the Theology of Work Project is that every Christian be equipped and committed for work as God intends. A Christian approach makes work more meaningful and productive, benefits society and the people we work with and for, gets us through the challenges we face on the job, draws people to Jesus, and brings glory to God.

LEARN MORE: www.theologyofwork.org



In *Work Matters* marketplace theology expert R. Paul Stevens revisits more than twenty biblical accounts — from Genesis to Revelation — exploring through them the theological meaning of every sort of work, manual or intellectual, domestic or commercial. Taken together, his short, pithy reflections on these well-known Bible passages add up to a comprehensive, Bible-based theology of work.



With deep conviction and often surprising advice, Keller (in his book, "Every Good Endeavor") shows readers that biblical wisdom is immensely relevant to our questions about work today. In fact, the Christian view of work—that we work to serve others, not ourselves—can provide the foundation of a thriving professional and balanced personal life.

THANK YOU ECF COLLABORATORS

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