

2 Corinthians

God's Glory and God's Grace

1. Affliction and Consolation

Introduction to 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 1.1-11

Aim: To introduce people to the situation in Corinth and to begin to think about how God meets us when we are suffering or struggling, and how we can support and encourage each other in those times

To start with:

To introduce Corinth and the situation the church was facing to people there is a multiple choice quiz below. Either get people to write down their answer or discuss in pairs/teams. (watch the timing though!)

1. Around what year was the church in Corinth founded? a) AD 42 b) AD 50 c) AD 61	<i>Paul founded the Corinthian church in about AD 50. He may have written 1 Corinthians in about AD 54 and 2 Corinthians in around AD 56.</i>
2. Approximately how old was the city of Corinth at that time? a) 500 years old b) 250 years old c) 100 years old	<i>Corinth was only about 100 years old. The ancient city had been levelled to the ground by Romans in 146 BC for the part it played in a revolt against Roman rule and a new city was not built until 44 BC one hundred years later.</i>
3. What made Corinth such a great place to build a city? a) It was an ideally situated sea port b) It was next to a key mountain pass c) It was on a large hill and surrounded by a very fertile land.	<i>Corinth was an ancient sea port. It was on a rather thin strip of land which allowed sea trade to both the east and the west.</i>
4. Which spot on the map pinpoints the location of ancient Corinth? (See provided map)	<i>The answer is B, Corinth was part of Ancient Greece before it was absorbed by the Roman Empire and its' location is within the boundaries of what is now modern Greece.</i>

5. As a young but nonetheless prosperous city, what was Corinth's approximate population in Paul's day? a) 60,000 or less b) 80,000 give or take a few c) 100,000 or more	<i>Archaeologist's findings point to a densely packed population of 100,000 or more. The size and proximity of public houses would have afforded people little privacy and suggest a society where most of a person's time was spent outdoors in company.</i>
6. Was Corinth the ancient home of a) the Olympic Games b) the Isthmian Games or c) the Nemean Games?	<i>The Isthmian Games, they were held in the first and third years after the ancient Olympic Games and were one of the reasons for the cities prosperity.</i>
7. Lastly then, what did the slang term "to Corinthianize" mean in wider Roman culture? a) to cheat someone for financial gain b) to engage in sexual immorality c) to seek out a gang brawl	<i>The answer is b - to engage in sexual immorality.</i>

- Given what you now know about Corinth, what do you imagine were the challenges they faced in faithfully following Jesus?

In 1 Corinthians Paul had answered a number of questions the Corinthians seemingly had about how to live out their faith. The tone of 2 Corinthians is slightly different and implies a church which knows what it should do but nonetheless finds perseverance hard in the face of persecution.

Exploring the Text

There are two options below - pick the one you think would suit your cell best.



OPTION 1

1. From what you can gather what seems to be going on for Paul and the Corinthians?
2. What strikes you about Paul's reaction to suffering or affliction? Why do you think he can have the confidence he does?
3. What sort of suffering would you say WE tend to suffer from and where do you think we tend to turn when we need "comfort"? Why do you think we tend to do those things?
4. Paul calls God the 'God of all comfort' or 'God of all consolation'.
 - How does God comfort us? (When have you experienced that?)
 - How does the process of comfort among God's people seem to work?
 - What effects does suffering appear to have according to Paul and how far do you agree with his understanding?
5. What effects does Paul appear to think prayer will have in difficult situations? What do you think he means by this?
6. What part does prayer play in your own challenges and struggles?

Reflect and Pray:

- Give people a few minutes to talk to God about their current 'coping mechanisms' give them a chance to repent of the things that are 'false comforts' asking Him to be their comfort. A good piece of music to play alongside this might be Tim Hughes 'God of all comfort': <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQFmvZ3MZtY> is a good version. It is seven minutes long but would provide a really helpful sound track to a time or meditation and prayer.
- Alternatively spend some time praying for those who have real struggles going on in their lives. If possible gather around and intercede for them.

OPTION 2

Use the passage and do a Manuscript Study

Give out copies of the passage (provided) and after reading it through two or three times spend 10-15 minutes in silence, re-reading the passage in your head. Provide the group with a variety of pens, pencils and highlighters. As you read individually, make a note of and consider things which stand out to you, surprise you, things that you don't understand, or which seem to be of particular importance.

When this period of time has elapsed get people into threes or fours to discuss what they've found, whether things have encouraged them, challenged them, that seem interesting or they don't understand. In these groups also ask them to think how they might apply this passage to our lives. Allow a further 10 minutes for this.

Finally bring the group back together and have each smaller group report back to the whole sharing anything of particular relevance or continuing concern. Try to encourage the groups to share especially their thoughts on application.

Reflect and Pray:

Either:

Pray as a group about what has challenged people from the study. Also about situations in which members of the group currently need comfort. If it is not already your habit as a group to do so then consider writing down the prayer requests so as to give thanks later (v.11!) as God answer prayers.

Or: Use Prayer Activity 1 in the first study option.