

Second Corinthians

Thomas Stegman, S.J.

Questions for Personal Reflection or Small Group Study

2 Cor 1:1-11

1. What does your Christian identity as one of the “holy ones” mean to you? What concrete step can you take today to accept your vocation to grow in holiness?
2. What are some specific circumstances in which you have experienced God’s encouragement and consolation?
3. Paul’s trust in God was deepened through his experience of affliction in Ephesus. Have you seen your trust in God grow through a challenging experience?
4. Read 2 Cor 1:11; Phil 1:3-5; Col 1:9-12. What do you notice about the way Paul prays? How can you incorporate his example into your own prayer, especially your prayer for those involved in ministry?

2 Cor 1:12-22

1. In today’s context, what might be an example of proper boasting as Paul understands it?
2. Some of the Corinthians’ difficulties with Paul stemmed from their jumping to conclusions and making judgments. Why is it good to give the “best interpretation” to others’ words and actions, as St. Ignatius of Loyola counseled?
3. What does Paul mean by saying we are “anointed” and “sealed”? What difference has this anointing made in your life? In what ways is the Spirit’s work in you preparing you for your full inheritance in the kingdom of God?
4. How can you, like Christ, give a more complete “yes” to God’s will?

2 Cor 1:23-2:13

1. Paul chose to write the tearful letter to the Corinthians rather than pay a visit because feelings were too raw. What can you learn from Paul about good ways of dealing with conflict?
2. Paul is a model of taking initiative in offering forgiveness, without waiting for the other party to ask for it. Is there someone with whom you need to take a similar initiative?
3. The reason Paul informs the Corinthians about his leaving Troas is to demonstrate his love for them. What are some concrete ways by which you can express your love for others?
4. What are Satan’s “purposes” (2:11) in the conflict between Paul and the Corinthians? What are his purposes in human relationships in general? How can you thwart those purposes?

2 Cor 2:14-3:11

1. What does it mean to be “the aroma of Christ”? How can you be the aroma of Christ today in your family? In the workplace?
2. Could your faith community be read by others as “a letter about Christ” If so, how?
3. In what ways is the Lord calling you to leave behind a “stony heart”? Do you find hope and resolution in the Spirit’s gift of a transformed heart?
4. Does God’s word energize you to participate in the ministry of the new covenant? If so, how?
5. What are some ways we can be tempted to take credit for our ministry (3:5)? How can you grow in your recognition that God is the one who qualifies you?

2 Cor 3:12-4:6

1. How bold are you in proclaiming Christ to others? Is the Lord calling you to be more bold?
2. What do you need to do—or, perhaps, to give up—in order to “turn to the Lord” as Paul understands it (3:16)?
3. Have you “gazed intently” on Jesus in prayer? How has this transformed you?
4. What kind of freedom does the Holy Spirit give? How have you experienced that freedom?
5. What does Paul mean (and not mean) about being a slave of others for the sake of Jesus (4:5)? Do you, like Paul, strive to proclaim the gospel in this way?

2 Cor 4:7-15

1. In what ways are we, Christ’s followers, like earthen vessels? What is the treasure within us? Why does God put his treasure in such fragile vessels?
2. What does it mean to “carry about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body” (4:10)?
3. How does Paul’s attitude toward his sufferings (4:8-15) inspire you in regard to the sufferings in your own life?
4. In what ways is Paul’s response to his suffering like that of Jesus in his passion?
5. Are you as deeply convinced as Paul that God is the God of life, the one who brings the dead back to life? If not, ask God to strengthen your conviction.

2 Cor 4:16-5:10

1. In what ways is your inner self being renewed day by day?
2. How can you keep your focus, as Paul did, on the things not seen? What occurs in your life when you spend your time and energy on what is merely transitory?
3. In the creed we proclaim our faith in “the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.” Does belief in the resurrection of the body impact how you regard your bodily existence in the present? How?
4. What do you think and feel about appearing before the judgment seat of Christ? How can you prepare for that day?

2 Cor 5:11-21

1. What is proper fear of the Lord? How can you grow in fear of the Lord?
2. Paul's life was turned around by the love of Jesus. How can you open yourself to be fired more and more by Christ's love for you?
3. What does it mean to regard another person "according to the flesh" (4:16)? What are some lenses through which you are tempted to regard others?
4. How have you experienced God's gift of reconciliation? How can you join Paul in participating in the ministry of reconciliation?
5. Does Christ's inviting and empowering you to be his ambassador excite you? How?

2 Cor 6:1-10

1. In what sense is today the "acceptable time... the day of salvation"? How can you take advantage of this acceptable time?
2. Why is it so important to Paul that he give no one cause for finding fault in his ministry? Why is it important for anyone who serves in the Church today?
3. What do you make of Paul's list of ministerial credentials (6:4-10)? What would your list look like?
4. How can you be inspired by Paul's perseverance in his ministry through "glory and dishonor, insult and praise"?

2 Cor 6:11-7:4

1. In what sense is Paul's heart open wide to the Corinthians? To whom are you being called to keep an open heart?
2. What are some "idols" in your life that can adversely affect your relationship with God and others?
3. What does our identity as the "temple of the living God" (6:16) imply for the way we ought to live? In what concrete ways are Christians called to be "in the world but not of the world" (John 17:11-18)?
4. Paul insists, as does Jesus (Matt 5:48), that all Christians are called to the perfection of holiness. What does holiness entail in your specific life circumstances?

2 Cor 7:5-16

1. How you have experienced God's encouragement through the ministry or help of another, as Paul did through Titus?
2. How can you grow in the ability to see God's hand in all circumstances, as Paul did?
3. What is the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow? Which kind did Peter have (Mark 14:72)? How do you know?
4. What elements do you see in this passage (7:5-16) that show Paul's deep affection for the Corinthians? What can you learn from this?

2 Cor 8:1-24

1. Paul teaches that the most important offering we can make is our self-offering to God. How can you make such a self-offering more consciously in the nitty-gritty of your day?
2. How have you observed people in their poverty manifesting great generosity? What does such generosity evoke in you?
3. What are the different ways Paul uses the word *charis* in this chapter? How are they related? In what sense is “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” the foundation of every grace in our life?
4. Paul insists on the importance of testing/proving our love (8:8). How does your putting love into practice form in you a more “tested” or “proven” character?
5. Are Paul’s principles of stewardship practical today? How?
6. How is Paul’s teaching about the need for transparency in the collection relevant to other aspects of Christian life and ministry?

2 Cor 9:1-15

1. What is a possible danger in Paul’s urging a kind of friendly competition between local churches?
2. Do you recognize all of God’s gifts to you, spiritual and material, as gifts to be shared with others? What steps can you take to be a more generous steward of God’s gifts?
3. In what ways have you seen God provide for your needs?
4. How does financial giving glorify God (9:13)? How does obedience to the gospel glorify God?

2 Cor 10:1-18

1. In what situations is it most difficult for you to embody “the gentleness and clemency of Christ” toward others?
2. How have you experienced the spiritual warfare that Paul alludes to? What are the powerful aids God gives you in this battle (see Eph 6:10-17)? How can you more fully avail yourself of them?
3. Am you a person who consistently builds others up, or do you sometimes fall into the temptation to tear others down? How can you avoid this temptation?
4. Why is it tempting to engage in comparing ourselves with others (10:12; see Mark 9:34)? What is potentially harmful about doing so?

2 Cor 11:1-15

1. In what ways do you cherish and foster your intimate relationship with Jesus? How do you let him continue to reveal his love to you?
2. Are there specific ways by which you can help others deepen their relationship with Jesus?
3. Why is Paul so deeply committed to preaching the gospel free of charge? How can his example inspire us today—even those of us who are paid for ministry?
4. How should we best understand Paul’s strong language about the “superapostles”?

2 Cor 11:16-33

1. Paul's engagement in foolish boasting is a risky strategy. Can you think of a time you have tried to go through another's door in order to bring him or her through your own door?
2. What is the purpose of Paul's hardship list here in 11:23-29 (and throughout the letter)? What do they tell us about being an ambassador for the Lord?
3. Paul insists on boasting in his weakness (11:30). Why? Are you willing to do the same?
4. What are the daily pressures on you that evoke anxiety and indignation? Are they similar to what evoked these things in Paul?

2 Cor 12:1-13

1. What do you make of Paul's reference to his mystical prayer? Do you know about and appreciate the tradition of mystics in the Church?
2. Do you know that all Christians are called to mystical union with Christ? (see the Catechism, 2014). What is this mystical union with Christ, and how can you strive for it?
3. Have you experienced a "thorn" in the flesh similar to Paul? How has it led you to rely more on God's power?
4. How can the window Paul gives us into his own prayer life in 12:7b-10 inspire your prayer?
5. Why is God's power experienced especially in our weakness? Have you seen God's power at work in the midst of your weakness?

2 Cor 12:14-13:4

1. How can Paul's expression of love for the Corinthians (12:115) inspire you in your relationship to those you serve? In what ways do you express your love?
2. Paul's list of vices (12:20-21) includes attitudes and behaviors that are divisive. How do you strive for unity and fellowship in your family? At work? In the Christian community?
3. What is fraternal correction? Why is it important in the Christian community? What are some reasons we tend to avoid giving and receiving it?
4. What "proof" would you offer (see 13:3) that Christ lives in you and speaks through you?

2 Cor 13:5-13

1. Why is character formation so important for Christians, especially those in leadership? How can you strive to let your character be formed in the values, attitudes, and behavioral patterns of Jesus?
2. Does reading this letter alter the way you will appreciate and share the sign of peace or kiss of peace at Mass? How?
3. How has reading this letter brought you greater insight into God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?