

Good morning and welcome!

Researchers tell us that starting in our early teenage years ... and continuing through life ... most of us, deep-down, are seeking answer to 3 questions

- 1) **Identity** — Who am I?
 - 2) **Belonging / Acceptance** — Am I liked? Am I loved?
 - 3) **Purpose** — What will I do with my life? **Deeper** = How can I make a difference? **Deeper Still** = What am I here for?
- Today, we won't be explicitly answering these questions ... BUT, I invite you to listen closely ... because the answers are there in our text today

Long passage today ... so let's dive right in in

Today, we are continuing in our series in 2 Corinthians

Shaped by the Cross

Passage

2 Corinthians 7:2-16

Turn in your Bibles

THEME The Road To Maturity And Joy Runs Through Repentance

The passage today says we **won't** get to joy ...

... and we **won't** get to maturity in our walk with Christ...

if we don't walk the repentance road

- We won't get there individually
- We won't get there as a church

The Road to Maturity and Joy Runs Through Repentance

I'd like to do a short, practical exercise with you ... to get us to focus our hearts as we come to God's word

Psalm 144:4 *Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.*

I invite you take just a moment and breathe in and out with me — and think about your life ... **done**

Will you join with me as we pray together to the Lord

Holy Father, we confess

our lives are but a breath —

A breath you infused into us at birth, as into Adam.

An inhale, an exhale.

So short, so fleeting... a vapor grasped at, but gone in the grasping.

We do not know how long or deep our breath shall be

or when our breath here shall cease,

and when we shall run, O quickly run,

to breathe forever the golden air of Your Holiness.

Holy Spirit, Breath and Wind of God,

Breathe into us today, we plead,

A taste of that gold-infused breath

that truly lies ahead...

That we may turn from sin and death

And run, O quickly run,

to bow before the Holy One.

Oh, Son of God, Eternal Word,

speak deep your Word into our hearts today,

and turn these hearts, so self-absorbed and cold,

into hearts of flesh,

hearts that beat in tempo with your Word.

Hearts that run, O quickly run, to repent,

and hearts that know that our rebellions,

so many, so red like crimson, when we confess,

You make brilliant white, like snow.

AMEN

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Scene Set

A messy church, deeply loved

A needed corrective refused

A painful letter sent

A Messy Church, Deeply Loved

The church at Corinth was t 5 years old when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians

- **All the believers in the Corinthian church** came to Christ out of the self-obsessed, messed-up culture of Corinth ... *and they still lived and worked within this culture*
 - As a result, it was a messy, dysfunctional church
 - You can read all about it in 1 Corinthians
- But despite this messiness, this church was *deeply loved* by Christ

Look folks ... church is good, but church is messy

- TBC is messy too ... it's not a matter of comparison
 - TBC is messy because we are messy
 - We're a family, right?
 - ▶ and families, even the best of them, are messy
 - **We may be messy ... But we're deeply loved by Christ**

Something truly marvelous about this:

God doesn't love us at TBC because of our performance

He loves us because we're in Christ

He loves us because of His grace

2nd line — **A Necessary Correction Refused**

- **Paul was on his 3rd missionary journey**
 - When he came to Ephesus (W coast of Turkey), he stayed for over 2 years
- **Acts 19:22** tells us that Paul sent Timothy from Ephesus to Corinth to see how the church was doing
 - ***We're not told*** ... but apparently Timothy came back to Ephesus and told Paul that a serious issue had arisen
- **So Paul traveled to Corinth himself**
 - When he arrived, he found that an influential man had convinced the church to reject Paul and abandon the gospel ...
 - This is why, in 2 Corinthians 2:1, Paul calls this a **painful** visit
 - ▶ And he **immediately** returned to Ephesus 'to spare' the church
 - ❖ It seems he left to avoid a catastrophic and destructive blow-up
 - ▶ You've gotta think that was humbling for Paul — kicked out of town by those whom he had brought to Christ
- **What the influential guy did was sin**
 - Romans 6:23 tells us that "*the wages of sin is death*"
 - ▶ **Sin's paycheck, always ... without exception ... is death**
 - To trash Paul, Jesus' chosen apostle, was to trash Jesus
 - The pride of one man did a lot of damage to the church and the gospel

In America today, it is almost impossible for us to view correction as love

But Proverbs tells us that "*the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights*" (3:12)

Do we get this ... do we believe it, deep inside?

- God confronts us because He loves us — not from hate or spite
- He corrects us because He delights in us — not out of anger or wrath

3rd line — From Ephesus, Paul wrote A Painful Letter

- This letter doesn't exist today
- We know that **Titus** carried the letter to Corinth

In 2 Corinthians 2:4, Paul writes about it:

*“I wrote to you out of much affliction and **anguish of heart** and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the **abundant love** that I have for you.”*

- **Paul's painful letter was a letter of abundant love**

= lit., **a letter of overflowing agape**

where **agape** = the characteristic love of God,

- which cannot be earned
- requires no return

- **Paul tells us he wrote out of ‘**anguish of heart**’** — it broke his heart to write this letter ... WHY?

- Because it carried the painful sting of correction
- Like a parent spanking a child ... sometimes necessary, but hard to do

So that's the scene set for 2 Corinthians as a whole, and especially for our text today

I've divided the text into 4 parts today ...

Let's dive into our First Section

I

2 Corinthians 7:2-4a

An Invitation to a Restored Relationship

In 7:2, Paul will pick up where he left off in 6:11-13

*We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; **our heart is wide open**. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) **widen your hearts also**.*

7:2-4a on the screen [read verse by verse as we go along]

^{2a} Make room in your hearts for us.
^{2b} We have wronged no one,
we have corrupted no one,
we have taken advantage of no one.
³ I do not say this to condemn you,
for I said before that you are in our hearts,
to die together and to live together.
^{4a} I am acting with great boldness toward you;
I have pride in you;

v2a — “***Make room in your hearts for us***”

Paul: “renew your love and affection for me as your spiritual father — don't follow after idols and opponents of the gospel”

v2b — *We haven't ...*

- 1) *'wronged any one'* = we haven't sinned against you or treated you unjustly... either in my short, sorrowful visit ... or my followup letter
- 2) *'corrupted any one'* = we haven't led you astray from Christ ...
- 3) *'taken advantage of anyone'* = we haven't exploited you in any way

Paul here reminds the Corinthians of the **integrity** of his actions toward them

- **But** he is also **contrasting** himself to false teachers that were trying to win over the church
- **In effect, he's saying to the Corinthians: "THINK!** How do the false teachers treat you?"

We'll find out later in the book that the false teachers were teaching lies about the gospel ... AND demanding pay for doing so!!

v3 beginning — *I'm not **condemning** you*

- Paul conveys two relational truths to the Corinthians:
 - 1) He has entirely forgiven the Corinthians for rejecting him earlier ... he keeps no record of wrongs ... no recrimination
 - 2) That his sorrowful visit and his painful letter were not condemnation, **but correction** administered in love

Rest of v3 — *"you are in our hearts to die together and to live together"*

- Paul love for the Corinthians is **a forever love**
 - This love isn't a love that slams the back door on the way out
- Paul is committed to the Corinthian believers and to their growth in Christ no matter what his circumstances are
 - Why does Paul reverse the usual order of words — *'life and death'* to *'death and life'* ???
 - One commentator ... Paul is reminding the Corinthians of his sufferings on their behalf

v4a — in ESV = “*I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have pride in you*”

- My paraphrase of 4a = “***In fact, I am really proud of you ... proud of your how you responded to my letter***”
 - What a motivation to recommit to your relationship with Paul!

Restoration after Correction

Six Facets of Paul’s Love for the Corinthians

7:2a — Initiates

7:2b — Acts in integrity

Paul hasn’t done anything to harm them

7:3a — Doesn’t condemn

7:3b — Expresses affection

You are in our hearts ...

7:3c — Conveys commitment

... in death or life

7:4a — Proclaims acceptance

I’m so very proud of you

In His response to the Corinthian’s repentance ...

- **Paul** doesn’t carry a grudge ... he doesn’t shun ... he doesn’t shame
- He doesn’t keep the Corinthians in the penalty box
- **He treats the Corinthians as they are: justified in Christ**
 - **Justification** is God’s verdict that believers stand before Him fully accepted in Christ’s righteousness
 - ▶ **Justification** is gift of God’s grace (we cannot earn it)
 - that we receive by faith when we first trust in Jesus for salvation
 - **What justification means is that**
 - the ledger of our sins (past/present/future) is wiped clean
 - and then that ledger completely filled with the brilliant righteousness of Christ

This doesn't mean the Corinthians won't need correction in the future ... *they certainly will*

- And it doesn't mean that there aren't consequences for sin ...
 - there **always** are

**This is a gospel-formed response to another's repentance
no condemnation / full acceptance / committed love**

I

2 Corinthians 7:2-4a

Truth to Take Away

Restored relationships require that we convey unconditional acceptance and love to those who repent

What about us?

How will we show acceptance and love to someone who repents?

NEXT SECTION

II

2 Corinthians 7:4b-7

Tidings of comfort and joy

The last time Paul spoke of his travels was in Chapter 2:

2 Corinthians 2:12-13

When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

Now, in this section of our text today, Titus and Paul reunite in Macedonia

As we go through the text on the chart, note the 5 instances of the word ‘encouragement’ (*in aqua italics*).

- I’ve replaced the word “**comfort**” (ESV) with “*encouragement*,” a valid translation of the Greek word *parakalēō* in this context
- Also note the words **joy/rejoice** in red and affliction underlined

4b I am filled with *encouragement*.

In all our affliction, I am overflowing with **joy**.

5 For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within.

6 **But** God, who *encourages* the downcast, *encouraged* us by the coming of Titus,

7 and not only by his coming

but also by the *encouragement* with which he was *encouraged* by you, as he told us of

your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me,

so that I **rejoiced** still more.

2 Corinthians 7:4b-7 (ESV, modified)

Let’s now unpack this section

v4b — *I am filled with encouragement. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.*

- Astounding statement — Paul writes that **while in the midst of suffering** ... he is “**filled** [lit = **filled to the brim**] *with encouragement ... and ... joy*”

Why does Paul say this?

lets go on

v5 — *For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within.*

The Greek word translated **affliction** in these verses has the idea of stomping on grapes in a winepress

- Paul was being **crushed** in Macedonia ... traumatizing for him
 - Hard for us to grasp how bad it was for Paul
- **Some of Paul's affliction was from "fighting without"**
 - Physical threats to Paul's life
 - ▶ Judaizers / Gentile unbelievers hostile to the gospel
- **Some of this affliction ... was Paul's "fears within ..."**
 1. Every morning ... waking up to hostility / intimidation / threats
 2. Deep concern about Titus — Why he didn't show up in Troas?
Was he OK? Did the Corinthians treat him badly?
 3. Anxiety about the Corinthian believers
 - Did the church reject his 'painful' letter?
 - Was the church going to turn away from the gospel?
 - Was all Paul's effort on behalf of the Corinthians ... all his time with them ... teaching ... admonition ... prayer ...
 - ▶ Was it all for nothing?

v6 — **But God,** *who encourages the **downcast**, encouraged us by the coming of Titus,*

- This verse tells us three things about God

1st — Our God is sovereignly at work ...

- ▶ even when we see no hope ...
- ▶ even when we don't think we can make it through the day ...
- ▶ even when life is tears

**2nd — Our God is sovereignly at work to come alongside us...
to *parakalēo* us**

- ▶ Paul writes “**But God encourages** *those who are ready to give up ... those who’ve lost all hope ... those who are in despair*”
- ▶ Our Triune God — Father, Son, Spirit — is our Helper, our Comforter, our Advocate, our Exhorter, our Encourager ...
- ▶ His Name is ... **Paracletos**

**3rd — God sovereignly brings his encouragement to us
through other believers**

- ▶ “**God encouraged us by the coming of Titus**” ... writes Paul
- ▶ God managed Paul’s circumstances so that ...
 - ❖ **just at the right time and place**
NOT in Troas ... **BUT** in Macedonia ,
 - ❖ He made a way for Titus to meet up with Paul

v7 — [⁶ **But God ... encouraged us**] ... *not only by (Titus’) coming but also by the encouragement with which he was encouraged by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.*

- Just imagine for a minute what Titus was thinking as he went to Corinth and read the letter to the church ...
 - and then hung around for the congregational meeting ...
 - and probably met with the influential man who had opposed Paul
- Titus was faithful...
- **But God**, through Titus’ ministry and through Paul’s painful letter changed the hearts of the Corinthians:
 - They had rejected Paul ... they had spurned him...
 - But now they can’t wait to see him ... they long for him to come

- **And so this 2nd section of text ...**
 - which began with Paul's encouragement and joy in the Corinthians
 - ends the very same way — with encouragement and joy
- **And note how gospel focused and other focused this encouragement and joy are ...**
 - For Paul and Titus found joy and encouragement, *not in their circumstances*, but in God's continued work in the Corinthians' lives

II

2 Corinthians 7:4b-7

Truth to Take Away

Faithful service and changed hearts
bring encouragement and joy to other believers

What about us?

How could our lives be a source of
encouragement and joy to other believers?

THIS TAKES US TO OUR 3RD SECTION

III

2 Corinthians 7:8-13a

**From sting of rebuke to life-giving
repentance**

Here's the Text

⁸ For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while.

⁹ As it is, I **rejoice**, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into **REPENTING**.

For you felt a **godly grief**, so that you suffered no loss through us.

¹⁰ For **godly grief** produces a **REPENTANCE** that leads to salvation without regret, whereas **worldly grief** produces death.

¹¹ For see what earnestness this **godly grief** has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.

¹² So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.

^{13a} Therefore we are **encouraged**.

Let's unpack the text verse by verse

vv8-9 — Paul writes, “*For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. ⁹ As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.*”

- I know my **painful** letter stung you.
 - I don't regret sending it, **but** I am sorry for the temporary pain it caused you
- For the sting of the letter created godly grief in you ...
 - Which led you to repent ...
 - And that brings me joy
- And so, “*you suffered no loss from us.*”
 - As one commentator notes, the Corinthian's repentance spared them further discipline from God

v10 — *For **godly grief** produces a **repentance** that leads to salvation without regret, whereas **worldly grief** produces death.*

- **We'll look at this verse in more detail in a minute**

vv11-13 — ***11** For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter **12** So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. **13a** Therefore we are encouraged.*

- **v11** — “Consider,” writes Paul, “how you dealt with this entire issue of the man who led you astray — it wasn’t easy, but you excelled
- **vv12-13a** — So yes ... I wrote to you, but not to tell you how to discipline the offender, nor to demand he apologize to the person he wounded .. but I wrote to YOU for your good ... so that you’d realize your faithfulness to me as Christ’s apostle ... and your faithfulness to the Lord
And all ya’ll are a great encouragement to me
- ‘Who was the injured party ... the one who suffered the wrong?’
 - We don’t know
 - One commentator suggests **Timothy ... or perhaps Paul**

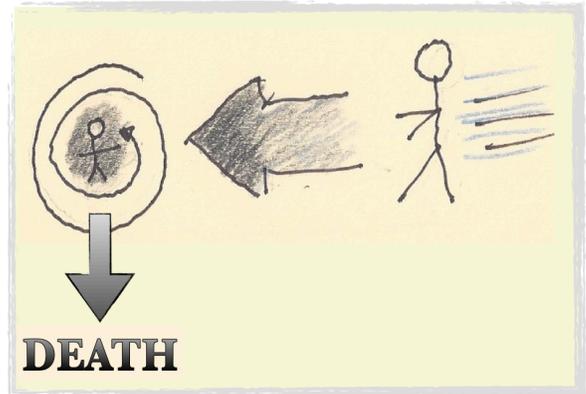
Now ... let's go back — a deep dive into v10

For **godly grief** produces a **repentance** that leads to salvation without regret, whereas **worldly grief** produces death.

Worldly Sorrow

Worldly Sorrow

- Sorry that you got caught
- Deflection and excuses
- Seeing yourself as a victim
- A curving in on yourself
- Unwilling to repent
- A will-setting decision



- **Because the focus of Worldly sorrow is 'ourselves'**, it drives us away from God — it makes us unwilling to repent
- **The danger in worldly sorrow** is that it can be a **will-setting decision away from God**
 - **A will-setting decision** is how habits (good or bad) begin ... it is a choice that sets us up to make future decisions the same way ... it closes down our desire to change
 - In terms of worldly sorrow ... a will-setting decision makes it very difficult to turn from our sin and self-focused desires back to God
 - And so we shut God out of our life — which is the road to death
relationships / psychological / career / financial / ultimately physical
- **As a believer**, though your eternity is secure, **you are not immune from wrecking your life ... stay off the path of worldly sorrow**

Godly Sorrow

Scott Hafeman
— “*At the heart of ‘godly sorrow’ is a recognition of our own inability to please God*”

Godly Sorrow

- **Confession** — sin / disobedience
- **Grief** — for not trusting in God’s love enough to obey His commands
- **Heartbreak** — for failing to love God
 - for being unfaithful to Him
 - for dishonoring Him
- **Bowing** — before the cross

Repentance

Repentance

- is not penance
- is a “heart turn”
 - ... **from** your sin
 - ... **to** God
- Zechariah 1:3



shuv — to turn, return

metanoia — a reversal of thinking

The mark of maturity is being quick to repent

PUT this all together

2 Corinthians 7:10

For ²godly grief produces a ³repentance that leads to ⁴salvation
⁵without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

1. Humbly receive the sting of God's correction
2. **Godly grief — Heartache for disobeying God**
3. **Repentance — Turn from sin and self-salvation to God**
4. **Salvation — Growth in godliness**
5. **No regrets**

eat spiritual
crow

Look at #5 — “No regrets” = the fruit of justification in Christ

Listen to God's invitation to Israel from Isaiah 1:18

*“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord:
though your sins are like scarlet, — they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson, — they shall become like wool”*

Godly sorrow and repentance leave no residual shame

- **We tend to keep records of our wrongs** ... to hang on to our regrets and our shame after we've confessed them to God
- **When we do so ... when we beat ourselves up about confessed sins ...**
 - *we fail to receive* gospel forgiveness ...
- **And it shows that, deep-inside, we are self-righteous**
for we think we are better than the gospel says we are

- **But 1 John 1:9** tells us that *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”*
 - God gives us a **“fresh start”** in our relationship with Him
 - So in Christ’s love to all of us, and me too ... there is no need for us to scrub what God has cleansed

Furthermore, as believers, Christ’s righteousness has already been imputed to us

- So now, we confess and repent **only** to restore our relationship with Christ, **not** to **re-earn** salvation and God’s acceptance — impossible!
- **So for believers ...**
 - the sins we confess to God are **already** buried under a mountain of white snow a million miles deep ... never to be uncovered
 - ***Let those sins stay buried under the white snow of the love of Christ***



FINAL SECTION OF OUR TEXT TODAY

IV

2 Corinthians 7:13b-16

Rejoicing in growing lives

READ the Text

^{13b} And besides our own **encouragement**, we **rejoiced** still more at the **joy** of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.

¹⁴ For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true.

¹⁵ And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling.

¹⁶ | **rejoice**, because I have complete confidence in you.

2 Corinthians 7:13b-16 ESV

v14 — Titus had not been to Corinth before arriving with Paul’s painful letter

- Paul is saying ... “We bragged about you to Titus ... and you didn’t disappoint. Your response to my letter confirmed all I told him about you.”
- Interesting — Paul went out on a limb for the Corinthian church. He had no idea how they’d respond ...

v16 — **So I rejoice that my confidence in you was well placed**

- Paul’s expression of his confidence in the Corinthian church sets the stage for him to encourage the church in financially supporting the poor believers in Jerusalem — chapters 8-9 — more next week!

IV

2 Corinthians 7:13b-16

Truth to Take Away

Joy comes as we see others grow in the Lord

What about us?

How are we helping others become mature in Christ?

THAT'S OUR MESSAGE TODAY

Shaped by the Cross

2 Corinthians 7:2-16

The Road To Maturity And Joy Runs Through Repentance

Accept
the Spirit's
correction



Return
your heart to
the Father



Leave
your sins buried and
your regrets behind



**Maturity
and Joy**

PRAY

Father God,

Thank you that you have loved us enough to bring the sting of the Spirit's rebuke to us in your Word.

Thank you, too, Father, that you delight in us, and that it is in this delight you correct us when we disobey, as we are prone to do.

And thank you that there is forgiveness with you, a forgiveness that knows no bounds, secured for us through the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ.

We pray, Father, that when we have sinned, you would give us hearts that humbly receive the sting of your rebuke ... and then hearts that turn and run quickly back to you.

Father, we look forward to that endless day when we will stand before you without fault and with great joy.

In the name of the Son, our coming King, through the power of your Spirit,
Amen