

BOUNDLESS JOY IN OUR SORROW”

2 Corinthians 7:2-16

When we think of the apostle Paul, “depression” is not a characteristic that comes to mind.

Yet, in 2 Cor. 7, he describes his life, using several surprising descriptors for himself:

No rest, harassed, conflicts, fears (5), downcast (6). Not exactly positive thoughts!

As Paul ministers to Corinth, the struggles that come from their lack of love for one another frequently cause Paul to struggle through sleepless nights. Thinking about them and praying for them. At times like that there’s nowhere else to turn, but to God, for comfort.

In this letter Paul has been speaking of ***the joy of serving Jesus***. For God’s servants, there is no greater joy than to see our spiritual children walking with God and growing in their walk with Him.

It’s the kind of joy parents enjoy when they see their children growing up and making good choices. *Parenting is wonderful!*

But there is no greater source of struggle than to watch people you love make wrong choices, and experience the consequences of those choices.

Paul often speaks of his fear for his children:

Gal. 4:11: “*I am afraid that I may have labored over you in vain.*”

1 Thess 3:5: “*When I could bear it no more, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.*”

2 Cor. 11:28-29: “*There’s the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.*”

Such ministerial concerns weighed heavily on Paul.

There's *never* a time when *someone* isn't unhappy with him and criticizing him for the way he did things.

Anyone involved in ministry for long will face such struggles sooner or later!

Phillips Brooks: "To minister to men is always to accept new happiness and new distress."

In 2 Cor. 7, we look over Paul's shoulder in the midst of such a struggle.

Paul has been misunderstood and falsely accused.

He has struggled with rejection and sought restoration but, as the chapter begins,

He doesn't yet know how those who have turned against him will respond.

He writes, explaining the motivation for his ministry, hoping they understand what "makes him tick" and appreciate his love for them."

EXPLANATION OF PAUL'S MINISTRY 2:14-7:16

He began his explanation with an expression of the . . .

Joy of ministry 2:14-16

Requirements for ministry 2:17-3:6a

Requirements only GOD can equip us to fulfill.

Basis of our ministry 3:6b-5:10

The eternal glory of God revealed in fragile human vessels.

Privileged position of ministry 5:11-21

Motivated by the fear of God and the love of God, . . .

It's our privilege to be representatives of God in the task of reconciling sinful men to God and seeing Him change their lives.

Last week we considered several specific...

Exhortations to the church based on that glorious ministry 6:1-7:1

We serve a God of salvation, in a day of salvation, therefore, we don't want to place obstacles in the way of people God calls to salvation.

Paul is determined not to let ANYTHING become an obstacle that will discredit his ministry as an ambassador. 3 *Neither should we!*

Separate from pagan alliances 6:14-7:1

A yoke is designed to join two beasts of burden together.
It doesn't work to join two different kinds of animals together.

They don't pull the same way!

We're the temple of God. 16b

God lives in us.

We're God's people.

Therefore *we ought to be differ-ent–distinct* from the world around us.

Abstain from evil deeds. 7:1

Corporately, we're the temple of God (16)

Individually, we're sons and daughters of God (18)

We should act like God's family . . .

We should be pure, as He is pure.

We should be holy, as He is holy.

We're HIS children.

We should live up to the family tradition.

Teaming up with God's children encourages us to live to please Him.

EXHORTATION TO RESPOND TO HIS LOVE 7:2

Paul appeals to them to return the love he has shown them.

He affirms that . . .

He hasn't treated anyone unjustly or done wrong to anyone.

He hasn't led anyone astray or contaminated them.

He hasn't used his position to take ad-vantage of anyone for personal gain.

If we're going to appeal to God's people to be all they should be, we'd better be sure we're modeling what it looks like!

As a faithful servant of God, Paul has acted in love toward them.

Therefore, he urges them to respond in love toward him.

PRAISE FOR RESULTS OF MINISTRY 7:3-16

Paul concludes his rejoicing about the blessings he enjoys in ministry, with a word of praise and encouragement for them.

His parental concern for them resulted in pain for both of them.

He felt great anxiety and deep hurt.

His letter caused them sorrow.

His lack of condemnation 7:3

Paul has no desire to condemn them.

He isn't saying this to put them down or criticize them.

He doesn't want to hurt them

—he wants to see them become all God wants them to

be.

He's speaking like a parent who sincerely says "*This hurts me more than it hurts you!*"

He has opened his heart to them—he loves them deeply.

He wants to unite with them—whether they live or die; either option is acceptable, as long as they do it *together!*

If we're just criticizing to build ourselves up, it's going to backfire!

This is about teaming up with God's people so that *together* we become all that God wants us to be.

His confidence in them 7:4

Paul has confidence in them.

He boasts about them.

He is filled with encouragement because of what he sees in them.

Therefore, **even in the midst of affliction, he's filled with joy.**

It's worth the price!

However much we suffer, when we see what God's doing in you, *it's worth it!*

Their response to his exhortation 7:5-16

Paul is encouraged because they respond appropriately to his exhortation.

His comfort from Titus' report 7:5-7

Their **temporary pain produces enduring joy.**

He went to Macedonia out of concern for them.

He couldn't sleep at night because of his concern

for them 5

Faithful service to God isn't all peace and pleasure!

Sometimes it's hard and painful.

It was for Paul, and it will be us too!

Then Titus showed up. 6-7

God COMFORTS him!

While Paul is encouraged by the good news Titus brings, . . .

The real solution to the frustration of ministry comes from God.

God is the source of all comfort.

As Paul stated in chapter 1,

"the God of all comfort, comforts us in our times of trouble."

He's encouraged to see Titus.

He's even more encouraged to hear about them!

They have been an encouragement to Titus.

They have been concerned about Paul.

They have been sorrowful about the things that have happened.

It was hard on them—but God used it to produce change.

They have changed their attitude.

Hearing what GOD has done in them, brings Paul encouragement.

When Titus informs Paul of their response, he celebrates what God has done in them.

Titus feels joy as he sees the sincerity of their faith and their responsiveness to instruction.

Their response to his previous letter 7:8-12

At times a loving father has to deal severely with his children, disciplining them for their own good.

Paul was concerned about the letter, fearing **it might hurt them.** **8**

It did hurt them.

But **they responded well to his concern and instruction.** **9**

Rather than allowing the sorrow to destroy them and eat them alive, it caused them to change their attitude and correct what was lacking.

Their sorrow produces good benefits—the godly repent and *change*.

That's the purpose of godly sorrow **10**

It's never easy to deal with at the time.

But, it leads to a change of attitude a n d
deliverance from destructive behavior.

Like parental discipline, it's hard at the moment.

It hurts for both parent and child,

But it brings good results.

Ultimately, it leaves no regrets.

If we deal with sorrow the way the world handles it, it leads to frustration, anger, and rebellion—it will “eat us alive”

—that kind of sorrow or regret doesn't lead to change

—it leads to rebellion and fighting.

—that response ultimately leads to death—it will destroy us!

Thus their sorrow is good—ultimately it's *temporary* sorrow for them both.

Look at the good that came out of it! **11-13**

They have corrected the problem and removed any guilt.

God has cleansed them and they stand innocent before Him.

Paul celebrates the fact that his purpose in writing has been accomplished.

He didn't just write for the sake of the one who wronged him.

He was writing for the benefit of the whole church, so they might together realize what God desires of them, and their involvement together in Paul's life and ministry.

As he observes their response to God's instruction through him,

It restores the JOY of serving Jesus!

Joy expressed by Titus 7:13-16

When Paul sees how they respond, it leads to celebration!

Finally Paul has cause to celebrate.

At last he can see a cause for joy.

The church has responded appropriately to Paul's love for them.

They too want to express their love for him.

Titus celebrates with him.

Their love and confidence grows.

God receives praise and glory.

Paul realizes that God has been at work.

God has restored the relationship.

God has given Him comfort.

Therefore, God gets the glory.

It's not about Paul.

He didn't "fix" them.

God has worked in their midst.

And ministry—the JOY of serving Jesus—is GOOD again!

WHAT PRINCIPLES FOR OUR LIVES DOES PAUL REVEAL?

HOW SHOULD WE PUT THEM INTO PRACTICE TODAY?

Sorrow (discipline) may not feel good at the time.

But, sorrow is good if it leads to a changed life.

When things aren't going the way we think they should, . . .

When we're discouraged because God's people aren't acting as they should, . . .

When we feel like throwing in the towel,...

We can trust GOD to work in His people and bring restoration.

He cares more about them than we do.

He won't let go.

He will be glorified in His church—*it's HIS CHURCH—NOT OURS!*

It's NOT a perfect church! But it's HIS church!

We can trust *Him* to do whatever is necessary to make it what He wants it to be. It may hurt for a while, but He WILL do it!

In HIS time, He will do His will in His church.

We can wait for HIM to do it!

We can trust Him to do it!

We can trust God to do His thing for His glory in His time!