

Our Work for God



SABBATH—AUGUST 29

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Corinthians 3:1–9; 2 Corinthians 4:7–18; 2 Corinthians 5:11–15.

MEMORY VERSE: “We have much trouble, but we do not give up. We are in hard places [trouble], but help always comes. People trouble [bother] us, but God is always with us. We are beaten, but we are not killed. We always feel as if our body is dying, just as Jesus died. Then the life of Jesus also can be seen in our body” (2 Corinthians 4:8–10, WE).



Our hope is that we will live in glory with Jesus after He comes back again.

THIS WEEK, we will look at 2 Corinthians 3–7. In these chapters, Paul talks about his work to win people to Jesus. Ellen G. White says, “What is the strongest proof that God chose someone to serve Him and preach the Good News about Jesus? The answer is the changed lives of the sinners that the pastor leads to Jesus. God makes the hearts and minds of these sinners holy. We see their new lives. Jesus lives within their hearts and minds. That’s how we know that God chose someone to serve Him and to be a leader and a teacher. When Jesus lives in our hearts and minds, we will have hope. Our hope is that we will live in glory with Jesus after He comes back again. [What is this glory? Jesus will give us new bodies that can’t get sick. He will give us everlasting life. We will live with Him forever.] So, when a pastor sees that his preaching is changing lives, his faith is made strong. The changed lives of these people are proof that God chose the pastor to serve Him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 328, adapted.

'LIVING LETTERS' FROM JESUS (2 Corinthians 3:1–9)

In what way can we be the same as a letter from Jesus? Read 2 Corinthians 3:1–9 for the answer.

In New Testament times, important people wrote letters of praise for others. These letters helped the people they wrote about to get promoted. The letters helped other leaders to trust and support these workers. Paul didn't have any of these letters. The changed lives of the Corinthians were proof that God gave Paul his work. At the same time, Paul knew that his efforts and skill didn't grow the church (2 Corinthians 3:4–6). God was the reason for the church's success. So, Paul refused to brag about his efforts (2 Corinthians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 2:2).

Paul uses the examples of the two promises to talk about his work: the old promise and the new promise. The old promise came from God who gave it to Moses to give to Israel. Paul and his friends taught the people about the new promise that God made to His people. We may think that the old promise gave God's people no hope of being saved. That is false. God offered His saving love to people in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament showed the Good News before it happened. "The Bible already said what would happen at a future time. It said that God would make the Gentiles [non-Jews] right with himself, if they believed in him. God showed this good news to Abraham a long time before it happened. He [God] said to Abraham, 'I will bless people from all countries because of you'" (Galatians 3:8, EASY).

In 2 Corinthians 3:1–4:6, we learn that the old promise is a symbol for the experience of people who depended on their own good behavior to save them. They tried to earn God's favor with their obedience. The new promise is a symbol for the experience of people who trust completely God's love and forgiveness. They depend on God to do everything He promised to do for them and in them.

As we can see, Paul is talking about two different experiences. He is not talking about two different messages about the Good News. God made one plan to save us. There is only one Good News. Paul says, God "did not save us because of any good things that we have done. He chose to do it [save us] because he is very kind. He decided to do that before time began, because of what Christ Jesus would do for us" (2 Timothy 1:9, EASY).



The old promise came from God who gave it to Moses to give to Israel.

SUFFERING FOR JESUS (2 Corinthians 4:7–18)

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7–18. Make a list of Paul’s sufferings in these verses. How did Paul live through these terrible experiences?



For sure, the words “life of Jesus” talk about the resurrection.

Hundreds of years ago in Old Bohemia, John Huss wrote, “Jesus is Master of this earth. We are sinners who live and die. But Jesus suffered for us! Why should we not suffer, too? God uses our suffering to make us clean from sin.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 105, adapted.

Paul was willing to suffer for Jesus. Paul knew he was the same as a pot made from clay that could break (2 Corinthians 4:7). At times, Paul felt hurt and confused about what to do. He got knocked down. He was hurt. But he did not lose hope. He didn’t let his sufferings destroy his faith. He didn’t believe that God left him alone (2 Corinthians 4:8, 9). Paul said, “We always feel as if our body is dying, just as Jesus died. Then the life of Jesus also can be seen in our body” (2 Corinthians 4:10, WE; also read verse 11).

What does Paul mean when he writes “just as Jesus died”? Paul may mean his sufferings in verses 8 and 9. Or he also may be talking about his understanding that he needed to die to self every moment, as Jesus died. The words “life of Jesus” may mean Paul’s escape from death. Or these words may mean the spiritual strength God gives us to win the fight against sin in this life. For sure, the words “life of Jesus” talk about the resurrection. As we already saw, the resurrection is the time when God’s people wake up from the dead at the Second Coming (2 Corinthians 4:12).

In 2 Corinthians 4:7–18, we read that God uses us to preach the Good News. We are weak. So, the praise for our success goes to God, and not us (2 Corinthians 4:15). Often, Bible workers suffer in their work for God. We may suffer much in this life. But our suffering is only for a short time compared with the everlasting reward that God will give us (2 Corinthians 4:17). “The things that we can see are only here for a short time. But the things that we cannot see will continue for ever” (2 Corinthians 4:18, EASY; also read 2 Corinthians 5:7).

Why must we always keep the hope of the resurrection alive in our hearts (1 Corinthians 15:52)?

**WORKING WITH JESUS TO BRING SINNERS
BACK TO GOD (2 Corinthians 5:11–15)**

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11–15. How do these verses show us that Paul’s work for God is all about Jesus?

Paul says, “We know that the Lord will judge us, so we are careful to obey him. Because of that, we tell God’s message to people. We want them to believe in God. And God himself knows that we try to do what is right” (2 Corinthians 5:11, EASY; also read verse 10). That’s why Paul wants to obey God in everything. Paul loves Jesus and trusts in His love for him. So, Paul wants to serve the Lord with all his heart (Deuteronomy 10:12).

Paul’s work is all about Jesus, and not himself. Paul doesn’t praise himself. Paul brags about Jesus (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul says, “But I do not want to say any great [good] things about myself. The only thing that makes me great is our Lord Jesus Christ’s death on the cross” (Galatians 6:14, EASY). Paul wants to give the Corinthians a good reason to brag about Him (2 Corinthians 5:12): “No, we are not praising ourselves again. But we are telling you this [our story] so that you may really be proud of [filled with pride for] us. Then you will be ready to answer people who are proud of themselves [filled with pride about their own selves]” (2 Corinthians 5:12, WE). These people who are filled with pride are false teachers. They don’t really care about people as Paul does.

Paul says he is a messenger for Jesus. What is his message all about? Read 2 Corinthians 5:16–21; Colossians 1:19–23; and Ephesians 2:13–16.

Paul’s message is: “ ‘Come back to God!’ ” (2 Corinthians 5:20, EASY). Again and again, Paul preaches this idea in 2 Corinthians 5:16–21. God accepts us because Jesus died for us on the cross. When we belong to Jesus, God makes us new people (2 Corinthians 5:17). God expects us to join Jesus in His work to bring sinners back to God. We must announce the Good News about Jesus to everyone (2 Corinthians 5:19). When we do this work, we become “messengers for Christ [Jesus]” (2 Corinthians 5:20, WE).

How does Jesus’ love for you help you to share Him with people who don’t know God?



Paul doesn’t praise himself. Paul brags about Jesus (2 Corinthians 12:9).

GOD WANTS US TO BE HOLY (2 Corinthians 6:11–7:1)

As we saw yesterday, Paul tells church members in Corinth to come back to God. Then Paul asks them to live a holy life. How? Paul gives us the answer: we must separate ourselves from people and things that separate us from God.

What does it mean to live a holy life? Read 2 Corinthians 6:11–7:1 for the answer.



A holy life is not something we do. But God expects us to do our part and say no to sin.

In 2 Corinthians 6:11–7:1, Paul talks about love. Church members must love each other as brothers and sisters (1 Corinthians 6:11–13). They show that they are one with God when they try hard to be at peace with each other.

Next, Paul warns church members not to separate from God. Paul then gives church members six rules. These rules will help church members to stay near to God in their hearts. (1) “Do not be joined together with those who do not belong to Christ [the Savior]” (2 Corinthians 6:14, NLV). (2) “So come away from those people” (2 Corinthians 6:17, ERV). (3) “Separate yourselves from them” (2 Corinthians 6:17, ERV). (4) “Don’t touch anything that is not clean” (2 Corinthians 6:17, ERV). (5) “We must keep ourselves clean from everything that makes our bodies or our spirits unclean [not clean; dirty]” (2 Corinthians 7:1, EASY). (6) “We should try to be altogether [fully] holy because we respect God” (2 Corinthians 7:1, WE). These rules show us that a holy God wants us to live holy lives. We also must separate from false gods.

In 2 Corinthians 6:11–7:1, you also will see seven promises. These promises show God’s plan for the church to be the same as a holy temple. (1) God will live in us, the same as a temple. (2) God will walk with us. (3) God will be our God. (4) We shall be His people. (5) God will accept us. (6) God will be a Father to us. (7) We shall be God’s sons and daughters. (Read 2 Corinthians 6:16, 17, 18.)

Do you see the first four promises? When we allow God to do these things for us, He can accept us. Then He will be our Father, and He will make us His children. This shows us that a holy life is a gift. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. A holy life is not something we do. But God expects us to do our part and say no to sin.

What do God’s promises in 2 Corinthians 6:16–18 tell us about what it means to be holy?

HOPE AND JOY (2 Corinthians 7)

How does Paul feel when he learns that the Corinthians were sorry for their behavior? Read 2 Corinthians 7 for the answer.

Paul tells the Corinthians that his heart is filled with love for them (2 Corinthians 7:3, ERV; also read 2 Corinthians 6:11). Paul also asks the Corinthians to love him (2 Corinthians 7:2).

The Corinthians loved Paul and his friends. That's why Paul feels so much joy in verse 4. Paul's words show the happiness in his heart: "I know you and I trust you. I am proud of you. You have helped me to be strong. So, even when we have many troubles, I am still [continue to be] very happy" (2 Corinthians 7:4, EASY). Paul is filled with hope and joy. We can help our pastors to feel hope and joy, too, when we give our hearts completely to Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 7:5–16, Paul explains some more about his reason for his hope and joy. These two ideas fill these verses. This part of the letter ends the same way it started: with hope in God (2 Corinthians 1:3–7). Paul's kind words in 2 Corinthians 7 comes from the happiness he feels. His painful letter to the Corinthians helped them.

Titus gives Paul the good news about his letter. But God is the real reason for Paul's hope and joy (2 Corinthians 7:6). That's why Paul says that God "helps us every time we have trouble" (2 Corinthians 1:3, WE; also read verse 4).

Yes, Paul's painful letter caused the Corinthians to feel very sad. But God used that letter to help the Corinthians to feel sorry for their sins and stop doing them (2 Corinthians 7:9–11). When the Corinthians started to feel sad about their sins, that was part of God's plan (2 Corinthians 7:11) to help them to stop sinning. God uses our sad and painful experiences to help save us (2 Corinthians 7:10). This news brings much joy to the heart of God's servants.

Did you do something against the Lord in the past that made you feel deeply sorry? How did this experience help you to stop sinning and come back to God?



God used that painful letter to help the Corinthians to feel sorry for their sins and stop doing them (2 Corinthians 7:9–11).



“God gave us this message to share with everyone on earth: Come back to God.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Re-read Ellen G. White, “The Message Heeded,” pages 323–334, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“We must show everyone in heaven and on earth that God is forgiving. We must show that God loves us. He brings us back to Himself with His love. We feel sorry in our hearts for our sins. We stop sinning and come back to God. We believe that Jesus died for our sins. We understand that God accepts us because of Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *Special Testimonies on Education*, page 223, adapted.

“As a church, God gave us much Bible truth. These truths are very important. God gave us this Bible truth to help bless the human family. God gave us this message to share with everyone on earth: Come back to God. God gives us His strength to help other people come back to Him.”—Ellen G. White, Letter 32, 1903, adapted.

When we come back to God, what must we do? We must live holy lives. Ellen G. White talks about this topic. She explains what Paul meant when he said, “We should try to be altogether [completely] holy because we respect God with fear [obedience]” (2 Corinthians 7:1, WE). Ellen G. White says that Paul “wanted to help the new Christians in Corinth to grow in faith and to become strong. Paul wanted them to have deep love in their hearts for God. Paul wanted them to live completely for Jesus and to build up His kingdom.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, page 201, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Paul says we are the same as pots made from clay. In these pots is a treasure from heaven. This treasure is the Good News about Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:7). For sure, clay pots can break. But how can our weakness show the Bible truth about the Good News?
- ② What does it mean to become a new person in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17)? How does this new life change the way we live each day? How did Jesus make you a new person?
- ③ In 2 Corinthians 6:4, 5, Paul gives a long list of his painful experiences of suffering for the Good News. What does Paul think and feel about his sufferings (read 2 Corinthians 6:6, 7)? How does Paul’s answer help you with your own suffering?

JAKE'S PRAYER DIARY

(The name of the Bible worker in this story was changed to Jake. To protect him, the place where he works is not named.)

Jake is a Bible worker. His job is to start new churches in places where people don't know about Jesus. Jake knew he must pray every day now that he and his wife were living in a country where there were very few Christians. Jake decided to keep a prayer diary. He wrote down everything he prayed for each month. Then he waited to see how God answered his prayers.

Jake met with a group of members at the new church he started. Together, they made a plan to study the Bible with the visitors who came to their church. The church members got together each day of the week to pray for the visitors.

During one house church meeting, a member introduced Jake to Omar. Omar was a cook who found Jesus many years ago. The Holy Spirit helped Jake to start a conversation with Omar. Soon, the two men promised to meet.

A few days later, Omar visited Jake. Omar told Jake how he learned about Jesus as he read the Bible. For the past 15 years, Omar was very careful. He didn't talk to too many Christians because he didn't want to lose his life. Omar's family and friends didn't know that he was a Christian. Jake listened with joy as Omar said that he wanted to be baptized.

From that time on, Jake and Omar met almost daily to study the Bible.

During that same month, Jake met Wassim. Wassim was a young man who left his country with all its troubles and went to Europe. Wassim had many questions about God and religion. He started to explore Christianity. In Christianity, Wassim found peace that he never knew before. When Wassim went back to his country, he searched online for other local Christians. Soon, he found Jake's house church.

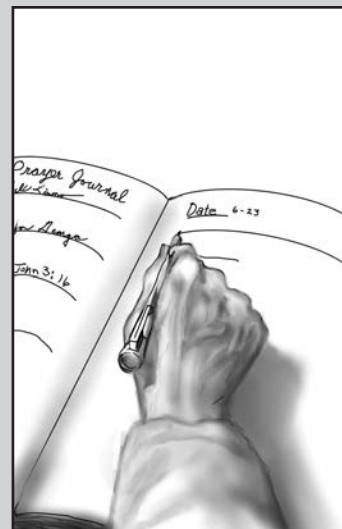
Jake was happy when he learned that Wassim also wanted to be baptized. Jake met each week to study with Wassim. They studied about faith, Jesus, and everlasting life.

After Jake's first month of prayers, he was filled with love and wonder for God's answers. A month ago, Jake asked the Lord to help him give Bible studies. Now he had two students who loved studying the Bible!

Jake is now getting ready to write down his prayers in his diary for month #2. His heart is filled with joy. He knows that his work for God is just getting started. Jake feels God's strength leading him forward.

To learn about the work that Global Mission Bible workers do to start new churches, visit bit.ly/GMPioneers.

INSIDE Story



Jake wrote down everything he prayed for each month. Then he waited to see how God answered his prayers.