

THE LOOKOUT

MAY 2024

Unit: 2 Corinthians Theme: Character

Overview: We move from a study of 1 Corinthians to a study of 2 Corinthians. Scholars debate how many letters were written to this troubled church (1 Corinthians 5:9; 2 Corinthians 2:3-4, 9; 10:9-10). But the completed canon of the New Testament includes these two. The word *troubles* could be used to summarize 1 Corinthians. Second Corinthians could be summarized with the word *character*. Someone said, "Reputation is what others think of you; character is what you really are." Paul did not have the best reputation, but he did have outstanding character; his character is on display in 2 Corinthians. Students will learn that integrity, perseverance, hope, and generosity are key qualities of character.

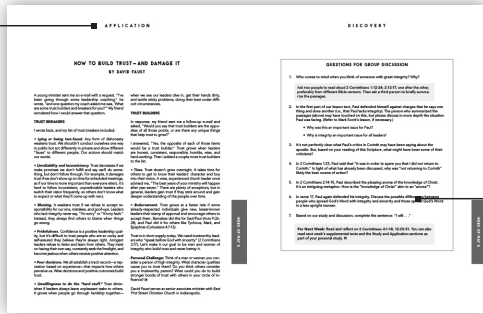
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF MAY 5, 2024

LESSON AIM: **As God is faithful, make your word "yes" or "no," but not both.**

UNIT: 2 Corinthians

THEME: Character

LESSON TEXT: 2 Corinthians 1:12-24; 2:12-17

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 2 Corinthians 4:2

STUDY

INTEGRITY

BY MARK SCOTT

Integrity means to live only one life. It means to be consistent, not a vacillator or one who is fickle. It means to be unmixed, uncompromised, and ethically honest. Integrity is a moral compass. The apostle Paul experienced unjustified criticism of his integrity from the church in Corinth.

After the opening greeting of this Epistle (2 Corinthians 1:1-2), Paul praised God for the comfort that he gives his people (1:3-7). Paul himself needed that comfort because of the afflictions he had to endure (1:8-11). One such affliction Paul had to endure was to often be misunderstood by the people he desired to serve. So, in verse 12, Paul began to defend his ministerial integrity.

Change of Plans Does Not Equal Lack of Integrity

2 Corinthians 1:12-17, 23-24

Paul's critics took undue advantage of him when he changed his plans. They pointed to those changed plans as evidence of dishonesty. Paul's defense was to say that his life was an open book. He lived one life. He lived with *integrity* (single-hearted devotion) and *godly sincerity* (pure and honorable motives). He did not rely on *worldly wisdom*. He instead relied on *God's grace*. He hoped that God's grace would speak for him to the people.

The problem was, Paul was sailing back and forth across the Aegean Sea as he made his way between the churches in Asia Minor and those in Macedonia and Achaia. He ultimately wanted to return to Judea with an offering for the saints there. But his plans were derailed for a number of reasons, not the least of which was his anxiety for the church at Corinth. Paul was so concerned about the church (he could not get them off his mind) that he changed his travel plans (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:13). Paul rebuffed his critics' charges by saying that he did not flippantly say "yes" to things and "no" to things without thought, prayer, and a concern for the church. The language is similar to Matthew 5:37. Paul desired to *spare* the church; he did not desire to *lord it over* the church.

The Triune God Is the Epitome of Integrity

2 Corinthians 1:18-22

Paul rooted his confidence for ministry and his integrity in the Triune God. All three members of the Trinity are mentioned in this paragraph. God is faithful. Jesus is the *amen* of the promises. The Holy Spirit is the deposit for

the future. Paul had integrity because God saved him and sanctified him.

God is not a vacillator. His faithfulness, evident in his *message* (logos), was not yes and no. And Jesus and the gospel that Paul preached about him was not yes and no. Before Paul defined the Holy Spirit's role in his ministry, he paused to offer an excursus about Jesus. Jesus was always the "Yes" man for God. In fact, all the promises of God find their yes in Jesus. (That reality may actually be somewhat of a hermeneutical construct in the Bible. Many of the promises in the Old Testament that many people relate to Christ's second coming might actually refer to his first coming.) Jesus is the grand *amen* of God because, as Christian educator Tom Ewald said, "He is God's dynamic affirmative to every negative dimension of life."

God made Paul *stand firm*, anointed him, sealed him, and placed his Spirit on Paul as a *deposit* (like a down payment on a house) to guarantee what would come later. If God was behind Paul's ministry, then that ministry must be filled with integrity.

Concern for Followers Is Evidence of Integrity

2 Corinthians 2:12-17

A hireling or false teacher would care nothing about his followers, but Paul was genuinely and deeply concerned about the Corinthian believers. In fact, he was so concerned that even though God had provided him an open door (for evangelism?), his spirit was restless. Paul was going through Macedonia to see the Corinthians when he ran into Titus (see 2 Corinthians 7:6).

Titus brought Paul such a good word about the Corinthians that Paul broke out in praise to God in a several-chapter discourse about the ministry of the new covenant, the nature of the ministry of reconciliation, and the suffering that the gospel brings to its workers (2:14—7:16). Using the imagery of a Roman army returning from a victorious battle, Paul spoke about the *aroma* of God in the gospel. It is a good aroma to those who are saved, but a bad aroma to those who are lost. That means some will embrace the message while others will not. But Paul's mind was pure and his conscience was clear. He did not *peddle the word of God for profit* (as some did). He served God with *sincerity* and integrity. ■

HOW TO BUILD TRUST—AND DAMAGE IT

BY DAVID FAUST

A young minister sent me an e-mail with a request. “I’ve been going through some leadership coaching,” he wrote, “and one question my coach asked me was, ‘What are some trust builders and breakers for you?’” My friend wondered how I would answer that question.

TRUST BREAKERS

I wrote back, and my list of trust breakers included:

- **Lying or being two-faced.** Any form of dishonesty weakens trust. We shouldn’t conduct ourselves one way in public but act differently in private and show different “faces” to different people. Our actions should match our words.
- **Unreliability and inconsistency.** Trust decreases if we make promises we don’t fulfill and say we’ll do something, but don’t follow through. For example, it damages trust if we don’t show up on time for scheduled meetings, as if our time is more important than everyone else’s. It’s hard to follow inconsistent, unpredictable leaders who switch their vision frequently, so others don’t know what to expect or what they’ll come up with next.
- **Blaming.** It weakens trust if we refuse to accept responsibility for our sins, mistakes, and goof-ups. Leaders who lack integrity never say, “I’m sorry” or “It’s my fault.” Instead, they always find others to blame when things go wrong.
- **Pridefulness.** Confidence is a positive leadership quality, but it’s difficult to trust people who are so cocky and self-assured they believe they’re always right. Arrogant leaders refuse to listen and learn from others. They insist on having their own way, constantly seek the limelight, and become jealous when others receive positive attention.
- **Poor decisions.** We all establish a track record—a reputation based on experience—that impacts how others perceive us. Wise decisions and positive outcomes build trust.
- **Unwillingness to do the “hard stuff.”** Trust diminishes if leaders always leave unpleasant tasks to others. It grows when people go through hardship together—

when we see our leaders dive in, get their hands dirty, and tackle sticky problems, doing their best under difficult circumstances.

TRUST BUILDERS

In response, my friend sent me a follow-up e-mail and asked, “Would you say that trust builders are the opposites of all those points, or are there any unique things that help trust to grow?”

I answered, “Yes, the opposite of each of those items would be a trust builder.” Trust grows when leaders are honest, consistent, responsible, humble, wise, and hard-working. Then I added a couple more trust builders to the list.

- **Time.** Trust doesn’t grow overnight. It takes time for others to get to know their leaders’ character and buy into their vision. A wise, experienced church leader once advised me, “The best years of your ministry will happen after year seven.” There are plenty of exceptions, but in general, leaders gain trust if they stick around and gain deeper understanding of the people over time.
- **Endorsement.** Trust grows at a faster rate if some already-respected individuals give new, lesser-known leaders their stamp of approval and encourage others to accept them. Barnabas did this for Saul/Paul (Acts 9:26-28), and Paul did it for others like Tychicus, Mark, and Epaphras (Colossians 4:7-13).

Trust is in short supply today. We need trustworthy leaders who “speak before God with sincerity” (2 Corinthians 2:17). Let’s make it our goal to be men and women of integrity who build trust and never betray it.

Personal Challenge: Think of a man or woman you consider a person of high integrity. What character qualities cause you to trust them? Do you think others consider you a trustworthy person? What could you do to build stronger bonds of trust with others in your circle of influence? ■

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DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Who comes to mind when you think of someone with great integrity? Why?

Ask two people to read aloud **2 Corinthians 1:12-24; 2:12-17**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

2. In the first part of our lesson text, Paul defended himself against charges that he says one thing and does another (i.e., that Paul lacks integrity). The person who summarized the passages (above) may have touched on this, but please discuss in more depth the situation Paul was facing. (Refer to Mark Scott's lesson, if necessary.)
 - Why was this an important issue for Paul?
 - Why is integrity an important issue for all leaders?
3. It's not perfectly clear what Paul's critics in Corinth may have been saying about the apostle. But, based on your reading of this Scripture, what might have been some of their criticisms?
4. In 2 Corinthians 1:23, Paul said that "it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth." In light of what has already been discussed, why was "not returning to Corinth" likely the best course of action?
5. In 2 Corinthians 2:14-15, Paul described the pleasing aroma of the knowledge of Christ. It's an intriguing metaphor. How is the "knowledge of Christ" akin to an "aroma"?
6. In verse 17, Paul again defended his integrity. Discuss the possible differences between people who spread God's Word with integrity and sincerity and those spread God's Word in a less upright manner.
7. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **2 Corinthians 4:1-18; 11:23-31**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■