

# 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.

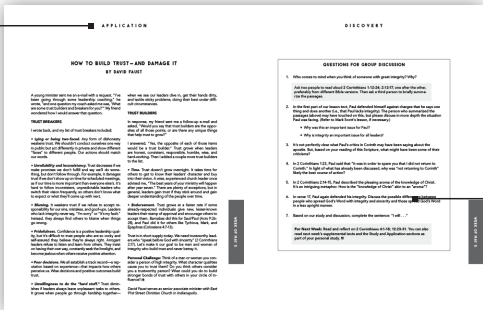
## HOW TO USE

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 19, 2024**

**LESSON AIM:** Take comfort that "if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."

**UNIT:** 2 Corinthians

**THEME:** Character

**LESSON TEXT:** 2 Corinthians 5:1-21

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Psalm 147:10-11; John 14:1-6;  
1 Corinthians 15:35-56

## STUDY

### HOPE

BY MARK SCOTT

*Hope* is the fuel that throttles faith. It drives it forward, and as such, it is a powerful motivator. Anne Lamott said, “Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come.” The gospel is hope-filled, and ministers of reconciliation need buckets of it to continue to *persuade* others.

In this beautiful section about the ministry, Paul has already stated that we have a ministry (2 Corinthians 4:1) and we have a treasure (4:7). Then he stated, “We have . . . an eternal house in heaven, *not built by human hands*” (5:1, emphasis mine). In hope we long for that forever home.

#### Hope Sustains Us in the Daily Grind

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Paul called our current address—the human body—an *earthly tent*. Someday it will be *destroyed*. But Christians need not worry because they have a *building from God, an eternal house in heaven*. It will last because it was not built with *human hands*.

But the grind is so daily. Now we groan (to be made narrow, or contracted, or squeezed) and are *burdened* (weighed down). Our preference would be to go to our *heavenly dwelling*. That is where the earthly tent will be *clothed* for eternity. Christians need the heavenly clothes of immortality that can be provided only by Christ. The old life constrained by the things of this world will be *swallowed up* (as in drinking something down) by God’s life. God can bring this about in our daily grind, and he has given proof of that by giving the Holy Spirit like a *deposit* on that heavenly home (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:22).

Part of the daily grind is realizing that so long as we remain on this stained planet, we *are away from the Lord*. But faith makes us *confident* (to be of good cheer and have courage)—used twice in this passage—that we shall be *at home with the Lord* someday. Presently, we live in such a way as to please the Lord. This present service to him is rooted in the reality that *we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*. Judgments and rewards will be given out then (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15), so this makes the daily grind worth it.

#### Hope Motivates Us in the Glorious Ministry

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

This section is clearly one of the high-water marks of New Testament Scripture. In a similar fashion as Romans

3:21-26, it marks out how Jesus’ death on the cross made us right with God. But in this case that message of the cross is placed within a missional context.

Paul gave two great motivations for sharing the message of God’s reconciliation. The fear of the Lord caused Paul to persuade others of their need for the gospel, and the love of Christ compelled him to help others become new creations. Paul’s credibility to persuade others was rooted in his “open book” policy of ministry. He did not need commendation from the church (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:1-3). The church knew his heart. He lived a life of good conscience (Acts 23:1). He wanted the Corinthians to take pride in what really mattered (i.e., matters of the heart).

The glorious ministry is centered in the death and life of Jesus. Jesus died—a large historical fact and huge theological truth. So, in a sense, the day that he died is when all those who accept him also died. Believers died with Jesus (Romans 6:3-4). This death announced Christians’ death to self so that they could *no longer live for themselves* but for Jesus.

Earthly constraints made the people look at Jesus from a *worldly point of view* (fleshly). Jesus was at one time just an olive-skin colored Jew. But when they came to really know who Jesus was, they could see that he was the Savior of the world and the only One who could make them into new creatures.

This glorious ministry was all God’s idea. He chose by his salvific act to *reconcile* (bring together parties that were alienated) people to himself. But then he went a step further. He entrusted this message to his *ambassadors* (elders or presbyters). A stunning truth is that God makes his *appeal* (encouragement) through people. He still uses people to save people. He has chosen, due to Christ’s sacrifice, not to count people’s sins against them. God was “hugging the world to himself” (Cotton Patch Version of the Bible) through Christ. God made the sinless Jesus sin for us. The result? We could become the *righteousness of God*. The appeal of this glorious ministry is simple: Be reconciled to God. It is your only hope. ■

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## APPLICATION

### SOMETHING GREATER THAN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

BY DAVID FAUST

What makes the great outdoors so great? Fresh air and wide-open spaces? Wildflowers and mountain vistas? Starry, moonlit nights? Sunrises and sunsets that paint the horizon with orange, pink, and purple? For me, the answer is “all of the above.”

God has given me opportunities to travel widely (a blessing for which I am very grateful), so I have seen Yellowstone’s bison and bears, and its canyons, prairies, waterfalls, and geysers. I have gazed in awe at the Rockies, the Alps, and the Smokies. I have seen Japan’s Mount Fuji and Switzerland’s Matterhorn. I have watched eagles soar overhead while whales breach off the coast of Alaska. I have strolled the beaches of Florida and California, and watched waves crash on Maine’s rocky shore. I have seen vineyards in Germany and France where grapevines in orderly rows cling to steep cliffs sloping down to the river below.

Earlier this year I walked through Ireland’s Mourne Mountains admiring the same pastel colors, crystal clear creeks, and lush green foliage that C. S. Lewis saw when he walked those trails while writing his *Chronicles of Narnia*. In that forest I noticed a boulder with words carved into its side. In large letters, someone had engraved this message on the stone: “STOP. Look around and praise the name of Him who made it all.”

#### Camping Out

Nature’s beauty points to God’s “eternal power and divine nature” (Romans 1:20).

A hymn writer suggested these words for us to sing and pray: “Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above, join with all nature in manifold witness to Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.” As someone put it, “Nature is God’s Braille for a blind world.”

Yet, ever since the Garden of Eden, the Creator has stamped these natural wonders with a solemn label:

“Temporary.” Physical science and biblical theology agree that the earth is on a path to destruction.

This world’s majesty and misery, glory and gore, dignity and disappointment, won’t last forever. Nor will all our buildings, money, and art. Whether we’re young or old, agile or fragile, healthy or sick, beautiful or plain, our bodies are headed toward death.

The apostle Paul compared our bodies to tents—temporary dwelling places where we camp out for a while. “We groan and are burdened” (2 Corinthians 5:4) as we await the time when we will fold up the tents of our earthly bodies and be done with them; but we look forward to the “eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands” that awaits us in the resurrection (vv. 1, 5). God has in store for us something far greater than the great outdoors.

#### Breaking Camp

If this fallen world still contains so much natural beauty, what will it be like in the “new heaven and a new earth” where there will be “no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Revelation 21:1, 4)? For Christians, death means breaking camp and exchanging the temporary tents of our mortal bodies for permanent mansions in glory.

So, let’s get outdoors and enjoy God’s creation, and let’s be good stewards of it; but let’s never elevate temporary things above the Creator. Nature can point us to God, but it cannot replace him. This world—including its beautiful things—will pass away; but our hope rests in the everlasting Creator who delights in making things new.

**Personal Challenge:** Go for a walk outdoors and notice the different ways God has revealed himself in nature. Praise the Lord for being not only the powerful Creator, but also your loving Father. ■

## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is one of the biggest risks you ever took based on your trust in another person? Did that turn out well?

Ask two people to read aloud **2 Corinthians 5:1-21**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. This lesson is simply entitled "Hope."
  - Does the word *hope* hold special meaning for you? Explain.
  - How does hope sustain you and/or motivate you?
3. In verse 5, Paul wrote that God has given us the Spirit as a deposit to guarantee what is to come.
  - How has the gift of the Spirit given you confidence as you "live by faith, not by sight" (v. 7)?
4. (Reread v. 14.) Give an example of something Christ's love has compelled you to do.
5. What is the difference between seeing people from a "worldly" point of view (v. 16) and a "heavenly" point of view?
6. Verse 17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"
  - What sort of changes have you witnessed in people who have become new creations in Christ?
7. To what extent do you share in the "ministry of reconciliation" (v. 18) where you work? In your church? In your neighborhood? In your hobby or during your recreation?
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **2 Corinthians 8:1-12; 9:6-15**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■