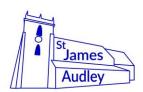


Picture © @Around Audley. Used with permission.

Bible Reading Notes

October 2021 - 2 Corinthians







How to use these Bible Reading Notes:

These Bible reading notes are a resource to help you feed on God's word a little and often and allow it to change your life. If you miss a day (or several!), don't feel guilty or try to catch up; just pick up wherever you left off – it doesn't matter if it's the wrong date.

Here are some tips on how to get the most out of this:

- 1. Find a time and place where you can be quiet but awake.

 Maybe set an alarm on your phone to remind you each day.
- 2. Pray. Ask God to help you understand what he says.
- 3. Use the notes to help you think about the Bible passage (use a good translation of the Bible like the NIV).
 - 'Read' tells you which verses to read.
 - 'Apply' shows how it affects you.
 - 'Pray' suggests ways to talk to God about it.
- 4. Pray about what you have read.
- 5. Look for a chance to share with someone what God has been saying to you.

These notes are easy to install on most phones or tablets.

Install the 'PrayerMate' App and you'll find it under 'Add Subject →

Biblical prayers & devotions → Real Food.'

If you have any problems, email info@prayermate.net.

Friday 1st October

What does authentic gospel ministry look like?

"Not like the apostle Paul's" – that seemed to be the answer floating around in Corinth. Only a few years after Paul had founded the Corinthian church, his relationship with them had become quite troubled. To make matters worse, false teachers ("super-apostles") had recently arrived in the church and actively sought to undermine the apostle. In response, Paul wrote the Corinthians this letter imploring them to recognise and fully embrace genuine gospel ministry.

Read 2 Corinthians 1v1-7

- Why do you think Paul starts his letter by stating his credentials (v1)?
- What is Paul's attitude towards his and Timothy's suffering (v3-5)?
- Why does he praise God despite their suffering?
- How does Paul's suffering benefit the Corinthians (v6-7)?

Apply

- What do you make of gospel ministers who look weak and suffer? How would you view a weak and suffering pastor?
 How should we view them?
- Have you met gospel workers who can testify to God's comfort in their suffering? How has their testimony encouraged you?
- How has the God of compassion comforted you personally recently? Who could you share this with?

Saturday 2nd October

Read 2 Corinthians 1v8-14

- How has his experience of suffering boosted Paul's confidence in God, both for this life and the next (v10-11)?
- What is Paul's aim in writing to the Corinthians (v14)?
- Given what we've seen in the letter already why might the Corinthians not fully boast in Paul at the moment?

Apply

- How does knowing the God who raises the dead give you confidence in the midst your own suffering?
- Why might we find it hard to boast in gospel ministers who face opposition and suffering?
- What do you think it would look like practically to boast in them?

Sunday 3rd October

Read 2 Corinthians 1v15-24

• How did the Corinthians seem to interpret Paul's change of travel plans (v15-17)?

Paul did change his travel plans, but his message and aim did not change (v18-19). He was always concerned with proclaiming Jesus in whom all of God's promises find their fulfilment and through whom God established the Corinthians in their faith (v20-22).

- How should this convince the Corinthians of the integrity of Paul's ministry?
- What do we learn about Paul's motivations both in wanting to visit Corinth in the first place and then in deciding not to come after all (v15, v23-24)?

Apply

Though Paul had previously announced two more visits to Corinth, he had decided to put his plans on hold because his previous visit had ended up being "painful". Instead, he had written a letter to the Corinthians which he sent via Titus (2 Cor 2v1-4). The Corinthians thought Paul's change of travel plans was a sign he was just self-interested (worldly), but Paul insists he acted for their good: he wanted to sort things out first, so that on his next visit he would have an opportunity to preach Christ, to build them up and bring them joy.

- What is your gut reaction when gospel ministers make decisions that you find painful or don't agree with? How do these verses help us evaluate such situations?
- In your own ministry, is your message that of God's faithful promise-keeping in Jesus? Is your motivation to build others up in their faith?

Monday 4th October

Read 2 Corinthians 2v1-13

• Why did Paul write the letter he sent with Titus instead of visiting the Corinthians (v1-4)?

Verse 5 indicates that during the "painful" visit one particular individual sinned and caused Paul grief. In the letter he sent with Titus, Paul had therefore asked the Corinthians to discipline the offender (v5-6). Now that this had happened, Paul asked them to forgive him (v6-8).

 What were Paul's motivations in his instructions to the Corinthians (v5-11)?

In v12-13 we see how anxious Paul was to hear back from Titus how the Corinthians had responded to his letter.

 Overall, how would you summarise Paul's concern and feelings for the Corinthians in the letter so far?

Apply

- When gospel ministers rebuke and challenge you or others to be godly, do you tend to trust them or are you quick to question or criticise them? Why? How would you be able to tell their motivations?
- What have we seen are the hallmarks of a genuine gospel minister? How do these challenge and encourage you in your own ministry to others?

Tuesday 5th October

Read 2 Corinthians 2v14-3v6

- Why did the Corinthians regard Paul's ministry as unimpressive (2v15-16, 3v1)?
- Why was Paul (unlike others) not willing to water down the gospel, even though to many people his message "stank", and they rejected it (2v14-3v6)?
- What proof is there that God was at work through Paul's ministry (2v15, 3v2-3)? So, why should the Corinthians rejoice in Paul's ministry rather than view it as a failure?

Apply

- Do you ever question faithful gospel ministry because it looks unsuccessful? How does this passage help us to have realistic expectations and to evaluate if gospel ministry is authentic or not?
- Why would it be dangerous if we were put off by the low success rate of a faithful gospel ministry?
- How does this passage encourage you in your own evangelism when it feels unsuccessful?

Wednesday 6th October

Read 2 Corinthians 3v7-18

- List all the differences between Old and New Covenant ministries (v7-18). Why is gospel ministry so amazingly glorious?
- How should the comparison between the Old and New Covenant ministries help the Corinthians see Paul's ministry in the proper light, even if it looks unimpressive on the outside?

Apply

- Do you think of gospel ministry as this glorious? Spend some time meditating on it!
- How does this passage give you confidence in the message of Jesus, even when it often looks unsuccessful?

Thursday 7th October

Read 2 Corinthians 4v1-6

- If the message of Jesus really is so glorious, why don't more people believe it (v3-4)?
- What difference does it make to Paul that gospel ministry is glorious, even if many are blind to it (v1-2)?
- What does it suggest about the Corinthians if they don't see gospel ministry as glorious?

Apply

- How does this passage help you have realistic expectations of people's responses to the gospel?
- How does it help you embrace faithful gospel proclamation?

Verse 6 tells us that God performed a creation-like miracle in those who have come to believe so that they can see his glory.

• How does this warm your heart?

Friday 8th October

Read 2 Corinthians 4v7-18

- Paul just told the Corinthians that faithful gospel ministry is really glorious. But what did being part of this ministry look and feel like for Paul on the ground (v7-12)?
- What kept Paul going (v13-18)?
- Why did God keep Paul weak (v7)? What was Paul's perseverance and endurance meant to show the Corinthians?

Apply

- Can you think of examples of suffering gospel workers keeping going because of the resurrection hope they have? How does this encourage you?
- How does having faith in the resurrection help you personally not to lose heart at the moment?

Saturday 9th October

Read 2 Corinthians 4v16-5v10

- According to these verses, how does resurrection life compare with life now?
- How does this explain why Paul and his ministry team didn't lose heart despite all the hardship they faced?
- What does it suggest about the Corinthians if they fail to make sense of weak-looking-yet-persevering Paul?

Apply

- Spend some time meditating on how much better resurrection life will be than life now!
- How can you keep a more eternal perspective in your life and ministry? How does seeing the perseverance of suffering Christians help you with this?

Sunday 10th October

Read 2 Corinthians 5v11-6v2

- How did the Corinthians evaluate others, including Paul (v11-13)? In contrast, how did the gospel shape how Paul regarded others (v14-17)?
- What role has God given Paul and his co-workers (v18 onwards)?

So far 2 Corinthians might seem like a very Paul-focused letter in which the apostle spends lots of time defending himself and his ministry.

 But given Paul's role, why is it so important that the Corinthians take pride in Paul (v12) and relate rightly to him (v20 onwards)?

Apply

- How does this passage help us see the importance of faithful gospel workers?
- How would we be able to tell if a gospel minister's heart is shaped by the love of Christ?
- How should the gospel impact the way we view others (non-Christians, Christians, gospel workers)?
- How does God's offer of reconciliation made possible through Jesus warm your heart (v18-21)?

Monday 11th October

Read 2 Corinthians 6v3-13

- Paul has spent the first few chapters of this letter defending his ministry. How does today's passage sum up all that we've seen about the shape and motivation of Paul's ministry (v3-10)?
- What does Paul want to persuade the Corinthians of (v3-4a, v11-12)?
- If Paul's ministry is indeed commendable in every way, what's the real issue behind the Corinthian's rejection of him? How does Paul turn the tables on them (v11-13)?

Apply

- Which of the seeming 'weaknesses' of faithful gospel ministry which Paul talked about do you find most offputting?
- If one of us has a problem with a gospel minister/ministry, how can we help each other work out if the problem is with the minister/ministry or us? Why might we be slow at realising/acknowledging the problem could be with us?

Tuesday 12th October

Read 2 Corinthians 6v14-7v4

Paul continues to expose that the real problem behind his troubled relationship with the Corinthians was not his ministry, but the Corinthians themselves. They were not opening their hearts to the apostle (7v2-4).

- But why not? What were their hearts drawn to instead (6v13-16, 7v1)?*
- What is so amazing about being one of God's people (v16b-18)?
- By not opening their hearts to Paul, who else were the Corinthians in real danger of rejecting? Why would this be so tragic?

*NB in the context of Paul's letter, being yoked to unbelievers (v14) is about partnering with false teachers and embracing an ungodly lifestyle, rather than marriage.

Apply

- Why is it tempting to join in with the world rather than embracing genuine gospel ministry?
- How do God's promises to dwell with us and to make us his people motivate you to live a godly life?

Wednesday 13th October

Read 2 Corinthians 7v5-16

Having finished defending his ministry, Paul now picks up the story from 2v12 where we saw that he had gone to Macedonia in search of Titus. He had been anxious to hear from him how the Corinthians had responded to the letter he sent.

- What news did Titus bring? How had the Corinthians responded to Paul's previous letter?
- Why was Paul so over the moon by their response (it seems Paul is as comforted by their response as he was by God's resurrection power in chapter 1!)?
- How does Paul justify the sorrow he had caused the Corinthians with his previous letter?

Apply

- How much do you think and care about your gospel ministers' concern (both their anguish and joy) for your spiritual progress?
- What's so encouraging about seeing someone else's joy in our repentance and growth?
- Are you willing to let your leaders say tough things to you and call you to repentance for the sake of your spiritual growth?
- Do you feel anguish and joy about the spiritual progress of others?

Thursday 14th October

Review of 2 Corinthians 1-7

We've come to the end of the first big section in 2 Corinthians. At the start, we saw that Paul's aim was for the Corinthians to boast in him and fully embrace genuine gospel ministry (see 1v14). Therefore, Paul spent lots of time in chapters 1-7 showing them that, even though his ministry looked weak and failing and attracted opposition, it was authentic. This also turned into a rebuke of the Corinthians: if they fail to embrace Paul's ministry as that of Christ's ambassador, it shows up their worldliness and rejection of God and his glorious gospel.

Surprisingly we find out at the end of this section that Paul knew all along that the Corinthians had already repented of their rejection of the apostle and recommitted themselves to him and his ministry. By the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he'd already found Titus in Macedonia and heard his report. But it is only in chapter 7 that Paul shared with the Corinthians just how much comfort and joy their repentance and obedience gave him.

• Why do you think Paul waited for 7 chapters and only told them at the end how joyful he was about their repentance?

Apply

- What have we've seen so far about the shape of genuine gospel ministry?
- What have you learned about the importance of our attitude towards faithful gospel ministers? How can our response to faithful ministers be a measure of our spiritual health?
- How has the letter so far helped you to get on board with genuine ministry even if it looks weak, unsuccessful and results in suffering and opposition?

Friday 15th October

Paul wants the Corinthians to be fully committed to authentic gospel ministry. But what does this look like in practice?

In the next section of his letter, Paul's focus shifts to the Corinthian's own ministry – specifically their giving ministry in support of poor Christians in Judea who Paul was collecting money for among the churches. He's showing them an opportunity to fully join in with genuine gospel ministry, as they follow through with their promise to give and put their money where their mouth is.

Read 2 Corinthians 8v1-8

- What is the grace (or gift) of God that has been given to the Macedonians (v1-5)?
- Why were the Macedonians willing to give money to other poor Christians despite their own extreme poverty?
- How should the example of the Macedonians motivate the Corinthians in their own giving ministry?

Apply

- What comes to mind when you hear the word "giving"? How do you feel about "giving"?
- How does this passage change how you think about giving money to poor Christians around the world?
- According to Paul, what would it look like for us to be a "rich" church (the word "excel" in v7 can also be translated "wealthy")?

Saturday 16th October

Read 2 Corinthians 8v9-15

- How does Paul use the example of Jesus to motivate the Corinthians to give to poor Christians (v9)?
- What exactly does Paul want the Corinthians to do in v10-15? Is he asking them to be like the Macedonians and like Jesus?

Apply

- How does the reminder that Jesus made himself poor for your sake warm your heart?
- How does this passage motivate you (and liberate you) in your giving to needy Christians around the world?
- What's so great about a worldwide church community that looks after each other's needs?

Sunday 17th October

Read 2 Corinthians 8v16-23

Paul is sending Titus and two brothers ahead of him to Corinth before he comes to pick up the Corinthians' money for the poor.

- What do we learn about the eagerness of these three gospel workers (v16-18, v22-23)?
- How does Paul seek to show the churches that his own eagerness to help with the collection is genuine and that he acts with integrity (v19-21)?

Apply

- Why is it so important that gospel workers/Christians are seen to act with integrity in the area of money?
- How is Paul working hard to do what is right both in God's eyes and before the churches an example to you?

Monday 18th October

Read 2 Corinthians 8v24-9v5

- How has the Corinthians' promised eagerness to help with the collection stirred up other people (9v2)?
- We saw yesterday, Paul is sending Titus and two brothers ahead of him to Corinth. How will this help the Corinthians prove to the other churches that their eagerness to help is not just empty words?
- What is Paul's motivation for the Corinthians? Is it just to avoid embarrassment or is it more positive?

Apply

- Have you ever intended (and announced) to give to needy brothers and sisters, but not gotten round to it? How does this passage motivate you to follow through on your good intentions?
- Is there a place for public giving and for celebrating people's generosity in the church? How can the generosity of others encourage us and spur us on?

Tuesday 19th October

Read 2 Corinthians 9v6-15

- In what ways will the Corinthians be enriched through giving generously?
- For what purpose will a generous giver be enriched by God?
- What do these verses teach us about God?
- What lesson does Paul want the Corinthians to learn (which the Macedonians have learned already [see 8v1-2])?

Apply

- Do you think of giving as a great investment or as a personal loss?
- How does this passage encourage you to be more generous and cheerful in your giving?
- How is what Paul is teaching about God's generosity in blessing the giver very different to prosperity gospel teaching?

Wednesday 20th October

Review of 2 Corinthians 8-9

- In chapters 8-9, how does Paul motivate the Corinthians to follow through on their promise to contribute to the collection for the poor? How does he <u>not</u> motivate them?
- How does the Corinthians giving ministry link with them boasting in Paul and embracing genuine gospel ministry?

Summary of chapters 8-9:

We've come to the end of the second section in Paul's letter, which focuses on the Corinthian's giving ministry. Paul wants to convince them that a generous giving ministry not only blesses the recipients and brings glory to God, but also enriches the giver, for at the heart of it lies the generosity of God and the gospel. Giving is a great gift from God to the giver; it's a great investment and not personal loss, as we might so easily think. If the Corinthians grasp this, they will boast in and fully embrace this ministry (like Paul, Titus, the two brothers, the Macedonians and the other churches did), and they will cheerfully and generously follow through on their promises to help.

Apply

- What are the different ways in which this section has challenged and changed your thinking about giving to needy Christians in other parts the world?
- What would embracing genuine gospel ministry look like for you practically in this area?

Thursday 21st October

In part 3 of his letter, Paul returns to the defence of his ministry, but now he turns to exposing false teachers ("super-apostles") who had recently arrived in Corinth and were opposing the apostle. This might seem strange at first glance, because we've seen in chapter 7 that the Corinthians had already renewed their commitment to Paul and his ministry. But just as in their giving ministry they needed to follow through with their good intentions and get the collection together, so also here the Corinthians needed to show that they really were on board with Paul's ministry by breaking with these opponents.

Read 2 Corinthians 10v1-11

- What is the accusation that some people in Corinth were bringing against Paul (v1, 10)?
- How does Paul refute these allegations to show that he is neither inconsistent nor is his ministry "timid" (v2-11)?
- What kind of ministry does Paul want to do/not want to do among the Corinthians when he comes to see them? What is his concern?

Apply

- What is the difference between how a godly gospel minister exercises authority and how the world exercises authority?
- What does a godly minister want to achieve through their ministry among people? How does this help you spot false teachers?

Friday 22nd October

Read 2 Corinthians 10v12-18

- What do we learn about the false teachers in these verses? How did they try to promote themselves over Paul and gain influence in Corinth (v12-13)?
- Is Paul equally self-promoting when he replies that he was the one to bring the gospel to the Corinthians (v14)? What does he boast in? Why does he seek to grow his influence in Corinth? (v15-16)

Apply

- The false teachers in Corinth were trying to gain influence in Corinth by bigging themselves up and pulling Paul down.
 What does/might that look like if it happened in your church context?
- How does this passage help you to tell the difference between people promoting themselves and ministers appointed by God who desire to grow God's kingdom?

Saturday 23rd October

Read 2 Corinthians 11v1-4

- Paul is now ramping up his attack on the false teachers. Why does he beg the Corinthians to put up with him and not the super-apostles (v1-4)?
- What is so deceptive and dangerous about these superapostles (v4)?

Apply

- Why might even Christians who have embraced faithful gospel ministry be taken in by false teachers?
- How does this passage help you to spot false teachers?
- How much do you appreciate your pastor's concern for your relationship with Jesus?
- In your own ministry, are you jealous for other people's relationship with Jesus?

Sunday 24th October

Read 2 Corinthians 11v5-15

- The Corinthians' old issue of judging by outward appearances crops up again here. Why did Paul not look as impressive in their eyes as the super-apostles (v5-7)?
- Why might the Corinthians think teachers who charge them for their preaching (unlike Paul) are superior and more loving?
- Why did Paul not take money from the Corinthians (v7-12)?
 How was he trying to expose the false teachers through this (v12-15)?

Apply

- Why are false ministers hard to spot? How does this passage help you to be more discerning?
- How might the way genuine gospel ministers show their love make it harder for them to be seen as genuine?
- How much value do you put on appearance and emotion as you evaluate someone's ministry? How much value do you put on a minister's concern for your relationship with Jesus?

Monday 25th October

Read 2 Corinthians 11v16-29

- What do you think Paul's tone is in v16-21? Why does Paul feel he needs to join in with the super-apostles' boasting game?
- How were the super-apostles treating the Corinthians (v20)?
- What's surprising about what Paul boasts in (v22-28)? How does this show him to be very different to the superapostles?

Apply

- Maybe we find it astonishing that the Corinthians put up with the super-apostles' behaviour in v20. But what might attract people to leaders who are abusive? What might trap Christians in such relationships with teachers at church?
- Paul and the false teachers are at opposite ends of the spectrum. What behaviours lie in between these two positions? How can this spectrum help alert you to potentially unhealthy ministries?
- How should this passage make you feel about ministers who makes themselves weak for you, like Paul did for the Corinthians?

Pray

Give thanks to God for gospel ministers who make themselves weak for you!

Tuesday 26th October

Read 2 Corinthians 11v30-12v10

- What is so weak, even shameful, about Paul's experience in Damascus in v32-33? In contrast what is so amazing about his experience in 12v2-4? (NB the man mentioned in v2ff is Paul himself as v6-7 show.)
- In the context of exposing the super-apostles, why does Paul mention, but then also seek to distance himself from, his third heaven experience (by speaking in the 3rd person about it)?
- Why has God given Paul the thorn in his flesh mentioned in v7-8?
- Why has Paul come to delight in his weakness (v9-10)?

Apply

- Paul doesn't mention the super-apostles in these verses. But how can you use this passage to help you work out what kind of leaders to reject/cling to?
- What's so great about a minister who knows he is weak and is therefore dependent on God?
- Do you ever gladly accept the ways in which God aims to keep you humble and dependent on him? How does this passage change your thinking?

Wednesday 27th October

Read 2 Corinthians 12v11-18

- This passage is full of emotions. How does Paul feel about the Corinthians here? What's his tone?
- Previously Paul warned the Corinthians that the superapostles are well-disguised. But why should it still have been obvious to them who the true gospel minister is (v11-13)?
- What's so outrageous about the Corinthians thinking that Paul is "crafty" (v14-18)? How should they respond to Paul?

Apply

- How much do you appreciate ministers who love you selflessly? (Think of some of the sacrifices your ministers make for you!) How should we respond to them?
- Do you think it is possible that, like the Corinthians, we might misinterpret our gospel minister's love for us as being "crafty" in some way?

Thursday 28th October

Read 2 Corinthians 12v19-21

- Paul has spent the last few chapters defending himself and his ministry. Why has Paul done this? What is his main concern for the Corinthians (v19-21, remember also 11v1-4)?
- What does this passage suggest about why the Corinthians put up with the super-apostles? How does Paul turn the tables on them? (Remember, we have seen something similar at the end of chapter 6.)

Apply

- How much do you appreciate your minister worrying about your holiness?
- Why might we not want to listen to ministers who care for our holiness – why might we prefer those who don't tell us hard things or just affirm us in our ungodliness? What does this tell us about our own concern for our godliness?
- How would you use this passage to distinguish false ministers from those who truly care for you?

Friday 29th October

Read 2 Corinthians 13v1-4

- The Corinthians were demanding proof that Paul really has Christ's authority and power (v3-4). Do you remember why they doubted this (see 10v1-2, 10v10-11)?
- What proof is Paul ready to give them if necessary (v1-2)?
- How does Paul compare himself with Christ to show that looking weak doesn't mean he doesn't have God's power (v3-4)?
- Why do you think Paul is slow to wield his power around the Corinthians, but willing to do so if necessary?

Apply

- When a minister is patient and warns gently about sin, are we tempted to mistake it for weakness? Why?
- How can you tell if a minister truly speaks for Jesus? What would their attitude to sin and the way they issue warnings be like?
- How does knowing that Jesus is living and working among us by God's power encourage you?

Thursday 30th October

Read 2 Corinthians 13v5-10

- Rather than testing Paul, whether he really is Christ's servant, whom ought the Corinthians be putting to the test (v5)?
- What would it look like for them to pass the test (v7)? From chapters 10-13, what would this mean practically?

The passing-or-failing-the-test language can seem confusing here (v5-7). If the Corinthians pass the test (i.e. repent), then Paul would not have to show his power (i.e. he would fail to look powerful in their eyes). But if the Corinthians do not repent, then Paul would have to show his power and discipline them (i.e. he would look powerful in their eyes).

What outcome does Paul wish for and why (v8-14)?

Apply

- How quick are you to examine yourself when a godly leader rebukes you, rather than being suspicious of them?
- How does this passage help you distinguish between ministers who use power for their own sake and those who use it for the building up of others?
- What's so beautiful about a church that is on board with a genuine gospel minister/ministry rather than being in the grip of false teachers (v11-14)?

Friday 31st October

Review of 2 Corinthians 10-13

In the last section of his letter Paul has once again defended his ministry, but this time he's done so in order to unmask the superapostles in Corinth. They were masquerading as "superior-Pauls", but Paul exposes that they are agents of Satan, false teachers who are self-seeking, who abuse their power and care nothing for the Corinthians' devotion to Jesus. The Corinthians must urgently reject them. Fully embracing Paul's genuine gospel ministry means not tolerating false teachers. There is no compromise here because their holiness and relationship with Jesus are at stake. Paul wants them to break completely with the super-apostles, to repent of the sin they have been drawn into, so that their relationship with Jesus and with one another is joyfully restored.

Apply

It seems the Corinthians are too trusting of the wrong people and too suspicious of God's faithful minister.

- How have chapters 10-13 helped you to distinguish between faithful ministers and false teachers?
- From the whole letter what have you learned about the shape and motivation of genuine gospel ministry?
- What would it look like for you to boast in and fully embrace genuine gospel ministry in your context?
- Why is this so important for our own relationship with Jesus?