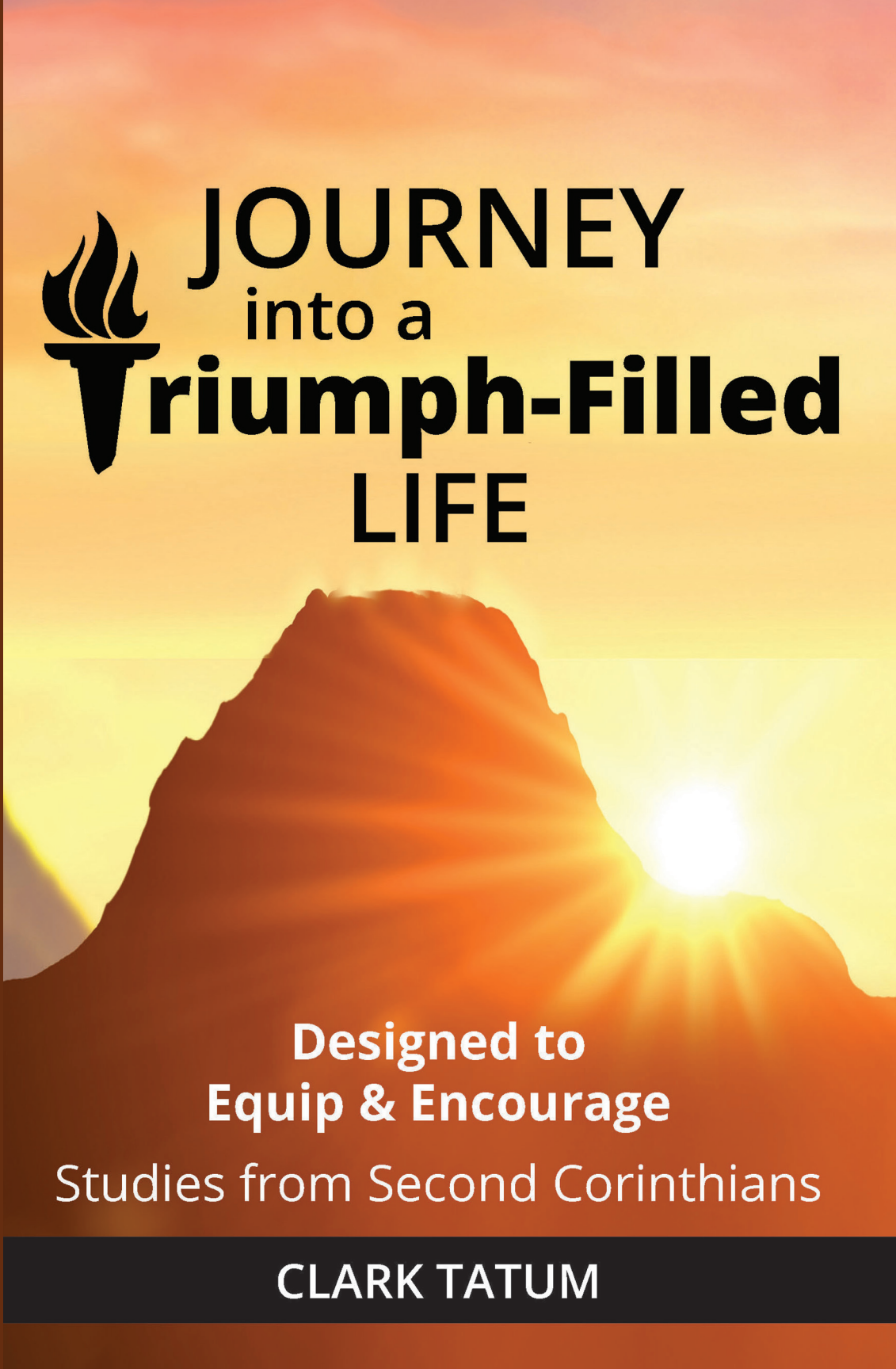
JOURNEY
into a
Triumph-Filled
LIFE
Designed to
Equip & Encourage
Studies from Second Corinthians
CLARK TATUM

Journey into a Triumph-Filled Life

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Journey into a Triumph-Filled Life
Designed to Equip & Encourage: Studies from Second Corinthians

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Introduction

The journey into a "Triumph-Filled Life" is a journey through Second Corinthians that is filled with encouragement and definitive reasons for Christians to remain faithful to God. The church at Corinth was an imperfect church, and understandably it was imperfect because it was made up of imperfect people like us. The good news for us is the Lord's church is where "Imperfect People" are "Perfectly Welcome." This doesn't mean we do not have a personal responsibility to spiritually grow in the faith or to repent of sin. The Corinthian church had many problems, and we can read about some of the specific problems in the first letter to the Corinthians.

What do we do when we realize we are an imperfect people and need the grace of God? What do we do when we realize we are being selfish and unloving? What do we do in the midst of our personal and public problems? We continue to listen to the Word of God and ask for His help to transform our hearts more and more into the image of Christ. We don't quit our journey with Jesus regardless of the problems in our lives or the problems we face in our local congregation. We keep praying, working, growing, and

believing Jesus loves imperfect people and will help us triumph over sin. As we walk by faith, God will continue to fill us with the fruit of the Spirit in our journey with Christ. Galatians 5:22-23, [22]*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* [23]*gentleness and self-control."* This kind of spiritual fruit is exactly what imperfect people, who have been baptized into Christ, need to not lose heart.

Every congregation will face some difficulties and experience some problems – Satan will see to that. However, we can triumph over them and move through them with God's help. For example, the Christians in Corinth, according to the Apostle Paul's first letter to them, were full of selfishness and pride. They were looking down on others and not caring about each other as they should. Some of the believers thought they were more important than others. The employer who was a Christian may have thought they were more valuable in the eyes of God than their employees. Doctors may have thought they were more important to the Lord than their patients. This attitude can still happen in our world, but it should not be the thought process within the family of God. If we think like this, we begin to think our gift is better than someone else's and this attitude breeds division and disunity. It was Christ who identified Himself as a servant to all and who came not to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28).

There is no greater need today than for a person to have a relationship with Jesus by humbling himself and to be committed to serving in the likeness of the Lord. Jesus was a humble servant who served unselfishly. When Jesus said, "Follow Me," He left us an example to follow. Philippians 2:6-8, [6] *"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,* [7]*but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.* [8]*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!"* When Jesus came to this earth, He robed Himself in human flesh and became a servant

above all else. The person with a humble heart does not avoid service, sacrifice, or obedience. The humble heart will live to love and serve God and love and serve others. Jesus' attitude of humility was His guiding philosophy. He took on the nature of a selfless, suffering servant and spent His entire ministry trying to uproot the attitude of selfishness and pride that had become so much a part of people.

The believers in Corinth, though immature in the faith, responded fairly well to the directives of God the Apostle Paul recorded in 1 Corinthians. From what we read in 2 Corinthians they indeed made an effort to correct some of the problems they had and their sinful practices, but there was still much to learn. Before Jesus ascended back to heaven, He had some important words for His apostles. [18]*"Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* [19]*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and* [20]*teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age'"* (Matthew 28:18-20). There is much to learn on the other side of baptism, and God expects us to learn from Him and obey everything He commands. This is the reason a second letter was needed for the believers in Corinth. The Christian life is a lifelong journey of following the example of Jesus. Paul said it this way: *"So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it"* (2 Corinthians 5:9).

In the past when someone mentioned the first-century church at Corinth to me, I would normally think of the many problems that existed among the membership. I would look at their letters as dealing with their problems and the sins that hurt them. Today, I see that these Corinthian letters were not simply written to point out their problems, but rather God wanted these Christians to remember what they were, individually and collectively, in Christ Jesus. God wanted them to know what the cross of Christ did for

imperfect people and how much He loved them. In His wisdom He knew that if we have a misconception of what happened at the crucifixion of Christ, we will find ourselves being influenced by the world rather than our Lord and Savior, Jesus.

The message of the cross that was preached in Corinth made it possible to blend together that which was previously impossible. 1 Corinthians 12:14-20, [14]*"Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.* [15]*If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.* [16]*And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.* [17]*If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?* [18]*But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.* [19]*If they were all one part, where would the body be?* [20]*As it is, there are many parts, but one body."*

The church at Corinth would learn that whatever gifts or talents they had been given were to be used to the glory of God. The church is a body – the body of Christ. "*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it"* (1 Corinthians 12:27). We need each other, and we need to love and care for each other. We need to understand that God loves us AS IS, but He loves us too much to leave us there. He refuses to leave us that way because He loves the imperfect, perfectly!

Certain stores have a little section where the merchandise is marked down considerably. The prices are usually several dollars less than the exact same item would be in another part of the store. The tip-off is a usual two-word phrase that you see on the tags or on a sign hanging somewhere in the area: "As Is." Sometimes they are called slightly irregular, sometimes they are called seconds, but whatever we call them, this is another way of saying these are damaged goods. The store has given us fair warning. This is the department

of something's gone wrong. We are going to find a flaw, a stain that won't come out, a hole, a zipper that doesn't zip or a seam that's not straight – somewhere there is a problem with the merchandise. The department store is not even going to tell us where that flaw is. We are going to have to look for that, but we know that it's there. There is a fundamental rule in that corner of the store: "No Returns, No Refunds, and No Exchanges."

In a very real way, we are all eligible to wear "As Is" tags. Isaiah 53: 6 reads, *"We all, we like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."* Thank God we can know, *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). The sinless blood of our Savior provides us an eternal cleansing of our soul that washes away our sins (Acts 2:38, 22:16).

The church of Christ is a blood-bought church, and because of this act of grace and mercy God makes it possible for us to be Christians (Acts 20:28). It is not only the church at Corinth that needed to hear again how Jesus loves the imperfect perfectly. We too need to embrace the encouragement we can receive from knowing God is leading us into a triumphal procession. The emphasis in this journey through 2 Corinthians will focus on a "Triumph-Filled Life." Notice the apostle cannot keep from bursting out in gratitude to God in 2 Corinthians 2:14, *"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place"* (NASB 1977).

Chapter 1

His Presence in Hard Places Brings Comfort

(2 Corinthians 1:1 – 24)

Hardships are part of everyday life, and there are times we all need a special measure of comfort. I heard a story about a young mother with three children who found herself in a hard place.

The phone rang one day and she answered it. The voice on the other end of the phone said, "Honey, it's Mom. I called because I know that you're busy with the kids, and I want to give you some help. I'm going to stop by to clean the house, take care of the baby, and prepare dinner for when the boys get home from school. I want you to get ready to go to my beautician. I paid her already and she is going to give you 'the works;' your appointment is at 1:00 pm. Give George a call at the office and tell him that you will meet him at your favorite restaurant for dinner. It's on me."

At that point, the young mother interrupted and said, "George? Who is George?"

The caller said, "Your husband, silly!"

The young mother said, "My husband's name is Fred."

The caller said, "Oh, is this 365-3212?"

To which the lady with her hands full responded, "No this is 365-3213."

The caller said, "Oh, I'm so sorry, I've got the wrong number."

After a deafening pause, the young mother asked, "Does this mean that you're not coming over?"

I am sure there are times we could all use some extra help as we deal with the challenges of life.

The letter of 2 Corinthians is filled with encouraging words that can bring us comfort in the most difficult days. The Apostle Paul spent about eighteen months in Corinth – around A.D. 52-53 – during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1). It was during Paul's third missionary journey, after spending about three years in Ephesus (A.D. 54-57), that he wrote his first letter to Corinth (about A.D. 55) near the end of his ministry in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:8). Shortly after writing his first letter to the believers in Corinth, Paul found himself in the middle of a riot in Ephesus. The background preceding the riot reminds us that Paul was accustomed to trials and personal challenges as he lived his Christian life. He had experienced public ridicule and rejection to the gospel in Ephesus, but the discipleship training he had done daily strengthened the church in the city.

The gospel was further advanced by unusual miracles. The NIV reads, "extraordinary miracles" (Acts 19:11). Any miracle is extraordinary, for that's what makes it a miracle, but the term used here distinguishes these miraculous manifestations from the more common healings done directly through Paul's hands. The extraordinary miracles were more indirect, and that was the extraordinary type where people took handkerchiefs and aprons that Paul had touched, which when applied to the sick brought

healing (Acts 19:12). The power of God worked indirectly to confirm the gospel.

> Acts 19:13-20, *13"Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, 'In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.' 14Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15[One day] the evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?' 16Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. 17When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. 18Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. 19A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. 20In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."*

Those who had a measure of belief in Ephesus, but had not totally made a break from the worldliness, now confessed their inadequate approach to God. They brought their magic books and cult manuals and burned them in a public display of repentance and dependence on Jesus. The public bonfire book-burning was the equivalent of 50,000 day's wages. This evangelism explosion in Ephesus led to a large-scale riot because those who made and sold books, idols, trinkets, and shrines realized they were going to begin to lose a considerable amount of income. By the way, this was truly a revival taking place in Ephesus. Revival is God's Spirit working through His Word, which is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12). Revival is an invasion from heaven at the request of people wanting to be right with God. When revival happens in our hearts, we will live more on God's strength than our own. Revival cannot be bought; it must be

sought. We cannot package it or come up with some formula for it; we have to desire it.

Demetrius, a silversmith, met with his peers and fellow tradesmen to stir up a great disturbance (Acts 19:23-25). Demetrius told the craftsmen in Acts 19:26-28,

> 26 *"And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all.* 27 *There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.* 28 *When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'"*

Notice Demetrius presented Paul's argument accurately. Demetrius' view of God led him to deny the Almighty God for the almighty drachma. If Artemis (Diana) was divine or majestic, she would be able to deal with a Christian man named Paul, right? Many in our day follow the path of Demetrius, who stirred up the crowd to the stage of an all-out riot. His interest was not to protect the name of Diana, but to protect his pocketbook. Money can be an instrument or an idol. I have heard it said, "When a Christian gets a hold of money it is a terrific thing; when money gets a hold of a Christian, it can be a terrible thing." It seems strange to us in America that the majority of Ephesians would embrace a religion so immoral. We look at it and we think, "Why, that is idolatry to the core!" And then we sit back and think that we would never do that! But are we not tempted ourselves to make a mockery out of the money that God has blessed us with that actually reads, "IN GOD WE TRUST?"

> Acts 19:30-32, 30 *Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him.* 31 *Even some of the officials of the province, friends of*

Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater. [32] *The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there.*

Later the town clerk spoke some words of wisdom to the unruly crowd (Acts 19:35-41). The rioters were admonished to settle down and, if needed, to take their accusations to the courts. Paul had not done anything wrong. The clerk understood that what the rioters were presently doing was headed towards getting them in trouble with the Roman officials. When we share the gospel of Jesus, there will always be a reaction. When others hear the gospel, they reject the message completely, and some might even oppose our belief in Jesus and try to hinder others from hearing the message. We cannot see what was inside of Demetrius' heart, but his words and actions were working in harmony with the Devil in opposing Paul. A religion without God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ at the front and center is inadequate.

Soon after the riot, Paul traveled into Macedonia (Acts 20:1) on his way to Corinth. While visiting churches in Philippi and Thessalonica he met Titus returning from Corinth with word on how Paul's first letter was received by the Corinthians. 2 Corinthians 7:6-8, [6]"*But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus,* [7]*and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.* [8]*Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it – I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while."* The 2 Corinthian letter was written (about A.D. 56-57) from Macedonia and Paul sent it with Titus (2 Corinthians 8:6,17), whom he would soon follow. It was written roughly six to twelve months after 1 Corinthians.

Life can be bumpy and twisty and neck-straining at times, but thank God there can be a comforting presence even in the hard places of life. May we never forget – **HIS PRESENCE IN HARD PLACES**

BRINGS COMFORT. God comforts us through His Word, through the Holy Spirit, and through others.

I know plenty of people who enjoy going to DisneyLand or Walt Disney World to stand in line and jump on board those giant two-inch steel tracks in a little cart-like thing called a roller coaster. I know other folks who are more like me who think, "Why would I pay money to be scared out of my mind on a ride that will send me upside down almost as much as right side up?" I know there is a rush that a person can get from the dramatic drops and turns for a while on the roller-coaster experience. But even for those roller-coaster junkies who enjoy it, it would get rather tedious – not to mention punishing – if they had to make the roller coaster home.

Living a roller-coaster life is no fun, yet we often live on what seems like an emotional, relational, and spiritual roller coaster. Everything is going along and we are right side up, and then something happens and we are tossed emotionally upside down. We experience hard places from the mountaintops to the valleys of life and are in need of God's presence. The call comes in the middle of the night, and before we pick up the phone, we know it is not going to be good news. The phone rings and the voice on the other end of the phone tells us there has been a serious accident or worse.

People, good people, religious people who love God in the midst of the confusion have asked me, "Why? Why me? Why now? Why this?" The question rings through every generation. It's a question that does not admit an easy answer. The mother or the father asks, "Why?" The children and the grandchildren ask, "Why?" When you look at the questions of tragedy and suffering, even the most fervent believers look up to the heavens and ask, "Why?"

The original Greek word in 2 Corinthians translated "trouble" or "affliction" is THLIPSIS. It can be translated as tribulation, trouble, anguish, persecution, burden, and of course, affliction. All these words describe trouble and afflictions that come in all different

shapes and sizes. Some of us have trouble in our personal life, problems in our family, and problems at work, and sometimes Satan uses those troubles to distract us, to discourage us, to lead us away from that which we know is right. And sometimes Satan brings those troubles or problems on us all at one time, or at least one right after another.

Job suffered emotionally and physically, and for a time in his life he was dealt one major catastrophe after another. When Job found himself in a hard place, suffering like we have never known, he doubted neither the sovereignty of God nor God's personal love for him. What a powerful example for us. By the way, it is worth noting the trouble that weighed Job down was not because of any sin in his life. Some people thought he was suffering as a result of his sins. That was incorrect.

While it is possible to suffer as a result of sin, it is wrong to believe all suffering is due to the sin in one's life. Jesus had to teach His own disciples this truth. They came to Jesus and they asked Him, [1]*"'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'* [2]*'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life'"* (John 9:2-3). Consider Jesus: He was sinless, and He suffered like no other person, including Job. Let us consider the early verses of 2 Corinthians and discover a proper perspective on the heartaches of life and the subject of comfort that only faithful Christians can experience.

> 2 Corinthians 1:1-24, [1]*"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia:* [2]*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* [3]*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,* [4]*who comforts us in all our troubles* [NASB uses "affliction" for the NIV word "troubles"], *so that we can comfort those in any trouble with*

the comfort we ourselves have received from God. [5]*For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.* [6]*If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.* [7]*And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.* [8]*We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.* [9]*Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.* [10]*He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,* [11]*as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.* [12]*Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.* [13]*For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that,* [14]*as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.* [15]*Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice.* [16]*I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea.* [17]*When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, 'Yes, Yes' and No, No'?* [18]*But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not 'Yes' and 'No.'* [19]*For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not 'Yes' and 'No,' but in him it has always been 'Yes.'* [20]*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God.* [21]*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us,* [22]*set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a*

deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. [23]*I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.* [24]*Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm."*

After a brief greeting to his readers in which Paul wished grace and peace to the brethren in Corinth and the surrounding region, he immediately began to talk about the comfort he had received from God in the midst of his hardships. Paul did not hesitate to place a remarkable emphasis on his own infirmities and needs. Paul was most concerned to show from the very first chapter that his confidence did not rest in himself but on God's power. He defended himself and his decisions at certain points, but his emphasis clearly remained on the faithfulness and reliability of God. The apostle showed the inseparable bond between suffering and comfort, and in this arena of life Paul presented God as the "God of all comfort."

God is the God of ALL comfort – in all of our troubles. Paul knew about hard places, but he also knew when life is tiring and you are struggling, God wants to comfort you. When school is difficult and work is exhausting or when your health is failing or loved ones hurt, it is easy to become discouraged. Physical and emotional suffering, unless we are careful, can lead us down the path of discouragement. Discouragement is one of Satan's most effective tools. And if discouragement hangs around long enough, we will experience fatigue, despair, self-pity, doubt, and bitterness. Paul understood this, and I think that's why we should learn this principle for life: "It's not so much what happens to us that matters; it's how we react that makes the difference."

For example, Satan attacked Job – a full frontal attack – but Job remained faithful. Years ago, someone told me, "When hard times come, be a student, not a victim." What was meant by that little statement was be a student of God and what God would want you to do in those hard places of life. Think about that idea for a

moment. Be a student, not a victim. A victim says, "Why did this happen to me?" A student says, "What can I learn from this?" A victim believes his hard times have come because God is trying to punish him. A student understands that God allows hard times in order to help him grow. A victim believes God has abandoned him. A student knows God is there even in the worst moments of life. That's the true Christian position. *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28).

There are things we can learn and benefit from when we encounter hardships:

1. Hardships can draw us closer to the Lord. When suffering and temptation visit us, it is important that we resist the devil and draw close to God (James 4:7-8). Remember the story of Jonah? Jonah, unlike Job, experienced some problems as a result of his personal rebellion against God. God revealed His will to Jonah, but instead of going to Nineveh and obeying God, he hopped on a ship to Tarshish and ended up in the belly of a big fish. Our responsibility to obey God does not go away simply because we run away. In fact, running away from doing what God desires us to do can make our situation worse – much worse. Therefore, if we are suffering as a result of sin and the guilt is weighing us down, we need to repent and draw close to the Lord. Otherwise we'll end up at a place we never planned to be.

When Jonah started out that day, do you think he thought he would end up in the belly of a fish? No way! Don't run from God's will. We are always better off obeying God. We may suffer in various ways while we are obeying God, but we will always be better off if we obey God in the first place. It is worth noting that God didn't give up on Jonah just because he ran away from what he should have done, and God doesn't give up on us easily. Be encouraged if you've been running in the opposite direction than God wants you to go

and understand He loves you too much to leave you alone. Our God is a seeking God. Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Resist the devil and draw near to God and God will come near to you (James 4:8).

It is apparent from Jonah's story that God is willing to do whatever He can to get us back on track. In Jonah's case, you know how far He went to get Jonah to refocus his priorities. God sent Jonah to the University of Hard Knocks, and in the deep of the sea he repented and replaced pride with prayer. God forgave Jonah and comforted him even in his trouble. The Bible tells us in Jonah 1:17, *"But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah…"* When Jonah's sin caused him to be thrown overboard and in danger of drowning, the Father of all compassion provided Jonah another opportunity to repent. When all seemed lost, God provided a fish not to eat him, but to house him. The large fish was not to be Jonah's grave in the sea, but rather an act of God's goodness. God spoke to the fish and the fish literally spewed him up on dry land.

2. Hardships provide an opportunity to receive God's comfort. Not all troubles in life come from sin in our lives. Many of our troubles are the natural consequences of living in a sin-filled world. When suffering comes our way, it is important that we draw near to God and not run from Him. When there's pain, there is a temptation for us to withdraw from God or blame God or get angry with God, but this only intensifies the pain. If we will turn to God in our pain and suffering, that's when the pinnacle of peace overrides the avalanche of trouble that has attacked our hearts. Our trouble may not recede simply by our drawing near to God, but in the midst of the trouble we can know the ONE who is able to comfort us no matter the trouble. The Bible says God *"comforts us in all our troubles"* (2 Corinthians 1:4). That means when we are sick, He is there by our bedside. When we run out of money, He is there providing for our needs. When others try to hurt us, He stands by our side and will never leave or forsake us.

In my second year of full-time ministry, I was working with a congregation that had two shepherds. Both of the men had heart attacks in the same week. One of the men (Horace) went to glory-land that week. Before he died, I remember him holding my hand and with a look of comfort and peace on his face that only God could provide he said to me, "It is okay Clark; I'm going to a better place." He found comfort in his trouble from God's presence residing in his heart. The other shepherd (Harley) was scheduled for heart surgery and was concerned about his fellow elder. Horace had died the day before, and the other family didn't want me to tell him that his fellow elder had passed away until after his surgery. I said, "Well, he is going to ask and I'm not going to lie, but God will help me say something." He did ask me about his friend, and when he did, I said, "He is in good hands!" We who believe know that to be true!

Some years later I took a call from Horace's daughter. Her husband had become a shepherd in that same congregation, and he had been diagnosed with stage four cancer. I talked with this couple at length and they asked if I would be able to conduct her husband's memorial celebration like I did her father's years ago when the time came? They understood how we can comfort others with the comfort God gives us.

Another Christian friend of mine named Jerald said it started with a pain that seemed like a pulled muscle. The doctor soon made the cancer diagnosis. As sometimes happens, cancer can sneak up on us despite the fact that we try to stay healthy. When I stood by his bed in his final days on earth, I asked him how the cancer had impacted him spiritually. He said, "Clark, I feel more relaxed and more at peace than ever before in my life." The things that used to bother him didn't bother him anymore. His suffering made him a stronger believer, and it refined his faith in the sovereignty of God. Cancer and suffering for my friend helped clarify what was really important.

It is my prayer to God that we could all learn that lesson before we are diagnosed with some dreaded disease or end up in a situation similar to Jonah's. While suffering and trouble are never any fun, in it we can see more clearly what really matters in life and what doesn't. It is through trouble that some people come to know the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.

3. The comfort of God equips us to minister to others (2 Corinthians 1:6-7). Paul looked at his sufferings – the hardship, the deprivation, the imprisonment, the unrelenting opposition he faced – and he understood God was doing something in him for the benefit of others. We never suffer alone. Someone else is always watching. Our friends and others watch to see how we will respond to tragedy. They want to know if what we say we believe is really enough for us in the hard times. They don't know, they aren't sure, maybe they've read the Bible a little, maybe they haven't, but they're watching how we respond to life's challenges and hardships. They watch how we respond to sickness, the loss of a job, a career setback, a financial collapse, and from the shadows they peer out in an effort to see if we really believe in God.

It is the greatest thing in the world to be a Christian, but it does not free us from all the burdens of life. When hard times come, we only have two choices: We can suffer by ourselves, or we can endure our suffering with God and the people of God. And as we receive comfort, we are equipped to minister to others. We can pass along to others what God has given to us. We might sum up the essence of God's comfort this way: From God – To us – To others. If we have ever thrown a pebble into a pond of calm water, what happens? From the point where the pebble enters the water, ripples spread out farther and farther. What starts as a ripple from one small pebble soon affects the whole pond. That's a picture of what God is doing in our life. He comforts us in our trials so that we might comfort another. The ripple effect spreads out from you to people you know and people you may never even meet. From God to us to others.

4. Affliction can empty us of self-reliance. Pressure is real, and Paul and his ministry helpers experienced great pressure to the point of death.

> 8"*We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.* 9*Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.* 10*He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,* 11*As you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many"* (2 Corinthians 1:8-11).

Paul was at the end of his rope, but that is where God can do His best work in us if we will hold to our faith in God. The word in Greek for "comfort" is PARAKLESIS. This reinforces for us that God is a God of comfort, exhortation, and encouragement. In fact, a form of this word, PARAKLETOS, is used for the Holy Spirit, also known as "the Comforter" (John 14:26 KJV). What an amazing statement we find in 2 Corinthians 1:3 – *"the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort."* All comfort comes from God! It isn't an angel, a cosmic force, a pill, psychotherapy, or a quick and clever slogan that warms our heart and lifts us up and comforts us in our trials. It is God. And God does not comfort us to make us more comfortable, but to encourage us and make us comforters. I have heard it said that most lighthouses are built by shipwrecked sailors. Many hospitals are built by the sick and their loved ones. When we suffer, we learn to care. Where nobody suffers, nobody cares. When hard times come, we should not trust in ourselves, but in the Lord who raises the dead. Paul reminds these believers that God is faithful (2 Corinthians 1:18).

God is aware when we are suffering, and the fact we encounter a trial does not indicate God does not love us or care about us. Paul was confident in his heavy weight of trial that God was with him and would ultimately bring deliverance (2 Corinthians 1:10,15). Therefore, he set his hope on God in the present and in the future.

A cattleman rode out into a clearing on the open range and saw a wild bull in the distance. The bull was attempting to ram another cowboy that had apparently fallen off his horse. The bull's head was down and his nostrils snorting, and the cattleman kept his distance and watched as the bull charged toward the man in the field. The man dove into a convenient hole in the ground and saved himself. As soon as the bull went by, the cowboy leaped out of the hole. In no time the bull came back madder than ever. Right before the bull reached him, the cowboy jumped back into the hole. Then when the bull passed him again, he popped back out. The cattleman watched this scenario several times. Finally, he shouted across the field, "Hey, cowboy, why don't you just stay in the hole?" Leaping out again, the cowboy yelled, "There's a bear in that hole!" That cowboy was caught between a rock and a hard place. Whichever way he turned, there was trouble. That is sort of an accurate picture of life for most of us.

Trouble is out there, and that is just one of the reasons why we need to be faithful and committed to God. Committing our lives to God does not remove us from the reality of some problems in life, but our faith in God will enable us to move through whatever storms life brings us.

CHAPTER 1 QUESTIONS
To Teach, Train, and Transform Lives

1. About how long did the Apostle Paul spend in Corinth during his second missionary journey? Where was Paul on his third missionary journey when he wrote his first letter to Corinth?

2. What took place soon after Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, and how does this show the opposition to Paul's message?

3. Where was Paul when he wrote his second letter to the Corinthians? What does Satan use to distract us, discourage us, and lead us away from that which we know is right?

4. Name three ways God comforts us in life. What should we never forget?

5. What opportunity is available for us when we experience hardships? In practical terms, what does it mean when the Bible says, "God comforts us in all our trials"?

6. In addition to the comfort itself we receive in trials, what other blessings can come from God's comfort?

7. What two things are we to do according to James 4:8? What will God do if we do these two things?

8. What can affliction do for us? When can God do some of His best work in us?

9. How might we sum up the essence of God's comfort? What was Paul confident of in his heavy weight of a trial (2 Corinthians 1:10,15)?

Chapter 2
God Leads Us in Triumph
(1 Corinthians 5:1 – 13 / 2 Corinthians 2:1 – 17)

When I was a young boy, I remember my parents having a television set that wasn't very impressive in comparison to today's models. It was a black and white Zenith and it was big, but I am not talking about a big-screen TV. The screen wasn't big at all, but the TV was in a big cabinet referred to as a TV console. And from my memory, it was one of our nicest pieces of furniture. But as far as a television, I remember the reception was fairly poor. In those days people used rabbit ear antennas which sat on top of the TV. I remember my mother putting aluminum foil on the two rabbit ear antennas to try to improve the reception. I watched my share of grainy black and white images. To turn on our Zenith TV, we had to pull out a small "on" button located near the channel dial. When the TV set was turned on, we had to be patient and eventually we would get a picture. We learned not to be concerned, because we understood it needed time to warm up. After some fuzzy crackling sounds, a small dot would appear in the middle of the screen, and if we saw that dot, we knew things were going to be okay. After a few seconds the dot would become a line that stretched from one side of

the screen to the other and then the line would explode into a bright square that would become a clear picture.

I bring up my old family television because the Bible story we are going to unwrap will take some time to warm up before the picture becomes clear. In fact, the story starts in 1 Corinthians 5 and ends up in 2 Corinthians 2. Our dot on the biblical screen begins in 1 Corinthians 5. The dot, which happens to be the sin of a man in the church at Corinth, had exploded and stretched itself across the church. And to make matters worse, the church's response to this individual's sin was all out of whack.

Therefore, the Apostle Paul was trying to help the church reposition her rabbit ears because they had lost the picture of what God's will was in the matter of sexual immorality. Paul was going to warm up the members of the church by way of apostolic instruction so they can again see clearly on the screen of their minds the subjects of sin, repentance, and grace. At first, their reception was not what it ought to have been, but Paul gives the church opportunity to adjust their spiritual antennas by giving them a clearer picture of what they needed to do. Before we read the text, I remind us there is no sin God can't forgive if the person will repent towards God.

> 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, [1]*"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife.* [2]*And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?* [3]*Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present.* [4]*When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,* [5]*hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.* [6]*Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?* [7]*Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast*

– as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.
8Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of
malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity
and truth. 9I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually
immoral people – 10not at all meaning the people of this world who are
immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would
have to leave this world. 11But now I am writing you that you must not
associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral
or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a
man do not even eat. 12What business is it of mine to judge those outside
the church? Are you not to judge those inside? 13God will judge those
outside. 'Expel the wicked man from among you.'"

Corinth in Paul's day was a vibrant, rich, economically prosperous city. At that time there were numerous pagan temples operating in Corinth, and for the most part they were connected to gross immorality. One of the most popular of all the temples in Paul's day was dedicated to Aphrodite, the sexual goddess. Lost inside this immoral city of Corinth was a confused church and, with that, a confused son. The church had tolerated sin to continue in the life of one of their members, and this particular sin was very open and public. From God's view, the reception of the early church at Corinth was all messed up. The church somehow thought by tolerating this brother's sin while he was living in an unrepentant state and attending the worship services that they were doing a good thing. In 1 Corinthians 5 we are not told the young man's name, but obviously they knew who Paul was talking about because his sin was so open in the community.

When Paul wrote in verse 1 that it was being reported, he was referring to the fact that it was continuing to be reported that sexual immorality existed among them. Paul spelled it out – *"A man has his father's wife."* This kind of behavior was unthinkable to find in the church that was to be the light in the community. We learn here that

this type of immorality wasn't common even among the unbelieving, immoral people of Corinth. This story was out in public for others to see. What was going on in the church in Corinth had become front-page news in the newspapers and was all over the supermarket tabloids. When Paul walked into a first-century grocery store, he could have seen the headlines in *The Greek World News Report* concerning the sexual scandal at the church in Corinth – only it wasn't so much a story on the immorality of this man in the church, but rather a story on how "tolerant" these Christians were with one of their own openly sinful members. The astonishing part of the story was the church was continuing to worship alongside this unrepentant sinner, and the church was proud of their tolerance of his fornication. Instead of shock over the man's sin, there was an acceptance of the sin. Far from tolerating the sin, the people in the church should have followed a biblical approach to encourage this brother to repent.

The woman at the well in John 4, who had a history of having had five husbands and one live-in at the time, was nothing compared to the confusion happening in the church at Corinth. The church had a distorted picture of what they should have been doing in response to the immorality. They were accepting his sin, and if they continued this tolerance without speaking with this individual about it, it could ultimately bring decay to the church. Paul did not mean for the Corinthians to try to keep the church out of the world, but to keep the world out of the church. He meant that those who profess to be saved must live with an ongoing spirit of repentance. This young man needed to repent of his sin, but by now the church at large needed to repent. *"And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?"* (1 Corinthians 5:2). The church even boasted about accepting this man's sin as if that were a good thing. Let a person continue to openly sin and let a church accept that person without expecting repentance to take place, and you will find this principle

at work: one bad apple can spoil a whole barrel of them. A little leaven can sour the whole batch of dough.

Now on a practical front, let me mention there may be times and situations in a local congregation where the members of the body at large may not know how the leadership has dealt with, or are presently dealing, a more visible sin. But my experience says we may not know, so shouldn't immediately assume that the sin is being accepted. There may actually be a clear expectation from the leadership for the sinner to repent. It was not the practice of the leadership in the early church as I see it to communicate to the congregation on all occasions how they were trying to help people with a specific sin. What is clear about the man who had his father's wife is that sin, all sin, needs to be taken seriously. In the case of the man in this immoral relationship, we are told he was in Satan's possession even though he was still attending church services. He was abiding in Satan's corner because he didn't have a desire in his heart to repent; plus, there was no expectation communicated by the leadership for him to repent.

Therefore, 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 gives an urgent call to take care of the health of the Christian community. The church had a responsibility to that erring one who was worshipping in their midst as if everything is OK. The church at Corinth's picture about this situation was distorted, and they had forgotten that repentance was not optional for any Christian to remain in that saved state. Jesus said, *"Unless you repent, you too will all perish"* (Luke 13:3). The man who had his father's wife was not cut to the heart for his sin. And even the church at large thought they were doing a loving thing by accepting him in his sin, they were wrong! Don't be misled by Satan or our society. Today more and more people have bought into Satan's lie that says, "There are no moral absolutes."

We have no problem understanding that today there are some absolutes when it comes to operating a commercial airplane. If the pilot

had no training or did not go to flight school, we wouldn't want to be a passenger on that plane. Imagine lying on the operating table; the anesthesia is just beginning to take effect when the nurse informs us that our surgeon had never gone to medical school – anesthesia or not, we'd come off of that table! Why? Because there are absolute standards before we call someone a surgeon. We demand absolute safety standards for our cars. We demand absolute health requirements for our food and absolute regulation standards for our banking system. We are emphatic about absolutes rules in the sporting events we watch, even to the point of watching replays in slow motion so we can be sure the rules are absolutely followed.

Everyone has fallen short of God's absolutes, but to ignore that there are absolutes and we need to repent of our sin is to be unclear regarding God's will. When we learn what God wants of us, it should lead us to repent and agree with God on what He says sin is and ask Him to forgive us. Scriptures indicate the man in his immoral situation needed to adjust his reception because what he was doing was not pleasing God. Paul's first letter was blunt and to the point and apparently the Corinthian church responded to the apostolic direction of the apostle's instructions. Paul indicated to the church that the man had, by his own actions, forfeited his privilege of Christian fellowship. Grace never ignores the importance of repenting when correction is required. God's grace would be sufficient for his forgiveness to take place, but not prior to repentance. Grace, when properly applied, would be all the man would need for spiritual wholeness and to return to fellowship with God and His church.

The man's story starts in 1 Corinthians, but it surfaces on a much more positive note for the man and the church in 2 Corinthians 2. When we connect the dots between First and Second Corinthians, we get the fuller picture of this man's journey back to fellowship with God.

2 Corinthians 2:1-11, [1]*"So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you.* [2]*For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved?* [3]*I wrote as I did so that when I came, I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy.* [4]*For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.* [5]*If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent – not to put it too severely.* [6]*The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him.* [7]*Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.* [8]*I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.* [9]*The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.* [10]*If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven – if there was anything to forgive – I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake,* [11]*in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes."*

The church at Corinth responded well to Paul's instructions, which were God's instructions. After the man repented of his sin, Paul wanted them to embrace him with the love of the Lord. The church of our Lord Jesus is a place where we come together to appreciate God's grace over our sins, but the church can never be a place where she acts like sin is no big deal. God takes sin seriously, and that is why the cross of Calvary was necessary. God took our sin so seriously He sent His Son to die in our place, to suffer the punishment for our sins. While God takes our sin seriously and our sin must be judged, we who are in Christ can live in the realm of mercy, grace, and the forgiveness of God. The good news for us is God is in the restoration business. When we begin to understand the depth of God's love and what He has done for us, is doing now, and has promised to do in the future, we will break out in thanking God for His love.

> 2 Corinthians 2:14-17, 14*"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.* 15*For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.* 16*To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?* 17*Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God."*

When I read here of a procession, I think of a celebration. I think of something like a parade when a sports team wins or some other parade festivities. Most people enjoy parades, and I am not just talking about the children. It doesn't even have to be the Rose Parade in Pasadena or the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City. Parades are things that cities and communities look forward to regardless of the size of the city. Parades are exciting! Even small towns will often gather once a year and have a parade. People will come into town from the rural areas of the countryside or farms from outside of town and enjoy a special day of food, fun, and balloons. It was always an honor to be asked to walk in the parade or have some part in the celebration procession. The school's marching band would usually be there, and they would be dressed in their uniforms with instruments in hand. School children might pile up on flatbed trucks disguised as some sort of celebration float for the occasion. Colored tissue paper poked through chicken wire frames might do the job. We often see people on horseback throw bubble gum and other things to the smaller children lining the streets. And at the end of the parade we might see freshly shined red fire trucks from the mostly Volunteer Fire Department, with their sirens occasionally blaring. These city parades are special occasions and don't happen every day.

The triumphal processions of ancient Rome were also special occasions, but between them there were wars to be fought and wars to

be won. And in between our parades today there is the reality of the daily grind of living good lives in the war which wages against our souls. The apostle shows us we can take steps of victory even in the midst of the spiritual war around us and in us. We can march in the Lord's victory parade even during the daily grind. How? By following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Concentrate on the words: *"God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ."* This phrase is the translation of one Greek word. The word was a technical term for a custom that was common among the Roman armies of that day. When Paul wrote these words to the Corinthians and they saw that word, they immediately knew what he was talking about. They had a clear picture of the application of his message. Today, we are so far removed from Paul's time that we miss what Paul was saying when he referred to a "Triumphal Procession." After the soldiers had won the victory, they dispatched a herald who would run all the way back to the city of Rome. He would run through the streets of the city, announcing that the victory had been won. The word "preach" (KERUX) comes from that word "herald," and that's what preaching is. It is going ahead of our conquering hero and announcing to everybody that the victory is won.

The faithful of God are *"more than conquerors"* (Romans 8:37). Literally, the original word means "super-conquerors." The New American Standard Bible reads, we *"overwhelmingly conquer."* We not only conquer, but we conquer by an overwhelming margin. This isn't just a promise; it is a statement of fact we can rejoice about! Because Christ loves us and we know Christ, we win by an overwhelming margin. Now, I suppose every Christian believes we're going to win eventually, but they may also think it's going to be close. They may think the margin of victory will be narrow, as if they would win in overtime. Maybe in the last 3 seconds, they assume they'll kick a field goal and beat the Devil 17 to 14 in a slim, narrow victory. Friends, that is not what the Bible indicates at all. The Bible doesn't

indicate we win by a narrow margin; we win by an overwhelming margin! We overwhelmingly conquer through Christ. We are more than conquerors from a spiritual standpoint, no matter what is going on physically around us. When we walk with the Lord and follow His lead, we can live spiritually triumph-filled lives.

Therefore, when the Bible speaks of a triumphal processional picture, it will be a magnificent victory celebration. A particular type of incense in Rome was burned in the temples for those occasions. And that's why Paul referred to the perfume, or the fragrance, in the text. If we had been a citizen of Rome in those days and we stepped out of our house and smelled that particular incense in the air, we would have known. It meant victory and there was going to be a celebration. We would know there was going to be a special parade. When a commanding general who was the conquering hero returned to Rome, the people would line the streets. The main figure in that drama was the victorious military leader. He would likely be riding in a gold-plated chariot drawn by white horses. When the people on the streets saw their hero in that chariot, they would cheer and shout. They would throw garlands and confetti into the air, but when they saw the officers of that defeated army chained to that chariot and being dragged along behind and followed by their army, they would really celebrate. This was a demonstration of the power of their hero. Paul was referring to that custom when he said, *"Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession."* Paul was Christianizing that custom. God's people will follow Jesus in the victory – there's no doubt – as Christ leads us from death to life.

As I started thinking about all the imagery in light of what Paul is going to share in this letter, I thought that perhaps there was more to the application than just seeing Christ leading us as we follow in the rear behind the enslaved captives. Consider at one time there were hostilities between God and Paul, but the Lord Jesus Christ had conquered him, and Paul had yielded to Him in unconditional surrender. Before we become a Christian, we are enslaved to sin and

we live chained to sin and there is no way we can get out of those chains without Christ. Romans 6:17, *"But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted."* After we surrender to Jesus and are freed from the bondage of sin, we voluntarily become slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:18,22). Paul wanted everybody to understand what he was saying here before he started detailing some of the bad things happening to him in his life and ministry that would seem to reveal defeat as we progress through 2 Corinthians. He wasn't living a life of defeat, but one of victory. He was more than a conqueror through Jesus Christ!

One of the most important steps on our part to being **more than a conqueror** is **surrendering to Jesus.** Surrendering to the Lord's will is the path of being a victor in the spiritual battle of life. Surrendering to Jesus assures victory. Jesus brought Paul victory over the sin that had so long bound him. If we want to be a conqueror, we must first be conquered. If we want to be an overcomer, we must first be overcome. We must surrender to the Lordship of Christ and submit to His Lordship. That's the principle by which Paul lived his Christian life.

Three Helpful Things to Remember About Our Spiritual Victory:

1. This victory is God's victory through His Son. This victory that Paul talked about is God's victory through His Son. It's not we who are triumphing; it's not we who are riding in that chariot. No, He doesn't cause us to triumph. **He leads us in His triumph.** It is God's victory through His Son. I'm trying to say that the main responsibility for victory in the Christian life is not mine; it is God's. I realize that sometimes we will use the expression, "win the victory," or something similar, and by that we mean we are to overcome the Devil by winning over temptation. But we should understand there are no victories to be won if Christ had not won the victory for us. Christ Jesus made victory possible for us when He died for us on

the cross, and without that victory there could be no triumphal procession in any way! The truth of the matter is that the responsibility for victory is not ours in that we could not accomplish something over the Devil apart from Jesus or without the power of His word or Christian armor He provides us. The victory is ours because it's God's victory through Christ.

2. This victory is ours through submission. This is God's victory through His Son, but it becomes mine through submission or surrender. How do I enter into this victory? By living under the rule and reign of Christ our Lord every day. We need to not only start the Christian race, but finish it. God gives us a choice every day to follow Him or not. Our number one responsibility is to make certain that moment-by-moment we are choosing to live under His Lordship. Every other responsibility we have in our Christian lives flows from that one. The thing that blesses other people is Jesus living in us. Without His life and His Word, no one is going to break out of their chains of slavery to sin. Without submission to the Word of God and our lives manifesting the life of Jesus, no hearts are going to be healed, no wounds are going to be ministered to, and no lives are going to be touched. It is His life that dwells in us that will bless people.

3. This victory is ours in any situation. 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 reads, 14*"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.* 15*For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.* 16*To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?"* What a beautiful word picture – the fragrance of life. The greatest smell we can spread as Christians is the fragrance that attracts others to Jesus' love.

There are two distinct smells we have as we live out our Christian lives in a non-Christian world. The location in which people find

themselves in life's journey will determine the scent we give off when others are around us. When we follow the lead of our spiritual Victor, we will either be the kind of person people enjoy being around or the kind of person people will try to avoid. To people who are tired of living hopeless lives, we who are "in Christ" present a pleasing aroma of life. There will be people who will see our hope in the present and the future and will be curious about the God we say has filled our lives with hope. On the other hand, we may encounter individuals who may not only refuse to hear about our eternal hope, they may even oppose us and the God we love and serve. It might be almost repulsive to them because they cannot fathom such endless hope or marvelous love. In such cases, we might do well to remember our own experience in accepting such hope and love when it was first introduced to us. Thank God He doesn't give up on us. And thanks be to God that He graciously leads us in triumphal procession.

CHAPTER 2 QUESTIONS
To Teach, Train, and Transform Lives

1. Explain what was wrong with the perspective the Corinthian church had at first with the man whose sin was very open and in public view? What was the sin, and how should they have responded, according to the apostle's instruction?

2. What is the urgent call in practical terms to the church according to 1 Corinthians 5:6-8? What is Satan's lie that more and more people are buying into in our world today?

3. What should the subject of grace in our lives never ignore?

4. When we connect the dots between First and Second Corinthians, what picture do we get of the immoral man's situation?

5. How do we know the church responded favorably to the instruction of the Lord through Paul?

6. What picture should we get when we read the words: *"God always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ?"*

7. Because Christ loves us and we know Christ, what can we know? How does Romans 8:37 support this idea as a fact?

8. What is one of the most important steps into being more than a conqueror in Christ?

9. List three helpful things we ought to remember when it comes to our spiritual victory. What are the two distinct smells we discharge as we live out our Christian lives, and why?