

# GLORIOUS MESS

**#1 II Corinthians 4:1-18** If you want God to truly use you in a meaningful way, you need to remember this: **It's not about you; it's all about Jesus.** That is the exact opposite of everything we've been taught. Our entire culture appeals to self-centeredness. Advertisements everywhere tell you, "You're number one! Do what's best for you! Think of yourself first!" But we're not the center of the universe—God is. That's why, when we make every problem, every opportunity, and every criticism about us, we become frustrated, angry and unfulfilled. "Take the selfishness out of this world, and there would be more happiness than we should know what to do with" (H. W. Shaw). God used the Apostle Paul in a mighty and marvelous way because he was able to say, "Our message is not about ourselves. It is about Jesus Christ as the Lord" (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 4:5 GW).

**#2 II Corinthians 4:1-6** Scripture reminds us that we're human beings. We're feeble and fragile. Jars of clay break easily. If you drop them, they shatter. Clay pots have to be handled appropriately and with care. If not, they'll be destroyed. **But the good news is that through our feebleness, the power and glory of God shine through.** Your humanity isn't something to hide. Instead, you can celebrate the power of God working through your limitations. When we deny our humanity and try to do it all in our own power, we are actually robbing God of his glory. Trust in God's power and not your own to accomplish his work in this world.

**#3 II Corinthians 4:7-12** People are watching the way we act more than they are listening to what we say. Billy Graham once wrote, "We are the Bibles the world is reading; We are the creeds the world is needing; We are the sermons the world is heeding." That's why it is incredibly important that we face difficult things with grace, faith and persistence. Faithful people keep on keeping on when other people choose to give up. Faithful people are diligent and determined. They are persistent. They change their perspective and focus on God's promises in his Word. Just remember this: **God is more interested in what you are becoming than what you accomplish.** Let his light shine through your life today!

**#4 II Corinthians 4:13-15** I suspect all of us would avoid pain and suffering if that was possible. But the truth is that pain and suffering are very much a part of life. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33 NIV). Count on it! **But when you use your pain to help others, God will bless you in ways you can't possibly imagine.** The Apostle Paul went through enormous pain in his life, which is why God was able to use him in enormous ways. He was shipwrecked, beaten, and robbed. He went without food, water, and sleep. Yet God used him to spread the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. In fact, if you were to ask Paul, "How'd you put up with so much pain?" He'd tell you it was because he wanted to bring people to Jesus Christ. He wanted to help others. He writes, "These sufferings of ours are for your benefit. And the more of you who are won to Christ, the more there are to thank him for his great kindness, and the more the Lord is glorified" (2nd Cor. 4:15 TLB). You may never suffer the same ways Paul did, but you will go through pain in life. I encourage you to not waste your pain. Use it for good.

**#5 II Corinthians 4:16-18** At most, you will live a hundred years on earth, but you will spend forever in eternity. That's why the Bible tells us to "fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2nd Cor. 4:18 NIV). When you realize life on earth is just temporary, it radically alters your values. Eternal values, not temporal ones, become the deciding factor for your decisions. John Wesley, the Father of Methodism, used to say, "I judge all things only by the price they shall gain in eternity." **Remind yourself today that God created you to live in heaven with him for eternity. Heaven is your home—not earth!** That will help explain why some of God's promises seem unfulfilled, why some prayers seem unanswered, and why some circumstances seem unfair. This life is not the end of the story! So fix your eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.

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Check out this Bible Project video on covenants to enhance your study this week!

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/covenants/>

**#1 II Corinthians 3** A Bible scholar says, “The Corinthians were a ‘letter’ not written with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. Even in the midst of his defense, Paul gives the glory to God. He says that they are a “letter from Christ” and written by the “Spirit.” Paul delivered this “letter” so to speak. But he didn’t write it. God was still the author of salvation. And Paul was his faithful servant.” Your salvation is a miraculous letter too. Give God thanks for “writing” you by His Spirit.

**#2 II Corinthians 3:1-3** According to studyandobey.com: “Paul’s recommendation letter is the Corinthians themselves. They not only knew who he was, but their faith was a direct result of Paul’s work on their behalf. The church was established by Paul. Their transformed lives were evidence of Paul’s good character and faithful service.” Who has influenced you in your journey to Christ and with Christ? Thank God for them. Who thinks of you as their leader to faith and in faith? Thank God for them.

**#3 II Corinthians 3:4-6** Sufficiency is from God. What is the difference between self-confidence and confidence in God? What is Paul recognizing when he says his confidence/competence is from God? Paul continues to respond to criticism of his ministry. He turns to Truth, to the One Who is the source of his credibility. How do you see God underwriting your life and ministry? Do you generate your ministry or does God? Our confidence comes from knowing that God is working through us.

**#4 II Corinthians 1:3:7-11** Writing to believers who knew Old Testament history, Paul contrasts following the law, the commandments, and knowing what is right and wrong, with new life in Christ. He says that following the law brought death, the recognition of sin. Righteousness is found in Christ, in the ministry of the Spirit. It is glorious! Take a moment to savor what the Spirit has done in our lives, washing away our sins and uniting us with Christ in righteousness. This is glorious!

**#5 II Corinthians 3:12-18** When Moses returned from meeting God, he wore a veil because the radiance of his face from meeting God would be fading. It was transitory. Paul then takes the idea of a veil and uses it to describe how the hearts of the Jews are still covered by a veil when they hear Truth. When we turn to Christ there is no veil, we see the Lord’s glory and we reflect it to all. This glory transforms us into His likeness more and more. Does it increase your praise and confidence to know that Christ by His Spirit is transforming you into His likeness? His glory is magnificent, like nothing else.

Devotions written by Paige Conat



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**#1 II Corinthians 1:23-2:17** Oh the power of a well written letter! We all have received them, some have been cherished, some not so much. Growing up letters became a powerful form of communication from my mom, we received them for encouragement, praise, or as a way for her to voice her displeasure. We learned very quickly that when we received a handwritten letter she was sharing encouragement or praise, but a typed letter meant we were in trouble. Like Paul, my mom's letters were written out of love and concern, but she never left us without knowing where we stood with her. We also knew that despite the troubles we may have found ourselves in, she loved us unconditionally, and was always ready to forgive. Does that sound like anyone you know? I believe that Paul is trying to teach us the same lesson that my mom taught us kids growing up. There will be trouble and bad, but God's grace and love are always there for us. As you read chapters 1:23-2:17 focus on God's love and grace. I wonder, would this letter have been handwritten or typed?

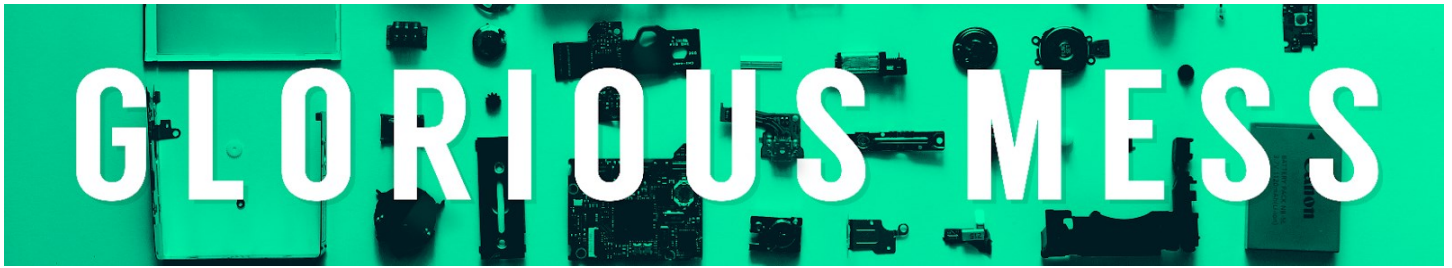
**#2 II Corinthians 1:23-2:4** At the end of chapter 1, Paul explains why he wrote instead of coming for a face to face meeting. In verse 23 Paul makes it very clear that he wrote to avoid, "severe rebuke" (NLT), "spare you pain" (MSG), "spare you" (NIV). This letter was an emotional letter written to encourage them to follow the advice he previously had given them in 1st Corinthians. Paul goes on to remind the Corinthians that his goal isn't to tell you how to grow in faith, but it is to come beside you to help you grow and find the joy in your faith. As you continue reading through verse 2:4, you feel Paul's emotions and how grieved he was for the people of Corinth. Have you grieved or are you grieving for someone who hasn't found the joy in Christ? If so, be like Paul, be willing to spare them grief, come beside and work to help them find the joy in Christ.

**#3 II Corinthians 2:5-8** Forgive and comfort.....the two important points of these verses. I will admit that I often struggle with forgiveness, I am really good at hanging on to the wrongs. So good, that for a really long time I wasted time and energy focusing on these perceived wrongs, they consumed me, controlled my self-confidence and self-worth. Thankfully, the Lord worked and worked on me, and I was able to forgive! With forgiveness came an ability to love those who I forgave. Let me make it very clear.....forgiveness isn't always easy, but when we focus on the grace God had with us, it changes our perspective. Is there someone that you need to forgive today? Remember, Paul reminds us to forgive and comfort.

**#4 II Corinthians 2:9-11** In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul puts the church to a test regarding a man who was sexually immoral. He harshly condemns the church for not addressing this man's sin. The church hears Paul, and eventually addresses the issue, and they hold the man accountable for his sin. This event was a test to see if the church would do the right thing, and they passed. In verses 9-11, Paul puts the Corinthians to another test regarding this man that they condemned, the test was to forgive and comfort this man after he repented. Paul again stressed the importance of forgiving and loving this man who had sinned. In verse 10, Paul leads by example, he forgives, "Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven - if there was anything to forgive - I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake." Do you pass the forgiveness test?

**#5 II Corinthians 2:12-17** There are those smells that just take you back to a fond memory, for me it is my mom's homemade applesauce - she loaded it with cinnamon, or my Peonies when they bloom in the late spring. In verse 14, Paul talks about how God uses us to "spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere." He goes on to point out that not everyone will find the "aroma" (knowledge of God) pleasing. He does however challenge us to speak for God with sincerity and integrity, and to continue to spread his aroma. When we are faithful with this, the Holy Spirit will work in changing those that don't appreciate the "aroma" of God. Be faithful.....who are you going to share your knowledge of God with?

Devotions written by [Kelly McCloughan](#)



**#1 II Corinthians 1:1-22** Welcome to the JFM summer series on the book of II Corinthians! The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth which he helped to establish on one of his missionary journeys—you can read about it in Acts 18:1-17. Paul's most recent visit had been a "painful one" (2:1) and this letter served as his way of instructing and encouraging this young congregation as their spiritual father. To get an overview of this book, watch the Bible Project video on II Corinthians: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/2-corinthians/> Read 1:1-22 through the lens of reconciliation. Paul loves the people of Corinth and it pains his heart to feel tension/division with them. Alongside the theme of reconciliation which is introduced here and carried through the first seven chapters, we begin to see a thread that is woven through the whole letter: Paul's desire that the Corinthians would be transformed in the image of Christ.

**#2 II Corinthians 1:1-7** Paul opens his letter with a traditional greeting that states the most important thing about him—his apostleship to Jesus—and to whom the letter is written. Paul adds his main hope for his readers: that they would know the grace and peace of Jesus. Beginning in verse 3, Paul shares one of the most beautiful descriptions of the costly suffering we endure as Christ followers. Paul himself was no stranger to immense suffering (see 11:23-33). **The word comfort or console means to invite someone to come near in order to encourage or exhort.** At its core, it is about truly **being with another** person in any circumstance. We do this by tapping into our own pain, remembering how it felt and the comfort we received in the midst of it; then giving hope or direction to the one currently in pain. Pain is a common denominator across humankind—we have all experienced in some form or another. Sharing in the pain of another is one way we bring them comfort. One of the worst feelings in the world is suffering alone. Who may the Lord be asking you to comfort?

**#3 II Corinthians 1:8-11** Paul gives the Corinthians a glimpse into the depth of his suffering which was so overwhelming that the NRSV says, "we were utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself" (8). We read in other places about the immense physical suffering Paul endured, but here he shares his mental anguish. Some commentators believe he was contemplating taking his own life because of the internal turmoil he was experiencing. Paul and his companions did not allow that dark place to overcome them, they took the right next step: "we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely on God, who raises the dead" (9, NLT). When we suffer, if we turn toward God or away from Him tells us much about the depth and trajectory of our faith. In addition, Paul thanks them for praying for him because it helped—the beauty of being a part of a praying community means we never have to face life's hardships alone! Praise the Lord!

**#4 II Corinthians 1:12-14** This passage concludes with Paul declaring that when Jesus returns, he will boast about the Corinthians and he hopes they will boast about him as their founding apostle. In the preceding verses, he explains why they can confidently boast about him and his partners, it is because: "our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you with integrity and godly sincerity...relying not on worldly wisdom, but God's grace" (12, NIV). Think about the primary relationships in your life and use this verse as a litmus test. Are you conducting yourself with integrity, sincerity and the grace of God with those you live or work with?

**#5 II Corinthians 1:15-22** After Paul explains why he had to change his earlier travel plans, adding that he was not going back on his commitment or vacillating, he shares with the Corinthians two major truths. First, he tells them that **Jesus was the fulfillment of all of God's promises**; because Jesus came, died and rose again, we can trust everything God has ever promised us. Second, Paul states the three-fold blessing that we receive as Christ followers. We are **anointed** by the anointed one—Jesus Himself. We are **stamped with His seal** which means we are marked out as His and share in His eternal life. We have been **given the spirit in our hearts** and this is only a portion of what is to come when we will be in the presence of the Almighty God for all of eternity! Spend some time thanking God for His overwhelming goodness!