



True love

2 CORINTHIANS 8-13

by James Hughes

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The Good Book Guide to 2 Corinthians 8–13

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Introduction: Good Book Guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home or in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, mums and tots, students, businessmen or teens. That's why we've designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the “big picture” of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to appropriately apply what we have discovered to our lives. Let's take a look at what is included:

- ↔ **Talkabout:** Most groups need to “break the ice” at the beginning of a session, and here's the question that will do that. It's designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
- ↓ **Investigate:** The Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. The **Leader's Guide** contains **guidance for questions**, and sometimes ☑ additional “follow-up” questions.
- ⋮ **Explore more (optional):** These questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to fit it all together like a jig-saw; or occasionally look at a part of the passage that's not dealt with in detail in the main study.
- **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you'll keep coming across **apply** sections. These are questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and your church. 🗣️ **Getting personal** is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have learned.
- ↑ **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God's word—in line with his concerns, purposes and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader's Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God's word.

Why study 2 Corinthians 8 – 13?

"We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you ... I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also ... I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you ... So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well."

(2 Corinthians 6 v 11, 12 and 12 v 14, 15)

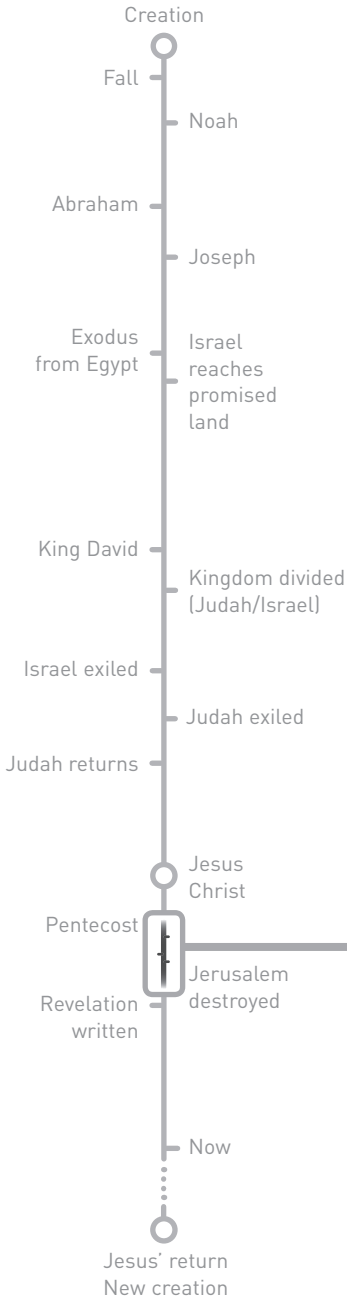
Welcome to one of Paul's most deeply personal letters.

Many think of 2 Corinthians as a "difficult" letter of the apostle Paul, and we need to read it carefully to understand his relationship with the Corinthian church. But it reveals a great deal about Paul himself, showing us his passion both for God's truth and for Christ's people, and a heart filled with true love—Christ-like love—for this church.

And the church in Corinth desperately needed such love. These Christians struggled to accept struggle, prioritising prosperity over faithfulness. They eagerly followed those offering fame and fortune rather than loyalty to God's word. Their problems were, essentially, with failing to understand and appreciate how Jesus loves us, and how we are to love each other. They were heading for spiritual danger, and needed to hear sometimes hard truths. Paul loved them enough to set out those truths in the second half of this letter.

We Christians now are really not so different from those in first-century Corinth. We too need to hear Paul speak to us today, encouraging us, challenging us, warning us—loving us. We study this letter then because it speaks to us as it spoke to them.

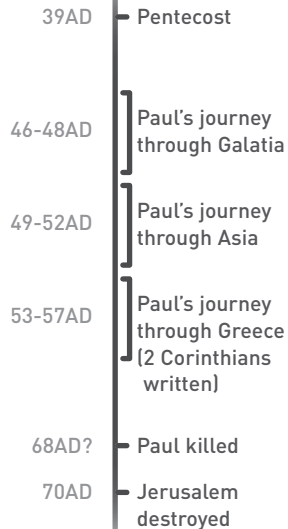
In these seven studies, covering the last six chapters of this letter, you'll see Paul's zeal, faith, grief, sacrifice and humility—the fruit of his devotion to Christ and the gospel—and you'll be changed by true love.



BIBLE TIMELINE

Where does 2 Corinthians fit into the whole story of God's word?

2 CORINTHIANS 55-57AD



1

2 Corinthians 8 v 1-24

GIVING AND RECEIVING I: FOLLOWING GOOD EXAMPLES

The first seven chapters of 2 Corinthians are perhaps some of the most personal in all of Paul's letters: they deal with his understanding of what ministry is, in the face of challenges from the church in Corinth. It is full of memorable phrases and ideas: how we have the light of the gospel as "treasure in jars of clay" (4 v 7), how Paul is Christ's ambassador (5 v 20), and how, facing opposition and persecution, Paul has "nothing", yet possesses "everything" (6 v 10).

The subject matter changes a bit as we reach chapters 8 – 9, which focus on giving; but then in chapters 10 – 13 Paul is forced to give a "boasting" defence of his gospel and ministry against "false apostles". But although this is a very personal lesson, it is full of insight into what it means to live for Christ day by day, and the reality of living in a fallen world.

talkabout

1. What's been your experience of hearing the subject of money and giving mentioned or discussed in church?

- What's your reaction, and why do you think you react like that?

investigate

2 Corinthians 8 and 9 form a distinct part of Paul's letter, dealing with one of the topics we often don't like to talk about in church—money. In the first two studies, we'll look at what Paul says about a collection for the Christians in Jerusalem, to see how it helps us have the right perspective on giving, and receiving; and to discover and reflect upon some important principles of giving.

➤ **Read 2 Corinthians 8 v 1-8**

There are two examples to learn from in this passage. This first is that of the Macedonian churches, which would include the Thessalonians, Philippians and Bereans.

DICTIONARY

Grace (v 1): undeserved kindness.
Titus (v 6): at this point, Titus was a member of Paul's mission team.

2. What does the "grace" that the Macedonian churches have been given look like (v 1-3)?

3. How did the Macedonians view their giving (v 3-5)?

4. What does Paul want the Corinthians to do (v 6-8)?

- What should their motivation be (v 8)?

5. To help summarise this section, make a list of the words used in verses 1-8 to describe giving.



apply

6. How does the giving of the Macedonians compare with your experiences of money and giving in church?

- What difference should the Macedonian example make to us?



getting personal

Think over what you have learned about the Macedonians.

- They were richly generous.
- They gave as much as they could and more.
- They were eager to help.

Which of these things would you like people to be able to say of you?

What do you need to do now to make that possible?

investigate

 **Read 2 Corinthians 8 v 9-15**

7. How does Paul want the Corinthians to follow the example of Christ (v 9-11)?



8. What makes the gift acceptable (v 12)?

9. What are the principles of giving and receiving set out in verses 13-15?

- What would the family of God's people look like if we were to follow Paul's instructions?



explore more

optional

▶ Read 2 Corinthians 8 v 16-24

Why is Titus coming to see the Corinthians (v 16-17, v 23)?

What are the qualifications of the two "brothers" (the first mentioned in v 18-19; the second in v 22)?

What is Paul's concern here (v 19-21)?

What should the Corinthians do, and why (v 24)?

What does these brothers' example tell us about dealing with money?



apply

10. What principles of giving have we learned today?



- How are you going to apply these principles to your own giving?



getting personal

“You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

Do you feel rich?

If not, why not, do you think? And how can you come to appreciate your true wealth in Christ?

If yes, is that seen by others? How can your life display the riches that Christ has given to you?



pray

Spend some time praying for anything that has come up in the study—but particularly:

- for generous hearts that desire to give to the Lord’s work.
- for wisdom in knowing how and what to give.
- for a fuller understanding of all that we have received in Jesus Christ.

