UPC Family Devotional

July – Week 4

Memory Verse of the Week:

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12: 9

July 25 Monday 2 Corinthians 10: 1-11

Some people have infiltrated the Corinthian church with criticisms that challenge Paul’s apostolic authority. They accuse Paul of being bold when absent but timid when present. Their worldly logic is that an apostle of God must look the part, just like many people expected Jesus to be a mighty king who would deliver Israel through war. The world views success on its own terms, but Paul reminds us that being a soldier for Christ does not mean showing off physical strength and warring against flesh and blood. Rather, we fight against false ideas to make every thought obedient to Christ. The power of God works to make his message attractive, rather than the messenger.

When have you been torn between worldly and spiritual success? How can you stay spiritually-minded in the midst of worldly influences?

Paul argues that his God-given authority over the church is not for the sake of appearances but for building up the believers. And although his opponents criticize his approach to ministry, Paul assures the Corinthians that what he writes and what he says in person possess the same authority from God. The word of God is not only for reading or intellectual exercise. It is to be obeyed with our actions, for that is the mark of a true believer. It can be easy for Christians to fall into the trap of wanting to appear spiritual through religious devotion. However, we must recognize and resist our sinful tendency to be satisfied with how we appear before others at the expense of living righteously before God in obedience to His word.

When are you more concerned with appearing godly than actually pleasing God? What are some indications of this tendency that you should watch out for?

July 26 Tuesday 2 Corinthians 10: 12-18

Paul refuses to engage in the tactics of his opponents, who have a habit of making much of themselves. Not only are they self-promoters, but in so doing they put others down through their criticism. Paul, however, confines his boasting to those things which God has allowed him to accomplish, namely, reaching Corinth with the gospel. The arrogance of worldly success is so often deceptive. We would be wise to take our cue from Paul: to take our eyes off worldly ideas of success and focus on accomplishing the things that the Lord has given us. That joy and glory that come from God's approval are of much greater worth than anything the world offers.

What worldly goals are you tempted to pursue? How can you refocus your commitments toward spiritual concerns?

Paul reiterates that his boasting will always be measured by godly standards. He wants his joy to flow from what God alone is doing so that his boasting will always be in the Lord. Even though Paul hopes for greater influence beyond Corinth, this hope is rooted in the Corinthians growing in their faith so that, through partnership, they can spread the gospel together with him. For Paul, God's glory is inseparably bound with a spiritual vitality he longs to see in others. Instead of the world’s pursuit of recognition and celebration of self-promotion, we should seek the joy that comes when we see God transforming lives, so that He alone will become our treasure and reward.

When are you most tempted to fight for your own recognition? What helps you find satisfaction in God?

July 27 Wednesday 2 Corinthians 11: 1-15

In our culture, which is always clamoring for the latest trend, we must take note that what is different can be disastrous when it comes to ultimate truth. We should be aware of any cultural or political claim that presents a different Jesus or a different gospel. We must exercise discernment so that we will not be lured away from Christ by attractive messages. One way we can guard the truth is by steadily engaging in a local church community that preaches the gospel in accordance with God's word. Let us also watch out for others who may be influenced by the world and gently exhort them about the dangers of being deceived.

What faulty interpretations of the Christian faith pose the greatest threat to your community? Whom is God calling you to warn about being deceived?

A major theme in Paul's letter concerns the standards that something may disqualify him for ministry- when in fact they prove his apostleship! When Paul refuses to ask for money from the church, which his opponents criticize him for, he displays a genuine heart of service before God. We should be wary of any Christian teacher that seeks out wealth and prestige. Paul condemns false teachers who masquerade as servants of light, and he is determined to expose them out of his love for the Corinthian believers. In our culture that avoids offending others at all cost, we should remember that it is an act of love to expose deception in the church and in the wider culture.

How can we protect ourselves from the deceptive lure of power and wealth? How can you speak both truthfully and lovingly to others?

July 28 Thursday 2 Corinthians 11: 16-33

Paul employees his rhetorical flair by sarcastically stating how he is "too weak” to take advantage of the Corinthians like the false teachers do. He then surprises his audience by bragging about the suffering he hasn't countered. When we face hard times amid our desire to follow the Lord, we can misinterpret them as though God were withdrawing his love for us by refusing to bless our efforts. But we must remember that God is actually counting us worthy to share in Christ’s sufferings. This encourages us to see that our efforts are not in vain rather than invalidating what we are seeking to do for God, our suffering shows us that we are on the right path.

What suffering have you faced while trying to serve the Lord? How have you experienced the joy of sharing in Christ’s sufferings?

Paul displays the burning heart of a pastor who feels constant anxiety for the churches and deeply empathizes with their struggles. Even if we are not pastors, we are each called to have concern for the spiritual well-being of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul’s story in Damascus seems to appear out of nowhere until we remember his conversion on the road to Damascus, where he first met Jesus and was brought to a place of humility and weakness. In the Christian life, weakness is neither a liability nor cause for despair. Rather, it is an opportunity to boast in the blessing that God provides to those who are poor in spirit.

How is God shaping your heart to care more deeply for her fellow believers? How can your weaknesses be an opportunity to boast in the Lord?

July 29 Friday 2 Corinthians 12: 1-10

Paul shares his own experience of a truly sublime supernatural encounter, in which he was spiritually transported into heaven itself and given a direct revelation from God! But Paul's purpose for this story is to communicate to the Corinthians that even such a rare encounter with God does not warrant great boasting. Whenever we have such experiences, we should never think we earned them so that we show them off as metals and become inflated with pride. Rather, we should just humbly bask in God's goodness and give Him the glory. When God reveals Himself to us in powerful ways, He intends to increase our faith so that we can be a blessing to others.

What spiritual encounters have you experienced with the Lord? How can you guard against pride when you receive God's blessings?

Paul intentionally shrouds his experience in paradise but openly speaks about the thorn in his flesh. Though the exact nature of his torment is unclear (whether spiritual, relational, or physical), we know that it was an agent of evil. And just as Jesus prayed three times in Gethsemane to be free of his great burden, Paul prayed for relief from his suffering but his request is denied. One reason God allows suffering in our lives is so that we may know that He alone is enough for us. Therefore, not only can we endure hardships, but we are actually able to find joy in the midst of them because we know that our father is with us and provides us with grace along the way.

What is a “thorn” that you have faced for our currently facing? How is God teaching you to find meaning in suffering?

July 30 Saturday 2 Corinthians 12: 11-21

Paul reminds the Corinthians how much he sacrificed for them, giving the example of parents, whose duty is to sacrifice for their children. As with an immature child, Paul spent time and effort training the Corinthians to grow stronger, making sure that neither he nor any of his fellow workers were a burden to them. We, too, should invest our resources into the body of Christ so that it will be better equipped to spread the gospel. It is certainly not easy work, but it has eternal benefits, even if we find that Christians mature at different paces. But let us be committed to making sacrifices in our walk together and build up one another as Christ’s Church.

Why should we regard the church as a priority in our lives? In what ways can you sacrifice your resources to build up God’s people?

Paul wants to make clear that all of his words and arguments have the spiritual purpose of exemplifying the gospel and helping the Corinthians mature as Christians. However, he fears that their immature attitude may only cause more problems and grief. It is difficult to receive the rebukes of those who are more mature in the faith, but that is exactly what we must to do. Having a teachable and repentant attitude pleases God and promotes our development into Christlikeness. Let us strive not to be so easily offended by what we assume about the intentions of others. Rather, let us ask God for the ability to hear His voice in the admonitions of those who He sends to us.

How do you react to godly rebukes from mature believers? How can you be more mature and receptive in those situations?