

Life Group Lesson

Nothing More Beautiful • Week of August 30

We have no idea what the apostle Paul looked like. But we know from his letters to the early New Testament churches, he had a beautiful spirit. Once Paul met the risen Christ, Paul was determined to follow Jesus no matter the cost. As he (and his team of co-workers) took the Gospel to unreached people across Asia minor, Greece, Europe and the Mediterranean world, they faced constant opposition. His body bore the scars of faithfulness, and his desire to reflect the glory of Christ kept him moving forward with Christ's message of salvation to the world.

In his second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul writes: "We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Nothing is more beautiful than when the church reflects Christ. Although faithfulness often means suffering, we must remember that in Christ is all that is good and glorious. Regardless of what Paul looked like on the outside, after being beaten, whipped, imprisoned, abandoned—Paul reflected the beauty of Christ on the inside.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-12

How can we reflect Christ? Without the transformational power of the Holy Spirit, we remain in darkness. But the light of Christ is immediately reflected in the heart of anyone who truly believes and receives Christ's love. God's Spirit calls us (from the deep place in our spirit) to turn from sin, and consider (give attention to, turn toward) the Lord Jesus Christ. We must listen closely to His voice, because this world is loud and can easily distract us.

1. We need the Holy Spirit to be able to say that Jesus is Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3). Satan blinds the eyes (the minds) of those who don't believe so that they cannot see the glorious light of the Good News. Read Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4. How does this help you understand the 'veil' of darkness that this world is under?

The devil wants to keep you in the dark. But Christ lifts that veil the moment you say 'yes' in faith to Jesus. Jesus once told a crowd, "This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one He has sent" (John 6:29). What is easy about simply believing in Jesus? What is hard about simply believing in Jesus?

"We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies" (2 Corinthians 4:8-10). Did you know how you persevere in a season of suffering can actually be one of the strongest witnesses to Christ that you could ever give? When it is hard to praise Him, and yet, you choose to offer a sacrifice of praise – often a watching world takes notice. Sharing Christ's suffering precedes sharing in His glory (see Romans 8:17).

2. Paul suffered for his faith, as well as those who partnered with the apostle Paul. They all suffered together. Even so, the beauty of Christ shone through the hardship of each one. How is the church suffering persecution today? How is the church reflecting the beauty of Christ today?

We too are in this together. What is beautiful about the church in your experience?

There is nothing beautiful about envy, jealousy, gossip or backbiting. But there is everything beautiful about forgiving, serving together, and celebrating the victories of others. When one part of the body of Christ suffers, we all suffer; when one part of the body rejoices, all rejoice. Jesus desires that we be one with He and the Father. He prayed—

"I pray that they all will be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me" (John 17:21-23).

From the beginning, it is evident that God desires to have a relationship with humanity. It is amazing that the Lord wants us to know Him personally, to enjoy fellowship, and to share life with Him. When you think about it, it makes perfect sense – He is the Giver (the Source) of life! The Lord knows us and loves us more than anyone. Just as the Lord revealed His name to Abraham (Genesis 17:1-2), personally called Moses (Exodus 3:4), personally provided shelter for His people (Psalm 105:39), personally instructed the building of a Tabernacle so He could live among them (Exodus 25:8) – God is building a people for Himself today.

3. Just as the Lord communed with a young shepherd boy out tending the sheep (Psalm 23:1), the Lord wants you to trust Him with everything that concerns you. Do you trust Him? Are you taking advantage of the awesome opportunity to fellowship with 'the Almighty'? How is the Lord personally revealing Himself to you? (share briefly)

The LORD God ultimately revealed Himself through His Son.

Read Hebrews 1:1-3. Christ has *already* cleansed you from all of your sin (take that in for a moment). All you have to do is believe! Trust Him and thank Him. Share a personal praise now.

Is there something causing you to be analytical to your own detriment? Don't try to analyze faith, just receive Jesus into your heart like a little child. It is that easy. Even if you don't understand everything about God and faith (and we won't this side of heaven), be determined to reflect Christ's love to those around you. Decide now before the tender moment of receiving (and reflecting) the Lord Jesus is dismissed. Pray now.

"That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!" (2 Corinthians 4:16-17).

One Year Bible Readings

August 30: Job 34:1-36:33, 2 Corinthians 4:1-12, Psalm 44:1-8, Proverbs 22:10-12
August 31: Job 37:1-39:30, 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:10, Psalm 44:9-26, Proverbs 22:13
September 1: Job 40:1-42:17, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, Psalm 45:1-17, Proverbs 22:14
September 2: Ecclesiastes 1:1-3:22, 2 Corinthians 6:1-13, Psalm 46:1-11, Prov. 22:15
September 3: Ecclesiastes 4:1-6:12, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:7, Psalm 47:1-9, Prov. 22:16
September 4: Ecclesiastes 7:1-9:18, 2 Corinthians 7:8-16, Ps. 48:1-14, Prov. 22:17-19
September 5: Ecclesiastes 10:1-12:14, 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, Ps. 49:1-20, Prov. 22:20-21



**Text: 2 Corinthians 4:1-12,
Ephesians 4:11-16**

Plain Truth:

We _____ Christ or our
beauty _____.

1. People of the New Way _____
up on purity of Living and _____
Christ.
2. Christians occasionally may be at the
_____ of our _____ but not the end
of our _____.