

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE

Lord, you want me to do what? Hosea 1:1—2:1

“In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’ ” Hosea 1:10b

Day 1: Read Hosea 1:1—2:1.

1. For a brief introduction to Hosea, let’s return to the time of the Exodus when God led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Read Exodus 20:18–19 and describe why God chose to speak to his people through prophets. (See also Deut. 18:9–22.)
2. Reread the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:14–22 and list some of the characteristics of a true prophet of God.
3. How do we know that Hosea is a true prophet? (Hint: Note all occurrences of the words “The LORD said...” in Hosea 1.)
4. Hosea is one in a long line of prophets, but who is the ultimate fulfillment of Moses’ words? (John 1:45; 5:46–47; Acts 3:22–26)

Day 2: Read Hosea 1:1–2.

5. Hosea lives in the northern kingdom of a prominent, powerful, and prosperous Israel. The world looks at Israel and sees success, but when God looks at Israel what does he see? (vs. 2)
6. Does the spiritual condition of his people come as a surprise to God? (Deut. 31:16–18)
7. Do you think God’s assessment of their condition comes as a surprise to Israel? Explain your answer.
8. Think about your own heart. What sins do you minimize or ignore? What sins do you consider too trivial to repent of? Meditate on James 4:1–10, and ask God to show you where you have been unfaithful to him...and then ask him for the grace to repent.

Day 3: Read Hosea 1:2–9.

9. What instruction does God give to Hosea? (vs. 2)
10. Who does “the adulterous wife,” Gomer, represent?

11. Why do you think it isn't enough for God to send Hosea out with a spoken message alone?

12. How does his obedience to God prepare Hosea to fulfill his appointed task? For example, what do you think Hosea learns through his own marriage about God's love for his people?

Day 4: Read Hosea 1:2–9.

13. If Gomer represents the nation of Israel as a whole, who might her children represent?

14. God gives the children unusual names. Jezreel is the firstborn. Jezreel is the name of a well-known town and valley in Hosea's homeland. It had been the site of glory for Israel in the days of Gideon, but more recently it had been the site of King Jehu's bloodbath (read about it in 2 Kings 9-10). The name is a reminder that God will punish the rulers of Israel, Jehu's descendants. And indeed, soon after Hosea's prophecy, the last of Jehu's line is assassinated, and only about 30 years later, Israel's "bow" (vs. 5)—its army—is defeated and the nation is taken into exile by Assyria.

What does God name the other two children, and what do their names mean?

15. Look at the three names and their meanings. What progression, if any, do you see in these successive messages to Israel?

Day 5: Read Hosea 1:10—2:1.

16. How is the whole tone of these verses different from the rest of the chapter?

17. What promises does God pour forth in the following verses:

a. verse 10a

b. verse 10b

c. verse 11

18. What surprising reversal of the meanings of the children's names occurs at the end of chapter 1?

19. What effect would this message have on Hosea's audience?

20. What effect does the message of God's unconditional love and saving grace have on you?

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**How God Allures****Hosea 2:2—3:5**

*“Therefore I am now going to allure her;
I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her.”* Hosea 2:14

Day 1: Read Hosea 2:2–5.

1. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated “rebuke” (NIV) or “plead” (ESV) has a legal sense, the pressing of a grievance. Do you think God is seeking a divorce, or is he seeking reconciliation? Explain.
2. The Canaanite culture (for example, the use of Baal idols in fields to increase crop production) has woven itself into the nation’s fabric, and generations of Israelites have known no other way of worship. Discuss how God considers this to be adultery. (vss. 4–5)
3. What is the self-deception of anyone who turns from God to idols? (vs. 5b, James 1:17)

Day 2: Read Hosea 2:6–8.

4. What is God’s strategy for winning back his people, his bride? (vss. 6–7a)
5. Why will Israel come crawling back to God? (vs. 7b) Share a time when you experienced God frustrating your path to your idols so that you would give up on them and come back to God.
6. Would you describe Israel’s attitude in 7b as a first-rate repentance and love? Consider the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. What “ground floor” level of relationship does God accept as beaten sinners come to him? (Luke 15:14b)
7. What does the unrighteous person think of all the good gifts she has received from God—food, talents, money, time, love, etc.? (vs. 8)

Day 3: Read Hosea 2:9–18.

8. Describe God’s “tough love” in verses 9–13. Describe God’s “tough love” in your own life.
9. What is God’s motive all along in his legal plea (vs. 1), in his blocking Israel’s path (vs. 6), and in his punishments (vss. 10–13)? (vss. 14–16)

10. How is God's vision for his relationship with Israel (and you) so much more than just bare forgiveness? (vss. 14–16)

11. What do you think verse 18 means?

Day 4: Read Hosea 2:19–23.

12. Verses 19 and 20 seem to be marriage vows. Find the word in these verses that indicates how long you can expect this renewed marriage to last. What 5 things does God “betroth” us with?

13. How do verses 21 and 22 paint a beautiful picture of God's lordship over all nature for the sake of his beloved people?

14. In the end, when God emblazons his ways on our hearts (Jer.31:31–33), how far will our love for him evolve from the enlightened self-interest of verse 7b to what God has had in mind all along? (vs. 23b)

Day 5: Read Hosea 3:1–5.

15. After the pick-me-up of a glorious future vision in 2:14–23, we return to the tawdry present reality of a faithless Israel. (vs. 1) Why do you think the book is laid out in this way? Any analogy to the messiness of your own life experience?

16. In verse 1, God spells out as plainly as anywhere in Hosea his object lesson in having the prophet marry a whore. How is God to Israel as Hosea is to his wife?

17. Did God set his love on you when you were godly or ungodly? (vs. 1; Romans 5:6)

18. It is striking that Hosea has to pay to buy back his own wife. (vs. 2) Who else had to pay for his own rightful possession? Who was that possession? What did he pay? (Jn. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:18–19)

19. Gomer's imposed isolation from her lovers pictures Israel's coming exile, her forcible removal from the Canaanites' debased religious rituals. But what is God's intended outcome? (vs. 5)

20. Israel will come trembling back to the Lord “in the last days.” When do you think that is? (Acts 2:16–17)

21. When we come “trembling back to the Lord,” is it akin to a trip to the doghouse? What also do we always come back to when we come back to the Lord? (Find the phrase in vs. 5)

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Anatomy of Infidelity Hosea 4**

“There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land.” Hosea 4:1b

Day 1: Read Hosea 4.

1. To whom is Hosea speaking and what are the three indictments that he brings on God’s behalf? (vs. 1) What must be going on in God’s heart as he brings these charges? (Reflect on 2:19–20.)
2. In the Old Testament the verb “to know” indicates sexual intimacy in marriage. What insight does this give into Hosea’s statement in verse 1, “There is... no knowledge of God in the land.” (ESV)
3. Describe the mayhem that erupts when Israel breaks relationship with God and disregards His law. (vs. 2) Why do you think Hosea’s list includes the social crimes of the Ten Commandments? (See Matt. 22:36–40.)
4. What judgments of God fall on the earth because the Israelites forsake the knowledge of God, truth, mercy and restraint? (vs. 3)
5. Think of a time when you have chosen to turn away from God. God always forgives our sin when we confess; write a time when you have seen God redeem even the consequences of that sin.

Day 2: Read Hosea 4:4-9.

6. Describe what the blindness of disobedience looks like. (vs. 5)
7. What did God intend for Israel’s glory to be? (Isa. 60:19) The Israelites have forsaken that glory for idols—what does this profit them? (vs.7; Jer. 2:11–13)
8. In verse 6, what two accusations does God level at his children, both priest and people? What are the tragic consequences of this behavior? (vss. 6, 9)

Day 3: Read Hosea 4:5–14.

9. What was the role of the priest? (See: Lev. 10:10–11; Mal. 2:7) Why is part of the blame for the people’s condition laid at the feet of the priests? (vss. 5–8) How might the charge of verse 8 be quite literal? (Lev. 6:26)

10. What does verse 6 mean when it says that “my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge”? How do we guard ourselves against this same destruction? (2 Tim. 3:14–16; Col. 3:16)
11. The priests’ obsessions have been food and sex; how do these ultimately fail them? (vs. 10a) What does Jesus tell us about fleeting pleasures and lasting satisfaction? (Mt. 18:6; Jn. 4:13–14)
12. “Harlotry, wine and new wine enslave the heart” (vs. 11, New KJV). Describe the indulgent downward spiral that gets Israel to this point. What else in your personal experience has a tendency to “enslave” your heart? (Consider Mt. 6:19–21.)

Day 4: Read Hosea 4:11–15.

13. The poem of verses 12 and 13 begins with people consulting a wooden stick and ends with them lying under the trees. How is this behavior utterly foolish and yet so alluring? What finally leads the people of Israel astray? (vss. 1, 12)
14. The worship of God had become so intermixed with the worship of Baal that the two almost became melded into one divine being. As Christians we are now God’s temple (1 Cor. 6:19–20); how might we be incorporating cultural non-biblical perspectives into our daily practical living (worship)? (Read Jas. 4:4–6.)
15. In verse 15 what is God warning the Southern Kingdom Judah against? What is happening at these two sanctuary sites as a result of the bad teaching of the priests and the disobedience of God’s people? (See Hos. 9:15; Am. 4:4.)
16. Why do you think Hosea gives an injunction against the people’s saying “As surely as the LORD lives!” before entering these sites? (vs. 15; Jer. 5:2)

Day 5: Read Hosea 4:16–19.

17. What does Hosea mean when he uses the interesting word picture of Israel as a lamb who is stubborn like a heifer? (vs. 16). Is there an area in your life where you are stubbornly, rebelliously refusing to let God rescue and shepherd you? (Reflect on; Mt. 18:12–13)
18. There is a two-pronged sad ending to this lifestyle of rebellion; what is it? (vs. 17)
19. Where is the glimmer of hope for the future of Israel? (vs. 19b; Jer. 31:16–20) To what hope can we as God’s children cling? (Read Isa. 53:5–6; Heb. 12:5–6; Rev. 3:19–20.)

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**God Pronounces Judgment Hosea 5:1–15**

*Hear this, you priests! / Pay attention, you Israelites! / Listen, O royal house!
This judgment is against you. . . . Hosea 5:1*

Day 1: Read Hosea 5:1–15.

1. To whom is this word of judgment addressed?

2. Skim through the chapter. List the charges of which Israel (and Judah, its sister kingdom to the south) has been found guilty. (Note: “Ephraim,” the most prominent tribe of the northern kingdom, stands for Israel in this passage.)

3. In what way is Israel guilty of “prostitution” (vss. 3–4)? (You might want to look at the commands and vows in Deut. 6:4–6 and Josh. 24:1, 16–27.)

4. What had God’s plan been for the people of Israel? (Gen. 12:3) What had they become instead? (vs. 1b)

Day 2: Read Hosea 5:3–5.

5. Look at Hosea 4:2 and Amos 5:10–12 (Amos prophesied in Israel shortly before Hosea). Jot down some of the Israelites’ “deeds” (vs. 4) that demonstrate their corruption. What does God’s anger over such acts reveal about his character?

6. Read Rom. 1:21–32 to trace the downward spiral of those who refuse to “acknowledge the LORD” (vs. 4). How is it possible for the deeds of such people to prohibit them from returning to God?

7. The Israelites’ prosperity caused them to become arrogant (as they had been warned in Deut. 8:10–14). What things tempt you to become arrogant? What is the remedy for such arrogance? (Rom. 12:3; Eph. 2:1–5; Jas. 4:10)

Day 3: Read Hosea 5:5–7.

8. Verse 6 refers to the bringing of animals for sacrifice. But the Israelites are simply going through the motions—their evil deeds belie their show of religion. How does God respond to their false piety? What does he want instead of empty ritual? (Is. 1:11–17; Ps. 51:17; cf. Jas. 1:27)

9. When have you found yourself “going through the motions”? What has helped you? If this is a problem for you now, pray that God would revive your spirit. Ask someone else to pray for you, too.

Day 4: Read Hosea 5:8–14.

10. Beth Aven (“house of wickedness”) is God’s sarcastic renaming of Bethel (“house of God”). Given what has been going on in Israel, why the name change?

11. What do verses 9 and 10 say is in store for Israel and Judah?

12. To what does God compare himself as the one who executes judgment? (vss. 12, 14) What do these images convey?

13. Nations form strategic alliances all the time. Why is Israel (“Ephraim”) sinning in turning to a powerful kingdom for help (vs. 13)? (Ps. 146:3–6; Dan. 2:21; 4:17)

14. Think back to a time this past week when you needed help. What did you do? Where do you turn for help?

Day 5: Read Hosea 5:1–15.

15. What glimmer of hope is there at the end of the chapter? How will God respond? (Deut. 4:25–31)

16. How does God respond to all who “earnestly seek” him (vs. 15)? (Acts 2:21; Heb. 11:6)

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Smoldering and Unrepentant Israel Hosea 6:1—7:16**

“Like Adam, they have broken the covenant— they were unfaithful to me there.” Hosea 6:7

Day 1: Read Hosea 6:1–3.

1. What do you feel as you read these verses—relief? hope? beauty? refreshment? yearning to be done with sin and the misery it causes?
2. Commentaries disagree on what to make of verses 1–3: Is it a shallow repentance, or has Israel really “hit bottom” this time and decisively turned to God? What do you think? Have you yourself ever talked this pious way but not really let go of your darling sins? (Read Jer.3:4–5.)
3. Does God “tear to pieces” (6:1)? Explain. (5:14; Amos 3:6) But what else must be said about some of the disasters in our lives? (Jer. 4:18; 5:25)

Day 2: Read Hosea 6:4–6.

4. Feel the pain in these rhetorical questions. Why is the Lord frustrated with Israel? When did Jesus express similar frustration? (Matt.23:37–38) How are frustration, severity, and love mixed in the Lord’s laments?
5. The imagery is lovely, but to say that someone’s love is “like the morning mist” or “like the early dew” is no compliment. What does it mean? Do you ever see yourself in that description?
6. Why are we fickle covenant children not utterly destroyed for all our unfaithfulness? (Mal. 3:6)
7. There are hundreds of laws in the Old Testament. But what broken “law” concerns God most by far? (vs. 6) How have you sometimes “majored on the minors” and ignored the laws closest to God’s heart? Take a moment to pray that your life would be marked by both “mercy” and “knowledge of God.”

Day 3: Read Hosea 6:7—7:1.

8. “Like father like son.” How is Israel an imitator of Adam in breaking the covenant?

9. A covenant is, basically, a relationship that involves obligation. With that in mind, how is God covenanted to us? (Hos. 2:19–20) How are we covenanted to him? (1 Jn. 3:23)
10. In his indictment, Hosea starts with Gilead in verse 8 (in the territories of Israel east of the Jordan). He then turns in verse 10 to Ephraim (west bank territories), then in verse 11 fingers Judah (southern kingdom), and lastly Samaria in 7:1. How far does the indictment of unfaithfulness reach? (See also Rom.3:9–18.)

Day 4: Read 7:1–16.

11. Skim these verses and list some of the sins or crimes of Israel. Is this list any different than the sins of all people of all times? (Refer back to Rom.3:12–18.)
12. Why do you think straying from God always tends to manifest itself in sexual perversion (vss.4 – 7; Rom.1:24ff)? How does this fit with the overall theme of the book of Hosea? (See also Ezek.16:esp.8ff; Rev. 21:1–2.)
13. In her sin, what is it that Israel does not realize? (vs. 2)
14. In verses 4–7, note the piling up of imagery of a nation in heat. What are some ways this is evident in our own culture?
15. Back to kings (vs. 7): What is conspicuously absent in their rule?
16. As Delilah sapped Samson’s strength, who is sapping Israel’s? (vss. 8–9) What does this mean? What or who will sap our strength if we are not careful? What is so insidious about the process? (vs. 9)

Day 5: Read Hosea 7:10–16.

17. There are two things that often look outwardly similar but that are as different as night and day in God’s eyes. One is worthless and the other a delight. What are they? (vs. 14a; see also Psalm 50:15.)
18. In spite of all this sin in his people, what does God long to do? (vs. 13b)
19. This chapter ends on a low note, but just turn the verses around and you see the hope held out to us. What could Israel—and we—do, even now, to reverse the spiral of sin? (vs. 14a)

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Reaping What You Sow****Hosea 8:1–14**

“They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.” Hosea 8:7a

Day 1: Read Hosea 8:1–14.

1. The verses in this chapter can be grouped into three ideas according to their message. Write short titles for the following three groups of verses:
 - a. Verses 1a, 7:
 - b. Verses 1b–3, 4b–6, 11–13:
 - c. Verses 4a, 8–10, 14:

Day 2: Hosea 8:1–3.

2. As the chapter opens, a trumpet is sounding. What does this signify? (See Ezek. 33:1–5.)
3. In verse 1 the word “eagle” gives us a picture of a large, swooping bird of prey (the original Hebrew word can mean “vulture” too). What tone do the images of the trumpet and the eagle convey?
4. Verse 1b states the reason for the sounding trumpet and swooping bird of prey and the reason for God’s impending judgment (vs.14b). What is it?
5. What outcry does Israel make in verse 2? What makes Israel’s claim of knowing God ring hollow to him? (vs. 3) Does Israel know God or not? (Read Jn. 8:39–44.)
6. Read 1 John 2:3–6. Think about yourself: how do you know that you know God?

Day 3: Read Hosea 8:4–6.

7. In what two areas does God bring charges against Israel?
8. When did a golden calf make its first appearance among God’s people? (Ex. 32:1–8)

9. Notice the words of Aaron, Israel's high priest, in Exodus 32:5. Do you think he thought of himself as an idolator? With a similar attitude towards their own calf-idols, do you think the Israelites of Hosea's day thought of themselves as idolators?

10. Think again of what you devote your time and energy to. Ask God to show you the things—the good things that you know are gifts from God—that you have made into idols.

Day 4: Read Hosea 8:7–10.

11. What two word pictures appear in verse 7? Explain them in the context of the foreign policy of Hosea's day. (Recall Hos. 7:11ff.)

12. The main context in verses 7–10 is Israel's foreign policy, but what is the heart issue that God is addressing?

13. How does the proverb “you reap what you sow” apply to us? (Gal. 6:7–9)

Day 5: Read Hosea 8:11–14.

14. Look closely at verses 11–13. Fill in the blanks to summarize three ironies that are features of Israel's corrupt religious life.
 - a. Altars for sin offerings have become _____
 - b. Israel regards God's law as _____
 - c. The effect of Israel's sacrifices is _____

15. What phrase in verse 14 summarizes God's assessment of his people?

16. Consider God's words to us in Revelation 3:17–22. As you worship, think about the state of your own heart. Ask God to show you ways you need to repent and write a prayer of repentance.

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**God Turns Away****Hosea 9:1–17***“...Woe to them when I turn away from them!”* Hosea 9:12b**Day 1: Read Hosea 9:1–3.**

1. It is probable that Hosea is delivering this sermon during the autumn festival of Sukkoth, a jubilant harvest celebration. God has told his people to rejoice at these times. (Lev. 23:39–43; Deut. 16:13–15) So why is rejoicing prohibited?
2. What will happen to the things that Israel is counting on to bring her joy? (vs. 2) Allow God’s Spirit to reveal in your own heart the things that may be bringing you counterfeit joy. (Reflect on Ps. 16:11.)
3. Ultimately the people will not enjoy harvest in the land because of what devastating consequence of their sin? (vs. 3) From whom do the bounty and privilege of remaining in the land come? (Lev. 25:23)

Day 2: Read Hosea 9:4–7a.

4. What is Hosea getting at when he compares the Israelites’ sacrifices in Assyrian exile to the “bread of mourners” (vs.4)? (Num. 19:11–16) Now this bread is good for only one thing; what is that? (vs. 4c)
5. Can we offer sacrifices that are pleasing to God? (Meditate on Ps. 51:17 and Heb. 13:15–16.)
6. What sad reality is reflected in the rhetorical question, “What will you do on the day of your appointed feasts, on the festival days of the Lord?” (vs. 5)?
7. Describe the calamitous consequences that befall Israel because of her disobedience. (vs. 6; see also Deut. 28:36–48.)

Day 3: Read Hosea 9:7–9.

8. God had given the prophets to Israel for her own good. What are some of the ways a prophet was to be a “watchman” (vs. 8) over Israel? (Hos. 12:10, 13) Compare this with the role God has given to leadership in the church. (Heb.13:17) Take a moment to pray for the leadership in your church.

9. Since the people would not acknowledge Hosea's words as true, what is their inevitable reaction to him? (vs. 7) Why should we not be surprised when this is a response that is elicited when we share the gospel? (1 Cor. 1:18–21)

10. How does Jesus link the persecution of prophets to the world's treatment of his own disciples, including those who follow Jesus today? (Mt. 5:11–12)

Day 4: Read Hosea 9:10–14.

11. Think of a hot, hungry and exhausted traveler amazed to find refreshing grapes or figs in the middle of a desert; then unfold the meaning of Hosea's imagery in this passage. (vs. 10; Hos. 13:5–6a)

12. What is the sordid result of Israel's choice to give her heart to gods other than the true God? (vs. 10b) Is there something in your life that you are cherishing which threatens to distort the image of God in you?

13. The growth of the nation of Israel in the eighth century B.C. was an aspect of her glory; how does this glory "fly away" (vs. 11)? (vss. 11–12)

14. How might God's turning away from Israel (vs. 12) be a severe mercy?

Day 5: Read Hosea 9:11–17.

15. Compare the curses of today's reading with the blessings of Deuteronomy 28:2–14. List some of the things that the Israelites are forfeiting.

16. As Christians, nothing can separate us from the love of God, but what are some benefits that we forfeit temporarily when we turn from God to embrace deceptive loves? Spend some time confessing to God where you are disobediently allowing yourself to be lured towards unfaithfulness to Him.

17. Israel is sentenced to be "wanderers among the nations" (vs. 17). Is this the last word that God has for them? (Rom. 11:1–5)

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Lessons From Agriculture****Hosea 10:1–15**

“Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD...” Hosea 10:12

Day 1: Read Hosea 10:1–2.

1. To what is Israel likened in verse 1?
2. What sinful use does Israel make of its “fruit”? Look at Hosea 2:8 and Isaiah 5:1–4, 7. How do these passages show the depth of Israel’s sin?
3. Think of a recent time when you used a gift from God in a selfish or unholy manner. How can you use this gift in a way that honors God?
4. Despite God’s tender care, Israel the “choice vine” grew to become a “corrupt, wild vine” (Jer. 2:21), unwilling and unable to give God faithful love in return. Who in fact fulfilled Israel’s end of the covenant? (John 15:1)
5. Where do we as believers today fit into the vine analogy? What are we called to do? (Jn. 15:1–5, 10–12)

Day 2: Read Hosea 10:3–15.

6. Verses 3, 7, and 15 refer to Israel’s king. When Israelites first settled the Promised Land, they had no king. Read 1 Samuel 8:4–7, 19–22, which relates how Israel came to have one. Where in this request for a king do you find the seed of Israel’s sin in Hosea’s time?
7. The word translated “lawsuits” in verse 4 is more commonly translated “justice” or “judgment.” What do you think the comparison of Israel’s justice with “poisonous weeds” conveys? (cf. Is. 5:7; Amos 5:10–12)

Day 3: Read Hosea 10:5–8.

8. What will be the fate of the “calf-idol” Israel has been worshipping?

9. Discuss the irony of an idol's being captured and carried off by the enemy. (cf. Is. 44:12–20) What deep emotions overtake people at the capture of their idols? (vss. 5–6; compare Rev. 18:14–19)

10. Bovine statuettes seem foolish idols to us, yet we so often fail to realize that our clinging to things around us is just as foolish. Think of something or someone you tend to depend on instead of God. How do you rationalize this dependence as reasonable? Why isn't it?

11. Look again at the people's chilling cries at the end of verse 8, and compare them to a similar cry of desperation in Revelation 6:15–16. What is it that inspires such terror?

Day 4: Read Hosea 10:9–15.

12. In verse 9 (as in 9:9), Hosea likens Israel's sin to an earlier series of events in the town of Gibeah, recounted in Judges. Skim Judges 19:1, 10–30; 20:1–48; just how bad is Hosea saying Israel's sin is?

13. Hosea compares Israel ("Ephraim") to a heifer who will be forced to wear a yoke. What does this image suggest about what will happen to Israel?

Day 5: Read Hosea 10:1–15.

14. What is Israel's crop? (vs. 13) What kind of crop is Hosea exhorting the Israelites to produce instead? (vs. 12) What hope is there for Israel if she will seek the LORD? (vs. 12)

15. We have a saying that "the punishment should fit the crime." This chapter highlights two of Israel's sins: her idolatry and her failure to trust in the LORD for protection. How are these two sins connected? How are the punishments prophesied here fitting? (vss. 2b, 5–6, 8, 13b–14)

16. When have you experienced God's removing or breaking an idol of yours? What effect did this have on you?

17. According to verse 12 and Hebrews 3:13, 15 when is the best time to repent from idols and seek the LORD?

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Israel's Tender Father Pleads****Hosea 11:1—12:14**

"How can I give you up, Ephraim?" Hosea 11:8

Day 1: Read Hosea 11:1–4.

1. Is the LORD reminiscing? What time and events of history is he remembering in verses 1–4? (Exodus 12:31–42; 16:4)
2. The gospel writer Matthew picks up Hosea 11:1 and says of the Christ child, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Matt. 2:15). To what event in Jesus' life is he referring? If God is here identifying Israel with his precious Son, what do you suppose are his feelings for Israel?
3. Describe the irony and perverseness of sin as noted in verse 2.
4. Find five metaphors in verses 3 and 4 describing what God did for his people in history.

Day 2: Read Hosea 11:5–7.

5. Secular histories may cite various reasons why the nation of Israel was conquered by Assyria and other nations, but what reason does God give? (vs. 5)
6. How does verse 7 indicate that Israel's sin against God is more serious than an accidental slippage?
7. Why will God "by no means exalt" Israel, "even if they call to the Most High" (vs. 7b)? Doesn't God always help those who call to him? How is this a caution to you? (Is. 29:13)

Day 3: Hosea 11:8–11.

8. God can bear it no longer. His ancient love for Israel overcomes his anger. Which words in verses 8 and 9 show this? Are you surprised to learn (Hos. 6:4; 11:1, 8–9) how emotional God is toward his people? Toward you?

9. The lion tore to pieces in Hosea 5:14, but here the lion roars for another purpose. What will be the effect of his roaring this time? (vss. 10ff)

Day 4: Hosea 11:12—12:6.

10. But in the meantime Ephraim “feeds on the wind” (12:1). What kind of life does that metaphor suggest to you?
11. What’s so wrong with making treaties with Assyria and Egypt (vs. 1)?
12. To abandon God is not to choose a solitary path but to plunge into relationship with another lover, as Israel has done with Assyria and Egypt. Who do your “lovers” tend to be, and what do you want from them? (Have they ever delivered?)
13. The nation of Israel has always been “a piece of work,” since Jacob grasped Esau’s heel (vs. 3). But, then again, Jacob at least was a man who persisted in seeking God’s favor (vss. 4ff). What does God want Israel to persist in to restore relationship? List three things from verse 6.

Day 5: Read Hosea 12:6–14.

14. What is the self-deception of the wealthy, and what does God again remind a prosperous Israel of? (vss. 8–9)
15. How did God speak to our Old Testament fathers through the prophets? (vs. 10) How does he speak to us now? (Heb. 1:1–2)
16. Gilead represents Israel’s social wrongs, while Gilgal represents her cultic idolatry (vs. 11). For both of these she is being judged. What are the social sins and the idolatries for which people of our own times will be judged, in your opinion?
17. What must we, like Israel, do to escape judgment and to approach God? (vs. 6)
18. How are we able to continually return to God? (1 John 1:7–9)

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**The Only Savior Hosea 13:1—14:9**

“I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.” Hosea 14:4

Day 1: Read Hosea 13:1–6.

1. Describe the change that Ephraim (Israel) undergoes in these first six verses.
2. In verse 3, what is Israel likened to? What characteristics do these images share, and what does this mean for Israel’s future?
3. Of what does verse 4 remind us (and Israel)? (See Ex. 20:2–3.)
4. What would Israel look like if she really knew God? (Deut. 6:10–25)
5. What is the difference between knowing God as Israel did and knowing God as Paul describes it in Romans 10:9–10?

Day 2: Read Hosea 13:6–8.

6. Forgetting God entails more than just a memory lapse. For Israel, what does it involve and how has it come about? (vs. 6)
7. Describe a period in your own life when self-sufficiency eroded your trust in God. What things do you pray for? Consider whether they are the very things that will make you independent of God.
8. What is God compared to in verses 7–8? What does this figurative language convey? (See Heb. 10:31.)

Day 3: Read Hosea 13:9—14:2.

9. What is ironic about God's question in Hosea 13:10? (Read Psalm 2 and consider how the power of kings compares with the power of God.)
10. In what sense was Israel's monarchy a rebellion against God? (Judges 8:22–23; 1 Sam. 8:5–8, 20)
11. Why do you think God would give his people something, e.g., a king, that has the potential to drive them away from himself?

Day 4: Read Hosea 13:12–16.

12. Hosea 13:12–16 describes the death of Ephraim using three vivid images. What are they? (vss. 13, 15, 16b)
13. What sobering fact do we learn in verse 12? Is this true only for Ephraim? (Mt. 7:21–23)
14. If in verse 12 we learn that God can't overlook sin, what words in verse 14 hint at the solution? Do you spot the ray of hope in Hosea 13:14? What is its significance for Israel? For us? (See 1 Cor. 15:55–57.)

Day 5: Read Hosea 14:1–9.

15. What should true repentance consist of? (Try to find three things in verses 1–3.)
16. How does God respond to the repentance of his people? (vs. 4)
17. What pictures does Hosea give of God's blessings to his people? (vss. 5–8; recall 2:16–23)
18. Write Hosea's closing admonition in your own words (vs. 9).
19. What has God most impressed on you during this study of Hosea?

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Suffering, Comfort and the Power of Prayer****2 Corinthians 1:1–11**

*“For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives,
so also through Christ our comfort overflows.” 2 Corinthians 1:5*

Introduction: 2 Corinthians is a letter written to the church (located in modern day Greece) that Paul had previously established. After founding the church, Paul returned for a second time to address someone in the church who had seriously offended him. The visit did not produce good results and caused Paul great sorrow. Subsequently, Paul heard of genuine repentance in the church and 2 Corinthians is written to express his thanksgiving for this, but also to confront those in the church who are challenging Paul’s authority.

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 1:1–2.

1. Paul begins his letter by identifying himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus” (vs.1). What were the criteria to qualify one as an apostle?

_____ Acts 1:22b, 1 Cor. 15:7–8
 _____ Matt. 10:1–7

2. How was Paul eligible to be an apostle? (Acts 26:12–18) Who commissioned him with this apostolic authority? (vs. 1a; Gal. 1:1) If one rejects the truth and relevancy of Paul’s message, who is actually being rejected?
3. How is the fact that Paul is an apostle important in light of what is going on in this church? (2 Cor. 11:3–5; 13)
4. To whom is this letter written? (vs. 1b) In what way are the people in this church saints? Are they especially virtuous? (Read Eph. 1:3–8; 2 Cor. 3:18.)

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–7.

5. In verse 3 how does Paul take the traditional Jewish blessing of God used in the synagogue— ‘Blessed art thou, O Lord our God and God of our fathers’—and reshape it? Why might this have been important in light of what the false ‘apostles’ were preaching? (2 Cor. 11:4)
6. In these five short verses how many times can you find the words trouble(s), distressed or suffering? How many times is the word comfort(s) employed? What might this show us about what is on Paul’s heart as he writes this letter?
7. Although Paul was particularly called to participate in the “sufferings of Christ” (Acts 9:16), what are the afflictions Jesus himself forecasted for *all* those who follow him? (See Jn. 15:18–20.)

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–7.

8. Rather than promising instant relief from suffering, what two facets of God's character does Paul emphasize to encourage this Corinthian church and Christians throughout the ages? (vs. 3)
9. Because God's character is unchanging, what does he do in the midst of Paul's suffering that He will surely do in the midst of ours? (vs. 4; Ps. 46:1-2; 94:17-19; Is. 49:13)
10. What is one of God's sovereign purposes both in our suffering and in the comfort he showers on us? (vs. 4) Share a time when due to your own suffering you were able to fulfill this purpose.
11. As we allow the comfort of God's presence to envelop us in our suffering, and as we trust in God's purposes, what does God develop in us? (vs. 6)

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.

12. What were the two lessons Paul learned as he felt the "sentence of death" (vs. 9) looming over him? (vss. 9-10) Are you in the midst of a situation where you are suffering for the sake of Christ, or simply suffering as a result of living in a fallen world? Pray that God would give you faith to learn these two lessons in your own life.
13. Whether Paul had lived or died, what was the source of his hope and comfort? (vs. 10; Ps. 33:18-22; 1 Pet. 1:3-5)
14. Think through the last 24 hours; how might you have lived the day differently if you were truly placing your hope in the hands of a God who has assured your future and has promised to work everything for your good in the present? (Rom. 8:28) Consider sharing your reflections with your group.

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.

15. List some of the open and honest phrases Paul uses as he asks for prayer from the Corinthian church. (vss. 8-9) What are some barriers that prevent you from requesting others to pray for you when you are going through difficult times?
16. Paul ends this passage (vs. 11) as he begins it (vs. 3), with an emphasis on the power of prayer and thanksgiving. How does giving thanks to God for who he is and what he does (especially in the face of adversity) demonstrate a complete reversal of a sin-sick heart? (Rom. 1:21)
17. Expand on the effects corporate prayer has on lives. (vs. 11) Who do you feel receives the greatest blessing through corporate prayer? Why?

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Paul's "Boast"****2 Corinthians 1:12—2:4**

"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." 2 Cor. 1:12

Background Information: Paul has made some changes in his plans to visit the church at Corinth. It seems that these changes have caused some of the Corinthians to question Paul's character and leading by the Holy Spirit. (Note that Paul writes using the editorial or apostolic plural in much of this section of his letter; thus, "our" and "we" often refer to Paul alone.)

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 1:12—2:4.

1. Look at the surprising first words of verse 12. In a number of places Paul writes that boasting is off-limits (Rom. 3:27; 1 Cor. 4:7; Eph. 2:8–9), but in 1 Cor. 1:31 Paul quotes Jeremiah: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." What is the difference between "boasting in the Lord" and showing off? Which is Paul doing? (Consider where Paul says the "holiness and sincerity" of his conduct come from and what is behind this blameless conduct. [vs. 12b])
2. What are you able to boast of in the Lord? Encourage your sisters by sharing your boast.

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 1:12–17.

3. Paul contrasts "worldly wisdom" with "holiness" and "sincerity" (vs. 12). What is the difference? (1 Cor. 2:1–5)
4. In verse 14 Paul makes it clear that he is weighing his conduct in view of "the day of the Lord Jesus." What is this day? (5:10) How would your own life be different if you acted consistently with that great day in mind?
5. What do you think the "this" in verse 15 refers to?
6. Paul is defending his actions against the criticism of some in the Corinthian church. Describe a time when you have judged someone without knowing all the circumstances. Now look at what Jesus says in Matthew 7:1–5. Pray that you would become quicker to extend grace toward others.

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 1:15–22.

7. Look at Acts 18:1–11. What is the "message" that Paul preached and the Corinthians believed (vss. 18–19)? How long did he stay in Corinth on that first visit? What do the truth of the message and Paul's conduct while in Corinth say about the character of the messenger?

8. What does it mean that all God's promises are " 'Yes' in Christ" (vs. 20)? (Lk. 24:44–47) Write down some examples.
9. How do believers respond to this past faithfulness? (vs. 20) What does this response mean?
10. How does God show his faithfulness in the present? (vs. 21a) How does this encourage you?

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 1:20–22.

11. In these verses we see each of the three persons of the Trinity at work. List the roles that Paul mentions.
God (the Father):
Christ (Jesus, the Son):
Spirit:
12. Throughout this paragraph, Jesus is referred to as "Christ," which means "The Anointed One." What is this anointing? (Lk. 4:18–19; Acts 10:38; cf. Mt. 3:16–17) What anointing do we who are "in Christ" receive (vs. 21)? (vss. 21–22; cf. 1 Jn. 2:20)
13. Who is the seal whom God has set on us? (Eph. 1:13) What is the implication of this sealing? (1 Cor. 6:19–20)
14. The Holy Spirit is also "a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (vs. 22). What is to come? (4:14; Eph 1:13–14; 1 Cor. 15:51–54)

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 1:23–2:4.

15. Paul now returns to the subject of his travel plans, and he is emphatic about his reason for changing them. What reason does he give? (vs. 23. Compare this with the way he describes his intended third visit in 13:2–3a.)
16. What is Paul's goal for the Corinthians? (vs. 24)
17. It can be difficult to maintain relationships over a great distance. For Paul and the Corinthians this difficulty was great because of the limited ability to communicate over distance and the interference of false apostles in Corinth who sought to turn the people against Paul. With what earnest language does Paul seek to reassure the flock in Corinth?

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Fragrance of Life****2 Corinthians 2:5–17***“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ....”* 2 Cor. 2:14**Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 2:5–11.**

1. Reading between the lines, we learn that someone in the Corinthian church has “caused grief.” (vs. 5) It’s not certain who it is, but the best guess is that it is someone who has slandered Paul and impugned his authority as an apostle. How does the tone of verses 5 and 10 suggest this scenario?
2. Peek ahead to 3:1; 5:12–13; 6:8; 10:1–2, 7–11; and 11:6 to get an idea of some of the slanderous scuttlebutt abroad about Paul. What are his detractors saying?
3. Paul says that when someone causes trouble to someone in the church, he or she actually causes trouble to whom else? (vs. 5)
4. How does Romans 12:3–5 provide a model to demonstrate how the sins of one person radiate throughout the church?

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 2:5–11.

5. What does Paul say is enough now? (vs. 6) What should the church’s next step be? Why?
6. List three positive actions Paul commends to the church toward the offending brother. (vss. 7–8)
7. Paul is hoping (vs. 9) that the Corinthians will prove to be as obedient in forgiving and comforting the brother as they were in punishing him. Speaking personally, which do you think is the harder task?
8. What does Paul mean by linking the issue of forgiveness with the issue of Satan’s “schemes” (vs. 11)? (vss. 10–11) Discuss how a failure to forgive plays into Satan’s hands. Any examples from your own experience?

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 2:12–17.

9. Paul expected to meet Titus in Troas (an important port city and gateway to Europe on the Aegean coast) and learn from him how the Corinthians had responded to his severe and “tearful” letter (cf. 2:4) and whether they had repented of their rebellion. But for whatever reason, Titus wasn’t there, and Paul was distressed. What is one of the personal sufferings Paul would later list in his litany? (11:28)
10. There was Paul with an open door for ministry (vs. 12) and he didn’t take advantage of it because he had “no peace of mind” (vs. 13) when Titus didn’t show. Was he wrong to leave? What do you learn about the man Paul?
11. Where did Paul go when he left Troas? (vs. 13) What did he observe about the character of God when he experienced “triumph” (vs. 14) in another town after leaving an “open door” in Troas?

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 2:14–17.

12. Paul’s readers would have been familiar with “triumphal processions” (vs. 14) held in Rome to celebrate great military victories. Paul adopts this imagery to depict how God (the victorious conqueror) leads you and me (his “captives”) in his parade, to the praise of his glory. Why should we not be surprised when the procession of triumph is simultaneously one of suffering and humiliation? (Consider 6:7–10 and 1 Cor. 4:9.)
13. Why do you suppose the effect of a faithful Christian on the people around him or her is likened to a “fragrance” (vs. 14) rather than, say, a sermon?
14. What is the content of that “fragrance,” (vs. 14) specifically? (vs. 14b) How does this accord with Jesus’ saying about the chief blessing that man can receive? (John 17:3)
15. Why does the Christian’s “aroma” (vs. 15) attract some and repel others? (1 Cor. 1:18; vss. 15–16)

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 2:14–17.

16. How can we weak and sin-prone Christians be “equal to such a task” (vs. 16)? Find the key words in verse 17.
17. Verse 17 is Paul’s second reference to “sincerity” (see also 1:12), a theme that will be developed more fully later as he contrasts his ministry to that of false apostles who “peddle” (vs. 17) the word of God. What is Paul’s motivation as he brings the gospel of life to others?

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Reflecting the Glory of the Lord 2 Corinthians 3:1–18**

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” 2 Cor. 3:18

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 3:1–3.

1. What’s the purpose of a letter of recommendation (e.g., as part of a job application)? Considering Paul’s role as founder of the Corinthian church, why is it absurd for him to give them letters of recommendation?
2. If the Corinthians are Paul’s letter of recommendation, who is the author of that letter? (vs. 3)
3. If the hearts of the Corinthians have been changed, (vs. 3) who is responsible for the change? (Rom. 15:17–19; 1 Cor. 2:4–5)
4. What do people “read” when they look at your life? In what ways have you changed since you gave your heart to Christ? How has he brought about change in your life?

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 3:4–6.

5. In verses 5 and 6 Paul speaks of his competence. Here he picks up the thread of what thought? (Hint: Look at the question he poses in 2:16.)
6. On what is Paul’s confidence (and competence) based?
7. How would you evaluate your own efforts to share the Gospel with others? On what do you base your confidence and competence?

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 3:3–18.

8. The word “covenant” used in the Bible is an agreement initiated by God that binds him to his people. Starting with verse 3 we see a contrast between two covenants—the old and new.

	Old Covenant (Ex. 19, 24)	New Covenant (Heb. 9, 10)
What is the setting of the covenant ratification?	Ex. 19:18	Heb. 9:14–15
Who are the parties involved?	Ex. 19:3–6	Heb. 7:25
Who is the covenant mediator?	Ex. 24:2	Heb. 8:6
Where is the covenant recorded?	Ex. 24:12; 2 Cor. 3:7	Heb. 8:10
What is the purpose of the covenant?	Ex. 19:5–6	Heb. 7:18–19, 25; 8:11–12

9. After God’s covenant with Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai, why was there a need for a new covenant? (Heb. 8:7–13; 10:1–4)?
10. Do you think the “failure” of the old covenant took God by surprise? Do you think the new covenant was an afterthought on God’s part—a Plan B? (Meditate on Psalm 130—esp. vss. 7–8.)

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 3:3–18.

11. What features of the old and new covenants does Paul emphasize in 2 Corinthians 3? (Use an NIV version of the Bible to fill in the blanks.)

Verse(s)	Old Covenant	New Covenant
6	covenant of the _____	covenant of the _____
6	The _____ kills	the _____ gives life.
7, 8	ministry that brought _____	ministry of the _____
3, 7	Engraved _____	written on _____
9	ministry that _____ men is _____	ministry that brings _____ is much more _____
7, 8	Came with _____	Came with even more _____
11	_____ fades	_____ lasts
14	To this day the same _____ remains	Only in _____ is it taken away
15, 16	When Moses is read, a _____ covers their hearts	Whenever anyone turns to the _____, the _____ is taken away
13, 18	Made Moses’ face _____	We _____ the Lord’s _____

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 3:6–18.

12. Read the account of the shining face of Moses in Exodus 34:29–35. How does Paul interpret and expand upon the image of Moses’ shining face here in 2 Corinthians 3?
13. What do you think the image of the veil represents in verses 15–16?
14. Go through the passage once more and note what Paul says about how Christ and the Holy Spirit are at work in the hearts of God’s people.
- | | |
|--------|-------------|
| Vs. 3 | Vs. 4 |
| Vs. 5 | Vs. 6 |
| Vs. 8 | Vss. 14, 16 |
| Vs. 17 | Vs. 18 |
15. Share a specific way that you have seen the transforming power of God’s Spirit at work.

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Focusing on the Unseen****2 Corinthians 4:1–18***So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.**For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:18***Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 4:1–6.**

1. Why do you think that, in the midst of having accusations leveled against him, Paul can say in verse 1 “we do not lose heart”? (2 Cor. 3:18) What is the substance of this ministry that propels Paul and other Christians through the ages? (2 Cor. 5:18)
2. Paul includes a grouping of strong and disturbing words: “secret and shameful ways”, “deception”, and “distort” in verse 2. What do you think is going on here?
3. What is it that prevents some from hearing and understanding the truth of the gospel? (vs. 4) How might this encourage you as you share the gospel with others? (vs. 6)
4. What is the simple yet profound content of Paul’s preaching that needs to be acknowledged by anyone to whom the gospel has been revealed? (vs. 5; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3) How would you explain what this means?

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 4:1–6.

5. Is Satan left unfettered to do as he pleases in preventing people from seeing and understanding Christ’s work? (Eph. 1:18–23)
6. What is conversion to Christ likened to? (vss. 3, 6; Gen. 1:1–3; Isa. 9:2, Jn. 12:44–46) Jot down as many similarities as you can between our conversion and the image(s) in these verses.
7. Can you think of an example in the last few months when God made his light shine in you by revealing a specific dark area in your heart?

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 4:6–12.

8. What is the “treasure” that is mentioned in verse 7? (vs. 6) Why is something of such great value being housed in such a fragile and inglorious vessel? (vs. 7; 12:9)
9. How do the four clauses in verses 8 and 9 illustrate God’s power in Paul’s life? What does Paul do when the Christian life becomes too much for him? (2 Cor. 1:9)
10. Why do you think that Paul interprets the experiences of verses 8 and 9 in terms of the death and resurrection of Jesus (vss. 10–11)? (See Phil. 3:7–11.)
11. Paul goes to great length to stress that the pain, pressure, frustration and affliction (the daily deaths) in a believers’ life is not pointless. Where in your own life have you found suffering to be part of the redemptive process? (vss. 11–12; 2 Cor. 2:14–15)

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 4:13–18.

12. Read Psalm 116:1–10 and list a few phrases that illustrate the ‘spirit of faith’ (vs. 13) that all believers have in common.
13. If the cross explains why Paul suffers, what is it that gives him the hope to persevere in his suffering? (vs. 14) How has this truth encouraged you to persist in a difficult period of your life?
14. Paul’s eye of faith enables him to look beyond his present trials and understand a little bit of God’s perspective of what is going on. What of eternal value is going on? (vs. 15)

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 4:1–18.

15. What is happening to you spiritually as you are breaking down physically? (vs. 16) How have you seen glimpses of that in your own experience?
16. Read 2 Corinthians 11:23–27 and then muse on how Paul can possibly call these afflictions “light” in verse 17. (See also Rom. 8:18, 28; 1 Cor. 2:9) What is it that is so “heavy” that makes these (our) afflictions so “light”?
17. If you want to keep going and not faint, what should you keep your eye on? (vs. 18) How can we grow in seeing the unseen more clearly? How can we help each other in this process?

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Eternal Future, Present Faith 2 Corinthians 5:1–10**

“Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.” 2 Corinthians 5:1

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 5:1–10.

1. What is the difference between a tent and a house? Which would you rather live in?
2. If “tent” represents the earthly body, what does the destruction of the tent represent?
3. What word does Paul use to describe our present body (our “tent”)? How does he describe our heavenly body (the “house”)? (cf. Phil. 3:20–21) Which sounds better?
4. Why do you think the image of the tent sprang to Paul’s mind? (Acts 18:1, 3)

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 5:1–5 and Romans 8:18–19, 22–26.

5. Why do we “groan” and feel “burdened” in our earthly bodies (2 Cor. 5:2, 4)? How is this groaning different from complaining? What virtue is it related to? (Rom. 8:24–25)
6. In verse 5, the Spirit is called a “deposit”; Romans 8:23 says that we have “the firstfruits of the Spirit.” In what way is the Holy Spirit a “deposit” or “firstfruits”? How is his presence in us connected with our groaning?
7. When you feel that life is unsatisfying or unfulfilling, how do you reassure yourself? According to these passages, will we ever attain complete fulfillment in this life?

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 5:1–10.

8. Why can we be “confident” (vs. 6; also translated, “courageous”) even now on earth? (Note the “therefore” at the beginning of vs. 6.)
9. Paul writes that “[w]e live by faith, not by sight” (vs. 7). What is it that we are unable to see now that requires faith? (cf. 1 Jn. 3:2)

10. For many of us, Paul's statement in verse 8 is hard to relate to (see also Phil. 1:23). Why do you think this is so? How can we cultivate a longing like Paul's?
11. When someone is going through a hard time, how do you encourage her? How often do you remind someone of the glorious heavenly future that awaits us as believers? How often does someone remind you? (Consider 1 Cor. 15:19)

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 5:6–10.

12. How does Hebrews 11:1 define faith?
13. On what does our faith rest? (1:20a; 1 Thess. 5:23–24) How is it demonstrated? (Gal. 5:6; Jms. 2:14–17; Skim Heb. 11.)
14. What do believers make their goal in life? How can we keep this goal before us each day as we do all the things that need doing?
15. What characterizes a life that is pleasing to God? (Rom. 12:1–2; Col. 3:2–17) Who brings these things about in us? (3:8–9, 17–18)

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 5:6–10.

16. Who does Paul say sits in the judgment seat?
17. Most commentators agree that the judgment spoken of in verse 10 is not the judgment of all humanity to determine who will be saved (Rom. 8:1); rather, it is the judgment of believers to evaluate their lives and reward them accordingly. Nevertheless, the prospect of this judgment is still very sobering (see 1 Cor. 4:5). How does this prospect affect the way Paul lives his life? (1 Cor. 9:24–27; Phil 3:12–14)
18. Read Paul's description in 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 of how believers will be judged. What kind of work "survives" (vs. 14) and brings reward? (Mt. 25:34–40; 1 Cor. 13:8–13; 15:58)
19. Contemplate for yourself the prospect of standing "before the judgment seat of Christ" (vs. 10). Ask God to examine your heart (Ps. 139:23–24) and to "sanctify you through and through" so that "your whole spirit, soul and body [will] be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). Be encouraged that "[t]he one who calls you is faithful and he will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24).

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Ministry of Reconciliation****2 Corinthians 5:11–21**

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all....” 2 Cor. 5:14

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 5:11.

1. Verse 11 refers back to verse 10. What specifically is the “fear of the Lord” Paul has in mind?
2. Since we “must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” one day (vs. 10), what does Paul feel impelled to do with his life?

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 5:11–13.

3. Why the strange and abrupt shift to a defensive posture in verses 11b to 13? Piecing it together with such clues as 1:17, 3:1, and 4:2, what inkling do you get of the background conflict that will be more fully addressed in following chapters? What slander is being spread against Paul?
4. Paul makes much of being “plain” (vs. 11) or transparent before people and God. Find related ideas in 1:12. How can you be “plain” in your relationships in a way that attracts people to God?
5. Based on 12b, what are the two possible contrasting ways of living among people?
6. In 13a, what do you read between the lines as being alleged against Paul? What “evidences” do his detractors have for this opinion? (11:23–27)

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 5:13–15.

7. If Paul’s trouble-filled life is not the evidence of madness, then just what is it that does control and drive Paul? (vs. 14)
8. State Paul’s brief summary of the gospel in verse 14.

9. To what end or purpose did Christ die for you, according to verse 15? How would living “for him who died for [you]” look different from living for yourself?

10. Why is it important that Paul tacks on, in the restating of his gospel, that Christ was also “raised” (vs. 15)? (1 Cor. 15:14, 17–20)

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 5:16–18.

11. Why do Christ’s death and being raised move Paul to change the way he regards other believers (vs. 16)? (vs. 17)

12. If your fellow Christian is a “new creation,” how should you look at him or her from now on, even if he or she is at the moment behaving badly? What is God’s work in progress in your fellow believer? (3:18) Is there a sister in your life that you must repent of judging or “writing off”?

13. With what words does Paul hasten to reaffirm that this new status in you and your saved neighbor is not the result of “pulling yourselves up by your bootstraps”? (vs. 18)

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 5:18–21.

14. Verse 15 stated the purpose for which you were saved. How does Paul refine that purpose in verses 18–20? What is your new job description now?

15. Think about what an ambassador is. Discuss how that imagery can give shape to your own daily life in terms of focus, purpose, zeal, choices, and self-control.

16. Paul makes one last appeal in verse 20 to those who may not have done what yet? Why is this act the most important thing a person can do? (Rom. 3:23; 5:1–2)

17. Yet again, Paul restates the simple gospel in verse 21. What do we learn here about the solemn transaction that wrought your salvation?

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Having Nothing, and Yet Possessing Everything****2 Corinthians 6:1—7:1**

For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” 2 Cor. 6:16b

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 6:1.

1. Summarize what Paul means by “God’s grace” (vs. 1). (Review 2 Cor. 5:17–21.)
2. How can someone “receive God’s grace in vain”? (See 2 Cor. 5:15; Phil. 2:21; 2 Tim. 4:10)
3. How can we avoid receiving it in vain? How do you know you are on the right track? (Compare Gal. 2:20 with the verses in question #2.)

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 6:2.

4. In verse 2, quoting Isaiah 49:8, what does Paul stress? What gives verse 2b its note of urgency?
5. If now is the time of God’s favor and now is the day of salvation, then what do we learn about “now” as opposed to, say, tomorrow? What warning is implicit here? (Heb. 3:12–13)
6. Concretely, what does it mean to you to know God’s favor? How does this affect what you focus on?

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 6:3–10.

7. Summarize Paul’s view of his “ministry” (vs. 3). (2 Cor. 3:6, 18; 4:1; 5:18, 20)
8. In Paul’s eyes, and rightly so, his ministry cannot be separated from his message (2 Cor. 5:18–19). What then might be a result of his ministry being discredited (vs. 3)?

9. Read through the list in verses 4–10. According to Paul, how does God display his power most clearly—through deliverance from suffering, through miracles, or through something else?

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 6:11–16.

10. In verse 13 Paul asks his readers to open their hearts to him. What lies at the heart of Paul's concern for the Corinthians? (Reflect on 1 Cor. 13:1–3.)
11. Examine your own heart and ask God to show you how you close yourself off from others. Why is this kind of self-examination so important? (See 1 Jn. 4:20.)
12. Why would two animals be yoked together? How is their behavior affected? How do the questions in verses 14b–16a help make Paul's point in verse 14a?

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1.

13. What kinds of things are you yoked to? Which of our culture's values do you share? To what do you devote time, energy, money? What is necessary for your happiness? What do you need in addition to Jesus?
14. As Christians what is our only yoke (vs.14)? (Consider especially 6:16b and 7:1.)
15. What does it mean to be holy? (vs. 17) Why does this matter to God?
16. Which statement is true and why, (1) or (2)? (Use a verse to support your answer.)
 - (1) Holiness comes through exercising will power and self-control.
 - (2) Holiness comes through worship.

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Regrets, Repentance, and Rejoicing 2 Corinthians 7:2–16**

*“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret,
but worldly sorrow brings death.” 2 Corinthians 7:10*

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 7:2–4.

1. List the reasons Paul gives why the appeal to “make room for us in your hearts” (vs. 2) is a reasonable one.
2. How does Paul express his concern for the Corinthians, and what do you think he means by “you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you”? (vs. 3)
3. Even in the midst of Paul’s trying circumstances, what does he say brings him great joy? (vs. 4)
4. What are some characteristics of your own church that cause you to rejoice?

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 7:5–7.

5. Paul resumes the story of his search for Titus which has led him from Troas to Macedonia. (See 2 Cor. 2:12–13) What is Paul’s state of mind as he reaches Macedonia? (vss. 5–6)
6. What is the source of Paul’s comfort during his emotional turmoil? (vss. 6a; 1:4–7)
7. How does God bring abundant encouragement to Paul? (vss. 6b–7)

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 7:8–13a.

8. Paul had written a letter to the church which had swung the allegiance of the church away from Paul. Explain why he regrets sending it, but on the other hand doesn’t regret sending it. (vss. 8–9)

9. Can you describe a situation when you, like the Corinthians, received a letter or a call from someone who pointed out a sin in your life? How did you respond?

10. What are the different effects produced by “godly sorrow” and “worldly sorrow”?

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 7:8–13a.

11. How is “godly sorrow” (vs. 11) which leads to repentance evidenced in the lives of the Corinthians? Can you relate a particular instance when “godly sorrow” caused repentance in your life?

12. In writing the sorrowful letter to the Corinthian church what hopeful outcome did Paul envision? (vs. 12)

13. Meditate on Isaiah 49:8–13, and marvel at this beautiful picture that patterns godly repentance. Write down some of your reflections.

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 7:1–16.

14. Paul is the only New Testament author to use the phrase from the Greek meaning; “fear and trembling” (vs. 15). Why do you think he uses it here? (Phil. 2:12, 13; Eph. 6:5; 1 Cor. 2:3–5)

15. What risk did Paul take in his communication to Titus about the Corinthians, and how did that turn out? (vs. 14) What is the basis of our confidence in other believers? (2 Cor. 1:18–22; 3:2–3, 18; 13:5)

16. What do we learn of God in Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians? Who sent Titus? Who sent godly grief? Who has us in his heart?

17. How do you see God at work in the relationships in your life?

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**The Grace of Giving 2 Corinthians 8:1–15**

“But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.” 2 Corinthians 8:7

Background: The Corinthians had begun a collection earlier for the poor believers in Jerusalem, but the troubles in their church seem to have derailed it. Paul now urges the Corinthians to finish what they began.

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 8:1–15.

1. What word does Paul use all through this passage for giving? (vss. 1, 6, 7, 9; also vs. 4, translated “privilege” in the NIV) How does this word inform one’s view of giving?
2. Who is the source of this gift? (vs. 1; cf. 1:3–4) Who then gains glory when Christians give generously?
3. If generous givers don’t get the credit, what reward can they hope for? In contrast, what reward comes to those who seek public acclaim for their giving? (Mt. 6:1–4, 19–21)

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 8:1–5.

4. The Macedonians were those who lived in northern Greece, including the Thessalonians, Philippians, and Bereans, while the Corinthians lived in Achaia, the southern region of Greece. What circumstances were the Macedonians facing when they took their collection? (vs. 2a; cf. Phil. 1:27–30; 2 Thess. 1:4)
5. Fill in the following surprising equation from verse 2:
overflowing _____ + extreme _____ = rich _____
6. Who took the initiative in the Macedonians’ giving? (vs. 4) Who usually has to do the pleading in missions?
7. What do you think it means to give beyond one’s ability?
8. Commentator Scott J. Hafemann writes that “we know who we are by how we spend our money.” What does the way you spend your money say about you?

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 8:6–9

9. What gifts does Paul list in verse 7? How is giving also a gift? (cf. Rom. 12:6–8) If “contributing to the needs of others” (Rom. 12:8) is one spiritual gift among many, does that let everyone who doesn’t have that particular gift off the hook? (cf. 9:7; Acts 20:35; Heb. 13:16; James 2:15–17; 1 Jn. 3:17)
10. Look again at the exchange in verse 9.
 - a. In what ways did Christ become poor for us? (Jn. 17:24; Phil. 2:5–8; Heb. 2:10, 14, 17–18; Lk. 9:58) How was he “rewarded” for this generosity? (Phil. 2:9–11; Heb. 2:9; Rev. 5:8–14)
 - b. How were we poor, and how are we now rich? (5:21; Gal. 4:3–7; Eph. 1:3–8)

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 8:10–12

11. How did Paul instruct the Corinthians to take their collection? (1 Cor. 16:1–2) Why is this a wise method?
12. Consider this passage along with Mark 10:41–44, Luke 12:48, 1 Corinthians 13:3, and 2 Corinthians 9:7. What makes a gift pleasing to God?
13. Even if it’s not the amount *per se* that makes our giving pleasing to God, we still need to make decisions about when and how much and to whom we will give. How do you think we should go about making such decisions?

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 8:13–15

14. What is the goal of such giving as the Corinthians are being asked to do?
15. In verse 15 Paul quotes Exodus 16:18, from the narrative of how God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness. Read Exodus 16:11–21. What does this story illustrate about the way God provides for his people and the way his people receive that provision?
16. How do you think the principle of the plenty of some supplying the need of others should work itself out in today’s church, both at the local level and worldwide? What role do you think God is calling you to play at this time in your life?

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Sowing Generously 2 Corinthians 8:16—9:15**

“...for God loves a cheerful giver” 2 Cor. 9:7

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 8:16–24.

1. Who is it that puts “concern” for people (vs. 16) into a person’s heart? What then should you do if you realize you lack concern or love for others?

2. Paul has often made it clear that it is God’s judgment, not man’s, that he cares about (1 Cor. 4:3). Why do you think he now considers it so important that people see him and other church leaders as handling the money offerings of the churches in a godly and ethical way (vss. 19–20)? (2 Cor. 6:3)

3. Again in verse 24 Paul urges the Corinthians to show proof of their love, and to vindicate Paul’s pride and boasting about them “so that the churches can see it” (vs. 24). Has Paul lately reverted to a religion of outward show? Explain.

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 9:1–5.

4. What here is the effect on other believers when one group of Christians shows eagerness in the work of the Lord? (vs. 2)

5. Paul is being tactful. What seems to have happened to the Corinthians’ early eagerness to contribute to the financial needs of their sister churches? (Read between the lines in verses 1–4.)

6. Why is Paul sending a few brothers ahead of him to make sure the Corinthians’ money offering is prepared? What kind of confrontation does the apostle want to avoid at his later visit?

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 9:5–6.

7. Paul loves the Corinthians enough to want them to do right and not want to embarrass or shame them. Do we always want that, and go out of our way to prevent a brother from sinning, or do we sometimes delight in someone’s failing so that we can look good or lord it over him or her? Consider 1 Cor. 13:6.

8. What are two possible ways of giving, and which does Paul seek from the Corinthians? (vs. 5b)
9. In verse 6, what is the principle that Paul states emphatically?
10. Do you think Paul is talking in verse 6 about money only? And yet, why is our open-handedness with money a good gauge of our heart condition?

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 9:6–11.

11. What kind of giver does God love? (vs. 7) Examine your own heart as a giver.
12. Generous giving comes with promises. What are they? (vss. 8, 10)
13. What are we believers—those who have been saved from hell and who possess all things in Christ!—to abound in for the rest of our lives? (vs. 8b; Eph. 4:11–12)
14. How does God distribute gifts (vs. 9)? What are some of the gifts you have from God that you might use for his kingdom? (Try to think beyond talents.)
15. Verses 10 and 11 seem to reiterate and reinforce verse 8. What do words like “abound” (vs. 8) and “enlarge” (vs. 10) and “made rich” (vs. 11) and “on every occasion” (vs. 11) signal about God’s blessing on your giving?

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 9:12–15.

16. What two benefits does our financial sharing with others accrue? (vs. 12)
17. In genuine faith, what will always accompany our confession of Christ? (vs. 13)
18. It becomes evident in verses 13 and 14—if it wasn’t already—that Paul, like Jesus, is supremely zealous for what virtue in the church? (John 17:23; Rom. 15:5–6)
19. What is “his indescribable gift” (vs. 15)? (1 Jn. 4:9–11)

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**A Life Shaped by Christ****2 Corinthians 10:1–18**

“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” 2 Cor. 10:5

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 10:1–2.

1. Paul knows that the validity of his ministry cannot be separated from the validity of his message—if one is discredited, so is the other. This chapter and those to follow comprise a defense of his ministry; they are also a defense of his message. What passionate concern lies at the heart of Paul’s defense? (Peek ahead to 11:2–3.)
2. As chapter 10 opens, there’s a shift in the tone of Paul’s writing. How would you characterize his tone here? (vss. 1–2)
3. Paul identifies with the meekness of Christ but rejects the label of “timid” that others have given him. What’s the difference between meekness and timidity? (See Matt. 5:5 and 2 Tim. 1:7; also, go to a dictionary if you wish.)

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 10:1–18.

4. In this chapter Paul addresses the false rumors that have been circulating about him. Fill in details of each rumor and the defense that Paul presents.

Topic	Rumor	Defense
The world’s standards	vs. 2:	vss. 2–5:
Boasting	vs. 8:	vss. 8, 13–17:
Belonging to Christ	vs. 7:	vs. 7:
Boldness vs. cowardice	vss. 1, 10:	vss. 1, 2, 6, 11:

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 10:2–5.

5. How does a life look that is lived by “the standards of the world” (vs. 2)? (Consider 12b.)

6. In verses 3–5 Paul uses a warfare metaphor. In this particular battle Paul is facing off against the false teachers in Corinth. This battle is part of a larger war. What are the opposing sides in this war? (Eph. 6:12) With what weapons do they fight? (2 Cor. 4:2)
7. Compare the goals of the opposing sides. (vs. 5; 11:3)

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 10:5.

8. Give an example of an “argument” or “pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God” (vs. 5a) that Paul encountered. (See Rom. 1:18–23 and 1 Cor. 2:13–14.) Can you think of examples that you have encountered?
9. Is “tak[ing] captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” only another way of saying that when you become a Christian you “check your brains at the door?” (See Acts 17:2–3, scan 16ff)
10. If every thought is obedient to Christ (vs. 5b), then how much of self is left that doesn’t belong to him?

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 10:7–18.

11. What is the authority (vs. 8) that the Lord has given Paul? What did Paul consider his mission field to be? (vss. 13–15; Gal. 2:7)
12. What does Paul mean by “building you up rather than pulling you down” (vs. 8)? (vs. 15b; Eph. 4:11–13)
13. What constitutes Paul’s major objection to his opponents? (vs. 12)
14. Paul’s opponents are known for self-confident boasting. In verses 13–18 Paul boasts too. But how is his boast different from that of his opponents? (See especially vs. 17.)
15. With what very basic principle does this chapter end? Consider prayerfully which is more important to you—“the approval of men, or of God” (Gal. 1:10).

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**A Clear and Present Danger****2 Corinthians 11:1–15**

“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.” 2 Corinthians 11: 2

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 11:1–6.

1. As the founder of the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 4:15), what role does Paul see himself in now? Who is the bride-to-be?
2. In this role, how is Paul jealous and why? (vs. 2; Deut. 4:23–24)
3. How might the Corinthian church lose its “virginity”? (vs. 3)
4. Compare the deception of Eve in the garden and the deception brewing in the Corinthian church. (vss. 3–4; Gen. 3:1–13) Why do you think Paul chooses this comparison?

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 11:1–6.

5. What flirtations are endangering the Corinthian’s pure and simple devotion to Christ? (vs. 4) Can you name something that you are flirting with or putting up with that is endangering your relationship with Jesus?
6. What is the danger of believing in a false Jesus—a different gospel (vs. 4)? (Acts 4:12)
7. Paul denies his inferiority to these ‘super-apostles’; then why does he admit that he is deficient in oratory skills? What does Paul emphasize that he is not deficient in? Why? (vss. 5–6; 2 Cor. 10:4–5; Col. 2:2–4)

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 11:7–12.

8. Why does Paul commit the “sin” (vs. 7) of declining a salary for his preaching? How might this seem like a snub to the Corinthian congregation?
9. Do you think Paul is saying that this is God’s standard for all preachers? (vs. 9; 1 Cor. 9:7–19; 1 Tim. 5:17–18)
10. How does Paul emulate Jesus in lowering himself to elevate others? (2 Cor. 6:10; 8:9) How does your heart need to be challenged in this area?
11. Why is Paul so adamant in his pledge to continue this practice of not accepting money from the Corinthian church? (vs. 12; 2 Cor. 2:17)

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 11:13–15.

12. List all the strong words that Paul uses to describe his opponents. (vss. 13, 15) How do these words express “godly jealousy” (vs. 2) for God’s people? (Jas. 4:4–5)
13. Who are these false apostles actually servants of? How is their masquerading similar to their master’s? (vss. 14–15; Jn. 8:44)
14. Review the masquerading strategies of Satan that Paul has revealed so far in this letter. (2 Cor. 2:10–11; 4:4; 11:3, 14)

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 11:13–15.

15. What are some ways that Satan might be disguising himself as “an angel of light” (vs. 14) today?
16. In spite of Satan’s masquerading warfare, of what can Christians be assured? (Jas. 4:7–8a) What is in store for Satan’s servants? (vs. 15)

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**A Little Boasting****2 Corinthians 11:16—12:10**

“But [the Lord] 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

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 11:16–33.

1. Paul writes in Galatians 6:14, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” yet in this passage he self-consciously boasts “not...as the Lord would, but as a fool” (vs. 17). Why does Paul feel driven to boast in this way, and what effect do you think he wants his boasting to have? (10:12; 11:2–5, 12–15; cf. Prov. 26:5)
2. How have the boastful “super-apostles” (11:5) been treating the flock in Corinth? (vs. 20) In contrast, how does Paul treat the Corinthians? (1:24; 4:5; 6:11–12) What qualities should be evident in those who would be leaders in the church? (1 Tim. 3:2–3; Mt. 20:25–28)
3. What kind of heart and beliefs lie behind behavior like the false apostles’? What kind of heart and beliefs lie behind behavior like Paul’s?
4. How are you tempted to “boast[] in the way the world does” (vs. 18)—whether aloud or to yourself—about your faith, your church, your pastor? How have worldly standards of success shaped your expectations of your church, your pastor, and other believers? What “image” do you want them, or yourself, to project to the world?

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 11:21b–33.

5. It is easy for us at such a distance to read and discuss Paul’s list of hardships in a blasé way. List several kinds of hardship faced by Paul. Choose two or three items, and imagine what it must have been like to experience them.
6. What compels Paul to preach, despite these costs? (1 Cor. 9:16–17; 2 Cor. 5:10–11)
7. Was Paul surprised to encounter so much trouble? (Acts 9:15–16)
8. After such a long list of physical hardships and dangers, verse 28 may seem anticlimactic. Look up some of the following passages, and describe “the pressure of [Paul’s] concern for all the churches”: 1:6; 2:4; 7:3; 12:20–21; Gal. 4:19–20; Phil. 4:2–3; Col. 2:1–5; 1 Thess. 2:17–18; 3:5; 1 Tim. 1:18–20; Titus 1:10–11.

9. Paul gives his exit from Damascus a privileged position in his list. Contrast the way Paul (Saul) left Damascus to the way he set out for it. (Acts 9:1–2, 22–25)

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 12:1–6.

10. Paul has had a number of visions that have given him direction and encouragement (e.g., Acts 9:12; 16:9–10; 18:9–10; 22:17–21), but this one, which he writes about only here, is truly extraordinary. Given what we have read in chapter 11 about Paul’s experiences as a minister of the gospel, why do you think he was the recipient of such a “surpassingly great” (vs. 7) vision?
11. Paul himself does not generally write about his visions, and even here he does so reluctantly. What clues in the text show Paul’s humble reluctance?
12. On what basis would Paul rather be judged? (vs. 6b)

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–10.

13. Why was Paul given this “thorn in [his] flesh” (vs. 7)?
14. Paul does not spell out just what form the “thorn” takes. In what way do you think the impact of this passage is greater this way, than if he had told us the exact nature of his struggle?
15. Paul did not ask for this thorn, and prayed repeatedly for it to be removed. What answer does he receive from the Lord Jesus?
16. For what things was God’s grace sufficient in Paul’s life? Will it be sufficient for yours?

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–10.

17. What kinds of weakness does God prize? (Mt. 5:3–11)
18. What do we lose when we seek to be strong and not weak? (1 Cor. 1:17; 2:4–5) What can we—like Paul—gain when we boast in our weakness? (vs. 9b)
19. How can you boast in your weakness?
20. Commentator Homer A. Kent writes, “Our Christian faith today [like the Corinthians’] depends on the validity of the apostle’s testimony. The reader will do well to study carefully Paul’s explanation, and let it strengthen his confidence in the apostleship of Paul.” Consider how this week’s passage strengthens your confidence in both Paul the messenger and his message.

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Paul's Concern for the Corinthians 2 Corinthians 12:11–21**

“We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.” 2 Corinthians 12:19b

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 12:11.

1. Why has Paul been put in the awkward position of having to point out the commendable aspects of his own life and ministry?

2. What phrase in verse 11 shows that Paul really doesn't have a “big head” about his accomplishments?

3. What impression does the derisive term “super-apostle” give you of the leaders who are trying to steal the Corinthians' affection from Paul?

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 12:12–13.

4. What are the marks of true apostleship that Paul points to for the Corinthians' consideration of the genuineness of his ministry?

5. Evidently, the Corinthians have been thinking less of Paul because he is “never a burden” (vs. 13) to them financially, but has supported his own ministry by a tent-making day job. What do you make of this strange psychology?

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 12:14–18.

6. Verse 14 reveals Paul's reason for refusing to be a financial burden to the Corinthians. What has he been trying to make perfectly clear?

7. More irony in verses 15–18. Put into your own words the case Paul is making. (See 8:6, 10–11, 16–23 to refresh your memory about Titus’ role in the offering for poor believers in Jerusalem.)

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 12:19.

8. Discuss the difference between a worldly, sinful self-defense and a godly self-defense.
9. It is evident from all Paul’s writings that everything he says and does, he says and does consciously “in the sight of God” (vs. 19). Discuss how your life would be different if you always practiced the presence of God in all your words and actions.
10. What is Paul’s primary concern in everything he chooses to say or do?
11. When the occasion arises that you need to correct a brother or sister who sins, how would the words you use be different if they were motivated by concern for his or her “strengthening”?

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 12:20–21.

12. In writing the letter to the church in advance of his next visit, what kind of encounter is Paul hoping to avoid?
13. List the sinful reactions Paul fears in verse 20, and draw up a list of the godly opposites to these.
14. Paul says it would “humble” him if he came and found the Corinthians unrepentant. Why would that be? (1 Cor. 4:15; 11:29)
15. Paul is not afraid of confrontation but does not relish it either. Discuss your own tendencies in difficult interpersonal situations. Is there anything you need to work on prayerfully?

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Knowing the God of Love and Peace 2 Corinthians 13:1–14**

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” 2 Corinthians 13:14

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 13:1–14.

1. As background for chapter 13, summarize what Paul himself has experienced about the reality of Christ. (3:4–6; 4:6; 5:16–6:2; Phil. 2:12–13)
2. What is Paul’s tone in today’s passage?
3. Why does he take this tone? How does he view his own life and ministry, and how then does he expect the Corinthians to view their own? (2:17; 5:10; 12:19; 2 Thess. 2:14–15)

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 13:4.

4. What major theme of 2 Corinthians recurs in verse 4? (Recall, for example, 12:9–10.)
5. If Paul had not understood that Jesus submitted to the ultimate weakness of death, what difference would it have made in his ministry? If Paul had not understood that Jesus was raised in power, what difference would it have made in his ministry?
6. What difference does Christ’s death and resurrection make for you today as you face your own weakness?
7. Meditate on Romans 6:4, 11–14 and Colossians 3:1–17. As a Christian, you have resurrection power. Ask God to show you one way that you are thinking and living as if Christ had never died and risen for you.

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 13:5–8.

8. In verse 5 Paul exhorts his readers to examine and test themselves to see whether they are “in the faith”—to see if “Christ Jesus is in [them].” What difference does the presence of Christ make in one’s heart and life? (Mt. 5:16; 7:21; Rom. 8:15–16; Gal. 5:22–23; Heb. 10:14; 1 Jn. 3:14)
9. Ask God for the grace to honestly examine your own heart. If you see little evidence of Christ’s work (or if you see the things Paul lists in 12:20b), go to him for forgiveness. Look again at 2 Corinthians 7:9b–10 and 3:16–18 for Paul’s words concerning repentance and sanctification.

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 13:7–14.

10. Paul desires “perfection” (vss. 9, 11 NIV) for the Corinthians. This word is more accurately translated “completeness.” It is also the same word used for fishermen “mending” their nets (Mk. 1:19 NASB, NKJV). What does wholeness or completeness look like in a Christian? (Phil. 3:12–14) In the Christian community? (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:11–13)
11. Is wholeness—completeness—a realistic goal? Why or why not? (Rom. 6:1–14; Gal. 5:24–25; 1 Thess. 5:23–24)
12. What does Paul’s desire for the Corinthians lead him to do? (vss. 7, 9, 11, 14)
13. Paul closes this letter with a prayer that includes the three members of the Godhead (vs. 14). As a Christian what have you received from the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit?

Day 5: Reflect on 2 Corinthians.

14. Postlude: Paul does make his third visit to Corinth (in Acts 20:2–3 we read that he spends the winter in Greece [Corinth]). We also know that during those few months that winter he writes his letter to the Romans—his fullest, grandest, most comprehensive statement of the gospel. In view of these facts, what can you guess to have been the response in Corinth to 2 Corinthians?
15. What are some lessons the Holy Spirit has taught you through your study of 2 Corinthians? Consider sharing one of these at our next (and last) meeting.