



Clay-like Calling: God's Glory in Our Weakness
A Collection of Devotionals Written from 2 Corinthians
by Our National Women's Ministry Team

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How We Steward Our Suffering to Serve Others

For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. . . . Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

– 2 Corinthians 1:5, 7

My first pregnancy ended at 13 weeks in a miscarriage. That sweet baby, whose heart had been beating 6 weeks before, had drifted off quietly without me even knowing. Since my body had not naturally expelled the pregnancy, the doctor decided that it was best to remove the baby surgically. It was an awful thing to knowingly and intentionally remove that baby. In spite of excellent medical care and tremendous support from my husband and family, I felt so very sad and alone.

A couple of nights later, I answered the phone to hear, "You don't know me, but we go to the same church, and I heard you just had a miscarriage. I've had two. Would you like to talk about it?" This woman, whom I had never met, reached out to me over this common area of suffering to comfort me. She went on to share her own experiences and what she had learned both from the doctors and through her conversations with the Lord. She encouraged me to have hope in the Lord in the midst of my confusion and grief, even as she comforted me with the comfort that she herself had received.

My miscarriage shook me. Did I do something wrong? Is God really who He says He is? Even those who study the Bible and believe it is true can still be surprised by suffering. Chronic or serious illness, job loss, divorce, or any number of other things can shake even the most faithful of believers. But the hope we see in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is unshakeable. Why? Because he had experienced God's sweet comfort in the midst of tremendous suffering, and his hope was *in the Comforter*.

Earlier in this passage, Paul called God the "Father of mercies" and the "God of all comfort." He went on to share that God comforts us in our sufferings so that we can share that God-given comfort with others in their suffering. Do you know what this means? Our suffering is not wasted! As we engage with God in our suffering, He reveals Himself to us and offers us comfort through His Word, prayer, and His body, the Church. Then, in His timing, He inevitably offers us an opportunity to share the comfort we have received.

Since the fall of man, suffering has been part of the human existence. As with every other aspect of the Fall, our experience of suffering is yet another place for God's glory to shine through and overwhelm even the worst of circumstances. Like Paul's, our hope can be unshaken, because Isaiah 54:10 (NIV) reminds us that:

"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

As we share in Christ's sufferings, so also are we blessed to share in Christ's comfort. Our hope is not shaken because it rests on the LORD, who keeps His promises and doesn't waste our suffering.

Lord God in heaven, thank You that the sufferings we experience give us another opportunity to experience Your grace and comfort and compassion for us. Holy Spirit, please help us to share the comfort that we have received even as we hope for that Day when all suffering will cease and we will see You face to face. In Jesus's name, amen.

Devotional by: Creigh Brown, Regional Advisor for Florida

Christ-Confident Leadership

For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that He will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

– 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

2025 was unexpectedly a tumultuous year for me (surely all tumultuous years are unexpected). I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease that has been challenging to treat and experience relief from. My disease brought new weakness into my life and has made old weakness more present.

In the past, I thought I was at my best when I was strong, when I could push through, stay busy, and feel capable. But now I'm learning I'm at my best when I can't do any of that. Because when I'm weak, it becomes clearer than ever that all along my strength has come, is coming, and will come from the Lord. I don't have the energy to trust in myself right now, and what a mercy of this season! When I'm stripped down, when all the false sources of confidence fade away, what's left is Jesus. His death is my confidence. His resurrection is my hope. He is the God who will raise me—and you, weary leader—day by day.

Here in 2 Corinthians 1, Paul wasn't hiding behind strength or pretending everything was fine. He was honest about being overwhelmed and desperate and feeling as if he had nothing left. And yet he saw purpose even in that place. His weakness wasn't wasted; it became the very means through which God taught him to trust.

Paul wrote that God “delivered us . . . and He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope.” As leaders, this is what we want to cling to—not the idea that our strength will return soon if we get a nap or that life will feel normal again if we can just do x, y, and z. We trust that He will deliver us. Again and again.

And just as Paul did, let's invite others in. Let's ask for prayer. Let's not lead from a place of polished confidence but from honest dependence, from Christ-confidence. To lead, after all, is to be vulnerable, to point others not to ourselves but to the God who is our Strength.

Weakness isn't the problem. It's the opportunity, the space where grace becomes real and trust becomes simple. When I'm weak, I'm reminded that I don't have to shoulder through. I am to rest in the One who already carried it all.

Father, thank You for meeting us in our weakness. We praise You that we don't have to be strong for You to be glorified. Teach us to be leaders who rely on You. When we are empty and tired, be our fullness and strength. Let our weakness draw us nearer to Christ. Amen.

Devotional by: Eden Flora, Regional Advisor for Mid-South

Leadership and Wise Decision-Making

I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time? As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in Him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

– 2 Corinthians 1:16-19

Have you ever needed to change your plans—cut a trip short or even cancel it completely? Recently, that happened to me. I had planned an extended visit with my family in another state. We had lots of special things on the calendar, but more than anything, we were looking forward to unhurried time together. A few days into the trip, however, I received word that I was needed back home. I was torn. I had so looked forward to that time with my family, and yet I knew I needed to get on a plane and return. The back-and-forth—*Should I stay or should I go?*—left me feeling indecisive and wishy-washy. I didn’t want to disappoint them. I didn’t want to break trust. The decision brought disappointment not only to me but to my entire family. Unmet expectations always sting.

Changes in our plans inevitably affect other people, and as ministry leaders we often feel this weight even more acutely. Maybe you’ve planned to study a particular book of the Bible and then needed to pivot. Or perhaps you’ve had to change the date or location of a retreat or adjust the menu for the Christmas brunch at the last minute. Ministry leaders have the unique ability to encourage or disappoint, to build trust or unintentionally cause doubt, to take credit or give glory to God.

In 2 Corinthians 1:16-19, Paul faced a similar situation. He had planned to visit the believers in Corinth twice—once on his way to Macedonia and again on his return. But circumstances forced him to change his plans. Knowing the Corinthians might feel disappointed or even question his reliability, Paul didn’t defend himself based on his intentions. Instead, he reminded them that when we make plans “according to the flesh”—human plans shaped by human limits and human desires to please—we will inevitably disappoint. We change our minds. We break promises. Circumstances shift.

Paul knew that if the Corinthians questioned his reliability, they might also question his message about Jesus. So, Paul reminded them of the truth and reliability of the gospel. Throughout Scripture, God has promised salvation to sinful people. These promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Paul pointed them to Jesus, reminding them of the unshakeable truth of the gospel: *“In Him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him.”* God’s Word is faithful and true. God’s faithfulness anchors us when our own falls short, reminding us that our confidence rests not in our reliability but in His unchanging character.

Our faithful and reliable God, thank You for always keeping Your Word. Thank You for fulfilling every promise You have made—especially Your promise to send Jesus, the Savior of the world. Thank You that we can depend on You completely. Even when our own plans shift or fail, Your plans remain steadfast, sure, and true. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Devotional by: Cheryl Mullis, Regional Advisor for Northeast

Established, Anointed, and Sealed: A Covenantal Framework for Life and Leadership

For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put His seal on us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

– 2 Corinthians 1:20-22

Making and keeping promises are a core component of our human relationships and societal structure, yet we find ourselves living in a culture that emphasizes individualism over commitment. Trust and accountability often seem nonexistent. All of us have been impacted by broken promises, from an inconvenience to a deep wound. Some of us find it difficult to make and keep promises, while others live in fear and pain of being disappointed or wounded by a promise-breaker. Hear these life-giving words: “All the promises”—**every one**—“God has made are Yes in Christ.”

The Apostle Paul reminded this struggling church that the history of God’s dealings with His people and the promises He made them have been fulfilled in and through Jesus. From the very first promise of a Seed that would crush the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15), Jesus accomplishes and affirms all that God has promised. Because of Jesus, God is our God, and we are His people. God’s covenantal promise is sure and certain, not yes and no, inconsistent and uncertain. We can bank our lives on all that God has said.

So we utter, “Amen!” declaring our agreement and trust in our faithful and steadfast God. As we testify that we believe Him and trust His Word, He is glorified. We anchor our hearts in the God that He is, and we are buoyed up when we grow weary.

But Paul didn’t stop there. God’s people are reminded that we are established together in Christ, anointed by Him, and sealed with the Holy Spirit. Notice God does the work, not us. This turns our attention off ourselves and onto Him. He gives us our sure footing in Christ and His Spirit, who is the covenantal promise of His presence with us and a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance. Being anointed implies royalty, daughters of the King, heirs with Christ, to one day inherit and rule over the world with Him. The Spirit is a gift because He testifies with our spirits that we belong to Him, He is the “first installment” of our full redemption at Christ’s return.

Don’t miss the plurality of the first-person pronoun, “us,” in these declarations. Together, God is strengthening and confirming us, and we can be sure He will sustain us to the end.

Many times in life and ministry, we feel insecure, unstable, or uncertain. Knowing we are established in Christ by God and sealed and anointed by His Spirit, grounds and stabilizes us to move forward with hope and confidence. His sure and steadfast promises are ours, and His presence with us is our guarantee. Every promise God has made has been fulfilled in our Savior. And so, we say, “Amen to God for His glory.”

Father, thank You for all Your promises that find their Yes in Jesus. Help us to trust Your Word and steadfast love. Thank You for establishing us in Christ, anointing us, and sealing us with Your Spirit. Give us grace to always utter “Amen” to God for His glory. In Jesus's name, amen.

Devotional by: Paula Miles, Women’s Ministry Trainer

Leadership in Hard Places

For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you. Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

– 2 Corinthians 2:1-11

Leading in women’s ministry often looks gentle from the outside—Bible studies, hospitality, planning, encouraging conversations. But anyone who has served in the church knows leadership carries a hidden, aching weight. Paul puts words to that weight in 2 Corinthians 2. “I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears . . . to let you know the abundant love I have for you” (v. 4). Leading in women’s ministry isn’t just organization or influence. It is love poured out, often at a real personal cost.

There is a kind of sorrow that comes only from loving people deeply. It isn’t the sorrow of frustration—it’s the grief of affection. It’s the ache of caring for people who are both beautiful and broken, just as we are.

I remember a season when this truth became painfully real. A woman in our church—someone who had served off and on with the women’s ministry team—asked if she could return to leadership. She was a complicated sister. She had a big personality: witty, transparent, generous, and wonderfully inclusive. She lit up a room when she walked into it. But mixed with those gifts were patterns that caused real hurt. She would take on leadership roles and then abruptly quit or disappear. She often shared her opinions quickly and sharply, leaving others discouraged or wounded. She was erratic and eccentric and beloved—all at the same time.

When she approached me about returning, I knew this would not be simple. Our Session had already counseled me that she was not ready for leadership. They weren’t unkind, rather they were shepherding this dear sister and the other women serving on the women’s ministry team. I agreed with their counsel, but that didn’t make the conversation easier.

This is the part of leadership Paul was talking about: the part many of us never expect, the moment when you must speak words that will likely hurt someone you care about. Words you prayed you wouldn’t have to say. Words spoken, knowing they may be misunderstood. Still, love compels us, love for Christ and love for one another.

Paul’s tears remind us that truth and tenderness are not opposites. Faithful leadership doesn’t avoid discomfort. It enters it—sorrow and affection woven together.

So, I prayed. I asked the Lord to steady my heart. I sought wise counsel. Then I invited her to meet for coffee. I told her gently that this was not the right season for her to serve in a leadership role. I told her she was valued and

loved, that her gifts were real, and that I longed to see those gifts used in healthy, life-giving ways. I offered other paths for service and encouraged her toward growth.

I hoped for understanding. I hoped for humility. I hoped for repentance. But she was hurt. She felt misunderstood. The conversation did not end the way I had prayed it would.

Even so, I sensed the quiet assurance that truth spoken with love and tears is still truth, and Christ meets us in these difficult moments—not to shield us from the emotional cost, but to shape us through it.

Paul went on to write that when repentance appears, the church must “forgive and comfort” the one who has caused sorrow, “lest he be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow” (vv. 7-8). Correction is not the end of the story. Restoration is always the goal. We are to reaffirm love, extend forgiveness, and guard the unity Christ purchased with His blood.

Paul’s words uncover something I often forget: Satan loves bitterness, division, and unforgiveness. He feeds on relational fractures. So, as leaders, we must labor not only to speak truth, but also to protect the body from the schemes of the enemy (v. 11).

Leadership, then, is not simply about decisions and planning. It is about loving people the way Christ loves us—truthfully, tenderly, sacrificially, and hopefully.

And this is where our hope rests. Jesus Himself is the Leader who wept over His people. He confronted sin with courage, restored the repentant with compassion, and carried the burdens others could not lift. Our leadership is faithful when it reflects His heart.

Perhaps you are in a season where leadership has left you tearful or weary. Maybe you’re walking through a hard conversation. Maybe you feel misunderstood or stretched thin. Maybe loving others has come at a cost you didn’t expect.

Take heart. Christ sees your tears. He understands the weight. And He promises none of it is wasted.

Your tears are not signs that you’re failing as a leader. They are signs that you’re loving.

Lord, grant me courage to love unlovely people, such as myself. Give me grace to walk by faith into sticky situations and extend the grace You pour out to those who I am privileged to serve. Amen.

Devotional by Chandra Oliver, Women’s Ministry Trainer

Cultivating a Life-giving Leadership Culture Where Followers Can Flourish

When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

– 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

When we think about leadership, we often picture confidence, control, and visible success. But in this passage, Paul shows us a very different kind of leader. Even though God opened a door for ministry in Troas, Paul admitted that he felt restless and concerned. He didn't hide his weakness or pretend everything was perfect. Instead, he trusted that God was still leading him.

Paul reminds us that God is the One who leads. He said that God "leads us in triumph in Christ," not because leaders have everything figured out, but because Jesus has already won the victory. This is important for anyone in a position of influence. Life-giving leadership doesn't begin with our ability; it begins with our dependence on God. When leaders know they are being led by Christ, they don't have to carry the pressure of being the hero.

Paul used the image of a fragrance to describe how God works through His people. As leaders follow Christ, God spreads the "aroma of the knowledge of Him" through them. That means leadership is not just about words or decisions, but about presence. The way leaders speak, listen, and care for others reflects something about Christ. For some, that fragrance brings encouragement, growth, and new life, and others may reject it, but the leader's calling remains the same: to be faithful.

A life-giving leadership culture is created when leaders stop trying to control outcomes and start focusing on faithfulness. Paul's words make it clear that leaders are not responsible for how everyone responds. God is the One who changes hearts. When leaders understand this, they are free to lead with humility, honesty, and grace. This kind of leadership creates an environment where followers can flourish—where people feel safe to grow, fail, ask questions, and become who God is shaping them to be.

Paul also warned against using God's Word for personal gain or approval. True leadership is not about popularity or performance. It is about speaking and living the truth sincerely, knowing that we ultimately answer to God. When leaders live this way, they point others not to themselves but to Christ—and that is where real growth begins.

God, thank You for being the true Leader who guides us through Jesus Christ. Help us lead from a place of humility and trust, not pressure or fear. Shape our hearts so that our lives reflect the fragrance of Christ. Teach us to be faithful, honest, and dependent on You, and to trust You with the results. May the way we lead create space for others to grow, heal, and flourish under Your grace. Amen.

Devotional by Courtney Denton, Regional Advisor for Mid-Atlantic

The Beauty of Spirit-Empowered Leadership

You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all.

– 2 Corinthians 3:2

When you think of a letter of recommendation, what is the first thing that comes to mind? If you're like me, it's probably not the Corinthian church! It's more likely to be related to your memories of applying for a job you really wanted or your desire to be accepted at the college of your choice. What were you hoping for that letter to say?

While it wasn't a letter of recommendation per se, my youngest son, Tim—who has Down syndrome—once introduced me as the keynote speaker at a conference. Here is what he said:

My name is Tim Hubach, the son of the Director (of MNA Special Needs Ministries). I'd like to introduce Steph H. She is nice. Loves to go shopping. And is afraid of snakes. Can't name them all. See me afterwards. Here she is . . .

It was an honest recommendation! It named my character, my interests, and noted my owned vulnerabilities. It wasn't flattery. It was voicing what my son knows and values about me. In his book *The Clay Pot Conspiracy*, Dave Harvey states, "Honor is openly voicing what we value."¹ He goes on to remind us how essential it is for leaders to honor others.

Honor serves two purposes in growing us as leaders. First, it turns our attention away from ourselves toward others. In doing so, it weakens our self-infatuation and subverts our desire to grab glory. . . Second, it presses us to study those we serve so we can find things in their lives to celebrate.²

Paul was honoring the Corinthian church in his statement declaring, "*You yourselves are our letter of recommendation*" (2 Cor. 2:2a, emphasis mine). By doing so, Paul teaches us that honoring is a demonstration of Spirit-driven "clay pot" leadership. Paul's "clay pot" had endured cracks from the Corinthian church. And yet, he was able to honor them as a positive reflection on his own Spirit-empowered ministry. Paul went on to say, "Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 2:5-6). Genuine honor flows from a Spirit-led heart—one that looks for the goodness, truth, and beauty in others. As such, it is life-giving. As a leader, how are you modeling the life-giving power of the gospel, through the power of the Spirit, by honoring those whom you serve and those who serve alongside of you? Ask God to direct your heart to honor others.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the privilege of serving with and alongside others who need Your saving grace as desperately as I do. Please give me eyes to see the goodness, truth, and beauty of Your image-bearers and to delight in helping them to see it as well. In Jesus's name, amen.

Devotional by: Stephanie O. Hubach, Regional Advisor for Northeast

¹ Dave Harvey, *The Clay Pot Conspiracy: God's Plan to Use Weakness in Leaders* (New Growth Press, 2025), 125.

² Harvey, *The Clay Pot Conspiracy*, 126.

Becoming What We Behold

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

– 2 Corinthians 3:18

I grew up in church and read the Bible, but I didn't yet know Jesus. In college, that changed. I met believers who didn't just talk about the gospel—they embodied it. One night as I wrestled with whether to trust Christ, I overheard a country song in which a husband, suspicious of his wife, said, "I didn't need to see him—I saw him in your eyes." Those simple words resonated with me. I realized I didn't need to see God; I saw Him reflected in the lives of the Christians around me. Their faces, words, and daily choices mirrored something different. I saw Christ in them—and that drew me to Jesus.

Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3 point us back to Moses. When Moses met with God on Mount Sinai, his face shone with glory, but the brightness faded when he left God's presence. Under the Old Covenant, the glory diminished. But for those of us in Christ, it's different. As we behold the Lord—through His Word, through worship, through prayer—we are continually transformed into His image by the Spirit. The glory does not fade; it grows.

This isn't new. From the very beginning, God designed us to image Him:

"Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." —Genesis 1:26

We were created to reflect what He is like. But in Christ, we don't merely *mirror* Him—we *manifest* His likeness because His Spirit dwells within us.

When I saw believers in college, what captivated me wasn't perfection—it was Christlikeness. Their love for Jesus and likeness to Him was clear. What do people see when they look at you, or me? Do they encounter someone who increasingly resembles Jesus? Someone whose life bears the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? Someone steadily shaped, softened, and transformed? We become like what we behold, and I know there are many things today that capture my attention and focus (social media, TV, responsibilities, work, family) and distract me from the most important thing: spending time with Jesus.

For weary ministry leaders—those who feel poured out, stretched thin, or unnoticed—this passage offers hope. Transformation is not something we manufacture. We are clay; He is the potter. As we behold Him with unveiled faces, **He** does the changing. **He** renews. **He** shapes. And what He shapes, He sustains. This passage makes me think of the story of Zaccheus in Luke 19. Because of his short stature, he couldn't see Jesus as He was passing by, so he climbed a tree, and that one choice put him in the path to encounter Jesus. His life was never the same. Jesus changed him, but Zaccheus put himself in a place to see Jesus.

In what ways can you put yourself in a place to see Jesus today? As you choose to spend time beholding Him, God's Word promises you will be changed to become more like Jesus—one degree of glory at a time.

Lord, fix my eyes on You today. As I behold Your glory, keep shaping me to look more like Jesus. Amen.

Devotional by: Jamie Voss, Regional Advisor for Southeast

The Danger of Self-Exhaustion and Self-Reliance

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

– 2 Corinthians 4:1-4

SignupGeniuses, Doodle Polls, meals to make, nursery duty to serve, Bible studies to plan, and so on. The tasks of a ministry leader are quite long. As a girl who likes to get the job done, I can find myself in a frenzy running down my to-do list. And quickly, all the things I believe I am doing “for God” can quietly become fuel for my own sense of worth. I rely on *my* effort, *my* planning, *my* strength. And when the cracks begin to show, I feel ashamed. Surely, God expects more from me than mess.

But that’s the subtle danger of self-reliance: it looks like devotion but is often self-love in disguise. We say we want to put the character of God on display, but deep down, we want to prove that *we* are capable, wise, and indispensable. We want to be needed, admired, and effective. We would never say it aloud, but sometimes or maybe even often, we love ourselves more than we love God.

Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 4 cut through that illusion. “*Having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.*” Mercy—*not merit*—is the foundation of every act of service, every moment of perseverance, every breath of faithfulness. Ministry is not something we possess or maintain through our grit; it’s something we *receive* by grace. Hallelujah! The moment we forget that, exhaustion will expose the idol of self.

The weight of ministry does not rest on us. The danger is not that we will grow tired in serving God, but that we will serve in our own strength. When we confuse God’s calling with our capacity, burnout becomes inevitable! But when we remember that every bit of our ministry, our faith, and our endurance comes from *His mercy*, we find rest and joy even in the labor.

The character of God—His steadfast love, His truth, His glory—is what sustains us. Our exhaustion, if we let it, can become an invitation to return to the mercy that started it all. So, instead of asking, “How do I keep going?”, let’s ask, “Whose strength am I depending on?” When the gospel is at the center of our ministry, we find the freedom to “not lose heart.” And if you feel like you’ve already lost heart, Jesus invites you back! Return to Him.

Father, thank You for inviting us into Your work. Help our hearts to rely on Your love and mercy to care and know Your people. Help us to return and repent when we fail and to rejoice that you invite us back again and again. We love You, LORD. Amen.

Devotional by: Eden Flora, Regional Advisor for Mid-South

Gospel-Centered Leadership

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

– 2 Corinthians 4:5-6

While in my early twenties, I worked at a large university in the Campus Life department. Through my job, I was introduced to a young woman who had walked through a horrendous set of circumstances. During our first conversation she asked me if I thought she would heal from this trauma. I first gave her my work-related answer and then I paused. She picked up on my pause and asked what I really thought. I shared with her that I agreed that the work-related answer would lead to a level of healing but that only Jesus Christ could do the deeper healing in all areas of her life. This initial conversation eventually led to this young woman declaring her belief in Christ. However, with time I soon realized this was not a true conversion but a picture of seed falling on thorns where it grew up and eventually was choked out. I was devastated that my new friend who once showed an interest in the Lord now wanted nothing to do with Him. After a year-long journey with my new friend, I was exhausted and started asking questions: *Did I explain the gospel well enough? Did I do something wrong? Did I give the right biblical answers to her tough questions? Did I say something to make her not believe anymore? . . .*

Throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul continually gave images for how the gospel is received. It is an aroma of Christ: a fragrance of life to life for the believer and a fragrance of death to death for those who are perishing (chapter 2). It is a gospel veiled to those who are not His and an unveiled glory to His children (chapter 3). To the unbeliever the gospel is false, but to the believer it is truth. The gospel brings reconciliation with God to the believer and continued discord with God to the nonbeliever (chapter 5). The gospel transforms the believer to the temple of God while the nonbeliever lives enslaved as an idol worshipper (chapter 6).

I am not to depend on my own strength or power or eloquent words. Salvation belongs to the God who brings light to the darkness. And so, my weariness has softened to a quiet perseverance. I continue to entrust the salvation of my friend into His sovereign hands. And, once again I stand ready to proclaim: Jesus Christ is Lord.

Father, thank You for shining light into my darkened heart. When I am weary and begin to shoulder the weight of another's salvation, lift my eyes to You. Remind me that You ask me to declare the truth of Christ, but it is You alone who brings the light of salvation. Help me to rest in You. Amen.

Devotional by: Kristie Harrick, Women's Ministry Trainer

Beautifully Broken

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our bodies.

– 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

Have you ever found yourself thinking, “Maybe I’m just not cut out for women’s ministry”? I hope so! That kind of honesty becomes the very place where God’s glory breaks through.

Let’s be honest; serving the women of our church is hard. Beyond the Bible studies, events, and discipleship spaces lie the real, heavy burdens our women carry. Entering into these holy places is a privilege, yet it can leave us feeling stretched thin, ill-equipped, and painfully aware of our own fragility.

Take heart! This is precisely where the upside-down nature of God’s economy meets us. The moments when we feel inadequate are the moments, Scripture tells us, we are jars of clay—ordinary vessels carrying extraordinary treasure. We are, in many ways, cracked pots. And out of the cracks of our vulnerability streams the light of God’s victory.

Paul’s words remind us that this design is intentional. A clay pot exists to hold something greater than itself. God places His all-surpassing power in fragile jars of clay so that no one mistakes the source of the power.

There is something comforting about Paul’s honesty in this passage. He did not pretend that following Christ makes us strong, polished, or unbreakable. Instead, he proclaimed that our weaknesses, if we carry them to Christ, are not liabilities in ministry but where Christ is displayed through our ministry. Paul’s voice carries weight because he intimately knew what it means to be pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down, and yet sustained by God’s power.

God delights in leaders who know they are jars of clay.

So, sister in Christ, as you carry the broken pieces of so many women’s stories, remember that you are the Lord’s chosen jar of clay. Cracked and weary, yes, but your broken pieces are held by a God who pours His glory through you so lavishly that even as you shine His light for others, you can feel its warmth resting gently on you too.

Lord, thank You for entrusting me with the hearts of women. Help me carry their burdens and lift their eyes to You. Sustain me in the moments where I feel incapable. In my weakness, show Your strength. In my limitations, reveal your sufficiency. Remind me that the power is Yours, not mine. Let Your light shine and make Your glory unmistakable in and through my life. Amen.

Devotional by: Janet LaRocque, Regional Advisor for Mid-America

Minister to Women in Light of Eternity

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

– 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Recently, I went on a mission trip to Tokyo, Japan. Before I visited, I learned from the Joshua Project (a research organization focused on unreached people groups) that Japan's gospel progress scale is lower than that of countries that are 90% Muslim. They are 98% unreached. In addition to that, the Japanese context, like other Asian countries, is an honor-shame culture. It is also difficult to be a Christian in Japan. One afternoon, after connecting over lunch with several Japanese nationals—women who were longtime Christians and key leaders in their church—we sat together in a Tokyo park. They told me it was so challenging to be a Christian in Japan that there was no way I could understand how difficult it was. They shared challenging personal and ministry situations they faced in their cultural context. After three hours with them, I told them we only have this one life, and as Christians, we must live in light of eternity, so we can live for Christ no matter what others think of us.

Our Lives Are a Vapor. What are the things that will last forever? Our holy Trinitarian God. The Word of God. People. There are only two eternal destinations for any person who has ever lived—either eternal fellowship with God and His people or an eternity without God. The truth of this reminds us that we need to be bold in evangelism and our discipleship of women. Our lives are fleeting and short. James 4:14 says, “Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” What is solid and lasts? The Word of God. In Deuteronomy 32: 46-47, Moses spoke to the people of Israel: “Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life” (NIV). We need to know God's Word and obey it. And in His word, God tells us we are to live by being transformed by who God is in His Word.

We Are Exiles in This World. “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20). The true nature of who we are in this world is as exiles and pilgrims. This world, our residences, our countries—as much as we enjoy and love these things, they are not our home. Our true home is in God's presence with His people forever. How we invest our time, our money, our gifts, and what we focus on and invest in shows our true priorities. Knowing our true citizenship is in heaven allows us to boldly proclaim the gospel and give biblical encouragement to women as we walk with them.

Living for the Eternal, Not the Temporal. Isaiah 40:6-8 says, “All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” We want to finish well—whether it's many years from now or sooner than we think. As leaders, we must remember daily to live in an intentional way for God's glory. It's part of the human condition to think we will have another day or more time. But Paul reminds us that it's the unseen spiritual things which are of greatest importance, not the temporal lives and worldly pressures we sometimes prioritize. As believers, we must encourage the women we disciple to remember to invest their time and lives in the eternal, everlasting Kingdom of God.

Father, Scripture says that our lives are like a mist and then we are gone. Forgive us for so many times focusing on and making the cares of this world a priority. Remind us daily to live our lives to reflect Your glory in everything we think, say, and do as we serve You by serving others. Thank You for the anchor of the gospel, which changes and transforms us and our perspective. Thank You for our faithful Savior who has redeemed us, and in His Name we pray, amen.

Devotional by: Melanie Cogdill, Women's Ministry Trainer

Leading Others in the Already-Not-Yet

For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal maybe swallowed up by life.

– 2 Corinthians 5:4

I have the privilege of living in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania—home of a large Amish community. We are surrounded by horse-and-buggies, delicious baked goods, and dairy farms. One of our local dairy farms has the best ice cream I have ever had—in my life. Truly. The flavors are amazing, the varieties of creative taste combinations are award-winning, and trying their different ice cream concoctions is a genuine treat. Possessing an abundant supply of those little taste-test spoons, the creamery generously dispenses “bite-sized bliss” to their long line of customers.

In her book, *Kingdom Calling*, Amy Sherman relays the following story about a workshop speaker who compares the lives of believers to those taste-test spoons:

He talked about the work of King Jesus in bringing restoration and held up one of those tiny pink taste-test spoons from Baskin-Robbins. You know, the spoons that offer you a foretaste of the ice cream to come. Jeff challenged attendees to see themselves as such spoons, for our role in the world is about offering foretastes of the kingdom to our neighbors near and far.³

What is the kingdom of God? And why do we *not* get “the whole stash of ice cream” yet? The kingdom of God is the reign of God—the power of God—pushing back the effects of the fall of humanity in every area of life and bringing flourishing in its place. Jesus’s kingdom is here in part already, but not in all of its fullness until He comes again. That means that we live in a world full of tension—tension between what-ought-to-be (and what-someday-always-will-be) and what-actually-is-right-now. As believers, our lives are a mix of the life-changing, present restorative power of the gospel—mixed with ongoing experiences of suffering and pain, along with grief and loss. We need to live and lead in the reality of this tension. When suffering surprises us, it reveals something about how we *mis*-understand the world to be. If we lead as if heaven-on-earth is a current and complete reality, we will always be surprised by suffering and shrink in its shadows. In *The Clay Pot Conspiracy*, Dave Harvey notes, “We each signed up to run toward suffering, not away from it.”⁴ As leaders, we ought to both anticipate suffering *and* anticipate how we might offer the pink taste-test spoons of tangible kingdom restoration and ultimate gospel hope into the midst of the already-not-yet experiences of the women we serve.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the reality of the gospel of the kingdom. We cannot fully express our gratitude for the finished work of Christ and all the benefits that are ours because of His saving work on our behalf. Please help us to dispense tastes of your grace in this life, even as we look forward to ultimate restoration one day! In Jesus’s name, amen.

Devotional by: Stephanie O. Hubach, Regional Advisor for Northeast

³ Amy Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good*, (InterVarsity Press, 2011), 23.

⁴ Dave Harvey, *The Clay Pot Conspiracy: God’s Plan to Use Weakness in Leaders*, (New Growth Press, 2025), 50.

Life-giving Leadership Requires Faith over Reliance on Flesh

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him. For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

– 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Leadership often pushes us to rely on what we can see and control. We measure success by results, approval, and visible progress. But in 2 Corinthians 5:6–10, Paul reminds us that the Christian life—and Christian leadership—is built on something different: faith. “We walk by faith, not by sight,” Paul wrote this to point us away from self-reliance and toward trust in God.

Paul knew what it is like to feel weak and uncertain. Life in the body is limited and imperfect, yet he spoke with confidence because his hope was not rooted in what he could accomplish. His confidence came from knowing that he belonged to Christ and would one day stand before Him. This eternal perspective freed Paul from living for immediate success and grounded him in faith.

Think about using GPS while driving. When you miss a turn, it can be tempting to panic or try to fix the route on your own. But when you trust the GPS, you listen, adjust, and keep going—even when you don’t recognize the road. Walking by faith is similar. Life-giving leaders trust God’s direction, even when the path feels unfamiliar or uncomfortable, instead of relying on their instincts alone.

This passage remind us that leadership fueled by the flesh leads to anxiety and control. When leaders rely on their own strength, they often feel pressure to prove themselves. But faith-centered leadership rests in God’s sovereignty. Leaders act responsibly, yet they depend on the Spirit, knowing that only God can produce lasting fruit.

Paul’s words also remind us that our goal is to “please Him.” Leaders who live for God’s approval are freed from the fear of failure or criticism. Because Christ has already secured our standing before God, we lead from gratitude, not fear. This kind of leadership creates space for others to grow, knowing that grace—not performance—is what sustains them.

Life-giving leadership requires faith over reliance on the flesh. When leaders trust God more than their own ability, they model a way of living that invites others to do the same, therefore pointing everyone to Christ, who alone is worthy of our trust.

Father God, we confess that we often trust what we can see more than we trust You. Forgive us for relying on our own strength and understanding. Teach us to walk by faith and not by sight, especially as we lead others. Help us seek Your approval above all else, resting in the finished work of Christ. Shape our leadership to be life-giving and grounded in trust in You alone. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Devotional by: Courtney Denton, Regional Advisor for Mid-Atlantic

Peacemaking Leaders Intentionally Seek Reconciliation

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

– 2 Corinthians 5:20

The spring after I stepped into the role of Dean of Students at a small Bible college, I had the opportunity to attend a conference for Christians in higher education. There, I heard from a Dean of Students at a sister institution whose honesty deeply impacted me. He described his own weariness in walking with Christian students who had settled into patterns of sin. He was exhausted from counseling and caring for students who claimed Christ yet seemed comfortable in their disobedience. At times he wondered if his words fell on deaf ears. The breaking point came when one of his student-leaders fell into temptation and appeared to be unrepentant. The student was called in to meet with him. Before the meeting, the Dean began to pray for the Lord's wisdom and was directed to the Word. He found himself reading the account of Nathan confronting David in his sin with Bathsheba. The Lord began to minister to his own heart through the passage. He realized what a privilege it was to be used by God to help bring a fellow believer back to a right relationship with the Father. That day as he confronted and counseled the young student-leader, his labor was transformed. Weariness gave way to joy. He could rejoice in knowing that the restored relationship between this student and the Lord would far outweigh the weariness he felt in the moment.

Paul understood this kind of burden and this kind of joy. His relationship with the church in Corinth had been difficult. After his planting the church and moving on, problems arose, and he responded with the first letter to the church. Many rejected Paul's admonishment and teachings, leading to what he called a "painful visit" (2 Cor. 2:1). That visit, along with an additional severe letter (which we don't have), was to move the believers toward repentance and to restore their relationship with him and the Lord.

In 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, Paul spoke to the ministry of reconciliation that had been entrusted to him. This ministry begins with the call for unbelievers to be reconciled to God through the finished work of Christ. Because Paul feared the Lord, rightly postured in reverence and awe of God, he was compelled to call others into a right relationship with God. And Paul made it clear that this ministry did not belong just to him alone. It belongs to all believers; we "who live might no longer live for [our]selves but for Him who for [our] sake died and was raised" (5:15). Every believer is called to be an ambassador of Christ, a minister of reconciliation.

Flowing from our reconciled relationship with God through Jesus is also the call to pursue reconciliation within the body of Christ. Believers are to be reconciled to one another, and believers walking in patterns of sin are called to repentance and reconciliation with God. Much of 2 Corinthians speaks to the reconciliation of believers with one another and back to faithfulness in their walk with the Lord. There will be seasons when we, like Paul, enter into difficult and even painful conversations. May we be reminded that in these moments, we join the well-worn paths of Nathan, Paul, and many believers before us who have known the joy of seeing broken relationships restored and repentant hearts renewed before the Lord. The ministry of reconciliation is not always easy, but it is always filled with the hope of God's restoring grace.

Father, thank You for reconciling us to You. Help us to not grow weary as we share in the work of the ministry of reconciliation. Give us Your joy as we anticipate the fruit of reconciliation. Amen.

Devotional by: Kristie Harrick, Women's Ministry Trainer

Consistent Leadership in the Highs and Lows of Life and Ministry

*Working together with Him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says,
“In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”*

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry . . . We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

– 2 Corinthians 6:1-3; 11-13

My church is in a time of transition. Weathering several leadership changes over just a few short years has taken a toll. We've walked through many low moments, punctuated by a few encouraging highs. In the midst of this, God blessed us with an interim pastor, a shepherd, who stepped into a congregation where relationships were messy and strained, leadership felt divided, staff were hurting, and many were simply trying to make sense of it all. Our interim pastor knew well the sustaining power of God's love in both life and ministry. He consistently affirmed his love for us, showed it in countless ways, and urged us—again and again—to love one another.

In many ways, we resembled the church in Corinth that Paul addressed in 2 Corinthians 6:1-13, reminding them that what stood between them and true health was their lack of love for one another. In 2 Corinthians 6, Paul continued to emphasize the ministry of reconciliation he had introduced earlier in his letter. He urged the Corinthians not to receive God's grace and then ignore its transforming power, but to turn to God immediately—right then—and seek a renewed relationship with Jesus. Paul believed that this grace, the powerful message of Christ's saving death, can reshape every part of life and leadership. When we grasp what it means to be reconciled to Christ, it moves us to pursue harmony with one another—whether we are walking through hardship or celebrating joy.

Paul described how God's grace sustained him through the hardest seasons—through physical afflictions such as sleepless nights, hunger, imprisonment, and beatings—and through spiritual burdens such as misunderstanding, slander, and false accusations. Paul knew that within the context of the church, these spiritual burdens often cut the deepest. As leaders facing hardships, we take hope in Paul's reminder that the gospel gives us the power to face them with grace. He urges us “not to receive the grace of God in vain” and to follow his example in having hearts that are wide open. Just as God transformed Paul's heart through the power of the gospel, enabling him to share himself freely and love others well, we pray that God will shape our hearts in the same way.

So how do we, as leaders, respond to the highs and lows of life and leadership? We don't wait. We receive God's grace today. We pray that God will fill us with sincere love—for Him and for others. We ask for tender hearts that are quick to repent and eager to walk in obedience as we love and serve God's people during every season of life. Faith, hope, and love abide. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13)

Dear God, it is so easy for us to become self-focused and distracted by the things that cause us discomfort and pain, closing our hearts to others. Fill us with an earnest and sincere love for those we lead, remembering that that love covers a multitude of sins. Amen.

Devotional by: Cheryl Mullis, Regional Advisor for Northeast

Yoked to the Father

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers...Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord...and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.

– 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Many years ago, I used to watch the Oprah show every day. During that time, I would often quote Oprah or the guests from her show. I quoted Oprah way more than I quoted God's Word. I was not very biblically literate at the time, and I was choosing to yoke myself to the wisdom of an unbeliever. I can look back at that time of my life as a cautionary tale reminding me that what I connect myself to will inevitably be what flows out of my mouth and what occupies my mind.

Paul presented a similar idea in this passage from 2 Corinthians when he wrote that believers are not to be yoked to unbelievers. He was encouraging the Corinthian to cling to the Lord in the midst of a corrosive culture instead of yoking themselves to the world as they were doing the work of the church.

Paul pointed out that righteousness has no partnership with lawlessness. Light does not have fellowship with darkness, for where there is light, darkness cannot exist. Think about this as you consider your life and ministry. Are there any areas of your life where darkness has crept in and pushed out the light? Does your private life look different than your public life? What voices are you listening to? What is occupying your mind and heart? Is it representative of darkness or light?

And in ministry, do you seek righteousness or has lawlessness started invading? This may seem like a strange question, for I'm sure we all endeavor to seek righteousness in our ministries. However, lawlessness can begin to sneak in if we are not watchful and vigilant. Listening to unbiblical voices, allowing disunity to fester, focusing on things of lesser importance and forgetting to focus on Christ, trying to be too culturally relevant at the expense of the gospel, undermining the authority under which we have been placed, ignoring conflict instead of working to make peace, working out of our own strength instead of relying upon the Lord—these are all ways that we can yoke ourselves to unrighteousness within ministry.

With this in mind, remember that through Christ's Spirit dwelling within us, we can turn away from darkness and seek light. Dear sister, be in the Word, seek guidance from the Holy Spirit, endeavor to honor the Father in both your private and public life, so you can say to those whom you lead, "Follow me as I follow Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

Father, as a leader in Your church, please help me to seek righteousness and not yoke myself with unbelievers. Help me cling to Your promise that You are my Father and I am Your daughter. Guard me against lawlessness, so that I will honor You with my thoughts, my words, and my actions. Help me to lead well, so I can say "Follow me as I follow Christ." It is only through Your power that I can accomplish this. Amen.

Devotional by: Allison VanEgmond, Regional Advisor for the West

Better Together

“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy. For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.”

– 2 Corinthians 7:1-9

Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 7:1-9 paint a vivid picture of what covenant life looks like among God’s people. His pronouns are communal—“Let us cleanse ourselves . . . Make room in your hearts for us . . . You are in our hearts . . . You felt a godly grief . . . What earnestness this produced in you!” Paul’s longing, affection, correction, joy, and grief were all woven into the life of the church because covenant life is shared life.

Leadership—particularly in women’s ministry—flows from this truth. We are not simply gathering women for programs or events. We are caring for a people whom God has bound together. We are helping women live out the reality that sanctification, repentance, grief, joy, and spiritual growth all happen in community.

Reflecting on Paul’s vision for covenantal community, my thoughts went back to a very different kind of community, formed in a very different kind of pressure.

As a military spouse during war, I expected my husband’s combat deployments. But what was unexpected was the way other spouses became my lifeline. The Army didn’t give us a handbook for endurance, but it gave us each other; and together we learned how to weather the seasons of deployment.

We leaned on one another, picked up the messy pieces, and cheered each other on. We learned quickly what Paul already knew: you cannot do the hardest seasons of life alone. You need community. So, together we formed new rhythms of relationship to survive what no one was meant to carry alone. Friday-night potlucks became our anchor—because weekends are lonely when your person is gone. Girls’ nights and movie outings gave us laughter in the middle of fear. A book club kept our minds busy. We celebrated birthdays and graduations, shared after-school pickups, and carried each other’s burdens in countless text threads.

We had nothing in common except that we had all fallen in love with soldiers—and yet, in that season, we had *everything* in common. Our tribe was an unlikely mix of backgrounds, ages, ethnicities, and personalities, but the shared weight of deployment knitted us together into something deep, fierce, and real.

And when deployment neared its end, we prepared for re-deployment—together. We collected new sheets, towels, and toiletries for the single soldiers returning to the barracks. We made signs and banners. We talked about hopes and fears for reintegration. And on those parade fields, we celebrated each homecoming as if it were

our own. What we shared was more than a social club. It was a sacred place—formed in sorrow, strengthened in hope, and marked by a love that could only exist in shared suffering.

What I experienced in those years is only a small taste of what life in the church *could* be—and what covenant theology says it *should* be.

If women bound together by only the Army could love each other with such intentionality, how much more should women bound together by Christ? We are not simply friends for a season—we are sisters for eternity. The Spirit Himself has placed us together, knitted us together, and called us to grow together.

This is where Paul’s words speak so deeply to us. Ministry is rarely tidy. Behind the scenes, there are tears, misunderstandings, forgiveness, and course corrections. There are women who bring joy and women who bring challenge. There are conversations that require courage and trembling hands. But we do not shoulder any of it alone.

Covenantal leadership recognizes that the Body matures as a whole body. Paul wrote a painful letter to Corinth because he loved them. His correction grieved them—but it was a “godly grief” that led to repentance, unity, and joy. Their growth encouraged his heart. Their obedience strengthened his faith. Their earnestness comforted him.

For women’s ministry leaders, 2 Corinthians 7 gives us practical guidance:

- **Lead with affection.** “Make room in your hearts for us.” Relationships are not optional.
- **Lead with emotional honesty.** Paul shared his fear, regret, joy, and relief.
- **Lead with courage.** Paul said the hard thing and trusted God with the outcome.
- **Lead with expectancy.** Paul rejoiced at the fruit of repentance. Remember, God is always at work among His people.
- **Lead together.** Holiness is a shared pursuit. Ministry is something we do *with* women, not for them.

Yes, the church is a strange sampling of every possible background—socioeconomic, educational, generational, marital status, personality, story. The thorns and thistles of the Fall are very real in our committees, our ministries, and our relationships. Working together will not always be easy. But covenantal leadership begins here: remembering that Christ—not the Army, not affinity, not convenience—has brought us together for our good and for His glory.

And if the Spirit could take a ragtag deployment tribe and transform it into a place of refuge and fierce love, how much more can He shape us, the covenant daughters of God, into a community where repentance is safe, joy is shared, correction is rooted in love, and holiness is carried together?

We are better together—not sentimentally, but covenantally.

Father, help me to reference You in all of my life and leadership. May my service alongside my sisters showcase Your patience, love, and humility through my dependence on You. Amen.

Devotional by: Chandra Oliver, Women’s Ministry Trainer

The Leader as the Chief Repenter

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. Therefore we are comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.

– 2 Corinthians 7:10-13

I did it again. I could have stopped myself—but I chose not to. Once more, in a conversation with a friend about a ministry issue, I blurted out ugly things about another person. I was frustrated and annoyed and wanted to validate and justify my feelings by seeking my friend’s approval. Sadly, this wasn’t the first time. What made it worse was that my friend and I had agreed we wouldn’t speak negatively about others anymore. But I did it again. Why is it so hard to turn away from my sin?

That night I couldn’t sleep. The Holy Spirit began to prick my conscience and move my heart to see how deeply my sin had offended God—I was filled with sorrow. That godly grief led me to repentance. I confessed my sin to God, and the next morning I called my friend and asked her to forgive me.

This grief over my sin is the very godly grief that Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 7:10-13—a deep sorrow because we have offended God, and that sorrow leads to sincere repentance and true heart change. It is the kind of grief that leads to a transformed life. Godly grief creates a desire in us to pursue righteousness, an eagerness to clear our name, and a longing to restore the trust and confidence others have in us. Reverence for God fills us with a righteous anger toward sin which fuels a zeal for God that is motivated by love. Paul was comforted by knowing that his Corinthian brothers and sisters had experienced this “repentance that leads to salvation.” And he rejoiced that Titus had been refreshed by this transformation in the church at Corinth.

As Paul disciplined and prayed for these believers, he not only saw them as they were but also as what they would become by the grace of God. As a leader who was quick to see his own sin, confess it, and repent, Paul knew firsthand the joy and freedom that godly sorrow brings. He longed for others to share in that same joy of salvation—being restored to a right relationship with Christ, their Savior.

As leaders, instead of viewing our sin and sorrow through the world’s lens—filled with regret, shame, or fear of consequences—let us commit to being *chief repenters*. Let us be marked by a deep sorrow over our sin, quick to confess it to God and to those we have offended, eager to pursue righteousness, and humble in seeking forgiveness when we are in the wrong. Such repentance restores relationships, strengthens trust, and points others to the transforming grace of Jesus.

Heavenly Father, forgive us when we have a flippant attitude toward sin. Fill us with an eagerness to turn from sinful habits. Thank You for Your kindness that leads to repentance. Thank You for Your forgiveness that restores us to a right relationship with You. Help us to become chief repenters, who daily repent of our sin, believe the truth of the gospel, and live lives of obedience as we love and serve You. Amen.

Devotional by: Cheryl Mullis, Northeast Regional Advisor

Leading with Generosity Because We Are Richly Blessed

For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means...and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us...For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

– 2 Corinthians 8:3, 5, 9

In 2010, three of the world's richest people launched The Giving Pledge. This initiative asked billionaires worldwide to give away the majority of their money to charitable causes. While some of the people who have signed the pledge (very notably the ones who started the initiative) have successfully given away billions of dollars, others have made the promise but have not followed through. While many billionaires (whether or not they signed the pledge) have given away a great percentage of their wealth, many of them are still overwhelmingly wealthy and are not suffering as a result of their incredible giving. They may have less money, but it has not really cost them any comfort or convenience.

Biblical generosity, especially as we see it in 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, does not come without a cost. In this passage we read of the overwhelming generosity of other people and are shown the costly sacrifice Christ made on our behalf. Then, we are exhorted to go out and do the same. Paul began by sharing the story of the Macedonian church who were suffering severe affliction and extreme poverty, but who gave “beyond their means.” They literally gave more than they could afford, and they did it because of their “abundant joy” in the grace of God. At times we may feel like what the Lord is asking us to give is too much, that we cannot afford it. But as we come to see and experience the Lord’s generous grace in our own lives, we should be overflowing with that same generosity of spirit to others. Another way Paul also exhorted the Christians in Corinth was by highlighting how blessed they already were. He reminded them that the church excelled in “faith, in speech, in knowledge,” and he called them to live generously out of that blessing. As we look around at our church and our ministry, let us first call to mind all the ways that Christ has blessed us through the time, talents, and monetary donations of the people around us. As we do so, we should be encouraged to continue to pour out generously so that we too may be part of the blessing.

Even as we see the example of others who give generously and become more aware of the blessings we have, we may still find it hard to give sacrificially. I think this is why Paul points to Christ as our ultimate example. We are rich in grace because Christ became poor! Jesus literally gave up heaven for us, and all we are asked to do is to “excel in this act of grace also.” In other words, go out and give sacrificially! The God we serve is so good and so kind and so generous that He not only provides for all our physical needs, but He gave His only begotten Son. Seeing the lengths God went to to be with us and draw us to Himself should encourage us to take similar steps to reach out to others and help them draw closer to the Lord. We may not have as much money as the billionaires taking The Giving Pledge, but we have our portion from the Lord, and we have been blessed with “every spiritual gift in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3). Because of this, we will always have plenty to give.

Father, thank You for so generously giving us everything we need for life and godliness. Please give us generous hearts so that we will willingly share out the overflow of all the good things You have pour out on us. Amen.

Devotional by: Marcie Tuten, Women’s Ministry Trainer

The Necessity of Gospel Partnerships—We Need Each Other!

As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.

– 2 Corinthians 8:23

Every opportunity I've ever had to serve in church has involved a group or team. At our first church thirty years ago, it was the Women's Ministry Team and the Bible Study Team. Since joining the Core Group to help plant our current church twenty years ago, I've served on the Assimilation Team, Kids' Worship Team, and Missions Team, and now serve again on the Women's Ministry Team. My husband and I together lead a Community Group, and we each separately lead Discipleship Groups.

I'm not mentioning these things in order to talk about my service record at church—many have served more sacrificially and in more ways than I have. I'm mentioning this because, again, *every opportunity I've ever had to serve in church has involved a group or team*. I don't think this is by accident; in fact, I think it's biblical.

God, Himself, works as a team. We know that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have worked together since before the "foundation of the world" (Eph. 1) to gather for themselves a people whom they would redeem. Although God and His covenant are both very personal, God has been working to gather to Himself a "people," not just a single person.

As he wrote, Paul knew that he could not accomplish God's purposes alone. He needed his partner, Titus, and his brothers from the churches to help him by delivering his letter and gathering the contribution for the Christians in Jerusalem. Sometimes, weary leaders, God chooses to work through our gospel partners and sisters in Christ rather than directly through us, according to the purpose of His good will.

Jesus, God the Son, modeled this for us when He chose twelve men through whom He would reach the world. Even those, He sent out "two by two" (Mark 6:7). Throughout the New Testament, there are examples of apostles and disciples of Christ who travel and minister together in groups, Paul and Titus being only one example. One message seems clear: ministry in community is good, but ministry in isolation is not.

Proverbs 27:17 says, "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another." In my own life, these teams and groups have been places for accountability and spiritual growth. Trusted relationships have stood the test when I've needed correction or exhortation. These teams and groups have been safe places for me to grow in repentance and faith as my awareness of both my sin and my need for a Savior has grown over the years.

First Peter 2:5 reminds us that we "like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house," and Romans 12:4 reminds us that we "have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ." Friends, we truly are better together! God uses the gifts and graces He's given me *in cooperation with* the gifts and graces He has given my leadership and the women on my team. Our ministries flourish when we intentionally remember that they are God's ministries and that He has invited us to serve within a community, the body of Christ.

Lord God in Heaven, thank You for inviting us into community. Thank You for providing us with the body of Christ, where we find encouragement, accountability, and opportunities to serve. Would You please refresh us and help us to grow in our ability to serve together, complementing one another's strengths and glorifying Your Name through our unity? In Jesus's name, amen.

Devotional by: Creigh Brown, Regional Advisor for Florida

A Cheerful Giver

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! — 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Does someone immediately come to mind when you hear the phrase *cheerful giver*? For me, it's my granddaddy. I knew from a very young age that he LOVED to give, whether it was money, time, words of encouragement, or vegetables from his garden. He just delighted in sharing what he had. Now he never had much, and died with little to his name, but what he had was freely given to anyone who needed it. As a child who lived next door to him, I watched him pick up hitchhikers and bring them home for a meal, daily save all his coins in his pockets for the extra missionary offerings, invite our pastor out for dinner, and drop off sacks of groceries to families who were struggling. And he did it with JOY! He would often smile at me and whisper in his deep Lowcountry accent, "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver!" I didn't realize then what he was teaching me through his words and deeds, but I came to understand it better as a young adult who was faced with being generous when it came to my time, energy, and money.

In our Women's Ministry roles, we are given ample opportunity to sow and reap. The Lord providentially often places people in our paths who have needs when we are serving the church. If you're like me, you might be tempted to be selfish and miserly with them. But there is a promise found here in the middle of this passage: "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." Through His abundant grace, He enables us to abound in doing good—even when we want to be focused on ourselves. The Holy Spirit gives us all the necessary gifts to be generous givers to those around us, even those who are difficult to love. Furthermore, we learn in verse 11 that we "will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God." This should encourage our socks off! Sisters, how wonderful is it that we will be used by the God of the universe to grow the kingdom and produce thanksgiving in others?! Now, we all know what that can practically look like among the saints: it is often taking a meal to a home, watching small children who need looking after, cleaning up messes that we did not create, and inviting people into our homes who will likely never invite us into theirs. What a privilege it then is to give—and to give generously. We will be able, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to focus less on ourselves, and more on giving to those around us. This is the hard and holy work of the kingdom.

Granddaddy often instructed me on the "main points" that Paul is referring to in this passage. During the prelude music at our wedding, we had a friend sing "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus." At our reception, my granddaddy came and found me and made sure to tell me that the song ministered to him especially. As we departed for our honeymoon, he reminded me that if I kept my eyes on Jesus in my marriage, the "things of the world would grow strangely dim," and I'd be able to serve Jesus in the ways He called me to serve in my new role as a wife. His words often still ring in my ears to this day with regard to serving the church.

Heavenly Father, would You help us to catch Paul's main point? Would You help our hearts to turn from our selfish tendencies toward giving in generous ways, knowing that this brings You glory?

Devotional by: Elizabeth Steele, Regional Advisor for Southeast

Humble Leadership Leads to Bold Faith

I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!—I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.”

– 2 Corinthians 10:1-2

These verses at the beginning of 2 Corinthians 10 mark an abrupt shift in Paul’s tone as he wrote to this church he loved. Without explanation, he changed topics and temper, launching a strong personal defense of his ministry and a vigorous attack against his opponents in the church. Perhaps you have found yourself in a similar context as a leader: misunderstood, falsely accused, longing to adorn the gospel with boldness and humility. We, like Paul, must lead in truth and love by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

Paul was accused of walking according to the flesh. His opponents could not reconcile the strength and boldness of his letters with his perceived unimpressive persona. Their values were inverted. His presentation of the gospel was not flashy but unpretentious. He was humble, considering others better than himself. He was poor and had experienced incessant trials and difficulties. He would not tolerate any distortion of the gospel, and he pleaded for the lives of the Corinthian believers to be marked by reconciliation and holiness, reflecting the beauty of the gospel. As a minister of the gospel, he was often challenged and misunderstood, yet he pressed on in the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

But how can we do that? The same way Paul did, by looking to Christ.

Jesus is our ultimate example of what it means to be meek and gentle. He said it about Himself in Matthew 11:29, “Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart.” We often think of meekness as synonymous with weakness, but instead, it is actually power under control. It is demonstrated through a humble and submissive spirit toward others. Gentleness is kindness and tenderness displayed to others. A gentle person is mild-mannered and not given to rash emotions. Jesus perfectly exemplified meekness and gentleness throughout His ministry. He befriended the outcasts and touched the lepers while boldly denouncing any pride or action that stood in opposition to the gospel.

Scripture reminds us that we have been “crucified with Christ, [and] It is no longer [we] who live, but Christ who lives in [us]. And the life [we] now live in the flesh [we] live by faith in the Son of God, who loved [us] and gave Himself for [us]” (Gal. 2:20). We are compelled by His love and empowered by His Spirit to lead humbly with boldness. When we are challenged or misunderstood, we can respond with meekness and gentleness rather than reacting with pride and anger. We remember that humility is not weakness but the posture of those who follow Christ. We pray for wisdom to speak the truth courageously with grace and love for the glory of Christ and the good of the church.

Father, make me like Jesus in all my relationships and circumstances. Give me the courage to speak the truth in love and the wisdom to respond to others with grace. As I lead, help me point others to Jesus. In His precious name, Amen!

Devotional by: Paula Miles, Women’s Ministry Trainer

Leadership Is Full of Battles We Fight on Our Knees

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.
– 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

My husband and I are fairly recent “empty nesters.” As our youngest son left for college last year, just a few months after our eldest son married and a year after our eldest daughter moved to work in a different city, my husband and I have experienced lots of opportunities for our faith to be challenged and stretched. Even as I write this, our youngest daughter has just accepted a job in another city and will be moving there within the next few weeks. This season of our lives is marked by change.

In all of these changes, my flesh has been tempted to worry. Will my daughter do well in her new job and find good roommates? Will working in a big city be good for her? Will my son be safe at college? What influences will tempt him? Will my children find Christian men and women to marry, or is God calling one or more of them to singleness? Will they remain steadfast in their faith, or will they become wise in their own eyes? In my flesh, I battle the desire to control anything that gives me an opportunity to worry. In my flesh, I am tempted to believe that it is good for *Me* to be on the throne of my life.

Praise God that we are not waging war according to the flesh! Praise God that He does not leave me without powerful weapons to fight my flesh!

God, through His Holy Spirit in me, enables me to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). When I am tempted to worry or feed my idol of control, He reminds me that He loves my children even more than I do and has promised to work His will for their good and His glory. He reminds me that I can repent of my sinful desire to control what happens in my children’s lives and that Scripture is full of Truth to hold close when I forget God’s promises. He has given me His Spirit, who equips and empowers me in the fight to enjoy God’s sovereignty and Kingship.

What else has our generous God done to help us in the battle against our flesh and the schemes of the devil? In Ephesians 6, Paul spoke of taking up the “whole armor of God,” (v. 11) which includes faith, righteousness, truth, salvation, and God’s Word, but he also spoke of “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication” (v. 18). God has given us the gift of prayer!

The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh. As believers, we fight on our knees when we go before the throne of our heavenly Father, our Good Shepherd, asking Him to do more than we can ask or imagine. He has thrown open the door to His throne room and given us full access to Himself through His Son, Jesus, who is presently interceding on our behalf. It is *His* power that can destroy the strongholds of sin and evil in our lives. It is *His* power that can change the unchangeable. When we pray, we are inviting Him to work in ways that we can’t even fathom, but He loves to surprise us with His goodness.

Praise God that He is powerfully working to keep His promises. He is faithful to His people, and He has equipped us through His Holy Spirit to faithfully persevere as we wait for that good Day when He will make all things new.

Lord God in Heaven, thank You for making me Your precious daughter. Thank You for giving me Your Word and Your Holy Spirit, who reminds me of the truth when I’m tempted to believe lies. Thank You that You are good and trustworthy, and that You are the best King I could ever hope for. Thank You that you hear my prayers and rise up powerfully to work on my behalf. Please help me to live faithfully, enjoying You and glorifying You. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Devotional by: Creigh Brown, Regional Advisor for Florida

The Snare-of-the-Compare Destroys Community Life

Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present. Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

– 2 Corinthians 10:7-12

Several years ago, I was asked to serve on a Women's Ministry team with many gifted women whose faith had been refined and deepened by various trials, accomplishments, disappointments, and surprises as they faithfully served and loved their churches. I still remember walking into the room and wondering, "What am I doing here?" I didn't feel I measured up to them and thought I had little to contribute to the discussion. I crafted a narrative in my mind about who I was and what I could offer the group. I succumbed to the temptation of determining my worth by comparing myself to others.

It can be tempting in Women's Ministry to compare ourselves to each other. We notice *her* winsome teaching, *her* confident leadership, *her* church's beautifully executed events, *her* joyful willingness to serve, *her* creativity in hospitality, and *her* seemingly endless capacity to serve. My guess is you may have wrestled with thoughts like these in your ministry. This pressure to measure ourselves relative to others flows out of where we are looking at any given moment. In other words, it matters *who* or *what* is our reference point: is it someone else and their abilities, or is it Christ and what He has done?

In 2 Corinthians 10:7-12, the apostle Paul reminded the believers in Corinth that he had no need to compare himself to others because he was confident his value came from the Lord alone. He understood that the gospel had saved him from the burden of needing to prove himself as a messenger of the gospel. In verse 12, Paul stated, "*Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.*" He recognized that comparing oneself to others is unwise and harmful to the church body, as it can lead to disunity, pride, conflict, and envy.

What happens when we let comparison cloud our vision in Women's Ministry? Firstly, comparison robs us of the joy of working together to encourage and equip women, instead fostering either jealousy or pride. Secondly, it can erode our trust in God and His good plan, leading us to question His goodness toward others and undermining the unity among believers that Christ sacrificed for. Thirdly, focusing on comparison causes us to lose sight of Christ and the gospel, shifting our hearts from serving to striving. Ministry becomes a competition rather than a calling, with our efforts centered on proving ourselves instead of pointing others to Jesus. However, when we fix our gaze on Him, comparison gives way to contentment and competition gives way to profound, joyful unity.

It's been a few years since I attended that Women's Ministry gathering and felt inadequate. Over the years, serving alongside those women revealed to me how each of us is designed by God to serve His people in a way that aligns with our individual strengths. I now understand that the Lord placed me in that room because together we would have the privilege of reflecting who Christ is to the women we served. Over time I also witnessed how our differences complemented each other and how we needed each person's perspective and ministry experience to serve His church. The truth is, we don't need to compare ourselves to each other or measure our worth against

one another. Instead, we should lean into knowing each of us has unique gifts that the Lord uses to build His kingdom. Our churches are stronger and healthier when we can use and celebrate our differences as we point our women to Jesus.

Father, thank You for reminding us that You want us to be wise and content with where You have placed us in our ministry and the unique gifts You have graced us with. What a gift it is to know that we get to serve such a loving and compassionate God! Help us treasure our calling and remember our purpose in ministry, knowing that each one of us is cherished and valued by You. May our ministry be a reflection of Your compassionate and tender love for Your people. In Jesus's name, amen.

Devotional by: Tatiana Anderson, Regional Advisor for West

What Is “Successful” Ministry? Our Boast Is Only in the Lord

But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

– 2 Corinthians 10:13-18

Don't brag.

A common command to kids about living in community. However, as an adult, I have been surprised how I want to brag in subtle ways, and sometimes even just to myself!

The Session loved my idea. She wanted to have coffee with me, not others. I was key to saving that doomed church project. If I'm tempted to brag, maybe Paul was too. Or, maybe this is one of those “good girl sins.” Bragging is more like speeding than murder. Yet, boasting is a very big sin because we steal glory from God Himself. In 2 Corinthians 10:17, Paul reminds us that only God is the creative power behind the “big” ideas, the Giver of wisdom in coffee conversations, and even the pull on us to say “yes” to a struggling team project.

If God is providing the lift, then why do I feel I like showing off my muscles?

In my case, I want to be valued, to be asked again, or to belong to a group. If I really dip deeply into my motives, productivity at church makes me *feel* closer to God and His people than “doing nothing.” The irony is I already have these cravings met *not through my* constant doing but through *Christ's*: His prayers for me (Romans 8:24), His Spirit working in me (John 14:17), His planned work that He wants me, specifically me, to do for His kingdom (Ephesians 2:10). If I'm boasting at all, it should be about Jesus.

However, in our desire to not boast or brag, we may feel like it's wrong to celebrate the wins we experience as God's appointed instrument. To that point, in 10:13, Paul described how great it is to serve in the spot God has put you in. For Paul, it was to preach to the Corinthians. What is it for you and me today? The Spirit uses our stories, skills, and spiritual gifts to accomplish His kingdom plans. Just as Paul was wired for his tasks, God wired me for mine. He gave me a creative brain, hard experiences so I'm more empathetic, and a love to collaborate. When I serve Him, I feel His hands around me as an instrument of His kingdom work, and frankly, that's pretty fun. Enjoying His hands holding me as an instrument of His kingdom work is a joy. It's when I make the work about me, when I forget He values me and invites me to collaborate with Him and others, that the puffy comes in. Instead of joy, I feel the ickiness of stealing another's glory—His. Instead, let us as leaders in His church follow Jesus's humble example of not bragging (when He is the only One who deserved to boast) but of bringing glory to our great God.

Please, Lord, forgive me for stealing Your glory as I work into the conversation what I do and accomplish. Stop this bragging even as I'm tempted to think it to myself. Call to mind ways You have helped me in broken times, so I remember I'm still dust and I need You. But also bring to mind those times You've used my “dustiness” to reach others with Your gospel message. I'm so honored to be Your servant in the work You've created for me to do. Help me to celebrate with You and give You the glory every time!

Devotional by: Susan Tyner, enCourage Podcast Co-host

Sound Doctrine Leads to Healthy Ministry

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ

– 2 Corinthians 11:3

Do you remember any of your advanced math courses in high school or college? (I'm going to seriously date myself here.) I attended college when there were still no calculators allowed in our Statistics course, and all of the formulas we employed had to be memorized. (Don't ask me to tell you what any of them are now!)

Somewhere along the line in my math classes, I learned about the concept of "necessary and sufficient conditions." When something is *necessary*, it is a condition that must occur in order that an action *might* happen. On the other hand, a *sufficient* condition is the thing that "clinches the deal" in order for that ultimate action to be completed. (I'll spare you from my demonstrating this with anything technical!) Instead, for example, it is *necessary* for there to be *clouds* in order for it to possibly rain, but there must also be a *sufficient* amount of *moisture* for it to actually rain. There can be clouds, but no rain. Rain occurs when there are clouds *and* sufficient moisture.

The same thing can be true about doctrine. God's Word provides all that is *necessary* for life and godliness, and from His Word, right doctrine is to be discerned. Paul was deeply concerned that the *minds* of the Corinthians be set on a sincere and pure devotion to Christ—which can only be grounded in a right understanding of the Person and work of Christ Himself as communicated to us in the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments. Right doctrine is *necessary* for healthy spiritual growth.

However, *exposure* to right doctrine alone is not *sufficient* to sustain us in a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. I suspect that we all know churches where right doctrine is taught, and yet, they are utterly unhealthy communities. Right doctrine alone is not sufficient. What makes spiritual health *sufficient* is a God-given heart of flesh, and not a heart of stone. We, and the women we lead, must not only *know what is true*, but must also personally *know the One Who is Truth*. If our hearts have not been softened by the gospel and renewed by the power of the Spirit, when we receive the Word of God, it will fall on hard ground and produce nothing.

What does right doctrine *with* a soft heart look like in ministry? It looks like a robust study of James 2 that actually results in repentance for how we have condescendingly treated others from different social circles. It looks like a deep conversation on the first chapter of Romans that moves with love towards those in our communities who live brazenly in ungodliness and unrighteousness. It looks like a study of Jesus's declaration of His kingdom in Luke 4 that results in recognizing our own spiritual experiences of poverty, blindness, and oppression—in such a way that causes us to seek out those who live daily in tangible poverty, with disability, or under injustice.

Heavenly Father, thank You for providing us with all that is necessary for life and godliness in Your Word, and for providing us with all that is sufficient through the transforming power of Your Spirit, because of the saving work of Christ accomplished for us. Help us to lead others in a way that calls them to both as well. In Jesus's name, amen.

Devotional by: Stephanie O. Hubach, Regional Advisor for Northeast

Serving God in Our Weakness Is Worth It

Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

– 2 Corinthians 11:29-31

By nature, I am not a particularly relational person. I had been through many months of relationally challenging ministry in an international context. I was attending the November 2024 MTW Conference, and as I got ready to go to the main session on Saturday morning, I literally prayed, “Lord, this is too hard. I can’t do it. I think I am going to quit. This is not worth it.” That morning, the main speaker, a missionary named Jonathan, said, “All Christians everywhere are called to ministry in God’s Kingdom. None of the mundane things done for Christ are lost. This is God’s work. This is His church. It is costly work, and we see our shame, weakness, and despair, but it’s these trials that drive us to deeper dependence on Christ. And it will be worth it.”

God Uses Our Frailty. The apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:29-31 acknowledged that he was frail and weak, and not only noted his weakness, but also boasted in his weakness. As Americans, even Christians emphasize and rely on experience, skills, and personality strengths as measures of competent leaders. We are drawn to and admire those with natural leadership abilities. God’s way is the exact opposite. He takes weak, frail, sinful people whom He has saved and calls us to follow and serve Him. If we think about how wretched we truly are and how God has, in His kindness and mercy, called us to His kingdom work in spite of ourselves, we are truly humbled and thankful that He would use us in our frailties. God does not need us to do or complete His kingdom work, and yet He chooses to use unlikely and unlovely people like you and me to labor in His church.

Serving Is Difficult. When we answer God’s call to serve others and disciple women in His church, we find that ministry is never easy and smooth. This is because, through difficulty and hardship, Christ sanctifies us and causes us to recognize that we are not sufficient in ourselves to carry out the ministry God has called us to. In 2 Corinthians 11:26-28, Paul listed the trials he had faced: “in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.” Paul faced physical, spiritual, and relational challenges, and he was anxious. This long list of trials and persecution from within and without the church would make any of us say, “No thanks, God, I’m out.” And yet Paul kept pressing on—motivated by the gospel and his desire to see that the churches understood their faith and were growing as disciples of Christ (2 Cor. 1:19-24).

Hoping in Christ as We Serve. Earlier in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul wrote that we are not to lose heart as we serve. We are investing in eternal things that will last as we minister to women in our churches. Our confidence is boasting in Christ, not in our gifts and in ourselves. When we do this, we fix our eyes on Jesus in our service, not in ministry outcomes. When we look to Christ and remember our gospel hope, we do persevere by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we have that gospel orientation, we know that our ministry, despite challenges, trials, and hardships, is worth it because we are serving our loving and faithful Savior.

Father, You are gracious, faithful, merciful, and kind. We are women who are weak, sinful, and needy. Forgive us for leaning on our leadership abilities or easily giving up on the ministry You have called us to. Thank You for using us in our weakness to serve Your church. We pray, Holy Spirit, that You would continue to conform us to Christ. Thank You for empowering us to do your work Your way. We praise You for Your people in our church. Please give us the strength to persevere in ministry for Your glory, honor, and praise. In the name of our loving and gracious Savior, amen.

Devotional by: Melanie Cogdill, Women’s Ministry Trainer

Leading with a Limp

I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses—though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

– 2 Corinthians 12:1-8

Imagine you are being hired for a ministry leader role—a staff position or on a leadership team. The recruiter hands you the job description, and at the top of the list of things they are looking for it states: “Must be weak.” What? For many, this would raise concern. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul wrote, pointing the Corinthian church to a different type of leader than would normally be enlisted. He described ministry leaders who lead with a limp.

For many ministry leaders, this is an uncomfortable and challenging posture because it is so contrary to how the rest of the world defines leadership. Our hearts are bent to want to think of ourselves as strong and successful leaders. Doing well in our jobs is not a bad thing, but where we look for strength is what can be dangerous. Most of the time we prefer to look at our own strengths—boasting about what we have accomplished: the number of people who showed up, positive feedback on our teaching, how well we have led a team, the number of successful events we have hosted, or even how much our ministries have grown. While these are wonderful ways the Lord has worked, how often do we use His work for self-validation or to boast in our own achievements? In what are we boasting?

I have been a part of a ministry serving people deeply affected by a recent natural disaster. To put it simply, it was heartbreaking. As a ministry leader, it is my job to help care for the sheep in my church. During this time, many were hurting and feeling the weight of this disaster in some capacity. This included us as leaders. We were sheep trying to care for the other sheep in the flock.

In times of crisis, we as leaders often feel overwhelmed with the many needs that arise while also we are being humbled by the reminder of how weak we really are. How quickly we realize we are sheep with limits, needs, and restraints. I often catch myself wishing I could be stronger, have more energy, or be the answer to the problem. The common denominator in those thoughts is “I.” The reality is I want to be the Shepherd in place of Christ. My desire to be more actually points me to my own weakness and convicts me to rest in His strength more than my own.

In *A Shepherd’s Look at Psalm 23*, the author writes that four things need to happen for a sheep to lay down in green pastures. One is to be free from fear. Freedom from fear comes from knowing a good shepherd is watching over the sheep. This is a posture of dependence. To be able to close their eyes and rest, sheep must first know their state and recognize their need for a shepherd.

Trusting the Good Shepherd means giving our fears and weaknesses to Him, especially when we feel ill-equipped and weary. It goes as far as believing He is watching, loving, caring and knowing the needs of the other sheep in the flock, even more than we do. Leading with a limp looks like being a sheep acknowledging weaknesses before

the Lord and resting in His strength first. It means trusting His work is more than enough, and He is the One who sustains in ministry.

As ministry leaders, we often feel pressured to be perfect jars of clay for the women in our ministries. What if, instead, the cracks we often try to hide are actually the very thing God uses in pointing ourselves and others to something greater—Someone greater. What if, instead of trying to play the role of the shepherd, we cling to Him in our weakness and point the flock to the true Shepherd? Paul was able to boast in his weakness because he knew in Whom he rested and was confident of the Lord's work through his own weakness. This is an invitation to us all.

Dear Lord, You are the Good Shepherd. You care, guide, and watch over us every moment of every day. Because of this, I am able to have open hands as a ministry leader in the way that I lead, care, and rely on You for strength. Forgive me where I often turn to rely on my own strengths instead of Yours. Thank You for being a God who cares, is near, and redeems His flock. Remind me of how I am a helpless and weak sheep in need of a Shepherd. Guide me in a dependent posture in how I lead today. Sustain me, oh Lord, as I cling to You. You are the One who is at work in and through me—even in the midst of my weaknesses. Help this truth drive my heart to boast in You all the more. Amen.

Devotional by: Mary Henley Green, Regional Advisor for West

Weak, Needy, Dependent Leaders Showcase the Sufficiency of Christ

But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

– 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

This past summer, the Lord slowed me down. Three days before I was to arrive at General Assembly to help lead our programming, I fell and severely injured my foot. A large black boot was not on my packing list or plan. What intrinsically was true became painfully obvious: I was a leader with a limp. We often intellectually assent to this fact, but when you hit the brick wall of your limitations, this truth collides with your heart. Even the apostle Paul needed to be reminded of his own frailty. He was jabbed time and time again by a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7). Courageously, Paul models for us what it looks like to wrestle with our weakness. Do we shun it as an unwelcome nuisance or embrace it as a heavenly advantage?

As I arrived at the Assembly, I began to wonder, how would there be enough time, energy, or resources to get the job done? This ideology of scarcity is pervasive in our culture. This feeling of lack or shortage breeds discontentment and grumbling. Our expressive individualism cries, "I need, I want, or I deserve more!" A scarcity mindset fails to consider God's character and design for our lives. Limits are a good gift from God. It is the divine crossroads that calls for surrender. Will we open our hands to die to our comfort, convenience, and well-planned agendas? The Spirit gently does His surgical, transformative work in our hearts as we yield to His plan. Not my will, but His be done.

Sufficient means "enough." I am not smart enough, gifted enough, or energetic enough to walk out the good works He has prepared beforehand for me to do (Eph. 2:10). Welcome back to gospel kindergarten. Bad news—you are not enough. Good news—His grace is sufficient! But praise God, His grace is sufficient, or enough. Here's the bottom line: We really don't believe God's grace is sufficient until we believe we are *insufficient*. And we are not postured to receive the sufficiency of God's grace until we know our own insufficiency.

God slowed me down this summer so I could see other people who had been slowed down by ministry. We slowly walked through the halls, sharing our suffering and insufficiencies. What if I had zoomed past these saints, boasting in "myself" or "my plans" in the past. More good news! You and I can humbly boast in our weakness. Why? So that the power of Christ may rest upon us. Living and leading out of weakness and resting in His power is where His glory shines the brightest.

Lord, I surrender my weakness, frailties, insufficiencies, and brokenness. Give me grace to lead with limits in such a way that others may see Your glory as Your power rests upon me. Amen.

Devotional by: Karen Hodge, Women's Ministry Coordinator

The Privilege of Serving Unlovely People

Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.

– 2 Corinthians 12:19-21

If you've been serving the church for more than a minute, you have experienced it in some form or another. (And surely Paul experienced it more than most!) What is this I speak of? Disappointment. Sad, and sometimes nagging, disappointment.

There has been much ink spilled over disappointment in the church. After all, we are one big ol' group of sinners. We live in a fallen world. We are led by fallen people. And lest we forget: we ourselves are full of sin as Adam's sin courses through our veins. BUT (here comes the good news!) we are a redeemed people, covered by the blood of Christ. It is this fallen but redeemed group of people that Paul calls by a special name. That name is "beloved." He teaches us that this church in Corinth, though many were their problems, was loved by him, and even more importantly than that, loved by God Himself.

As you read through this particular passage, you can hear Paul's frustration and his concern. And boy, oh boy! Who in women's ministry can't identify with quarreling (over the decorations for the Mother-Daughter Banquet), jealousy (that someone else got the position you wanted), anger (that your idea was firmly rejected), hostility (toward the woman who, you thought, had been trustworthy), slander (against you on social media), gossip (about you behind closed doors), conceit (Surely, no one can do it better than you?), and disorder (That event was a disaster because you weren't the one in charge!). As you can see, I have experienced every single sin listed above in very personal ways. I have been deeply hurt and disappointed by unlovely people within the church, and I have been the unlovely one who disappointed others.

In one difficult circumstance, the disappointment was overwhelming, and it dragged on for a couple of years. The Lord was allowing hardship in my husband's and my ministry life that was just *not* going away. There was accompanied public slander. There were groups of people who would not speak to us. There were (of course) people who left the church and threw a few mud pies at us as they left. I kept praying and asking the Lord to resolve it, take it away, take us away—just do something to change it! But He didn't. We had to walk through it for a long period. We had to keep showing up and praying for and even serving some unlovely people. My husband was totally committed to praying for the folks who had caused such hurt, and every time we would pray for them, I could sense the Lord reminding me of my own sin, my need for forgiveness, and the fact that a sovereign God had ordained this very situation.

I had to believe the hard truths of Scripture: that God Almighty was working for His glory and for my good in this and through this.

The lovely part of this passage is that Paul reminded the Corinthians of that very thing with this wonderful phrase, "all for your upbuilding, beloved." And that makes my woeful, disappointed heart sing for joy! My heart looks for hope, and it is found here—knowing that my God, *the* God, has plans to build me up because I am His beloved.

Taking great comfort in this knowledge gives the Christian the ability to serve a big ol' bunch of unlovely people because He is working in us through this service. Through the daily plodding along, through the "next faithful thing," through the mundane, . . . He works in us. Praise be to God.

Heavenly Father, we cry out to You for the grace we need to love the unlovely people. Help us first to recognize our own sin and find joy in the journey You give us, however muddy it may be. Give us joy in loving the hard people You bring into our lives, knowing that we can be difficult ourselves. Let us lean hard into Jesus and rest in His everlasting arms, finding His completed work on the cross to be the very thing that presses us onward. In Jesus's name, amen.

Devotional by: Elizabeth Steele, Regional Advisor for Southeast

God's Power in Ministry

This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not spare them—since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but in dealing with you we will live with Him by the power of God.

– 2 Corinthians 13:1-4

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to chair our church's Women's Ministry Team. Since I had served in that role multiple years previously, we confidently escaped for a weekend of prayer and goal-setting for the coming year. At year's end, not one goal had been touched, much less completed. God was building a different house from the one we'd laid out blueprints for by bringing us multiple families requiring comfort and assistance in major ways we hadn't anticipated. Their needs superseded our plans. Psalm 127:1 declares, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." Were we frustrated? Definitely. Were we repentant? Eventually. Did we pivot? Finally. We had to learn that "neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Cor. 3:7). God grew a different garden with us that year.

Reading 2 Corinthians 13 through literary eyes, we might say that Paul moved into his closing here, "saying what he's said." He repeated his intent to visit Corinth a third time (Acts 20:2-3, a three month visit to the region). Next, in verses 2-3a, he returned to the issue of church discipline for any remaining unrepentant sinners dealt with previously. Finally, Paul returned to a key theme in verses 3b-4, Christ's suffering, culminating in His crucifixion as weakness (2 Cor. 1:3-7). Paul confessed that his own weakness and power parallel that of Christ's weakness and power by virtue of Paul's relationship to His Lord and Savior. Paul acknowledged that Christ's "weakness," and God's power formed the foundation of his ministry. Paul was reminding the Corinthian church (again) that God's power was speaking in him as well as working among them. God is indeed the Builder of houses and grower of gardens.

Yet, suffering in crucifixion was not the end of Christ's story. The resurrection reminds us that Jesus again "lives by the power of God." Serving as Christo-centric leaders means acknowledging our weaknesses just as Paul did in this passage. It means following God's roadmap, even when we thought we had already GPS'd the route. As we move into 2 Corinthians 13, 2 Corinthians 12:9 grounds us. "But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." What a gem for leadership we find here! Paul points out that because we live with Him, we also live by the power of God. Are we ever qualified to lead? Not without Jesus, whether it is Paul or us. God's strength manifests through our limitations and weaknesses. Our leadership team learned that we had not failed to reach our goals; we had instead succeeded in making ourselves available for God's power and God's plan in ministry.

Walking in our "clay-like calling" can indeed bring God glory in our weakness.

Father, thank You for teaching us how to have joy in glorifying You, especially in our weakness, our clay-like calling. Forgive us for thinking we are strong leaders who have it all together. We are reminded here that our difficult circumstances, wounds, accusations, and limitations allow You to showcase Jesus through us, for Your glory to shine through our cracks. Help us to continue to joyfully glorify You in our callings and our challenges as You grow us. In Jesus's name, amen.

Devotional by: Teri Anderson, Women's Ministry Trainer

True Strength in God's Household

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you fail to meet the test! I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come, I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

– 2 Corinthians 13:5-10

When we moved to Las Vegas, I quickly noticed details about city architecture. With a little inspection, I realized that the big resorts have non-structural facades. The Strip is flanked by buildings with Roman columns, castle turrets, and unique modern designs that look like real wood, metal, or even red bricks and waterfalls. Although eye-catching and beautifying, they are actually faux flourishes of foam or synthetic stucco. Most big cities and resorts now build this way for practical reasons, though looking genuine to the eye.

Paul showed concern that some of the members of the Corinthian church may not have been a genuine part of the household of God, that they may have been attached to the true body like the deceptive embellishments on city buildings. In this closing plea to the Corinthians, he asked them to examine themselves to see if they were in the faith. Romans 8:16 promises that “the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.” Paul knew that if their faith was genuine, then repentance and a return to obedience would confirm Christ’s presence in them, not because faith depends upon good works, but because true regeneration produces lasting fruit.

This passage includes Paul’s final summary about why he had written to the Corinthians, and, in part, contains an architectural metaphor. In verse 10, Paul affirmed that he preferred to use his authority as an apostle to build them up, to encourage them, rather than to harshly tear them down. He used the phrase, “building up” as a word picture for “edifying” which originally referred to constructing a building (an edifice). Remember that in 2 Corinthians 10:8, Paul had noted, “For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building up and not destroying you . . .” Paul seemed to assume the “test yourselves” response would be a positive one, that restoration would have begun even before he arrived. Paul anticipated his visit would be edifying to them all and they would be growing in the faith of Christ as he had first taught them.

Finally, this passage gives us some guidelines for giving gracious accountability to members of the body. For example, Paul had provided time for repentance to occur. He had already visited them and written twice about the issues in the church. In addition, Paul expected self-examination to be part of the accountability process, anticipating the Holy Spirit’s intervention for all parties involved. To that end, Paul was specific regarding issues of believing false teaching and behaving immorally. And he realized that in his leadership role, his overarching focus was on the well-being of the corporate body of Christ. He knew he must deal with individuals in the context of community. Although the modern facades of cities do provide extra insulation, assist with drainage, and cut construction costs, they provide no structural strength. Paul wanted the Corinthians to realize that in the household of God, we are indeed a “temple of the living God,” strong in Him as He mends the cracks so His light shines through (2 Cor. 6:16).

Lord, as we serve You in our ministries, help us to be quick to repent and fulfill Your call to build up others, discerning how to be gracious when accountability is required for the good of Your church. For Your glory, amen.

Devotional by: Teri Anderson, Women’s Ministry Trainer

Getting Ready to Say Goodbye

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. 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 13:11-14

A few years ago, we reached a milestone in our family life. My kids were finally ready to stay home alone! When they were younger, my husband and I had to hire a babysitter and leave a list of ways to care for my girls every time we wanted to leave the house. Over time, and with a good amount of teaching and training, my girls have grown and matured and learned how to care for themselves. We no longer need to pay a babysitter or leave a detailed list of nap times and feeding schedules, but sometimes the kids still need a few reminders about what needs to be done while we are away. So usually, as we head out the door, we find ourselves listing the things that they should do before we get home and then end with some goodbye kisses and hugs.

Paul ended this second letter to the Corinthian church in much the same way: with reminders that the members of the church in Corinth are loved and that there are a few things they need to do as a result. Paul used the word “brothers” to remind the congregation, both men and women, that they are a part of God’s family. This was both an encouragement that they belonged to God’s family and a justification for what Paul was asking them to do. As a family, the church should “live in peace” by rejoicing with each other when good things happened, restoring one another after sin had hurt relationships, and comforting one another when sad or hard things inevitably would come about. And while we can read this list quickly, it can be hard for us to put these things into practice because they touch on all aspects of our lives. This is why Paul reminded the Corinthians that the “God of love and peace” was with them as they would go about these tasks. And God does not ask us to do anything that He has not empowered us to do! God Himself is love; God Himself is peace. And if we know and love Him, we have His spirit living inside us empowering us to live in such a way that we show the world the beauty of being in God’s family. After these reminders, Paul ended with a beautiful Trinitarian benediction, blessing the church with a distinct characteristic of each member of the Godhead: grace of the Son, love of the Father, and fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This final sendoff reminds us that all the good that takes place in each individual life, and in the church as a whole, is an outpouring from the Lord.

One of our roles as Women’s Ministry leaders closely mirrors my work as a mother in that our goal is to one day be able to leave the “house” and for everything to continue on smoothly in our absence. Consider your time as a leader as your chance to teach and train and encourage your women. You do this so that when you are ready to move on from ministry, all you will need to do is give some short reminders and the encouragement that the God of grace and love and fellowship will always be with them, just as He was with you.

Dear Father, thank You for Your Word that shows us how to say goodbye. Help us to see and know the best time and the best way to allow the people coming behind us to put into practice the things we have been learning together. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Devotional by: Marcie Tuten, Women’s Ministry Trainer