



May 22 & 23: Fulfillment

Overview

There are times in life when we all feel like people have deliberately run over us, when we have been knocked down or deeply wounded. In the book of *2 Corinthians*, Paul emphasizes the special resources available to those who are Christians and who are hurting. This letter was written to a troubled church and a hurting people. Throughout the letter Paul encourages the church to remain faithful. Paul himself had faced many hardships; he was able to encourage them because Jesus Christ had transformed his attitude. As we look through *2 Corinthians*, we will see how God can change our perspective and take us BEYOND the blues.

Goals of the study guide:

- To recognize that the Christian life is full of progressive growth in every area.
- To understand the role that God's truth plays in our spiritual development.
- To see that spiritual transformation is a lifelong process of becoming more like Christ. .

Key points:

- As our character develops so does the glory of God that is a primary part of our life.
- Obedience of God's truth and spiritual growth are directly linked.
- Spiritual freedom lifts us above an attitude of guilt and despair and takes us to a place of hope in God.



Take a second look ... Sermon Summary

Christianity is not one continuous emotional high. There are struggles, there are failures, there are temptations and occasional moments of despair. But like a maturing marriage, if you stay through the difficult times, you will discover that the longer you know the Lord, the better the relationship becomes.

The world offers temporary thrills followed by boredom, emptiness, misery and death. Christ offers commitment followed by increasing joy, purpose and eternal life.

There are three areas in which Christianity gets better with time:

1. There is an ever-increasing *glory*.

2 Corinthians 3:7-8, ⁷...if the ministry that brought death ... came with glory ... ⁸will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?

"Glory" means honor or tribute, but in the deeper sense, glory is "richness of character reflected in a radiant countenance." The Bible speaks of God's "Shekinah glory." There is a brightness and a majesty about God's character that is so powerful that it radiates from His being. The Bible says no man could look on the face of God and live.

The Christian should have an ever-increasing glory. As we mature in Christ, there should be an ever-increasing sense of self-worth because we belong to Him! Our glory intensifies, because...

- It is *internal*, not *external*.
- It is a *cure*, not a *diagnosis*.
- It brings *righteousness*, not *frustration*.

2. There is an ever-increasing *truth*.

2 Corinthians 3:14, But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.

People who do not know Jesus Christ are spiritually blind. The light of Jesus hasn't penetrated their heart and mind.

Verse 16 says, But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

3. There is an ever-increasing *freedom*.

2 Corinthians 3:17, ...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

People can become slaves to gluttony, lust, greed or fear. *Romans 6:16* says, *Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?*

The Old Testament brought slavery of another kind—a slavery to *guilt*. God had given man a list of rules to obey. And He warned him, “If you sin, you will die.” But man didn’t keep the rules, he just felt guilty and became a slave to guilt.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18, *17Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Are you being transformed? Do you want the veil removed?

- Turn from the *world*.
- Turn to the *Lord*.

How are we changed? We are transformed into His image by looking at His glory. We become like what we constantly behold.

2 Corinthians 5:17, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*



Take it to the source ... Bible Study

Introductory question: What would go into making your ultimately stupendous, perfect day? Why would you include the particular things that you choose to do?

Opening thought:

Everyone is looking for fulfillment in life. All of us have some kind of ideal life or day that we dream of or hope for. This rather lighthearted discussion will help your group start thinking about what fulfillment means to them. It may also help each person to look at what their real priorities are.

Read *2 Corinthians 3:7-11* and *Exodus 34:29-35*.

1. Why do you think the Bible links richness of character and glory? How does one contribute to the other?
2. Read *Romans 8:1-4*. How does living according to the Spirit help us to display the glory of God in our daily lives?
3. If the life of the Spirit is a life that comes from God, what does that say about the life that you can be living today? What is your response to the fact that this ever-increasing glory is now part of who you are?
4. What do you think are some of the characteristics of a “glorious life” in 21st century America?

Key points:

- The more we become like Christ, the more we are a reflection of His glory.
- If the life you are now living comes from God, then it is a supernatural life. Have your group discuss what that means in 21st century America. It probably won’t mean walking on water, but it may mean being empowered to show compassion beyond what you would do in your own strength, or it may mean that you are enabled to speak to people about Christ in a way that you could never do in your own power.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:12-16.

1. How does an ever-increasing understanding of the truth of Jesus Christ increase both your hope and your boldness?
2. What kinds of things in our world can cause our minds to be dull to the truth of God?
3. Can you think of a time when eternal truth has been at battle with temporary desires or actions of this world in your life? What are some practical things you can do to keep your mind focused on God's eternal truth and life principles?
4. Verse 16 states that turning to the Lord takes away the veil that covers our mind. What are some reasons why there is a direct connection between obedience and greater spiritual understanding?

Key points:

- The more we understand God's Word and His plan for our lives, the more we have a hope that goes beyond the immediate circumstances of life. This hope increases our boldness to live an extraordinary life, one that is outside society's accepted norm.
- God's truth is continuously being opposed by the principles and practices of this world. We must continually remind ourselves of God's principles by regular Bible study and practical obedience of all that we see there. The more we obey God and His guidance, the more we begin to understand the fullness of God's plan for us.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 and 4:16.

1. How has spiritual freedom positively affected your life since you began to live in cooperation with the Spirit of God?
2. What does this say about the Christian life being a lifelong, progressive journey? Does that reality encourage you or discourage you? Why?
3. What are some examples of transformation that you have experienced in your own life or in the life of somebody you are close to?
4. What are some ways that the Spirit is currently working in your life to make you more like Christ? What can you do to "turn to the Lord" to strengthen that work in your life?

Key point:

- The Christian life is a lifelong process of growing and developing and becoming more and more like Christ. A lot of us would like the process to take about five minutes, but God gives us what we can handle and keeps transforming us in ways that go beyond anything we could do in our own strength. This is the encouraging truth that keeps us going day after day. It is also the exciting reality that brings a new and eternal dimension to every aspect of life. Everything can be part of God's process of transformation!



Take it home ... Practical Applications

This week take some time to look back over your own spiritual journey:

- What are some major ways that you have been transformed by the Spirit of God?
- How can you thank God for the work He is doing by bringing ever-increasing glory to your life?
- What are some areas where you are still in the process of "turning to the Lord"? What does practical obedience look like in that situation?

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All Bible references are from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.

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