

## **The Heart of a Restorer (Discussion Guide on page 10)** (2 Corinthians 1:23-24; 2:1-4)

There's a saying, *One man's trash is another man's treasure*. Growing up, I watched my dad bring home broken stuff that he found in allies, fix them up and make them useful again. Once he purchased a used Ford Econoline van, which was used as a work vehicle for a refrigeration company. Among other things, the transmission was shot. It looked like a beat-up van to me. However, slowly but surely, he transformed that work van into a conversion van with carpeted flooring, plush seats and a custom paint job.

Some people see things as broken and only good for the garbage heap. Others see beyond the brokenness to what can be. This is especially true of God.

God will bring final judgement to this fallen world. But when God sent Emmanuel into the world the first time, He didn't come to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. When God looks upon humanity, He sees more than sin and brokenness. He sees what His rescuing and restoring grace can do in and through the lives of all who believe (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Now, what is true of God, ought to be true of all who have been made new by the saving grace of Jesus. All who are saved receive the Holy Spirit not only to be made new, but to take on God's heart so that we can become vehicles of His restoring grace.

As believers, who have been restored, we are called to see people not as they appear right now, but for what and who they can become. No one is too broken for God. There is grace potential in everyone.

**Main idea:** The heart of a restorer is transfixed on Jesus and their aim is to serve others for their joy from the outflow of their love relationship with Jesus.

This morning we are going to learn from the life of Paul, who was transformed by grace, 3 key qualities of a restorer's heart.

## 1. Restorers are worshippers

The first quality of a grace restorer is that restorers are worshippers. Keep in mind that in this chapter Paul was defending his integrity against those who were accusing him of not being a man of his word.

In a previous letter, he had written about his intentions to visit the church, but he didn't follow through with his plans. And so, his detractors questioned his apostolic authority and devotion.

To defend his character, Paul explained that when he said he wanted to visit them, he didn't do so in the flesh. Rather, he made plans trusting in the promises of God that are always **yes** in Jesus. He trusted that God would make a way through Christ to fulfill His plans and purpose for his life and ministry.

Now after explaining that his intentions to visit them was based on the faithfulness of God, and before explaining in more detail why he decided not to follow through with his plans, Paul wrote: *“But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth”* (2 Corinthians 1:23).

What made Paul the faithful minister of the gospel that he was? What made him such a powerful vessel of restoration? He lived his life with a conscious and continual awareness of God.

Earlier in verse 12, Paul appealed to the witness of his conscience, which was informed by the word, as a dominating influence in his life. And now in verse 23, Paul is calling on God to be a witness against him to assure the Corinthians of the truthfulness concerning the reason he will give for not coming to visit them. This is not Paul giving a pinky swear. This is how Paul lived his life, namely with a clear conscience before God.

Repeatedly throughout his letter, Paul appealed to the witness of God and his God informed conscience to emphasize that his words were true—that he was not making things up (2 Corinthians 2:11).

At the conclusion of this letter he writes, “*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” (2 Corinthians 12:19).*

What Paul is saying here is that in the same way he lived his life, he also wrote this letter, namely in the presence of God. How many of you know, worship is more than an event; it’s a lifestyle.

True worshippers see the worth of God and treasure Him above all things. True worshippers live with a conscious and constant awareness of God. True worshipers don’t just say amen on Sunday. They do everything they do for God’s eyes only. True worshipers know a joy and satisfaction in God that is not dependent upon outward circumstances. Because worship is what we were made for, true worshippers are satisfied in God. They don’t need others to serve them or celebrate them to be happy. Rather, they find joy in serving others for their joy.

Notice again that Paul said toward the end of his letter, “*It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved” (2 Corinthians 12:9). In other words, because Paul did everything he did in the awe inspiring, soul satisfying and transforming presence of God, including writing this letter, his aim was to build up the Corinthians whom he loved.*

Like Paul, are all your actions, decisions and words that you speak, write or post done in the presence of God? When I was a kid there were many things that I would do and say in the presence of my friends that I would never do in the presence of my earthly father. But since Jesus came into my heart, the presence that most influences what I do or don’t do, whether in public or in private, is God’s presence. How many of you know, we can’t be true worshippers if who we are in public doesn’t match who we are in private.

True worship is more than raising your hands in church. True worship is to live with an awe-inspiring awareness and knowledge of God that

more than anything else shapes everything you do and say. This is why Paul ended His letter to the Corinthians with the benediction: *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all”* (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Do you live your life in the presence of God? Does His presence shape your life more than anything else? If God’s presence is not your greatest influence and joy, it could be that you’ve never come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. But it could also mean that you’ve been violating your conscience by acting against it and grieving the Holy Spirit in the process whose primary ministry is to make the presence of God real to us.

Like Paul, if we are going to be men and women of integrity, we must live before God with a clear conscience which is continually being informed by the word of God.

Now, because Paul lived a life of worship in the presence of God, which satisfied the deepest needs of his heart, he also found joy in serving others for their joy.

This brings us to the second quality of the heart of a restorer:

## **2. Restorers are workers**

After calling on God as a witness against him, who Paul revered above all else, he continues in verse 24: *“Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith”* (2 Corinthians 1:24).

Remember also that at the end of the previous verse, Paul gave his reason for not following through with his planned visit. He wrote: *“—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth”* (v.23b).

Paul didn’t change his mind about coming to Corinth because he was above them or felt that he was too good for them. On the contrary, he refrained from coming to them because he loved them and didn’t want to cause them pain. Moreover, Paul’s motivation in refraining from

seeing them again was not that he thought he was too high and mighty, but rather that he and his ministry companions worked for their joy (v.24).

In addition, although the Corinthians needed to grow up in their faith, Paul knew that their faith in Jesus was genuine—that they hadn't lost their faith. Therefore, he decided to write another letter before visiting them to address his detractors and other ungodly attitudes in the church. He chose to write in order to avoid making another painful visit. Paul continues his explanation in chapter two verse one:

*“For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you.  
2 For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? 3 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” (2 Corinthians 2:1-3).*

O how this passage demonstrates the heart of a restorer—the heart of a man whose ultimate aim in ministry was the restoration of others in Christ. Because Paul knew the joy of the Lord, it was his joy to help others find their joy in Christ.

Although Paul didn't shy away from speaking hard truth, whether in person or through his letters, he didn't take pleasure in correcting, confronting or rebuking others. He knew that sometimes speaking the truth hurts. But although he knew that the truth would sometimes hurt, he didn't find comfort in inflicting the hurt, especially in person.

Therefore, he writes in verse one: *“For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you.”* And he further explains in verse two: *“For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained?”* (v.2). Paul didn't want to go to Corinth and spend all his time correcting and rebuking people that were opposing him or questioning his apostolic authority. Rather, he wanted to experience the joy of their mutual fellowship with Jesus.

So, as he explains in verse 3, he wrote to them so that when he came to them he would not have to suffer the pain of seeing them in pain for having to rebuke them. He was hoping instead that his previous letter would have restored them back to a place of joyful fellowship with Christ.

How many of you know, when we know the joy of fellowship with Christ, we will not have a critical and fault finding spirit? Rather, we will be grateful for the people God brings to our life so that we might mutually encourage each other in the Lord. When we know the joy of the Lord, our aim for coming to church won't be to be served. When we know the joy of the Lord, our aim will be to serve others for their joy. When we worship the One who has rescued and restored us by His grace, we will work hard by His grace so that others can know the joy of Jesus.

As Paul said at the end of verse 3, when we know the joy of fellowship with Jesus, our joy will be the joy of others in Christ. So, Paul's motivation for not following through with his planned visit wasn't that he was indecisive or didn't care, but that he loved the Corinthians and wanted to spare them pain.

This brings us to a final quality of the heart of a restorer:

### **3. Restorers are weepers**

Paul continues: *"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"* (2 Corinthians 2:4).

When you read carefully through Paul's letter to the Corinthians, you will discover that he had more than one reason for writing it. We've already learned that he wrote it to refute his detractors. Another reason he gives for writing this letter is found in verse 9 of this chapter where he writes: *"For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything"* (2 Corinthians 2:9).

Now, although Paul gives more than one reason for writing this letter, there was an ultimate reason and aim for this letter. Remember that

toward the end of his letter in chapter 12 and verse 9 he wrote: *“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”* (2 Corinthians 12:19).

Did Paul defend his integrity in this letter to the Corinthians? He most certainly did. When he wrote, *“Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you?”* he’s not contradicting himself. Rather, he’s communicating that defending himself wasn’t the main reason or goal for writing to the Corinthians. The main reason was not to put them down but to build them up. Moreover, he wanted the Corinthians to know that all the hard truth that he was compelled to share with them was motivated by love.

As Paul explained in verse 4: *“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”* (2 Corinthians 2:4).

Notice that it was important to the apostle Paul that the Corinthians understood that when he wrote letters to them, which contained words of comfort and correction, he did so not with anger but with anguish. He wanted them to know that when he wrote to them he did so not with grinding teeth, but with tears flowing down his face.

When exhorting the elders in the church of Ephesus, Paul also wrote: *“Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears”* (Acts 20:31). Paul didn’t care if the church thought he was an eloquent speaker or elegant writer. It was more important to him that they knew not what a great theologian he was, but rather the abundant love that he had for them.

In his recent book titled, *Fan the Flame*, Jim Cymbala writes: “Paul... told the Ephesian leaders, “I served the Lord . . . with tears” (Acts 20:19). When was the last time you heard a minister say that? It doesn’t fit our image of a contemporary pastor. We think a minister is someone who preaches sermons and officiates at weddings and funerals. Many pastors see themselves as something akin to a CEO

or CFO, managing a staff and a budget or overseeing a building program. How many would even think to define themselves by their tears shed for others? But Paul does just that, and he conveys the same sentiment later in his address: “Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31). Clearly, Paul felt it was important for these leaders to be reminded of his tears.

One day, many years ago, the Lord awakened me to a passage in Scripture. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, “Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you” (2:7–8). The image is that of a woman pulling down the top of her dress and tenderly bringing the baby to her breast. In reading this, I felt as though God had shown me a missing element in my own ministry. I knew Paul had preached the gospel. I knew he followed the Holy Spirit’s leading. But now I saw that he also loved people with a profound tenderness and intensity. That’s what helped his preaching and ministry reach deep inside his listeners. The heart, even more than the head, is the key to speaking effectively on Christ’s behalf.”

Concerning the tears of Jesus, the revivalist preacher Leonard Ravenhill wrote: “Jesus was a man of tears. Oh yes, he whipped the people when he went into the Temple, but wait a minute, if you read a few verses back he wept before he whipped. If you’re going to whip them, weep over them! That makes all the difference in the world.”

God used Paul mightily in restoration because he had more than a head full of knowledge; he had a heart full of love for those he ministered to. If God is going to use us in restoration, we must do more than speak words over people, we must also weep over the people that need to receive God’s word.

Now where did Paul’s anguish and tears, which helped to make him an effective minister of the gospel, come from? He wrote: “*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*” (2 Corinthians 2:4).

Notice that the anguish that he felt and the many tears that he shed was linked with the abundant love that he had for the Corinthians.

It's been said, grief or anguish is the cost of love. Because of his great love for us, Jesus took on a body of flesh so that He might enter into our pain and suffering. Because of His great love, Jesus suffered the pain and agony of the cross so that we might be saved from sin and know the joy of fellowship with God in this life and for all eternity. And the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5:5, that *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*"

O when we have a heart full of God's love and not just a head full of knowledge, God will use us in restoration.

How do we come to know more of the love of God? We must seek His face in worship. We must cultivate intimacy with God through prayer, through the word and in close community with other believers. We grow to know more of the love of God not by serving ourselves, but by making ourselves available for God to use us to serve others for their joy in Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

Restorers are worshipers. The more we know God and His great love for us through the Spirit the more we will work not for ourselves, but with others for their joy. Serving others for their joy enhances our joy.

When we truly worship God and grow in His love we will not only work for the joy of others, but we will anguish in prayer and serve with tears until we see Christ magnified in their lives. We will see people not for who they are now, but for who they can become.

O may the love of Christ poured out abundantly into our hearts break us and make us vehicles of God's restoring grace to the glory of Christ our King.

**Main idea:** The heart of a restorer is transfixed on Jesus and their aim is to serve others for their joy from the outflow of their love relationship with Jesus.

### **Review**

Why did Paul find it necessary to defend his integrity? (See 2 Corinthians 1:12-21)

### **Assess**

In the message, it was said that restorers (instruments of God's restoring and rescuing grace) are worshipers (See Corinthians 1:23; 12:19). What makes a person a true worshiper and what is the connection between being a true worshiper and a restorer?

It was also said that restorers, who are true worshipers, are workers. In their service to others, what does a true worshiper work for—what is the aim and goal of their work? (See 2 Corinthians 1:24; 2:3; 12:19) What motivates them to work with this specific goal in mind?

Why are grace restorers also weepers (2 Corinthians 2:4; Acts 20:19, 31; Galatians 4:19)?

Where do the tears of a restorer come from? (2 Corinthians 2:4; Nehemiah 1:4; John 11:35; Luke 19:41)

What enables us to see the grace potential in others, especially in people who seem far from God? What enables us to see not just what a broken person is right now, but who they can become?

### **Apply**

How do we get what we need so that we can SEE hurting and broken people and be used in their lives as instruments of God's restoring grace? (2 Corinthians 2:4)

What's hindering you from being an instrument of God's restoring grace?

What do you need for God to do in you so that you can make that call you need to make, or write that letter, or make that visit, or have that difficult conversation or share the gospel with someone God has laid on your heart?

**Pray:** Scripture-fed, Spirit-led and worship-based prayer