

I want to give a quick shout-out to my people joining us in our online community! I'm so glad you are a part of the Foothills Family and that you're with us in worship and studying God's Word from wherever and whenever you're at. If I haven't been able to meet you, my name is Doug; I'm one of the pastors here, and I would love to connect with you on the patio after we worship together. So please come say hi. But for now, if you would grab your bible and open with me to 2 Corinthians 7. I'll be reading out of the ESV this morning.

There's a very real truth that I think most of us underestimate – our past, especially those early developmental years, deeply shapes how we live and respond to life as adults. It's in those early years that patterns are formed, connections are wired, and beliefs about ourselves begin to take root. Long before we ever learned theology – who God is – we learned survival: how to handle disappointment, how to earn approval, how to avoid rejection. And whether we realize it or not, those early lessons still echo in the way we respond to life today.

I think many of you know parts of my story, but briefly, I grew up in a really unhealthy, consistently violent, fearful, and shame-inducing environment. For years I was naïve to how deeply those experiences would affect my adult life. Looking back now, I can see how they shaped my drive to perform – to be perfect, to never let anyone down, to avoid criticism at all costs. I learned that mistakes meant disapproval, and disapproval equaled rejection. I was told I was worthless, that I'd never be loved or amount to anything. So I worked hard to make sure I was never the problem, never at fault – because if I was, it would prove everything I'd been told.

And so, when someone tried to correct me, I didn't hear love – I heard failure. I felt shame. I lived my life – in my marriage, in ministry, as a parent – doing everything I could to avoid the possibility of a mistake, because there was nothing more terrifying to me than confirming that old lie: that I was worthless and unlovable.

And maybe some of you can relate to that. Maybe you've asked yourself that same question: Why do I do what I do? Why do I react the way I do when someone points something out? Why does correction sting so deeply?

Because the truth is, correction touches something sacred in all of us – our longing to be seen as enough. It's not just about the behavior being corrected; it's about what that correction represents. For some, it reopens an old wound – a moment when love felt conditional, when being wrong meant being unwanted. For others, it triggers pride – because we've built our worth on being right, on appearing successful by the world's standards.

And that's why correction is so hard. It presses on the places where we still carry shame – whether we realize it or not.

But here's the good news – and what we're about to see in our text this morning – God uses correction not to condemn us but to heal us. His correction is never rejection; it's restoration. It's how He brings life back to what sin has damaged.

So I want to ask you this morning to take a posture of vulnerability and humility – to allow your heart and mind to hear God as He speaks through Paul. What I'm asking is simple: as we walk through this passage, trust God.

Because what we're about to see is something beautiful: how godly correction, when received with humility, can actually lead to repentance, restoration, and joy.

So, as we turn to 2 Corinthians 7, we're stepping into a very personal moment between Paul and the Corinthian church. There's history here – tension, misunderstanding, even hurt feelings. Paul had previously written what he calls a "severe letter," confronting sin and calling the church to repentance. It wasn't easy for him to write, and it certainly wasn't easy for them to receive. And yet now, in this chapter, we get to see the beauty of what happens when correction is received with humility and God works healing through repentance.

Paul begins with a heartfelt plea in verse 2: "Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one." Now we need to hear Paul's tone correctly, those aren't the words of a man defending his ego – they're the words of a father longing for reconciliation, for relationship to be restored. The phrase "make room in your hearts" literally means "open wide" – remove the barriers, the tightness, the defensiveness. Paul is saying, let love back in. Don't keep us at a distance because of what was hard to hear.

It's very revealing that Paul doesn't start by restating his authority or giving his credentials. Instead, he starts with affection. This is really important. Hear this, that's what godly correction always does. It doesn't come from pride or authoritarianism; it comes from love.

He says in verse 3, "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." In other words, I'm not trying to make you feel small – I'm trying to remind you that you're loved.

There's something profoundly redemptive about this. Paul doesn't want the relationship to stay strained. His goal wasn't to win an argument or to protect his standing or his image; it was to win their hearts back to God. That's what healthy correction looks like – it's never about control or superiority. It's about restoration. When correction flows from love, it leads to life.

And that's hard for us, right? Because most of us, when we're confronted, we don't hear "love" – we hear "rejection." We instinctively assume that if someone points out something wrong, we hear in the depths of our minds that we're unworthy or unwanted. Which is why we get so defensive, But Paul's example here is so freeing. He's showing us that godly correction and godly love are not opposites – they're companions. The one gives credibility to the other. To love someone truly means to care about their holiness, not just their happiness.

That's why Paul can say in verse 4, "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." Because even in the midst of tension, he sees the work of God in them. It's as though Paul is saying, I still believe in you. I see God's grace at work, even when it's messy. I think this is where most of us struggle. We know how to correct when we're frustrated. We know how to confront when we're angry. But to correct with affection – to speak hard truth with tears in our eyes and hope in our heart – that's different. That's the posture of Jesus Himself. Remember what John 1:14 says: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." Jesus never separated the two. He didn't wield truth like a weapon; He offered it as a pathway to healing.

And if you've ever been on the receiving end of that kind of correction – gentle, loving, firm but grace-filled – you know how transformative it can be. It doesn't crush you; it restores you. It doesn't drive you away; it draws you back. That's what Paul is after with the Corinthians.

Maybe God has been trying to correct something in you – an attitude, a relationship, a habit – and you've been resisting because it feels like criticism or owning the fault causes you fear or shame. But what if His correction isn't punishment? What if it's actually protection? What if God's saying, "Make room in your heart for Me again"? "I want to refine you not reject you."

That's what Paul is asking of this church. "Open your hearts." Let grace in where defensiveness has built a wall. Let repentance do what resentment never can – bring peace!

Now, as we read on, Paul turns from his plea for reconciliation to describe what happened next – and it's remarkable. He says in verses 5 and 6, "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."

You can almost feel Paul's exhaustion in this. He's been battling criticism from outside the church and heartbreak from within. He's tired. He's anxious. He's wondering if he's lost the people he loves. But then Titus arrives – and with him comes comfort.

That phrase, "But God, who comforts the downcast," is the turning point for Paul. It's one of those beautiful "But God" moments in Scripture – where despair...it gives way to divine encouragement. It's important to see here how God comforts Paul. Through the presence of a person. Titus shows up carrying good news: that the Corinthians had repented, that their affection for Paul had been renewed, that the relationship was being restored.

I love that. God doesn't just comfort Paul through some mystical experience; He comforts him through community. Through a brother who shows up with a story of grace. Sometimes the most powerful way God comforts us is through another person's obedience. Someone who shows up, listens, and reminds us that God is still at work.

And maybe that's how God wants to use you this week – to be someone's Titus. To carry encouragement to someone who's weary, to bring good news where there's been tension, to remind someone that God is still redeeming what's broken.

And notice what Paul says next in verse 7: "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." You know why this is incredible? Because this is the fruit of godly correction – longing, mourning, zeal, restoration. Because what began for Paul in grief ends in joy.

That's the mystery of grace: correction that once caused pain becomes the very thing that brings peace.

Paul continues in verse 8, "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." You can hear the tension in Paul's heart. He's not a cold theologian or an unfeeling leader; he's a pastor who loves deeply. He's saying, "When I saw how my words hurt you, I regretted it for a moment, because that's never what I wanted." That's the heart of a true shepherd – correction never delights in pain. It grieves over it.

But notice where Paul lands in verse 9. "As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting." That's so powerful – "grieved into repenting." In other words, their sorrow had a purpose. It wasn't just emotional pain; it was a spiritual awakening.

Paul shows us that here are two kinds of sorrow here – and this is where we really need to lean in, because every one of us will experience both of these at some point. Verse 10 says, "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."

That's one of those verses that deserves to be underlined in every Bible. Because not all grief leads to life. There's a kind of sorrow that drives you deeper into despair – the kind that makes you replay your failures over and over again, that whispers, "you'll never change, you'll never be enough, you've ruined it for good." See, that's worldly grief. It looks like

repentance on the surface, but it's rooted in shame, not hope. It keeps you stuck because it's more focused on yourself than on God.

But see then there's godly grief – and Paul says it “produces repentance that leads to salvation without regret.” Godly grief doesn't crush you; it transforms you. It's the sorrow that opens your eyes to sin and your heart to grace. It's conviction, not condemnation. It's the pain that wakes you up to your need for mercy.

That's what happened in Corinth. Their grief led them to repentance. Their sorrow over sin drew them closer to God, not farther away.

And then Paul describes the evidence of that repentance in verse 11: “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.”

That's not the language of people stuck in shame; that's the language of people set free. Look at those words again – earnestness, eagerness, longing, zeal. That's what repentance produces. When the Spirit convicts a heart that's willing, He doesn't leave it in regret – He ignites it with renewal.

I love how C.S. Lewis described it: “Repentance is not something God demands of you before He will take you back; it is simply a description of what going back looks like.” That's what the Corinthians experienced. Their grief wasn't the end of the story – it was the turning point.

And maybe you've felt that same battle internally – the tug between shame that pushes you away and conviction that pulls you home. The difference between the two is simple: shame tells you to hide; conviction invites you to return.

Worldly grief says, “You failed; stay away.”

Godly grief says, "You failed; come closer."

And friends, that's what repentance really is – not running from God because you've sinned, but running to Him because you finally see His grace for what it is.

This is why Paul rejoices. He doesn't celebrate their pain – he celebrates their transformation. He says, "You were grieved for a little while, but that grief led to repentance and repentance led to life." What began with tears ended with joy.

And so I think it's worth pausing here to say this: if you're in a season right now where God's correction hurts – where He's pressing on something in your life that feels tender or uncomfortable – don't despise it. The pain might actually be the evidence that He's near. Hebrews 12:11 says, "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

God's correction is never to destroy you; it's to form you. His conviction is not proof that you've lost His favor – it's proof that you have it. Because the Father only disciplines those He loves.

That's what the Corinthians came to see. And that's what Paul celebrates here – a community that allowed pain to become the pathway to peace, where conviction led to comfort and grief gave way to grace.

And then Paul closes this section in verses 12 and 13 when he says, "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."

Paul is looking back over this whole painful process and realizing something beautiful—God had been working underneath it all. The

purpose of the confrontation wasn't to expose a wrongdoer or to defend his reputation; it was to reveal the sincerity of their faith. The letter that once cut so deep ended up uncovering something genuine in their hearts.

That's what the Spirit does through correction. He peels back the layers of pride and self-protection until what's left is real devotion—real affection—for Jesus and for one another.

And look how it ends: "Therefore we are comforted." After all the tension, the tears, the misunderstanding, Paul says, "We're at peace again." What began in conflict ends in comfort. The same people who once resisted his correction are now a source of his joy.

That's the fruit of godly correction. The enemy wants you to believe that repentance will only bring regret, or some loss—but Scripture says the opposite. Repentance is what restores relationship, renews joy, and revives the heart.

You can almost feel Paul breathe again in this moment. The heaviness that's been sitting on him lifts. He can see that the grace of God actually worked. The Corinthian church is back on track, and his relationship with them is healed. That's why he says earlier, "In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy." Joy doesn't come because the process was easy—it comes because grace won.

Maybe you've been through a hard season where God's been confronting something in you or around you, and it's been painful. But if you'll stay open, if you'll let the Spirit finish His work, that same sorrow will one day give way to joy. Psalm 30:5 says, "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning."

Before we pray out for the day, I want to mention briefly to those of us who need to give correction. Scripture is clear about the posture and purpose. Paul's aim wasn't to win an argument; it was restoration (2 Cor.

7:12). So first if you find yourself needing to give correction someone, your posture is so important, as Paul says in Galatians: "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted" (Gal. 6:1, ESV). Gentleness and self-watch. Jesus adds in Matthew 7, "First take the log out of your own eye... then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matt. 7:5, ESV). So here's the reality friends, if you feel correction of a fellow follower of Jesus is needed, repentance starts with me.

Next, proximity: correction travels best across a bridge of relationship. Remember how Paul started, "Make room in your hearts for us" (2 Cor. 7:2, ESV). So, be close enough to carry the weight with them, not just point at it. If you haven't wept over them, you're probably not ready to warn them.

And lastly, purpose: the goal is restoration, not vindication. "Speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15, ESV) means truth with tears, clarity with care. Aim for their holiness, not your victory.

If we correct this way—humble, close, restorative—God often turns hard conversations into holy ground.

So Paul's story with the Corinthians reminds us that God's correction is never meant to shame us—it's meant to shape us. His goal isn't to make us feel small; it's to make us whole. And when we respond to correction with humility instead of pride, with repentance instead of resistance, we step right into the place where grace does its deepest work.

Maybe today God's pressing on something in your heart—an attitude, a relationship, an area you've justified for too long. Maybe He's saying, "Make room in your heart for Me again." Don't pull away; draw near. Let godly grief do its work so that repentance can bring renewal. Because the same God who comforted Paul, the same Spirit who restored the Corinthians, is still doing that work today—right here, right now.

Because in the end, this passage isn't just about Paul and Corinth—it's about us and Jesus. We're the people He corrects because we're the people He loves. And when we finally let His truth break through our defenses, when we stop hearing condemnation and start hearing invitation, then we'll discover what the Corinthians did—that the pain of conviction always leads to the peace of restoration. Friends, God's correction is never rejection—it's His invitation to return.

Let's pray.