

Lesson #8 - 2 Corinthians

Before starting this lesson, read **the entire book**.

Paul started and developed the church in Corinth from 51 to 53 AD. After he left, 2 years went by. In early 55 AD, Paul is teaching in Ephesus. While there, he hears about serious problems in the Corinthian church. He knows the church members have salvation, but there was no evidence in their daily lives. So Paul writes them a letter of reproof and sent it by means of **Timothy**. It is our book of **1ST CORINTHIANS**.

In just a few weeks Timothy returns and says the church has refused this reproof. Timothy is young and by nature is very timid. Paul thinks Timothy has misunderstood their response.

So Paul makes a quick personal visit and to his dismay, finds the people are defiant. Now it is not just the one leader, but many are involved in immorality. Teachers have come, giving a false message. They claim to have more authority than Paul. In fact, while Paul is there, they insult him to his face, in front of the congregation.



The situation is critical. Paul knows this could end his ministry and destroy the churches he has started thruout all of Greece. He also knows that more confrontation will only make things worse. So Paul leaves and returns to Ephesus. He immediately sits down and writes them a letter. Later, he refers to it as a **harsh or severe letter** (13:10). Because he is reproofing people by name, it is too personal and so is not included in our Bibles.

Paul sends this harsh letter with **Titus**. He is a young man who is assertive and not afraid to speak up. Titus is to deliver the letter, stay long enough to see if the people really respond and then return by boat to tell Paul of the outcome. But just after he leaves, Paul realizes he does not know how long he will be in Ephesus. So he sends word Titus should return by land thru northern Greece and Troas. They would meet each other at one of the churches along the main road.



The Corinthian church is at a crossroads. Whose message are they going to follow - the one Paul gave them about Jesus; or the new ideas of the false leaders? Church members need to use Scripture to decide whose message is from God?

As the days go by, Paul continues teaching in Ephesus, but his mind keeps going to Corinth. How are church members reacting to his letter? Do they understand the issues? Will the church end in a disaster, bringing shame to the name of Jesus? The days go into weeks and the weeks into months. Titus should be returning at any time.

Then one day as Paul is teaching in Ephesus, a riot breaks out against him. Knowing his life is in danger, he leaves town immediately. From Ephesus, he heads north to Troas. He fully expects Titus will be there. But to his dismay, Titus has not arrived. The people in Troas ask him to stay and teach. But there is no point in starting any **new** work, when his authority as an apostle is being questioned. So he leaves Troas and heads west to Macedonia - northern Greece. Since Titus will be coming that way, he can meet him that much sooner and find out about Corinth.

As Paul waits in Philippi, in the province of Macedonia, the events of the last months have taken their toll. Anxiety and tension about Corinth, fear of losing his life in the Ephesian riot and some kind of physical problem - all of these has left him discouraged and depressed.

Finally Titus arrives and he has good news. The majority of church members in Corinth have changed their attitude. They want to follow Paul's leadership and message. However not all the problems have been resolved.

Some of the church members continue in immorality.

A small group still follow the false teachers. Their accusations against Paul are being heard everywhere and by everyone. They say he is not an apostle; he is a liar, a coward, is planning to embezzle money and in reality is insane.

So in early 56 AD, while still in the city of Philippi, Paul writes them yet another letter, our book of **2ND CORINTHIANS**.

Once again he sends it with **Titus** along with some of the church leaders in northern Greece. It is another letter of reproof.

OUTLINE

Reproof thru explanation	1-5
Reproof thru instruction	6-9
Reproof thru defense	10-13

Second Corinthians is the most personal of all his books. He reveals some of his deepest feelings. For example,

We do not want you to be uninformed, church members, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia - meaning Ephesus, the capital of the province. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 1:8

In 7:5 he adds more details. *For when we came to Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn - conflicts on the outside, fears within.*

Paul was a man of tremendous faith, but he also experienced discouragement and despair.

No matter how great our trust, in our humanness, we become discouraged. But in the times of our deepest despair, is when we experience God's deepest comfort. Then later, we can comfort others with compassion and empathy. We have been there - we know what those feelings are really like.

This was Paul's experience - conflict and fears, but then...

But God who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. 7:6-7

Paul is overjoyed at the response of the majority.

REPROOF THRU EXPLANATION

Chapters 1-5

It is the rebellious minority that needs his reproof.

WHY HE CHANGED HIS TRAVEL PLANS.

In his letter of 1 Corinthians, written from Ephesus, Paul said he would visit them **after** going to Macedonia. In the harsh letter, he changed his plans and said he would go directly from Ephesus to Corinth, north to Macedonia and then return to Corinth before going east to Jerusalem.

But Paul is now writing this letter **from** Macedonia. As yet, he has not gone to Corinth. His enemies are saying, *See, Paul is a liar. He says one thing in one letter, something else in another letter and then changes it again. You cannot trust that man.*

Paul replies, *let me explain why I did not come to see you first.*

I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. 1:23

...I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. 2:1

Instead of using his visit to deal with problems, Paul decided to write. If the letter brought about a change, their time together could be one of joy and mutual blessing.

This is why he changed his plans.



WHY HE WROTE THE HARSH LETTER

When he wrote the harsh letter, it was hard on him. 2:3 But he did it because he loved them. This was not just an emotional love, but also tough love. Without reproof, these believers could never spiritually mature and develop

WHY THEY NEED TO RESTORE THE MAN WHO WAS DISCIPLINED BY THE LOCAL CHURCH

Both in our book of 1 Corinthians and in his harsh letter, Paul had told the church to discipline the man guilty of incest with his stepmother. The church had finally taken action. The man privately repented and corrected the situation. Time has gone by, but the church has not publically responded to the man's repentance.

So Paul writes, *I am glad that you were obedient in this matter. Here is further instruction. Publically forgive and restore him.* The first reason he gives is 2:6-8.

The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.

The church is to restore and forgive **so he will not think his sin is so great that he is beyond forgiveness.**

In theory he may know that God has forgiven him, but he may not be able to forgive himself. He may think the church members will never forgive him. Inner healing will come, not just thru his private repentance, but also from assurance by church members that he is accepted, forgiven and restored.

In addition, the church is to restore and forgive...

In order that Satan might not outwit us or take advantage of the situation. *For we are not unaware of his schemes.* verse 11.

Satan could divide the church by getting people to take sides - some wanting to keep this man out and others wanting to take him back. He has repented; he has dealt with the situation. Time has gone by to show he truly has changed. The church should now restore him - include him in the potluck meal and in Holy Communion. They should invite him to their homes for meals. Since he had been a leader in the past, they should restore him as a leader.

Satan could also destroy this man with false guilt. Both the Holy Spirit and Satan can bring guilt into a person's life.

Guilt from the Holy Spirit is genuine and specific.

If a person responds, it leads to repentance, admission it was wrong, correction, and healing. The whole purpose of guilt from the Holy Spirit is to bring healing.

Guilt from Satan is false and vague.

A person feels guilty, but does not know what for or why. He feels guilty for who he is - that he as a person is bad and there is no hope. Instead of bringing healing, it is destructive to his mind, body, and emotions.

WHY PAUL HAS USED HIS AUTHORITY OVER THEM CHAPTERS 3-5

1. Because God has called and gifted him to be their leader.

Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant. 3:5-6

2. Because of God's Reviewing Stand.

*For **we** must **all appear** before the **judgment seat** of Christ, that each one may **receive what is due** him for the things **done** while in the body, whether **good or bad**.* 5:10

Paul is not only talking about himself and the Corinthian believers. He is talking about all believers, including us. Most people feel uncomfortable when they read this verse. It sounds intimidating. The reason is that our English words do not have the same meaning as the Greek words that Paul used.

The Greek word **APPEAR** means **to reveal the true character of someone or something.**

JUDGMENT SEAT is the Greek word **Bema**.

The Romans called it a **rostrum**.

We would call it a **Reviewing Stand**.

In Corinth it was across from the marketplace and in front of the governor's residence. It was a raised platform where a person of authority would sit. The entire town would gather around.

JUDGMENT SEAT is the Greek word **Bema**. (continued)

Its purpose

Sometimes there was a public trial and punishment given.

Mostly, it was where **people were publicly defended, vindicated** or had their **reputation restored**.

That is what happened to Paul. When he was teaching in a private home in Corinth, Jews from the synagogue next door had dragged him to the center of town in front of this Reviewing Stand. They told the governor that Paul was breaking the law and should be arrested. But after hearing their complaint, the governor told them Paul was innocent. It was at this Reviewing Stand that Paul was vindicated - his reputation was restored.



It was the place where **athletes** received their crowns,
after winning their races.

After a battle, **soldiers** would receive their awards and honor while everyone watched.

TO RECEIVE WHAT IS DUE means **wages; what you have earned**.

DONE in the Greek language, means not only **what** you do, but also **why** you do it.

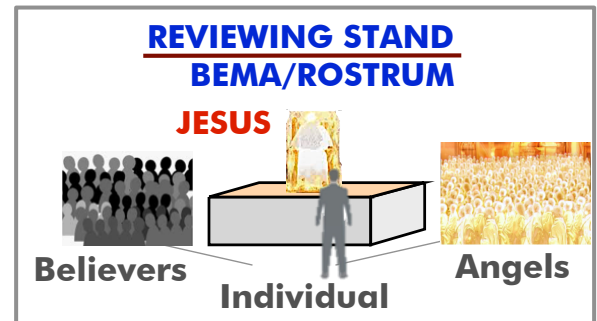
IN THE BODY means what we do in this life - **our words, actions and attitudes**.

GOOD AND BAD mean **worthy or not worthy of wages**.

Putting this together, with the meanings and ideas that Paul used, chapter 5:10 reads,

...It is necessary that the true character of all believers be revealed. It will happen in heaven in front of the Reviewing Stand of Jesus in order that each of us receives our wages. They will be based on our choices, how we made them and how we used our opportunities. They will be shown either to be worthy of wages or worthless. 5:10

In the future, when Jesus returns and all believers have their resurrection bodies, we will meet Jesus in their air and He will take us to heaven to be with Him. Each of us will individually stand in front of Jesus' Reviewing Stand with the angels and other believers looking on.



This has nothing to do with our salvation or if we are going to get kicked out of heaven. Jesus made our payment and we accepted it. This is how we get to enter heaven. Once in heaven, there is no possibility of ever getting kicked out. Let me put it another way. Salvation is a **gift**. Jesus offers it and we accept it.

It is what we do **after** we have salvation that then gives us wages or rewards. The Reviewing Stand is a time of evaluation to determine our wages. It involves our choices and *why* we made them. It involves the opportunities God gave us to learn, to obey, to change and to serve. What did we do with those opportunities?

We will get wages - rewards, praise and honor for all the godly desires and motives in what we did and said.

There will be wages and rewards for wisely using the opportunities God gave us. It is what Paul meant about building with gold, silver and valuable stones.

There will also be a display of all the wrong desires and motives of what we said or did. Some things looked so impressive and wonderful when we did them in this life. But if the motive was wrong, at the Reviewing Stand it will be seen as worthless - like building with wood, hay and straw. Now before we panic, thinking about all the wrong things we have done in life, remember - all disobedience, wrong motives or desires that have been **confessed** to the Lord are forgiven and erased. They are gone for ever. Only the wrong things that we never dealt with that are displayed for all to see. We will be told there are no wages to collect for these things.

The Reviewing Stand is a place of **evaluation**. It is also a place of **vindication, apologies** and **justice**. Over our lifetime, we will experience false accusations, serious injustice or terrible wrongs. Many times people who do these things go to the grave, never admitting their wrong, never apologizing. There is so much in this life that is unjust, unfair and unresolved. But this life is not the end.

That which is not corrected in this life, will be corrected at the Reviewing Stand of Jesus.

It will be a time of justice when Jesus clears our name and our reputation. Those who have wronged us will have to bow the knee and publicly admit their wrong. It is the time we get all the apologies we have been owed.

When we experience injustice in this life, if there is no way to correct it, we can hand it over to Jesus and ask Him to collect the apology at His Reviewing Stand. God made us to need justice in order to resolve injustice. We have the assurance that one day we will get that apology - we will get justice in front of all believers. With this knowledge we can let go of injustice and move on with our life.

We are told about this Reviewing Stand - not to make us live in fear, but to encourage and motivate us. It is when Jesus will give us our rewards. It is also when there will be justice. All the wrongs will be corrected.

This only involves believers. Because some apologies are owed us by unbelievers, let me assure you, we will get those as well. At a much later time, when unbelievers are resurrected, there will be a judgment just for them. It is at that time they will have to admit how they wronged us and will have to apologize. We will be able to hear it.

REPROOF THRU EXPLANATION

Why Paul changed his plans.
Why he wrote the harsh letter.
Why they need to restore the disciplined church member.
Why Paul has used his authority.

Chapters 1-5

He is not doing it to show his power.

He is doing it because he was called by God to be their leader and because of God's Reviewing Stand.

He wants to act responsibly so he can collect his wages and his rewards.

REPROOF THRU INSTRUCTION

Chapters 6-9

THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM

The paraphrase of 6:11 in the Living Bible expresses it the best.

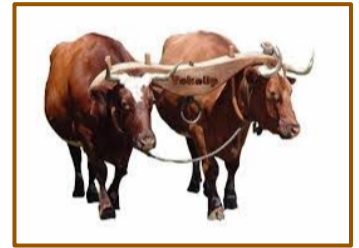
Oh, my dear Corinthian friends! I have told you all my feelings. I love you with all my heart. Any coldness still between us is not because of any lack of love on my part, but because your love is too small and does not reach out to me and draw me in. I am talking to you now as if you truly were my very own children. Open your hearts to us! Return our love! 6:11-13

Paul is talking about emotional love and tough love - love that takes responsibility. He does not want just a one-way relationship of warm feelings and acting responsibly towards them. He wants them to also have warm feelings towards him and to act responsibly.

THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH NON-BELIEVERS.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 6:14

By using the word “yoke”, Paul is creating the picture of 2 animals pulling a plow. If the animals are not the same size, they cannot pull together in that yoke and accomplish their purpose. Rather than sharing the load to make it easier, one will always be pulling by itself, plus trying to offset the opposite pull of the other.



In the Greek language Paul is saying,

STOP becoming yoked with unbelievers - stop putting yourselves in relationships with non-believers where **you** will pull in one direction and **they** pull in another.

For the Corinthians this involves various situations...

They are to stop their immoral relationships at the temple of Aphrodite.
 They are to stop using the pagan juries to settle trivial church problems.
 They are to stop joining in the vice, dishonesty, idolatry and immorality of Corinth.
 They are to stop looking for marriage partners among non-believers.
 They are to stop aligning themselves with the false leaders in their own church.



Paul is not against friendships with non-believers. But teaming up with them is different.

In relationships that involve major goals and decisions –
 a mature believer wants to do what is right - to please God.
 The non-believer wants to do what works the best; is the easiest or most convenient.

Paul says, *Instead of using all your energy to offset the influence of the other person, join in relationships where you can pull together - where you have the same goals.*

THEIR GIVING - chapters 8-9

In his previous letters, Paul had told them about Jewish believers in Jerusalem who were in financial hardship. The Corinthians had been the first to talk about taking up an offering for them. In fact they had gotten so enthusiastic they encouraged the churches in the north to do the same.

Now Paul is in northern Greece; he has picked up their money and soon will be in Corinth. So he writes,

There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints, (about your offering), for I know the eagerness to help. I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year, you in Achaia, (in Corinth), were ready to give and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. 9:1-2

...So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you have promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given. 9:5



To be sure it is done in the right way, Paul continues,

Each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 9:7

These believers should not let anyone else pressure them in how much they should give. They should not put pressure on themselves, to give a certain amount or a certain percent. God wants them to give cheerfully. The Greek word for *cheerful* is *hilarón*. It is the root word from which we get our word *hilarious*.

Paul is literally saying, *God loves a hilarious giver - one that enjoys giving and is elated with the opportunity. One that is thrilled with the privilege of giving.*

Paul has given reproof thru explanation, thru instruction and now,

REPROOF THRU DEFENSE

Chapters 6-9

He deals with their accusations against him, using sarcasm. His enemies say...

HE IS A COWARD AND AFRAID TO COME TO CORINTH

Paul replies,

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you. I Paul, who am timid when face to face with you, but bold when away. 10:1

Paul is sarcastically quoting what they said about him. He says, *I am writing in meekness, but if you do not correct these things, I will be just as bold in person as I have been in my letters. I am not afraid to deal with these issues. I am not a coward.*

HIS SPEAKING AMOUNTS TO NOTHING

Paul says,

Maybe I do not have their eloquence, but at least I have knowledge, (which is more than they have). 11:6
Again, Paul is using sarcasm.

HE IS NOT WORTHY OF A SALARY

His enemies say that Paul knew he was inferior and that is why he did not accept a salary while he was in Corinth. Paul defends himself and explains. He knew these false teachers were claiming to be apostles. But he also knew they were only in it for the money. They were being accepted in the churches because they copied his methods. But when they came to Corinth, they discovered he did not get a salary. So their purpose to make easy money was defeated.

Paul explains, the reason he did not accept a salary was so he could undermine their plan.

He says,

Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel free of charge? ...And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 2 Cor. 11:7, 12-14

Paul makes 2 important points.

1. False teachers can be very clever.

That is why they are able to deceive so many. The only way to spot a false teacher is to compare their words and actions with what God says in Scripture. If there is a contradiction, the person is not from God. They are being influenced by Satan.

2. Satan masquerades as an angel of light.

When he comes to tempt us or give us a false message, he presents it as innocent, appealing and good. He appears as an angel of light because that is what he used to be.

Satan was created as the most beautiful angel, head over all the other angels. His name was *Lucifer – the one who bears light*. But when he rebelled and said, *I will be God*, he became God's adversary.

That is how he got his name. The Hebrew word for adversary is Satan.

Satan appears as “**an angel of light.**”

But in reality, he is “**the prince of darkness**”.

HE IS INFERIOR IN POSITION, WORK, EXPERIENCE AND POWER

Paul's defense in chapters 11 and 12 are hard to understand because he keeps saying he is boasting about this or that. The false teachers in Corinth boasted they were more spiritual; they had more authority. This had impressed some of the church members. It is why they rebelled against Paul. So Paul responds in the style of these teachers. In sarcasm, he says, *well, since you are so impressed by the boasting of these false leaders, I can boast just as well as they can.*

For example, the false teachers acted as tho they were “**SUPER-APOSTLES**”, so in sarcasm Paul says, *I do not think I am in the least inferior to those super-apostles. 11:5*

The false teachers bragged about all the **WORK** they had done and how much **SUFFERING** they had gone thru - that proved they were more qualified. Paul says,

Are they servants of Christ? I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely and been exposed to death again and again. 11:23

The false teachers bragged about their **SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES** - it proved they were more spiritual. In 12:1 Paul tells about a vision he had, but instead of saying "I", he puts it in 3rd person.

I know a man who had this vision. Paul is talking about himself.

The false teachers bragged about signs and miracles they had done to prove their **POWER**. In verse 12 Paul tells the Corinthians he also has done signs and miracles while he was in Corinth.

HE IS DISHONEST WITH MONEY

His enemies say Paul is going to embezzle the offering money going to Jerusalem, Paul defends his honesty. 12:17

HE IS AN IMPOSTOR

His enemies say that Jesus is not speaking thru him.

In the 1st century, when people rejected God's authority in an apostle, the apostle could use God's power to bring physical punishment on the person. So Paul warns those who continue to rebel, that when he comes, if they have not repented, he will use God's power to bring physical punishment on them. 13:2

In this book of Corinthians, Paul has reproved their actions. Altho they have salvation, there was no evidence in their life. He also reminds them about **two benefits of their salvation**, which we also have.

1. God answers our prayers.

However, He does not always answer the way we want. Three times Paul asked God for healing, but God said *no*. Instead of healing, he received God's grace to accept it. He received God's power to go thru it.

Salvation does not guarantee our prayers will be answered in the ways we want.

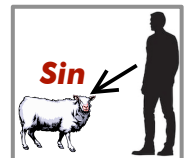
Salvation does guarantee God's grace and power will always provide what we need. God says to us,

*My **grace** is sufficient for you. My power will be everything you need in your weakness.*

2. We are now good enough to meet God's standard of holiness.

Paul uses the Jewish sacrifices to explain how this can be possible. In the Old Testament the Jews used animal sacrifices. They were literal animals, but they were also pictures of Jesus.

One offering was called the sin offering. A person brought a perfect lamb to the temple and laid his hand on its head. In picture form, the person was transferring all of his disobedience to the lamb and the lamb died in his place for his disobedience. It is why it was called the sin offering.



This same person had to bring another **perfect** lamb and laid his hand on *its* head. It was called the burnt offering. In this offering, the perfection of the lamb was symbolically transferred back to the person. It could only be in picture form because animals were never adequate to take away sin or to give moral perfection.



This is why Jesus came as the perfect Lamb - the Lamb of God. Paul describes this in 2 Corinthians 5:21.

For our sakes God made Jesus, who did not know sin, to be sin, so that in Jesus, we might become the very holiness of God. (NAB)

When we accept Jesus' payment, 2 exchanges take place.

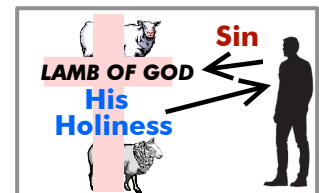
Our disobedience is declared transferred to Jesus and the holiness or absolute goodness of Jesus is declared credited to our account.

As the Living Bible puts it

God took the sinless Christ and poured onto Him our sins.

Then in exchange He poured God's goodness into us.

This is how we are good enough to live with God forever. What an exchange that He offers us.



EXTRA INFORMATION FOR THE STUDIOUS AND INQUISITIVE

WHY GOD ALLOWS US TO GO THRU TRIALS AND HEARTACHES

To learn about God's comfort 2 Cor. 1:4

Who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Paul realized that as he experienced God's comfort thru all his troubles and problems, he in turn was better able to comfort others who were going thru trials. He would be able to speak from experience and not just theory.

Obviously we never enjoy our problems and all the emotional feelings that go with them. But as we experience God's comfort thru them, we can more adequately understand and relate to others in their difficulties. We will not just be giving pat answers. We have experienced that God IS sufficient and able to get us thru. If we never had a problem, how could God ever use us to help anyone else in their problems? What right would we have to encourage them?

So others learn about God's power and life 2 Cor. 4:7, 10-11

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ...We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

Paul realized that the trials in his life were a way for God's power and life to be shown to the world around him. He could preach and talk about Jesus 24 hours a day, but until people could see the evidence of Jesus in his life, his words were meaningless.

We may try to tell others about what God can do for them. But until they can see us in the frustrations and trials of life with real emotions of fear and discouragement, they will never be convinced that He is the answer to their life. Only as they see us pressed, but not broken, perplexed, but not quitting, and knocked down, but getting up again, will they ever believe the Jesus is all He claims to be.

This does not mean that knowing the purpose of our trials will keep us from being discouraged. Of course we will be.

Because we are human, we will experience discouragement many times in our life. But when we do, it does not need to crush us.

The Holy Spirit will remind us that God's grace is more than enough to meet our needs.

The Holy Spirit will bring others into our life who will bring comfort, wisdom and encouragement.