



April 17 & 18: Inspiration

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.



Take a second look ... Sermon Summary

Are we expecting too much of our leaders? No one is perfect, but if a public leader flagrantly, frequently betrays his stated convictions, he really is not qualified to lead. In *2 Corinthians 1*, beginning with verse 12, Paul defends his qualifications as a leader. He sets down some realistic standards we can use to measure the people we elect to serve or to measure the spiritual leaders that we follow.

If you only trust yourself, inevitably you will wander away. On the other hand, if you follow everyone who claims to be a leader, you will invariably be led astray. So let's examine these biblical keys to inspiring others, then we can respond to those who lead according to their merit.

1. Integrity

2 Corinthians 1:12, Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God.

There are three words in this verse which outline what integrity is.

- Conscience

There are three kinds of consciences:

1. A *weak* conscience.

That is the conscience that has been programmed to believe that some activity is sinful when it really is not sinful.

2. A *seared* conscience.

This is a conscience that has been violated so often that it no longer feels guilty about anything.

3. A *good* conscience.

If we obey our conscience and it has been programmed properly, we live with a clear conscience. Paul could have withstood the scrutiny of the press in his life because he lived exactly what he said!

- Holiness

We don't have a right to expect spiritual leaders to be perfect ... but we do have a right to expect the general direction of their life to be *different*.

- Sincerity

Paul's motives were authentic. When true sincerity flows from our lives, there is no deception ... no embellishing the truth for our personal advantage.

2. Clarity

2 Corinthians 1:13. When you are dealing with critical matters, it is important that you speak the truth CLEARLY!

3. Transparency

2 Corinthians 1:17. There should be an unashamed openness about a leader. Most people can accept mistakes if they feel leaders are being honest. They can't accept being deliberately lied to.

4. Humility

2 Corinthians 1:19-22. For a spiritual leader, this means dependence on Christ and not self.

Spiritual leaders have a right to be followed only if they follow the example of Jesus or of Paul who said, *Follow me as I follow Christ.*



Take it to the source ... Bible Study

Introductory question: Who is your favorite historical leader? Why?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12, Acts 24:16, 1 Corinthians 8:7 and 1 Timothy 4:12.

1. What is your definition of a good conscience?
2. How could a weak conscience or a seared conscience affect your perspective of God and your relationship with Him?
3. How can consistent Bible study help you develop a good conscience?
4. What daily decisions should you be making if you want to live with a clear conscience?

Read Psalm 78:70-72.

1. The word "integrity" has the same root as the word "integer" which is a whole number. What does that say about David, a leader who led with *integrity of heart*?
2. If you were asked to create a list of most desired character traits, where would integrity be on the list? Why?
3. Considering the characteristics of conscience, holiness and sincerity, how would you describe integrity to somebody who asks?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:19-22.

1. What does it mean to you to say that you are dependent on God and not on self?
2. Why is this attitude of dependence on God such an important quality in a spiritual leader?
3. How do you respond to Paul's words that "*it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ*"?
4. How does this affect the way you view spiritual leaders? Do you rely on them more than you should? Or are you learning to look to God to be the source of your strength and life transforming power?
5. Are your leaders pointing you to Jesus Christ? Are you leading others to Jesus Christ? What steps can you take to be sure you are leading and being led in a way that inspires confidence in Jesus Christ?



Take it home ... Practical Applications

Take some time to consider the people you are looking to as spiritual leaders.

- Pray for them as they guide you into a closer relationship to Jesus Christ.
- Ask yourself if the people you are following—whether through personal relationship, TV, radio, books or some other way—are displaying the biblical keys to inspiring others.
- Look at your own life and consider how you are leading others toward Jesus Christ—by what you say, by what you do and by how you respond to every situation.



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

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