

# “Fundamentals, Not Hype” // 2 Corinthians 12:11–13:14 // God’s Power in Broken Vessels #11<sup>1</sup>

## Announcement

We are hearing incredible stories of God meeting us during this season of 21DOPF. We know that when the people of God pray, God hears us and answers us, and as we close out 21DOPF my prayer is that your passion for prayer has grown. We always say that the greatest answer to prayer is a hunger for more prayer. So my prayer has been that God will make us into a people who don’t need to be compelled to pray, or even need special seasons to do it, but people for whom it becomes as instinctive as breathing--privately, in small group settings, corporately--that we’d become, from top to bottom, people who pray.

We’re entering into a new season right now where all our small groups are going to be doing a study I wrote called *Everyday Revolutionary*. It uses the books of Daniel and 1 Peter to show what faithfulness to Jesus looks like in the midst of a hostile culture. This is a really important moment right now in our society--you look at what’s going on in places like Minnesota and you see that our community is deeply divided, and looking for answers to questions of

justice and peace, and we have a moment to testify to the distinctiveness of God’s kingdom like never before, and I believe this study will help us better do that.

In fact, I want to lead us in prayer about both of these things, can I? If you’re at one of our campuses, will you stand with me?

- I pray first, Lord, for our church as we come to the end of our 21 DOPF, that you would make us hungry for prayer. Hungry for your presence. People who seek you first, and most, in everything.
- Second, Lord, I pray for this growing sense of turmoil in our country.. We ask you to heal the division and brokenness in our society, to bring peace, and that you’d enable us to be hands and feet and voice of Jesus in this moment.
- Help us represent Christ above all, and that we would see every person first as made in the image of God.
- I pray that we would be people whose words and actions reflect Jesus, and that we would make the gospel beautiful to those who are hurting and disillusioned.
- We ask this, Lord Jesus, in your name--and if you agree with that, would you say Amen? Amen.

Now, remain standing if you would, **one final time in this series, for the reading of God’s word?**

**12:11 I have been a fool! You forced me to it (And all the parents in the room said... Amen.)**

<sup>1</sup> Sources consulted: Eric Mason, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 2 Corinthians*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2024); Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians*. Gary Millar, *2 Corinthians for You* (London, UK: The Good Book Company, 2020);

Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* (London, UK: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Skip Heitzig, “[Expound: 2 Corinthians 12-13](#)”, April 12, 2023, Calvary Church; Tony Merida, notes shared via email. And others as noted throughout.

for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. 12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. 13 For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!

14 Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. 15 I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?

Now, chapter 13:5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! 6 I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.

**Leader: This is the Word of God for the people of God.**

**People: Thanks be to God.**

Thanks be to God indeed! You may be seated.

In the early hours of June 6, 1944, General Dwight D. Eisenhower gathered his top commanders into a room and issued one of the most important military commands ever given: ***"Operation Overlord" was a GO.*** D-Day, as we now call it, would go down as the largest amphibious invasion in human history.

The stakes that morning could not have been higher: tens of thousands of lives were on the line, and if D-Day failed, the war could drag on for years. Literally the future of Europe, and, by extension, the future of the world, hung in the balance.

You'd expect Eisenhower's instructions in those moments to be stirring, eloquent--maybe even poetic--the kind of thing you'd memorize in school one day. But historians say that Eisenhower's leadership rarely operated that way. When the pressure was greatest, he didn't rely on hype; he emphasized fundamentals: **STAYING FOCUSED on your objective; maintaining DISCIPLINE; TRUSTING one another; PERSEVERING even if you find yourself isolated.**

He anchored his instructions in 8 words—8 words that have become some of the most famous in military history: ***"The eyes of the world are upon you."*** Eisenhower knew something that every great leader knows: when the stakes are the highest, you don't need hype—you need fundamentals.

That's exactly what the Apostle Paul does as he brings 2 Corinthians to a close. The last half of 2 Corinthians 12 and all of 13 are his final words to the Corinthian church--a church under a lot of pressure; a church being seduced by charisma and tempted by compromise. The stakes that morning could not have been higher; this wasn't simply about the fate of a nation; it was about the faithfulness of God's church in a hostile world and the survival of God's mission. And yet, Paul doesn't hype them up; he doesn't end this book with a grandiloquent, rah-rah flourish. He calls them back to **5 fundamentals**. *Let's take a look.*

### The 5 Elements of Paul's Final Charge

First, Paul says, remember that...

#### 1. Spiritual polish does not equal spiritual power (12:11–12)

Paul begins where Eisenhower did—not with confidence, but with clarity. He wants them to stop confusing the flashiness of the flesh with true spiritual power. This has been a theme he has referred to again and again in 2 Corinthians.

- Remember, Paul's opponents in Corinth are a group of self-appointed leaders he calls "**super-apostles**," a group he mentions specifically there in **vs 11 of chapter 12.**<sup>2</sup> (In Greek, *huper-lian-apostoloi*—literally, "extra-super apostles"; that's Paul's sarcastic name for them: *extra-super-awesome-apostles*);
- These apostolic posers boasted long resumes and attempted to bolster their authority with things like advanced degrees, rhetorical skill, or flashy displays of spiritual gifts.
- They also, we learn, demanded lots of money for their leadership. They had big speaking contracts and rolled up in Cadillacs flanked

by traveling posse; probably sent out MOU's with requirements for what temperature they liked their Diet Cokes and what color M&M's were unacceptable in their green room bowls.

- At least, that's probably what they would have been like today. The point is, by the world's standards, they looked like winners. But in Paul's view, they undermined the gospel itself by shifting attention away from God's grace and onto human impressiveness. **Hear me:** HUMAN *ability*, human *strength*; human *glory*, is always the enemy to God's power.
- In contrast to these "*extra super awesome mega apostles*" Paul says, **vs 11**, "**I am nothing.**"
- Get your mind around that, would you, church? This is literally the most important figure in Christian history outside of Jesus himself—the man who wrote  $\frac{2}{3}$  of your New Testament, who'd traveled more miles and planted more churches and endured more suffering than anyone else saying, "**I. Am. Nothing.**"
- Yet it was Paul's sense of nothingness, we learn, that was actually the source of his power. It's the fundamental paradox at the heart of the Christian life: Those who think they are something have nothing; those who think they are righteous in God's sight will never inherit the gift-righteousness of Christ; those who think they are powerful are actually weak. Christ only fills empty hands.
- Paul goes on in vs 12 to say that In contrast to these **super-awesome-mega-apostles**, **(vs 12)** "**The signs of a true apostle were performed among you...**"
- **And what are those signs?** Paul has pointed to 3 things in his letters to the Corinthians:
  - **First, his suffering (2 Cor 6:3–10).** Those people Jesus chooses to be his representatives have to suffer like he did. It's not my accomplishments or my entourage or the

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 11:5

- size of my speaking fee that proves I'm an apostle, he says, it's my suffering like Jesus.
- **Second, his fruitfulness.** In **(1 Cor 9:2)**. In 1 Cor 9:2 Paul had said to the Corinthians, "YOU are the seal of my apostleship." The Spirit had enabled Paul to plant a church in a place where none had existed before. That was proof of the power of God on his life.
- **Third, signs and wonders.** He mentions that right here in verse **(2 Cor 12:12)**. Dramatic answers to prayer. Healings. Words of prophecy. These miraculous signs and wonders, he says, weren't performed through big, flashy displays of the flesh, but quiet, meek power in prayer.
- Notice, btw, that Paul says these signs "**were performed**" among you--he uses the passive voice, showing that he wasn't the one doing it. Even though he's the one who did the signs and wonders, he doesn't say, "*I* performed the signs of a true apostle among you," he says, "these signs "were performed" among you. He's creating distance from them.
- You see, at every point, Paul takes the focus off of himself.
- **Let me be personal with you for a minute:** I've had to learn, church--at every point: ***There's only room up here on this platform for one person to get glory.*** And if it's gonna be me, you're not gonna get Jesus--and here's the thing: lifting up J.D. Greear may feel good to me for a minute but it won't help you at all.
  - It's why I have this statement **(PIC)** etched here in front of our pulpit--it's what I look at while I preach; it's the statement made by some Gentile seekers in John 12 who came looking for Jesus. They said to one of Jesus's disciples, "Sirs, we wish to see *Jesus*."
  - This statement reminds me up here each week that what you come to "see" is not the wisdom or rhetorical performance of some middle-aged man; you need to encounter Jesus himself.

- And if I put me on display up here you're not gonna get him.
- There's only room for one of us to get glory, and you really need it to be him.
- **All my life God has put this choice in front of me.**
  - I've told you the story of how early on in my pastoring here I took a day of prayer and fasting to pray for God to send revival to our city. I was asking him to send the kind of revival to our city that you write about in history books that changes the trajectory of a city. The kind of revival they write about in history books 100 years from now...
- Of course, maybe you'll never be on a stage, but I know you're also tempted to take pride in 'spiritual polish'--to measure your worth by how much theology you know, or your reputation for wisdom or how many people look to you as a mentor or how much money you give. These fleshly boasts compete with, not promote, the power of God in your life.
- **Christ only fills empty hands.** The paradox of the Christian life is that those who think they are something are actually nothing; those who know they are nothing get filled up by the great **EVERYTHING**.

Fundamental #1 is that those who focus on spiritual polish will never experience true spiritual power.

## **2. True love gives, not exploits (12:13–18)**

In contrast to the "super extra awesomely amazing mega apostles," Paul says, I never sought to use you to build my own career. I didn't even charge you money for all my services." Literally, he says, **vs 14**, "**I seek not what is yours, but *you*...**"

- In **vs 13–18** (of chapter 12), Paul lists out several ways he's demonstrated this kind of selfless love for them.
  - **First, he says, vs 14, I've always been willing to go the extra mile for you.** Literally. He offers to make a 3rd trip to come

and see them, even though it's super inconvenient for him, just so he can be reconciled to them. He's not the one that wronged them, and yet he's willing to go the extra mile to be reconciled to them. **My friend Pastor Eric Mason** tells a story about having conflict with a friend and Eric suggested they get remediation, but the other guy couldn't pay for the plane ticket to go to the remediation, so Eric said, "I paid several hundred dollars just so an aggrieved friend could come cuss me out." That's basically what Paul does here.

- **Second, vs 16, Paul says he's endured being misunderstood by them.** Throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul refers to several things he's done out of love that had turned around on him.
  - For example, Paul's critics took his refusal to charge for his ministry as some kind of indication that his ministry had no value<sup>3</sup>--the whole "you get what you pay for" kind of thing.
  - Or, when Paul refused to defend himself by attacking other leaders, the false teachers used that to say clearly Paul had something to hide.<sup>4</sup>
- **If you're going to truly be committed to someone, you're going to have to endure having your motives misunderstood and turned around on you sometimes.** That doesn't mean you're doing something wrong. It happened to Jesus.
  - Jesus healed a demon-possessed man and they accused him of being in league with demons.
  - He befriended sinners with God's love, his critics used that to say he was soft on sin.
  - He shared meals with sinners and his critics accused him of being a glutton who liked to party more than he did pray.
  - In his final message to his disciples in the Upper Room, Jesus made clear: Following a misunderstood Savior means

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:7–12; 12:13–18

<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:6. He'd delayed a visit to them because he was trying to spare them a confrontational showdown and they'd accused him of being unreliable

embracing misunderstood service. It's just part of the package.

- Then, in **vs 14 (b)**, Paul uses an analogy that most of us can relate to. "Basically," he said, "I'm like a **parent** in that regard.' If you're a parent, you learn quickly that your often-selfless love is not always understood or appreciated. Right?
  - **Your wisdom is not appreciated:** Look, I don't know what image you have of Greear family devotions--I suppose you think growing up my kids all had little "Dad-wisdom notebooks" they kept close by and at the end of our family meal they'd pull them out and say, 'Feed us now from the word, father,' and they'd hang on every word I say and write it all down. But I assure you that was not the case. I'd be like, 'Hey, let's take a few minutes and read a Bible story,' and they'd be like, '*Ugggggg.... How long is this gonna take?*' And while I'm talking, the kids are looking off in other directions, then someone makes a rude bodily noise that totally kills the moment. Or sometimes now I'm trying to give them counsel on some issue and they're like, "Ugggg, dad, why do you feel the need to comment on everything in my life?"
  - And sometimes my flesh is like, "Kids, I'm not trying to brag, but when I go speak at a college ministry the most popular thing I do is the open mic Q&A time. College students will line up at microphones to ask questions, and we always have more questions than we do time. And when we're done, I've usually got a line of students who want to ask individual questions and I usually have to cut it off at some point and go home TO YOU. And here I am, sitting with *just you*, trying to speak individual wisdom into your lives, and all you can think about is, WHEN WILL IT BE OVER?"

(2 Corinthians 1:15–17; 2:1–4). Then he'd written a painful, tear-filled letter and they'd accused him of being harsh and manipulative. (2 Corinthians 2:3–4; 7:8–9).

- It's just part of the package--right, parents? But you just accept it--because you didn't get into parenting for the appreciation or praise. Love means pursuing them when they appreciate it and when they don't, when they understand you and when they're annoyed by you.
- An older parent who was giving some counsel to Veronica and me told me that the teenage years are like that scene in Apollo 13, which was the movie starring Tom Hanks about the failed mission to the moon. Trying to get back to earth, the ship was pretty badly damaged and they weren't sure if it would be able to make it back through the atmosphere or if it would burn up on re-entry. The worst part was that they knew they would lose all radio contact during re-entry, which meant they wouldn't know if it burned up. All they could do was stare, for 4-5 painful minutes, at that spot in the sky the capsule was supposed to emerge. My friend said, "Those are the teenage years. You basically lose all radio contact and you just stare at the place they're supposed to come out and hope they make it. All you can say is, 'They went in at the right angle!'"
- The important thing is you're there at the beginning and you're there at the end and you don't go anywhere in the middle.
- **That's what true love is.** You gotta have thick skin and a tender heart (instead of vice versa.) You're in it not for what you get out of it but because you love and are committed to the people you are called to.
- I can think of few things more needed in our church like ours. So many relationships end up being consumer-based or transactional. People come to church with a set of religious services they are looking for--"I want an inspirational talk--it needs to be entertaining. Not too long! Worship needs to be just

right--all my favorite songs played at just the right volume. My small group needs to be drama-free; really, what I mean is that I'm the only one who is allowed to have problems and everyone needs to be attentive to those problems and devoted to helping me."

- **\*\*\*Soap box warning\*\*\*** I get complaints sometimes from people at our church who say it's hard to get plugged in. And I get it--sometimes that's on us; we have so many people trying to get into small groups that sometimes it's hard for us to keep up. And we're working hard on that, I promise. But **SOMETIMES** (and here's the soap box), sometimes--when I talk to people who don't feel connected, I'll ask them what they're doing to serve and they almost always say they aren't. Or someone will say, "I went through a hard time last year and no one from the church called me." And I say, "Are you involved in people's lives enough that they would know to call you? And how many other people in the church who were going through a hard time did you call last year? You think you were the only one who went through problems?"
- There's an important principle in **Proverbs** that almost always rings true. It says: **"Whoever refreshes others will be refreshed."<sup>5</sup>**
- Can I tell you who almost never has a problem getting connected here? People who show up to church early and don't rush home when it's over; who volunteer and just show up to serve; people who, if the first small group they try out doesn't work out, they try another one, and if that one doesn't work they just start their own. People who look for needs around them and start investing in people's lives. Those who approach the church from a transactional standpoint will almost always be disappointed. But the ones who "refresh others" will themselves be refreshed.

<sup>5</sup> Prov 11:25

- Again, that doesn't mean we don't have work to do on our end making it easy for you. We're devoted to that. Just saying this is the other side of that.

Fundamental #2 is "True love gives, not exploits." Instruction #3:

### 3. Examine yourselves (13:5–6)

OK, this is a heavy one. After Paul clears away the illusion of polish and glitz, he turns the spotlight where it actually belongs—not on him, but on them.

**13:5**, Examine yourselves, to see whether you are (really) in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

- Paul just says to them straight up: "Hey, you need to ask: Is your faith really real?" This is a sobering question, maybe one of the most important you'll ever ask yourself. Is it possible that despite all your religious activity, you've never actually truly been converted?

Now, let me take a little pressure off of you. This is not supposed to throw you into tailspins of despair— "What if I'm not really saved; what if I didn't pray the prayer right or I wasn't sorry enough for my sins and it never really 'took' in me?" Paul has a *specific* audience in mind when he asks this question--actually, 2.

- First, he's thinking about (A) the **willfully unrepentant**. In **vs 21 of chapter 12** Paul says that some of the people in the Corinthian church "**have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.**" They knew these things were wrong, and just kept doing it anyway. They just didn't want to give up that part of their lives to Jesus.
  - Paul says that it's inconceivable that you would call Jesus "Lord," and think yourself reconciled to him, while willfully

and intentionally practicing those things that put Jesus on the cross.

- Jesus himself said the same thing. In **Luke 6:46**, he asked a group of would-be followers, "**Why would you call me Lord and not do the things I say?**" That makes no sense. It's a contradiction in terms--"Lordship" means surrender. To call Jesus "Lord" and not surrender to him is meaningless. It makes a mockery of the word. It would be like calling someone "wife" and never talking to them, paying attention to them, or coming home to them.
- The second group Paul is thinking about is (b) **the unchanging**. **Look at 13:5:** "Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!"
- IOW, do you show evidence of Christ being in you? How is it possible that Jesus Christ would literally live inside you and you wouldn't show signs of change?
- I had a friend whose 10 year old daughter accepted Christ, and she did it by asking Jesus into her heart--and then she talked to the kids director about being baptized, and she was really excited until about a week before her baptism she came to her dad with a troubled look on her face and said, "Dad, I'm confused. You said that when I accepted Jesus he came to live in my heart." And her dad said, "Yes, sweetheart, that's right." "But daddy, how tall was Jesus? Her dad said, "He was a grown man; probably about the same size as me." She said, "Well, dad, if Jesus is as tall as you, and he came to live inside my heart, shouldn't he just kind of... stick out everywhere?" And her dad said, "Well, yes, actually he should..." but probably not in the ways YOU'RE thinking. You start to show evidence of supernatural change in your heart. That's how he sticks out of you. You start to develop a dislike of sin. Sin, or a disrespect for God and his laws, starts to bother you. You start wanting to be close to God. If these things aren't present, Paul asks, you need

to ask, "Is Christ really in you?" Because if he is, he'll start to "stick out everywhere."

- **Now, be encouraged: Paul gives a wide berth for people who struggle in the Christian life.** If you look in v 20 of chapter 12 (go back there), Paul gives a long list of things that characterized the Corinthians: "quarreling; jealousy; anger; hostility; slander; gossip; conceit; disorder..."
- I mean, this doesn't sound like a Spirit-filled, church-going Christian, right? It feels more like an episode of "The Kardashians" or "The Real Housewives of Corinth." Right?
- What's encouraging to me is that Paul didn't say struggling with these things proves that Jesus isn't really inside you. **Paul recognizes that these things are present in their flesh, just as they are present in his, and in mine and yours, and that we are going to struggle with them.**
  - The question is "Have you truly repented of them?" Have you turned from them and started looking to Jesus to change you?
- As we often say around here, it's "**Not sinless perfection** (that we're looking for), **but a new direction.**" *Not sinless perfection, but a new direction.*

Before we move on, I need to ask you--sitting here in front of me, or at home on your couch--wherever: **Examine yourselves, to see whether you are (really) in the faith. Test yourselves.**

- Listen, if you are sitting here this weekend in open, unrepentant sin--in an immoral relationship; living with a boyfriend or girlfriend; dating someone you know you shouldn't be dating; doing shady things with money; hiding things on your tax return; cheating at school on a regular basis; lying to your parents; nursing some willful, secret sin; I don't mean struggling with it but

willfully continuing to practice it--Friend, don't deceive yourself; Jesus certainly isn't deceived. He says, Matthew 7, on that last day he'll say to you, when you say, "Lord, I was a church-going person! I wasn't an atheist; I was on your team!" He'll say, "Depart from me, you who work lawlessness; I NEVER KNEW YOU."

- **I'd invite you to truly repent today; he's ready to receive you, but you have to repent, with sincerity.**

#### 4. Do the hard work of accountability (13:9–11)

#4 is really quick. Paul encourages them: Be willing to do the hard work of accountability with each other that I am doing with you. In vs 9 of chapter 13, he says, "**Your restoration is what we pray for. For this reason I write these things...**"

Paul has done the uncomfortable thing of entering into their mess with them and confronted them with it.<sup>6</sup> In vs 11, he says to them, "**Finally, brothers... aim for restoration** (with each other)." IOW, he's saying, "Now do with each other what I have done with you."

One of the greatest demonstrations of love is a willingness to confront someone who is in sin or making foolish choices that are going to harm them and hold them accountable. I say it's one of the great demonstrations of love because for most of us it's easier just to ignore someone, even a friend, and isolate them rather than going through the discomfort of confrontation. We tell ourselves we're giving space, or respecting boundaries, when, in reality, we just don't want the discomfort that confrontation brings. It's easier to avoid. To live and let live. To let someone drift. It's easier just to "let them." I get "respecting boundaries" and "not taking responsibility for other people's choices," but Paul shows us true love doesn't step back when things get messy—it steps in, *for the sake of restoration.*

<sup>6</sup> It's all," he says in 12:19, "for your upbuilding." "Authority... for building up and not for tearing down" (13:10)

**Now, let me acknowledge:** there are different personalities in this room. Some of you love to confront. Pointing out others' faults gives you a great deal of delight. You're an Enneagram 8, like me. And your spouse is like, "For the love, pastor. The last thing my spouse needs is more encouragement to *confront*." Fair enough. There's two ways we go wrong with this, and Paul points to both of them in this passage:

- **Sometimes we fail to confront because of the discomfort it brings.**
- **Sometimes we over-confront out of irritation or a desire for vindication.** (IOW, your real aim in confrontation is not helping them grow or to restore them, but merely to give vent to your frustration OR to demonstrate that you are in the right--that is, to vindicate yourself. You show this by the lack of patience and tenderness you show to the person. If your real goal is restoration, you'd be much more patient and graceful. You are more likely to cheer when someone is getting something right than to criticize when they fall short.)

**BOTH of these postures are selfish.** Love IS willing to confront when you see someone hurting themselves; but the confrontation is always done with humility (because you recognize you too get a lot of this stuff wrong, which makes you patient) and your goal is restoration, which makes you gracious.

(Quick question: Which side of **this**  are you more liable to struggle with? Show of hands for this one? This one?)

My guess is more of you struggle here than here. **Augustine** said, "Better it is to love even with the accompaniment of severity, than to mislead by (excess of) lenience."

- Confront, even if awkward. THIS IS LOVE.

- But do so aiming at restoration, because it's not about winning an argument—it's about restoring a person.

I told you this one was quick, so let me give you one practical challenge on this one, and I'll move to our last one. Here it is: I want you to take one significant relationship in your life and ask yourself: "*If I fast forward in my mind 20 years... What is one thing in 20 years I will probably look back on and wish I had said to that person?*" And then, ask God to help you say that to them **this week**. Will you do that?

OK, last one...

## 5. Go forward **WITH** (13:11, 14)

13:11 Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace;

Paul ends his letter, like Eisenhower did his orders before D-Day, telling them they are not supposed to do this alone. Two things you should go forward with in the Christian life:

**First, each other:** Paul says, "COMFORT one another. Agree WITH one another. Live in PEACE with one another." **Be TOGETHER.** I learned this a few years ago from my trainer at the gym. When a herd of cows senses a storm coming, they run from it, scattering as they go. Of course, the storm always catches up with them, and when it does, it's especially hard on them because they are out in the cold alone. Buffalo, by contrast, instinctively do the opposite: When they sense a storm coming, they huddle together and walk *into* the storm. I'm sure their cow cousins think they're crazy, but this gives the buffalo 3 advantages: First, they get extra support from being huddled together. Second, the fur is thicker on their frontsides than their

backsides, which gives them extra protection for warmth, and third: it literally shortens the storm for them, since they are walking through it.<sup>7</sup>

Like I said, it was my trainer at the gym who used this analogy, and to be honest, I wasn't sure how that illustration was supposed to inspire me to do more burpees--but I do know it illustrates well what Paul is saying here in vs 11. You'll winter this storm of a world better if you do it together. So, my challenge to you is to GET CONNECTED here if you're not. Take advantage of one of these GroupLinks to get involved in one of our small groups here. Join a volunteer team. Men, come to our Men's Conference coming up in March. Literally the theme is 'Don't Walk Alone'! Students, join up with our student ministry. Don't just come on Sunday morning; come on Sunday night to small groups or to Midweek. College students: Do City Project this summer--it will really help you make deep connections that will help you thrive spiritually throughout the year. Talk to your **campus pastor** today and he can connect you with any of these things.

Paul says, "Do it with each other," but more importantly, do it *with God*. vs 11, again: "...the God of love and peace will be with you." In vs 14, he makes the whole "with God" aspect even fuller: 14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

- Paul got the whole Trinity involved in helping you live the Christian life.
  - **Grace**, that's associated with Jesus. Through his death on the cross, Jesus removed anything that could separate you from God. All the punishment for your sin has been taken away; there is therefore now no condemnation, no punishment, no anger left for those who are in Christ Jesus. God feels nothing

<sup>7</sup> Yes, buffalo really do this:

toward you now but positive, fatherly, loving emotions. He's ready to help.

- AND the **love of God** (that's associated with the *Father*.) It's easy to forget that the grace Jesus purchased for us was birthed out of the love of the Father--Jesus's death was not some clinical, theological transaction God pulled off; nor was Jesus trying to make God like you again--no, Jesus's salvation was a deeply emotional rescue, the price paid by a weeping, broken-hearted Father who wanted so badly to bring you home. And it's a love that doesn't stop with your salvation; that same love now pervades every part of your lives. It's like King David said: "*Surely goodness and mercy and love will follow me (literally, 'haunt me') all the days of my life.*"
- And then, finally, **fellowship**--that's the part of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings the presence of God into us. Hear me: The Christian life is not something you live *for God*--you don't have what it takes. It's something his Spirit lives out *through you*. So, don't be discouraged. You may think the Christian life is impossible, and it is for you, but it's not when you have God himself living it through you. I always say the Christian life is so hard that only one person in history was able to live it, and they named it after him--and now that Victorious One lives in you. Let him stick out everywhere. Yield yourselves to him and let him take over.

## VAMP

**These are the last instructions Paul gives the Corinthians**--his final speech before D-Day. And, like Eisenhower's, they are less a rousing speech; they're really just practical, basic instructions--the **fundamentals**:

1. Spiritual polish does not equal spiritual power
2. True love gives, not exploits
3. Examine yourselves, as to whether you're really in the faith
4. Do the hard work of accountability, and
5. Go forward **WITH**

And all God's people said, "Amen," and Hallelujah. Let's bow our heads to spend a moment in direct communion with this Holy Spirit, can we?

What's the Holy Spirit compelling you to do? He's the real preacher, not me. Any of these you need to act on? What action do you need to take? Sit for a few moments, and whatever he prompts you to do, say, 'Yes, Lord!' **(Wait 30 secs)**

J.D. prays. Let's stand to sing a great Trinitarian song--and celebrate the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are with us to help us do this!