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## Daily Meditations

### June 7-12, 2021

The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Year 2 and written by the St. Stephen's Meditation Writing Team: Dave Boyd, Jon Campbell, Becky Denton, Pat Gillory, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, and Carroll Wilson.

Click on the scripture reading for each day to go directly to link. Current and past copies of the "Daily Meditations" may be found at: [ststeve.org/daily-meditations](http://ststeve.org/daily-meditations)

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### PROPER 5:

*O God, from whom all good proceeds: Grant that by your inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by your merciful guiding may do them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

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## Takes My Breath Away

### Monday, June 7, 2021

### **2 Corinthians 10:1-18**

*"The world is unprincipled. It's a dog-eat-dog world out there! The world doesn't fight fair. But we don't live or fight our battles that way—never have and never will. The tools of our trade aren't for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that massively corrupt culture. We use our powerful God-tools for smashing philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and impulse and emotion into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity." - 10:3-6*

What a battle plan! Attack, clear out the obstacles and reshape into a conquered state. But sometimes a conqueror has to quell rebellion, and that is what Paul is doing in this letter. The church Paul established in Corinth is not a peaceful place, but filled with controversy and (oh no!) troublesome people. Some there are questioning Paul's style of teaching and even his authority to teach them. He gets down to the business of defending himself here in the 10th chapter, and his thought and use of language take my breath away. Something in me craves to hear that peace, love, and harmony abound, but without these troublesome Corinthians, we would not have Paul's powerful teaching to them.

And Paul is speaking to us as well: our corrupt culture is no different; our church is full of troublesome ideas and people; it's still "a dog-eat-dog world

out there," and we still hear the call to remake our lives into the "structure of life shaped by Christ." We still have the same "tools at hand" that Paul uses even if we don't have Paul's command of thought and language: the high, pure example of the life and thought of Jesus the Christ, the unfailing guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the eternal love of God the Father. The most important things in life are the most simple and basic. Ironically, using these tools, I choose to be a "conquered" servant-conquered by Christ.

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## Not Worth More than Paul

Tuesday, June 8, 2021

### 2 Corinthians 11:1-21

*"I wonder, did I make a bad mistake in proclaiming God's message to you without asking for something in return, serving you free of charge so that you wouldn't be inconvenienced by me?...I'm giving nobody grounds for lumping me in with those money-grubbing preachers, vaunting themselves as something special. They're a sorry bunch—Pseudo-apostles, lying preachers, crooked workers—posing as Christ agents but sham to the core. And no wonder. Satan does it all the time, dressing up as a beautiful angel of light." - 11:7, 12b-14*

Conor McGregor: \$120 million. Dak Prescott: \$107.5 million. LeBron James: \$96.5 million.<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Copeland: \$760 million. Bishop T.D. Jakes: \$150 million. Joel Osteen: \$40 million...three of the ten top paid preachers that are based in Texas.<sup>2</sup>

Are these living athletes and ministers valuable? Absolutely. Are they more valuable than Paul...or me? I would say, that according to the values of our world, yes. But, I would also say that in God's eyes, they are not worth more than Paul for sure.

I have heard it said many times that we value things by the price tag or the value placed on something by the maker/artist/performer. *Ask not, get not*, in other words. Or, *if you don't value yourself or your product, how do you expect others to value you?*

In the passage above, I think Paul is turning this thinking on its ear. Instead, he is putting the high price tag on how he values the souls of Corinth. In a Christ-like gesture, he supports himself with manual labor and contributions from Macedonia to demonstrate that Christ's gift of eternal life, the most valuable gift of all, is free for the taking. In modern musicology, Paul's gift reminds me of the Garth Brooks song that Bob Dylan wrote:

*I'd go hungry, I'd go black and blue/I'd go crawling down the avenue  
No, there's nothing that I wouldn't do/To make you feel my love*

We do not know who these critics of Paul are nor what differences in teaching they offer, but there's obviously something not right with them or Paul would not be so vehement in his denunciation. But how would the newly taught Christians in Corinth be able to discern between Paul and these apparent "angel[s] of light?" How would we? In answer to this thorny problem as my mom would tell me, "Pretty is as pretty does." Observing a person's actions over time always reveals that person's real values and motivations. In the words quoted, Paul points out several areas of comparison, helping these new Christians as well as us to have parameters for evaluation. As another song says, "and I see your true colors shine through...and that's why I love you."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/brettknight/2021/05/12/the-worlds-10-highest-paid-athletes-conor-mcgregor-leads-a-group-of-sports-stars-unfazed-by-the-pandemic/?sh=4843079126f4>)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.etinside.com/top-15-richest-pastors-america-promise-i-will-shock/>

## When What Shouldn't be Happening, Happens

Wednesday, June 9, 2021

### 2 Corinthians 11:21-33

*"If I have to 'brag' about it, I will brag about the humiliations that make me like Jesus." - 11:30*

Paul continues his use of ironic sarcasm in his comparison of his "credentials" versus those of the false teachers seeking to discredit him. I cannot resist comparing Paul's mocking self-defense to the legend that Lord Cornwallis played in the ballad "The World Turned Upside Down" when he surrendered the British army at Yorktown in October 1781. According to the values of our world, what shouldn't be happening happens. The most powerful, almost undefeated army in the world capitulates to a disorganized bunch of ragtag American rebels. A chosen apostle of our Lord, the King of Kings, defends himself using a daunting list of horrific humiliations, not honors and kudos.

The difference between our physical world and the spiritual world we seek couldn't be more sharply defined: Success in our world translates to money, honors, and prestige; success in the spiritual realm equals self-sacrifice, humiliation, and often suffering for your belief. The "Suffering Servant" from *The Book of Isaiah* comes to mind:

*He was beaten, he was tortured/but he didn't say a word.  
Like a lamb taken to be slaughtered/and like a sheep being sheared/he took it all in silence.*

*Justice miscarried, and he was led off/and did anyone really know what was happening?*

*He died without a thought for his own welfare/threw him in a grave with a rich man,  
Even though he'd never hurt a soul/or said one word that wasn't true." - Isaiah 53:7-9*

Clearly Paul sees Jesus as "The Suffering Servant," and in his efforts to model his own life after Christ, Paul becomes that servant also.

As far as I can tell, this list of the humiliations and mistreatments that Paul undergoes is in addition to the difficulties chronicled by Luke in *The Acts of the Apostles*. Only the necessity of routing the false teachers who had descended on the church in Corinth provokes Paul into "boasting" about what has happened to him as he serves Christ. In his earlier *Letter to the Church at Corinth*, Paul spells out the difference between self-aggrandizing teachers and servants of Christ by quoting Isaiah 29:14:

*I'll turn conventional wisdom on its head,  
I'll expose so-called experts as crackpots."*

A message here? Perhaps to see with the eyes of Christ what's really happening rather than glibly accepting the values of the world. In my own life, do I seek kudos and praise, or do I seek service? Frankly, both. The totally human side of me craves acknowledgement of value; the Holy Spirit suggests to me paths of service.

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# What it Takes to Let Go of Self

Thursday, June 10, 2021

## 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

*"Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become." - 12:10*

This past year I have engaged in a spiritual wisdom study seeking to bring myself into closer communion with God. Part of that has been the struggle to engage with a daily spiritual practice. The key element of spiritual practice is, surprisingly, removing the preoccupations of time, commitments and life anxieties for a brief period of *just being*.

You would be surprised how hard this is. I live a relatively easy life, free of big problems, with time stresses and preoccupations only of my own making, but the habits of a lifetime of work, structured time, and cultural expectations as well as how I perceive myself (ego) create barriers to grasping a few moments daily of some form of quiet meditation. My answer to creating a "being space" is to lose myself in reading Scripture or a meditation, writing a journal about anything, immersing myself in a walk or yoga. These are my tools to turning off a cluttered and clamoring mind.

How much harder would it be for me to let go of self-directedness if I were, like Paul, letting go of self in the midst of "...abuse, accidents, opposition, and bad breaks." Yet, he does. Paul is saying that he consciously relinquishes the very human drive to control a situation and trusts that Christ will take over and resolve it as it should be. The more he is able to do this and channel Christ through a situation, the more effective his ministry is.

Ironically, "letting go of self" takes self-control. Is this self-control a "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22) because it only comes after you allow the Holy Spirit to guide you? This seems much more spiritual than just resisting my craving for chocolate. Among the criticisms leveled against him in the chapter before, Paul is portrayed as a "cringing and wishy-washy" minister (10:1-2). I cannot but think that Paul exerts self-control and exhibits gentleness when with the Corinthians in person, but allows the full blossoming of his passion and commitment to Christ in these letters. What a blessing we have them.

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## The Cosmic Spiritual Court

Friday, June 11, 2021

## 2 Corinthians 12:11-21

*"I hope you don't think that all along we've been making our defense before you, the jury. You are not the jury; God is the jury—God revealed in Christ—and we make our case before him." - 12:19*

This passage makes me think of Tom Thumb or that series called "The Littles" portraying the lives and perspectives of tiny (6") people. In their perspective, insects are giant monsters and a cat a creature of complete destruction, a crumb of bread their daily loaf and a cup of water a swimming pool. How does God see us, his creation? Does He marvel at how monumental we see the world events; does He chuckle at how upset we get over petty squabbles?

When our feet are firmly planted in this world, it is a challenge to lift our perspectives to the spiritual level...to God's viewpoint.

In defending himself against the criticisms leveled against him, Paul has been talking to the worldly Corinthians, but in this verse, he points out that his judge and jury are in the cosmic spiritual court of Christ and God, and he feels justified in his actions before them. This is not to say that the opinion of the Corinthian Christians doesn't matter to him...he has invested himself totally in the effort of bringing them to Christ and Christ to them...but with a deep sense of rightness, he asserts that in his teaching and behaviors with them, only the highest opinion truly matters.

Having this rock-solid sense of having done the right thing is what I desire in my most insecure moments. Scrutinizing my thoughts and actions under the microscope of comparing them to those of Christ is a real soul-wrenching experience. I am sure Paul spent hours engaged in this very human activity, weighing his actions against the true measure of Christ. Then he deliberately shifts the perspective of the readers of this letter to the Supreme Court of heaven, calling on all of us to lift our thoughts and hearts to God.

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## Testing Oneself

*Saturday, June 12, 2021*

### **2 Corinthians 13:1-14**

*"Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourself regular checkups. You need first-hand evidence, not mere hearsay, that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it." - 13:5*

Tests are scary. For many of us in our retirement years, tests imply something is not perfect in our physical makeup or health. For students in school, tests are the measuring stick against which they can judge their own progress in a learning situation. We rely on tests on mechanical objects to assess safety, speed, endurance, etc. Regardless, tests represent a dividing line between good and not-so-good. When Paul writes to these struggling Christians to "test" themselves for their faith, they must have puzzled over this directive, as I did. How do I test myself in being solid in my faith? Is Jesus Christ in me? What would that look like? What *wouldn't* that look like? Well, on *my* test, I would place what Jesus calls the greatest commandment first:

*Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence." This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' These two commands are pegs; everything in God's Law and the Prophets hangs from them." - Matthew 22:37-40*

It that one isn't a hard enough test, then I would add John 13:34-35:

*"Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other."*

Hmmm...the recurring theme of this test is love. So, the supreme example of love is Jesus' self-sacrifice:

*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. - Galatians 2:20*

How'd I do? While I can see some glimmers of good, I do not think I passed my test, so I need to follow Paul's advice "to do something about it," to invest myself more in my Christian walk. Quite honestly, I think this will be a lifelong

improvement project.

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