

## The Algebra of Grace

### Opening Prayer

*Leader* The Lord be with you.

*People* And also with you.

*Leader* Let us pray.

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### Remembering the Message (Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-11)

**A. Bring your Bibles...to church and to small group.** Jot down notes in the margins, underline. These are Ancient Words, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; words that are both timeless and timely. The Bible is an enduring message that transcends every generation and penetrates every heart. (Hebrews 4:12) The Holy Spirit speaks in Scripture to transform our hearts, our thoughts, our lives.

### B. Background on the letter

- This letter of 2 Corinthians was written in the spring of 54/55 A.D., 3 years after Paul started the church in Corinth, and 22 years after the death of Christ. It was actually one of four letters written by Paul (the previous letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9, the letter of 1 Corinthians, the tearful letter mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:3-4, and the letter of 2 Corinthians); two of the letters have disappeared into antiquity.
- Corinth itself was an opulent and decadent port city that served as a crossroads for sea traffic between the Aegean region and the western Mediterranean. It was a melting pot of cultures, religions, and peoples. The church in Corinth was growing and consisted of a number of house groups (like our small groups). They gathered to worship God and to face life's struggles, issues, challenges, and joys together.
- This is the most personal of all Paul's letters, filled with deep emotion. Paul is at the breaking point (1:8b-9) and throughout the letter he shares his experience of receiving God's "Grace Under Pressure." He also points to the relationship between suffering and the power of the Holy Spirit at work in him. This is the means of extending God's comfort into the lives of other believers.
- Fr. David reminded us that Paul was blinded in his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Paul had a radical conversion but he shares much in common with us - he heard the voice of Jesus but he didn't witness Jesus' miracles, hear him teach, or see him on the cross. Just like Paul, we walk and live by faith.

**C. The Father of all Compassion and the God of all Comfort**

- God may be seen by some as a God of rules, laws, restrictions and judgments. Paul points us to God who is the father of compassion and comfort. Fr. David unpacked “compassion” and “comfort” as two different responses.  
**Compassion is feeling, understanding, hearing, and empathizing with another person while comfort is the actual administration of that compassion – it is compassion in action.** God has compassion on us and, in an act of mercy, God offers comfort to us.
- Fr. David pointed out several ways we experience the comfort of God. Jesus on the cross. Resurrection. The power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. The gift of his word in scripture. Sacraments. Community – the body of Christ, small groups, families.

**D. The Algebra of Grace**

- God has compassion and gives comfort to us and we in turn comfort others out of the overflow of His comfort. Regardless of what is on one side of the “algebraic equation” (hardship, famine, suffering, trials, loss, violence, disaster) the other side of the equation is always CHRIST! For Paul, everything happens for one reason and one reason only: to bring us to Christ so that we might know Him more.
- Christ is not only the agent of compassion and comfort...but also of power and of strength. Some more algebra – whatever you are facing God will give strength and power needed to face it and to overcome.
- One final note: This is not about The Little Engine That Could....”I think I can, I think I can.” If you’re living life as the little engine, trying to make it under your own steam then God invites you to turn to Him. The power of God extends beyond our own strength and points us and others to Christ.

**Going Deeper**

- A. How have you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit speaking through ancient words of scripture to bring about change in your life? What scripture passages in particular have been transformational in your walk with Christ?
- B. Paul points his readers to God, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. What other stories or passages in the Old Testament reveal God’s compassion and comfort? What stories of Jesus demonstrate his compassion and how is his compassion actively expressed in comfort?
- C. There are many hardships that Paul and the early church experienced. What are some of the hardships they faced and what are the troubles we face today? (think globally, nationally, personally)



- D. How has God shown compassion and acted to bring comfort in your life?
- E. What are the ways you have witnessed the algebra of grace? When have you received the overflow of God's comfort from another? When have you given out of the overflow of comfort you have received? When has the answer to the equation of a difficulty in your life been simply, Christ?
- F. What are you facing now that is an invitation to turn to Christ and receive His comfort? Use this as an opportunity to draw near to Christ. Commit to pray for one another and to share God's comfort with others this week.

### Closing Prayer

Lord God, king of the universe, you are amazing and powerful, you are filled with compassion and you give comfort. We thank you for the reality of your Son's work on earth... the teaching, the cross, the empty tomb. We thank you for the released power of the Holy Spirit into our lives. We come to you, Father of compassion and God of comfort and pray that we would know you and experience your compassion and comfort in every part of our lives and that we would reach out to comfort other, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ and for the honor of your Name.