

Open Your Heart small groups resources:

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B (June 23, 2024) – Open Your Heart: In Sorrow and Rejoicing

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants think about what they need to clean out and release to make room for God.

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [2 Corinthians 6:1-13](#). Reflect. Respond.

The message conveyed in 2 Corinthians 6:1-13 is multifaceted but centers around the themes of reconciliation, endurance in ministry, and the challenges faced by followers of Christ.

- **Reconciliation** (Verses 1-2): Paul urges the Corinthians, and us today, not to receive God's grace in vain. Instead, we are called to respond promptly to God's offer of salvation. Now is the time to accept salvation and reconciliation. Ask for forgiveness from God and one another. What does God's grace mean to you?
- **Endurance** (Verses 3-10): Paul describes the trials and hardships he has endured as a minister of the gospel. Despite facing afflictions, hardships, and persecution, he and his fellow workers remained faithful. This passage highlights the reality of life challenges and the challenges of ministry. But it also emphasizes the resilience and perseverance of God's people and the requirement to continue serving God faithfully. When were you resilient and persevered?
- **Servants of God** (Verses 11-13): Paul expresses his deep affection for the Corinthians and calls them to open their hearts to him and his ministry companions. He urges them to be generous and to have a deep, mutual love for one another as they serve God together. How might you show deep, mutual love for someone with whom you serve?
- **Response to God's Grace**: Paul urges readers not to let God's grace go to waste. The call to action is to respond without delay to God's offer of salvation. When was the last time you let God's grace go to waste? How did it make you feel? What will you do differently?
- **Faith**: Despite facing challenges, Christians are called to stay focused and faithful to their commitment to following Christ. Our call to action is to endure challenges with resilience and without quitting.
- **Embrace Reconciliation**: Paul emphasizes the importance of reconciling with God and one another. The call to action is to seek reconciliation in relationships and to foster unity within the community of believers.
- **Open Hearts and Minds**: Believers are encouraged to have open hearts and minds to God and others. We are called to show generosity and compassion.
 - o How will you live out these values in everyday life, treating others with kindness and empathy regardless of how you are treated? How will you live in this space of action in this season of your faith community?

Friends, be encouraged; release all doubt. We have been invited to believe in the goodness and faithfulness of God for ourselves. The first step is to make room in our hearts for others. When we make room in our hearts, we may begin to trust others and trust in the abundance of God's grace. I invite you to make room in your hearts for others.

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

Great God, We come before you with grateful hearts, acknowledging your abundant grace poured out for us. Thank you for the opportunity to be reconciled with you through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the cross. Help us to respond to your grace with the urgency of now, not letting the time we have go to waste. Amen

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B (June 30, 2024) – Open Your Heart: In Need and in Abundance

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer,

- When did you last open your heart to others in sorrow? Share your story.
- When have you opened your heart in rejoicing with others? Share your story.

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [2 Corinthians 8:7-15](#).

- "Now as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you--so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking" (2 Corinthians 8:7).
 - In what do you excel?
- "For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).
 - Why do you think Paul uses the example of Jesus' choice of poverty and the chance we might become rich?
 - What does it mean to be "rich" in this context? What do you think is the world's meaning of "rich"? What do you think is God's meaning of wealth?
- The goal is equality. "As it is written, 'The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little'" (2 Corinthians 8:15).
 - What do you think is meant by "the one who had much did not have too much"?
 - What do you think is meant by "the one who had little did not have too little"?
- **The Preaching Note says**, "Paul is asking for a relationship. We are one in the body of Christ. We share as one in the body of Christ. It's an ideal, we must admit. Yet we strive for it anytime we open our hearts. And whether we have more than enough or whether we are lacking, we find help and hope in the body, hope in the relationship within the community of faith to whom we have opened our hearts."

- What might be lacking in your life?
- What do you have more than enough of that you can share with others?

Prayer Time (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:
Thank You God, for the grace that you provide us day by day. Help us not take these gifts for granted; help us to be grateful for your love and strength to run on. Grant us resilience amid daily challenges and show us how to open our hearts in kindness to one another, just as Paul taught the Corinthians. Jesus, help us grow in faith and love, imitating your grace in all that we do. Amen – It is so!

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year B (July 7, 2024) – Open Your Heart: In Weakness and In Strength

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “What do weakness and strength mean to you?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). [Read 2 Corinthians 12:2-10](#).

Discussion Questions

- The theme for today is “Open Your Heart: In Weakness and Strength”
 - Have you needed someone else's help? How did you feel?
 - Have you helped someone in great need? How did you feel?
- Paul talked about being caught up in the “third heaven” and his being taken up into the heavenly realms where he heard things he kept to himself (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).
 - Do you believe it is important to keep some spiritual things or blessings between you and God? Why or Why not?
- Paul describes a "thorn in the flesh" given to him by God (2 Corinthians 12:7-8).
 - Why do you think God allowed Paul to keep struggling with the painful thorn, even after Paul pleaded three times for it to be removed?
 - What are your thoughts on the world's meaning of wealth and riches versus God's meaning?
- Paul in this text says he is content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for the sake of Christ.
 - How is it possible to be "strong" when you are "weak"?
 - Have you ever felt strong when you were insulted, faced hardships, or were lied about? How did you stay strong?
- **The Preaching Note says**, “Notice too that this thorn doesn't come from God. God doesn't cause suffering to get us to pay attention or to change our ways or our thinking—despite what some loud voices in our world today are trying to tell us. Suffering isn't punishment. But God can use

any occasion, any circumstance, to help us grow and learn, if we pay attention, if we ask in humility what we could learn.”

- Are there “some loud voices in our world today” that influence our thinking? How might you be able to stop those voices from influencing you?
- This week, in which area of your life do you want to grow and learn?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Prayer: Great and mighty God, help us understand the meaning of being strong even when we are weak, to persevere and stay strong when we are persecuted. Bless us to have joy in our suffering because your grace is sufficient. Amen – We believe it to be so!

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Dr. Stephanie Moore Hand epitomizes grit and leadership excellence, showcasing unwavering commitment and a tireless work ethic across corporate, faith, and governmental realms. She is an acclaimed author, a sought-after speaker, and the recipient of the 2021 Harry Denman Award. She is a wife, mother, author, and consultant; and most important, she loves Jesus.