

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 112** and ask **Question #1: What's a chore you'd love to "outsource" to someone else?**

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG, page 113** and the author's description of his negative childhood experiences with yard work. Note his solution is to outsource the job to others.

SAY: "Today we will look at an aspect of our lives as believers that we can't outsource: ministry to others."

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 113: God works through us to make a difference.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to remind us of our responsibilities in personal ministry to others. Ask Him to make us dependent on Him and competent in what we do for Him.

SESSION 3 I AM A MINISTER



The Point

God works through us to make a difference.

The Bible Meets Life

While we can be thankful for the work of our pastors and church leaders, ministry is not just for a select few. Some people are set apart for specific offices and

ministries within the church, but we are all given the privilege of doing the work of a minister. The call to follow Christ is a call to serve Him, and we serve Him through the opportunities He gives us to serve others.

The Passage

2 Corinthians 3:4-12

The Setting

The apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians while he was in Macedonia after the Corinthians had first questioned his ministry and authority, then warmly reaffirmed both. We can thank God that Paul went through such an experience with the Corinthians because it led to rich reflections on ministry. In 2 Corinthians, we discover essentials of ministry as servants of Christ. As we do, we can personally minister with greater adequacy, purpose, and boldness for God's glory.

2 Corinthians 3:4-6

4 Such is the confidence we have through Christ before God.

5 It is not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.

6 He has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

KEY WORDS: New Covenant (v. 6)—A covenant is a commitment between parties. God established a covenant with His people at Sinai (Ex. 19:5-6) and a new covenant in Christ (Luke 22:20).

Letter (v. 6)—Refers to the written law (Rom. 7:6) that sets forth commands and penalties without imparting the power that people need to keep the commands.

1 ▶ Verse 4-5. Because God empowers us, remarkable things can happen in the lives of other people through our ministries. Remarkable things happened in the Corinthians' lives through the ministries of Paul and his missionary team. In fact, the Corinthians' lives were like recommendation letters validating Paul's ministry (2 Cor. 3:1-3).

Paul must have been profoundly grateful to be able to say this about the Corinthians, given the turbulence that had rocked his relationship with them along the way. Over a period of eighteen months Paul had proclaimed Christ in Corinth (Acts 18:1-17). It was a fruitful time. Many people had been saved. A vibrant church began. After Paul left Corinth, however, serious problems arose. Paul addressed some of them in 1 Corinthians. The influence of "false apostles" (2 Cor. 11:13) contributed to the problems. Resistance to Paul grew in the church.

Paul knew his relationship with the church was at risk. He also knew authentic Christian ministry in Corinth was at risk. He made a painful visit to Corinth and wrote a letter that has now been lost to us (see 2 Cor. 2:1-4). By the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, good news of repentance and reaffirmation of Paul's ministry had reached him (vv. 5-11; 7:5-13). Truly, God had done great things in the hearts of the Corinthians. He had worked to bring forth their first response to the gospel. He had then worked to bring them to needed repentance and reconciliation with Paul. ◀

STUDY THE BIBLE 2 Corinthians 3:4-6



10 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 118.

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 3:4-6.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** to provide more background information about the church at Corinth and some of the unique issues addressed in this letter.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Ask group members to list some of the qualities of an effective minister. Then ask group members if they would have confidence to do the work of a minister. Say, "The good news is whether you have any of the listed qualities of an effective minister or have confidence to do ministry, it doesn't matter. It is God who makes us competent and adequate to do the work of ministry He calls all believers to do."

GUIDE: Refer group members to the story of the author's first ride in a helicopter on **PSG page 114**. Relate the humorous account of his friend, the pilot, giving him the controls and saying, "It's your turn to fly." Ask members to share times when they were thrust into situations they were not equipped to do and told, in effect, "it's your time to fly."

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 2** to explain the basis of Paul's confidence:

- *Not competent in ourselves.*
- *Our adequacy is from God.*

DISCUSS: Question #2 (PSG, p. 115): What does it look like when we rely on our own competence instead of trusting Christ to work through us?

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** on page 119 (**PSG, p. 114**) to provide explanation on the phrase *new covenant*.

Paul knew all of the true and lasting good in the Corinthians' lives was God's work. His **confidence** in ministry was strong because it was **through Christ before God**. Paul was confident in God's commitment to work through him. As Paul wrote earlier, "Every one of God's promises is 'Yes' in him," that is, in Christ (1:20). Since Paul was in Christ, the promises of God for His people applied fully to Paul and his ministry. God's promise to give the Holy Spirit to empower His servants in Christ (Luke 11:13) was a promise to Paul. His confidence was strong because His confidence was in a strong Christ and a faithful God.

Our confidence can be strong as well! What need is God unable to meet for us through Christ? God has no lack. We may look at a ministry challenge and think, "That's a very big challenge; I'm not up to it." We should also think, "We have a very big God; He's more than up to it." We can serve with confidence because God gives us what we need to serve Him and make a difference.

2 ▶ Paul's confidence was also a humble confidence. Some teachers who had been in Corinth apparently presented themselves as personally impressive (2 Cor. 11:5). Paul and his partners did not do that. They knew that **it is not that we are competent in ourselves**. He did not depend upon himself. Difficult trials had taught Paul not to do so (1:9). He had learned the lesson well.

Jesus also taught us this. He did not command His followers to step out in their own strength to be His witnesses. Instead, He told them to wait until they received the power of the Holy Spirit the Father promised (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8).

Though we are not competent in ourselves, we can be effective ministers because **our adequacy is from God**. This was true for Moses. God assured Moses He would be with him, work miracles through him, and teach him how to speak and what to say (Ex. 3:12,20; 4:12). The same was true for Joshua (Josh. 1:9) and for the prophets.

The same can be true for us. When we depend not on ourselves, but on God, we can serve with confidence in His divine adequacy.

Confidence and ministry complement each other. Confidence leads to ministry. Ministry leads to confidence. We gain confidence with experience. Someone asked a renowned fisherman, "How can I learn to fish well?" He answered, "Put a line in the water." Nothing substitutes for starting to do what God gives us to do. As we experience God working through us in His power, our confidence in Him will grow. ◀

3 ▶ Verse 6. God makes us **competent** for a purpose. It is for us to be **ministers of a new covenant**. This reference to a “new” covenant implies an old covenant. God established the old covenant at Sinai about fourteen centuries before Christ was born (Ex. 19:5-6). The old covenant was **of the letter**. At Sinai God chiseled commandments in letters on stone tablets (2 Cor. 3:7). In addition to the Ten Commandments, God gave Moses other commandments that were written down.

About six centuries before Jesus was born, God revealed through Jeremiah that a “new covenant” was coming. The new covenant would involve God writing His teaching on His people’s hearts (Jer. 31:31-33). The internal work of **the Spirit** on the human heart was to supersede external writing on stone tablets.

Jesus Himself announced the inauguration of the new covenant when He established the Lord’s Supper. He said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20). Based on this new covenant, God redeems and relates to the people whom He is saving. It is a covenant based upon the blood sacrifice of Christ and applied by the Spirit to the hearts of God’s people. ◀

4 ▶ In saying the letter kills Paul did not mean written revelation is bad or destructive. Paul believed “all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable” (2 Tim. 3:16). The letter of the law kills in the sense that it sets forth commands and obligations without empowering people inwardly to meet them. The law exposes people’s unrighteousness and announces the penalties that loom over them. “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law” (1 Cor. 15:56).

By contrast, **the Spirit gives life**. The Spirit has renewed us and given us life so that we are new creations for whom the old has passed away and the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 7:6).

Further, by our ministries “the Spirit gives life” to others. The Spirit brings people to faith in Christ and changes them increasingly into the image of Christ.

In fact, only the Spirit has the power to give the life about which Paul wrote. Our ministries will never be successful because of appearance, speaking ability, intellectual prowess, money, technology, or marketing. Our adequacy for ministry can only come from God. He is able and willing to make us competent and to use us to make a difference in ministry. ◀

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** to highlight information about how ...

- ... *the new covenant contrasts to the old covenant.*
- ... *Jesus’ introduced the new covenant when He established the Lord’s Supper.*

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** on page 119 (**PSG, p. 114**) to explain the phrase *the letter*.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 4** to explain the meaning of the letter of the law. Contrast the letter that kills to the Spirit who gives life.

DISCUSS: Question #3 (**PSG, p. 115**): **What qualities are essential for a good minister?**

(Alternate: When have you had the opportunity of ministering to someone?)

TRANSITION: “In the next verses we will see an example of how God’s glory was revealed in the past and how it pales in comparison to what the Spirit produces now.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

2 Corinthians 3:7-10



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 3:7-10.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 116**, to Old Testament examples of God's glory revealed:

- "The LORD's glory appeared" over the children of Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 16:10).
- "The glory of the LORD filled the temple" (1 Kings 8:11).
- The glory of God was reflected in Moses' face.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **DIGGING DEEPER** on **PSG page 117**, *Glory* which compares the experience of Moses and the Israelites to glory revealed through grace.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 5** for further explanation on *glory* from the Old Testament perspective.

2 Corinthians 3:7-10

7 Now if the ministry that brought death, chiseled in letters on stones, came with glory, so that the Israelites were not able to gaze steadily at Moses's face because of its glory, which was set aside,

8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?

9 For if the ministry that brought condemnation had glory, the ministry that brings righteousness overflows with even more glory.

10 In fact, what had been glorious is not glorious now by comparison because of the glory that surpasses it.

5 ▶ Verse 7. Ministry that brings righteousness is a glorious thing! The ministry Moses had under the old covenant **came with glory**. The glory of Moses' ministry was great enough that **the Israelites were not able to gaze steadily at Moses's face because of its glory**. When Moses spoke with the Lord, his face shone (Ex. 34:29-35). Seeing the radiance, the Israelites were afraid. Between the times that Moses went in to speak with the Lord, he would put a veil over his face. Therefore, the ministry did have a distinct glory about it. ◀

6 ▶ Verses 8-10. It stands to reason that **the ministry of the Spirit** under the new and greater covenant would be even **more glorious**. After all, the ministry under the old covenant **brought condemnation**. It could not do otherwise. The law gave commands and set forth standards. It did not renew rebellious hearts and give power to love and obey God from the heart.

On the other hand, **the ministry** of the new covenant **brings righteousness**. How does the ministry of the new covenant bring righteousness? We'll explore two ways.

First, it brings righteousness in the sense of bringing right standing with God. It is the ministry of bringing a powerful message—the good news that powerfully makes sinners right with God when they believe. What is this message? We have all sinned (Rom. 3:23) and, based on our own actions, are all unrighteous. We are unjust in God's sight. If God had

left us to ourselves, we would have remained guilty and under a sentence of eternal condemnation, but God did not leave us to ourselves. “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3). He endured the penalty of sin in our place as our substitute. He took our unrighteousness upon Himself and offers us His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21)! If we believe in Christ for salvation, God declares us righteous based on our faith.

By telling us of the good news of salvation, someone brought righteousness in Christ to us. We bring the righteousness of God into view for people when we tell them the good news about Jesus. Paul used the wonderful image of “ambassadors for Christ” (v. 20). You can be Christ’s ambassador. You can engage in ministering truth, love, and righteousness in Christ to other people. When you share this news, you are engaging in the ministry that brings righteousness.

Second, the ministry of the new covenant brings righteousness by leading to good and righteous works in the lives of believers. The Spirit produces the fruit of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). Indeed, the Spirit works to produce the attitude and actions of love that truly fulfill the whole law (v. 14). Because of the work of the Spirit, believers grow in living righteously for God’s glory.

Aren’t our words and deeds dramatically different than they would be without God’s Spirit working in our lives? Our attitudes are different. Our actions are different because of the Spirit’s influence and power. Jesus said, “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). When we live for Christ, we are engaging in the ministry of bringing righteousness to others. As the Spirit empowers you, let your light shine!

All of this means you and I can make a difference in the lives of others as God works through us to put His righteousness on display. When we bring His righteousness into view for others, God is glorified. As God changes others’ lives through our ministries, God is glorified in their lives.

Therefore, **the ministry that brings righteousness overflows with even more glory** than did the ministry that shone on Moses’ face. The old covenant displayed God’s glory and was rightly awe-inspiring for its time. There is, however, **a glory that surpasses it**. The moon has a distinct glory at times, but when the sun is in full blaze the moon hardly seems bright. ◀

A man drove an older automobile for many years. The console lights and head lights had a certain brightness to

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible

Commentary 6 on page 122 and this page to explain that the ministry of the Spirit is more glorious compared to the law that brought condemnation. Share the two ways the ministry of the new covenant produces righteousness:

1. *It brings righteousness in the sense of bringing right standing with God.*
2. *It brings righteousness by leading to good and righteous works in the lives of believers.*

SAY: “All of this means you and I can make a difference in the lives of others as God works through us to put His righteousness on display. When we bring His righteousness into view for others, God is glorified. As God changes others’ lives through our ministries, God is glorified in their lives.”

DISCUSS: Question #4

(PSG, p. 118): How do we make sure that God gets the glory for our ministry?

(Alternate: What can we learn from the imagery in these verses?)

TRANSITION: “Next we will see how this knowledge gives us hope and leads us to act with boldness.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

2 Corinthians 3:11-12



15 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 3:11-12.

GUIDE: Refer group members to the author’s story on **PSG pages 118-119** of going to evangelism training as a boy and the humorous outcome of his first attempt to share the gospel with a stranger. Share a personal story of being uncomfortable while sharing the gospel, or ask one or two volunteers to recall their own awkward moments in sharing the gospel.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 7** on this page and page 125 to explain the meaning of the phrase “what endures will be even more glorious.”

him. Then the man purchased a new car. He was amazed by how bright the console and head lights were. Compared with the newer lighting, the old was quite dim.

The glory of new covenant ministry is in more than chronological “newness.” The glory is in the power to bring righteousness to people. When we serve God by presenting His righteousness to others in word and deed, the glory shows. When other’s lives are changed, in part, through our ministries, God receives glory. When we reach eternity and see the effects of our ministries, that will be glorious indeed!

2 Corinthians 3:11-12

11 For if what was set aside was glorious, what endures will be even more glorious.

12 Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness.

7 ▶ **Verses 11-12.** Paul acknowledged that even **what was set aside was glorious**. When God revealed Himself to Moses and Israel at Sinai, He did so with fire, smoke, earthquake, thunder, lightning, and the sound of a trumpet (Ex. 19:18; 20:18). Moses’ face shone. All these phenomena testify that there was a glorious quality to the old covenant. The old was, however, set aside for a fuller and enduring revelation of righteousness and salvation. If what was set aside had its glory, **what endures will be even more glorious**. The new covenant endures in the sense that its terms remain in effect. Nothing will supersede the covenant of redemption by grace through faith in Christ. The gospel basis on which we minister is an everlasting gospel. The apostle John testified that the praise of heaven goes to the exalted Lamb, Christ Himself, who was slain to purchase people for God by His blood (Rev. 5:9). The covenant of redemption established by His blood stands firm in heaven. Heaven is populated based on it.

Ministry under the new covenant is glorious because it leads to people experiencing heaven’s glory. Paul had personally encountered the glorified Christ (Acts 9:1-9). He knew that every believer has experienced the light of God’s glory in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). He also knew that

a greater experience of God's glory in Christ is coming for believers. In heaven, we will look directly and fully upon the glorious Lord Jesus. All believers have this hope! The new heaven and new earth will include one glorious feature after another (Rev. 21). Perhaps the most glorious feature of all is described in these simple words: "They will see his face" (22:4). An old gospel song repeats this refrain: "O that will be glory for me, Glory for me, glory for me! When by His grace I shall look on His face, That will be glory, be glory for me."¹ The ministry of the new covenant is glorious because it leads to the glory of heaven.

Ministry under the new covenant is also glorious because it leads to glory for God. If we are saved, we have no reason to boast in ourselves, because salvation is God's work (1 Cor. 1:31; Eph. 2:8-9). Our redemption is based on the work of Christ on the cross (1:7), applied by the Spirit to our hearts, and for the purpose that God's glorious grace will be praised (vv. 6,12,14). Further, the good works we do as believers in Jesus are for God's glory. The glory for our good works goes to God because by His Spirit He has recreated us and enables us to do what pleases Him. As Paul wrote, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (2 Cor. 10:17). ◀

8 ▶ Having **such a hope** gives us **great boldness** for ministry. We have boldness because of our personal eternal hope in Christ. People may resist or even persecute us, but why would we fear them or be deterred? Whom should we fear other than the God who is Lord over eternity (Matt. 10:28)? If God has promised us final and eternal victory in heaven as His people and ministers, we can minister here and now boldly.

We also have boldness because we know that the ministry of bringing Christ's righteousness to others is necessary to their eternal hope. If we don't proclaim Christ, how will they hear and call upon Him and be saved (Rom. 10:13-15)? As ambassadors of Christ we are authorized by and responsible to God, for He is "making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:20).

You and I will spend eternity knowing we were right to proclaim righteousness in Christ during our earthly lives. In other words, we'll know we were right to be Christ's ministers. Let's do now what we will be glad we did when we reach heaven. Heavenly mindedness can yield earthly boldness. The hope we have in Christ for the future emboldens us to minister now. ◀

1. Charles H. Gabriel, "O That Will Be Glory," 1900.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible**

Commentary 8 to give show how this "hope gives us great boldness."

DISCUSS: **Question #5**

(PSG, p. 120): What gives you boldness to serve as a witness for Christ?

(Alternate: What does it look like to serve Christ with boldness in this culture?)

DO: Encourage group members to take a few minutes to complete the activity "**Help Wanted**" on **PSG page 120** and share your responses with the group.

LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:** **God works through us to make a difference.**

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 121)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: We need this reminder that we have a responsibility to all be God's ministers who share His grace with others. It's not the pastor's job alone to minister, God intends to work through us to make a difference in the lives of others.

PRAY: "Father, help us to be sensitive to the leadership of the Spirit to do the work of ministry that will bring honor and glory to You."

LIVE IT OUT

What can you do this week to live out the truth of this passage?

- ▶ **Pray.** As a follower of Jesus, God has given you His Spirit and the competence to minister in His name. Ask God to give you a fresh dose of confidence so you can boldly minister to those around you for the glory of God.
- ▶ **Share.** Ask God to give you an opportunity to put your faith in action. Look for an opportunity this week to share Jesus with someone else. It may be a stranger or someone in your circle of influence that doesn't have a relationship with Christ. God will empower you and equip you for this opportunity and is ever-present in your life. Go in confidence and trust the Lord with the results.
- ▶ **Make serving others a habit.** Like other habits in your life, the habit of serving is developed over the course of time through intentional acts one day at a time. Make a practical list of ways you can serve and minister to others this week.



BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



Egyptian bronze mirror

God's glory is the mighty, weighty presence of God upon our lives in an overpowering, dynamic way. It may be a theophany of physical or spiritual occurrence. It may be visual (as Moses saw the burning bush), vocal (as Paul heard the voice of Jesus on the road to Damascus), or visceral (as Jonah had an internal urge and compulsion to go to Nineveh). But however it comes, it is a mind-changing, heart-moving, powerful encounter with Almighty God.

The Holy Spirit assisted Paul and will assist every believer in reflecting Jesus Christ. Mirrors in those days were made of flat pieces of cast metal or bronze and

had to be continuously polished to properly reflect the desired image. The indwelling Holy Spirit gives vigorous cleaning to every Christian who permits it and desires to reflect Jesus Christ. No sin, no action, or habit need be hidden. God's Holy Spirit polishes the life of every believer that we might reflect Jesus Christ more accurately (2 Cor. 3:18).

Paul honored Christ because he knew Christ's glory was God's glory. If you want to see God, look at Jesus. The glory of Christ is the focal point of the universe. Jesus is the primary object of all creation, adoration, and worship (4:1-6)

From his conversion on the road to Damascus until his death, Paul believed experiencing God's weighty might and presence left one humble and transformed. Giving his life as an expression of the glory of God was Paul's aim and every believer's duty.

The excerpt above is from the article "Glory: The Meaning" (Summer 1999), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

The gospel is declared with boldness so that those yet to believe would come to confess Jesus as Lord.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.



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