

ZOOM

"A CLEAR VICTORY"

2 CORINTHIANS 2:12-3:6

This Week's Core Competency

Giving Away My Life – I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes. Romans 12:1, *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Our approach to the world begins with our five senses. We see, hear, touch, taste and smell our way through life, rarely contemplating how these senses gather information for our brains to process. Light informs sight. Sound waves produce hearing. Texture and temperature stimulate touch. Taste helps us perceive a small portion of the world of chemicals. Smells attract us or repel us. Research and development in the fields of light, sound, textile and cuisine are innumerable. Perhaps the least studied and most mysterious of all our senses is our sense of smell. Osmology, the study of odors, aromas and scent, has few experts or innovators, like in other fields of study.

Scientists today are just now beginning to understand how our brains actually process the information coming through our nostrils. Unlike the perception of light and sound, smell signals move first into our brain's emotional and memory sections before moving on to the rational and categorization regions of the brain where light and sound are first processed. A scent can often stir up

Smell is a potent wizard that transports you across thousands of miles and all the years you have lived.
— Hellen Keller

a strong emotion or remind us of something in our past long before we can identify the actual source of that scent. We can perceive what seems invisible through our noses. Some smells like vanilla or citrus are often associated with pleasure. Other smells like smoke or decay act as warning signals of danger. Often we struggle to determine exactly what a certain smell is.

The ancient world was much less antiseptic and sterile than our own. With no refrigeration and few preservatives, ancient cities would be rife with marketplace odors. Streets crowded with sweaty shoppers, vegetables in various stages of decay, livestock freshly slaughtered, coal embers cooking spicy stews - ancient cities were a complicated menagerie of pungency.

Incense, smoke and perfumes (concentrated and distilled scents) were often used by ancients to mask unpleasant smells and remind people of lofty and transcendent realities. Deities were often petitioned with the assistance of strong aromas for acceptance and mercy. These same smells reminded supplicants that there was another realm outside their own that they perceived could be reached somehow with smoke and incense. The ancient world was perhaps more in touch with their olfactory senses than we are.

In our world of media and technology, smells are getting harder to come by. We understand and appreciate the importance of scents, even if we don't encounter them as often as we used to. Sometimes odors can surprise us. Unseen and unheard, odors and aromas can sneak up on us and pack a punch! They can remind us of pleasant things in our past or they can frighten us with warnings of present or future danger. In an

cont. pg. 2

analogous way, faith, like an aroma, unseen but very present, can have a surprising effect on people who encounter it. Your faith can impact others for Christ. We may not perceive what effect we may have on others, but our faith, hope and love can remind people of what is missing in their own lives. What aroma is your faith producing? Would God be pleased? Would your friends be attracted or repelled by the aroma of your faith?

day **1** ENCOUNTER – read God’s word to put yourself in touch with him.

2 Corinthians 2:12-3:6

12Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, 13I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-bye to them and went on to Macedonia.

14But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. 15For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? 17Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? 2You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. 3You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

4Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. 5Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 6He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

* Circle the pronouns in v.12-13.

* Box the pronouns in v. 14-17.

* Underline the actions of the Lord in vv. 12 and 14.

* Double underline the words "triumphal procession" in v.14.

* Double underline the words "fragrance" and "aroma" in vv. 14-16.

* Put brackets around the words describing "fragrance," "aroma," and "smell" in vv. 14-16.

* Underline the "who" phrases in v. 15.

* Box the phrase "who is equal to such a task" in v. 16.

* Circle the word "letter(s)" in vv. 3:1-6.

* Double underline the word "hearts" in vv. 3:1-6.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. How could Paul not have "peace of mind" in a place where the "Lord had opened a door" for him (2 Cor. 2:12-13)?
2. Describe the irony of the imagery of God always leading "us in triumphal procession in Christ."
3. Who is the "fragrance" (2:15) and "aroma of Christ" (2:15-16) primarily for, God or people? Explain.
4. What is the "smell of death?" What is the "fragrance of life?" How can we be both?
5. What is "peddling" (2. Cor 2:17)? Why is Paul distancing himself from this practice?
6. According to 2 Corinthians 3:2, how did Paul view the Corinthian believers?
7. To what is Paul alluding with the phrases "tablets of stone" and "tablets of human hearts"?
8. Paul is competent and confident in ministry through God, not of "the letter" but of "the Spirit." Describe what Paul means here.
9. How does the imagery of "triumphal procession" (2 Cor 2:14-16) relate to the image of a "letter" (2 Cor 3:2-3)?

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of its message to clarify your understanding of the passage.

Serving God involves developing the skill of contingency planning. Not everything we outline works out like we want. But God is surprised by nothing and ready for everything. Anyone who has ever gone on a mission trip or volunteered for a service detail knows that flexibility is the key to sanity and true ministry. Service to God also requires dependence upon God for His working and His results. Paul's philosophy of ministry is clearly illustrated in 2 Cor. 2:12-3:6. Paul's approach to ministry can be a model for us as we minister, parent, lead and serve.

Paul had mastered the skill of working on God's plan and shelving his own. Repeatedly in 2 Corinthians 2:12-3:6, Paul rehearsed how God was actively moving and working, while he was faithfully following. God even used the internal discomfort of Paul to move him along to another region for more ministry and fellowship (2 Cor. 2:12-13). Don't be surprised if God uses your lack of peace as much as he gives you peace in a given situation. God can use both our stirrings and our rest to move us to His plan and mark.

Describing his awesome assignment as a man "sent from God" (2 Cor. 2:17), Paul used three powerful images to convey the wonder and beauty of the work he was privileged to fulfill. So powerful is the work displayed by these word pictures that Paul exclaimed, "who is equal to such a task?" (2 Cor. 2:16). Two of these illustrations came from the life and culture of Rome. The final analogy came from the rich imagery of the Old Testament. All three images served as powerful displays of Paul's heart and approach to ministry. We would do well to be likeminded as we serve God and others. Our co-workers, friends and families would be greatly blessed if we "zoomed" in on such an approach in our own agendas and endeavors.

The first image that Paul presented was that of the Roman Triumph. In 2 Cor. 2:14, Paul stated that Christ "leads us in triumphal procession." For this we can be thankful. "Triumphal procession" is a singular Greek word here used only here in the New Testament (a slightly different form is found in Colossians 2:15). This word carries all the pomp and circumstance of a Roman conqueror's victory parade. This colorful expression "was used to denote the Roman 'triumph,' celebrated by victorious generals on their return from their campaigns. The general entered the city in a chariot,

preceded by the captives and spoils taken in war, and followed by his troops, and proceeded in state along the sacred way to the Capitol, where he offered sacrifices in the temple of Jupiter. He was accompanied in his chariot by his young children, and sometimes by confidential friends, while behind him stood a slave, holding over his head a jewelled crown. The body of the infantry brought up the rear, their spears adorned with laurel. They shouted 'triumph!' and sang hymns in praise of the gods or of their leader. Paul describes himself and the other subjects of Christ's grace under the figure of this triumphal pomp, in which they are led as trophies of the Redeemer's conquest" (Marvin R. Vincent, Vincent's Word Studies, v. 14, Biblehub.com). Paul was claiming that Christ was triumphant and that ironically, he had made Paul his conquered, captive, his forever slave. In this visual image and understanding, Paul did not lead the parade. Christ had conquered him and was leading him as a captive trophy of his grace. Life, ministry, family and career work differently if Christ is in the lead and we are his conquered captives.

The second image Paul used to describe his ministry was that of the aromas that flooded the streets of Rome during a "triumphal procession." Along the streets of Rome, the parade route was navigated past altars to many different Roman gods. Altars would be ablaze with sacrifices and incense to celebrate the grand occasion. Many of those marching in the triumph would be waving torches or swinging diffusers of smoke. Everywhere the scent of victory and conquest would be in the air. Paul used this pungent imagery to convey that he was on the altar of sacrifice and his life was a sweet smelling offering to God, the very aroma of Christ offered to the one true God (2 Cor. 2:15). Paul expanded on this analogy by stating that to those around him, this fragrance of Christ was fragrance of life to some and the stench of death to others. Paul saw his entire life a sacrifice that would draw people to God or that would sharpen people's resolve to move away from Christ. Paul found this opportunity to be a great honor while also being an overwhelming with responsibility. Our lives carry the aroma of Christ. We should not shy away from letting the presence of Christ fill our lives and touch the lives of those around us.

Paul's final image was not so much about what God did with him, but what God had produced through

him. In 2 Cor. 3:1-6, Paul described the Corinthians as the result of all his sufferings. Paul did not need external validations for his ministry (2 Cor. 3:1). Instead he had living proof in the Corinthians themselves. Paul described the Corinthians as the result of his ministry; they were his "letter of recommendation" written by God not with the ink of humans but by the Spirit of God. This was a very personal image of affection. Paul stated that the Corinthians were written on his own heart (2 Cor. 3:2). Paul heightened the importance of the letter imagery by connecting it to the Old Testament concept of tablets. Later in the chapter Paul went on to contrast the glory of the law which was written on tablets of stone with the glory of the work of the Spirit in their midst (2 Cor. 3:7-8). Paul was saying that the faith of the Corinthians, written on their hearts, was more glorious than the law written on tablets like the Old Testament Law. Our reward is the lives that are changed as a result of our love, service and leadership. The fruit or "letters" of our lives is seen in the lives of those we influence.

Paul was confident and competent (2 Cor. 3:4-6) not because of his own skills or talents, but because of God's work through him. This work was bringing a superior, new covenant to the Corinthians. This superior covenant was from the Spirit who brings life and not from the letter or law which brings death. Paul did not need to be in charge (2 Cor. 2:14). He was not serving himself as others did (2 Cor. 2:17). He did not need his audience's approval (2 Cor. 3:1). Paul was a competent captive; his life was a fragrant sacrifice spread by the Spirit of Life. The proof of such an exemplary life was found in those who came to faith through his ministry.

How do you approach service, ministry and life? With Type-A adrenaline and hyper planning? Or do you work with open hands, and an open heart? Are you willing to be led, spread, and diffused? Do you need recognition and applause from others or is God enough? Do you enjoy seeing others blessed, with God getting the glory and others getting the benefits? Are you "conquered" or are you still trying to "conquer"?

The Message of the Passage

Follow Christ, so captivated by Him that others cannot escape your passionate witness. Serve confidently in God's Spirit, allowing Him to produce masterpieces of new life through you.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the three "living questions" below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following living questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

v.14 **triumphal procession** "to present any one in triumph; so that the accusative is never the triumphing subject, but always the object of the triumph, ... as a 'triumpher' celebrates his victories. In this figurative aspect Paul considers himself and his like as conquered by God through their conversion to Christ. And after this victory of God his triumph now consists in all that those conquered by their conversion effect as servants and instruments of God for the Messianic kingdom in the world; it is by the results of apostolic activity that God continually, as if in triumph, shows Himself to the eyes of all as the victor, to whom His conquered are subject and serviceable. For the concrete instance before us, this perpetual triumph of God exhibited itself in the happy result which He wrought in Corinth through the apostle's letter" (*Meyer's NT Commentary, 2 Corinthians, 2:14, Biblehub.com*).

vv. 14 & 16 **fragrance** "The term in verse 14 for fragrance (*osme*) is used of both pleasant and unpleasant odors... To the former group the preaching of the gospel is, literally, 'an odor [*osme*] from life to life.' To the latter it is 'an odor [*osme*] from death to death.' ... Most interpreters understand 'to' as pointing to the end result. Acceptance of the gospel ultimately results in life, while rejection concludes in death...It is the progressive element that is primary. The idea is that the preaching of the gospel causes either death or life to become increasingly more rooted in the hearer. To those who are on the road to destruction the gospel is like a noxious fume that relentlessly carries the unwary to their death. To those on the road to salvation it is comparable to a compelling fragrance that invigorates all who come in contact with it" (L. L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians, Intervarsity Press New Testament Commentary, 83-84*).

v.15 **aroma** "Paul is not the source of the aroma. It comes from his message about the cross of Christ.... In ancient religious ceremonies, fragrances conveyed the ethereal yet keenly sensed presence of the deity. During religious festivals when the image and accoutrements associated with the deity were carted through cities in processions, cult personnel would spread incense or other aromatic substances along the way to announce the approach of the deity... as 'the pleasing fragrance of Christ' Paul depicts himself as the harbinger of the deity's presence because it is through him that 'the knowledge of God' is being made known" (David Garland, *2 Corinthians, New American Commentary, 148*).

v.17 **peddle** "Means a retail-dealer, a hawker or a pedlar and thus indicates somebody who is intent on dispensing his goods for the sake of gain. In general the term carried a pejorative implication. The verb occurs only here in biblical Greek ... 'making merchandise of the of the word of God' is much nearer to the graphic original" (Philip E. Hughes, *2 Corinthians, New International Commentary of the New Testament, 83*).

vv. 3:5-6 **competent** Same word found in 2 Cor. 2:16 - "equal" or "worthy" (*ikanos*) for the task of spreading the gospel. Some say that Paul answers the question of 2 Cor. 2:16 with 2 Cor. 3:5-6. "The sentence doubles back on itself. Paul means, 'We do not consider that any part of our sufficiency arises within ourselves. Nothing stands to our own credit.' The counterpart of this follows: 'rather our sufficiency comes from God.' That is, ability to bear the burden of responsibility imposed by the apostolic mission and to execute the mission itself, comes from God. This is an intelligible, self-contained thought. It may be however that it was given shape by the use in the LXX of the 'Sufficient One' (o *ikanos*) as a name or title for God, El Shaddai" (C.K. Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians, Harper's New Testament Commentary, 111*).

v. 3:6 **letter/Spirit** "The letter kills in that it causes us to sin knowingly; but the Spirit gives life in that it causes us to fulfill what is commanded. Let the Spirit be added therefore to the letter, and the letter to which the Spirit gives life no longer kills. Accordingly, we ought not to regard the letter as condemned or reprehensible. The letter alone, forbidding evil and commanding good, kills the soul of those who transgress it. But the Spirit, who through the grace of the new covenant is in the hearts of believers, now gives life to their souls by justifying them, and hereafter will also cause their bodies together with their souls to live everlasting" (Hughes, 102).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Dads and father figures, today we celebrate you! Thank you for your sacrifice, love, leadership and provision for our families. Your words are so important to young hearts and minds. Some things to remember to say: (1) I love you. Period. No matter what. Unconditionally. And nothing will ever change that. (2) I believe in you. You can do it. Anything is possible. You are a winner. (3) Love God. Love your spouse. (4) I am with you. And even when you can't see me, you can be assured I'm thinking of you. (5) I am proud of you. You are beautiful. You are amazing. You have great purpose in this world. (6) Respect yourself. Respect others. Respect your Mom. (7) Your character is always more significant than your reputation. Never forget who you are and that you first belong to God. Who you are in secret is just as important as who you are in public, because God sees both. (8) I am sorry. Would you please forgive me? I forgive you. (9) I am praying for you. You have my blessing in all that God calls you to do in this life. (10) Work hard. Save some. Spend a little. Give a lot. (11) Don't take yourself too seriously. Laugh. Have fun in life. Every day is an adventure. (12) Be brave. Be strong. But always remember that it's OK to be afraid. And it's OK to cry. (13) Pray. A lot.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read 2Cor. 2:12-3:6

1. What does the text say about the way we "smell" as believers?
2. Does Paul expect payment for preaching the gospel?
3. Where does he say his competency comes from?

What Do You Think

Paul says that when we live for Jesus we give off the "aroma of Christ". How can you make sure you are accurately portraying Jesus at home, in your neighborhood, with your friends.

What R U Going To Do

Who is that special man in our life who has shown you how beautiful Jesus is - your dad, granddad, a family friend, a teacher? Draw him a picture of something that smells great and say thank you today!

Core Comp

Giving Away my Life - I give away my life to help with God's work.

Memory Verse

2 Corinthians 4:17 - For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade _____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. He and his wife Ruth have been married forty-eight years and have one son, Zach.

Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.

Eric Wright (Th.M. Dallas Theological Seminary) guest author.



8001 Anderson Blvd.
Ft. Worth, TX 76120
1-866-PANTEGO
Fax 817-275-6403
www.pantego.org

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.