

Life Group Leaders Guide: Pono Church 2 - 2 Corinthians 1-2

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker

Worship Song Suggestions

- "Goodness of God" - Bethel Music
- "The Blessing" - Kari Jobe
- "Yes and Amen" - Housefires
- "Graves Into Gardens" - Elevation Worship

Icebreaker Question: Share a time when you tried to fix something using the "wrong tool" or an overcomplicated solution, when a simple solution would have worked better.

Key Scripture Passages

- 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 (God of all comfort)
 - 2 Corinthians 1:18-22 (Yes and Amen in Christ)
 - 2 Corinthians 2:14-17 (Aroma of Christ)
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Main Takeaways

1. The Gospel is the "Peanut Butter" Solution

Paul addresses every dysfunction in the Corinthian church by pointing back to the death and resurrection of Jesus. We don't need complicated spiritual formulas—we need to return to the simple truth of the Gospel.

2. God Comforts Us IN Our Troubles, Not Just OUT of Them

God doesn't shield us from suffering, but allows suffering to shield us in Him. The comfort we receive in our trials equips us to comfort others.

3. All God's Promises Are "Yes and Amen" in Christ

Everything God has promised has been confirmed and made available through Jesus. Our salvation package includes forgiveness, reconciliation, adoption, eternal life, the Holy Spirit, transformation, and much more.

4. Your Outlook is Determined by Your Uplook

How we see our circumstances depends on how we see Christ. Walking by faith means seeing God's promises as closer than they appear to our natural eyes.

5. Are You Self-Appointed or Christ-Anointed?

True ministry, leadership, and service flow from God's anointing, not our own strength or qualifications.

Discussion Questions

Section 1: Comfort in Suffering (2 Cor 1:3-7)

1. Pastor Mark shared testimonies of people having hard conversations during the Ho'oponopono series. Have you recently taken a step of faith in reconciliation? What happened?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. How does Paul's understanding of comfort differ from the world's understanding? What does it mean that God comforts us "in" our troubles rather than just getting us "out" of them?
3. The sermon mentioned an auntie who went through a divorce and now leads a divorce care ministry. How have you seen God use your past pain to comfort others? If you haven't experienced this yet, what past struggle might God want to redeem for ministry?
4. What's the difference between escaping trouble and finding God's comfort in the midst of trouble? Share an example from your life.

Section 2: Yes and Amen in Christ (2 Cor 1:18-22)

5. Pastor Mark listed many aspects of our "salvation package" (forgiveness, reconciliation, adoption, eternal life, Holy Spirit, etc.). Which of these do you struggle most to believe is fully yours right now?
6. The "telescope illustration" showed how faith changes our perspective—making God's promises appear closer than they seem to our natural eyes. What promise of God seems far away to you right now? How might God be asking you to "flip the telescope"?
7. Read 2 Corinthians 1:20. What does it mean practically that all God's promises are "yes and amen" in Christ? How should this change the way we pray or approach challenges?

Section 3: Self-Appointed vs. Christ-Anointed (2 Cor 1:21-22)

8. The Corinthian church was influenced by "super apostles" who were self-appointed rather than Christ-anointed. What are modern examples of self-appointed leadership or ministry? How can we discern the difference?
9. In what areas of your life (work, family, church, friendships) might you be operating in your own strength rather than Christ's anointing? How can you tell the difference?

10. The story of Martin Luther showed how his ministry changed when he remembered, "He is alive." What would change in your daily life if you started each day remembering Christ's resurrection power is available to you?

Section 4: The Aroma of Christ (2 Cor 2:14-17)

11. Read 2 Corinthians 2:15-16. Paul says we're the "aroma of Christ"—smelling like life to some and death to others. Have you experienced people reacting negatively to your faith? How did you respond?
12. Pastor Mark shared a humorous yet profound insight: the dead rat smell became a "glory smell" because it meant the rat was gone. How does this change your perspective on the "stink" of trials in your life?
13. "When God calls, the smell sprawls." Where is God calling you to carry the aroma of Christ? What would bold obedience look like in that place this week?
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Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge: Pick ONE

Option 1: Comfort Others

- Identify someone going through a trial similar to one you've experienced
- Reach out and share how God comforted you in your suffering
- Offer to pray with them or walk alongside them

Option 2: Flip Your Telescope

- Write down one area where God's promises seem far away
- Find 3-5 scripture promises related to that area
- Each morning this week, read those promises and pray, "Jesus, help me see this as close, not far"

Option 3: Check Your Source

- Identify one role or responsibility where you've been operating in your own strength
- Write "He is alive" somewhere you'll see it daily (mirror, phone background, doorway)
- Each time you see it, pause and ask, "Am I self-appointed or Christ-anointed in this moment?"

Option 4: Spread the Aroma

- Pray daily: "God, where do you want me to carry your aroma this week?"
 - Take one small step of obedience to be Christ's presence somewhere specific
 - Share with the group next week what happened
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Closing Reflection Questions

1. What is one "rat in the kitchen" (dysfunction or false belief) that God is exposing in your life through this sermon?
2. What's one simple, gospel-centered truth you need to return to this week?
3. What would "mustard seed faith"—small, daily obedience—look like for you in this season?

Prayer Focus

- Pray for those in the group currently experiencing suffering or trials
 - Ask God to help each person see His promises as "yes and amen" in their current circumstances
 - Pray for boldness to be the aroma of Christ in difficult or dark places
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal where people are operating in their own strength vs. Christ's anointing.
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For Next Week

Read 2 Corinthians 3-4 in preparation for the next message in the Pono Church 2 series.

Additional Discussion Questions to Choose From

How does the idea that God comforts us in our troubles rather than removing us from them challenge your understanding of what it means to experience God's presence in difficult times?

Pastor Mark shared that many people in the congregation had difficult conversations about reconciliation recently. What barriers prevent you from initiating a hard conversation that could restore a broken relationship?

The sermon suggests that walking by faith means seeing God's promises as closer than they appear through our natural sight. In what area of your life do you need to flip the telescope and see God's provision as near rather than far away?

Paul writes that we are a pleasing aroma of Christ to some and a smell of death to others. How does this reality affect the way you approach sharing your faith or living out your values in secular spaces?

The message distinguishes between being self-appointed versus Christ-anointed in our roles and responsibilities. How can you tell the difference in your own life between operating in your own strength versus God's anointing?

If your salvation package includes forgiveness of past, present, and future sins, how should that truth change the way you process guilt and shame when you fail?

The Corinthian church was influenced by super apostles who valued worldly power and eloquence over the weakness of the cross. What cultural definitions of power or success are most tempting for the church today to adopt?

Pastor Mark said that God allows suffering to shield us in Him rather than to shield us from it. How does this perspective change the way you pray for yourself or others who are going through trials?

The sermon emphasizes that the gospel is the simple but effective rat trap for every dysfunction in the church. What complex solutions are you tempted to pursue instead of returning to the basics of Christ's death and resurrection?

Considering that your outlook is determined by your outlook, what practical rhythms or disciplines help you maintain a Christ-centered perspective when circumstances feel overwhelming?

5-Day Devotional: Finding Comfort in Suffering

Day 1: The God of All Comfort

Reading: 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Devotional:

God doesn't promise to remove us from our troubles, but to comfort us within them. This is a radical shift in perspective. We often pray for escape, but God invites us to experience His presence in the fire. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we can walk through flames without being burned when the fourth presence joins us.

The beautiful mystery is this: your suffering has purpose. God comforts you not just for your own sake, but so you can comfort others. Your pain becomes your ministry. The divorce you survived, the anxiety you've battled, the loss you've endured—these aren't wasted experiences. They're preparation for the comfort ministry God is calling you toward.

Reflection: What suffering have you experienced that God could use to comfort someone else? Who needs the comfort you've already received?

Day 2: Every Promise Is Yes in Christ

Reading: 2 Corinthians 1:18-22

Devotional:

Salvation isn't just a ticket to heaven—it's a comprehensive package of promises already delivered. Forgiveness of all sins. Reconciliation with God. Adoption into His family. The indwelling Holy Spirit. Eternal life. A guaranteed resurrection. An inheritance reserved in heaven.

These aren't distant hopes; they're present realities confirmed in Christ Jesus. Everything God promised has found its "yes and amen" in the finished work of the cross. You don't need to earn these gifts or wait for them—they're already yours by faith.

The question isn't whether God will deliver on His promises. He already has. The question is: will you flip the telescope around and see these promises as closer than you think? What feels impossibly far away is actually right here, magnified by faith.

Reflection: Which promise from your salvation package do you most need to embrace today? How would your life change if you truly believed it was already yours?

Day 3: Christ-Anointed, Not Self-Appointed

Reading: 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Matthew 7:21-23

Devotional:

There's a crucial difference between operating in your own strength and being empowered by God's Spirit. You can do all the right things—lead your family, serve in ministry, even perform miracles—with a self-righteous heart disconnected from the Source.

The super apostles in Corinth had impressive resumes, powerful speaking abilities, and letters of recommendation. But they were self-appointed, drawing from their own might rather than Christ's anointing. Jesus warns that some who do mighty works in His name will hear, "I never knew you."

The key question for every role you fill: Are you the source, or is Christ? Are you parenting, leading, working, and loving from your own giftedness, or has the Holy Spirit anointed you for these tasks? The difference determines whether you'll burn out or overflow.

Reflection: In what areas of life are you operating in your own strength rather than Christ's anointing? What would it look like to surrender that role to His empowerment?

Day 4: Your Outlook Depends on Your Outlook

Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Hebrews 12:2

Devotional:

Martin Luther preached all the right doctrines, but looked drained and angry, burdened by persecution. Someone told him, "The gospel you're preaching convinces me that the God you believe in is still dead." Luther realized he was disconnected from the resurrection power he proclaimed.

He wrote above his doorway: "He is alive." That simple reminder transformed everything. When your outlook is fixed on the living Christ, your outlook on circumstances changes completely.

Walking by faith means giving up reliance on physical sight. It means flipping the telescope so God's promises appear magnified and close, not distant and small. Healing isn't far away. Restoration isn't impossible. Deliverance isn't delayed. When Christ is your focus, everything shifts. The dead rat smell becomes the sweet aroma of victory—proof that the enemy is defeated.

Reflection: What "doorway" in your life needs the reminder "He is alive"? How would fixing your eyes on the risen Christ change your perspective today?

Day 5: The Aroma of Christ

Reading: 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

Devotional:

You are meant to smell like Jesus. Your life—every breath, conversation, ambition, and act of obedience—is a living sacrifice, a sweet aroma rising to God. To fellow believers, you smell beautiful, radiating the love and compassion of Christ. To the perishing, you might smell like death because the gospel confronts darkness.

But here's the mystery: what smells like death to the world is actually the fragrance of life. The dead rat in the shed stank of decay, but it also proved the rat was gone. Your suffering, when surrendered to Christ, becomes a beautiful smell—proof that sin and death have been defeated.

When God calls you to go somewhere, the smell sprawls. You carry the presence of Christ into dark places, and they can't help but notice. You're captives in Christ's triumphal procession, marching in His victory parade with sincerity, sent by God for His glory alone.

Reflection: Where is God calling you to spread the aroma of Christ? What small act of obedience could move a mountain stone by stone through everyday faithfulness?