

Experiencing the Best Possible Life

(2 Corinthians 7:11-16)

Jesus died and rose again so you and I could have not only eternal life, but also the best possible life here on earth (Jn 10:10). In this passage, Paul praises the Corinthians for cleaning up their acts and getting back to living the best possible life. Don't let your pride keep you from doing the same. How can you experience the best possible life? First ...

Start with true repentance (7:11-13).

The first step in experiencing the best possible life is to repent of all sin. What does Paul say to the people in Athens in Acts 17:30?

This means whatever the consequences of failing to respond to God in the past, it is nothing compared to ignoring the death and resurrection of Christ. **Experiencing the best possible life** begins with repentance. In this passage, Paul lists seven results of *godly grief*, or **true repentance**. If you truly repent, these seven things will show up in your life.

1. **Earnestness** (7:11a). *For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you.* The word *earnestness*, or "carefulness," means "serious intention" or "determined." If you truly repent, you will be serious, or earnest, about making changes in your life.
2. **Eagerness** (7:11b). *But also what eagerness to clear yourselves.* The word translated *clear yourselves* (APOLOGIA, apo-lo-gee' -ah) is the word from which we get our word "apologetics," which means "a speech made in defense." It refers to the defense, or proof, of Christianity. A person who truly repents will be eager to make amends and clear his or her name. If we truly repent of sin, we will want to remove the stigma of our sin and prove ourselves true believers.
3. **Indignation** (7:11c). This means being outraged and repulsed about our former sins. How does Romans 6:21a describe this kind of indignation?
4. **Fear** (7:11d). This means alarm or apprehension over our past sin. It is a reverential fear of realizing God would have harshly judged our sin had we not repented. We are alarmed to think what would have happened to us for all eternity had we died before coming to Christ. Repentance causes bold, blatant sinners to become deeply distressed about their past sin.
5. **Longing, or "vehement desire"** (7:11e). This is a *longing* to be right and stay right with God and others. It is a deep desire to restore broken relationships caused by sin.
6. **Zeal** (7:11f). This refers to a passion to live for what is holy and right. It is an intense yearning to live a pure life. It also includes deep indignation for what is sinful.

7. **Punishment, or "revenge"** (7:11g). This is a strong desire to accept the consequences of our sins. When we truly repent, we don't play the blame game, claiming to be victims of circumstance. **True repentance** means we take full responsibility for our sin. It includes sincerely praying what prayer in Psalm 51:3?

David knew part of the consequences for his sin would be living the rest of his life with the memory of what he had done. He was willing to accept that. **True repentance** always accepts the consequences for sin.

Paul concludes this list, *At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter* (7:11h). This means the Corinthians have done everything necessary to make things right. That's what people who truly repent do. All seven of these aspects are part of **true repentance**.

Paul explains, *So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong* (7:12a-c). Paul's first letter was not to condemn the person who wronged him or to get personal revenge (2:1 & 5). What was the purpose of his first letter (7:12d)?

Paul wants the Corinthians to look at their behavior *in the sight of God*, or from God's perspective. When you look at your life from God's perspective, you see it in a whole new light.

Because of what Paul and his associates have seen happening in the lives of the Corinthians, they *are comforted* (7:13a).

Paul continues, *And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all* (7:13b-d). Paul is delighted to see how happy Titus is because he too has suffered for the sake of the Gospel. Paul is a true friend to Titus. We discover what true friends do in Romans 12:15. What is it?

On the other hand, your enemies will rejoice when you weep and weep when you rejoice.

To experience the best possible life, **start with true repentance** and ...

Stay obedient (7:14-16).

Because of their godly sorrow, the Corinthians were obedient to Paul's inspired commands. Paul had great confidence this would be the case. Therefore, what does he write (7:14a)?

Paul was confident they were genuine believers and would therefore repent and be obedient. He had apparently boasted to Titus before sending him to Corinth that the Corinthians would respond correctly to his first letter. Paul was a respected apostle who should be able to know the difference between true believers and false ones. So, his reputation was at stake and the Corinthians did not put him to *shame*.

Therefore, Paul writes, *But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true* (7:14b). Paul's spiritual discernment was vindicated when the Corinthians repented.

Paul is a great example of the power of believing in people, even when they fall into sin. He practiced what he wrote in Galatians 6:1 ... *if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness*.

Next, Paul expresses Titus' respect and love for the Corinthians. What does he write in 7:15a-b?

Titus, who apparently had real doubts about the genuineness of the Corinthian believers, now has great affection for them. The Corinthians had received Titus *with fear and trembling* (7:15c). The phrase *fear and trembling* describes the proper response of true repentance and a desire to be obedient. It is an attitude of awe, reverence, and submission to God's Word.

Our need for repentance is sometimes revealed through reading the Bible, listening to a sermon, participating in a Bible study, or hearing the words of a loving, Christian friend. Other times, we are brought to repentance through what I call a "spiritual impression," in which God speaks directly to your heart and convicts you of sin.

As a result of their repentance, Paul writes, *I rejoice, because I have perfect confidence in you* (7:16). He rejoices because now he is sure of their faith and has *confidence*, they will **stay obedient** to God's Word. At first, Paul was broken-hearted over the behavior of the Corinthians he had won to Christ and disciplined. But now, notice how many times he uses the words *joy or rejoice* in chapter seven: six times in five verses (4, 7, 9, 13, & 16). This is an example of what promise found in Psalm 126:5?

Your past life may bring tears, but you can now begin to experience the best possible life, resulting in *shouts of joy*.