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*Dear Friends,*

*I want for you to be blessed this month as I share the apostle Paul's chat with his Corinthian friends as found in 2Corinthians 11:16 – 13:14. We read from "The Message".*

***2Co 11:16 Let me come back to where I started—and don't hold it against me if I continue to sound a little foolish. Or if you'd rather, just accept that I am a fool and let me rant on a little.***

***2Co 11:17 I didn't learn this kind of talk from Christ.***

***2Co 11:18 Oh, no, it's a bad habit I picked up from the three-ring preachers that are so popular these days.***

***2Co 11:19 Since you sit there in the judgment seat observing all these shenanigans, you can afford to humor an occasional fool who happens along.***

***2Co 11:20 You have such admirable tolerance for impostors who rob your freedom, rip you off, steal you blind, put you down—even slap your face!***

***2Co 11:21 I shouldn't admit it to you, but our stomachs aren't strong enough to tolerate that kind of stuff. Since you admire the egomaniacs of the pulpit so much (remember, this is your old friend, the fool, talking), let me try my hand at it.***

***2Co 11:22 Do they brag of being Hebrews, Israelites, the pure race of Abraham? I'm their match.***

***2Co 11:23 Are they servants of Christ? I can go them one better. (I can't believe I'm saying these things. It's crazy to talk this way! But I started, and I'm going to finish.) I've worked much harder, been jailed more often, beaten up more times than I can count, and at death's door time after time.***

2Co 11:24 *I've been flogged five times with the Jews' thirty-nine lashes,*

2Co 11:25 *beaten by Roman rods three times, pummeled with rocks once. I've been shipwrecked three times, and immersed in the open sea for a night and a day.*

2Co 11:26 *In hard traveling year in and year out, I've had to ford rivers, fend off robbers, struggle with friends, struggle with foes. I've been at risk in the city, at risk in the country, endangered by desert sun and sea storm, and **betrayed by those I thought were my brothers.***

2Co 11:27 *I've known drudgery and hard labor, many a long and lonely night without sleep, many a missed meal, blasted by the cold, naked to the weather.*

2Co 11:28 *And that's not the half of it, **when you throw in the daily pressures and anxieties of all the churches.***

2Co 11:29 *When someone gets to the end of his rope, I feel the desperation in my bones. When someone is duped into sin, an angry fire burns in my gut.*

2Co 11:30 *If I have to "**brag**" about myself, **I'll brag about the humiliations that make me like Jesus.***

2Co 11:31 *The eternal and blessed God and Father of our Master **Jesus knows I'm not lying.***

2Co 11:32 *Remember the time I was in Damascus and the governor of King Aretas posted guards at the city gates to arrest me?*

2Co 11:33 *I crawled through a window in the wall, was let down in a basket, and had to run for my life.*

2Co 12:1 *You've forced me to talk this way, and I do it against my better judgment. But now that we're at it, I may as well bring up the matter of visions and revelations that God gave me.*

2Co 12:2 *For instance, I know a man who, fourteen years ago, was seized by Christ and swept in ecstasy to the heights of heaven. I really don't know if this took place in the body or out of it; **only God knows.***

2Co 12:3 *I also know that this man was hijacked into paradise--again, whether in or out of the body, I don't know; God knows. There he heard the unspeakable spoken, but was forbidden to tell what he heard.*

2Co 12:4 *(SEE 12:3)*

2Co 12:5 *This is the man I want to talk about. But about myself, I'm not saying another word apart from the humiliations.*

2Co 12:6 *If I had a mind to brag a little, I could probably do it without looking ridiculous, and I'd still be speaking plain truth all the way. But I'll spare you. I don't want anyone imagining me as anything other than the fool you'd encounter if you saw me on the street or heard me talk.*

2Co 12:7 *Because of the extravagance of those revelations, and so I wouldn't get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan's angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty!*

2Co 12:8 *At first I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that,*

2Co 12:9 *and then he told me, **My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.** Once I heard that, I was glad to let it*

*happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness.*

*2Co 12:10 Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size--abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. **I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.***

*2Co 12:11 Well, now I've done it! I've made a complete fool of myself by going on like this. But it's not all my fault; you put me up to it. **You should have been doing this for me, sticking up for me and commending me instead of making me do it for myself.** You know from personal experience that even if I'm a nobody, a nothing, I wasn't second-rate compared to those big-shot apostles you're so taken with.*

*2Co 12:12 All the signs that mark a true apostle were in evidence while I was with you through both good times and bad: signs of portent, signs of wonder, signs of power.*

*2Co 12:13 Did you get less of me or of God than any of the other churches? The only thing you got less of was less responsibility for my upkeep. Well, I'm sorry. Forgive me for depriving you.*

*2Co 12:14 Everything is in readiness now for this, my third visit to you. But don't worry about it; you won't have to put yourselves out. I'll be no more of a bother to you this time than on the other visits. **I have no interest in what you have--only in you.** Children shouldn't have to look out for their parents; parents look out for the children.*

*2Co 12:15 I'd be most happy to empty my pockets, even mortgage my life, for your good. So how does it happen that the more I love you, the less I'm loved?*

*2Co 12:16 And why is it that I keep coming across these whiffs of gossip about how my self-support was a front behind which I worked an elaborate scam? Where's the evidence?*

*2Co 12:17 Did I cheat or trick you through anyone I sent?*

*2Co 12:18 I asked Titus to visit, and sent some brothers along. Did they swindle you out of anything? And haven't we always been just as aboveboard, just as honest?*

*2Co 12:19 I hope you don't think that all along we've been making our defense before you, the jury. **You're not the jury; God is the jury--God revealed in Christ--and we make our case before him.** And we've gone to all the trouble of supporting ourselves so that we won't be in the way or get in the way of your growing up.*

*2Co 12:20 I do admit that I have fears that when I come you'll disappoint me and I'll disappoint you, and in frustration with each other everything will fall to pieces--quarrels, jealousy, flaring tempers, taking sides, angry words, vicious rumors, swelled heads, and general bedlam.*

*2Co 12:21 I don't look forward to a second humiliation by God among you, compounded by hot tears over that crowd that keeps sinning over and over in the same old ways, who refuse to turn away from the pigsty of evil, sexual disorder, and indecency in which they wallow.*

*2Co 13:1 Well, this is my third visit coming up. Remember the Scripture that says, "A matter becomes clear after two or three witnesses give evidence"?*

*2Co 13:2 On my second visit I warned that bunch that keeps sinning over and over in the same old ways that when I came back I wouldn't go easy on them. Now,*

preparing for the third, I'm saying it again from a distance. **If you haven't changed your ways by the time I get there, look out.**

2Co 13:3 You who have been demanding proof that Christ speaks through me will get more than you bargained for. You'll get the full force of Christ, don't think you won't.

2Co 13:4 He was sheer weakness and humiliation when he was killed on the Cross, **but oh, he's alive now—in the mighty power of God!** We weren't much to look at, either, when we were humiliated among you, **but when we deal with you this next time, we'll be alive in Christ, strengthened by God.**

2Co 13:5 **Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith.** Don't drift along taking everything for granted. **Give yourselves regular check-ups. You need first hand evidence, not mere hearsay that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it.**

2Co 13:6 I hope the test won't show that we have failed.

2Co 13:7 But if it comes to that, we'd rather the test showed our failure than yours.

2Co 13:8 **We're rooting for the truth to win out in you.**

2Co 13:9 We couldn't possibly do otherwise. **We don't just put up with our limitations; we celebrate them, and then go on to celebrate every strength, every triumph of the truth in you. We pray hard that it will all come together in your lives.**

2Co 13:10 I'm writing this to you now so that when I come I won't have to say another word on the subject. **The authority the Master gave me is for putting people together, not taking them apart.** I want to get on with it, and not have to spend time on reprimands.

2Co 13:11 **And that's about it, friends. Be cheerful. Keep things in good repair. Keep your spirits up. Think in harmony. Be agreeable. Do all that, and the God of love and peace will be with you for sure.**

2Co 13:12 Greet one another with a holy embrace.

2Co 13:13 All the brothers and sisters here say hello.

2Co 13:14 The amazing grace of the Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you.

Dear friends and fellow believers, please ponder this message. Re-read it if necessary, and seriously ponder its relevance in your heart, and be blessed as you allow the Holy Spirit to guide you into ALL truth. Our July letter will touch on some of these same topics, as we tease them out a little. Be blessed!

Till next month

From my house to yours

Blessings of the abundant kind!

Leila Nord.

