

Teaching the other two thirds

Illustrations.



Cori and Ian (a “background” story for 2 Corinthians 1:3-11)

The idea of this story is to set up the sorts of issues that Paul is writing into. Cori and Ian are two members of the church in Corinth. Cori is a Christian who is having a difficult time, and Ian represents the “super apostles”, the teachers in Corinth who promised ease and victory in the Christian life. The idea is that we can come back to this story when we discuss application. How would the part of Paul's letter that we're looking at this week help them both?

Cori was really pleased that it was Sunday morning at last. She'd just finished her first week in her new class at school, and it hadn't been good. On Wednesday morning – the first day of school – she'd tried to hide in bed and pretend she was sick. All of her best friends were in the other class, and she was scared that no one would like her.

Her mum got out the thermometer and put it in her mouth. While she was holding it with her tongue, Cori said a quick prayer – God, please can I not go to school today. But then the thermometer beeped and her mum checked the number. Cori was completely healthy, and before she knew it, she had eaten her coco pops, brushed her teeth and was walking into her new class.

Her new teacher, Mr Brown, was nice, and she liked the maths lesson. But her heart sank when Mr Brown said they had to find a partner and practice their times tables. She didn't know anyone. No one would want to go with her! Mr Brown saw that she was by herself, and made a group of three friends split up so one of them, a girl called Susie, could go with her.

Cori wanted to make a friend, so she tried to be friendly. “Where did you go on holiday?” she asked. “I went to Spain with my dad and mum,” she said, “what about you?” Cori had been on holiday to Devon with her family and on a church holiday where she learned about Jesus, and she told Susie about both of them.

“You don't mean that you believe in God, do you?!” asked Susie. “My dad says that only stupid people believe in God.” Cori didn't know what to say, so she carried on with her times tables in silence. As soon as Susie went back to her friends, she could

see them all whispering and pointing at her and laughing. She knew what they were talking about. At break none of them wanted to play with her, so she sat by herself and ate her sandwich. She wished she really was sick.

Thursday and Friday were no better, so Cori was so excited when it was the weekend. On Saturday morning they always had pancakes for breakfast, and she played in the garden with her brother. But she was looking forward to Sunday morning most of all. Her church had got a letter from their old minister. His name was Paul, and Cori loved him. He used to talk about Jesus with such excitement and joy, and everyone in the church had been sad when he left.

But now he'd written a letter, and the new minister was going to read it to the whole church on Sunday morning. Cori longed to know what he would say, what his news was and – above all – what he would teach them about Jesus. So she was really pleased that it was Sunday morning at last.

There was just one person that she didn't want to see. Ian. She didn't really know why, but whenever she talked to Ian, she felt a little bit less happy. Ian talked a lot about God, and he tried really, really hard to make God happy. She wouldn't say it to anyone, but she secretly thought that Ian was just better than her. Maybe that's why she felt bad after talking to him.

But there was Ian. “How was school, Cori?” She thought about lying, but she told him the truth. “You know what your problem is?” said Ian. “You're not letting God help you to make friends! Do you think that God wants you to be sad at school? Of course not! He wants you to have friends, so he can make you good at making friends. Just look at me. I've got loads of friends, because God has made me funny and good at football and clever. So everyone wants to be friends with me. That's what God wants to do for you as well.”

“Um... But...” Cori wasn't quite sure what to say. But just at that moment - “ssshh, here he comes”. The minister was at the front of church and was starting to read the letter. “From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus” it started.

Cori sat back in her chair to listen, still wondering what she should say to Ian.

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The farmer's warning (Proverbs 1:7)

Most of the best stories start once upon a time in a faraway kingdom. This one is a bit different. It starts once upon a time in a faraway farm.

When this story starts, the sun was just rising over the distant hills and peeking through the curtains. The flowers were opening their petals ready for a new day. The cockerel was shouting his "Cock a doodle doo!" And Adam and Josh were waking up, with no idea that today would be one of the most important days of their life.

They were brothers, but they looked nothing like each other. Adam was the oldest. He was short, but he had long blonde hair that sometimes got in his mouth. Josh was much taller, but his hair was very short and dark, and almost as stiff as a wire brush. Today, these two brothers – one short and one tall – were going to be in charge of the farm for the very first time.

When they came down to breakfast their father was already waiting for them, with a sad look on his face. "Boys", he said once they'd sat down with their toast and jam, "I have to go away to the city. I have some important business there, and I'm going to be away for three months. While I'm gone, you are going to have to look after the farm."

The two brothers both stopped chewing their food. They had always known that one day their father would leave and they would be in charge. But they'd never dreamed it would be so soon. They didn't want it to be so soon.

"You can't go!" said Adam. "We can't run the farm - we don't know what to do."

"And we'll miss you," added Josh. "The best thing about the farm is having you here. It won't be anything like as fun without you here."

Their father gave them both a warm smile. Then he spoke slowly: "Josh, of course I'll miss you too. You know that I wouldn't leave if I didn't have to. And I'll be back as soon as I can. And Adam, of course you're ready. You've always lived here with me. I've taught you nearly everything I know. I know that you'll be fine. There's just one more thing that I have to show you – the jam shed". Even in their sadness, Adam and Josh both felt a jolt of excitement. Ever since they had been babies, they'd never been allowed in the jam shed. They had always wondered what was behind the heavy oak doors. Every July they watched with amazement as buckets of strawberries and apricots were carried in by the strong farmhands. And every October they waited

with excitement for the day that the jam would be ready, and jars and jars and jars of the sweetest and juiciest jam were carried out again. But they had never been allowed to see inside.

They followed their father through the garden and past the chicken house, and held their breath as he pulled a rusty key from his pocket, turned it in the lock, and pushed open the doors. As their eyes got used to the dim light inside, they could just make out the two biggest tanks they had ever seen. Each one ran down a whole wall of the shed and was made entirely of glass. Adam went to the one on the left and saw that what was inside was red – a red deeper even than blood. It was the tank of strawberry jam. Josh went to the one on the right and saw that what was inside was orange – an orange richer even than the sun. It was the tank of apricot jam.

Their father stood at the door, enjoying their excitement. He remembered the first day he had been allowed inside the jam shed, and had waited for years for this day. Today he was entrusting everything to his boys. He blinked back a tear of happiness, and called Adam and Josh together for his final instructions.

"While I'm gone, Adam is going to be in charge of the strawberries and Josh is going to be in charge of the apricots. Here is the thermometer to check the temperature is right – you'll need to do that every day. These are the buttons to turn on the big stirrers to mix the jam – you'll need to do that every week. But the most important thing is this: Never open the tanks. Leave them close until I get back. Then I'll show you how to take out the jam and put it in jars. Then you will know everything about the farm."

He made Adam and Josh promise that they would do exactly what they'd been told, and then he got ready to set off for the city. He hugged both his sons, and all three tried not to cry – none of them managed. Very soon, he was walking down the road, and Adam and Josh were at the fence waving until he disappeared around the bend. They both sighed, and then they both got to work.

There was so much to do on the farm – feeding the animals, pruning the trees, washing the equipment and checking the jam – that very soon a whole month had gone by. But then something very unusual happened. Josh was in the jam shed sweeping up some dust, when a woman appeared in the doorway. She was wearing a shiny green dress and bright blue make-up. When she walked, her dress dragged on the floor behind her, and when she talked her tongue seemed to flick in and out of her mouth.

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“This is amazing” she said. “Look at all of this jam. There’s so much of it, and such a beautiful orange. I bet it tastes amazing too, does it?”

“Er, I’m sure it does” said Josh, not sure what to make of this green woman. “But I haven’t tried any. My father told me not to open the tank until he gets back.”

“Don’t open the tank?! Well, then how will you know whether the jam is any good? It makes sense to taste some so you’ll know if it’s got the right amount of sugar and fruit. You’re in charge. You can if you want.”

“I am in charge,” said Josh, “but my father told me not to open the tank. I don’t know why, but I’m sure he knows better than me. Or you.”

“Your father is tricking you,” replied the woman. “He knows how delicious this jam is and he wants it all to himself. He doesn’t want to share it with you. He’s mean – he won’t even let you have one little jar to try for yourself.”

Now Josh got angry with her. “My father isn’t mean! I know he loves me. I know that whatever he told me to do is what’s best for me. Even if I don’t know why.” With that, he pushed the woman out of the shed and went back into the house.

Josh never told Adam about her, and after that, life went back to normal – feeding the animals, pruning the trees, washing the equipment and checking the jam. But after another month had gone by, Adam was in the jam shed and she appeared in the doorway again.

“This is amazing” she said. “Look at all of this jam. There’s so much of it, and such a beautiful red. I bet it tastes amazing too, does it?”

“Er, I’m sure it does” said Adam, not sure what to make of this green woman. “But I haven’t tried any. My father told me not to open the tank until he gets back.”

“Don’t open the tank?! Well, then how will you know whether the jam is any good? It makes sense to taste some so you’ll know if it’s got the right amount of sugar and fruit. You’re in charge. You can if you want.”

“I am in charge,” said Adam. “And you’re right. It would make sense to find out if it tastes right. I wonder why my father said that I shouldn’t.”

“Your father is tricking you,” replied the woman. “He knows how delicious this jam is and he wants it all to himself. He doesn’t want to share it with you. He’s mean – he won’t even let you have one little jar to try for yourself.”

Now Adam got angry – with his father. “I think you’re right! He’s never given me what I wanted. All my life he’s never let me in this shed, and now he’s finally let me in where I can see all this wonderful jam but can’t taste any of it. It’s even worse than being outside! I’m going to.”

Adam got a jar from the shelf, carefully opened a hatch in the side of the tank and spooned out the jam. It smelt amazing. He put some in his mouth. It was delicious. The woman smiled to herself, and left.

After that, it was just one more month of feeding the animals, pruning the trees, washing the equipment and checking the jam before their father returned from the city. And it was finally time to open the tanks and sell the jam. They started with the strawberry. They made jar after jar after jar after jar of jam, and when it was all out of the tank they tried one together.

Their father was thrilled: “This is the best we’ve ever made. And Josh, it’s all for you. You and your friends can eat as much as you want, and you can sell the rest and do whatever you want with the money. Well done, my son.”

Then they turned to the apricot. But as soon as they opened the hatch an awful smell filled the shed.

With tears in his eyes, their father asked: “Adam, did you open the tank?”

Adam couldn’t say anything. He just nodded. He didn’t know it, but when he opened the tank to taste the jam some germs had got inside. Just a few, but they had spread through the tank. And the more they ate the jam, the more they grew and grew and grew, until they filled the whole thing. They had turned all of the jam rotten.

“This is why I told you to never open the tank. Why didn’t you trust me? You knew that I know better than you. You knew that I love you. Why didn’t you listen to me? All of this was meant to be for you and your friends. But now it all needs to be thrown away, and you’ll get nothing.”

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. (Proverbs 1:7)

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Illustrations.



Cori and Ian (a background story for 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4)

Each week we're going to hear a story from Cori and Ian, two members of the church in Corinth. Cori is a Christian who is having a difficult time, and Ian represents the "super apostles", the teachers in Corinth who promised ease and victory in the Christian life. The idea is that we can come back to this story when we discuss application. How would the part of Paul's letter that we're looking at this week help them both?

Before school, when they were having breakfast, Cori's dad asked what Cori wanted to pray for about school. "Please could you pray that Susie and her friends would stop laughing at me?" Cori asked. "They are still saying that only stupid people believe in God. I want someone in my class to be my friend."

Before he prayed for her, he showed her his favourite verse from the Bible: "I will never leave you or forsake you, says the Lord." "Dad, what does forsake mean?" "It's another way of saying leave. So when God says 'I will never leave you or forsake you', he's really just saying the same thing twice. So you know it's definitely true. God says: "I will never, never leave you." Then he prayed that God would stay with Cori today at school, checked she had her lunch and said goodbye.

But by the end of the day, Cori was confused. It didn't *feel* like God was with her. Susie and her friends were still mean to her, she had no one to play with at play time and she broke her favourite shoes on the way home. "If God has promised that he will never leave me, why does it feel like he has left me?" Cori wondered.

It's the sort of question that she would have asked Paul when he was still in the church. He always listened to Cori's questions, and he always told her something wonderful about Jesus that helped her to understand and feel better. She missed him very much! But, she thought to herself, maybe on Sunday when we hear the next bit of the letter that he wrote us he'll somehow know what my question is and tell me the answer. I hope he does!

When Sunday came, Cori was so sure that Paul's letter would say something to help her that she ran into church and was going to head straight for her normal chair. But her path was blocked by a lot of people arguing. "I told you we should never have trusted Paul!" one person shouted. "No, I'm sure that there's a really good reason" someone else said.

Cori saw Ian at the edge of the crowd and asked him what was going on.

"It's Paul," Ian said. "You remember that he promised he would come and see us again soon? Well, we've just found out that he's not going to. He doesn't want to come and see us any more, so he's just sent us this letter instead. I reckon he's found a new church that he likes better and he can't be bothered with us anymore. Anyway, he lied to us. I bet you can't trust anything he said. I bet you can't even trust what he said about God."

Cori went to her seat with her mind whirling. Could it possibly be true? Could Paul – Paul who she loved and missed – have lied about coming back and seeing them? And – a thousand times worse – could it possibly be that Paul had lied about God? She'd been confused why it didn't feel like God was keeping his promise to never leave her. Could it be that the reason is that the promises of God Paul had told them about were lies as well? No. Surely not! There must be some other reason for everything. There must be. As the minister started to read the letter, she leant forward in her chair, desperately hoping that Paul would explain everything.