



POWER IN WEAKNESS | WHAT MESSAGE ARE YOU SENDING? (3)

September 21, 2025

2 Corinthians 2:5-17

PURPOSE

To discover and experience Jesus Christ in our midst
To cultivate mutually encouraging relationships
To participate in God's mission to the world

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Discussion Question

- The sense of smell is strongly connected with memory. What's your favorite scent or perfume?

WORSHIP

PLEASE OPEN IN PRAYER

RESPONSIVE PRAYER — Psalm 103

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,

Bless his holy name!

Bless the LORD, O my soul,

And forget not all his benefits,

Who forgives all your iniquity,

Who heals all your diseases,

Who redeems your life from the pit,

Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

Who satisfies you with good

So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

SCRIPTURE READING

2 Corinthians 2:5-17

⁵Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. ⁶For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, ⁷so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. ⁹For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. ¹⁰Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, ¹¹so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

¹²When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, ¹³my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

¹⁴But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. ¹⁵For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

BIBLE STUDY Summary

We are in a sermon series called Power in Weakness, and over the next few months we will study the book of 2 Corinthians, often considered Paul's most painful, personal, and passionate letter. As Paul continues defending his ministry in 2 Corinthians, he shifts from explaining his change of travel plans to addressing a painful situation in the Corinthian church. The passage moves from a call to forgive and restore a repentant offender (verses 5-11) to Paul's reflection on his ministry in light of God's triumph in Christ (verses 12-17). Both sections reveal how the gospel redefines weakness and strength, teaching the Church that Christ's power is displayed not through human triumph but through humility, reconciliation, and service.

The man who wronged Paul and grieved the church (perhaps during Paul's "painful visit," cf. 2 Cor. 7:12) had been punished by the congregation (verse 6). But Paul now warns them not to let necessary discipline harden into exclusion. Instead, they are to reaffirm their love and forgive this man, lest Satan gain a foothold through bitterness and division (verses 7-11; Ephesians 4:26-27). Christ himself taught that discipline is always aimed at repentance, forgiveness, and ultimately, reconciliation with God and neighbor (Matthew 18:15-35; Westminster Confession of Faith 30.3). To withhold forgiveness from the repentant is to deny the gospel, for "as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Colossians 3:13).

From this pastoral concern, Paul launches into the striking image of the triumphal procession (verses 14-16). In Roman culture, a victorious general paraded through the city with captives in tow. Astonishingly, Paul identifies himself not as the general but as a captive of Christ, yet one who shares in Christ's true triumph over sin and death (Romans 6:15-23). This "captive" ministry spreads the "fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere" (verse 14), which, like the incense of a Roman victory parade, cannot be ignored. Yet this aroma has a double effect. It is life to those who believe and death to those who reject (verses 15-16), reflecting the two-edged nature of God's Word (Isaiah 55:10-11; Hebrews 4:12; Westminster Larger Catechism 160-161). In this way Paul contrasts his ministry with the so-called "super" apostles who peddle God's Word for self-gain (verse 17). He insists that true Christian ministry is sincere, Christ-centered, and God-glorifying, participating in Christ's victory by proclaiming him, whether in weakness or strength.

1. Looking at the Bible

- From the passage, share with the group some key phrases or ideas that stood out to you.

2. Looking at Jesus

At Central we believe that all of Scripture points to Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the theological center of the Bible. Every passage not only points to Jesus, but the grand narrative of the Bible also finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.

- Verse 14 speaks of God “leading us in triumphal procession in Christ.” How does this image of being led as captives in Christ’s victory parade connect with Paul’s teaching in Romans 8:37 that “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us”? What does it mean that our victory is found not in ourselves but in Christ’s triumph over sin and death?

3. Looking at our Hearts

- In verses 10-11, Paul links forgiveness with being aware of Satan’s schemes. How does forgiveness guard us from the “root of bitterness” (Hebrews 12:15) and from not giving the devil a foothold (Ephesians 4:27)?

4. Looking at our World

- The phrase “fragrant aroma” is often connected with the language of sacrifice described in the Old Testament book of Leviticus. In his other letters, Paul speaks of sacrifice in terms of being a pleasant, acceptable smell to God (Christ’s sacrifice in Ephesians 5:1-2; sacrificial giving in Philippians 4:18). How can we as Christians live sacrificially within the Church and the world in order to become a life-giving fragrance?

PRAYER **Pray for each other:** Share any prayer requests you have.

- Pray for the sick, the mourning, and those who are going through hard times at Central. Pray for God’s swift deliverance and for them to find hope and encouragement in Jesus.
- Pray that believers and churches in NYC would not shrink back but declare and embody the gospel with boldness — that though it’s offensive, it may be a saving aroma to many.