



## POWER IN WEAKNESS | TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY (5)

October 5, 2025

2 Corinthians 4:1-15

### 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

- What's something that you've made that you're especially proud of?

### WORSHIP 10 MIN

#### PLEASE OPEN IN PRAYER

#### RESPONSIVE PRAYER — Psalm 116

For You have rescued my soul from death,

**My eyes from tears,**

**And my feet from stumbling.**

I shall walk before the LORD

**In the land of the living.**

I believed, and so I spoke,

**"I am greatly troubled."**

What shall I repay to the LORD

**For all His benefits to me?**

I will lift up the cup of salvation,

**And call upon the name of the LORD.**

I will pay my vows to the LORD;

**May it be in the presence of all His people!**

### SCRIPTURE READING

#### 2 Corinthians 4:1-15

*<sup>1</sup>Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. <sup>2</sup>But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. <sup>3</sup>And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup>In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup>For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup>For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

*<sup>7</sup>But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. <sup>8</sup>We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to*

*despair; <sup>9</sup>persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; <sup>10</sup>always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our bodies. <sup>11</sup>For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. <sup>12</sup>So death is at work in us, but life in you.*

*<sup>13</sup>Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, <sup>14</sup>knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. <sup>15</sup>For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.*

## **BIBLE STUDY**   **Summary** **40 MIN**

We are continuing our fall sermon series, *Power in Weakness*, during which we're looking at the book of 2 Corinthians — appropriately considered Paul's most painful, personal, and passionate letter. Numerous commentators say this week's passage from chapter 4 is Paul at his most passionate and revealing. Dane Ortlund, the author of "Gentle and Lowly," calls 2 Corinthians 4 "one of the richest and most precious chapters in the Bible." Paul continues the defense of his ministry and reiterates his philosophy of ministry from the previous chapters. The overall theme of this chapter is "not losing heart" (as seen in verse 1, and repeated in verse 16), and Paul gives several explanations of how he doesn't become discouraged in his work while also emphasizing the authenticity of his ministry. This week, we will narrow his reasons to three key principles.

**Principle #1: Ministry by God's mercy.** Paul begins by saying that he has this ministry (see also 3:6) by the mercy of God. The Apostle is referring to his personal conversion experience: how he was blinded by seeing the light of the gospel (verse 4) but how God has shone in his heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God (verse 6). Paul gives thanks to God for being merciful and appointing him to this ministry (1 Timothy 1:12-13). Paul's understanding that this ministry belongs to God and that he has been made a steward by God's mercy is what keeps Paul from compromising the message or mishandling finances, as he was accused in verse 2.

**Principle #2: Power in Weakness.** In verse 7, Paul explains that this gospel message is in "jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." This is one of the central themes of the epistle of 2 Corinthians, which is also evident by the title of our sermon series: *Power in Weakness*. The Apostle responds to various criticisms — many of them false — but ultimately he won't boast in anything but his weaknesses, for God's power is made perfect in weakness (12:5-10).

**Principle #3: "Soli Deo Gloria."** This leads to the third and main principle of Paul's philosophy of ministry: It's not about him, but all about Christ. The Reformer John Calvin wrote in his commentary,

The man who wishes to preach only Christ must forget himself...Here all pastors of the church are reminded of their rank and condition, for whatever title of honour they may have to distinguish them, they are nothing more than the servants of believers, for the only way to serve Christ is by serving his church as well.

Paul's ultimate defense of his ministry is that the gospel message isn't about proclaiming himself (either in eloquent rhetoric or charisma) but rather proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord (verse 5). In all things, Paul is acting out of obedience and faith — similar to all other believers — for the sole purpose of glorifying God, not himself (verse 15). Glory to God alone — or in Latin, "Soli Deo Gloria."

### 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.

- The biblical scholar C. K. Barrett said on verse 5, "It would be hard to describe the Christian ministry more comprehensively in so few words." How does this verse change/affect your understanding of the gospel and ministry? (Compare with Romans 10:9.)

### 3. Looking at our Hearts

- What personal event is Paul referring to in verse 6? (See Acts 9.)
- Salvation is not a one-time event but a process. How does God continue to shine his light in our hearts today (1 John 1:5-9)?

### 4. Looking at our World

- Look at verses 7-9. How does the "power belonging to God and not to us" enable the descriptors assigned to us in verses 8-9?
- How is this different from the world's understanding of power?

### **PRAYER** **15 MIN**

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

Pray for Central's leaders and officers (elders and deacons). Pray that they would faithfully handle the ministry of preaching the gospel, not proclaiming any other name but Jesus (verse 5). Pray that they would not lose heart (verse 1) and would continue to show that the surpassing power belongs to God (verse 7).