

THE GOSPEL SHAPED CHURCH

Proclaiming Christ through Weakness - 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*(Leaders, please use these questions **as a guide for discussion**. Please don't feel like you have to go through every one!)*

Warm-Up

1. What is something you feel particularly well-equipped or confident doing? What is something where you often feel completely out of your depth?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

2. Looking back at verse 6, what is the “treasure” Paul says we carry in verse 7?
3. Paul describes Christians as “jars of clay.” What would a jar of clay have represented to Paul’s original readers? What is he communicating about us through this image?
4. Why does God choose to place such an extraordinary treasure in weak and unimpressive vessels? According to verse 7, what does our weakness demonstrate about God?
5. How does recognising ourselves as “jars of clay” challenge the way we often think about who is qualified to serve God?
6. Where are you most conscious of your own weakness or inadequacy in serving Christ? How might verse 7 change the way you view that weakness?
7. Read verses 8–9 carefully. What four hardships does Paul describe, and what four realities prevent those hardships from defeating him?
8. Verse 10 says Paul is “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus.” How did Paul’s weakness and suffering reflect the pattern of Jesus’ own life and death?
9. How can our weakness, suffering and dependence on God actually become a platform for displaying the power and life of Jesus?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:11-12

10. What does Paul mean when he says, “death is at work in us, but life in you”? What was his ministry costing him, and what was it producing in others?
11. Why is dying to ourselves an unavoidable part of gospel-shaped ministry rather than an unfortunate side effect of it?
12. What might costly service for the sake of someone else knowing Christ look like in your life? Consider your time, career, money, relationships, hospitality, church involvement or willingness to speak about Jesus.
13. Where might comfort, convenience or protecting your own schedule currently be making it harder for you to give yourself in service to Christ and others?
14. Where might God be calling you to serve or speak about Christ despite feeling weak, inadequate or under-equipped? What would faithful dependence on God look like there?

PRAY: *Thank you Lord for the treasure of the gospel and thank you that you have entrusted it to us weak vessels. When we are feeling weak, pressured, or inadequate, please help us to depend on your power rather than our own strength. Help us to be living sacrifices so that others may find life in Christ. In Jesus’ name, Amen*

TITLE: The Gospel shaped church - Endures Hardships

PASSAGE: 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: A Gospel-shaped church preserves even in hardships because Christ is the one with the Power and Glory

STRUCTURE:

- V7-10 - Weak Jars but a Powerful God
- V11-12 - Death for the sake of Life

- What does a Gospel shaped church look like?
- Well, last week, we saw quite clearly that the Gospel-shaped church Proclaims Christ. With Integrity, patience and Humility.
- We proclaim nothing or nobody else - except Christ.
- But how do we do this? And what if the going gets tough?
 - What if we're feeling weak?
 - What if we're feeling like we're not up to the task,
 - what if we feel ill-equipped, under-resourced,
 - What if we feel under pressure from people both inside and outside the church?
- Well - perfect.
- Because God doesn't always use the powerful and strong to proclaim his message. Instead, he uses weak jars of clay.

- **Weak Jars but a Powerful God**
- Paul writes that we have this treasure of the Gospel, the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, that we have the light of the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, this beautiful message, in fragile earthenware.
- 4:7 "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."
- *Now these days if we have Jars of Clay in our houses - they usually are for decoration. You either put them on a buffet table, or maybe on the floor in a corner [if you don't have toddlers]....they are there to look good! Maybe they're even painted nicely or gilded with gold paint. They're a precious item!*
- *But in the first Century, jars of clay were everywhere and used for anything! They were an everyday item!*
 - *Washing, oil lamps, wine, water...everywhere!*
- *In fact - if you were to bring someone from the first century to see our jars of clay on display, it would be Bizarre!*
- *As bizarre as us travelling into the future, only to see some plastic Chinese takeaway containers on display!*
- Jars of clay are like our modern day plastic takeaway container.
- Disposable, breakable, non-remarkable...fragile!
 - They're only designed to contain the precious contents of fried rice or a delicious beef mulligatawny curry!
- And when it comes to Christian mission and message - this is what Paul likens us to.
- We are like Plastic containers.
 - Now it's worth mentioning at this point, that Paul isn't making a statement about our value as human beings made in the image of God. Of course, we have immense value!
 - But he's more talking about the role and function that we play in Christian mission and ministry!
- We are containers!
- Because what we contain and preach is powerful and so valuable
- We have this treasure of the hope of the world.
- And it's given to us weak vessels, in order [2nd half of V7] to show that the power belongs to God and not to us.
- God uses us weak plastic containers for the purpose of showing off **his** strength and glory and grace!
- Because he is the one that we proclaim, he is the creator and king of the universe, the one who deserves all the honor and glory - he's the one who rescued us from our rebellion in our attempt to dethrone him as king through the death and powerful resurrection of the Son Jesus Christ, and he is the one who we proclaim!
- And so in order to let this be known to the world, God uses us weak jars - to show off just how amazing he is.

- And let me tell you - this is such an amazing relief. Because this means that we DON'T have to be powerful, or amazing, or strong - we just have to be faithful and diligent to God in proclaiming him in word and our actions! We can let God be God, and recognise that we are not!

- For me personally, these words are some of the most comforting when it comes to being a minister and being on mission.
- Some of you already know that this has been probably one of the harder years of my life. The weight of supporting and raising a young family, serving here at St John's in a growing church, dealing with various sicknesses and emergency room visits that come with having a 2 year old, has been significant.
- And alongside this I've also been working through a diagnosis of depression and anxiety with various health professionals...
- And let me tell you - as of today the 4th October 2026, I'm feeling a bit like a cheap plastic container that's been used a number of times, is kinda disintegrating a bit, and you're kinda thinking maybe it's time to retire this one!
- But the amazing comfort - is that the power and glory belongs to God...not me. I don't have to be strong, I just have to be faithful.
- In fact at the end of this book Paul will write that God's grace is enough for him, because his power is made perfect in...**weakness!**
- Now I'm not saying all this to get your sympathy (although I don't mind skittles, haribo gummy bears and cadbury dairy milk chocolate) - and let me tell you, I feel so supported by you all as a congregation here...
- But maybe you're considering stepping up in doing God's work but maybe you're not feeling up to it...
 - Whether it's joining a serving team or roster for the first time...
 - Whether it's putting up your hand for leading a team or being on PC...OR
 - Whether you're considering applying for an internship role here at St John's OR
 - Maybe you're considering theological study and thinking about vocational ministry...
- If you're feeling weak, ill-equipped, but still confident in the Gospel and the power of God - come join the party!
- And at a church level, the message is much the same.
- We don't have to be powerful, perfect, or strong... We don't have to have the biggest and best programs, or the flashiest light show...we are plastic takeaway containers. Temporary. We will return to the earth one day!
- But thanks be to God... all the power belongs to him.
- So then all we have to be as a church is a faithful pointer to the treasure that is the Gospel in our words and in our actions!
 - Now this isn't an excuse to be lazy...or to be sloppy...
- But this is a great reminder of who we are when it comes to being a Gospel-Shaped church.
- We are containers for the Gospel. We proclaim Christ and not ourselves. And we proclaim him from a place of weakness, knowing that he is the powerful one.
- In fact, the more that we gaze at Jesus and fix our eyes on him, the more we'll recognise his power and authority. And the more we'll recognise our fragility and frailty and cast ourselves on him.
- And the more we do this, the greater our endurance will be when hardships come.
- Because hardships will come! Whether it be pressure to conform in the workplace, or hard life or health situations...or other types of challenges - the Christian life isn't always easy!
- It wasn't for Paul! Later on in the book, he'll write down a list of his challenges and weaknesses, which include beatings, various persecutions but also danger in traveling, hunger and thirst, and his daily pressure and anxiety for all the churches...it wasn't an easy life and ministry!
- But he writes this:
 - V8 "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies."
- Because all the power belongs to God and because God is faithful, Paul was under pressure but never destroyed.
 - he had pressure on him;
 - He was perplexed - cornered, at a loss,
 - He was hounded
 - He was thrown down, perhaps even depressed
- But God still held him fast. He wasn't crushed, or forsaken, or destroyed...but he showed off the life and power of Christ through his weakness and sufferings.

- In V10 - Paul uses a really interesting Phrase, he writes that he was always carrying the death of Jesus...
- The greek word for death here is slightly different to the usual one - it's the word *nekrosis* - which really means the process of dying or the deadness
- So it's almost as if in Paul's life - he is following in the footsteps of Jesus who was tortured and killed and he is showing off the life and sufferings of Jesus...
- *Gary Millar writes in his book on 2 Corinthians that he was placed as a pastor in Dublin in a Presbyterian church in the year 2000 that didn't have an Evangelical background. And it wasn't the best experience from what I've heard from him!*
- *And during that challenging time he received a regular email from John Chapman which contained only 15 words "Dear Gazza, please remember they crucified the Lord Jesus - why should you expect anything better?"*
- Rather than something to be despised and to be ashamed of - God uses our weaknesses and sufferings as the very platform for the display of his power and glory.
- For we are weak jars...plastic takeaway containers...but we have a powerful God.
- And it's all worth it - because it brings life.
- **Death for the sake of Life**
- V12 "So death is at work in us, but life in you."
- *In places like Koorong, you'll often find coffee mugs or picture frames with nice verses printed on them in flowery handwriting, maybe on a nice background...*
- *Maybe Psalm 23:1 - the Lord is my shepherd...or John 3:16, for God so loved the world...or many other quotable verses...*
- *But I don't think I've seen much merchandise with 2 Corinthians 4:12 on it!*
- But here's the reality, if we as a church want to be a Gospel-Shaped church that displays the life of Christ, that proclaims the treasure of the Gospel, that is effective in evangelism, then we need to get our heads around the simple fact that we are mortal, we are weak...and that the call to gospel-shaped ministry is a call to die!
- It's a call to die to ourselves and our own wills, and give our lives entirely to Christ, give our lives in service to others - in order that people might have life and know of the life that comes from being in relationship with Christ.
- What might this look like in practice?
 - It might look like turning down that job promotion in order to have more time for a subject at bible college...
 - It might look like saying 'no' to other Sunday commitments like kids birthday parties, or family events, in order to prioritise gathering with God's people around his Word...
 - It might look like using annual leave to serve at a Holiday Kids Club; or another type of mission week...
 - It might look like having people over for lunch or dinner for deep fellowship even though it interrupts our schedules...
 - It might look like inviting a colleague or friend who isn't a Christian to a church service or to a Christmas event even though it might disrupt the relationship...
 - It might look like even leaving your career behind in order to pursue paid-vocational ministry...
 - IN ORDER THAT - those who don't know Jesus may have life...
- But we do this as people who are clay pots or plastic takeaway containers - mortal, frail and weak vessels.
- Millar writes "We take the gospel as men and women who are dying to men and women who are dying. If we truly understand this, we will not lose heart but give ourselves to sharing the gospel with others while we have breath."
- The cost is great. But the benefit is so worth it - as we'll see next week:
- V17 "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,"
- So the Gospel shaped church proclaims Christ - through weakness - for God's Glory.