

## Paul's Retirement Plan 2 Corinthians 4:1-18 August 21, 2022



If you are like me – when you turn 60, people start asking questions like – so – ah – when are you retiring?

Well, I do have a retirement plan.

At this point, I plan to retire from my medical work in two years, five weeks and two days.

And I plan to retire from ministry when I stop breathing.

That doesn't mean I will be a pastor till I die – but whatever I can do to share Christ or help His church – my hope is to do it until I die.

I want to suggest that a biblical retirement plan – is to realise a slave can never retire from ministry.

We are working our way through the book of 2 Corinthians.

Paul wrote this book because a group of men – self-styled super apostles – turned up in Corinth preaching a twisted man-centred version of the gospel.

And they sought to discredit the ministry of Paul.

2 Corinthians is Paul's defence of his ministry.

I have titled the series on this book – **crucified leadership**. And I want to sum up this book this way:



A saint with character shaped through adversity is a saint God can use

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In this book, Paul gives the Corinthians and us a long series of:



1:1-2      God's church - God's leaders

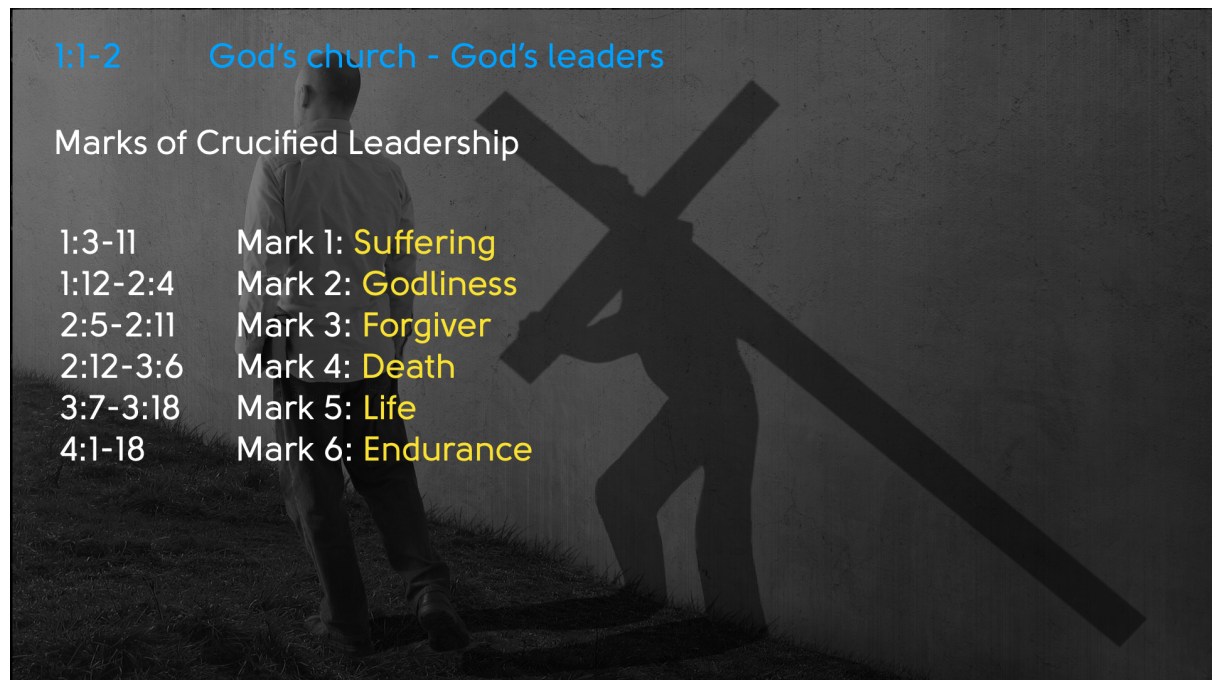
Marks of Crucified Leadership

**Marks of crucified leadership.**

Leadership in the church is not like leadership in the world.

The head of the church is a crucified Saviour so the leaders of His church must exhibit crucified leadership.

This morning we come to the **sixth** mark:



### **Endurance.**

Perhaps I could summarise it like this.

**We refuse to give up in ministry. We choose to endure.**

Have a look at our passage.

Twice – in verse 1 and in verse 16 Paul is speaking of his ministry and says – *We do **not** give up.*

Two weeks ago – Dena and I were walking on the beach – and we were reflecting on some of the trials and struggles in the early years of the church and she asked:

If things had stayed as tough and the church didn't grow and mature – do you think you would have left the ministry?

I honestly don't know the answer to that.

What I can say is that I hope that the God would have given me the strength to keep ministering by realising – it is not success that matters – but faithfulness – and what we do matters eternally.

But I am under no illusion that persevering in ministry is easy.

Many if not most of those I knew well at Seminary are out of ministry.

Many of those I knew well in ministry right here in Brisbane are no longer in ministry.

It is hard.

Ministry is tough.

You cannot read 2 Corinthians and come to any other conclusion.

Martin Luther once said:

If I were to tell people all that I have suffered in the ministry of the Christian gospel – no one would believe me.

Most ministers never have Luther's level of struggle, but I can say, I have never met a pastor who has not regularly contemplated walking away from ministry.

Criticism, disputes, the weight of souls, the pressures on families – it adds up quickly.

You don't have to be a pastor – so many Christians find themselves saying – finding time for ministry is hard so I need to pull back on ministry.

So why did Paul address this?

Likely the super apostles had told the Corinthians – old Paul needs to hang up his pulpit.

He had his time and place – but his message of Christ and Him crucified is so yesterday.

Paul doesn't bring in the crowds. Paul alienates people.

We are who the Corinth of today needs.

It is also likely that Paul is having a dig at some of the super apostles who **had** given up.

Most likely ministry had not turned out to be the rosy comfortable life they expected.

These guys were hired hands – in it for the money and the acclaim. When the going got tough – some of those tough guys got going.

So, Paul is saying – one mark that my ministry is true is this – I endure.

I have not changed my gospel – I have not tickled ears – and yes it has been tough – but what I do is too important to give up.

Paul was probably in his 50s. In those days that was considered relatively old and he certainly had some mileage on him.



But Paul had no intention of slowing down.

He says, you won't find me getting out of the line of fire and collecting seashells by the beach waiting for Jesus to come.

So, look with me at 2 Corinthians 4:1:

Therefore, since we have this ministry because we were shown mercy, we do not give up.

He says, God gave us the New Covenant ministry – the ministry that actually saves lives eternally.

How could we ever give up? If we have the only way to life – how can we ever say – because it is hard – because it is uncomfortable – I will give up?

Paul had experienced this mercy. He deserved death but was given life.

When you read his letters – you get the impression that every day of his life Paul was overcome at the mercy of God and that he was convinced if God could and would save him – a blaspheming murderer – He could save anyone.

He knows better than anyone what is at stake – it is eternal life and death. Because of this – he will **not** give up.

It is probably not politically correct to say this – but humanly speaking – certain occupations are more vital than others.

Truth is – if all the social media influencers disappeared overnight – the world would not miss a beat. It might actually improve.

Farmers, nurses, builders – we actually need them.

But not one of these occupations affects eternity.

Being called to preach the gospel and seeing the spiritually dead live – that matters – eternally.

And that drove the Apostle Paul.

In Acts 14 Paul was stoned and left for dead.

At that point I think most of us would get up and say – yeah – that is a bridge too far – I have done my bit – I am actually good at business so I will focus on funding Barnabas and others to do missions.

Not Paul. He went right back to ministry.

Paul will **not** give up ministering until the Lord calls him home.

Here is my summary of our passage this morning.



**As slaves of Christ, our retirement plan is – we cannot retire from ministry.**

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I'm using retirement differently to the way we normally do.

Work for 40 years – retire and stop working for 30 years and then die.

I am saying we are slaves sent to do ministry – so we can't retire from ministry.

If any man in church history had reason to leave ministry – put his feet up and retire – it was the Apostle Paul.

He didn't. He couldn't. He finished the race well.

This passage is primarily addressed to pastors and those who serve in ministry.

But never forget – we all have our ministries – we are all New Covenant ministers – and while we may not be pastors, Elders, women's ministry workers – whatever your ministry is – keep going – even when it is tough – don't give up.

Paul then gives four reasons why **we must refuse to give up ministering until we die.**

**First, we refuse to give up because:**



We refuse to give up because:

Our ministry is as slaves of Christ 2-6

### **Our ministry is as slaves of Christ 2-6**

Paul says – why don't I give up? – because as a slave of Christ I do not get the choice to give up.

Every one of us gets 80 years or so to share the gospel and see souls saved. The day we die – our ministry is done – forever.

Considering how crucial ministry is in this life, I find it incredible that Jesus did not send angels to the lost with His gospel.

He made us His slaves – those who are who struggle to stay faithful and are tempted to wimp out every single day.

I love going to the beach for a few days – it refreshes me. I feel so carefree.

But it is also a battle.

Every time, there is this voice that whispers in my ear – Craig – you have done your bit – surely God would say 30 years at the coalface of ministry is enough – its Rhoi's turn – so sell your house – buy an apartment on the beach, live on your super and the pension – get collecting those seashells.

But one thing that stops me is that I know I am a slave of Christ – this is not my decision and what He calls me to do **is** life and death. Eternal life and death.

It is not that nobody else can do it – it is that He calls every last one of us to do it.

What I do in an operating theatre can be life and death – but what I do here is far more important than that – this **is** eternal life and death.

If any man deserved to put his feet up, collect shells on the beach and wait for Jesus to come it was Paul.

But, Paul knows slaves don't get that choice.

Verse 2:

Instead, we have renounced secret and shameful things, not acting deceitfully or distorting the word of God, but commending ourselves before God to everyone's conscience by an open display of the truth.

When ministry is tough – one of the first pressures is to make our gospel more palatable to the lost.

But Paul knows – slaves don't get to change the message of the Lord who sent them.

There is only one gospel that saves the lost – but that gospel does not tickle ears.

It is decidedly uncomfortable. The true gospel says:

You are a sinner.

You can't save yourself.

You will suffer in this life.

What a shock that the world does not like this gospel.

Jesus said it in John 15:18:

If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you.

Paul added this in 2 Timothy 3:12:

In fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

If you preach the gospel clearly and correctly – you will face opposition and persecution.

So, the great temptation is to twist it a bit – water it down a bit – make it more palatable.

God has a wonderful plan for your life – you don't have to make sacrifices now – just go to church when you can – give a bit – let grace cover your sins – retire young and hang on for heaven.

Sin and repentance are never mentioned – hard parts of the Bible are avoided and other bits are twisted to fit the God wants you happy narrative.

People will flock to that. You will fill your church.



You tell yourself – look at the results – see my favourable Google reviews – I must be doing something right.

There is no doubt preaching a man-centred gospel makes ministry easier.

In the past two weeks I have spoken to two pastors who have been publicly attacked because of a biblical stance they have taken.

I know of other men who have had to leave their denomination and church and long-term friendships for the gospel.

So, there is a constant pressure to make the gospel more appealing.

Paul says – no! We renounce secret and shameful things – we become men of integrity.

And a man of integrity does not do what the super apostles have done – namely acting deceitfully by distorting the word of God.

Distorting it – is to twist it just a bit but make it say something very different.

I have been in ministry for 32 years – long enough to know that you can twist Scripture to fit any doctrine you want.

You take a verse out of context – say it loud and pound the pulpit.

You keep looking until you find an obscure meaning of a word – and say it as if it is the only meaning.

You give a paraphrase that just tilts it enough to fit your teaching.

You take a promise given to Israel or the Apostles – and say it is for everyone.

You can make the Bible say Jesus is not God, salvation is by works, baptism saves you, have enough faith and healing and wealth are yours, hell is not real or is only for a time.

And it will sound pretty convincing.

And of course, you need to be paid for these wonderful insights.

Back in 2:16 Paul said these men market the word of God for profit.

You give the world what they want to hear and they will be happy to pay.

Brothers and sisters, I have a long and ever-growing list of hard teachings I would dearly love to ignore, deny or twist.

Election, hell, suffering.

Divorce and remarriage, women in ministry, spiritual gifts.

I can assure you – tickling ears on these topics would make life so much easier for me.

But I can't do it.

You compromise in one place – and soon you compromise at the very heart of the gospel – because the gospel is offensive.

But we simply must not compromise because eternal life and death is at stake.

Only the true gospel saves.

Mormon teaching, Jehovah's Witness teaching, liberal social gospel – they all sound plausible – certainly palatable – but they lead to hell.

Paul knows this.

Notice he says we must commend ourselves before God to everyone's conscience by an open display of the truth.

This is a fascinating statement.

*First*, if you preach the truth – it commends you before God.

On the final day – we won't have to defend the truth – the truth defends us.

It is almost as if on the last day – you don't have to defend why you taught these truths – it is as if all your correct teachings are there lining up to say – Almighty God – this one taught us correctly. She didn't wimp out – he cut it straight and gave it straight.

So do the hard work.

In 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul says:

Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.

Correctly teaching is literally cutting it straight.

You do the hard work – you cut it straight. Then you give it straight.

That will commend you before God.

*Second*, if you preach the truth – the consciences of believers know it is true.

Our conscience is the part of us that the Spirit of God appeals to. Consider 1 Corinthians 2:10–16:

Now God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit ... so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God. ... The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything, ... we have the mind of Christ.

The Spirit of God reveals the truth to us and commends the truth.

If you are a believer with a Bible – the Spirit of God will let you know when you are hearing someone preach the truth.

We all thoroughly deserve hell.

Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone – not by your works.

Jesus does it all.

The Spirit says – **truth**.

When you hear a false teaching.

You are actually a pretty good person – so God chose to love you.

God wants you to have health and wealth.

The Spirit of God says – **not truth**.

In chapter 5 verse 11 – Paul again appeals to their consciences – which should know the truth.

Unfortunately, our conscience is a somewhat unreliable guide because we can harden our conscience and suppress the Spirit's witness.

But, if you have the Spirit, His commending voice is there somewhere.

Paul is saying – hey Corinthians – you know what I am saying is the real deal.

Verses 3-4:

But if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this age 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.

Paul preached the true gospel, but it seems the super apostles complained about it.

Not all that many were turning up and coming to Christ.

Maybe it was too hard to understand.

Maybe he preached too long. Remember the story of Eutychus in Acts 20. Paul preached so long – until after midnight – he fell asleep – fell three floors and died.

Maybe – Christ and Him crucified – was too repetitive.

Maybe – it offended the Jews and the Gentiles.

Paul is adamant – if they don't get it – it is not because I didn't give it straight.

Paul says – just as there was a veil over the hearts of Israel – so there is a veil over the hearts of unbelievers.

But fascinatingly he says – the one who put that veil there is – **the god of this age**.

Who is this?

Scripture frequently describes spiritual hardening as being caused by two entities.

God	Us
Romans 9:18:	Zechariah 7:12:
So then, he has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and he hardens whom he wants to harden.	They made their hearts like a rock so as not to obey the law or the words that the Lord had sent by his Spirit.
Romans 11:7–8; John 12:37–40	Ephesians 4:18; Hebrews 3:13
Exodus 10:20:	Exodus 8:15:
But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart.	But when Pharaoh saw there was relief, he hardened his heart.

## God

Romans 9:18:

So then, he has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

Romans 11:7–8; John 12:37–40

The classic is Pharaoh. Exodus 10:20:

But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart.

## Us

Zechariah 7:12:



They made their hearts like a rock so as not to obey the law or the words that the LORD of Armies had sent by his Spirit.

Ephesians 4:18; Hebrews 3:13

Scripture also says Pharaoh hardened his heart. Exodus 8:15:

But when Pharaoh saw there was relief, he hardened his heart.

There is little doubt that our sin and fallenness leads us to blind our hearts to spiritual truth – but God is the one behind this.

What about Satan? Scripture says he twists truth, he lies, he tempts – but nowhere is he said to have the power to harden and blind.

Except possibly here.

Nowhere else is Satan called god – except possibly here.

So many see this reference to the god of this age as being a reference to the true God.

They hold that Paul is saying it is God who blinds the hearts of unbelievers who are not elect and hardens their hearts to the truth.

That is possible.

But this is a strange way to refer to Almighty God.

Elsewhere, Satan is called the ruler of this world – the prince of the power of the air.

So, I think most likely this does refer to Satan.

In other places God uses Satan to work His means – for example Satan put it in Judas' heart to betray Jesus.

So, I think Paul is saying – Satan is one of the means God uses to harden hearts and blind eyes.

How does Satan blind minds? He is the father of lies, he twists truth, he tempts, he misrepresents.

False gospels, false religions, false teachings are empowered by Satan.

Paul is saying is this – he presented the gospel clearly, accurately and truthfully. He doesn't need to water it down.

If some refuse to respond – it is not the fault of the gospel Paul preached – it is that Satan blinded them.

And it would also be true to say – that they blinded themselves – and even that if they are not chosen – God blinded them.

The problem was not with the gospel Paul preached. He does not need to change that.

John Calvin put it this way:

The sum is this — that the blindness of unbelievers detracts nothing from the clearness of his gospel; for the sun is not less resplendent, that the blind do not perceive his light.

Christ – the image of God – has come. The glory of the gospel is clear. The problem is not with the glory – it is that many are blind and cannot see it.

I am sure you have been there. You share the gospel – clearly, accurately – but the eyes looking back don't get it.

You speak truth – they hear foolishness.

But this is nothing new.

You read the Gospels and one question you have to ask is – why didn't every last one of those who saw and heard Christ believe?

They saw His miracles, they heard His teaching.

Judas saw everything.

And they walked away.

God did not call them. They were not elect. God hardened them.

He used means – their own sin and desires. Satan's work in this world.

**And** they were entirely responsible for rejecting the light and the glory of Christ.

When men and women are blind – we have to pray.

We have to pray – God open those eyes that they may see Your glory – because nothing else will save them.



How do you know the gospel you preach is the true one?

Here is a good start. Verse 5:

For we are not proclaiming ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus's sake.

Does it proclaim two things?:

Jesus as Lord.

Us as slaves.

Most translations water slave down and say servant. No – it is slave.

Servant isn't strong enough.

You choose to be a servant – you are captured and deemed a slave.

You choose how and who you serve – a slave is told who to serve.

Jesus Christ – the Son of God – the One who died for our sin – is Lord – God come in the flesh and our King.

We are bondslaves of Christ given as a gift from Him to serve the church.

You can retire from being a servant – but as a slave you get no choice – you serve Christ until you die.

There is not retirement plan for slaves.

Paul said to this church who had given him so much trouble – I am your slave – for Christ – so I can't stop. He sent me – only He can tell me to stop.

I will serve you and see you grow – for Christ – and I will **not** give up.

Paul knows saying Jesus is Lord doesn't play well to people who think they are god.

But saying you are a slave doesn't play at all.

The world says I am slave to no one. The world says I am the most important person – I just need to find the best me and live it.

The gospel is countercultural.

The gospel says – you are slave **to** Christ *and* **for** Christ.

That is the gospel that saves.

And God when enslaved us to Christ through the gospel – we do not have the right to retire from service Him while we are breathing.

Verse 6:

For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

God said – Let there be light in the creation – and there was.

God said – Let there be light in our hearts – and there was.

He removed the veil – we saw the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ. The Spirit made the truth of the gospel live in us and we saw the full glory of Christ.

**And** the glory of God comes to dwell in us.

God uses faithful slaves to work His kingdom purposes.

Let me summarise this.

This is what we are – slaves of Christ – filled with His glory – and sent with His gospel.

The world doesn't want to hear this but as slaves of Christ we cannot change His message or abandon His service.

And this is God's plan to save.

Nothing else will get your unsaved uncle – your hard-hearted neighbour – your scoffing workmate – into heaven.



So, we do not give up. We do not water down the gospel. And we go on as slaves of Christ.

*Secondly*, we refuse to give up because:



We refuse to give up because:

Our ministry is as slaves of Christ 2-6  
Our suffering displays the power of God 7-12

### **Our suffering displays the power of God 7-12**

Suffering and struggle are not something that should cause us to give up.

They are a part of the plan of God to display his power and reach the lost.

So, we will not give up.

Paul, just spoke about this power within us – but how is the unmatched and unrivalled power and glory of the Creator God to be displayed to a dying world?

Not in miracles of might. Not in displays of majesty and authority.

But in weakness that reeks of death – **yet does not die.**

Verse 7:

Now we have this treasure in clay jars.

This treasure – the knowledge of God's glory – the one and only way of salvation – is housed in clay jars.

In the days of Israel – God's glory dwelt in a magnificent ark housed in a splendid Temple.

Today, it dwells in us – and we are far less magnificent.

And if you are ever tempted to think too highly of yourself – here is Paul's description of you – a clay jar. A temporary container.

Clay jars were used to house everything – food, oil, wine – occasionally even treasure.

But here is the thing – clay jars have a use by date. They get brittle, they get damaged, finally they break up.

Our bodies are clay jars. They get brittle, they get damaged, finally they break up.

Why would God put His glory inside such feeble, unimpressive vessels?

Verse 7:

So that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us.

The power to save, to convert a fallen rebel sinner – is beyond my comprehension.

We love ourselves, our sin, our comfort – we are our own idols.

To open blind eyes, to transform a heart – that is so far beyond the ability of any man or woman.

Here is the issue – if the clay jar was impressive – men might give the glory to the jar rather than the Potter.

The super apostles thought that through their preaching, their palatable gospel, their persuasive words could save.

No, only God can save. The fact He uses weak, brittle, unreliable men and women – and the gospel still goes forth – and churches reach new nations – shows the power is from God and not us. He gets the glory.

It is not that God makes us powerful – no He does something greater – He uses us in our weakness.

Verses 8-9:

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed.

Because we live in weak mortal bodies – the struggle of ministry leaves us battered, despondent, attacked and struck.

But because of the power of God in us – none of that stops us ministering. We are:

Battered but not broken.  
Despondent but not desolate.

Attacked but not abandoned.  
Struck but not shattered.

Our bones cry – throw in the towel – the Spirit of God in us says to the world – is that all you got – I will not let this one break?

We refuse to give up. Without the Spirit of God in us – we would give up – but the Spirit does not allow us to break – He sustains us in our weakness.

Verses 10-11:

We always carry the death (*nekrosis*) of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be displayed in our body. For we who live are always being given over to death (*thanatos*) for Jesus's sake, so that Jesus's life may also be displayed in our mortal flesh.

Paul uses two different words for death – *nekrosis* and *thanatos*.

We carry the death – the *nekrosis* – of Jesus in our body. Probably a better translation is dying.

*Nekrosis* is the dying of the body. Deteriorating – through every struggle and suffering.

The affliction – the perplexity – the persecution – the being struck down.

Ministry and the suffering and persecution – it kills you bit by bit. Battered, despondent, attacked, struck.

When you preach Christ – you cop it.

Sometimes literally and physically.

Sometimes verbally, psychologically, bullying.

Your family, your church, your assets – all are fair game to wear you down – to necrose you – bit by bit.

But, the power of God is in us – and so we do not give up.

By His strength:

We are not crushed, not in despair, not abandoned, not destroyed.

However, we are not immortal, so the day comes when we are given over to final death – *thanatos*.

Eventually, our clay pots give out. We do actually die – eventually whether it is from the attacks or sheer old age – we die.

But, our lives end only when God says – your ministry is done.

And until that time – the life of Christ in us – the power of God – sustains us.

But Paul's point is that when the world looks at us and sees us dying – giving our life for a Saviour we can't see and an eternity we have not seen and there is a power within that sustains us – in this they see the life and power of Christ.

Charles Simeon was appointed to a church that did not want him and hated his evangelical gospel.

They locked the pews and refused to let him preach the night sermon. This went on for 12 years.

He felt like giving up daily.

But through his weakness – God sustained him and the power was finally seen by these rebels.

Progress came after 12 years, but it took 30 years for most opposition to die down.

They saw this weak vessel refuse to crack and amid his dying they found life.

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

For 2000 years, Christians have gone to tough places, endured unthinkable opposition and suffered in ways we can't imagine.

Everything inside them screamed – go home – be quiet – give up.

They did not. And the power of Christ in those frail clay pots changed the world.

When you are persecuted – and you do not give up – but continue to show grace and love and share Christ – eventually some realise – this is not natural – this is from above – tell me again about this Jesus.

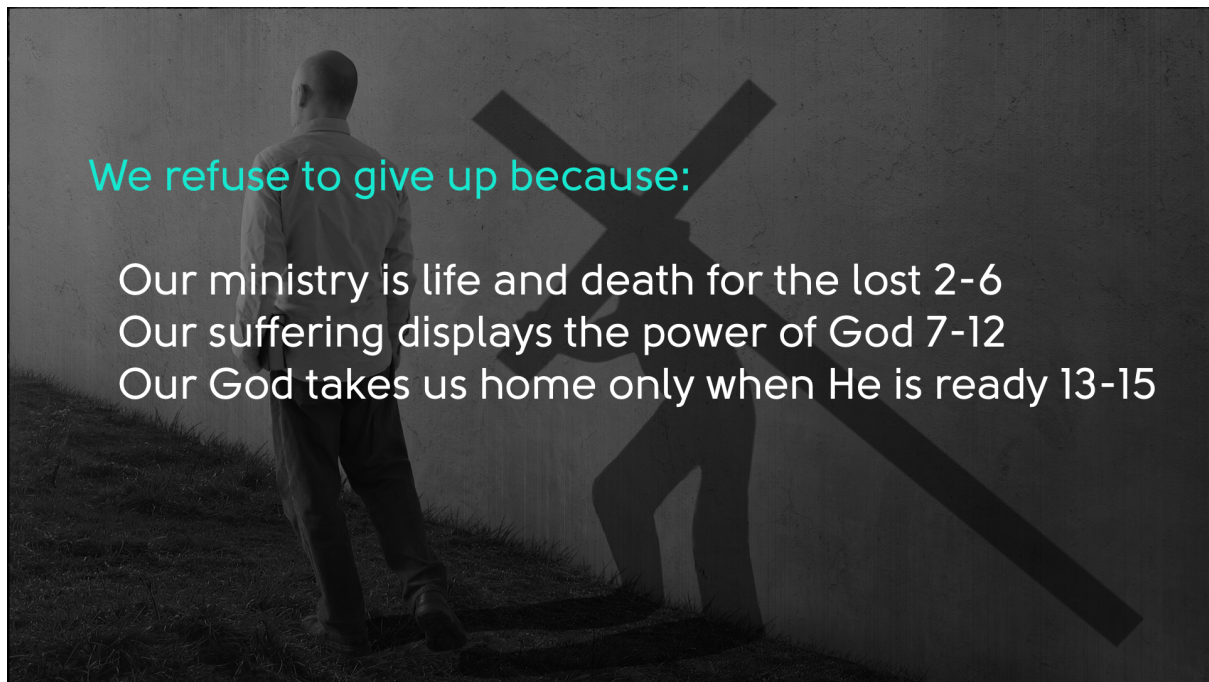
Verse 12:

So then, death is at work in us, but life in you.

In this way, our suffering displays the power of God and leads to their salvation – their life.

*Thirdly*, we refuse to give up because:





We refuse to give up because:

Our ministry is life and death for the lost 2-6  
Our suffering displays the power of God 7-12  
Our God takes us home only when He is ready 13-15

### **Our God takes us home only when He is ready 13-15**

God decides when we die. And only death ends our ministry.

Until then we do not give up.

Verse 13:

And since we have the same spirit of faith in keeping with what is written, **I believed, therefore I spoke**, we also believe, and therefore speak.

Paul is quoting David in Psalm 116.

David thought he was about to die – he said the ropes of death were wrapped around me.

But David believed God would do what was best. If God still had work for him, kingdom work, the Lord would deliver him – if not – God would take him.

In this case God delivered him.

Paul says – we have the same spirit of faith.

Paul's clay pot was getting pretty chipped and it may die – but only if God had no more work for Paul to do.

And when that day comes it holds no fear because of the resurrection. Verse 14:

For we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you.

If God says – Paul your race is done – hallelujah. No tears from Paul.

It is the same point he makes in Philippians 1:21–24:

For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don't know which one I should choose. I am torn between the two. I long to depart and be with Christ—which is far better—but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

If I have work to do – God will give me strength to endure.

If my work is done – praise God – to die is gain.

Until then, I minister with all I have. Why? Verse 15:

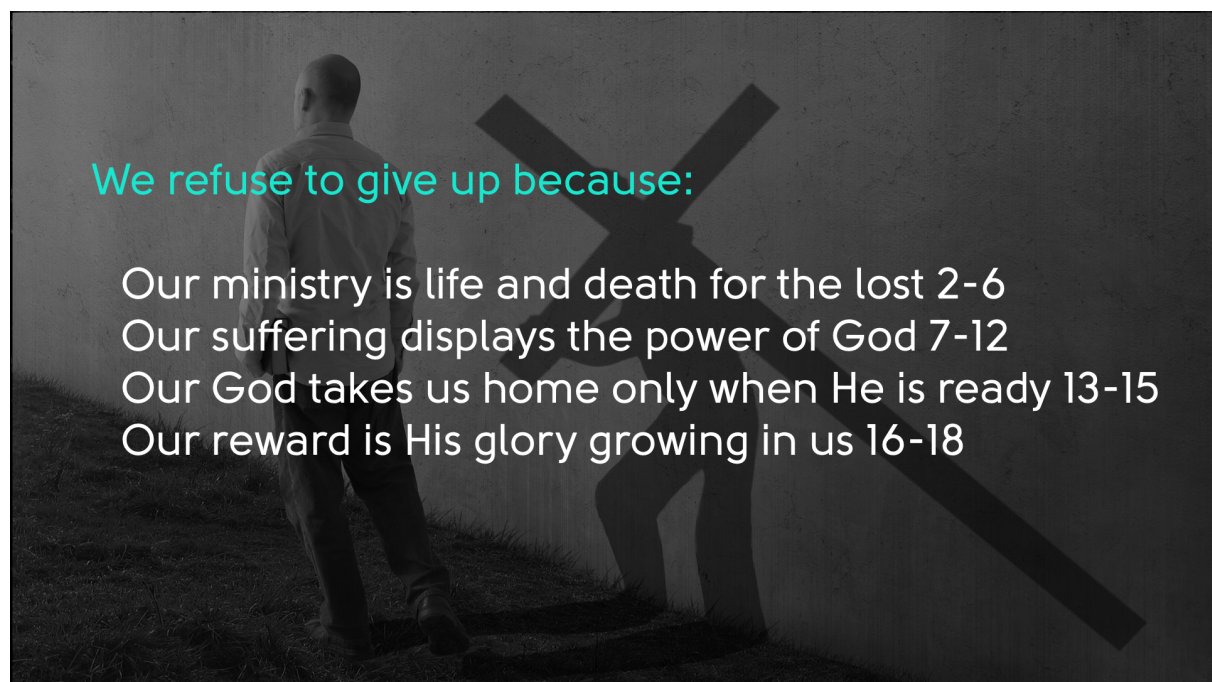
Indeed, everything is for your benefit so that, as grace extends through more and more people, it may cause thanksgiving to increase to the glory of God.

I will not give up. I will keep ministering to see the grace of God extend to more and more people.

I want to see more people saved – so more give thanks to God and He is glorified.

Ministry is tough – sharing the gospel is hard – but God uses our struggle – our dying – to spread His gospel and magnify His glory.

Paul adds a *fourth* and final reason why, we refuse to give up. Because:



**Our reward is His glory growing in us 16-18**

This is a tough passage. The whole question of reward in heaven is tough.

One issue is I think we read this too individualistically.

If I suffer for Christ now – it brings me reward then.

I am laying up stuff in heaven that is just for me.

Look, the whole concept of reward in heaven is one that I have struggled to understand.

What is the treasure that our ministry, our suffering, our lives – lay up in heaven?

Not easy to answer.

Here is what I believe Paul is saying.

Verse 16:

Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day.

Because of all Paul said in verses 1-15 – he refuses to give up. And now he adds one final reason.

Every bit of suffering – physical, emotional, weariness, persecution – causes an additional crack in his clay jar.

The word translated *destroyed* back up in verse 9 is a different word to the one here. In verse 9 the word means completely destroyed – lost.

This word for destroyed here means destroyed bit by bit.

I don't think Paul is talking of normal aging. That every time he looked in a mirror there was another wrinkle, more grey in his beard. His muscles were becoming weaker. His back hurt. His eyes were failing.

I think he is speaking of the destruction that comes over time from the toll of ministry. The grinding down in the battle.

The emotional, spiritual and relational toll of sharing Christ and shepherding the church.

But each crack on his outer person – declared the real him – his inner man was being renewed.

What does this mean?

In this context it seems to mean the glory of God in Him is growing. His ministry piles up glory.

In verse 6 we saw salvation brings the glory of God into us.

Verse 7 – This glory dwells in cracked pots.

Next week in chapter 5 Paul contrasts our earthly tent – these bodies – with our heavenly dwelling – our resurrection bodies. And the glory of God in us by the Spirit is only a down payment on the full glory.

But what this verse implies is that every bit of persecution, every beating, every attack – caused the glory of Christ in him – the glory that we receive after death – to grow.

The idea seems to be that as he dies for Christ – souls are saved and Christ is glorified and this glory grows within Him ready for eternity.

Verse 17:

For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory.

Read Paul's incredible list of persecutions and sufferings in chapter 11.

He calls them – momentary light affliction.

Most of us would call them – ongoing severe afflictions.

But only compared to this life.

Paul gives the equation.

Our momentary light affliction produces our eternal weight of glory.

Suffering is momentary compared to eternity – it only lasts a lifetime.

Suffering has consequences which are light compared to eternity – they only last a lifetime.

Paul is saying – every struggle, every attack, every discouragement is worth it because every last one produces an eternal weight of glory.

Your ministry is not in vain. Every sacrifice counts. Spending your youth into your old age for Christ is no sacrifice.

So don't build your life around what is fleeting and cannot last – build it around what will last forever.

As Jim Elliot put it – he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

So now, the great question – just what is this eternal weight of glory?

Don't think of this as some form of divine capitalism – heavenly merit.

Don't think all your hard work, your sacrifices, your giving, your persecution – means a bigger mansion, more heavenly treasure and a more prominent place in the kingdom.

I give an extra \$100 – another brick in my heavenly mansion.

I share the gospel – another gold brick on my mansion's pathway.

I don't think so. In verse 15 Paul said – his ministry, his suffering, his dying is used by the Lord to see the grace of God spread to more people – so more people are in heaven giving more praise to God – so more glory for God.

Our ministry spreads the gospel – leading to more glory.

And because the Spirit is in us and we are in Christ – more glory for Him means more glory for us all.

If I understand this right – and I freely admit I may not – I should not have reward envy over the huge pile of glory Paul has laid up.

I should not cry when I compare my meagre crown to Paul's whopper.

No, each of our ministries glorifies Christ – in particular through the lost coming to faith and praising Him – and then because we are all united to Christ – this total weight of glory becomes ours.

I know this might be confusing.

But, if you are making sacrifices in this life in the hope of more personal reward in heaven – I think you may be disappointed.

But, if what drives you is a love for Christ and a burning desire to see Him glorified and His name being praised – then that is our reward and there is no greater reward possible.

If that disappoints you – if your hope is for personal glory in the age to come – I think your understanding of the gospel may need a little adjustment.

The truth is that best of us is nothing more than an unworthy servant. The best of our works are but filthy rags.

You do not want to get to heaven and say – OK give me what I deserve. All we deserve and have earned is hell.

But by His grace, He allows us to share in His unfading glory.

Verse 18:

So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

This accumulating glory is not seen.

We can't see the weight of glory in us. We can't see the weight of glory being laid up in heaven. But we know it is there.

What we can see – our cracking pot – our ministries – is temporary – but what is unseen – heaven and the glory waiting – is eternal.

Our focus has to be on being a faithful slave and trusting God will use this.

The super apostles said – Paul where are your crowds? Give up.

Paul said – I can't. As a slave only Christ can release me from service.

I have to stay faithful. I have to keep on preaching Christ and Him crucified.

I have to trust that God is using my weakness to achieve His ends.

I have to trust He is building an eternal weight of glory – even though I can't see it.

Brothers and sisters, my point this morning is not to say – don't plan for your retirement from your working life.

No – of course you should.

My point is this – you are slaves so you can't retire from ministry.

If you are a Christian – you have a New Covenant ministry.

You may not be paid – but you are a minister.

So, your plan should be to keep ministering faithfully until you die.

Kids – you have your life ahead of you. You probably can't even imagine finishing school – let alone deciding what you want to do. But Jesus made you His slave – which means you have to fit Him into your plans. Sharing Him and serving His church have to be in there.

Young Adults – I know getting an education and finding a job is about all you can handle right now. But if you don't plan to have a ministry – you won't have one – you will not be faithful – so get ministering.

Mums and Dads – I know paying the mortgage and school fees and putting money into super might be your life right now. Jesus wants more. He can't have the scraps of your life.

Retirees – you may have retired from work – but with all that extra time, money and the motivation that heaven is coming – all too soon – I trust your ministry is better than ever.

I know the world hates our gospel and church life can be tough – and our ministry can be discouraging.

That is OK – God even uses that to lay up glory. So don't give up.

CT Studd put it this way:

Only one life 'twill soon be passed  
Only what is done for Christ will last

Only what is done for the name and glory of Christ – not us – Christ – will last.



This is the third time I have shown you this in a sermon.

It sits in my office.

If the actuaries are right – if I don't develop cancer or have a bad accident or Christ does not return – I should live about 20-25 years more.

I am an optimist and went with 25 years.

The first time I showed this to you – it had 50 \$1 coins in it. I spend one every birthday. It now has 25. I can't believe how few that looks to me.

But, it reminds me my clay jar, my outer man is getting more cracked and will one day shatter.



But each crack lays up glory for Christ. I have limited time. I can't just retire to the mountains – I can't just collect seashells – while breath goes in and out I have a job to do – and so do you.

## **Paul's Retirement Plan**

### **2 Corinthians 4:1-18      August 21, 2022**

**Main Point:** As slaves of Christ, our retirement plan is – we cannot retire from ministry.

#### **General Questions:**

1. What are the pressures that might make Paul or any pastor give up ministry?
2. How does the fact Paul had been shown mercy drive him on?
3. Why does the fact Paul knows he is a slave for Christ keep him ministering?
4. Why do the demands of ministry pressure us to water down the gospel and our hard teachings?
5. Why is do so many false gospels and false teachings sound so palatable and right?
6. If our conscience is an unreliable judge – why does Paul appeal to it?
7. Who is the 'god of this age' who blinded eyes?
8. How do you understand the roles of God, Satan and us in hardening our hearts?
9. What does it mean – Jesus is our Lord? What does it mean we are His slaves?
10. What does it mean we are slaves **to** Christ *and* **for** Christ?
11. How does our suffering for the gospel – our dying for the gospel – display the power of God?
12. What does Paul mean – we have this treasure in clay jars?
13. Why did God put His glory in something so weak?
14. What sustains us and causes us not to break and not be destroyed? How does this help the gospel spread?
15. Why is death something not to be feared? How does the hope of the resurrection help us to keep ministering now?
16. What is the weight of glory produced by affliction?
17. How does suffering produce this glory?
18. Discuss these:

Jim Elliot:

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

CT Studd:

Only one life 'twill soon be passed  
Only what is done for Christ will last

**Application Questions:**

1. Do you have a ministry now? If not how can you plan to serve?
2. What plan to you have to keep ministering until you die?
3. How can you make sure you are a workman who handles the word of truth right?
4. What should you do if someone seems blind to the gospel you are sharing with them?
5. How do you view how you will spend the years when you retire from work?
6. What can you do to encourage pastors not to give up?