

**Pastor Kyle Mercer**  
Jars of Clay

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Series: Where Glory Dwells  
2 Corinthians 4:7-18

**BIG IDEA – I GIVE UP SOMETHING I LOVE FOR SOMETHING I LOVE  
EVEN MORE**

Nothing will challenge your faith like the suffering of an innocent person. If you see some child or some young adult suffering, it will challenge your faith. I love what Maggie said. This is what suffering does. She said suffering strips away. If you've ever been through suffering, it takes from you. It takes your health. It takes your opportunities. It takes your future. I've talked to people before, and do you know what they experience when they suffer? Dream death.

Have you ever had dream death? That's when all of the things you thought you were going to do or were going to do in your marriage or were going to do with your family are no longer happening. I love what Maggie said. She basically said, "I'm going to trust God. I'm going to embrace the mystery. God is working, but I don't know how." At the end of that story, we got to see a little bit of how God is working.

Let me just say this, by the way. If you are suffering in any way, this is why we have a prayer team. At the end of the service, if you're going through something, while we're singing that last worship song, I want you to come on up and get prayed over, because one of the things we're going to do, as a church, is we are going to walk together through suffering. This is why we gather together.

Speaking of gathering together, we had something incredible happen on Friday night here. I want to show you a picture. We had over 1,000 men for our men's night. Isn't that incredible? Guys, again, I'm not guilting you. I'm not making you feel bad. If you were not here, you missed out totally. We can't put lightning in a bottle. It doesn't transfer on YouTube. You had to be here.

I picked Jon up from the airport. (The guys heard this story, because I told them it when they were there that night.) I picked Jon up from the airport, and he said, "Mate..." He has all this language for me. He's Australian. He said, "Hey, mate. How many men do you think are coming tonight?" I said, "Well, we have 900 registered." He said, "That's the largest group of men I will speak to this entire tour."

Why am I telling you that? God is up to something unique. It wouldn't be appropriate to get into the details of what he talked about, but it was an incredible time. Let me tell you this. For those of you who are interested, Jon Tyson is a giant, and I recorded a separate podcast with him that we're going to be releasing this week.

He talks about how he came to faith in Christ, how he got called to ministry, how he ended up in New York City from Australia, what life is like in New York City, and what it was like to be personally mentored by the late, great Tim Keller. So you don't want to miss that.

By the way, ladies, coming up in two weeks is your turn. Jen Wilkin. Are you ladies excited? The Oprah Winfrey of evangelicalism will be in the building. You ladies... Men don't register for things, but women do. We have almost 1,300 women registered. We have 1,300 seats, so don't tell anyone else about this event. (I'm just kidding.) You're going to be sitting on the floor. We'll seat the mezzanine. We're going to make it happen. You're going to want to be here for that event.

Finally, guys, it's Mother's Day. If you're just finding out it's Mother's Day, you are in so much trouble. Oh, man. Guys, we love moms. I love my mom. I love my wife and the mom of our kids. I say this every year, but Mother's Day is both a time of great celebration and, for some people, it's a really, really hard day.

If you're here and you're a mom, stand up. Just stand up if you're a mom. Get up. Come on. Look at this. Hey, listen. If Christ is the head of the church, moms are the heart. Ladies, thank you so much. Listen. Jon Tyson did something to me this week. He's a man full of faith.

I was thinking. Mother's Day is also a very hard day for people. It's a hard day because you lost your mom or it's a hard day because you're still single, and you're like, "I want to be a mom, but I'm not even married." One of the silent sufferings in churches is infertility and "We can't get pregnant. We can't stay pregnant."

Coming off a time with Jon Tyson, I just want to pray for anyone in this room right now who would say, "We've been trying to get pregnant, and we can't. We can't get pregnant. We can't stay pregnant." I'm not going to force anyone to, but if you're in

here right now, I'd like to pray with you, but I'd like the people around you to pray with you for a second.

If you're here right now, and you're struggling with infertility, and you would have the courage to stand, would you stand? We want to pray with you on this Mother's Day. Thank you. If you're around them, put your hands on them. We're just going to pray. If you'll extend hands, we're going to pray. We need to believe God for big things. I'm going to pray for us.

Lord, I thank you for the few couples in here. I know there are probably some others who said, "We don't want to stand about this." There are some things we struggle with and we go, "I don't have a verse for this," but then we look at the desire for a mom to have kids, and we realize this is a big theme in the Old Testament. This is the beginning of the New Testament.

God, there are women who are crying out who want to have kids, and I pray for these women and their husbands who stand next to them. Lord, I pray that you would give them the desire of their heart. It's a prayer for life. It's the kind of desire you would want to answer. "Would you give us a child or many children, that we might raise them in the Lord, that we might teach them the gospel, that we might pass on the faith?"

So, I pray that even right now, Lord, you would do something in them. I pray that we would be celebrating, as the Bible says, that they are with child. We believe in the power of prayer. We claim all of this in Jesus' name, amen.

We're in the summer now. It's summertime. There's a huge event happening this summer that I want to make sure you guys know about. My birthday is at the end of the summer. This is not a normal birthday. I'm turning 40 this summer. Okay? What happens when you're 40 is the word *young* drops off the front of your... I'm no longer a young man; I'm just a man. Right?

As soon as you turn 40, nothing you do is impressive anymore. When you make a lot of money before 40, people are like, "Yeah!" When you make a lot of money after 40, they're like, "You should. You should be. You're 48. I mean, yeah." Pray for my dear wife. Year in and year out, my birthday is not a big deal, but 30 was a national holiday, and 40, I'm pretty sure, is going to be an international holiday.

She says, "You have such high expectations that I don't know what to do." I'm like, "I know. I don't know." In preparation, I'm reading a lot of books. You guys binge Netflix shows. I binge books. I'm binging on "second half of life" books. It's interesting. Freud,

that great psychoanalyst, focused on the first half of your life, and he was obsessed with your relationship with your mother. That's what he wrote on.

Carl Jung was obsessed with the second half of life. Like, how do you deal with legacy and generations? Well, one of the things I've been reading a lot about is health span versus lifespan. Pretty simple. Right? Your lifespan is how long you live. Now, this is what's interesting. In 1900... That wasn't that long ago in history, speaking of historical matters.

In 1900, the average lifespan (you're not going to believe this) was 44 years old. Fact. So, midlife was 22. Today, the average lifespan is 75 years old. I don't know how they figure this out. I'm just passing it along. They did lifespan versus health span. So, average lifespan in America is 75. The average health span is 65. What does that mean? The average person will suffer some type of chronic illness, some type of disability, for about a decade of their life.

Now, some people say, "That's not going to be me." Like *this* guy. Let me show you a picture. Have you ever heard of Bryan Johnson? How old do you think he is? He's 46 years old. Let me tell you about him for a second. Bryan Johnson made... I don't know. He's one of those tech guys who made a couple hundred million dollars in Palo Alto. He started Project Blueprint.

What Bryan Johnson has been doing for the last handful of years... Go look him up. It's all public domain. It's all open source. It's all free. He has been spending \$2 million a year trying to reverse the aging process. He's trying to get back to a biological age of 18 years old.

Why am I talking about this? Because if you'll type to or turn to 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, Paul, for the next two weeks... We're going to talk about it *this* week, and we're going to talk about it *next* week. We're going to talk about the body. Why do you have a body? You've probably never asked that question. Why would you? You have one, and everyone else you know has one.

Paul, this week, is going to say your body is a jar of clay. Like we just prayed for, sometimes that jar of clay can't get pregnant. Next week, Paul is going to say it's a tent. Unfortunately, next week, we may even have to talk about camping, so come back. Paul is going to talk about the effects of sin and suffering on the body. We're going to look at this for the next two weeks. I want you to see this with me.

## **01 WE HAVE SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY IN SOMETHING ORDINARY**

Verse 7: ***"But we have this treasure in jars of clay..."*** This passage is so popular that a Christian band in the 90s named themselves after it. Anyone here listen to Jars of Clay? Oh, yeah. ***"...to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."*** Okay. We have to talk about treasure.

Part of what I want you to know is how wealthy you are spiritually right now. There are a lot of places in the Bible where Jesus talks about treasure. By the way, when we're young (maybe even as adults), we're obsessed with treasure. We love the idea of pirates, and "Is there buried treasure? Are there sunken ships? Where is there treasure?"

There are a lot of times in the New Testament where Jesus talks about treasure, but every time that I can find and remember, Jesus talks about treasure in heaven. Jesus says, "Do not store up treasure here..." Remember this? This is in the Sermon on the Mount. "...where moth and rust destroy and where a thief can break in and steal." He says, "Instead, store up treasure in heaven."

He basically says, "You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead." By faith and good deeds, you can store up treasure. First Peter says there's treasure reserved for you in heaven, Christian. I love it when things are reserved for me. That doesn't happen very often, but every once in a while, you get a reserved seat or a reserved parking spot. That means it's for no one else, and you can cut the line and get right to it.

That I know of, this is the only place in the New Testament that talks about the treasure we have right now. What is this treasure? If you drop back to verse 6, it's the knowledge of the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The treasure isn't money that we have in our bodies; the treasure is a message. What makes the message so valuable? Well, who it's about. It's about Jesus Christ and what he did.

What makes the message so valuable is its power in people's lives. It literally changes lives and legacies and destinies. But he said we have this treasure... Do you see where it's at? It's in a jar of clay. This isn't insulting. You're made in the image of God, and God loves you, but he says, "I want you to understand what your body is." He says it's a jar of clay, but in that jar of clay there's treasure.

Here's what would happen back then. This still happens today. People would hide something very valuable in something that wasn't valuable. I wonder if *you* have any hiding places for some of *your* valuables. This is the old stuffing money under a mattress kind of idea. Back then they would say, "Okay. Something is valuable. I'm going to put it in this jar." Sometimes they would bury the jar in the backyard.

These were common jars. Here's a way to think about it. We don't use jars or vessels like this as much anymore. This would be like God saying... If you used it today, one translation might be, "You're like the plastic bag that carries the groceries or your shopping items." Or maybe the better definition is "You're like Tupperware."

Have you ever cooked something...? You know, someone has a baby or they're sick, and you bring them a meal in Tupperware. Do you ever ask for that Tupperware back? You shouldn't. It's a little strange if you're doing that, because it's not about the Tupperware; it's about the items that were in the Tupperware.

Now, here's what I want us to understand. This is so freeing. You're a jar of clay. Here's what this means: You're finite. You're vulnerable. You're fragile. You're limited. See, as a jar of clay, you realize, "Okay. We have limited time here." Like, I'm a jar... Paul is going to get here. I'm going to break, and I'm going to be broken, and I'm not going to be around forever.

In fact, I try to think about this often here. I try to think (I'll just talk about myself for one second) that I am the interim pastor at Two Cities Church. Every pastor is an interim pastor. In 50 years, probably much sooner, somebody else will be here, and I'll be dead and gone. As the great theologian Conan O'Brien said... He did say something very deep. He said, "All graves go unvisited in the final analysis."

When was the last time somebody visited your great-grandparents' graves? It has been a long time. I don't mean to be too dark. There will be a time, if the Lord tarries, where no one will come and visit your grave anymore. You're a jar of clay. You're here for a limited amount of time. You get about 28,000 days.

We have limited energy. Right? Especially the older we get, the less energy we have. Paul is going to talk about that. We have limited gifts, and we're just fragile. One accident can happen... These jars, by the way, were very easily broken. You've seen this before in your life or someone else's life. One accident on the mountain bike, one colonoscopy that you go in for and they find something you didn't think... You will immediately feel your mortality.

So, what should we do as jars of clay? There are three things you need to do as a jar of clay. First, be *empty*. What kind of jar would God use? God loves to use an empty jar. The problem with us is we're so full. I mean, some of us are maybe full of sinful things, but we're full of just fluff. All we do is consume. We consume food, and we consume social media. We consume streaming services, and we consume YouTube. We're just not empty.

One of the things Jon Tyson was telling me this week (and I've told you this before) is the people God uses are not just the godly and gifted. That's what we think. Who are the most godly and gifted people? That's who we need. He says it's godly, gifted, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

God uses those who are empty. God uses those who are *available*. God can't use a jar that's not around, even if it's empty. Not that long ago, a couple of us were down in Florida at this church that's growing so quickly. We were down there to learn from them. We basically said, "Guys, we're growing, but you're growing even faster. How do you find leaders?" Because that's what you're always... You know, leaders and money.

"How do you find leaders? How do you launch more and more Community Groups?" I've been thinking about this for three months. He said, "Well, when it comes to a Community Group leader or a leader in our church, we care a lot less about ability. What we're looking for is surrender."

He said, "When we're looking for a Community Group leader... Yeah, we want them to have good character. We want them to have some social skills and be able to talk, but what we care about with a Community Group leader is high surrender, because if you're high surrender, you'll figure out everything else."

Be empty. Be available. The third one is to be *clean*. Have you ever gone...? You know, you're thirsty, and you go to your cabinet, or however you do this in your kitchen, and you grab a cup. It's empty, and it's available. You look inside, and you're like, "Did this go in the dishwasher?" You don't want to use something that's not clean. I'll show you this. In 2 Timothy 2, Paul says this.

Verse 20: ***"Now in a great house there are not only vessels..."*** That's the same word...*jars*. ***"...of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel [jar] for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work."***

You know what? I used to think (I don't know why I thought this) God just picked certain people to work through. I mean, he is sovereign, so in one sense I'm sure he does that. He just picks. "Okay. Down in Florida there's this girl named Julie. I'll use her. Up in Boston there's a guy. I'm going to use Bob up in Boston." I mean, God is sovereign. I think God uses people who want to be used.

I'm not going to quote Jon Tyson anymore today except to say this last thing, because he was so impactful. He's writing a book that's going to be coming out in the

future. It's all about prayer and revival, and it's called *God Comes Where He's Wanted*. If you get usable, God will wear you out, but a lot of people don't want to pay the price to be used by God. The price is character. The price is repentance.

Look at what it says here. It says we're a jar of clay, but there's something interesting. Look here. ***"But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."*** If you ever get upset that you're just weak... As you get older, you get upset that you're going to die. We're not as afraid of death as much as sometimes we're afraid of dying and the whole process.

Here's what I want you to understand. This is a very deep verse. Basically, God says, "I designed your weaknesses. I designed you so I could get the most glory." God designed salvation to humble us. Salvation was designed so the only thing we add to our salvation is the sin that made it necessary. That's humbling. The only thing I bring to my salvation is my sin.

God made even our Christian service humbling. How do you get the treasure out of the jar? It has to be broken. God designed the world in such a way that it would be so obvious when God does something through you that it wasn't you.

## **02 PAUL'S EXPERIENCE WITH HIS JAR OF CLAY**

Paul explains what it's like to be in this jar. Verses 8-9: ***"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed..."*** What do you notice about all of those? It's a reality he's experiencing followed by a *but not*. Four times (you can go back and look at those two verses) he says, "But not..." There's the appearance of things, and then there's the actual reality of it. I want to talk about this.

He talks about the four types of sufferings we experience in this jar. The first is physical suffering. He says, "We are afflicted but not crushed." If you've been following along in our series, the word *afflicted* was there the first week. Paul uses this at the very beginning of 2 Corinthians 1 to talk about his life. It means pressure. What he's literally saying is, "I'm pressed, but I'm not crushed."

Here's what I want to encourage you with if you're a Christian: you can handle more suffering than you think. Here's how life works. The average Christian thinks they can handle more temptation than they can. They can't. And they don't realize they could handle a lot more trials than they currently are. You can't think about the future apart



from the grace of God. When the trial is there, God doesn't waste his grace. He doesn't give you the grace before the trial; he gives you the grace *in* the trial.

Paul says, "We're afflicted, but we're not crushed." Secondly, he talks about mental suffering. We might say *emotional suffering*. He says, "I'm perplexed, but I'm not driven to despair." What does it mean to be perplexed? The Greek word literally means "I'm in a state of confusion."

Thank you, Paul. Thank you, apostle Paul, who hears directly from God and writes Scriptures. Thank you for admitting that even the great apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says, "Guys, there are a lot of times where I'm confused." This is why the longer I pastor, the more I realize you just have to embrace the mystery of life.

It's like, "Man, why did they have a stillborn child?" I'm perplexed but not driven to despair. "Why did she leave this earth so early and leave three kids behind?" I am perplexed, but I'm not driven to despair. Paul says, basically, "I'm in a state of confusion, and I have more questions than answers..." We've talked about that a lot here. "...but I know the one who has the answers."

Look. I don't think God owes us an explanation, but I do think, to show off his wisdom and goodness, in heaven God will explain all of these things that we can't understand right now. He says, "Here's what it's like to be in a jar." You're afflicted but not crushed. You're perplexed because you're finite. You know, your brain weighs three pounds. That's what he's saying. "I can't think of all this."

Look at what he says next. He says he's persecuted but not forsaken. The word *persecuted* here literally means hunted. Just think about the apostle Paul's life. He's like, "People are after me." He would upset some people, and then he'd leave the city, and sometimes they'd come after him. They'd follow him to other cities. Paul is like, "Everywhere I go, people are hunting me."

He said, "I'm persecuted but not forsaken." He's basically saying, "When everybody is against me, God is still with me." One of my most meaningful experiences, deepest experiences, of my first year here at Two Cities was actually something that happened at a different church. There was this guy, and he was in his 30s. He died. It was a heart issue. This was about five years ago. He died in his early 30s.

He was at Chick-fil-A and had some chest pain. All of the cardiologists were confused. He just died, leaving three kids, the youngest of which was 3 months old. I didn't even know him well, but I snuck in the back. I sat in the balcony at this big

funeral for him. I saw his wife with their three kids, and she was all dressed in black. I was completely overwhelmed.

There were all of these different speakers who came. I'll never forget this one. He wasn't even a pastor. I don't know why he was speaking. I can't remember his role in the family. He got up. He flew there from far away. I'll make this up. He said, "I came here today from Idaho."

He looked at the widow in the front row. "I came here to tell you God has not forsaken you." I was like, "Okay. That's a word." When your husband dies and leaves you with three kids, you might think, "Has God forsaken me?" Paul says, "I am persecuted but not forsaken."

Last one: "I'm struck down but not destroyed." That's a wrestling term. He's like, "I'm body slammed." Here's what Paul is saying: "I keep getting back up." That's it. All you have to do is get back up as many times as you've been knocked down, and you're doing well. Proverbs says, "A righteous person falls seven times." *Seven* in the Bible means indefinite. He keeps falling but gets back up.

### **03 MINISTRY IS ACCELERATING & AMPLIFYING DEATH AT WORK IN PAUL**

Now look. It gets more interesting. We have to spend some time on this. Look at verse 10. Paul makes it so hard on us. Look at this. ***"...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus..."*** What does that mean? ***"...so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies."***

Basically, here's what Paul is saying: "I am a pallbearer for the Lord Jesus Christ." Have you ever been a pallbearer? I've had the honor to do that. The pallbearers are close. They were close to the person who died. Paul says, "I know he's risen, but I carry the death of Jesus Christ with me everywhere, as if I was a pallbearer." It's what Luther said. Luther said, "I feel as though Jesus Christ died yesterday."

He says more, though. Three times, he talks about death. ***"For we who live are always..."*** Paul, always? ***"...being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."*** Here's another... We get these little summary statements of Paul's ministry. He's like, "Let me say it in a sentence." Here it is. "Here's my ministry in a sentence." ***"So death is at work in us, but life in you."***

I don't even know how to talk about this. Different books in the Bible, I'm like... As long as I'm here, I'm going to preach as much of God's Word as I can, and we're not going to avoid anything, but when I approach different books, I'm like, "I don't know if our church is ready for this book."

One of the things that made me think about not doing this book was I was like, "Is our church ready to talk about suffering? We just did Habakkuk. Are we ready to talk about this?" For Paul, suffering... He says *death*. Death is emotional, physical, relational, and mental. Pain is what he's talking about.

If you go back in those two verses, he uses the word *always* twice. For Paul, death was constant. Death was continuous. Paul almost died several times. He'll get into that later. At one point, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says, "I..." Could you imagine this? He's not romantic about this. He's not being euphemistic. He's not metaphorical.

At one point, Paul writes to the church. He's talking about the resurrection, and he says, "I die every day." It's like, "You're still alive. What do you mean you die every day?" How do I talk about this in a culture that is obsessed...? This is so hard to talk about, because our culture is obsessed with self-care.

Could you imagine trying to have a conversation with the apostle Paul about self-care? "Paul, you need a nap and a little bit of 'me' time." Paul would be like, "What is 'me' time?" This isn't wrong, but we live in the generation of the manicure and the pedicure and the Swedish back massage. I mean, we are designing our lives to pamper ourselves.

You probably don't know much about this, but in the church right now, there's a movement called the *emotionally healthy spirituality movement*. I have a book. Let me show you this book. I'm not against this book. I've read this book. I've recommended this book. On the copy that I had it said, "A million copies sold."

Peter Scazzero, great guy (I've never met him personally), was leading a large church in New Jersey, and he got burned out. All of the marriage books are written by guys who had horrible marriages, and then they fix their marriage and write the marriage book. Then everyone thinks, "I need to do the things the marriage guy said."

Here's what I want to talk about. You cannot build your life on emotionally healthy spirituality. I've seen this again and again. Those books are about margin. Those books are about your sabbath. Those books are a lot about personal reflection. If that is a church planter's favorite book, we will not plant him. I'm just telling you this. This is a little insider information behind the scenes.

I've seen guys try to plant with this mentality, and then they try to get their launch team to get up at 6:00 in the morning to set up chairs, and they're like, "No, no, no...sabbath. Hold on. I read the book. I need nine hours of sleep at night." It's like, "Okay. No, no, no." You build a church and a life on mission, and you remember emotionally healthy spirituality. You work six days, but you do take your day off. We're living in a time where this doesn't make any sense.

So, here's what Paul is saying. This is so intense. Paul is saying ministry was designed to kill you. Let me bring it down for us. If you've ever been a parent, and you have your one kid or your two kids... It could happen in the first few months, but certainly a couple of years in. You're like, "Parenting is killing me." That's how it was designed. I'm dead serious.

A couple of years into marriage... "Marriage is killing me." That's how it was designed, literally, because you're supposed to suffer and sacrifice and lay your life down for your wife. What does that feel like? Death. Exactly. No offense, ladies. That wasn't supposed to be funny. Women... I mean, submitting to your husband... Death. Right?

I'm just telling you what we try to do... You want tips and tricks and techniques so you don't have to die. It's like, "How do I get to disciple my kids without having to die?" You don't. "Let's do it. How does my neighbor come to Christ without me having to die?" Sorry. It's not going to happen. Paul basically says when you do ministry right, it accelerates and amplifies the death process in your life.

Have you ever seen the picture of Abe Lincoln before and after the Civil War? Guys, that's a picture five years apart. Do you see what it did to him? The first picture was taken in 1860. The second picture was taken in 1865. He aged so much walking our nation through the Civil War.

One of my favorite pictures of parenting is *this* one. It's a picture that what a dad does (a mom does too) across their life is they give themselves to their children so that at the end there's less of them and more for their child. Paul says, "Guys, this is how it works." So, you're going to have to... I'm using that term *die* elastically. You know what I'm talking about when I say that.

There are three types of death. There's *death to self*. That's the hardest. Guys, what does Jesus mean when he says...? I mean, do we believe this? "Anyone who wants to follow me must deny themselves..." Okay. Maybe I could interpret that softly. "...and take up their cross." What is the cross? An instrument of death. Where do you head with the cross? Do you go to a lot of places with the cross? You head to one place: Golgotha. What can you carry when you're carrying a cross? Nothing.

Here's what death to self looks like: I submit to God's Word, God's will, and God's way. That's how you know you're dying to yourself. Not because you didn't eat potato chips when you wanted to. I'm under God's Word. I don't have my opinion anymore on things God has said or what God has said *becomes* my opinion.

Secondly, *death to sin*. Have you ever tried living without sin in your life? That's why people keep going back to it. Saying "no" to heterosexual lust or homosexual lust... Do you know what it feels like? Death. Like your flesh is being pulled from your bones is what it will feel like, depending on how deep you've been in it.

Someone told me one time that an alcoholic, when he doesn't have a drink... I thought this was such a good illustration. An alcoholic who has an addiction to alcohol, when he feels like he hasn't had a drink in a while and needs a drink... He said it feels like you're at the bottom of a 30-foot pool, and you're like, "I've got to get up for air, and I've got to get up soon for air." So, what does it feel like when you keep telling yourself "no"? It feels like death.

Final one. How about *death to safety*? Guys, I'm not saying, "Be unsafe." I'm not saying, "Drive 30 miles over the speed limit and don't wear a seat belt." I'm not saying, "Go buy a motorcycle, don't wear a helmet, and ride right after it rains." We're not saying that, but I think we're desiring adventure.

Why do we go on roller coasters? Because our lives are so boring. There are no roller coasters in Africa. It's like, "There are enough dangerous things out here. We don't need *that*. There are lions." Right? We jump out of planes. We are longing for some type of adventure, and there has to be that. That's why I built in that the gospel goes forward one relationship at a time and one risk at a time. Paul basically says, "I'm willing to die."

#### **04 PAUL SHARES HIS OUTLOOK ON LIFE**

Look at what he says here. Verse 13: "*Since we have the same spirit of faith...*" Here's what that means: outlook on life. Spirit of faith...attitude. This is my spirit. "*...according to what has been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe, and so we also speak...*" Basically, Paul says, "Even though I'm suffering, I'm going to speak."

Do you know that nothing will silence you like suffering? I know it's silly and goofy that I do this, but I've been cold plunging now for about six months. That means getting

into very cold water usually very early in the morning. I was in 40-degree water at 5:30 this morning. That's cold.

One of my favorite things to do, though, is to introduce new people to cold plunging, because I love to see a person when they... You meet the real person when they get into ice cold water. You're like, "*There you are.*" One of the things I've noticed is when someone gets into ice cold water for the first time, they are silent, because they are suffering.

I had this one guy over. He is so kind. He's very godly. He's in our church. He got into cold water, and I said, "How are you doing, man?" He said, "Shut up." I'd never had him speak to me that way my whole life. He was suffering. He wanted to be silent. He wanted me to be silent. Paul says the temptation when we are suffering is to be silent, and he said instead we need to speak.

Paul says this. Verse 14: ***"...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence."*** We keep talking about this, because this is where Paul goes. Paul says, "Why am I not afraid of death?" We need to have a faith that's not afraid of death and dying. He said, "I'm not afraid of death because I believe God is going to raise me from the dead."

I told this story a long time ago, but it has always been moving to me when I heard it. I was at a missionary conference years ago, and I had a missionary tell a story. He said there was this couple. Imagine this. You know, you go overseas, and you're on all of these crazy roads. I've been all over China and India, and it's terrifying. These people drive these massive trucks on these little roads.

Well, this married couple... They were second-career missionaries. They're on these back roads. I don't remember exactly what happened, but something happened to where their car began to go off the side of the road off of a cliff. The husband is driving, and the wife's door opens up, and she almost falls out of the car off the cliff.

She doesn't. She gets back in, barely. She closes the door. They calm down for a second. This is the powerful part. She looks at her husband and says, "I was ready." She didn't know until... She said, "I was ready. I thought I was going to die, and in the moment, do you know what I thought? I was ready." Paul says, "I'm not really afraid to die, because death is a doorway."

This is important, though. If you've ever lost someone, this is really powerful. Look at what he says here. ***"...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence."*** In other words, Paul is like, "And I'm not afraid of missing you, because I'm going to see you soon."

If you ever have somebody who is dying of cancer and has little kids, here's what they think: "*They won't.*" They don't think, "*I won't*" if they're dying; they think, "*They won't.*" "*My kids won't. My husband won't. My wife won't.*" Paul says, "Listen, guys. We're going to be together a lot quicker than you think, so I'm not afraid."

He spent the whole chapter saying, "I love you, guys." He says, "Don't worry. If I go ahead of you, you'll be meeting me very quickly, and the Lord Jesus is going to reunite us in the resurrection." That's our hope. Then Paul says this: "***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.***" Paul is like, "I'm doing this for you."

## **05 WE HAVE TO HAVE AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE**

Verse 16. Here it is. Remember, I told you last week he starts and ends with "We do not lose heart." "***So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.***" He's talking about getting older and suffering. What he's saying is that you have an outer self and an inner self.

This is an interesting thing to think about. Across your life, your body and your soul go in opposite directions. If you're living a vibrant Christian life, that's what's going to happen. This is why, by the way, you'll meet somebody in their 80s, and they are still vibrant, though their body is falling apart, because their soul has been so alive, and it has been so strengthened.

Paul says, "Though outwardly we are perishing, inwardly we are being renewed day by day." Pastor Nate talked about this a couple of weeks ago. It's the incremental nature of our spiritual growth. I want you to see this. This is important. He says, "***For this light momentary affliction...***" It's like, "Paul, really?" Paul could say that about his own affliction. "***...is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison...***"

Different passages in the Bible tell us different things about why we suffer. I won't give you a whole theology (I've done it before) and purpose of suffering. Basically, one of the things he says here (every word matters) is "This light momentary affliction..." It's amazing that Paul can say that. I've always said minor surgery is surgery somebody else is having. There's no minor surgery if you're having it.

Paul is able to look at his own suffering and say, "In light of what's to come, it's light and momentary." Then he says, "It's preparing for us glory." Here's what I believe this means: God will honor every person's suffering in heaven. I really believe this. Do you

think I'm going to get the same honor of some missionary family that moved their entire life with all of their kids to learn a language? No way. And I'm fine with it. They're getting way more honored.

I don't know how it works up there. I don't know if we get to see it on a video screen. It's like, "I want to talk about them right now," God says. "I want you to know that everything... You know how hard it was for your kids? They didn't have any friends for a decade. You said goodbye to your grandparents. We're going to honor this." Think about some mom who has a child with special needs. Do you think she's getting treated like every other mother? No way.

God is going to say, "I saw it. I know what it cost. I know how you came alongside your son or your daughter. I know how hard it was. You had to deal with him or her being misunderstood and all of these years. I see it, and I'm going to reward it." Do you know Joni Eareckson Tada? She has been in a wheelchair for 50 years. Again, I don't know how it works, but God is going to honor it. That's the purpose.

Paul ends with this. Verse 18. Here it is. Paul says, "You have to keep an eternal perspective. ***...as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.***"

He basically says if we're going to live this way, if we're going to suffer for other people, if we're going to sacrifice, if we're going to serve... He basically says, "You need a larger time frame." Years ago, I went to this leadership development thing. The guy was helping us plan and "visioneer" our lives.

He said, "Guys, the first thing we're going to do is plan out three years. Where do you want to be in three years?" He said, "Let me tell you why three years." He said, "Because no one thinks three years. Everyone thinks over the next year, and if they're going on a big vacation, they're going to go 18 months, but I want you to think three years. I want to give you a time frame that's going to mess with you."

That's what Jesus is doing through the apostle Paul. "I want to give you a time frame that's going to mess with you. It's eternity." By the way, that's what it means to be mature. There are a lot of different things about how to become mature. One of the main things... Like, when you see your son or daughter become mature, it's when they stop thinking just about now and start thinking about later.

What Paul says is we can't just think about now; we have to think about later. He says it really strongly in verse 18. He says we don't look to the things that are seen; we look to the things that are unseen. In some ways (and I don't understand this), the



unseen is more real than the seen. How is that possible? Can that be possible? How can something I don't see be more real than what I see? Well, everything we see is going to pass away, the apostle John says, but what is unseen is eternal so it will always be here.

Guys, what would it look like if we actually lived like the apostle Paul? Let me summarize Paul's message today: *a ministry that costs you nothing accomplishes nothing*. The apostle Paul says if you want to make a difference, you're going to have to die to yourself. So, what I want to encourage you, as we're closing... I want you to think about "Where would I like to see life?"

It's like, "Okay. I want to see life in my marriage. Oh, I want to see life in my family. I want to see life in my kids. I want to see life in my neighbors." Great. Now you know the domain in which you're going to have to die. If you'll bow your heads and close your eyes, I just want to give us a chance... Just in your heart. I'm not going to ask anyone to raise their hand. I'm just going to ask you to respond.

I'm going to ask you to pray the prayer, "Lord, would you make me a vessel that is empty?" It's up to you. Maybe you want to put your palms up like *this*. "Lord, I receive. I want to be empty. Lord, cleanse me of whatever needs to be cleansed. Lord, I want to be available. I know you care more about my availability than my ability. Lord, I want to be clean." If there's an area of your life where you know, "You know what? This is it. I need to draw a line in the sand; I need to repent," I pray you'd do that.

Lord, I pray over the men and women in this room, that you would make us like the apostle Paul. He was so willing to sacrifice. When you sacrifice, what you basically say is, "I'm going to give up something I love for something I love even more." Lord, would you give us a love for our wives, for our husbands, and for our children that would make us willing to sacrifice?

Lord, would we say with the apostle Paul, "We're afflicted, but not crushed. We're perplexed, but not driven to despair. We're persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." Lord, the idea of death working in us so life can work in others... That's the principle of the gospel. Because, Jesus, you died, we now can have life. Would we live out that pattern of the gospel here at Two Cities Church. In Jesus' name, amen.