

# Power & Perseverance

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Focal Verses • 2 Corinthians 4:1-16

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will CONSIDER Paul's position in seeing himself as a slave for Christ's sake, CONTEMPLATE goodness about God and community, and COUNT on God's power to work through us to do His will in ministry to others.

## In Focus

The past year had been the worst of Felicia's life. She was in a terrible car accident that left her facing months of painful rehabilitation. Felicia knew that God would see her through this difficult time, but sometimes she felt alone and desperate. Determined to keep trusting God, She began to consciously thank Him for His blessings. As Felicia praised God for her home, her husband, her church, and especially her children, she began to think about others who were worse off than herself. Being a mother had taught her endurance and the power of love. She felt like God was calling her to share that beyond her home.

Felicia knew she couldn't physically go out and help other people, but she could let God use her in a different way. She asked her pastor for a list of names and addresses of people who were hospitalized, in a nursing home, or in jail. She began to pray for these people on a regular basis and began to write letters of encouragement to each one. Soon, she began to receive letters back from people who were encouraged in their relationship with God or had come to know Christ through Felicia's testimony of God's faithfulness.

*God calls each believer to spread the Gospel. Today we will learn that we are God's servants, and He will give us the power to serve Him despite our weaknesses or circumstances.*

## Keep in Mind

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9, KJV).

## KJV

- 2 Corinthians 4:1** Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;  
**2** But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.  
**3** But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:  
**4** In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.  
**5** For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.  
**6** For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.  
**7** But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.  
**8** We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;  
**9** Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;  
**10** Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.  
**11** For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

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**12** So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

**13** We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;

**14** Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.

**15** For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

**16** For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

### NLT

**2 Corinthians 4:1** Therefore, since God in his mercy has given us this new way, we never give up.

**2** We reject all shameful deeds and underhanded methods. We don't try to trick anyone or distort the word of God. We tell the truth before God, and all who are honest know this.

**3** If the Good News we preach is hidden behind a veil, it is hidden only from people who are perishing.

**4** Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

**5** You see, we don't go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus' sake.

**6** For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

**7** We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

**8** We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair.

**9** We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.

**10** Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

**11** Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies.

**12** So we live in the face of death, but this has resulted in eternal life for you.

**13** But we continue to preach because we have the same kind of faith the psalmist had when he said, "I believed in God, so I spoke."

**14** We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with you.

**15** All of this is for your benefit. And as God's grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory.

**16** That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day.

### The People, Places, and Times

**Jars of clay.** Clay was a common commodity in the Mediterranean, and earthen vessels made of clay were strictly utilitarian and considered almost disposable. Clay jars were ordinary, relatively fragile, and less valuable than the day's more beautiful and enduring bronze vessels. A clay jar would be thrown away if it

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was flawed or became ceremonially unclean. In biblical times, people sometimes hid their treasures in clay jars, thinking thieves would assume that an ugly earthen jar would hold nothing of value.

## Background

Paul's opponents accused him of not acting or preaching like a "true" apostle—that he was weak, lacked authority, and didn't possess the verbal skills of some of the false teachers of the day. In addition, these false teachers accused Paul of misusing funds, implying that he could not be trusted because he had to change his planned visit to the Corinthian church.

Paul countered these accusations by reminding the Corinthians that God had miraculously intervened in his life and chose him as an apostle (1:1; Acts 9:15). He also urged the Corinthian believers to remember his demeanor and behavior while he lived and worked among them. He freely admitted that he was not a polished orator. Still, he reminded the church that his knowledge of the Gospel and his integrity were more important than his masterful delivery of a speech (2 Corinthians 10:10–11, 11:6). Paul also reiterated that his humble demeanor was modeled after Jesus' example and that Christ's power was more clearly seen because of Paul's weakness (11:30, 12:9–10).

*How can we avoid judging messengers of the Gospel because of how they look or sound?*

## At-A-Glance

1. The Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:1–6)
2. The Trials (vv. 7–11)
3. The Hope (vv. 12–15)

## In Depth

### 1. The Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:1–6)

In these verses, Paul continued refuting his opponents, who apparently accused him of being underhanded or deceitful. He appealed to the Christians to examine their consciences and to remember that he had always been truthful with them and taught the Gospel plainly. He asserted that if anyone did not understand the truth of the Gospel, it was because they had been blinded by the "god of this world" (v. 4). Only people who have embraced Jesus Christ can understand certain spiritual truths. Satan plans to prevent people from comprehending and, therefore, receiving the truth.

Paul reiterated that he did not preach to build his popularity but because he sought to serve others on behalf of Jesus. He imitated Jesus, who humbled Himself as a servant to secure our redemption (Philippians 2:5–8).

*How should we respond when people try to question our intentions or harm our reputations?*

### 2. The Trials (2 Corinthians 4:7–11)

In verse 7, Paul pointed out that God has chosen to use frail humans to accomplish His will. This is a striking juxtaposition—flawed, fragile, and ugly pots holding the greatest treasure of all, the light and hope of the Gospel. Because Paul had committed himself as a slave to Christ, he shared in His suffering. The various hardships and persecution he endured were a constant reminder of his human frailty and of God's power. Though he was jailed, beaten, and falsely accused, Paul's enemies were not able to destroy him.

Paul said that he always carried around or bore in his physical body the death of Jesus Christ, not forgetting the sacrifice that He made. Paul had learned to die daily to his flesh so Jesus' resurrection power could be revealed in him.

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*How can our suffering push us toward God instead of away from Him?*

## **3. The Hope (2 Corinthians 4:12–15)**

Paul's willingness to suffer as a servant of Christ greatly benefited the Christian believers at Corinth. He reminded them that his hardships were part of the cost he paid as a servant to bring the light of the Gospel to them (v. 12). Then, quoting from Psalm 116:10, Paul said along with the psalmist that he was compelled to tell others what God had done for him. His story of deliverance, suffering, and servanthood had only made him more confident of his position in Christ. He exalted in the promise that every believer will be resurrected one day to stand in God's presence with all the saints.

Paul was encouraged that his labor and suffering were not in vain. Many Corinthians had come to know Christ, and the kingdom of God was advancing. More and more people were gaining salvation as the Corinthians shared their faith, and, as a result, God was receiving glory.

*How does remembering God's glory encourage us to persevere in serving God?*

## **Search the Scriptures**

1. How did Paul maintain a clear conscience before his opponents (2 Corinthians 4:2)?
2. Why did Paul remind the Corinthians that God created light out of darkness (2 Corinthians 4:6)?

## **Discuss the Meaning**

God gives believers the power to carry out His work even in the midst of hardships and trials.

1. What is the main task that God gives to every believer?
2. How do our struggles and trials enable others to see Jesus' power more clearly?

## **Liberating Lesson**

Self-sacrifice and service to others are not very popular these days. People seek to please themselves and will go to great lengths to satisfy their desires. As believers, we must reject self-absorption and accept our responsibility to put our fleshly wants aside to serve others. When we receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, we accept the amazing gift of salvation, but with that gift comes the responsibility to share the Gospel of Christ with others, no matter the cost. The only way we can accomplish this is to allow His power to work in us despite (and even through) our human weaknesses.

## **Application for Activation**

On a sheet of paper, list those things you see as your own personal weaknesses or disadvantages. Perhaps you have a physical disability. Perhaps you are out of work or don't own a vehicle. Maybe you struggle to control your anxiety.

God wants to show Himself power in what you consider "weak." Commit yourself and God so that He can work through you and reach others with the Gospel, no matter your frailties or problems.

## **More Light on the Text**

**2 Corinthians 4:2–15, KJV**

**1** Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; **2** But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

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When proclaiming the Word of God, Paul had been accused of “craftiness” (Gk. *panourgia*, pan-oorg-EE-ah; “cunning” or “false wisdom”), but here he begins his defense. Many suggest that the accusations were being made by other “apostles” in Corinth who were challenging Paul’s authority. The word used here to accuse Paul is the same word that was used to describe Satan’s deception of Eve in the Garden of Eden (cf. 11:3). Paul asserted that, unlike Satan, he did not walk in craftiness and had renounced the “hidden things” (Gk. *kryptos*, kroop-TOS; “concealed” or “secret”). Rather, he sought to speak the truth of God’s Word exactly as it is. Paul believed that this Word is powerful and, when presented directly and unadulterated, can prick the “conscience” (Gk. *suneidēsis*, soon-I-day-sis). Paul was ever mindful that since he preached “in the sight of God,” he sought to be above reproach in conducting his ministry’s responsibilities.

**3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.**

Paul reminded the Corinthians that Satan had not been absent but continually worked to “blind” (Gk. *tuphloo*, toof-LO-o; “to blunt the mental discernment”) their minds. That is why the truth of the Gospel was hidden from them. Satan, “the god of this world,” was not desirous that the light of the Gospel should shine on them. Still, their unbelief did not diminish the truth that Christ is God (cf. Hebrews 1:3). Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that the light of Christ’s “glorious” (Gk. *doxa*, DOX-ah; “splendor,” “majesty,” or “a thing belonging to God”), Gospel, when received, can pierce the veil of Satan’s darkness.

**5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.**

Some may think that an educated man like Paul would get caught up in the fame and say whatever the crowd wanted to hear. But Paul’s experience on the Damascus road (cf. Acts 9:1–9), where he met Christ Jesus, so affected him that he presented himself as a “servant” (Gk. *doulos*, DOO-los; “one devoted to another to the disregard of one’s own interests”) to the Corinthians for Christ’s sake. Because of Christ and the mission with which Paul was charged, he would not flatter the people with flowery words, wit, or charm. His purpose was to show Christ and not himself.

**6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.**

Paul drew the Corinthians’ attention back to the beginning of God’s creation when He pierced the darkness and caused light to shine through (cf. Genesis 1:3). In the same fashion, He gave Jesus Christ to the world. For any who would look, the knowledge of God’s glory could be seen in Christ’s face. Now, Christ the light, which pierced Paul’s darkness of heart on the Damascus road, shone forth to pierce the darkness of any who would believe. Paul explained that the “treasure” (Gk. *thesauros*, thay-sow-ROS; “the place in which good and precious things are collected and laid up”) of this knowledge was entrusted to “earthen” (Gk. *ostrakinis*, os-TRA-kin-os; “clay with a suggestion of frailty”) vessels as another means for displaying the “excellency.”

**8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;**

Paul had become used to being a hunted man. Because of his witness for Christ, he constantly had to flee from one city to another for his own safety (cf. Matthew 10:23). Even now, upon his return to Corinth and within the church he founded, he had accusers who questioned his motives. In the face of such treatment, one would be tempted toward discouragement, but Paul shared in four powerful statements his faith and trust in the supremacy of God’s great power. Though “troubled” (Gk. *thlibo*, THLEE-bo; “to press hard upon”), Paul was not distressed. Though “perplexed” (Gk. *aporeo*, ap-or-EH-o; “to be without resources”), or “to be left wanting,” he was not in

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despair. God had always provided for Paul's sustenance and well-being. His trials only served to reinforce his faith in Christ. Paul knew "persecution" (Gk. *dioko*, dee-O-ko; "to make to run or flee" or "to put to flight") firsthand and had even been "cast down" as though dead. His experience showed him that God would never "forsake him."

**10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. 11 For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.**

Paul tried to help them understand that Christ's purpose on earth—to redeem humanity—involved a constant "dying" (Gk. *nekrosis*, NEK-ro-sis; "being put to death") on the Lord's part. The Lord Jesus had constantly been the target of Jewish leadership who sought His earthly life. Even so, Christ spent His physical energies and spiritual strength in the service of those He came to save. Christ knew sleepless nights and emotional distress. In a sense, His death upon Calvary's cross was but the culmination of the dying process—He had been experiencing until He reached Golgotha. Christ endured this gradual dying so that in His resurrection, His life could show forth in the bodily ministry of those who believed in Him.

Paul understood this gradual death because he lived daily under the constant threat of death. He explained that, like Christ, we who live and belong to Christ also experience constant dying as we are "delivered" (Gk. *paradidomi*, par-ad-ID-omee; "to give over into the hands of ") to death. This should not be surprising for the believer, for God the Father sees all those who believe in Christ as having died with Him (cf. 5:14). This He does for our sake so that the life that is through Christ can be made "manifest" (Gk. *phaneroo*, fan-er-O-o; "has made plain or evident") in our mortal bodies for all the world to see. Such sacrifice is to the service of humanity and the glory of God.

**12 So then death worketh in us, but life in you. 13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;**

Paul's daily physical suffering and dying were to be seen for the benefit of the Corinthians. As he emulated the life and ministry of Christ, they too were to emulate this example, daily dying, so that it might work to the benefit of life. Paul then reminded the Corinthians of the teaching of Psalm 116:10. The writer of that psalm knew affliction, but that did not deter him from speaking. Paul wanted the Corinthian church to understand that to speak even while suffering, and affliction was actual evidence of having "believed" (Gk. *pisteuo*, pist-YOO-o; "to trust in Jesus or God as able to aid either in obtaining or in doing something") and would serve to strengthen faith. Paul's encouragement to the Corinthians was for them to "speak."

**14 Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.**

For Paul, everything found its purpose in the Lord Jesus. Like Jesus, Paul could know suffering and rejoice in it. Like Jesus, Paul could give his life in ministry and self-sacrifice. Because of Jesus, Paul believed that God would bring him and all other believers to the newness of life. Death would have no hold. No matter how unpleasant, life on earth would have found a purpose that served humanity and brought honor to God. In the end, Paul promised the Corinthians that they would all be together in the presence of God. This, Paul "knew" (Gk. *eido*, I-do; "to be confident of"). It is a confidence we also can share.

**15 For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. 16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.**

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Everything Christ accomplished and Paul sought to accomplish had one grand end: to bring glory to God. On the strength of the abundant grace bestowed upon him, even in the midst of his sufferings and trials, Paul gave thanks, believing that as a result, many others would also come to God with “thanksgiving” (Gk. *eucharistia*, yoo-khar-is-TEE-ah; gratitude; actively grateful to God as an act of worship”). The worship and thanksgiving would then “redound” (Gk. *perisseuo*, per-is-SYOO-o’ “to overflow”) to the glory of God.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

Mark 16:1–20  
Psalm 104:19–26

### TUESDAY

Luke 1–2  
Psalm 104:27–30

### WEDNESDAY

Luke 3–4  
Psalm 104:31–35

### THURSDAY

Luke 5–7  
Psalm 105:1–11

### FRIDAY

Luke 8–10  
Psalm 105:12–22

### SATURDAY

Luke 11–12  
Psalm 105:23–38

### SUNDAY

Luke 12:13–59  
Psalm 105:39–45