

One of the things none of us likes, but all of us have are limits. As humans we have all sorts of limits. We have limited strength. Limited intellect, limited knowledge, limited experience, limited abilities and limited communication skills. As humans we have all sort of limits. And we're typically annoyed by them.

Add to these our physical limits. We need a certain amount of sleep, or we're grumpy. We can only go so long without food and water. We battle disease, vision problems, joint pain, loss of energy as we age. It's all incredibly annoying.

I'm not a good sick person. In addition to feeling sick, I feel irritated and grumpy because I can't do what I need to do or accomplish what I need to accomplish. It's annoying to me to be down with colds, or the flu, or foggy headed with allergies.

Add to our innate limitations as humans, the obstacles, challenges, and resistance we face in life. I mean life is one never-ending problem-solving opportunity after another. We face obstacles that expose our limits. We face challenges that bring us to the end of our rope. And at times we face difficult people in our lives who make things hard for us. These limits frustrate. They can discourage us. They get in our way!

And at times, I'm guessing you've felt that way as well. I know I have. If I just had more energy, was a little smarter, had a better memory, had a greater intellect, less insecurity, less fear of failure, and less concern over being accepted by others. If I was just a little better and a little less hindered by limitations....then....then....then I'd be a real powerful force for God.

For many of us all these challenges are annoying, frustrating, – maddening. To us they are useless, waste of energy and a waste of money. They often embarrass us, we feel shame about these limitations or weaknesses. So, We do our best to avoid them, hide them, or try to pretend they don't exist. They feel disqualifying for us as representatives of Jesus to our worlds.

[Transition] - But, I want you to know the Bible flips the script on this whole conversation.

The Bible has a completely different perspective. The Bible teaches there is actually purpose and meaning in our frailties and limits. Even in our pain and suffering. God uses it all!!!

The Bible teaches embracing our limits and frailties actually magnifies Gods presence and power in us. It completely flips the script. Rather than be annoyed and ashamed of our weaknesses and frailties we can learn to embrace them as tools in God's hands.

To be clear, I'm talking about human limits here. I'm not talking about how we limit ourselves, or make life harder by our sinful choices. I'm talking about human limits and frailties that annoy us...but showcase God.

Transition: How in the worlds does this work? Let's see how Paul explains this dynamic.

First, let's get some perspective. The verses we're in today 7-15 are part of a bigger teaching Paul is giving to the Corinthians which starts back in Chapter 3 where he's celebrating our salvation and the transforming work of the Spirit in our lives. At the beginning of Chapter 4, Paul teaches that we Christians have the calling on our lives to take the love and life of Jesus to our world. Each of us is called to testify and reflect Jesus in all the orbits of our lives. Doug unpacked that for us last week.

Now, this week he illustrates and gives some personal examples from his life and ministry about how that works. Then through the end of Chapter 4 and into Chapter 5, he draws out some implications and applications for our lives. Pastor Phil is preparing to unpack that for us next week.

Let's look at our text for today in that context. I want you to see how Paul flips the script when it comes to our limits. If you haven't yet, open your Bibles to 2 Cor. 4. I want to show you the first phrase of verse 7. I'm reading out of the NIV

Verse 7 begins, *"But we have this treasure in jars of clay..."*

God knows we are fragile messengers.

The "treasure" is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It refers to the life-giving message of Jesus. It refers to all the good things Jesus brings into our lives—love, forgiveness, transformation through the Spirit, etc. All the blessing and good things Jesus makes possible in our lives—that's the *treasure* we carry as God's ministers and messengers.

But, that divine, powerful, life-changing treasure is carried by you and me; humans, fragile, limited messengers, that are prone to break. That's us. We're like clay pots—easily chipped, cracked and broken.

This "treasure in fragile pots" analogy highlights the truth that the powerful impact of the gospel on culture comes exclusively from God, not from human strength or ability.

He says it in the last part of verse 7. The treasure of the gospel is housed and carried into the world by a bunch of cracked pots...why? *"to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.* In other words, the secret sauce of your effectiveness is your humble ownership of your weakness and limits.

[Illustration] – Paul had some limits and weaknesses he prayed over and over would be taken from him. But God didn't take those limits away! I

love the way the way the story is paraphrased in *The Message* by the late Eugene Peterson.

"I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan's angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty! At first, I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me,

My grace is enough; it's all you need.

My strength comes into its own in your weakness.

Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become. – 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (The Message Bible Paraphrase)

[Illustration] – By now, most of us have watched portions of the Charlie Kirk memorial. I was marinating in this text at the time, and I thought to myself, this is a perfect example of God's power showing up best in our weakness and sufferings.

When Erika Kirk was at her most weak and fragile moments, she magnified the presence and power of God in more powerful ways than ever before.

What you and I and the rest of the world experienced during her tribute at Charlie's Memorial was the raw power of God radiating through her suffering, grief, and raw emotion. I suspect it moved and inspired every viewer around the world. And it demonstrates Paul's truth today, that God's strength is most visible in our weakness and sufferings.

Here's a truth we must never forget: **God's power is magnified when we embrace our limits.**

[**Transition**]- Paul demonstrates this truth from his own life.

Look at verses 8-9

⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

Our weakness magnifies Christ's strength in us (vv. 8-12)

Here Paul considers the suffering and persecution he has endured as part of his "clay-potness." In other words, it's not just his personal human limits and frailties that make him a fragile messenger, it's also all the trials he's endured.

Paul lists out many of the trials he endured, and many believers endure (e.g., being hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down).

But he emphasizes believers are not defeated because God sustains them. Their struggles don't define them or ultimately defeat them.

Though we might endure all kinds of suffering, we are not done in by our circumstances. Why? Because God has the ability and power to sustain us in the midst of adversity. Given Paul's weakness and our weakness, our perseverance can be attributed only to God. In fact, *suffering provides a platform for the display of God's power!*

[**Transition**] - Now in verses 10-11 he does something that seems a little confusing at first. He looks at his weakness and suffering through the lens of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also

be revealed in our mortal body. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

Let's unpack this because it's a little confusing. When he says, "*we carry around in our body the death of Jesus*", he's referring to his sufferings—the list in the verse above, being "hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down.

And when he says, "*so that the life of Jesus may be revealed*", he's referring to being sustained by the power of God—the fact that he's not crushed, not in despair, not abandoned, and not destroyed.

Basically, Paul is saying the power of God being displayed in his sufferings and sustenance is, in fact, the same power that was displayed in Christ's death (sufferings) and resurrection. God's power is magnified in both!

In the same way that God did not ultimately abandon Jesus in the grave, so too God's resurrection power sustains Paul in his own experiences of persecution and suffering. Both experienced persecution and suffering and both were sustained and raised up by God.

Now, it's important to note, the Greek grammar used in verse 11, "*we are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake*", is in the passive tense. That emphasizes the reality that our human frailty along with our suffering is not just coincidental. It's not a hinderance that chokes out our effective witness.

Instead, it's the grand stage upon which God showcases his divine power through our lives. It's not just coincidental. It's part of God's divine plan for the spread of the gospel. This means instead of suffering being something that makes God look bad, it's the very stage upon which he showcases his power.

[Transition]- But, how can we live this truth out in our lives? Look at verses 13-14

***13** It is written: "I believed; therefore, I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, **14** because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.*

Our faith drives our perseverance and proclamation (vv. 12-14):

Paul's quoting Psalm 116:10 to point out this dynamic he's talking about here is not new with him. In fact, he stands in a long line of Spirit-led righteous ones of the past who have suffered, faced death and cried out in desperation for deliverance, and God's power delivered them and sustained them.

For this reason, his willingness to speak out for Jesus remains strong. Despite his hardships, weaknesses, and challenges, he was committed to allowing the power of God to be magnified through it all.

His confidence and faith in the one who raised Jesus from the dead continued to fuel his resolve and drive his proclamation of the Gospel. He knew, the same power that conquered the grave lived in him. And it lives in each one of us who have come after him.

[Illustration]- I saw one interview where Charlie Kirk was clear eyed about the dangers and challenges of continuing on in his commitment to speak boldly about his faith, and to speak truth to power, and to give direct correction to bad thinking and reasoning.

And it was his confidence in God's faithfulness to sustain him, even through death, that gave him that bold resolve. At one point he said, "All death can do to the believer is to deliver him to Jesus."

[Quote]- Soren Kierkegaard once said, "The tyrant dies and his rule is over, the martyr dies, and his rule begins." This is classic example of how God's power is showcased and magnified in our human frailty.

[Illustration] - One report I read said, Charlie Kirk gained 10 million more Instagram followers after his death. That's 10 million more people who have been exposed to his message of Jesus. They thought they were silencing him but instead they did the exact opposite.

Another report said before his martyr death TPUSA had approximately 3,500 chapters on High School and College campuses. I think Charlie had a BHAG goal of like 20k chapters. According to Thursday morning's Instagram post, TPUSA reports over the last couple of weeks they have received 121,000+ requests from high school and college students nationwide to start a chapter or get involved with an existing chapter. For Several days that number was doubling every day after he was assassinated.¹

When you embrace the realities of human weakness with all your limits and frailties, even to the point of death...the power of God in you shines even brighter. His power is magnified through you. Those far from God consider your life and see something different and inspiring in you. And in that moment, they are drawn one click closer to opening their heart to their creator. You may not know it. They may not tell you. But you can trust it.

[Illustration]. Did you see all those folks who stood up when Dr. Frank Turek, Charley's apologetics mentor, shared the gospel at the memorial and invited them to come to Jesus? It's a radical example, but it reminds us again that God's power shows up best in our limits and sufferings.

[Transition]- As it turns out...this is the actually the chief end to suffering. This is its primary purpose. Look at verse 15.

¹ TPUSA Instagram post, Thursday morning, October 25, 2025.

15 "All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God."

4. Magnifying God's power is the chief end of suffering (v. 15)

The ultimate purpose of enduring trials and struggles and limitations in our lives is so the grace of God reaches more and more people, leading to greater and greater thanksgiving and glory to God.

We never enable God's power to shine more vibrantly through our lives than when we are walking through suffering, or embracing our limits, trusting God all the way.

[**Transition**] - Let me wrap up our time with a few key takeaways.

Implications/Applications:

1. Embrace weakness and lean into God.

{**Quote**} - John Milton said, "The martyrs shook the powers of darkness with the irresistible power of weakness"

Isn't that fascinating? I love that! What a concept? The irresistible power of weakness. I hope the imagery of being a jar of clay will serve to always remind you that your human frailty is not a setback, it's an opportunity to showcase God's power.

[**Illustration**]- Remember, all the heroes of the Bible? Think about it. They faced similar types of limitations as you and I do. But, through steady reliance on God their weaknesses showcased God's power in amazing ways. And God used them to accomplish his work in the world to his glory:

Abraham was old
Joseph was abused
Moses stuttered
Jonah was fearful and reluctant
Naomi was a widow
Peter was impulsive and hot-tempered

Martha worried a lot
Thomas had doubts
Zacchaeus was unpopular
Paul had poor health
Timothy was timid.²

And like us, often these “hall of famers” of the Bible initially saw their limitations and frailties as inadequacies, as obstacles to their effectiveness and usefulness for God’s work in the world. But, just as John Milton said, There’s something about, “The irresistible power of weakness.”

[Illustration]- I actually think this is the most powerful thing about Celebrate recovery. They have created a culture of humility and willing ownership of their weaknesses, frailties, hurts, habits, and hang ups. And in that ownership, and in that community of others doing the same, the power of God is unleashed for change and transformation.

They are not just saying, “This is who I am. I’m broken. Accept me as I am.” End of story. Staying stuck doesn’t glorify God. NO, they are saying, “This is who I am. I am broken. And with your help I’m leaning on God to change and am inviting the Holy Spirit to transform me.” That glorifies God and magnifies his power.

2. Continue to share your faith even when it’s difficult

Paul had a resilience despite suffering. Review and remind yourself of the many examples of God’s faithfulness in the past. Find those examples in the Bible. Recall those examples in your own life. List them out. Spend time reflecting on those stories. Remind yourself as Paul did, you are one

²Warren, Purpose Driven Life, p. 232-233.

in a long line of very human, imperfect believers who can trust in God's faithfulness and be sustained.

Practically, each of us can seek to reframe our personal trials—such as illness, loss, or conflict—as opportunities to demonstrate hope and point others to Christ.

For example, if you are enduring a health crisis you might journal how God is sustaining you and showing up for you and share that with your small group or maybe even a neighbor, or a co-worker.

If you're a parent facing family struggles, you might model forgiveness and faith to your children, showing them how trials can lead to spiritual growth and impact others.

Or maybe you are in a hostile environment and experiencing job discrimination for your beliefs, but you continue to live out your faith with integrity. Your courage could lead a coworker to ask about Jesus.

3. Never forget, as you lean on Jesus your sufferings magnify God's power.

It's not a truth we especially love—that suffering leads to greater display of God's grace and glory. But it's true.

So, embrace weakness...trust God...allow God to show off through your life!!