

Well, good morning; how are we? Good, good! I want to give a quick shout-out to my people joining us in our online community! I'm so glad you are a part of the Foothills Family and that you're with us in worship and studying God's Word from wherever and whenever you're at. If I haven't been able to meet you, my name is Doug; I'm one of the pastors here, and I would love to connect with you on the patio after we worship together. So please come say hi.

Last week Pastor Dillon walked us through 2 Corinthians 3 and explained to us that we are qualified by the Spirit, not by diplomas, not by human recommendation, not by our own business or financial accomplishments, or any of our own merits. Instead, the Spirit Himself writes on our hearts and transforms us into the image of Jesus. That's how Paul contrasted the fading glory of the old covenant with the surpassing glory of the new.

Now today, as we step into chapter 4, Paul picks up right where we left off. Starting in verse 1, he says, "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart." And this is a fitting way for Paul to continue—because Paul is writing to a church in Corinth where his ministry is under attack. A ministry he had poured his life into with tears, prayers, and countless hours of teaching, only to be dismissed as weak and unimpressive.

And remember Corinth itself: it was a wealthy port city, a crossroads of trade and culture. In Corinth, people paid money to hear polished speakers, a lot like how we buy tickets for concerts today. Fame, status, and power were the measure of greatness. Against that backdrop, Paul's plain speech and constant suffering seemed foolish. By contrast, he was mocked as weak, unimpressive, even a failure. The false teachers played

right into the Corinthians values—they flaunted their credentials, boasted of spiritual visions, and sold a “Jesus +” gospel, as Dillon explained last week.

Now, let me pause here. Because you might be tempted to think: “Okay, so Paul’s talking about ministry—his ministry. Or, he’s talk about ministry, so that’s for pastors, missionaries, or church leaders. This doesn’t apply to me.” But when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he wasn’t writing to a seminary classroom or a church staff. He was writing to the whole church. And he expected that every Christian is doing ministry, because every Christian is called to ministry—not all in the same role, but all are called to serve, to witness, to reflect Jesus in their sphere of life. And when I say, “Paul expected that every Christian is doing ministry,” we have to remember, that Paul is writing this letter under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, meaning, it is God who is speaking through Paul. So, God’s expectation for the Christian is that every single one of us is serving in a ministry where they are testifying and reflecting Jesus.

So, when Paul says, “we have this ministry by the mercy of God,” he’s not just talking about himself—he’s talking about us. If you belong to Jesus, you’ve been entrusted with His ministry.

And to a culture obsessed with strength and outward glory, and a culture that promotes merit, much like ours, Paul’s humility looked like failure. But Paul doesn’t deny any of it. Instead, he roots his confidence in something deeper: his ministry was not his own doing—it was a gift of mercy. And because of that, he refused to lose heart. In the kingdom of the world, strength, outward glory and merit is the way. But, in the Kingdom of God, it’s humility.

So, we see in chapter 3, that the Spirit qualifies us for ministry. Now in chapter 4, Paul says mercy sustains us in ministry. His defense against discouragement isn’t self-confidence—it’s God’s mercy.

John Calvin put it like this, Paul is saying, "I don't own this ministry; it all comes from God. And that's what keeps me from giving up. When I remember that God never gives me a burden without also giving me His mercy to carry it, I can keep going." And that's why Paul can say, "we do not lose heart." Because ministry never started with him, and it never depends on him. It's mercy from start to finish.

And that brings us to the question we need to ask: how do we not lose heart when life presses us, when we feel fragile, when it seems easier to quit than to keep going? The answer is the same—our hope is not in our resume or reputation, but in the mercy of God who calls and sustains us.

And that's not just Paul's story. That's our story. Some of you carry the weight of discouragement right now. You look at your life, your job, maybe even your walk with Jesus, and you feel like you're falling short. You feel inadequate to minister in these places. Or that you have disqualified yourself. But hear this: your adequacy was never the point. The fact that you belong to Jesus, that you've been entrusted with His gospel, is mercy from start to finish. You didn't earn it; you don't have to maintain it by performance. You serve from mercy, not for merit.

Think about what that means in daily life:

- When we parent our kids and feel like we blow it, remember—our qualification is mercy. God delights to work through imperfect parents who lean on Him.
- When we serve in ministry and wonder, "Am I really cut out for this?"—remember, the only reason we're there is because of mercy.
- Even in the political climate around us, where influence is often measured by power, money, and platform, Paul reminds us that gospel influence is measured by mercy.

- And don't miss this: maybe you've never thought of yourself as a minister. But if you belong to Jesus, you are. Every conversation with a neighbor, every prayer for your kids, every word of encouragement you speak—that's ministry entrusted to you by mercy.

This changes the way we see setbacks. If my ministry is based on my ability, then failure will crush me. But if my ministry is grounded in God's mercy, then even failure becomes a place where His mercy can shine brighter.

So, the first anchor Paul gives us is this: ministry is mercy. That's why we do not lose heart. Not because we're strong, but because God is merciful. And if you belong to Jesus, you've been entrusted with His ministry.

Paul continues in verse 2: "But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."

This is Paul saying: "Because this ministry is mercy, I don't have to play games with it." He's drawing a line between himself and the false teachers who were manipulating the Corinthians. The word "renounced" here is strong – it means to have nothing to do with, to disown. Paul is saying: "We've walked away from shady methods. We're not going to peddle the gospel like salesmen. We're not going to water it down to make it easier to swallow. We're not going to add fine print to get you hooked."

Now, if you lived in Corinth, this hit home. The city was full of sophists – professional speakers who made their living by twisting words, impressing crowds, and adjusting their message to win favor. People paid to hear them, and the more entertaining, the better. Paul wants nothing to do with that. His goal is not applause but truth. That's why he says he speaks with the "open statement of the truth." What you see is what you

get. He speaks plainly and lets God commend him to people's consciences.

And friends, we need this today. Because we live in a culture where image management is everything. Politicians spin. Advertisers manipulate. And Influencers polish everything for show. Even churches can fall into the trap of hype, branding, or softening the hard edges of the gospel so people won't be offended. But Paul says real ministry is not about spin – it's about integrity. The truth doesn't need dressing up; it needs to be declared.

Charles Spurgeon once said: "Defend the Bible? I would as soon defend a lion. Just turn it loose; it will defend itself." That's Paul's heart here. He didn't tamper with the Word. He let the lion out.

Paul's point here is that real ministry doesn't twist the truth. It doesn't use gimmicks or spin. It speaks openly and lets God do the convincing.

We just saw this lived out in the life of Charlie Kirk. Here's what no one can deny: Charlie was committed to speaking the truth plainly. He refused to be bought. He wasn't worried about what critics thought, or about losing influence by saying something unpopular. He wasn't in it for applause – he was in it because he believed truth matters. The gospel matters and he wanted to bring the gospel of Jesus to every single person that he could. That kind of courage should stir us. Because Paul's call here is the same: don't tamper with God's Word, don't sell out the gospel, don't trade integrity for approval. Speak the truth, in love, and let God handle the results.

That's what Charlie modeled in the public square. And that's what Paul calls us to in the ministry of the gospel. There is a tendency in modern American Christianity to tell about that Jesus loves you. And he's recklessly chasing after you...yeah! To put a cross on your back! We can't tell only half the Gospel. Yes, Jesus loves you. And died for you. And he

expects the same from you! And in a world where comfort and ease motivates us, we have to share the entire truth of the Jesus life.

So, what does this mean for us?

- For those who preach and teach here: our job is not to impress, but to be faithful. Our authority doesn't come from polish, but from truth spoken plainly before God.
- For every believer: integrity in ministry means living without a mask. You don't have to present yourself as more spiritual than you are. I don't care how many bible studies you've led. It's about your resume. You don't have to sell Jesus with gimmicks. You simply share what He has done in your life and speak the truth in love.
- Practically: that may mean being honest in your testimony instead of exaggerating. It may mean sharing the gospel with a friend without trying to make it "cool." It may mean confessing your weakness instead of pretending you've got it all together.

And then Paul explains why integrity matters so much. Verse 3: "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world 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."

Here's the sobering reality: some people don't believe not because the gospel is unclear, but because their eyes are blinded by the enemy. Satan, "the god of this world," as Paul calls him, keeps people from seeing Jesus. That means we don't resort to tricks or manipulation to get people in the door. Because what people need is not gimmicks; they need God to open their eyes.

That's why in verse 5 Paul says, "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." The message is Jesus, not Paul. The posture is servanthood, not self-

promotion. Ministry integrity means we get out of the way so Jesus can be seen as Lord.

And this really hits home for us. Because if we're honest, even when we serve in small ways – maybe helping in kids' ministry, showing up early to greet, serving on the worship team, or in our student ministry – we can still make it about us. We wonder if people notice us, if we're appreciated, if we did a "good job." We like to look competent, we like to feel important. But Paul says, "No. We are your servants for Jesus' sake." The word he uses there is *doulos* – literally a slave. Paul's saying, "I'm not here to build my name; I'm here to serve you, so that you see Jesus as Lord."

So the question becomes very personal: when I serve, are people seeing Jesus, or just seeing me? Do our lives point upward, or do they point back at ourselves?

Paul closes this section in 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 the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Now, I really don't want to miss the imagery Paul is pulling in. He takes us all the way back to Genesis 1. In the beginning, the earth was formless and void, darkness covered the face of the deep, and God spoke: "Let there be light." And there was light. Creation happened not because of human ingenuity, not because darkness slowly learned how to glow, but because God Himself spoke into the void.

Paul says that's exactly what happens when someone comes to faith in Jesus. The human heart, apart from Jesus, is darkened, blind, unable to see the glory of Jesus. Verse 4 told us Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers. But God, with the same creative authority He used in Genesis, breaks into the heart and says, "Let there be light." And suddenly, eyes are opened. Hearts awaken. Jesus is seen as glorious.

That means the ultimate power in ministry does not rest with us. It's not our polish. It's not our persuasiveness. It's not even how faithfully we try to love and serve others. At the end of the day, ministry depends on God shining His light. Only He can take a blind heart and make it see. Only He can speak life into the void.

And let me tell you – that is both humbling and freeing. It humbles us, because it reminds us that salvation isn't about us "closing the deal." We can't argue someone into the kingdom. We can't manipulate someone into faith. We can't shame them into seeing. It's God alone who opens eyes. But it's freeing, because it takes the pressure off. We are not the source of the light, but we reflect the light of Jesus.

Think about how this plays out in your everyday life.

- Parents, when you're praying for your son or daughter who's walked away from church and faith, you can't force them to see Jesus. But you can pray with confidence that God is able to shine His light in their hearts, just as He did in yours.
- Students, when you sit in a classroom where faith is mocked, you may feel powerless to convince your peers. But God is able to open blind eyes. Your call is to live faithfully and trust Him with the results.
- In your workplace, when a coworker dismisses the gospel, or their lives don't reflect the gospel, it's not the end of the story. The same God who said, "Let there be light" is still speaking today and will shine through you.

One of the church fathers, Augustine famously prayed, "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." That's another way of saying: every blind heart is still longing for light. And when God shines, everything changes.

So let's step back and see the sweep of Paul's thought.

- Anchor 1: Ministry is mercy. You don't lose heart because God entrusted you with this calling by grace, not by merit.
- Anchor 2: Ministry requires integrity. You don't twist or soften the truth; you speak it plainly, with humility, and let God do the convincing.
- Anchor 3: Ministry depends on God's power. At the end of the day, you are not the source of light – Jesus is. And when God shines, eyes are opened.

Mercy. Integrity. Power. That's how Paul endured. That's how the church in Corinth was called to endure. And that's how we endure. But here's the crucial thing: you can't reflect what you haven't received. You can't shine what you haven't seen. Paul says God has "shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

In other words, the deeper life with Jesus precedes faithful work for Jesus.

So let me ask: Are you rooted? Not merely busy for God but rooted in God. Roots go down before fruit comes out. The deeper your roots in the mercy and truth of Jesus, the steadier you'll stand when the winds of discouragement blow—and the more real fruit you'll bear.

Psalm 1 calls it being "planted by streams of water," unwithered leaves, fruit in season. That's the picture of a believer who doesn't lose heart.

And don't forget why roots matter: roots exist for fruit. The deeper life isn't an escape from mission; it's the engine of mission. Rooted people reproduce—they quietly multiply life in others. Paul didn't preach himself; he preached Jesus Christ as Lord, and he took the posture of a servant for Jesus' sake (v. 5). That's reproduction—Jesus's life in you, forming Jesus in others.

So here's the invitation, Foothills Family—let's be Rooted & Reproducing:

1. Rooted (Deeper Life): This week, set a simple daily rule: Gaze – Grace – Go (5-5-5).
  - *Gaze*: Fix your eyes on the face of Jesus in the Word (2 Cor. 4:6).
  - *Grace*: Confess and receive mercy—no spin, no masks (v. 1-2).
  - *Go*: One concrete act of obedience that reflects His light to someone.
2. Reproducing (Making Disciples): Name three people God has placed near you (home, work, neighborhood). Pray daily that God would shine light in their hearts (v. 6). Look for one honest, unforced moment this week to speak of Jesus (v. 5) and to serve them for Jesus' sake.
3. Integrity Practices: Choose one "no-spin" practice: refuse flattery, avoid exaggeration, and stop softening hard truths. Let the open statement of the truth be your way (v. 2). Turn the lion loose.

Church—don't lose heart. Be a people of mercy, a people of integrity, a people of power—because you are a people rooted in Jesus and reproducing in Jesus. The world doesn't need our polish or platform; the world needs Jesus. In His mercy, He has chosen to shine through you.

He said "let there be light – again, and again, and again, until the day we see Jesus face to face.