Surprised By Hope — Delivery Transcript

2 Corinthians 4:6–18 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, April 24, 2022 · *21 Days: Fast & Pray*

Watch or listen: Subsplash (video & audio) · YouTube

> ⚠️ ***AUTO-GENERATED TRANSCRIPT — verify against the audio before quoting publicly.*** *Produced from a Descript transcription of the Broadview Church sermon recording and lightly cleaned (filler words removed, obvious mis-hears of names and Scripture references corrected). No timestamps. The posted recording is the same 11:00 a.m. service as the YouTube livestream linked at the start of the message. Scripture readings follow the CSB, which Wes was reading from in 2022. This is not a publication-ready manuscript and it is not Wes's exact words for print. Check any line against the recording before it goes on a graphic, in an email, or in a book.*

All right, thanks to Crystal and the team for leading us this morning. If you have a Bible, you can open to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. I know some of you are like, Are we going back to the book of Revelation? Please, no. Please, no. And no, we're not, today. We will be going back next week, more than likely. So I know you're all super excited about that. And I would have probably gone back this week, but I didn't think I was going to be preaching this week. I thought I had talked to Taylor about covering the pulpit because I went on a trip this last week to Louisville, Kentucky.

Is that where Louisville is? It's in Kentucky, right? Great trip. I was at a conference called Together for the Gospel. Has anybody ever heard of that conference? It was a good conference. It was their last one. It's not necessarily a Baptist conference. It's a lot of different faith traditions coming together for the gospel. Together for the Gospel. Great conference, but I knew I was going to be gone and not able to study and write a sermon. And so I was hoping Taylor would cover the pulpit. And he is preaching this week— just not here.

I thought we had an understanding he was preaching here. He thought we had an understanding he was preaching at West Campus. Miscommunication, so I got the pulpit. And any sermon takes a little while to write, but sermons on Revelation take longer than the average bear. And I just didn't want to do a disservice. And so I've got a message that is not in the book of Revelation, but does, I think, give us a closing word for what we've been talking about as a congregation over the last couple of months. If you're new to Broadview, over the last two months or so we've been looking at this idea of breakthrough and praying for God to grant our church breakthrough: clarity in how to think about what's next, wisdom and clarity for what's next, a breakthrough in our experience of God's power in our worship

services not just that we come to church and sing some songs and go about, but we actually experience and encounter God in times of gathered worship.

And then we've been praying for a new seed of faith to believe God for a new story. Our church started as a real small church, and God, through various different months and years and building programs and just amazing things, grew Broadview to be what it is today. But churches if they don't have a new dream and new faith, they end up just coasting and plateauing, sometimes declining and dying a slow, painful death. I know you don't want to be a part of a church like that, and I certainly don't want to be a part of a church like that either.

And so we've been praying for God to give a new seed of faith to trust him for a new story. And it was so cool last week during Easter Sunday, as, after the message, for people who felt led of the Lord to respond either through a first time decision of being saved and baptized or by getting their baptism on the right side of their conversion, we had right at ten— I think ten, maybe eleven— people raise their hand, come forward, get baptized. A really cool demonstration of God's power to save and to motivate and change.

At 9:30— not eleven, but 9:30— I got the great honor of getting to baptize Blaze, my firstborn son, which was one of the coolest things I've ever gotten to do as a dad or as a pastor, kind of a combination of those two things. And so as I thought about what to say to close out that pursuit of God and that experience of God answering some of those prayers in very specific, tangible ways, my heart and mind were led to this passage in 2 Corinthians chapter 4. And it's a little bit of a counterintuitive idea.

The title of the message is "Surprised by Hope." It's one thing to experience God, and one moment in God's presence can change your life forever. But what does it mean as a Christian to continue to walk with God when life is not going well, when those visible breakthrough moments or those joyous occasions are replaced with a valley? A hardship where you're questioning not only, Is God good? but, Does he even exist? Have I gotten all this stuff wrong? Those seasons of crippling doubt, despair, where you're questioning your calling, your effectiveness— does God want to use you, or does he care about you?

How do you experience communion with God when life is really hard? How do you enjoy God when life stinks? That's what I want to look at this morning. And it may seem like a kind of an odd way to end this chapter. But the reality is in our church we have a lot of people walking through incredible pain and suffering. Every time I preach on a Sunday morning I look out at the congregation and I see y'all's faces and some of you, you know, look happy to be here, and some of you, you know, don't, but some of you are not happy to be here because your life is falling apart.

You're going through deep, deep suffering. And you need to be reminded of the power of hope. And the thesis of today's message is that hope is powerful. Hope has the power to change you in some surprising ways, and particularly the hope that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ at our lowest moment, in the most unlikely of ways, hope in Jesus' resurrection can change you. And there are people in our church who are walking through the pain of physical pain, of things like chronic pain and illness, of autoimmune disorders. There are people who have cancer in our church, people who have heart disease.

There are people who are suffering relational pain in our church right now. I don't just mean in general, but specific people with specific names going through specific hardships of wondering, Is the marriage going to make it or not going to make it. Some people in our church are on the other end of an unexpected divorce and trying to put their life back together and say, Can I have even kind of a normal life now that this has happened to me? There are people in our church who have sons and daughters who won't talk to them anymore.

Prodigal sons and daughters who they've been praying for and it seems like instead of things getting better and drawing closer, it's getting worse and worse and worse. And how do those people live the Christian life? How do you have joy in God when your life is going through that kind of pain and suffering? That's what I want us to look at this morning because there's surprising power in hope to address those questions. Those of you who are here this morning and you're suffering from crippling anxiety or a debilitating depression or emotional, mental unhealth, unwellness, that seems like it's just taking you off the field of effectiveness for the kingdom.

Like God doesn't love me, doesn't care to use me. I think there's a word in this passage for you and seeing the surprising power of hope. All hope, regardless of its object, is future focused. So when you think about hope, I think the way we defined it last week was that hope is an eager expectation or desire about the future. It's not just kind of a glib I-hope-it-happens, or we kind of use the word hope lightly in that way. That's not what true hope is. It's not even just a desire.

It's a desire that you hold with eager anticipation that something's going to happen in the future. And it doesn't have to be Christian, right? We all have hopes in different things. People who are not Christians can have hope for the perfect spouse, and their hope in that future reality has power in the way that they live their present everyday life. So if you're single and looking and your hope is in that future spouse, it's going to change how you date today. It's going to change the people you date, the way that you date, the things you say yes or no to, the things you allow into your life.

If you're an expecting mom or dad, the fact that you're expecting that baby to come into the world that's going to change what you purchase, what you don't purchase, what you do or

don't do. All hope is future-oriented, and just because it's about the future doesn't mean it doesn't have power for the present. In fact, any hope that's genuine hope has tremendous power over how you live your day-to-day life. And that's particularly true when it comes to your hope in Jesus. And in particular, Jesus's resurrection from the dead. We saw that with Peter last week.

We're going to see that with a guy named Paul today. A proper focus on what Jesus will do one day we're going to see from Paul has surprising power for how you live your life. So with that in mind, let's read the passage, 2 Corinthians chapter 4, starting in verse 6. We're going to read down to verse 12. Remember, this is Paul writing to a group of Christians in Corinth. These Christians in Corinth were kind of suspicious of Paul's credentials because of his suffering and because of his weakness. And so Paul is basically giving a defense of not only am I qualified to do what God's called me to do, but that my weakness and suffering is actually my credentials for how you know God is with me.

So he says 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 God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ." In other words, the most precious, infinitely valuable treasure of the universe, knowledge of God, that's been given to us through Jesus Christ. So when you know Jesus, when you get to know Jesus, you get to know God Himself. When you experience communion with Jesus, you experience communion with the living God. And he says, "We have this treasure"— this treasure of knowing God— "in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power"— the power of knowing God— "may be from God and not from us.

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed. We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be displayed in our body. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus's sake, so that Jesus's life may also be displayed in our mortal flesh. So then, death is at work in us, but life in you." So I want to show you some surprising things about hope out of this passage.

And here's basically the thesis of the message. When you put your hope in God's promise about your future, you will discover that such hope unleashes God's power in your weakness. And it advances God's purpose in your pain. The surprise is that it's in your weakness, not your strength, that God's power is made manifest. And that it's in your sufferings and pain, not necessarily your successes and pleasures, where God's purposes prevail. Hope in God's promise about your future unleashes God's power in your weakness and advances God's purpose in your pain. That's exactly what Paul is saying in this passage.

So first let's look at what it means to have God's power in our weakness. I'll read again chapter 4, verse 7. Paul says, "Now we have this treasure"— the treasure of knowing God and being rightly related to him— "in clay jars"— talking about the human body— "so that this

extraordinary power may be from God and not from us." We all know what it means to put really valuable objects in not so valuable containers, right? How many of you ladies have a swanky expensive diamond ring and you just put it in a little wooden box?

Does anybody do that? Is my wife the only person that puts her really valuable stuff in cabinets and things? What are you doing? How many of you guys have some really expensive firearms and you just put 'em in a metal box in a gun safe? Really valuable gun, not so valuable gun safe. How many of you have like a super expensive gun safe and cheap guns? Okay, it's the opposite of what I'm talking about. We all know what it means to put an infinitely valuable object in a not so valuable container.

I read an article this week, or a story this week, about these college kids who were trying to get a couch for their dorm. And so they go to this garage sale and they find a couch. It had been very lived in, very laid on, but it was twenty bucks and it was the right price. So they buy the couch, they bring the couch home and it's all lumpy and lopsided and stuff, not super comfortable, and so they try to smooth out the lumps on the couch and they won't smooth out and so they unzip the couch cushion to try to pull out the cushion to see what's going on and there wasn't any cushion in there whatsoever.

It was a couch full of stacks of $100 bills. Could you imagine this? Stacks of cash in the cushions. They take all the cash out. It turns out to be like a hundred thousand dollars or some crazy amount like that. And so they have this moral dilemma, what am I going to do with all this cash? I got it for twenty bucks. Is this some kind of joke? Is there a movie camera? I mean, is this, you know, one of those kinds of episodes? So they take the couch back. Oh, they don't take the couch back.

They go back to the guy who sold them the couch and they said, Dude, it's like a hundred grand in the couch. Is this some kind of joke? It turns out he was selling the couch for his grandma, who had been stacking cash in that couch her and her husband, their whole life, saving up for their rainy day, and she, because of old age and mental things of that nature, just forgot about it. And the grandchild never knew about it, and so he was selling this couch unawares, completely unawares, of the value contained within it.

That's the argument Paul's making about you and me. And he's not trying to be dense or unhelpful. Back in the first century, it was very common if you had a really expensive item, you didn't just want to go put it in your house where anybody could steal it, you would put it in a jar of clay. Because the jar of clay could go and be buried in your backyard, you cover it up, and then it's in safekeeping, and then when you want your valuable back in your possession, you dig up the jar of clay, you crash it on a rock, it shatters, and you pick up your valuable thing and you go about your merry life.

I think Paul probably had one of those jars of clay in his backyard and it's sitting in his backyard and it's preaching to him. Paul, this is representative of your body and your life. And the knowledge of God that you have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Your body ain't all that. Your physical flesh— it's valuable. I'm not saying it's not valuable, but the thing that gives you your infinite worth is the fact that God has placed within you a capacity to know God, to be rightly related to God. You're made in the image of God, and the fullness of knowing God and experiencing God is yours through faith.

So you have this infinite treasure that's been placed in your not so valuable body. And the reason that God designed it that way is so that all of your boasting would not be in you, but it would be in him. All of your treasure wouldn't be in your physical flesh and your strengths and abilities, but would be in his sufficiency, in his grace, and in his power. So it's important that we not confuse the value of the container with the value of the content within the container. It's not to say the body's unimportant.

Jesus came in a body, the body's important, he redeemed our bodies. But at the end of the day, our bodies are not all that valuable. I read an article about the chemical compounds in the body and what would happen if you had some kind of machine to suck out all the chemicals in your body which are about 65% oxygen, I think 15, 18% carbon, 10% hydrogen, 3% nitrogen, 1.5% calcium if you drink enough milk, 1% phosphorus, 0.35% potassium, 0.25% sulfur, 0.15% sodium, 0.15% chlorine, and after that the chemical compounds just get less and less and less and there's a whole lot of them.

But I read this article that said if you had a machine that would kind of like separate the chemicals out and put them into these separate little containers and your body just kind of— pfft— went away, because you put all those chemical compounds and elements in jars, that you could get all of those elements at Walmart for probably somewhere around twenty-five to fifty dollars. Depending on how big a boy you are, right? Bigger boys get more money. And maybe if you were to take your skin and tan it and sell your skin as leather, you could get a little bit more money.

But who would want to do that? The point is, is it doesn't matter how much you're worth on paper. Some of you have a pretty nice net worth on paper. But our bodies at the end of the day are little more than dignified dirt, jars of clay, from the dust we were made, to the dust we will return. The value is not in us necessarily. We're here today and we're gone tomorrow. The value is in what God has put in us. So never confuse the value of the content with the value of the container.

We're little more than dignified dirt. The container is corruptible, but the content is incorruptible. The container is weak, but the thing within us is strong. The container can be broken, but the Spirit of God is unbreakable inside of us. The container is unimpressive, but the reality within it is glorious. Our smallness is a platform for God's greatness. And I wish

you could believe that with all of your heart. Because if you're a Christian, here's what's going to happen to you. If you're a Christian and you're growing in grace, you're going to get closer and closer to the Lord.

And the closer you get to the Lord, the more aware you become of your inadequacies, the more aware you become of your badness, as C. S. Lewis calls it. And it's that way with anything. Anytime you get in the presence of glory, it exposes your weakness. That's why when guys get in the presence of really pretty girls, they forget how to talk, you know. Because they're in the presence of that beauty. Or guys, when you go to a football game or whatever and you see like these amazing athletes or you're at Guitar Center and you see this amazing musician.

You thought you were good, but then you see Esteban over there and he's going to town. And it kind of exposes weakness and insecurities in you. That's what happens when you become a Christian and you get in the presence of God, it exposes your weakness. And there's a temptation, it's just natural to want to say, You know, I'm not good enough, I'm not strong enough, I'll never be used by God, I don't have enough talents, I don't have enough skills, I don't have enough abilities. And there's even a temptation to kind of shrink the glory of God.

Maybe let's make God a little bit smaller and a little bit more manageable and a little bit more like us. Because I don't want to be around that glory. I don't want to be exposed. I don't want to feel weak. I don't want to feel insecure. That's not the answer. The answer is not to shrink who God is and the answer is not to have a pity party over who you are and your weaknesses and whatever the case may be. The answer is to press in to that weakness to allow it to create in you a spirit of dependency and humility because when you have that kind of spirit, God is able to take your weakness and manifest his power.

Your smallness becomes a platform for his greatness. Your weakness becomes a platform for his strength. And that's exactly what Paul says. And so this attitude of I'm no good, nobody loves me, everybody hates me, I might as well go home— I can't be used in the kingdom. I don't have gifts, I don't have talents, I don't have abilities. You have everything that you need. First off, that's half true. Yes, we're not all that. God chooses— for whatever reason, he has chosen to manifest his power by taking the weak things of the world and shaming the strong.

He manifests his wisdom by taking the foolish things of the world and shaming the wise. That's just how God operates. The fact that he has chosen you is nothing special about you. It has everything to do with how good he is. But the answer is not to cry over your strengths and inadequacies, the answer is to allow God to use those as a platform for his greatness. The mess is the message. And when you do that, when you receive that and believe that and live that way, Paul says you're going to be absolutely dumbfounded by your newfound ability to persevere through pain and suffering.

You're going to be dumbfounded by your newfound ability to have a good attitude, even though things are not going well in your life. To have confidence, even though your weaknesses are on display for everyone to see. That's what he goes on to say in verses 8 and 9. He says, I'm afflicted in every way, but I'm not destroyed— or, I'm afflicted in every way, but I'm not crushed. I'm perplexed, but I'm not in despair. I'm persecuted, but I'm not abandoned. I'm struck down, but not destroyed. In other words, no matter how hard people try and destroy me, they can't win and I can't lose.

They aren't strong enough to overcome the power of God when I embrace that power through my weakness. Notice what Paul's not saying. He's not saying what a lot of self-help gurus say we should say. If you ever listen to those self-help tapes, they tell you to go look in the mirror. The man in the mirror is strong. The man in the mirror is awesome. Has anybody else ever done this? Am I the only one? I'm just kidding. I haven't done this. But I have listened to the Chicken Soup for the Soul self-talk.

Boost yourself up, make yourself strong. Look at who you really are, deep down inside. Positive thoughts, positive vibes. That is not what Paul is saying here. He's not pretending that he's something more than who he actually is. All he's saying is, it ain't about me, it's about the Lord. And so I can take my weakness and be honest about my weakness and let it be a platform for God's strength. There's a big difference between those two things. The world prizes the container. The world prizes the strength of the container. In the kingdom, the strength of the container isn't the focus; it's the strength and the power of the God who uses the weakness of our lives to demonstrate his power.

And he actually goes on, he's kind of funny in the way that he does it, but later on in this letter he's defending his ministry against these so-called superapostles. So in the church in Corinth, they were all about external appearances. They were all about listening to preachers who had a good flow and good polish and all of that stuff. Well, Paul, you may not have known this, but Paul was kind of weak and blind and fragile and old. And these superapostles came on the scene and said, Paul, I know he helped start the church, but the guy's a joke.

He's a loser. He can't see, he's blind, he's not a good public speaker, he bores you to death when he preaches, much less when you read his letters. Listen to us. Follow us. Look how strong we are. It's like Brad Pitt, but Christian. You know? We're awesome. And so the church in Corinth was starting to follow these people. And Paul comes in and says, I know what they say. But what they say is the opposite of what's actually true. And if we're going to boast about who we are, let me tell you how my boasting is going to go.

He says in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, "Are they servants of Christ? I'm talking like a madman"— in other words, I'm not actually being serious, but if they're servants of Christ, then— "I'm a better one: with far more labors, many more imprisonments, far worse

beatings, many times near death. Five times I received the forty lashes minus one from the Jews. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day in the open sea. On frequent journeys, I faced dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, and dangers among false brothers."

Danger, danger, danger. "Toil and hardship, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often without food, cold, and without clothing. Not to mention other things, there is the daily pressure on me: my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?" Look at this: "If boasting is necessary"— if we're all about boasting— "I will boast about my weaknesses." That's someone who understands the surprising power of hope. He even goes on to talk about how in his life there was this thorn in the flesh.

And people debate about what it is. Was it his blindness? Was it his unimpressive public speaking? He had some insecurities. And he prays to God, he says, three different times, God, take it away, take it away. I'll be more useful if you remove this from my life. If you would just take this hardship away from me, I could be better. I could be more effective. And time after time after time, three times Paul prays for it to be removed, three times God says to him, no. He says in chapter 12, verse 9, "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.' Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me.

So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong." So here's— it's counterintuitive, but it's crucial for you to learn as a Christian. The way to experience God's power in your life, the way to experience God's presence in communion is not by fixing yourself up, making yourself strong, self-reliance, all that stuff. It's actually going to hurt, not help, your relationship with God. He's not impressed by you, he's not wowed by you, he's not waiting on you to get your act together.

What he wants from you is brokenness, an awareness of your weakness, and a desire for his power, his righteousness. What he can give is not what you can give to him, but what he can give to you when you're in that kind of place. Then you're ready to experience God. And you can experience God on the mountaintop high or in the valley low because those are his terms. I don't remember who said this, but it's such a good line. If dependence is the goal— and it is; dependence is the Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven — So dependence is the goal.

If dependence is the goal, then weakness is the advantage. You don't have to run from your weaknesses. You don't have to hide. You don't have to cover them up. You don't have to

pretend like they're not there. You can actually embrace them. Because they're a platform for God's power. That's the first surprise. The second surprise: not only is our weakness a platform for God's power, our suffering can be a microphone to preach God's gospel. God's power is displayed in our weakness. God's purposes are advanced through our pain. 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 10, Paul says, "We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be displayed in our body.

For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus's sake, so that Jesus's life may also be displayed in our mortal flesh. So then, death is at work in us, but life in you. And since we have the same spirit of faith in keeping with what is written, I believed, therefore I spoke, we also believe, and therefore speak. For we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you. Indeed, everything is for your benefit so that, as grace extends through more and more people, it may cause thanksgiving to increase to the glory of God."

That's a lot of words. Essentially what Paul is saying is he's saying, I'm going to allow the death of Jesus on the cross to shape my suffering. So Jesus suffered in a certain way, and through Jesus' suffering, God used it to bless the world. In fact, we are saved because of Jesus' suffering on the cross. Well, if that's what my Lord did through his suffering, then I, as his disciple— I get an opportunity in my suffering to pattern my life after his. And so I can suffer as he suffered. When he suffered, he said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

When he suffered, he entrusted himself to the care of his heavenly father. When he suffered, he didn't shipwreck in his faith. He allowed his suffering and his joy within that suffering to put on loudspeaker the sufficiency of the grace that is in God. And so when I do that in my suffering, something changes about the way I see my suffering. It doesn't mean my suffering is enjoyable. It doesn't mean that God's punishing me because of my sin. Not all suffering is because of God's punishment. It doesn't make my suffering hurt any less, but what it does do is it gives my suffering meaning.

It gives my suffering a purpose. It means that even in the valley low, I can allow God to use my pain and suffering so that He can advance His purposes through my life, namely the purpose of helping people come to know and see and discover for themselves the sufficiency of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Imagine your life as that clay pot and your sufferings as cracks and holes in that clay pot. And the greater the suffering, the greater the cracks and the greater the holes. And the water of knowing God and being rightly related to God is being poured into your clay pot that's all cracked and broken and the water's pouring out everywhere.

And if the assumption was my goal is to keep as much water in me as physically possible, then God has failed through your suffering. But that's not God's purpose. God's purpose is to

use your life as a beacon of hope, to use your life as a platform for his glory. And so when you, as a cracked and suffering vessel, allow the glory of God and the knowledge of God to pour out of you through your suffering— you suffer with joy, you suffer with faith, you suffer with love. That water is being poured out onto all these other people.

It's hitting the grass, it's hitting the ground. It's moisturizing the seed. It's giving birth to new faith, new flowers of God's grace. New people are coming to know and experience God because of your suffering. It gives your suffering meaning. It doesn't mean you enjoy it. It means that you use it for the glory of God, and that changes the way you suffer. It changes your whole perspective on the valleys of life. So you experience God's power in your weakness, and you experience God's purposes in your pain. When we were in Louisville this week, we had to Uber everywhere because Taylor got an Airbnb too far away from the place.

So we, like, walked one day and I got blisters on my feet. I was like, I ain't doing that again. So we got this Uber. A lot of the Ubers were kind of crazy people, but this one Uber was this old lady, short blonde hair, and annoyingly happy. Anybody know those people? They're just annoyingly happy. And she goes, I love to get young people in my Uber because I can lecture to them. And I don't think she was talking about us because we're not young, but she was going on and on about these people.

And turns out this lady had just overcome stage four lung cancer. Now lung cancer is not easy to beat, ever. Stage four lung cancer near impossible. But she said, I'm so happy I beat it. I think she was a smoker. And then she told me, my doctor said that I beat cancer so I could be an Uber driver. And when I heard her say that, I thought, ah, I don't know about that. God saved you to be an Uber driver. And maybe God did. I don't know. I'm not God. Maybe he did.

But as I was thinking about that statement and this text, I thought to myself, it wasn't just that God saved you. You didn't just beat cancer so you could bless people. Even getting cancer can be used by God to bless people. The suffering itself, not the deliverance, not the healing, the suffering, the pain, the gasping for air, the hardship, the I can barely get air into my lungs, that itself can be used by God, can be leveraged. That's what Paul's saying. I'm going to boast in my weakness and in my suffering.

I get an opportunity to suffer with Jesus. I get an opportunity to pattern my life after Jesus. I get an opportunity to declare to the world His grace is sufficient, no matter how hard your life may be. And when you take that approach to your suffering, you will find a new power at work within you that enables you to persevere and you will experience God using your life in ways that you never imagined were possible. Our weakness is a platform for his greatness. Our sufferings are a platform for his gospel.

Not all suffering is punishment. So instead of letting your suffering discredit your ministry, begin to see your suffering as a platform for greater ministry. Your mess is your message. And that's not just physical suffering, by the way, it's relational suffering. You know, everybody goes through hardships in relationships and it's very easy to turn inward, to turn against each other. But if you're in Christ, it's an opportunity for you to join hands and use that hardship as a platform for God's power to be displayed. All of us are broken, all of us sin against one another, all of us have these challenges where we screw things up.

But your ministry is not in how well your lives are put together. Your ministry is the sufficiency of God's grace to take even broken people and use them for his glory and heal them and transform them. It's a different way of thinking. But that mind shift puts you in a position to experience God's power and God's presence in ways you cannot without. Finally, Paul closes with this final surprise, and that is not only that God's power is perfected in weakness, and his purpose prevails through our pain, but that God uses all of our affliction, and that his ultimate purpose in our affliction is to prepare us to receive the fullness of his promise.

And that's where Paul closes in chapter 4, verses 16 and 17: "Therefore we do not give up." We do not give up. "Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory." If you're here this morning and you find yourself in a place of suffering, I would commit those verses to your memory. I don't know how many times I've prayed this verse over people in the hospital. I don't know how many times I've thought, meditated on this verse as I was walking through hardship or as I was watching people who I love go through hardship.

So many times when you're in the valley low, this is the furthest thing from your mind, but this needs to be on the forefront of your mind if you're going to make it through. I'll never understand why God allows certain people to suffer the ways that they suffer. There are people in our church who are the sweetest people, the most godly people, people who if we canonize saints, we would actually canonize them. And yet they have the hardest suffering, the most extreme trials over the longest period of time. And I ask myself, God, why?

Why do you let that one suffer the way you do? And that person asks themselves the same question. And I don't have an answer to that question, but here's what I do know. That suffering, their suffering, your suffering is not meaningless. And it's not passive, it's active. God is actively doing something very important in your pain and suffering, which is, he's preparing you for the promise. That suffering is producing. It's like a little factory and it's producing something. You don't see it right now, but it's producing something absolutely precious, absolutely awesome, so precious, so awesome.

Paul says it's not even worth comparing the two. You're going through hell, I understand, and it's consuming your mind. It's all you ever think about, but someday when God's glory is revealed and Jesus comes again, the thing that's consuming your mind every waking moment will be a brief afterthought. It will be like, what was that again? The glory will swallow it up. And that's what you've got to remember. And you'll be shocked by how that hope changes the way you see your affliction. You don't see your affliction as God's punishment.

It's God's invitation to be prepared for glory. And we all want glory. We spend our whole life chasing glory. That's why we watch football games with athletes that are better than us. It's why we watch the Olympics. It's why we work our tails off to buy a certain kind of house, drive a certain kind of car, because we were made for glory. We want to live it. We want to enjoy it. But Paul is saying, don't live for the glory that can be given to you here, live for the glory that can be given to you there.

And that glory is determined by how you suffer now and by how you embrace your weaknesses here. It's actually such a contrast. Do I have it up in the ESV? It's a direct contrast. Light is compared with weight. Momentary is compared with eternal, and affliction is compared with glory. Paul's saying there is no comparison. I know I'm comparing the two, but you can't even compare the two. Because the glory that's coming will so infinitely outweigh the hardship you're going through. So if that's true, how should we then live? Paul closes in verse 18.

"So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen." We don't focus on what we can see; we focus on what we can't see. "For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." So the final question for us this morning is where is your focus? Where is your attention? Are you focused more on your weakness or are you focused on God's power? Are you focused more on your suffering, or are you focused more on God's purpose in your pain? Are you focused more on what you can see or on what you can't see?

It's a natural temptation to live a life where you get the glory in the here and now. But the invitation of Christ is to live a life where you get the glory in the sweet by and by. And when you let that hope be the thing that drives you, you will be surprised by its power to change the way you think about your weakness to change the way you think about your suffering, to fill you with power you once did not know, to endure and persevere, and to give you such sweet joy and optimism and faith through even the lowest valleys of your life because you know it's not meaningless, that God is actively using it in your life to produce for you and to prepare in you the fullness of the promise that is yours when you put your hope in the Lord.

So if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, that's the invitation of hope. Whoever told you becoming a Christian was going to make your life easier lied to you. It won't make your life easier. But it will make you stronger so that no matter what you face in

this life, you will have power to overcome. Jesus said, in the world you will have trouble. But take heart because I've overcome the world. And if you want to be able to overcome the world, the power that overcomes it is faith.

Faith in Jesus, hope in his resurrection from the grave, and the same God that raised Jesus from the dead can give life to your body— not only when you go to heaven, but in the here and now, enabling you to persevere and overcome. So for those of you who are here this morning who are God's people, Christian people, and you're walking through pain and suffering, I want to encourage you in the Lord this morning that God would open your eyes and change your focus, not to what is seen, but to what is unseen.

And it's difficult to live by what is unseen because it forces you to walk by faith. But God rewards faith with a demonstration of his faithfulness. And so this morning, if there's something you want to pray about, maybe something you need to give to the Lord, maybe it's as simple as praying a prayer right there where you're seated. You can make that chair an altar and say, Lord, open my eyes to see the unseen. Help me to shift from being obsessed with what I can see and to instead be liberated by what I can't.

Help me to see your hand in my pain. Help me to see your power in my weakness. Help me to be surprised by hope. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for this time and we thank you for the promise that we've been given through Jesus. And, you know, it's something you would expect a preacher to say, what I've said this morning, but this is not my idea. These are not my words. These are the words of Scripture, written from someone who practiced what he preached, who endured incredible suffering because of his hope in the Lord.

And that's the calling you've put on our life. And so would you move in this hour as we respond? Help us to see what we cannot see. Give us the courage to repent and to believe, to put into practice what you're calling us to do, to find our hope not in this world, but in the world that is to come. Allow our conviction about what will happen in the future to revolutionize the way we live in the present. And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll take just a few moments for you to pray and to respond.

I'll be down at the front if you want to pray with anybody.