

Servant Leadership lessons from 2 Corinthians

1. The suffering leader (2 Cor. 1:1-11)

Let's read passage and notice the sort of picture of the Christian life and Christian leadership you get here...

READ 2 Cor. 1:1-11

This is not prosperity gospel, healing gospel, comfort gospel is it?

Lots of affliction – and there is a purpose in that.

v3-4

- two "all"s – God of all comfort – all genuine comfort comes from him, found in him
- in ALL our affliction – wonderful comfort – in every affliction there will be the comfort (a great promise)

- but you can miss that comfort if you think it's never his will for you to suffer

God of all comfort doesn't mean he is going to make your circumstances comfortable – it's clear that there will be afflictions

and the comfort will be IN those afflictions – won't keep you from them or take you straight out of them

why would we go through suffering? Answer: union with Christ

v5 – sharing in Christ means sharing in his sufferings –

something Paul develops later in the letter – 2 Cor. 4:8-11 _____

Peter says the same thing: 1 Peter 4:13

Romans 8:17

Philippians 3:10 - know the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings – [cf. the inauguration prayer for president and deputy president which stopped at "the power of his resurrection."]

Missionary to the Vanuatu John Paton describes his experience of hiding in a tree, at the mercy of an unreliable chief, as hundreds of angry natives hunted him for his life:

I climbed into the tree and was left there alone in the bush. The hours I spent there live all before me as if it were but of yesterday. I heard the frequent discharging of muskets, and the yells of the Savages... Never, in all my sorrows, did my Lord draw nearer to me, and speak more soothingly in my soul, than when the moonlight flickered among those chestnut leaves, and the night air played on my throbbing brow, as I told all my heart to Jesus. Alone, yet not alone! If it be to glorify my God, I will not grudge to spend many nights alone in such a tree, to feel again my Savior's spiritual presence, to enjoy His consoling fellowship.

- but if you think that suffering is completely wrong, nothing to do with God, just from the devil, must be rebuked then you will miss the comfort of fellowship with Christ.

The Paradox is that if you think you should live in constant comfort and that God should be making you constantly comfortable, then that actually makes you un-comfort-able. It will not be possible for you to be comforted – if you see it as utterly evil and God-forsaken state rather than seeing it as a place for the deepest fellowship with Christ.

v6b _____

You cannot receive the comfort in affliction when you are busy fighting it and rebuking it but only when you patiently endure.

Then notice how the servant leadership comes in – v4 and repeated in v6 _____
cf. the idea that it's important for pastor to be perfectly healthy & successful, seems that the Corinthians or at least some of the super-apostles there would have looked down on Paul for his suffering

In contrast – *suffering is a qualification for pastoral ministry*; you are only equipped to comfort the flock because you have suffered and are suffering

It is extreme suffering here:

v8 – cf. “God only gives you what you can take” – No – *beyond* – he thinks he's going to die

Purpose:

v9 –

All the way through the Scriptures self-reliance, self-confidence, self-sufficiency are not good things – God is not glorified by self-reliance and it is death to us – God is a Giver, Overflowing fountain of life and comfort and we are made to receive from him. Sin, as Augustine and Luther said, is man curved in on himself, refusing the life and comfort of God – saying “I can do it without you”

That's our nature, that's what our education system encourages.

God is not pleased by preaching that puffs people up to think they can do it on their own.

Needs to cut us down, kill us. You can't.

And God is not pleased with me as a preacher when I think I can do this on my own. I've been to theological college, I've read the right books, I've done my exegesis, I can preach, I can pull off an impressive sermon.

God is not pleased with that and often he'll use suffering in a very physical, earthy way to humble us, to bring us back to him, to show us our weakness and need of him. So we come to a different sort of confidence and sufficiency – 3:4-5 _____

'raises dead' (not 'takes us out of every situation')

If I am in a boat that's sinking and someone says, ok the Kenyan navy are great at raising wrecks from the sea bed – how does that sound?

I've got cancer all over my body and someone says, “Jesus said I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me even though he dies yet he will live”

E.g. Lady with cancer all over her body who would say “Nothing a resurrection can't cure”

That's what he's talking about in v10 too – “so great a death” = death & hell

- guarantee of future deliverance = resurrection

Prayer – v11 _____ - humility in asking for prayer in many of his letters

- probably not for physical release from suffering – go against what he's been saying – in Colossians and Ephesians, from prison, when you'd expect him to ask for prayer for release he asks for prayer for clarity and boldness to preach the gospel – what will cause many to give thanks? 4:7

(inadequacy), 14 (resurrection confidence), 15 _____

Wants them to pray that he would keep patiently enduring this life of suffering and being given over

to death, keep relying on God, keep experiencing the comfort of fellowship in Christ's sufferings – so that people would look at Paul suffering joyfully, look at the Corinthians praying for him to suffer joyfully and see those prayers being answered and go Praise God!

Lesson 1: the servant leader will suffer in this life, but that is for *his* good that he will depend on the resurrection God, for the good of *others* that he would be able to comfort them, and ultimately to the glory of God.

- Have you experienced in your own life (or seen in the ministries of others) God comforting in affliction? And have you had the opportunity to (or seen others) comfort others with comfort received?
- How does Paul's pattern encourage us and challenge us?

2. The consistent leader (1:12-22)

1) LIFE v12-17 PAUL'S FAITHFULNESS

Culture: We're different person to different people, not keeping promises, not sticking with one thing, particularly among youth lot of instability

➔ Into church – change plans, change strategies

Same person all the time – v12 – towards you = as he serves them
earthly wisdom says don't commit, move with the times, cultural chameleon, manipulate
grace of God says be consistent, be one thing, be who you are in Christ, a child of God

Paul was accused of going back on his word to go and meet them and he says v17 _____

Big challenge – do we keep our word? Meet you. Attend.

Psalm 15 – importance – don't make promises lightly

also Proverbs 6:1-3 – sometimes we won't be able to keep promises

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

2) WORDS Starts to talk about his words and especially he's talking about his preaching: v18-20

What are they preaching?

Why? – all promises of Bible find yes in him – the Bible is not a promise box – it is a book of promises that find their fulfilment in him. Paul, Silas, Timothy, weren't preaching promises of this and that – they were preaching the fulfilment of the promises. Not God promises you good, riches, life – God gives you Christ who is good, who is the riches, who is life.

That is who they consistently preached. Day in day out.

And that consistency in life & word was rooted in their identity in the consistent Christ: v21-22

That is your identity if you are born again – in Christ, anointed, sealed, guarantee (of future resurrection into the full likeness of Christ) – if you have that don't have to be a cultural chameleon, you don't have to please people with everything you preach – you have that stability so you can live a life of stability and consistency

3. The Emotional Leader

- What is your goal in gospel ministry?

2 Corinthians: There is a reason it has been preserved for us and one of the key reasons, seems to me, is to give us as a pattern for pastoral ministry - Not a bad thing to read it as a manual for pastoral ministry and what is the number one thing he talks about? Suffering. Suffering is the number one qualification for pastoral leadership.

Then consistency and integrity – personally lives and words and promises – reflecting the faithfulness of God in keeping all his promises in Christ.

Now – we'll look at **emotional leadership**

Paul founded a church there along with Silas and Timothy (Paul always believes in team ministry) 18 months preached the Word, many believe including Synagogue Ruler (good start) Paul leaves, Apollos goes over to them (good communication, preparation for his visit) and waters the church in Corinth with the Word (good follow-up)

Over the next four or five years problems emerge (warning that starting well doesn't mean all going to be smooth)

Paul writes a letter to them we haven't got about avoiding sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5:9)

At some point Paul visits them again – painful visit (2 Cor. 2:1) second visit (2 Cor. 13:2)

Gets a letter from them about lots of problems and questions

He writes them another letter (1 Cor.) – letter full of the gospel

Titus goes to visit them and brings back news – encouragements, still some issues in the church and they're not very happy with you

And he writes them another letter (2 Cor.) (so over the years there's lots of involvement and an escalation of concern and tension in their relationship)

That's the context of this letter – a real relationship, complicated relationship, conversation going on between a church planter and the church he desperately cares about.

Very tense – which is actually encouraging that in gospel ministry relationships can be very difficult and messy things – they were then and are today. Paul has to spend a lot of time in this letter clearing up misunderstandings about why he's done what he's done, misunderstandings about his intentions and feelings towards them, and misunderstandings about what apostolic ministry is all about. It's a very passionate appeal for reconciliation and restoration and the urgency is he's on his way to visit them. He's preparing them for his coming to visit them. Beautiful mixture of warning and encouragement – 2 Cor. 12:14-13:10.

there's a lesson here for us already – that when relationships in gospel ministry become difficult *you work at them*. Sadly it's very common in churches and ministries and mission organisations that things are swept under the carpet, issues emerge, relationships become sour and no-one directly confronts, seeks reconciliation, just fester, get worse and worse and eventually church splits or ministry collapses. Paul, because he's a servant, because he wants to serve these people, to build them up, because he has this massive parental concern for them, he's not going to let this relationship just collapse.

Exercise: look for all the emotion words

READ: 2 Cor. 1:23-2:11

- What are the emotion/heart words you see in this passage?

The Christian life and Christian ministry is very largely about the affections, heart.

1:24 = great definition of servant leadership

Not lording it over – not shouting, dictating

Not lording it over their faith – not saying ‘believe this because I say so’, not getting between the believer and God as a mediator

Working with – get alongside

For your JOY in the faith – cf. Phil. 1:25 – that is the aim of ministry – promoting, encouraging joy in Christ. That is what drives our whole lives, what we seek our joy in, where we find satisfaction and security and comfort. That is what will e.g. keep the youth member from immorality; or lead to giving (8:1-2; 9:7).

And notice it’s not just individual thing – corporate – 8:1-2; 2:5-7 – the whole community needs is an emotional community, and the point is they need to be getting emotional together about the right things, happy and sad about the right things in the right way to right degree (7:8-11).

And notice that this is spiritual warfare – 2:11

cf. 11:2-3 _____ ***What is the spiritual warfare here?***

“The great contest of heaven and earth is about the affections of the poor worm which we call man.” ([John Owen](#))

The devil’s designs are the opposite of God’s designs – God wants our affections, wants us not to rely on ourselves but on him, receive comfort from him, rejoice in his Son – the devil wants the opposite of that, he wants us to treasure this world, rely on ourselves, wants us to drown in self-pity or be intoxicated with self-joy. So if you are working with people for their joy in Christ then you are fighting Satan. That is spiritual warfare.

Spiritual warfare is not the devil trying to make you ill and God trying to heal you. The devil might be very happy that you are well and God might be wanting you to go through trials. Spiritual warfare is about the affections.

And a key thing for us to see here is that for those of us in that battle, for those in the ministry of increasing people’s joy in Christ, the ministry of realigning affections, working with hearts, that itself a very emotional thing – to do 1:24 will mean a journey of mountains and valleys, great emotional highs and lows. (2v1-11)

Because if you love the people you are serving and you love Christ, if you feel that “divine jealousy” for people, then your greatest joy will be seeing the people you love enjoying the Christ you love and your greatest pain will be when the people you love are not delighting in Christ but are running after other things.

E.g. v4 _____ when did I last write a letter like that, or pray for someone like that?

A very tricky thing – v5-8; 7:5-13

Not solo – v13 – need to deal with the emotional load by relationship with God and with others

Lesson: the servant leader will himself go through much joy and grief in the battle of working with people for their greater joy in Christ.

- How does this compare with our culture (the way we usually interact) and with a professionalised view of Christian ministry?
- Are we ready for this kind of emotionally-involved servant leadership?

4. The preaching leader / The servant preacher

Let me describe a city

- Pragmatism, instant answers
- City which worshipped sex and prosperity and career and education and prosperity
- Love talking, social media, politics, debate
- Big on style, surface, way you present yourself
- Big on celebrity, cults of personality
- And that had got into church – immorality, greed, politics, style over substance, celebrity pastors
- There was a big leadership crisis

Which city?

Corinth

Servant Leadership lessons from 2 Corinthians:

Lesson 1: the gospel minister will suffer in this life, but that is for *his* good that he will depend on the resurrection God, and for the good of *others* that he would be able to comfort them

Lesson 2: the gospel minister is not to be a Yes/No man, in a time where very few people keep their commitments, we are to be men and women of our Word, dependable, faithful because the Son of God we proclaim is not Yes and No, but all the promises of God are Yes in them.

Lesson 3: the gospel minister works alongside people for their joy in Christ and that is a complicated thing, and it is a hugely emotionally-involved, emotionally costly thing to do.

- How do servanthood and ministry of the Word fit together?

The preacher is a servant and the preacher serves very largely through the preaching of Christ from the Scriptures (2:12-4:6)

READ 2 Cor. 2:12-17

I want us to zoom in on verse 14 – much misunderstood but very helpful verse – v14 –

What does Paul mean when he talks of how God “through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere”?

Sometimes people pray that there would be the ‘aroma of Christ’ in a home or a city. But what is the ‘fragrance of Jesus’? What are we talking about? What does Jesus smell like? A flowery meadow? Is it about the triumphal procession? So as non-Christians see our victorious Christian life, triumphing over sin, triumphing over exams, triumphing in our careers – then they will know the fragrance of Christ.

What is the fragrance?

To God – v15 – Leviticus background – sacrificial language – interesting...

What is the Triumphal procession? Could be we are the soldiers or could be we are the captives – true that we are conquerors, share in the victory (Rom. 8; Revelation), also we are Christ’s captives, slaves of Christ (common Paul expression). But the important thing is what does it look

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like to me led along by Christ in his procession? 1 Cor. 4:9-13. 2 Cor. 4:8-12. If we are the conquerors in this triumphal procession then we are very Christ-like conquerors, conquering through suffering and sacrifice - looking like a slain lamb. That is how 4:11 "the life of Jesus is made manifest" - that is part of how the fragrance of Christ goes out - by us looking like scum, looking very weak, looking poor, looking like dead men - but dead men who have a treasure.

And that's the other thing - there is weakness and suffering and the treasure of THE GOSPEL.

Back in chapter 2 and look at the context

When I came to Troas to preach the gospel... (v12)

Who is sufficient to these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. (v16-17)

And in between those two brackets, what does it say this fragrance is all about?

"...the knowledge of him" (v14).

And what are the reactions to this fragrance? Interestingly it is not that everyone is attracted by the wonderful flowery scent:

to one [perishing] a fragrance from death to death, to the other [being saved] a fragrance from life to life. (v16)

Haven't we heard that somewhere before?

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:18)

So I'm thinking in 2:14 Paul is talking about his suffering procession and his *preaching of the Cross* using a metaphor of smell. To some, Christ-centred preaching will stink. To others it will be mmmmmmmh.

So suffering & preaching.

We must use words in spreading the gospel. "Preach the Gospel and if necessary use words" always. Some will hate the message, others will love it.

On v1-3 might just notice in v2 that the letters are probably written on the hearts of Paul and Timothy - "our hearts" - if you could open up Paul you'd find the Corinthians written across his heart - it's talking about his love for them - which is a big concern in this letter - 2:4, 6:11; 7:2. He's saying in 3:2 that his love for them can be read by all - anyone can look at Paul and the pains he goes to (literally the pains he goes to for the Corinthians) and say, "Look how he loves them."

Question: What does glory look like? What do people usually mean when they talk of "calling the glory down" or "seeing glory"? Where to we expect to encounter the glory of God?

READ 3:1-4:6 - and notice all the ref. to glory

From verse 4 his point is ministry of new covenant even more glorious than the old Mosaic. Sinai was glorious; ministry of new covenant even more glorious (even though it doesn't look it – paradox – Paul's ministry did not look at all glorious and the Old Covenant was very outwardly glorious but the weak looking ministry is more glorious than the glorious looking one)

v6 – doesn't mean the new covenant ministry is not a ministry of the Word

Look at v14-18 _____

How are people transformed?



(Cf. also Luke 24:45)

Now we see that in practice in 4:1-6 God's Word, veiled, Glory

v1 – not by merit, popularity contest – by grace – not by performance

v2 – not underhand cf. how might we try to lure in teenagers with 'seeker friendly' methods? what 'atmosphere' do we try to create? is music and a big PA and a celebrity speaker the big draw?

- open – letting the Bible speak – letting it convict the conscience

- Truth – not truths, subjective, relativist, "In my opinion" – the Truth of the Word, the Truth who is Jesus who you find in the Word

v3 – some will not accept – it's a spiritual thing, blindness – even if best speaker they will not see Christ if they are blind

So what do we do? Don't change methods, don't lose your nerve, we v1 do not lose heart...

We preach

v5 – Preach not ourselves – not loads of anecdotes about ourselves – we present ourselves as servants, not in the exalted sense ("Mtumishi") but in the scummy, slave sense, "for Jesus' sake"

An old pastor told a younger pastor as he was going off to a new church – remember "You are their servant, they are not your master" – v helpful – you spend yourself for them, but you are not directed by their tastes and preferences, you are directed by Christ – you will sometimes grieve them – as Paul had to – for their good and for Christ's glory

They may say to you we don't need long sermons – let's just do praise and worship or interviews with famous Christians or 5 steps to financial security – but Christ is our boss and he says the best way to serve his sheep is by feeding them with the Word – so that's what we do.

Key thing in v5 – preach JESUS – in every sermon

Spurgeon: "I would never preach a sermon - the Lord forgive me if I do - which is not full to overflowing with my Master. I know one who said I was always on about Christ, and he would come and hear me no more; but he said if I preached a sermon without Christ in it, he would come. Ah, he will never come while this tongue moves - for a sermon without Christ in it? A Christless sermon? A brook without water? A cloud without rain? A well which mocks the traveller? A tree twice dead, plucked up by the roots? A sky without a sun? A night without a star? It would be a realm of death—a place of mourning for angels, and laughter for devils! O Christian, we must have Christ!"

Why here so important to preach Christ? 3:18 – we need to see Christ to be transformed – and also it is as we preach Christ that God does the extraordinary miracle of 4:6 _____

Something really struck me over the last couple of months is this truth that John Piper pointed out –

God loves to open the eyes of the blind when they are looking at his *Son!*

God does not reveal his Son to me by coming to me and saying, "Now, John, I know that you don't see anything magnificent in my Son. You don't see him as all glorious and divine and attractive above all worldly goods. You don't see him as your all-satisfying treasure, and you don't see his holiness and wisdom and power and love as beautiful beyond measure. But take my word for it, he is all that. Just believe it." *No!*

Such faith would be no honor to the Son of God. It cannot glorify the Son. Saving faith is based on a spiritual sight of **Jesus** as he is... given to us through his inspired Word, the Scriptures.

So we preach open the Scriptures, preach Christ, praying that God would open eyes. That is glory ministry.

So picture Paul – shabby, unimpressive – holding the Scriptures – maybe squinting – he had an eye problem – he's speaking about Jesus from the Scriptures – speaking not very impressively, speaking in a tone that sometimes sent people off to sleep – now that doesn't look glorious. And as he does that some people are unimpressed. But some, God takes away the veil and opens their eyes and they see the glory of God in the face of Christ. That is a spectacular glory.

v6 – a glorious miracle equivalent to the creation of light itself

- What does it mean to be a servant preacher?
- If we do an honest review of our preaching over the last few months, to what extent has it been "overflowing with Christ"?