THE LETTERS OF PAUL E10 | NOVEMBER 8 2026 PM | JONATHAN SHANKS

Christ in 2 Corinthians

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Journal entry, Wednesday, July 15, 2015. Fourth day on the job at Hornsby Baptist Church as senior pastor.

Has anyone else discovered that the best way to travel in a time machine is to journal? And I dug up my journal, and I felt like I traveled in a time machine this last week. Fourth day on the job.

So you're with me? We're back 11 years, 2015. Capitals.

Felt very overwhelmed this morning. In the shower, wondered about whether I might get a nervous breakdown out of this experience. Got into the car to start driving from the Sutherland Shire to Hornsby, an hour drive.

And put the Bible on audio and I put the Bible on audio on. And the passage was 2 Corinthians 9, Paul's Hardship. And very quickly it went into, My grace is sufficient for you, 2 Corinthians 12, 9.

Last Saturday, before the auction, we were selling our house. Mum was praying a blessing on us and she wrote me a text, having been prompted to write, My grace is sufficient for you.

So then I got into the car and I heard, My grace is sufficient for you. I feel the Spirit saying to me, That scripture is for you.

Then I'm driving along and Shane and Shane, who are a band I like, are playing and they randomly start singing the song, My grace is sufficient for you.

And then the phone rings and it's Leanne about something else. And then I say that I feel like God is saying, His grace is sufficient for us.

And she says, that's the verse she had this morning in her devotional, 2 Corinthians 12, 9, My grace is sufficient for you. So I continue. Thank you Lord so much for hearing us and speaking.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing the words of Christ. This is true, this is true. Faith comes by hearing.

I feel like God is confirming that we are meant to be at Hornsby or at least whatever will happen in our ministry here, that His grace is sufficient for us.

And the challenging times are where the best revelations come from. God was speaking encouragement to me through 2 Corinthians 9. Paul has been flogged and is worn out, but he still goes on.

He even talked about dealing with difficult people and the fact that you've got to push through that and sometimes you need to stand up for yourself. Self, end quote.

His grace is sufficient for you. We're in this Christ in Scripture project and tonight is 2nd Corinthians.

And we're focusing in on the most prominent theme in 2nd Corinthians, which is when we are weak, we are strong. And out of this thesis, we're going to unpack four reasons why God wants you weak.

Does that excite you? Four reasons why God wants you weak. Corinth, Ben talked a bit about this this morning.

It was a city that celebrated success, wealth, influence and impressive personalities. And unfortunately, some of those values had found their way into the church.

Paul had established the church on his second missionary journey, probably around 50 to 52 AD. You can read about it in Acts 18. He spent 18 months there.

Ben said this morning that was the second longest time spent in any of the churches. The longest was three years in Ephesus. So he spent time there planning the church.

However, the relationship between Paul and the Corinthian Christians became increasingly complicated. The church struggled with division, immorality, pride, spiritual competition and questions about Paul's authority.

So Paul wrote 1 Corinthians around 54 to 55 AD. Then he had a painful visit discussed in 2 Corinthians 2.1.

Paul wrote another quite severe letter, apparently with tears, confronting the situation, which we don't have in our Bible.

He then wrote 2 Corinthians around 55 to 56 AD, probably from Macedonia after Titus brought encouraging news that many in Corinth had responded positively to Paul's correction. Does that make sense?

Did you follow that? So, he's been there, left, wrote a letter. It's sort of a bit of aji-baji.

And then Titus actually says, you know, things are going okay, Paul. So he writes this letter in response to all of that.

And this letter becomes one of his most vulnerable, heartfelt messages, really raw, and unpacks this extraordinary paradox that is what life's all about, that when we're weak, God is strong.

And that's what happened with Jesus, clearly, the crucified Saviour. But it's also something that happens with us, that we're called to weakness.

So four reasons why God wants you weak. Reason number one, it's a bit of a long text, but it's from chapter one. Reason number one is for the sake of others.

That's why he wants us weak, so we can bring comfort. Paul writes, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Chapter one, verse three.

The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation.

If we are comforted, it is for your comfort which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.

And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

And now it starts getting pretty real and honest here, he says, We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia.

We were under great pressure far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. It's going to be pretty bad, doesn't it?

This is the guy who saw Jesus in the flesh in a revelation and has seen so much of the power of God. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death.

But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us again.

On him we have set our hope that he will continue to live, and he will deliver us as you help us by your prayers.

Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many. God wants us weak for the sake of others so that we can bring comfort. Another journal entry.

I got on a roll. I started reading my journal. March 2014.

So this is the last year at the last church we were at. This is leading up to Hornsby. I feel like I am at the end of myself.

And having been here for three months and finding God's grace, I just feel that I'm struggling to even find God's grace anymore. It's my journal, so it doesn't make sense.

I'm worn out and feel that from now on, I'm only going to give more and more fuel to the enemy that will be used against me. There is absolutely a limit on what people can cope with.

And I think I'm at that limit. By limit, I mean professionally. Not that I'm losing hope in life.

I'm just finding it particularly relentless and I don't feel like it's just or fair. I don't know what more I can do. I'm struggling to show mercy because I'm grieving and I'm slowly feeling anger.

The text says, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble

with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. Life will remind us that you're not as strong as you think. When I was at that church, I used to be supremely confident.

We saw the church grow from 70 people to 900. I used to be quite confident in God's ability through me. I was also, I think, humble.

Honestly, I felt humble. But this is more humble than I had felt before. I felt like, yeah, there's a limit.

And I have limits, and I'm not as strong as I thought. The Apostle Paul actually related to that. And maybe you can relate to that.

He despaired of life itself. A godly, wise Bible teacher who trained me in pastoral care, he thought that he meant he was ready to commit suicide. He was at his end.

That's full on like that, isn't it? Just the thought that the Apostle Paul could get so down. But the text says, this happened that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

You can get to a point in your life where you feel like all hope is gone, and you're as good as dead. But Paul wants to remind us and the Corinthians, the God we believe in raises what? The dead.

That's an incredible hope, isn't it? That you can feel like I'm as good as gone. And you lift your eyes to the horizon and you see a loving God who is a God who raises the dead.

Hallelujah. We put our hope in the God who raises the dead. What that means is there is no low where you can go that God can't find us and deliver us from.

And when he does that, when we walk through lonely pathways, seasons of pain, and I'm trying to use words that articulate it, but if you know what it's like, there are no words that articulate it well.

When it's really tough, when you're walking through space in life that just is so hard, there is a hope that when you find God in that place, you can be used by God to share that hope with others.

That's the point, that he has allowed us to get to that place of weakness so that we can comfort others with the same comfort that we receive from him.

I've mentioned this many times before, but it's just such a cracking illustration. I was reading this book by a guy called Parker J.

Palmer, and I stumbled upon this illustration that he's told about his own life, and I've sort of never forgotten it. And Parker J.

Palmer, who was a really together guy, he was a principal of various colleges, and he's done heaps of stuff. He talked about descending in depression, down and down and down into this pit of just darkness.

And he said, I went down so far that I remember this sense of hitting the ground, hitting the bottom. And he said, wow, I can't get any lower. I can't get any lower.

This is, I feel so down, so down. He actually talked about no one could help him in this place of depression, apart from one friend who never said a word, but just came and massaged his feet.

Just, he just knew what it was like to be depressed. And he said, I came down and I got to the bottom of this hole and I touched the bottom and went, oh, okay, look, this is good. I'm at the bottom.

And he sort of looked around. And there was a whole community of people there. He just had this realization.

Oh, I think I'm meant to touch this so that I can reach these people. There are people here who are in deep, confusing pain. And it just takes someone else to have empathy because they've walked that journey.

To bring the comfort God wants to bring.

Reason number one, God wants you weak for the sake of others so that you can bring them comfort through empathy. Reason number two, God wants you weak for the sake of himself, for his glory.

Second Corinthians 4 says, and this is this sort of one of the epic passages in this book, we have this treasure which, if you look just above, just if you have a Bible, just look above chapter four, verse

seven. It talks about the light of the glory of God in the heart of a person. And so it's that light, that glory, that power that comes from the gospel, that's the treasure.

And it's in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us. We're hard pressed, he says, on every side, but not crushed. Perplexed, but not in despair.

Persecuted, but not abandoned. Struck down, but not destroyed. And then a little bit later on, he says, therefore, we do not lose heart.

Though outwardly, we are wasting away, yet inwardly, we are being renewed day by day. I don't know why I feel like this, but I do.

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs. Outweighs them all. So we fix our, I did not expect this.

We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. Since what is seen is eternal, but what is unseen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

The story of God coming close to creation and ultimately filling his pinnacle of creation, humanity, with his spirit, is the goal of the story of the Bible.

And the ultimate goal is that one human being would run the universe. And that's what's happened. The Lord Jesus has come, he's been the ultimate human being, died and rose again, and now he's running the universe.

But this idea of God in the soul of a human being, for some reason, God in his wisdom decided that's going to look like treasure in jars of clay. So this big plan God had, he could do anything.

He's like, oh, what I really want to do is put my spirit in humanity, put a human on the throne to run the universe, and have this really strong relationship with humans.

But the way it's going to work is this treasure of my power in them, it's going to sort of look like a treasure in a jar of clay. What's that communicate to us? It starts with V, rhymes with vulnerability.

Like that's his sort of thing. It's going to be like, it's not going to be easy. And of course, that is what the story of Christ is.

Immensely crazy, the vulnerability of God in human flesh in Jesus. But this is so that the glory goes to God. And in verse 16, Paul says, We don't lose heart.

We don't lose heart in all of this, which implies we could lose heart. Being a jar of clay, being a jar of clay with this power, you could lose heart. You could lose your motivation.

You could lose your passion. You could lose your purpose.

But the reality of scripture is when the power of God is made available through weak and fragile human beings, it would seem like there's more chance that the glory goes to God. Amen? The glory goes to God.

And in that last passage I read at the end, it was hard because I was feeling emotional, but outwardly we are wasting away. Outwardly we are wasting away.

When you read that passage out to a bunch of relatively young people, people don't really feel like that applies to them.

But when you read that out with a group of people over 80, like they're living that, they know that, right? Like my body is atrophying, like it's breaking down. In fact, yours is too.

Muscle is breaking down, bone density is breaking down. It's just old age takes away that veil, right? When you're young, you don't see that it's happening.

But we are breaking down. But the text says, even though that's happening on the outside, on the inside, there is a glory being revealed. In the brokenness, there's glory.

Anyone have the joy of having Influenza A in this little season? Oh, John, you had it. Who else had it?

Anyone else have? Okay, cool. But you've had bad coughs, right?

We've all had bad coughs. I had Influenza A. And it was horrible.

My son Josiah had it. And at the start, I just got it, he said, oh, dad, that's bad. And when a doctor says, that's bad, because he's just had it, I was like, oh, this might be bad.

And it was bad. In fact, I didn't know the name of what had happened to me. I coughed so much that I got this incredible pain in my stomach, like I'd had a hernia.

And then I ended up having to hold my stomach so much when I was coughing. Anyone had that? Anyone else?

Oh, wow. Yeah, okay. There's a name for it.

I can't remember. But I wore my weight lifting belt through the day to try to hold my stomach. And it was in so much pain.

And I thought, no one's going to understand how much pain this is. And then Josiah, my son, who's a doctor, comes over and he says, when I had Influenza Ray, I had a something and it was some name for it.

And he said, my stomach split. And it's unbelievable. It's excruciating.

And so what happened with me is I showed him I had a bruise from here to here. He said, oh, there's been a hematoma happen when you split your stomach open and then it spread all the way around.

So it's just this horrible bruising. So lovely stuff. I'm just trying to be as vulnerable as I can up here.

But I say that because I'm having this hellish experience, coughing all night, night after night, in immense pain. And guess whose eyes, who I fixed my eyes on?

Like there was no one else but to say, God have mercy. God have mercy. God have mercy.

And I thought of people I've known who have had a lot worse. But there are times in your life when, my point being, Paul's saying, when you're really unwell, when you're very much clay, it's not all bad.

Because it tends to make us not have any confidence in the flesh. Amen? We're like, where does my help come from?

God, have mercy, please. And then you start bargaining. I, Lord, if you stop this cough, I will.

So I'm going to pay back all this stuff. I've promised.

God wants you weak for the sake of himself, for his glory. Because the weaker we are, the more we look to him. Just tends to be.

And the third part is, God wants you weak for the sake of yourself, for your encouragement. Chapter 7 verse 5 says, When we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn.

Conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus. And not only by his coming, but also by the comfort you had given him.

He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. By all this, we were encouraged. Conflicts on the outside, fears within.

Who can relate to that description? We live through seasons of life, and if you haven't yet, you probably will. But you sort of feel battered from the outside, one thing after the other.

Like I said in that journal entry, it's like, oh, this feels unfair. Oh, there's another hit. Oh, another hit.

And when you're down, it's sort of, sometimes it's just beyond you, how many things can be challenging from the outside. But then you get filled with fears from the inside.

And so this line is so pertinent for us, no matter when you live, conflicts on the outside, fears within. When I wrote this, I was thinking, I was preaching it to the morning service.

So I thought, there's bound to be people that would respond and this would be meaningful. But I don't know, I have no idea. But can I ask you, would you ever be willing to raise your hand?

I'm not going to ask you to do anything, but just for a sense of solidarity. Does anyone relate to experiencing at times in your life conflicts on the outside and fears within?

And maybe even particularly right now. Anyone raise your hand? Oh, look at that.

Look around, guys, if you want to be encouraged. Conflicts from the outside, fears within. Mike, can you please pray for us a blessing?

Come up here, Ian, if you could. I haven't teed him up, but I'm just sure you will be happy to.

So people with conflicts from the outside and fears within, could you please pray a blessing on them as one who is in that space?

I'm not in that space now, but I certainly was before. Depression, broken marriage, failed business, of knowing where there is no colour in life anymore.

Shades of grey, and you're just trying to survive and get through the day. But greater is the one that is in us than he that is in the world. So let's pray.

Put your hand on your heart. Father, we thank you, no matter how we feel, no matter what the circumstances are around us, we can come and sit before you. We don't feel it.

We might not sense it. But Father, we give you permission to come and flood our soul, to bring healing where there is brokeness, to provide a way where there is no way to change the circumstances.

And Lord, that you would stir up hope within us, that we can live today with a sense of hope that tomorrow will be better.

Father, continue to remind us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, that Lord, there is great value in us and you have put purpose on our lives.

And despite abuses that might be at home, injustices that have occurred, you are the one that says you will restore. And that is your promise that we stand on.

And for those of us that are in darkness at the moment, Lord, may your Holy Spirit flood our souls to know your comfort and your peace, and to know that all is well in eternity and with you.

Father, grant us peace to rest well tonight. We would have good restorative rest. And that we can wake up in the morning with this sense that today is a new day, and your mercies are new and fresh every day.

And we thank you for the privilege of every day that you give us. Lord, may you bring people into our lives that speak truth, that speak life, and will take time to love and encourage us, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Thank you, man. Appreciate it.

And what happened was God sent Titus to encourage Paul.

God is a God clearly who loves to bring comfort. And this time round, he chooses to bring comfort through a kingdom catalyst. We talked about kingdom catalysts the other day.

Titus. Titus told Paul of the community of people who loved him and the good that was happening in Corinth. He used his words to bring life where there was death.

The God who raises the dead. Sometimes he does that through a Titus. And so verse 13, Through the ministry of Titus, by all this we were encouraged.

So I want to ask you, who has a Titus calling to live out? Who has a Titus calling to live out? As I read about Titus, is anyone feeling or stirring in their heart going, yeah, like, I want to be that person.

It's a hand that goes up at the back. So you want to be a person who speaks life where there's conflict from without, and there's fears from within.

Can I ask you on the flip side, if you raise your hand, if that's something that maybe God has given you an opportunity to do, and you want to be that.

I mean, it sounds like everybody put their hands up, but I'm just looking around. Are there people who want to do that?

In the same way, I want to ask if anyone would like to come and pray a blessing on those, pray a Titus Calling blessing. Anyone like to do that?

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you that you demonstrated your love to us through your Son Jesus. Let me just pray for those people who you have blessed and equipped with the ability to encourage.

You loved us first, and because of that, we can also love.

And I just pray for people who have people in their life who need encouragement and need someone to come alongside them and, yeah, be the person who meets them where they're at, at the bottom of a hole, that

you would give them the words to say, help them to know when not to say anything, just put a boldness on their heart to put themself in a situation that might feel uncomfortable, but that is really just what is

needed in that moment. We just pray that as we experience pain, yeah, that you wouldn't let us pull us down, but that you would help us to use that for your glory and your kingdom. And yeah, we just pray against

the attack of the enemy in spots of pain in our life, but that you would redeem those things so that we can be, yeah, the people who you use to encourage and bless others. We just pray protection over those

people. As they do your work. Let me pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

We'll pray that. Thank you.

For the sake of yourself, God wants you weak for the sake of yourself, for your encouragement, because he wants to send people to encourage us when we're attacked from the outside and fearing from within.

And finally, God wants you weak for the sake of the kingdom, for our victory. Chapter 10, 2 Corinthians 10, 4 says, The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish strongholds and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.

And we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. We are in a spiritual battle. That's clear from the New Testament.

Paul says that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual powers in the heavenly realms. And that's not always easy to remember or actually believe. But it's what we're told.

I don't know about you, but I don't feel very powerful in contrast to an angel. Like an angel, like a... Normally people fall to the ground when angels turn up.

Like they think they're God because they're so glorious. Let alone a fallen angel or the evil one, the archangel who fell. Like I don't feel very powerful in the face of supernatural power.

And yet, when we realise that in our weakness, we can still wield, we can use the weapons of faith and fight with a different power, then that changes everything.

And it's knowing that we are weak reminds us our power is not in ourselves. Amen. But it's in something that God has given us.

And that's what Paul says. We're fighting with weapons, not of this world, but we fight with divine power that comes through the gospel directly through Jesus.

There is a power in the truth of the gospel that demolishes strongholds out there and in here. Both. Because Christ has won the battle.

Colossians 2 says, having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Christ, let me just announce it again. He has defeated the enemy.

Hallelujah. And the power of his blood and the empty tomb provides us, his church, with the authority of his name, provides us everything we need for victory in this world. We have enough.

So when the devil... Ben talked a bit about it the other day, I guess quoting me, when the devil fires his fiery arrow, and every now and then, you know, you sort of duck, but every now and then, it goes...

You know, that's a good shot. What do we do? What do I always say we do?

Good shot. No one said you weren't a good shot. But I belong to Jesus, and the blood of Christ covers me from all my sin.

And I'm not sort of taking that for granted, but I am boasting in that. I boast in my weakness so that Christ might be glorified.

And so we pull out that blood, that arrow, and we say Christ has risen from the dead, and He has accepted me by faith, and so I am bringing guilt and condemnation and shame and disappointment to Him, and I'm

taking them captive. That's the power I have. I can take all the stuff that is natural, but it happens when I fail.

The guilt and the condemnation and the conviction, conviction is good, but I'm going to take captive the condemnation, and I'm going to take captive the progressive evil that I'm being led down, the temptations.

I'm going to, by God's grace, take them captive and make them obedient, bring them before Christ and make them obedient to Him. And in doing that, I'm reminded that happens because I'm weak and He is strong.

I am weak, I get hit every now and then by those arrows. But my strength is in the grace of God shown to me in Jesus. And I access it through the power of the Holy Spirit.

So God wants you weak. I know this is, we did in our Bible study this week, it's actually a really profound thing. I would encourage you and your life hubs to hang out in this topic for a bit.

Because we had women, someone's here tonight, who was like, you know what? A lot of my life is trying to find a voice. A lot of us women have been suppressed.

And so like, I want to be strong. And it's like, yeah, that's so true. How do the two go together?

Because walking and being strong and courageous is like a good thing. But clearly like, it's out of our weakness that we find that strength. So, this is provocative.

God wants you weak to comfort others, to give him the glory, to receive his encouragement, to live in the victory of the cross and the resurrection. And what is extraordinary behind all this is just a reminder.

Just think about this.

When God, who is unlimited with power, like, unlimited in power, like, okay, omnipotent, like, he can do anything just with a thought, like, we can't understand that, but he has all power, all creativity.

He's created everything ex nihilo from nothing. He has complete knowledge and he's unlimited in life. You can't kill him and he's never not been there.

When he comes close in Christ, he walks around in weakness. He lives the Jesus life. When God, who is all those things that I just said, comes, let's just race through the storics.

Do you want to find Christ in 2 Corinthians? Born a helpless baby in a pretty poor setting, flees from Herod as a refugee, get the powerlessness he's feeling, like experiences hunger and temptation.

He knows what it's like to be tired and thirsty. He's exhausted, so he falls asleep in a boat. There's weakness in this.

He's not just, boy, I can do anything. Have you ever thought that? Everyone else is working, he's asleep.

You could go, oh, he's just so good at his rhythms and limits. I think he's probably just tired. He's just really tired, he's exhausted.

I've never even thought that before, but I think that's probably true. He's just carrying such a load. He weeps at Lazarus' tomb, washes his disciples' feet.

I mean, that one's nuts, isn't it? His disciples are like, where's the servant coming? Our feet look really dirty.

And he pulls out the towel in the water and starts doing it. What?

His agonising question in Gethsemane allows himself to be arrested, silent before his accusers, mocked and beaten, nailed to a cross, dies and buried, lifeless, lying in a tomb. He knows weakness.

Like the whole story of the gospel is this story of weakness leading up to a cross. And of course, 1st Corinthians says, what in about chapter one? The cross is foolishness to the world.

What king, what leader, what Lord dies on a cross? The world says strength is never needing help. Jesus says strength is trusting the Father.

The world says strength is having power over others. Jesus said, it's laying down your life for others. The world says it's avoiding suffering at all cost.

Jesus shows that it's remaining faithful even through suffering. The world says strength is conquering your enemies. Jesus says strength is loving your enemies.

At the end of 2 Corinthians, there's this pithy little verse that sort of wraps it all up. 2 Corinthians 13, four. For to be sure, suddenly an Irish guy got in there.

For to be sure, to be sure. He was crucified. That's silly, sorry.

He was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. That's so pithy, isn't it? To be sure, he was crucified in weakness.

Yet he lives by God's power. In what ways do you feel weak? How might God be leading you to discover his power in your weakness?

That others might be comforted, God might be glorified, we might be encouraged, the kingdom might come in victory and power.