

# **SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

BY

**Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship**

## **Lesson 24**

### **The Supremacy of Love**

By

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We are reading [John 13:18-35](#) (NKJV).

18 “I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.’

19 “Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He.

20 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”

21 When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.”

22 Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke.

23 Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.

24 Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke.

25 Then, leaning back on Jesus’ breast, he said to Him, “Lord, who is it?”

26 Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.” And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.

27 Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.”

28 But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him.

29 For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, “Buy those things we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor.

30 Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

31 So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him.

32 “If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.

33 “Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you.

34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:18–35, NKJV)

The love of Jesus is that supreme mark of being His disciple. His love flowing out of our lives, was what He meant when He said, “By this all men shall know that you are My disciples.” Christ’s love is that mark of genuineness of servanthood. It is interesting He did not say, “Good sermons are the mark of My servant.” We should be encouraged about that. He did not even say that people would know us by our holiness, faith, or even our Scripture knowledge—as important and vital as those things are. “The greatest of these is love,” His Word tells us ([1 Corinthians](#)

[13:13](#)). That is the supreme mark of Christ's servant. Is that the chief characteristic of my life and of your life?

When I think of marks and being marked, I think of my grandpa who owned a ranch in Wyoming. He raised all kinds of great animals, like pigs, chickens, and cattle. When I was a boy we would go over and visit the ranch. I got to see him do all kinds of cool things to these animals, like chopping off the chickens' heads. I loved that. That was so great because then the chicken would run around without a head, just bumping into everything. It was cool to see. Watching my grandfather brand the cattle was another very interesting sight. He would take this red-hot iron and press it upon the hide of the cow. The cow's flesh would sizzle and even smoke. Even those big strong bulls would whence and pull back in pain. I enjoyed watching that. You know how boys are—they love that stuff. But even though that brand hurt the cow, it was so beneficial to the cow so that everyone for miles around knew that those cattle belonged to my grandfather, because they had this brand on their flesh. I thought it was a beautiful brand. It was a big "T" for Taylor. It was great.

The Lord Jesus Christ has put His mark on us. It is His love that He has placed upon our hearts and upon our lives. And by this people know that we are His servants. How are they going to know? We can say whatever we want about how they are going to know but this is what Jesus said. This is what He said would be that supreme mark, and He wants everyone to see it.

The truth is that loving with His love can be painful, right? It can be hard. Sometimes human sheep will bite the hand that feeds them. Those you are trying to love will hurt you. It can be difficult.

We look at Jesus' life and how He was crucified. Never was greater love shown, but never was greater pain experienced than in His love. And here in [John 13:21](#), on the night before the cross, it says, "Jesus became troubled in spirit." The word "troubled" means stirred with anguish. And why was He so troubled? He said, "Because one of you will betray Me." That really saddened the Lord. It troubled His spirit.

In [verse 18](#) He quotes the prophecy about this from [Psalm 41:9](#). The full verse really gives us an impact. It says,

Even my own close friend, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread,  
has lifted up his heel against me.

In other words, my close friend turned on me and kicked me. It is one thing to be attacked by an enemy; it is another thing to be betrayed and attacked by a close friend. That hurts very deeply. It can cut and crush your heart.

Maybe you have been betrayed by someone who you thought was a friend or a loved one. That hurts so deeply. Perhaps someone has undermined you, lied about you, or stabbed you in the back, who you thought was a strong supporter. Now, I am sure it has happened to most of us to one degree or another. If it has not, it will. It is just one of those guaranteed things.

But the question is: how do I react? How do I respond when I have been hurt, betrayed, or attacked? That is when it is the hardest to love. Do I harden my heart? I have been hurt so I want to harden my heart. Or do I become calloused and negative? If so, then God's love is choked out. Do I become bitter, close my heart, or hold on to ill feelings? It is easy to do that, isn't it? It is very natural, but it is not supernatural.

Jesus said, “As I have loved you, even so, love one another” ([John 13:34](#)). It is not a natural love. It is a supernatural love. If we become bitter, if we harden ourselves, if we get callused or cynical, even as pastors, then God’s love is choked out. It cannot flow. So the Lord wants me to run to Him. Only with His love can my heart be strong and yet tender at the same time. How do you keep a tender heart in this world? It is really easy to see how people get hardened in this world and how people get cynical or closed off. But with Christ, we cannot afford to do that because He has called us to love. We can keep a tender heart and yet be strong through the power of His love as He heals us.

A couple years ago, I had an experience where someone close to me in the ministry betrayed me and sinned against me. Afterwards, this person was very sorry and appeared to be repentant. But I was so hurt, I did not trust him anymore. I did not want to forgive him. I just wanted to cut him off because I had been grieved. I was angry. One day I was telling this person, “Just leave me alone.” And he said he would, but on one condition—“If you will call Pastor Chuck Smith and ask him what you should do. I have called him and talked to him and he told me he wants you to call him.” I was betrayed again! I thought, “No, I am sure he will agree with me.”

So I called Chuck and told him my side of the story. He was sympathetic to a degree, but he began to ask questions about this person’s repentance. I had to admit the person appeared repentant. He seemed sorry. But I said, “Chuck I do not believe him. He is a deceiver.” Chuck said, “He seems very sincere to me.” “Yeah, Chuck, but you do not know him like I do. You see, I love him, Chuck, but I do not trust him anymore.” And he said, “Wayne, I think you are bitter.” I said, “No, I am not bitter. I am just hurt.” He said, “You are hurt and you are bitter about it.” It was not funny at the time, though. He said, “I think you need to forgive.” And I said, “Chuck, I think I need to cut him off.” He said, “Well, Wayne, it sounds like your mind is made up. So I have to go now.” It seemed kind of abrupt to me. I said, “Well, will you at least pray for me before you hang up?” “Sure.” And so we prayed. Chuck prayed, “Lord, thank You for loving us so much. And thank You that You do not love us like Wayne says that he loves this guy.” He actually said that. I thought, “Are you praying to Him or me?” But he prayed and said, “Thank You that You are so merciful. And yet, when we ask forgiveness, You do not cut us off. You keep loving us and You restore us. Amen.” You know it really struck a note. Not a good one, but it struck a note. I told him thank you for praying for me. And I think I mentioned something about faithful are the wounds of a friend.

Through that God began to show me that there was bitterness that was choking me. It was choking my life and it had to go. The Lord asked me to fully forgive this person, to restore him, and cover that sin. Love covers. It forgives and cleanses and forgets. He said, “My love suffers long and is kind” ([1 Corinthians 13:4](#)). I am just really being honest here. I began to think about this. And honestly I told Him at one point, “Lord, I do not think I want to love like You do if this is what it is about. I mean, You died for us. I do not want to suffer long. I will suffer short maybe, but not long. This is just too much.” But He said, “Don’t you want to be like Me?” “Yes, I absolutely do.”

Then that Scripture [1 John 3:16](#) came to mind.

By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us and we  
ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Love is not just good feelings and saying sweet nothings. It is covering, forgiving, encouraging, and being the one who will reach out when it is hard.

The way Jesus deals with Judas here is so amazing. In [John 13:26](#), He tells John,

“The one who will betray Me is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.” And having dipped the bread He gave it to Judas Isacariot the son of Simon.

This is a special thing that is happening because they had a custom in that time and culture that at feasts, the host of the banquet could choose to honor one of the guests. The way he honored them is that the host would take a piece of food or bread and dip it in the sauce and then give it to them. It was kind of like making a toast today. They were toasting them in friendship and in love. I think that is what Jesus is doing here because it was not an insincere gesture on Jesus’ part. It was an awesome example of a final extension of His love to this guy who had closed himself off time and time again. Judas would more readily receive Satan and his plans and ideas, than Jesus. Judas constantly refused even though he had every opportunity just like all the other disciples. He had the same privileges that they had but he was not receptive.

I think receiving the love of Jesus every day and being sensitive to what He says is the most important thing if we are going to be men who love. They say that the same sun that melts ice also hardens dirt. The effect of Jesus’ dealings on us depends on our heart’s attitude toward Him. No matter how prominent or expansive our ministries may become, it is critical for us to keep a receptive, humble heart toward Jesus and His Word. Without that, the mark of His presence in our lives is squelched.

Judas made his final choice of whom he would serve.

Now after the piece of bread Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.”—[And notice verse 30. This is the big turn.]—Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately and it was night. ([John 13:27, 30](#))

To me that is spiritually descriptive of what happened here. He rejected and turned away from Jesus and His love. He was swallowed up in the darkness because he walked away from Jesus.

I love the way Peter answered the Lord in John 6. Jesus asked him, “Do you also want to go away from Me?” He said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life” (cf. [John 6:67–68](#)). To whom are you going to go? To whom am I going to go? There is nowhere else to go for love than to Christ. Yet, we see that Peter too, struggled within himself. He even denied Jesus in the next verses, as Jesus said he would do.

The main hindrance to the love of Christ in my life is myself. It is my flesh, my weaknesses, and the flaws in my life.

Jesus said to the disciples, “Most assuredly I say to you, one of you will betray Me” ([John 13:21](#)). Remember, Mark’s Gospel tells us that each one of the disciples began to ask Him, “Is it I?” ([Mark 14:19](#)). Every single one of the disciples except Judas, realized, “It could be me. Is it I?”

Do I have the capacity to betray the Lord in my fallen nature? We have that capacity in our flesh, given the right temptation that appeals to our particular weakness or a trial severe enough that would come along. We have seen some guys go through some really hard times. And yet, Christ is faithful. If it were not for the grace of God, we would perhaps deny the Lord like Peter. Do we

say we are better than Peter, or James and John, the sons of thunder? They were men of temper and selfish ambition. My flesh is no better. When I choose temptation instead of Jesus I am choosing selfish love instead of His love.

God sees the private times when no one else sees, right? He sees that. When I choose anger, fear, or lust rather than obeying Christ, it is in some measure the betrayal of my allegiance to the Lord. And so when Jesus said to Peter, James, and John, “Watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation, because the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (cf. [Mark 14:38](#)), that is something we have to take heed to or it will choke us, right? It will choke that fire of God’s love from our life. Bitterness, jealousy, lust, anger, fear, these are like weeds that choke. They choke out God’s love from our lives. And I have noticed something about weeds. You do not have to plant them, they just grow. They are floating around in the air or something. They are just there.

Saturday I weeded our rose garden. It was covered with weeds. It is about the size of this platform. We had roses, or I thought we did, throughout the garden. I could not see one rose; the weeds were so tall. From fall to spring I had not really touched it. I did not plant any weeds, but they were all there. They had basically overcome the entire garden. So as I was going through pulling out weeds frantically and just conquering that garden because I could not even see the roses, I got cut all over. I even had a splinter on my forehead that I brought down to the retreat here. As I was washing my face I noticed I had gotten a little thorn caught in my forehead from the rosebush and I have a scar.

Spiritual weeds are already planted in your flesh, in our natural hearts. They have to be weeded. Maybe you are being plagued and defeated by these things that we mentioned. Some weed pulling has to take place. You are not going to have a beautiful, fragrant, fruitful garden without the pulling out, the mortifying of the flesh.

Now, as I weeded my rose garden, there were some weeds that had pretty little flowers on them. They are actually beautiful. I thought they were flowers, knowledgeable as I am. But I asked my wife and she said, “No, they are weeds. Pull them. It is a rose garden not a weed garden.” So I pulled them out.

I noticed there are certain things that are carnal in my life that I do not think are too bad. They are actually helpful or maybe even spiritual. We rationalize that striving and being critical can be called zeal. It is just zeal, that is all. Anger and wrath are just righteous indignation. It does accomplish the righteousness of God, no matter what James said. Fear is not unbelief; it is just practical faith. Even lust is just helping a needy sister. But a weed is a weed. We know that in our hearts because the Holy Spirit is faithful, right? He is faithful. He sees even the beginnings of your heart turning away and He begins speaking to your heart.

Several times I have heard Pastor Chuck say, “The Lord does not warn you about something that you do not need to be warned about.” When He warns us about something, it is because we need to be warned and we have to pay heed.

When we love the flesh and the world, the love of the Father is pushed out. And there is a lot of world to love, it seems like.

Now this is where the cross becomes so special, so dear really. In [John 13:31–32](#) it says,

So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him,

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God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.”

Look at how many times the word “glorify Him” is used. What is it talking about? It is really talking about Him going to the cross. Look at [John 12:23–24](#). It says,

But Jesus answered them saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it produces much fruit.”

So the cross brought glory to the Father and glory to the Son. From a human viewpoint, it looks like defeat, not glory. But we know that it accomplished the most glorious of all works—salvation and redemption. And the fruit that has come through the cross is amazing.

Only Jesus and the Father, of course, could accomplish redemption. The twelve could not do it. In [John 13:33](#) He says, “Where I am going, you cannot come. I told the Jews already that where I am going you cannot come. Now I am telling you too. Where I am going you cannot come” (paraphrased). They could not be the ones to go to the cross to die and save us.

Nor can we pastors today be saviors to people. That is not our job. We are their pastors, but not their saviors. And that is a relief. I think it is a great relief when we realize that we are not the Messiah. But we have the privilege of showing them the Messiah. And how do we do that? We show them by loving them and by loving one another. All of them will know and will see.

The cross really helps us because it is the flesh that gets in the way of that. It keeps me from being loving because it focuses on self. Sometimes we treat people like the focus is on us when really, Jesus’ focus was on ministering to them. “Whom the Lord loves, He disciplines” ([Hebrews 12:6](#)). Those stern words pierce us, don’t they?

I love Paul’s motto. He said in [Galatians 2:20](#),

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

How do we live the life where Christ is living through us? How do you do that in a practical way? It is Christ who lives through me. And the life that I now live, I live by faith. I believe, “Okay, Lord, live through me.” I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. So I believe in Him and I just want Him to love them through me, live through me, shine through me. That has to be our motto.

Samuel Rutherford was once asked, “Isn’t taking up your cross a burden?” He said, “Yes, the cross is a burden to me like wings are to a bird.” Birds have to carry those wings around but it is not like a burden. They do not complain, “Ooh, get these wings off me.” No, they can fly. They can get off the ground. They can soar. Through the cross, we can be delivered from being earthbound. We can rise with Christ through His power. It is a thing of faith, obviously.

I remember years ago I was working at a job that was during one of those key times. I was working every day next to this guy I could not stand. Do you ever experience that? Of course, you

probably do have that sometimes. This guy was so irritating and self-absorbed that it was torture every day. And one day I was so fed up, I went into the bathroom just to get away from him. I even cried out, “God, deliver me from this guy.” I was not expecting an answer from the Lord, but I did clearly hear the Lord speak to my heart, “Do you love Andrew?” “No.” “Didn’t I say love your neighbor as yourself? Even love your enemies.” “Yes, but that was before this guy came along. I cannot love him. He is a jerk.” “I know. And I know about you as well. Do you think I love Andrew?” I had to think about it, but then I realized, “Well, You love everyone, Lord.” “If I give you My love for him, will you love him for Me?” There was a long pause. “If You give me a supernatural love, I will do it. But that is the only way.” It is crazy, but the Lord began to change my heart about that guy. He showed me things about him and gave me a real heart for him. Andrew came to the Lord and God has done a marvelous work in him.

The key to loving like Jesus is receiving the love of Jesus regularly. How can we love like Christ without receiving the love of Christ? I really like what John says in [John 13:23](#). “Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples whom Jesus loved.” Now John wrote this, right? We know that. He refers to himself as “that disciple whom Jesus loved.” It is himself he is talking about. The thing I love about that is how confident he was that he was the Lord’s beloved. That is how he spoke of himself.

You can have that confidence. I can have that confidence. We have a wide array of churches. Sometimes you might think, “Oh my church is not like this, or like that. He does not love me as much. I am not blessed as much.” Hey, who is the disciple whom Jesus loved? You are. I am. He loves us just as much. It is not that He loves us more than all the other disciples. That is not a stable thought. But He loves you just as much. He loves you infinitely, totally. That is what needs to fill our minds and our hearts in order to love like Him, because when we are full of His love, we will be loving.

He said, “As I have loved you.” How has He loved you? How has Jesus loved you? Has Jesus loved you? Has He forgiven you? We can be like Peter, “Lord, how many times do I have to forgive? Seven?” I think Jesus’ response to Peter indirectly was, “How many times have I forgiven you?” Have you ever thought about the seventy times seven? Of course it is 490. I have thought about certain sins and how many times I have committed them. You can get into adding it all up. But the Lord forgives if we confess. He is faithful and just to forgive us. We love because He first loved us. Our hearts can be channels of His love and forgiveness. Our lives can be instruments of His love. Each day the Holy Spirit wants to pour out the love of God and flood our lives with the love of Christ (cf. [Romans 5:5](#)).

Paul said in [Galatians 6:17](#), “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” It is interesting that back then in the Roman Empire, often slaves were branded by their masters, so that everyone would know who their owner was. Paul is sort of using that as an illustration about all that he had gone through. He wanted everyone to know he was the slave of Jesus Christ. And his life was driven. He said, “The love of Christ constrains me. The love of Christ controls me and compels me. That is what motivates me to do what I do, to say what I say, and to respond the way I do. It is the love of Christ that I yield to.” That was the mark he was referring to. Obviously he had physical marks, but this mark was the love of God.

What is it that marks your life? What is it that controls and compels you and affects how you respond? What motivates you? What things are not going to burn up? When we stand before Him—not to be judged as far as salvation, but as far as rewards—will it be gold and silver and precious stones? Those are the works that are done in the Spirit by love. People will know it is



from Him by the love. They will say, “That is the Lord! That cannot be you, that is the Lord.” That is not natural, that is supernatural. And that is what needs to be supreme in our ministry.

Turn to [2 Corinthians 4](#). God uses broken vessels. That is what we are going to talk about. The Lord wants me to share with that He uses broken vessels, earthen vessels, and even cracked pots. So there is hope.

One of the great stories of the Bible is about how Gideon and his army fought the mighty Midianites. The Midianites were an army of scavengers. They would come up to the land of the children of Israel at harvest time and steal their crops. They were a huge army of at least 135,000 men. Gideon’s army was only 32,000 men, so they were out-numbered more than four to one. I am sure Captain Gideon was thinking, “We have to get more men.” But as he was thinking these things, the Lord spoke to him and said, “Gideon, you have too many men. I want to give you the victory but unless I lessen the troops, you are going to think that the victory comes through you and your army. People are going to think it is the army and not realize it is Me. And so I want you to tell whoever is afraid to go home.” He did and 22,000 went home. That is not a good sign. Two-thirds of his army was totally filled with fear and they went home. Now there were 10,000 men. They were out-numbered thirteen and a half to one. And the Lord said to Gideon, “There are still too many” (cf. [Judges 7:1–4](#)).

To make a long story short, the Lord weeded it down to 300 men. Now the odds were four hundred fifty to one. And the Lord said, “I like it. That is good. Now I can give you the victory. This is what I want you to do, Gideon. I want you to take these 300 men and I want you to give each one of them three things. I want you to give them a trumpet. I want you to give them a clay pitcher and a torch lit on fire. I want you to tell them to put the torch in the clay pitcher. Have those 300 men take the pitchers and the trumpets tonight at midnight and go out and quietly surround the army of the Midianites.” They did as they were told. They crept up and quietly surrounded the enemy. Then at the signal all those 300 men blew their trumpets, broke their pitchers, and the torches glared out. The Midianites must have thought it was a nightmare. (cf. [Judges 7:16-22](#)).

Normally an army will have just a few men who will blow the trumpets. A few guys at the front of the troops will blow the trumpets. But in this case all 300 men were blaring their trumpets. The Midianites must have thought, “Man, they have an army of a million.” They became confused and confounded, and the Lord delivered the Midianites into the hands of the children of Israel.

Now each of these three items is very significant to us as New Testament believers. First of all, the trumpet represents trumpeting the gospel. It represents blowing the horn of the Good News. And notice that every single one of them was to do it. Not just the leaders, not just a few, but every single person was to blow his trumpet. And this is true of Christians and of the disciples of the Lord. We can all be witnesses. In fact, we are all commanded to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Each one of us can do it in our own way. That is the beauty of the New Testament. We are all priests. We all have that ministry to go to the people on behalf of God. Whether you are a pastor or a common lay person, every person can share Christ in his or her own way.

Now what about those clay pitchers? Those clay pitchers represent the believer, the Christian in whom is the treasure. It says [2 Corinthians 4:7](#), “We have this treasure in earthen vessels.”

The torch, of course, is the light of the world, Jesus Christ. Unless the pitcher is broken, the light, the warmth, and the glory of Jesus Christ cannot be seen. And so it is that unless we are broken,

the glory of Jesus Christ and the work of God cannot be accomplished to the extent that God wants to happen.

Let's read about that.

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.  
8 We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;  
9 persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed—  
10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.  
11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.  
12 So then death is working in us, but life in you.  
13 But since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak,  
14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.  
15 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. ([2 Corinthians 4:7–15](#), NJKV)

So we have this treasure in earthen vessels. God is really different from human beings. If you had the Hope Diamond, this big, blue, forty-four carat diamond of India and it belonged to you, would you put it in your cookie jar and leave it on the counter there in the kitchen? I do not think so. Or say you had a million dollars, a thousand one-thousand-dollar bills with Grover Cleveland's face on it. If you had a thousand one-thousand-dollar bills, I do not think you would put them in one of those clay flowerpots that crack and break. I do not think you would do that. What would we do? We would put it in a vault. We would put it in a bank. We would make sure it was as secure as possible, so that no one could get at it.

But that is not the way the Lord does it. He puts Himself in earthen vessels so that people can get at it. In fact, there are three reasons why God uses broken vessels. We see here three great reasons why God has chosen to do it this way. First it says, "That the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."

What if we were really powerful people or perfect people? Then people would look at us and they would admire us. They would think, "Oh, you are amazing." But we are not. We are imperfect people.

It is kind of sad that we do not want our imperfections to be seen. We want to be honored. We want to be admired. We have this weakness—we want the attention. We want to be focussed on. And so we act very strong and wise. We go around like we have it all together. We do that because our egos crave admiration. Naturally we do not want to show our weaknesses or our imperfections; we might feel humiliated.

Here is something really interesting about Paul. He says in [2 Corinthians 4:8](#), "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair." Here is the apostle

Paul, probably the most amazing teacher and writer of the Word—pastor extraordinaire, preacher, and apostle of God—and yet he says, “I am perplexed.” The word “perplexed” is very interesting. Literally in Greek it means: at a loss mentally.

We are at a loss mentally. We do not understand. We are confused. Most normal pastors today would not share that. They would not get up and say, “I am mentally deficient,” even though it is true. They would not get up and say, “I am totally confused. I do not realize what is going on.” No, instead they say, “I have the answers for you.”

Paul was going through stuff he did not have the answers for and people are going through things around him. He could not just give them perfect pat answers. He did not understand; but he knew the One to point them to, even though he himself was not mentally capable of explaining it to them.

I just sat at the bedside of a forty-year-old mother who has three children. She has a husband who loves her dearly, two young teenage daughters, and a twelve-year-old son who is handicapped and needs full time attention, which she provides. They are dear, wonderful, committed Christians in our church. She had terminal cancer. We have been praying for months and she was not physically healed. It came down to the point last week where we had to begin to plan her funeral. And she died a few days ago. What am I going to say to her husband? He understands she is in paradise. She is with Jesus. We all rejoice in that. But here he is and I do not know what to say. “God loves you? He is with you? We are here standing with you?” It is tough. Mentally, I am unequal to that. I cannot explain it.

My wife has a saying which she has not used lately, but she says, “Wayne, you have PMS.” I said, “What? What do you mean?” She said, “Pastor’s Mental Syndrome.” “What is that?” “I do not know, but all you pastors get it.” It is true; we are not perfect. We do not have all the answers.

This ought to be encouraging because we look at our imperfections and our flaws and we think: “How could we ever be used for the Lord?” Brother, you can be used because you are what you are. You are an earthen vessel. You are not perfect and therefore the treasure, the glory of Jesus Christ, can be seen. You see it is not the container, it is the contents, right? That is what the Lord wants to show off, the contents. And the contents of our life, the treasure, is Jesus Christ.

I think of the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were forgotten for a thousand years. They were put in these jars and hidden in caves. A little guy was walking around Kumron and just throwing rocks like boys do. He was throwing rocks up into the cave and all of sudden, he heard a clang. He wondered, “Whoa, what is that?” He was curious and wanted to find out what was going on. He climbed up and saw a bunch of these clay containers and pots. He looked in there and there was all of this old writing and everything. It probably did not mean anything to him. It was the Word of God. Now everybody wants to see it. It is the most amazing thing. But it was in those clay pots.

Jesus Christ resides within you and within me. As you are hiding His Word in your heart, His eternal Word lives in you! And it has to get out, so you must be broken and I must be broken. Maybe you are a cracked pot or a leaky vessel. That is good. The Lord is doing a work.

The first reason is so that the glory and the excellency might be of God and not of us. The second reason God chooses weak and fragile vessels is because He wants breakable vessels so that common people can partake of the contents.

Let's refer back to how we as human beings lock up our treasures. We put them in impenetrable vaults and in places where they are secure because we do not want anyone to take our treasures. But God wants people to take His treasures. God wants us to go tell everyone the combination: repent and receive Christ! He wants us to spread high and low that the door is open because of what Jesus Christ did. And then He lets us be broken so the contents will come pouring out.

That is what Paul is talking about here. He says, "We are hard pressed. We are perplexed, persecuted and struck down, bearing in our bodies the dying of Jesus in order that the life of Jesus may come pouring out and may be manifested."

You see when we, as servants of Christ, are hard pressed by difficult circumstances, when we are confused, when we do not understand what is going on, when we are hurt deeply by people, when life has knocked us down, when we feel we are going to die and it is impossible for us—what do we do? We cry out to the Lord and we find His grace is sufficient. He pours His grace into our hearts and He heals our hearts. He works in our hearts. He fills our hearts. And we find that there are people all around us who have the same exact needs, and now we can relate to them. We know what the answer is because we had that too. We can say, "Here is the comfort I received when I was going through something like that. This is what the Lord did in my life. This is how He ministered to me." It is a hard but blessed process.

And part of it is that we are being emptied of ourselves and emptied of focussing on ourselves. We cannot really be very useful vessels when we are full of ourselves. I think of Stephen who is really an inspiration. He is such a great example. In [Acts 6:3, 5](#) it says of him that he was a man full of faith, full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, and power. Why? He had these qualities because he was full of Jesus.

What are you full of? What am I full of? When people say, "You are full of it," what is "it"? You are full of yourself. You are full of pride. You are full of baloney. But it boils down to being full of myself, and that has to change, right? There has to be an emptying process that takes place. Even for wonderful people, even for very useful people like Paul, there is the process of emptying so that we can be filled. Then we can have His love, which is a greater love. Perhaps we are loving people, but do we love like Jesus loved?

Maybe some of you have seen movies depicting the terrible cost of God's love, as Jesus dies on the cross covering a multitude of sins, absorbing sin and showing God's grace. Recently the Lord was telling me that is what He wants to do in my life. He wants to make me more like Jesus. And it was killing me. I will have to admit I said, "Lord, I do not want to be like You to that degree. I mean, I want to be like You, but not totally, in the sense of dying." He said, "Well, that is My love, you see. You can absorb things. You can be a shock absorber and you can bring Jesus into the midst of that." I was protesting. And He said, "Well, not your will but Mine be done. I desire what is best for you. I really want you to be like Me. And I want to bless you and use you, and I want you to be filled with Me."

He empties us of ourselves and then He causes us to be broken-hearted through the ordeal. Now, there is something beautiful about a broken-hearted person. It is a lovely thing when our self-will is melted, when our stubbornness is softened, when our pride is humbled and the tenderness and the grace of Jesus Christ shines out. That is a beautiful person. That is a wonderful person.

David talked about a weaned child in [Psalm 131:2](#). What is a weaned child? A weaned child is one who cannot get fed the way it used to be fed. That time is over; now there is another way. They do not like that at first.

We had to say, “Well, now it is time to eat on your own.” There is a breaking process, an accepting, and a surrendering. And that is not easy. But in that surrender there is so much peace and there is a whole new level of growth. And that is what God wants to do.

David experienced this after his failure with Bathsheba. When he finally confessed and repented, he prayed in [Psalm 51:10](#),

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.  
13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.  
15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise,  
16 For You do not desire sacrifice or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. (cf. [Psalm 51:10, 12–13, 15–16](#))

What does he mean? God does not just want religiosity. God does not just want us to go through the motions, doing all the right rituals and that kind of religious thing. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” ([Psalm 51:17](#)).

The offering of a broken heart is very beautiful to God. That is what He wants. The flesh resists what I am saying, but brothers and sisters, He wants this. He wants our hearts melted and broken and He allows us to go through these things so that we are tenderized; we are opened up. There is something so beautiful in a person who is vulnerable—that brokenness is so attractive. The love of Christ becomes accessible to people. It draws people and they open up. They want that grace that you have received because they need it as bad as you, or worse. And so they come to Him.

Back in [2 Corinthians 4:15](#) it says, “That grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.” It is more and more glory for God.

The Lord wants to lighten our load, believe it or not. He wants to rid us of the clutter and the excess baggage. He wants to lighten our heavy hearts and entrust His treasures, which are far better. As we go through things, we find out what is really valuable and meaningful in life. I think we all saw that after 9-11, but we have picked up our clutter again. Family, God, loving people, and traveling light, these things are the important things. The Lord allows disturbances and afflictions, such as Paul speaks about here, in order to refine us. He is pouring us from vessel to vessel.

In [Jeremiah 48:11](#) we read about Moab settling on his dregs. He had not been emptied from vessel to vessel; therefore, his impure taste had remained in him. And this is what they would do with wine in order to refine it and purify it. They would pour it from vessel to vessel so the dregs, the distasteful aspect of it, would be filtered out. Otherwise the wine’s taste would be inferior. We are inferior. We are filled with self unless He pours us from vessel to vessel and we are changed. We really do not change easily. I do not. I should not speak for you. I am probably the worst guy here and it takes some doing a lot of times with the Lord. But He wants us to taste like Jesus. And that is what we want to taste like, right? We do not want to be prideful. We should not be thinking

about ourselves, what we are doing, and what is going on about us all the time. God wants us thinking of Him, others, and His cause.

There was a preacher who preached this really searching, convicting message about pride. Afterward this lady came up and said, “Oh pastor, please pray for me. I need prayer. Your message really hit me.” He said, “Really? How did it hit you?” “Well, pride. I have this pride and I need prayer.” “Well, what is the pride? Tell me about your pride.” And she said, “I am just so proud of my beauty. Just before the service tonight I stared at myself in the mirror for an hour. I am so proud of my loveliness and beauty.” The pastor said, “I will pray for you. But that is not the sin of pride, it is the sin of your imagination.”

That is the thing about pride. It is so blind. It is so stupid. But it is there, in one way or another focussing on self. It can be that you are down on yourself. “Oh I am so bad. I am so sinful.” That is also a form of pride. The Lord presses us into a greater dependency on Jesus.

[Second Corinthians 4:10](#) says, “Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.”

Verse 13 tells us how this happens. “Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore we speak.”

You see the Lord uses circumstances and the things we go through to force us to grow in faith. That is what Paul is saying in all these verses. When he says in [2 Corinthians 4:8–9](#), “We are hard pressed on every side, but we are not crushed,” that is faith. When he says in [verse 8](#), “We are perplexed, but we are not in despair,” and when he says, “We are persecuted but we are not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed,” that is faith. When we look at our circumstances and we say, “I am totally wiped out. There is no hope whatsoever,” that is unbelief. And that is what happens. You start whining “Oh, woe is me. I am nothing.” And you feel that way. But then faith causes you to turn your eyes upon the Lord and you realize there is hope. He is doing a work.

And I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in me will complete it for the day of Jesus Christ. (cf. [Philippians 1:6](#))

He knows what He is doing. He loves me. And that is faith because we are joined to a living Lord. [Second Corinthians 4:14](#) says, “Knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus, will also raise us up with Jesus and will present us with you.”

There are three reasons that He uses broken, earthen vessels. Reason number one is so that the excellency may be of God, that He might receive the glory, not us. Reason number two is so the contents of Christ can get out to people through broken hearts. Number three is so that we will continually come to the Lord to receive, because we are broken vessels and we are always leaking out. It is always pouring out and we always need to be refilled. You see, if we were not broken we would remain self-dependent. We would remain filled with ourselves. But because we are broken we have to go to Him. We have to get under the faucet. We have to keep coming to Him and that is the beauty of it.

When I was reading about the Amazon River, I learned that it is so huge. It is 4,000 miles long. It has a drainage area of 2.5 million square miles. The mighty Amazon is twice as huge as the Mississippi, in terms of drainage area. It is estimated that up to seven million cubic feet of water per second are discharged into the Atlantic Ocean at the mouth of the Amazon. Seven million

cubic feet per second is so much that the power of that fresh water coming into the ocean actually freshens the ocean for 200 miles out. For 200 miles it is fresh water. But do you know how the mighty Amazon begins? It begins as a little trickle up in the Andes Mountains where no one sees it. It just begins to trickle from way up there alone.

And that is where it must start for us. If we are going to become part of a mighty work of God—and God is doing a mighty work—we must receive that living water on the mountain with the Lord. Go to Him to be refreshed each day. Drink in His love and the water of His Word. Then as we are refreshed, we come down and join with others. All these tributaries join together and a mighty Amazon is formed. And as we come down with that living water we have received, and together with others we make it available, things are going to grow! Life is going to sprout up everywhere. It starts small. It is that heart broken before the Lord, receiving, and crying out to God.

Let's bow our heads.

Dear Jesus, Your ways truly are amazing. They are so different from man's ways. They are so pure. We are impure in ourselves, but You are purifying our lives and breaking our hearts so that we have a sacrifice to give You, a broken innocent heart to share with You. Without Your work we would not have that. Lord, we want to yield to that work. We do not want to fight against it. We do not want to resist the beautiful work that You are doing. Though Paul was being insulted and overlooked, when he saw his gross weakness, he finally got to the point where he said, "I glory in that, because then Your power comes through. Then I am made strong in You." Praise You, Lord. Thank You so much that You love us and You want Your love to fill us. It is such a different, higher, surpassing love. Praise You Lord Jesus.