

DISPLAYING THE GLORY OF GOD

SERIES: THE NEW COVENANT AS A LIFESTYLE

By Doug Goins

What does it mean to display the glory of God? Often, during worship, we sing of displaying God's glory. Consider these familiar lyrics, "*In my life Lord, be glorified...in our home, in our church...be glorified.*" Now if you were to try to explain that to some of your non-Christian friends or relatives, how would you interpret it for them? Phrases like, "we want God to be glorified in our church" or "we want the glory of God to be displayed in our Christian community and family." What exactly does that mean? Look at what the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:12-15:

So death works in us, but life in you. But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe, therefore also we speak; knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

In this passage, Paul is summarizing the things that he has already written about in the opening chapters of this letter-- attitudes that God has given him, circumstances and events in his life, which he says has had a positive effect on the lives of the people around him, and his brothers and sisters in Christ in the church in Corinth. He is convinced that somehow all of this works to God's glory.

In verses 8 and 9 (see Discovery Paper #4639), Paul summarized his own experience of suffering, struggle, and difficulty. We saw that these experiences, in fact, are not abnormal. This is how life is when you follow Jesus Christ. It's going to be tough because we live in a sinful, fallen world, a world of rebellion against God. Look at how Eugene Peterson paraphrases 2 Corinthians 4:8, 9 from *The Message*:

We've been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we're not demoralized; we're not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do; we've been spiritually terrorized, but God hasn't left our side; we've been thrown down, but we haven't broken.

Then, beginning at verse 12:

While we're going through the worst, you're getting in on the best!

We're not keeping this quiet, not on your life. Just like the psalmist who wrote, "I believed it, so I said it," we say what we believe. And what we believe is that the One who raised up the Master Jesus will just as certainly raise us up with you, alive. Every detail works to your advantage and to God's glory: more and more grace, more and more people, more and more praise!

Paul comes up with two primary convictions about “the glory of God.” In the first three verses, Paul focuses on the unity of the body of Christ which displays the glory of God. When you live, love, serve and minister out of unity, God is glorified. Then, in verse 15, the praise life, the worship life of the body of Christ, individually and collectively, displays the glory of God. Now how did Paul learn this? How did he end up with the insight, perspective and wisdom that verses 12-15 suggest?

First, the word of God itself informed him. As a Jewish rabbi trained in the scriptures, Paul has saturated himself in the Word and has memorized much of the Bible. He begins this section by quoting from Psalm 116, which is powerful revelation. But, because the word of God doesn’t exist in a vacuum, he goes further and relates it to his own personal experience--the issues that *he* is wrestling with--the difficult things as well as the good.

Life and ministry; it’s not about us

Look carefully at the first three verses--the unity of the body of Christ displays the glory of God. The first emphasis is that life and ministry is not about us. You know how we joke “it’s always about you, isn’t it?” Well it’s just the opposite from God’s perspective. It really is about the Lord Jesus. It’s about other people always, not about us. Paul says in verses 12 and 13,

“So death works in us, but life in you. But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE,’ we also believe, therefore also we speak....”

Paul’s life was difficult, and his decision to follow Christ made his life even more complicated. Why did Paul endure a life of hardship and struggle? Over the years, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, experience taught him that his willingness to live sacrificially for Jesus’ sake, his willingness to keep on telling the truth about Jesus, even when there was resistance and opposition, would result in spiritual life in the people around him--in his family, his community and church. That is the nature of our common life as a body of believers. The principal in verse 12, of life for the Corinthians coming out of death for the apostle Paul, is related to his earlier statements in the opening chapter of this letter where he introduces this beautiful theme of vicarious suffering (see Discovery Paper #4632).

We belong to a fellowship of suffering. Paul wants the Corinthian church, and us as well, to understand that God supplies all the resources we need in what is, in reality, a commonly shared experience of suffering. God allows our individual struggles so that we can identify with each other, and so that we can enter into each other’s struggles and difficulties. Paul says we suffer because of our identification with Jesus Christ. He suffered, and since we are identified with him, it goes with the territory. God blends together our difficulties and the spiritual comfort that we can offer to other people; therefore, suffering isn’t wasted and it isn’t pointless. God is ultimately in charge and he is going to use all the suffering, the comfort, and the relationships to grow us up together and to bring us to spiritual maturity, not as isolated individuals but as a community, as a body.

Notice that Paul doesn’t become self-centered in his suffering. Pain will very naturally turn us inward and make us protective and self-absorbed. But the call here is to live sacrificially, to live like Jesus Christ. If you look at chapter 4, verse 5, Paul identifies himself as “your bond-servant for Jesus sake.” That is how he lived his life, and like Paul, we are in a sense suffering servants too. That was one of Jesus’ titles and it’s going to be a part of our lives as we choose to follow him in ministry and service. As you lose yourself in costly service to somebody who is hurting, as you choose to offer care, to

offer comfort to that person, the wonderful result is that you will begin to see hope reborn in that person. You will see healing at work by the power of the Holy Spirit, and life becomes visible in that person.

If you have kids you'll identify because as parents we give ourselves and we sacrifice ourselves. Not because we're masochists, but because there is a goal in mind--we want our children to grow up to be healthy, contributing mature adults and that is why we are willing to die, so they can have a grown-up, healthy life. The same principal is expressed in our church family. We can faithfully encourage one another even when it's inconvenient. You can endure the loneliness of prayer, of intercession, for someone else. That's sacrificial living.

We can remind each other of what is true and what isn't. Often times, speaking truth to one another involves tremendous risk. What if we are rejected? What if we are misunderstood? Are we willing to take the risk with one another, to lovingly tell the truth? But again, the promise of God's Word is if we are willing to do that sacrificially, the results are going to be life. And Jesus says it's an abundant life, a full life.

None of us *want* to live out of death, so adversity is inconsistent with how we think the Christian life ought to be experienced. We resent hardship and are resistant to experiences that might make life difficult for us. We prefer the illusion of being in control of our circumstances, wanting to operate out of a position of strength. But God's Word calls us to accept circumstances and, if necessary, to live out of limitation, live out of difficulty, live out of suffering, while still focusing on the needs of the people around us. Basically, to ask ourselves, "how can my struggle benefit somebody else?"

Speech based on faith

Paul was willing to live sacrificially for Jesus' sake and knew that that resulted in spiritual life being experienced in the people around him. He believed that faith in Jesus, which prompted outspokenness, is going to have a spiritual impact on them as well. That is the principal in verse 13: speech based on faith. Paul had learned from Psalm 116 that faith cannot stay silent, "...I believed, therefore I spoke," Paul says. The quote is directly from the Old Testament, but it is actually from a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures called the *Septuagint*. So if you lay this New Testament quote next to the actual quote in Psalm 116, they are not exactly alike. However, by faith Paul, and the writer of the psalm, are declaring that as we give testimony to God's faithfulness in our lives, even in the midst of the trials and pressures, that God is going to use it to spiritual effect on the people around us.

There is an amazing parallel between Paul's life and the life of this psalmist. The author of Psalm 116 is unknown, but refers to himself as somebody who is simple, and a servant of God. Paul would have identified with both points. Like the psalmist, Paul lives out "the word of God" in his personal experience, and the result for Paul, and us, is spiritual understanding and wisdom so that we can live life more effectively.

The psalmist makes clear that he is a servant. He wants to serve the Lord and he identifies himself as "O Lord, surely I am Thy servant..." (116:16), but then he describes this tremendous humiliation. Notice the vocabulary, all the different ways he is trying to explain it, which makes it hard for us to know exactly what he was going through. Was he talking about illness or the threat of death, or opposition? Has he been unjustly accused of something? He begins the psalm by saying,

I love the Lord, because He hears
my voice and my supplications.

Because He has inclined His ear to me,
therefore I shall call upon Him
as long as I live.
The cords of death encompassed me,
and the terrors of Sheol came upon me;
I found distress and sorrow.
Then I called upon the name of the Lord:
“O Lord, I beseech Thee, save my life!”
Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;
yes, our God is compassionate.
The Lord preserves the simple;
I was brought low, and He saved me.
Return to your rest, O my soul,
for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.
For Thou hast rescued my soul from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling.
I shall walk before the Lord
in the land of the living.

And the verse that Paul quotes,

I believed [or I spoke in faith] when I said,
“I am greatly afflicted.”
I said in my alarm, “All men are liars.”

What that emphasizes is that the psalmist is tremendously disillusioned with people, perhaps people he trusted, and they betrayed him somehow. But, his faith in God gave the psalmist the courage to speak out despite opposition, to confess his faith. Like the apostle Paul he didn't feel like it at the moment--crushed, dismayed, and disillusioned. But God delivered him. Further on, the psalmist acknowledges that if he shares the story of God's faithfulness with people of faith, the community of faith in Jerusalem, then he knows that they will be encouraged by it; not about him and his story, but encouraged by God's story--God at work in his life.

In 2 Corinthians 2:13, Paul speaks out of the same spirit of faith, or “the outlook of faith,” as it is described by a 4th century biblical commentator, John Chrysostom. He was the Bishop of Antioch and the Bishop of Constantinople, a powerful preacher, and is also famous for his commitment to the Bible. As an Orthodox theologian in an age of apostasy when people were not standing true to the faith, Chrysostom was run out of the church in Constantinople because of his stand for truth, and died while fleeing from the Emperor. In his writings, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, Chrysostom says this about verse 13:

Paul reminds us of a psalm which abounds in heavenly wisdom and is especially fitted to encourage us in dangers. The psalmist uttered these words when he was in great danger, from which there was no possibility of escape except in the power of God. In similar circumstances, Paul says that we who have the same Spirit will be comforted likewise. Thus he shows that there is a great harmony

between the Old and New Testaments; it is the same Spirit at work in both. The men of old were in danger, just as we are, and like them we must find the solution through faith and hope. (1)

I was trying to think of a contemporary example of someone living out the kind of troubles reflected in verses 12 and 13, living sacrificially, putting life on the line for other people, being inconvenienced for Jesus' sake, and then, telling the truth when it's not popular. You may remember Greg and Hillary Lundstedt. Greg was an intern at PBC from 1998-1999. Last summer we had the honor of commissioning them to their first full-time pastoral ministry. Both were coming out of the business world to begin ministering in a church in the Central Valley. There was a core group of people in that church who wanted biblically-based ministry. They wanted the Word of God to be central in the preaching and the study life of the church. At the same time, there was a backlash against Greg by folks who did not like the biblical preaching that Greg brought--the biblical view of what the church ought to be--and these folks began to resist and challenge him. They eventually brought in denominational officials to challenge Greg--his theology, his view of the Scriptures.

Greg Lundstedt is a gracious man, he's wonderfully dialogical, and is not confrontational or challenging. He has been back here a couple of times and has shared the pain and difficulty of that because he has a vision of what God can do in the church. He has been fearless in telling the truth about what God wants for that church. Greg would identify with the psalmist, and with the apostle Paul. He is just trying to love people for Jesus' sake and be faithful to the scriptures, and develop a leadership model that is consistent with the scriptures. On the one hand, he loves what he is doing. But on the other, it is a struggle every day because of the opposition and resistance to who God has called him to be as a shepherd and teacher of the Word.

So, again, what motivates a person whether it's the psalmist, the apostle Paul, or Greg Lundstedt to keep living sacrificially for Jesus' sake? To keep telling the truth regardless of personal consequences? We find the answer in verse 14, the confidence of resurrection power at work:

...we speak; knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.

Just like the psalmist had been rescued from this life threatening danger, Paul himself has experienced resurrection power in his own life and ministry. This verse echoes the story that Paul told in the beginning of the letter, 2 Corinthians 1:8-10. Notice how it parallels Psalm 116, along with this verse of chapter 4:

For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us....”

In his life, Paul experienced deliverance like that on a number of different occasions. He understood that one day death would finally claim him, as it will every one of us. But Paul wasn't the least bit intimidated by the prospect. The power of God that has raised Jesus Christ from the dead and the power of God that has been at work in Paul's life in all circumstances, is the same power that will raise him to eternal life from death. Paul is echoing the joyful message of the early church: that Jesus Christ is victor over death.

Verse 14 also folds us into that because Paul sees this amazing, exciting reunion of God's people with him:

...knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.

Paul anticipates standing together with all the believers in Jesus Christ who have ever lived. What that means for us is if we know Jesus and have a relationship with him, the Bible says that we are "in Christ." We have union with him and we are going to remain in that union whether we are dead or alive. His resurrection guarantees our resurrection, collectively, so the communion of the saints, the body of Christ, can't be destroyed by death. The unity of the body of Christ is even maintained in eternity. I appreciate how Larry Crabb describes it in his book *Finding God*:

One day, we move from this world to the next. And our Lord greets us with a bear hug. We collapse before Him in reverence and wonder, but His embrace keeps us close. He laughs and says, "Look behind you!"

And there is our parents who died years ago, happier than we've ever seen them, and our sister, and our miscarried baby, and Dr. Luke and Elijah and Enoch. Now we're laughing. We can't stop. And the sweetest voice in all creation says "Welcome. You're finally home!" (2)

That is what we have to look forward to. The unity that God has created here will be carried into the reality of eternity, a heavenly reunion.

The last verse of our passage is a magnificent statement of how the praise and worship of the body of Christ displays the glory of God. Verse 15:

For all things are for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

Again, this verse wonderfully echoes the opening thanksgiving that Paul gives in chapter 1, verse 11. You can see how the themes are interwoven: "And He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping us through your prayers, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many."

There are several important things here that we have emphasized in verse 12. First, "other-centeredness" which is the focus of our lives and ministry: "For all things are for your sakes...So death works in us, but life in you." What really matters is *you*, what God is doing in *you*, not the circumstances that we are struggling with because all of us who are in Christ are united with one another, and what effects one of us, effects all of us. Even though Paul experienced and witnessed suffering, death, and tears, he knows it is all working for good for the body of Christ. He is, therefore, willing to go with it and not fight against it, not resist it.

Second is the grace of God extended--"grace which is spreading to more and more people." As we allow this resurrection life to be expressed through us as individuals, and to other people in the church, our neighborhoods and communities, and when it is expressed through sacrificial service, through lovingly telling the truth about Jesus, then Paul says that God's gracious resources are then extended into more and more lives. *You can actually make a choice to love somebody for Jesus' sake, to live sacrificially in the moment, and that person gets changed.* The Spirit of God is at work in them

and they choose to turn around and love somebody else, and speak truth to somebody else, and so on. It grows like a living organism, it's dynamic, and the result is spiritual life, spiritual growth in the body. People get saved, people see Jesus in us and are drawn to that. They want to know what's different about you. They come to know Jesus and new believers bring an infectiousness and energy, enthusiasm and gratitude that strengthens all of us and encourages all of us, and it perpetuates. That is how God designed us to live. That is how the body is to grow up and be strengthened.

Finally, Paul emphasizes musical worship and praise, like a choir and orchestra building in a crescendo, voices singing thanksgiving to God for his gracious saving activity with a thunderous finale, "to God be the glory." Thanksgiving is increased because God's grace is spreading; it's "out of control." There is so much thanksgiving, so much gratitude that you can't get a word in edgewise. On everybody's tongue is gratitude for who God is and what he is doing among us. In Paul's view, the people giving thanks are the people who have gone through great sorrow, deep hurt, and real heartache, and yet in the midst of the struggle, they've made a choice. The choice is to look to God for strength, for comfort, and not to try to manage their own comfort or make themselves strong. The choice is to trust God and the fact that he loves us even though it may not *feel* like he does. They experience the love of God and inner joy and peace and they are strengthened during the difficulty. They can now look back on it and want to proclaim it--to tell everybody--just like the psalmist in Psalm 116. See how he closes this psalm, verses 12-19:

What shall I render to the Lord
for all his benefits toward me?
I shall lift up the cup of salvation,
and call upon the name of the Lord.
I shall pay my vows to the Lord,
Oh may it be in the presence of
all His people.
Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of His godly ones.
O Lord, surely I am Thy servant,
I am Thy servant, the son of
Thy handmaid,
Thou hast loosed my bonds.
To Thee I shall offer a sacrifice of
thanksgiving, and call upon
the name of the Lord.
I shall pay my vows to the Lord,
Oh may it be in the presence
of all His people,
in the courts of the Lord's house,
in the midst of you, O Jerusalem.
Praise the Lord!

The psalmist makes several references to the whole community and how he can hardly wait to tell everybody what God has done. When a song like that comes out of a heart overflowing with gratitude for who God is, God is glorified. A song of thankful deliverance is sung "to the glory of God."

When Ray Stedman preached through 2 Corinthians in 1979, he shared in that message a testimony from Billy Graham's *Decision* magazine. It is quoted in Ray's book, *Power Out of Weakness*. As I read it again this week, I realized that it's just as powerful now as it was 21 years ago. The writer of this letter to the editor in *Decision* magazine is anonymous so we don't know if it was a man or woman or how old this person was when they wrote it. However, the writer obviously understood the heart of Psalm 116. They understood the reality of new covenant living.

For a long time I had been bitter about life. It seemed to have dealt me a dirty blow, for since I was 12 years old I have been waiting for death to close in on me. It was at that time I learned I had muscular dystrophy. I fought hard against this disease and exercised hard, but to no avail. I only grew weaker. All I could see was what I had missed. My friends went away to college, then got married and started having families of their own. When I lay in bed at night thinking, despair would creep from the dark corners to haunt me. Life was meaningless.

*In March of last year my mother brought home from our public library Billy Graham's book *World Aflame*. I started reading it, and as I read I realized that I wanted God. I wanted there to be meaning to life. I wanted to receive this deep faith and peace. All I know is that now my life has changed and I now have joy in living. No longer is the universe chaotic. No longer does life have no goal. No longer is there no hope. There is instead "God who so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).*

I continue to grow weaker. I am close to being totally helpless and am in pain most of the time, but sometimes I am so glad I am alive that it is hard to keep myself from bursting at the seams. I can see for the first time the beauty around me, and I realize how very lucky I am. Despair is such a waste of time when there is joy; and lack of faith is such a waste of time when there is God. (3)

A life transformed like this one truly displays "the glory of God," and it's a word of thanksgiving, of testimony such as this that displays "the glory of God." For 21 years that statement has been read over and over again, and God is still using it to glorify himself. That is how God is glorified in and through the church. Lives are transformed by grace--saving grace, the grace that brings people to Jesus. The world looks at how we live, how we treat each other, and they see the grace of God expressed when we really love one another sacrificially, the way that Christ loved us. One of the distinctive marks of the early church was reflected in the observation by a non-Christian: "Oh, how they love one another." Doctrine is important, what we believe is important, but is it visible in the way we treat and relate to one another? Does it glorify God? It's a life lived out of joy and faith and love, and it is strength that has been toughened by the crucible of suffering and by struggle, shaped by perplexity, persecution, catastrophe, but it never stops rejoicing in the power of God and it is driven by hope. The apostle Peter writes, "And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 5:10, 11).

Scripture quotations are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE ("NASB"). © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, 1996 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Where indicated, Scripture taken from *The Message*. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

NOTES:

1. Chrysostom, John, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 9.2*, Ancient Christians comment on Scripture, Ed. Bray. © 1999, InterVarsity Press, Downer Grove, IL. P. 234.
2. Larry Crabb, *Finding God*, © 1995, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI.
3. Ray C. Stedman, Expository in 2 Corinthians - *Power Out Of Weakness*, © 1982, Word Books, Waco, TX. P. 84. (Discovery Paper #3683 can be downloaded from the PBC web site: pbc.org)

Catalog No. 4640

2 Corinthians 4:12-15

11th Message

Doug Goins

May 28, 2000

[Back to Index Page](#)

Copyright © 2000 Discovery Publishing. This data file is the sole property of [Discovery Publishing](#), the publications ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation free of charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated into any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the prior written consent of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made, in writing, to: Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA 94306-3695.