



PART 2

PAUL IN CORINTH: LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

Chapter Eight

A LEADER MADE OF CLAY

CLAY POTS ARE HUMBLE

In Christ's day the world was filled with intellectuals and influential people. There were celebrated philosophers in Athens, unsurpassed scholars in Alexandria, the most powerful political leaders the world had ever known in Rome, and some of the most meticulous rabbis of all time in and around Jerusalem. Christ bypassed them all and called simple, crude, unknown, and uneducated fishermen from Galilee to be His disciples.

So Paul said, "You know what? You're right. *By myself*, I'm good for nothing but taking out the garbage." In the words of [Romans 7:18 NASB](#), "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not." But *by God's grace*, he was an ugly jar that contained an immense treasure.

God's own power was made manifest in Paul because he did not get in the way. That's why he said,

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NASB)

⁹"And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

¹⁰Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

God is still bypassing the elite. He's leaving the proud intellectuals in universities and seminaries, and He's looking for clay pots who will carry the treasure of saving truth with humility. By using frail and common people, God makes it clear that the power is His, not ours.



The fact that God can make spiritual leaders out of such unsightly clay jars is proof of the greatness of His power. Spiritual power is not the product of human genius or human technique. The power is from God.

And the wonderful thing is that our weakness doesn't prove fatal to the cause of truth. In fact, it is advantageous, because it gets us out of the way and lets the power of God do its work. The great and encouraging reality of our calling as spiritual leaders is this: Knowing our weakness isn't a disadvantage; it is essential to what we do as leaders. And therefore, with Paul, we can rejoice in that weakness.

It is important to remember that we are not talking about sin; we are talking about normal human limitations. Because of the weakness of our flesh, we *do* sin ([1 John 1:8](#))—but sin itself is never to be tolerated or gloried in.

1 John 1:8 (NASB)

⁸“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

Sin—especially willful sin or unrepentant sin—is seriously detrimental to leadership. As we shall see in chapter 10, sin can even permanently disqualify a person from spiritual leadership.

The humility that stems from knowing our human frailties ought to motivate us to hate sin and to be constantly and continuously repentant. That was the spirit of the apostle Paul himself, as we see in [Romans 7](#). Every true spiritual leader will cultivate a holy hatred for sin and a humble, repentant heart over sin in his own life. That is an essential part of the life of every humble clay pot.

CLAY POTS ARE STURDY

Although clay pots are cheap, ordinary, and disposable, they are also amazingly durable. They can survive enormous amounts of stress and rough handling. Even if chipped, they can still be useful. You can scour them all you want and they simply won't wear out. The prolonged heat of an oven doesn't hurt them at all. Of course, they *can* ultimately be broken, but short of that, not much can ruin a clay pot.

Paul's leadership had those very same characteristics. He described his life of constant trials in [2 Corinthians 4:8–9](#):

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 (NASB)

⁸“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;

⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”

Yes, he was a clay pot—in some ways fragile, breakable, replaceable, valueless. But don't underestimate him, either. He was a *sturdy* clay pot, not eggshell china.

This quality is absolutely essential to anyone in leadership: *A leader is resilient.*

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #19

A LEADER IS RESILIENT

This is a marvelous partner to the virtue of humility. The leader, while knowing his own weakness, must be strong and stalwart.

Leaders are perpetually beset with trials. After all, leadership is about people, and people cause problems. Some people are problems. The leader, while being fully cognizant of his own frailty, must nonetheless find strength to endure every kind of trial—including pressure, perplexity, persecution, and pain. Notice that Paul speaks of those very trials in a series of four vivid contrasts (hard pressed, not crushed; perplexed, not in despair; persecuted, not forsaken; struck down, not destroyed).

To those who charged that Paul’s weaknesses crippled his ministry, he replied that he had been strong enough to endure every ordeal he had faced. Whatever did not kill him would only make him stronger. Paul (like a classic clay pot) was humble, yet durable. He was quite aware of all his own weaknesses. But at the same time, in those weaknesses he was mighty (cf. [2 Corinthians 12:10](#)).

2 Corinthians 12:10 (NASB)

¹⁰“Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Nothing is more completely Christlike than that sort of strength in weakness.

2 Corinthians 13:4 (NASB)

⁴“For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God *directed* toward you.”

Again we see that the strength behind our resilience is *God’s power*. The leader who is called and empowered by God and utterly dependent on Him for strength has infinite resources on which to draw. *Durable? Such a leader is practically invincible.*

Paul was not the sort of decorative pottery that sat on a shelf somewhere; he was a mercilessly battered jar. He was hammered all his life by people who would have been quite happy to see him break into a thousand pieces. The circumstances of his beleaguered life and transient ministry also added many hardships over and above the stress of dealing with people.

2 Corinthians 1:5 (NASB)

⁵“For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”



2 Corinthians 1:8-9 (NASB)

⁸“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;

⁹indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.”

2 Corinthians 6:4-5 (NASB)

⁴“But in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,

⁵in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger.”

This was nothing new for him. In his earlier epistle to the church at Corinth, he had written,

1 Corinthians 4:11-13 (NASB)

¹¹“To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless;

¹²and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;

¹³when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, *even* until now.”