



PART 2

PAUL IN CORINTH: LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

Chapter Eight

A LEADER MADE OF CLAY

CLAY POTS ARE STURDY

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

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #19

A LEADER IS RESILIENT

CLAY POTS ARE EXPENDABLE

Paul saw his whole life as a process of dying. He wasn't being morbid; he was simply recognizing the true nature of his earthly existence. It was a hopeful, not a gloomy, perspective: **"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain"** ([Philippians 1:21 NASB](#)).

As a mere clay pot, Paul knew he was expendable and was willing to be sacrificed. In [Colossians 1:24](#), he wrote,

[Colossians 1:24 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁴**"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."**

He wasn't suggesting that Christ's sufferings weren't enough to purchase full redemption, or that Paul's own afflictions added something to the finished work of Christ's atonement. He did not imagine there was any saving merit in his pain. But, as he had already said in [2 Corinthians 1:5-6](#), his sufferings had a profound temporal benefit, even for the Corinthians:



2 Corinthians 1:5-6 (NASB)

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

⁶But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer.”

In other words, his sacrifice was ultimately for their benefit.

2 Corinthians 4:12 (NASB)

¹²“So death works in us, but life in you.”

2 Corinthians 4:15 (NASB)

¹⁵“For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.”

2 Timothy 2:10-12 (NASB)

¹⁰“For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and* with *it* eternal glory.

¹¹It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him;

¹²If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us.”

It wasn't some masochistic love of pain that drove Paul, but love for the Corinthians.

Nonetheless, as far as Paul was concerned, the trials were welcome. He expressed his main longing in [Philippians 3:10](#):

Philippians 3:10 (NASB)

¹⁰“That I may know Him [Christ] and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”

Remember that Jesus' earthly sufferings were not limited to the pains of the cross. He, too, was relentlessly stalked and ruthlessly hunted by His enemies. He lived in the face of death until He died on the cross. None of us will ever suffer a fraction of what He suffered. Few of us will be called upon to bear even a tenth as much hardship as Paul bore. But every leader who is faithful to Christ will have *some* share in His sufferings.

The true leader must be willing to “endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” ([2 Timothy 2:3](#)).

2 Timothy 2:3 (NASB)

³“Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”

It is a privilege to bear such things *for Christ's sake* ([Romans 8:17-18](#)).



Romans 8:17-18 (NASB)

¹⁷“And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.

¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

2 Corinthians 4:17 (NASB)

¹⁷“For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison”

When we learn to embrace trials, anguish, and distress as

1) friends ([James 1:2-4](#); [Romans 5:3-5](#)) and

James 1:2-4 (NASB)

²“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Romans 5:3-5 (NASB)

³“And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;

⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

⁵ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

2) as reminders of our own weakness ([2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#)), we become more dependent on the power of God and therefore more effective as leaders and witnesses for Him. His life is unleashed in our dying.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NASB)

⁷“Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!

⁸ Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.

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.

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.”

“I have been crucified with Christ,” Paul wrote in [Galatians 2:20 NASB](#), “and 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 up for me.”



The testimony of such a life is powerful beyond measure. For Paul, the life of Jesus was being manifested in his own mortal flesh ([2 Corinthians 4:11](#)).

[2 Corinthians 4:11 \(NASB\)](#)

¹¹ **“For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”**

Here was this battered, bruised, hammered, maligned, persecuted man, who was nothing but an earthenware vessel. But in his nothingness Christ’s life was being manifested. How else could anyone explain the courage of Paul’s preaching and the transformation of so many lives under his influence? Right there in Corinth, total pagans with no knowledge of the true God had come to faith in Christ after hearing Paul preach in their city square. What could account for that, other than the power of God?

Paul was exposed constantly to forces that were intent on killing him. Yet he was more than a conqueror ([Romans 8:37](#)), because the Lord Jesus Christ infused his life with such power that his influence as a spiritual leader overturned the world.

[Romans 8:37 \(NASB\)](#)

³⁷ **“But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.”**

The powerful influence of Paul’s life and writings is still felt today, as it has been felt across the centuries.

He told the Corinthians,

[2 Corinthians 12:15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵ **“I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?”**

To the Philippians, he likewise said,

[Philippians 2:17 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁷ **“But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.”**

It was a worthy use for a disposable clay pot. Such a life of sacrifice suited Paul fine, because the return on the investment was so worthwhile.