

Reimagining Ministry: The Surpassing Power is from God and Not to Us

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.” 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

Life is very chaotic and unsettled. We are facing changes at an incredible pace. Whatever we thought was normal is slipping away and our longing to get things “back to the way they were” are diminishing. Certainly many things have returned to reflect the past and we have settled into those adjustments. Other things are still very uncertain. We are often being overwhelmed in ongoing cultural battles that impact us constantly unless we choose to hide from the collateral flashpoints. We are dealing with social injustice, changing paradigms, philosophical conflict, religious turmoil and reeling from the ruptures in our sense of community. Christians, unfortunately, have been tossed to and fro in this political, societal and church storms that have left many maneuvering to figure out how to navigate to a safe haven through the flack of all this posturing. The only thing that seems constant is that everything is constantly changing. The question is how do we operate in this environment? What do we focus on in this journey? How do we reimagine our life and ministry in this firestorm? The danger is we feel like we have been hammered by all this and we are often left staggering to gain our balance.

Paul begins in this text by affirming that we have this treasure in earthen vessels. That treasure is *“the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”* (2 Cor. 4:6). The first point of having this treasure is to *“show that the power is from God and not ourselves.”* Up until this pandemic, and we may not have even been aware of this until the pandemic changed everything, is that there are some people and even churches that would have reversed that statement at least in the way they operate. This is not to suggest that anyone does this intentionally for the most part, but the actual behavior of many could easily re-write this verse to say, *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to us and not to God.”* We have a tendency to try and do things for God rather than allow God to do things through us. We are often tempted to prove to others how indispensable we are to God’s kingdom work rather than ‘showing’ the power is from God and He alone is the only indispensable element in His kingdom program. I often tell our people that everyone is “indispensably dispensable” – what I mean is that every person is unique in God’s hand and God uses them to make a distinct impact for His kingdom work, but only Christ is indispensable in God’s kingdom work. If God takes one of us out of the equation, believe it or not, He will guarantee His kingdom will continue because it is *His* kingdom not ours. But the question is how we know we are operating with this in reverse. Paul might give us a clue in the following verses.

We are afflicted but not crushed – if we are operating with a mindset that we are trying to show the power is from us and not God, then the outcome of being afflicted is that we are often crushed; we are left despairing, feeling forsaken and for some, destroyed. *This is because we keep on trying to prove the power is from us and not God.* Afflictions show the limits of finite human beings and the borders of our abilities. When that happens we can start feeling sorry for ourselves because we feel exposed, not the center of attention and not as indispensable as we think we are. How do we fix it? Good question, one single thought:

We have this treasure in jars of clay, to (start) showing the power is from God and not ourselves. Don’t trust me on this, trust the text. When we start, dare I say it, showing the power is from God and not ourselves, we will begin *reimagining* ministry and life the way God intended it to function – the power is from God. We need to start trusting Him in this.

In His grace,

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