

# Totally Basic, Awesome, Common-Sense Theology That We Frequently Forget

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[0:00] Well, this morning I'd like us to turn back for a wee while to 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and we will read again at verse 5 to 7. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

For God, who said, let light shine in the darkness, has shone into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that their surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

I'm sure every one of us, or certainly many of us, would agree that life in 2025 is very, very full.

Every week feels busy, lots happening, lots to think about, lots to remember.

Whether that's work or school or emails or bills or holidays or appointments or meetings or friends or family or sport or exercise or doing your steps or doing your geolingo or keeping up on social media.

Even when we're doing nothing, it still feels like there's tons happening. It still feels like it's busy.

Life is full. And because life is full, our minds are full.

[1:13] And when that happens, when our minds are full, things spill over. Things slip through our fingers. Things so easily get forgotten.

In the chapter that we read, Paul describes himself, describes people as jars of clay. You can see it there in verse 7. In other words, just very ordinary, unremarkable containers.

But sometimes I feel even more like a sieve of clay. Everything in my head is just slipping through and being forgotten. There's too much happening as everything slips from our grasp.

Very often I feel like that. Maybe you sometimes feel like that. Maybe you constantly feel like that.

And because of that, because life's so full, it's so easy for important things to get pushed to one side.

And it's easy to forget the things that we really need to remember. The chapter that we read, that I can read for us, helps us with all of this. Because it teaches us and reminds us of some magnificent and beautiful truths.

[2:21] And so we're going to think about this chapter together. And we're going to think about it under the longest service title that you've ever heard. Totally basic, awesome, common sense theology that we frequently forget. And under that, we're going to look at five headings that are almost just as long.

Number one, the true unchanging, life-giving message of the gospel doesn't need tweaking. The abundant, all-surpassing power of God is never not enough. The people who are used by God never need to be anything more than weak.

What God promises His people for eternity means that loss and hardship now is always worth it. And if Jesus is really Lord, then we really need to listen to what He says.

So, longest sermon title ever, longest headings ever, but I promise you not the longest sermon ever. We'll still try and keep it not too long.

So, number one, the true, unchanging, life-giving message of the gospel doesn't need tweaking. Throughout the history of the Christian church, there has been a constant pressure to modify or adjust or add to the message of the gospel.

[3:27] That was a problem from day one for the Christian church. Again and again, if you read through Paul's letters, he is addressing the

problem of false teachers. Now, Paul had a fascinating life as a leader in the Christian church.

He traveled to different places. Often, he would spend several months in a particular location. He would plant a church there. He would help teach and build up the Christians. In that particular community.

And then, he would move on to a different place and do the same thing. And so, he was an itinerant in lots of different ways. But often, what would happen with Paul, having been in a location for a while, he would move on and the place where he had left, at the place where he'd left, others would come in and they would start to teach a different version of the gospel.

And sometimes, they would come and they would try to add more to what the gospel required. That happened in Galatia, who Paul wrote to in the letter to the Galatians.

It happened in Colossae. And you see that in the letter to the Colossians. There's this extra set of requirements that gets added to the gospel. And Paul has to write these letters to say, no, that is not the gospel.

[4:39] Other times, though, rather than adding more requirements to the gospel, in other contexts, people were saying that, you know, actually, it doesn't really matter how you live your life and actually sinful stuff.

It's actually okay. It's fine. You can do what you like. That's what was happening in Corinth, where Paul was writing to the Corinthians. There was a lot of patterns of behavior in the church that people were saying were perfectly acceptable.

And Paul was saying, no, it's not acceptable to do that. That's not what you should be doing. And so in different ways, the message of the gospel can be distorted very easily. And it's a huge threat to the church.

A different gospel is not the gospel. And ever since the days of the New Testament, the same pressure has been on the church to tweak the gospel. Often that falls into two categories, legalism and antinomianism.

Legalism is where we add more requirements to the gospel. There's something extra that you have to do in order to make sure that you're saved. And it's something that we do instead of what God does.

[5:39] And that can happen in hundreds of different ways. In the early church, there was about what you ate, who you had meals with and things like that. In our context, maybe people will talk about things like your very strict Sabbath observance, or what particular denomination you're in, or whether you've had a certain experience, or whether you attend this, that, or the next thing.

Adding requirements that you have to fulfill in order to make sure you're a Christian. It's all different examples of legalism. On the other hand, it's what you call antinomianism, which basically says, look, it doesn't matter how you live, you're forgiven, do what you like.

And if you find yourself living in a particular context where the rest of the world is doing something that's contrary to what the Bible says, it doesn't matter.

You can just be like them. You can follow what everyone is doing. And so that affects the church in moral issues like gossip, or money, or anger, or sex, or retaliation, where the patterns of the world around just get followed by the people in the church, and people say, that's fine.

And so in all of these ways, again and again and again, people have tweaked the gospel, distorted the gospel. And the key point is that we feel a pressure to do this.

[7:00] Sometimes we feel a pressure to make the gospel more attractive. And so we think, oh, people today are different. They're not like the first century. They're not going to like what we're seeing.

We should tweak it to make it more appealing. Sometimes we feel we need to make it more complicated because we think, well, actually, this seems too simple. We need to make it more complicated, more elaborate, maybe even a bit more impressive.

And sometimes we want to make the gospel a wee bit more domesticated. So we'll actually try and tone down aspects of it, and we'll make sure that it's maybe not as urgent, not as serious, and we definitely don't want it to be offensive to people.

And so again and again and again, there's this pressure because we think that a tweaked gospel is going to be a more effective gospel. But all of that is a massive mistake.

And we must never forget that the primary tactic of sin, of the kingdom of darkness that opposes Jesus and opposes the gospel, the primary tactic is not to make you hate the gospel.

[8:03] The primary tactic is to deceive you with a twisted gospel. If you look at world history, it's really interesting that the campaign to make humanity atheists has never really had that much effect.

If you look at world history, and if you even look at the world today, the kind of campaign to make people atheists doesn't tend to be effective, and the periods of influence that it has doesn't tend to last for that long.

But a distorted message of salvation has led millions of people astray. A tweaked gospel causes so much damage.

And it's all reminding us that the true, unchanging, life-giving message of the gospel does not need tweaking. Paul highlights this in the verses on the screen.

He says there that he's got no interest in disgraceful, underhanded ways, refuses to practice cunning, or to tamper with God's word. Instead, he just wants to give an open statement of the truth.

[9:11] He's got no interest in tweaking things. He just wants to tell people as it is. And it's reminding us of this point, the true, unchanging, life-giving message of the gospel does not need tweaking.

That is totally basic and totally awesome. It's basic because if the gospel is the truth, then changing the truth is crazy.

That's just common sense. If you went to the doctor and you got a diagnosis and then you went out back home and told everyone something different to what you've just been told, that's crazy.

Because you're not going to get the treatment that you need. Same in any other setting. If the gospel is the truth, then tweaking it is madness.

And so it's basic, but it's also awesome because if the gospel is the truth, then we actually have the truth. If the gospel is the truth, then we actually have the truth in front of us.

[10:24] And that's everything that we need. We need to know the truth about our origins. We need to know our truth about our destiny. We need to know the truth about nature and we need to know the truth about the supernatural.

We need to know the truth about right and wrong. we need to know the truth about guilt and justice we need to know the truth about what we really are as humans and we need to know the truth about whether God exists and whether our relationship with him matters and the big claim that I'm making every week before you as every new week begins the big claim I'm making before you is that we've got the truth this is the truth that we desperately need and it's very important for us to remember two things that are so important for us to remember as Christians we must never ever be arrogant about the truth and often that's been hugely damaging where Christians have claimed we've got the truth and there's a kind of arrogance with it that's ridiculous and hopeless and so damaging we must never be arrogant about the truth but at the same time we must not be timid about the truth because this is the truth life and death and time and eternity and heaven and hell and right and wrong truth and lies we've got to have the answer and maybe this isn't it maybe this isn't it maybe something else is but if something else is what is it?

our claim is that this is the truth and that's what makes the gospel so awesome it's what we need it's what we long for and that's why as we go on serving Jesus together as we start every new week on a Sunday we come back to what God is telling us in his word the world around us is constantly changing and yes we absolutely need to be able to communicate that truth in a way that the world that we're in right now understands but the content of what we communicate must never change the true unchanging life-giving message of the gospel does not need tweaking point number two well one of the reasons we're tempted to tweak the gospel is because we will think that a modified gospel is more effective but behind that assumption that a modified gospel is going to be more effective is the feeling that God's power is not quite enough and we've got to be honest and say that it's very easy to fall into that trap we look at the people around us we look at the number of empty seats in this church we look at how interested people seem in the gospel and it's so easy to think this isn't going to work so we pray for our family and our friends and our colleagues and yet we think is this really going to work?

we have events at church like mission weeks and place nights and buffet evenings there's one coming up in November and you think is this really going to work? we invite people to church is it really going to work?

and it's so easy to feel discouraged it's so easy to feel like it's just not going to happen and so often we feel powerless and you know just I don't know if I should say this or not but very often that's how I feel I feel powerless and you're kind of looking at people I'm looking at my community looking at and you're thinking oh man and you doubt and you wonder and you think oh is this going to work? [14:00] are people going to respond? and because we feel powerless we project those feelings onto God and we conclude that he is a bit powerless too and that's why 2 Corinthians 4 is such a brilliant chapter to come back to again and again because it is reminding us that the abundant all-surpassing power of God is never not enough I love the way Paul speaks in this chapter because his description of us is about as insignificant as it can possibly be in fact that's actually a big issue behind the whole of this letter 2 Corinthians because some of the people in the Corinthian church were doubting Paul's authenticity and authority so they were questioning his credentials and Paul's kind of spiritual CV wasn't wasn't matching up it wasn't good enough and so they're they're saying Paul look we don't think that you're quite where you should be we don't think you're quite you know we don't think you're quite good enough and Paul responds by saying you're absolutely right you're absolutely right he says other people they might have all sorts of commendations he says

I'm just a stuttering stumbling insignificant jar of clay and the big point that Paul's making is that that's exactly how it's meant to be because the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us and that surpassing power of God is never ever not enough it's the power that called the universe into existence you can see it there in verse 6 it's the power that's brought light into every heart that was blinded by sin it's the power that has changed so many lives and that has not stopped working we long to see people come to faith people who people who are going through their lives and people for whom eternity is just a mystery or something they don't think about or just and for whom life is meaningless pointless they feel lost we long to see these people come to faith to find the peace and joy that comes through knowing Jesus we long to see people profess faith people who are believers and who do know that this is true but yet find it so hard to say yes

I am a follower of Jesus and we long to see people grow in their faith so that we become more confident in telling others about Jesus and as we serve together in our church and yet so often we think it's not going to work it's not going to happen but whenever we think like that we're forgetting we are forgetting that the abundant all surpassing power of God is never not enough that's basic basic common sense if God is God then of course his power is enough of course it's enough and that's awesome because that's the power we have access to that's the power that we have access to as we seek to follow him and so as Christians we need to remember this every week we need to remember that the all surpassing power of God is never not enough we need to remember that as we seek to overcome sin in our lives we are struggling and battling to overcome sin we need to remember

God's power we need to remember this for growing in our faith we think well I want to learn and I want to heal and I want to grow we do that through God's power we need to remember this as we persevere through days that are difficult when we have trials and doubts and struggles we need God's power as we try to leave mistakes in the past and remember that we are forgiven through Jesus and we need to remember God's power as we try to witness to others and encourage them to come to church as Christians we need to remember this every single week and for anyone who is not yet a Christian or who is not sure you absolutely need to remember this because it is his power that saves you nothing about what you do and it is his power that keeps you it is his power that keeps you I became a Christian when I was about 14 and that was entirely God's doing and I have I have made many wonderful attempts in the

I don't even know how many years it is since then 35 odd years I can't remember what's 42 take away 14 28 years since then I have made many wonderful attempts at messing it up and it has never been because of my power that I am still following Jesus it is because he keeps us and so

please please never think to yourself if I start following Jesus then then the power is going to run out and I won't be able to continue the all surpassing power of God is never not enough number three the people who are used by God never need to be anything more than weak when we kind of forget the power of God we easily jump to the conclusion that we are the ones who need to be strong again this is part of the issue in Corinthians later on Paul refers to his opponents in Corinth as super apostles and this is the idea that there we go he mentions it at the end of verse five these other leaders have come in and they're like look we're at a different level to Paul and they're supposedly more superior more impressive more skillful and it looks as though Paul is actually quite happy to say look yeah they're far better speakers than I am they're far more eloquent they're far more skilled and all of that thinking is to fall into the trap of concluding that success that the success of the gospel is tied to the strength of the person who's sharing it it's so easy to think that that the success of the gospel is tied to the strength of the person who's sharing it that's never true that's never ever true because the minute we think like that we are forgetting that the people who are used by God never need to be anything more than weak and that's part of the imagery that's been captured that's captured in the phrase that we are jars of clay that's how Paul describes us ordinary insignificant and actually quite easy to break and these verses on your screen 8 to 11 describe what that can involve sometimes we are afflicted so we're under pressure harassed sometimes we're perplexed we don't really know what we're doing sometimes we're attacked persecuted sometimes we're struck down bruised stumbling struggling all of this is because we're weak and all of these things happen because we're not strong enough but the whole mission of the church is based on the conviction that you never ever ever ever need to be strong enough and that's because we're never going to be strong enough it's impossible it's metaphysically impossible for us to be strong enough to do everything that

[21:43] God wants us to do it's theologically unnecessary for us to be strong enough because their surpassing power always belongs to God and as a consequence of that he's committed and delighted to work through people who are weak and Paul constantly speaks about his own weakness in this letter later on in chapter 12 he speaks about a thorn in his flesh his own weakness his struggles he pleaded for God to take it away but he recognized that God was using that to tell him that his grace is sufficient his power is made perfect in weakness that's always how God works and it's basic we're all weak we're all finite we're all frail we're all fragile but it's awesome because that's who God uses God does amazing things through those who are weak number four what God promises his people for eternity means that loss and hardship now is always worth it one of the things that's so good about this chapter 2nd Corinthians 4 is that it helps to realign our perspective so it shifts our perspective on God helps us to see more of his astounding power it shifts our perspective on ourselves we're jars of clay we're weak that's all we ever need to be but this chapter also shifts our perspective on time and eternity that's what you see at the end of the chapter that we read and as Paul shapes our perspective he wants us to draw a comparison between the sufferings and difficulties and frustrations that we experience now with the promises that God is making for our future now Paul and the whole of scripture never ever pretends that being a

Christian is always going to be easy it never pretends that it's not going to involve affliction Paul experienced it himself very often we will experience it as well often for Paul he suffered physically and again this letter gives examples of this he speaks later on of being beaten with rods stoned shipwrecked hardship hunger thirst cold exposed and so he often experienced physical suffering for his faith but he also experienced emotional suffering in fact and that's actually the bigger context of this letter because the people in Corinth are doubting him they're questioning him they're kind of on the brink of falling out with him and he's anxious about that he's been judged and criticized by them and yet he's so anxious for them now physical hardship is something that Christians have experienced many times in history it's something that Christians today in other parts of the world experience we don't often experience that in the same way ourselves and that's a mercy from God but for all of us we experience emotional suffering bruises and worries and fears and struggles we

will constantly experience in our lives and that hurts it's painful and the huge danger is that because it hurts we think that it's not worth it and that's the massive risk that we face it's a danger for us in our discipleship we think that as we're following

Jesus while serving in church following God's call in my life involving myself in other people's lives letting people get close to me all of these things are risky and we can think well it's not going to be worth it and this is an even bigger danger for those of you who maybe are not quite sure where you are in terms of your faith or you're just reluctant to take that next step because you think well if I follow Jesus it's going to change things it's going to make me weird it's going to spoil my life it's going to disrupt things it's going to make people talk about me it's going to be awkward and it's not worth it and every time we think like that every time we think like that we are forgetting that what God promises for eternity means that when you suffer hardship and loss and frustration now it's always worth it it's always worth it and again that's basic

God's promising you paradise everything everything that's good in life just now is a glimpse of what God wants us to enjoy forever so everything that's in your life just now that is really genuinely brilliant the whole reason that's in your life is that God's giving you a taste of what he wants you to have forever and at the same time everything that makes your life rubbish is because of the influence of sin God promises you an eternity when all of that's gone the influence of sin is ended forever God promises us justice how we crave justice God says justice is going to be done and God promises that for everybody who has been bruised and battered and hurt in life he's going to wipe away every tear from your eye and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain for the former things have passed away if you suffer things just now if things are a little uncomfortable just now if that's what God is promising you surely it's worth it surely that's basic common sense but it's not just basic common sense it's also utterly awesome because God is preparing for you an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison you see it there in verse 17 literally what he says there the literal

Greek there is surpassing greatness into surpassing greatness in other words what God wants to give you is just wave after wave of the best of the best that's why Paul can say to us at the start of the chapter and at the end of the chapter we do not lose heart do not lose heart do not lose heart what God is promising you is amazing so the true unchanging life-giving message of the gospel doesn't need tweaking the abundant all-surpassing power of God is never not enough the people who are used by God never need to be anything more than weak what God promises his people for eternity means that loss and hardship now is always worth it and then number five if Jesus really is Lord then we really need to listen to what he says and that's just basic we proclaim not ourselves but Jesus as Lord and if he is Lord then we gotta listen to what he says that's just basic if Jesus isn't Lord the Christian faith's nonsense if he is

[28:46] Lord we've got to listen there is just no middle ground and so it's basic theological common sense but this is also where we see just how awesome the gospel is we're saying you've gotta listen to what Jesus says what's he saying what is Jesus saying to you he's saying I know you I know you I know your life I know your fears I know who you are he's saying I love you I love you to the point of dying for you he's saying trust me just trust me he's saying follow me and he's saying I have got so much that I want to give you Jesus is

Lord but he is an unbelievably generous and kind and committed and wonderful Lord and so we really need to listen to what he says this is all totally basic awesome common sense theology that we frequently forget with God's help let's remember these five things this week Amen