

Abundant Grace

LESSON 4

Hidden Treasure

Topic

Gospel

Theme

God has entrusted believers with a priceless treasure, the gospel.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will share the light of his treasure.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 5

Scripture Focus

2 Corinthians 4

Summary

Paul's ministry was open and honest. Paul served Christ loyally with pure motives. Although he encountered opposition and fatigue, he continued to spread the gospel, which he knew was a priceless treasure.

Outline

I. The Servant's Confidence (2 Cor. 4:1–6)

- A. His perseverance (4:1)
- B. His openness and honesty (4:2)
- C. His opponent (4:3, 4)
- D. His preaching (4:5, 6)

II. The Servant's Difficulties (2 Cor. 4:7–15)

- A. His weakness (4:7)
- B. His hardships (4:8–15)
 - 1. The work of death
 - 2. The ministry of life

III. The Servant's Hope (2 Cor. 4:16–18)

Memory Verses

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in 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 earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:6, 7).

GETTING STARTED

Cold Cash

Police officers urge homeowners not to hide cash and other valuables in their freezers. They say a freezer is the first place a burglar will look.

ASK: What are some other places people store their valuables? (Q1)

ASK: What might be some strange places to store valuables? (Q2)

The apostle Paul wrote about the gospel as a valuable treasure stored in a strange place. His revelation of that place helps us appreciate it and seek to share it.

Eureka!

ASK: What valuable discovery have you made, perhaps at a garage sale or flea market?

ASK: What do you consider the most valuable item you own?

ASK: What makes it valuable to you?

The apostle Paul told the Corinthians that God keeps a priceless treasure in a surprising place, which we will discover after learning about authentic gospel ministry.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. The Servant's Confidence (2 Cor. 4:1–6)

Paul affirmed that the ministry of the gospel cannot fail (2 Cor. 4:1–6). Even though critics deny, malign, and oppose the gospel, it will prevail. With this confident attitude, Paul devoted his time and energy to the task of spreading the gospel.

A. His perseverance (4:1)

Because the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ under the New Covenant is superior to the ministry of the Old Covenant, Paul vigorously proclaimed its message (4:1). Moreover, he did so because he had received this ministry by the mercy of God. Saul, the persecuting Pharisee, would never have become Paul, the missionary-evangelist, had it not been for the goodness and mercy of God. We sense Paul's spirit of perseverance when we read his affirmation, *We faint not*. He did not lose heart. A true servant of God perseveres because in mercy God has called him or her into His service.

READ: John 3:15–18. **ASK:** What did Paul escape through God's mercy that is far worse than any persecution he experienced as a minister? (Q3) *Eternal separation from God and eternal condemnation.*

BUZZ GROUPS: Divide the class into groups of four or five; give each group a sheet of paper and a pencil. Give groups about six minutes to identify two positions of service in the local church. They should list several pressures associated with each, as well as reasons for persevering in service. Have the groups report their conclusions to the class.

B. His openness and honesty (4:2)

As a minister of the gospel, Paul was open and genuine. He renounced anything that was dishonest (4:2). His motives were pure, and his conduct was beyond reproach. He didn't use the ministry to advance his own interests, nor did he try to make God's message palatable to sinful human tastes. He didn't add any false doctrine to the gospel, nor did he remove anything from it. His ministry commended itself to every person's conscience because he preached the truth.

Yet anyone, including Paul, who tries to serve God by leading a righteous life and by sharing God's unchanging message will encounter stiff opposition. The Devil does not relinquish his hold on hearts without a fight.

ASK: Every believer has received a ministry. What motivates you to perform your ministry even in the face of criticism or weariness? (Q4)

ASK: What deceitful use of the Word of God have you observed? (Q5)

C. His opponent (4:3, 4)

The nations teem with lost people. We see the faces of lost on our personal devices, televisions, in our neighborhoods, at work, in stores, and almost everywhere we go. It is not simply that the unsaved will be lost someday in eternity; they are already on the road to perdition. The process has already started; however, the grace of God can rescue as many as believe the gospel and trust Christ as Savior. Unfortunately, the gospel is hidden to the lost until God lifts scales of unbelief from their eyes. Paul wrote, *But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost* (2 Cor. 4:3).

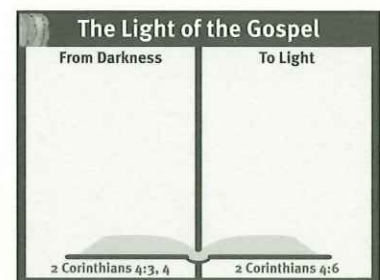
Satan, the archenemy of God and His people, rules the unregenerate world. Paul identified Satan to the Corinthians as *the god of this world* (4:4).

READ: 2 Corinthians 4:4. **ASK:** What does it mean to have your mind blinded? (Q6) *The mind cannot comprehend, or see, the truth.*

To keep unbelievers in his grasp, Satan blinds their minds. He doesn't want them to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, *who is the image of God* (4:4).

RESOURCE: Display resource 5. **ASK:** What means does Satan use to blind the minds of the unsaved? (Q7) (Record learners' answers on the resource.) *Unfounded philosophies, subtle lies, and selfish pursuits.*

ASK: What evidence have you seen of Satan's blinding the minds of the unregenerate? (Q8) *Growing perversion in entertainment; intolerance of moral values; gay rights movement.*



D. His preaching (4:5, 6)

False teachers in Corinth were trying to build their own kingdom. They peddled religion for their own glory. However, Paul's motives for ministry were far different from theirs.

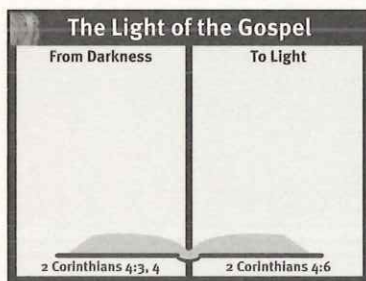
Paul and his colleagues didn't preach themselves; they preached Jesus Christ (4:5). Rather than putting themselves on a pedestal to be admired by a following, they exalted Christ and assumed the role of servants on behalf of Christ.

ASK: What characterizes the life of a Christian who preaches himself? (Q9)

Selfish motives, self-reliance, and pride. Impatience with people and jealousy over the success of others.

ASK: Name some people whom you consider great Christian leaders. What makes them great? (Q10)

Paul compared the act of spreading the gospel to God's act of creating light (cf. Gen. 1:3). When God saves a person, He makes him a new creation and permeates the person's heart and mind with spiritual light and dispels the former darkness (2 Cor. 4:6). The glory of God, reflected in the face of Moses, faded because Moses was a mere man. However, the glory of God, reflected in the face of Jesus, is permanent because Christ is Deity. When we look at Jesus, we get to know what God is like (4:6).



RESOURCE: Display resource 5. **ASK:** What are effective ways to usher blind and lost souls into the light and liberty of Christ? (Q11) (Record learners' answers on the resource.) *Live as an example of joy and contentment; love them; show them grace; tell them what God is doing in your life; boldly proclaim the gospel.*

TESTIMONIES: Share about the moment you passed from darkness to light, or from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight.

ASK: Many unsaved people assume that the Christian life is dull, but Paul used *glory* and *light* to describe what God accomplishes in the lives of those who believe on Christ. How has knowing Christ as Savior brightened your life? (Q12)

II. The Servant's Difficulties (2 Cor. 4:7–15)

Beginning at verse 7, Paul described some of the difficulties that confronted God's servants in the first century. Difficulties will dog our steps, too, if we serve the Lord uncompromisingly. The gospel will prevail, of course, but we will experience hardships as we share it with others.

A. His weakness (4:7)

Paul testified that the gospel ministry is a treasure contained in *earthen vessels* (4:7). Because clay is brittle and subject to deterioration, an earthen vessel is fragile. In his analogy, earthen vessels signify believers' bodies. We have this treasure

in earthen vessels so *the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us* (4:7).

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:26–31. **ASK:** Why does God choose mainly average people to do His work? (Q13) *So no flesh should glory in His presence.*

ASK: How does knowing that God most often uses average people to do His work encourage you? (Q14)

B. His hardships (4:8–15)

In verses 8–15 Paul cited four examples from his personal experience that attest to the frailty of a servant of God. He was *troubled on every side*; he was *perplexed* (4:8); he was *persecuted*; and he was *cast down* (4:9).

1. The work of death

Paul's imagery of being *troubled on every side* (4:8) conveys a picture of being pressed down in everything. He was under constant pressure. But he was *not distressed*, even though he was hemmed in with no way of escape. If pressures related to Christian service seem to be closing in on you, don't become distressed. Instead of looking around and seeing obstacles, look up and see God's omnipotence.

Although Paul was perplexed, he did not despair (4:8). Like him, we may find ourselves in situations when we do not know where to turn. At such times, we ought to turn to the Lord, as Paul did, to find direction instead of despair.

Paul often faced persecution. His adversaries tried to hunt him and harm him, but God did not abandon him (4:9). Similarly, our Heavenly Father abides with us forever. He will not abandon us, even in the scorching heat of persecution.

ASK: Is it possible to proclaim the gospel and not be persecuted? Why or why not? (Q15) *No. See 2 Timothy 3:12. Proclaiming the gospel involves living for the Lord. All who live for God will experience persecution to some degree.*

ASK: Have you experienced God's encouragement when you were discouraged? How did He encourage you? (Q16)

Paul was *cast down* (4:9). The term speaks of being temporarily defeated, of losing a battle. But Paul was not *destroyed*. He had lost a few battles, but through God's help he was winning the war. He was down but not out.

Verses 10 and 11 contrast the weakness and hardships of gospel ministry. These verses could be summarized to parallel the previous four contrasts. Paul was always dying, but he was not dead. He lived in constant danger. His life always hung by a thread because of his missionary work for Jesus. *The dying of the Lord Jesus* (4:10) does not refer to Christ's death on the cross but rather to Paul's near brushes with death because of his proclamation of Christ.

2. The ministry of life

Paul's risking his life to bring the Corinthians the gospel resulted in their receiving eternal life by faith in Christ (4:12, 13).

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:15. **ASK:** What did Paul say would sustain him during

his ministry? What would be the result? (Q17) *God's abundant grace. Giving of thanks and glory to God.*

Paul was confident that gospel ministry would lead to a mighty and eternal victory. God had raised up Jesus, and He would also raise up Paul and the Corinthian believers (4:14). Paul was also confident that as the gospel spread, more people would believe on the Lord and thanksgiving would increase, bringing glory to God (4:15).

III. The Servant's Hope (2 Cor. 4:16–18)

In verse 16 Paul returned to his key thought: we do not lose heart in serving God. In all our difficulties we can possess hope.

The *outward man*—the body—perishes, Paul affirmed. As we grow older, this fact becomes clearer. We learn by experience that the human body is subject to decay, destruction, and death. However, the *inner man*—the inner self, our invisible, spiritual being—experiences daily renewal because the Holy Spirit is constantly at work in us.

READ: 2 Corinthians 4:8, 9, 17. **ASK:** Contrast what Paul said about his afflictions in verses 8 and 9 with what he said about them in verse 17. What made Paul's afflictions seem light when they were extremely difficult? (Q18) *Paul knew he would receive a reward and God would be glorified if he continued to live for God throughout his life.*

Paul placed his persecutions in the category of *light affliction* (4:17), because he was able to view them from Heaven's perspective. They would not last long, whereas Heaven is forever. Like Paul, we ought to look beyond the present to the future, beyond the physical to the spiritual. We ought to set our affection on heavenly concerns instead of on earthly concerns (4:18).

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Use the following activities to help your learners share the light of their treasure.

Sharing the Wealth

ASK: With whom have you recently shared your treasure, the gospel? (Q19)

ASK: What fears motivate you to keep your treasure hidden from those who desperately need it? (Q20)

Treasure Planning

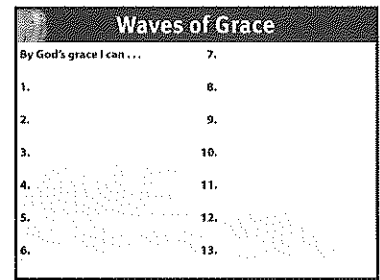
ASK: What truths can help you focus on eternal things rather than on temporal things? (Q21)

ASK: What one person will you commit to sharing your treasure with this week? (Q22)

Summary and Memory Verses

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: By God's grace I can share the light of my treasure.

Encourage your learners to memorize 2 Corinthians 4:6, 7. Give them an opportunity to quote the verses in class next week.



Abundant Grace

Topic

Glorification

Theme

Glorified bodies and eternal rewards await believers.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will anticipate eternity by serving God.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 6

A Change of Address

Scripture Focus

2 Corinthians 5:1–15

Summary

This lesson emphasizes the truth that someday believers will be free of physical ailments, trials, and troubles. Every believer will receive a glorified body when Jesus raptures the church. This prospect leads us to serve Jesus faithfully.

Outline

I. The Prospect of a Glorified Body (2 Cor. 5:1–8)

- A. The temporal tent versus the heavenly house (5:1)
- B. The groaning and desire (5:2–4)
- C. The down payment (5:5)
- D. The confident believer's preference (5:6–8)

II. The Motivations for Present Service (2 Cor. 5:9–15)

- A. To please the Lord (5:9)
- B. The Judgment Seat of Christ (5:10)
- C. The fear of the Lord (5:11–14)
- D. The love of Christ (5:14)
- E. The lostness of the unsaved (5:14, 15)

Memory Verse

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"
(2 Corinthians 5:1).