

The Life of Paul: From Chief of Sinners to Apostle of Grace | Transforming Power of God's Grace

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[0:00] And we're going to look at a man, Paul. Let's look at the man, Paul. And in 1 Timothy 1.15, he writes this, this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

Here he is, the chief of sinners, Paul. Paul, formerly a persecutor of Christians, an antichrist. Yet a man now enabled to be a man of God, transformed by God's power, by the grace of God and driven by the gospel.

So think about Paul and let's unpack a little about his life today. A new man, once an antichrist, now a passionate proclaimer of the gospel.

And he says to you, to me, follow me. We know our Lord says, follow me. And Paul was one who said, follow me also. And so there's something we should take note of, I think. I'm not sure that it was said of any other.

But Paul says this, he says, 1 Corinthians 11.1, be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Paul says, I'm a blueprint for you, a model. His life is a model for us. And what can we learn from him? I think we do well to have a look at his life.

[1:44] Paul, Paul, he was much used of God, for the glory of God, in planting churches, writing much of the New Testament, and spreading the gospel across the Roman world.

What can we learn from his life, the example that he says, follow me. We see grace at work in a human soul. Chief of sinners. I think he meant that. He meant just that. That's what he was.

He didn't try to hide the fact that, yeah, I'm a sinner. I'm the worst. I'm the worst of the worst. He didn't try to manufacture any righteousness of his own. And we see grace at work in this human soul, Paul.

Paul's story shows endurance of faith through pain, suffering, and weakness. But first we see the man that he was. We first meet him presiding over the killing of Stephen.

The first martyr of the church, Stephen was stoned to death. Paul was there presiding over it, standing by the possessions of those that were picking up stones, hurling at this man Stephen to kill him.

[3:02] And here's Paul, a colluder in this massacre of Stephen. Yet God was able to reach the worst of men.

That should speak to us, shouldn't it? I think sometimes we can look at people and think they're beyond redemption. You know, people that we know, oh, they're a pretty rotten sinner. But really, when we look at ourselves in the mirror, then we're just as bad as anyone else, aren't we?

And no one of us is more deserving than another. So we think of Paul, chief of sinners. What can he teach us? We can see in Paul, this worst of men, that God is able to reach the chief of sinners, the worst, by saving grace.

It's grace that saves, isn't it? Notice Paul's life transformation. He was a Christ-hater. As it picks up after the death of Stephen, then Saul, as he was, it tells of him, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest.

And it says of Paul, as Saul as he was, that Saul desired letters to Damascus, to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they be men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

[4:28] He wanted to haul the Christians away, take them to Jerusalem to be persecuted and likely killed. But something happened on the road to Damascus.

Something happened to Paul, as he was then Saul. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shined around about him a light from heaven, this dazzling light.

And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

And he said, Who art thou, Lord?

And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Now the picture there is of the goading of animals, where they would ensure that the animal would steer correctly, and they'd have these goads, these sharp instruments that would make the animal go straight ahead.

And so the Lord's saying here, hey, you're kicking against my direction. You know, I'm directing you this way, and you're kicking against it. You're rebelling against what I want for you. That's the picture of, that's the intention of that.

[5:49] And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

So the Lord meets Saul on the road to Damascus. He says, Go into that city, the city that you're going to, you're breathing out slaughter and threatenings, you're wanting to kill these Christians. Go into that city, and I'll tell you what to do. Of course, we know the story goes as he was met there, and the first words to him was brother, as Ananias met him.

So he was transformed, and he became a brother in Christ to the Christians. And so in Damascus, he was used of God to preach the gospel, and there's a wonderful transformation.

So we see the glory of God here, transforming this man, turning a persecutor into a proclaimer. And God can turn an antichrist into a disciple.

[6:49] That's the wonder of it, isn't it? It's the wonder of grace. So don't ever look at someone and say, Oh, they'll never become a Christian, because the worst of men can be saved. Look at the turnaround in his life, the saving power of God's grace.

And God's grace, God's power of grace, can still turn Saul's into Paul's. Amen? God's grace is still active and working. Look at Paul's life.

He began with pride. As Saul of Tarsus, he had a lot to brag about. We pick it up there, Philippians 3.5, for example. Paul writes how he was circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, and Heber of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee.

And he had a lot to brag about. All of his credentials of human pride, religious, social, intellectual. He had it all. And he was zealous, a zealous scholar, trained under Gamaliel.

He was a man trusting in his own righteousness, though. But on the Damascus road, everything changed. Everything changed. Jesus transformed him.

[8:03] And he became a new man by saving grace. And he writes further of that grace change. What things were gained to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

All of those things, all of his credentials, all of his status. And I do count them, but dunk, that I may win Christ. What he counted as gain.

All of those credentials, of his heritage, of his background, of his training, of his prestigious learnings, of his doctrinal precision as a Pharisee.

They had everything pretty right as far as on paper. But Paul says, I count that all as dung.

What he once considered as gain, he counts now as loss, as dung, as manure, as rubbish, as trash, as junk. What mattered most now was to know Christ.

[9:13] To know Christ. You can imagine if he was applying for a job and he had a CV, a resume, and he says, here's what I have to offer. Dung.

You know, that's my credentials. That's everything I am, everything I've achieved, everything of my status. Dung.

Rubbish. Compared to knowing Christ. Puts it all in perspective, doesn't it? All of his credentials, he discounts it. He counts them as nothing. And when Paul looks back, he says, he counts all his background as done, worthless.

He was willing to surrender everything for Christ. To know Christ, the value of that. And Paul surrendered his status, his self-reliance to embrace Christ.

Christ's righteousness, that's what mattered. Was to gain that, to know that, to win Christ. To be found in him, not having my own righteousness, knowing his power.

[10:17] What about us? Are we clinging to credentials, talents, training, background, achievements, status?

Paul says, it's rubbish. Like Paul, let's lay aside pride and self-sufficiency. Can we let go of worldly achievements and pride?

Paul had reason for pride, but he says, it's worthless. Everything pales into nothing, doesn't it? In comparison with Christ, to know Christ.

Paul sees Christ as the ultimate gain, the ultimate true value. It's interesting, Saul was renamed Paul.

And the name Paul means little. Interesting thought, isn't it? Paul's new name means little. Reflects his humility before God. He's little and all his status is nothing but done.

[11:26] That he may win Christ. That he may know Christ. Christ Jesus, my Lord. The excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord.

So right after he was converted, Paul saw himself rightly before a holy God. As we first read, he called himself the chief of sinners. He knew he had nothing to offer but his unworthiness.

And even when God grants Paul extraordinary revelations, in 2 Corinthians 12, we could reckon it speaks of Paul being caught up to the third heaven.

He could have bragged on about that. A lot of TV preachers do, you know, don't they? Say, yeah, let me tell you my latest trip to heaven. Paul says, no, I'm not going to brag on about that. I'm not going to make much of my revelations.

I'm going to make much of him, my saviour. So saving grace, it transformed the man, Paul. And in Paul's life also we see sufficient grace. We see the grace of God in Paul's life as sufficient to see him through.

[12:34] All that came across his path. And look at Paul's life. When the Lord saved him, he said, in the saving of Paul, God says, I'll show him the great things that he must suffer for my name's sake.

TV preachers will tell you, hey, get saved and you're going to have some great things. God says to Paul, the great things that he's going to suffer for my name's sake.

But in all of it, the sufficiency of grace, Paul faced relentless trials, beatings, stonings, shipwrecks. He tells in 2 Corinthians 11, of labours, more abundant, stripes above measure.

He's talking about his back being shredded with the scourge, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. So he came to death's door often.

He endured hunger, constant dangers. There's records of it that he writes here, for example, as it reads on 2 Corinthians 11, of the Jews five times received by forty stripes, save one, so thirty-nine times, lashed on his back, five occasions.

[13:51] That's a lot of beatings, isn't it? Imagine what his back would have looked like. That's a lot of stripes. Thrice was I beaten with rods, you know, big heavy wooden sticks, thick wooden sticks, beaten.

Once I was stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck. A night and a day have I been in the deep. Of course, we know this occasion where he got dragged out of the city and they thought he was dead. Verse 26, in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my known countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren.

You could unpack all of those perils, couldn't you? There's a lot of danger that he went through. He went through much danger. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, so in sleepless nights, in praying, in suffering, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often in cold and nakedness, beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

Paul had much to endure and he says, follow me. He says, hey you, follow me. Come on, come and join Paul's team. Come and join my mission.

[15:18] Come and endure with me. Come and see some of these great things that you can be a part of, the great things that you must suffer for my name, the name of Jesus.

And he spent roughly four to six years of his ministry in custody. Think of that. as much as possibly six years of his ministry. That's almost a quarter of his life of ministry.

So, you know, this is the cadetship, if you want to join, if you want to be an understudy of Paul. He says, a quarter of your ministry is going to be spent in prison, in stocks, in chains, in humiliation. And Paul faced also emotional pain, betrayal, slander, and concern for the churches. Yet his faith held firm. And even so, he wrote, our present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Through it all, Paul's faith never wavered. History tells us that ultimately, Paul was beheaded for his faith. Follow me. Follow me.

[16:35] He says to you. Follow me. And in his life, Paul knew the sustaining power of God's grace. He writes further, we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed.

We are perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, cast down, but not destroyed. To keep Paul humble, God allowed a thorn in the flesh, some persistent affliction that Paul had. It's not named. And this thorn reminded Paul of the grace of God. We don't know exactly what it was, and in a way you could think, well, that's probably a good thing, because, hey, Paul's thorn could be my thorn, whatever your thorn might be.

It's kind of good in a way that God's not specified what the thorn was, because then we can all relate how our thorns in our lives could mirror Paul's experience.

Because, brother, sister, God allows thorns sometimes. He allows thorns in your life, in mine, to keep us humble and dependent upon him.

[17:52] Amen? And we can find that God's grace is sufficient for your thorn, for your thorn, to sustain you through your weakness. We all face our own thorns, if you like, whether they be physical, emotional, or spiritual.

We can trust that God is wanting to use them to draw us closer to himself. Thorns. It's not nice, is it, having a thorn? I know, I've been doing some gardening lately, and on those rare occasions I go in the garden, and I didn't have my gloves on, and I felt it afterwards.

It's still got the thorn in there. You get that sometimes? These little thorns, they're so deep. It's still in there. I've got to get Julie. She usually helps me move my thorns.

She likes to wield the needle and dig it in and dig out the thorn, and she's such a blessing. Such a blessing, isn't it? To get the thorn out, isn't that good?

To get the thorn out, oh, relief. But in Paul's case, the thorn, he had to put up with it. And what could it be, the thorns, in your life, in mine?

[19:05] Could it be physical ailments? Something's wrong. It's a thorn. Sometimes God doesn't take it away. We've got to ride through it.

Relationship, struggles, financial hardships, persistent temptations. There's thorn after thorn at times, isn't there, in human life? Ever since Adam, thorns and thistles, isn't it?

It's going to come out of the ground. I'm going to have a good word to Adam when I see him. Those thorns, they still afflict us today, don't they? But thank God, God says that thorn is going to be used for my glory.

And when Paul pleaded three times, hey, he was human. Lord, take it away. Take it away. Take it away. Ask God three times to remove the thorn.

But God's response is this, my grace. My grace is sufficient for thee. For my strength is made perfect in weakness.

[20:10] Paul says, most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. You can know the truth that grace is sufficient for you.

And the word sufficient, it means enough to meet the need. He just gives you just enough grace to meet the need. It's telling of an ongoing moment by moment provision.

Brother, sister, God's grace is enough for you. Whatever your thorn. And hey, I know some of you have got some big thorns. We know that. There's some very big thorns amongst us in our congregation.

People going through incredible trials. Faith doesn't mean being free from trials. It means trusting God in those trials.

God will give you grace, brother, sister, to get through that. And God's grace is sufficient. It's enough to meet every need, moment by moment.

[21:15] Another truth here is that of power in weakness. Notice that my strength is made perfect in weakness. God's power is made perfect.

In other words, it reaches its full expression. He says my power is most fully demonstrated in weakness. So when you're feeling weak, when your strength is failing, it's all the more that his strength is for you.

It's all the more that his strength is made perfect in you. When your human strength fails, when you're feeling totally lacking and inadequate, that God's strength is going to shine, the brightest as the light shining brightest in the darkness.

God's strength shines brightest when we are weak. So brother, sister, that weakness, that infirmity, you can rather glory in it like Paul. That the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Yeah, bring it on. Lord, I want your power to rest upon me in my weakness. Paul, by faith, he can find God's strength. You can too. Working in your weakness.

[22:21] May we trust God's grace in such times of testing, of trials, when answers to prayer are delayed or denied. Rest in the promises of God's power.

He's made perfect in weakness. God's promise. His grace is enough for you. Sufficient through every trial. And Paul pointed to God's sufficient grace.

When I am weak, when I am weak, then am I strong. May we surrender our pride. Paul had to let go of it.

Trust in God's grace. May we surrender our strength to his power. Whatever our thorn that we may face, hear God's promise for you today. My grace is sufficient for thee.

For thee. And surrender your thorns to him. Think of it. Well, I mean, and you might say, well preacher, it sounds a bit far-fetched. You know, it doesn't sound realistic.

[23:26] It's God's promise. Paul says, I take pleasure in these infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, distresses, for Christ's sake.

Hey, I'm going to give glory to God no matter what. No matter how it feels, no matter how hard it is, you can surrender your thorns to him. And true strength comes from surrender. That you yield to him.

Hey, Lord, I'm weak. I'm the chief of sinners. I've got nothing but dung to offer. He says, my grace is sufficient for thee. What is your thorn?

Surrender it to God. Trusting that God has a purpose. He's got a plan. Trust him. When trials come, remind yourself that God's eternal plan is bigger than we can even comprehend.

To learn to trust during the pain. You know, one of our number is in palliative care at this time.

Brother Reg, he's only got maybe two weeks to go.

[24:34] And this is real. Brother Reg. these are sad times. Yet, he's not finished his course yet.

And the finishing line is just, he's closer than us, maybe, maybe not. But, he's in reach of the finish line. Amen. Can we trust God, even in pain, even if we're lying in the palliative care unit, when I am weak, then am I strong.

Whatever your struggle, sickness, loss, doubt, bring it to God, your thorn. I've asked God to take it away, time after time after time.

And he said, no, no, no. My grace is sufficient for thee. Brother, sister, this is real, isn't it? And, trust God to sustain you, bring your thorn to him, bring your struggle to him, bring your weakness to him, bring your inadequacy to him.

Know that God's grace is more than enough. God's grace will always be, always be sufficient. And reflect how it tells us, we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are according to his purpose.

[26:05] It's good whatever is happening because I love God and he's got a purpose and I'm going to trust him, his promise.

All things are working out. And keep your eyes on Christ, that hope, that blessed hope, that promise, that assurance of heaven. I know when we were witnessing one time, one of our brothers was talking to some folk and talking about how this is the record that we know that we have eternal life.

That's a promise. That's a promise. That's an assurance. And this book, the word of God, is full of promises, isn't it? And you can claim this one, brother, sister, all things are going to work out for good.

And so we see also Paul not only had his saving faith, this chief of sinners now a saved man, he also had sufficient grace to see him through those trials and thorns, he also had sustaining grace. And Paul had this driving force, his message, the grace of God, that was his message. My gospel, gospel of grace, his message was grace.

[27:26] From go to woe, isn't it? From end to end, from moment to moment, from glory to glory, it's grace, it's grace, it's grace. And Paul's driving force, this message, took him to that final stretch of the running track, the final stretch of his race.

He says, I want to finish my course with joy. Paul's transformed life, it's God's grace that filled his mission, to share the gospel, the gospel of grace.

Paul's ministry was a marathon of endurance. Despite opposition, betrayal, physical hardship, he says, I'm not there yet. I've not apprehended yet, I've still got a bit more of that running to do.

My legs have got to keep running forward, just a little bit longer. And it fuelled his mission to share the gospel, the gospel of grace, driven by his mission. What was it that kept him going?

The driving purpose of Paul wasn't comfort or self-preservation, but fulfilling his God-given mission. It's the same for you, sister, brother, you've got a mission, you've got a work, a service to fulfil, a God-given task, and only you can do it.

[28:48] He's given it to you personally. He says, here's my charge for you, here's my mission for you, that task. And for Paul it was to testify the gospel of God's grace.

His life was secondary to his mission. Notice how he says this, none of these things move me. None of these things move me.

All of the things that he suffered, he says nothing. Neither counts on my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy and the ministry which I've received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

none of these things move me. He says I'm not going to be deterred. Even my life I don't count it of value, of itself. So Paul he travelled thousands of miles, plants and churches, wrote much of the New Testament.

He was driven by this burning desire to make Christ known. And he persevered, he remained steadfast. That sustaining grace, despite being afflicted, struck down, persecuted, perplexed.

[30:07] He says this, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Will we have the same heart as Paul? Will we keep our eyes on the prize?

Brother, sister, we're not there yet. There's still some days yet, maybe weary days, and then there'll be some running yet to do.

Brother, sister, have the heart of Paul. Paul, hey, I want to finish my course with joy. I want to press toward the mark. Well, we kept our eyes on the prize, despite constant hardships.

Paul never gave up on his mission. His God-given purpose. Brother, sister, you've got one too. A God-given purpose. How do we keep going when ministry is difficult, when people disappoint, when suffering comes?

Paul says, follow me. I'm a model. Here's the blueprint, the Paul blueprint, right? And in Acts 16, it tells how, and he lived it too. He practiced what he preached.

[31:09] In Acts 16, 22 through 25, Paul's there in prison, just been beaten up. I don't know whether he got beaten with rods or lashed or both at that time, but here he is in prison with Silas, severely beaten.

What's he doing? Praise God. Praise God. Singing hymns of praise. And the prisoners heard them. Who's that nutcase? Phew. Some crazies in this prison tonight. At midnight. Come on.

Praise is in prison. And even from prison, Paul's voice rang out with hope as he writes, rejoice in the Lord. Always. Philippians 4.4. And Paul kept that eternal perspective.

He says, for our light affliction, hey, all of these little things that I suffered, all of that misery, he says, our light affliction is but for a moment.

[32:14] Boom. Works for us a far more exceeding and eternal way of glory. Don't you want some eternal way of glory? Wouldn't that be good? Just have a little bit of light affliction before, all right?

Wouldn't it be good to get to heaven and God's going to give you this weight of glory? A far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

I'm sure that Paul's got an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Think of it, brother, sister. And Paul's hardships didn't derail him.

They fuelled his testimony. He saw every trial as an opportunity to advance the gospel. Here's what he says about the things which have happened unto me. They've fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.

Hey, it's been good. The gospel's got out. Well, when he was praising God in the prison, the prisoners heard them, the jailer got saved, these things have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.

[33:16] Wow, it's a good thing. Praise God. Paul viewed life as a race with a finish line and a reward. He saw that eternal perspective. It gave him strength to undergo temporary difficulties, forgetting what is behind, straining for what is ahead.

At the end of his life, Paul could say this, the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.

And he says that the judge is going to give it and to all those who love his appearing. Sustaining grace, that's yours today. By the grace of God, isn't it? He's going to help you get around that final bend, the final finishing line, the tape's just ahead.

It's just moments really, isn't it? As you're nearing the finish line, can you be like Paul? A life poured out for Christ. A fight worth fighting.

A race worth running. A faith worth keeping. A reward worth waiting for. I fought a good fight. Hey, don't stop fighting.

[34:27] It's not over yet. You might lose a few battles, but you're going to win the war. I like that one. Isn't that true? Keep on fighting.

Keep on faithful. Keep on running that race. What about us? Can we learn to persevere through adversity? to follow Paul? Press on despite hardship and discouragement.

Maybe you're feeling like, hey, I can identify with Paul at the moment. Life feels overwhelming. Fix your eyes on Christ. Look unto him. Know his promises.

You might ask, how can I serve God in this trial? Share your testimony. Let it make you shine brighter to the fire. Pray for others. Write a note of encouragement.

Sometimes when you're down, it's good to lift up some others and be a blessing to others. You don't know what that might mean to people. It's nice to receive something like, we got a handwritten note from someone and it was full of love and joy and comfort.

[35:36] And I thought, well, they handwrote that note. It can mean a lot to people, can't it? What can we do to bless someone like Paul? Let your chains be a platform for God's glory.

Paul's chains didn't stop him writing letters. Exhorting, encouraging, uplifting, reaching out to others, being a blessing. Before his conversion, Paul's zeal as Saul led him to persecute Christians.

He was part of the Antichrist movement of his day in a way. But after encountering Jesus, that same passion was redirected towards spreading the gospel. And he says, woe unto me if I preach not the gospel.

Here was his passion. What about us? Do we care about lost souls? How can we be zealous for God's glory? Can we channel our energy into God's mission?

Where are we directing our passions? Is it to temporary things or eternal things? How can we channel our talents, our passions, our resources into what's going to honour God and bring him glory?

[36:45] Can you surrender your passions to God's purposes? Paul was passionate. He was zealous as a zealous Pharisee. And then he becomes a zealous soul winner.

Let God direct your passion to his glory. Paul's life wasn't easy, but it was fruitful. And he says, come, follow me. Come and join me on this mission.

His humility kept him steady. His faith sustained him. His zeal spread the gospel. And Paul says, we're all just vessels of clay. Hey, we're all in this together. We're all just as inadequate and weak. We're all frail and unworthy. But we have this treasure, this treasure, this heavenly treasure, this glory, this excellency of the power of God, this treasure in earthen vessels.

And it's all to the glory of God, isn't it? And we see Paul's joy, as I say, even in prison, he wrote these words of Philippians. get this sister, brother, rejoice in the Lord 90% of the time.

[37:58] Oh, no, sorry, got that wrong. Rejoice in the Lord 99% of the time. No. no. No. Rejoice in the Lord always.

Always. And again, do it again. I know we were in a church and the song leader says, sing it again. And he keeps singing it again.

Sing it again. Rejoice in the Lord and rejoice again. Rejoice again. Rejoice again. Paul says, I've learned in whatsoever state I am there with to be content.

Hey, isn't that something? Here's Paul in privation, in prison. He says, I've learned to be content.

What's your circumstance? Are we content? Or is it always thinking about what I need?

What I need? I need more, more, more of this, more of that. Or rather, hey, actually, I'm glad with what I've got. I'm thankful for what I've got. Thank God for what I've got. It may not be much, but I've got something and I can be content.

[39:04] No matter my circumstance, I can have a contentment, a holy contentment. Paul learned contentment through dependence. His joy was Christ. His joy was in Christ, not in his circumstances.

And then we think of his thorn. Paul's thorn kept him humble. Hey, maybe we need those thorns. Maybe that's going to help me be a stronger Christian, that thorn that I hate, that I want God to take away.

That Paul's thorn kept him humble. His suffering strengthened his faith. His imprisonment spread the gospel and his joy inspired generations. These words speak to us now.

From Paul's prison cell, rejoice. And he says, even in all of this, he says, for which cause we faint not. Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

Hey, God's renewing us day by day. He's doing that work on the inside of us. Even though in the outward we're fainting, we're weak. God's grace will enable you in your times of trial.

[40:03] Faint not. He says, for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. God can use your limitations for his glory.

That light affliction, hey, Lord, I'm not feeling like it's very good right now. This trial, this test, this affliction, it's just for a moment. Just for a moment.

It's only an eye blink. And then glory. Brother, sister, don't lose heart. And know that God can use even the affliction for his glory.

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Eternal. Channel your passions into God's mission. Like Paul, you can serve from your chains. You might feel like, hey, I've got nothing. My CV is dung.

[41:08] My background, my status. I'm the chief of sinners. What would God want with me? And now I'm in prison. He says, serve me.

From your chains. Look for ways to share Christ's love. Even in your limitations. And I know there's some folk that are watching that they're a bit housebound now, they can't get out much, but they tune in.

Hey, you can serve God from your affliction. You can serve God even though you're a shut-in, but you can't really get out so much. God can use you to minister. Amen. To share love.

To write an encouraging note. To pray for someone. To share your testimony. And what about that thorn? I've asked God three times to take that thorn away.

My grace is sufficient. God's going to be sufficient for you. He's going to be enough for you. Even though there may be physical pain, emotional wounds, spiritual battles, here God's promise, my grace is sufficient for thee.

[42:17] God allows thorns to keep us humble and dependent on him. Like Paul, you can declare, when I am weak, then am I strong. Hey, that's going to make me stronger. Those tests.

So Paul's life, to recap, it shows a saving grace. God transforms us from pride to humility. God's strength empowers us in our weakness.

Because saving grace avails today, as it ever has done. While you've still got breath, you can be saved. And the sufficient grace, God's strength empowers us in our weakness.

You can't be too weak, that God cannot use you. And the sustaining grace, that God's mission drives you to persevere. May we finish our course with joy. Brother, sister, the finishing line is just days away.

Finish well. Finish your course with joy. And God is at work in every believer. Paul says, follow me. And he says, God's working in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

[43:30] It's God's work. Grace. It's all of grace, isn't it? It's grace. That saves us. Grace. Incarnate. Stop.

Saul and his tracks on the Damascus road. Bang. And everything changed. Because grace stepped in, in the person of Christ. And it's the same for you and me, isn't it?

The chief of sinners can be now an apostle of the faith. And God works in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure. It's grace that motivates us to pursue godly actions.

God's working in you, right now, right here, right now. And there's still a work yet to do, that you might well make a decision and do. Do it. Activate to do his good pleasure.

Here's the ultimate goal of believers. It is to please him. It's to please him. To do of his good pleasure.

[44:33] The ultimate goal is that you would please him, that you would please God. Paul lived to know Christ and to make him known. And he looked at all else as secondary, as dung.

And that's the kind of esteem we should put upon our own worthiness. I am dung. I am a chief of sinners.

I don't deserve any scarrick of the grace of God. But thank God that he loved me so. And he loves us so. The loving kindness of God, isn't it? The undeserved, unmerited grace.

His kindness to a chief of sinners. A lousy, rotten sinner. And you can trust God's will to save you. And that his will is for your ultimate good and glory.

Maybe like Paul say, I'm going to finish this race. I'm going to finish well. Hey, this is not a time to let up. This is a time to get a second wind.

[45:34] And to keep on running. Running even better than I used to run. Fighting even stronger than I used to fight. Keeping the faith.

intentional effort. Discipline. Focus. Paul says, won't you follow me? Won't you follow me? Follow my example.

As I follow Christ, of course, we can follow any human. And there's things while you don't follow when they're a bad example. But Paul says, follow me.

And if God can save and use a man who identifies himself as the chief of sinners, isn't the hope for you and me? Wow. If God can save Paul, then he can save me.

And if God can save Paul and use Paul, then God can save and use me. Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that your grace is all sufficient.

[46:33] Lord, we see your grace saving Paul, a man who the world would have thought would never be saved. that saving grace touched him and saved him. Lord, we see your sustaining grace took Paul through many valleys and trials and tests, even that he had to endure a thorn.

Likewise, Lord, your grace sustains us when life is hard and troubles come. We can hang on to you. And Lord, we thank you that your grace is sufficient.

It's enough. That's all we need. We don't need anything else but your grace. There's nothing more that we really need value or yearn for than to be found in Christ, to win Christ, to know Christ.

Pray that each one might have that knowledge, the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord. We thank you, Lord, for that. Bless each one.

Lord, help us to keep on pressing on this race of life, this journey. And we know, Lord, it's sometimes steep and it's a bit of an obstacle course sometimes, Lord, running the race with

patience.

[47:55] Give us that perseverance we need. And Lord, most of all, that we'd learn more and more to rest upon your grace and rejoice in it every day, moment by moment.

Lord, bless each one. We pray if there's any yet to trust you as their saviour for the first time, that even at this moment they would say, Lord Jesus, save me from my sin.

Be my saviour, my Lord. And help us, Lord, to follow on in your steps, Lord, as you led Paul to follow you and not to shy away from any test that might come across our path, to know that heavenly hope is sure and your promise is sure, your assurance of eternal life because we already have it, we that trust you.

Lord, we thank you for that. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.