

2 Cor 11.16-33 – Boasting in weakness

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Main Point – Serve the Lord in weakness, even suffering, to please him.

It was 1964 and ahead of his world title Boxing match, Muhammad Ali announced to reporters, **(SLIDE)**, “I am the greatest!”-----

For Australians, with our tall poppy syndrome, we look down on such boasting.

We see it as a turn-off, and maybe more common in other cultures.

And yet, Aussies boast, it's just a bit more subtle.

I wonder what you're tempted to boast about?-----

I wonder, if you were to boast, what you'd boast in?-----

Your school or exam results?-----

Or those of your grandchildren?-----

Maybe your sporting or work achievements?----- Your CV?-----

Social media has given people opportunities to boast in all sorts of things – holidays and bodies, families and food.

And when is it ok to boast?-----

Is it ever ok to boast?-----

Boasting was big in the 1st century Greek culture of Paul's day.

Leaders would talk big, when it came to their qualifications and achievements.

And boasting is a theme that started in 2Cor 10 and will continue into ch12.----

Last time we heard Paul say, I won't boast in what others have done.

If we're gonna' boast, boast only in what the Lord has done. **(SLIDE)**

'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord'. **(10.17)**-----

And if Paul is forced to boast, he'll only boast about his weaknesses.

Remember weakness has been a key theme in this letter, **serving and suffering in weakness**.

Let me **quickly Recap**.

Back in 2 Cor 1.3 & 4 and v9, **(SLIDE)** Paul was saying that in our afflictions, which makes us feel our weakness, God comforts us in them.

And God uses our afflictions and suffering to make us rely on him and not ourselves.

When it comes to sharing the good news about Jesus, most people don't receive it as good news, and it can bring rejection and opposition.

We learnt that it can be like the smell of death to people. **(2.16-SLIDE)**

Remember in **ch4v7**, we have the treasure of Jesus in jars of clay.

We are the weak, fragile, ordinary, breakable people, yet we have a great treasure.

And we want Jesus to be seen as we serve him in our weakness.-----

Our bodies are weak and mortal, get ill, groan and will die. **(SLIDE- 5.2,9,11,15)**.

But we make it our aim to please the Lord;

and keep calling people to be reconciled to God through Christ **(5.14-20)**.-----

In ch 6 Paul shared of his love and sufferings for the Corinthians **(SLIDE- 6.4-6)**, as he called them to not withhold their affection from him (6.13).-----

We've heard of the phenomenally generous Macedonians who gave to the needs of others and to Paul's ministry, even in their poverty **(SLIDE- 8.2)**.

They followed the example of Christ who became poor to make us rich (8.9).-----

Then in **ch11 v5**, Paul's presence and preaching may seem weak **(SLIDE)** compared to the “super apostles”, but he is in no way inferior to them.-----

Now the theme of serving the Lord and his people in weakness continues.-----

But before we get to that, Paul speaks firstly about **Who is the fool, my first point**. **(SLIDE)**

This whole section from 11v1 to 12.13 has been called 'The Fool's Speech'.

A fool is someone who is stupid or senseless, & lacks reason or intelligence.
 It's possible Paul has been labeled a "fool".-----
 But he wants the Corinthians to question who the fools really are?-----

v18 says many boast according to the flesh – about human, worldly & external things.
 That's what Paul's enemies, the "super apostles" had been doing.

Boasting in their appearance, abilities, achievements.
 Yet they are only false apostles, and servants of Satan.(v13-15)
 But in order to respond and to get a hearing with the many deceived Corinthians, Paul feels forced to boast.

So **v16**, he'll boast a little, like in **v21-22**, that he's a true Israelite, and a better servant of Christ than they.

But really it's foolish.

To say such things makes him feel like a foolish madman.-----

The false teachers in Corinth are fools.

But then Paul says many Corinthians are being fools too, **v19** – for only a fool puts up with fools.

And Paul feels compelled to confront them.-----

Proverbs 26 gives us 2 seemingly contradictory Proverbs (**v4-5-SLIDE**):

Don't answer a fool according to his foolishness
 or you'll be like him yourself.

⁵ Answer a fool according to his foolishness
 or he'll become wise in his own eyes.

In other words, one needs wisdom to know when not to answer a fool, and when to answer or correct them

And we trust that Paul has God-given wisdom here, and he is answering the fools so they don't lead the church astray.-----

Paul feels compelled to answer them, for look at what the false teachers have been doing in **v20** –

enslaving, exploiting, proudly exalting themselves, & slapping people in the face.

And with great sarcasm and tongue-in-cheek Paul says, 'to our shame we've been too weak for that'.

It's sarcastic humour.

Paul is not too ashamed and weak to exploit, use and insult people.

No, he has loved the Corinthians, even after they rejected him.(cf. 11.2-3).

Paul is belittling and mocking the super-apostles here and anyone who sides with them.

Who is the fool?

Paul's making really clear, he is not the fool.

They are, and anyone who goes along-with their boasts and lies.-----

While Paul feels foolish to boast, we now look at **what Paul does boast about in vv23-33, Point 2(SLIDE)**

Feeling embarrassed to boast in anything he's done or experienced, we now see Paul only boast about his sufferings & weaknesses.

Remember from Acts 9 last week, when Paul-Saul came to follow Christ, he was told he will suffer for serving Jesus. And this has happened.-----

In this list he is wanting to show how he has been a servant of Christ, a better servant than the false teachers in Corinth.

And notice that he inverts the boasting in achievements to talk about sufferings.

With far more labours (hard work), more imprisonments, worse beatings and more times near death, in his serving Jesus.

Then he gives details of these and wow what a list:

Five times the 39 lashes.

Deut 25.3(SLIDE) speaks of Israelites not being given more than 40 lashes, with a whip. So to make sure one never got 40, they'd stop at 39 – keeping the letter of the law.---

Three times beaten with rods.

The book of Acts only records one of these (**SLIDE- Acts 16.22**), and his stoning, when he was pelted with rocks until his enemies thought he was dead (**Acts 14.19-20**).

Three times shipwrecked. Again one is mentioned in Acts (27.27-28.10).

So clearly Acts didn't record all that Paul did or experienced.

He endured time in the open sea, presumably treading water.

And then life-threatening danger in many places, from many people, many times.-----

He keeps going in **v27** - toil and hardship, sleepless nights, times of hunger, thirst, cold and no clothes.

He could say more, and it seems he forgets then later mentions, his lowering in a basket through the wall in Damascus, as he fled for his life

We read about that last week in Acts 9.

Wow, what a list!

Wouldn't you be blessed to join Paul on a mission trip?

Parents, if your child said they wanted to go on a short-term mission trip, and this was the list of possible experiences, Would you let them go?-----

Would you send your child on this team?-----

Yet if he has to boast this is what he mentions, as God-honouring.-----

Honestly when I look at this list, it's so foreign to me.

I've never been stoned, beaten or imprisoned for serving Christ.

And Paul's sufferings should give me perspective on my own.-----

Maybe this list gives you perspective on your own suffering, and ought to make us grumble less?-----

But come back to **v28,(SLIDE)** there is the daily pressure– his concern, or anxiety, for all the churches.

His concern for his fellow Christians weighs heavily on his heart and mind.

His love for others means that when others are weak, he empathises, and suffers too.

When others are enticed to sin, led astray; or face the prospect of falling away from the faith, Paul burns with indignation.

He gets angry at those who led to the stumbling.

It's a heavy emotional toll.-----

And to summarise all this, he says in **v30,(SLIDE)** if boasting is necessary, I will boast about my weaknesses.-----

This list is not an ego-trip.

Paul has not been corrupted by power.

He is not needing to be needed, or coddled.

Nor does he need to be seen as the best; or greatest sufferer.

Paul's not boasting in himself, and the God and Father of the LJ who deserves praise forever, knows he is not lying.-----

Indeed Paul will boast only in his weaknesses, so God will get the blessing, praise, glory.-----

If he must boast, he'll boast only about his weaknesses.

So how does this relate to us?

Final point, Our Response.(SLIDE)

Coming back to the teaching about **boasting**.

Some people, like Muhammad Ali or these new preachers in Corinth, they like to blow their own trumpet.(SLIDE)

And maybe we're tempted to boast too – about our achievements, accomplishments, experiences.-----

When's it ok to boast?-----

In chapter 10, Paul said, only when we boast in the Lord.

In chapter 11 Paul doesn't want to boast at all.

And to undercut the false teachers, he'll only boast in his weakness.

Come back next Sunday to hear that it's weakness that enables Christ's power to shine through.-----

Not that we are to go around boasting, "I've suffered more than you".-----

But How do you go with boasting, honestly?-----

Do you need to change your attitude and behaviour?

Because to boast in yourself, your own greatness or success, your body, abilities, achievements, is proud, arrogant and ungodly.-----

Do you need to think again before you post certain comments or images online?-----

Whether with what you think or say, is there a foolish boasting you need to stop?-----

Let's now think about Paul's **sufferings** as we too serve in weakness.(SLIDE)

Next week in ch 12 we'll think more about the weakness of suffering in this fallen world, with sickness and Satan.

Many of the things in this long ch11 list we've not experienced in serving Jesus.

But there's some things in this list that maybe you and I have experienced in ministry.

Toil, hard work, hardship, sleepless nights.

Or the daily pressure and concern for brothers and sisters.

This speaks of a weight and even exhaustion, in caring for other people.

Maybe the time and energy you put into cleaning the church, or cleaning up after Play Grp.

The time, love and sacrifice to prepare and lead that bible study.

The hours you spend serving in the building here.

Or the sacrificial time you give to serve, share Christ, or support sisters or brothers.

So many different ways we serve Christ.

And sometimes we really feel our weakness.

Maybe when someone doesn't respond well to our pastoral care.

When you do your best to teach faithfully or love generously, and it's ignored or not well received.

Even the ways you serve the Lord in your workplace – with integrity, honesty, hard work, a concern for others and openness about Christ – it's costly.

When you love your parents, your child, your spouse, your sibling;

when you just want to forget about someone or get even, but love. It's costly.

Choosing the path of apparent weakness as you choose to suffer for the good of others, is costly.

Where you can find power to keep doing that, we'll consider next week.

Or are you convicted of your lack of love for others at Bundy?

Your lack of zeal in serving the Lord and his people?

Your lack of willingness to endure pain or discomfort, lose time or sleep, to serve Jesus?---

We should be willing to suffer as we give ourselves to serve others.-----

I'm not saying burn yourself out.

We do need to manage our commitments.

And some people have and do over-exert and then crash.

And that's not helpful for their family or church family.

But please ask yourself, is there a lack of self-sacrifice, and willingness to make costly decisions to serve others and Christ's kingdom?-----

Let's not fear burnout and do nothing. Toil and hardship is to be expected.-----

Now there are seasons of ill-health, mentally or physically, seasons where we must care for our dependents, or when our day jobs are long and tiring and we focus on serving the Lord there.

But do you desire, strive and pray you'll get to serve the Lord in other ways?-----

I put before us all the example of our Lord Jesus.

More than Paul he experienced hardships and pain, to serve God and us.

Our Lord Jesus was flogged, imprisoned and beaten.

Jesus was repeatedly in danger from people and in various places.

He knew hunger and thirst, and nakedness; toil and hardship, and the weight of pressure & concern for his disciples.

And remember Paul's words in **1Cor 11.1,(SLIDE)** Imitate me as I imitate Christ.

Our Lord Jesus, called us to remember that leadership is about service.

We follow the King who gave his life as a ransom to save us.(Mark 10.45)

We follow the King who washed his disciples dirty feet and said in John 13,(**SLIDE**) 'I have given you an example, that you should do as I have just done for you'.(**Jn 13.15**)

So we deny ourselves, die to ourselves, and follow our Lord in faith, with all the strength and grace he gives.[Mk 8.34; John 15.1-5]

But by grace, as we bear the cost of serving others, we can be a blessing to others. Maybe one of the next 5 stories will encourage us to follow their example, whether it relates to you now or it may in the future.-----

Lexie is retired and a widow, and cares for her grandchildren 2 days a week.

Yet she also serves in her church. She visits the sick, she calls people when they're away from church, she drops off flowers, and makes meals for people.

Lexie writes to encourage missionaries. She encourages people in their faith in the Lord Jesus.-----

Lexie sometimes looks tired and weary.

But she is laboring, toiling, even going without sleep, in order to serve and encourage others.

Lexie doesn't boasts about all she does. She never boasts.

She knows she is loved by Christ, and so she passionately serves people.

And God shines-through in her weakness.-----

Or I think of **Samir**, a married guy with 3 kids under 5. He and his wife **Sarah** are not getting a full night's sleep, and both of them are normally tired.

But Samir and Sarah have servant hearts.

Samir is normally out at work during the day, and Sarah is home with the kids.

When he gets home Sarah appreciates Samir's help with the kids and house.

But Sarah encourages him to go out to his growth group one night a week, and early to church to serve on a music team – even when it means Sarah is left getting the kids to bed on, or to church, on her own.

Samir looks after the kids on Sat mornings so Sarah can read the Bible with a friend.

And together they strive to have people over for a meal. Even when it's super-easy, not Masterchefy, and when the house is still untidy, and one of them pops out to get the kids to bed.

Both a sacrificially serving even when it's hard.-----

They feel always tired, but they pray several nights a week, that God would be their strength and joy.

Or I think of **Fiona**, who a single woman in her 30's, she works hard at her job, and is open that she follows Jesus.

She seeks to love and listen to work colleagues, care about them, and share Jesus with them, even when it means some people avoid her or gossip behind her back.

Fiona sometimes will do the dishes or clean the bathroom when it's her housemate's turn.

She serves on Sundays in different ways, puts her hand up when something needs to be organized or done, and sacrifices her time to serve Christ in multiple ways.

Fiona, struggles with her mental health and energy levels, but strives to have a close walk with the Lord, so she can have the desire and strength to support her friends and catch up for coffees when they're struggling.

Fiona is thinking about how she can best serve the Lord going forward, and is considering serving him overseas cross-culturally.-----

Or there's **Sally**, a single Mum doing her best without much support, as she even manages life with a child with special needs too.

She is keenly aware of her weakness and feels it every day.

And for her serving Jesus is just persevering in loving her two kids, sending up short arrow prayers of thanks, or cries for help, throughout the day.

When Sally perseveres in patience, gentleness, love and kindness, with her kids and with others around her, it's a great testimony to God's power and grace.

She's never tempted to boast in anything about herself, but the fact that she's still reading the Bible with her kids and able to make it to church with them, is super encouraging for others.

She pleases the Lord in her weakness too.-----

Then there's 16 year old **Jude**.

He is open with his friends in Year 10 that he's a Christian, and he wants Christ to call the shots in his life.

Sometimes he cops criticism for this and it leaves him isolated or hurt.

Jude is striving to avoid wasting endless hours or days gaming, and fighting to say 'No' the temptation to look at porn.

He knows he is weak in his sexual purity, so puts boundaries in place, has sought accountability, is striving to find true joy in Jesus, and encourage his mates at youth group to do the same.

He's started meeting up with a friend from school who's curious about Jesus, to read the bible, and sacrificing his sleep to get up 30 mins early, to read his bible and pray.----

Jude comes early to church to serve on the tech team, and prays every week that he'll honour his parents and be kind to his siblings, even when they totally frustrate him.

Each of these stories, are great examples worth imitating.-----

None of them boast in the things they do, or sacrifices they make to please the Lord.

But all of them are willing to suffer and serve in weakness, like Paul, like Jesus.----

How about you?-----

Let's pray.