

## IDOP 2025 – Bible Talk Outline

### ‘Hard pressed...but not crushed’

**SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 (NIVUK)**

*<sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup> We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. <sup>11</sup> For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. <sup>12</sup> So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*

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This Bible talk outline is intended for use in IDOP 2025 services focusing on the theme of *Pastors under Pressure*. It gives a suggested structure and illustrations for further development. Talks based on this outline could be 15-25 minutes long.

### Introduction

#### *Testimony*

In Sri Lanka Pastor Akashan leads a local church and has trained and nurtured many church workers. However, his ministry is not popular with local residents who have frequently targeted his building. Seven times the church has been set on fire and seven times Pastor Akashan has worked on his own to restore it. Despite the harassment and danger, he continues his ministry.

#### *Issue*

In several countries across the world Christian pastors are under pressure from local mobs, government officials and other religious leaders. As front-line leaders, some face harassment and violent attacks, while others face arrest and imprisonment. This causes stress and material hardship for both the pastor and his family. They can be threatened with eviction from their homes, made to pay large fines, and their children may face bullying and discrimination in school. Despite all these pressures, persecuted pastors are determined to fulfil their calling to preach the gospel and care for God's people.

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### Bible Passage – 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

#### Context

This letter was written by the Apostle Paul to the church in the Greek city of Corinth. Paul had to deal with lots of controversy in this church including their questioning of his authority. Nevertheless, he loved them, and the letter is full of pastoral care and concern.

In chapter 1, Paul talks about the comfort he received from God in his troubles and how he is committed to passing this comfort on to the Corinthians. In chapters 3 to 6, he describes his role as an apostle and the work God had given him to do.

#### Treasure in jars of clay

The 'treasure' Paul refers to is the glory of the message of Jesus that has been revealed to him and that he has been commissioned to share with the world. (Refer back to chapters 3-4.) How do we imagine such a glorious treasure should be looked after? Where should it be stored? How should it be communicated to the world?

Surprisingly, Paul says that the treasure has been entrusted to him and he is nothing more than a jar of clay – vulnerable, ordinary, expendable. Verses 8-9 spell out what this looks like in his life: hard pressed...perplexed...persecuted...struck down. (Examples could be cited from Paul's experience e.g. beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, Acts 16; beaten and left for dead in Iconium, Acts 14.)

#### *Testimony*

In India, Hindu extremist groups prompted local police to come and arrest Pastor Mohan while he was meeting together with around 50 other Christians in his home. A mob then surrounded the house threatening and provoking the believers.

After his arrest, Mohan was initially released, but he was then accused of forcing people to come to his church, in breach of India's 'anti-conversion' laws.

He was remanded in custody for a month — but he said it felt much longer. The other criminals in the prison bullied him and forced him to do all the menial chores, like mopping the floors and cleaning out the drains.

After a month in prison, Mohan was released and was told by police not to return to his home area. Meanwhile, his court case drags on. He is regularly summoned to

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court, and each time there are more court fees to be paid. Mohan said, 'We are under a lot of pressure. We are very stressed.'

Release International's partner in India is providing legal assistance to frontline church leaders like Mohan.

### **Power in weakness**

In verse 7, Paul says that the reason the treasure of the gospel is stored in clay jars like him is to show that the surpassing power of the gospel is from God and not from us. It is in the weakness and vulnerability of his messengers that God's power and glory is most effectively seen. This is evidenced in the paradoxes of v.8-9: 'but not crushed...but not in despair...but not abandoned...but not destroyed. (Again, cite examples from Paul's experiences in Acts.)

Time and again, Paul is miraculously delivered, and people respond to his message. If he had been a person of wealth and status this could be explained at a human level. But he was not. His weakness and vulnerability, and the unlikeliness of his success serves to focus attention on God's power and glory.

### **Testimony**

In China, Pastor Wang Yi is currently serving a nine-year prison sentence because of his Christian work. Back in 2018 he was arrested along with 100 members of his church and was later convicted of 'inciting subversion of state power.'

The authorities refused to let Wang Yi's family visit him in prison for three long years, and since his arrest his family and other church members have been closely monitored by the authorities. We know very little about his present condition.

Pastor Wang Yi always knew there was a risk he could be arrested, and he instructed his church to release a statement he had written if that happened. Here is an extract:

'I hope God uses me... to tell those who have deprived me of my personal freedom that there is an authority higher than their authority, and that there is a freedom that they cannot restrain, a freedom that fills the church of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.'

Even in prison, Pastor Wang Yi continues to bear witness to God's power and glory.

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### ***Life in death***

In v10-11 Paul says he is, 'always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.' The crucial point here is Paul's identification with Jesus.

As a messenger of Jesus, Paul was being treated in the same way that Jesus was treated by the world. In that sense, death was always on the horizon for him. But even as he carries that vulnerability and rejection, the promise and power of resurrection life is also present in him. Jesus is alive and through the Spirit he communicates resurrection life to his people. That is what preserved Paul and enabled him to do the work God had given him.

### **Response**

In v12 Paul says, 'death is at work in us, but life in you.' The daily dying Paul experiences in his work as God's messenger brings the benefit of Christ's life to other people.

As Christians we are all part of one global family. We belong to each other and we have a responsibility to serve each other - to bring life to each other, even if it costs us. What could you do to bring life to your brothers and sisters who are persecuted for their faith across the world today?

### ***Stay informed***

Encourage people to sign up for ***Voice*** magazine and other information. Point people towards [Release International's website](#), podcast and social media channels.

### ***Pray***

Encourage people to use the *Prayer Shield* prayer diary to pray consistently. This is available with the ***Voice*** magazine or on [Release International's website](#).

### ***Give***

Point people to the [Give page on Release International's website](#) or arrange an IDOP offering during the service.