

# Spiritual Life: The Fragrance of Christ

by Stephen Kaung

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*Stephen Kaung's sermon explores the essence of spiritual life as a blend of human weakness and divine strength, exemplified by the fragrance of Christ in our lives.*

**Duration:** 53:31

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 2:12

**Topics:** "Spiritual Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the Catholic Convention held in England every year, where people gather to hear messages on victory. The motto of the convention is 'When you fall, shout victory.' The speaker explains that this motto may seem contradictory, but it holds a secret. When we fall, we should shout victory because even though we may fall, Christ never falls and His power is manifested in our witness. The speaker emphasizes the importance of blending weakness and strength, tears and shouts, in our spiritual life, and how God always leads us in triumph in Christ Jesus.

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## Transcript

Move up a little bit so it's easier. Will you please turn to 2nd Corinthians, 2nd Corinthians chapter 2, 2nd Corinthians chapter 2. We'll read from verse 12. 2nd Corinthians chapter 2, verse 12.

Now when I came to Troas for the publication of the glad tidings of the Christ, a door also being opened to me in the Lord. I had no rest in my spirit at not finding Titus my brother. For bidding them adieu, I came away to Macedonia.

For thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in the Christ, and makes manifest the odor of His knowledge through us in every place. For we are a sweet odor of Christ to God, in the saved and in those that perish. To the one an odor from death unto death, but to the other an odor from life unto life.

And who is sufficient for these things? For we do not as the many make a trade of the word of God, but as of sincerity, but as of God before God, we speak in Christ. May we look to the Lord. Our Father, we do praise and thank Thee through the blood of our Lord Jesus and through His broken body.

We have boldness and ecstasy to come to Thy very presence. O how we praise and thank Thee for this privilege, that we may behold Thee, we may hear Thy voice, and we may be touched by Thee. So, Lord, we just open ourselves to Thee at this moment, and we ask that Thy words shall become living and

operative, give us understanding, give us revelation and wisdom, that we may truly know Thee and know Thy life.

We ask in Thy precious name. Amen. Lately we have been considering together as to this matter of spiritual life.

We mentioned from the very outset that 2 Corinthians is almost like Paul's autobiography. In other words, if we want to know Paul, a man in Christ, then we have to study this second letter to the Corinthians. Now, in this letter he reveals to us the important elements of spiritual life.

In other words, what is spiritual life? That is spiritual life indeed, and is not a counterfeit nor a substitute. We mentioned before two things. One is the sentence of death.

Unless there is the sentence of death in us, we will never experience true spiritual life, which is resurrection life. To put it simply, without knowing death, there can be no knowledge of life. Death must work in us.

Death must deal with us, before the life of our Lord Jesus will be manifested. So first of all, we remember that spiritual life has the element in it of the sentence of death in ourselves. Then the second element is yes in Christ Jesus.

All the promises of God are yes in Him, and are amen by Him. It is not I, the sentence of death, but Christ. Yes in Christ.

Now, this morning we would like to come to the third element of a true spiritual life, and that is the fragrance of Christ. The fragrance of Christ. The occasion for this is very startling, because Paul said he came to us for the publication of the gospel.

A door also being open to me in the Lord, but I had no rest in my spirit at not finding Titus, my brother. You know, as you remember, Paul was in Ephesus. He wrote a letter to the church in Corinth, having heard of their conditions.

And after he wrote that letter, the first letter to the Corinthians, he was so concerned for them, he sent Titus to Corinth. Whether Titus was the bearer of the first letter to the Corinthians or not, we are not sure. But one thing we do know, and that is, Titus went to Corinth.

Try to help them, to restore them, to prepare the way for Paul's visit. And then Paul started to leave Ephesus. He came to Troy for the publication of the gospel.

And the Lord opened a door for him, for the gospel. But he had no rest in his spirit. Why? Because he didn't find Titus there.

Evidently he and Titus had some prearrangement. That Titus went to Corinth to prepare the way, to help the Corinthian believers, and then he will come to Troy. As Paul arrived at Troy, they will meet at Troy.

And there, Titus will tell Paul what had actually happened. But when Paul arrived at Troy, Titus was not there. For some reason, he was delayed.

Therefore, Paul had no way to know the effect of his first letter upon the Corinthian believers. Whether they will accept his letter and repent, or they will harden their heart further against him. So not knowing

exactly what had happened, he had no rest in his spirit.

He, he didn't know what to do. He was actually in a kind of suspense. And because of that, he couldn't do the work into us.

The door was wide open, but he had no desire, he had no heart. He couldn't do the work. So he left to us, and sailed straight to Macedonia.

Instead of going to Corinth first, and from Corinth to Macedonia, and from Macedonia back to Corinth, and from Corinth back to Judea, as he told the Corinthian believers. The reason why he went straight to Macedonia without passing Corinth was, he wanted to wait until he knew what had happened. Now brothers and sisters, in a sense, this sounds defeat.

He went to Troy for the gospel. The door was wide open, and we were thinking he should stay there. Now if the door was closed, of course, you couldn't do anything.

But if the door was open for the gospel, surely Paul should stay there and preach the gospel. But he didn't do that. There was unrest in his spirit.

So he left. He went to Macedonia. It sounds as if Paul was defeated.

He should be stronger than that. He shouldn't be so anxious. He shouldn't have unrest.

He should overcome his own feelings, and he should continue on with his responsibility. But he left. He went to Macedonia.

But you listen to the next verse. But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in the Christ, and makes manifest the order of his knowledge through us in every place. In verse 13, he said, I had no rest in my spirit, so I left.

Now in verse 14, he said, thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ. Now these two verses do not seem to fit each other. The preceding verse seems to tell us that Paul was defeated.

But the next verse tells us that thanks be unto God, who always leads us in his triumph in Christ Jesus. He is triumphant. How can he be defeated in one moment, and be triumphant in another moment? Or how can he be defeated and triumphant at the same time? Now dear brothers and sisters, this is spiritual life.

Spiritual life is a paradox. You may see two opposites, as if they are conflicting, contradicting each other. And yes, spiritual life is just a combination of these two.

In other words, Paul said, I had no rest in my spirit. That shows the humanity in him. Always lead us in triumph in Christ Jesus, that shows the divinity in Paul.

What is spiritual life? Spiritual life is not the elimination of humanity. It is not to eliminate the human side in us, and make a spirit. You know, lots of people think that to be spiritual, you literally become a spirit.

You are no longer a human being. You will have no feeling whatsoever. You will never feel tired and weary.

You will never be disappointed and discouraged. You will never be tempted. You will never fail.

You are infallible. You are always strong. You're never weak.

You're never anxious. You're never worried. You are not a human.

You are a spirit. But dear brothers and sisters, this is not spiritual life. Spiritual life does not eliminate the human side in us.

As long as we live, as long as we are in this body, we will feel, we will be tired, we will be disappointed, we will be tempted, we may fall. The human side is always there. Spirituality is not total, independent divinity.

In other words, spiritual life is the life of Christ in us. There is the divine life in us, but the container of that divine life is the human life. We have a treasure in the earthen vessel.

The vessel is fragile. The vessel can crack. The vessel can be broken.

But thank God, through the cracking and the breaking of the vessel, the light of the treasure is manifested. Now this is spiritual life. Spiritual life is not the total elimination of humanity, nor is the total independent manifestation of the divinity.

It is divinity manifested in humanity. That is spiritual life. Paul is human, and he is not trying to hide his humanity.

You know, often times we try to hide our human side. In other words, when there is a weakness, we try to hide it, to cover it. We feel that if that weakness is known, it will bring disgrace to God, and it will bring shame to us.

So everybody tries to hide his weakness. Everybody tries to hide his human side. We always try to put up a front, as if we are always strong, we are always happy, we are always joyful, we are always triumphant.

We do not want to confess that there is unrest in my spirit. We do not want to confess that there is weakness in us. We do not want to confess that we may fail.

But dear brothers and sisters, do not try to be superhuman. God wants us to be human. It is for this very reason that Christ came into this world.

If He does not want us to be human in the first place, He will not create us as human beings. If He does not want us to be human in the second place, He will not send His Son into this world to be a human being like us. If He does not want us to be human, then He does not need to die on the cross in our stead.

Redemption does not eliminate humanity. Redemption is to rescue humanity. We have fallen.

Because we have fallen, we are subhuman. We sometimes are inhuman. Therefore Christ comes to redeem us, that we may be human beings as God means us to be.

So brothers and sisters, do treasure that humanity in us. Do treasure the human side of our life. Do not make the mistake as if we are no longer human, and whenever anything that smells human comes out of us, we are ashamed of it, and we try to hide it.

Not at all. Paul frankly confesses that he had no rest in his spirit. He couldn't continue the work into us.

So he sailed for Macedonia. Now what is meant by the sentence of death? Do we not say that we have to know the sentence of death in us? We have to answer with the answer of death in us? Now what does it mean? Remember, the sentence of death on the cross does not destroy humanity, does not destroy the human side of us. The reason why we must have the sentence of death in us is because our humanity has fallen.

We have to be delivered from the tyranny of our self-life. We have to be delivered from our natural energy, from our human wisdom, from our self-glory, that is to say we have to be delivered from this self-life in us. But that does not destroy our soul.

That does not destroy our individuality. What is fallen needs to be delivered, but what is created only needs to be purified. God has created us as human beings and he wants us to be human beings today and forever, even in eternity.

He wants us to be human beings. He wants to deliver us that we may be human. He wants to purify us that we may be as human as he wants us to be.

I think this is something that we have to be reminded again and again, because oftentimes we do not think it that way. But thank God, on the one hand you find the humanity, the human side, but at the same time on the other hand you find the divinity, the divine life in us. God puts his life in us, but that does not deify us.

Thank God we have his life in us, but we are not being deified, we are human beings. And his life in us is manifested in this human vessel. You remember Paul says, when I'm weak, then I'm strong.

Therefore I boast of my weakness, that the power of God may be manifested, and the power of God is perfected in my weakness. Here you find the weakness of man, and there you see the power of God. The weakness of man does not interfere with the power of God.

On the contrary, the power of God is made perfect in the weakness of man. If we are strong, if our human life is complete, intact, then the power of God has no way to manifest itself. It is only because there is a weakness in us.

Therefore it gives the power of God the perfect opportunity to manifest itself. In Galatians chapter two verse twenty it said, I'm crucified with Christ. No longer live I. I'm crucified with Christ.

No longer I. The sentence of death is upon me, therefore it is not I. But Christ, yes in Christ Jesus. But dear brothers and sisters, it says, I'm crucified with Christ. It is no longer I, but Christ, period, no.

But Christ who lives in me. In other words, certain part of I is eliminated. But there is certain part of I still there.

The I that is eliminated is the self-life, the fallen life. But the I of me that remains is the humanity that God has created, and is now being purified. So it is Christ who lives in me.

When I'm weak, then I'm strong. Here you'll find Paul said, I had no rest in my spirit, and it is evident. He didn't try to hide it.

All the brothers and sisters in Church notice it, and probably some of them will say, ha ha, Paul, look at yourself. Are you ashamed of yourself? I remember many years ago, that was back in 1937. I was in

Canton serving the Lord, and I was sick.

So an elderly sister took me into their home for rest, and this sister was newly saved. And while I was in their home, you know, I was so restless. I felt that, well, the weather there didn't fit me.

You know, Hong Kong was so humid and hot. It didn't fit me at all. And I was, I was unwell, I wasn't well.

So I was thinking all the time, I must leave, I must leave, I must go somewhere. And I had a mindset on a mountain. I wanted to go to that mountain very much.

I wanted to go there and rest. So I prayed and prayed, and asking the Lord, you know, I said, Lord, what do you want me to do? I need a rest. Where should I go? But all the time, you know, I was thinking of that mountain.

And I was so restless. One day that sister came to me and said, Brother, why are you so restless? She noticed it. Oh, I was so ashamed of myself.

I was the one who was supposed to help her, spiritually. And now my restlessness was shown, because I couldn't hide it. Now, brothers and sisters, if brothers and sisters noticed restlessness in me, it was a small thing, because I was no good anyway.

But with Paul, the great apostle Paul, he had no rest in his spirit, and the brothers and sisters there noticed that. Oh, they were turned away from Paul. But thank God, that they might not see Paul more than what he was.

And that's what Paul wanted. That no one will see him higher than what he really is. You know, brothers and sisters, we always want people to see us higher than what we really are.

We want to appear more spiritual than we really are. And when we are discovered, my, we want to hide. But not Paul.

Paul is open. He is transparent. He not only let the people know he had no rest in his spirit, but he told it, he mentioned it to the Corinthian believers too.

He said, I had no rest in my spirit. That's what I am. I am a weak vessel.

But thanks be unto God, who always lead us in triumph in Christ Jesus. Even when Paul was weak, he was strong. In what sense? Even the believers in choice.

Even though they saw his restlessness, at the same time they saw Christ in him. You say, can it be possible? It is possible. In spite of his restlessness, the fragrance of Christ diffused from Paul.

Even in his failure, there was victory. He failed, but Christ overcame. You know, there is a motto with the Catholic Convention.

I don't know if you know the Catholic Convention. Now, the Catholic Convention has been convened, oh, for, I think since the turning of the century. Every year, in the second week of July, in Catholic England, there will be a Catholic Convention, and people from all over the world will go there, to hear the message on victory.

And you know, there is a motto in Catholic Convention, and that is, when you fall, shout victory. When you fall, shout victory. Now, how can you do that? That's not true.

When you fall, cry. Before, shout victory. How can it be? Now, brothers and sisters, there is a secret there.

When you fall, shout victory. Why? Because you fall, but Christ never fall. And His power is manifested in your weakness.

When you fall, and you cry, you think of yourself. You pity yourself. You fall into yourself, and you will fall deeper.

But when you fall, you shout victory. You say, Lord, I cannot do better, that is what I am, but you are best. I look up to you, and I praise you.

Brothers and sisters, it is at that time you find the victory of Christ is manifested. That's the secret. Our problem with spiritual life is, we want to be strong.

We want to be spiritual. This is what I am. Look at me, how strong, how spiritual I am.

That's what we want, but this is not spiritual life. This is pseudo-spiritual. You are trying to be spiritual.

That's not real. Real spiritual life is on the one hand, there is the weakness and the frailty of the vessel. The humanity there.

And yet, at the same time, there is the strength and the glory of the divinity, the divine life. That is spiritual life. It is a combination of the human and the divine.

It is a blending of weakness and strength. It is a coming together of tears and shouts. That is spiritual life, who always leads us in triumph in Christ Jesus.

Paul seemed to be defeated into us, and yet, even so, God overruled. God overruled. When he arrived in Macedonia, Titus arrived.

And you'll find good news, good report, and Paul's spirit was lifted. So dear brothers and sisters, just be true and real. It is all right to be human, but don't forget, when you are weak, then you are strong.

No rest in spirit, always in triumph in Christ Jesus. And to make manifest the order of His knowledge through us, in every place. You know, odor, or aroma, or fragrance, it is the most intangible thing.

You know, a color you can see, a music you can hear, but odor, you cannot see an odor. You cannot hear an odor. You can only smell it.

And when an odor is there, aroma is there, it just spreads spontaneously. You know, you do not need to make an effort to make it smell. You know, if you have a perfume here, you know, you do not make an effort to make the perfume smell.

You know, if the perfume is here, it just diffuses spontaneously and unconsciously. No control. It is no control.

You know, you don't see anything, you don't hear anything, and yet it is there. And it has its effect, because it expresses so, so quietly, and yet so spontaneously and unconsciously it spreads. Now we are

the fragrance of Christ.

That is the way it ought to be. In other words, it is not that we try hard to smell good. We try hard to be spiritual.

We try hard. You know, no effort. No effort.

If the fragrance is there, it will diffuse. Now suppose you work in a perfume factory. Now whole day you are working there.

Now you don't put any perfume on you, but if you work in a perfume factory, after a day's work, when you return home, everybody will smell the perfume. It is there. And that is what spiritual life is.

The fragrance of Christ. It is not something with effort. You don't even need to apply it, but because of your life with Christ.

That fragrance is there in your life, and it will diffuse. In spite of your weakness and failure, and sometimes because of your weakness, it is magnified. Isn't that strange? You remember Mary who came to anoint the Lord Jesus with a pound of nard? Now that pound of nard was stored in that alabaster flask, and it had a stopper to it.

The alabaster flask is a beautiful vessel, but as long as it has a stopper, and it is not broken, the pound of nard is still there, but there is no fragrance. An alabaster flask is good to look at. It may be good to touch.

It may be very fine and delicate, but there is no fragrance. No fragrance. It is only when the stopper is taken out, and the flask is broken, then the oil is poured upon the head and the feet of our Lord Jesus, and the Bible said the fragrance spread all over the house.

Everybody smelled it. Oftentimes we consider ourselves as an alabaster flask. Actually we are earthen vessels.

And how we try to protect that alabaster flask? We will not let anyone to touch us. It is to be put maybe on the mantle and let people admire it, but as long as it is intact, as long as it pretends to be perfect, the oil, the ointment, the fragrance, the radiancy of Christ is imprisoned. Let it be broken.

Break it over the Lord. And only when we are willing to be broken, then the fragrance of Christ will spread all over the house. Brothers and sisters, don't be downhearted because you fail.

Don't feel too ashamed because brothers and sisters notice you are still human. Thank God for that. You never know.

Because when you are broken, the fragrance of Christ is manifested. Formerly it was you, but now it is no longer you. It is Christ.

Now that's spiritual life. And you know Paul used an illustration. He said, now of course this fragrance or this aroma of Christ comes from our knowledge of Him.

You know, as we know Him. Know Him in an experiential way. Really know Him.

You know, not in the mind, but in your life, in your experience. Just what we said. When you have no rest in your spirit, it seems as if you have failed and now He leads you in triumph in Christ.

That's an experience. When you are weak, then you are strong. That's an experience.

Now that's the knowledge of Christ. And the knowledge of Christ becomes that fragrance. Brothers and sisters, it is something in your life.

You don't need to open your mouth. Now I do not mean to say that. Don't open your mouth.

I really want to encourage brothers and sisters to open your mouth. I feel that lots of brothers and sisters mouth are sealed. But they are not sealed by God.

They are sealed by the enemy. Their mouth needs to be unsealed. We should praise the Lord.

We should magnify His name. We should testify to His goodness. You know, we should offer the sacrifice of our praise.

The praise of our lips is a sacrifice unto God. We should. We should.

But I am speaking of another thing, and that is, do not think that your knowledge of the Lord must come through your mouth. Now if that is the case, it is just too sad. If your knowledge of Christ has to come through your mouth, it is just too sad.

It shows that it is mental knowledge. If you have a real knowledge of Christ, even when you are saying nothing, it diffuses. Even when you fail, it diffuses.

That's what fragrance is. You have no control over it. Just like Moses' face showed.

He didn't know about it. Oh, brothers and sisters, how much do we know Him? How much do we know Him in our experience? And you know, oftentimes you do not experience Him until you discover your weakness, because you have no need of Him, if you are strong. But thank God, through our life experience with Him, the fragrance of Christ is with us.

We become the fragrance of Christ. And here Paul used an illustration. He said, For we are a sweet order of praise to God in the saved and in those that perish, to the one an order from death unto death, but to the other an order from life unto life.

Now Paul used an illustration. During the Roman time, they have what they call triumphant procession. When a general went out and conquered a country, subdued the enemies, and we were told that at least kill five thousand enemies.

And it was a complete victory. And he must be in the field when the victory was done. In other words, a general that had conquered a foreign country, that had a complete victory.

The greatest honor that the Roman empire will give to that conquering general was, give him a triumphant procession. And when he came back, there will be a procession in the city of Rome. The whole city will be involved.

The senators, the state officials, they will march in the front. They will be followed by the priests and the sacrifice. And then following them will be people who are spreading incense, burning incense.

And we are also told that at that time all the streets, everywhere along the streets, there will be incense burning, everywhere. And then will come the general, gorgeously apparel, arid. And, no, no, not the

general.

Then will come the captives. All the captives will march before the general. They will be in chains as an exhibit of his victory.

And then will come the general. And behind the general will be his victorious army. And when after the procession was over, those captives were either killed or sold to slavery.

But those soldiers that join in the battle, they will be rewarded. So that's the reason why Paul said, we are the odor, the fragrance of Christ. To those, to the one an odor from death to death, but to the other an odor from life to life.

It is the same odor, the same fragrance, the same aroma that is all over the city. But to the captives, it was an odor of death to death. Why? Because when they smell that odor, it means death.

They ought to die. But to the victorious army, it is from life to life. They will live and they will be rewarded.

So that's the reason why Paul said, who is competent, who is sufficient for these things. Tremendous. Tremendous.

Now dear brothers and sisters, what is spiritual life? Spiritual life is not I but Christ who lives in me. And I now live in the flesh by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. What is spiritual life? Spiritual life is the sentence of death, yes in Christ, the fragrance of Christ.

You see the combination of these three elements? On the one hand the sentence of death that deals with the self-life in us, on the other hand that is yes in Christ, it is the life of Christ which is yes, always yes, and yet you find it is the divine life in the human life. The fragrance of Christ which is the combination of the life of Christ and the vessel, earthen vessel. It is the life of Christ diffusing through the earthen vessel.

As we live in this world, we are the light of the world. We are the salt of the world. We are the fragrance of Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters, as we go along in our life's journey, as we touch different people, to some it will mean death, to others it will mean life. No one can touch spiritual life without either be put to death or be raised in life. This is what Christian life is.

This is what spiritual life is. And you know Paul said, who is sufficient for these things? Isn't that tremendous? But this is what we are. This is what spiritual life is.

As a matter of fact, this is what Christ is, because no one can touch him without either be death or in life. And as it is true in Christ, and spiritual life is Christ, therefore it must be true in us. So may the Lord help us.

Shall we pray? Our Heavenly Father, we do praise and thank Thee that Thou has not eliminate the humanity in us, but instead Thou does purify it, Thou does dwell in it, and Thou does manifest Thyself through it. O Lord, we do ask Thee that we may be open, true and real before Thee, that we may always be humble before Thee, knowing that we are weak. It will be a surprise if we are strong.

Lord, we boast in our weakness, that Christ, the power of God, may be manifested. Lord, we do know that this is a tremendous testimony, and we do desire that we may know Thee more, that the fragrance of

Christ may be increased, and Thou may be glorified in the church. In the name of our Lord Jesus.

Amen.

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