

WE DO NOT LOSE HEART

II Corinthians 4:16-18

[Journal – suffering – we do not lose heart]

If anyone was tempted to lose heart, it was Paul. He suffered emotionally and relationally at the hands of false teachers who measured the success by outward measures and not the heart.¹ He suffered physically at the hands of angry religious leaders and government officials who beat his body and eventually ended his earthly life. At the beginning of this letter, Paul goes as far as to say, *“we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself”* (1:9). If anyone was tempted to lose heart, it was Paul.

In chapter 4 of his letter, we see a repeated phrase – *“We do not lose heart”* (4:1, and 16). Only a man who had been tempted to lose heart could write this. He writes to Christians who are tempted to lose heart. In our passage this morning, Paul answers three questions – how do we not lose heart, why do we not lose heart, and what does not losing heart look like? His answers are surprising.

I. How We Do Not Lose Heart (v. 16)

In 4:16, Paul continues his line of thought from earlier in the chapter:
“So we do not lose heart.”

What does it mean to “lose heart”? The word literally means to “be weary” or to “give up.”² What does this look like?

[It looks like Israel before entering the Promised Land their first time. They are so close, but instead of going in, they decide to send spies to scout out the roads they should take and the cities they will have to fight against. When the spies come back, their report has a devastating effect on the people. Deuteronomy 1:28 records their response: *“Where are we going up? Our brothers have made our hearts melt, saying, ‘The*

¹ Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 323-347.

² Zerwick, p. 541.

people are greater and taller than we are. The cities are great and fortified up to heaven. And besides, we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.’”

They forgot the promises of God and could only see the difficult task, and *their hearts melted*. They lost heart. Instead of going in, they gave up. Often, I feel like, “This is too hard, and even if I give everything I have, I won’t make a difference, so I’m not even going to try. Has this ever happened to you?]

What is causing you to lose heart? What situation or relationship is making it tempting for you to grow weary? Where are you tempted to give up? Parenting, work, singleness, marriage, hard friendship, hard person, a particular sin... I have identified several situations and relationships this week that have made it very tempting for me to lose heart. **What is that for you?**

But Paul says “*we do not lose heart.*” How is this possible? He goes on to explain how we do not lose heart: “*Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.*” “Outer self” refers to your body or physical being, and “inner self” refers to your spirit or spiritual being.³

So first, the “outer self is wasting away” – this is not hard to believe because we feel it. Trials in the Christian life wear us down physically, emotionally, mentally.⁴ Maybe we are not facing execution or the whip like Paul, but seeking to fulfill our responsibilities – as an employee, as a parent, as a spouse, as a daughter or son – in a way that honors Christ, costs us. We lose sleep, we lose weight (or gain it), we lose patience, we become exhausted, we wear down.

³ Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians*, p. 479.

⁴ R.V.G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 76.

But Paul says this outer breakdown is not all that's taking place in the life of the Christian: at the same time that our body is wearing down, *"our inner self is being renewed day by day."*

And look at the language: "our inner self is being renewed" – it is happening currently, even when we feel like we're falling apart on the outside. And notice the passive verb – the inner self "is being renewed." **We don't renew ourselves; God renews us.**

How? Notice the word: "re-new" – to make new again. Where does this take place?

1. At salvation – II Cor 5:17 – "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."
2. Through the means of grace – One example is drinking from God's Word. Psalm 19:7 says, "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul."

[Another way I've seen God renew me recently is through deep fellowship. Not casual small talk, but deep friendships where we can be honest with each other and lock arms together – Christ-centered friendships.]

3. At glorification – when Jesus returns – this is the one I'm most excited about. Jesus says in Rev. 21:5, "Behold, I am making all things new." One day soon, not only will we be fully made new, but all of creation will be made new.

So how do we not lose heart? God won't let us, but instead, like a shepherd, he renews our souls with the living water of himself. He will finish the work he began in us. **Our souls are renewed as our bodies are destroyed.**

But this reality does not make the pain go away. We still live lives of pain, intense trials, death, tears, battles that show no signs of ending. With all this, why do we not lose heart?

II. Why We Do Not Lose Heart (v. 17)

Paul gives the answer: *“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”* Paul gives three reasons why we do not lose heart:

1. We don't lose heart because our suffering is *“light.”* As in not heavy. You may say, “Blake, you don't know my pain.” Paul is not saying that our suffering now is easy. His own afflictions were very heavy in human terms. He says in 11:23ff: [Read 23-28] – this sounds anything but light. But that's just it! Paul is saying that in comparison to the glory to come for every believer, our suffering now is light! The *“weight of glory”* is so heavy that it far outweighs the sufferings of this life.

Paul says in Romans 8:18 – *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”*

2. We don't lose heart because our suffering is *“momentary.”* This does not mean it will go away soon. I recently heard a brother say to a group of men: *“Some of you are in crucibles that you will be in until the day you die.”*⁵ Paul's crucible certainly was not short-lived. It *“lasted from his conversion to his martyrdom.”*⁶

[But in comparison to eternity, Paul's sufferings were a blip on the radar. Consider the math – let's say Paul lived for 60 years. That would mean he has been experiencing the glory of heaven with Jesus for approx. 1,950 years, and he's just getting started.]

In comparison to eternity, our sufferings are momentary, and

3. We don't lose heart because our sufferings *“are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”*

This last reason is shocking to me. Paul says that the sufferings of the Christian *“are preparing/producing/achieving...an eternal weight of glory beyond all*

⁵ Larry Bolden, Wellspring Retreat, January 23-26, 2020.

⁶ Hodge, p. 480.

comparison.” There is a cause-and-effect relationship between our sufferings, even in the mundane callings of the Christian life, and our glory to come. Our sufferings now produce that glory. How does this work? It’s a complete mystery to me. I only trust in the sovereign grace and will of God in making this happen.

[One takeaway from this mysterious truth is that, for the Christian, **no suffering is meaningless**. Did you hear that? **Your suffering is not meaningless**. Single brother or sister, your fight for purity and waiting on God in your singleness is not meaningless. It is achieving glory to come. Parent, your struggle to love and disciple your children when nothing seems to be working is not meaningless. It is achieving glory to come. Those of us who battle deep doubts that God is real, that his word is true, that his heart towards you is good, **but you fight not to give up on the word, prayer, fellowship** – this battle is not meaningless. It is achieving glory to come. This is why we do not lose heart.]

So as we’re living the Christian life in the presence of suffering, pain, and death, what does it look like for us to not lose heart?

III. What Not Losing Heart Looks Like (v. 18)

Paul paints a portrait of the person who does not lose heart in verse 18: [READ].

Bottom line: The one who does not lose heart is the one who is increasingly captivated by eternal things. The one who looks to things unseen and eternal.

The word “look” means more than take a glance. It means to “give special consideration to” something – to “pay attention to it.”⁷ The NIV translation is “fix our eyes.” It has the sense of looking to a goal and directing all our “attention, desires, and efforts” towards that goal.⁸ To be captivated by it.

⁷ William Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 323.

⁸ Hodge, p. 481.

And what is the goal Paul has in mind? Eternity. Similar to what he urges the Colossians – “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col. 3:1-2).

Why look to things unseen?

Paul gives two reasons:

1. “the things that are seen are transient” – that word means – “only lasting for a time,” “limited in duration,” “temporary.”⁹
2. “but the things that are unseen are eternal”

[An example is Moses – “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. (think about that! Why?) He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward” (Hb. 11:24-26). His heart was captivated by things unseen and eternal, and I can only imagine the joy he is experiencing right now].

This makes sense – if you’re going to live for something, why not live for what will last not only for this life, but into eternity? **What would your life look like if you were increasingly captivated by eternity?**

[I got a taste of this when I spent two weeks on the Yakama Native American Reservation in Washington State two summers ago as a requirement for my seminary coursework. Like many reservations, Yakama is nearly overrun with darkness, hopelessness, and despair. Our church-supported missionaries Chris and Mary Granberry founded Sacred Road ministry and Hope Fellowship Church, and they do extensive mercy ministry and outreach to the reservation (our youth went last summer). I was supposed to interview Chris, and the only time he was free was early in the morning during his daily hot tub time. I asked him, “I know

⁹ Danker, p. 304; Zerwick, p. 543.

life and ministry here are deeply hard and exhausting. What keeps you going? (how do you not lose heart and give up)?" He smiled and said one word: "Jesus."]

The last two years I've been struck by his answer, because to be honest with you, I'm often tempted to lose heart. What I read earlier was my journal entry not long after my mom's back injury. I have been tempted to lose heart ever since in so many areas of my life, even this week.

But God keeps renewing my inner being day by day. I am reminded that my sufferings as I seek to follow Jesus are light, momentary, and are producing an eternal glory beyond my wildest imagination. And by the Holy Spirit's work in my heart, I have become increasingly captivated by Jesus, the One I long to see face to face and the One who did not lose heart through death and was raised so that you and I may not lose heart.