

# “We Do Not Lose Heart”

An exposition of 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

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by John Miller

Big Idea: God uses even our afflictions to make us into the people He has designed us to be.
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## The Introduction

You who have been at Trinity for some time may be surprised to know that it's been almost 7 years since that personal crisis that eventually led to my six-month sabbatical from this position. To this day, I don't know how to describe that experience. Was it depression? Was it anxiety overwhelming my ability to think clearly? Was it the melancholic side of my personality asserting dominance over my phlegmatic side? Or was it God, drawing near to an analytically oriented Norwegian, and saying, *“Okay John, now I want you to feel something. It will help you teach My word and shepherd My people.”*

I think it was God. Now, don't get me wrong. I hope never to go through that experience again. It was a long and painful 2½ years from start to finish, and if this church had not stepped in as strongly as you did – especially with that six-month sabbatical – I would certainly not have remained in pastoral ministry. But God was leading you, too! You became, for me, the voice of God, saying, *“John, it isn't just your ministry that matters to me. It's you! You matter! And I'm going to give you the people of Trinity as a visible picture of My love for you!”* God used you in those days! Without your strong statement that you wanted to help me as a man, I would have bailed out of pastoral ministry, and it would have been a mistake, because all through that miserable experience, and in the 5 plus years since I've come back to my position as Senior Pastor, God has been using that experience to help me grow and to open doors for ministry that have never been open to me before. I am a stronger minister of Jesus Christ today because I went through that experience and had just enough faith in God to stay the course and not bail out. Looking back on it, I can see that God was in that experience and that He used it to make me a more complete man and a more complete minister of the Gospel – not a perfect minister, just a more complete one.

We shouldn't be surprised by this. This is what God does – not just in me but in all who live by faith in Jesus Christ! Even in times of distress and trial, God is always renewing you – so that you will become the man – the woman – He intends you to become. I want to show you where the Scriptures affirm this statement.

## The Nature of Ministry for Christ

The affirmation comes from the words of Paul – a man who knew his own trials – and it's found in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Let me read that passage.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> 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. [NASB]

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 is set in the middle of a long discussion about ministry in the name of Jesus Christ. That discussion starts back in chapter 1, verse 12. At chapter 4, Paul begins discussing some of the challenges that come with ministry for Jesus.

- In 4:1-2, he speaks of the need to renounce our own sin. A minister of Christ has to be pursuing godliness and holiness. You might struggle on this point, but it's a struggle you must engage in.
- In verses 3-6, Paul points out that some will not receive our message about Jesus. No matter how much you love some people, the gospel will remain veiled to them, even as you continue to preach Christ.
- And in verses 7-12, Paul points to the visible trials that might come our way as we minister in the name of Jesus Christ. He speaks of being "afflicted...perplexed...persecuted...struck down." Miserable experiences, all of them!

"But," he says in verse 13, "having... the spirit of faith... we speak in spite of our struggles." In verse 14 he says we speak as those who know the power of God! And in verse 15 he says we speak as people who are able to freely give ourselves for the sake of others.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore...

That is, given the faith we have in Jesus Christ, given the hope we have in Jesus Christ, given the freedom we enjoy in Jesus Christ...

<sup>16</sup> ... we do not lose heart...

To "lose heart" is to give up – to give in – to faint at the sight of your adversaries. A believer knows the struggle of walking away from sin, but he doesn't give up in that struggle. A believer knows the pain of friends and family who reject his Savior, but he doesn't give in to hopelessness. A believer can be just as afflicted and perplexed and lonely and disappointed as anyone, but she faints at the prospect of facing her life – as rotten as it might look on the outside. She sees, by faith, something nobody else sees. Let's read on in verse 16.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying [with all of the junk we have to put up with in this world], yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

You understand that there is a world your eyes can't see. We see the discouraging world, the disappointing world, the cruel world, but that's not everything that's happening in you and around you right now. That's just the world where your outer man lives. There's another world we live in – an unseen world – a spiritual world – and that world is alive both around

you and in you – if you’re a believer in Jesus Christ. And Paul, right in the middle of a discussion of how hard it can be to live for Christ in the outer world, says, “*You know that your inner man is being renewed every day! You know that a power other than you is refilling your inner reserves every day.*” That’s what this verse says. Something other than you is renewing your inner man every day. Paul doesn’t say, “*You are renewing your inner man every day.*” You have neither the knowledge nor perhaps the strength to do that. He says “[your] inner man is being renewed day by day.” A power other than you is doing this renewal work – even as you are being “afflicted,” even as you are feeling “perplexed,” even as you are being “persecuted,” even as you are being “struck down” “[your] inner man is being renewed.” Why would we give up, knowing that God is renewing us even on the hard days?

Back in 2001, when God was beginning to walk me through that journey, there were days and weeks and eventually even months at a time when I could not imagine that I would ever again enjoy pastoral ministry. I just felt beat up – every slight offense felt like a hammer blow – every tiny detail gone wrong on Sunday morning just ignited a quiet rage in me far out of proportion to the significance of the detail. That was my outer man imagining things and blowing things out of proportion and inventing things for my mind to dwell on. It was a very unhappy way to live. But today I can look back and say that even in those days, my “inner man was being renewed.” Even in those days, God Himself was leading me down a path that would make me stronger, more full of faith, more filled with hope, more filled with expectations of good things yet to come. God was renewing my inner man. That God whose lovingkindnesses are new every morning (Lamentations 3:23) was creating a new and better me. And do you know what tools he was using? Look at verse 17.

<sup>17</sup> For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

Now, we could quibble over whether our afflictions should be labeled as “light.” Affliction never feels “light.” But if we go down that line of arguing, we’ll miss the good news of this verse. What I want you to notice is that it’s our afflictions – those things we desperately want to get away from – those things that torment us – those things that make our life miserable – it’s those afflictions that produce something of value to us.

<sup>17</sup> For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

When we walk with God, even our afflictions work to our benefit. We don’t lose heart, because we know what the end result of this affliction will be. We don’t lose heart because affliction produces an accumulation of unseen glory! But what does that mean? What is this glory? ... Well, I don’t really know. How can we define glory? I can only tell you that it’s something that requires the most lofty of human words to describe. To speak of “glory” is to speak of something magnificent – something splendid – something superb – something marvelous. We run out of adjectives to describe glory.

I love the simple logo that we’re using on our church sign. In one way it looks like Jesus dying on the cross for us. But in another way, it looks like a man looking into the heavens

and beholding glory! What is glory? We're not sure, but we know that it's something highly desirable. We also know that it is largely unseen in this world. We're talking about that unseen spiritual world again. We don't know exactly what this glory is, but we do know when it is being accumulated for us. Verse 18 tells us that this glory is being produced...

<sup>18</sup> while we look not at the things which are seen [That's our struggles, our trials, our disappointments] but at the things which are not seen [That's the glory that is yet to be revealed.]

Under the sovereign power of God, our afflictions produce glory for us, as we walk through the afflictions with our eyes fixed on the glory. This isn't a denial of our problems. We can talk about our problems – just don't let them be the only thing you talk about. We can seek help for our problems – just don't think that your problems are the only thing going on in your life. We can address the issues of our physical world – just don't forget that you live in an unseen spiritual world as well, and it's the unseen world that is going to last forever. Look at the end of verse 18.

<sup>18</sup> ...for the things which are seen [our struggles, our heartaches, our sufferings] are temporal [temporary – they'll end!], but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Even in times of distress and suffering, God is renewing you in the spiritual world, so that you will become the man – the woman – who He intends you to be in eternity. And when we know this in the depths of our heart, “we do not lost heart!”

## One Application of My Own

I know this today, better than I did seven years ago. I know it better because of that miserable affliction of seven years ago. That affliction produced and is producing still “an eternal weight of glory far beyond comparison” to the pain it once caused. And the interesting this is that other people are benefiting from my affliction. Let me give you just a few examples of how other people now benefit from the growth that came from my affliction.

- A couple of years ago a pastor I've known for a long time rather suddenly resigned from his church, and ugly rumors were spreading about why he resigned. In all the years I'd known him, I had never called him just to discuss life. But I called him one day after his resignation. I didn't ask about the scandal, though I acknowledged hearing about it. I just expressed my conviction that God was still doing a great work in his heart and that I'd be glad to walk with him if that would help. I would never have done that seven years ago. It was my affliction that moved me into a more aggressive kind of personal ministry.
- More recently, another pastor resigned from his church, and I felt burdened over whether he was discouraged. So I called him just to check on his heart and to remind him that God is still renewing his inner man whether he pastors that church or not.

- A couple of weeks ago I called a pastor who I suspected was hurting over a situation in his church I'm aware of. I had no intention of trying to solve his problems! I just wanted to say that he is somebody who matters to me and that I'm confident that God is working – even through this situation – to renew his own heart.

I would never have done these things seven years ago. But you know what I learned in my affliction? I learned that I need to be reminded that God is renewing me, and that He's using even my afflictions to do it. And I've learned that there are many other pastors out there who need to be reminded that God is renewing their inner man, even as they struggle through their ministries. And I've learned that you need to be reminded that God is – even now – renewing your inner man, and He's using your struggles and your disappointments and your heartaches to do it and to produce “for you an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” to what you are needing to endure right now. You may not be able to see it right now, but by faith, God's word calls you to focus your attention on “the things that are not seen” so that you can be among those who can say, “We do not lose heart!”

## Russia

Now, let me completely stun you by saying that all of this is merely the introduction to what I want to say today. This is merely the framework for the picture I want to hang in your mind today. I want you to envision this church (as a single, unified body) offering today's message (of a God who is renewing us even in the midst of our struggles – of a God who is using our struggles to renew us – of a God who is “day-by-day” giving us a reason to press on, to persevere, to keep going, to “not lose heart” – I want you to picture you and everybody around you combining your prayers and your participation for the purpose of delivering today's message to a group of people who live in a place where encouragement can sometimes be a bit sparse. That place – as the crow flies – is 5000 miles to our east.

Seven weeks from tomorrow, four of us from Trinity will make our 3<sup>rd</sup> annual trek to Vladimir, Russia to minister to the hearts of our Wesleyan Mission staff in Russia, and our purpose will be to deliver – in bodily form – the message I've just preached today – of a God who is renewing us even in the midst of overwhelming struggles. Joining me on the traveling part of this trip will be Doug & Caroline Keiser and Tempa Haines. I've very enthused with the presence of each of these three people. But these three aren't the only ones I want “with” me on this trip. I want you too!

I don't have time, today, to tell you everything that I need to say. I plan to come back to this subject next Sunday. Let me just say this. I want you to be praying about this ministry, because I am going to ask you to finance the whole trip – not only for the four of us from Trinity, but for all of the mission staff in Russia. I'll take time next week to explain why I believe all of us should be involved in this particular ministry, but for today, let me just put it on your radar. Next Sunday I will come back to this subject and ask you to donate a pretty sizeable amount of money to finance this trip. But for today it's enough to say this much. Paul went to great lengths to make sure the Corinthians understood two things: (1) that ministry in the name of Jesus Christ is full of trials and afflictions and (2) that God uses even

our afflictions to bring about the results He desires. Though we can look around us and see all sorts of reasons for just giving up in our desire to live for Christ and in our efforts to minister in His name, yet every one of those reasons will one day disappear, and in the eternal world – where only God Himself sees clearly today – we have every reason to press on and to do so filled with faith and hope and an expectation of tremendous benefits coming not only to us but to those to whom we will minister in days to come. “We do not lose heart.” Let’s take this message to the ends of the earth!

# "We Do Not Lose Heart"

(a Scriptural context for Vladimir '08)

February 10, 2008

## The Text: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

<sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> 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.

## Two Key Statements to Hold On To

- 1) "*We do not \_\_\_\_\_!*" (v. 16a)
- 2) To the contrary! Even when life is grim on the outside (read 2 Cor. 4:7-12), "*our inner man is being \_\_\_\_\_!*" (v. 16b)

These two statements are true (or can be), even during hard times. Why is this so? Because affliction \_\_\_\_\_ an accumulation of unseen \_\_\_\_\_ for the one who is being afflicted. (v. 17) Our role, on this earth, is to keep our attention focused on "*the things which are not seen*" today, but will be seen in eternity (v. 18)

**Notes:**