

“We Do Not Lose Heart”

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Part 2

February 24, 2008

by John Miller

Big Idea: We passionately deliver this message: “We need not lose heart, so we don’t!”
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Let me introduce Brian and Cara Burke. Some of you know Brian & Cara, but let me make them known to all of you. Brian grew up in Annandale, New Jersey – Cara in Mishawaka, Indiana. Their paths crossed both in college, at Indiana Wesleyan University, and in Russia, where each spent time as young singles, engaging Russian teens and children with the gospel of Jesus Christ. God used those experiences to give both Brian and Cara a passion for the people of Russia, and in 2005, as a young married couple, Brian and Cara were appointed as directors of the Wesleyan mission work in Russia. Vladimir became their home, and this picture shows Brian and Cara standing outside the Wesleyan Ministry Center in Vladimir, Russia.

I love this couple. Someday I’d like to get them here, so you can meet them and get to know them personally. But for today, let me just describe the setting they labor in.

- They minister in a culture where leadership is exercised through iron-fisted power – even in the church. It’s a culture that needs to learn how to practice grace. That’s a transition that generates a lot of discouragement.
- They live in a culture where men have largely abdicated any kind of positive societal or family modeling. Brian and Cara have been given the task of calling men to become leaders in their families and in their churches. That’s a hard transition to achieve, and it opens the door to a lot of discouragement.
- They face an Orthodox Church hostile toward evangelicals. The heritage of Russia is Orthodox, and nobody who threatens the religious dominance of the Russian Orthodox Church is warmly received – even if you do it in the name of Jesus. Discouragement lurks in that battle.
- They face a government increasingly resistant to western missionaries. Our most recent arrivals in Russia – Stephen and Laura Descalzo and their young son Silas – were refused any visa that would last more than 90 days! After 90 days, they will have to leave the country and reapply for entry, with no guarantees of anything. What’s going to happen when the visas run out for other members of the team? It’s discouraging to think about.
- Like all of us, they face a whole myriad of spiritual powers (Ephesians 6:12) each of which is happy when Russia takes no steps at all toward a saving and transforming relationship with Jesus Christ. Ephesians 6:10-17 tells us that we need spiritual weapons to stand the “schemes” or “methods” of the devil. Discouragement is one of the devil’s “schemes,” and he has found Russia to be an easy target.

- Add to these things a plummeting dollar, which makes all of their ministries more expensive.
- Add to this the challenge of being 5,000 miles from family and friends who might be an ongoing encouragement to them.
- Add to this an almost endless series of struggles and setbacks that have plagued evangelical ministries in Russia, and you can begin to sense how easy it would be for the men and women who proclaim Christ in Russia to lose heart.

Last Week's Message

That's the subject we talked about in my last message – losing heart. Actually, we talked about not losing heart. 2 Corinthians 4 is Paul's testimony concerning his own mindset as he labored in the name of Jesus. "*Ministry is a battle,*" he says in 2 Corinthians 4!

- Ministry confronts us with the challenge of renouncing our own sin and changing the way we live (4:1-2).
- Ministry puts us face-to-face with people who refuse to hear our message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (4:3-6).
- And sometimes, as it did with Paul, ministry imposes physical and emotional hardships. Paul spoke of being "afflicted... perplexed... persecuted."

"But," he wrote in verses 13, 14 and 15. We possess a "spirit of faith." We know the power of God. We succeed by the grace of God. "Therefore," Paul says in verse 16...

¹⁶ ...we do not lose heart... [NASB]

To the contrary!

¹⁶ ...our inner man is being renewed day by day. [NASB]

We're getting stronger in our faith – even as our afflictions continue. We're becoming more certain of our message – even when we are perplexed by circumstances. We're becoming more confident that what we do will be good for the people around us – even as some of those people are trying to squeeze us out of their world. We're getting stronger... because we know, as verse 17 says, that...

¹⁷ ...momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison... [NASB]

And it's happening (verse 18)...

¹⁸ while we look not at the things which are seen (affliction, persecution, suffering), but at the things which are not seen (eternal glory); for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. [NASB]

I'm indebted to Adam Molstad for inspiring the chart I've printed on your sermon guide – "The Flow of Life for a Believer in Jesus as Described in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18." This chart is a good summary of what God does for us even in the midst of affliction. In fact, the passage tells us that God uses afflictions to accomplish good things – great things – glorious things! Our "momentary, light afflictions" produce "for us" an "eternal, weight(y) glory." And knowing this, "we do not lose heart."

That's a great message! 2 Corinthians 4. It's an encouraging message. We need not give up, so we do not give up. Several of you told me two weeks ago that this very passage has encouraged you during some of your hard times. Others told me you're in hard times right now, but you've been encouraged by this message. What an encouragement your story is to me! There's power in God's word, and we all need to be reminded of this!

Our Communication of This Message

How many other people might be encouraged if we would share with them the truth of how God is always renewing their inner man? What would happen if you and I not only applied this heart-strengthening message to our own souls, but also took it upon ourselves to do what Paul was doing in 2 Corinthians 4 – going to some effort to pass this good word on to somebody else? Paul did go to some effort to communicate this message. In today's culture, we think, "*How hard could it be to write a letter?*" My wife sits down at the computer every night and writes an email to our son in Japan, to our son in Chicago, to our daughter in Ames, knowing that those letters will arrive within seconds of being composed. But it wasn't quite so easy in the 1st century.

- First, it probably cost Paul some money to write this letter – not for postage, but for materials. I don't know if Paul wrote 2 Corinthians on papyrus (a paper like product) or on parchment, which was made from sheepskin, but both were expensive. I heard someone say recently that it might have cost Paul as much as \$60 by our monetary standards just for materials to write one letter. Is it worth \$60 to you to send one letter to one small group of believers? It was to Paul!
- But it took more than money to write this letter. Paul had to actually write the letter. And he couldn't just pick up a pen and start writing on that \$60 piece of sheepskin. He had to get a reed and split it to make a sharp-point. Then he had to mix some soot with a gummy plant material in order to make ink, so he could dip that reed into that home-made ink and start writing – not at 70 words per minute like we do on our keyboards, but probably more like 7 words per minute! Let's say Paul could write 7 words a minute. The Greek version of 2 Corinthians contains 3,336 words. At 7 words per minute, it would take just under 8 hours to write this letter, if he didn't pause to consider how to phrase his next thought! Is there a message that burns so deeply in you that you would spend 8 hours of your life spelling it out so that someone else could be encouraged like you are? Paul went to some effort to communicate this message!
- Then, after writing the letter, he had to somehow get the letter from where he was (in Philippi or Thessalonica on the far northern coast of the Aegean Sea) down to Corinth,

which is about 300 miles south in Greece. You could go by land down the rugged east coast of Greece. But before you start your journey, let me first take away your car, your motorcycle, your bicycle, and all possibilities of taking a bus. If you want to deliver this message, you'll have to walk it there. Or you might go by ship, for a fee of course. Or you could send your letter with a traveling merchant heading to Corinth. Better make it somebody you trust, though, or he might just take your money and throw away your letter. Paul had to work to get this message delivered to the Corinthians.

My point in all of this is to ask this question: How passionate are you about delivering an encouraging message to people who need it? Are you willing to put some money into the delivery of a message like this one? Are you willing to put some time and effort into the delivery of this message? Are you willing to send it as far away as it needs to be sent, by whatever means might get it there in a way that it can be heard? Paul was passionate about proclaiming all of the good news about life in Jesus Christ. That good news starts with the proclamation of being saved from your sin as you trust Christ to save you, but our good news doesn't end at the promise of salvation. There is so much more that needs to be said to those who are already trusting Christ. How passionate are you for getting all of the gospel to those who need to hear it?

A Call to Respond

Five weeks from tomorrow, four of us from Trinity will make our 3rd annual trek to Vladimir, Russia to minister to the hearts of six Wesleyan missionaries in Russia – seven counting Silas! I've introduced you to five of them already. Let me add Mandy Moran and Kerry Pickard to my picture. Our purpose in going will be to deliver – in bodily form – the message of 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 – that we need not lose heart. Given the tough task these men and women face in Russia, we want to bring to them a refreshing message – one that might enabled them to stay on that field as long as possible – especially now that the future of evangelical missionaries in Russia is something of a question mark.

I told you in my last message that Doug & Caroline Keiser and Tempa Haines are going with me to Vladimir. Ron & Diane Bremner have been there. Marlene Troyer has been there. Jeremy Good and Linda Klingman and my own Karen and others have been there. After this year there will have been 10 of us who have delivered a ministry of refreshment to the missionaries in Vladimir. But really, it's been more than 10 of us! Scores of you have helped deliver this message through your giving and through your organizing and that's the way it needs to be. I believe that God has given this ministry to our whole church – at least for a time. Here's how it came about

Five years ago, some friends of our from another church suggested that Karen and I look at the possibility of getting involved in an educational ministry in another part of the world. It was an intriguing thought to me, so one day – as I was driving across country on one of my trips to Annapolis, Maryland – I stopped into our headquarters in Indianapolis to speak with Scott Olsen. Scott was the Assistant Director of Global Partners at that time – the mission arm of the Wesleyan Church – and he listened to my thoughts, asked a few questions, and

then asked a more direct question. “*Have you ever thought about going to Russia?*” Well, not only had I thought about it, but I’d been there three years earlier and I was going back in a few months to teach at a seminary in Moscow. But Global Partners was looking for an experienced pastoral couple who could serve as mentors to a young staff in Vladimir and to a young group of Russian pastors.

I have to tell you, I was intrigued by that possibility. As I said in my last message, God had already opened my heart to the need for somebody to be more proactive in helping pastors take care of their own souls, and it wasn’t hard to see the same need on the mission field – probably even more urgent. So we pondered that possibility. However, it wasn’t the right time to do something like that, so Karen and I said no. Yet, I knew that I wanted to be part of a ministry of encouragement to pastors and missionaries. I just didn’t know what it would look like.

A year later, I was talking about this subject – again with Scott Olson – and sharing my unorganized ideas for developing a ministry to pastors, and he said, “*Would you consider doing that for missionaries?*” So I said, “*Tell me what you’re thinking.*” And he said, “*We have two places that I would love to see a church take on for the purpose of pastoral care. One is Haiti and the other is Russia.*” And that is the conversation which launched this ministry to our missionaries in Russia.

In each of the last two years, we’ve worked – as a church – to bring a life-giving encouragement and refreshment to some faithful laborers who work in a tough culture. Some of you have given time and money to help this trip happen, and I need you to help us again. We’ll have to go to some effort to do this. Tempa and the Keiser’s will be giving up vacation time. I’ll be taking on extra work in a season that really doesn’t need any more work. Marlene Troyer and others will be helping us gather some treats to take to our brothers and sisters in Vladimir. And all of us together will be spending \$10,000 on this trip. The 5-retreat we’re sponsoring doesn’t cost that much. It will cost about \$2800. But getting there will cost twice what the retreat costs! But how passionate are you about delivering an encouraging message to people who need it? Are you willing, like Paul, to put some money into the delivery of a message like this one? Are you willing, like Paul, to put some time and effort into the delivery of this message? Are you willing, like Paul, to send it as far away as it needs to be sent, by whatever means might get it there, so that it can be heard? Are you willing to do what you can do and to let God use you?

[Kid’s Choir – “Use Me”]

Conclusion

Can mere encouragement really make a difference? In 1854 Edward Kimball was teaching a Sunday School class of teenage boys. I’m guessing there were some discouraging moments in that work. One boy in particular could scarcely read or write. He knew almost nothing of the Bible. He once searched the Old Testament trying to find the Gospel of John! It would have been easy for Ed Kimball to be discouraged with that boy. I wonder if somebody

encouraged him. I know for certain that Kimball kept after the boy. He wanted that boy to know Christ. Here's how Kimball himself described his ministry to that boy on one particular day.

"I was determined to speak to him about Christ and about his soul, and started down to Holton's boot store." (That's where the boy worked.) "When I was nearly there I began to wonder whether I ought to go in just then during business hours. I thought my call might embarrass the boy, and... other clerks would... taunt him with my efforts in trying to make him a good boy." (You can hear the devil trying to discourage Kimball from talking to the boy.) He continues. "In the meantime I had passed the store, and, discovering this, I determined to make a dash for it, and have it over at once. I found him in the back part of the building wrapping up shoes. I went up to him at once, and putting my hand on his shoulder, I made what I felt afterwards was a very weak plea for Christ. I don't know just what words I used... I simply told him of Christ's love for him, and the love Christ wanted in return. That was all there was. It seemed the young man was just ready for the light that then broke upon him, and there in the back of that store... [the boy] D. L. Moody gave himself and his life to Christ."

D. L. Moody! The most famous evangelist of the 19th century. We cannot even count the number of people who can trace their spiritual heritage back to D. L. Moody. But you know what? Every one of them can also trace their spiritual heritage back to a Sunday School teacher – Edward Kimball, who shared Christ with a young D. L. Moody. But let's go back one step further. Every one of Moody's converts can also trace their heritage back to an unnamed man, an unidentified woman, who somewhere along the line came up to Edward Kimball – the Sunday School teacher – at a discouraging time and said to him, "Don't give up, Edward! We live by faith. We live with hope. We believe that what we're doing will be to the benefit of others. We do not lose heart!" I'll bet somebody said that to Edward Kimball – at sometime during his ministry – never knowing that his word of encouragement would result in the conversion of a D. L. Moody.

This is what we're trying to do in Russia – encourage the workers who are calling the people of Russia to Christ. We may never know on this side of glory what results from the ministry. The D. L. Moody of Russia might be waiting for one of these six people to press through whatever discouragement they might be feeling and to share Christ with him! How passionate are you about delivering a message that might bring this about?

Over the next few weeks, we will be receiving funds for this trip. You can write a check to Trinity Bible Church and put 'Russia' on it and it will get where it needs to go. Marlene Troyer will be gathering some supplies and goodies to take with us to the team in Russia. Feel free to contact her and as she gets information, she'll be happy to pass it on to you. Or how about adopting Brian and Cara and their team and putting them on your prayer list? That too is an excellent way to deliver an encouraging message.

"We Do Not Lose Heart" (part 2)

(a Scriptural context for Russia '08)

February 17, 2008

Today: An Application from 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Last Week's Message: "We Do Not Lose Heart"

Read or listen at www.cedarfallstrinity.org. Click on 'sermon archive.'

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

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

The Flow of Life for a Believer in Jesus As Described in 2 Corinthians 4:17*	
WHAT WE EXPERIENCE NOW	momentary ¹ light ² affliction ³
WHAT GOD PRODUCES FROM IT	eternal ⁴ weight(y) ⁵ <u>glory!</u> ⁶

¹ "Momentary" means it will eventually end.

² "Light" means "easy to bear." Matthew 11:30 uses the same word of Christ's yoke, which included some seemingly hard things to endure. The implication of 2 Corinthians is that human affliction can become much worse, a teaching which dovetails with Scriptural teachings about hell. Human afflictions in hell will not be "light."

³ "Affliction" is a circumstance we hope will end. (The good news about a believer's affliction is found in footnote #1.)

⁴ "Eternal" means it will never end!

⁵ To have "weight" means "to exist in a large amount."

⁶ "Glory" will be a circumstance we'll hope never to come to the end of! (The good news about a believer's "glory" is found in footnote #4.)

* My thanks to Adam Molstad for the observations which inspired this chart!