

Life is hard; few survive it. This morning we're going to talk about the struggles we experience in our day to day lives and what this means for our walk with God and one another.

OPENING PRAYER

2nd CORINTHIANS 4:16-18

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.

It's easy to be discouraged when things don't go our way, especially when they pile up. When I was sixteen, in one week I got beat-up by a bully at school, I got fired from my job, and I totaled my car. I was discouraged!

But St. Paul wrote, **"we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (v.16)**. I was decaying alright! We all face limitations, frustrations, and turbulent times. I'm sure we could go around, and we could each tell a story about our own perfect, bad week.

A couple weeks ago we talked about being **"jars of clay,"** about how we're nothing if we're not receptacles of God's grace. Paul drove the point home here as he compared the **"outer man,"** which is decaying and dying, to the **"inner man,"** which **"is being renewed day by day."**

The people who originally read Paul's letter probably had hopes for something better. After all the Holy Spirit was doing a marvelous work among them! They were speaking in tongues and prophesying; there were miraculous healings and a host of other signs and wonders. The people were awash with the gifts of the Spirit. What could possibly go wrong?

Pride. That's all it took. The original sin, which we also just talked about. It all began to come apart; decay set in.

But Paul wrote, **“the inner man is being renewed day by day.”** Paul himself suffered, so he was not minimizing the struggle. Rather, he put it into perspective as a child of God. That's everything, putting all of our experiences into perspective as children of God.

Paul wrote, **“For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (v.17).**

Let's break it down: **“momentary, light affliction”** and **“an eternal weight of glory.”** On the one hand, our physical suffering is **“momentary,”** or just for an instant, and it's **“light,”** or of little consequence. On the other hand, our spiritual rewards are **“eternal”** and weighty, that is, they are of great consequence.

How long is a person's life? When I was young I spent a lot of time with my Grandma Sally. When I six, she was in her 40s, and I thought she was ancient! She went on to live another 50-years! One of the last things she said to me was, “Richard, life is not as long as it seems to be when you're young like you. So get the most out of it.” I was already 50-something.

Looking back on my life it seems like just yesterday I had my first crush on Wendy in kindergarten, that my grandpa gave me my first driving lesson, that I was graduating from high school. The years pass quickly; they're like mist which dissipates as quickly as it forms.

As we live our years we are happy and we are sad; we have great joy and great disappointments; we experience success, and we're crushed by defeat. Life happens. Our bodies break down day by day, until that final day when we leave nothing behind but dust.

But Paul wrote that our **“momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory.”** **“Producing”**: What's happening in our day to day lives is creating in us hope for eternity, a vision for the things of God. Paul wrote that in midst of this life we live, **“our inner man is being renewed.”** Already we're living for eternity.

This is the Christian perspective, and it's a good reason to be a Christian, for without Christ, we have only today with all its sorrows. But the Christian does not focus on the present time. Rather, we fix our gaze on the glorious hope of the age to come. As we read in the letter to the Hebrews, we fix **“our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).**

Jesus saved us from death, but he also taught us how to suffer: He despised it, and on the third day he rose from the grave and declared his victory over death and the devil.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us imitate our Lord!

Later, St. Paul wrote to the church in Rome, **“we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:3-5).**

This means that when we suffer, we are not discouraged. Rather we double-down and we proclaim Christ is king! We don't lose hope, for we know we are being purified, and every day we're one step closer to looking into the eyes of God Almighty. Tribulation, perseverance, proven character, hope: What would we be without the Spirit of God who sustains us?

Paul wrote, **“we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (v.18).** The Christian's hope is not in earthly things but in that which is eternal. We know that so much of what we see and hear is rubbish and that if we give it too much attention it will only make us crazy, at best, or it'll drive us to drink, or worse!

In no way do I mean to disparage the beautiful things of our temporal lives in this temporal world, things like music and art, architecture and gardens. God has blessed us with the beauty of relationships one with another and with the glories

of nature. We breathe these things in, and we say thank you. But they are only temporary.

Behind these temporal happinesses, there in the back of our minds we remember the toil and frustration, the disappointment and the failure, the suffering. And this is where Paul's words come to bear, where the **"momentary, light affliction"** is only our training ground for **"an eternal weight of glory."** The suffering is **"light"** because the **"glory"** is so great! Temptation and sin are but pesky flies we swat away as we anticipate our heavenly home.

What can we do when we are hurting? We remember Jesus, and we pray, we sing melodies which lift up our hearts, and we meditate on his words. These spiritual disciplines bring us comfort.

But Paul also wrote earlier in this same letter, **"the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴...comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God"** (2nd Corinthians 1:3-4).

Jesus knew pain, and he knew death, and so he is able to minister to our bodies and to our souls. And he's given us the same ministry, to lift each other up in prayer, and with words of encouragement, and with acts of service.

This week let us consider our struggles, our suffering, and let us give thanks for them, for the Lord works through these experiences, drawing us ever closer to his heart.

This week let us use the grace we have received to minister one to another, lifting each other up in love.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.