

## Don't Lose Heart! (Part One)

Let's turn in our Bibles to 2 Cor. 4. We're not going to get through the entire chapter this morning, but let's read a large portion of the chapter so we get Paul's flow of thought.

*4 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. <sup>2</sup> Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. <sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.*

*<sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup> We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. <sup>11</sup> For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. <sup>12</sup> So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*

*Jump with me down to verse 16*

*<sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. **2 Cor. 4:1-12, 16-18 (NIV) (Pray)***

Paul opens and closes this chapter saying, we do not lose heart. I don't think he repeats that line, *we do not lose heart* because he's never been tempted to lose heart. Just the opposite, I think he repeats it because losing heart has been a very real temptation for him.

We know Paul as the guy who wrote most of the NT, planted churches around the world and changed history. His was a life well lived to the glory of God. Why would he ever struggle with losing heart?

The reason is Paul lived his life like we live ours: one day at a time. And on any given day churches that he had planted were struggling with sin and division. Relational tensions often boiled over and when things went wrong Paul was often the lightning rod for criticism and blame.

Paul watched people he loved and invested in walk away from the faith. He lived with constant betrayal and persecution. I think losing heart was a very real struggle sometimes for Paul. And it can be for us too.

The Greek word translated "to lose heart" means to grow weary, to give up. In context it means to get so disheartened we stop doing what God has called us to do.

At our last Thrive, Sharon Folkert prepared our youth for a community service project by having them quote Eph. 2:10 over and over again: *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Eph. 2:10 (ESV)*

We aren't saved by good works, but we are saved for good works! You are God's workmanship, handcrafted by God to do specific works He has planned out in advance for you to do. Opportunities God has tailor made for you to make an eternal difference. Wounded people God wants you to help heal. People God has put in your life to influence for Christ. You don't have to be a perfect, super Christian, you just need to be who God created you to be, and share Christ.

This week I listened as Paul and Monicah Mwangi shared about Paul's dad who passed away this week, and with tears in their eyes they shared how he made a difference for Christ in their lives. Yesterday in our men's meeting each of us shared about one person who had influenced us towards Christ. The people we mentioned were all normal, flawed people. They didn't do it perfectly. But God used them to move our hearts towards Christ.

God has a race specifically marked out for you to run, a good fight for you to fight. And it isn't the same as the person next to you. God has a unique plan for using your life for His glory.

Losing heart means we lose vision for being used by God. Losing heart sidelines us. Losing heart takes us out of the game. We just go through the motions but our heart's not in it. That's not how we want to live. That's not how God wants us to live.

So we're going to learn from a guy who had circumstances say over and over again "lose heart!" and over and over again he said, unh unh, we do NOT lose heart!! This message is called "Don't Lose Heart" and we start with this:

### **1. Don't lose heart – remember God's mercy!**

*Therefore since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart...*

The word *therefore* takes us back to chapter three. What he's about to say is built on what he just said. The Spirit of God set us free from the law, took away the veil, and transforms us from glory to glory as we behold the glory of our Lord Jesus. *Therefore!*

How did we qualify to get all this? By what we did? Because we earned it? Because we deserve it? No, no, and no. It's all God's mercy. Paul was hating Jesus and destroying Christians when Jesus called him. That's mercy. Paul never forgot he owed everything to God's mercy.

When we lose sight of God's mercy, we start to think it all depends on us. It depends on our efforts, our abilities, our faithfulness. We start to think we need to change people's lives. We need to win our children, our spouse, our friends for Christ. We need to bear good fruit for God. That's an exhausting way to live. Remember, the same Eph 2 that says God *created* us in Christ to accomplish good works, says that God is rich in mercy. The good works flow from God's rich mercy.

Don't lose heart – remember God's mercy!

## 2. Don't lose heart – be sincerely committed to God's truth!

Paul says since we have this ministry through God's mercy we don't lose heart. *Rather...* let's pause at that word rather. Rather means instead of. Rather than lose heart we do something else instead.

And what we might expect is an opposite emotion. Rather than lose heart, we take heart. We feel encouraged. Instinctively we think Paul is going to put the opposite emotion to losing heart there.

But he doesn't put an emotion in there. He puts an action in there: *Rather (than lose heart), we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.*

Rather than lose heart, we renounce all secret, shameful ways and distorting of God's word. Rather than lose heart and do those things, we set forth the truth plainly. Instead of losing heart I'm *doing* this. Action, not feeling.

There can be a temptation to tinker with God's word to make it more popular with the crowds. That's what's going on behind the scenes at Corinth: professional apostles were marketing the Bible to get bigger crowds. They pointed to themselves, their wisdom, their eloquence, their large crowds. And then they pointed to Paul and said, he's not much of an apostle. He's not eloquent, in fact he's a boring speaker. His letters are more impressive, but in person he's a real let down. Paul could have been tempted to tinker with God's word to make his ministry more crowd-friendly. That would have been losing heart. Instead of doing that – *rather* - he set forth the truth plainly, commending himself to people's conscience, but always in the sight of God. We need to love people but live for God's approval. If we get that backwards we start to live for people's approval, and that will lead to messing with God's truth.

Ironically, getting people to love and speak well of us at the expense of God's truth will leave our hearts cold and empty. Conversely, having people speak badly about us because we're speaking the truth boldly can bring joy to our hearts. Jesus said as much:

*"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matt. 5:11-12 (NIV)*

Don't lose heart – be sincerely committed to God's truth!

## 3. Don't lose heart – do the part God's given you to do!

*On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. <sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*

There is a paradox here: God created us to do good works but we can't do them. God gives us a ministry that we can't do. We tell people about Jesus – but no matter how persuasive we are, no matter how eloquent we are, they will remain blind. Satan has blinded their minds and their eyes so they cannot see the glory of Christ.

The Bible describes mankind's spiritual state apart from Christ as being blind, and being dead. No matter how persuasive we are we can't talk a dead person out of being dead or a blind person out of being blind. Can't be done.

When I walk into a dark room, I flip on the light switch. I don't create the light, I don't command electricity to flow. I just flip on the switch. But that part, combined with NYSEG's part, turns on the light.

God calls us to do our part: flip the light switch on. Speak the truth plainly. Preach Christ, not ourselves. We have a part to do, then God has a part to do.

If we think of losing heart as feeling discouraged and disheartened, some of us might think, that's not me. I feel great! But if we think of losing heart as losing vision for the good works God created us to do, we might realize, that IS me! I'm loving life, but a vision for gospel work isn't a part of it. We've stopped flipping the light switch. We've lost heart.

I've talked to more than one person who has shared that with all this COVID lockdown, they've gotten used to being isolated. Comfortable with it. It's hard for them to go out, they enjoy staying home. They've had to unplug from social interactions, and for some it may take some effort to plug back in again even when it is safe for them to do so.

The same is true for all of us when it comes to the good works God created us to. We can disconnect from sharing Jesus with our friends. We can lose heart for pointing our kids towards Jesus and the Bible, especially when they don't seem very open to it. We can totally stop seeing the people around us as needing to hear about the same grace and love and mercy that rescued us.

Once we unplug from the good work God has for us to do, it becomes easy for us to lose heart and have no vision for it.

That's why we need each other: to stir up one another up to love and good works. Grace, God has given us together a mission full of good works, but we can lose heart. My heart settles. Your heart settles. We lose heart. We lose vision. Then along comes a brother or a sister and they stir us up and get all that vision that's settled stirred up again! And sometimes we're the one stirring someone else's heart up. We need each other or we will lose heart. Notice Paul says, "we do not lose heart". He wasn't alone.

Don't lose heart – do the part God has given you to do!

#### **4. Don't lose heart – believe that God will do what only He can do!**

*<sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.*

This verse reaches back to Gen. 1 when God said, "let there be light". There was no light before then, light didn't exist. God called it into being with a word. When we preach Christ, that same God says, "let there be light" and the light of God's glory shines in once blind hearts. We can't do that, but God has chosen to do it in cooperation with our part. We share Jesus, He shines the light of His glory in a dead heart.

That's what happened to us when we came to Christ. We saw God's glory in Christ's glory. We saw God's worth in Christ's worth. We saw God's love in Christ's love. We saw God's forgiveness and acceptance in Christ's forgiveness and acceptance. And it was like light shining in a dark place.

CS Lewis once observed: *"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."* Let there be light!

Jesus is the light of the world. And he's told us, let your light (the only light we have is reflecting Jesus!) so shine that men see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Have you lost heart? Don't search your emotions. Look at your actions. Have you lost a vision for the good works God created you to do? Have you unplugged from the gospel mission?

Or maybe you have a ton of heart, a ton of vision. You're sharing Jesus every chance you get. You're influencing people towards the kingdom every chance you get.

Either way, we need each other. Sometimes you'll be the one who needs to be stirred up, sometimes you'll be the one who stirs up someone else to love and good works.

Paul has more to say on this that we'll look at next week...

### **Call band back up**

Let's not be sidelined, Grace Community. Let's not lose sight of why God put us together. And let's believe God will do what only God can do as we do our part. Don't lose heart...

- Remember God's mercy!
- Be sincerely committed to God's word!
- Do the part God's created us to do!
- Believe God to do the part only He can do!