

## How to Avoid Losing Heart as Your Body Falls Apart

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8

June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Big idea: We can avoid losing heart in physical suffering by looking through our immediate suffering to glory that awaits on the other side of death.

Intro –

Last week we began a series on death, dying, and what happens next.

I started this series by unpacking the prayer request in Psalm 39 – Make me to know my end, make me to know the extent of my days.

When we know our end, we can prepare for it and we can live differently now.

Many people say, “I’m not afraid of death but I am afraid of dying.” They are afraid of their bodies breaking down and falling apart. They are afraid of the pain and suffering that inevitably comes with age.

Many in our body are living that experience of suffering right now – cancer, paralysis, debilitating back pain, long term effects from a stroke, heart attack, decreased lung capacity, joint pain, and more.

Many are currently living with chronic pain or fear that they will. Living with chronic pain has a way of sucking the joy from life.

Harvard Law Professor and Christian William Stuntz who died of colon cancer in 2011:

“Living with chronic pain is like having an alarm clock taped to your ear with the volume turned up—and you can’t turn it down. You can’t run from it; the pain goes where you go and stays where you stay. Chronic pain is the unwelcome guest who will not leave when the party is over.”

How can we avoid losing heart when our bodies are falling apart?

Whether the decline is slow and steady or sudden and catastrophic, we will all experience the decline of our health. We may all be tempted to lose heart. This passage describes this process and tells us how we can avoid losing heart.

To lose heart is to become discouraged, weary, disheartened; disillusioned with God and His goodness.

It’s easy to happen, whether because of the physical hardships mentioned above, or other hard edges of a broken world – racism, unwanted divorce, betrayal, loneliness, unfair biases against your profession, and many more.

There are reasons leading up to v 16 that Paul gives for not being disheartened –

v. 1 – we’ve received mercy and a ministry from God

v. 5 – we preach Christ and focus on Christ, not ourselves

v. 7 – recognize the treasure is the gospel and we are just earthen vessels

v. 14 – we can be confident in the resurrection

But I want to focus on the reasons that come after v. 16 because they apply not just to suffering for the gospel but suffering as our bodies break down.

1. Focus on what God is doing **inside** you rather than what is happening to your **body** (4:16)
  - a. Our outer man is decaying
    - i. We deal with physical sickness, disease, deformities, and accidents from our conception and they only increase with age. Everyone experiences them and yet some people seem to bear an especially large load.

- ii. From the Christian worldview, all of this pain and suffering originated with sin.
  - 1. Not that particular suffering is linked to a particular sin – like some type of karma – but that suffering entered the world because sin entered the world.
- iii. Ecclesiastes describes this very poetically
  - 1. **Ecclesiastes 12:1-4** Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them"; <sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain; <sup>3</sup> in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim; <sup>4</sup> and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.
  - 2. <sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain;
    - a. We think of youth as a time of dawning light, old age as the time of twilight's gloom (Mac)
  - 3. <sup>3</sup> in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop,
    - a. As people age often their arms begin to tremble and their backs bend over
  - 4. the grinding ones stand idle because they are few,
    - a. teeth – they are missing! They are few!
  - 5. and those who look through windows grow dim;
    - a. eyes
  - 6. <sup>4</sup> and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low,
    - a. Doors – mouth is closed without much to say
    - b. The grinders aren't very active
  - 7. and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.
    - a. Unable to sleep in the morning as the sound of a board wakes them up
- b. Yet for the believer, there is an inner work in the heart that God can accomplish even as -and in some cases, because of – our bodies breaking down.
  - i. Day by day, continually, He can renew and give spiritual life.
  - ii. Renewal is happening in the inner man – the heart, the control center
  - iii. The inner man is being strengthened and renewed by the Holy Spirit as He uses His Word.
  - iv. He is renewing us as our bodies fail – we are “being renewed,” but the Lord Himself is doing the work of renewal.
    - 1. Jesus, who is gentle and lowly, whose yoke is light, continues to walk with us in our suffering and renew our hearts.
    - 2. We may pray, “Lord, my body hurts. Renew my heart that I might not lose heart.”
- c. My first experience with suffering and how God used it to work in my life.
  - i. Junior year of high school. I had played on the school basketball team my first two years of HS, but I was pretty mediocre. The summer before my jr year my friends and I lived on the basketball court just down the road from our house. It was built by a family whose kids were now grown and they invited kids from the community to play on it anytime they wanted, day or

night, so we took them up on it. I couldn't wait for the season to come around. I had some early success once the season started and the coach could tell I had improved, but then I had a minor knee injury. I was able to keep playing, but I limped to compensate. That limping led to a stress fracture in one of the vertebrae in my back. The pain from that led me to miss the rest of the season and it's led to 24 years of off and on back pain. To a HS kid, missing 1 out of the only 4 years of a sport available felt like a big deal. But, God was doing something at the same time. It was that fall that I trusted Christ. He used this experience to focus my attention on Him.

- d. What can God do internally as our bodies suffer externally?
  - i. Draw our attention to the ugliness of sin and its effects.
  - ii. Expose our inability to control life.
    - 1. **Job 1:21b** The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."
  - iii. Reveals our dependence – on people and on God.
    - 1. One man described how his father grew up during the great depression. He was powerful and independent all his life until he got older. His strength faded and he finally asked for help from others, first from his adult son and then from God.
  - iv. Produce gentleness and humility.
- 2. Focus on what is **lasting** rather than what is **momentary** (4:17)
  - a. Our affliction is real but it is momentary and light by comparison.
    - i. Compared to eternity it is brief.
    - ii. Why do you go to the dentist? Why do you sit, vulnerable in a chair while someone sticks sharp objects in your mouth and scrapes your teeth? It's awful! But it's brief compared to the next 6 months before you next appt. It's awful but you make it through because you know it's brief.
    - iii. Something is only "light" or "brief" in comparison –
      - 1. Is 20 lbs heavy? Depends if you're talking about a newborn baby or a barbell.
      - 2. A 4-year degree is brief compared to a 40-year profession.
  - b. Paul's own suffering was significant, so this isn't coming from someone who is out of touch.
    - i. In 1 Corinthians 4 he describes being hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, homeless, and reviled. In 2 Corinthians 1 he talks about being so burdened he despaired even of life. Chapter 6 describes beatings, imprisonments, sleeplessness, and hunger. (1 Cor. 4:11-13; 2 Cor. 1:8-10; 4:8-9; 6:4-5)
  - c. It's not merely that the affliction is short and light compared to eternity, but that in some way God is using the light and momentary affliction to produce something in us – a weight of glory far beyond comparison.
    - i. There is a casual connection between how we endure hardship now and the glory we will enjoy.
- 3. Focus on what is **unseen** and eternal rather than what is **seen** and temporal (4:18)
  - a. It's easier to see the suffering – the test results, the weight loss or gain, the cancelled plans, the missed events.
  - b. But there are things that are unseen that we look ahead to and are lasting.
    - i. What are the things that are lasting? That are eternal?
      - 1. The Triune God, His Word, people.
      - 2. Are we living for those things – the things that will last? Are we looking
    - ii. The enjoyment of heaven with Christ now and the new earth later.

- iii. Freedom from the very experience of sin.
    - iv. No more death, mourning, pain. No more injustice.
    - v. The very presence of the Lord with us, seen with our own eyes.
  - c. Randy Alcorn on Darrell Scott whose daughter was murdered at Columbine – most people are “look atters” we should learn to become “see throughers”
    - i. In other words, most people look at their present suffering and that’s all they can see. We need to learn to see through them to the greater joy that awaits us with Christ.
    - ii. In the hall of faith in Hebrews 11, the believers are described as longing for a better country (Heb 11:16).
    - iii. In Colossians 3:1, we are told to set our hearts on things above.
    - iv. It’s hard to look forward to or set our hearts on things that we can’t picture, like the young boy who was sad when they got to Yellowstone because he thought they were going to Cold Stone.
    - v. Would your kids be excited if you told them you were taking them to Disneyland? It would depend on whether they have a concept of what Disneyland is – can they picture it? Have they thought about it?
      - 1. That’s my plan for next week – answering the question, “what is heaven like? Where does the believer go now if he or she dies?”
  - d. If we look at the stuff that is seen, we won’t find what we need to endure without losing heart, even if they are neutral things that aren’t good or bad – success at work, a nicer home, better car.
    - i. **Matthew 6:19-21** "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.<sup>20</sup> "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; <sup>21</sup> for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
  - e. Focusing on what is unseen and eternal requires faith by its very definition.
    - i. **Romans 8:24-25** For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.
4. Look ahead to your permanent home that will replace this earthly tent (5:1-4)
- a. Our present bodies are like earthly tents that will be replaced by a permanent home.
    - i. God has made people as unified beings, body and soul, both united. But our current bodies are like tents – they are temporary.
    - ii. Camping is great. I love camping. I like to stay in a tent. But I wouldn’t want to live in a tent.
      - 1. Like one comedian said when his wife brought up that camping is a tradition in her family. “It was a tradition in everybody’s family until we came up with the house.”
  - b. John Johnson – God is preparing us for glory but gradually unpreparing us for this life.
    - i. Life gets harder. Mobility decreases. Pain increases. We can respond with bitterness or we can allow those things to pry our hands loose from their hold on this life and begin to reach ahead to life with Him.
  - c. It describes us as “groaning” in our present bodies.
    - i. That’s not talking about the way you groan when you get out of a chair – but the general sense of groaning with dissatisfaction with this life – disappointments, pain, frustrations, weariness, the continual onslaught of sin from within and without.
  - d. Our permanent home will be a resurrected body.

- i. **1 Corinthians 15:42-44** So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*; <sup>43</sup> it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup> it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*.

5. Anticipate your future with the **Lord** (5:5-8)

- a. God Himself is the one who is preparing us for this purpose – to be with Him in future glory, covered in a resurrected, glorified body, no longer weighed down by the presence and consequences of sin.
- b. The Lord is with us even now – there is nowhere that He is absent and He draws relationally near to those who are his own.
- c. But there is still a sense in which we are seeing Him through the eyes of faith. When we're absent from the body, we'll be present with Him though in a way that we are not now and cannot be now.

6. Conclusion

- a. Notice the contrasts throughout this passage:

4:16	Outer man	Inner man
4:16	Decaying	Being renewed
4:17	Momentary, light affliction	Eternal weight of glory
4:18	Things seen	Things unseen
4:18	Temporal	Eternal
5:1	Earthly tent	Building from God
5:6	Home in the body	Absent from the Lord
5:8	Absent from the body	Home with the Lord



1

William Stuntz: "Living with chronic pain is like having an alarm clock taped to your ear with the volume turned up—and you can't turn it down. You can't run from it; the pain goes where you go and stays where you stay. Chronic pain is the unwelcome guest who will not leave when the party is over."

2

1. Focus on what God is doing **inside** you rather than what is happening to your **body** (4:16)

3

**Ecclesiastes 12:1-4** Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them";  
<sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain;

4

**Ecclesiastes 12:1-4** <sup>3</sup> in the day that the **watchmen of the house tremble**, and mighty men stoop, the **grinding ones stand idle** because they are few, and those who look through **windows** grow dim; <sup>4</sup> and the **doors on the street are shut** as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will **arise at the sound of the bird**, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.

5

**Job 1:21b** The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."

6

2. Focus on what is **lasting** rather than what is **momentary** (4:17)

7

3. Focus on what is **unseen** and eternal rather than what is **seen** and temporal (4:18)

8

**Matthew 6:19-21** "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.<sup>20</sup> "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; <sup>21</sup> for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

9

**Romans 8:24-25** For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

10

4. Look ahead to your permanent home that will replace this earthly tent (5:1-4)

11

**1 Corinthians 15:42-44** So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*; <sup>43</sup> it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup> it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*.

12

## 5. Anticipate your future with the Lord (5:5-8)

13

4:16	Outer man	Inner man
4:16	Decaying	Being renewed
4:17	Momentary, light affliction	Eternal weight of glory
4:18	Things seen	Things unseen
5:1	Earthly tent	Building from God

14

5:6	Home in the body	Absent from the Lord
5:8	Absent from the body	Home with the Lord

15