

“Why We Do Not Lose Heart”

2 Cor 4:16-18

March 29, 2026

Despite the best scientific advances, we can't control how long we live. Job 14:5 says that our sovereign Creator has determined the number of days each of us has on earth. Aging can be discouraging, especially for those who believe this life is all there is. In Paul's day, the Greco-Roman culture viewed aging with despair. Greek poet Aeschylus said bluntly, "There is death once and for all and there is no resurrection." – aren't you excited about this sermon now?

Considering Paul's age when he wrote 2 Corinthians (probably mid-50s), and the persecution and physical torment he suffered for Christ, it's remarkable that he began today's passage with ***“Therefore we do not lose heart”***! As Pastor John Marc shared last week, Paul's life may have looked like a failure from the outside, but he knew that the life of Jesus becomes visible to others through suffering. Paul was ***“constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake”*** (v.11), but he was driven by the hope that ***“He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus”*** (v14). Let's learn how our lives can bring glory to God in the midst of affliction as we read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

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.

Danelle and I recently watched a documentary on the history of Disneyland. The concept came to Walt Disney while taking his daughters to the park on weekends. He saw how much they enjoyed playgrounds, but wanted to give them something more exciting. Walt Disney took a huge risk when developing Disneyland, struggling to convince investors and his brother (and business partner) Roy that people would *pay* to come to an amusement park – this was a new concept! For years, Disneyland existed only in Walt Disney's mind. He made drawings and hired artists, but ultimately the success or failure of the park rested on his shoulders. When costs ran *way* over budget, Disney even borrowed against his personal life insurance policy to complete construction. Walt Disney suffered from anxiety, lack of sleep, and numerous rejections in pursuit of his dream of building Disneyland. The point is that he tenaciously pursued this goal based on the *hope* that it would one day come to pass and be worth his many sacrifices.

In today's passage, Paul tells us to place our hope in three essential spiritual realities, especially when we experience affliction –

Main Point: In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Paul uses three contrasts to teach us the value of essential spiritual realities so that we will not lose heart when experiencing affliction.

1. Inner Renewal Overcomes Outward Decline (16)

2. Future Glory Overcomes Present Affliction (17)

3. God's Kingdom Overcomes This Passing World (18)

I pray we will take to heart Paul's encouragement not to place our hope in this decaying, afflicted, passing world, but in the renewing, glory-producing work of the Holy Spirit, Who conforms us to the image of Jesus Christ so that our lives will bring glory to God! Paul's first contrast reveals that:

I. Inner Renewal Overcomes Outward Decline (v16)

Paul begins verse 16 with ***“Therefore we do not lose heart,”*** but what does “Therefore” refer back to? Earlier in chapter 4, Paul said believers are *afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down* – but *not* crushed, despairing, forsaken, or destroyed. Why? Because as Pastor John Marc said, God deliberately chooses to use weak people so that *His* power will be clearly seen working in and through them!

God has chosen fragile vessels like us to reveal the light of the Gospel – that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, Who came from heaven to save sinners! Christians carry this treasure in *“jars of clay”* to make it clear to everyone that God alone can transform lives.

Paul says in Romans 1:16 that this Gospel Treasure ***“is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”***

After his *“Therefore,”* Paul's first contrast explains how Christians can serve the Lord with great hope despite their afflictions and the impact of aging -

Verse 16 says, ***“but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.”*** A literal translation is: ***“But even if our outward man is being destroyed, but our inner man is being renewed day by day.”***

Even as our earthly bodies march toward the grave, God is transforming our “inner man” to be like Christ daily, and we have the certain promise of receiving a resurrection body when He returns! Colossians 3:4 says, ***“When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”***

When Paul contrasts the “*outer man*” and “*inner man*,” he isn’t speaking of two separate entities, “the body” and “the soul” – he’s referring to human existence from two different *viewpoints*. The “outer man” is a whole person in his “creaturely mortality” - the *earthly man*. The “inner man” is also a whole person, but he is a “new creature” in Christ (2 Cor 5:17) - the *eternal man*. Colossians 3:10 describes this as the “***new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.***”

The Corinthian Church tended to evaluate people (including Paul) from an *outward* perspective. Many do this today: how often do people who are *unremarkable* in the world’s eyes become popular? Paul acknowledges in 2 Cor. 5:16 that he himself once viewed Jesus from a worldly perspective, but that dramatically changed when he encountered Christ on the road to Damascus!

Paul knew that his battered physical condition caused some to question whether he could be an effective Apostle, but their judgement was based on a misunderstanding of what makes a faithful servant in God’s eyes. Paul knew that while a Christian’s earthly “shell” is decaying and dying, their inner self is steadily being conformed to the image of Jesus. This inner transformation far outweighs our outer decay! As Steven explained when preaching on 2 Cor. 3:18, this inner renewal takes place as we “behold” the Lord - as we walk closely with Jesus while the Holy Spirit transforms us “***into the same image from glory to glory.***”

Danelle has been sorting family pictures, which is fun. One of the things we (and our kids) laugh about is how I used to have long hair – yes, I even sported a mullet for several years! But as they say, “hair today, gone tomorrow!” There’s something else I’m missing from my youth - here’s a hint: can you guess what sports award I won in the 4th grade...shot put! Yes, I am now missing some *muscles* that I used to have!

If you had seen my “outer man” in younger years, you would also have observed that I had a temper, was argumentative, swore, and frequently told lies. Since becoming a Christian, those sinful outer traits are gradually dying as Jesus renews and changes my “inner man.” This is also true for *you* if you are a Christian! God is sanctifying you - He promises that “***He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus***” (Phil. 1:6).

So, how do you pursue the renewal of your inner man while your outer man is decaying? By establishing biblical *priorities* and *perspectives*. First, you make reading God’s Word the #1 priority of your day – don’t let *anything* push it aside! Don’t check your email first – you might get sucked in and never come back to the Bible! Second, meditating on Scripture puts everything in *perspective* and reminds you that your hope is not in this life; it’s in your future life – which has already begun – with Jesus Christ!

Reading Colossians 3:1-4 reminds you to **“set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth,”** because **“you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”** Romans 8:38-39 encourages you that no person or power in the universe can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

NOTE: Only you can resolve to nurture the growth of your inner man, because it is *invisible* to everyone else...except God. 1 Sam. 16:7 says, **“man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”** Ultimately, we pursue spiritual growth so that whatever we do, we **“do all to the glory of God”** (1 Cor. 10:31).

After teaching us to value the daily inner renewal God is accomplishing *despite* our physical decline, Paul’s next contrast teaches that:

II. Future Glory Overcomes Present Affliction (v17)

He says: ***For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.***

Let’s first consider some afflictions that Paul suffered for the sake of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 11:24-27, he notes that:

- Five times he received “forty lashes less one.” [designed to *almost* kill...a cruel Roman punishment]
- Three times he was beaten with rods. [similar to being caned; *extremely* painful]
- Once he was stoned. [dragged out of the city of Lystra and thought to be dead – how severe do you think this was if Paul appeared to be dead?]
- Three times he was shipwrecked, also adrift for a night and day at sea.
- He suffered many sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, and nearly constant danger from numerous enemies and the natural elements.

This is the Paul who tells us to see our afflictions as “momentary” and “light”!

Paul says our earthly affliction is **“momentary,”** or **“short-lived.”**

A.W. Pink wrote: *“O that God would enable us to examine our trials in their true perspective. Should our afflictions continue throughout a whole lifetime, and that life be equal in duration to Methuselah’s (969 years), yet is it momentary compared with the eternity before us!”*

Paul also calls our affliction **“light.”** The Greek word, *elaphros*, means “easy to bear.” It’s the same word Jesus used when inviting those who are weary and heavy-laden to come to Him for rest (Matthew 11:30). He said:

“For my yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Burdens and afflictions are light *in contrast* to what they produce: a close relationship with Jesus, and eternal glory!

So why does Paul say that momentary, light affliction ***is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison?***

First, it does *not* mean that suffering for Christ earns us a place in heaven. Scripture is clear that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone, *not* by works (Eph. 2:8-9).

The phrase ***“Is producing for us”*** is in the present tense, meaning this is an *ongoing process*, and the use of the passive voice indicates that *God* is the One producing the glory, not us. The glory is not compensation for our affliction – God graciously causes future glory to *grow out* of our present suffering for Christ.

David Garland says: *“Implicit in this verse is Paul’s belief that God is working through our affliction, not despite it, to bring about an eternal abundance of glory in us.”*

So, what is the ***“weight”*** of glory? Back in 2 Cor. 1:8, Paul said he was ***“burdened excessively”*** in Asia, beyond his strength. The word for “burdened” or “weighed down,” comes from the same root as *“weight of glory.”* Paul uses the same words to communicate that the affliction which once felt like a deadly weight around his neck now seems *weightless* compared to the *immeasurable* glory the Lord is preparing for him.

Scottish pastor James MacKnight said:

“It is hardly possible to express the force of this passage as it stands in the original. Nothing greater can be said or imagined. The apostle, about to describe the happiness of the righteous in heaven takes fire [he “gets fired up”]. He calls it not glory, merely, but a weight of glory, in opposition to the light thing of our affliction, and an eternal weight of glory, in opposition to the momentary duration of our affliction, and a most exceeding eternal weight of glory, as beyond comparison greater than all the dazzling glories of riches, fame, power, pleasure, or than anything that can be possessed in the present life!”

Paul uses much hyperbole to stress that our present trials are *minuscule* compared to the glory we will experience eternally in God’s presence!

At the 1976 Summer Olympics, Japanese gymnast Fujimoto Shun seriously injured his kneecap during a tumbling run, causing tremendous pain. His team had won gold in the four previous Olympics, so he was not prepared to sacrifice the glory of Japan. Shun did not reveal his injury to teammates or coaches, and competed in the pommel horse and ring exercises; events where further injury was guaranteed. Fujimoto scored an impressive 9.5 on the pommel horse and a phenomenal 9.7 on the rings, dismounting from eight feet above ground and maintaining balance on the dismount. The dismount further damaged his kneecap and ligaments in his right leg. Fujimoto later said: *“We wanted to preserve Japanese gymnastic history, so it wasn’t pressure.”* He chose to view his affliction as momentary and

light compared to the glory awaiting his team as they won their fifth consecutive Olympic gold!

But how should we be motivated by future glory to endure affliction?

We memorize key Scriptures to cultivate this eternal perspective -

2 Corinthians 4:17 reminds us that all afflictions are *momentary* in light of eternity. Romans 8:28-29 reminds us that **“God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”** This includes *afflictions*, which cause us to be: **“conformed to the image of His Son.”** And Romans 5:3-4 reminds us that: **“tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.”** One commentator says earthly afflictions prepare us for eternal glory by: *“Weaning us from the world, purifying our hearts, causing us to look to God for consolation and support in our trials, and inducing us to contemplate the glories of the heavenly world.”*

After instructing us to count present afflictions as *momentary* and *light* compared to the future glory they are producing, Paul’s third contrast teaches that:

III. God’s Kingdom Overcomes This Passing World (18)

He says: **“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.”**

Wrapping up his 3-verse exhortation, Paul prescribes how to avoid losing heart and put affliction in proper perspective. We have to stop *fixating* on our physical decline and the trials we experience, instead using eyes of faith to look at eternal spiritual realities. Paul’s word for “look” (*skopeo*, related to “scope”) means “to observe,” “to notice carefully,” “to pay attention to” or “to contemplate.” The idea is to keep a watchful eye on something, continuously thinking about it. In other words, Paul is telling us to fix our attention on heavenly realities with great *interest* and *desire*.

This supersedes human vision; it conveys the idea of regarding something as *profoundly* important. In Colossians 3, Paul says, **“set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”** Why? Because we have died and our lives are hidden with Christ in God. And what is our future hope? Verse 4 says: **“When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”**

The foundational spiritual reality to focus on is the resurrection of Jesus Christ! David Garland says, *“Paul’s supreme confidence in God’s promise and God’s power rips away the*

veil of suffering and tears that otherwise would blind him to the glorious heavenly existence that comes after death.” In Philippians 3:18-20, Paul says unlike enemies of the cross of Christ, **“who set their minds on earthly things,”** a believer’s **“citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

In 1 Corinthians 15:20, Paul gives powerful encouragement that **“Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep!”** And in 2 Corinthians 5:4, he states that **“what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.”** The resurrection of Jesus and the promise that **“He Who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies”** (Rom. 8:11) is how Paul is able to say: **“Therefore we do not lose heart”!**

Kent Hughes writes, *“Everything we see with our eyes is temporary. There is nothing we can look at that is not transient, from the possessions we own to earth itself to the farthest star to the tiniest microbe.”*

But the *unseen* is eternal – God Himself, the souls of all human beings, the promises God has yet to fulfill, and Heaven itself. These are the things we must choose to “look at,” “pay attention to,” and “contemplate”! If we fail to look at unseen heavenly realities, we will be overcome with discouragement, doubt and feelings of defeat when we encounter affliction!

In 2 Kings 6:8-23, the prophet Elisha had been secretly warning Israel’s King about the King of Aram’s intention to ambush him. When the Aramean king discovered Elisha was a spy, he surrounded him with horses, chariots, and a huge army. Elisha’s servant was terrified of this army, but Elisha told him not to fear, saying: **“those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”** Then he prayed for God to open his servant’s eyes, and the Lord revealed the *unseen* reality that **“the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”**

Elisha wasn’t exercising wishful thinking. By faith he saw what could not be perceived by his senses alone. Heaven’s horses and chariots of fire were actually there!

Unless we take Paul’s advice and look with spiritual eyes at the unseen realities of God’s Word *daily*, we will lose heart! But how do we do this practically? Here are two suggestions:

1) We must stop being preoccupied with things that tempt us to *cling* to this life.

What this looks like varies from person to person. For example, you might watch TV shows or read books that make you so covetous of worldly things that you become unhappy with your job or marriage. Or maybe you listen to podcasts on health that feed your fear of getting sick or dying. The truth is that it’s hard not to be preoccupied with this life; it’s the only one

we can currently *see* and *touch*! But over and over, Scripture urges us to focus on God's Kingdom, which lasts forever. For example, Jesus says in Matthew 6:20-21:

“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

We instinctively (and experientially) know that nothing in this world will last. That's why we lose heart after putting our hope in fleeting things. But Paul began this passage with ***“Therefore we do NOT lose heart...”*** (vs 16), so clearly there is a way to overcome the despair that focusing on this world brings. When we “put off” our obsession with earthly things, this is what to “put on”:

2) We must intently study unseen eternal realities.

This can't be an occasional glance. Remember the word “look” means to *pay attention* to something with *great concentration*. To develop an eternal perspective requires effort! Here are four quick suggestions:

a) Study God's Word daily. Paul told Timothy, ***“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth”*** (2 Tim. 2:15)

b) Meditate on the hope of the Gospel daily – if you have received forgiveness and the gift of eternal life through repentance and faith in Christ, the Gospel is your *source of hope*! 1 Peter 1:13 says: ***“Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*** ***(share the Gospel – John 3:16, 1 Peter 2:24)

c) Pursue holiness as you anticipate Christ's return. The Apostle John wrote: ***“We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”*** (1 Jn 3:2-3)

d) Share the hope of the Gospel every chance you get! (1 Pet. 3:15) – The greatest spiritual reality we can share is that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again on our behalf (1 Cor 15:3-4). As Pastor John Marc said last week: ***“God places the priceless treasure of the gospel in weak servants, sustains them through suffering, and uses their faithful proclamation”*** to bring others to Christ and bring glory to God.

Walt Disney pictured a “Magic Kingdom” in his mind's eye, but as exciting as Disneyland is, it will one day crumble and return to dust. God's Word fills us with *eternal hope* as we look for His coming Kingdom. When we focus on inner spiritual renewal *not* outward decline, on

future glory *not* present momentary affliction, and on God's glorious kingdom *not* this passing world, we will not lose heart. Instead, we will look for Christ's appearing and joyfully live for His glory in the present! Please pray with me.

Benediction: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 – *“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.”*