

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8 Adopting an Eternal Perspective

Summary: Paul did not lose heart in difficult times because he was absolutely convinced that the internal and eternal aspects of life are better than the external and immediate.

This morning as we jump into Scripture, we discover perspective is a pain-reliever. Yes, we learn that perspective is practically a pharmaceutical. What am I saying? Simply this: the pain you experience is greatly affected by the purpose you see it playing.

One great example is childbirth. Even Jesus pointed to the power of the illustration, that pregnancy and childbirth are full of discomfort, pain, even agony at times. Now, today we often use an epidural or other medications to reduce that pain, but from the beginning of time, and all around the world, billions of mothers have endured the full pain and struggle of childbirth soothed only by the hope of holding in their arms the child they carried in their belly.

Perspective made the difference.

So too with athletes – champions feel pain. They feel the cramping of their muscles, the stabbing in their lungs. They hear that voice inside saying it's time to pull back or take a breather, but they shut it out, they dig deeper, they press on, *because* they know the victory they want lies on the other side of the pain.

And in the realm of personal finance, one of the core principles that differentiates you from the government is you can't just print more money when you need it or raise taxes, you have to tell something no in order to tell something else yes. And for years there has been this growing FIRE movement online which stands for Financial Independence Retire Early - with whole online communities coaching people how to cut costs now *so that* they can retire early.

In each of these situations, the mother giving birth, the athlete pressing through the pain, the person cutting their expenses – someone is *choosing* to accept discomfort now because they're convinced it will help them see something better later. Their pain today is being relieved by their perspective on tomorrow.

Paul says the exact same principle applies to all of life.

We've been reading his letter to the church in Corinth, a city in the country of

Greece, and for several weeks now we've heard him talking about how hard life has been, what difficulties they have been through, it was so bad at one point, he wasn't sure they were going to make it. But through it all he's had this positive outlook – he's not grumbling, complaining, or whining. Why? Because, he has an eternal perspective and that makes all the difference. Read with me and notice what he says:

Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

We're going to keep going in just a minute, but you can already see the theme he's developing – he says yes, my life hurts – outwardly it looks like we're **perishing**, we're certainly being **afflicted**, but it's all temporary, and it's nothing compared to what God has in store for us in heaven for eternity. You see he has a different perspective on current events.

Watch as he continues to develop the thought and pay particular attention here to his certainty and conviction, notice how confident he is:

2 Cor 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, 3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 4 For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

6 So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 7 For we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Here's what I hope to help you see today: the Christian life is built upon the belief that things will be better forever with God in heaven, even if things are really rough today down here on earth. In other words, perspective matters.

One of the biggest movies at the box office recently is the latest Marvel release – Doctor Strange and Multiverse of Madness – based on the idea that there are other dimensions, parallel realities, and parallel universes and sometimes they have

profound effects on our lives. In fact, the entire Marvel Cinematic Universe is based on this idea – that there are things happening out there, outside our daily lives, that have a tremendous effect here and now and that even explain why things are the way they are.

Well, that's all entertainment and fantasy, but it touches on something true – there is something out there, something bigger than any of us, something that existed before any of us and will carry on forever – eternity. It's real and we're headed there.

Paul says he went through very difficult times in his life and ministry, and yet he did **not lose heart** *because* he was absolutely convinced that the internal and eternal aspects of life are better than the external and immediate. And, by the way, we can begin to experience them today.

Let's look at what he says.

First, I need you to notice, Paul is very honest about his present situation. He says **our outward man is perishing**. He's a realist. Paul doesn't deny reality. Life is hard. Pain is real. Ask the woman in labor: is she tired? Does it hurt? Is she questioning her decision? Yes, yes, and yes. But, she's holding on, pressing through, *because* she believes in the outcome. Ask the athlete, is he really sore, really tired, is it really that hard, and he'll tell you: yes, but he's not going home without the win, the record or the trophy, so he presses on.

Christian, you have to know this because it affects how you endure difficulty in life. If you think what Paul was going through wasn't really that big of a deal, then when something hard comes into your life, you'll be able to give yourself an excuse – you'll be able to say, yeah, but my situation is different, my situation is worse. My situation is more difficult.

But that's not true – there's no difficulty you face that is categorically new, no one has ever experienced something that bad before. We all share common pain, common setbacks, common disappointments – *and that's meant to be good news*, it's meant to let you know you're not the only one – you can reach out and talk to people who know what you're going through.

So notice, Paul doesn't gloss over his pain, he addresses it. It's there and it's real, brutally real in fact. And, as we mentioned last week, he experienced all of this pain, all of this opposition, all of this mistreatment and injustice and disappointing outcomes *while serving God*. He was right smack dab in the middle of God's will, doing the right thing, the right way, at the right time, and this was the result. Christian, don't miss that.

Christians in the West have been influenced by this spiritually toxic idea that if you

just do everything right, live a good life, say your prayers, and show up to church occasionally God is going to bless you and your life will be easy. That's not what we see in Scripture.

Paul says, [our outward man is perishing](#), even while we serve God.

This is something that is universally true. All of us are breaking down. There's this little bubble from adolescence to somewhere in your mid-twenties where you don't feel it, you don't think it's real, but as life goes on you experience it more and more. We are dying, decaying, wasting away, like rust consuming metal – our strength and the things we spent it on all begin to fade and crumble. This is life.

People see it, they feel it, they sense it, and so they try to fight it. They resist it with nutrition and exercise. There's always another new diet coming along or some vitamin or supplement, some new super food – you've got to eat this or drink this or take this, it will help with your... and you fill in the blank. What's going on there? People are trying to fight the fact that we're [perishing](#).

Others try to numb the pain of perishing with alcohol, drugs or food, we call it 'comfort food' for a reason, or they turn to Netflix or Tik Tok or YouTube to be amused and zone out so they can escape what they don't want to confront – the truth that we're [perishing](#).

And then there's another powerful pain-blocker that's probably the most abused here in our region: work, putting in more hours, starting a new project or taking on a bigger project, anything to help you feel productive so that you can tell yourself you're busy and you're important, you're producing and you don't have to deal with the voice inside that keeps telling you what you know is true: you're [perishing](#).

It's happening to us all.

And for some, it's made worse, accelerated even, by [affliction \(vs 17\)](#). This could come in the form of an injury, an illness, or things or people in your life that actively make it worse. Life is hard on it's own, [affliction](#) makes it harder.

It takes many forms. Kids might be [afflicted](#) by neighborhood or classroom bullies. That boy or girl that won't leave you alone. That picks on you. Singles you out. It doesn't matter whether you're 8, or 12, 16 or 18, 22 or 42 it's never fun to be the one someone else is laughing at, or to just want to be left alone and yet you're unable to escape the harassment.

[Affliction](#) can come at you emotionally, verbally, or physically. It can be something someone does to you or something you have to endure - some illness or ailment, some diagnosis. A friend of mine was just diagnosed with Thyroid cancer. He's a big

guy – a solid man physically and spiritually, the kind of guy I’ve always looked up to, and suddenly he’s been **afflicted**. With or without the cancer he’s **perishing**, that’s true of us all, none of us live forever, but now on top that, he’s being **afflicted** *while* trying to love his wife and their kids, lead a team at work, and serve faithfully in his local church.

No doubt he can identify with what Paul says starting in verse 2 about **groaning** for a better body.

Paul was a tent-maker by trade. And that was still a big deal at this point in history at this place in the world – there were cities, of course, with buildings made of bricks and stone, but tents were still a very common part of life because they were portable – you could carry one around with you and set it up easily whenever you needed temporary shelter.

Well, Paul says our lives on earth are kind of like those tents – a temporary living situation that is going to be replaced and he’s looking forward to settling into something permanent that’s been prepared by God.

Many of you know the pain involved with moving, some of you know the experience of living in a temporary situation for too long, living out of suitcases and waiting for something more permanent to open up. You know what it is to **groan** at times under those conditions – get me out of this suitcase and into my own bed. Well, Paul says, that’s like the groaning we feel for something better eternally too.

When I served at Arlington National Cemetery I did a lot of funerals and one of the passages I turned to often was John 14 where Jesus told His disciples on the night before His death,

John 14:1 (ESV) “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”

Well, Paul believes Jesus. He believes that our conditions here on earth are just temporary and he longs for the permanent solution Jesus promised.

He also describes it as **earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation from Heaven**. **Earnestly desiring** is a phrase used in another place to refer to the desire that a newborn infant has for its mother’s milk. It’s a strong desire, and Paul is saying that’s how we feel about what is coming next – he really, really, is looking forward to heaven.

I’m taking the time to explore all of this because we need to understand the intensity, the reality, of Paul’s situation. We need to understand that the pain in our

lives today, the [perishing](#), the [affliction](#), the [groaning](#), the [earnest desire](#) for something better or different, is something he would recognize.

Friends, I want to help you understand, Scripture speaks to the kind of situations you face. It hears your complaints. God sees and speaks to your pain. And, Paul would tell you, one of the most powerful pain-killers available is perspective.

Remember, my goal this morning is to help you see the Christian life is built upon the belief that things will be better forever with God in heaven, even though life is really rough down here today on earth. In other words, perspective matters.

Two things are true about Paul. First, he was going through some very rough times. We've seen that, explored that this morning. But Second, he was also *absolutely convinced* that it was only a minor inconvenience compared to what lay ahead and that made all the difference in how he experienced his pain.

Listen to him say,

[5:1 For we **know** that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God,](#)

Listen to him say,

[6 So we are **always confident**, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.](#)

Listen to him say,

[8 We are **confident**, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.](#)

This is not a man who is guessing. Or who 'thinks so.' This is a man who is confident *because* he is convinced and that conviction gives him a bold, courageous faith. His theology forms the foundation of his life.

But it's not just what he knows and believes, church look at this, it's also what he has *experienced*.

Look with me back in:

[2 Corinthians 4:16](#) Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day.

So, there are two things happening to Paul, he is perishing, but also [being renewed](#)

and it happens to him **day by day**. Church, listen, he is not debilitated, he is strengthened. And you have to notice this, because it's super important: he's not rehabilitating himself, he's receiving **renewal** from the outside.

Yes, he participates in it, he receives it, but there is a force acting within him and upon him and that makes the difference. He is **being renewed**. Made new. Refreshed, recharged, sustained, and carried. *And the exact same thing is on offer to you today* – renewal in the midst of perishing, affliction, and groaning.

It begins with repentance – turning to God if you have been walking or wandering or drifting away.

Psalm 51 is David's song of repentance after committing adultery with a woman named Bathsheba and then plotting the death of her husband. David confesses what he has done to God and prays:

Ps 51:1 Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.

9 Hide Your face from my sins,
And blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And **renew** a right spirit within me.

Perhaps you need to follow David's example and confess your sin, ask God to create a clean heart in you, and then to **renew** a right spirit within you. He's willing to do all of this, but you have to ask.

Jeremiah turned to God at a terrible time in his nation's history – many of the people had wandered away from God spiritually and they had just been invaded and conquered politically when Jeremiah prays:

Lamentations 5:21 Turn us back to You, O LORD,
and we will be restored;
Renew our days as of old,

I want you to see that **renewal** comes from God in response to our request – we ask Him for it, and He faithfully provides.

So, if you feel like you're [perishing](#), [afflicted](#), [groaning](#), [burdened beyond measure](#), ask for the [renewal](#) that comes from God.

Isaiah described it like this:

Isaiah 40:28 Have you not known?
Have you not heard?
The everlasting God, the LORD,
The Creator of the ends of the earth,
Neither faints nor is weary.
His understanding is unsearchable.

29 He gives power to the weak,
And to *those who have* no might He increases strength.
30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary,
And the young men shall utterly fall,

31 But those who wait on the LORD
Shall renew *their* strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.

Church, this is the [renewal](#) on offer to you from God. It is the [renewal](#) offered to His people throughout history because life has always been hard, difficult, full of trials and tears and challenges but He has NEVER expected us to get through it all on our own, we're not here to grind it out with grit and determination, we're meant to live in His strength.

Let me show you this one more time:

Titus 3:4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5... He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior

Church, do not be surprised when life is hard. Do not be surprised to discover that you are [perishing](#) or [afflicted](#). But keep the right perspective. There is more to life than what you can see, touch and taste.

The internal and eternal are far better than the external and immediate.

God is training us to walk by faith and not by sight – He wants us to know and remember that life here is important – what we do, what we say, how we react and

respond, all of these matter, but they matter *in light of eternity*. It's all about your perspective.

And maybe that's something for you to consider as we prepare to receive communion. Take a moment or two as the worship team plays and talk to God about the trials in your life – either the ones you've been through in the past or the ones you're going through right now.

Tell Him if you feel like you're **perishing**, like things are falling apart. Tell Him if you're feeling **afflicted**, targeted by someone or something that is wearing you down, an extra burden you feel like you're carrying. **Groan** to Him about your **desire** to be with Him – to trade in your tent for a room in His house. Tell Him about the sins you've endured from others and the ones you've committed yourself and ask for **renewal**. Ask for His **Spirit** to be magnified in you. Ask Him to help you know and feel the difference He makes in your life.

You remember last week I showed you what happens when you put your weight on an empty aluminum can and what happens when you do the same thing with one that is filled and sealed – it can bear the weight because of what's inside.

Ask God to do that for you today – to come inside if you haven't already, and to fill you up, to give you inner strength. Tell God how much you need Him, and then come up and receive the elements, these reminders of what He's already done and in a minute we'll remember Jesus who has gone to prepare an eternal place for us where there will be no more perishing, no more affliction, no more groaning, only peace, healing, rest and joy forever.

But first, let's pray.

Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8 Adopting an Eternal Perspective

Summary: Paul did not lose heart in difficult times because he was absolutely convinced that the internal and eternal aspects of life are better than the external and immediate.

- What other examples can you think of where a shift in perspective changes the way you experience what's happening?
- Where, in your life, do you experience the greatest misalignment between your present and your eternal reality?

- How are you navigating that?
 - What are you learning/have you learned from it?
 - What has helped you prioritize the eternal and internal aspects of the situation?
- Paul says he does not lose heart in difficult times. Why?
 - What else do you learn about not losing heart from the following passages:
 - 2 Cor 4:1
 - Galatians 6:9-10
 - Ephesians 3:13
 - Luke 18:1
- How would you use this passage to counsel or comfort a friend who is going through a very difficult season of life?
- The Greek word for affliction is also translated as tribulation in some passages. What do you learn about Christians experiencing affliction/tribulation from the following passages?
 - Romans 8:35-37
 - Revelation 2:9-10
- What else do you learn about renewal from Romans 12:1-2?
 - Where and how have you experienced renewal in your life?
 - Where would you like to see it?
- According to 2 Corinthians 5:8 to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. How does Jesus reinforce this idea in Luke 23:43?