



Hope, Because Each Day Brings Us Closer
2 Corinthians 4-5

HOPE, BECAUSE EACH DAY BRINGS US CLOSER 2 Corinthians 4-5

[Video¹] Eighty years in two minutes. Thankfully, life doesn't pass that fast, but that time-lapse video reminds us of what King David once said. "How fleeting is my life ... Each man's life is but a breath" (Psalm 39:4-5, NIV). Life is short and it's sobering to think about, but sometimes we just have to laugh about getting older.

Two women were talking on the phone about getting older, and one of the women said, "I feel like my body is falling apart, so I decided to take an aerobics class for seniors. I bent, twisted, jumped up and down, and perspired for an hour. But, by the time I got my leotards on, the class was over."

One man was able to look on the bright side of getting older. "I've had bypass surgery, a hip replacement, and two new knees. I'm half blind, can't hear, and take 10 medications every day. I have poor circulation, high blood pressure, and get up three times a night to go to the bathroom. I can't even remember if I'm 75 or 85. But, thank God, I still have my driver's license."

We can laugh about getting older, but deep down, there are worries and fears. We fear the limitations of getting older and not being able to do what we want to do. We worry about running out of money. We worry about health issues. We fear the big health issues like Alzheimer's and cancer. And we fear the loss of a spouse, because one of us is going to die first.

To combat the worries and fears is a secular movement called "successful aging," that says it's all a perspective. Just change your attitude and you can live an active, positive, and productive life. That sounds good, but as hard as we try to make our latter years active, positive, and productive, the reality is that getting older means slowing down. Getting older means things don't work like they used to. Getting older means every day brings us closer to "you know what."

Now, I'm not just talking to older people. I'm talking to everyone. This message is relevant for everyone, whether you're in your 30s or in your 80s.

The hymn we often sing asks the question all humanity is asking, "What is our hope in life and death?"² ***We believe our hope in life and death is Christ alone!*** Hope is trusting that He will help us in this life and trusting that He will get us to the next life. Even though every day brings us closer to "you know what," we "rejoice in hope" (Romans 12:12). ***Every day brings us closer to death, AND every day brings us closer to heaven,*** to experiencing relief, rest, and peace, to seeing Jesus face to face and being with Him forever.

The Apostle Paul reminded the Christians at Corinth of this great truth, and he reminds us as well. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Paul confidently declared, "We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18, ESV).

That passage is packed with theology. It's also packed with hope. So, let's unpack it together.

NO MATTER HOW HARD LIFE GETS

Much of 2 Corinthians is Paul responding to his critics. Paul was criticized by outsiders and insiders, and he persevered because of the urgency of the Gospel. For Paul, all the hardship was worth it if the Gospel continued to spread to more and more people.³ From that context, Paul said, "We do not lose heart" (2 Corinthians 4:1, 16).

The same principle of persevering and not losing heart applies to us. ***No matter how hard life gets, hope is the reason we do not give up.*** Hope is the reason "we do not lose heart."

In 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul referred to our hope as a treasure, and said, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." Another version says, "jars of clay."⁴ Our bodies are fragile and break, we grow old and feeble. Yet, inside this earthen vessel, this jar of clay, we have a treasure. That treasure is the Gospel, the grace of God, the life of Jesus within us. Jesus is our treasure and He is our hope. Yes, we walk about in earthly bodies that will decay and die, but that does not define us. Who and what we really are is defined by Spirit of God living in us. This body will decay and die, but so what? We will live on.

That hope was why Paul was able to say in verses 8-9, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9, NAS).

We may be "afflicted." We may face all kinds of trouble, illness, and heartache. But we are "not crushed." We are not broken to pieces. Our lives do not completely fall apart. Because of hope, we do not give up.

Yes, sometimes we are "perplexed," confused, and ask God "why?" But we are "not in despair." Because of hope, we do not give up.

We may be "persecuted," opposed by enemies, betrayed by friends, and attacked by critics. But we are "not forsaken." We are not alone. God is with us every step we take. Because of hope, we do not give up.

We may be "struck down, but we are not destroyed." We may take hits in life, but we are never defeated. Because of hope, we do not give up.

Paul admitted that life is hard. We know it's hard. ***But no matter how hard life gets, hope is the reason we do not give up.*** Hope is the reason, as Paul said, "We do not lose heart."

EVERY DAY BRINGS US CLOSER

Second Corinthians 4:16-18 is filled with theology. It's also filled with hope. As we unpack it, this truth will become clear. *Every day brings us closer to death, AND every day brings us closer to heaven.*

Separate those two statements for a moment. Every day brings us closer to death ... That statement ends with a period for those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. For those who do not believe in Jesus Christ, every day brings them closer to death. Period. But for those who do believe in Jesus Christ, that statement ends with a comma. Every day brings us closer to death, **AND** every day brings us closer to heaven. Every day brings us closer to experiencing relief, rest, and peace, and closer to seeing Jesus face to face and living with Him forever.

“Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16, ESV).

Science tells us that a man reaches his physical peak at around age 30. After age 30, muscle mass decreases, joints ache, and the body begins a long, slow decline. “Our outer self is wasting away.” Our bodies are aging, slowing down, fighting disease, and headed toward death. It is a physical reality that our latter years are defined by decline and decay. It is a physical reality that every day brings us closer to “you know what.”

Yet there is a spiritual reality at work at the same time. Even though our bodies are getting older and “wasting away,” as Paul said, “our inner self is being renewed day by day.” The Bible says God “is at work” in us, so that we might fulfill His will and please Him and glorify Him more and more every day (Philippians 2:13). Paul teaches us that God “who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6, ESV). Paul was referring to the ongoing process of sanctification, where we become more and more like Jesus until the day we meet Jesus.

If spiritual maturity is His ultimate goal, then even our suffering has a purpose. In Romans 5, Paul said, “We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope” (Romans 5:3-4, ESV).

The physical reality is that our bodies are wasting away, decaying, and headed toward death. But the spiritual reality is that the Lord is working in our lives, using both good and bad, shaping our character, making us more like Jesus, and preparing us to meet Jesus. Yes, every day brings us closer to death, **AND** every day brings us closer to heaven, closer to the day when we see Jesus face to face.

It may not feel like it now, but verse 17 is true. “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:17). Elsewhere Paul said, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18, ESV). Paul was saying that 80 years of hardship in this life will seem “light” and “momentary” once we experience the “eternal weight of glory” to come. Peter said the same thing. “After you have suffered for a little while, the God of grace

will call you to His eternal glory” (1 Peter 5:10, NAS). The glory to come will outshine any hardship we’ve faced.

An obvious illustration is childbirth. When my first son was born, I remember the long hours of straining and groaning and sweating. I can’t imagine what Kathy was going through! Childbirth is hard, that’s why they call it labor. It’s painful. But it’s amazing how quickly a mother forgets all that as she holds her baby in her arms. The pain of childbirth is light and momentary compared to the joy of holding a newborn baby in your arms.

Hope allows us to look beyond our present struggles. In 2 Corinthians 4:18, Paul said, “We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” Every pain and struggle we endure now is temporary. And hope allows us to look beyond it all. Hope allows us to look beyond what we see to what we cannot yet see, to what is eternal.

But until that day comes, we live in a state of paradox. We live with the reality of contrasts, between now and then.

- the outer self versus the inner self
- the body wasting away versus the soul being renewed
- light momentary affliction versus the eternal weight of glory
- the seen versus the unseen
- the temporal versus the eternal
- our earthly tent versus our eternal house

The physical reality and the spiritual reality are both true, both are happening at the same time. But what is happening to your body, the opposite is happening to your soul. We feel the physical reality every day. We feel the decline of our bodies. We feel it in our knees, and we see it in the mirror. But the spiritual reality is what gives us hope. And hopefully, we feel it. Hopefully, we see ourselves growing in faith, becoming more like Jesus, loving Him, and longing to see Him.

The Aborigines believed the afterlife was some distant island beyond the horizon. The Polynesians believed the afterlife would be spent on the moon. Native American Indians believed the afterlife would be spent hunting buffalo. But the earliest Christians believed they would spend eternity with God in heaven. Many of the early Christians were buried in underground catacombs. Inscriptions for the dead were etched on the walls of the catacombs. One read, “In Christ, Alexander is not dead, but lives.” Another read, “One that lives with God.” And another said, “He was taken up into his eternal home.”⁵

Every day brings us closer to death, AND every day brings us closer to heaven. Every day brings us closer to experiencing relief, rest, and peace, and closer to seeing Jesus face to face and living with Him forever.

HOPE CHANGES THE WAY

Because we believe that, *hope changes the way we endure struggle and changes the way we view death*. We can have the same attitude Paul had in 2 Corinthians 5.

Paul said, “*We know* that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven” (2 Corinthians 5:1, NIV). The “earthly tent” is our human body, which at some point will die, will be “destroyed” to use Paul’s word. But death is not the end. Our “earthly tent” is temporary, but our “eternal house” is forever. We can believe this, and we can hope in this, because Jesus said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in Me. In my Father’s house are many rooms ... and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and get you and take you home to be with me” (John 14:1-3). That’s our hope.

“Meanwhile *we groan*, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling” (2 Corinthians 5:2, NIV). We groan because life is hard. We groan and resent the hardships of this life and long for the relief of the life to come. Paul said, “While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it’s not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying (decaying, suffering) bodies will be swallowed up by life (eternal life, eternal rest)” (2 Corinthians 5:4, NLT).

There’s a benefit to pain and struggle. Pain and struggle create discontent with this life, with this world. Pain and struggle make us groan and long for something better. And better it will be. We groan and long for Revelation 21, which promises no more tears, no more grief, no more pain, no more suffering, no more death. Heaven will be a place of relief, rest, and peace.

But right now, 2 Corinthians 5:7, “*We walk* by faith, and not by sight” (NAS). What we believe, not what we see, must determine how we live. That’s what hope does. All around us we see decay and death, but we hope for rest and peace. Paul said, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV). The moment we die will be the moment our faith becomes sight.

Paul said in verse 8, “*We are confident* ... to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). The moment we die is the same moment we enter into the presence of God. There is no limbo, there is no purgatory, there is no waiting. I say it at every funeral, the moment we close our eyes on earth will be the same moment we open our eyes in heaven and see Jesus face to face. Paul said, “We are confident of this.” This is our hope. Paul mocked death when he said, “O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55). Death is not final. Death is ... relief ... healing ... peace ... joy ... a door to eternity ... and the moment our faith has been waiting for. Jesus called heaven Paradise, a place beyond our wildest imagination. Heaven will be so wonderful that the pain and problems we have now will fade away.

Therefore, we live with hope. And verse 9 says, “*We make* it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it” (2 Corinthians 5:9, NIV). Whether we live or die, whether in this life or the next, our goal is to please Him. Our desire is to thank Him and glorify Him for all He has done for us. The goal is not to get the most out of life before we die. The goal of this life is to please God and to get ready to meet Him.

Hope changes the way we struggle. Hope changes the way we view death. And hope changes the way we live.

CONCLUSION

A quick glance in the mirror reminds us that Paul was right. “Our outer self is wasting away.” That’s a physical reality, but there is also spiritual reality at play. “Our outer self is wasting away, but our inner self is being renewed day by day.” God is at work in us, shaping us to be more like Jesus and preparing us to meet Him face to face.

One more time, hear this great truth. One more time, this is our hope.

“We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18, ESV).

Every day brings us closer to death, AND every day brings us closer to heaven, closer to relief, rest, and peace, and closer to the day when we see Jesus and live with Him forever.

NOTES

¹ “Danille.” Filmmaker Anthony Cerniello created this time-lapse video using shots taken of family members of various ages. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRqPJdgdIM>

² “Christ Our Hope in Life and Death,” word and music written by Keith Getty, Matt Boswell, Jordan Kauflin, Matt Merker, Matt Papa, Getty Music Publishing, 2020.

³ See 2 Corinthians 4:15.

⁴ See ESV, 2 Corinthians 4:7.

⁵ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Eternal Perspective Ministries, 2004), page xix.