

TAKE HEART, DON'T LOSE HEART

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 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.

There are experiences in your life that teach you vital truths - landmark lessons that you never forget.

One such experience happened to me years ago.

The CCSM Christmas party was on the horizon, and Kathy was thrilled that I had promised her a new outfit. We loaded the kids in their car seats and headed to the department store to purchase new threads for mom.

Kath began the evening with a **promise**. She ended it with **the fulfillment of that promise** - but *in the meantime* some strange, bizarre events occurred.

At the time, one of my three sons - *who will remain nameless for reasons that will become obvious in a moment* - was just a few years old, and in the process of being potty trained. While his mom combed through the racks of clothes I whiffed an atrocious smell.

There was no mistaking the aroma - *my son had pooped in his britches*. Mom was engrossed in major decisions, so I set out for the van to clean him up.

As we walked down the aisle to the exit I noticed my toddler walking in a peculiar manner... *sort of like John Wayne*. Like he'd been in the saddle for days...

Suddenly, two clumps of you-know-what slid down his pants-leg and plopped out onto the floor.

It looked sort of like this... *I just grooaned!*

My first reaction was to clean it up, but I had no rag.

So I did what any conscientious dad would do... *I just kept walking!* I had no choice, we kept walking!

We were hustling out the door as fast as we could when my son stops in the middle of the traffic, and shouts, "**Dad, I think I've got something in my boot!**"

Trust me, I didn't stop to find out what that something was! I picked him up and raced to the car!

After changing my son's diaper we re-entered the store with paper towels to shovel up the mess. I was glad to see no one had stepped in his deposit...

By this time Kathy had purchased her new outfit and was ready to leave... **A promise had been made, and that promised had been fulfilled - but *in the meantime* - I had to deal with some distressing circumstances!**

And when you think about it, this is the story of our lives. All of life is lived **"in the meantime"** - between the *giving of a promise* and the *keeping of that promise*.

Our here and now - this earthly life - is the *"in the meantime"* - *"the in-between time."* Life is the interval between a *promise given* and a *promise fulfilled*.

Jesus has excited us with staggering promises. The Church, *His Bride*, has the promise of an inheritance much of which is still future... One day we'll walk streets of gold. We'll be clothed in robes of white!

For all eternity we'll get second helpings of things for which we're now famished! Romans 8:17 calls us **joint-heirs with Jesus**. In Christ all God's wealth and wonders are in our name - *but a significant portion of our inheritance is waiting for a future date*.

When the CC Christmas Party finally arrived and I saw Kathy decked out in her new outfit, I thought, *"Wow, that's one good-looking babe!"* My wife looked so *glorious* I totally forgot about my messy experience!

And that's the reaction we'll have when we finally reach the heavenly shore. **The future glory that awaits every Christian will overshadow today's difficulties.**

God makes us all promises, and He'll keep those promises, *yet in the meantime* God ordains for us to walk through some messy, even pooppy experiences.

This world is full of sin, and pain, and sickness, and hurt, and hate, and exhaustion, and injustice, and betrayal, and despair - *life in the meantime gets hard*.

At times *it just plain stinks* - but rest assured, God has a purpose for the messes we're forced to endure!

Here's a startling statistic for you... Did you know a child goes through 5000 diapers by the time he or she is two years-old? Having raised four kids, that means Kathy and I have changed 20,000 smelly diapers!

Here's my point, to grow a kid you have to confront and clean up a lot of poop! Maturing a child is messy business. *And the same is true with a child of God!*

We enjoy the good times when God's blessings are tangible, but we all know we learn more from the difficulties, and trials, and persecutions, and stresses.

Here's a quote to remember. It's an Sandy Adams original. In fact, someone turned into a plaque that now hangs in my office. Here it is, "It takes the manure for us to mature." *"It takes the manure for us to mature."*

One day all our heartaches and headaches will be worth it! We'll have zero complaints in heaven... but *in the meantime* how do you handle life's hardships?

Do you take heart, or do you lose heart?

If anyone knew about poop it was Paul! If his ship wasn't sinking - he was being beaten and thrown into jail - or run out of town - or stoned and left for dead...

Yo, Paul was accustomed to one "bad-hair day" after another... But in verse 16 Paul commands us, "**do not lose heart**" - and then he gives us three reasons why...

Paul points to three different contrasts...

First, is the contrast between the outward man and the inward man. Second, he contrasts the world's afflictions with heaven's glories. And third, is the contrast between the visible and the invisible.

Here's what Paul is telling us... focus on these three contrasts and you'll *take heart - not lose heart!*

The first reason Paul doesn't lose heart is the contrast between what's happening to him physically and what's happening to him spiritually.

In verse 16 Paul observes, *“Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.”* Outwardly, we're *destined to decay*. Inwardly, we're being *renewed day-by-day*.

Understand, Paul's physical body was perishing...

As I mentioned, Paul endured severe trials... He was stoned once - beaten ten times - shipwrecked four times - imprisoned countless times! Bible scholars believe Paul even had a chronic and painful eye disease. He refers to it later as his *"thorn in the flesh."*

Perhaps Paul's most debilitating trial was the constant concern he had for the churches he planted.

Pastor Paul's parish was the entire world.

And to top it all off Paul was aging!

And that alone is enough to cause a person to lose heart. Paul's physical body was slowly deteriorating...

Which reminds me of a list - a Top Ten list. Here's [The Top 10 Ways You Know You're Getting Older...](#)

10) The twinkle in your eye is the sun's reflection off your bifocals. 9) You get cautioned to slow down by your doctor, and not the police. 8) It takes two tries to get up from the couch. 7) You throw a party, that the neighbors don't even realize is a party.

6) You happen to spot a pretty girl walking down the street and your pacemaker sets off your neighbor's garage door opener. 5) Your joints are more accurate at predicting weather than Glen Burns. 4) You go to straighten the wrinkles in your socks, when you remember that you aren't wearing any socks.

3) All your favorite music is in the bargain bin at Wal-Mart. 2) You help a little old lady cross the street, and realize she's your wife. The #1 way you know you're getting older, Your ears are hairier than your head.

In a tribute to getting older, here's a great little parody of a Julie Andrews classic. It's a take-off of the song from The Sound of Music, "*My Favorite Things*."

"Maalox and nose drops and needles for knitting - Walkers and handrails and new dental fittings - Pacemakers, golf carts, and porches with swings

These are a few of my favorite things.

Back pains, confused brains, and thicker eyeglasses - thin bones, and fractures, and false teeth in glasses - and we won't mention our short shrunken frames

When we remember our favorite things.

Then the chorus, “When the joints ache, when the hips break, when the knees go bad, I simply remember my favorite things, and then I don’t feel... so... bad!”

Yet the truth is, these are not our favorite things.

Today’s society worships youth. *Nobody* admires an *old body*. We praise the young, the sleek, the beautiful.

And when we’re no longer *any of the above* we have a difficult time coping with our obvious mortality.

Most folks just don't want to believe they're not what they used to be. They live in outright denial; until they attempt something normal and injure themselves...

Other people search for the fountain of youth... They buy protein shakes and supplements. They sign on at the health club. During a commercial they jot down the number for the Hair Club for Men... We can get quite discouraged to realize that our outer man is perishing.

Yet despite the reality that persecution and just growing older, were eroding Paul’s physical health and youthful vigor... the apostle refused to lose heart!

Paul knew that *as the outer man deteriorated, the inner man was being invigorated*. Day by day, even as he aged, Paul's spiritual strength was being renewed.

Paul didn't get discouraged over his aging body or chronic illness. He wasn't fearful of his own mortality, for he understood his physical body was not *the real Paul*. His body was a tent - a temporary dwelling. The *real person* is the inner man - the *person of the heart*.

An iceberg moves through the ocean against gale force winds and tidal waves - *and we wonder how?*

The answer is 90% of the iceberg is underwater.

And I'm like an iceberg! Look at me and all you see is 10% of what I truly am. The *substance lies under the surface...* You can't size me up by taking my measurements. There's more to me than meets the eye. I might be fading physically but I'm alive spiritually.

The growing Christian isn't *grieved* over his *gray hair*, or *bumped out* over his *aching back*, or *devastated by his disease*, or even *crushed by his cancer...*

There's more to his life than bones, muscles, kidneys, and livers. Even though our outer man is getting weaker and weaker - we can take heart, if we cultivate the inner man. We can grow spiritually strong.

Once a little boy asked his grandpa, "*Are you rotten on the inside?*" The man was rather shocked, "*Of course not, why would you think such a thing?*"

The little guy replied, "*Well, when an apple wrinkles on the outside it means it's rotten on the inside.*"

That might be true of apples, but not Christians.

In my opinion, one of the modern world's best inventions are rechargeable batteries. Today, when batteries fade, just plug them into a charger and they are good again for another hundred hours.

Standard batteries... you *use'em and lose'em*.

Well, the human body is like a like standard battery. We use them, then discard them. But God made the spirit of a person to be rechargeable. Daily, we can plug into God's Word, prayer, fellowship, even worship.

When we spend time with the Holy Spirit, He infuses us with fresh power and energy. God's presence stimulates a spiritual current - a joy rises up inside.

This is why Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 4:8 "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." Physical exercise is okay - it serves a purpose - but spiritual training is infinitely better!

Who wants to merely exist, without really living? It's been said, "Everyone wants to add years to their life, but Jesus wants to add life to your years!"

It's so refreshing to watch an elderly saint grow older and younger at the same time. Their body may be aging, but their outlook stays youthful and optimistic.

The only fountain of youth is fellowship with God!

The second reason Paul doesn't lose heart is the contrast between the afflictions of this world and the glories of heaven. He says heaven's blessings are so heavy they make earth's troubles seem trite.

Paul puts it this way in verse 17, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory..."

Notice, Paul refers to the messy difficulties of this life, *the pooppy experiences* - as "*our light affliction.*"

Have you noticed, we live in a day when **lite (L-I-T-E)** is in vogue! There's *lite mayonnaise - lite butter - lite salad dressing - lite ice cream - even lite chocolate syrup.* Low calories - no cholesterol - that's the ticket!

Modern science has learned how to process foods in a way that minimizes the threat of heart disease.

And Paul had also learned a similar secret... he processed harsh, brutal, stressful trials in such a way that enabled him to see his troubles as "*lite afflictions!*"

Paul's faith filtered out disappointments, and reduced the spiritual cholesterol called discouragement. His spiritual digestion eliminated the attitudes that cause spiritual heart disease - *the hardening of the soul.*

Paul had learned the secret that enabled him to stay *buzzed* even when others were *bumped*.

And recall Paul's afflictions - *illnesses, shipwrecks, imprisonment, torture, beatings, emotional rejection.* If Paul called these afflictions "**lite**" - then surely the afflictions we experience are that much lighter!

And what was the secret to Paul's perspective?

It consisted of two truths... **One**, Paul learned that earth's afflictions are "**but for moment.**" In light of eternity, 80-90 years is just a few ticks of the clock.

And **two**, Paul learned that **our present suffering is working for us an elaborate and eternal reward.**

Notice, Paul calls his trials a momentary affliction, *yet the man suffered the better part of 30 years?*

How can 30 painful years be *"but for a moment?"*

We've all seen camera shots of the astronauts in zero gravity floating in the space shuttle. It looks fun!

In watching them we learn that what's heavy on earth - taken outside of our atmosphere - becomes lite as a feather. In the heavens, heavy objects grow lite!

And this is what Paul did with his heavy afflictions.

He tells us in Ephesians 1:3 that spiritually we've been *"seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."*

So whenever Paul started to feel *weighted down*, he just *sat down* with Jesus. When Paul viewed a problem from the scope of eternity, what *had* seemed heavy beyond belief - *what was about to bury him – suddenly, became nothing, and trivial, and light as a feather.*

See a difficulty up against eternity, and even a whole lifetime of hurt and suffering is just a nano-second.

Christian apologist, CS Lewis, described the whole sordid story of human history as a mere, *"false start."*

Imagine, a swim meet. The distance swimmers are on the starting block. It's the marathon of swimming, the 10 kilometer race. *But just before the gun sounds, one of the swimmers jumps early. No big deal, just a false start - at the conclusion of the swim that one man's eagerness will be a vague, distant memory.*

Now think of the whole history of humanity as simply *a false start* in light of the long, lengthy eternity that lies before us. In light of forever, 6000 years of sin and suffering, is just a few folks jumping in the pool too soon. It's a mistake - a bother - but after a million years of glory, it'll be a distant memory. It's our eternal hope that makes the miseries of this world more bearable.

A man was once reading his Bible, when he prayed and asked God, "Lord, is it true that to You a thousand years is as one second?" God said, "Yes, it's true."

"Then, is it true that to You one million dollars is as a single penny?" God said, "Yes, that's true too."

The man replied, "Then, do you think I can have a penny?" God answered, "Sure, in just a second!"

Here's the truth, this world's heavy afflictions become lite when we realize that from the perspective of eternity even a lifetime of sorrow is just for a moment.

Paul's troubles were momentary, but they also "*worked for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*" We think of our trials as intense, profound, severe experiences... but the real heaviness is heaven. Life's most profound events are not *earthly afflictions*, but *heavenly glories!* The *happiness of heaven* is far heavier than the *sorrows on earth*.

After you see the Cascade mountains of the Pacific Northwest, or the Colorado Rockies it tickles me to hear someone talk about the North Georgia *Mountains*.

If a westerner saw what we call "*mountains*" they'd snicker. Compared to Ranier, Georgia mountains are anthills...

Likewise your problems might seem massive. In your mind, *nothing* could be more intense than your current struggle. Yet if you could get just a glimpse of the *treasures and pleasures* of heaven... If you could savor a sip of the joy you'll one day guzzle...

Once you realize the intensity of the delight that awaits you in heaven - suddenly the trials you currently call "*mountains*," won't be "*mountains*" after all. The wonders and glories of our heavenly inheritance will make the trials of this Earth seem like speed bumps.

In his science fiction space adventure *Paralandra*, author CS Lewis wondered what it would be like for a human to taste fruit in a perfect, un-fallen world.

In his story an earthling is transported to a planet unsoiled by sin. He finds a cluster of un-fallen fruit, and I love how Lewis describes his reaction to its taste...

"He had come to a part of the wood where great globes of yellow fruit hung from the trees. He picked one of them and turned it over and over. By accident his finger punctured it, and went through into coldness.

After a moment's hesitation he put the little slit to his lips. He had to extract the smallest, experimental sip, but the first taste put his caution all to flight. It was so different from every other taste... like the discovery of a totally new genus of pleasure... unheard of among men... It dawned on him that for one drink of this on earth wars would be fought and nations betrayed."

I believe heaven's simplest pleasures will produce an ecstasy unheard of on earth! We'll need a glorified body just to *handle all the heavenly highs!*

Heaven is so sweet that just a single second there will more than make up for a lifetime of suffering here on this earth. No matter what you've suffered in this life your first moment in heaven will wipe away all the pain.

People ask, "If God is good why does He allow so much suffering and pain in the world? Couldn't He stop it if He wanted?" *And most certainly He could!*

But unlike our shallow priorities, God's concerns for us stretch far beyond tomorrow. God cares about our welfare for all of eternity! Rather than simply pad our tomorrows with comfort, He wants to maximize our eternal experience. Heaven is forever and He wants that forever experience to provide optimum enjoyment!

Understand, one of the problems with human beings is that we often lack an appreciation for what's good, and pleasant, and best - *until we first taste its opposite.*

I've heard it put, "The only way to truly love something is to first be without it." Human nature takes for granted the richest blessings until they're gone, and out of our reach. We appreciate what we now miss.

I've actually heard people from the islands of Hawaii gripe about living in Hawaii. *Imagine...* I suppose it is really rough living in a tropical paradise all year round.

But here's the human reality, native Hawaiians won't appreciate what they've got until they've spent a hot muggy summer in South Georgia, *below the gnat line no less* - or a subzero winter in frozen Wisconsin.

A decade or so ago, some of you spoiled Atlanta Braves fans were complaining about your team. You griped because we only won our division and made the play-offs annually. *We only won a single World Series!*

Today, Braves fans would love to be competitive enough for the games to matter past the fourth of July!

My point is we're all so fickle... We don't appreciate anything until we've first lived without it for a while.

And given this very human tendency, wouldn't it be horrible if God just sat us down - *right from the beginning* - in a perfect Utopia. Give us just a few weeks and we'd be complaining about Paradise.

Understand, if you have nothing to compare it to, even perfection loses its luster in a short time. And if you're dissatisfied with perfect, *where do you go?*

Let me suggest, God knows what He's doing! By allowing us, what amounts to just a few seconds in a fallen world, He is enhancing and securing for all eternity our enjoyment of heaven. God is *sweetening the sweet by priming us with a taste of the sour.*

Paul refuses to lose heart because he **contrasts the outer man that's perishing with the inward man that's being**

renewed - and when he contrasts his momentary sufferings with the weight of his eternal reward...

But there's also a third contrast that causes Paul to take heart... It's when he **contrasts the things that are visible with the things that are invisible.**

Paul says in verse 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.”*

Paul had faith to see beyond what can be seen...

Let me warn you of a mistake we all make - we assume this tangible world is *the real world*... not so!

This world is merely a shadow. It's a dollhouse full of *toy types* which are a dim reflection of the real thing. The *“real McCoys”* lie just beyond the curtain.

Earth's joys are a diluted version of heavenly highs. Earth's sin-inflicted pain is a feeble forewarning of the punishments of hell. This life is just pre-season. Eternity is where you finally start keeping score.

Warren Wiersbe writes, **“If we would only see the visible world the way God wants us to see it, we would never be attracted by what it offers.”** Get your eyes on the invisible, and you'll see through this world's façade.

In Hebrews 11:26 we're told how Moses refused Egypt's temptations, **“(He) esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the**

king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.” Eyes of faith see the unseen.

When you look through this world’s illusions, partaking of its pleasures are like nibbling on a wax apple. They’re fake, phony, and spiritually tasteless.

You're taste buds were made for deeper enjoyment. CS Lewis wrote, "Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We're half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. We are far too easily pleased."

Remember, *material stuff* can never satisfy a *spiritual need*. That's why we call it “*stuff*” - it just stuffs us.

It doesn't satisfy us. We're left empty and hungry.

Remember that the tangible world around us is only an illustration. It's a visual aide to help us grasp the realities of an invisible, spiritual, and deeper realm...

A mother's love speaks of God's tenderness...

A father's guidance depicts God's tireless concern...

A child's trust is a lesson in saving faith... Jesus said that to inherit His Kingdom we need the faith of a child.

Ephesians reminds us *the romance between a husband and wife* is an intro to the potentials for intimacy that exist between Christ and His church...

According to Scripture *a raging river* or *a brisk breeze* should whet our appetite for the Holy Spirit...

A rainbow reminds us of God's faithfulness.

A sunrise speaks of His mercy.

A lightning bolt alerts us to His soon return.

A sunset warns us of His coming judgment.

When we fail to look behind the symbols around us to the substance of which they speak we miss the point of the lesson... We miss out on the meaning of life!

Paul tells us not to look to the things that are seen, but the unseen. The Greek term translated "look" is the word, "skopos" - from which we get our word, "scope."

Like a scope on a rifle... or the expression, "to scope it out..." Paul is saying we're to focus our attention on the invisible world. Fix your mind on spiritual realities like *love, mercy, fellowship, faithfulness, integrity...*

The spiritual issues of our life shouldn't just be hobbies or passing fancies - *that we play with, leave for a while, and come back to when we have the time.*

We need to zero in on these realities. Live our lives fixated on the spiritual. Elsewhere Paul says, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." How often have you thought on spiritual things this week?

Even in the physical circumstances that preoccupy us and demand our daily attention we need to always be on the lookout for the hand of God. You never know when God might intervene in your circumstances. He may want to *bless you, or use you, or redirect you.*

The reason Paul takes heart, rather than loses heart, is his ability to see beyond the *visible* to the *invisible*.

He saw through *the scenery of his life* to the hand *behind the scenes!* Here's a truth, you and I see life clearly, only when we see through the eyes of faith!

Remember, we've been given a promise, and God is faithful to fulfill His promise - *the best is yet to come.*

But **in the meantime**, don't get discouraged by the poop. **“It takes the manure for us to mature.”**

Let me warn you, get caught up in the *outward and cosmetic* - the *here and now* - the *visible and tangible* and you'll lose heart... you'll get discouraged. Better to see life from an *inward, eternal, spiritual* perspective.

God is faithful to empower and encourage us, if we maintain the right outlook. Live from *the inside not outside, think eternal not temporal, look to the unseen not the seen* - and **you'll take heart, not lose heart!**