

Study Guide



We Don't Lose Heart Because...

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Main Idea

All of us are tempted to lose heart in the midst of suffering, but God's word unfolds why we do not need to no matter what we face.

Overview

In verses 1 and 16 of chapter 4 Paul says, "We do not lose heart." In between these verse he explains at least 6 reasons why:

I. Don't Lose Heart Because Suffering Shows the Surpassing Power of God (v. 7)

- God designs for the treasure of the gospel to be carried around in weak cracked clay pots so that the beauty of the gospel and the power of God shines through those cracks
- Paul's personal weaknesses and sufferings ensure that everyone understand any sustaining power in his life is from God not from Paul himself
- When we act like we have not personal weaknesses or struggles, we rob other the opportunity to speak the gospel into our lives, and us in theirs

II. Don't Lose Heart Because Suffering Ends with "But Not" (vv. 8-9)

- Because the "and" was in Jesus' life the "but not" can be in yours.
 - In his death Jesus was afflicted and crushed for our sin – like a Lamb led to slaughter.
 - In his death Jesus was perplexed and driven to despair – crying out in the garden, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death...Father if there's any other way take this cup from me."
 - In his death Jesus was persecuted and forsaken – crying out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have your forsaken me?"
 - In his death Jesus was struck down and destroyed willfully giving up his life
- Every person actively trusting in Christ alone has God's divine "But Not" to anchor their soul amidst life's most severe storms.

III. Don't Lose Heart Because Suffering Displays Jesus (vv. 10-11)

- "Christians are always dying but never lifeless"
- Our suffering, struggles and sorrows give us a prime opportunity to die to ourselves and display Jesus

IV. Don't Lose Heart Because Suffering is God's Gift to Deepen Your Faith (v. 11)

- Notice what verse 11 says: "We who live are always being given over to death for Jesus sake."
- Paul clearly sees his suffering not as accidental or unfortunate, but as God's divine plan.
- Suffering is God's gift to help us trust fully and only in him (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8-9; Phil. 1:29; 1 Pt. 4:12-13, 19)
- God ordains suffering because it helps will wean us from sucking on the false security of the world.

V. Don't Lose Heart Because Suffering is an Opportunity to Proclaim Jesus (vv. 12-15)

- Paul sees all his suffering as part of God's design to spread the gospel, to bring life to others
- Paul quotes Psalm 116, which talks about a man in the midst of affliction that still proclaims the goodness of God – he believes so he speaks
- Even in affliction Paul believes that God is good so he speaks; he points people to Jesus, and grace extends to more and more people, and more and more people give thanksgiving to the glory of God.

VI. Don't Lose Heart Because Suffering Awakens Anticipation for Heaven (vv. 16-18)

- Paul references his weaknesses and struggles; he says that he is “wasting away” on the outside
- “Paul's mortal existence is constantly wasting away and rushing headlong toward death. But Paul's inner existence, united with Christ, is always being renewed and proceeding toward every increasing glory.” (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18)
- The immense weight of glory that was being prepared for Paul, and being prepared for all those who are in Christ, comes not just after the affliction and suffering, but through and by that affliction and suffering
- Our suffering magnifies and helps us anticipate the glory that is to come

Questions

Discussion Starter: *Why is evil/suffering seen as one of the biggest obstacles to the Christian faith? How can we possibly use it, not as an obstacle, but as a pointer to God?*

1. Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-18.
2. In verse 7, Paul compares himself to a jar of clay. What is he trying to achieve by using this metaphor (cf. Ps. 31:12; Is. 30:14)?
3. Verse 7 says we carry the “treasure [of the gospel] in jars of clay to show the surpassing power of God belongs to God and not to us.” How does being a “jar of clay” show the surpassing power of God?
4. What do we miss when we do not understand ourselves to be “jars of clay” but try to be “ornate crystal vases?”
5. In verses 8-9, what does the repeated use of “but not” tell us about Paul's focus? Why do you think Paul was able to have such a focus in the midst of suffering? (note: you can read 11:23-30 for a list of Paul's sufferings)
6. What are some practical ways for us to ensure we have “but not” focus amidst our sufferings?
7. You can summarize verses 10-11 as “Christians are always dying but never lifeless.” What does that mean?
8. Twice in verses 10-11 Paul says “so that” – what does this tell us about one purpose of our suffering?
9. Why is it helpful to know we “are always being given over to death?”
10. In verses 12-15, Paul talks about how he uses suffering to point others to Jesus. Why might others listen to us with a “closer ear” in the midst of our suffering? How do we not minimize the pain in our suffering, but yet still point others to Jesus?
11. In verses 16-18, Paul tells us how anticipates the glory that is to come in heaven. How is this different that simply comparing or enduring to get through bouts of suffering?
12. What are some practical ways to look at things unseen?

Accountability Question: *Are there areas of your life that you are hiding because you don't want to be seen as a clay jar?*