

SIGNIFICANT TRIALS? SUBSTANTIAL FAITH!

Recently I was thinking about some of the ministry partners and mentors that I've *not* been able to spend time with over the last few months. As I reflect on each of them, I thank God for their sacrificial and faithful witness, which has made such a deep impression on me. To me, they are spiritual giants. Of course, there's nothing about their physical appearance that shouts "I'm a spiritual giant." You wouldn't give them a second look if you passed them on the street. But for nearly every one, God formed their character through adversity or loss in such a way that they developed a faith and trust that was so deep it almost has a substance to it. I'm sure you've known such people too and I'm glad because we all need good examples of Christian faithfulness. In today's passage, Paul serves as just such an example as he shows us how we can face troubles in such a way that the life of Jesus is manifested in us.

In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Paul writes, "*so 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 transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*"

This passage comes to us through a letter that Paul wrote to believers in Corinth. He wanted to make peace with them over past disagreements and affirm his role as a minister of the Gospel and an ambassador for Christ. In the letter, Paul talks about the suffering he has experienced. He has been afflicted in every way, perplexed, persecuted and struck down, but through it all he has retained his hopefulness. This is because Paul has learned an important lesson. He has come to see *through* trials and challenges and recognize that there's something else at work. There is a day-by-day renewal of his unseen, inner self that is preparing him for an eternal reality.

THE WEIGHT OF GLORY

It's no small thing to learn to look through daily trials and pain. (In fact, my neck is aching as I prepare this devotional right now!) Paul realizes however that what we see and feel do not have the final say on reality. Even if we suffer in our physical bodies, these trials can actually strengthen and mature our eternal self. Suffering therefore has a purpose as we learn to trust in God and release our desire to control circumstances or avoid pain. Through this act of submission, God prepares us to witness and receive a glory so profound that it will have a substance to it, a weight even!

In *The Weight of Glory*, C.S. Lewis writes, "the promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is."

Paul's ability to see and move in these eternal realities is what makes him a spiritual giant. But his spiritual self stands in stark contrast to his physical self. Paul's opponents in Corinth comment, "(Paul's) letters are weighty and strong but his bodily presence is weak and his speech of no account." Indeed, Paul's earthly resumé is characterized in Chapter 11 by whippings, shipwrecks, imprisonment and deprivation of many sorts. Meanwhile his eternal resumé is marked by a genuine humility and God-honoring integrity. Most importantly, he has learned to wield truth in love as an invitation to relationship with Jesus, because he has known the miraculous grace of God in his own life. For these reasons, we do well not to judge our spiritual maturity by outward, visible signs, but by the fruit that manifests through our lives.

ETERNAL WEIGHT

So what does this mean for us as we face the challenges of the coming day? Well, first off, we should think about weightiness in the right way. It's a good thing! And we get there as we make the daily decision to live for God. If you choose to do so, you can count on trials that may leave you feeling physically depleted and emotionally worn out by the end of the day. But at the same time you can also celebrate that you are on a tried and true path to Christian maturity. As you walk out each day under the weight of Jesus' easy yoke, your inner, eternal self is being renewed and grown. And so we can be encouraged, or as Paul says, "not lose heart" as we look through the "light momentary afflictions" of the day and anticipate the day when we will be able to bear up under the eternal weight of glory that emanates from our Father in heaven. God bless you!

REFLECTION:

1. What aspects of spiritual weightiness do you recognize in those around you?
2. Think about the last time you experienced suffering. Were you able to see through it to the work that God was doing in your life? How did He grow you?
3. Life with Jesus is a mixture of present joy and delayed gratification. Thank Jesus for his presence with you by the Holy Spirit and ask him to give you the depth of character to wait for the day when faith will be made sight (2 Cor. 5:7).