

We Need Not Lose Heart in the Face of Suffering

Small Group Follow-up Study for 2 Corinthians 4:7-15

RE-READ

[7] But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. [8] We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; [9] persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; [10] always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. [11] For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. [12] So death is at work in us, but life in you.

[13] Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, [14] knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. [15] For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

RECAP

"Why is it that the children of light sometimes walk in the thick darkness; why [is it that] the heralds of the daybreak find themselves at times in tenfold night?" so asked the great Charles Haddon Spurgeon in his book, *Lectures to My Students*. His answer, in typical Spurgeon style, was multifaceted: "The times most favourable to fits of depression, so far as I have experienced, may be summed up in a brief catalogue."

- *The hour of great success*: When at last a long-cherished desire is fulfilled, when God has been glorified greatly by our means, and a great triumph achieved, then we are apt to faint. It might be imagined that amid special favours our soul would soar to heights of ecstasy, and rejoice with joy unspeakable, but it is generally the reverse. The Lord seldom exposes his warriors to the perils of exultation over victory; he knows that few of them can endure such a test, and therefore dashes their cup with bitterness.
- *In the midst of a long stretch of unbroken labour, the same affliction* may be looked for. The bow cannot be always bent without fear of breaking. Even the earth must lie fallow and have her Sabbaths, and so must we.
- *One crushing stroke has sometimes laid the minister very low*. The brother most relied upon becomes a traitor. Judas lifts up his heel against the man who trusted him, and the preacher's heart for the moment fails him. ... Equally overwhelming is the blow when an honoured and beloved member yields to temptation, and disgraces the holy name with which he was named. Anything is better than this.
- *When troubles multiply*, and discouragements follow each other in long succession, like Job's messengers, then, too, amid the [agitation] of soul occasioned by evil tidings, despondency [deprives] the heart of all its peace.

In short, Spurgeon says that hardships, faced in gospel ministry, when compounded, have the greatest tendency to dishearten the child of God. Perhaps you can relate. If so, then you need to hear the message of our text: we need not lose heart in the face of suffering. We need not lose heart, first, our suffering puts God's saving power and the beauty of the gospel on display. We need not lose heart, second, because, even in our suffering, God is going to give us his grace to keep on going. We need not lose heart, third, because God uses our suffering to strengthen the church. And we need not lose heart, fourth, because we can call on the Lord in the midst of our suffering and know that he will deliver us one way or another.

RESPOND

1. What caught your attention from Sunday's sermon? What are you still thinking about/mulling over? What questions did Sunday's sermon raise that remain unanswered in your mind?
2. Which of Spurgeon's reasons for discouragement resonated with you most? Why? What help did you find in our look at 2 Corinthians 4:7-15?
3. What lessons may we learn from Paul's description of us as "jars of clay" (4:7)?
4. Have you experienced a "but now" moment that you can recall? Tell us about it.
5. How important is encouragement in the Christian life? How may we give it to one another? How has the faith of our fathers fed your faith?