

ZOOM

"MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE" 2 CORINTHIANS 4:1-18

This Week's Core Competency

Joy— I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances. John 15:11, *I have told you this so my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

The Christian Life Profile, a discipleship tool to assess Christian beliefs, practices, and virtues, asks those who take it to respond on a five-point scale from "does not apply at all" to "applies completely" to the following four statements:

1. I have inner contentment even when things go wrong.
2. Circumstances do not dictate my mood.
3. I am excited about the sense of purpose I have for my life.
4. I can be content with the money and possessions I now have.

Although the word "joy" doesn't appear in 2 Corinthians 4:1-18, it is implicit in Paul's description of his circumstances and reaction to them. The chapter more or less opens and closes with the words, "we do not lose heart" (vv. 1, 16). Other translations read: "we do not give up" (NLV); "we do not become discouraged" (NET); "we faint not" (NKJV). According to the apostle, "the gospel of the glory of Christ" that reveals "the knowledge

We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

— 2 Corinthians 4:16

of the glory of God in the face of Christ" is a treasure believers have in "jars of clay," a figurative reference to their mortal bodies. He describes their human frailty with these words: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then death is at work in us, but life is at work in you" (vv. 8-11). In spite of the fact that believers are wasting away physically, they are being renewed day by day spiritually. The irony of their desperate situation does not rob them of their joy.

More generally speaking, joy belongs to those who cultivate close fellowship with Christ. You've no doubt heard it said, "The key to joy is Jesus first, others second, yourself last." The statement is memorable; whether it's absolutely true or not is another matter. One thing is for sure, however. Joy comes through knowing Christ—serving him, yes, but knowing him intimately even more so. I'm reminded of the story of Mary and Martha. Listen to it from *The Message*. "As they continued their travel, Jesus entered a village. A woman by the name of Martha welcomed him and made him feel quite at home. She had a sister, Mary, who sat before the Master, hanging on every word he said. But Martha was pulled away by all she had to do in the kitchen. Later, she stepped in, interrupting them. "Master, don't you care that my sister has abandoned the kitchen to me? Tell her to lend me a hand."

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"The Master said, 'Martha, dear Martha, you're fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it-it's the main course, and won't be taken from her'" (Lk 10:38-42).

"One thing only is essential," Jesus said. That one thing is knowing him, which comes through being with him. In his first letter, John wrote, "And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete" (1Jn 1:3, 4). John's joy was made complete by passing it on to his readers. By passing on fellowship with the Father and with his Son, John passed on his joy because fellowship with the Father and with his Son produces joy.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

1 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We

always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. 15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Box "therefore" indicating *result* in v. 1.
- * Box "since" indicating *reason* in v. 1.
- * Highlight "we do not lose heart" in vv. 1, 16.
- * Underline "we" in v. 2.
- * Circle "secret and shameful ways" in v. 2.
- * Circle "deception" in v. 2.
- * Circle "veiled" in v. 3.
- * Box "so that" indicating *purpose* in v. 4.
- * Circle "image" in v. 4.
- * Circle "light" in v. 6.

- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 7-9.
- * Underline "jars of clay" in v. 7.
- * Circle "all surpassing" in v. 7.
- * Circle "hard pressed," "crushed," "perplexed," "persecuted," "abandoned," and "struck down" in vv. 8-9.
- * Box "so that" indicating *purpose* in vv. 10, 11, 15.
- * Box "so then" indicating *result* in v. 12.
- * Bracket "outwardly" and "inwardly" in v. 16.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. In what does Paul take heart?
2. Explain the *contrast* introduced by "on the contrary."
3. Put what verse 3 means *literally* in your own words.
4. *Who* blinds *whom* and *how*?
5. The gospel enlightens us (vv. 4, 6). How so?
6. To what does "this treasure" refer in verse 7?
7. Explain the *purpose* served by the "jars of clay."
8. Verses 10-11 contain a rather obscure *paradox*. Explain it best you can.
9. Identify the hope Paul alludes to in verses 13-14.
10. **Discussion:** Talk about how God renews us *inwardly*.

day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

This passage consists of four paragraphs, and like all good paragraphs, each one has a topic sentence that expresses the main thought of the paragraph. The first sentence in a paragraph isn't always the topic sentence but often it is, and in the first paragraph, it is. "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart." Put differently, "Because God in his mercy has given us this work to do, we don't lose heart."

If anyone ever had a good reason for losing heart, becoming discouraged, giving up, Paul did. But instead of quitting, he patiently pressed on. How he viewed his work made all the difference in the world. Warren Wiersbe is right when he says, "The way you look at your ministry helps to determine how you will fulfill it. If you look on serving Christ as a burden instead of a privilege, you will be a drudge and do only what is required of you. Some people even look on service as a punishment from God. When Paul considered the fact that he was a minister of Jesus Christ, he was overwhelmed by the grace and mercy of God. His positive attitude toward the ministry had some practical consequences in his life" ("2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:641). Then he goes on to mention three. *It kept him from being a quitter* (v. 1). "We do not lose heart," he said. *It kept him from being a deceiver* (vv. 2-4). Some would stop at nothing to advance their ministry, but not Paul. He didn't spin the truth or edit his message to suit his hearers. He simply told the truth and left the results up to God. In a nutshell, he had integrity. And *it kept him from being a self-promoter* (vv. 5-6). Paul's ministry wasn't all about Paul. It wasn't all about the minister. It was all about Jesus Christ and all about others (641-42).

Through God's mercy we who have been saved all have work to do—work entailed in being Christians. We're not apostles like Paul; most of us aren't employees of a church or Christian ministry. But we're all "God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph 2:10), and we all run the risk of losing heart. But if we see our work like Paul saw his, we can patiently press on and not give up.

The first sentence in the second paragraph also serves as the topic sentence. "We have this treasure

in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. For apostles as well as other believers, being Christian is a matter of life and death. Paul makes that perfectly clear in this paragraph. On one hand, we possess the treasure "of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ life" (v. 6)—and the ministry that comes with it. On the other, this treasure is contained in the frail clay jars of our humanity, concealing its true value. God planned it this way to show that we are powerless apart from his all-surpassing power. We have neither the power to give life nor the power to minister that life to others. We are wholly dependent on him. That dependence on him is evident in four profound paradoxes of the Christian life and ministry. In each case, our human frailty is evident on one side of the "but" and God's all-surpassing power on the other. "We are hard pressed on every side," Paul says. In other words, at times we feel like the four walls of our Christian existence are closing in on us. But then he goes on to say, "But not crushed" because God provides a way of escape. "Perplexed"—sometimes we just don't know what to do in a given situation. What *would* Jesus do? "But not in despair" because God guides us. "Persecuted"—while less common in the West, a person stands to lose his or her life in some countries for converting to Christianity. "But not abandoned" because God sees us through these ordeals. "Struck down"—women and children are often subject to verbal and physical abuse from unbelieving husbands and fathers because of their commitment to Christ. "But not destroyed" because God will lift them up. No wonder Paul goes on to say, "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus." In other words, Christians, obviously some more than others depending on their circumstances, suffer and in some cases die for Christ's sake and so share in Christ-like suffering. But to the extent that we are given over to death for Jesus' sake, the all-surpassing power of God is revealed in us, giving us life.

Following the opening quotation, the first sentence in the third paragraph likewise serves as the topic sentence. "With the same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present

us with you in his presence." Although they are "given over to death for Jesus' sake," believers persevere because they have hope in a future resurrection. They believe in "life after, life after death."

The first sentence in the fourth paragraph again serves as the topic sentence, which uses

repetition to close the loop of Paul's thought begun in verse 1. "Therefore, we do not lose heart." Even though we are physically "wasting away," spiritually we are being renewed by the hope of eternal glory that far outweighs temporal troubles.

The Message of the Passage

Because our ministry is from the Lord, we share the gospel with integrity, speaking what we believe in hope of resurrection, even though in our human frailty we are continually beset by troubles.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 *living questions* to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living questions*:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **therefore** The word probably looks forward to the next clause with this sense, "Since through God's mercy we have this ministry, therefore, we do not lose heart." "He had no reason to lose heart (cf. Gal 6:9), for God in his mercy had granted him a privilege exceeding that of Moses (cf. 1 Tim 1:12-16). He had been called not to communicate the law but to dispense grace. A minister of the gospel has a higher calling than even the mediator of the law. Paul regarded this divine commission to serve under the new covenant as more than compensating for all the trials he endured for being true to his calling (vv. 7-12, 17; cf. Rom 8:18), including the malicious charges of his Corinthian opponents (note v. 2)" (Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:340).

v. 2 **secret and** Lit., "hidden things of shame" a reference to the kind of things a person might do when no one is looking or under the cover of darkness. See "shameful hidden deeds" (the NET Bible); "disgraceful" ways (RSV).

v. 2 **deception** Lit., "walking in craftiness." "Paul's word means literally 'readiness to do anything', usually any bad thing; as we say, 'to stop at nothing'" (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC, 128). The person who uses this is ready to use any trick in the book, to win an audience.

v. 2 **distort** Lit., "falsifying." The verb means "to use deceit, to use bait, to ensnare, to corrupt with error, to falsify, to corrupt" (Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 462). Paul is likely responding to unnamed critics in Corinth who accused him of falsifying the gospel, probably by not requiring Gentile converts to keep the law—the same ones who carried letters of recommendation with them (see 3:6; cf. Acts 15:1, 5).

v. 3 **veiled** Paul returns to a figure he used in 3:14-16 to refer to "not understanding." Jewish people didn't understand his gospel; it didn't make sense to them. They didn't *see* what he was saying.

v. 4 **blinded** They didn't *see* what he was saying because Satan had "blinded" their minds—something all unbelievers have in common according to this verse. "The fault, however, is not in the gospel, but in those who have failed to discern its glory. The unveiled gospel, openly proclaimed, has been veiled to them because it is veiled *in* them: the veil is over their hearts and minds (3:14ff), not over the gospel" (Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, 125).

v. 7 **jars** Lit., "earthen vessels" (cf. RSV, NASB, NKJV). "In the opinion of T. W. Manson, the earthen vessels from which the Apostle draws his analogy here 'are the small pottery lamps, cheap and fragile, that could be bought in the shops of Corinth' (135-36). 'The plural vessels suggests that Paul is thinking not only of himself but also of his colleagues'" (Barrett, 138).

v. 8 **hard pressed** Lit., "that which presses upon or burdens the spirit" (Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, 202), legitimately translated "pressured," "burdened," "troubled," "afflicted."

v. 8 **crushed** Lit., "to pressure into a narrow place." The Greek word speaks of the narrowness of a room, a confined space, and then painfulness of which this is the occasion (203).

v. 8 **perplexed** The Greek word means "to be at a loss, to be in doubt, to be perplexed, to be despondent. In the papyri it was used of one who was ruined by creditors and was at his wit's end" (Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 464).

v. 9 **persecuted** The Greek word means "to hunt, to hunt down like an animal, to persecute" (464). "Paul speaks of being hunted. He knew very well the intense agony of being hated and pursued like a quarry by his fellow-men; but he also knew that, however savage their hatred, he was never forsaken and left as a prey to his enemies. The divine promise, 'Under no circumstances whatever will I forsake thee' (Heb. 13:5)" (Hughes, 139).

v. 9 **abandoned** The Greek word means "to desert, to abandon one in difficulty." The word occurs in the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT in God's promises not to forsake his own (Deut. 31:6-8; Joshua 1:5; 1 Chron. 28:30; Ps. 36:25, 28)" (Rienecker, 464).

v. 9 **struck down** The Greek word means "to knock down, to strike down w. force. The word was used of throwing an opponent down in wrestling or of striking someone down w. a sword or another weapon" (464); cf. Acts 14:19, 20.

v. 10 **death** "The word suggests a process, the making dead (*nekros*), and it is probably that Paul's meaning is that one who observed his life as a Christian apostle would see, constantly repeated, a process analogous to the killing of Jesus" (Barrett, 139-40).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

To children, life's disappointments can sometimes seem insurmountable. I missed that shot in the soccer game and we lost. I can never face my team again. Other kids made fun of me at school for the mistake I made in class. Can we just move? It's easy for both kids and adults, to get so focused on what's happening in the present that we can't see the future. In our text today, Paul reminds us that everything in the present is temporary. While we may be caught up in the struggles and trials of today, God is calling us to shift our perspective to eternity. It takes discipline to look past today's circumstances and into the hope and joy of the future promised to God's children. Meditate on these passages this week and challenge each other to live with an eternal perspective rather than a temporary one. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). "But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31). "Behold, I am coming soon" (Revelation 22:12). There's nothing like the promises of God to turn our eyes from the seen to the unseen. Praying your family focuses on eternity this week!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read 2Co 4:7-18

1. What words does Paul use to show he is enduring hardship?
2. According to verse 8, what is his attitude about his hardship?
3. What does Paul encourage the Corinthians to focus on?

What Do You Think

Paul didn't look at his circumstances when he was in a trial; he looked at Jesus. What trial are you experiencing right now? How can you look at it through God's eyes?

What R U Going To Do

Find some old sunglasses or pick up a pair at the dollar store. Glue paper over the lenses so that you can't see out of them and write Jesus on the paper. Whenever you face a trial this week, put on your "Jesus" glasses and focus on Him instead!

Core Comp

Joy - I am happy on the inside no matter what's happening on the outside.

Memory Verse

2 Co 4:17 – *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

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30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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