



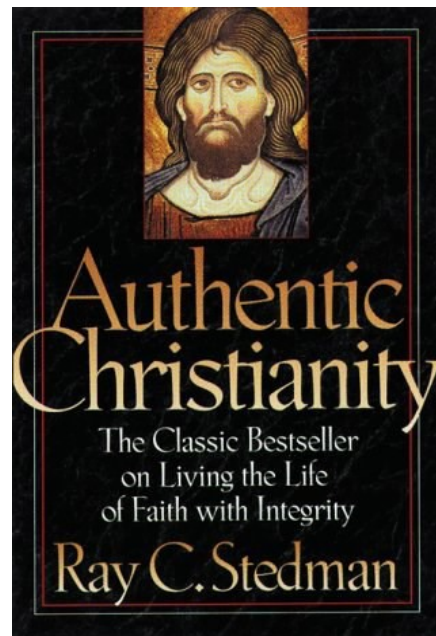
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IS THIS AS GOOD AS IT GETS?
[FAITH AND MOTIVATION – 2 COR 4: 16-5: 17]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JULY 1, 2007

FROM THE **masterwork** SERIES STUDY OF:



IS THIS AS GOOD AS IT GETS?

[FAITH AND MOTIVATION – 2 COR 4:16-5:17]

I read a sad story this week, a story about a honeymoon disaster. The newlyweds arrived at the hotel in the wee hours with high hopes. They'd reserved a large room with romantic amenities. That's not what they found. Seems the room was pretty skimpy. The tiny room had no view, no flowers, a cramped bathroom and worst of all—no bed. Just a foldout sofa with a lumpy mattress and sagging springs. It was not what they'd hoped for; consequently, neither was the night.

The next morning the sore-necked groom stormed down to the manager's desk and ventilated his anger. After listening patiently for a few minutes, the clerk asked, "Did you open the door in your room?" The groom admitted he hadn't. He returned to the suite and opened the door he had thought was a closet. There, complete with fruit baskets and chocolates, was a spacious bedroom!

Ugh! Can't you just see them standing in the doorway of the room they'd overlooked? Oh, it would have been so nice...a comfortable bed instead of clumpy sofa. A curtain-framed window rather than a blank wall. A fresh breeze in place of stuffy air. An elaborate restroom, not a tight toilet. But they missed it. How sad. Cramped, cranky, and uncomfortable while comfort was a door away. They missed it because they thought the door was a closet.

"Why didn't you try?" I was asking as I read the piece. "Get curious. Check it out. Give it a shot. Take a look. Why did you just assume the door led nowhere?" Good question. Not just for the couple but for everyone. Not for the pair who thought the room was all there was, but for all who feel cramped and packed in the place called earth. It's not what we'd hoped. It may have its moments, but it is simply not what we think it should be. Something inside of us groans for more. But what? And why?

Today, as we continue with our study from Ray Stedman's *Authentic Christianity*, I want to remind you of one of our foundational scripture verses in this study from **1 John 5:12 (NIV)**. Remember what it says? *"He who **has** the Son has life; he who has **not** the Son of God has not life."* It's simple. We find the authentic life that Christ calls us to lead when we're filled with the Son, Jesus Christ. Bottom line it's "everything from God...nothing from me!"

Let me ask you this. **WHAT MOTIVATES YOU? WHAT INFLUENCES YOUR LIFE DAY IN AND DAY OUT? WHAT KEEPS YOU GOING? WHAT PART DOES FAITH REALLY PLAY IN YOUR DAILY LIFE? WHY DO YOU THINK PEOPLE CHOOSE FAITH?**

Open your Bible to **2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (MSG)** and follow along. I'm going to read from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase to make sure you get the idea of what Paul is saying here: ¹⁶⁻¹⁸*So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. **But the things we can't see now will last forever.***

That last sentence sounds a lot like FAITH, doesn't it? And what is "faith?" **HEBREWS 11:1 (NIV)** defines it this way: *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."*

In these verses from 2 Corinthians 4 we just read, do you see what Paul says? *"We do not lose heart."* We're not giving up! It's easy to lose heart, isn't it? It's easy to feel like giving up. It's easy to be discouraged, disillusioned, depressed, and disappointed. The reason why it's easy to lose heart in this life is because we face so many troubles. Each stage of life has its own set of troubles and as we grow older, WHEW! **HOW DOES THE AGING**

PROCESS AFFECT YOU COMPARED TO, SAY, TEN YEARS AGO? IS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE? Ha! How much time do you have? Sit down, grab a chair. Let me tell you about this thing called "aging."

Look again at what Paul says, *"Outwardly we are wasting away."* That's pretty blunt. Our outward bodies are decaying (NASB), dying (NLT), and perishing (NKJV). We older citizens know this better than anyone. But that's reality for all of us, not just seniors. Today, all of us here are one day closer to dying than we were yesterday. That's a sobering thought.

As we talked last week, consider for a moment the problems Paul was experiencing. Look back up at **2 COR 4:8-9**: *"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."* WHAT WAS THE SECRET OF PAUL'S COURAGE IN THE MIDST OF SO MUCH ADVERSITY? He did not dwell on his present problems; he looked ahead to the fulfillment of God's promises. In other words, Paul had an eternal perspective. You need to remember that: Having an eternal perspective will radically alter your values and desires.

This is why Paul could describe his troubles as "light and momentary." Now, with all we know about Paul, his problems were anything but light and momentary. But look at what he said in **Romans 8:18**, *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."* Though his problems were real and intense, his problems did not overcome him. Instead, he says, *"we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen."* Why did he do this? Because "what is seen is **temporary**, but what is unseen is **eternal**." In other words, *"The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever" (The Message)*. The unseen things are what count because they are eternal. They last forever. The seen things, the things of this life, do not. They are temporary.

Look back at verses 17-18 of 2 Corinthians 4 (NIV): *¹⁷For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* **HOW CAN THIS PASSAGE BE AN ENCOURAGEMENT IN OUR LIFE TODAY? HOW CAN WE MAKE THE "UNSEEN" ETERNAL REALITY A STRONGER PART OF OUR DAILY LIFE?**

In our opening story about the honeymooners, we talked about something inside of all of us **GROANING** for something more. Don't you feel that way sometimes, asking yourself the words of the title I wrote on the board today: **IS THIS ALL THERE IS? IS THIS AS GOOD AS IT GETS?** Deep down inside each of us we know there's more—a lot more! **HOW HAS YOUR PERSPECTIVE CHANGED ABOUT THE WAY YOU LOOK AT LIFE, SAY, OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS AS YOU'VE GROWN OLDER?**

A man named Smith was sitting on his roof during a flood, and the water was up to his feet. Before long a fellow in a canoe paddled past and shouted, "Can I give you a lift to higher ground?" "No, thanks," said Smith. "I have faith in the Lord and he will save me." Soon the water rose to Smith's waist. At this point a motorboat pulled up and someone called out, "Can I give you a lift to higher ground?" "No, thanks. I have faith in the Lord and he will save me." Later a helicopter flew by, and Smith was now standing on the roof with water up to his neck. "Grab the rope," yelled the pilot. "I'll pull you up." "No, thanks," said Smith. "I have faith in the Lord and he will save me." But after hours of treading water, poor, exhausted Smith drowned and went to his reward. As he arrived at the Pearly Gates, Smith met his maker and complained about this turn of events. "Tell me, Lord," he said, "I had such faith in you to save me and you let me down. What happened?" To which the Lord replied, "What do you want from me? I sent you two boats and a helicopter!"

Open your Bible to **2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-5 (NIV)**. As I read this, please notice that in this passage we find that heaven was not simply a **destination** for Paul; it was also a **motivation**. He was anxiously waiting for the day when he would fully participate in the abundant life promised in heaven. Listen to these words of Paul: *¹Now we know that if the **earthly tent** we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. ²Meanwhile we **groan**, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, ³because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

How did Paul describe our bodies? [TENT OR EARTHLY HOUSE] Yes, he used a tent or earthly house as a picture of our present earthly bodies. Anybody here ever been camping? Ever thought about your body as a tent? Not a bad metaphor. I've spent some nights in tents. Nice for vacation, but not intended for daily use. Flaps fly open. Winter wind creeps from beneath. Summer showers seep from above. Canvas gets raw and tent stakes come loose. We need something better, Paul argues. Something permanent. Something painless. Something more than flesh and bone. And until we get it, what do we do.

Look again at **2 COR 5:2**. What does Paul say we do: Groan! And so we groan. And well we should, Paul argues. We were not made for these puny quarters. See verse 4: *"For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened"* (2 Cor. 5:4 NCV). I know I'm not telling you anything new. You know the groan of the soul. You didn't need me to tell you it's there.

But maybe you do need me to tell you **IT'S OKAY**. It's all right to groan. It's permissible to yearn. Longing is part of life. It's only natural to long for home when on a journey. **We aren't home yet.**

As Max Lucado says, we are like orphans at the gate of the orphanage, awaiting our new parents. They aren't here yet, but we know they are coming. They wrote us a letter. We haven't seen them yet, but we know what they look like. They sent us a picture. And we're not acquainted with our new house yet, but we have a hunch about it. It's grand. They sent a description. And so what do we do? Here, at the gate where the now-already meets the path of the not-yet, what do we do? **We groan.** We long for the call to come home. But until he calls, we wait. We stand on the porch of the orphanage and wait. And how do we wait? With patient eagerness.

Listen to a few scriptures to help us with this patient eagerness:

ROMANS 8:25, *"We are hoping for something we do not have yet, and we are waiting for it patiently."* (emphasis added)

ROMANS 8:23 (NIV), *"We wait eagerly for our adoption as sons."* (Emphasis added) Patient eagerness. Not so eager as to lose our patience, and not so patient as to lose our eagerness.

Yet, we often tend to one or the other. We grow so patient we sleep! Our eyelids grow heavy. Our hearts grow drowsy. Our hope lapses. We slumber at our post. Or we are so eager we demand. We demand in this world what only the next world can give. No sickness. No suffering. No struggle. We stomp our feet and shake our fists, forgetting it is only in heaven that such peace is found.

We must be patient, but not so much that we don't yearn. We must be eager, but not so much that we don't wait. We'd be wise to do what the **newlyweds** never did. We'd be wise to open the door. Stand in the entryway. Gaze in the chambers. Gasp at the beauty. And wait. Wait for the groom to come and carry us, his bride, over the threshold.

So, with this eternal perspective in mind, WHAT is our MOTIVATOR? What motivates us to walk the walk and talk the talk, day in and day out? It's easy on Sunday—but what about tomorrow in the marketplace...or when that confused tourist cuts us off by crossing three lanes of traffic to turn in front of us, without giving even a signal? **HOW? THAT'S THE QUESTION?**

First, look at verse 7 of **2 COR 5** to be reminded of HOW we are to walk: *"for we walk by faith, not by sight."* OK. Good. Faith, not sight. But what's the MOTIVATOR here? It's like telling a child not to do something and they do it anyway? What keeps the child from willfully disobeying the parent? **FEAR!** Yes, fear, that's one. And there's also a bigger one. Turn to **2 COR 5: 8-15 (NLT)** and follow along as I read: *⁸Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord. ⁹So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, **our goal is to please him.** ¹⁰For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.*

*¹¹Because we understand our **fearful** responsibility to the Lord, we work hard to persuade others. God knows we are sincere, and I hope you know this, too. ¹²Are we commending ourselves to you again? No, we are giving you a reason to be proud of us, so you can answer those who brag about having a spectacular ministry rather than having a sincere heart. ¹³If it seems we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God. And if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit. ¹⁴**Either way, Christ's love controls us.** Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. ¹⁵He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.*

Did you see the most supreme and powerful motivator in verse 14? **Love!** Just as God's love made Paul willing to do so courageous and risky things, that same love should motivate us to diligently seek to serve and please Him too. Remember what **2 Chronicles**

7:14 (NKJV) says? *¹⁴if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

God's Word is full of promises for us if we will just obey and worship Him. He has made it simple. Yet we ignore Him. *In the new movie just out starring Steve Carrell, **Evan Almighty**, God appears visibly to a new Congressman just as he's been elected and moved into a ritzy neighborhood outside of Washington, D.C. The Congressman has it all—wife, children, new Hummer, new big (big) house, all the "stuff" that Congressman would expect. However, God confronts Steve Carrell's character and says that He wants him to build an ark. Although God appears in-person, Carrell says no thank you and further says that he has **other plans**. God does just what you and I would do if our child told us that what we wanted done was not part of HIS PLANS! God laughed!*

How are we motivated by the "love of God"? What does Paul mean when he says the "love of Christ" controls us? Good question. And a great answer is found in **1 JOHN 4:10 (NIV)**, *"This is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."* Love begins with God, not with us. Christ loved us first.

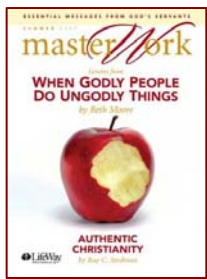
But the important point to see here is that **LOVE, NOT DUTY**, is the proper motive for Christian functioning. *"If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15)*, says Jesus. It is not the other way around: "If you keep my commandments you will love me." Think for a moment how you show love to your children or to your spouse? Love makes obedience easy; it is the delight of love to do what the loved one desires. I do what my wife wants me to (generally) as an expression of my love for her!

So, the TWO motivating factors in our lives to follow Christ and live an authentic Christian life everyday are **FEAR OF GOD** and **THE LOVE OF CHRIST**. Paul reminds us in **verse 17 of 2 Corinthians 5**

(NLT) that we are new creations: ¹⁷ *This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*

Remember, living the Christian life is not **HARD**, it's **IMPOSSIBLE**. Only through the power of Jesus Christ living in our life can we handle all life throws at us. I close with Paul's words from **Philippians 4:13**, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*"

Let's pray.



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