

Devotional Reading #5

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ while we fix our gaze not on the things which are seen, but on the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Paul testifies to the fact that if we belong to Christ, we can maintain our spiritual vigor even as we wane in physical vigor. What great news for those of us who are experiencing the physical limitations that come with advanced years!

Yes, it is true that we can no longer do as much as we used to be able to do, nor can we do all of the same things that we used to do. Reduced physical capacity is a reality with which we must come to grips. We do neither ourselves nor others any favors by denying this fact.

But there is a wonderful compensation available to those who are indwelt by God's Spirit. We can be spiritually renewed and refreshed each and every day! Paul's claim in verse 16 testifies to the veracity of Jesus' promise concerning the Holy Spirit: "Whoever believes in Me, from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). The Holy Spirit is like an artesian well which continues to bubble up its life-giving refreshment. This is why people often remark about Spirit-filled seniors that they seem "younger than their years." Not that they are so physically vigorous, but that they have a zest for life, a keen interest in others, and a spiritual zeal that outweighs their advanced years.

If this is Jesus' offer, why do we often fail to experience it? There are many answers to this question, but Paul reminds us here of one key way of appropriating this daily inner renewal: "while we fix our gaze not



on the (temporal) things which are seen, but on the (eternal) things which are not seen.” “Fix our gaze” is the Greek word *skopeo*, from which we get the English word “scope.” When a bird-watcher “scopes” a bird, he peers intently through his binoculars to see and appreciate this marvelous member of God’s creation. As the bird moves from branch to branch, he follows it carefully, rather than being distracted by other visual stimuli.

Paul has cultivated the capacity to fix his gaze on the eternal life that he will one day inherit, along with all who have received Jesus. Of course, it is difficult to focus on some future reality unless we know something about it. That is why Paul immediately goes on to describe some of the wonderful aspects of eternal life (2 Corinthians 5:1-11). He speaks of receiving new bodies that will never age or die. He speaks of heaven as the ultimate homecoming, when we join Jesus and other believers in a perfect world we will never have to leave. He speaks of being richly rewarded for the service we have rendered to Jesus in this life. These are just a few of the many things revealed in the New Testament concerning eternal life. Paul says that through the gospel, God has “abolished death and brought to life and immortality to light” (2 Timothy 1:10). As you read the New Testament, make a habit of looking for what each book teaches about the next life that awaits you. This practice will not only increase your knowledge of eternity; it will also cultivate a focus on eternal things.

Paul gives us another eternity-focus cultivation tip in Romans 8:22,23. *For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.* Notice that Paul likens the sufferings of this life to the pains of child-birth. And he likens the blessings of God’s Spirit in this life to first fruits – the earliest fruits that guarantee a full harvest later.



What enables mothers who are in labor to endure such agonizing spasms? Sure, it is because they focus not on the labor pain itself, but on the fact that each labor pain brings them one step closer to the joy of holding their newborn in their arms. In the same way, through practice we can develop the habit of letting each suffering remind us that we are one step closer to being home with the Lord. And as we do this, we will find the Holy Spirit infusing fresh strength into our souls!

Similarly, we can learn to view each blessing in this life as a foretaste of the ultimate blessings that await us in eternity. When we experience some beauty in nature, we can let that remind us that the new heavens and the new earth will far exceed the beauty we now see. When we experience a great day with loved ones, we can let that remind us of the day when we will be at home in God's family forever. When we note a way that God has transformed our character, we can let that remind us that we will one day be freed forever from our sinful natures and perfectly radiate Christ's character. Rather than clutch on to each temporal blessing and mourn that it is passing away, we can learn to thank God for it and look forward to its greater fulfillment. And as we do this, God's Spirit will infuse us with fresh energy to serve Him until that day!

Lord, thank You for giving us the free gift of eternal life through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank You for revealing so much trustworthy information about heaven in Your scriptures. Help us to cultivate an operational focus on what we will inherit after our short time on this earth. And as we cultivate this focus, thank You that You will energize us each day to keep serving You!

