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Do Not Lose Heart
2 Corinthians 4: 13-5:1

¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸ because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

5 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

When I was in 8th grade,
my beloved ***Grandpa Bill died*** after a long battle with cancer.
It was Easter morning, and we were staying with relatives in Cushing.
I will never forget it because that morning I woke up ***startled***,
with the strangest feeling that something had happened to Grandpa.
It was only later in the day that I learned that at the same time I woke up
startled with that strange feeling,
my beloved Grandpa ***had passed*** from this life to his eternal one.

My Grandpa Bill was part of a Presbyterian church,
and he was the one who made me ***feel at home in church***.
He cleaned the church, and let me run around it while he did so.
That was my first time in the pulpit!
Grandpa took me to funerals, to church services, to potlucks,
he helped me see that church was family,
and God's family was a place of welcome.
We had a ***very real spiritual connection***.

So I guess it's no surprise that I experienced this at his death.
My strange feeling was replaced by a ***powerful peace***—
a sense that he was safe with God, finally whole, finally free.

What a gift.

Have you ever had an experience like that?

I remember a ***prayer time during a power walk*** many years ago, while I was on vacation with one of my kids, visiting a dear friend on the Carolina coast.

God put on my heart a verse of scripture from ***Hebrews 4: 14-16***:
let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, that we may find mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.

I was encouraged in this prayer time ***to come boldly to God*** with my greatest needs, despite the fact that I felt like life was going pretty well.

What I didn't realize is that something ***bad was just around the corner***, and I would lean heavily upon the verse God had given me in that beautiful run on the beach.

I think about that often while reading scripture, and *Streams in the Desert* each morning, And I've had so many of you say something similar—that ***God seems to give you just the right word***, Just when you need it. It's like the page that day was written ***just for you***, Just for your situation.

Have you ever ***thought of someone*** in need, just before they called you on the phone? Have you ever had a feeling that something bad was going to happen, just before it actually did? What about feelings of déjà vu?

How do you explain these experiences? Do you believe in ***a sixth sense***? Do you believe in the ***spiritual world***? -- the good and evil that we cannot see, but we know exists?

I read something interesting this week about ***sharks and birds***---did you know that they have a sixth sense? It's a magnetic sense.

A man named Rupert Sheldrake wrote a book called *The Sense of Being Stared At*, and he writes about how sharks and birds have a **magnetic** sense, that enables them to respond to the earth's magnetic field. Fascinating, isn't it?

Sheldrake goes on to suggest that humans may have **a spiritual sense**, that connects us to one another, and the world. He says that most people have sensed others **staring** at us, while our backs were turned at the time. Sixty percent of us claim to have experiences of **telepathy**. Rupert Sheldrake, *The Sense of Being Stared At* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2003), pg. 24.

Some say that we have **this sixth sense, of extrasensory perception**. Beyond the traditional five senses, of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. But what about that spiritual sense—**deep in the heart and mind**? It's something I cannot fully explain, but I know it is real. Have you experienced it?

Paul may be talking about this, when he encourages us **to not lose heart**. He says that we can have **hope**, because our momentary **affliction**, is nothing compared to the eternal **weight of glory** we'll eventually experience.

And where is that eternal glory?
It's **beyond the surface** of this world, and our lives,
It's a world with God.
Paul says ¹⁸ *because we look not at what can be seen, but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.*

What if we really do have a sixth sense for the eternal?
What if that sense is the **presence of God** inside of us?
Isn't that what we learn in scripture?
That God resides in us?
Isn't that what kids seem to know intuitively?

That Jesus is where? In our **hearts!**

And what if we have this sense,
Because we are made in the **image of God?**
Wouldn't that mean it is a **gift** from God?

When you think of your own spiritual sixth sense—
what does it do for you?

What it has done for me is give me **hope**.
It lets me know that God is in fact at work in my life.
It reminds me that the **Holy Spirit** is at work in my spirit.
I feel more **connected to God** when I pay attention to the spiritual realm,
Both in my heart, and all around me.

Paul reminds us in his letters to the Corinthian church,
That we **hold the very presence of God inside our hearts**.

In fact, we do not need to lose heart,
Because our **hearts are being renewed** day by day, by God.

Listen again to 2 Corinthians 4:

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

It's interesting—this idea that God is inside of us,
Has actually been a source of **debate** for many years.

In 1934 two theologians, **Karl Barth and Emil Brunner** had a serious debate
over the location of God—specifically, the **point of contact**,
Between humans and God.

Karl **Barth** believed that we can only find God **outside** of us,
while **Brunner** insisted that the point of contact
could be found **within** the human heart.

The funny thing is, when I was reading about this debate,
I was thinking—**why is this a debate?**

Isn't God in **both places?**

And isn't the apostle Paul saying that God is in BOTH places?

In these verses **Paul seems to be saying** just that—

That God is found within the human heart,

As he describes, our **inner nature is being renewed** day by day,

And God is beyond us—in the building from God, eternal in the heavens.

The Benedictine Monk named **Bede Griffiths** traveled the world, and asked people from all different religions—**Where is God?** And strangely, the Hindus and Buddhists in the East, all pointed to their own **hearts**, while Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the West, would consistently point up, **to the sky**.

Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*, (New York: New World Library, 2001), 79.

If someone asked you right now,

Where is God?

What would be the first answer to pop into your head?

Would you point to your **heart? Or to heaven?**

It's interesting to think about,

And it might just reveal a lot about your faith right now.

Celtic Christianity often talks about **'thin' places**, Those times and places where humanity and God meet—where the eternal and the temporal come together.

Today many believers have a sense of how and when they have experienced God's presence, but we do not always have a **good vocabulary** to describe this.

Paul seems to give us one.

Paul believes that the spirit of Jesus Christ resides within us,

That the Holy Spirit is at work in our spirit,

and that Jesus is actually working in us to make us new creations! (2 Cor 5:17)

He also believes that we are **already** in the presence of God,

But **not yet** in the eternal presence of God.

We are **already** saved by Christ, but **not yet** in our eternal home.

That eternal home is something we look forward to, like the many rooms in the Father's house in heaven, that Jesus describes in **John 14** when he tells his disciples, *let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me.*

We have a ***foot in both worlds***—in the now, and the not yet.
 We ***live in two worlds***—the ***physical*** one, and the ***spiritual*** one,
 The one we can ***see***,
 And the one we ***cannot see***.

That spiritual world is ***just as real and powerful*** as the physical one.
 Some people say that Paul separates the physical and spiritual,
 but he does not.
 He sees the power of each, and their working together in our lives.

I was talking to one of our members yesterday about the upcoming VBS,
 and the power of the spiritual realm.
spiritual battles.

We don't talk a lot about that in Presbyterian circles,
 because we do not subscribe to the theory that little devils are all around us
 causing us to make bad choices, or forcing us to do bad things.
 We take full responsibility for our actions.

However, the great theologian C.S. Lewis once warned in his book
The Screwtape Letters:
 We should ***not spend too much*** time thinking about the demonic,
 And we should ***not pretend it does not exist***.
 It's very real---and we're crazy to ignore it,
 But equally crazy to get too obsessed with it!

Jesus was very clear in his teaching and healing and preaching,
 that ***evil is real***,
 and the devil is at work against all that is good.
 You don't have to believe in a little guy running in a red suit—
 all you need to do is turn on the evening news,
 and you will be reminded.
 Evil exists.
 It is very real, and very powerful.

And as Christians, whether we can see it or not,
 we live in a ***spiritual world***,
 and we get caught up in ***spiritual battles***.

As a Pastor, I see this most clearly whenever we are embarking on some ***new ministry or mission***, or a big celebration like Easter or Christmas.

You can pretty much bet that whenever we are trying to do something good and big with God, we will ***come up against evil***—somewhere, somehow. We might be faced with negative attitudes, sickness, despair, dwindling resources, all kinds of challenges and trials, that make us ***doubt the goodness of God***, and our mission!

This is what we call ***spiritual 'warfare'***. And it's exactly why we are told to put on the ***armor of God*** in Ephesians—because when we are faced with trials, we need more than ever the power of God's Word, God's Spirit, and truth, righteousness, and faith (Ephesians 6:10-18).

For so many kids, ***Vacation Bible School*** is a life-changing, transformative experience. The songs, games, crafts, and studies ***imprint*** God's word and love upon their hearts---forever. How many of ***you can recall*** something learned from VBS many, many years ago? I sure can!

So this week—for four days—we will be inviting young people ***to be transformed by God's grace and love***. Which means it ***won't all be easy***—here at church, or in our hearts and homes. We must be diligent in prayer---asking for God's strength and courage. We must hang onto to the promises of God's word, That our inner nature is being renewed, day by day, Even though things seem to be declining on the outside.

We need to hang onto the promise that ***what we see is not all there is***—we have something much more than our daily suffering! In the words of Paul, this slight, momentary affliction is nothing compared to the weight of glory that will one day be revealed to us.

Now, our trials and suffering
do not feel like something slight, or momentary,
but in an eternal perspective, in God's perspective,
That's exactly what it is.
It's just a **blip** on the radar screen of life.

This week will be **glorious**, for the joys of VBS are incredible.
It will also be **challenging**,
because we are bringing Good News to a world that thrives on bad.
And we are believing that the power of God's goodness and love,
is stronger than any evil or hate.

C.S. Lewis writes in his book, *The Great Divorce*,
about a bus ride from hell to heaven,
and how everything in heaven is so **REAL**,
so heavy, so weighty, that it actually hurts the feet of the people from hell,
who are not as 'real' as the people in heaven.

Hell is where people live in darkness,
and keep drifting further and further away from one another,
and away from any light.
Hell is where people are not exactly real.

Which is a great way to look at the spiritual world.
The **eternal**, good stuff is heavy, weighty, REAL,
And the **evil, suffering**, hurting stuff is slight, momentary, a blip.

Goodness holds weight.
Evil does not.

And the presence of God—is always, always,
Right before us,
In our hearts,
And In our lives.

Rev. Mark Barger Elliott tells a story of **a teacher and his disciple**.

The disciple asked the teacher---*where shall I find God?*

The teacher replied, *right here.*

Then why can't I SEE God?

Because you do not look.

But what should I look for?

Nothing, just look.

But at what?

At ANYTHING your eyes slight upon.

But must I look in a SPECIAL kind of way?

No, the ordinary way will do.

But don't I always look the ordinary way?

No, you don't.

But why not?

Because to look, you have to be here---You're mostly somewhere else!

Mark Barger Elliott, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol 3, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 113.

I pray that **all of us would look for God**—right now, right here.

In our hearts, and in our world.—In VBS!

And hang onto the Good News today from God!

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure...

That is the **Good News of the Gospel**, my friends.

Take Heart,

God is with us, making us new.

Amen.

