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2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Seventh Message

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THE HOPE OF THE NEW COVENANT

When I was growing up, one of my family's favorite cartoon strips was Peanuts, featuring Snoopy, Linus, Peppermint Patty and of course, Charlie Brown and his nemesis, Lucy. We always enjoyed watching the Charlie Brown episodes on TV, which we now enjoy with our kids on DVD, too. Lucy is pretty rough on Charlie Brown's self-esteem just about all the time, which among other problems keeps him pretty discouraged. But he keeps plucking up his courage and trying harder at life. In one scene, Lucy offers to hold the football so Charlie Brown can kick it. She's made this offer many times before, and every time he has gathered himself, run his fastest toward the ball and kicked with all his might, only to have Lucy pull the ball away at the last second. But this time she's being extra nice, and says she's really going to hold the ball so he can kick it. He's pretty sure what she's going to do, but he makes up his mind to just try harder and make it work out right this time. He gathers all his strength, runs full speed toward the ball and, of course, Lucy pulls the ball away. Charlie Brown's feet and arms fly up in the air, and he lands flat on his back, completely discouraged and hopeless.

Have you ever felt like that? Have you tried really hard, and then tried harder, and harder, only to fall flat again and again? Are you ever tempted to completely lose heart and give up? The question reminds me of Jesus' description of the multitude of people he saw: He said they were "like sheep without a shepherd." Without a shepherd, when a sheep falls it gets stuck on its back with all four feet sticking up in the —completely helpless. That's us oftentimes!

Life is hard. I know. I have seven kids with lots of challenges. I often wish I had an instruction book for each child that tells me just how to handle each complicated situation I run into. Many of you feel the same way with the challenges you face. Though we sometimes enjoy periods of great joy and happiness, we also experience seasons of great struggle and heartache. Discouragement can sap us of our inner joy and hope, and leave us unable to move.

How can we stay on our feet, dancing through life with confidence? Do we just need to find a relentless will to keep on trying? It didn't work for Charlie Brown! And how are we to face death, the ultimate opportunity for despair, and something none of us can escape? In the last verses of 2nd Corinthians 4, which we'll look at this morning, Paul gives us the answer to these questions. Let's see how his words affect us both now and for our future.

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the thing which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:16-18')

In these three short verses, we see three powerful contrasts:

- Our outer man (decaying) is contrasted with our inner man (being renewed).
- Our affliction (momentary, light) is contrasted with our glory (eternal, weighty).
- Things seen (temporary) are contrasted with things unseen (eternal).

As we look more carefully at these contrasts, we will see that Paul is giving us three powerful reasons for not losing heart (or conversely, maintaining hope). He'll also give us one key to persisting in that hope. Before that, though, he tells us why this hope is so important, so let's begin there. Verse 16:

I. The Importance of Confident Hope

Therefore we do not lose heart ...

Paul starts with a very strong "therefore we do not lose heart." But why would Paul and believers in Christ generally be tempted to lose heart? To find out, we need to be good Bible students and ask, "What is the therefore there for?" We need to review what Paul has already told us earlier in this letter. In 4:1-15, we

learned about the often burdensome trials we encounter. I understand that when Roman soldiers tortured a man, they would lie him on his back and put a large rock on his chest, then add another and another to increase the pressure. That's a picture of the pressures we experience. In Paul's own case, the pressure got so bad, he thought he was going to die: "... we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life ..." (2 Cor 1:8).

I can relate to Paul. My last few years have been filled with wrenching difficulties, like complicated family illnesses and deep personal rejections that together have often left me feeling like there were no answers and no hope of things ever getting better. So given the extent of our trials, why would Paul say we don't lose heart? A few weeks ago, when we looked at the beginning of chapter 4 and saw these same words, we learned that it was because Paul knew they had been given an incredible ministry, and the apostle then started to say he especially had hope because they were being transformed into the likeness of Christ. "But we all, ... beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory..." (2 Cor. 3:18).

Paul went on in 4:1-15 to say that God's power is greater than everything in life and even in death. So he has nothing to fear, and that truth was causing grace to spread and thanksgiving to God to abound. And all that was SO encouraging that he says in 4:16, they just don't lose heart. Now he's returning to that theme of hope to give the details of how it can be real for all of us.

It's important to understand that when the Bible talks about hope (conversely, not losing heart), it's very different from the way we talk about hope in our everyday conversations. We hope the weather will stay sunny and warm. We hope our kids will grow up to be happy and successful. We hope the doctor will know how to fix what's wrong. We really hope the Sharks will go on to win the Stanley Cup, and the Giants will win the World Series! None of these things are a certainty (though some of us wish that a Sharks championship were a sure thing!). Biblical hope is very different. It is always the anticipation of some good thing of which we are absolutely confident. It is synonymous with "trust" and "having full confidence in," like in 1 Tim. 4:10 where Paul tells Timothy: "we have fixed our hope [set our full confidence] on the living God, who is the Savior of all men."

As a result, comments longtime PBC Palo Alto pastor Doug Goins, "a biblical view of hope doesn't make us passive or resigned. It is energizing. It results in eagerness, anticipation and optimism. It helps us overcome disappointments and fear so we can live actively and serve the Lord with enthusiasm and follow him wholeheartedly." For those reasons, I'll use the term "confident hope" today to distinguish biblical hope from our typical, wishful-thinking kind of hope. And for believers in Christ, that kind of confident hope is powerfully motivating—courage-producing—for the way we handle life, especially in pressure situations.

So as I said, in our text Paul returns to his focus on how we can maintain our confident hope, and he gives us three powerful reasons. Let's look at the first one in the rest of verse 16:

II. The Reasons for Confident Hope

though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day

This is the first of the three contrasts we saw earlier. Paul says the first reason we can have confident hope is not by trying harder to get our lives together, but rather that our "inner man" is being renewed, even though our "outer man" is decaying. By "decaying outer man," he has two things in mind. First, he's referring simply to our mortality—our bodies and minds with our limited capabilities—what he called "earthen vessels" in 4:7. "Decaying" carries with it the idea of wearing out, and even being completely ruined or destroyed. We know that, as we get beyond our prime, our bodies and minds function worse and worse. This is especially obvious in our advanced years, as we lose muscle tone and mental ca-

pabilities and as we gain wrinkles, gray hair, fatigue and trips to the doctor. Our bodies are headed downward, with no hope of going in the positive direction: it is a relentless process we ultimately cannot stop. Secondly, Paul is referring back to our weakness as human beings and the way afflictions tend to rob us of life and our sense of well being:

we are afflicted in every way ...

perplexed ...

persecuted ...

struck down ...

always carrying about in our body the dying of Jesus ... (2 Cor 4:8-10)

We can relate to Paul, can't we? At times, it seems like life is beyond us. The apostle summarizes our mortality and weakness under pressure by describing them collectively in 4:16 as the "outer man decaying." By itself, that's a big hindrance to our confident hope.

I have a good friend, co-worker and brother in Christ named Tony, who is very familiar with this problem. About 12 years ago, he was diagnosed with a brain tumor that was affecting his cognitive abilities. He went on to have surgery and recover. But several years later, the tumor returned, and he had to go through the same painful process all over again. He was afflicted, perplexed, felt struck down and deeply discouraged as he faced this decay in his body. But Tony had a secret resource: the "inner man." My dad is in a similar spot. He is in a rehab hospital in Savannah, Georgia, where he is slowly recovering from major spinal surgery. We're hoping he will recover and be able to walk normally again and play golf, but we won't know for a while. It's very hard on him and on my mom, but like Tony, they know the secret of the "inner man." What is that secret?

In contrast to the decaying outer man, Paul says something incredible is happening for the believer at the same time: the "inner man" is being renewed. By inner man, he means the non-physical, spiritual part of us. This is the new creature begun in us when we accepted Christ as our Savior and Lord (2 Cor 5:17). Again, I think Paul has two things in mind with his term "the inner man being renewed." First the inner man is growing: "renewed" means to "make new again." It has the idea of being refreshed, even amidst trials. Ray Stedman describes it as "inner stimulation ... that keeps us triumphant, rejoicing, optimistic, faithful, trusting and expectant."³ Paul is capsulizing what he wrote earlier in chapter 4, where he highlighted the surpassing greatness of God's power (4:7), the life of Jesus (4:10), and our future resurrection (4:14). And notice the expression "day by day." Paul is emphasizing that the renewal is happening over and over: it's not a one-time replacement. He doesn't necessarily mean the amount of renewing we experience is equal each day, but that it's a process that goes on and on. Just like the decay of the outer man cannot be stopped, the renewal of the inner man cannot be stopped! It's a relentless process in a positive direction. God is committed to completing in us the work he began when we first came to him—the work of making us like him! Secondly, notice that both "is decaying" and "is being renewed" in verse 16 are passive for us, out of our direct control. Despite all the self-effort we might put forth in preventing the former and promoting the latter, in the end these are things that other forces are causing to occur to us.

So the contrast is vivid: spiraling decay with no hope of improvement on the physical level, and incredible ongoing renewal on the spiritual level. By the way, Paul is not suggesting that the body is unimportant, or that we should ignore its warnings and needs. His point is simply that the renewal of the inner man is more significant than—and cannot be slowed by—the decay of the outer man. That's Paul's first great reason for not losing heart.

What is Paul's second reason for the believer not losing heart? Verse 17:

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison

In this second of the three contrasts I mentioned earlier, our current affliction is compared to our glory—our afflictions being momentary (short in duration) and light (not very heavy or burdensome), and our glory being eternal (lasting forever) and weighty. Further, the glory is beyond all comparison. It's not even in the same league as the affliction. There is also a word play here which doesn't show up in English. The Hebrew word for glory, *kavod*, which lies behind Paul's use here, is derived from the word for heavy or weighty. So he's emphasizing the weightiness, the incredible value of the glory compared to the affliction.

Let's now consider "afflictions" and "glory" a little further and then see how they're connected. Sometimes my family thinks momentary light affliction simply means seven kids living in a 1300 square foot house on one income, with the

house crammed floor-to-ceiling with books for the kids' education. They think eternal weight of glory just means living in God's mansion in heaven, you know, the "big, big house with lots and lots of room; and a big, big table with lots and lots of food; and a big, big yard where we can play football."⁴ We got a taste of that in February when our extended family rented a very large house in Colorado during my oldest son's wedding weekend. It was cool; we didn't want to come home. Other times we parents feel like momentary light affliction is simpler, like losing repeatedly at Parcheesi to our young children. When you point out that it would be nice if they took pity on you, they smile and say, "But Dad, pity is no fun." I think Paul had something larger than that in mind!

Paul was very familiar with affliction, as we saw briefly before, but when you read the details, it doesn't sound very light or momentary. Chapters 11-12 of 2nd Corinthians tell us he regularly had to deal with weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions and difficulties of every kind (2 Cor 12:10). Specifically, Paul says:

Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. [forty would have killed him] Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. (2 Cor 11:24-27)

Now I've had a tough last few years, but I've never had anything as tough as what Paul went through. Nevertheless, Paul came to view his afflictions as momentary and light. He was writing with eternity's values in view. He was weighing the present trials against the future glory. He's not minimizing the pain we feel, just putting it into perspective. But affliction—especially the most painful—stirs in us deep longings for something larger, large enough to not just rescue us but open to us a new world, to give us a place to be fully known and fully welcomed and to belong. We long for an eternal home.

What about this "glory"? We could spend a whole Sunday studying this glory, but for today I'll summarize: He's basically talking about Christ likeness—being fully like him, fully good, fully beautiful. He's talking about Christ like character that is being produced in us in this life that we enjoy in part now (and that the world around us sees in part now) and that will be finished, fully revealed and fully enjoyed by us after our death. "Glory" has the root meaning of weight, heaviness, significance or even honor. It doesn't mean worldly glory conferred by other people. Author C.S. Lewis says something that at first might seem rather unusual. He says glory means "approval or appreciation by God," "when the redeemed soul learns ... at last that she has pleased Him whom she was created to please" ... and is "loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artisan delights in his work ..." (We're not just in the presence of Jesus, but he's glad we're there!) To Lewis, glory ultimately "means good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgement, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last."⁵ When the prodigal son came home after running away and blowing his fortune, he experienced a visible form of that approval which pictures a deeper reality—that we have an eternal home into which the Father will welcome us. Lewis goes on to say the unfortunate opposite of glory would be to hear the words, "I never knew you. Depart from Me."

Having looked at the second set of contrasted terms (affliction and glory), let's now notice the fascinating way those two terms are linked. Unlike the first contrast, where the contrasted items are simply linked by "yet," these two items are tied together in a very different way: the first produces the second! The affliction actually produces the glory! To confirm we're not dreaming, we find the same thing in Romans 8:17: "we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. We share in His sufferings, but we will also share in his glory! So in weighing our present afflictions against the glory being produced in us and for us, Paul is saying that our trials actually work for us. In his letter to the Romans, he concludes that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (8:18).

That's also how Christ viewed his sufferings, isn't it? He endured rejection and death by crucifixion. Obviously those were not light in themselves, but light in comparison to the glory he received. Jesus suffered complete rejection, but through it received full acceptance by the Father. Jesus suffered death, but was raised to life and now rules over the heavens and the earth. Since we share in Jesus' sufferings and will share his glory, we can summarize our own sufferings

and glory similarly. We experience rejection at times, but we have received full acceptance by the Father and will have that forever. We experience affliction, decay and death, but receive eternal life and will ultimately reign with Christ (2 Tim 2:12).

In sum, at some point, at some level, Scripture says we will all face significant affliction. And when we do, we usually don't feel like it is momentary or light; it feels impossibly heavy and like it will go on forever. So what are your afflictions these days? We're challenged with health issues, loss of loved ones, financial difficulties, loneliness, employment issues, relationships, parenting problems, imperfect marriages, unfulfilled longings, feeling overwhelmed by life, and of course, the flesh (our old nature apart from Christ); the list goes on and on. The great news of verse 17 and Paul's second great reason we can have confident hope—that our affliction is actually producing glory for us—gives us tremendous strength in all our afflictions, even when they are enormous and ongoing.

By the way, that list of our afflictions that produce glory doesn't include our sinful choices. As one commentator says, "We must not misunderstand ... and think that a Christian can live any way he pleases and expect everything to turn into glory in the end. Paul was writing about trials experienced in the will of God as he was doing the work of God. God can and does turn suffering into glory, but He cannot turn sin into glory. Sin must be judged, because there is no glory in sin."⁶

Together, the first two reasons for confident hope are that Paul understands that his trials are working for him, not against him. Recently one of the men in our adult elective class told us he has a life threatening medical condition requiring a rare and untested treatment. And a woman in our class told us she was going into the hospital for serious cancer surgery. Their bodies are decaying. Incredibly, neither of these wonderful people was in despair—not even close! Even today, they're not. And those who visited the woman just before her surgery saw not a worried woman but angels—a taste of heavenly glory! These two people know that their inner selves are being renewed even as their bodies decay, and that their afflictions are light and temporary compared to the incredible glory God is producing in them and for them. They know that because of the third reason Paul gives for confident hope. Verse 18:

while we look not at the things which are seen, but (we look) at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

This is the third of the three contrasts we saw earlier and the third reason for a believer's confident hope—that we look at what is permanent and eternal, rather than what is temporary. It's not hard to notice the key words in this verse: "seen" is repeated four times, and "look" effectively appears twice.

First, some important points about "look." This word does not mean to glance at briefly. It means "a mark to aim at," to "concentrate on," to "fix one's eyes and mind on"—like in baseball, where batters are taught to keep their eye on the ball, not on where they want it to go. As for our other key word "seen," the "things which are seen" refers here to the sufferings and afflictions we experience in this temporary existence on earth. The "things which are unseen" refers first to the incredible eternal glory God is producing in us, but it also calls our attention to the other realities of the spiritual realm, like the Word of God, the world invisibly held together by Christ, the angelic beings working for and against God, and ultimately the invisible God himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I especially think of Christ, described as "the radiance of [God's] glory" (Heb 1:3), and "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). And I think of our certain heavenly destination: new heavens, new earth, resurrected body, no more pain or tears, no enemy to hurt us—just everlasting joy!

Wiersbe summarizes the contrast this way: "The things which are seen seem so real because we can see them and feel them, but they are all temporal and destined to pass away. Ultimately, only the unseen eternal things of the spiritual realm will last. Again, we shouldn't press this truth into extremes and think that 'seen' and 'unseen' necessarily oppose each other. When we use the things which are seen in God's will, He transforms them into the unseen, and they become a part of our treasure in heaven."⁷

The point is that what is essential is invisible to the human eye. The reasons for our confident hope have to do with how we see reality. Learning to see rightly, fixing our eyes on the unseen, gives us that confident hope. This is what is meant in Hebrews 11 when the author writes that the great men and women of faith, from Noah and Abraham to Sarah and others, achieved what they did because they walked by faith, not sight. They saw the invisible.

We tend to focus on the superficial and the seen. How can we "look at what is not seen," practically speaking? Since the physical Jesus is not here, what should we do? Put a picture of him on the wall and stare at it? Here are three suggestions that may seem basic, but are rich: First, look often into God's Word. Its truths are there to anchor us, correct us and guide us (2 Tim 3:16). Second, pray regularly. Jesus taught his disciples that "at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1). And third, consider keeping a journal, either of thanksgiving or hard times or both. Jotting down a few notes each day can train your heart toward thankfulness and can give you a record you can later look back on to see God's goodness and how major hardships often later appear as momentary light afflictions and have been redeemed into something greater. These three disciplines will remind us of the spiritual realm that exists all around us, and that life is not just what we see and feel.

So we have three compelling reasons to not lose our confident hope in the Lord:

1. Our inner man is being renewed, even though our outer man is decaying.
2. Our afflictions actually produce glory for/in us (not just pain).
3. Our eyes are fixed on the eternal (especially the Lord), not the temporal.

That third reason for a believer's confident hope is also the key to a critical question: How can we hang onto that hope? How can we make it our regular experience? Let's look more closely at verse 18:

III. Persisting in Confident Hope

while we look not at the things which are seen, but (we look) at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Verse 18 contains the key to the process by which that confident hope becomes real. That key is obscured in certain English translations, such as the NIV, which renders the beginning of verse 18 as though it is an outcome of the truth in verse 17: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen." The NASB captures the intent better by its use of the word "while" which could also be rendered "provided"; the grammar implies a conditionality, "*provided* we don't fix our eyes on what is seen." In other words, if our focus is on the seen world, verses 16-17 (renewal of the inner man and afflictions producing glory for us) won't work. But if our focus is not on the seen but on the unseen they will work. Our inner man will be renewed despite our outer man wasting away, and our light momentary affliction will produce an eternal weight of glory for us.

So the key to how we can maintain our confident hope boils down to placing our faith in Christ each day. This is confirmed elsewhere in the New Testament, such as in Hebrews 12:1-3, where the author urges us to

...run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

In some movies now, we are given special glasses so we can better see the depth of the images on the screen. In the movie "National Treasure," the heroes seek a secret map, a map that's fully visible only when viewed with special glasses that had been carefully hidden for centuries. Wouldn't we all love such glasses to help us see the secrets to living our own lives? The great news is that we don't need special glasses to magically help us see the details of God's invisible plan; we just need to maintain our confident hope by fixing our gaze on the right things, especially Christ himself.

When we do look at him we are not necessarily given the answers to all our questions, nor the reason for our affliction. But we are reminded that God is present and seated on his throne, in control, not threatened. And then we remember his Word of truth, which tells us that his will is for us to be conformed into the image of his son, Jesus, and that he will not rest until that process of transformation is complete and we are fully welcomed into his presence in heaven.

All this touches me in very practical ways. Because of our church and the encouragement to be transparent with our struggles, I've been honest in letting people know about the severe challenges I've experienced the last several years. When I'm asked how I'm doing, I don't just say "pretty well" and move on. Instead I open up. As a result, I'm constantly hearing people say, "I don't know how you handle it all!" They see that any reasonable person would be crushed by all of it. They can tell there's something else giving me the ability to handle it all. I don't see the glory of God being produced in me, but they can sense it!

I wish I could say I've consistently fixed my gaze on the Lord the last few years when pain has threatened to engulf me. I have at times. But often I've honestly struggled, wondering if the trials and the pain would ever end. I keep wanting solutions, but I am re-learning that what I should want more is the Lord himself, to gaze on his beauty, like David of old:

**One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek;
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD,
And to meditate in His temple. (Psalm 27:4)**

Several times in the last month, things have been especially difficult, and I felt I needed to seek the Lord in a more focused way than I had been. So I decided to spend one whole day fasting and praying. I prayed for my children, the obstacles in their lives and my relationship with them. I asked God for breakthroughs, but I also found that I just needed to seek his face. That day of fasting and prayer helped me focus on the eternal, not the temporal, and since then I've been calmer and less prone to frustration when trials show up. So I commend fasting and prayer to you as something to do in special circumstances.

I have no poem of my own to creatively express my pain and my small taste of God's glory, just groanings and "bowls of incense" filled with prayers of saints from PBCC and elsewhere. But a poem of one of my teenage sons, written as he struggled through extremely difficult times, expresses well the way we can be struck down, even deceived, and yet find God's glory, his full acceptance.

*The Angel of Darkness (excerpts)*⁸

I walked the highway,
Happy, carefree, empty,
I thought not, I just wanted to be happy.

Then I met the angel, dark and beautiful.
He explained to me a different way,
Easier and more fulfilling.
I loved that angel, he seemed to really know,
And he wanted to help me, to make me special.

I walked with him for many a day,
My past life I scorned,
And I kept walking, never looking back.
I had seemed to leave it all behind,
When I suddenly tripped and fell.
I tried to stand, but found I had no strength.
I looked to my angel to help me,
Confident to be greeted with a loving smile.

Yet when I looked he was not there,
I realized now there was no light,
That I had been walking blind,
Unseeing following his lead.

I cried out for help, but my voice merely echoed away.
The chilling realization set in,
I was alone, in a world all my own.

I lay there, empty and broken.
As I waited for death to take me,
Images flashed through my mind.
A fireside talk with a faithful friend,
Laughing games with siblings,
My parents' loving embraces.
I remembered too the One I once had loved,
And with a last despairing choke,
I cried out, "Father!"
I fell backward into pain, waiting for the end.
But no, far off the darkness seemed to shift.
Indeed, the veil of night parted slightly,

And through it came a light,
Like nothing I had seen or felt before.
This light was soft and tender.

As the light grew nearer, I saw it was a Man.
His eyes bore no chilling gaze,
Instead, love shone from them,
Love I could not just see,
I felt it, warming my heart from within.
The Man came to me, His gaze met mine,
And I could not look away.
He reached down to me, with hands big and tender.
He picked me up, and cradled me to Him.

With a soft gasp of realization,
I saw that this was the Man, the One I used to love.
Safe within His arms, I knew I was returning home,
Back to the fold I had wandered from.

Now armed with His love in my heart, I felt safe from evil.
I knew now that my Father, my precious, loving Father,
Would never leave me.
He would always be there,
Once more to bring me home.

Today's text gives us three life-changing reasons we as believers can handle even enormous affliction without losing heart, and it provides the key to persisting in that confident hope—fixing our eyes on the Lord. So the question we're left with is, what are we fixing our eyes on? Afflictions and the temporary things we can see? Or the all-powerful God we can't see but who we know loves us and is producing his glory in us and for us, to enjoy now and forever in His kingdom? He is the One who makes each mess into a message, each test into a testimony, and the One who transforms us into the likeness of his Son. He is worthy of all our attention and all our worship! So we can always be encouraged, and we need never lose heart!

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:17, KJV)

¹ Except as otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible.

² Doug Goins, "Time & Eternity," a sermon delivered at Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, CA, June 4, 2000.

³ Ray C. Stedman, "Beyond the End," a sermon delivered at Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, CA, November 11, 1979.

⁴ Lyrics from Big House, by Audio Adrenaline.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 33-36.

⁶ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books).

⁷ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*.

⁸ Steven T. Brown, "The Angel of Darkness," 2009, excerpts.

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