

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Light Momentary Afflictions.*"

Go ahead and open your Bibles to **2 Corinthians 4**.

I'm preaching a few sermons about our bodies breaking down as we get older.

As I shared last week, when I was lying on my back in bed for a few weeks I started keeping track of different things God was teaching me, because I had so much time to reflect. I decided to write those things down so I wouldn't forget them. Then I decided to share those thoughts with you, because all of our bodies break down.

This chapter contains the verses that came to mind more than any others.

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Quick question...

Do any of you listen to the comedian, Brian Regan?

Katie and I really like him, and we have seen him in person.

Over the last few weeks I saw quite a few doctors, and there's a joke Brian makes about doctors. He says they can be very rude. They walk in and the first question they ask is, "What SEEMS to be the problem?"

As though there is nothing wrong, it just seems that way to you.

The question minimizes your suffering.

The reason I mention this joke is it comes to mind with these verses. Let me read through them, and you see if it sounds like Paul is minimizing our suffering...

**2 Corinthians 4:16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction (in other words, "What seems to be the problem?") is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.**

Did you catch what sounds like Paul is minimizing our suffering?

He said our trials are light momentary afflictions!

- They're not that bad.
- They're no big deal.

And this brings us to lesson one...

**Lesson 1: (part one) every trial is a light momentary affliction...**

We will deal with part two later.

Could you imagine saying this to someone when they're suffering?

*“Hey, this trial you think is terrible and excruciating is only light and momentary.”*

If we were counseling people how to counsel others we would tell them NOT to say this.

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It sounds terrible, but here's the thing...

It's not some insensitive, oblivious, ignorant counselor saying it.

It's God saying it through the apostle Paul!

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So you say, “Well maybe this is only about trials that are light and momentary...versus trials that are terribly painful and difficult?”

No, this is about trials that are terrible, painful, and difficult. Look back at verse 8...

**2 Corinthians 4:8 We are AFFLICTED IN EVERY WAY** (they are suffering every way you can imagine), **but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 PERSECUTED, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For we who live are always BEING GIVEN OVER TO DEATH FOR JESUS' SAKE** (they are living on the verge of death), **so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us** (they are so close to death they say it is at work in them...that's close to death when it's working in you), **but life in you.**

Paul uses the word **we**, because he's also referring to his traveling companions. To be with Paul was to go through trials.

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So Paul and his companions suffered terribly, but he could still say they experience **light momentary afflictions.**

The obvious question is how could terrible suffering be described this way?

That's what we'll answer in the rest of the sermon.

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Look with me at **verse 16...**

**2 Corinthians 4:16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.**

At the beginning of the verse he says **we do not lose heart...**and this brings us to lesson two...

## Lesson 2: light momentary afflictions (part one) are discouraging.

There are many ways to suffer:

- Mentally
- Emotionally
- Spiritually

But because Paul says **our outer self is wasting away**, we know he's talking about physical suffering.

Not to minimize other kinds of suffering, but there is something unique about physical suffering. We talked about this last week when we saw that Satan took everything from Job, but told God that Job would finally curse Him when he afflicted him physically.

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Again, I want to ask you to believe me when I say that I don't think my suffering was worse than anyone else's. But with that said I do feel like the few weeks in bed gave me some appreciation for how bad it is for people when they experience chronic pain.

Hopefully this will make me a better counselor. If people ever come to me and they're suffering with chronic pain I will tell them that I believe it is as bad as they're describing.

And like Paul said, how tempting is it to **lose heart** when we suffer physically?

These words are appropriate, because it can be very discouraging and even depressing:

- You can feel hopeless and despair
- You can think, *"If I'm going to feel tomorrow like I feel today, I don't want to go through tomorrow."*

But now for the encouragement!

If you look back at the verse, Paul says **our outer self**, or physical bodies, are **wasting away**...and believe it or not this can do some wonderful things for us...and this brings us to the next part of lesson two...

## Lesson 2: light momentary afflictions (part two) can give us eternal perspectives.

The words **wasting away** are a good description of how we feel when we get older and our bodies break down. We talked about this last week, so I don't think I need to focus on it again.

But I do think it's important to consider one of the wonderful things that can happen when our bodies waste away:

- It can encourage us to remember our bodies are temporary and this life is not our home
- It can lead us to focus on the next life versus this life

- It can cause us to long for our glorified bodies. No more:
  - Aches and pains
  - Diseases
  - Disabilities
  - Degenerative disc disease
  - Sciatica issues

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Someone sent me an email this past week about the recent sermons and they said...

*“It is hard at times to realize I can't do [certain things]. This body just can't/won't work like it used to. [We should] look for the blessings and give thanks to God for those blessings. It is a good reminder this body is just a shell that I live in here on earth and some day I will have a new body and a new home to praise my Savior. Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”*

That’s a good point I hadn’t really thought about before: we receive glorified bodies, not just so we don’t experience physical suffering any longer, but so that we can use them to worship Christ.

**Philippians 3:20 Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who WILL TRANSFORM OUR LOWLY BODY TO BE LIKE HIS GLORIOUS BODY, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.**

It’s good to be reminded that we are going to receive glorified bodies, and there aren’t many better reminders than our earthly bodies wasting away.

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And one more important point before we move on from this lesson...

I deliberately, repeatedly used the words “it can,” versus “it does,” or “it will.” In other words, when our bodies break down IT CAN do these wonderful things for us, but it’s no guarantee.

Some people’s bodies break down and:

- They never lift their eyes off this life
- They never look up to heaven
- They look down at this life the whole time

And it’s very unfortunate when this happens.

So let me encourage you, when your body breaks down let that be a wonderful encouragement to:

- Develop an eternal perspective
- Look up to heaven
- And look beyond this life

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I want you to notice something else wonderful that happens while our **outer selves waste away**. Paul says our **inner self**, which refers to our spirit, **is being renewed day by day**...and this brings us to the next part of lesson two...

## Lesson 2: light momentary afflictions (part three) strengthen our spirit.

This is a beautiful contrast that I want to make sure we don't miss:

- While our physical bodies break down, our spirits are renewed, or strengthened, day by day.
- It's like Paul says: *"What does it matter if our body wastes away as long as our spirit gets stronger?"*

We don't like trials, but this is one of the many places in Scripture that discuss their benefits, such as how they sanctify us.

I'd like to invite you to keep this in mind, and here's why...

Physical suffering is discouraging, but remembering how it sanctifies and strengthens us can give us the encouragement we need.

This is one of the main reasons Paul could say trials are light momentary afflictions.

Look also at **verse 17** to see something else light momentary afflictions do for us...

**2 Corinthians 4:17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,**

This brings us to the next part of lesson 2...

## Lesson 2: light momentary afflictions (part four) increase our heavenly blessings.

**Eternal weight of glory** refers to the future blessings and rewards we receive when this life comes to an end. Experiencing trials only serves to increase that endless blessedness.

Our suffering feels far from light and momentary, but when we consider the heavenly blessings it's producing, two wonderful things happen:

1. First, our suffering looks smaller...it looks light and momentary.
2. Second, we see trials working for us versus against us.

It's similar to what Paul said in **Romans 8:18**...

**Romans 8:18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**

For Paul the future glory far outweighed the present suffering.

It's all about proportion:

- The glory is much greater than the suffering.
- The trials are light because Paul's contrasting them with the glory we receive that is **beyond all comparison**
- The trials are momentary because Paul's contrasting them with eternity

Paul was weighing the present against the future...and we should too! If we do, our trials can look light and momentary.

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Look at **verse 18...**

**2 Corinthians 4:18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.**

When Paul says **things that are seen** he's referring to the physical world, which is, as he says, **transient**, or temporal.

When Paul says **the things that are unseen** he's referring to the spiritual world, which is, as he says **eternal**.

So he's contrasting:

- the physical and temporal world we live in
- with the spiritual and eternal world we will go to in the next life

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A.W. Tozer said the spiritual world is the only real world.

Why would he say that?

This world seems real because we see it and feel it, but it's temporary because its destined to pass away. The spiritual world is the real world because it's eternal and will not pass away.

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Now regarding the spiritual world, I want you to notice an interesting paradox in these verses...

Paul says we look not to the things that are seen but we look to the things that are unseen.

Did you catch the paradox?

You can't look at unseen things. They are unseen. That's what it means to be unseen. You can't see them.

So how do we look at unseen things?

By faith!

## **Hebrews 11:1 Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**

In other words, faith is looking at unseen things.

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The great men and women of faith in **Hebrews 11** achieved what they did because they “saw the invisible.”<sup>ii</sup>

Let me share an interesting example from Scripture...

Do you remember when Abraham and Lot parted ways?

We know why Lot chose the way he did, but we don't really know why Abraham chose the way he did. Listen to this...

**Genesis 13:8** Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. **9** Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.” **10** And Lot **LIFTED UP HIS EYES AND SAW** that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)

It says **Lot lifted up his eyes and saw**. He chose the way he did b/c he was a carnal man who looked at the physical.

Abraham, on the other hand, was a spiritual man who looked for the unseen. We can't tell that from **Genesis 13**, but he was looking for a city too...

**Hebrews 11:10 [Abraham] was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.**

So while Lot was looking for a city, Abraham was looking for a city...but a spiritual, eternal one that wasn't going to be burned down by sulfur from heaven.

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Now what does this have to do w/ light momentary afflictions?

Developing this spiritual, eternal perspective – that the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 had – is the key to understanding how trials can be viewed as light momentary afflictions...and this brings us back to lesson one...

**Lesson 1: (part one) every trial is a light momentary affliction (part two) when viewed in light of eternity.**

Paul knew better than anyone how important it is to have an eternal perspective. This is what allowed him to deal with His trials so well:

- It didn't have so much to do with how he viewed his suffering as it had to do with how he viewed his future.
- He knew that one day all of his suffering would be over and he would enjoy his eternity.

He wants to encourage us to develop an eternal perspective. Notice the repetition of the word eternal:

- **17 light momentary afflictions are preparing for us an ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY beyond all comparison,**
- **18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen ARE ETERNAL.**

So when you read these verses and say, "What allows every trial to be viewed as a light momentary affliction?"

The answer is: an eternal perspective.

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As we suffer it's easy to focus on the pain in the present, but we should focus on the joy of the future.

- With an eternal view our trials can seem light and momentary
- Without an eternal view our trials seem heavy and endless.

Why is it this way?

If we don't have an eternal, heavenly, spiritual perspective all we have is an earthly physical perspective which means all we see is the trial.

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Do me a favor...

At the beginning of **verse 18** look at the words **we look not to the things...**

The Greek word for **look** is *skopeō* (pronounced: skah-pay-oh), which is a verb. The noun form is *skopos* (pronounced: skah-poss), and it means, "the distant mark looked at, the goal or end one has in view."

It only occurs once in **Philippians 3:14** where Paul says **I press on toward the goal** (or *skopos* pronounced: skah-poss), **for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

Paul is saying to keep the end or goal in view, which is another way to say to have an eternal perspective.

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I don't know about most of you, but I hated running. I've always had poor endurance. Maybe God gave me back and sciatica problems so I would have a good excuse not to run any more. Just one more blessing to consider!



But even if you like running you have to admit it's challenging. When you run you try not to think about the pain and discomfort. There are people who say they experience a runner's high, but I think they're lying.

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You keep the finish line in mind. You might even think about the prize that you win at the end.

Listen to what John MacArthur said, "*Endurance is based on one's ability to look beyond the physical to the spiritual, beyond the present to the future, and beyond the visible to the invisible. Believers must look past what is temporary and perishing, such as our bodies and even this whole world, to what is eternal.*"

In other words, we must have an eternal perspective, and that's what allows trials to be light and momentary.<sup>iii</sup>

## Conclusion

I want to conclude by taking you back to the beginning of the passage we've been looking at. Look at the beginning of **verse 16...**

**2 Corinthians 4:16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.**

In the ESV **verse 16** starts with the word **so**, and in other translations it says there for.

Whenever we see the word therefore, we look to see what it's there for. So what Paul said in verse 16 relates to what he said earlier. Or in other words, we shouldn't lose heart b/c of what he wrote previously.

So what did he write earlier?

Look at **verse 14...**

**2 Corinthians 4:14 knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.**

This is why we don't lose heart.

This truth of our resurrection puts everything into perspective:

- Every trial
- Every difficulty
- Every struggle
- Every suffering

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And, notice it says **with Jesus**.

It doesn't just say that the Father will raise us like he raised Jesus, although that alone is tremendous. It says he will raise us **with Jesus and bring us into his presence.**

This is the beautiful hope of our eternity...

We have a glorious future with Christ.

This wonderful reality allows any suffering to be light and momentary.

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But for those who are not in Christ, the sad reality is that they're suffering is just beginning. It doesn't have to be this way. The end of this can be the end of their suffering.

All of us are going to die. Why not die and enter glory and joy?

There is no excuse. If you reject Christ He will reject you before His Father.

If this reaches even one of you and sobers you to the reality of your eternal future, please come see me after service. It would be a privilege to speak w/ you.

Let's pray

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<sup>i</sup> I have experienced discouragement at different times. I don't think I've experienced much depression. And I don't know if I would ever say I was despairing. Biblically speaking, despairing means you are completely hopeless, and could even contemplate suicide.

When I came back to church someone shared with me about his best friend who experienced chronic pain and ended up committing suicide.

Again, that didn't cross my mind, but I do think I'm better able to understand why that would happen with people.

<sup>ii</sup> Hebrews 11:10, 13-14, 27

<sup>iii</sup> We knew the holidays are going to be predictably difficult for people this year, because of the number of people who had lost loved ones. So we put that in the weekly worship guide as a prayer request.

I was really surprised by how many people were listed I'll read what was written...

*"Pray the church family who will be experiencing their first holidays without their deceased loved ones: Cashes, Haulks, Cunninghams, Schmitz/Malyna Donald, Lehtonens/Coopers, Sandy Bjorkman, Glen Armstrong, Penders/MacFarlanes, Edith Cole, Raleys."*

I want to share something that I hope can encourage not just these families but all of us, because all of us have lost loved ones before...

First, let me be clear that while a miscarriage is difficult, I don't think it compares with the loss of a child, parent, sibling that you have developed a relationship with for years.

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We experienced a miscarriage during those weeks that I was bedridden.

When we experience a miscarriage, or the loss of a believing loved one, is there any good that can come from it?

I think there is.

To put it simply, it causes us to look forward to the next life even more.

We are talking about the blessings associated with the light momentary afflictions, a miscarriage is one of them, and I think there is even blessing in this.

This is our third or fourth miscarriage, and each one of them makes the thought of heaven sweeter. Every time Katie has a child it's the most exciting day my life to me that child for the first time. With every miscarriage I can look forward to heaven more because it will allow me to know those children that I haven't been able to know on the side of heaven. At this point I have a few waiting for me.