

The title of this morning's is, "*When Our Bodies Waste Away.*"

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 down my thoughts so I wouldn't forget them. Then I decided to share those thoughts with you, because this has been such a trying year for so many people.

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Last week I didn't talk much about the trials I've experienced recently, but I plan to this morning and I want to ask one favor...

I was concerned about sharing so much about myself, because it could sound as though I think what I experienced is worse than what others have experienced.

So I want to be clear up front, and I'm trusting all of you to believe me when I say this: I don't think my trials compare with, or are worse, than the trials that others have experienced. They are simply trials God allowed in my life, and I wanted to share how he has used them for my good, so it might help others.

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

I will introduce the verses this morning, but we won't finish them. 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. 17 For this light momentary affliction 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.**

In verse 16 the ESV says **outer self**. Other translations say outward man or outer person. It's referring to our physical bodies. And like we read about last week in **Ecclesiastes 12**, they are **wasting away**:

- The New King James says **perishing**
- The NASB says **decaying**

And this brings us to lesson one...

**When our bodies waste away (lesson one) God is taking things from us.**

If you think about trials for a moment, what are they? Aren't they basically God taking something from us?

Think about Job. God allowed Satan to take away:

- His animals
- His servants
- His house
- His children

And this was only day one!

On day two God allowed Satan to take away:

- His health
- His physical comfort
- His sleep

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Then how did Job describe what happened to him?

**Job 1:20 [He] said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and THE LORD HAS TAKEN AWAY; blessed be the name of the Lord.”**

Job understood that God was taking things from him. This is what trials do.

In our lives they take away:

- Our finances
- Our health
- Our comfort
- Our ability to do certain things
- Our jobs
- Our loved ones
- Even our lives

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Listen to what happened with David. We don't know how old he was, but we know his body was wasting away, and as a result something was taken from him...

**2 Samuel 21:15a There was war again between the Philistines and Israel, and David went down together with his servants, and they fought against the Philistines.**

David learned from his mistake 10 chapters earlier when he didn't go to battle with his men, but stayed behind in Jerusalem.

This time he went to fight, but listen to what happened...

**2 Samuel 21:15a DAVID GREW WEARY. 16 And Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze, and who was armed with a new sword, thought to kill David. 17 But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid and attacked the Philistine and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, “You shall no longer go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel.”**

David went out to battle like he had done countless times before, but something was different. His mind told his body what to do, but his body wouldn't respond like it used to

So what happened?

God took away David's ability to fight.

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Later as David's body wasted away further he lost his good circulation...

**1 Kings 1:1 King David was old and advanced in years. And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm.**

When you get older it's harder to stay warm.

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Now let me give you a little background, so you can understand what I feel like God took away from me...

Some people can tell you horror stories about their college roommates. Fortunately, all my roommates were wonderful.

I want to focus on my roommate my freshman year: Bill Neller.

If I had to describe Bill in three words it would be:

1. Smart – he was an engineer
2. Nice – I can't imagine anyone ever having a problem with him.
3. Muscular – he was really into working out and he taught me how to work out.

I know this isn't beginning as the most spiritual sounding story, but I'm getting to a point.

This is when my bodybuilding journey began. And of course by journey I mean obsession.<sup>i</sup>

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Even after becoming a Christian, my obsession didn't really change. I was a schoolteacher for most of my Christian life before becoming a pastor. I would teach summer school whenever I could, but it wouldn't last the whole summer. So I would still be left with about four weeks of free time. I wanted to take mission trips, and I'm ashamed to say this, but my biggest concern was being able to work out and get in my meals.

A friend of mine went on a mission trip to China and she said how hard it was to get meat there compared to the US, so I decided I wouldn't take a mission trip to China b/c I knew I wouldn't meet my protein requirements.

Katie told me to share two stories:

1. First, when Katie and I got together after high school I took her to the gym before going to dinner for our first date...so I guess the gym was our first date.

2. Second, an older sweet woman in our church invited us to a fancy Christmas dinner at her house. I was afraid she wouldn't have much meat...and she didn't. But fortunately I came prepared. I brought a chicken breast with me. I was pulling it apart under the table to eat it very subtly...but she caught me...and got really mad. Apparently, she didn't care about my bodybuilding efforts.

Basically, from my freshman year of college I worked out religiously for the next 15 to 20 years, including my first few years here.

And I feel like God took that away from me. When you have degenerative disc disease you can't lift very much. <sup>ii</sup>

But when our bodies waste away, there are still many blessings...and this brings us to lesson two...

### When our bodies waste away (lesson two) look for blessings.

When you feel like your body is wasting away it's understandably very tempting to focus on the trial. I would like to encourage you, as difficult as it can be at times, to look for the blessings.

When we were going over the sermon Katie wanted to share something encouraging with the pregnant and postpartum women. She said...

*"You may feel as though your body is wasting away, but try not to focus on that. Focus on the blessing and gift God gives with pregnancy. I had 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 in our bathroom because I was so sick during pregnancies. I was comforted that even though I felt like I was wasting away, God was doing a mighty work in my body creating an eternal soul. Recognizing this filled my trial with hope."*

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Let me share a few of the blessings I thought of over the last few weeks. I'm going to read them largely as I recorded them...

First, I was still able to do many things: read, study, respond to emails, pray, make phone calls.

When I was improving, I walked down to my office to get some books and Randy was working on my new shelves because a pastor can never have too many books. He was bending down, which was something I couldn't do, and it occurred to me how fortunate I am to have a job that still allows me to be productive and fulfill many of my responsibilities. <sup>iii</sup>

This wouldn't be the case if I was still an elementary schoolteacher or an officer in the Army. Maybe if I was an officer in the Air Force :-).

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Next blessing...

Sometimes I think we forget—I know I do—how fortunate we are to live, not just where we do, but when we do. I was given meds that could—literally—take away just about all my pain.

Through most of human history, and even for people in some parts of the world today, they're forced to suffer with little to no relief. This thought alone made it difficult to complain about anything.

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Next blessing...

I felt blessed by the doctors God allowed me to have. When you're suffering you feel thankful for people who seem to be able to help.

I would tell them, "I thank God that He brought you into my life." One of the doctors seemed visibly touched.

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Let me tell you about another trial I experienced earlier this year that in and of itself became a blessing...

There is a condition called dystonia, which is the abnormal and involuntary contraction of muscles.

I learned about:

- A guitarist who developed dystonia in one hand, and had to reverse the way he held the guitar
- A golf player who developed dystonia when putting the ball, which caused him to hit it too hard and miss the hole

I've always typed pretty quickly, but I developed dystonia in my left hand and stopped being able to type. I literally had to contort the whole left side of my body to keep my hand still over the keyboard. Even now when I type with my left hand I have to do so very slowly by pushing with my pointer finger.

I've become convinced God is disciplining me for all the years I made fun of Jim and Dave behind their backs for the way they type. We shouldn't make fun of older people. Remember when those young men made fun of Elisha the prophet and a bear came out and attacked them? I'm thankful I only developed dystonia.

I don't know whether this sounds like a big trial or not, but for me it has been, and is probably even worse than my sciatica, because so much of my job and life is spent typing.

I went to physical therapy, but it wasn't helping, although they would say it's because I wasn't doing the exercises I should do...which is true. If I told you the exercises you probably wouldn't do them either.

I finally decided to start using dictation with my computer. There was a learning curve, but I think sometimes my dictation is faster than my typing used to be.

And this brings me to the blessing...

When I was lying down I couldn't type with my hands, but I could dictate. So I could thank God that I learned to dictate before I found myself in bed for four weeks fairly unable to type with my hands.

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Next blessing...

When I was able to walk, this gave me greater appreciation for being able to stand and walk. We all take things for granted. It could be our:

- Sight
- Hearing
- Mobility
- Comfort

When those are taken away we become very thankful for them if they are returned.

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Next blessing...

When others experience trials it's an opportunity to love them. When we experience trials it's an opportunity to be loved.

I felt very loved the last few weeks as many people:

- Reached out to us
- Sent us cards
- Brought us food
- Told us they were praying for us

I felt very thankful to have a church family.

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Next blessing...

I was part of a Zoom call and at the end they asked for prayer requests. One of the women who was part of the call lived in Honduras and she talked about the hurricane that hit and displaced many people. She said you could drive down the road and see it lined with everyone who was homeless.

Keep in mind this is while I'm in my comfortable bed in my warm house, receiving first-rate medical attention, being waited on by my wife, eating good food. It puts things in perspective.

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Next blessing...

When my back goes out and I'm in bed for a few days it's the darkest time of my life because I'm in pain and I can't do anything.

If you would've told me that I was going to go through something similar, but more painful and longer, without any idea when it would end, I would've expected it to be an even darker time. But I can say that I wasn't despairing. I can even say that much of the time I was encouraged.

I believe it is a good example of God's grace being sufficient for me in a situation that I would've imagined being much worse.

Sometimes I think we imagine things being much worse because we haven't been given God's grace yet.

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The next blessing...

I think every father wants to be strong for his children. We don't want to look weak and helpless. But that's how I looked for a few weeks to my kids, and one of the blessings was how kind they were to me. They prayed for me each day and regularly told me how sorry they were about what was happening. They would come in to see me and there were some very wonderful moments with them.

Johnny was my faithful water boy. Until he told me he needed to take a day off.

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The next blessing...

I could say the same about Katie. Husbands want to look strong for their wives. I think a season that could've been trying for our marriage was one of the sweetest we've enjoyed. I don't think there's been another time that we felt so close to each other.

She was taking care of me, our house, and her children. She is amazing.

Katie would give me a massage each day, and that went really well until one night we were going to call the ambulance because of the pain. Then we stopped the massages.

We thought of getting business cards that said, "Massages so good they'll make you call 911."

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Now I will be honest with you...

After listening to me share all these blessings you might be saying, "Well Pastor Scott, it doesn't sound like your trial was that bad."

That's actually sort of the point...

One of the reasons I wanted to share these blessings with you, is to encourage you to look for blessings when you feel like your body is wasting away...and this brings us to lesson 3...

**When our bodies waste away (lesson three) give thanks for the blessings.**

This is like step 2:

1. Step 1: look for the blessings.
2. Step 2: give thanks for them.

I think you'll be surprised by two things:

1. First, the number of things you can find to be thankful for even in the midst of trials.
2. Second, how much better you will feel after thinking about these blessings and giving thanks for them.

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And I want to be clear about something...

I'm not sharing this lesson because I think it's good advice. I do think it's good advice, but that's not why I'm sharing it. I know, and appreciate, you don't want me to get up here and tell you my personal thoughts. You want to hear God's word!

And that's why I'm sharing this with you!

This is completely biblical to give thanks no matter what we are experiencing. There are many verses I could give you. Here are three:

1. **1 Thessalonians 5:18 GIVE THANKS in ALL circumstances** (including our bodies wasting away); **for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**
2. **Philippians 4:6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything** (including our bodies wasting away) **by prayer and supplication WITH THANKSGIVING let your requests be made known to God.**
3. **Ephesians 5:20 GIVING THANKS ALWAYS AND FOR EVERYTHING** (including our bodies wasting away) **to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,**

Why do you think God asks us to give thanks no matter what we're experiencing?

I'm sure part of it, or maybe even most of it, is about God. He is good and he deserves our praise and thanks no matter what we're experiencing.

But I also think it's for us. When we give thanks:

- We feel better
- We develop a better disposition
- Our eyes are lifted off ourselves and up to God

We stop feeling sorry for ourselves, and we start feeling thankful.

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Imagine something for a moment...

Two people going through the exact same trial:

- One person thinks only about:
  - how much they're suffering
  - how terrible their circumstances are
  - how much better everyone else has it
  - maybe even how unfair God is allowing them to go through this.
- Someone else thinks about the blessings:
  - the ways God is using this trial in their life and others' lives



- the glory the trial brings God
- the opportunity they have to go through the trial in a way that honors Him

Can you imagine how much differently these two people would feel, even though their trial is identical?

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Earlier mentioned Job's trials and all that was taken away from him. I was reflecting on something that I thought was interesting...

If you weren't familiar with the book, what would you expect to be most likely to cause Job to curse God?

Personally, I would expect the loss of his children to have the greatest chance to cause him to curse God.

Job lost all of his children and then listen to what happened...

**Job 2:3 The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." 4 Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. 5 But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." 6 And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."4 Satan [said to] the Lord, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. 5 But stretch out your hand AND TOUCH HIS BONE AND HIS FLESH, AND HE WILL CURSE YOU TO YOUR FACE."**

Isn't that interesting?

Satan told God that Job wouldn't curse Him if He lost all of his property and children, but the moment he started suffering physically, then he would curse God.

Satan knows how miserable it is for us when our bodies waste away.

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As I said earlier, certain things are being taken away from us:

- It might be our strength
- It might be our abilities
- It might be our comfort

I spent so much time discussing working out, because I wanted you to see how big of a deal it was for me for so many years.

For most of my adult life much of my security was bound up in being physically fit strong.

God took that away from me, because He doesn't want my security bound up in that. He wants my security bound up in what Christ has done for me.

And this brings us to lesson four...

**When our bodies waste away (lesson four) God wants to be our security.**

I'm guessing most of you never cared about being bodybuilders, but I bet much of your security is still bound up in your body.

When your body starts to waste away it seems like a real attack on what's most important to you, because our bodies allow us to do all the things we want to do. And this can, understandably, be very difficult for us.

I want to encourage you with this truth...

God is taking away something that we have put security in, perhaps for much of our lives, because He wants to be our security.

Our security should be bound up in what Christ has done for us, and when we put our security in something else, it's a blessing when God removes that. It's almost like we have an idol that God reaches in and takes it out.

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Let me close with this question...

What is your security bound up in?

Whatever the answer is to that question, you may have to be ready for God to take that away from you.

J.C. Ryle said, *"Trials are intended to make us think, to wean us from the world, to send us to the Bible, to drive us to our knees."*

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<sup>i</sup> To give you an idea, at the end of my sophomore year, my ROTC instructor told all of us to write a summer fitness plan. He was afraid that we had trained all year, we were going to go home for the summer, not work out, and come back out of shape. That was pretty much the furthest thing from my mind. I couldn't wait to get home for the summer and work out with all the free time I'd have.

Not only that, I was going to get my parents involved. We got a family membership at the local gym. I would take Mom down to the track early in the morning and run laps with her. She's a stronger woman today because of that wonderful investment I made in her 😊.

But anyway, I wrote out my summer fitness plan, turned it into my instructor, and he said that when we came back in the fall he was going to see if we met our goals.

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When we came back in the fall, he passed out all of our fitness plans for us to see if we met our goals, but he didn't give me mine. I could tell pretty quickly that something was wrong.

Everyone else's plan contained things like:

- Run 3 miles per day, three times per week
- Increase my push-ups by 20
- Do 400 situps per day

I still remember my goals were something like:

- Lift weights for two hours per day six days per week
- Add 15 pounds to my benchpress
- Increase the size of my arms by half an inch

So my instructor holds up my plan before the class and he reads it and says something like, "The US Army wants soldiers who were agile, fit, and can maneuver through different terrains. Not bodybuilders who can go on a stage."

<sup>ii</sup> When I went to the doctor a few weeks ago, he gave me a lot of pills and so he wanted to watch my kidney and liver function. I also haven't had any extensive checkups before, so he said he wanted to check everything. That day they drew blood, and it seemed like anything you could test from some blood they tested. He told me I would get my results pretty quickly, and sure enough I did. I was able to look at them online.

They made it simple enough that a layperson could understand the results. There's a bar with an arrow at and bolt ends of the bar. It's good if the arrow is right in the middle, meaning whatever they were testing isn't too high or too low. Fortunately, it seemed like all the levels were really good. In other words, it seemed like I was very healthy.

In other words, it really seems like God just took this one single thing on my life.

<sup>iii</sup> God allowed me to improve enough to be able to perform a wedding, because it didn't involve much more than walking down the church, officiating, and walking home but still very thankful to be at the do that.