How to Endure Suffering & Hardship for Christ

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

3/6/2011

Introduction:

You can make it! You can endure any difficulty you experience as you seek to serve Christ!

I. *You can endure hardship because you have…*
GOD'S POWER to sustain you (v.7-11)

II. *You can endure hardship because you have…*
A SURE FAITH to hold on to (v.13-14)

A. Faith to Speak the Gospel (v.13)

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III. *You can endure hardship because you have…*
A SELF-LESS MINISTRY to motivate you (v.11, 15)

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V. *You can endure hardship because you have…*
AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE to encourage you (v. 17-18)

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A. Faith to _____ the _____ (v.13)

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A. Your Ministry is for _____ (v.12, 15a)

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Introduction:

The ministry is glorious, but it comes with a cost (Lk. 14:28).

There are pressures to be faced (2 Tim. 3:12).

Paul's hardship in ministry - *Acts 9:16* - For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

SEE: 2 Cor. 11:23-28

Paul's troubles (v. 8-11) are described to us to help us.

Romans 15:4
For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

You can make it! You can endure any difficulty you experience as you seek to serve Christ!

I. *You can endure hardship because you have…*
<u>GOD'S POWER</u> to <u>sustain</u> you (v.7-11)

"Treasure" – that which is valuable and expensive

"This treasure" - the treasure is the Gospel ministry
This treasure is the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (i.e. the Gospel message – cp. 4:3).

"Earthen vessels" = clay containers

"Earthen" - made of clay, earthenware, pottery. Corinthian pottery was well known in the ancient world ((Strabo, Geography, 8:6, 23; Martin; ABD, 1:1136); Paul may have been referring to the small pottery lamps which were cheap and fragile or he may have referred to earthenware vases or urns. The point seems to be that the valuable treasure is contained in weak, fragile, and valueless containers (Hughes; SB, 3:516; NW, 2, ii:436:38; Thrall; Furnish). The ending of the world signifies material out of which something was made ((MH, 359). (Reinecker, p. 399)

"Earthen vessels" - Clay jars (our fragile human bodies).

God puts a glorious treasure inside of a weak container and pours out that treasure into the lives of others, so that in the end it is the treasure that is glorified and not the vessel.

The extraordinary power is from God and not our flesh.

Work performed in the flesh will wear us down to the bone. But work done by His power will never diminish.

To be effective in ministry, we must ask God for His power and strength every day. As Paul said: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

"Ministry takes place when divine resources flow through human channels to the glory of God" (Jack Palmer).

v. 8
"Troubled" - to face tribulation (lit. pressure) – afflictions that come pressing down upon you; heavy burdens

"Yet not distressed" - not pressured into a narrow place (Rienecker, p. 400). Not stressed out to the point of being restricted or crushed

"Perplexed" - to be at a loss as to what to do. To be in doubt as to which way to go; to be at "wit's end."

"Not in despair" – Not completely baffled (Barrett, cited by Reinecker, p. 400). Not despondent.

"Persecuted" – to be hunted down like an animal; to be pursued by your enemy.

v. 9
"Not forsaken" – Not deserted; not abandoned. Not left to yourself.

God promised to never forsake His children.

Deuteronomy 31:6-8
Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he *it is* that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.
And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it.
And the LORD, he *it is* that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.

Joshua 1:5
There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, *so* I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

1 Chronicles 28:20
And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do *it*: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, *even* my God, *will be* with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.

Psalms 37:25
I have been young, and *now* am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.

Psalms 37:28
For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.

v. 9
"Cast down" – struck down, knocked to the ground

"Not destroyed" – not utterly ruined; not perishing

v. 10

Paul and his associates were continually exposed to the possibility of imminent death. Their very life was in danger on a constant basis. Death was always knocking on the door, yet all the while Christ's power to live was revealed.

No one can take your life until Christ allows it. He alone holds the keys of death (Rev. 1:18).

When Paul's body looked like the death sentence was written all over it, Christ's life was infused so that death was rendered powerless.

v. 11

Verse 11 is a re-explanation of verse 10. The particle "for" gives an explanation of the preceding (Reinecker, p. 400).

"For Jesus' sake" - The forces of Satan and evil will often threaten the very life of those who belong to Jesus. But no evil can triumph over you because of Christ's sovereign power and control.

"The life of Jesus" - Jesus literally lives in his people. He is our life (both now and for eternity) (Col. 3:4).

Many times God's people will be right at the brink of death and Jesus comes to the rescue and delivers from death.

We are troubled for Jesus' sake and we triumph by Jesus' life in us.

II. *You can endure hardship because you have…*

A SURE FAITH to hold on to (v.13-14)

A. Faith to Speak the Gospel (v.13)

"As it is written" - Paul cites Psalm 116:10 – I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted:

"The same spirit of faith" – All of Christ's servants have the same Holy Spirit who has enabled us to believe.

He convinces us of God's truth; He persuades us of the validity of the Gospel of Christ.

B. Faith to Know the Future (v.14)

The sure faith (v. 13) particularly involves a confidence of life after death (v. 14).

"Knowing" - The verb *"oida"* expresses knowledge grasped directly or intuitively by the mind (Burdick, cited by Reinecker, p. 401).

Just as God the Father raised His Son (Jesus Christ) back to life, He will also raise us (by means of His Son) back to life.

The hope of the resurrection is the pinnacle of Christian faith. Hope of life after death, makes death more bearable and life more livable.

It is not fairy tale or fiction but reality. Just as the resurrection was reality in Christ, so it will be reality in the Christian.

"Shall present us with you" - God the Father shall present every single believer to His Son. Just as a father presents his daughter to the groom, so God the Father shall present the bride to His Son Jesus Christ.

III. *You can endure hardship because you have…*
A SELF-LESS MINISTRY to motivate you (v.12, 15)

A. Your Ministry is for Other's Benefit (v.12, 15a)

v. 12
"Death…in us…but life in you" - Paul's faithful preaching and living brought him face to face with death; but his faithful preaching and living had the effect of bringing the Corinthians face to face with life (Paul had suffered much that others might be saved).

"All things" - All things endured or suffered. All trouble, persecution, insult and injury.

"For your sakes" - For the sake of your salvation, life, and resurrection. What a selfless goal in ministry!

B. Your Ministry is for God's Glory (v.15b)

1) The Spirit gave faith
2) By faith Paul preached
3) When he preached others gave him trouble
4) By faith he persisted
5) His persistence resulted in many becoming saved
6) In life and eternity people will thank God for His salvation
7) This thankfulness will bring God glory forever

IV. *You can endure hardship because you have…*
A DAILY RENEWAL to recharge you (v.16)

2 Cor. 4:16
For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

"For which cause" - The cause of God's saving gospel which will result in His glory

"For which cause" - For the cause of the believer and the future resurrection, Paul never lost heart or became discouraged in ministry.

So that others might have grace and end up glorifying God, Paul did not **"faint"** (**"we faint not"** – a phrase repeated in 4:1).

"Our outward man perish" - The physical body experiences gradual destruction (in Paul's case, some of this physical affliction came at the hands of his persecutors (4:8-10); he would be "troubled. . . distressed. . . perplexed. . . and persecuted." (v. 8-9).

Paul's stoning, beatings, and other stresses would take their toll on his body; his outward man would "take a beating."

Despite our efforts to sustain health, the fact remains—due to sin—that our bodies do begin to wear out.

Stresses, illnesses, aches and pains, etc., are part of mortal life. The outward "you" will with time, age, and circumstance perish.

However, the good news is that the inward "you" can be renewed (refreshed and made new again) day by day.

The Word "Renewed" is <u>passive</u>, indicating that the renewal is not self-induced.

> Just as you have no control over you speed and rate of growth physically (you simply eat, sleep, and exercise, and somehow the growth process occurs irrespective of your desire to grow [Mt. 6:27]), so, if you consume God's Word, the Word will cause you to grow.
>
> You cannot independently manufacture your own spiritual growth. God causes you to grow as you receive the needed nutrients of His Word and strength He has to offer.

Peter exhorted Christian women to pay attention to the inner spiritual you.

1 Peter 3:3-4

Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

"The hidden man of the heart" = the inner, unseen person of the heart.

V. *You can endure hardship because you have…*

AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE to encourage you (v. 17-18)

v. 17
Our **"affliction" -** tribulation/pressure

The pressures we face are qualified (defined) as:

1) **"Light"** – weightless, not heavy

"Affliction for Jesus' sake, however crushing it may seem, is in fact light, a weightless trifle" (Hughes, cited by Reinecker, p. 400).

2) **"But for a moment" -** temporary; a short amount of time compared to eternity

Note the play on words:
"Light. . . weight"
"Moment . . . eternal"

The rewards received outweigh and outlast the pressures we endured for our Lord. Transformation occurs when we look at life with His perspective.

Note the context of 4:8-15 & 5:1-9

How is the inward man renewed day by day? How can we grow spiritually and not lose heart?

This occurs when we look at life from God's perspective, from heaven's perspective.

Romans 8:28 – "All things work together for good…"

v. 17
Keep your eyes on the future hope, and the present afflictions that you endure for Christ will seem as momentary light weights. Compared to the eternal and heavy glory to be experienced in Heaven.

When we have God's perspective we will focus on the spiritual rather than the physical, the eternal rather than the temporal.