

HOW TO “FAINT NOT” IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS

Notice on your outline one of the verses I gave you last week: **II Kings 13:14a** “Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died.”

I wonder how many of you—right now—have “the sickness whereof” you ***will die*** from?

Some of you might be thinking, ‘Did Pastor just say what I think he said?’ To which I reply, Yes—you heard me right! And just to make sure you heard right, I’m going to ask it again:

I wonder how many of you—right now—have “the sickness whereof” you will die from?

‘Wow, Pastor, nothing like starting off the sermon on a depressing note!’

Is that a ***mean*** question? **No**, it’s not—and here’s why! Yesterday morning I took a couple of minutes to jot down the list of our ***members***, regular ***attenders*** (including children), and the ***spouses*** of our regular attenders—whether they are a regular attender or not.

The number? 42! Guess how many have persistent, significant health challenges? ***Over half***—22 of the 42! Please know that I’m not saying over half of you have a ***life-threatening*** medical condition! What I am saying, though, is that many of you suffer—some of you ***daily***—with ***physical ailments*** that you would gladly get rid of if you could!

And—as mentioned last week—I would love to take all your ***health problems away!*** I can’t do that, though, but God course can! But often times ***He doesn’t!*** Why?

--Is it because some cases are ***too difficult*** for Him? **No**; that’s not the reason! ***Jeremiah 32:27*** “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?”

--Is it because He doesn’t ***love us?*** **No**; that’s not the reason either! ***John 15:13*** “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Jesus didn’t lay down His life just for His ***friends***, though—He died for His ***enemies***, too!

--Why, then—if God is the ***most powerful*** and the ***most loving*** Being in the universe—does He allow ***His children*** to ***suffer?*** Because He is also the ***most wise***—and has reasons for doing things that are ***beyond our ability*** to understand!

Simply put, ***God is God***—and we are not! And because He is God, His ***thoughts and ways are higher*** than ours—and He ***has reasons for doing things*** that don’t necessarily make sense to us.

And we need to not just ***grudgingly, reluctantly accept*** that—we need to ***embrace and enjoy*** the reality that our God is ***infinitely greater*** than us! You may get tired of me saying this, but I’m going to say it again anyway: *If I could totally understand God, I would be equal to God! And I don’t want a God that is equal to me—I want one infinitely wiser than me!*

But God does give us ***some reasons*** for suffering—and we briefly touched on some of those last week. Here they are again:

1) To purge us. ***Isaiah 48:10*** “Behold, I have ***refined thee***, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the ***furnace of affliction.***”

2) To prevent pride. Paul plainly declared in II Corinthians 12:7 that he was given a “thorn in the flesh” so he wouldn’t become proud.

3) To prepare us to help others.

4) To bring praise to God and point others to Him.

We see that in the stoning of Stephen...and the singing of Paul and Silas in prison...and the joyful spirit of women like ***Joni Eareckson Tada*** and ***Ciara Dierking***.

And ***you and I*** can follow their example—and more importantly, Jesus’ example—by ***bringing glory to God*** as He props us up—and others see ***His*** strength in ***our*** weakness!

Question: Does ***knowing why*** God allows us to suffer, help us remain faithful to Him and live in a way that pleases Him ***even in the midst*** of our difficulties? **Yes**; to a certain degree!

But God also teaches us—through the Apostle Paul—how to “faint not” while going through trials! We have the remedy...the recipe...the “do’s and don’ts” in II Corinthians 4, verses 16-18. Please turn there. Notice what these verses say.

First, let’s consider... **1. The resolve to “faint not”**

We see Paul’s resolve...his determination...his decision not to “faint” in the beginning of vs 16:

--“For which cause we faint not...”

A. The definition of “faint”

What does “faint” mean? We know that Paul is not talking about “tipping over” from being wobbly—or “passing out” from dehydration!

The Topical Lexicon in **Biblehub** defines it as “spiritual, emotional, and moral fatigue that tempts a believer to abandon a God-given assignment or attitude.” Each of the six times it is used in the NT it is “to urge **steadfastness under pressure**.” The same Greek word is used in vs 1 of this chapter. Some other familiar verses are Luke 18:1 (“...men ought always to pray, and not to faint”) and Galatians 6:9 (“And let us not **be weary** in well doing...”).

So “faint” means, ‘don’t give up...don’t lose heart...don’t quit!’

B. The decision to “faint not”

How do we know Paul had made a decision not to give up? We see Paul’s decision not to faint—his resolve—in the words “For which cause.” This phrase comes from the Greek word “dee-oh” and means “therefore, for this reason, because of this.”

We also see Paul’s decision to keep going and not give up in the **tense and voice of the verb “faint.”** First, it is in the **present** tense—not the **past** tense or **future** tense. Why is that significant? Because Paul **is not** saying, ‘I didn’t give up in **the past**.’ And he **is not** saying, ‘I will try not to give up in **the future**.’ He is saying that right now—at that moment—he was going to **continually keep on** fighting the tendency to give up!

And it is in the “**active** voice.” What does that mean? It means that it was something **he personally was doing**—not something that was **happening** to him. You’ll see why I’m pointing this out in a little bit.

What about us? Are we resolved not to give up? Are we going to keep going **for the Lord**—and keep going **to the Lord**—regardless of the difficulties of the trials in our life?

Paul did—and he certainly **had difficulties!** We looked at the whippings and beatings and stonings and imprisonments and shipwrecks last week in chapter 11. And he gives us some more here in this chapter! Notice what it says in verses 8-11.

Time does not allow me to expand on these verses, but “troubled...and persecuted...and always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus...and always delivered unto death for Jesus’s sake” does not sound overly pleasant to me!

How was it that Paul could keep going in spite of all the difficulties he faced? In verse 1, he says he had **received mercy**. Aren’t you **glad for God’s mercy?** Aren’t you glad that God **took the punishment** that you and I deserved for our sin on Himself—and paid **our debt for us!**

Here again is **Titus 3:5**—a verse you should be getting quite familiar with because I quote it often! “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but **according to His mercy He saved us....**”

That’s **not the only reason** Paul resolved not to give up, though. In vs 14, we see his unshakeable faith that he would someday be resurrected—and be forever with Jesus!

And that brings us to... **2. The recipe for “fainting not”**

How was it that Paul could continually persevere and not give up on God—or stop doing what God called him to do—even in the face of the incredible trials God brought his way?

--He was certainly motivated by **God’s mercy** as pointed out from vs 1.

--And he certainly was convinced of his **future resurrection** as we just looked at in vs 14.

But in vs 16-18, he expands on his attitude...his mind-set...his perspective that really serves as a recipe for us to “faint not.” And he does so by giving us **one** “don’t”—and **three** “do’s”!

First, the **don’t**... A. Don’t ignore the reality of outward degeneration!

We see that in vs 16 in the phrase “though our outward man perish.” In this context, “perish” **does not mean** “decay” or “rot.” In other words, Paul is not talking about our bodies **turning to dust** someday.

What he is saying is that our outward man—the physical **health and strength of our bodies**—are trending **downward**. Our bodies—for those of us over 40, anyway—are not **improving**! They are going **downhill**; they are **degenerating**!

It is also interesting to see that “perish” is in the **present tense**. Paul is not saying that his body **will wear out** in the future; he is saying that it is **happening now**—and will continue to happen!

It is also in the **passive** voice—meaning it is something that is **happening to him**—not that he is doing to himself. His body wasn’t going downhill because he **didn’t take care of himself**! It wasn’t because he wasn’t **eating right** (when he wasn’t in prison)—and it certainly wasn’t because he **didn’t exercise** (unless, of course, he was in prison). And he probably had **regular health check-ups** because Luke, the beloved physician, traveled with him!

How do we stay faithful to God while going through **bodily, physical** hardships? Not by pretending we don’t have them! They are a reality—and Paul reminds us of that very thing in this verse! So here’s our “don’t”: *Don’t ignore the reality of outward degeneration!*

Now for the first “do”: B. Do accept responsibility for inward renewal

Notice now the end of vs 16: “...yet the inward man is renewed day by day.”

What’s the **inward** man? It is the inner, invisible part of us that **does not decay**—and does **not die**!

Theologians debate as to whether or not our inner man is made up of **one part**—a soul/spirit combination—or **two parts**: a soul and spirit. The Bible sometimes refers to **three**—body, soul, and spirit—but also (sometimes) uses soul and spirit interchangeably.

Time doesn’t allow me to “divide asunder the soul and spirit” (Hebrews 4:12), but the main point Paul is making is this: The **inner man**—the spiritual life that we have from God if we are a child of God—is not dependent on **outward** circumstances! In fact, Paul says here that they are heading in **opposite directions**!

The **outer man** is continually going downhill and losing strength, but **the inner man** is being “renewed day by day.”

1) The meaning of renewal.

What does “renew” mean? It doesn’t mean our inner man **disappears** at the end of the day and a **new one** needs to **be created** at the beginning of each day!

II Corinthians 5:17—possibly on the same page of your Bible—says, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a **new creature** [creation]: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become **new**.”

So God’s children **are a new creation** in Christ—and don’t need to be recreated every day! But our inner self needs to be **renewed**...it needs **to grow**...it needs to be strengthened. Biblehub defines **renew** as “moving from one stage to a higher (more developed) one.”

A parallel thought is in II Corinthians 3:18—a verse that may once again be on the same page of your Bible. Notice what it says. Being changed “from glory to glory” means from one degree of glory to another degree. In other words, becoming more and more like Jesus!

2) The method of renewal.

So what is the method of renewal? How does our **inner man grow**—and become stronger—when **our body**—and the **world** around us—**is falling apart**?

Once again, the **tense and voice** of the verb help us understand what Paul is saying—and what we need to do in light of what he is saying.

First—just like the verb perish—“renew” is in the **present** tense. He was not renewed in **the past**—and he is not waiting to be renewed **in the future**. He is now—presently—continuing to be renewed. **How often?** Day by day!

Second—and again, just like the verb “perish”—it is in the **passive** voice. That means Paul did not **renew himself**—someone else “renewed” him. And that **Someone else**, of course, was the Holy Spirit! And the **same Holy Spirit** that renewed **Paul** day by day—and kept **him** faithfully and joyfully serving God in spite of intense physical suffering and trials—**can also renew us** “day by day.”

But we **have a part**, don’t we? You already know what I’m going to say, don’t you?! We can’t just **stare out the window** hoping our garden will plant itself—there is work to be done! But unlike **literal gardening** where we “take the winter off,” we can’t “take time off” when it comes to being spiritually renewed!

So what’s our part?

--According to II Corinthians 3:18, it is **seeing the glory of God** in the **word** of God.

--**Acts 20:32** “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to **the word of His grace**, which is able to **build you up...**”

--**Romans 12:2** “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the **renewing of your mind**, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

--How is our mind renewed?

By reading the word of God!

--How do we know the will of God?

By reading the word of God!

This same truth is taught In John 15:3; John 17:17, Romans 10:17; and I Peter 2:2.

But growth isn’t just a matter of **taking in** the word of God—we need to **obey it!**

--In Matthew 7, both the foolish man and the wise man **heard** the sayings of Jesus, but only the wise man **did** them!

--**James 1:25** “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and **continueth therein**, he being not a forgetful hearer, but **a doer of the work**, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

What is the recipe for remaining faithful—for “fainting not”—regardless of **what kind** of suffering God allows into our lives—and **how long** it lasts?

First, don’t ignore the reality of outward degeneration.

Second, accept your responsibility—your role—in inward renewal.

Third... C. Do view trials from God’s perspective

We see that in vs 17. Is this **merely Paul’s** perspective? No! It is certainly the perspective **that Paul had**—but **God wants us** to view **our trials** the same way!

--“For our **light** affliction.” I found it interesting that the only other place that the Greek word translated “light” is found is in **Matthew 11:30** where Jesus said, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Was **Paul’s suffering** “light”? Were his trials easy—and pain free?

Not at all! So was Paul **lying**—or being “macho”? Neither one, right?

--**On God’s scales**, anything we go through here is “light”—it is small and insignificant—compared to the “weight”—the heaviness and greatness—of our rewards in heaven!

--How “heavy” will those rewards be? Our English translations fail to capture what it says in the Greek. “Far more exceeding” in the Greek is literally “exceedingly, exceedingly” or “excessively excessive” or “infinitely exceeding.”

--Is it any wonder Paul writes of the “unsearchable riches of Christ”—and that the “breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ is beyond our comprehension!

Back to our verse: “...which is but **for a moment...**”

--We’re Paul’s trials **measured in minutes?** Obviously not!

--Acts 24:27 refers to Paul being in prison for **two years!**

--Acts 28:30 refers to **another two years** where Paul was under house arrest!

--And it is quite possible that he had his “thorn in the flesh” for 10 plus years!

But once again, Paul is **not lying**—and he is not **being stoic!** He is simply reminding us that the trials of this life—regardless of **how long** they last—are merely **a moment** compared to eternity!

One more “do” in Paul’s recipe for “fainting not” in the midst of our trials and it is this:

D. Do look at the things that are not seen!

We see that in vs 18; notice what it says. **How** do we look at things which are not seen?

Paul is not talking about **literally, physically gazing** at something, is he? The word “look” here means to contemplate...to fix our mind’s eye on... to direct our attention to.

What are we supposed to focus on? What are we supposed to direct our attention to?

--Are supposed to focus on **our trials?** **No!** Those are things that are **seen**—and felt!

--What about focusing **on cars and houses and money and toys** and things? Is that what we are supposed to direct our attention to?

No! Those are things that are **seen**—and are **temporary!**

--What are we supposed to **focus** on? What are we supposed to **direct our attention** to?

Not at the things which **are seen**—but at the things which are **not seen!**

In other words, we are to focus on **the eternal!** We’ll expand on that more next week when we get back to the book of Colossians.

And **Colossians 3:1-2** ties right into the focus Paul talks about here in verse 18! Notice on your outline: “If ye then be risen with Christ, **seek those things which are above**, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. ²Set your affection **on things above**, not on things **on the earth.**”

So what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. First, remember God has a reason for trials—and He **may or may not let you know** the reason! Arthur T. Pierson wrote: “The old refiner never leaves his crucible, but sits down by it, lest there should be one excessive degree of heat to mar the metal. But as soon as he skims from the surface the last of the dross, and **sees his own face reflected**, he puts out the fire.” (*Streams in the Desert* (1), October 29th).

That’s what God is doing in us—heating up the fire, to remove the dross, so we reflect Him!

2. Don’t quit! Resolve to live for God regardless of what He brings your way!

Our Pastor in Lake Mills would occasionally sing a song entitled, “Don’t Quit!”

I couldn’t find the words on-line anywhere, but I remember the chorus:

Don’t quit, there’s a job to be done; Don’t quit, there’s a race to be run;

Don’t quit, there’s a crown to be won! Don’t quit, weary Christian, don’t quit!

What’s the recipe for not quitting?

1) It’s not by pretending you don’t have trials! But don’t focus on them, either!

2) Do your part in renewing the inner man. God will renew you—“He giveth power to the faint”—but you need to be in His Word taking in the milk and meat. That is what He uses to grow and strengthen you!

3) View trials from God’s perspective.

--They are light compared to the heaviness of the blessings of heaven

--And they are but a moment compared to eternity!

4) Focus on the eternal—not the temporary! I know that is “easier said than done,” but that is what God calls us to do!

Speaking of which, are **you ready for** eternity? Do you have Christ?

Have you personally received Him? **John 1:12** “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name:”

Believing about Jesus is not enough—we need to personally **receive** Him. Have you done that?