



**Grace Under Pressure: We Do Not Lose Heart**  
**The Sermon Study Guide**  
**2 Corinthians 4:7-12, 16-18**  
**October 4, 2009**

**Opening Prayer**

We thank God for his word: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* 2 Timothy 3:16

**Leader The Lord be with you**  
**People *And also with you***  
**Leader Let us pray**

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**Remembering the Message (Read 2 Corinthians 4)**

**Introduction**

Fr. Jason shared a story of a record-setting tennis match – the longest match ever played on a single day: 6 hours and 31 minutes. Sometimes our lives can feel like a marathon tennis match – we are at the point of absolute exhaustion. We may want to just give up in the face of the challenges of life. We may be exhausted, overwhelmed, in the place of losing heart.

The apostle Paul was also under a lot of pressure. Nevertheless, he is able to affirm in the beginning and the end of 2 Corinthians 4 that “we do not lose heart.”

**Going Deeper**

1. What are some of the things we face today which might cause us to lose heart?
2. From your study of the book of Acts and Paul’s letters make note of some of the difficulties Paul was facing in ministry and life in general. Look at 3 or 4 of the following examples or include some examples not listed here.  
Acts 13:49-50, Acts 14:19-20, 36-39, Acts 16:6-10, 19-24, Acts 20:7-9, 36-38, Acts 21:10-14, 27-36, Acts 23:12-15. Other references to some of the hardships faced by Paul can be found in 1 Cor. 2:1-5, 16:9, 2 Cor. 6:3-10, 10:10, 11:23-12:10, Galatians 1:6-7, Ephesians 6:19-20, Philippians 1:15-18, 4:10-13, 2 Thess. 3:1-2, 6-13, and 2 Timothy 4:9-16.

**Background: Paul's Ministry** Paul was responsible for writing half of the books in the New Testament. He was the evangelist commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ himself and he brought the gospel into Galatia, Asia Minor, and Greece. And yet, it seemed in many ways that his ministry was a failure.

**Background: The Church in Corinth** The city of Corinth was the third most important city in the Empire and had as many as 1 million people in it. Compare that to Dallas with 1.2 million in 2005. But as we consider the church in Corinth we find that it was a series of small cell groups that met in homes, occasionally meeting as an entire church in the home of Gaius. The entire church in a single home! Scholars estimate that the church in Corinth could have been as small as 50 - 100 people.

### **Paul's struggles: Failure (4:1-4) and Weakness (4:7-9)**

So many things could have caused Paul to lose heart; he speaks of 2 of those things here in this passage – failure and weakness. 50 out of 1 million people in Corinth converted under the teaching of Paul? Paul could have looked at the numbers and seen the fruit of his commissioning by Jesus as a failure. And this wasn't happening just in Corinth. Everywhere Paul goes there are far more people who reject his message and seek to discredit or even persecute him than respond to the gospel. Paul could see this discouragement and sense of failure as intimately tied to his identity as a Christian and even his job.

Paul also sees himself as weak. He has human frailties and limitations. Fr. Jason unpacked what it means to be “hard-pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted, struck down”. Paul feels constant pressure from the world. He is constantly at a loss and without answers to the things going on in the world and to him. There are those coming after him trying to harm him in so many ways. He is thrown down constantly by the world around him. Paul is suffering over and over again – physically, mentally, and emotionally.

### **Going Deeper**

1. What does it mean to be hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed? Perplexed, but not in despair? Persecuted, but not abandoned? Struck down, but not destroyed? How did Paul specifically experience these things in life and ministry? What keeps Paul from being crushed, in despair, feeling abandoned, destroyed?
2. When have you experienced failure? Weakness? What are some of the ways you responded?
3. What are the things that you are currently facing that could cause you to “lose heart”?
4. What might “loss of heart” look like in terms of thoughts, words, and/or actions?
5. What are the places in which people find identity, significance, or meaning for their lives? What about you – as you consider your own life, where do you find your identity? Explain.

**Paul's Response** Fr. Jason directed our attention to Paul's response to failures and weaknesses. When there was failure, Paul focused on being faithful to God (4:1-3). Rather than dwelling on what he could not change, Paul put his effort into being faithful to the God who could change all things. When there was weakness, Paul focused on God's power in him (4:7-11). Paul never minimized his suffering, never denied his own confusion and pain, never acted as though everything was just fine. Paul was honest about his suffering but he saw God's plan and power. What Paul sees is that his life is a mess, but the fact that he is not crushed, in despair, abandoned, or destroyed is the greatest evidence that God's power and presence is at work in his life. Paul saw a present and a future purpose in everything he went through. The present purpose was to transform. The future purpose was to prepare for glory.

1. When have you experienced God's power in the midst of failure and weakness? What did that look like in your life?
2. Can you look back at times of suffering, failure, and weakness in your life and see God's purpose? If so, how has God used suffering, failure, and weakness in your life? How has God's glory been revealed through those times? How did God use those events or circumstances to transform you?
3. What are ways we can be faithful to God in times of failure?

**Closing Scripture (Read aloud together)** *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

### **Closing Prayer**

Take time to pray, either aloud or silently, for those places where you are hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down. If you are in a small group, divide into smaller groups of 3-4 people. Pray for one another – for God's strength to we might respond faithfully in times of failure, for clarity of vision to recognize God's power at work, for an increase of faith, and for God's purpose to be revealed.

**Pray together:** Gracious Father, thank you for your tender mercy towards us. You are the God of all hope, the God who gives strength, the God who is at work redeeming every circumstance, every failure, every weakness. We trust that your purpose is being worked out in the stuff of our lives – in this present life to transform and in the future to prepare us for glory. Strengthen us by your grace. When we fail, help us to be faithful to you. Help us to remember that your power is at work in us when we are weak, for your power is made perfect in weakness. Lord, we believe – help us in our unbelief. Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from us the light of your love; the love you have made known to us in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*