

Adult Teaching Resources

June 10, 2018



Season After Pentecost: The Perils of Pauline ... Thinking (May 27-July 8)

2 Corinthians 4:5-12 (RCL 4:5-12) – “Treasure Sharing”

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:5 (RCL 4:13-5:1) – “We Don’t Lose Heart”

2 Corinthians 5:6-17 (RCL 5:6-10 [11-13], 14-17) – “By Faith, Not Sight”

2 Corinthians 6:1-13 – “Living Oxymorons”

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We Don't Lose Heart

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:5

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

"So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day." 2 Corinthians 4:16

Many years ago, I attended a youth retreat with the theme, "Life's not fair. Learn it early." Back then, I thought it was a fun, frivolous theme; but as I have gotten older, I see the truth in that statement.

As much as we want to cruise through life, without any worries, we can't. Life is hard. And sometimes, life can seem unfair.

In our lesson today, we'll explore the struggles and challenges Paul faced in his ministry to the church of Corinth. Paul's struggles were more than getting through a difficult finance committee meeting or worrying about what the youth were doing during their lock-in. For Paul, his struggles were truly life or death; yet, he continued forward in the name of Christ.

Opening

Ask everyone to find a partner. Ask this question for each person to share:

When life gets difficult, where/what do you turn to for help?

Encourage everyone to be honest and transparent with their answers. With this question, especially in a church-related setting, it's easy to say, "When life gets tough, I turn to Jesus." We sometimes give that answer, because we're think we're expected to give some type of "religiousy" answer. But, if they don't turn to Jesus, encourage them to share where they turn. No one should feel the pressure to say "Jesus," unless it's their truth.

After some time sharing where/what they turn to for help, ask them to consider this question:

What gives you hope?

Again, if the answer has nothing to do with God or church or religion, that should be fine.

Give everyone time to share their thoughts and open the floor for volunteers to share, if they are comfortable sharing in the larger group.

Reading the Bible

What statement of unity do Paul and Titus have from scripture? (just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke.") How do they live that truth out? (the believe and so they speak)

What do they know to be true? (the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise them also with Jesus and bring them and us into his presence)

What is happening to the outer nature? (it is wasting away) What is happening to the inner nature? (it is being renewed day by day)

What are we being prepared for? (an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure)

What do we look at? (what cannot be seen; what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal)

What happens is the earthly tent we live in is destroyed? (we have a building from God's house, eternal in the heavens)

What is our attitude in the earthly tent? (we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling)

What do we wish for in the earthly tent? (to be further clothed)

Who prepared us for all of this? (God)

Making Connections

If you had to choose a verse of scripture or story from the Bible that mirror where you are on your faith journey, what would you choose? How does that choice speak to your current faith situation?

What adversities have you faced in life? What role did God play, if any, in those situations, to get you to where you are today? How often do you share the "adversities" part of your faith story?

Where do you find strength when things get difficult? How does that help you?

What does the resurrection mean to you?

Paul talks about the outer nature and inner nature of humans. What do those terms mean to you? Where does God relate to both natures?

What do you compare your outer and inner self to? How, like Paul, do you explain the metaphor?

What do you groan for with God?

Making Connections *continued*

Our Lesson Writer says, “Paul is mainly driving at the insecurity we all feel when thinking about death and what follows. We like ‘being clothed’ with the physical life we have now, and we dread the thought of being naked without it. We want assurance that the heart of our being won’t be left cold in the ground, but that we will be ‘further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.’” What insecurity do you have about death and what follows? How do you handle those anxieties?

So What? ---

Form smaller groups of 3-4 people. Read verse 5:5, “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” Explain this verse relates mainly to Paul’s concern for death, but can also be applied on a larger scale.

Ask each group to share with each other their thoughts about these questions:

Where in your life do you need to apply this verse to give you hope and assurance?

What keeps you anxious?

What worries you?

How does the Spirit calm you?

Give everyone time to think and share within their small groups, then open the floor for larger group sharing and discussion.

The Challenge ---

This week, use verse 5:5 as your prayer. When you are faced with challenges and/or anxious moments, pray, “God, you have prepared me for this very thing, who gave me the Spirit as a guarantee.”

Prayer ---

Loving God, life is hard and it can be easy to give up. But, you have prepared us for this very thing, and you gave us your Spirit as a guarantee. Help us to lean on you when the going gets rough. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The text—The Revised Common Lectionary has 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 as today’s text, then skips over vv. 2-5 to begin next week’s text at 5:6. The committee may have done this because vv. 2-5 include Pauline speculations about what happens after death. Rather than ignore those puzzling but interesting verses, we will include them in our study.

Confidence in the resurrection—Paul found great confidence in speaking of how God raised Jesus from the dead, leading him to believe God would raise believers, too.

Consider these examples:

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 – “For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.”

1 Corinthians 15:14-15 – “. . . and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.”

Romans 8:11 – “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.”

Inner and outer selves—Ernest Best describes Paul’s reference to an “inner” and “outer” self in this way:

When he contrasts inner and outer natures Paul does not have in mind the comparison common in the ancient world as in ours of an immortal soul imprisoned in a mortal body from which it is set free at death. Nor has he in mind the contrast of the loss of physical vigor with old age and a possible deepening of life in the spirit. “Our outer nature” is the life we live among other people in which we may be persecuted or suffer in other ways (see 4:8–11). “Our inner nature” is the new life that comes into being with our relationship to Christ when we become new beings (5:17). Our inner nature is not yet perfect or complete; it will be hereafter; meanwhile it is being renewed and is growing every day.

(Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987], 45.)

Digging Deeper *continued*

Clothed, or not?—If you read from more than one Bible translation, you may find it curious that vv. 2-3 appear so different. This is due to a text critical issue. Mitzi I. Minor does a nice job of explaining it:

Ancient manuscripts have different participles in the verse. Some have *ekdysamenoi*, which can be translated, “if we are unclothed.” The NRSV follows this reading. Other manuscripts, however, have *endysamenoi*, which can be translated, “if we are clothed.” The TNIV follows this reading. [Compare NRSV and TNIV Translations of 5:2-3] A number of recent scholars choose the latter option as the likely correct reading and understand the verse to say, “if indeed we are clothed, we will not be found naked.”

The NRSV believes the participle *ekdysamenoi* belongs in v. 3 and translates the sentence (vv. 2-3) this way: “For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling—if indeed, when we have taken it off, we will not be found naked.”

The TNIV opts for the participle *endysamenoi* as the best reading and translates this way: “Meanwhile, we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.”

The text-critical decision here is difficult since the manuscript evidence is solid for either participle. Those who agree with the NRSV argue that Paul is likely being paradoxical (i.e., we, though unclothed, will not be found naked) and that “when we are clothed, we will not be found naked” is redundant. Those agreeing with the TNIV say the redundancy makes this reading the more difficult one and that a scribe would not likely have created it.

(Mitzi I. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2009], 95).

Skipping death—Some interpreters believe that Paul’s desire to be “further clothed” means that he wants to be “overclothed,” that is, to put on heavenly clothes over his earthly clothes, so that he doesn’t have to die (lose his earthly clothes) and be “naked” in the interim, before the resurrection brings a new heavenly wardrobe.

Guarantee—When Paul speaks of the Spirit as a “guarantee” of our future resurrection, the word he uses typically means “down payment” or “pledge” of future payment.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Why does Paul quote from Psalm 116:10 as he does?

Paul's quotation of scripture in 2 Corinthians 4:13 is curious. It comes from Psalm 116:10, which is equivalent to Psalm 115:1 in the Greek translation known as the Septuagint (LXX). Paul, like other New Testament writers, often quoted from the Greek version rather than the Hebrew. This is natural, since he was writing in Greek, and his readers would have readier access to the LXX than to Hebrew scrolls. The Hebrew and Greek versions often differ, however, as they do here.

Paul also quotes the verse in a very loose way, one that modern divinity school teachers would never allow their students to get away with. The rabbis of Paul's day paid little attention to context when applying scripture texts to daily life, but introduced all kinds of other thoughts as they picked over isolated words or phrases.

In context, the author of Psalm 116 had spoken of being in mortal danger and praying for help. After surviving a perilous period, he offered his gratitude to God in the form of a psalm. In v. 10, he wrote: "I kept my faith, even when I said 'I am greatly afflicted.'" That makes perfect sense in Hebrew.

Most English translations, like the NRSV quoted above, interpret the particle *kī* from the Hebrew version (which can mean "for" or "because" as well as "if" or "when") to mean "even when." The psalmist had remained faithful to God, even while speaking of the danger that afflicted him.

The Greek translators, however, moved the verse to the beginning of another psalm, added an "alleluia" to it, and took *kī* to mean "therefore." This separated the act of speaking from the comment on suffering, so the verse reads something like "Praise the LORD: I believed, therefore I spoke. And I was greatly afflicted."

With this reading in mind, Paul ignored the second half of the verse and cited only the words "I believed, therefore I spoke."

This implies that the psalmist meant to say "Because I had faith, I testified of it."

In the original context, that's not what the verse intended. Even so, it does reflect the overall message of the psalm: the author had trusted God through a time of dire peril, and lived to testify of God's help.