

The Ministry of Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5

Need

Do you ever get disillusioned about life? Why does this happen?

Do you ever feel out of place, as if you did not belong here? Why?

Do you feel spiritually empty? How do you recover your spiritual drive?

- ☺ Question: How did you do last week? What spiritual successes did you have? What spiritual failures?
- ☺ Question: How did our lesson last Sunday help you this week in your spiritual life?
- ☺ What can I do better that will help you this week?

How can I serve God when my life is so messed up??!! - 2 Corinthians 4:10-14

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

Do you ever get disillusioned about life? Why does this happen?

Ever feel like your life is falling apart: that you're doing good just to hold a few of the pieces together, much less serve God?

Sometimes I think we forget that we are no different from anyone else in this world. We are all broken people living in a broken world. We are new creations, but we aren't exactly finished products yet and we are still living in a world that is still waiting for its recreation (Romans 8:19-21).

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Not one of us will not finish our life in this world without being touched by the brokenness of the world. I read an email yesterday that said, "Never take life too seriously. Nobody gets out alive anyway." Life is terminal. We forget that sometimes. God did not create the world broken, but we have made it that way and that brokenness will somehow touch us. It may be our own failure; it may be someone else's failure, often its nobody's fault. It just happens. It may be a triple bypass like a good friend of ours, DeNola Towers, went through a year or so ago, or a heart transplant like two very good friends of ours, Bob Netherton and Kay Daugherty, went through. It may be the loss of a child. It may be financial trouble. It may be depression or illness. Or it may be loneliness or discouragement.

Never feel less God's child because you are experiencing difficulty. Never feel that the difficulties of life keep you from serving God. In fact, it is often in those times that God can work through us in more powerful ways than at any other time. It is out of the darkness that the light shines most brightly. And it is in the difficulties of life that the difference God makes in our lives is most clearly seen.

The world is not impressed with or drawn to our perfection. In fact, it is repelled by our apparent “perfection.” But the world is drawn to a message that says, “we are broken too, but we serve a God who loves us in spite of our brokenness and has given us victory even in our brokenness.”

The world does not need to hear how good we are. The world needs to hear how good God is. That’s why Paul says in 4:7,

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

God doesn’t expect us to be perfect, but He does expect us to be transparent and faithful - faithful in the way we respond to trouble, transparent in that we open our lives to the world. Then the world will see God in the very fabric of our lives.

Now I’m not suggesting we brag on our failures. But I am suggesting we quit wearing this “I’m perfect” mask, and that we be willing to share how we deal with our problems with God’s perspective.

Never forget – whether life brings good or bad – that God is working to renew, to recreate us in Christ’s image. 4:16 says,

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day,..

Even when life’s troubles surround us, God offers us the encouragement that, whether we see Him or not, He is there and He is working.

Where’s home? – 2 Cor. 5:4-5

For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come..

Do you ever feel out of place, as if you did not belong here? Why?

If you ever get the feeling you don’t belong here, it’s because you don’t. God created you for something better. Paul says in verse 5, that God made us for heaven. He made us to be like Him and with Him. And it’s not like God just created us and watched us go down the tubes. He is actively working to prepare us to be with Him.

It’s kind of like there is a big hole inside of each of us. There is something missing. As God recreates us, we become more aware that something is missing and we hunger to be whole. That hunger is the Spirit, whispering to us to look beyond the moment to the future, to the unseen (4:18).

Remember what Jesus said in John 14:1-3,

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

So know that when you feel that aching, that “out of place” feeling, that it is from God. And be encouraged that God is preparing you to be where He is.

Remember Paul’s struggle in Philippians 1:22 –

Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

What role does faith play in this?

How does Paul’s “home” affect his daily living?

But I feel like a spiritual shell!: 2 Corinthians 5:14, 21

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Do you ever feel spiritually empty?

Ever feel like God's not listening?

What causes these feelings?

- Sin
- God is working to reveal Himself to us in a new and deeper way/get our attention/prepare us for next step
- Sometimes God is working in ways that we do not see and cannot understand – remember Job.

If you've ever had this feeling, you know what I'm talking about. You feel burned-out, empty. You have no spiritual energy. You don't feel like serving anyone and don't even want to be around anyone.

Sometimes this feeling of emptiness is caused by a feeling that God is not listening. You keep praying, but God doesn't respond.

How do you recover your spiritual drive?

What should we do?

Look back

- remember Moses
- remember Job
- listen for God's voice as you study His word
- remember the cross. Christ experienced silence from God – “Why have you forsaken me?” Something happened that had never happened (not just in time, but in eternity) – the one became two. Christ was separated from God by our sin!
- Don't miss this. The cross settled once for all the fact that God loves you. You may wonder why things are happening to you, but you cannot question the fact that God sent His Son to die for you. He loves you; no question. Yesterday changes the way we view today. We hold on to God's love for us, even as the storm roars around us. We can lean on Him, because we know with certainty that He loves us.
- Paul said that it was Christ's love that compels him. The cross was not a passive love. It was an active, dynamic love that changed human existence. This love compels us to look beyond our circumstances – to reach out to others just like Jesus reached out to us.

Look inside

- look to see if there is sin in your life; if so, submit obediently to God's will
- look at how God has already changed you
- confirm with God your commitment to Him
- look with anticipation for the lesson God will teach you about Himself

Look forward – look at your journey from the perspective of the end of the journey. *Max Lucado's parallel between his trip and life's journey.* At the end of the journey, all the problems were forgotten. No complaints about the length of the journey when they were eating the Thanksgiving dinner. When you remember the journey as you lie in the hammock, resting – suddenly it all becomes worth it.

Watch for God to reveal Himself to you

Life looks so different: 2 Corinthians 5:16-20

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Attitude change.....

God is all about reconciliation in this world. He has done the hard part through Jesus. As Christians we have accepted Jesus as Lord of our lives. Now, like leaven working throughout the dough, God is spreading that lordship and reconciliation through every part, every aspect of our lives. That's the "inward renewal" we talked about last week. Now we began to see life differently. We began to see others differently. We even began to see ourselves differently.

We have purpose. We have a mission. It's God-given and it's an integral part of God's process of reconciling the world to Himself. The surprising, incredible message of God's reconciliation is communicated with words and with action. It's something that brightly shines out of our lives like Paul talks about in 3:18. And it's something communicated, kind of like an "aroma", from the way we react to life and the way we serve the people God gives us to serve each day.

And there is an urgency associated with these attitude changes. Listen to what Ephesians 5:15 says,

Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Wilson's translation of this is,

Look guys there isn't much time left and there's lots to do. This is no time for foolishness. Figure out what God wants you to do. Watch for every opportunity God gives you because evil is everywhere.

Paul's point is clear. Who knows how long each of us will live, but regardless, it won't be long enough to do what needs to be done. We live in a world of evil. This is not where we belong, but we do have a purpose here. Let's get on with it. Let's see the world differently. Let's look at people and events the way God looks at them.

Next Week: A Look Back

When you feel Spiritually empty

