Winnie Was Right:

“NEVER GIVE IN”

**2 Corinthians 4:1-18**

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hurchill’s 1941 call for courageous perseverance resurrected Britain from being bombed into oblivion, when all hope was lost. Today’s threats are as palpable: hatred, disease, layoffs, bankruptcies, despots, 401K’s less the K’s. Angst makes headlines.

A friend writes, “I’m struggling with my powerlessness and vulnerability….we can do nothing without God. Please pray that these struggles would be an opportunity to learn to trust the Lord more deeply, to be transformed by His Spirit, and that new Hope in Him would be the fruit of this season.”

On Crucifixion Eve Jesus was facing His own fears, pleading for Plan B, but in the end, submitting to His Father in His own “death valley.”

Are you in the Sahara of career, health, finances, relationships or your standing with God? Is your muse named doubt, fatigue, emptiness, disappointment, grief, desperation? Could calm emerge from current chaos? Can suffering turn sad to glad? **Let’s read 2 Corinthians 4:1-18 (p. 391, MSG).**

DISCUSS: How did Paul stay focused and productive?

**DISCUSS: Why the clay pot metaphor?**

**DISCUSS: Why do some “get It” and others don’t?**

DISCUSS: What threat does “the god of darkness” pose?

**DISCUSS: How did Paul define reality?**

#### Coping, Not Copping Out

Paul, the ex-religious hitman, wore a bulls-eye that attracted jeering mobs, violent rejection, stonings, beatings, shipwreck, prison, decapitation. How did he, and how can we keep from losing heart?

1. **God has not kept us in the dark. His Light has brought us face to face with the Truth.**

Mercifully, God gave Paul a stage for breaking the news about Jesus whom he’d hated and whose fans he’d tormented (Acts 9:1-9).

Transformed and propelled by the Gospel, this former Pharisee did not lose heart. He saw pain as a privilege to taste what Christ had endured to buy our pardon from sin’s death sentence (Romans 3:22-30). Paul hung in, and Rejection turned into Rejoicing.

1. **It’s not about us; it’s all about the Treasure that wants to inhabit the clay pot that is our life.**

God places this priceless *treasure* of the Gospel in ordinary people like us to showcase His power (Romans 7:18 and 1:16). God puts that Power under your hood. It comes standard with His new life.

Paul was quick to speak only Truth, exactly as the risen Christ had “in-Lightened” him in person, knowing some will place their trust in Jesus. Others won’t because Satan, that imposter/deceiver, is hell-bent on keeping us in the dark (2 Corinthians 11:14).

1. **By sorting out what’s real from what’s not, we can handle today while focusing on forever.**

God's strength is best seen in human weakness. Despite knowing he’d become a piñata, Paul was fired up to speak out. Even if death took him, he couldn’t lose. Christ’s followers can look past today’s temporary bad times in view of the indescribable, never-ending celebration God has in store. Struggles today may feel more real than heaven tomorrow. But in Reality, the opposite is true.

#### Lazarus, Time To Get Up!

Just before the crucifixion Jesus’ good friend Lazarus got very ill. His sisters rang 911 for Jesus, but He waited to come (John 11). By allowing his friend to die, then bringing him back to life, Jesus proved He was indeed God. As a result many onlooking Jews accepted Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah.

DISCUSS: If this had happened to your family, how would you have felt?

In *Breaking Free*, Beth Moore finds in this Lazarus story that…

1. “Christ never allows the heart of His own to be shattered without excellent reason and eternal purposes.
2. “Joy and effectiveness may pause for awhile as grief takes its course, but those who allow their broken hearts to be bound by Christ will experience (joy) again (Romans 5:1-5 and James 1:2-4).When shattered by loss, we can welcome a supernatural power to our lives -- the power to live again on this earth when we’d really rather die.

“Resurrection life awaits you. Will you continue to sit in a dark tomb, or will you walk into the light of resurrection life? Lazarus, come forth!”

##### *Taking, Not Losing Heart*

If life for you seems to go only uphill, take a tip from Paul:

1. God has included you in what He’s up to. Don’t quit now!
2. Think clay pot. Jesus, the Treasure; you, the toter.
3. Celebrate that God’s best is yet to come. THAT is reality!

Paul writes, “Don't be ashamed to speak for our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, just because I am in jail for serving him. Use the power that comes from God and join with me in suffering for telling the good news. God saved us and chose us to be his holy people. We did nothing to deserve this, but God planned it because he is so kind. Even before time began God planned for Christ Jesus to show kindness to us. Now Christ Jesus has come to show us the kindness of God. Christ our Savior defeated death and brought us the good news. It shines like a light and offers life that never ends” (2 Timothy 1:8-10).

His Deal

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www.HisDeal.org

george@HisDeal.org

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• “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

• “We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. … God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus” (Romans 3:22-26).

• “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

• “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved” (Romans 10:9-10).

• “Whoever believes in the Son of God inwardly confirms God's testimony. Whoever refuses to believe in effect calls God a liar, refusing to believe God's own testimony regarding his Son. This is the testimony in essence: God gave us eternal life; the life is in his Son. So, whoever has the Son, has life; whoever rejects the Son, rejects life. My purpose in writing is simply this: that you who believe in God's Son will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life, the reality and not the illusion” (1 John 5:10-13).