

Faith for Life: 70s+  
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Mary is 75. 3 years ago she had a stroke. It was a game-changing tragedy for Mary and her husband, Fred. Before that, they were enjoying every minute of their retirement. Both healthy and strong, they served in their church, visited their grandchildren, and took their yearly cruise with friends. But because of the stroke, Mary has needed constant care and a lot of rehabilitation. Fred has been a faithful husband providing the primary care for his wife. Thankfully, he had the strength and the love to do so. But 2 months ago Fred died unexpectedly of a heart attack and now Mary's future is uncertain.

Mary has made good progress from her stroke, but she hasn't recovered fully and no one expects that she will. Her children have started talking to her about making a move to assisted living so she can receive the kind of ongoing care and attention she needs. But the thought of it is heartbreaking. She's already lost so much. The stroke took away the things she enjoyed in her life. She lost her mobility, her speech, her vacations with friends, and most of all, time with Fred. Her husband has just passed away and she's just starting to feel the loneliness of his absence. And now, they want to take away her home; the place where she has all her memories. She doesn't know what to do.

Dilbert is 81. He's a widower, too; his wife died 6 years ago, but he's managed OK primarily by spending time with his buddies. They do everything together. His band of brothers drink coffee in the mornings, bowl together in the city league, golf when the weather is nice, and talk about the Brewers.

But a double-whammy has hit Dilbert. One of his best friends just died; his golfing buddy; his coffee partner. Dilbert is taking this almost as hard as when his wife passed away. But Dilbert has got another problem. He got into a car accident and now he's afraid of losing his driver's license. His memory has been getting worse; his eyesight isn't the best. If he loses his car, he will lose a very important piece of his freedom. Dilbert is lonely and afraid.

Dilbert and Mary are facing loss. They have already lost a lot and they are on the brink of losing more; it feels like the losses are piling up on each other and it's too difficult to manage them all. That's a pretty common experience for those in their golden years. Loss of health. Loss of friends. Loss of mobility and freedom. Loss of a spouse. Loss of home. And eventually, for every single one of us, we have to face the reality of our own passing - our own loss of life.

The question for the 70s and beyond is this: *How do I cope with loss?* How do I deal with the reality that many things in life aren't just changing, but they are fading away? Now, some of you might be thinking, "Well, that's not me! I'm doing fine." You don't even like the suggestion that this might be a possible concern. I get that and I understand. Yet, the problem with loss is a universal challenge regardless of our generation or decade of life. Loss finds all of us. But we're not preparing

ourselves well if we ignore the anticipated losses in our 70s and beyond. If we're not prepared, the losses will take us by surprise and we won't be ready. And then, most likely, rather than facing loss with faith, we will respond in fear.

I can tell you how I want to cope with loss: I want to handle and cope with loss like Job. Do you remember Job? Loss found Job in a particularly tragic and sudden way. He lost his possessions and property. He also lost many family members in a blink of an eye. He went from full and happy to empty and devastated. But listen to how Job responds to his losses in Job. 1:20-21 (READ).

What a remarkable thing for Job to say in the face of loss. Children - gone. Property and possessions - gone. In the next chapter we see Job losing his health and on the brink of death. Yet, his faith in God remained as fragile as it may have been. With all this loss, Job says, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Do you have that kind of faith? Does your trust in God compel you to say in the face of loss, "The Lord gave, and he gave so good... I'm so thankful. But now the Lord has taken away. And he has every right to take away. And he has my eternal good in mind when he takes away. So, in everything and at all times, blessed be the name of our God!" I want that kind of faith. And I don't know if I have it, you know? Who knows that they have that kind of faith? You only know when you face your loss and discover whether you have it or not.

So, what do you and I need to know, what do we need to believe to have a faith that's ready to deal with loss? Turn with me to 2 Cor. 4. Let me tell you about this passage from the Apostle Paul. Paul is teaching the Corinthian church how they can remain hopeful and encouraged in spite of the fact that they are facing many losses. Growing older really isn't the reason why Paul is facing the losses in his life; instead, it's the trouble and hardship of ministry. The ministry is so grueling on Paul's body that it even reminds him of his own mortality. In chapter 5 he mentions the destruction of his body through death, but even if that happens, he has hope and confidence in a new body, a resurrected body, that God will give him. But his struggles are affecting him psychologically, too. He's not just trying to figure out what he will do someday when he dies; he's trying to learn how to cope today with his losses. So, with that in mind, let's read vs. 16-18 (READ).

Notice the opening concern in vs. 16: losing heart. That's the psychological test; his losses tempt him towards discouragement and doubt. But Paul puts it positively saying, "we do not lose heart." So, while losing heart is possible, he finds victory and comfort instead. Where does this encouragement come from? Let me show you how he spells it out.

The reason why Paul doesn't lose heart is found in vs. 16; he says, "Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day." Look what encourages Paul. He's encouraged, he's not driven to despair *because his inner self is being renewed on a daily basis*. Every day, his soul is being transformed; every day, his heart is maturing and his character is becoming more Christ-like. And that's in spite of the fact that his outer self, his body, is decaying

and wasting away. Paul is looking at two different aspects of his life: in the one hand is his earthly life. His health. His wealth. His relationships. His freedoms. His comforts. The food he enjoys. Weekends at the lake. And this earthly life of his is wasting away. It's dying. It's decaying. It's fading away. He's losing it.

How would you feel if that's what was happening to your earthly life? Freedoms taken away. Less time with the grandkids. Not enough money to afford going to Florida anymore during the winter time. You can't taste your favorite foods. What are you thinking? Might it feel like you are DEFCON 1? Are you starting to doubt God and question your faith? Cancel Christmas; things are bad.

But in your other hand is growth in Christ. More maturity. More love of God. Your soul more content in his promises. The sweet presence and fellowship with your Maker and Savior. Paul looks at both of his hands and he says, "We are not discouraged; we're not losing heart because I'm growing in Christ day by day even though my earthly life is wasting away."

Now, why would he say that? How does that happen? The answer is in vs. 17. It says, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." Vs. 17 is a statement of truth for you to believe. Paul is saying that the afflictions we experience in our present life on earth prepare us, work in us, a heavenly glory from God. That's what the struggles and sufferings on earth do in the life of a follower of Jesus. There are never any random, meaningless sufferings on earth for a Christian. All our sufferings, afflictions, losses are working for us an eternal reward. God takes our losses and sufferings and renews our souls by them. He teaches us to be patient; he humbles us through the pain; the losses make us hungry for grace; the hardships make us look toward eternity. FBC, mark it down: afflictions in the life of a believer prepare for us an eternal weight of glory from God.

Do you know when that's the hardest to believe? When you're in the pain; when you just experienced loss. When you're happy and healthy, well-fed and full, we hear this message, this passage, and say, "The Lord gives and takes away. Yeah, I believe that. I can praise God!" Yeah, of course we say that... now. But how about then... when the losses pile up. To be ready then, you have to prepare now. You have to settle in your mind and heart right now what God is doing when you are going through your losses.

We're not done; the next verse is as important as the ones we just read. You need to understand: faith gets instantiated. That means that the things we believe in our head and heart get worked out in our lives. Faith is only real when it moves from head, to heart, to action. So, notice Paul's act of faith in vs. 18, "as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen." The only way Paul could be encouraged in the face of loss is by looking to the unseen glories of eternity. If Paul stays focused on the visible, temporary, but tempting realities of this earth he would only be discouraged by losing what he sees with these eyes on a day to day basis.

I'll give you an example. Let's say your health has deteriorated to the extent that you can not do the things you that want. You're in pretty consistent pain and discomfort. You have to use a walker. It's very difficult to go out and you love to go out. If your eyes, your attention, are fixed on those troubles and the losses you experience because of your health problems will you lose heart? Yeah, I'm pretty sure you will. Because that's what you're looking at; that's your focus. How can you not be discouraged? But let's say you are putting your faith into action so that even though your body is failing, the eyes of your heart are focused on the forgiving grace of your savior; you're looking at the blessings of his mercy; you look intently at the greater humility and patience God is working in you through his trial. You can see the maturity God is growing in you. Now will you lose heart and grow discouraged? Not very easily. Why? Because your eyes are fixed on the eternal, more valuable, riches of God's grace that he is giving to you in the face of your losses.

The key to that, of course, is believing that the eternal, glorious realities of Christ in heaven and in you are of greater value than the temporary, fleeting realities on earth. That's not so easy to believe, is it? But Paul is dropping those not-so-subtle hints in vs. 17 and 18; let me read that again and look at how he contrasts the eternal realities with the earthly ones (READ).

I feel very presumptuous giving you 70 and 80 year olds advice, but I'll try. The most important encouragement I think I could give you is *keep reminding yourself of the gospel*. We never become immune from the temptations of doubt and discouragement, losing heart or losing faith. As we battle the increasing trials of loss and even our own mortality, we need to go back to the basics. We need to be reminded that what's been holding us all these years, what we've been depending on for decades, is still solid ground. We need to know that the foundation we've built our lives on is true even now in the face of our greatest obstacles and trials.

So, find ways to remind yourself of the gospel. Like we mentioned earlier, keep setting your eyes on the unseen realities of eternity. Now, we all need help with that. First of all, we need the help of scripture. So, make sure you are still receiving reminders from the scriptures. Music might be a helpful tool and resource for you reminding you of all the wonderful truth that we've been believing our entire lives. And one another, too. We need one another to help us. Don't be too proud to keep asking for help and encouragement. Ask a grandchild to read you the Bible. Talk about the things of God with friends to keep a fresh faith. I know it will serve us well.

Many of you 70 and 80 year olds have been a good example for me. I've learned much from you. Thank you for your faithfulness. I know God isn't through with you yet so keep seeking him so you have all the necessary mercies to be all that Christ is calling you to be.

Key Vs: 2 Corinthians 4:16

#### Questions for the week

- What was the most helpful truth from scripture today? Why?
- How were you challenged today?

- What are things you should look at to guard yourself from despair in the face of loss?