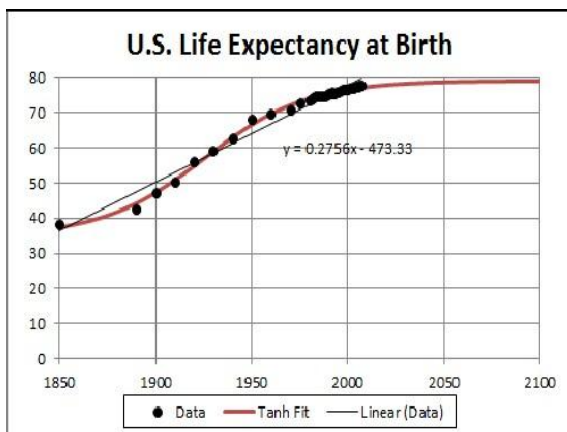




⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ 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. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. ¹³ It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken."^b With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. ¹⁵ All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ 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.



Two weeks ago the Centers for Disease Control released new data on life expectancy for those living in the US. The good news is that the life expectancy has now surpassed 78—78 years and two months to be exact. The bad news is that this only applies to people who are born today. The rest of us have to use the life expectancy prediction when we were born, which is a lot less than 78. But there is still good news—if you are already thirty years old, statistically speaking you will surpass the life expectancy when you were born. But there is also more bad news. No matter

how old you are, this passage reminds us—as if we needed reminding—that our bodies are “wasting away.” We can eat right and exercise and not smoke and do all kinds of good things—and we should do these just for the sake of stewardship—but we cannot reverse the aging process or as Paul puts it, the “wasting” process. That’s a brutal way of saying it, don’t you think? What if you ran into an old friend that you hadn’t seen in several years and you noticed a little more

gray hair than he had before and instead of saying, “Hey, looks like you have a few more gray hairs there” you tell him, “Goodness, you really are wasting away, aren’t you?”

That is the bad news—you and I are wasting away because sin has affected every atom in all of creation. Sin is the reason we age. Sin is the reason that things rust and rot. Sin is the reason that stars explode and become supernovas. But Paul did not write this section of Scripture merely to point out our gray hairs and wasting bodies. In verse sixteen he wrote, *Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.* In other words, sin is wearing down our outward being but our inner being is being renewed day by day. Moreover, the key message in this passage is the first sentence of verse 16. *Therefore we do not lose heart.* To lose



heart means to be discouraged to the breaking point. To lose heart means to despair in a spirit of hopelessness. Some of you may be dangerously close to losing heart and others may feel like they are on a slippery slope toward losing heart.

This morning the Holy Spirit wants to speak into your heart and mind—don’t lose heart. But this isn’t one of those “just try harder” kind of sermons. We have probably all seen this picture with the phrase “Never Give Up!” I also like this variation on a theme with a small lizard. Or I could show you the [death](#)



[crawl scene from Facing the Giants](#) and then I could run up and

down the aisles yelling at you, “Don’t lose heart! Don’t you lose heart on me!” But I’m not going to do that because that would just be a “try harder kind of a sermon. Instead, let’s look together at real, Biblical reasons why we should not lose heart—even if we feel we are headed in that direction like a runaway train.

Back to verse seven. *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.* I think we all know that we are the jars of clay, but what exactly is the treasure? Is the treasure the gospel message, the ministry that Paul is speaking about in this passage? Or is the treasure our salvation—the fact that God *made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ?* I don’t think we have to choose because I think the treasure encompasses both the ministry of the gospel message and our salvation. Another way of defining our treasure is to say that it is Christ. The gospel message is fundamentally a person and not mere words. Obviously, the words about Jesus are extremely important, but they are not mere words, are they? They are words of a message about a person, and that person is Christ. So it is with our salvation. We are saved out of death and into Christ but fundamentally we are saved out of death into life with Christ. Christ is the ground of our salvation, the means of our salvation and the hope and joy of our salvation. The treasure we have in jars of clay is Jesus Christ.

But that’s not what you do with a treasure, is it? Imagine if you had just bought a priceless Rembrandt painting and I went over to your house and asked if I could see it. You reply, “Oh, yeah, that old thing. It’s around here somewhere. I think it’s in the basement in a box. You don’t store a priceless painting in a musty box in the basement. But even a priceless painting cannot

begin to compare with the priceless treasure of Jesus Christ, yet*—+ Jesus has chosen to place that treasure in us—jars of clay. In Paul’s day, a jar of clay was vessel with almost no worth. It could not be fixed and could not be recycled. If it broke, it was just thrown away.



Putting his priceless ministry in our jars of clay sounds a bit irresponsible if you ask me. It seems a little bit like putting a group of ten year olds in charge of building our church building. What if we had done that? If we had, right now I would probably be standing on a platform made entirely of Legos®. The ten year boys may not have

been able to hook up electricity, but I know there would be plenty of cool flashlights all over the place. If the ten year old girls had been in charge of decorating, our church lobby would have looked something like this. But even this analogy doesn’t do justice to a priceless, eternal ministry of the gospel and of our salvation entrusted to sinful, clay pots.



But we truly are jars of clay. Are we not from the dust of the earth? Are we not earthen vessels? Paul does not mean to imply that we are worthless, but only that our worth is insignificant compared to God himself. Like it says in Isaiah 40: *Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.* We are grass. We are clay pots. Our worth comes from the treasure that fills us not from our natural worthiness. There is a twisted type of teaching that says God loved us so much because we were so worthy of being loved. This is sentimental hogwash that is sub-Biblical. God did not love us because we were so lovable. Where would anyone get such an idea? What does Romans 5:8 say? *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* We were still sinners when he died for us. And why did he die for us? To demonstrate his own love! His infinite love is on display, not because we were inherently worthy, but precisely because we were not inherently worthy. The sacrifice of love was so great because we were so unlovable. We were God’s enemies. This is what the previous verses in Romans 5 say. *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.* According to verses 6-8, we were powerless, ungodly, unrighteous and sinners. God displayed his love by dying in place of such people as you and I.

Therefore, do not lose heart. Do not lose heart because you have this great treasure in a jar of clay. God did this *to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.* The ability to not lose heart and become discouraged and hopeless is not a “try harder” kind of message but rather a “look and see” message. Look at this priceless treasure that we have, even though we are clay pots. Your worth is not in yourself but is grounded in Christ.

Even though we possess this treasure, it doesn't mean that life is easy. ⁸*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.* We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed. Instead of saying "hard pressed on every side we might say that we are overwhelmed. We feel these pressures coming at us from every direction. Like Paul, we are also perplexed. This word means exactly what you think it means. We don't know which direction to choose. We are overwhelmed to the point of indecision. Something is beyond our ability to understand. We are far less persecuted than was Paul, but we are persecuted in small ways and we all know we are no more than a law or two away from serious persecution. Finally, we are struck down. Knocked down would also be a good translation. Do you ever feel knocked down? We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; we are persecuted, but never abandoned; we are struck down, but not destroyed. The word destroyed is related to Apollyon, the Destroyer. Christians can never be destroyed in this sense. We can be delivered from trials and tribulation. We can be delivered from death and ultimately we will be delivered through death, but we can never be destroyed. In light of all of these truths, do not lose heart.

There are more reasons not to lose heart in verse thirteen. *With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, ¹⁴because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.* Paul purposefully wrote in us/we language—*will also raise **us** with Jesus and present **us** with **you** in his presence* As we know, Paul had a strained relationship with the believers in Corinth much of the time. He wanted them to know that he was not in any way superior to them. He was an apostle, called by God to spread the gospel through hardship and persecution, but in the end, he was just like them. When he would be raised with Jesus and enter into his presence, so the believers in Corinth would be raised and enter into Jesus presence. As difficult as the relationship was at times, they would be with one another for all eternity. This is a good reminder for us as well. We should be able to get along with one another. We should be able to live at peace with one another. If ever that would be true, it should be true among fellow believers. But it doesn't always work out so well, does it? But the person with whom you are in conflict, if they are a true believer, they will be raised up with Jesus and presented into his presence right beside you.

Which brings us back to verse sixteen. *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.* Everything Paul said up to this point was supposed to instill hope into his readers and now all that follows is intended to do the same. While our bodies waste away, our inner being is being renewed day by day. Notice the passive verb in this verse—we are being renewed. God is doing the renewing. This should make us think back to 3:18—we are being transformed. In other words, we are undergoing a daily metamorphosis. Part of the difficulty of this verse is the fact that it does not feel like we are being transformed on a daily basis. If I wake up tomorrow morning and ask myself, "Have I matured spiritually since yesterday? Has any more spiritual fruit grown since this time yesterday?" then I will almost certainly be discouraged.

Growing spiritual fruit is a bit like growing actual fruit. When the blossom first sprouts forth, you are able to catalog daily changes. If you look carefully, you can see the blossom change every day. Once the fruit starts to form, the changes begin to slow down. You could probably measure the daily growth with a micrometer but you will not be able to see it with the naked eye.

This is why I recommend taking spiritual inventories on more of an annual basis. Over the course of a year one should be able to observe a difference in a person's spiritual life. I have developed a [Spiritual Growth Inventory](#) for this very purpose. Please take one home with you and complete one for yourself this week. If you are really brave, ask your spouse to fill one out on you and compare yours with theirs. It is very encouraging to be able to look back and see how you have grown in holiness and Christ-likeness over the past year. Even if you can't see this happening on a daily basis, it is enough to know that we are being renewed day by day. I can't see my cells growing in my body but every day about 20 billion cells are being made.¹ In the same way, inwardly we are being renewed on a daily basis. Do not lose heart. Your inner being is being renewed day by day.

The last two verses may just pack the biggest punch of all. I don't think the NIV captures the meaning as well so I will use the ESV. ¹⁷ *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,* ¹⁸ *as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

The first thing that sticks out to me is the phrase "light momentary affliction." My life has been incredibly easy compared to the suffering of most people in the world throughout the history of the world. I know that my life is easy compared to Paul's suffering which makes it all the more amazing that he would refer to his own troubles as light and momentary. We have seen this list before, but it bears repeating. *I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.* ²⁴ *Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.* ²⁵ *Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea... (2 Cor 11:23-25).*

Tell me—in what sense are these light and momentary? When I read this it feels heavy and prolonged. We can only imagine how Paul's physical body bore the marks of all of this suffering. Surely his back would have been a massive web of scars. He may have had neurological damage from being stoned. His body was cracked and broken and chronic pain must have been his constant companion. But he viewed all of this as light and momentary.

Moreover, what about all of the suffering in Japan? Only good planning and preparation kept the death toll from rising into the hundreds of thousands but when I see the pictures and the video, none of it looks light and momentary to me. It appears to be devastating and lingering. By the way, every Christian should be ready with an answer when our family, friends and neighbors comment on tragedies like this, which only seem to multiply with each year. How would you answer the person who said to you, "I just don't understand why God would allow this much suffering?" Or what would you say if you were asked a doozy of a question like this one when Martin Bashir interviewed Rob Bell.

After Hurricane Katrina I preached a message called [Lessons from Hurricane Katrina](#) in which I addressed the Biblical answer to suffering due to natural calamities, which can also apply to all kinds of suffering. I can get you a copy if you would like because we need to be ready to give an answer to these kinds of questions not just so that you sound all smart but because such questions are golden opportunities to share the gospel.

But we must be careful with such questions because there is a pastoral way to address the problem of suffering and there is a theological way to do so. For example, the theological answer that I provide in the sermon about Hurricane Katrina is a good way to handle the age old question of the problem of evil addressed so succinctly by Martin Bashir. There are answers to these questions and we must be ready to give them. On the other hand, we must also be ready with a pastoral approach to the problem of suffering. You would never approach someone whose child has just died and tell them that what they are experiencing is light and momentary trouble. That would be cruel and it's not at all what Paul meant by this verse. At such times you come alongside people in their deepest grief. Paul in no way discounted suffering, even his own suffering. As I said, he suffered way more than I ever have or probably will and more than most of all of us in this room. But the thrust of his argument is that his suffering or suffering even beyond what he experienced, is momentary and light compared to the eternal weight of glory.

You can better see these comparisons in verses 17-18 when they are placed side by side.

momentary

eternal

Is sixty years of suffering but a moment when compared to eternity?

light (easy to bear)

weight (heavy burden)

Isn't our suffering light and easy to bear in view of the "heavy weight" of glory? If you could put the two on a scale, there would be no comparison.

affliction

glory

What is affliction when laid alongside of glory?

seen

unseen

We must remember that all of our suffering takes place here in the world of the seen while our weight of glory is already happening in the unseen world.

transient

eternal

Our momentary, light afflictions are seen and transient. But in comparison, we have an eternal weight of glory that is unseen but everlasting. Moreover, the eternal weight of glory in verse seventeen is said to be "beyond all comparison." The original language of this phrase is very exciting. Beyond all comparison is literally hyperbole upon hyperbole.² We know that a hyperbole is a form of exaggeration but Paul did not use the word hyperbole in the same way that we do. Think of it as an exaggeration that is actually true. Imagine that you saw your friend just coming out of the movie theater from watching the latest hit movie and you asked, "Hey Joe, how was the movie?" And all excited, Joe answers, "That was the best movie I have ever seen! You absolutely have to see it!" Right about then you must be thinking, "Wow, Joe really liked the movie but he sure is prone to exaggeration." But then a week later you get a chance to watch the movie and guess what? It actually is the best movie you have ever seen. In fact it was so good, that all other movies should be immediately hailed as garbage and incinerated. This movie was so good that you can't imagine ever seeing another movie for the rest of your life. Do you

see, Joe wasn't exaggerating at all. He spoke what seemed like a hyperbole but it was actually truer than you could have ever imagined.

This is the kind of hyperbole that Paul means. It is a wild exaggeration that is actually true. Moreover, it is a hyperbole upon a hyperbole. It is a hyperbole times a hyperbole. It truly is "beyond all comparison." And what exactly is "beyond all comparison"? Of course he is describing Heaven. But not just Heaven the place, but Heaven the place where Jesus lives. The eternal weight of glory that is beyond all comparison is Jesus. Some of you are thinking, "Are you telling me that I am supposed to forget all of my troubles in this life by meditating on the next life?" Yes, that is exactly what I am telling you because that is what Paul is telling us.

Listen to this quote from C.S. Lewis.

"If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. . . . It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this." (*Mere Christianity*, chapter 10). Do not lose heart. Christ is our treasure and we will be raised with him in his presence.

Rich Maurer
March 27, 2011

^b Psalm 116:10

¹ <http://www.kidskonnnect.com/subject-index/31-health/337-human-body.html>, accessed on March 24, 2011.

² ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν