

We Do Not Lose Heart

- ✦ **We believe...in Jesus. (vv.13-14)**
- ✦ **We give thanks...overflowing. (v.15)**
- ✦ **We gain weight...in glory. (vv.16-18)**

Dear fellow “*jars of clay*” in whom God has hidden His treasure of the Gospel:

Coming home to America always give me deep satisfaction. The freedoms we enjoy means people have a way out of poverty if they’re willing to work and take advantage of opportunities. Even the poorest Americans have access to unmatched healthcare, education, parks – and the list goes on. We sometimes look like “ugly Americans” blind to blessings, like tourists complaining about sand on a beach.

Yet you and I know how deceiving looks can be. Will God’s blessings last for our country that seems intent on shutting God out of everything? Sickness and loss, disease and heartache all come to Christians too. But it’s when you actually live like a Christian, speak up and witness to your faith, then you understand why the Lord’s Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **We Do Not Lose Heart.**

✦ **We believe...in Jesus. (vv.13-14)**

Ever know someone who just could not keep quiet about Jesus? Maybe your seatmate on a plane. You wanted to sleep, watch a movie; he wanted to talk. Maybe you were that guy wanting to share your faith; he was uninterested. ***“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*** (1 Corinthians 1:18) Paul felt this too: ***“I believed; therefore I have spoken.” With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak....”***

Walking one summer with my friend and fellow Pastor Loren Steele, we talked about how God led us to the Gospel. Out of the fearsome guilt of Lutheran pietism, the Lord led my family into the Wisconsin Synod. Here the pastors taught us to listen to God’s Word instead of looking at ourselves. Christ takes away our fear. He did that for Loren Steele too, but his story was more dramatic than mine.

Growing up in the gangs of L.A., Loren was a hardcore unbeliever who wanted nothing to do with God. “How did you become a Christian?” I asked. “Through my wife.” “How did you meet?” “In a bar.” “Really? How did that work?” “I kept dating women who turned out to be Christian. She was number seven, the first who didn’t tell me to get lost. So I married her.” I met Loren Steele shortly after he believed in Jesus. He and Charlene were driving up through Oregon to figure out what to do with his life. They parked their trailer overnight in our church parking lot and worshiped with us in Bend. Next day Loren talked with my Granddad who got me interested in ministry. Next I was helping him with Greek as his R.A. in college. Then it was here where he couldn’t even go out to dinner with fellow Pastor Fred Kogler without crossing the street to get contact information from Hmong. Loren was everyone’s best friend. I found out at his funeral he served in SE Asia during the Vietnam War, learned Hmong and Chinese. Loren was God’s tool to get many of us sharing the Gospel with Asians.

“We also believe and therefore speak, 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.” It took some convincing by the crucified and risen Christ to get Paul to believe Jesus was not an imposter, but the Son of God our Savior. But once convinced, Paul always kept his eyes on the gates of heaven. There you can look forward to seeing your believing loved ones again. But better still, Jesus plans to have us stand with Him and all the souls He reached through us with the Gospel. What a victory parade that will be!

✠ We give thanks...overflowing. (v.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.” In New Life’s early years this was always on my mind. Fellow WELS believers supported our new mission with their offerings. We would not get to meet most of them until we’re home in glory with God. But their generous offerings supported pastor and family, mission expenses, plus buying land and building a church with a low interest loan from the CEF (Church Extension Fund). Praises to God were **overflowing** here. Now it’s our turn to shine the light of God’s Word into our neighborhoods and beyond by our mission offerings. **We give thanks...overflowing.**

This comes from taking God’s Word seriously. If God calls something a sin, we agree – especially if it’s something I like, but God forbids. Unrepentant sin leads to death. But when God shows us how Jesus died for all our sins, He works repentance through the Good News of the Gospel. I’m so grateful God forgives me that I don’t want to sin anymore. I want to speak up for Jesus all the time. Then others can receive this miracle of faith by grace from God’s Word. His riches grow as you give them away.

✠ We gain weight...in glory. (vv.16-18)

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” It must have been during the spring of 1992, midweek Lenten services, that I first saw someone physically *“wasting away”* because of cancer. While his body was dying, his spirit was soaring in gratitude that God got through to him before it was too late. He took a motorcycle trip with his buddies out to California. Everywhere he wore a bright purple athletic suit so people would ask him why he was so happy. Cab drivers, waitresses, everyone he met needed to hear how God was renewing him day by day in the Good News of sins-forgiven. Then he asked to leave a legacy of thanks to God for the Good News from our New Life ministry. You see it every time we worship in the bright mission statement above the altar. Our one stained glass window was installed on the day the Lord called Steve Williams home to glory. He’s up there praising God with Loren Steele and all the rest free at last.

We Do Not Lose Heart because heaven gives us a whole new view of things. How could a man who spent so much time in prison for Christ and suffered extreme persecution say this? *“Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”* Think of it this way with the worst of the troubles troubling you like that friend you lost in school when you tried so hard. Put him/her on a balance scale. “You’re temporary; I’ve got my best Friend Jesus forever.”

You know the job you lost that you thought you just had to have? Put it on the balance scale and look at how light it really is compared to the glory of God in heaven. Our work there will be like going up north to your brand new cabin, to launch your new boat with your beautiful wife and excited kids. But no one ever gets tired or crabby. We won’t have to come back here again.

Don’t do this out loud, but you can even hold up your impatient boss and say, “You’re only temporary. My real boss is Jesus. And He has saved me from my sins.” Then you can be loving, kind and respectful to the undeserving coworkers too because Jesus has been all of that to you.

Temporary, passing away, light weight – here, but **We gain weight...in glory.** So don’t let your heart weigh you down. This too shall pass. With new priorities Jesus says, *“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”* (Matthew 6:33 NIV84) Jesus can deliver on that promise. For He who died has also risen. So we look forward to the *unseen, eternal things* of bliss and glory with God in heaven. Americans blessings spread God’s Word. Maybe we should all start wearing bright purple athletic suits. Amen.