

WHAT A SPA CAN'T DO 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

INTRODUCTION

I remember when only a few luxury hotels and resorts had spas. That has changed. Now many hotels consider a spa as necessary as ice machines. You won't find them in the Motel 6 or the Penny Sleeper Inn, but you will in an awful lot of hotels today. At first I thought that since I don't really care about spas that maybe I just hadn't noticed them before and for some reason now they were showing up on my radar, but it turns out that's not the case. They really are proliferating. The International Spa Association says that in a 4 year span from 2000 to 2004 the number of hotels with spas more than tripled from 473 to 1662! The trend has continued since then.

You can get all sorts of treatments at spas. In Hawaii you can get lava rock massages and in the northeast you can get maple body wraps. The spa at Hersheypark in Pennsylvania offers their signature "Chocolate Fondue Wrap." At the Hotel Del Coronado spa you can have your choice of Swedish massage, Thai massage, Lomi Lomi Hawaiian massage, Asian fusion massage, shell massage in which tiger clam shells are heated and used to massage your body, lymphatic drainage massage, or you can have a tropical sugar scrub. In Israel a spa has a treatment that uses king snakes that slither up and down your body to relax you. I'm thinking that's not going to work for me. At the Shizuka Spa in New York you can have a Geisha Facial which uses sterilized nightingale excrement to revitalize your skin. Just what you always dreamed of, a bird guano facial. At the Hotel Heubad in Italy you can have the Original Volser Hay Bath. You soak in a water bed heated to over 100 degrees while wrapped in wet hay.

The goal at these spas is to relax you, maybe even make you look and feel younger. But there is a limit on what spas can accomplish. They cannot make you as strong, energetic, and youthful as you were in years past. Today we will look at a passage of Scripture that says it is possible to find a renewal that no spa can ever provide. If we are to be antifragile, meaning grow stronger when dealing with chaos and stress, including the passage of time, we need to find a source of renewed energy that will power us no matter what happens. The Bible says this is possible. We'll see that in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 as we examine it today.

To be antifragile:

INVEST IN THE INWARD

Paul says “we do not lose heart.” He was antifragile because no matter what happened he did not give up even though he had plenty of reason to. In verses 8-9 he said he was hard pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted and struck down, then in verse 11 he said he was “always been given over to death.” But he wasn’t discouraged. A significant reason for this resilience is that he knew what was happening on the inside. “Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”

Paul knew about outwardly wasting away. He suffered the ravages of growing older just like every other human being. But in addition to that he had been subjected to some very harsh treatment. He was repeatedly beaten and jailed. When your body is badly treated there will eventually be a price to be paid.

Years ago Laurie and I were invited to attend when a friend was inducted into the San Diego Chargers Hall of Fame. There was a big dinner on Saturday, then Sunday evening they had a ceremony at half time of a Charger game. They had the Hall of Fame members walk out to the center of the field at half time. It was sad. These men in their early 50’s hobbled out there as though they were near 90. The rough treatment their bodies suffered as players in the NFL was now having an effect. When a body is mistreated it pays a price.

Clearly Paul knew what it meant to “waste away” outwardly. Everyone who is past a certain age in life knows what that’s like. It is an inexorable process that impacts exactly one out of every one human beings. The Myatt offspring have a great love for all things Disney. Fortunately they both married people who seem to share that love. They love the fast rides at Disney. I was amused when both of them said not too long ago that they are finding themselves to be more sensitive to some of those rides than they used to be. In some cases they experience some motion sickness. Do you know why? They’re getting older!

We can ignore this reality for a while but at some point it becomes undeniable and deeply annoying. It happens to everyone at some point. Our eyes can’t make the adjustment from something far away to something close up. Our back and joints develop strange aches and pains. We slow down. Some of our systems don’t work as well as they used to and our metabolism seems to semi-retire, thus causing us to put on weight just by walking past a bakery. We lose physical strength. We pull muscles just getting out of bed. It is more than disconcerting when you plot the trajectory of change and see the direction it is heading. It is discouraging to know that you are not going to get better. You are not going to get over this aging thing.

Given that Paul was subjected to the worst this life has to offer and saw the effects on his body, why wasn’t he discouraged? Why was he so alive, so energetic despite all that he

had endured? It was because no matter what might happen to his body, “inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” On the inside he was getting stronger, better day by day.

In 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 Paul wrote about some of the hardships he faced. He said, “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.” In verse 9 he said, “in our hearts we felt the sentence of death.” Well that sounds pretty discouraging to me. Sounds like he felt doomed. But then he went on to say, “but this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.” So in verse 10 he said, “He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.” Paul grew in his faith. As he went through many of the trials he endured and found that God was there with him and got him through his confidence in God grew. He was able to grow in optimism about life. He simply wasn’t afraid of much.

At the end of his life while awaiting execution Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:16-17, “At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength.” In verse 18 he said, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.”

Paul saw changes in himself. He saw increasing confidence and awareness of God’s presence with him. He saw more joy, more love, more courage. He saw that he experienced an ever deeper walk with God and was becoming more and more like his Lord.

Most people think of religion as the effort to be good, to measure up to God’s rules and standards, to try to get God to love them and to earn their way into heaven. Paul was one of those, in fact an extremist. The problem is that effort is ultimately exhausting and futile. Paul discovered when he encountered Jesus Christ that by putting his faith in him he was given God’s love and acceptance as a free gift. He lived daily knowing he was loved by God totally and unconditionally. What he found and we can find is that real love, God’s love is both life giving and empowering. It just gives more and more life, peace, joy and strength. That is what love, real love always does.

Do you see the power of this if we focus on the spiritual rather than the physical? It says we will be renewed day by day as time passes. What if as we age we got younger and stronger? Wouldn’t that be cool? But that’s exactly what Paul says happens to us spiritually in Christ. Our bodies might be getting older, but our spirits get younger and stronger.

Laurie is an amazing person who seems to defy age. She and Carissa went to pick out a cake for Carissa and Michael’s reception this fall. The young woman who was helping

them at the bakery was shocked when Laurie told her she was Carissa's mom. The girl thought they were sisters. But one night Laurie was washing her face. She was looking in the mirror and she said, "It is really hard trying to keep up something that's decaying."

The physical process of aging is no fun, but life takes a lot of other things from us. Parents know this. You start out as the center of your child's universe. But then comes that day when they go to school and other people, friends and teachers began crowding you out. Then they become teenagers and they're ashamed that they have parents. They start driving and they don't need you to transport them, and you fade a little farther out of the picture. Then comes college and they hardly know they have parents except when they need money. Then they get married, and you find you have a very distant back seat, which is as it should be. But you realize you don't matter much anymore.

Our society makes this even worse. It worships youth. It likes beautiful young bodies and the energy, dynamism, and creativity of youth. As you get older eventually you begin to get the message, "you don't matter old man." Many people combine this sense of loss of place and importance with the physical problems and they become a little resentful, angry, bitter, and crotchety.

What a difference for someone who has Christ, for that gets better and better. A relationship with God actually grows better and stronger as we grow older. Imagine a person who may be old, who may be disregarded and seemingly cast aside by the world, but who is more full of life, more full of love for God, more full of joy, more full of love for people than ever before. This is what can happen when we focus on the renewal of the inner person in Christ.

Isaiah 40:31 says those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. It's not physical strength that will be renewed. It is internal strength. This is a *promise* that as we walk with God we may grow old outwardly we can still be young, vital and alive on this inside forever!

Laurie's parents went to Hawaii last year with Laurie's sister and her family. Our niece, Joelle, wanted to go parasailing. She was only 10. She couldn't go by herself. But her mom and dad were not interested. I can relate. I wouldn't be either. Guess who was eager to go? Laurie's 78 year old mom was up for it. Still fully alive. Wouldn't you rather be like that than stuck in a rut, angry and dead inside and out? In Christ we can all be alive and enthusiastic as long as we live.

My grandmother died just before her 101st birthday. She became a widow at the age of 70 and lived another 30 years. Her last 10 years of life seemed very hard to me. She lived by herself. Her husband was gone. Everyone she knew and loved from her generation was gone. Even one of her sons was gone. She couldn't drive. Her hearing failed. Her

eyesight became so bad she could no longer read. Her arthritis was so bad she couldn't sleep in bed. She had to sleep sitting up. But to my amazement in her last year of life when she was asked about how hard her life was she said, "I like my life. I am never alone. Jesus is always with me." The outer person was wasting away, but the inner person was being renewed day by day.

EMPHASIZE THE ETERNAL

Paul wrote in verse 17, "Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." Who thinks their troubles are "light and momentary"? Most of the time we moan and complain about our troubles.

Have you thought about what Paul called "light and momentary"? In this letter he would describe some of his troubles. In 11:24-28 he said, "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one." This was the most severe beating allowed by Jewish law. The Jewish historian, Josephus called it a "most disgraceful penalty" because it was so horrific. In his commentary on 2 Corinthians Paul Barnett wrote (p. 542), "The severity of this beating can be inferred from the provisions made in the event the offender defecated, urinated, or...died as a result of the blows." Paul experienced that five times!

He went on, "three times I was beaten with rods." This was Roman punishment. That makes a total of 8 times he was publicly beaten. But there's more. "Once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, danger from Gentiles." Did you get that? Who hated him and wanted to kill him? Well, there were the Jews, his countrymen. Then there were the non-Jews, the Gentiles. Who's left? No one. Everybody was out to get him!

He had often been without sleep, without food, and even without adequate clothing in the cold. I compared my troubles to Paul's. How many times have I been physically beaten? That would be zero. Okay, Paul wins 8 to nothing. How many times have people tried to kill me by throwing rocks at me? Zero again. Paul wins again 1 to nothing. How many times have I been shipwrecked? Well, we were once on a sailboat in the middle of Mission Bay when the tiller broke, and that led to some excitement, but it wasn't a shipwreck. Zero again. Paul wins once more, 3 to nothing. He was shipwrecked 3 times? No, actually there was another one later after he wrote this letter. If I was taking a cruise and saw Paul board the ship, I'd get off fast. I've never been in danger from Jews or Gentiles, never been in danger from bandits or rivers. Never gone without food or adequate clothing except when I went to a Padre game expecting it to be warm on a summer evening and wasn't prepared for how chilly it got.

Light and momentary troubles? Are you kidding me? Comparing my "troubles" to what Paul went through would be like comparing the mortgage on my house to the national

debt. How could Paul say his troubles were light and momentary? Was he being facetious, or exaggerating to make a point? No, that's how he really saw it. The beatings, the travails, the stress, were real and he felt it all. He didn't enjoy it. But he viewed it all through the lens of eternity. Compared to the weight of glory that he knew was being stored up for him in eternity the worst of his troubles were trifling matters.

My brother once worked briefly in a potato shed near our home town of Bakersfield. The shed is where the potatoes are brought in, packed and then put on boxcars for shipment. Part of the job involved filling boxcars with 50 or 100 pound sacks of potatoes. You want to talk about hard work. Imagine spending the entire day picking up and stacking 50 pound sacks in 100 degree heat. That is exhausting, unpleasant work.

But suppose someone said to you, "I want to do something that is going to change your life, but I want to know you really want this. So I am going to ask you to spend a week working in the potato shed packing those boxcars with sacks of potatoes." You ask, "Well, what do I get if I agree?" The person says, "If you do it, I will give you \$50 million." Would you say, "Uh, let me think about it. I'm not sure it would be worth it"? I don't think so. We'd rush to do it.

That may seem silly, but the Bible tells us that if we will be faithful to God in the day to day of life that's an apt analogy for what awaits us in God's eternal kingdom. We will be rewarded for our faithfulness to a level that it is beyond our comprehension. Paul and Peter both got glimpses of the "glory" of that reward and said it literally was inexpressible. The beauty and joy of it simply cannot be put into human language. Paul understood what awaited him in eternity. He knew it was worth all the trials he faced and even more. Is the glory really that great? Paul says it is an eternal weight of glory from *huperballen* to *huperballen*. That word is the source of our word "hyperbole." So the idea is "exaggeration." From exaggerated eternal glory to exaggerated eternal glory is what awaited Paul and us.

Then you have to add in the duration issue. Yes, sometimes it feels like our troubles will never end. But I've noticed that's not true. They do end. Things change. As hard as they might be, eventually our trials end. They may be closely followed by another, but nothing on this earth lasts forever. And it is interesting when you look back on them it doesn't seem like over the course of your life it lasted that long. But the glory we are storing up for ourselves will last forever.

I think about Toby and Anna. They are displaying the very principle that Paul is describing. Some time back Toby decided that what he really wanted to be in life was a doctor. That's great, except he got his college degree in business. His one science class in college was Animal Science because it was an easy A. So, though he was already a couple of years out of college, he went back to school to pick up what would essentially

be the courses required for a pre-Med major. That would take him nearly three years before he ever started Med school. We all know that is a long hard trek. But Toby and Anna are on that trek, committed to doing it. Why put themselves through such difficulty? Because it will be worth it in the long run. He will be a doctor the rest of his life.

But there is a key idea I want you to observe. How does Paul get the glory he is talking about? He says ***the troubles themselves are the very things that are achieving the glory*** that he was referring to! They are not merely obstacles in the way. They are necessary to the process!

That makes sense in Paul's case. He went through all the stuff he suffered in order to bring the Good News of Jesus to people all over the Roman Empire. Of course God would reward him with glory for sticking to it through all that hardship when it would have been easier to quit. But what about us? Our trifling hardships aren't usually directly related to some ministry effort. They're just part of life. Does this work for us?

Yes, it does. You have to look at 4:6-10 to get that message. Paul wrote there, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' 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. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

The message is that God has enormous power, the power to create from nothing, to create light out of darkness. He wants to display this power. He chooses to do that in us, ordinary clay pots, fallible, flawed, often failing people who are not in the least bit impressive. How does he display that power? We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed. We are perplexed because we don't understand why these things are happening to us, but we don't despair. In other words, we simply stay faithful to God when we are in the pressure cooker of all the trials of this life.

It is in the process of standing firm, of trusting God and staying faithful to him, obeying him, shouldering our troubles with patience, faith and joy, not giving up when they seem to go on forever, that we are displaying his glory and thus storing up glory in eternity.

Think of yourself as a goalie on a hockey team. That is a difficult, demanding and exceedingly stressful role to play. If you make a mistake it costs your team dearly because there is no one to cover for you if you mess up. People shoot rubber pucks at you, pucks that are as hard as a rock, at speeds of up to 90 miles per hour, from all angles.

I have observed my son, Toby playing as a goalie. I have seen him play in games in which his team totally dominated their opponents. The game is played almost entirely near the other team's goal. He faces very few shots and the few that come his way are weak and easily handled. He might get a shutout, but it doesn't mean much because the hardest thing he did during the game was fight off the boredom.

I have seen other games that were the exact opposite. The other team was clearly better and dominated play, firing blistering shot after shot at the goal he was defending. He had to flop all over the place in absurdly acrobatic moves in the effort to keep them from scoring, making one outlandish save after another I've seen him have to fly all the way across the goal mouth and do the splits and somehow get a skate in the way of an oncoming shot and deflect it away from the goal. Only his phenomenal play kept his team in the game.

Which of those would you say is more stressful and difficult? Clearly the latter kind of game. He would come off the rink after a game like that sopping weight from the sweat, having lost several pounds, totally exhausted. The other kind of game ended with him relaxed and having expended almost no energy. It was so easy almost anyone could do it.

Which of those do you think Toby would prefer? It is the more difficult of the two. That's when he gets the glory. That's when he shows what he's made of and what he can do. That's when his teammates pound him on the back and thank him for winning the game for them. That's when opponents congratulate him and tell him he stood on his head that day making saves against them. When I was coaching his high school hockey team he had a game like that. After the game the coach of the other team, who did not know Toby was my son, congratulated me on the win then said, "Man your goalie is awesome. He killed us today."

We will all have hardships and losses. Life is going to have its share of troubles often painful for each of us. Our afflictions, our troubles are those difficult games. They are the times when we are piling up glory. They are our opportunity to show what we're made of and what we can do! How will anyone see the grace and forgiveness of God displayed in you unless someone hurts you, betrays you, disappoints you and hands you a gold plated opportunity to extend them grace? How will anyone see that you have a great God unless you face a situation that would seemingly shake anyone's faith, and you go through it with hope, optimism and total confidence in your God?

Going up to bat in a baseball game is stressful. It's a little scary because that guy is throwing a hard ball at you and could seriously injure you. And you are attempting to do an exceedingly difficult thing. It is so hard to hit that round ball with a round bat. The odds are heavily in favor of you failing. Yet going to bat is your chance. That is when

you can actually do something, when you pile up glory. What Paul tells us is that our troubles are our turn at bat! See them for what they are, the chance to store up glory.

INFUSE THE INVISIBLE

The last verse is what makes this possible. “We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” Paul is telling us to view life as essentially spiritual, to infuse all we do with a focus on what is invisible.

We must fix our eyes on the unseen because we can’t see eternity. We can’t see the glory that awaits us. Underlying everything that happens in our lives is a world of events and causes that we cannot see. We cannot see eternity, we cannot see God, we cannot see Satan, yet they are very real and are impacting all that is happening to us and around us.

This may sound to some like superstition. Yet we believe in the invisible all the time. We are told that this music stand is made up of atoms, and that in those atoms are electrons whirling around. Have you ever seen an electron? No, and you never will. Well, I won’t believe it unless I see it. Um, okay, but it is true whether you believe it or not and it is impacting your life even if you don’t believe it. In fact, you tacitly acknowledge the reality of it every time you turn on a light or fire up your computer. So we believe in things we cannot see. In fact we count on them all the time. Even as we speak we are being bathed in signals that allow us to listen to the radio, talk to people on our cell phones, access the internet and watch television. We do this without another thought.

Fixing our eyes on the invisible truth does not demand enormous faith. We do it every day of our lives. But how will it make us less fragile and more able to gain from chaos and stress?

It points us in the right direction

The last sentence of this passage is a truth we know but have the hardest time keeping straight. It is that all that is seen is temporary. Our version of that sentence might be “all that is seen is immediate and tangible.” We can see it and feel it and as a result it has a tendency to block our vision of the unseen. If you remember nothing else from this talk, if you have been sleeping and have missed the whole thing, wake up and get this one truth. If you can see it, it is temporary.

The money, the house, the car, the acclaim of this world, all of it is temporary. What will last forever? Things you cannot see. Things like love. God himself. His eternal kingdom. Worship of God. These are the things we should emphasize.

You have been given some precious resources. How will you invest them? If you invest them in what is seen you will end up with nothing. It is certain. So I encourage you to invest in what is unseen, for it will last forever.

It provides motivation

It is only when we fix our eyes on the unseen, on God's eternal kingdom, that we will have the motivation to persevere, to do the hard things, to hang in there when the going is tough. If we look at the seen, we will at some point despair and give up because life in the seen world is essentially sad and empty.

Where will you get the motivation to teach a Sunday school class, for instance? If you look at the eternal reward you will be able to keep doing it even when it is hard. Where do you get the strength to endure losses and pain, yet still have confidence, joy and enthusiasm for tomorrow? Where will you get the patience to keeping loving the kids when they are pushing every hot button you've got and creating some new ones for you that they are pushing? How do you keep loving that spouse who seems oblivious to your needs? You get it from knowing that God is with you, he loves you, and you are storing up eternal glory as you faithfully, joyfully walk with him.

Years ago there was a woman who lived on our street who was a real piece of work. She was ideal to play the role of one of the witches in *Macbeth*. Double, double, toil and trouble. Like those witches she sought to create trouble for the people around her. This woman was mean to our kids and was just generally an unpleasant person.

When she and her family moved away no one was sorry to see her go. But it was interesting that she seemed sad to leave. That was in part because of one person who made an effort to actually care about her. She made quite a thing out of saying she would miss this person. The person was Laurie.

Laurie chose to express love to her not because she was so endearing, but because Jesus told her to. She put her eyes on the unseen. Laurie got no reward for that. The world did not take notice. There was no article about it on the news websites with a headline that read, "Woman shows unusual kindness to neighborhood battleaxe." She was not given a medal for her effort. No one patted her on the back. She got no financial reward. But she fixed her eyes on the eternal weight of glory that is unseen, and that was enough motivation for her to care about a person when no one else did.

Invest in the inward. Emphasize the eternal. Infuse the invisible into every moment and you will be renewed and can be strong and vital, truly antifragile no matter how young or old you are until the day you die.