

Fighting through Suffering

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FIGHT - For What Matters Most - NK | June 14, 2026

Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

Well, here is a reality that we all know too well. We don't like it, but we know it's true: in this world, we will have trouble. That's actually a direct quote from Jesus. Jesus says:

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

— John 16:33

Trouble, suffering, the hard moments of life - we all understand they're real and they're universal. Every single one of us is going to walk through challenging seasons.

Just to illustrate that for you, I want to give you a snapshot of our church family. These are just some things that I know about from the past several weeks. We've had a handful who have been diagnosed with cancer and have begun to undergo treatments. We've had a handful in our church family who have passed away after suffering through illnesses for a long season. We've had several in our church family who have lost loved ones in the past couple of weeks due to illness or accident.

We've had some who have lost their jobs and are facing a complete financial crisis in their family. We've got people here in our church who have sick children and are having to navigate issues with them. Some of them have severely sick children, and they're walking down this road with their kids right now.

Come out of the medical realm and the financial realm, and I talked with a family last week who feel completely isolated and alone. Some sin in the midst of their friend group has popped up, fractured the group, and left many of them isolated and feeling like they don't have anywhere to turn.

All of these issues are real. All of them are hard, right? This is suffering. These are challenging times. And this is just from our church family over the past couple of weeks - people I know about.

So if you've ever heard the phrase, "Life can be hard," that's because of this stuff. If we were to focus on this too much, if we were to allow the suffering of this world to take up too much space in our minds and hearts, we'd get to a place where we'd begin to spiral and actually start to lose heart.

Nobody wants that, right? There's not one person who came in this morning thinking, "Man, I hope today I hear something at church that makes me lose heart." I'd argue the opposite is true. When we gather as a family of believers, our hope is that we would encourage one another, build one another up, and leave gatherings like this full of hope.

That's my prayer for all of us this morning. No matter what season you're in, whether it's a season of joy or a

season of sorrow and suffering, my prayer is that you would leave filled with hope, with a renewed heart because of the grace of God found in the promises of God.

This morning we're going to continue our series that we've been in for several weeks now. It's called Fight for What Matters, and our main idea today is this: fight through suffering.

I'll acknowledge this is a different kind of fight than we've seen so far in our series, but it matters. Why? Because, like I just said, we're all going to face suffering. When we do, we've got a choice. One of two things is going to happen. We can let that suffering hurt our hearts and drive a wedge between us and our relationship with God, or, as we're going to see in our Bible this morning, we can let God build up and strengthen our hearts even in the middle of that season of suffering.

We see exactly how that happens in 2 Corinthians 4. If you've got your Bible, go ahead and open there. We're going to unpack verses 7 through 18, but we're going to start with verse 16. Verse 16 is the main idea of the passage, and it's really held up by everything else we're going to read.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

— 2 Corinthians 4:16

As we talk about fighting through suffering, that's the answer key, right? Verse 16 is the answer. How do we do it? Two things: one, don't lose heart; and number two, be renewed from the inside out every single day.

We're going to unpack this verse and then the text around it to see how it supports it. But as we look, it's important for you and me to understand that this is a letter written by Paul to a church family just like us in the city of Corinth. It is a church family who, like Paul and like us, walked through hard times and seasons of suffering.

In this section of the letter, Paul says, "Listen, I understand that you're walking through challenging seasons, that you've got pain. Let me show you what to do with that pain."

Look at the middle of the verse again: "Outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." Paul says, "I understand. We're wasting away."

The phrase loses a little bit when you go from Greek to English. He's not trying to minimize pain or minimize suffering. He's fully acknowledging it. With this phrasing, he's saying this is like a house that is breaking down on the outside.

Think of an old home. Think of the paint cracking. Think of the siding beginning to fall off. Think of problems with the windows. Think of gutters hanging down, right? It's an old house that is wasting away. Then you open the front door, walk in, and it's completely different. The kitchen is brand new. The countertops are brand new. The appliances are brand new. The floors are brand new. It's like there's been a contractor working on the inside.

The renewal Paul speaks of is an internal, inside-out kind of thing that happens in our lives. But how? How do

we get that contractor in there? Do we do this ourselves?

The answer is no. This is a key here. What does the Bible say? Look at verse 16: "We are being renewed." This verb is passive, meaning this internal heart construction, this heart renewal, is happening to us. It is not something we are making happen to ourselves.

This is a work of God in our lives, and it's continuous. It is a work of God in our lives, and it's happening day in and day out. The work of God in your heart is not limited to a Sunday morning experience. We learn here that God is constantly working in us, even in seasons of suffering, to bring us to this place of spiritual renewal and strength deep down in our hearts and souls.

So how do we fight the suffering that we are guaranteed to experience? We don't ignore it. We don't act like it's not there. We don't put on a brave face. We follow the example God gives us in His Word right here through Paul, who was no stranger to suffering. We refuse to lose heart, acknowledging that God's doing something inside us even in the challenging seasons. That's it.

Now, those of you who are not in a season of suffering - if your life feels good and smooth right now - are thinking, "Okay, I got it. When suffering comes, to fight back, don't lose heart. Be renewed. Sounds good. What's for lunch? I'm ready to go."

But for those of you who are walking through a time like I described earlier, those of you who are in a season of sorrow or suffering right now, you're thinking, "What? What are you talking about? Is that it? How? How do I not lose heart? I'm sick. I don't know what's going to happen to me."

Maybe you're thinking, "My loved one just died. I don't know where I'm going to go next. My life's a mess. My marriage is over." You're thinking that there's got to be more.

If you're thinking that, let me just say: you're right. Paul didn't write verse 16 in isolation and just move on. He used the entire context of this text to hold it up, to tell us why he's able not to lose heart and why he knows he's being renewed from the inside out.

If we're going to follow this example and keep our hearts strong and be renewed even in seasons of suffering, we've got to look at how Paul did it. Paul did it as he simply did what Jesus said.

Jesus is clear in Matthew 7. We're going to face these seasons. Some people are going to be renewed and stand strong in the middle of suffering, and other people are going to be crushed under the weight of their suffering. As Jesus tells the story about how it goes for each set of people, He's very clear on the difference. I want you to see if you can pick it out.

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house.

Yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

— Matthew 7:24-27

The rain, the streams, and the winds are the suffering and turmoil of the world, right? All of that happens to this person, and the house doesn't fall because the foundation was on the rock.

It doesn't say one person is going to face suffering and one is not. Both sets of people are going to face it. I believe Paul was able to face suffering and not lose heart, but instead come away renewed even through his suffering, because he built his life on the teachings of Jesus, on the Word of God. That's key for you and me as we face these kinds of scenarios.

Paul knew that, so he doesn't just say, "Hey, don't lose heart," and move on. No, he told us in verses 7 through 18 why he doesn't lose heart. He gives us truth there to anchor our hearts.

Verse 16 is the pinnacle, right? Everything before and after it is holding it up. If you underline or highlight in your Bible, notice that the first word of that verse is "therefore." It's saying, "Everything I've said up until this point is the reason why I don't lose heart."

Then verse 17 begins with the word "for," meaning, "Everything I'm about to say is also the reason why I don't lose heart and why I am being renewed day by day."

We're going to look at his reasoning in verses 7 through 18, understanding that these are truths. These are anchors for our hearts and souls. Our action step today is simply to let these truths sink deep down into our hearts so that they will anchor us in seasons of joy and seasons of sorrow.

God Is Powerful in Our Weakness

Look at verse 7:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

— 2 Corinthians 4:7

Truth number one, or anchor number one, is this: God is powerful in our weakness.

In that verse, the treasure is the gospel. That's where the power in our lives comes from. And God has chosen to put this most powerful treasure into what? A clay pot. That's you and me.

Clay pots were common back then. They were used for everyday tasks. They would break. They could be discarded easily. People weren't too worried about them if they left them behind. The contextual equivalent today might be a red Solo cup, right? You're not too worried about it. If it's gone, it's gone, and you just move on.

If someone broke into a home back then, they weren't looking in the Solo cup for the valuables. They were

looking for the silver and the bronze pots. That's where the treasure would be, not the clay ones.

Paul is making a point when he speaks of a valuable treasure in a clay pot. He is making the point that God is strong even when we are weak. In those weak moments, we don't lose heart. In fact, we're encouraged and built up when we allow our hearts to be anchored to this: "I'm weak. God's strong, even in my weakness."

We don't like to admit when we're weak, right? That's just part of our culture. We don't like to acknowledge when we need help. Clay pots crack, and so do we. We know that. We understand that we're going to face moments in our lives and families when, left to our own strength, we just can't make it through. I think internally we all get that.

I read something this week that reinforced that thought in my mind - that not just believers, but people across our culture, understand that concept.

Did you know that Amazon, I believe, owns Kindle, and you can highlight things in your Kindle? If you've ever read a digital copy of something through Amazon, when you highlight things, they make a note of it. They're able to track that and see who highlights what. I'm sure it's so they can sell you something later, but they track all of that, and they've got a list of the most highlighted sentences in all their books worldwide on Amazon Kindle.

I'm going to share it with you in just a minute because it really drives this home. But before I share it with you, does anybody have any ideas about which book it might be from? Any guesses?

What did you say? The Bible. Okay, good. I was hoping somebody would say the Bible. We're at church, guys. Come on, right? We had one person in the first service too, and they were also sitting on the front row, just over here.

Here's the deal: it's not the Bible. It's actually from the Hunger Games series.

Listen, this is not a spectacular sentence by any stretch of the imagination. It appears very plain and matter-of-fact. So just think: Why, out of all the books that exist in the world that people have read, is this highlighted more than anything else? People noticed it. They took time to focus on it. They highlighted it so they could go back and see it again. Why?

Here it is: "Sometimes things happen to people and they're not equipped to deal with them."

It's the most highlighted sentence in all of Amazon's books because it connects with something deep inside of us. We understand that life is hard. We know we're going to face moments that we are not equipped to deal with on our own. We're going to face moments when we will not have the strength to overcome. We know that.

Still, most of us do whatever we can not to let people see the cracks in our lives. We don't want them to see the weakness. We don't want them to see the struggle. We want to put forward the polished version of our lives, not the weak versions.

Let me encourage you: that brave face you try to put on where you say, "Everything's fine. I don't need help" - you don't need to worry about that. Understand: you're a clay pot. You're weak, and God is strong.

Let God's strength shine through your cracks to the world around you. People talk about being real or authentic. That's it. It's being able to say, "Hey, listen, I'm weak. God's strong. It's because of the power of the gospel that God has placed inside me that I will not lose heart, that I will continue to be built up and renewed day by day."

God is strong.

Joni Eareckson Tada was 17 years old in the summer of 1967. She was hanging out like a lot of us do in the summer. She was on the water. She dove off a raft into the Chesapeake Bay, which was shallower than she thought. She hit her head on the bottom, and immediately her neck was broken. She was a quadriplegic in a wheelchair from that day forward.

Clay pot. We are weak. Our bodies are frail. Things are going to happen to them.

She spent years depressed, wondering why God didn't just take her then and wondering why God wasn't healing her now. She really wrestled with that. But slowly, she turned to the Word of God. She allowed her mind to be anchored to the truth of God's Word, and that's when her perspective began to shift.

That's what Paul's saying here. He's saying, "I will not lose heart. My mind is going back to anchors found in the Word of God."

Joni stopped asking God to change her external circumstances and started asking God to change her from within. That's verse 16. She began to be renewed day by day, even in her suffering.

Today she's still around, almost 60 years later. She was on the radio earlier this week encouraging people around the world. She leads a ministry that gives thousands of wheelchairs every year to people around the world who need them.

She still paints. She can't move her arms to paint, so she holds the brush in her teeth. She said, "The paralysis that I've experienced, I used to hate, but now I cherish it more than anything."

Do you know why? Because she is reminded every day that she is weak and God is strong. Her body has been wasting away for almost 60 years, but no one who has had the honor of meeting her can doubt that something incredible is happening on the inside. She's being renewed day by day.

We are weak. God is strong.

God's Presence Sustains Us

Truth number two: God's presence sustains us. Look at verse 8:

*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed;
perplexed, but not in despair;
persecuted, but not abandoned;*

struck down, but not destroyed.

— 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

We could say a lot, but I want to zero in on verse 9: "We are not abandoned."

Paul's giving his personal testimony here. Yes, this can and will happen to all of us, but Paul is saying, "Guys, this happened to me." He's saying, "I was hard pressed on every side, but I wasn't crushed."

That language of being pressed would have made his audience in Corinth think of a grape going into a winepress. What happens to the grape? It's pressed. It's crushed. The juice runs out. It's destroyed. Paul is saying, "I was facing that same pressure, but I was not crushed. I've been confused, but I've never been hopeless. I've been persecuted, but I've never been taken down. I've never been destroyed."

How is that possible? He's facing all of that, and the answer is right there in verse 9: he knows he's not abandoned.

Have you ever had a moment when you've walked through a trial or suffering and thought, "God, where are You right now?" Paul says the answer is right here: God's with us.

So often, it's God's presence in our season of suffering that has us still standing. Again, Paul is anchored by the teachings of Jesus. What does Jesus say in Matthew 28?

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

— Matthew 28:20

That's what Jesus said. He said, "I'm going to be with you always, all the way to the very end."

Know that if you're a follower of Christ, God has promised His presence in your life. You will never suffer alone. You will never walk through a trial alone. It's His presence that's going to sustain you in your most difficult seasons.

Charles Spurgeon, the great pastor, put it this way: "I've learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages." He embraces and is thankful for the trials in his life because they point him back to the presence of God in his life.

As Paul writes here, he's saying, "I'm not going to lose heart. I'm going to be renewed because God is with me."

Others Are Strengthened Through Our Suffering

Truth number three: others are strengthened during our times of suffering.

When we face suffering, we want it to matter, right? We want it to mean something. We want to know that it's not wasted.

You can look and see that a lot of nonprofits, charities, and foundations are founded on the heels of some kind of crisis or tragedy in a person's life. There's one in our area that a lot of you, I'm sure, are familiar with,

especially if you have students or teenagers. It's called the Kailee Mills Foundation.

Kailee was a high school student who passed away in a tragic car wreck a few years ago, and her parents founded this in her memory to save the lives of other teenagers. They're saving lives every single day.

Starting in verse 10, Paul says that his suffering is ultimately going to help other people.

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.

So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

— 2 Corinthians 4:10-12

Then in verse 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.

— 2 Corinthians 4:15

What is "all this"? The suffering. It is all for you.

Paul says, "Death is at work in me, but life is at work in you." Paul says, "I'm suffering. Death is winning in my body, but it's for your benefit. The life of the gospel is at work in you ultimately because I am suffering."

We're clay pots with a treasure inside, and when the clay pot cracks, what's inside is going to shine out. The power of the gospel is going out to others.

One of the guys here at our church is walking through cancer treatments right now. He'd be the first to tell you that, physically speaking, it's been really hard. But we've seen God's Word jump off the pages here in his life.

As he's faced this trial, so many people, including myself, have had their faith strengthened as he's suffered. He's a leader in a lot of areas of our church. One of them is our Tuesday night men's group.

I was talking to some of the guys in that men's group this week, and this is what they had to say about him: "When PK rolled into our small group a few weeks ago, he gave us the clearest picture of God's Word from James 1 that we could have asked for. He shared how happy he was to be with us and how God has been good to him even during his battle with cancer. Like always, PK brought energy and life and wisdom to our group of men that night."

Other people are being strengthened and encouraged through his suffering. Their prayer lives are increasing through his season of suffering. They're seeing God work like God promised He would. They're being strengthened in the midst of a trial.

Paul is able to say, "Listen, I'm going to suffer, but I'm not going to lose heart because I know it's not meaningless. God, I'm going to suffer, but I'm not going to lose heart. My inside is going to be renewed in a

powerful way because I know You're using this in the lives of other people. I know my suffering is bad, but, God, I'm going to press on because You're doing what only You can do through it."

God is working in the lives of other people as you walk through those challenging seasons.

Let me encourage you with this: the impact God wants to work in and through your life to others is not confined just to your seasons of suffering. When you are on the other side of it, God continues to use it.

The very first chapter of the letter, 2 Corinthians 1, says this:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,

who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

— 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Think about that. He comforts us in our troubles. Why? So we can comfort those in trouble with the same comfort we ourselves received from God.

God uses the trials in our lives to strengthen the faith of others while we're in the trial and on the other side of it as well.

Here's a question you could ask yourself: "Who in my life is going through something now that God has already taken me through?"

It's not a coincidence that you know them. It's not a coincidence that you know what they're walking through right now. God wants to work through you in their life like only He can do.

I will not lose heart. God is working in others through my suffering.

Death Is Not the End

Truth number four: I will not lose heart because death is not the end.

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 to himself.

— 2 Corinthians 4:14

For the believer, you know and understand that when your time on earth is done, you have an eternity waiting for you in the presence of God.

I just want to remind you how the Bible describes the presence of God. Revelation 21 says:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

- Revelation 21:1, 3-4

In his suffering, Paul says, "My anchor is the promised future I have in Christ. I will not lose heart even in the face of death. I will be renewed because I will be with the Father."

For us today, as we face the death of our loved ones and our grief, we don't lose heart because we know we will be with them again. As our bodies get weaker and older and closer to death, we will not lose heart because, just like Christ was raised, He's going to raise me. I'll be in a place where death is just a memory and tears are no more.

So I will not lose heart. Outwardly I'm wasting away, but in my soul, every day God's doing something new. Every day God's doing something fresh. He is renovating me. He is building me up and strengthening me from the inside out, and He's not going to stop until I see His face.

That's the reality. One day we're going to see His face. All of this is going to be gone - the good, the bad, and the ugly. It's going to be gone, and we're going to be standing before our heavenly Father.

Our Suffering Is Temporary and Light

That's the basis of truth number five: our suffering is temporary and light.

You might think, "Well, not mine." Let me explain.

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

— 2 Corinthians 4:17

Paul is not trying to minimize what you are going through. He's just restating what he's told us: heaven is waiting for us.

He's saying, "As hopeless as I might feel today, I'm not going to lose heart because I know this moment of suffering is not going to last forever. It will end."

The truth we need to understand is that it might not end on this earth. There is a certain kind of pain that some of us may experience in our lives that we're going to hold on to for the rest of our lives. But Paul says, even with that kind of pain, don't lose heart. Be encouraged. Let this be a truth that anchors your heart and soul.

One day you'll be in heaven. Those tears will be gone, and the presence of Jesus will give you indescribable joy.

"Our light and momentary troubles," he says.

I've had trouble that hasn't felt light. I've had trouble that's felt very, very heavy and very scary. I'm sure you

have too. Why would Paul call that kind of trouble light?

You may think, "It's because Paul never faced any kind of heavy trouble." Well, he did. In 2 Corinthians 11, he gives us just a snapshot of it, not to boast about himself, but to boast about the power of God in his life.

I have been flogged and beaten. I have been exposed to death again and again.

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, 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, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles;

in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.

I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep;

I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food;

I have been cold and naked.

Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

Who is weak, and I do not feel weak?

— 2 Corinthians 11:23-29

He knew pain. He knew suffering. He knew weakness. And he did not lose heart. That is key: he did not lose heart.

Not from the beatings. Not from the imprisonment. Not from the dangers. Not from the betrayals.

Why? Because he knew that no matter how bad it was - and it was bad, and it was heavy - it was going to pale in comparison to the glory that was waiting for him in heaven.

In no way does he make our suffering small. Instead, what he's doing is making huge the reality of the joy we're going to experience in heaven.

Fix Your Eyes on the Eternal

How does he close out? Look at verse 18:

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen,

since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

— 2 Corinthians 4:18

Truth number six: we fix our eyes on the eternal.

He's saying, "Look up. Get your eyes up there on the Lord."

The fixing of our eyes is not just taking a look, getting a quick glance, and then going back to what we were doing. No, fixing our eyes describes an intentional, sustained focus in a certain direction. It's where you allow your mind, your heart, and your emotions to dwell day in and day out.

As Paul describes suffering, here's what he's saying: "I'm not going to give all of my mental and emotional time and energy to the trials around me. Instead, I'm going to fix my eyes on the unseen spiritual realities that are present in my situation because I know that's what matters for eternity."

As you walk through trials, let me remind you: just look up. Look up and keep your eyes on Jesus. As you do, you will not lose heart.

Many of you know the man I spoke of just a minute ago who is walking through cancer treatments. His name is Paul Kidney. He's a great friend, encourager, and mentor to many in this room, including myself.

He's walking through a diagnosis right now that would cause a lot of people, frankly, to lose heart - one that might cause people to spiral, be filled with despair, or be afraid. Listen, I haven't seen that in him. In all the time I've spent with him, I just haven't seen that.

In fact, when we first sat down months ago and he told me, "This is what the doctors have said," he wasn't afraid of what the doctors said. Do you know what he was most afraid of? He was most afraid that we at the church were going to say, "Why don't you just take it easy for a little bit and stop serving everywhere you're constantly serving?"

That's what he was afraid of. He wanted to continue doing what God's called him to do: to love God, love others, and love so many people here in our church family.

I'm telling you, he's able to do that. He's able to keep serving in this season of suffering because he's keeping his eyes up.

Paul is right over here. We spoke on the phone earlier this week, and I just want to publicly acknowledge, Paul, that the way you have kept your eyes up and focused on the Lord has been such an incredible encouragement to me, to my faith, and to the faith of so many.

As we talked and got off the phone, my kids were in the car with me. They said, "Who were you talking to, Dad?"

"I was talking to Mr. Paul."

I told them, "I called Mr. Paul to encourage him, and he spent 15 or 20 minutes encouraging me." That's just how it goes because of the way God's working in his heart, keeping his eyes up.

As we talked, he said, "Listen, I just want people to know that their prayers are making a difference in my life. Not because of things physically. Their prayers are making a difference in my life because God's doing something incredible in my heart and in my soul every single day. In the midst of this suffering, I am being built up, renovated, and renewed."

I'm just telling you, it's the text coming alive in his life because he's focused on what is eternal. What a great lesson for us.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

— 2 Corinthians 4:16

The trials and suffering of this life are taking a toll on us, but we will not lose heart. Instead, we're going to allow the Lord to rebuild us, renew us, and do something special inside us each and every day.

We're going to face suffering. It's going to hurt. But spiritually speaking, when we're talking about our hearts and souls, even in the midst of these seasons, God can and will do incredible things in our hearts to draw us deeper and closer in a relationship with Him.

As you remember and anchor yourself to these truths, I promise you, no matter what you face, you will not lose heart.

Would you pray with me this morning?

As we bow in prayer, let me acknowledge again that everybody is in a different place right now. For some, things are light and easy, and you're good. You will face suffering. Let these truths anchor you.

For others, you're walking through a season of suffering right now. If that's you, I just want to encourage you: do not lose heart. Do not lose heart.

Do not let the trials you're walking through now drive a wedge between you and the Lord. Instead, allow Him, in the midst of this suffering, to rebuild and renew you day by day. That happens as you hold on to the truth of the Word of God.

Allow God to do what only He can do. Acknowledge that you're weak and He is strong. Let the power of the gospel that He has placed deep down in your heart and soul renew and restore you day by day.

If you've walked through an incredible season of trials and challenges, let me encourage and remind you as well that God still wants to use that in the hearts and lives of others.

Second Corinthians 1 says that God comforted you. You're supposed to take that love and comfort God gave you and pass it on to other people who might be walking through the same thing.

Ask God, "God, who do I share this with? Who do I encourage who might be walking through what our family walked through?" Keep your eyes up and open, ready to pass that on.

Finally, let me say that when those trials come - Jesus said it in Matthew 7 - the ones who can stand are the ones who have the power of the gospel inside them, the ones who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

If you're here today and you've never trusted Christ as your Savior, maybe your child had a great week at VBS and you wanted to come back today just to see what this is all about. Maybe a friend invited you. Maybe you're

here today and you're not sure why.

Let me just say that if you've never trusted Christ as your Savior, that's why you're here.

In just a minute, we're going to stand and sing one last song. We'll have some pastors and prayer partners down here at the front. We want to pray with you about what God's doing in your life.

If you're ready to trust Christ, just walk down and say, "I'm ready to trust Christ."

If you're walking through a storm right now - and we all will - and you want someone to pray over you and encourage you, that's why we're here. We want to encourage you, build you up, help you, and point your eyes and your heart toward the Lord so that you don't lose heart and so that you can be built up, like God says right here in these verses.

Whatever is on your heart, whatever you might need prayer over, in just a minute when we stand and sing, that's your invitation. We'd love to pray over you.

Father, we love You and trust You. God, we thank You for Your Word and its promises. God, help us. Help us anchor our hearts to these truths so that we don't lose heart, but instead, God, are renewed day by day. It's in Your name we pray. Amen.