

“Confident in Affliction”

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:1

Graphics: rock climbing, climbing gear, mountain

Big Truth: The people of the Panama UMC are called to be confident in God’s provision, love, grace, and mercy. Often, when physical affliction, criticism, lies, unmet needs, and weakness are present in our lives, we tend to take our eyes off Jesus and focus on the problems. The Apostle Paul gives us encouragement to be confident in God no matter what. Like a rock climber who faces all kinds of adversity, God has given us the tools to win the race for eternity with Him.

Focus Phrase: Faith in God gives me confidence in physical affliction.

1. Introduction

- A. **Confidence.** In some ways it’s the thing of Hollywood movies as someone stands up to the adversary. Or the subject of corporate inspirational posters that hang on the walls of offices around the nation.
- B. It’s usually expressed in words like honor, getting the hard job done, persevering through hardship, or achieving life-goals.
- C. The Merriam-Webster definition of **confident** is: *full of conviction; having or showing assurance and self-reliance.*
- D. Now, there’s nothing inherently wrong with confidence, because I think we can go too far the other way in our lives and second-guess and waffle about everything and every decision or task. But confidence in our own ability to achieve something or press through hard things has a very human limit. I’m not telling you something you don’t already know.
- E. But if we’re honest, are we really as confident as we SAY we are? Especially in our own abilities?
- F. Stan Purdum writes, “One dream image that many people report having is that of being somewhere in public and suddenly discovering they have no clothes on. According to dream researchers, that may be symbolic of feeling vulnerable, or of fear that others will recognize that you are not as confident as you appear. We clergy have our own version of that dream. It’s standing in the pulpit preaching and suddenly realizing we have no clothes on. Perhaps that represents our fear that the sermon really isn’t good enough or doesn’t have enough substance, and that people will see through it.”
- G. I’m not about to admit whether or not I’ve had that dream, but we all struggle with being confident.
- H. Thankfully we’re not called by God to be confident in ourselves, or even our spiritual gifts. We’re called to have confidence ONLY in the Triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- I. Today, we're entering into a new 5-week sermon series from 2 Corinthians called **Confident**. True faith in God gives us confidence, because our faith assures us that God is in control. Our theme verse is Hebrews 4:16 which says, "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."
- J. Each week in this series, we'll look at experiences that can defeat us...ways we are in need, emotionally, physically, and even spiritually.
- K. We'll use this rock climbing and equipment as a metaphor for the tools God gives us to trust in him more - to build more confidence in Him. The goal is to reach the summit, having been a good and faithful servant of God. Along the way, we'll go through trials - with physical afflictions, criticism, lies, unmet needs, and weakness.
- L. God is calling us to be confident in Him through it all.
- M. Here's where I'm going with this: we are people of faith. We believe in Jesus and his care for us. We believe that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purposes (Romans 8:28). We so often stand up confidently singing praises to God. We confidently pray with others who are hurting and need encouragement.
- N. AND YET, we all - every one of us - go through times of affliction and pain.
- O. And when that happens, there's always a temptation to take our eyes OFF JESUS and all the things I listed, and lose our confidence in Him, those around us, and on our own abilities to press on.
- P. Confidence in God leads us to trust Him more, and then confidently share our lives with others, inviting them into deeper confidence in Him.
- Q. If you're a person of faith and yet not confident that God has your back, then the pain of life will defeat your best efforts to live God's best for you.
- R. For today, we'll start by focusing on those times in our lives when we have **physical afflictions**. Our symbol for today is this climbing helmet. Think of it as God's protection of the most important things. And even if you're afflicted, God knows what to protect to keep you safe. I don't care if it's something like COVID or a simple procedure. It doesn't matter if it's terminal or an annoyance. Every time we are afflicted, we come closer to being face-to-face with our mortality.
- S. Let's pray and take our first step up the mountain. Paul has some great encouragement for the disciples in Corinth...and us.
- T. **Let's Pray!** Turn to 2 Cor. 4...starting in verse 7...

2. Scripture

A. READ 2 Cor. 4:7-12

- i. The Apostle Paul is writing this letter to the church in Corinth, after having written to them previously in 1 Corinthians about their divisions and how they were being compromised by the culture around them. He was scolding them.
- ii. But prior to writing 2 Corinthians, Paul, himself, went through a series of hardships that were pretty humiliating...people were accusing him of lies, were critical of his message and past, and casting doubt on his credentials.
- iii. So, in many ways, Paul was working out his own pain while trying to help the Corinthians to grow through their own pain...to be confident in Jesus.
- iv. He started off in verse 7 by calling their bodies clay jars. Now, clay jars are fairly durable, and very useful, but can also be fragile if bounced around or dropped. Basically, Paul was saying that their bodies were amazing creations of God, yet are subject to frailty and getting broken. Could be through disease or misuse or accidents.
- v. But those bodies are still Gods...and the treasure Paul talked about was faith in God - placed in those clay jars. The set of things we believe to be true about God - that God created, that God provides for us, that God sent Jesus to forgive and cover our sin, that the Holy Spirit is IN us, and that Jesus offers us everlasting life!
- vi. Our faith highlights the power of God to sustain us...IN US...and not US giving ourselves life and trying to maintain it.
- vii. And, then Paul gave some examples...see which of these have ever been part of your life: affliction of any kind, being perplexed, persecution, being struck down, even death.
- viii. And Paul was talking about the body of Christ here and not just individuals. They were in it together, even though he knew they would feel it most intensely individually.
- ix. We see this today too: This week alone, I've had someone I love in a car accident, another had a large sum of money stolen, another has been sick and the doctors don't know what's wrong, another had surgery, and still another is fighting depression. And those are just the ones I know about.
- x. But through everything, Paul said, no matter what happened, the faith-filled life is not crushed, not driven to despair, not forsaken, and not destroyed! Instead, these clay jars filled with faith in God carry the physical "death of Jesus in the body, SO THAT the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies." In real and tangible ways!
- xi. To say that another way: BY FAITH IN GOD, our mortal bodies are sharing in the physical dying process with Christ - who was human - so that

BY FAITH our bodies are being prepared for the everlasting LIFE that Jesus is experiencing right now!

xii. As we give up our control and thinking that we are in control, having to make things happen on our own - confidence in ourselves - (as we give that up) then the power of God and the life of Jesus can begin to shine through even our frail bodies. That's where our confidence is to be placed.

xiii. Let's read verse 13...

B. READ 2 Cor. 4:13-5:1

- i. If I knew that every time I tried something, like a game or a sport, I would win, I think I would be pretty confident while I was playing.
- ii. If I knew every sermon was the best sermon ever, then I'd be confident in writing and preaching.
- iii. If you knew that no matter how hard something was, that in the end you will be victorious, then wouldn't that bring confidence in the whole process?
- iv. I THINK the answer is yes, but we don't always have that assurance in life's endeavors. We aren't God. We are human. And because we are human, our bodies are mortal and prone to disease and brokenness, all due to the sin nature in us. Remember that at Creation, God made humans perfect, whole, and with everlasting physical life. For us, and every other human after the fall, the clay jar gets cracks in it, or shatters all together.
- v. Paul makes a bold statement in verse 16: "We do not lose heart." It's a statement of confidence in God. We stay confident - not in our own bodies or our own efforts to fix anything that's wrong, physically, but confident in the fact that even if we lose the physical battle, "...we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

3. Application

- A. When I think about confidence, I often think of those who do things that most of us would not do or be afraid to do. One example is free-climbing, which is basically taking the fun sport of rock climbing and making it frightening and deadly. In regular rock climbing, you're supported by ropes from above, so that if you slip, the ropes will catch you and you won't fall too far. In free climbing, you still have ropes attached to you, but they are below you, attached to the rock face from 5 to 50 feet below you. If you happen to lose your grip, your fall can be pretty nasty, even deadly if the anchors don't hold or you hit the rock face hard enough. Any kind of rock climbing takes confidence in the hardware...in your abilities...and in anyone helping you.

- B. Emily Harrington recently became the first woman to free climb El Capitan in Yosemite National Park in under 24 hours. But it wasn't without a physical toll. Here's a short video about it...
- C. VIDEO/AUDIO**
- D. One of the things that Emily experienced was a loss of confidence after she was injured. She fell a pretty long way and slammed against the rock face, injuring her head pretty badly. But she could've also lost her confidence if her equipment failed, or if her handholds gave way, or if the person helping her was gone, or if she got too tired.
- E. When your physical plant (your clay jar) with which you engage life becomes the source of your struggles, it's hard to ignore the pain - physical and emotional. When you're injured or sick or just wear out, it can become a challenge to experience joy in life let alone in ministry and mission for Jesus... to do what God has gifted you to do.
- F. One thing that might have helped Emily Harrington that day on El Capitan was a helmet! Now, I wasn't there, so didn't see her fall, but let's use this as a metaphor for God's protection of the most important things about you that will help you stay confident in Him.
- G. God created you and me with hearts to love Him and minds to serve him and to glorify Him, along with our hands and feet. There isn't a spiritual helmet that can protect our physical head and heart. But there is spiritual armor that Paul talks about in Ephesians 6: a helmet of salvation...and a breastplate of righteousness. The helmet protects your mind because of the faith you have in your salvation through Jesus Christ. The breastplate protects your heart because it's in right relationship with God.
- H. And when, by faith, your mind and heart are focused on God's good intentions for your life, then in those times when the doctor gives you a report you didn't want, or it's just hard to get around, your mind and heart STILL want to glorify God. The key is to take our eyes off the distress and on Jesus.
- I. Here's a promise and a challenge for you, me, and every follower of Jesus during those times in life when our bodies fail us in any way:
- J. First, the promise: **You may be stricken personally, but you don't have to suffer alone.**
- i. Emily Harrington had a support team that helped her through the preparation, climbing, and final ascent to El Capitan.
 - ii. You have a team of people surrounding you through every struggle in your life...especially the ones that immobilize you. Some of them are right here.
 - iii. Because you're part of a faith community, the people around you are commanded to help you. It can be simple things like meals or a wheelchair

or a prayer by a bedside. It can be an arm to hold or just sitting to listen and visit in those scary times.

- iv. But it's encouragement for your soul to see more than you can see. The people that are walking this Jesus road with you will remind you of your salvation and God's goodness. We will remind you that no matter what happens to your body, it's a clay jar that will wear out. Yet, God's not done with you until the day He calls you home!
 - v. The Holy Spirit in me will connect with the Holy Spirit in you, and that will begin to raise your chin up. Reach out to your church family. Reach out to me. Let's pray for healing and wholeness. Let's sing songs of praise and tell of God's wonderful deed together. Psalm 105:2 says, "Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts."
 - vi. Let's be the church, church! Find someone who needs you and pray! The giver and the receiver will rise up confident in the Lord!
- K. And here's the challenge for all of us when (not if) we are physically afflicted:
Be a witness to God's goodness to others in the way you suffer.
- i. I've met people in my time in ministry that absolutely blow me away in the way they suffer. Maybe someone is coming to your mind right now.
 - ii. These amazing saints found out they have cancer and can't help but praise God, even though they're scared and hurting.
 - iii. Or they're taking care of someone who's hurting and they keep praying and keep serving and keep loving. And they're joyful, even though they aren't happy about the clay jar being cracked.
 - iv. And do you know what happens? Does the person get healed? Sometimes. But do you know what happens every time someone suffers well? The people around them are inspired. The people around them see God working in SPITE of the pain...in spite of the struggle...in spite of the fear of the future!
 - v. Be confident in God now and when affliction comes, be confident even MORE in God's future for you.
 - vi. It's WAY easier said than done, but put on that helmet of salvation and breastplate of righteousness and God will guard your heart for those days when you are too weak to stand and in pain from the frailty of our bodies.

4. Conclusion

- A. There's a hymn called Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus, and the chorus goes like this, "Turn you eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace."

- B. God doesn't promise us health for today or tomorrow. He doesn't promise us pain-free bodies or even long life.
- C. What He does promise us is that if, by faith, we are confident in His eternal glory and life with Him, that our bodies, though frail and sometimes wasting away, will show the life of Jesus in us to the world. And when we reach the top of the mountain, we can shout God's praises to the world!
- D. And, our confidence in HIM will show others His power and life!
- E. Let's Pray!
- F. During communion, if you have something that's causing you physical pain, or something for which we can pray, I'll be here, ready to pray for you. Others may feel the pull to surround you or others. Church, we are the church! God is on the move! Let's pray for each other this morning, in CONFIDENCE!
- G. Communion...