

CFAMC DEVOTIONAL PAGE
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Brothers and sisters in Christ, greetings to you! Thank you for this opportunity to delve into God's word together. My devotional this month centers on the third and fourth chapters of II Corinthians, highlights of which I will present to you in a moment. But, to set the stage, I hope you will allow me to be candid and vulnerable with you as to why I chose these chapters, since I suspect that many of you can relate to my own experiences. At the end of this, I encourage you all to read through these chapters as many times as you can.

I have come to expect that each year, during the summer months, I will struggle with my purpose and identity in life. The academic calendar, and the routine that comes with it, is blacked out; there is a long hiatus of empty time that leaves me far too much opportunity, it would seem, to focus on my shortcomings, failures, and issues regarding mortality (either my own, or of friends or family members who are nearing the end of their journeys here on this earth). There are no students to serve, no meetings to be held, no shirt, tie, and jacket to don at the beginning of each day.

Whatever will I do when I retire if this is how I react to 2.5 months off? Keeping myself busy helps to some extent, so I often fill my summers with activities such as composing, teaching extra students (while wearing shorts and a T-shirt), or other projects at home. In a sense, though, I am simply ignoring the problem rather than addressing it; I'm not really thinking through who or what I am in relation to the God I serve.

I know that I am not alone in feeling this way. I am sure that many of you have experienced the same sensations, quite possibly with greater intensity than I have, and for a variety of reasons or circumstances that I may never understand or be called to endure.

I recently heard of one of my former colleagues, (a God-fearing man to be sure), struggling in this way. He is retired, after teaching for over 50 years at the university level, and his wife of at least as many years died just about a year ago. While he was actively teaching, I would have said that I had never seen a more "purpose-driven" individual; everything he did was for a reason, and he felt a sense of urgency to proclaim the gospel and the kingdom of God. Now, however, for him life has no meaning; he recently confided in a mutual friend, "I don't know why I'm here anymore."

I believe II Corinthians 3-4 has something to say in this regard, and it sets a proper perspective for us to effectively rebuke such thoughts. Please reference the beginning of chapter 3, stated below:

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

At this stage of his epistle, Paul is reminding the Corinthian church of their identity in Christ. What higher calling than to be referred to as a *letter* (a creative work, not unlike a composition I might add; I've placed the word in italics whenever it appears) written by the great Savior of humankind. Beyond this, we can see the sense of pride that Paul takes in these converts; he actively ministered to them, and the Spirit took that work and inscribed it on "tablets of human hearts." I can't help but think that this passage directs us to look back on what the Lord has done, (read the *letter* again!), in order to remind us of His presence in our lives and encourage us towards what is ahead.

As composers we are all guilty, to some extent at least, of ungodly pride. How easy it is to take credit for the "letters" (creative works) that have been given to us by the Lord (I Cor. 4:7). But Paul embraces his role in the Spirit's *letter* (it is the "result of our ministry") while whole-heartedly acknowledging God's involvement in the process. In 3:6 he goes so far as to say "...our competence comes from God." Ought we not, as composers, to take the same approach?

The rest of the third and fourth chapters follow this by outlining what and who we are in Christ; what our identity is and what we can expect to do with that identity. Here are just a few wonderful tidbits taken from various points in these chapters.

Because we are Christ's *letter* we are:

- ...partakers in a glorious ministry (3:7-8)
- ...very bold (3:12)
- ...beholding with unveiled faces (3:18)
- ...not losing heart (4:1)
- ...shining with the knowledge of God's glory (4:6)

And all of this comes from the power and providence of our great God. We are merely the “jars of clay,” (4:7) but because of his great gift to us we can claim the immensely encouraging and often-quoted verses from 4:8-9:

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

Hallelujah, what a Savior! Oh, to be reminded that He is the potter and we are the clay; but what a glorious product we become, and what potential we have, when crafted and molded by His able hands. God’s purpose for us goes beyond what we know and see here on this earth. So we can say to each other, look back at what the Lord has done. As He has been faithful, so He will be faithful; as He has been good, so He will be good. And blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21).

I will end with the following from II Corinthians 4:16, after which I encourage all of us to scour these two chapters for more kernels of truth. This is our hope, and it is a bright and glorious hope!

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