

TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS

Introduction: Much of life for many people is about coping. We think of coping as merely “getting by” or just “surviving.” The dictionary defines “cope” this way: “to deal *effectively* with something difficult.” Allow me to share with you from the faithful life of someone whose name is not in the Bible, but whose life is written across it’s pages who “coped” with life’s hardships.

I. God gives us treasures in unusual forms.

- A. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels” – hardships (2 Cor. 4:7)
- B. My grandmother faced significant life catastrophes/hardships.
 - 1. Polio at age 3.
 - a) Dancing on her daddy’s feet to the music from the phonograph.
 - b) Cartwheels on her elbows.
 - 2. Post-polio syndrome effected her physical abilities for life.
 - 3. Lost her father at an early age.
 - 4. Lost her husband early in life.
 - 5. Spent 10 years in a mental hospital.
 - 6. Survived a lightening strike.
 - 7. Survived a tornado in Oklahoma.
 - 8. Survived Melanoma and breast cancer.
 - 9. Grappled with the emotions of losing two of her daughters to cancer.
 - 10. Lived until nearly 92.
- C. She wasn’t perfect, but she didn’t complain or blame God. She just kept serving... and she did it with a smile.

II. Some lessons we learn for “dealing effectively” with life when it challenges our faith. 2 Corinthians 4-7. God gives us perspective to get past any hardship - “treasure in earthen vessels” (4:7)

- A. It’s never as bad as it seems to be in the moment. “Momentary, light affliction...” (4:8, 9, 16, 17)
- B. Hardships help me put God and self in proper perspective. (4:7, 3-5)
 - 1. Hardships caused by an event that causes you to question God and his power and love. There’s a country song, “If you’re going through hell, don’t slow down. just keep going.”
 - 2. Hardships caused by people. People who see you in a wrong light even though you’ve
 - a) The hurt, self-doubt, and discouragement caused by people who have left us.
 - b) The Corinthians had given Paul a lot of reason to doubt himself. (7:5-8)
 - c) Don’t give up on people even when they’ve given up on you. “Our hearts are open to you... open wide to us.” (6:11-13)
- C. This burdensome life is just temporary. We have a permanent home to reach. (5:1-7)
- D. Our *ambition* to be pleasing to God is regardless of our circumstances, because of the judgement we’ll face–life’s outcome. (5:8-10)
- E. The love of Christ “controls” our hearts and our actions so that we don’t live for self, but for God and others. (5:11-21; 6:4, 11-13)

Conclusion: My grandmother was the “servant” kind. She didn’t let hardships harden her heart toward God or others, nor cause her to view herself as a victim of unfairness. They were treasures. What got her through all those hardships in her life was her view of her life saved by God. Service is the great role of every Christian that moves us beyond a narcissistic life of selfishness to a life of godly purpose and ambition.