

# Focusing on the Blessings Not the Problems

*(2 Corinthians 2:14-7:4)*

Tony Campolo tells the following camp incident in his book *You Can Make a Difference*:

I was in a junior high camp once. Everybody should go to a junior high camp once. The Bible is right. I should say my Roman Catholic friends are right. They should never have gotten rid of that doctrine of purgatory. There is a purgatory. It is junior high camp. I went there and these boys were rotten, just rotten. There was one little boy who suffered from cerebral palsy, and these cruel junior high boys just mocked him. As he walked across the grounds in his disjointed manner with his grotesque movements, they followed this spastic kid and they imitated him and mocked him. They thought that was fun. I saw him one day when he was haltingly trying to ask directions to the craft shop. "Which...way...is...the...craft...shop?" he asked. And the other boy, imitating him, said, "Thaat waay," and he laughed at the boy. He thought that was fun.

But the epitome of that agony reached its crescendo on a Wednesday when it was his turn to give devotions at the morning hour of worship. And all the other boys laughed as little Billy stumbled his way to the platform. And they laughed at this spastic kid as he stood behind the pulpit. And the giggles were there and I watched little Billy take ten minutes to say, "Jesus ...loves...me, ...and...I...love...Jesus."

When he finished, there was dead silence. A revival broke out and fifty young men in that camp are in the mission fields or in the ministry today because little Billy was able to overcome his resentment and serve God and give testimony to the opportunities that he had, opportunities that came out of a situation that he had every right to be resentful about.

This is what Paul does in 2 Corinthians. Paul's circumstances were so bad that he "despaired even of life" (1:8).

1. The Corinthians had accused Paul of being of untrustworthy, untruthful, undependable just because Paul changed his plans about coming and visiting them (1:12).
2. There had been a miscommunication between Paul and his co-worker Titus (2:12-13).
3. There was a group at Corinth who viciously attacked Paul because they did not like the way he preached (10:10). These have been called the Nick Pickers Brigade.

Paul stops recounting his bad circumstance in 2:14 all the way to 7:4 and focuses on the blessings of serving God.

## **1. Focus on the Victory That God Gives (2:14).**

Paul uses the example of the Roman Triumph, which was the Roman version of the American “ticker-tape” parade. Paul thanked God for leading us to victory even in miscommunications. When Paul went to Troas and Titus did not show up. As Paul waited to meet with Titus, he painted a church. God gave the victory even in a miscommunication.

## **2. Focus on the Lives That God Changes (3:1-18)**

Paul’s enemies criticized him because he did not have the proper credential. Paul’s credentials were the changed lives his ministry of the Gospel had produced. Focus on the transformed lives your ministry can effect whether in the nursery, Sunday school, Awanas, Youth, etc.

## **3. Focus on Power That God Gives (4:1-18)**

From where comes this power? Paul asked earlier, “Who is sufficient for such things? It does not come from us. Our bodies are like fragile clay pots (4:7). Not beautiful, china or crystal. Paul was not impressive physically (10:10).

Church history says Paul was under 5’ tall, bald, hook nosed, with diseased running eyes. The Corinthians had criticized Paul’s clay pot. The power comes from the treasure within. This is Paul’s theology of the physical body. In 4:16, the outward body is perishing.

If you live long enough, your body will wear down. Sorry! Tomorrow I go for a shot in my spine to relive lower back pain. It is not just those who grow older. Aimee Copeland is only 24 years old. Now she has to focus on the inward man.

But the focus should not be the outward man. “Yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.”

## **4. Focus on the Eternal not the Temporal (5:1-9)**

Paul started this focus in 4:16-18. What is unseen but important?

We have not seen Christ, but He is the most important Person.

We have not seen Heaven, but Heaven is the most important Place.

We have not seen our Rewards, but they are our most important Possessions.

Focus on the Eternal because life is so brief (5:1 “for”). This physical body that we inherited from our parents is like a tear bear tent ready to be folded at any moment. When that happens at death, God will give us a body not made by humans, that is eternal and in the heavens.

## **5. Focus on Your Character Not Your Circumstances (6:3 “Giving no offense in any thing that the ministry be not blamed”**

A. Paul lists 9 external trials following “patience” or endurance in difficult circumstances (6:4-5)

1. Three general trials: afflictions, necessities, distresses
2. Three specific trials: stripes, imprisonments, and tumults
3. Three self-inflicted hardships: labors, watchings, fastings

B. Paul now lists 9 inner qualities (6:6-7). Hans Finzel gives five levels of leadership with five ascending levels of influence. The lowest level is position where people follow the leader because they will get fired if they don't. The next level is relationships. At this level people follow because they like the leader. The third reason people follow leaders is because of the results the leader brings to the ministry. Level four is reproduction. This reproduces himself/herself in follows. The first four levels either have to do with competence or relationships. The fifth level and the greatest reason people want to follow leaders is character. This is most important reason. People follow the leader whom they respect.

## **6. Focus on Encouraging Others not being Encouraged (7:5).**

When Paul finally met Titus in Philippi, Titus encouraged Paul with the news that the severe letter Paul had written and Titus had delivered had been responded to with repentance. The Corinthians had encouraged Titus and now Titus had encouraged Paul. This is what Paul focused on rather than the problems of ministry. In trials, focus on your ministry to others not on your personal misery.

Instead of focusing on the negatives we can meditate on the positives. Instead of complaining about what we do not have, we can give thanks for what God has so bountifully supplied. Instead of majoring on our problems, we should list our blessings and “name them one by one.” Or as my pastor used to say, “Count your many blessings name them ton by ton and it will surprise one what the Lord has done.”

Aimee Copeland, a 24-year-old Georgia graduate student contracted a flesh eating infection May 1 as she and friends zip-lined along the Little Tallapoosa River near Carrollton. When the homemade zip line broke, she fell to the water and rocks below, cutting a gash in her calf on a stone.

Doctors believe the bacteria, *Aeromonas hydrophilia*, entered her body from the warm water into the deep gash. The gash required two dozen staples to close. The flesh-eating bacteria destroys muscle, fat, and skin tissue by emitting toxins that cut off blood flow to parts of the body.

The doctors had to amputate her left leg up to her thigh to prevent the spread of the disease.

The 24-year-old woman battling deadly bacteria learned early Thursday that she faces more amputations

But even as she's remained in critical condition at an Augusta hospital, Copeland has shown remarkable resilience, detailed by her father, Andy, on a Facebook page dedicated to his daughter.

In a Friday morning Facebook post, Andy Copeland said he and his wife explained to Aimee that she would need the amputations.

"Aimee, I do not want anything to happen to you," Copeland said he told this daughter. "Your mind is beautiful, your heart is good and your spirit is strong. These hands can prevent your recovery from moving forward. The doctors want to amputate them and your foot today to assure your best possible chance of survival."

From her hospital bed, Aimee told her parents she was a little confused, but would figure it out. Her parents then told her she would be fitted with artificial limbs eventually, her father wrote in the Facebook post.

"She smiled and raised her hands up, carefully examining them," Andy Copeland wrote. "She then looked at us. We all understood her next three words."

"Let's do this," Aimee Copeland said.

Aimee's dad, mother, and sister are taking this ordeal one day at a time. They are focusing on the positives, laughing, and sharing family memories. Mr. Copeland said he was thankful the Aimee was alive, that the disease had not affected her mind, and that her fingers would not have to be amputated.