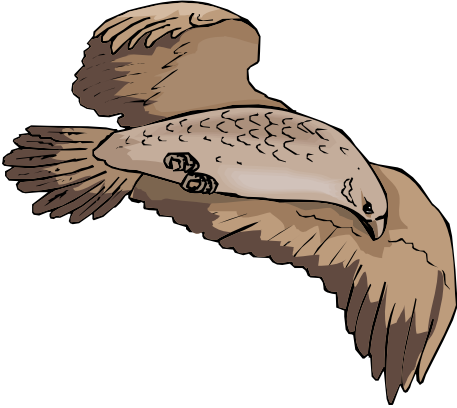


# SOARING ABOVE THE CLOUDS

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, October 15, 2006



Centuries before the time of Jesus Christ, the people of the Old Testament already drew hope and assurance from their faith in Yahweh God. ~ Isaiah, the prophet assured them, "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." At the dawn of Christianity, the Apostle Paul further developed the same theme when he wrote to encourage the early Church in -

**2 Corinthians 4: 5-12:**

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "**Let light shine out of darkness,**" who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. **But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.** We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you."

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If ever there was a passage in the Bible that all of us should embrace and know by heart — this is it! It **contains** wisdom that is not of this world; it **summarizes** WHAT WE BELIEVE about God and Jesus; it **provides** understanding about our relationship with God. Just sense the power of this image! **"We are weak as clay formed into jars but we are carrying extraordinary power within us. That power belongs to God."** That is the secret why we need not go down in the battle of life. While many people battle to just cope with the hard knocks of life, we KNOW HOW to do better than just coping. We can change lemons into lemonade! We can live life victoriously, no matter what! It has to do with our faith! When dark and stormy clouds come and threaten to take our sunshine away, we can and should literally soar above the clouds like an Eagle!

How do you know its going to be a bad day? One cynic says it is when you call suicide prevention and they put you on hold ... or when you hit a hole-in-one in golf and you're playing alone.

A certain cowboy out west was in a heap of trouble. A wild bull was after him. Head down and nostrils snorting, the bull charged toward him. The cowboy dove into a convenient hole in the ground. As soon as the bull passed over the hole, the cowboy leaped out. The bull came back, madder than ever. Right before the bull reached him, the cowboy ducked back into the hole. Then, when the bull passed, he popped back out again. He did this several times. A passing stranger watching this scenario shouted, **"Hey, cowboy, why don't you just stay in the hole'?"** Leaping out again, the cowboy yelled, **"I can't ~ there's a bear in that hole!"** That is how it is some days. We get caught between a bull and a bear.

The Bible provides vivid descriptions of how Gods people triumphed over adversity and became more than conquerors. Paul knew what it was to have a bad day. He had

many of them -- shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonment. Obviously, he also knew the secret, not only to cope with the bulls and bears of life, but also to conquer them and be victorious.

Some one asks, "How are you doing?" and we answer, "All right, **under** the circumstances." Paul never stayed **under** his circumstances. He knew how to get on top of them. Whether shipwrecked, imprisoned and in chains, his life was testimony to the truth that we can be victors rather than victims. What was Paul's secret? **He knew the power of God in his own life. His faith in Jesus Christ connected him with the reservoir of God's power.** Therefore, nothing that happened in his eventful life was strong enough to crush him. Through faith in Jesus Christ, he not only coped but also conquered.

Paul had the wisdom to accept opposition as part of life. How often do we whimper if things do not go our way? We whine at every set back. If the currents against us are strong enough, we throw up our hands and say. **"Oh well, I wasn't meant to succeed anyway"** – as if we can blame some invisible force.

A certain birdwatcher tells about seeing a bird build its nest in the stormy season. Patiently and hard, it works all the time. Every time when a storm came the little bird's home was blown to the ground in pathetic ruin. The bird was there, too, however. It was not mourning over the destruction. It was busily rebuilding. Hurricanes are a part of life for us here in Florida – but we have learned some secrets the hard way – **before, during and after** the storm we know what to do!

A desperate person recently confessed, **"My life seems like one long obstacle course, I am the chief obstacle!"**

Life can be tough. For most people, life is tough! The people who have made the most significant contributions to this world of ours have been people who have confronted that truth head on. They not only coped, but they conquered.

I love to tell the story of Grandma Moses! She and her husband Tom raised 10 children on a farm. She loved to do needlework, but as she became older, her hands were stiffened with arthritis. Finally, at the age of eighty, she could no longer handle a large needle to embroider, so she decided to try painting. She found she could handle the paintbrush more easily and began painting pictures--mostly farm and county scenes.

One day a New York City art collector passing through her small town saw her pictures in a drugstore. The rest is history. Beginning **after** 80 years of age, Grandma Moses painted over 1500 popular paintings. 25% of her paintings were painted after she was 100. She developed an international following. Why? Apparently only one reason: **Because her hands were stiffened with arthritis and she could no longer embroider.**

It is about taking that which is useless and making it useful - taking that which is hopeless and making it hopeful – taking that which has been defeated and making it victorious. That is what the cross is all about--a symbol of shame turned into a badge of triumph. Through our faith in Jesus Christ, we know that the God of Paul is also our God. The power that enabled Paul to soar above the clouds is also available to us.

Did you know that an eagle knows when a storm is approaching long before it breaks? The eagle will fly to some high spot and wait for the winds to come. **When the storm hits, it sets its wings so that the wind will pick it up and lift it above the storm. While the storm rages below, the eagle is soaring above it.** The eagle does not escape the storm. It simply uses the storm to lift it higher. It rises on the winds that bring the storm.

When the storms of life come upon us - and all of us will experience them -, we can rise above them by setting our minds and our belief toward God. The storms do not have to overcome us. We can allow God's power to lift us above them. God enables us to ride the winds of the storm that bring sickness, tragedy, failure and disappointment in our lives. We

can soar above the storm. Remember, it is not the burdens of life that weigh us down; it is how we handle them!

"You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord,  
Who abide in His shadow for life,  
Say to the Lord, "My Refuge,  
My Rock in Whom I trust."

And He will raise you up on eagle's wings,  
Bear you on the breath of dawn,  
Make you to shine like the sun,  
And hold you in the palm of His Hand."          Amen.