

Do Not Be Discouraged

by A.W. Tozer

Discouragement is a common problem in the Christian life, but it can be overcome by remembering that God is with us and seeking His presence.

Duration: 31:30

Scripture: Exodus 33:14, Deuteronomy 31:6, Joshua 2:3, 2 Samuel 11:2-4, Psalm 27:9, Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 8:23-27

Topics: "Discouragement"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher talks about feeling captive and discouraged in life. He uses the example of Ezekiel, who was held captive and had his freedom taken away. The preacher emphasizes that when we have our own way taken from us, we may feel discouraged, but we can still find hope and shine in darkness. He encourages Christians to not be discouraged and to remember that God is with them and will help them. The sermon concludes with the reminder that the Lord God will help us and we should not be confounded.

Transcript

This is tonight and Sunday, but I am not going to talk about redemption, and only sin. It is found in Deuteronomy 1, 21, 1, 21. Behold, the Lord thy God hath set a land before thee, the weapon possessor.

For the Lord God hath said unto thee, Fear not, neither be discouraged. The weapon possess the land. And remember that God hath said, Fear not, neither be discouraged.

I want to talk a little about discouragement and what the Christian can do about it. This topic comes up in the next 10 or 12 years, Mr. Fulchers. Perhaps it should come more frequently because I know what a discouragement it is.

It is one of the Christian's worst enemies. Maybe it, I doubt that it is the greatest. I doubt that discouragement is the greatest enemy the Christian has, but it could be the greatest nuisance the Christian has to deal with.

And it is a valuable thing on his war against the saints because it is seldom recognized for what it is. The Christian becomes discouraged. He's good sometimes, he says seldom, he's just being realistic.

And he's forgetting the reason. It is discouragement. And it works when no other temptation will.

Not the guilty of any sin willingly, and who has victory enough that he doesn't fall unwillingly, may yet be visited by this in person, dark shadow from the pit this thing we call discouragement, and good in the Christian life. Discouragement, as I've pointed out before on other occasions, is a mood. It is an emotion which can easily become a ruling emotion.

And it is more than an emotion, it becomes position. It becomes an outlook and an attitude. It becomes a lens through which we see everything, dark glasses through which we behold everything before us.

And of course, mood is mental climate. It isn't the man, it's the weather that the man has on the landscape. Just as weather isn't the field or the farm, but it goes a long way to determine whether the farm shall have a good crop or not.

So mood is not the man, but it is determined whether there shall be a good crop, and what kind of plants are going to grow. Joy and power simply can't grow in the climate of discouragement. But fear and self-pity and self-engrossment are found there.

Now you'd be surprised, I suppose, if you many Christians at any gathering are bothered by a degree at least of discouragement. Because there's no class of Christian, there's the young Christian and there's the old Christian. I find that after serving the Lord, more or less raggedly and spotly, but serving him nevertheless for a long half or two-thirds of my life, I am nevertheless as prone to discouragement today as I was when I was seventeen.

So if I'm an example, even a poor example, it is safe to say that this discouragement, the sober-minded man, which he takes to be a solid, well-set-up and self-assured person, may be suffering from a deep discouragement, so deep that it's affecting him physically. The radiant Christian, the shining Christian. I meet a few of them, not many, but you meet a few radiant Christians.

They're shining and they're beautifully Christian. They're overflowed. And yet, in the deeps of their heart, they're often discouraged.

They keep the shine on, and they don't mean to be hypocritical, because they've learned to smile. The muscles are used more than the smile. But if you could get at the root of their lies, you'd find they were deeply discouraged over something.

And there are the very lucky who seem to dwell so very high that you could hardly believe it's possible, that dwelling as they are, as it were among angels, could be discouraged, but they do get discouraged anyhow. And there are those tactical, down-to-earth Christians that are followers of the kind that are tactical and salty, and you say, well, surely they never would be discouraged, but they get discouraged too. And so I met a lad here this morning, came to church with heavy feet, dragging what might not be feet, but that seemed to him like as if each one weighed 40 pounds, dragging them off to church, because he felt he ought no particular urge because of the discouragement that had come upon him.

Now, I want to talk a bit about the causes of discourage prescribed to us. You know, the difference between negative preaching and positive preaching is that negative preaching finds out what's wrong and positive prescribes for the remedy. The doctor that would only diagnose, tell you what's wrong in a way, would only be half a doctor.

And a book that would only tell us what's wrong with it would only be half a book. But this book then tells us what to do about it. I want to do that myself.

Well, one of the causes of discouragement, there was the man Elijah. And he is a dramatic example of a gray man that became deeply discouraged. He did it, he was discouraged because there was nobody around him that understood him going his way.

He lacked the support of like-minded souls. It may be that in your home or in your office or from a thing, the major part of your time, that you have no like-minded souls with whom you have fellowship. Now, that may bring to you, as it did to Elijah, a great sense of loneliness.

And here is a little trick that I want to call to your notice, that the loftier and more dramatic the character is, the farther down he can plunge into discouragement. I suppose in his lifetime, or perhaps in a thousand-year period in Israel's history, the mount endured to call the prophets of Baal to make a test. Elijah did it, and Elijah went from that mount, where fire fully came, straight down to the cave and to the juniper tree.

Now, the higher you go, the further down you can go. They have a saying in the prize ring, that the bigger they are, the harder they fall. And that same thing is true in the spiritual world.

The farther up we get, the farther down we can come and take the means of grace to save ourselves from discouragement. And the higher the I am, Christians are never very discouraged because they never have very much to aim at. They don't expect anything, and when they don't get it, they just say, well, I do it.

But there are Christians with fine high ideals, higher than they're able to reach. And six months of struggling for ideals that they can't reach or haven't yet reached may turn them back on them to discouragement. The loftier the ideals of spiritual aspirations, the wider they become to the invasion of discouragement.

Now, what is the cure? The cure is simple. The cure of discouragement is based upon an error. You think you're alone when actually you are not.

In the first place, there are fowls like you. There are merry clubs and red-headed clubs and bald-headed clubs. I wonder why we shouldn't form a little club of those who are prone to be discouraged and talk it out with each other.

You'll find that there are a lot of them. And if you were to go to heaven and gather round you this morning a group of little beings, who have gone to be a thousand of them, and they get up and testify, let me tell you that if they told the whole truth, they'd remind themselves when they felt pretty blue about this whole business of serving God in a bad world like this. So there are thousands like you in the world, and your discouragement is based also upon a failure to remember that God is with you and that you're never alone.

There's a little church we used to sing a song. I haven't heard it, I think, since. I've, uh, I'm the lightning flashing, I've heard the thunder roll, I've, uh, seen senior pelican breakers bashing, trying to conquer, and I've heard the voice of Jesus telling me, still to fight on, you promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone.

And the chorus was, no one alone. Well, that's true, all right. The song wasn't great among the great, but it has the truth in it.

And you're never alone. You're never by yourself. Are not the angels sent forth to minister unto them that shall be heirs of God? If you say, yes, yes, that's all right, Saint Teresa and Francis and Penny and Sergeants, it no doubt helps them.

What kind of a mother would it be that gave all of her attention to her healthy children and let the sick ones lie in rocks? And what kind of God would God be if he sent his angel Augustine and Julian and forgot us poor people in need? No, no. He sends his angelic to minister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation, but for a moment are in a tight spot. And wasn't it when our Lord was in blood, was sweating blood, that the angels came and ministered unto him? It was not when he was in Joseph's shop helping his father here and there and getting in the way and growing up to be a big boy.

That wasn't when he needed the angels, but it was with flowing from his pores as it were swept or sweated blood. So if you're one, you're the very one the Lord has pointed out. In fact, I have scripture for this because it was when Elijah was in deep distress that Joseph slept blue and despondent, that God said to an angel, go down and feed Elijah the prophet.

And he went down and baked cake for Elijah. Not a ravenous prophet, but a discouraged, despondent prophet. And an angel had that job to do.

One that may discourage us Christians is the wickedness of the people. And we have Jeremiah for a Bible example. Look around him in every place he looked with wickedness.

Just every place. He had no newspapers in that day, but if he had, he would say most of the rest of the paper covered with wickedness or reports of wicked deeds or wicked plans. And Jeremiah just got plain talking and not had anybody pay any attention to it.

He's called a weeping prophet. But he's a long way from being a weeping prophet. You get discouraged.

And what are you going to do about it now? You remember that man who vexes right? Surrounded by iniquity, the stars in yonder heaven don't shine in the daytime while they're all ready to light up on the earth. Why do they shine at night? Because the darkness makes them visible. And so, in all the periods of the history that have been reasonably decent, the great saints have always stood out when the darkness was upon the earth.

When our Lord came and was dead. The church burst into paganism as into the deepest, the biggest darkness. At least came not at a time when everybody was praying, everybody was praying.

See, they came at a time when nobody was praying. A handful, they called the Holy Club. At least nobody we know about was praying.

So my friends, 2600 years have gone by since Jeremiah prayed and preached in discouragement. And for years, believing men and women have learned how to live and shine in darkness. And they learned it from the very Jeremiah so much of the time.

Then, captivity. Did you ever feel that you were captured? Did you ever, when you heard somebody talk about our free American way of life? You say to yourself, free, how do you get that way? I haven't been able to get away from these four or five children for months. And I love them, and God knows I'd die for them, but sometimes free.

And you fellows, that get up and go to your job, go to your work, and punch the card, and hear the bell, get out again and go home, and back, and it's a repeating in and out, and up and down, day in and day out, until in the two weeks vacation they give you, it doesn't help you at all, because you take your work with you and carry it backwards. Maybe two weeks, do not. And you say, I'm captive.

I feel I'm captive. And then if I've got anything out in income tax, and if I've got anything left from income tax, somebody gets, needs an extension, or, I have to pay that out, and here I am. Call me a free American? Oh, dear friend, you're the freest person in the world, even politically, yes.

I can stand up here and condemn anybody from the president down to the corner police, and not only have a loud speaker out in front, condemning the policemen, loudly, you can't do the same. Freest nation in the world, we thank God for the stars and the stripes. There are white with the prayers of a thousand saints and red with the tears of ten thousand men who died to keep us free, and blue with the baldric of the skies, the poet said.

Let's thank God that still, even though you're free, you don't feel you're free. You feel you're captive, and you don't choose to get like that, too. Just when I say to myself, now, I can shake my head and be free, I get a space, and then there's something to do.

And brethren, this man, Ezekiel, was captive. He is. And he was sitting among the captives by the river Tebar.

I don't want to travel all the time. I don't want to travel. I could have gone to a half a dozen or twenty different countries and had my way paid over the last year.

Because I find that almost everything in Chicago you'll find anywhere else. And if it isn't, you can always read that. But, I would like to see the river Tebar.

I really would. I'd like to sit down there and dangle my toes in the river Tebar, a stream flow by, and try to recapture the emotions that must have visited that young priest of Israel. As he sat there, despondent, knowing that he was now a captive, a slave in a stream, and everywhere he looked he saw harps hanging on willow trees, and a silence that you could cut with a knife.

An acceptance of some old lady or the petulant cry of a child, not a sound. And Ezekiel sat by the river Tebar. He was discouraged because he was a captive.

But do you know what Ezekiel saw as a captive that he didn't see before he was a captive? He saw heaven opened and had visions of God. And do you know that it's right from where you visited all people want to serve God the hard way, and I never could understand why. I was here some time ago and answered to a question about how a young student going to college can get free so that he can work and can still pray as much as he ought to.

And I made several suggestions, and I said among them, why, uh, readjust your life, adjust it so that, uh, your praying time fits in with your study time and all the rest. And, uh, after that, sanctify, consecrate your studies so there is something good too. And people wrote me more and more and joined the cult of, uh, uh, of positive thinking.

And the world dear me, brother told me that you mustn't tell young people that they're there to readjust their prayer life whether you make good grades or not. I didn't tell them not to pray. I only told them that

they could that they they could get academic activity if they knew what to do about it.

Nobody wanted them to know, I guess. Anyhow, that was Ezekiel. What a captive he was.

He was home and back again and the kitchen and the baby needing attention while there's something else. Say, I'll lie down five minutes. And you lie down five minutes, the telephone rings, somebody's banging on the back door.

All he's wanting you to do is take a package from Mrs. Jones next door in which you would please, and you do, but your rest has been broken. So you feel you're captive. If you could only look up, you might see heaven open.

You might have visions of God, but always remember that when we're too free, we get carnal and have our fellow who has his own way is not likely to be looking for God's way. But it's when we have our own way taken from us that we get our fellow get a feeling of discouragement, but out of it all and through it all the light of heaven may shine. Then there is a gloomy book that says just a few verses down from the text that I read.

It says that the brethren made our hearts to be discouraged. The brethren made our hearts discouraged. Whither shall we go up, they said.

Our brethren have discouraged our hearts that are greater and taller than we. Half my lifetime has been spent, I think, telling, reassuring people that aren't bigger than we are. But they're just not, that's all.

They may rate higher and way more, but in God they're not big as we are. Nobody as a Christian walks in the will of God. He's bigger than anything you can bring against him any time.

God be in us for us who can be against us. These discouraging brethren. I like to meet old Tom here because he's never discouraged.

Now, I have no doubt that that is. I have no doubt each human being, as long as he's in the flesh, he'll have his time. But I have never met him when he was, I think.

But I meet so many gloomy brethren. They're always anticipating something that is going to happen. Usually it doesn't happen, but often they think it's going to.

Well, do you know the answer and the cure for the gloom that is shed upon us Christians? It is, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give you rest. Now, that's what God said to Moses. The brethren said, We can't go up.

And God said to Moses, My presence shall go with thee. And if the presence of God is with you, you should too be afraid. You know the answer too well, and we'll pass it on.

Then I want to point out another thing that the people of the Lord, if they're conscientious, reading Christian biography does. You say, Now, wait a minute, I've heard you recommend we read Christian I do recommend we read Christian biography, but you have always got to know how to do things. It isn't the doing, it is knowing how to do it and then doing it.

If we do the right thing wrong, that's not so good at all. If we read Christian biography wrong, it may harm us instead of help us, because we read so little about the great souls that have lived, and then we

compare ourselves with the great souls, and we begin to wonder if we're Christians at all. We get very blue with the results.

Now, I'll tell you what causes that, and what you can do about it. In June, I answered, Oh Lord, help me. I don't know why I ever promised to do it, but I've got to go to Wheaton.

There's a convention there of editors and writers and journalists students, and they have two subjects they want me to handle. Neither one of them, which I am capable of handling, but they put a little pressure on, so I said yes. And one of them is the obligation of the Christian biographer to his public.

I've got some convictions on that, and I'm going to tell you at least one little thing I'm going to tell them, that most Christian biography is not so, because the biographer feels that if he were to tell the truth about it, he'd discourage the readers or take away something of the glamor of this great character. So, he tells all the high days and never mentions the low days. He tells about all the light shining peaks of his life and never mentions the deep halls.

He tells about the time he was victorious and never mentions the time that he got defeated. He tells about the time that he prayed all night and tells about the time that he fell asleep about nine o'clock and didn't make it. And tells always the good things and the bad.

Now that is intellectual dishonesty and it isn't fair to the public that reads it. One of the obligations we owe to our public if we write biography is to tell the whole truth. I told almost the whole truth about A.B. Simpson and William Fred and some people huffed and puffed and shook their feathers and said tort.

I didn't sell him near as short as I should have because though he was a saint he was a mighty human saint. And there never was a saint yet that didn't have a human side to him. And that's why Thomas DeCampus himself a great saint had peace of mind examined not too closely into other men's matters.

And he was talking about Christian men too. Around four week spots you'll find them. Have you noticed that Christian, that is biblical biography, always helps you.

Whereas the other kind of biography tends to discourage you often because biblical biography tells us David wrote a hymn. Sure he did. David slew the enemy.

Sure he did. Stole Bathsheba's wife. Stole Uriah's wife Bathsheba and murdered Uriah.

He did that out of the biography of Christian Christ but not the one the Holy Ghost wrote. If you can you can know the whole thing about a person. Be nearly as discouraged as if you only read the very top peak of experience.

Then you will say well I never read that. Like the man we heard about whom I've often mentioned who heard a fellow testify how it had been this was a great storm and the ship was ready to sink and he prayed and the Lord delivered them and he went home and cried half the night. Said oh God you've never delivered me.

God said have you ever been to sea? He said no. He had never been to sea but he wanted to be delivered. Now what's the answer? The discouragement that comes from reading about the great saints.

I read about Saint Francis and the others and I say I'm not a Christian. I'm nothing. Well let me tell you.

First place you didn't see the other side of it. It is they're dead. Why, we'd have saints all over the Church here, halos everywhere.

The simple fact is, we know each other too well to believe all that about each other. I know how he lies on his face and prays for the hour with me and with Brother Moore and others at least three times a week. We have our prayers up here.

I know his love of God and his worship, but I also know his thoughts, he's telling me. And he knows mine, he shakes his head. So my brethren, thank you, and not somebody else, the little boy was asked, who would you rather be, yourself or Lincoln? He said, why, Lincoln's dead.

And there's a sense in that, a good sense. So my friends, remember this, and then we're through for the morning, three words. The Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded.

He has set my faith like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifies me, who will contend with me? Let us stand together, who is my adversary? Let him come nearer to me. Behold the Lord God, who is he that shall condemn me? Lo, they all shall wax old as a garment, and a mock shall eat them up.

the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light. Let him trust in the name of the Lord, whose face shall not be seen. So if you have been coming through shadows and darkness, and if you have been threatened by the devil or your enemies, you have a perfect right to stand up and say, The Lord God will help me, wherefore should I be confounded? And hear God say, All who walk in darkness and have no light, trust in the name of the Lord, and say yourself upon your God, and you will be all right.

See, that is true of me, and of you, and of this church. You believe it? Amen. So let us come up this morning with cheerfulness, with reverence and humility, but with meek self-assurance as well, knowing that the Lord shall not throw us out, forget us, and leave us somewhere along the way, or rust on the highway, but that the Lord, looking after every one of us, knows our name, all about us, and we are safe in his keeping, those storms around us are sweeping.

He is the pilot of Jealousy. We will have the communion service to follow, and it is for every child of God. You don't have to be a member of this church.

We recognize that this church is an organization, whereas the church of God is an organism. It is composed of members of his body by the new birth. So from wherever you come, wherever you are, if everything is right between you and God, you join us this morning as we go on into the service.

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