

I Have Labored in Vain

by David Wilkerson

David Wilkerson's sermon offers encouragement to those feeling discouraged by emphasizing that even great figures in faith have faced feelings of failure and the importance of relying on the Holy Spirit.

Duration: 44:14

Scripture: Isaiah 49:5

Topics: "Discouragement"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that God has greater plans in store for His people than they can imagine. He encourages those who are feeling discouraged and have not seen their expectations fulfilled to lift themselves up and trust in God's promises. The preacher references Jesus' words in Isaiah 49:4, where Jesus expresses his feelings of laboring in vain. However, the preacher explains that this feeling is a result of measuring little results against high expectations. Ultimately, the message is one of encouragement and trust in God's greater plans.

Transcript

This recording is provided by Times Square Church in New York City. You're welcome to make additional copies for free distribution to friends. All other unauthorized duplication or electronic transmission is a violation of copyright and other applicable laws.

This recording cannot be posted on any website. However written permission to link to the Times Square Church homepage may be requested by emailing info at [timesquarechurch.org](mailto:info@timesquarechurch.org). Other recordings are available by calling 1-800-488-0854 or by writing to Times Square Church Tape Ministry, 1657 Broadway, New York, New York, 10019. I have labored in vain.

Now this is a message of encouragement to those who are here this morning having come discouraged. You were discouraged this morning. You've been discouraged for a while and the Lord brought you for this message.

You were discouraged because of failed expectations. The things that you thought and believed fully that God spoke to you have not happened. And there are other things that you had expected to happen by now and they have not happened.

You have prayed and you've not seen an answer to those prayers. And you come to this place where you say after all of my prayers and after all my faith, after doing everything I believe God told me to do, there's a sense of failure that creeps in at times. There's an hour, there's a moment when the enemy comes with a lie.

You have labored in vain. You have completely missed the mark. Now if you face the feeling of failure, now I don't know who I'm addressing.

But while I was sitting here this morning, the Holy Spirit spoke very clearly to me that to the majority of those that are hearing me in the annex, the overflow rooms in here, me in the auditorium and behind me, wherever you may be, that the majority fit this message. That sense that comes to you, you may not have it now, you may have seen it before, it may be on the way. As I've said, just wait a day or two or a week.

There will come this time when you look at your life and all that you expected God to do, all that you expected to hear from God and all that you expected in the way of answers to prayer and the things that you wanted to achieve. And now as time slips by, you look at it and say, I'm a failure. I have this sense of failed.

I have not accomplished what I want to accomplish. I really haven't made any impact. I have not been effective.

And all of these lies from the devil come pressing in. Now, if you have that sense of failure at times, you've got someone maybe in that hour right now, you're in good company. You're in the company of spiritual giants.

I want to just tell you about Elijah, for example, this great prophet of God. Do you remember that moment of failure that came to him when he says, Father, why don't you just kill me? Because I am no better than my father's. In other words, my father's failed and I'm a failure like my father's.

He said, just take my life. Paul the apostle had a fear in him. He carried a fear that lest I have labored in vain, that I have labored in vain.

St. Bernard, who was one of the great writers and great preachers of all time, in his latter days said, I have failed in my purpose. My life has been a failure. My words and my writings have been a failure.

Calvin, the father of Calvinism, in his dying day said this, all that I have done has been of no value. The wicked will gladly seize on this word. But I repeat it again, that everything I have done has been of no value.

I've labored in vain. Here are the words of David Livingston. David Livingston was one of the greatest missionaries of all times.

He opened Africa to the gospel. Twenty-three years of ministry, establishing ministries and bringing in missionaries to Africa. He was one of the godliest, most dedicated missionaries in time.

In fact, he brought England to its knees regarding missions. And England then sent missionaries all over the world. His words, when you read them today, are like fire that burn in your heart.

A man who'd give in body, soul, ministry, life, everything to the Lord and the sacrifice of his life to Christ. And after twenty-three years, and this is according to his biographer, his sense of failure gripped David

Livingston. And this is what he said, all that I have done has opened up Africa to the slave trade.

Because the slave traders followed David Livingston wherever he went. And he said, I've only opened up the slave trade. And all the mission societies that he had raised up are bearing no fruit.

And after twenty-three years of labor, my work seems to me to be in vain. I have labored in vain. One of the greatest missionaries, as far as I'm concerned, who has affected and impacted my life is David Bowen.

David Bowen was from Long Island years and years ago. He gave up riches and wealth and fame. And he went as a single man to Bombay, India.

And when he went there, sent by mission society, he looked at how missionaries were living at the time with servants and living far above the people of India and Bombay in its poverty. And he decided to give up his mission support. And he began to dress like the natives.

And he lived in a little insignificant, poor neighborhood in a hut. And he spent twenty-three years. His books inflamed my soul.

His book on Love Revealed, for example, is one of the greatest books on Christ that I've ever read. And I have his life story and his biography. And in twenty-three years of ministry, he had no converts.

Not one single convert. Even though he ministered every day on the streets in the sweltering heat and sun. Living on just bread and water at times.

Praying and everything. Walking the streets, weeping. Giving his all.

He never saw a single convert. And yet, when he died, he died as the most respected missionary in India. Even idolaters.

Even Hindus. All of those false religions said, if I want to know what a Christian is and who he is and what he's like, it's David Bowen. He set the example.

And he has impacted, his books have impacted many ministers around the world ever since. And last night I was reading in his biography these words. I'm the most useless being in the church.

God bruises and crushes me with disappointments. He builds me up. Then he permits me to fall back to nothingness.

I would like to sit with Job. And I sympathize with Elijah. My labor has all been in vain.

You say, well preachers shouldn't talk like that. Missionaries shouldn't talk like that. Christians should talk like that.

That sounds like the language of unbelief and fear and doubt. No, this has been the language of all the giants. This is the language of Maram Gyan.

This is the language of all the great preachers of all time and all the Christians of great time. Both in the pulpit and out of the pulpit. They have experienced this sense that comes, this lie from the pit of hell.

I have not achieved what I thought God called me to. I have not achieved. I have been a failure.

And I know what that voice sounds like. It would shock you to know that Jesus Christ himself experienced this very sense of having not accomplished his purpose. Now go to Isaiah 49.

Let's start at verse 1. Listen, O Isles, unto me and hearken, ye people from far. The Lord that called me from the womb, the Lord that called me from the womb, from the bowels of my mother, he hath made mention of my name. He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword.

In the shadow of his hand he has hid me. He has made me a polished shaft. In his quiver he has hidden me.

Now listen to the next few verses. And said unto me, this is Christ saying, God has said to me. And he said unto me, this is Jesus speaking, thou art my servant, O Israel.

Now that is not Isaiah. Isaiah was called in a mature, later age. In fact, when you go to verse 5, it proves that it's Jesus Christ.

He's the one who was gathered from the very womb to be his servant. Who was formed in the very womb of God to be his servant. This is all about Jesus.

Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. Now this is Jesus answering back to the Father. Jesus said, see in verse 3, you said, God, you're my servant, O son, in whom I'm glorified.

I'll be glorified. That I said, I'm speaking back to the Father, Jesus said, I have what, labored in vain. I've spent my strength for nothing and in vain.

Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord and my walk with my God. When I first read that passage, now I've read that many times. Last week, when I read that, I literally stood at my desk and I began to praise the Lord and said, incredible.

I said, I can't believe what I'm seeing. I read it again. Then I said, Jesus speaking, I have labored in vain.

I've spent my strength for nothing and in vain. I said, oh God, Hebrews was right. The writer of Hebrews is right.

Surely he's touched with the feelings of our infirmities and he's tempted in every point as we are, yet without sin. And I said, oh God, thank you for allowing your son to taste at this point this sense of failure. How he relates to me then when I go through that.

And it's no sin to go through that because Jesus experienced it and yet without sin. That discouragement, that despondency, that woundedness that sometimes we feel because things are, you look at it and say, this is not what I was promised. This is not what I saw.

This is failure. I have wasted my strength. This has been in vain.

You are my servant in whom I will be glorified. Then I said, I've labored in vain. What was the mission of Jesus Christ? What was his mission? He was sent to bring, he came to this world, the Bible says, to bring back Israel to God.

To restore the preserved of Israel and to bring back the tribes. He was come to save Israel. He came as a Jew among Jews.

He was a Jew. He was called to redeem Israel. He was called to bring.

The high priests were to humble. The prisoners were to be set free. The nation was to be delivered from the power of sin.

And Christ exalted. And that was his ministry. That was his mission.

And the Lord said, he has made me a polished arrow, in other words. And he's put me in his quiver. God had him prepared from the foundation of the world.

Prepared him, polished him and put him in his quiver. And just waited for the hour that he would come forth. And he said, he has made my mouth as a sword.

The word of God is a two-edged sword. He came into the world to do a work. He was clearly, the message, his mandate was clarified.

You're going to go to redeem Israel. You're going to preach a word. I'm giving you a piercing, sharp word that will cut through the hardest of hearts.

And he comes. He comes prepared. He comes with joy, with glory in his being to redeem Israel.

And what happens? He came to his own and his own received him not. They rejected him as a person. Those sharp piercing words, they ignored and hardened their hearts.

So they could not be pierced. He came to a whole generation that saw his miracles. They had blinded eyes open.

The deaf were able to hear and the blind could see. And the dead were raised. And then they ignored his miracles or they belittled his miracles or thought nothing of it.

And then we wind up, the story ends with Israel crying out, crucify him. And at the end of his ministry you find Jesus standing over Jerusalem, weeping. And I believe that's when the enemy comes to Jesus.

And that's the moment that God allows him to experience this human passion, this human despair. It was short-lived but it was powerful so that he could be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. So that when you and I today, in our generation, in our time, and when we feel like a failure, when everything seems to be happening in our life contrary to what we believe we were promised.

And having done everything right, having prayed and fasted and done everything, then yet the answer doesn't come. And here's Jesus standing before Jerusalem and he said, oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem. How I would have gathered you as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

But you would not. So your house is left to you desolate. Can you imagine the pain with which Jesus had to say those words? Your house is left to you desolate.

And the devil said, this is the house you were called to save. This is the work that you were called to. And I believe that's the moment Jesus uttered these words.

Now that's not in the Bible but I speculate with that. And I feel it in my soul that that was the time the enemy came. And that's when Jesus, after standing there before Jerusalem and weeping, they rejected him.

He knew he was going to be crucified for the people who he came to give his life. And that's the moment he cries, I've labored in vain. All my strength, everything I've given, everything I've done.

He did everything according to the mind of God. He uttered not a word. He committed no act.

He did no healings. He did nothing except what he hear and saw from his father. I've done everything right.

There's what else could I do? This is in his humanity. Does anybody here understand what I'm talking about? I have labored in vain. Now why did Christ speak these words? And why have all the spiritual giants and warriors of all time uttered these words at times? Now I assure you that before God took these men in that last hour and last breath, there was a hosanna ringing.

Hosanna is a victory ring in their soul. But they passed through this experience. Now why did Jesus? Why have these words? Why would a man of God? Why would a woman of God? Why would anybody who knows Jesus? How could this very Son of God speak these words? Because it is the measuring of little results in comparison to expectations.

Little results in comparison to the great and high expectations. Jesus had these expectations, these high expectations, and he looks and it seems so little compared to what he expected. I want this to be applied to everyone who hears me today.

Some will say, well this sounds like it applies only to ministers and those who are doing a great work for God. All these missionaries you've named, all of these Bible prophets. The truth is we're all called to one grand purpose.

Every one of us are called to be like Christ. Every one of us have a ministry and that's unto Jesus. To become the express image of Jesus Christ, Savior, Lord, and God.

That is our calling. And you cannot call yourself a Christian if that is not your main goal in life. The longer I live, the more I become like Christ.

The less the flesh is in control. You have to have this cry in you, I want to be like Jesus. I don't want to live in the flesh.

I don't want to be jealous. I don't want to have temper eruptions. I want to be everything that Paul said I should be if I'm going to walk in faith and charity.

I want all of these things. And I desire it. And we have these high expectations.

We have the promises of God. That's the two-edged sword. We have these expectations of all the promises of God being fulfilled in our lives.

So we set out to be like Jesus. We set out, I'm going to be like Jesus. I'm going to be more Christ-like.

And as you set your mind to this, changes begin to happen in your life. Things change and you become nicer, more gentle. I preach from this pulpit a message a number of months ago entitled, Called to be Christ-like.

And I had set my mind on becoming, and I had said in the course of the message, to be like Jesus, you have to start with those that are closest with you. Closest to you. Especially if you're married.

Your husband, your wife, your children. And then those on the job and those around you. They have to see Christ in you and the change in you.

So I set my heart, no matter what it costs, that I would be more like Jesus. And I'm going to be the most Jesus-like husband a man could ever be. Oh, did I try.

And after the first week, struggling with every eruption. No, Jesus wouldn't do that, so I won't do it. I am going to be like Jesus.

And if I got through the day and I didn't say an unkind word, and I was so nice to Gwen and really gentle and sweet. And I know you all think that I'm a very sweet, gentle man. But flesh is flesh is flesh.

And you, every deacon, elder, flesh is flesh. And it erupts. And there was an eruption or two because I kept that after a week.

You know, I congratulated myself was another day. This was a Christ-like day. Thank you, Lord.

I'm a success. After the first week, I said, Gwen, do you see more of Jesus in me? She said, yes, I do. And I was so encouraged.

This is it. Finally, after all these years. Oh, thank you, Jesus.

I'm becoming more and more like you. And then came the worst week. I gave into the flesh.

Now, just don't read something into that. I wasn't screaming at my wife or anything else, because I usually just clam up and go in my office and read. It's just that kind of rejection of quietness.

And after a week of that, I said, Gwen, how would you judge me now? She said, more like Paul. You see, flesh can't cast out flesh. You can struggle all you want to be like Jesus.

The Bible said, but if you through the Spirit of God do mortify the deeds of the flesh, then you shall live. It's through the Holy Spirit, it's yielding to him. Jesus said, I'll live, yet not I. I'm not struggling through this, Lord Jesus.

I'm not holding you, you're holding me. And there are going to be times that I fail. There will be times that I have not lived up to my expectations, these high expectations.

And it's very dangerous when the enemy comes in and lies to you and says, you're a failure, you can't make it. And you ask any young person that's backslidden, you ask any Christian that has grown cold, told the Lord what happened. Why have you turned? Well, that same lie, that same condition that I'm talking about.

Well, I tried, I prayed, I fasted, I went to church, I did everything right. And I really, I put my, every effort I could into it. And the enemy comes and lies to that person and says, no, you didn't make it, you failed.

Because there's an eruption of the flesh, some old thoughts, old ways try to come, screaming back at the soul. And then there's this sense that, well, I failed. And the enemy says, you have failed, you have not made it.

And the same goes for parents who have children that are not saved or who have turned their back on the Lord. And they have fasted, they've prayed, they have the promise of the two-edged sword that God was going to keep. Promises from the Bible.

And then after years, months or years roll by and there's still no change, then the enemy comes and blames the parent. You're a failure. Your prayers don't prevail.

You have labored in vain. It's all been in vain. And that's what I hear from young people.

They say, well, I tried, it didn't work. God didn't answer my prayer, I had no miracle. And so I have labored in vain.

You see, it is in our battle with the flesh that causes us to fall into despondency. It's the battle with the flesh. It's the enemy saying, after all that you've been taught and the calling and the anointing upon you, how can you think the thoughts that still fudge your mind at times? How can you even think? And it's in the mind, it's in the battle of the mind, in the faith.

And when we fail in what we believe is our mission and the mandate from God, when we don't seem to be able to live up to the expectations that we've set and that we have read of in this word, high expectations that can be met only by believing and trusting the Holy Spirit. And when we judge ourselves, and this is what was happening here, Jesus was judging himself. And we judge ourselves, something we have no right to do.

Something we have no call to do. We have no scriptural reason for it. In all sincerity, there are some people here right now going through this, because for a long time, the promise, the things that God laid on your heart, and here you are in this meeting today, hearing me speak, and you look around and examine your heart and you examine your life and examine what you are doing, whether it's on the job or whether it's ministry here in the church or whatever it may be, and all you see is failure.

And the devil comes in and says, you've just wasted all that prayer, all of that church attendance, all of that that you have done and all the faith that you've expanded, it's been all in vain. It's for nothing. One of the worst lies the devil has ever implanted in the human mind.

Some of you are crushed, and you even say, did I do something wrong or did I hear wrong from God? You can be sure that's what the devil is putting in the mind of Christ, putting questions, making him question whether he heard right, whether he got the message right, whether it was clarified truly to him or was it the flesh or was it something of another voice. I've got to impress upon everyone who's hearing me now two things. I'm not going to preach much longer, but there's some things that I've got to impress upon your heart.

One is you know from Isaiah 49 verse 4 now, you know that it's not a sin to go through this experience. It's not a sin when these lies come to you. It's not a sin when you take a fall into despair, this despondency that causes you to think failure.

It's not a sin for the beginning of this. It's not a sin when this hits you, when it falls upon you, when it wounds you, when it brings you down to plain words depression. That's not the sin because Jesus experienced this yet without sin.

Establish that in your mind. But secondly, it's very dangerous to allow this lie to fester and inflame your soul. It has to be dealt with by the power of the Holy Spirit immediately.

If you're here now and you've had this for a day, a week, a month, in love I plead with you to hear what Jesus said and His way to deal with this. You have to deal with it only as Christ dealt with it. He was touched with the feeling of your infirmity and mine and here is the way out.

In the same verse, verse 4, then I said, I've labored in vain, I've spent my strength for naught and in vain, yet surely my judgment or where there is verdict, my verdict is with the Lord and my work with my God. The Holy Spirit awakens His spirit and mind and says, No, I will not receive this lie. My verdict about my effectiveness, the verdict of my life, of my ministry is in His hands.

He's the one. I don't know how effective I've been. I really don't know.

He's speaking as a man now. But my Father, I put the verdict in His hands. I am not going to judge myself anymore.

Folks, the Bible says, judge yourself and you will not be judged. But He's talking about something entirely different than this. Listen closely now.

You do not judge how effective you are because you don't know how many lies you've touched, even with the word. A hug. Something that you, just the way that you conducted your life, the way you prayed, the way you trusted God through hard times and people were watching you.

You have no way of knowing till you stand before Him on that day and you hear testimony after testimony after testimony of those that you didn't know anything about. He says, my judgment, my verdict is with my Father. I have labored in vain yet.

Surely, my verdict is with the Lord and my work with my God. Stop passing verdicts on your life and on your ministry or on your effectiveness on the job or in your home. Don't pass verdict.

Just stay in the prayer closet. Stay with Jesus in that beautiful communion. And the Lord was still, He said, I will not let anything shake me from this walk with my Father.

This mutual respect with my Father. I shall not be moved. And then Jesus, in chapter 49, verse 5 and 6. Now, I'm paraphrasing this, but you can check it out when you go home.

It's all there in verse 5 and 6. In essence, this is what He said. God speaking to Him in verse 5. Alright, so Israel is not yet gathered. Alright, I told you to gather.

And that has not happened in the way you expected it. Because later, you know the Bible says one day all Israel shall be gathered. The promise will be fulfilled.

And the Lord says, so Israel is not yet gathered. And yes, I called you to bring in the tribes. But that was a light, a little thing compared to what is coming for you.

That call was nothing in comparison to what I have in store. I'm going to make you now a light to the whole world. You'll become a light to the Gentiles, not just the Jew.

I've got something in store for you. And while the devil is lying to him and saying it's all in vain. You've labored for nothing.

God is in heaven, God is in His glory. Preparing this great blessing. And the whole world, He said, to the ends of the world.

While you sit here, beloved, this afternoon, this morning. You have this feeling, this sense that, you know. I'm going to die one day and never having received my promise.

Never seeing my expectations fulfilled. And the Lord is saying, all right, stop. Stop your moping.

Lift up that feeble leg. It's been crippled. Rise up from the dust, oh Israel, rise up.

He said, I've got better things in store. I've got things beyond anything you could think or expect or believe. I have things in store for you that if you knew, you would leap with joy.

I will give you as a light to the Gentiles that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the world. Let me give you this word and I want you to hear it, saints. And rise up in faith with this 1 Corinthians 15, 58.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be you steadfast, unmovable. Always abounding in the work of the Lord. For as much as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

He said, you know that. Deep inside, you know that. He said, all right, now start abounding in the work.

Get back to work. Get back to doing what I told you to do. And just trust the Lord.

Stay in prayer. Believe God. And get all of this junk off your back.

Get all this stuff off of you. Because it's out of the pit of hell. God didn't tell you that you're a failure.

The devil himself told you that. Glory be to God. I'm not going to listen to those lies.

As for me, I'm just going to rest in the Holy Ghost. I'm going to believe him to convict me when I do wrong. I'm going to believe he's going to give me the power to do what is right.

And he's going to give me the knowledge and the ability to understand his word. But he wants me to walk in peace. Not in turmoil.

He wants to bring peace to your soul. Would you forget now trying to get victory over one issue? And just believe God that he has everything under control. All the issues.

Will you stand, please? Hallelujah. Isn't God good? I'm going to call all failures to the altar. I'm not being facetious.

If this word has touched you. If you say, Pastor Dave, this is my message. This is where I have been.

This has been my struggle. Bring it to the Lord. If you're here this morning and you have grown cold.

Or you have faked it in your faith. If you have this despair, this despondency just hanging on you. Come for deliverance and believe God for a miracle this morning.

And in the annex. Would you go forward? Just walk between the screens so you didn't block the view. And let me pray for you right there.

And by just stepping out, that's an act of faith. Say, Lord, I'm stepping out of this condition now. By faith I'm going to step right out of it.

And I'm coming to the balcony. Come down the stairs on either side. And just come as the Holy Spirit leads you.

If you don't know Christ. Please join these that are coming. I bring all of these that have come humbly before you.

In the annex, in here, in the auditorium. And we bring them to you, Jesus. We come boldly to the throne of grace.

We come boldly asking in your name now for encouragement. Lord, lift this spirit that is from the enemy. Jesus, I am so blessed that you know what we're talking about this morning.

And you look at every heart that's here. Every struggle. Every battle that everyone is fighting.

And today, Lord, everyone has problems. Everyone has battles. Everyone is overwhelmed at times.

Become Holy Spirit right now. Remind us of the faithfulness of Jesus. And the promise of the word that will never fail.

You said I will never fail you. And Lord, look down now at humble hearts. Confessing hearts.

Seeking hearts. Lord, let everyone that has a sincere heart. A believing heart.

Walk out of here this morning relieved and set free. And saying I'm going back to the battle. I'm going back in faith.

Because I believe God has something good in store for me. God, I believe you have nothing but good on your mind for your children. Nothing but the best.

So will you receive now, Lord, our prayer. Will you pray this with me right now. Lord Jesus, thank you for understanding what I'm going through.

And I come to you because I know you have felt what I feel. And you were brought through by an act of faith. And I come now with that same act of faith.

And say God, only you can judge me. And only you can keep me. So I surrender my doubts, my fears in Christ.

I am not a failure. I have not failed. But in Christ, all things are possible.

Now give him thanks right now, Lord. I give you thanks. I give you thanks.

I give you praise. Hallelujah. It doesn't take long for the Holy Ghost to do something in your heart.

We sing a song. Shake off those heavy bands. Lift up holy hands.

Well, that's something he's calling us to do now. Take a step of faith and shake it off. And don't walk out of here carrying that load.

Casting, what does the Bible say? Casting all your care, all your care upon him. For he cares for you. Because how does he care for you? He's been through.

There's nothing you and I have experienced that he hasn't experienced. And that gives me great comfort. Great comfort.

Thank you, Jesus, for your presence. Now we go out of this house with a shout in our hearts. And a praise in our lips.

Lowered be to God. This is the conclusion of the message.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/13/SID13882.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/david-wilkerson/i-have-labored-in-vain/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net