

The Discipline of Disqualification

by Denis Lyle

Denis Lyle's sermon explores the struggles of discouragement in ministry through the life of Jeremiah, emphasizing the need for repentance and God's promises of restoration.

Scripture: Isaiah 55:7

Topics: "Ministerial Burnout", "Persevering Faith"

Description

Denis Lyle preaches about the challenges preachers face when dealing with exhaustion, depression, and discouragement in ministry, using the example of F.W. Robertson and Jeremiah. He emphasizes the importance of not giving up or running away when faced with tough situations, as God calls His servants to persevere and seek restoration. Lyle highlights how even chosen servants of God like Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Jonah faced discouragement and doubts but were restored through repentance and God's grace.

Transcript

F.W. Robertson died at the age of thirty seven. In 1851, twelve years before his death, he was visiting Geneva, hoping to restore both his faith and his broken health. He visited the celebrated Swiss leader Henri Caesar Malan, who, looked at Robertson shook his head and declared, "You will have a sad life and a sad ministry." That word was fulfilled as far as F.W. Robertson was concerned. You see depression and discouragement are enemies of the soul. What then is a preacher to do when he faces exhaustion in this rat race What is the best way to face this insane age and make our way through this madhouse without going crazy in it What is a servant of God to do when, as Woodrow Wilson former President of the USA once put it, he has worn out his constitution and is living on his by-laws As Vance Havner put it, "how is he to carry on when he is a back number if he does not have to his credit or discredit one ulcer, one heart attack or one nervous breakdown" Well, perhaps Jeremiah helps us to answer these questions.

For in this prophecy Jeremiah announces the impossible: he resigns and then declares immediately that he cannot resign: he quits but he cannot quit. (20:9) Any true preacher can understand Jeremiah's crisis. Almost every servant of God has had a spell when he was ready to resign, and knew all the time that he couldn't. Its human to want to run away from a tough situation. My, have there been times when you felt like quitting and running away Yet resigning from your church, giving up your Sunday School class, leaving that committee will never solve the problems or meet the needs in your heart.

You'll probably meet the same situation and the same people (with different names) in the next church you'll join. Why? Because God won't let His servants run away. (Rom 8:29) Is it unusual for chosen servants of God to become discouraged and endanger their own ministries? No, because every servant of God is human and subject to the weakness of human nature. Moses became discouraged and wanted to die. (Num 11:101-5) Joshua was ready to quit and leave the Promised Land (Josh 7:6-11) Elijah even abandoned the place of duty and wanted to die (1 Kings 19) and Jonah became so angry he refused to help the very people he came to save. (Jonah 4) What about Jeremiah? He also was human and had his feelings, but at least he honestly admitted them to God.

Instead of piously covering up his true feelings, he poured out his heart to the Lord, and the Lord answered him. God's answer may have shocked the prophet, for the Lord told him he needed to repent. (Jer 15:19) You see because of his attitude toward God and his calling Jeremiah was about to forfeit his ministry! He was about to experience the Discipline of Disqualification. Let's look at his case this... and note: (1) THE PRESSURE THAT CRUSHED HIM Here is a servant of God under severe strain.

Indeed he has broken down under the burden of his responsibility. What caused this breakdown? The passage gives us some clues. For one thing there was: (a) UNCEASING OPPOSITION: Look at his prayer in (Jer 15:15) My, this persecution was fanned into flame by his own townspeople. The people of Anathoth, Jeremiah's hometown attempted to assassinate him. (Jer 11:18-12:6) Everyone's hand was against the prophet. The princes, prophets, priests and people of his land were against him. (Jer 26:8) Jeremiah was hated and despised.

Sensitive to his people's response, Jeremiah felt keenly the attitude of his people. The fact of his rejection weighed heavily on his heart. Gradually he succumbed under the pressure of his people's opposition and vented his dismay to God. He realized that he was being persecuted because of his message and ministry. "Know", he reminds the Lord, "that for Thy sake I have suffered rebuke". (Jer 15:15) Unceasing opposition! Could this be the cause of your spiritual breakdown? Are you experiencing the pressure of unceasing opposition in the home: office: firm: university? Is it not right here that some of us are failing today? We expect success, we meet with rejection.

We continue to witness, hearts become harder, and soon the servant is accusing his Master of having broken His promise. (Jer 15:18) (a) My, what do we expect when we bring an unpopular message? A message of judgement, but we must deliver it no matter how unimportant it is to the ears of the people. (a) (b) UNRELIEVED ISOLATION: For as he recounts his past experience Jeremiah says, "Thy words were found... O Lord of Hosts". (Jer 15:16) This is an obvious allusion to his call related in (ch 1) He then mentions the cost of answering that call: "I sat not... with indignation". (Jer 15:17) The Book of Jeremiah reveals that, while there were several individuals who befriended the prophet in a time of dire need, very few stood with him in his testimony against the sin of the people.

As a prophet he was called to walk a narrow path in solitude. Called to experience the pressure of Unrelieved Isolation. (Ps 1:1) My, are you called to walk alone? Are you experiencing this pressure? The pressure of Unrelieved Isolation! My, Christian... beware in case you break down under the pressure that arises because of your separation from the world. Oh, it's so easy to imagine that like Elijah you're the only one standing for the truth: it's so easy to award yourself medals for your noble stand.

My, what you need is to be inwardly fortified, by communion with God and by fellowship with other believers. (a) (b) (c) UNDISCIPLINED THINKING: For Jeremiah permitted himself to indulge in thoughts

which led to the volcanic eruption of (15:18) "Why is my pain... that fail" What is Jeremiah saying He's laying the blame for his circumstances at God's door. He is openly accusing God of having failed him in the hour of his need. He charges God with being a liar and compares Him to a mirage of the desert.

Isn't it remarkable that the man who had just breathed the words of (15:18) had just made the statement of (15:16) One moment most orthodox a few seconds later accusing God of deception and failure to help. My, is this not so true to our own experience One moment we are expressing our confidence in God: the next our unbelieving hearts are laying charges against him. Oh, to have our thoughts disciplined that we may not speak evil with our tongues. My, do you feel that Providence has dealt you a hard blow Have you hard thoughts of God this...

Listen: " In spite of what thine eyes behold: In spite of what thy fears have told Still to His gracious promise hold Believe good things of God." (2) THE POSSIBILITY THAT CHALLENGED HIM How does God deal with a student in His school who wants to quit How does God deal with a saint in His family who accuses God of breaking His Word Well, this spiritual breakdown automatically disqualified Jeremiah from continuing as the Lord's messenger! While in a state of criticism and faithlessness, he could not represent God.

What then was the possibility that challenged him Well, look at (15:19) "Thereforth... thus saith the Lord, if... mouth". The possibility put forward by the Lord to Jeremiah is: (a) CONCERNED WITH HIS RESTORATION: This is repeated in various phrases: "I will bring thee again, and thou shall stand before me... thou shalt be as my mouth". (15:19) When Jeremiah was initially called to the prophetic office, the Lord had said to him, " Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth". (Jer 1:9) Jeremiah was set apart as a prophet of the Lord.

But now, because of his criticisms of God's dealings, he had disqualified himself from being the Lord's messenger. But My, God is always ready to restore and recommission. (Is 55:7) My, have you had hard thoughts about God Have you been charging Him with forgetfulness and faithlessness toward you Have you been entertaining an unbelieving attitude toward Him You see if you heart has been filled with a spirit of unbelief and hardness, then you cannot speak for God. My, God will not recognise you as His messenger and will not validate your message.

But lest you despair, hear God's assurance: "If thou return then will I bring thee again". (15:19) (a) (b) IS CONDITIONED BY HIS REPENTANCE: " If thou return... and if thou take forth the precious from the vile". (15:19) W.G. Blaikie has paraphrased this verse like this: "If thou returnest to Me and givest up these doubts and reproaches, I will take thee back as my servant, to stand before me, and if thou bringest forth in thy heart, good instead of unworthy thoughts of Me, thou shalt be My mouth".

The figure involved is that of a smelter. Jeremiah is urged to purify his thoughts, to separate the precious gold of the Divine Word from the worthless slag of sinful human ideas. My, is that what you need to do Do you need to pass judgment on yourself Do you need to stop your undisciplined thinking God is always willing to meet those who have suffered defeat: pressure: breakdown but there must be repentance for the Lord cannot use messengers who are out of harmony with His purposes. (3) THE PERIL THAT CONFRONTED HIM For we read in (15:19) "Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them".

How are we to interpret this Divine Command to Jeremiah Commentators have differed widely in their interpretation of these words. Ill: Dr. Smith suggests an alternative translation, "They (the people) shall return unto thee, but thou shall not return unto them". What's the Lord saying to Jeremiah Just this.

"Jeremiah you're going to be confronted again by the people of Jerusalem and Judah. They want flattering messages, they want prophecies that will promise peace and judgment.

But you are by no means to lapse again in heart and mind so that you revert back to the place of failure and defeat. Take your stand for Me and with Me". Do you see what God was teaching Jeremiah That through his failure under pressure he had become like the people of Judah. They were marked by unbelief so was he. They were marked by resistance to God's Word so was he. (20:9) And weakened now in his inner man he could so easily become the victim of the people's desire for messages of peace.

My, the peril that confronted him was the peril of compromise! It's so easy is it not to side with the people against the Lord It's so easy is it not to side with others in their sin Compromise is so easy in THE MORAL REALM: My, in this permissive society sin no longer shocks even Christians. Of course society gives all kinds of titles to sin. Instead of drunkenness we call it alcoholism. Instead of lust we call it an affair. Do you see what's happening We are constantly trying to minimise and nullify what the Bible says about sin.

Compromise is so easy in THE DOCTRINAL REALM: People today want us to sink our differences in a sea of heavenly love. They tell us, "its love and not truth that counts". Compromise is so easy in THE ECCLESIASTICAL REALM: For the Charismatic itch is still appealing to so many churches. But My, as we begin a new session we affirm our opposition to The Charismatic Movement: The Ecumenical Trend: The Romeward Drift. Ill: We say with Martin Luther: "Here I stand. I can do no other.

God help me." But come back to Jeremiah, for I want you to notice that God dealt with him both in the severity of law and in the sweetness of grace. For notice not only (1) (2) (3) (4) THE PROMISE THAT COMFORTED HIM For along with warning there came encouragement. Look at (5:20-21) Did you notice the three-fold promise (1) "I will make thee..." (2) "I am with thee..." (3) "I will deliver thee..." You see there was (a) THE PROMISE OF THE LORD'S POWER: "I will make thee". (15:20) A wall of brass to withstand the attacks and antagonisms of his people.

Now when Jeremiah was initially commissioned, the word of the Lord to Jeremiah was, "Behold I have made this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar and brasen walls against the whole land". (1:18) You see what had happened was this. Through his lack of faith in the Lord, Jeremiah had allowed himself to be broken down under the pressure of his people's opposition. But now the Lord offers him another opportunity of standing fast in the evil day. "I will make thee". My, how are we to stand against error and evil of every kind in this age Only through (a) Ill: A great preacher of a former day was discouraged, and thought about resigning when he received this impression from the Lord.

"What you need is not to resign your commission, but to have your commission re-signed." One thing is certain: a minister may have his study walls lined with diplomas: a sheaf of recommendations from the mighty of the land, but if the stamp of heaven on his commission is faint and fading, he had better take time out until he can return to his pulpit with a brand-new autograph from God. And when he is thus re-signed, he will be reassigned, like Elijah, like Jonah, like Peter. a. (b) THE PROMISE OF THE LORD'S PRESENCE: "I am with thee". (15:20) Jeremiah had permitted circumstances to obscure this great truth.

Later he was enable to say, "The Lord is with me as a Mighty Terrible One". (20:11) "Jeremiah don't be afraid of YOUR FOES... why 'I am with thee.' Jeremiah don't be afraid of THEIR FACES... why 'I am with thee.'" Was it not to a group of timid, fearful disciples that the Lord said, "Lo I am with you always... age." (Matt 28:20) My, in that adverse theological climate in the office: in the shop: in the university: in the hospital you are not alone, God is with you! (a) (b) (c) THE PROMISE OF THE LORD'S PROTECTION: "I

will deliver thee". (15:21) And was this particular promise fulfilled Indeed it was.

Jeremiah was persecuted: assaulted: imprisoned: treated despicably but he was brought through opposition, siege, famine and pestilence. My, God delivered him according to his promise. III: Was it not George Whitefield who said, " I am immortal until my life's work is done". The Discipline of Disqualification! For Jeremiah he was warned about being set aside as a prophet of the Lord. Tell me: like him have you questioned the goodness and wisdom of God Like Jeremiah have you criticised God's dealings in your life Is the Lord speaking to you this as He spoke to Jeremiah He calls you to REPENT: to RETURN: and to be REINSTATED in His service. Will you response to His appeal Will you return to the Lord "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord, say unto Him, Take all iniquity, and receive us graciously". (Hosea 14:2) My... God will.

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