

Discouragement, Continued

by Harmon A. Baldwin

Discouragement is a common experience for Christians, but it does not mean you have lost your faith or are failing in your spiritual journey.

Scripture: Psalm 126:5, Romans 8:18, 1 Corinthians 2:3, 2 Corinthians 4:16, 2 Corinthians 11:29, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Galatians 6:9, Philippians 4:13, Hebrews 12:1, James 1:2

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Perseverance"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin delves into the causes of discouragement within ourselves, emphasizing the weakness and personal struggles even holy men like Paul faced, highlighting the need to find strength in Christ despite our weaknesses. He also explores the dissatisfaction many feel in their spiritual journey, cautioning against comparing oneself to others and stressing the importance of continuous growth and advancement in faith. Furthermore, Baldwin addresses the causes of discouragement from external factors such as financial struggles, persecution, and the impact of associates, urging perseverance and trust in God's provision even in the face of challenges.

Transcript

3. Causes of discouragement within ourselves. No person has such a full view of his own astonishing weakness as does the holy man. "Oh," says some one, "a holy man is not weak." Indeed, and who is this that is wiser than what is written? Paul says, "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3) Again, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory in the things which concern mine infirmities" (2 Cor. 11:29, 30.) Again, "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9). And many other passages on the same line. Paul felt that by his personal weakness he was made strong in Christ, that he was compassed about with infirmities, and that he was set forth last, as it were, delivered unto death. Will we assist the three false friends of Job by adding accusation upon accusation because he cried unto God from the sackcloth and ashes of his own personal weakness and suffering?

I prayed that in a certain place God would give me one hundred souls. He answered my prayers. In another place I prayed just as earnestly and with just as much burden, but no fruit was forthcoming. My weakness! my weakness! Oh, that I had the ability of a Paul, the eloquence of an Apollos, the strength of a Peter the courage of a Daniel, the burden of a Jeremiah, the triumphant faith of an Isaiah, the power of a

Moses, the spiritual sweetness of a David, the thunderous power of a John or a James, Yet, above all, if I had the divine compassion of my Master Himself, then, hear and be ashamed, O earth! I could not, in some places, do many mighty works, because of their unbelief! I conclude that my own weakness reproaches me, perhaps, when it should not, but this does not always hinder me from accusing myself of being a failure. Is not this the common experience of the God-fearing, God-bearing, burden-bearing servants of God?

Oh, that I might plead with Moses, weep with Jeremiah, mourn with Isaiah, groan with Paul and go to Gethsemane with Jesus; oh, that I might see the travail of my soul, and look upon new-born souls; but are your hopes blasted and your prayers unanswered? Despair not, for, God has said it, "In due season ye shall reap if ye faint not." It may be that God writes success when men, and even yourself, write failure.

Jeremy Taylor likens us to the fabled lamps in the tomb of Terentia which burned underground for many ages, but as soon as they were brought out and saw a brighter light, went out in darkness. Then he adds, "So long as we are in the retirements of sorrow, of want, of fear, of sickness, we are burning and shining lamps; but when God lifts us up from the gates of death, and carries us abroad into the open air, to converse with prosperity and temptations, we go out in darkness, and we can not be preserved in light and heat, but by still dwelling in the regions of sorrow." There is beauty and some truth in all this, but the danger is that such a life would produce only a morbid and ghastly piety, and these bright lights would irradiate -- "only a tomb." But God knows how to temper the sunshine and the rain. "He who made us, and who tutors us, alone knows what is the exact measure of light and shade, sun and cloud, frost and heat, which will best tend to mature those flowers which are the object of His celestial husbandry; and which, when transplanted into the paradise of God, are to bloom there forever in amaranthine loveliness" (Rogers.)

Then, who is it that has reached a place in his religious experience where he is completely satisfied? He may be satisfied with the quality, and he is if his heart is cleansed, but the quantity is another question. Show us the man who has reached a place of complete satisfaction, and we will show you a man who has become stagnant in soul. The Psalmist declares that he will be satisfied when he awakes in the likeness of God. There is a possibility that present attainments when measured by the attainments of others, and the vast possibilities of grace, will seem so meager that there will be danger of the soul sinking in despair unless strenuous effort is immediately made for further advancement. Just a note here in passing: Do not attempt to gage your own experience by the reported experiences of men whose lives have been written, such as Bramwell, Carvosso, Fletcher, etc. Why? Simply because the biographer has often omitted the struggles and losses and inserted the victories and good things. They want to make a hero of their favorite. God only knows the struggles of soul through which these great men went before they gained the victories which are recorded. Are you, too, willing to struggle? Then you can be great -- in God's sight, if not in man's.

4. Causes of discouragement from without. This would include all such things as financial loss or want, persecution, vile accusations, the character of our associates, and hundreds of things which we cannot understand and which persist in crowding themselves into our everyday life.

Just one: financial want. Some may laugh at the man who groans under financial pressure; perhaps such persons have felt such pressures, perhaps they have not. Wesley says, "O want of bread! want of bread; who can tell what this means, unless he hath felt it himself? I am astonished it occasions no more heaviness even in them that believe!" May we add that it is comparatively easy to endure such things

one's self, but when your children are in want, and your companion is fading because of a lack of proper nourishment, then the heart will surely groan. That minister of the gospel, or layman either, is made of martyr stuff who can steadily pursue his way in the path of duty when others are plentifully supplied and his own are suffering from absolute necessities. Is he sinning when he looks at his strong right arm, and feels the pull towards secular labor which would supply all his needs? But some one says, "If a man does God's will God will always supply all his needs." Such talk as that is an easy way out for the man who will not give of his cash to help support the gospel. It puts all the responsibility on the servant and lets the one who should give, and does not, go scot-free. There are two sides to the question.

The writer in one place, after a trip around the circuit, drove his faithful horse into the barn for the night. There was not a fork of hay or a quart of grain to give him, and while Duke looked over toward the manger and pawed the floor, we looked into his big, kindly eyes and wept. "Old faithful fellow, you can have nothing tonight." But why should this poor beast go hungry? Let us not attempt to locate the blame, for that is not our question. The matter in hand is the depression which we naturally felt. If we did not yield to a complaining or fault-finding spirit, our tears were but the result of natural pity and did not show a corrupt heart.

5. Some of God's most successful ministers are most beset with discouragement because they feel their labors are producing so little results. It is said that at one time Bishop Asbury had fully made up his mind that his work was a failure and that he would quit. In this frame of mind he slipped into a meeting, taking a seat unobserved near the door. During the testimony meeting a sister arose and stated that she owed her salvation to Bishop Asbury, giving time and particulars. When she was seated, the bishop arose, told of his temptation and decision, but declared that if he had been instrumental in the salvation of one soul he would continue to preach the gospel. Just such facts are the only things that keep some of the rest of us going. Are our hearts unclean because we are thus depressed? Not necessarily.

Some of the best of God's people have almost been driven to despair in their very dying moments. A notable example of this is found in the annals of early Methodism. Thomas Walsh, a Methodist minister, was so holy and devoted that even Wesley stood in awe of him, but his biographer says that in his dying hour this great soul lay thus, as it were, in ruins for some considerable time, and poured out many a heavy groan and speechless tear from an oppressed heart and dying body. He sadly bewailed the absence of Him whose wanted presence had so often given him the victory over the manifold contradictions and troubles which he endured for His name's sake." The characters of neither good nor bad men can be surely inferred from their dying words, -- it is the life that tells.

The discouragement which blasts the soul: When I yield, in the midst of the pressures, to a distrustful spirit, when I become despondent concerning God's power, or willingness to help me; when I cease to rejoice in God in the midst of my sorrows, or to trust God in my pains; when I am persecuted and forsaken, cast down and destroyed; then, and only then, is my spiritual strength stolen away, and I am become as other men.

But any approach towards this point is, in that degree, detrimental to grace and a hindrance to success. No man can be his whole bigness for God when he is looking sadly at his weaknesses, or despondently viewing his temptations. The Word of God says, "In due season ye shall reap, if we faint not."

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