

I Don't Lose Heart

by J. Oswald Sanders

We do not lose heart because of the ministry of the new covenant and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Duration: 44:09

Scripture: Matthew 11:28, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 3:18 - 4:1, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, 2 Corinthians 5:4-5, Galatians 6:9, Ephesians 1:3, Philippians 4:13, Hebrews 10:23

Topics: "Discouragement", "Perseverance in Faith", "Encouragement"

Description

J. Oswald Sanders emphasizes Paul's message of encouragement in the face of discouragement, drawing from 2 Corinthians 4. He reflects on his own experience of feeling pressured while serving in a challenging mission field, and how Paul's assurance of not losing heart stems from the mercy of God, the strength provided through the Holy Spirit, and the promise of eternal glory. Sanders highlights that despite outward struggles, believers can find renewal and courage by focusing on the unseen and trusting in God's timing for harvest. Ultimately, he encourages the congregation to embrace their ministry and remain steadfast in faith, knowing that God is at work even when results are not immediately visible.

Transcript

Tonight I want to speak about Paul's panacea for discouragement. And I'd like you to turn to Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 4. This passage has a special significance to me because on one occasion when I was general director of the China Inland Mission, it was then, or the OMF, our missionaries had been working in South Thailand in a Muslim field that was tremendously resistant. And they'd worked for a long while without seeing any results.

And those of you who have worked among Muslims know how difficult it is when they're totally unresponsive. And I was to go and be the speaker at their annual field conference. And things had been so pressured that I had had no time whatever to do any special preparation.

And I felt I must have something from the Lord for these people to encourage them. And yet there had been no opportunity whatsoever. I went to bed pretty late at night and I had to leave about four in the morning to get the bus and so on.

And I woke up about two o'clock with a burden on my heart. Lord, what am I to say to these people? I'm not saying this is a very good way to go about it. But I was half awake and I put my hand out and there was a new translation that had come out.

It was C.K. Williams, not the American but the British Williams. And I'd had this translation not for very long. And I picked it up and wiped my eyes and opened it.

And it fell open at 2 Corinthians chapter 4. Now my wife had a habit if I got a new translation she generally got down on it first. And she'd go through it and she used to mark it. And her markings were always very suggestive.

And when I opened this thing I saw, we do not lose heart. We do not lose heart. We are of good courage always.

We are of good courage. I thought, hello, what's this? And I was awake then. And I began to read the surroundings.

Why could he say we do not lose heart? We are of good courage always. And the Lord very graciously in a very short time, I don't usually get messages in a short time, I've got to work for them. But in a very short time the Lord illuminated these scriptures to me and it was to them a great encouragement.

And so when I read these passages that circumstance comes very vividly to mind. But would you look in verse, chapter 4 and verse 1. It says, therefore since through God's mercy we have this ministry we do not lose heart. Then verse 18, therefore we do not lose heart though outwardly we are wasting away yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Chapter 5 verse 4. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the spirit as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always of good courage and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.

We live by faith not by sight. We are of good courage I say and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. Well there were the four statements that came before my mind.

Now for Paul to be able to say we do not lose heart, there must have been some very strong motivation mustn't there? Because he didn't have things all easy. And when you think of Paul saying that I think you might feel as I do, well of course that was Paul. If I had had his great mental ability, if I'd had his superb preparation, if I'd had his apostolic authority then perhaps I mightn't lose heart either but I'm no Paul.

No we're not. But did everything fall into Paul's lap? Now I very quickly thumb back through that this letter and I'd like it very quickly to look at some verses and see how it was with Paul. Look at chapter one and verse eight, the second part.

We were under great pressure far beyond our ability to endure so that we despaired even of life. We ever got that far? Under such great pressure that he despaired of life. Chapter two and verse four, I wrote to you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears.

Great distress, anguish of heart, many tears. Chapter four verse eight, we are hard pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted, struck down. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

Chapter six and verse four, rather as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way, in great endurance, in troubles, hardships, distresses, in beatings, imprisonments, and riots, in hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger, in purity, in truthful speech, and so on. Chapter seven verse five, when we

came into Macedonia this body of ours had no rest but we were harassed at every turn. Conflicts on the outside, fears within, but God who comforts the downcast comforted us by the coming of Titus.

Chapter 11 verse 23, are they servants of Christ? I am more. I've worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked.

I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I've been constantly on the move. I've been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, from my own countrymen, from Gentiles, in the city, in the country, at sea, in danger from false brothers.

I've labored and toiled. I've often gone without sleep. I've known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food.

I've been cold and naked. Besides everything else I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Well, therefore we do not lose heart.

They don't seem to go together, do they? And yet this was Paul's testimony. And he's got something to say to us about it. And we'll look at the secrets of his victory.

The first is that he was entrusted with a ministry. Chapter 4 and verse 1. Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Paul was acutely conscious of the fact that he had forfeited any right whatever to serve the church of God.

He had persecuted them to the death. He'd hurled men and women into prison. He'd been absolutely ruthless, forever disqualified for the ministry.

And yet he said, in spite of that, I've received God's mercy and I've been entrusted with a ministry. And because I have been entrusted with this ministry, I don't lose heart. There were two things that impressed him tremendously.

The first was the magnificence of God's mercy. I have received mercy. And you know, it's only through the mercy of God that we have our ministry.

None of us deserve it. And this speaker probably less than any. And yet through mercy we have this ministry.

The second thing that impressed him was the wonder of the message that had been entrusted to him. What message was it? If you read back in the context in chapter 3, he's speaking about the ministry of the new covenant. The ministry that was even more glorious than that of the old covenant.

And he said, now we have received the ministry of the new covenant. And because of that, we can be of good heart and of good courage always. I don't know if you've ever made a deep study of the old covenant and the new covenant.

The new covenant, as in Jeremiah chapter 31, Ezekiel 36, Hebrews 8, Hebrews 10. If you've never done it, it's a tremendously rewarding study. And I believe that this message, when it came to the Jews, must have been a staggering thing to them.

Here they were. They had been brought up, burdened by the old covenant. Thou shalt, thou shalt not.

This tremendous demand which they found themselves totally unable to comply with. And then they had all the pharisaic accretions until there were, what is it, 613 rules they had to keep. And the burden was so great that they were absolutely pressed down under it.

And then suddenly, there comes this new covenant, the promise of the new covenant. And it was an amazing thing to them. You see, the new covenant was not a message for a spiritual elite.

It was tailored to people who had failed ignominiously. They failed every time God gave them a chance. And so, because of their failure, the Lord gave them a new covenant that would make up for the defects of the old one.

It was tailored to meet the need of a discouraged and a failing people. And there's something else. Christ himself is the surety of the new covenant.

He's the one who stands surety and guarantees the performance of the conditions of the new covenant. It was based on the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. And it must have come as a wonderful revelation to these people that instead of being shackled with the burden of the old covenant, never able to attain, instead of thou shalt, thou shalt, there came the reassuring, I will, I will, I will do this.

I'll put my law in your heart. I'll put my spirit within you, and so on. And here is this wonderful, reassuring message.

And Paul says, why? Since I've got a message like this, the wonder of it. What point is there in losing heart? I've got no reason to lose heart. He himself was a beneficiary of the new covenant, and he also was able to go and pass that message on to other people.

You know, we don't speak much about the new covenant, do we, really? And very many Christians live still under the old covenant. They're still under rules and regulations, and they're trying to fulfill the law themselves. Whereas the terms of the new covenant, the basic thing is their sins and their iniquities, I will remember no more forever.

Not mere forgiveness, but obliteration. They're out of my memory altogether. And what a wonderful thing that must have been to the Jews.

You see, every time they offered a sacrifice, there was remembrance of sin made every year. There was a constant reminder of their failure. And now the Lord says, I'll wipe the whole slate clean.

Their sins and their iniquities, I will remember no more forever. And Paul was gripped with the wonder of this message. And he said, why? That's why I don't lose heart.

I've got no reason to lose heart. And when you think of the blessings that came under the new covenant, there was the blessing of spiritual apprehension. I will write my laws on their minds.

God knows where to begin. I'll write my laws on their minds. The spiritual aspiration, I will write it on their hearts.

And he's going to touch the springs of desire. I'll write it on their hearts. I'll give you a new heart.

Instead of the heart of stone that is unresponsive, I will give you a new heart so that you will be responsive. You'll aspire after righteousness, your hunger and thirst. And then the spiritual affinity.

I will be their God. They shall be my people. I will put my spirit within you.

Here's the wonder of the indwelling God. And God said, I'll be your God. You'll be my people.

There'll be this reciprocity, this mutuality between us, spiritual affinity. And then the spiritual attainment. They will all know me from the least to the greatest.

Here is a tremendous promise. It's possible for the least believer to know God in all his greatness and in all his glory. And then there is spiritual absolution.

Their sins and their iniquities, I'll remember no more forever. Well, here is the wonderful message. Because Paul had been entrusted with a ministry, he did not lose heart.

Well, what's the next one? The next one you'll find in chapter 4, verse 18. Read verse 17. Yes, chapter 4, verse 17.

Therefore, 16, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. He was endowed with new strength.

Like Paul, every one of us is conscious of the wear and tear of our service, aren't we? There is wear and tear in it. If we're really doing our job, we are spending ourselves. Every time our Lord performed an act of service, he gave a little piece of himself away.

When that woman even who stole up through the crowd and just touched the fringe of his garment, when she did that, Matthew says that he perceived that virtue, that nervous force, that physical force, that spiritual force had gone out of him. He lost something. And if we are doing our job, there will be wear and tear.

And we've got to be willing for that. We've got to be prepared to get tired for Christ. We get tired for anything else.

We don't mind getting tired at sport. We'll get tired at different kinds of things. Why shouldn't we get tired for Christ? We shouldn't complain about it.

Well, Jesus said you can save your life. You don't have to give yourself away. But if you save your life, you'll lose it.

But if you lose your life for my sake, why, then you'll save it. And Paul said that although I'm experiencing wear and tear, and what do you think his old body was like after chapter 11 verse 23? What a wreck his body must have been. How did the organs stand up to all that? How did the muscles? Why, his body must have been a constant wrecking pain.

And he had the thorn, the special thorn of the flesh in addition. There was all those things. But he said even though our outer man is wasting away, our inner man is renewed day by day.

The wastage of the outer man is comparatively unimportant. The important thing is our inner man being renewed day by day. You see, all the great victories in the Christian life are not victories of the body so much as victories of the spirit.

Many people with very weak bodies are very strong spiritually. And that's the thing we should counterpart. It's rather remarkable that while our body is wasting away, the Lord uses the very trials and so on that cause the body to waste in order to strengthen us and renew us inwardly.

The very same things. You notice what he says. Our light and momentary troubles, they don't seem like that at the time.

They seem as though they're going on forever and they're very heavy. But these are the very things that the Lord uses and he turns them into something that is inward strength, makes us stronger because of it. I don't think we've got to go around looking for opportunities to cause our body to waste away, but when it's happening, why the Lord can use it to his glory.

Dr. A. B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, all his life was in very poor health. He was a great advocate of healing, but he himself said he had to depend on the Lord every day. It was constantly drawing on him for the strength to get through the day.

But you see, he appropriated the strength that God would give. And this verse is an encouragement to us to do the same thing. You're tired? Are you spent? Are you weary? All right.

Are you claiming from the Lord that strength that is promised? Paul said, I can do all things through Christ who makes me strong. That meant that he was weak. He wasn't able to do it himself, but he could do it through Christ who makes him strong.

Now, he's not saying that he could do everything in the world. The word doesn't carry that connotation in that verse. But what he's saying is, I can do everything that is in the will of God for me to do today through Christ who today makes me strong and infuses inner strength into me.

And it's true for us. We can do, the Lord will empower us to do his will. And we can say with Paul, though our outer man is wasting away, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

And the trouble, the reason it's not being renewed and we're not getting this strength sometimes is because we are not appropriating it. That's why. It isn't that God hasn't given.

He gives strength to the faint. Ephesians 1.3, I believe, is a key verse that we need to constantly remind ourselves of. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.

That's not a promise. It doesn't say God will bless us with every spiritual blessings if we do so and so. It's just a plain statement of fact.

God says, I have given you every spiritual blessing. There's not one more spiritual blessing to come to you. That's comforting, isn't it? You have every spiritual blessing now.

They have been given. How many of them are you receiving? That's the question. Am I appropriating what God has given? Paul appropriated this necessary strength even though he felt his bodily powers waning.

Every day, Lord, you've got a plan for me to do. You've got a ministry for me today. I appropriate the strength to enable me to do your will fully today.

We don't have to worry about tomorrow. We can do the same tomorrow. It says day by day and that means day by day appropriation.

And James would say to us, you know, you have not because you ask not. Or I think he'd say, you have not because you don't take, you don't appropriate the provision which God has made. And so that was why Paul could say, I've no need to lose heart because every day I'm receiving from the Lord new accessions of strength.

He was endowed with new strength. The next is in chapter five, verse five. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the spirit as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come.

Therefore we are of good courage or in the NIV we are always confident. Now in the translation that I read on that occasion, this is how it put it. God has given us his spirit, part payment and promise of more.

Therefore we are of good heart always. That's the idea behind the guarantee or the earnest. You know the idea of an earnest and engagement ring is, what is it? It's a promise of something better to follow, at least you hope it will be anyway.

But, and so this is a very good translation. Part payment and promise of more. And here's another reason why you don't lose heart.

You've had an experience up to that. It's all right. You've only had part.

That's only just the beginning. There's something much better on ahead. It was that that kept Paul cheerful.

It wasn't his circumstances. Now those circumstances were enough to get anybody down. However, he stood all those things.

Who could think of it? Don't our adverse circumstances seem petty? Don't they seem small when you compare them with his? But it wasn't his circumstances. What was it enabled him to keep cheerful, to be of good courage always, never to lose heart? It was the presence of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, always available, always present, always there alongside to help. God has given us his spirit.

He's given us part payment and this promise of more to follow. When I go to Niagara, I go occasionally when I'm in Canada, I go to that point where many of you have been, where the water is there just down at your feet and you see it rushing over and you look up. There it is, part payment and promise of more to follow.

Well, here is the promise of the Spirit. The highest, the best, the deepest experience we've had of the Holy Spirit is only a foretaste of something better that God has got for us. And here is Paul rejoicing in the presence and in the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his own life.

And he said, this is enough to make me of good courage even although the circumstances are adverse. The Holy Spirit is always active. He's always available.

Therefore, I am of good courage. A progressive experience. And then the fourth thing in verses 7 and 8, chapter 5, verses 7 and 8. We live by faith, not by sight.

We are confident, I say. We are of good courage. Why? Because we live by faith, not by sight.

Now, you remember that we read in chapter 3 or chapter 4, verse 17. Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.

Here is the attitude of faith. Faith gives reality to the unseen. It gives substance to it.

And Paul says, we fix our eyes not on the things that we can see, but on the things that we can't see. Abraham endured as seeing him who is invisible. You see, faith gave substance to the reality of God.

You can't help being discouraged when you look around at the circumstances around us today. When you read your newspaper, don't you get up with a feeling of exhilaration, say how wonderful. The media are making a wonderful job of telling us in detail what the devil is doing in the world.

You analyze the newspaper, go through it one day, and see exactly how much it tells you what God is doing in the world, and how much it tells you what the devil is doing in the world. And if you get your eyes on what is seen, what do you see? You see social unrest. You see political intrigue.

You see economic instability. You see industrial chaos. You see moral laxity.

You see marital breakup. All around, there is that which will discourage. And in your counseling and your contact with people, you are all the time in contact with people who are in deep distress, and many of them in deep trouble.

And if we are looking at the things that are seen, we can't help being discouraged. But Paul says, that's not the whole picture. We are not looking at the things that are seen merely.

We fix our eyes on Jesus. When Peter fixed his eyes on the Lord, he was able to walk on unstable water. When Peter took his eyes off the Lord and became engrossed with the billowing waves, he sank.

Paul says, we walk by faith, not by sight. Therefore, we're of good courage. We don't lose heart.

But if we take our eyes off the Lord, that's when we lose heart and become discouraged. We turn our eyes inwards. Do you get very much encouraged by turning your eyes inwards? It's necessary for us to do it every now and again.

I mean, there is a place for wholesome introspection, provided it is positive and not negative. But as you turn your eyes within, there's not very much to encourage there. The Lord says, from within, out of the heart of man proceed.

You know the rest, don't you? That's what you get when you look inside. But when you look out to the Lord Jesus, why, what a different perspective you get. We walk by faith and not by sight.

And we've got to learn that lesson. Paul says, because we do that, we're trusting the Lord. We're turning our eyes away from ourselves and from our own frailty and our own failure.

Because of that, we are of good heart. We are of good courage. Now, that was the four things that came to me as I thought that morning.

But one more came to me afterwards. And you'll find that in Galatians chapter six. Galatians chapter six and verse nine.

Verse seven. Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked.

A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction. The one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Let us not become weary in doing good. For at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we do not lose heart. If we do not give up.

Here is the fourth, the fifth thing. Remember the first one? He was entrusted with a ministry. The second one? He was endowed with new strength.

The third one? He was endowed with the Spirit. The fourth one? He was enraptured with the eternal. He was not looking at the things that are seen, but the things that are unseen.

And now, he's encouraged by the promise of harvest. Therefore, we do not lose heart. Let us not grow tired of doing what is right.

It's not nearly you get tired as you find perhaps that you're not seeing much fruit for it. Nothing. The failure to see fruit is one of the most fruitful means of discouragement.

When you don't see very much happening, you've put everything you've got into it. You've prayed and you've wept and then nothing happens. Well, here is an encouraging verse.

It encourages us to believe that at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we do not lose heart. I like that rendering at the proper time. There is always a proper time for harvest.

There's a time for sowing. There's a time for germinating. There's a time for developing.

And there's a time for harvest. And so often, we get impatient at the slowness of the process. And yet, what we're seeing this morning is if you're going to have one, two, three, four, five, you have to have five, four, three, two, one.

And the five, four, three, two, one is often a very discouraging time because you don't see anything. Amy Wilson Carmichael, the great missionary to India, tells that one day, she was going down a hot Indian road and she saw a road mender. And the little man was sitting on a very big rock and he had a little hammer.

And he was sitting there tapping away. And she looked at him and she thought, how futile. That little hammer can never break that rock.

But she thought, I'll watch and see what happens. And she waited. And quite a good time, he kept on tapping.

Very monotonous job, but he kept at it. And then all of a sudden, he gave one hit and the whole thing burst into a hundred pieces. And she said, road mender, which blow was it broke that rock? Was it the first blow or the last blow? The old man thought for a time and then he said, well, it was the first blow and the last blow and every blow in between.

And so it was. Lewis Pallal and Billy Graham sometimes have the privilege of striking the last blow. But there would be no last blow if there hadn't been five, four, three, two, one.

And so Paul says, don't get discouraged. Don't get weary. At the proper time, at the proper time, you will reap if you don't lose heart.

Don't throw in the sponge. Don't get discouraged. God's got the right time in the physical realm.

There is the regular process of germination and development and growth and then the full kernel in the ear. And at the proper time, the harvester puts in his sickle and reaps the harvest. And you are going to see the harvest.

You don't have the joy of striking the last blow every time. It may be your privilege to strike the very first blow. I think one of the greatest thrills to me has been to go into other countries and to speak to people who have never heard the gospel before.

And so I'm having the privilege of striking the first blow. And the first blow must be struck. There must be the presentation of the message the first time.

And who knows who else is going to strike the lows in between. I remember on one occasion in our Bible college, one man gave his testimony about his conversion. And he told how over a period of several years, different students from our college had spoken to him about his soul.

And every one of them had made an impact. But it took a period of years before he came to accept Christ. And he told us which were the different ones that had been there in the process.

Well, I think that's something to encourage us. Don't feel that because there is no immediate response that nothing has happened. If, as I said last night, the word is spoken in dependence on the Holy Spirit, you will have left saving impressions on the mind of that person.

And at the proper time, the harvest will come if we don't lose heart. You know, the adversary is very wily. Discouragement is one of the sharpest weapons in the satanic arsenal.

If he can get us discouraged, he's achieved a major victory. So here Paul shares his secret. You've got a ministry, the ministry of the new covenant.

Why, what a transforming, what a revolutionary message. Grip afresh the wonder of it. You can be every day, you can have new accessions of strength direct from God so that you will be able to do all the will of God for that day.

He's given you the Holy Spirit, part payment and promise of more. It's always better on the head. You know, in that verse in 2 Corinthians 3.18, we all beholding the glory of the Lord are being changed into the same image from one degree of radiant glory to another.

You see, it's a progressive experience on and on and always better on the head. Therefore, don't lose heart. Be encouraged.

And then we don't look at the things that are seen. We know, but we don't. We're not preoccupied with the things that are seen.

We want to know what's going on. We want to know where we are in history and where we are in our community, but we're not preoccupied with that. Our eyes are fixed on Christ, the victor.

And then we can be encouraged. If we are doing our work, there's no need to lose heart because at the proper time, we will reap if we do not lose heart. There is Paul's secret.

We can appropriate exactly what Paul had. Paul had no resource, which we do not have. We have as many spiritual blessings as he did.

We have the equipment that he had. His equipment was the power of the Holy Spirit. And so, therefore, we do not lose heart.

Therefore, we are always of good courage. Perhaps not always. We're still in the body, but nevertheless, there is the general promise of what can be as we appropriate the resources God has put at our disposal.

Shall we have a few moments in quietness? Lord, we thank you for the privilege, the undeserved privilege of being entrusted with this ministry, the ministry of the new covenant. May we ourselves live under the new covenant and not under the old. We thank you for all the assurances of your word that as we obediently proclaim the word, you have given the Holy Spirit to bring it to fruition.

We pray that we may not allow the adversary to discourage us, but that we may keep our eyes fixed on you. We pray that the eternal things, eternal values, may mean far more to us than that which we can see all around us. Give us an optimistic outlook on the world of today, because you can change it.

We want to be the instruments of bringing light and the light of the knowledge of the glory of God into darkened hearts. So then, we pray that we may be very confident that you are working unseen often, and that at the proper time, your time, we will reap the harvest if we do not lose heart. Thank you, Lord.

Amen.

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