

Dangers of Discouragement

by J.R. Miller

The ideal Christian life is one of habitual cheerfulness, and we should never give place to discouragement, but instead trust in God's care and provision.

Scripture: Habakkuk 3:17, Romans 8:37

Topics: "Discouragement", "Encouragement in Faith"

Description

J.R. Miller addresses the dangers of discouragement, emphasizing that it is often underestimated as a mere emotional state rather than a significant spiritual threat. He illustrates how discouragement can lead to rebellion against God, using the Israelites' journey through the wilderness as a cautionary tale. Miller encourages Christians to maintain a spirit of cheerfulness and to actively support one another, warning against the sin of being a discourager. He concludes that even in the face of hardships, believers should find strength in God and view challenges as opportunities for growth. Ultimately, he asserts that discouragement should never be allowed to take root in a believer's heart.

Transcript

We are not apt to think of discouragement as either dangerous or sinful. Some people seem to think it rather a pleasant experience than otherwise; at least, they appear to find a sort of relief and satisfaction in dropping down now and then, into a depressed mood. They make no effort to overcome their disposition to sadness, or to climb out of the deep valley of shadows--up to the mountain-tops where the sun is shining. They resent the kindly efforts of those who would help them to be cheerful, as if they were meddling with matters which do not belong to them.

We should settle it once for all--that the ideal Christian life is one of habitual cheerfulness. It has its experiences of difficulty, of disappointment, of suffering; but these are meant to be only lessons set for us to learn, and we are not expected to fail in them. Provision is made for us in the grace of God, by which we may overcome in every such experience, and be more than conquerors through him who loved us.

A feeling of discouragement creeping into our heart should be met, therefore, as a temptation. He who opens to it, and lets it in--does not know to what sin and sorrow it may lead him. An example will help us to understand the peril of discouragement.

A fragment of old history tells us of the Israelites, that at a certain time they were much discouraged because of difficulty of the way. The way itself was indeed hard, rough, and dreary, leading through the

sandy desert, where the heat was intense, with no shelter anywhere from the sun's fierce, smiting rays. It was discouraging also because it was a sudden interruption of their journey. When they were at the very gate of the promised land, a barrier was thrown across their path, and they were compelled to make a long detour through an inhospitable wilderness, instead of entering at once into the country toward which for so long their hopes had been leading them. What made it all so much worse was the needlessness of it--but for Edom's disobligingness. Edom would not allow his brother Israel, to pass through his country to reach his own land. Indeed, he said that if he attempted to pass, he would resist him with armed force. It certainly was very discouraging to be treated so by a brother.

We are scarcely surprised that the Israelites were discouraged, and yet we must read the story through to the end, to see to what the discouragement led. They murmured against God and against Moses. Then murmuring grew into profane contempt of God's mercy and goodness, and to the grievous sin of rebellion. It is when we follow it to its final outcome, that we see the true nature of discouragement.

Many people find the way of life hard at some time or other. There are scarcely any who do not come upon points of hardness, even amid the most prosperous and happy years. There are elements in many people's condition and circumstances, which in themselves are hard. Sometimes it is sickness, sometimes poverty, sometimes sorrow. The burdens are heavy. The toil is oppressive. The way is wearisome.

Then sometimes, as in the case of the Israelites, much of the hardness is caused by unbrotherly conduct. There are brothers who put barriers in the way, and make life harder for brothers. We all need to guard our conduct most sedulously, lest we become hinderers of others in their godly living. It is a sin to be a hinderer. We commit a grievous wrong against another, when we make life harder for him--when we make it harder for him to be true, honest, pure-hearted, and worthy. Edom made it immeasurably harder for Israel, simply by being disobliging. There are many people who make the way longer and harder for others, when by a little unselfish obligingness, a little cheering helpfulness, they might make it easier for them.

It is a sin to be a discourager! The ten spies who brought back the cowardly report about the giants, and thus spread disheartenment and dismay--wrought a great crime against the people. Their discouraging words led to most calamitous consequences--the doom of death on a whole generation, and the shutting of a nation out of the promised land for forty years.

Yet similar wrongs are being committed continually right in our own Christian days. Discouragers go about among men, and, by their gloomy, pessimistic words--they make life incalculably harder for them. They put out the lamps of cheer and hope which shine in men's homes. They quench the very stars that burn in the sky above men's heads. They take the gladness out of hearts. They see only the dark shadows of life, never the sunshine; and they prate wherever they go of gloom and doom. They never bring us a message of cheer. We are never stronger, braver, happier, or truer--for meeting them.

On the other hand, after a talk with one of these discouragers, we always feel as if part of life's beauty had faded, as if there were less to live for. Our stars of hope shine less brightly, and a sense of weariness and languor creeps over our spirits. Life is harder for us after meeting them.

There should be nothing but condemnation for the discourager. He is an enemy of his fellows. He casts a black shadow over human hearts. He is an enemy to mankind. It is a great sin against humanity--to make life harder for men. Our great Teacher spoke some of his most scathing words against those who put stumbling-blocks in the path of God's little ones. This divine censure falls upon all who in any way lay

hindrances in the paths of others.

The Christian duty of everyone is to be an encourager, a helper of others in their life. No mission can be nobler, diviner, than that of him who lives to be an inspirer of hope and cheer, and to make others braver and stronger for life's experiences.

There is a pleasant story of a plain woman in Glasgow, who, one summer day, was walking along a street in which some poorly clad children were running barefooted at their play. A policeman saw this woman stoop down again and again as she went on, each time picking up something which she put in her apron. The officer supposed she was finding and appropriating something she should not take, and, hurrying after her, demanded in a threatening manner that she let him see what she had in her apron. The trembling woman complied, and showed the guardian of the city's safety some pieces of broken glass which she had gathered up out of the street. "I thought I would take them out of the way of the children's feet," she said. The act was a beautiful one. The poor woman was doing angels' work. She was making the street a safer place for the children to play in.

There are some thoughtful people who will never let a piece of banana-skin or orange-peel lie on the pavement--but will stop, no matter how hurriedly they are walking, to remove the dangerous rind, lest someone might be made to stumble, and be maimed by stepping on it. It is well that there always are those who have an eye and a hand for such ministries, who are ready to save us from the consequences of others' hurtful carelessness.

It should be our aim, not only to pick up bits of broken glass from the children's playgrounds to make them safer, and to lift from the sidewalks bits of orange-peel or banana-skin to prevent accidents to the unwary--but in all life's ways to gather out the stones and the stumbling-blocks, and whatever might hinder or hurt our fellow-pilgrim in his journey.

Whatever the cause of, or whoever is responsible for the hardness, there is no doubt that in every life, there are many experiences which have a discouraging tendency. It may seem almost too much to say that whatever the hardness of the way may be, nevertheless, a Christian should never be discouraged. Yet this is the other side of the lesson. It is never safe to give way, to even the beginnings of discouragement; for if we do, we cannot know what the end will be.

Discouragement cherished leads to despondency and despair. Even if it does not grow to such sad ripeness, it works grievous harm in a life. It produces a noxious atmosphere, in which all the lamps burn but dimly. It weakens one's moral purposes, and paralyzes one's energies. A discouraged man is only half himself. He takes hold of duty with only half his usual earnestness. His feet drag wearily as he goes about his duties. Discouragement makes the hard path--much harder; and the heavy load--much heavier. We should live continually so that our life shall make it easier for others to live; never to be hinderers--but always helpers, of others.

No one can afford to yield to discouragement, even for one hour, in the smallest degree. We require all our strength all the time--if we would be equal to the burden, stress, and responsibility of our common days. Life is not easy for any of us, if we would meet it worthily, and make of it what God expects us to make. It is necessary that our eye shall be clear, its light undimmed; that our heart shall beat with full pulsings; that our hand shall be strong and steady, and that all our powers shall be at their best. This cannot be--if we are the prey of discouragement, or if we yield in even the smallest degree to its influence.

Then, not only does discouragement weaken us, unfitting us for our best work--but it leads to doubt and unbelief, and oftentimes to other sins! It leads to murmuring and complaining, and these are sins which grieve God. It makes men blind to God's goodness, and oftentimes rebellious against God's will. Many people throw away their chance in life, through discouragement.

When Norman McLeod was a boy he was much discouraged, and, in a fit of petulance, said, "I wish I never had been born!" His pious mother said, "Norman, you have been born; and, if you were a wise child, you would ask the Lord what you were born for." He took the good advice, and found that God had a noble plan for his life.

"But how can we keep from being discouraged?" asks someone. "When the way is hard, when the burdens are heavy, when the path is through hot deserts, when even friends make life harder for us--how can we help being discouraged?"

There is an answer to this question of fearfulness in the words of the old Hebrew prophet: "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign LORD is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains!" Habakkuk 3:17-19

If we are Christians, there never can be a sufficient reason why we should be discouraged. "If God is for us--who can be against us?" We need only to abide in Christ, doing always our simple duty, and leaving all in his hands.

There is no doubt that every hard thing that God permits to come into our life, has a blessing wrapped up in it. The things which appear before us as discouragements, prove to be helps toward nobler attainments.

A Christian physician, whose career has been full of faith and noble ministry, gives this experience: He was a poor boy, and a cripple. One day he was watching some other boys on the ball-field. They were active, strong, and wealthy. As he looked on, his heart grew bitter with envy. A young man who stood beside him noted the discontent on his face, and said to him, "You wish you were in those boys' place, don't you?" " Yes, I do!" was the answer. "I reckon God gave them money, education, and health," continued the young man, "to help them to be of some account in the world. Did it never strike you," he continued, after a moment's pause, "that he gave you your lame leg for the same reason--to make a man of you?"

The boy gave no answer, and turned away. He was angry--but he did not forget the words. His crippled leg was God's gift! To teach him patience, courage, perseverance! To make a man of him! He thought of the words until he saw their meaning. They kindled hope and cheer, and he determined to conquer his hindrance. He grew heroic. He soon learned that what was true of his lame leg, was true also of all the difficulties, hindrances, and hard conditions of his life--they were all God's gifts to him to help him to be of some account in the world--to make a man of him.

The lesson is for all of us, especially for young people who seem born with more than their share of disadvantages, limitations, hard conditions. God gave them this heavy load, whatever it is, to make something of them. The deformity, the burden, the weight of some other one's need laid upon the shoulder, the inheritance of difficulty which seems to be a hindrance to a worthy life--is but another opportunity to grow, to become stronger, richer-hearted, more a man or a woman, to win a higher place in

life, and a brighter crown in glory!

In any case, we should never give place to discouragement for a moment! If we are God's children, we have only to keep ourselves in God's hands, and keep our own hands off; then, out of the sorest difficulties and the hardest conditions, blessings will come. God lives, and is caring for us, and we can say:

"God is in his heaven--All is right with his world."

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