

Divine Instrument

by K.P. Yohannan

K.P. Yohannan's sermon emphasizes how God uses discouragement to draw us closer to Him and strengthen our faith.

Scripture: Genesis 39:3, Exodus 16:4, Psalm 73:28, Psalm 119:67, Proverbs 4:23, Proverbs 23:7, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 1:8, 2 Corinthians 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Topics: "Discouragement", "Hope in God"

Description

K.P. Yohannan emphasizes that while we may feel equipped to handle life's challenges, discouragement is a common experience that can serve as a divine instrument for growth and reliance on God. He illustrates how God uses our struggles to draw us closer to Him, much like the Israelites who had to gather manna daily for sustenance. Yohannan encourages believers to maintain hope and a positive attitude, as seen in the lives of Paul and Joseph, who faced immense trials yet remained steadfast in their faith. Ultimately, he reminds us that our perspective and attitude towards difficulties can shape our journey and strengthen our relationship with God.

Transcript

It seems that with all our knowledge, information and experience, we should be on top of the mountain more of the time. I know this is how I often evaluate my life. I think that after all I've endured, I should now be able to face all kinds of problems without discouragement. But it doesn't work like that. I can preach a message and see hundreds of people set free. I can witness remarkable things that the Lord is doing in some of the most unreached parts of the world. But within a short time, I can find myself bogged down, discouraged and confused, wondering what to do next and trying to find a way to quit, slow down or find an easier path.

Finally, I realized that discouragement, although a tool of the enemy, is also an instrument of God, used to shape us and bring us into all that He has for us. In his book *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis gives the dialogue between senior devil, Screwtape, and the junior devil he is teaching, Wormwood. The instruction given to Wormwood on how to deal with man's disappointment and discouragement is eye-opening. Work hard, then, on the disappointment or anti-climax which is certainly coming to the patient during his first few weeks as a churchman.

The Enemy [God] allows this disappointment to occur on the threshold of every human endeavor. . . . It occurs when lovers have got married and begin the real task of learning to live together. In every

department of life it marks the transition from dreaming aspiration to laborious doing. The Enemy takes this risk because He has a curious fantasy of making all these disgusting little human vermin into what He calls His "free" lovers and servants--"sons" is the word He uses. . . .

Desiring their freedom, He therefore refuses to carry them, by their mere affections and habits, to any of the goals which He sets before them: He leaves them to "do it on their own." And there lies our opportunity. But also, remember, there lies our danger. If once they get through this initial dryness successfully, they become much less dependent on emotion and therefore much harder to tempt.¹ It's true. Take heart in the truth that God uses discouragement to work all sorts of good into our lives.

By it, He strengthens weak knees, granting the fortitude to journey on and preparing us for the next seasons of life. Discouragement also has a unique way of keeping us connected to Him. It is easy to forget how much we need God when the skies are blue, the sun is shining and the birds are singing. But watch the dark clouds roll in and the storms come, and we are forced to seek shelter--in Him. This is why the psalmist said, "But it is good for me to draw near to God" (Psalm 73:28).

In another version this verse reads, "But as for me, the nearness of God is my good" (NASB). Daily Drawing Near In Exodus 16, we see a picture of how the Lord designed our spiritual lives. The Israelites were required to daily collect the manna God provided for them. They couldn't collect enough on one day to last for two days, for if they collected more than they needed for that day, it spoiled and became full of worms. They couldn't store it up. What they gathered was enough to sustain them for only one day.

The Lord has designed our spiritual life like that as well. Daily we must come to Him to be refreshed and restored. Just like the Israelites needed to gather the manna daily, we need spiritual refilling daily. And the beautiful thing is, He fills us whenever we come to Him. We are drawn to Him daily out of absolute necessity. Without Him we are like a branch cut off from the vine. It is good that we need to come daily to the Lord. If we didn't, we would so easily wander and try to live in our own strength.

God loves us too much for that. In Psalm 119:67 the writer tells us, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word" (emphasis added). The affliction worked for good, drawing the psalmist back to keeping God's word. Our discouragement works for good in our lives as well, drawing us nearer to the Lord. This also reminds me of the familiar verse, Romans 8:28--"All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

God continually causes "all things" (and discouragement is one of the "things" included) to help us come back to Him continually for refilling. Truly, the nearness of God is our good. I understand that it may be difficult to believe that God has a plan even in the discouragement you may be facing. But regardless, He is believable. And He knows our breaking point (see Psalm 103:14). The struggles and all the difficulties you and I face are designed to reshape us, not to destroy us.

His Presence, Our Hope Because we know that God is good and is able to work all things together for our good, we can find the strength of heart to continue on. In 2 Corinthians 4:1, Paul says, "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart." If you read through 2 Corinthians, you'll soon find how it seems the whole book is filled with the struggles Paul faced. But underlying all of his struggles are the words, "we do not lose heart."

You could write those words as the theme over every chapter in 2 Corinthians. It seems to be the declaration of Paul's life. And because he took hope in the Lord, he did not lose heart. Why? Because it is

not the absence of difficulties or the absence of problems that makes the difference. It is the presence of the Lord. Paul was starving, shipwrecked, imprisoned, stoned, beaten and left for dead (see 2 Corinthians 11). He was on the verge of an emotional breakdown so that he almost lost his mind and "despaired even of life" (see 2 Corinthians 1:8).

Paul's life was full of hardships. But what made the difference was that Paul brought these hardships to God. He came to his Lord daily because in the pressures of the world and in the weakness of his flesh, he knew he could not stand alone. He focused on Christ, and it was Christ who caused him to stay in the fight and to stay encouraged. This is why he was able to say and encourage others to "give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for [us] in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18, NIV).

Paul knew from past experience the faithfulness of God to work good from each situation. His hope was in the Lord--not in his circumstances, not whether he had a good day or a bad one, not in being with the right people or difficult people. In Genesis 37-39, we see this is the same way that Joseph lived. Although it seemed that time and time again things in his life just seemed to go wrong, we never hear Joseph complaining or grumbling. Why? Because of two reasons: First, he had faith in God--a faith that affected his perspective toward suffering.

And the second reason is that God was with Joseph. All throughout the story of his life, we are told, "the LORD was with Joseph" (see Genesis 39:3, 21, 23). The Power of Our Attitude Paul and Joseph chose to put their hope in God. They could have easily stayed where they were at, in dismay over the troubles of their lives. But they did not do this. They lifted their eyes and put their hope in God. Here is where we see how important our attitude is in every situation of life.

Proverbs tells us that "[as a man] thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). This is the reason why Scripture also tells us to "watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23, NASB). You see, our attitude is like a sail. Whichever direction we place our sail, those winds will take us to particular destinations. If we put our sail up to catch only the winds of discouragement and doubt, it is certain that we will reach the destination we set for.

But if we choose to place our sail in the confidence of God's goodness, we are bound to be carried along by Him and see His faithfulness. In his book *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart*, Charles Swindoll writes about the importance of our attitude to all the situations of life. Words can never adequately convey the incredible impact of our attitude toward life. The longer I live the more convinced I become that life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we respond to it.

I believe the single most significant decision that I can make on a day-to-day basis is my choice of attitude. It is more important than my past, my education, my bankroll, my success or failures, fame or pain, what other people think of me or say about me, my circumstances, or my position. Attitude keeps me going or cripples my progress. . . . It alone fuels my fire or assaults my hope. When my attitude is right, there's no barrier too high, no valley too deep, no dream too extreme, no challenge too great for me.² Our perspective is so very important.

We can choose either to see these difficulties and become discouraged or to turn to our good Father and believe that He has a way to turn even the most difficult circumstances into good. It is the mystery of His sovereignty. Flip through the pages of the Bible, and you will see, in story after story, how each person we revere as a hero of the faith encountered discouragement. Not one was exempt. And even the more modern-day faith examples had hills to climb and obstacles to overcome.

Let us then, by faith, fix our eyes on the good that He will produce in our lives out of the difficulties that are bound to come, and stay encouraged because of Him. May I take your hand and encourage you not to give up? Be strong on the inside. Notes: 1 C.S. Lewis, *The Quotable Lewis*, ed. Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1989), p. 161. 2 Swindoll, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart*, p. 38.

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