

Encouraging the Discouraged

Hebrews 12:12

Discouragement is a part of life, isn't it? Many of us have been discouraged from time to time. There are those in the world today as a result of obstacles and setbacks in life. They become discouraged, despondent, even depressed. You know, somebody said many years ago that life is tough. And I would agree with that. At best, life can be very, very difficult.

A teacher of mine many years ago in college said that one of the great tools the devil uses in life is discouragement. And you think about that as a Christian. We're trying to live a righteous life. We're trying to live for the Lord, advance his course. We want to go to heaven. And yet discouragement can become so real in life.

In the book of Hebrews, the writer is addressing some spiritual problems that Christians in the first century were facing. There were Hebrew Christians, those who had come out of Judaism, and some were going back to the old law. Some were on the verge of doing so. And so the Hebrew writer is trying to emphasize to them the fact that today and that being the case in the first century, that they were under a better covenant founded upon better promises.

And so really the idea is, why would you want to go back to an inferior law? In chapter two, at verse one. The Hebrew writer talked about how some of them were drifting or allowing their spiritual steadfastness to slip. In chapter two, verse three, he spoke of those who were neglecting the greatness of God's salvation. In chapter five, the writer there addresses the spiritual immaturity of some of God's people.

And so we turn to chapter 12, and we hear of the Hebrew writer saying in the long ago in verse 12, therefore strengthen the hands of them which hang down and the feeble knees. And the picture here is that of a child of God who's become discouraged, whose hands are hanging limp, whose knees are buckling under the pressures of life.

And so, that being the case, what I want to talk about in our lesson today and our study together today, is encouraging the discouraged to be faithful. I want to say that again, encouraging the discouraged to be faithful. And the reason I say that is because in life it is so easy to get discouraged. It might be that you're watching this program today and you're battling discouragement, despondency.

Maybe you feel depressed over your plight in life. Well, that's the case for many, many people. And yet, to understand that through a study of the Word of God reliance upon God, we can gain the encouragement that we need to plow forward. I want to begin by, first of all, going back and looking at Hebrews chapter 12, beginning in verse one, because there the writer says, look back.

You remember he said, therefore saying, we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses. Now the writer is referring back to those great saints of days gone by. He mentions many of those people by name, and talks about the obstacles and trials and tribulations that they encountered. There's something to be said about looking at the lives of other people and learning from their lives, from their mistakes, from their victories.

Matter of fact, we can look back at some of the great saints of God, and we can see how they persevered in times of trouble. And so think for a minute or two about some of the great names identified by the writer. I can't help but think about Noah. The Bible says that Noah was a preacher of righteousness in Hebrews chapter 11 at verse seven, the Bible says, by

faith Noah being warned of God, of things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Now imagine if you can. Here's Noah preaching, teaching, building an ark. And no doubt there were people that probably mocked and ridiculed him, scoffed at the idea that there would be a universal flood. I mean, you're telling me, Noah, that you're making preparation for a global flood? That's right. Well, don't you know that that could have been discouraging to him in the long ago?

And then you think about the fact that when it was all said and done, besides Noah, only seven souls were saved in that flood. And then the writer mentions a man by the name of Joseph. And you go back and you read the Genesis record about the life of Joseph at the tender age of 17 years old. He was basically sold out by his brothers, cast into a pit, sold to the Ishmaelites and Midianites, separated from family and friends for many, many years.

And you look at the obstacles and difficulties that that young fella faced, and all the things that he endured over a period of time. And yet he remained true to God. In Genesis chapter 39, when the Bible tells us that Potter first wife sought to seduce him, and because he stood true to God, what happened? You remember cast into prison.

And so here was a fellow that was beaten down time and again. A young fella. And yet he remained true to God. Discouraged, probably, but reliance upon God without question. And then the Hebrew writer mentions David, a man after God's own heart. David was a great, great man. And yet you think about some of the trials and tribulations that he faced.

Saul. King Saul tried to killing take his life, and then his own son Absalom sought to steal the kingdom from him. Don't you know that would have been discouraging, that that would have broken his heart. I suspect that David dealt with discouragement in a very real way. I think about Moses. The Bible says in Hebrews chapter 11 that he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin for a season.

Now, when you look at the life of Moses, the great leader and lawgiver of Israel, and the constant murmuring and complaining of the children of Israel, the incident involving the golden calf, the sin of God's people. Time and again, Moses faced setback after setback. You remember when he disobeyed God and because of his disobedience, God said, you're not going into the promised land.

Don't you know that broke his heart? Do you not believe that that would have been discouraging to this great man of God? Sure, it would have been. The Hebrew writer also mentioned Samuel, one of God's great prophets of old. In first Samuel chapter eight, we have a record of God's people coming to Samuel the prophet. And they requested, they said, give us a king, that we might be like all the nations about us.

And the Bible says that Samuel became dejected, saddened by what they asked for, and God had to remind him. And the long ago he said, look, they haven't rejected you, Samuel. They have rejected me that I should not reign over them. So discouragement can be very real in life. And the writer is simply encouraging us as God's people to look back and to recount the lives of some of God's greatest servants, to see how they dealt with setback after setback after setback, and to understand something about trusting in God.

So, number one, there's the idea of looking back. But then secondly, to look up because you remember he speaks of Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was

set before him, listen to what he said endured the cross, despising the shame, and has set down at the right hand of God. Now you go back and you look at the life of Jesus, and you are reminded of the fact that the Lord Jesus demonstrated perseverance, endurance.

Now, I can't fully fathom all that Jesus experienced in the heartless trial as he stood before the high priest Annas and Caiaphas as he was sent to Pilate, and then to Herod, back to Pilate the mocks the ridicule, the scoffers, and then the beatings, the taunts, the scourging, and then to be nailed on a wooden cross lifted up just outside the walls of Jerusalem.

To understand that Jesus Christ paid the ultimate price for our sins. But what the Hebrew writer is saying is, look, we need to look at Jesus. We need to fix our eyes on the Lord and to realize that the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated a persevering spirit. Now, is there a common thread here? Well, obviously, if you go back and you look at chapter 11 and you look at the lives of some of God's great saints, how did they make it?

When they became discouraged, perseverance, endurance, reliance upon God, trusting God when times are tough. Jesus, the Son of God, was no doubt put under enormous strain with regard to the cross. And really, the weight of the world rested upon his shoulders. Didn't it? Because you see, God's God's redemptive plan revolved around the death of his beloved son, Jesus.

And yet Jesus went to the cross with joy. Now, some might say, how in the world could the Lord Jesus Christ go to the cross with joy? Well, I think the answer is the Lord Jesus understood the end result of the cross, and that is through his death on Calvary we can enjoy eternal salvation. The Hebrew writer said, though he were a son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered, and because the Lord Jesus suffered, bled, and died for us.

Peter said in first Peter chapter three, verse 18 that we have the opportunity to enjoy our relationship with God. You remember what he said, for Christ also has once suffered for sins the just for the unjust. Now lie that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, made alive by the spirit. And so to understand that Jesus died so that we might enjoy eternal life, and that we might enjoy the provisions of his death.

So, number one, we look back. Number two, the Hebrew writer said, we need to look up. But number three, I would suggest we need to look out. The writer is encouraging Christians in the first century and verse three he talked about the importance of weighing very carefully what the Lord Jesus experienced on our behalf, to consider him, to look at what occurred to Jesus, how he was able to deal with that and ultimately overcome.

And the reason is, he said, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. And here's the picture of people who are fainting. They are wearied, they're discouraged. And the writer is saying, look, you need to hold on. You need to be faithful to God. And so then in verse 12 of chapter 12, the writer would say, strengthen the hands of those who hang down and the feeble knees.

Well, what about us as God's people? Is it not the case that there are people around us who are discouraged, hurting? Is it not the case that there are some in the body of Christ that we know personally that have given up? They've already they've already raised the white flag. They've given up. They've gone back into the world, like some of the Christians in the first century to whom the writer was addressing.

So what then, can we do as God's people to encourage the discouraged? Well, I think first and foremost, we need to maybe consider some things. Number one, as a child of God, I've got

to understand that no man is an island unto himself that we have responsibilities to one another. You remember in Galatians chapter six, in verse two, Paul would say to the Christians and in Galatia, bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

I think about Paul in Romans chapter 12 at verse 14, when Paul said, rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. You see, we have the opportunity to encourage the discouraged, to help lift up the fallen, to encourage those who are giving in to the pressures, difficulties, discouragements of life. So what can I do? Well, number one, my presence says a lot, doesn't it?

I mean, you think about how sometimes people isolate themselves when troubles and trials occur in life and when they become discouraged rather than mingling and associating with people, they withdraw. And so to have a presence in their life or in their lives, if it's multiple people. And sometimes when we associate with people who are discouraged, we can remind them of some hard truths of life.

Can't wait. I mean, we, like the Hebrew writer, can talk about some of those great men and women of God who face discouragement. You remember Elijah the long ago? Elijah had that great showdown on Mount Carmel, 450 prophets of Baal put to death. And then after that great victory, Jezebel, the evil wife of Ahab, sent word to Elijah.

And basically she said, look, your hands mine. Well, Elijah became discouraged and fled, wanted to die. And God had to remind that prophet in the long ago, I still have 7000 that have about the need to bail. Well, sometimes we need to be reminded. We need to be reminded that we're not the only ones, that we're not the only ones who become discouraged and weary and feel like giving up.

That we're not the only ones who become despondent in life. And so when we sit down and talk to people, we can remind them of the Elijah and the Noah's and the Moses, the some, and the Samuel's people that faced obstacles and trials and difficulties. Let me share with you a couple of examples in the New Testament, and I'm talking about, as we associate with people in the faith who are discouraged and who are at the point of giving up.

Go back and look at Second Timothy chapter four for a minute. You remember when Paul wrote his final letter to Timothy, and he told him, look, I'm already being offered. I'm already being poured out as a drink offering. The time of my departure is at hand. I'm about to leave this world. But he said I fought the good fight.

I finished the course. I've kept the faith. Because of that. There's laid up for me a crown of righteousness. But down in verse ten, Paul makes mention of a fellow by the name of Demas, and Paul said, Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world. You think that would have been discouraging to Paul? Don't you know that was a disappointment to him, that he was a fellow comrade, somebody who had served side by side, shoulder to shoulder, in the army of God.

And now the world has claimed him. What about Alexander the coppersmith? Paul said that he did me much harm. Now there are those of us in the body of Christ, those of us living today. When people have they mistreated us, they've wronged us. They've hurt us, they've cut us deeply. Is that discouraging? Yes it is. And I have no doubt Paul was a human being just this way and that.

Paul felt the sting of discouragement from time to time. In my mind, Demas would have been a discouraging, a discouragement to him, Alexander the coppersmith, and what he had to deal with with regard to that person, no doubt discouraging. And then drop down. Look at verse 16

in verse 16, Paul said at my first defense, no man stood with me.

All men forsook me. So here's Paul facing some preliminary trial, a time in life when he needed some allies. He needed some people that would stand by him and stand with him. And what did he say? All men forsook me. I pray, God, it will not be late of their charge. And then in verse, then in about verse 16, Paul said, but the Lord stood with me, and the Lord strengthened me.

You see, discouragement is a part of life. So when we sit down as a visible presence in the lives of those who are discouraged, who, like the Hebrew Christians, are on the verge of giving up, we can remind them that there have been others that have faced similar plights in life. They have found themselves on the other end of discouragement, and we can try to encourage them, not talk about the presence that we have in the lives of those who are discouraged.

One of the things that we can do is remind them of God's presence, to remind them that God is standing with them and God is standing by them. When the Apostle Paul, when Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, you remember he was in prison. The time was about A.D. 6162 And Paul said in the long ago, the Lord is at hand.

In my mind, I just think about here's Paul saying the Lord is right beside me. When Paul and Silas were in that jail in Philippi at midnight, the Bible says they're praying and singing praises to God. Do you not think that on that occasion, despite the fact that many stripes have been laid upon their backs, despite the fact that they're in prison, their feet, their feet are fastened in stocks, they're hurting, they're suffering.

And yet, at midnight, what are they doing? They're praising God. Would it not have been the case that they felt a sense of closeness to God in that, in that context? Sure. And so to understand that discouragement is a reality, but again, to encourage the discouraged, to remind them that God's presence never leaves them. We go back again and we look at second Timothy chapter four, when Paul said that all had forsaken him.

But he said, the Lord stood with me, and the Lord strengthened me. Here's what the Hebrew writer said in chapter 13. The Hebrew writer said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. That's a promise. Back in the book of Joshua, Joshua chapter one, when God said to Moses, or rather God said to Joshua in the long ago, Moses my servant is dead.

You remember the promises made to him. He said, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. What a daunting task to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land. And yet God said, I'll be with you. And so we can remind those that we know and love who are discouraged and hurting. We can remind them of our care, our love for them by our presence.

And while in their presence we can remind them of the constancy of God's presence. David said many years ago in Psalm 56, David affirmed this I know God is for me. When we face the valley of discouragement in life, we need to remember when it's all said and done. God is for us, and God's not just for us.

God is with us. Now there's another thought here. We talk about our presence, the presence of God. But what about prayer? What about praying for those who are discouraged? Those who are hurting. Those who are suffering. Those who have become despondent. Those who are depressed. You know, back in the book of Hebrews and chapter four, the writer talks about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our great high priest, who's gone into the heavens.

And you remember he said, that we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the

feelings of our infirmities, but one who has been tempted in all points like his way, yet without sin. And then in verse 16 he said, therefore let us draw boldly under the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Now we have the privilege and opportunity of going before the throne of God on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Christ, who become discouraged. They're dismayed. They're despondent, some even depressed, some on the verge of giving up. Some have given up. And we can pray that they will come to their spiritual senses, or that they can once again be encouraged back to a right standing in life.

In Hebrews chapter four, verse 16, the writer talks about coming before God's throne of grace. Now let me just share something with you. I mentioned Paul a moment ago. You remember in Second Corinthians chapter 12, Paul said that because of the abundance of revelations that had been given to him, that there was given him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him.

And so because of that thorn in the flesh and the pain of that thorn in the flesh, Paul said, he prayed to God three times to remove it. And the Lord said, my grace is sufficient for you. Now there's a lesson there. And that is when I'm discouraged, when I'm hurting, when I'm facing obstacles in life and circumstances that are incredibly difficult for me to navigate through, to remember that God's grace is there for me.

And you know, I would also add this to remember that when we sit and talk to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are discouraged, some who have given up and going back into the world, that we can encourage them to repent, to turn things around, ask God to forgive them, and to enjoy once again the beautiful fellowship that we have in Christ.

James said, confess your faults one to another. Pray one for another that you may be healed. Here's the beauty. Here's the beauty of being a child of God. And that is to know that if I stumble and fall, become discouraged, dismayed. If for whatever reason, I were to give up and go back into the world, maybe I've wave that white flag and I've given up long ago.

But to understand that, here's what John said. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us. To cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Now what a blessing to know that there is a God in heaven who will forgive me, restore the fellowship that I once enjoyed and that I can enjoy fellowship with people of like faith.

That is a tremendous blessing. And so I want to close today by encouraging you. If you are discouraged, I want to encourage you. Be faithful to God. Don't quit. Don't give up. Don't walk away. Know. Understand this. There's a God in heaven who loves you. And there's a God in heaven. If you've given up on him, he hasn't given up on you.

And the God in heaven who saved you when you were baptized into Christ, when you rose to walk in newness of life, that same God will forgive you if you'll acknowledge your wrong. Repent of your sin, turn back to him. And as John said, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us. To cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and then to enjoy fellowship once again.

What a tremendous blessing that might be that you're watching this program, and maybe you're discouraged in life, and maybe in your heart of hearts, you feel like that this life has nothing to offer you. There's a void in your life. Could I encourage you to come to Christ to understand that Jesus bled and died for you? That God commands his own love toward us, and that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Would you put your faith and trust in Jesus as a Son of God? Would you be willing to repent as they did on Pentecost day? Acts two, verse 38. Confess the name of Christ as a eunuch did in acts eight, verse 37. Be baptized into Christ, and have your sins washed away. The salt dead acts 2216 and be faithful.

God bless you.