

“And this Gospel shall be preached...”

Matthew 24:14

Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God

You Can Conquer Discouragement

Discouragement is one of the most powerful and devastating emotions known to man. Like the withering effect of a scorching wind, it can leave us weak, helpless, fruitless and lifeless.

Discouragement is a negative force that stifles growth, drains enthusiasm, inhibits drive, disorients one's mind and leads to failure in life. Of all the causes of failure discouragement is probably the most difficult to overcome.

Ironically, discouragement is oftentimes elusive and hard to trace. We can readily identify some causes such as sickness, criticism, rejection, loss of a job, etc. But other causes seem to appear out of nowhere.

In this discussion I plan to isolate some of the hidden causes of discouragement and offer solutions that will work. Once we understand the subtle workings of this enemy we will be much better prepared to cope with it.

What is discouragement?

To begin let's examine the word *discouragement* itself. The prefix *dis* means: without, opposite, deprive, exclude, expel or absence. Discouragement, then, means without courage! It means to be disheartened — lacking the courage to try or go on.

Here's where many people come up short. When problems strike they become fearful, think the worst will happen, run from their troubles and leave the results to chance. They may be weak-willed, lazy-minded or simply afraid to face reality. They are afraid that they will not measure up and eventually fail. Obviously this approach only leads to more discouragement because nothing was done to remove the cause — the problem still exists.

Let's now look at some of the underlying, hidden causes behind this destructive emotion.

Satan the primary instigator

Satan the devil is the foremost cause behind discouragement. He is man's greatest foe. To overthrow man and wear him down, Satan has saturated this world and all of its social systems with diabolical lusts and venom. Like a devious snake studying its prey Satan watches and waits to ensnare man in his weakest moment when he least expects it or when he's caught off guard.

More often than not, feelings of guilt, shame, failure and despair are direct attacks of Satan. He relentlessly tries to undermine man's faith in God and destroy his feelings of self-worth. His objective is to cause us to lose heart, think ourselves inferior, throw in the towel, give up and forsake God.

The apostle Paul says that Satan works in the hearts and minds of people. "herein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). This means that he's constantly trying to get at us — "... because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Our strongest defense against Satan's power is first to recognize who he is (our greatest enemy) and also turn to God for help to resist Satan's evil, negative thoughts and moods. Powerful resolve and firm commitment to stand steadfast against Satan will drive him out of your life. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Next time depressing moods come to mind for no apparent reason, stop and think. Satan may be seeking a door of entrance.

Mountains we face

Another major cause for discouragement of some

people is when goals and tasks seem too big, awesome and overwhelming, even virtually impossible to reach.

These people become frightened with the complexities of life and wonder if they can make the grade. It seems there is so much to do, so many problems to overcome, so many bad habits to break, so much knowledge to learn that there's not enough time to do it all. The Kingdom itself seems so ethereal and far away that its future reality is hard to grasp in everyday life.

It's like trying to scale a rugged mountain that towers into the sky. The climber sees himself weak and small at its base. His goal is to reach the top, but the summit is high and far away. The footing is unsure, not to mention unseen obstacles along the way. The journey is threatening, foreboding.

On the spiritual plane people look at their shortcomings with misgivings and doubts. They see in their minds' eyes the giant goal God has placed before them — that of becoming sons of God in His Kingdom. One of Satan's devices is to negatively use this great goal to cause doubt and apprehension in our minds. The climb is too steep or the path is too rough. The tendency is to give up and quit before one even starts.

But such individuals, who decide to stay on level ground, hoping that that will solve their problems, have failed already by exerting no effort and standing still.

The key lies in the meaning of faith and courage. When one steps forward and faces all obstacles he learns a great lesson: Not only does he advance, but accomplishment is easier than he thought.

Failure to grow

While some people become fearful at the enormity of their goals and responsibilities there are countless scores of others who get depressed because they have planned no goals at all. They are lazily drifting along whiling away their lives. They are like a ship at sea, jostled by the waves with no ports in sight.

Deep inside such people is a lingering, nagging frustration. They're downcast and miserable because they are accomplishing nothing worthwhile.

The reason for this type of discouragement: God created in man a desire to grow, a desire to achieve, a desire to succeed. Growth is the principle that governs life. It's a principle that you see manifested in all of creation. From the sprouting of a seed to the birth of a child, all life starts small but grows through many stages of development until it reaches maturity. Life is an active, ongoing process, forever reaching higher levels of growth and usefulness. Just to observe the world around us will prove that God who created and sustains all things is a creating, progressing and dynamic God.

And the Creator placed within man the same creative desires to grow and achieve.

Whenever anyone fails to grow in character and develop his life he experiences a deep sense of emptiness, futility and failure.

How vital it is then to embark on a program of setting positive goals in order to grow and be happy and to lead a rich and productive life.

Goal attainment each day

We need to think on a daily basis of reaching our goals. This will prevent us from being overwhelmed with the bigness of our tasks and reduce them to steps

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we can easily manage. By approaching our goals one step at a time we will grow in courage and confidence.

Success breeds success. One step leads to another until finally our goals are reached. The joy and pleasure that comes from succeeding will serve as a stimulus to push us forward.

The most rational way to move a mountain-size task is simply to shovel it away one scoopful at a time. It may be a huge mountain that will require a lot of scoopful and many hours of diligent effort, but each shovelful will bring us that much closer to success.

The key is to begin. You have to start before you can finish and be determined to follow through to the end.

Remember, it's standing still, failing to grow, that causes discouragement.

Once you start moving toward your goals you will lay down a track record of success. As you continue to progress, even if only a step or two at a time, you will gain confidence and self-respect. Thus with a success pattern firmly established you will eventually achieve a full and satisfying life.

You will no doubt meet hardships and obstacles on your journey. But those who are positively determined will look on obstacles as challenges or opportunities, not as roadblocks. They become bolder, wiser and stronger with each new challenge or opportunity. Take a step forward with renewed determination and before you know it you will have reached your glorious quest.

Success through persistent effort

Once we have firmly established our goals (and only we can determine which are important to us) we must set sail in their direction. This calls for 100 percent commitment, hard work, raw determination and persistent effort. Only those who start the journey and keep sailing onward will ever reach their destination.

Most people have good intentions and resolve to go all out. But when they meet with unexpected problems they get discouraged and quit.

Thus they fail. They stop trying. A little more push, a higher reach, a stronger and more powerful self-command would likely have made the difference between failure and success.

Either they feel incapable of bearing the pain from exerting effort or they lose confidence in their abilities to forge ahead. The result? They slip backward into a lifestyle that seems more comfortable and less demanding.

But such backsliding brings a penalty — a penalty of deep depression and doubt. The innate desire God placed in them for growth and development has been stifled. The curse of failure becomes evident and takes its toll in forms of guilt, dependency and varying degrees of self-contempt.

Clearly the only sure cure to master discouragement is to establish meaningful goals and grow daily toward their fulfillment.

True success through Christ

However, in the final analysis, the secret of success lies in the power and the might of Jesus Christ. We have our part to play and much is required, but we can only go so far. If we are to accomplish goals that bring lasting success we must be spiritually united to Christ. This is a vital key.

Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me... for without me, ye can do nothing" (John 15:4-5). "For in him we live, and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). "But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18). And again, "Now unto him that

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is able to do exceeding abundantly above that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. . . .” (Ephesians 3:20).

These scriptures clearly prove that human strength alone is insufficient — the power of God is vitally needed.

What does God's Spirit do? It enlightens our minds, opens our understanding, empowers our wills and imparts the courage and motivation to press forward. God's Spirit is an added force or energy, just like the flow of electricity, that infuses new life.

Here lies another great pitfall of discouragement. The influences of the devil and the trials of life can undermine our efforts and desires. But God helps us to circumvent these influences and trials through imparting to us the power of His mighty Spirit. With this new energy, which God's Spirit gives, “all things are possible.” God will see us through any problem or circumstance as we continue our journey, if we will only believe Him and act on what He says in His Word!

Sin produces failure

Sin is a force that produces discouragement because it breaks our contact with God and the flow of His Spirit.

Remember, God is the source of our strength and He imparts to us the confidence and power to accomplish our goals — that is, the vision, the courage and inspiration to move ahead in spite of all odds. “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). “I can do all things

through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).

Walking with God then in a spirit of willing obedience produces success. But when we sin and break His laws we cut ourselves off from His power. “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).

Thus sin not only blocks the flow of God's Spirit (His life and energy in us), which is vital to our success, but it also creates negative attitudes that bring failure. When we sin we condemn ourselves and fall prey to depressed moods and syndromes of guilt. Subsequently we lose interest in our goals and direct our energies to other pursuits. Instead of repenting and getting our lives in harmony with God, we run away, hide and escape to deaden the pain of guilt.

Clearly then sin produces failure, inflicts guilt and destroys our purpose for living. Growth, which is essential to life, has been interrupted.

If we are discouraged we would be wise to see if sin has entered and broken our relationship with God.

Sin makes us negative

A subsequent problem that sin causes is that it transforms one into a negative and critical person. This condition naturally follows when the growth principle has been violated.

The subconscious realization that one is sinning, and hence is cut off from God, leads to self-criticism and self-disrespect. When we are unhappy with ourselves we tend to react negatively and critically toward others. Instead of correcting mistakes we tend to blame others for our problems in life.

On the other hand when we are growing and over-

coming we are genuinely happy and reflect a positive outlook. We tend to express an outward concern for others and attract many friends. We become a real inspiration to be around. What is your overall bent toward life — negative or positive? Be honest with yourself. For there is no way you can experience total fulfillment unless you are walking with God and are rooting sin out of your life.

Summary

We have looked at the hidden causes of discouragement. To overcome them we must remember that God created in man a desire to achieve, grow and succeed. To fulfill this desire we must set goals. The Spirit of God will help us determine what they should be. Goal attainment must be brought into each day and is a step-by-step process. Success is attained through bite-size accomplishment. We will discover that the daily steps of progress, no matter how small, will give us joy and confidence because they bring us closer to success.

Success comes through diligent effort. There is no genuine achievement without it. Just one more push, a higher reach, a second effort may make the difference between success and failure.

The overall achievement of a successful life can be compared to weaving a beautiful tapestry. The final product is made up of many little fibers. Each thread may not seem that important, but when all are put together they form a beautiful masterpiece.

The Spirit of God blends everything together for the right result. As God works in us and unites us with His mind we cannot help but be successful. It's guaranteed.

This then is the secret to overcoming discouragement and experiencing a fruitful life.