

Overcoming Discouragement

For many years Elijah stood alone against the world. A backbreaking drought collapsed the economy. The king's men frantically searched while Elijah hid. Finally on the top of Mount Carmel a showdown took place. God rained down fire from heaven. The sacrifice was consumed. Four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal were killed. Elijah was convinced the people of Israel would repent and turn to Jehovah. Unfortunately, when the people failed to respond properly the prophet became discouraged. He left northern Israel for the southernmost part of the country. He dismissed his servant. He crawled under a tree and prayed to die. He was completely discouraged!

Satan has two primary weapons- doubt and discouragement. Discouragement is the feeling of despair in the face of obstacles. How do we overcome discouragement? God, through the Apostle Paul, provides the answers! If anyone should have been discouraged it was Paul. In 2 Corinthians his ministry was under attack. False teachers infiltrated the church of Corinth. To gain a hearing for their lies they had to destroy Paul's credibility. Paul was not discouraged despite their attacks. In 2 Corinthians 4 the Bible spells out three steps for overcoming discouragement.

The first step is to leave the results in God's hands (verses 1-6). Paul begins in verse 1 by saying, "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart." What motivated Paul? The mercy of God in sending Jesus to die motivated Paul!

In verse 2 Paul said that he simply spoke and lived the truth. He "renounced the hidden things of shame." There was no room for sin in Paul's life. He made the truth known and left the results in God's hands. Paul said, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." Our purpose in life is not to please ourselves or preach ourselves but Christ. My greatest joy in ministry should be to see people grow. Too many try to compete with others rather than serving others. The best leader lays aside his agenda to insure that every person- every individual- can be successful.

Discouragement often comes from unmet expectations. God simply calls us to be faithful. Leave the results in His hands. Make the truth known. Speak the truth. Live the truth. Make the Word known and leave the results to God.

The second step is to die to self (verses 7-15). In verse 7 Paul tells us what we suspected all along. Paul said, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." We are simply clay pots! Clay pots always have a nick or chip because they are fragile. God chose clay pots because He does the work.

We must look realistically at ourselves. You and I are clay pots- nothing more and nothing less. What is the purpose of a clay pot? It is to be used. Mother Teresa's work among the dying in Calcutta is legendary. She won the Nobel peace prize for her impact for good. She said, "I am like a little pencil in God's hand. He does the thinking. He does

the writing. The pencil has nothing to do with it. The pencil has only to allow itself to be used.”

Paul said, “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed...” (verse 8a). He felt the pressure and stress but by God’s grace he wasn’t crushed. “We are perplexed but not in despair...” (verse 8b). The word perplexed means “confused, frustrated, stretched.” At times even Paul was confused, frustrated and stretched but he was never in despair or hopeless.

Dying to self is living for a higher purpose. It is laying down your life as a sacrifice to God. Jesus laid down His life for us. He paid the ultimate price to offer the ultimate sacrifice. You and I are called to lay down our lives for others.

The third step is to live for eternity (verses 16-18). Paul continued, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” When I look in the mirror I’m reminded that my outward person is perishing! Our inner person must be the priority over our outer body.

In verses 17-18 Paul described our daily problems as momentary and light. He described eternity as long and glorious. He said, “For the things that are seen are temporary but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

The Apostle Paul changed the world. He made a difference. He left a mark. Why? He was never defeated by discouragement. How can you and I overcome discouragement? Leave the results in God’s hands. Die to self. Live for eternity.

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