

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, March 5, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

THE MAGNIFICENT JOY OF TRIALS Dealing with Discouragement *James 1:2-4, Selected Scripture*

“Consider it pure joy, my brother (and sisters) whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” –James 1:2-4 (NIV)

We began our study several weeks ago called “The Magnificent Joy of Trials.” Although it sounds absurd or perhaps at least a little sarcastic that trial should be counted a “joy”, we have discovered that maturing in our faith and finding a complete (or whole, full, mature) faith includes times of trial... sometimes great trial. Without them we never really develop... and nobody ever escaped the process. We simply cannot become the people God intends us to be without some headaches and heartaches. Just for review we have discovered that when troubles and hardships... trials come we can do a couple of things with it:

2 Possible Responses to Trials:

1. **We can grow bitter** – The opposite of joy could be bitterness. James says to “Count it all joy whenever you face trials of many kinds...” I guess the opposite of joy would be the reaction we usually have when life gets hard and the trial mount. We get mad at God, mad at the world and mad at others. We can lash out and allow our pains and disappointments in life to literally defeat and stifle the life out of us. We become bitter.
2. **We can grow better** – That’s what James says. He is telling us that for a believer, the trial we experience in this life can actually make us better... they can serve to mature us in the faith so that our faith is complete and not lacking anything.

So the question is how do I develop and mature in my faith rather than wilt and die in despair and bitterness when I’m hurting? How do I turn moments of struggle, and hardship, and difficulty into opportunities to develop my faith? James mentions *“trials of many kinds”* and we have explored a couple of these different types of trials that God may use to grow us in our faith the past few weeks.

Where We Have Been: (2 trials we have explored the past few weeks)

1. **The trial of waiting** – What do we learn from the trial of waiting? We learned to wait, rest and trust in God.

2. **The trial of failure** – What do we learn from the trial of failure? We learned that failure doesn't have to be final... that we learn from our failures and that sometimes failure gives us a greater dependence on God.

The Christian life is an overcoming life. Even though we will definitely have problems and personal struggles in this life... trials of many kinds as James calls them, we will be able to overcome because of Jesus. Because of Him, we have victory over the world, including sinful habits, bitterness, loneliness, guilt, fear, and discouragement. God desires for you to live an overcoming life! Jesus, Himself, said in John 16:33, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* In this study we want to pay particular attention to the trial of discouragement.

Some Christians have an erroneous idea that it is somehow sinful for a genuine believer... genuine child of God to be discouraged, even for a moment. This idea is probably a result of so much teaching and preaching on the idea that Christians *should not* be discouraged, or that we have so many blessings, we don't really have cause for discouragement. However this might come to be accepted, the idea is taking the truth a little further than need be, because discouragement in itself is not *sinful*. There are some consequences of discouragement that may certainly be unwelcome and not beneficial to the people of God... it is a real trial, but that is another issue altogether.

No one is immune to getting discouraged sometimes, not even the Christian. It usually hits us at surprising moments, yet there are times when we can almost predict it. Fighting it is never a pleasant experience. Sometimes discouragement can be deep and complex – lasting for days or even months. On the other hand, some last for only a few hours. Tragically, sometimes deep discouragement can lead to deeper mental anguish and result in tragic consequences. If we let it deep discouragement can leave lasting scars on one's life. Let's take a look at this trial and how to deal with discouragement and how we can grow better through this trial rather than bitter. Can discouragement be one of those trials of many kinds that James speaks of that we may consider pure joy? If so, how?

I. DEFINITION OF DISCOURAGEMENT

A Good Definition of Discouragement: *"Discouragement means to deprive of confidence, hope, or spirit; to dissuade or deter; and to hamper; hinder."*

Some Causes of Discouragement: In spiritual matters, discouragement cannot be a good thing, especially if one continues in the state without addressing the cause. Someone may discourage because of any number of things.

1. **Harsh words** – Harsh words, words spoken in anger, or sharp criticisms can break the spirit of person very quickly. They dishearten. They sometimes humiliate. They wound deeply and we don't get over them quickly. Sometimes they may make us think worse of ourselves than we already do, and add grief upon grief. Stick and stone do break our bones, but words really do hurt us, also.
2. **Ungodly behavior** – Our own, and that of others that we expect more from can bring on great discouragement. Sometimes even the ungodly behavior that we see in our

culture and society can become a source of discouragement to Christians. This is not always a bad thing. We should be bothered by “sin” and “ungodly” behavior. It ought to disturb us, but to dwell on it to the point of despair is not healthy spiritually or physically.

3. **Undue stress and pressures** - The daily stresses and pressures we face can certainly bring on times of discouragement, particularly when the daily drone of those pressures drags on. The monotony itself can be discouraging, but undue stress and pressure... added strain to the daily routines can undo us. Add to the pressures we already face and all of the sudden we are facing a mountain rather than a mole hill.
4. **Facing hardships** – Hardships in life always carry a measure of discouragement with them... particularly if those hardships involved our loved ones, extreme health issues, loss (personal, financial, loss of life), unexpected catastrophes, etc.
5. **Persecution** - We don't face extreme persecution for our faith in this part of the world, at least not like those in some countries where being a Christian is illegal. We do face a milder form of persecution all the time in ridicule, assaults on our Christian ideals and principles, belittling of our faith, etc. No matter what form the persecution may take, great or small, anytime what we believe strongly in is assault or under attack it can bring on great discouragement... even despair.

NOTE: In each case and in every situation the problem must be addressed and the one who is discouraged must be given a solution for the discouragement. If we stay in our discouragement we will certainly grow bitter, disillusioned and can even deep further in to despair and depression if not careful.

II. VICTIMS OF DISCOURAGEMENT

Christians should never get discouraged. That's a common attitude from some people and it is decidedly wrong. People who claim Christians should never get discouraged have failed to understand a basic truth, that it is not something the person chooses to do. It is not showing a lack of faith or that they are lacking in their spiritual life. Discouragement is often, quite simply, something that is out of our control. A whole host of circumstances, some of our own making and some not, may contribute to discouragement. And quite frankly, some of what makes for life's most discouraging moments legitimately ought to discourage us. It is not a spiritual failing on the person's part. Some people think faithful followers of God don't experience discouragement, but there are many great Christians of our time and in history who were prone to discouragement, and many great people of faith... even heroes of faith in the Bible who had moments (sometimes extensive) of great discouragement.

John Bunyan was born in England in 1628. He received little schooling, but became a deacon in a Baptist church when he was 27 years-old and immediately saw success as a preacher. Because at that time it was illegal to preach without a license from the government and Bunyan belonged to an illegal denomination, he spent a total of 12 years in prison before dying at age 60. Bunyan wrote his most famous book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, while in prison. It is an allegory meant to illustrate the difficulties faced by Christians. *The Pilgrim's Progress* tells the story of a man named Christian who is on his way to the Celestial City. In their travels, Christian and his companion are captured by a giant named Despair and locked away in a castle called “Doubting Castle.” The giant starves his prisoners and beats them every day, trying to make Christian and

Hopeful commit suicide. Finally, Christian remembers he has a key tucked in his clothes. The key is called Promise. Christian and his companion use the key to unlock their chains and escape the giant and his castle. In this episode, Bunyan shows how Christians can be captured and imprisoned by discouragement and doubt, but that they can overcome discouragement by remembering who God is and what He has promised.

Christian leader examples of those who suffered depression: There have been many great leaders, preachers, and missionaries in the history of the Church who have also struggled with bouts of depression. Some of the more notable examples are the following.

1. **Martin Luther** (founder of the Protestant Reformation)
2. **John Bunyan** (Christian preacher and martyr, Pilgrims Progress)
3. **Hudson Taylor** (Founder of the China Inland Mission)
4. **A.B. Simpson** (founder of the Christian Missionary Alliance)
5. **Adoniram Judson** (missionary to Burma)
6. **Charles Haddon Spurgeon** (19th century revival preacher)
7. **Mother Theresa** (missionary to the poor and destitute of India)
8. **Billy Graham** (Billy Graham Evangelistic Association)

“The Christian life is not a constant high. I have my moments of deep discouragement. I have to go to God in prayer with tears in my eyes, and say, ‘O God, forgive me,’ or ‘Help me.’”
– Billy Graham

Biblical examples of those who suffered depression: Similarly, some of the great heroes of the faith and many Biblical examples emerge from Scripture of those who struggled with discouragement.

1. **Moses** (Numbers 11:10-15)
2. **King David** (Psalm 6, 13, 38)
3. **Hannah** (I Samuel 1:9-18)
4. **Elijah** (I Kings 19:1-18)
5. **Job** (Job 3:1-26 and 6:1-7:21)
6. **Jeremiah (Jeremiahs 20:14,16)**
7. **Jonah** (Jonah 4:1-3)
8. **Nehemiah** (Nehemiah 1:4, 2:1)

Though each one struggled with discouragement, each one’s struggle was different. We are going to look at three of these a little closer and understand their discouragement. In reviewing each man’s case, we will note physical, emotional and spiritual reasons for their being discouraged.

1. **Moses (Numbers 11:1-15)** – Moses had been miraculously used by God to lead the Israelites from Egypt. The people knew little else than a life of miracles – safe passage through the Red Sea, steady diet of nourishing manna, ample water, Divine guidance (cloud by day, fire by night) – yet they griped about everything. It was neither the Promised Land nor the promising future on which they focused, but Egypt. Weary of their God-given daily diet, they longed only for the leeks, garlic, and onions of the land of their bondage. The text in **verse 10** reports, **“Moses heard the people of every family**

wailing, each at the entrance of his tent. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled.” (NKJV/KJV “displeased,” NLT “very aggravated”) *literally the words translated as “troubled” means “depressed.” Interesting! He was so despairing, discouraged that in verse 15 he asked God to kill him says, in speaking to God, “If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now...” (v.15). Why was he so discouraged, do you think?

- (1) **Physically – stressed (vv.16-17)** He was exhausted and overworked... stressed out because he had not learned to delegate his work load. He tried to handle it all by himself (see Ex. 18:13-23 where his father-in-law, Jethro, advised him to delegate so that he would “be able to endure.”)
 - (2) **Emotionally –inadequate (v.15)** Moses had an inferiority complex; he held low view of his self-worth. Remember that he made many excuses for his own feelings of inferiority and inadequacy when God originally called him to lead His people to freedom. He took the situation here with the people personally... as one of personal failure. They were really rejecting God not him. Moses was diligent in his leadership, and yet had as his reward griping and complaint.
 - (3) **Spiritually – distant (v.11)** Moses felt distant from God. He said to God in verse 11, “... why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?” Do you hear the implication spiritually? What does Moses’ words reveal about how he felt about his relationship with God at this time?
 - (4) **How God handled him – (vv.16-25)** Moses as instructed by God to spread his work load, to slow down. He was to find seventy men to do the work he alone was trying to do.
 - (5) **What God says to us - (v.17) You don’t have to carry your burdens alone** “... They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.” We do not have to carry the burden alone. God, Himself, and other that He provides will help carry the load. When we are discouraged seek the support and encouragement of God and others.
2. **Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-21)** – A series of events tracked Elijah’s life, including a famine that he himself had prophesied, and a confrontation on Mt. Carmel where he defied 450 prophets of Baal. After seeking out a solitary retreat next to a juniper tree, his reward was a threat on his life – issued by Jezebel. His words were like Moses’ in verse 4, “While he (Elijah) himself went a day’s journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. ‘I have had enough, Lord,’ he said. ‘Take my life...’” Again we have an exhausted and discouraged man of God. Why?
- (1) **Physically –exhausted (v.3)** In fear for his life, Elijah had just run approximately 30 miles. Not only was he weary from running, but also from relating to the cultic prophets on Carmel. He had missed sleep and meals... he was worn out.
 - (2) **Emotionally – fearful (v.10)** Whereas Moses struggled with inferiority, Elijah suffered from a martyr’s complex. Note his words in verse 10, “... I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant,

broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left and now they are trying to kill me too." He felt all alone, like there was no one else by him. Not so. God soon reminded him of that, saying that he was joined by 7,000 others in Israel who had refused to bow to Baal.

- (3) **Spiritually – weakened faith (v.3)** His fear was an indication that his eyes were not on God, but on the enemy. Jezebel was anxious to take his life, and it seemed all were against him – Jezebel, the world, even God.
 - (4) **How God handled him** – God didn't rebuke Elijah. Instead, God fed His servant and allowed him to sleep (vv.5-8). The food which the heavenly men delivered to him was so adequate that it kept his strength sustained for 40 days, until he reached Mt. Horeb. Not only was he well fed and well rested, but God also supplied him with a friend – Elisha (vv.19-21).
 - (5) **What God says to us – (vv.11-13) God is at work, behind the scenes even when we don't see Him** The 3 phenomena, wind, earthquake, and fire, announced the imminent arrival of the Lord. The Lord's self-revelation to Elijah came in a faint whispering voice (v.12). The lesson for Elijah was that Almighty God was quietly, sometimes imperceptibly, doing His work in our lives and we can trust and rest in Him.
3. **Jonah (Jonah 4:1-11)** – In the wake of a miraculous escape from Egypt, Moses slumped into real discouragement. In the wake of a display of Divine superiority over the prophets of Baal, Elijah fell under depression's spell. Jonah, in the wake of perhaps the greatest evangelistic success ever recorded, became its victim. The entire city of Nineveh (the capital of Assyrian Empire) repented and turned to God. Note the same words, but from a different man in **verse 3, "Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."** Why did Jonah battle such discouragement?
- (1) **Physically – fretful **angr* (vv.1-3)** He had fought hard against God. He had attempted a trip to Tarshish to avoid preaching in Nineveh, and in the process had survived time in the belly of a fish. He had preached his way across Nineveh, and effort that took three days to achieve.
 - (2) **Emotionally – bitter (v.2a)** He was a bitter man, angry at God for showing His compassion and grace to the people he himself despised. He felt superior to them. Jonah was a bigoted nationalist more than he was an evangelist.
 - (3) **Spiritually – hardness (vv.2-3)** Jonah was carnal. Anger was the tell-tale symptom of his deeper spiritual problem. In this instance he wanted to preach without seeing the results for which an evangelist usually hoped.
 - (4) **How God handled him – (vv.4-9)** God brought the facts to his attention and pointed out that he had no reason to let his anger kindle.
 - (5) **What God says to us – (vv.9-11) We must surrender our ways and thoughts to God and let Him take care of it.** Jonah had a way that he wanted things to work out and when his plan didn't work out as expected he was angry, discouraged and despondent... even to the point of wanting to die. God said to Jonah in **verses 10-11, "... You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from**

their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city.”

III. VICTORS OVER DISCOURAGEMENT

Five significant lessons emerge from this study which, if applied can help us to not only win over depression and discouragement, but to actually grow in their midst.

5 Lessons Finding Joy in Discouragement:

- 1. Recognize that discouragement is not a sin, it is a symptom –**
- 2. Maintain a consistent program of relaxation and rest –** You may have to delegate some of your work load to do this.
- 3. Guard against those subtle feeling that war against you (inferiority, martyr, and superiority) –** Keep your eyes on the Lord and away from yourself.
- 4. Remember that God is for you, not against you –** It is not His design to make your life miserable, but meaningful.
- 5. Don't forget, Satan and his demons may be behind your discouragement –** It's one of his sharpest darts.

“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him my Savior and my God.” –Psalm 42:5