

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, August 9, 2017 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

NO PAIN, NO GAIN
“How God Grows Us”

The Pain of Dealing with the Three D’s – Part 1
“Gaining Ground in Spite of Doubt, Discouragement and Disappointment”
James 1:2-4, Luke 22:31-34 & 54-62, Various

“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 “No Pain, No Gain.” Although it sounds absurd or perhaps at least a little sarcastic at best, that the pains and difficult trial of this life should ever be counted a “joy,” or an opportunity for “gain,” what we have discovered is that maturing in our faith, really growing in our faith, finding gains in our faith includes times of pain and heartache... trials ... sometimes even great pain and trial. Without them we may never really develop... and nobody, it seems, ever escapes the process. We simply cannot become the people God intends us to be without some of life’s pains, heartaches, difficulties along the way... some bumps along the road. Just for review we have discovered that when the pains of this live come, when trial and difficulties 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 fact 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 gain in the midst of the pains of this life, after all the study is called “No Pain, No Gain?” How do I experience the growth.. the gain, despite the pain? 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 and gain in my faith? James mentions *“trials of many kinds”* and we have explored a

couple of these different types of pain in life that can be trials that God may use to gain ground in our faith.

Where We Have Been: (5 pains though which we may find gain)

1. **The pain of WAITING** – What do we learn from the pain of waiting? We learned to wait, rest and trust in God.
2. **The pain of SUFFERING** – What do we learn from the trial of suffering? We learned that suffering in this life is not an optional course, but a required course we will all face at some time in some way, and that times of suffering may deep our faith and dependence on God.
3. **The pain of LOSS** - What do we learn from the pain of loss? We learned that loss is one of the hardest pains to navigate and come through. We learned that we are not alone in our loss... that loss is not a sign of sin and that everyone experiences it. God is faithful in our times of loss, to see us through, to strengthen us and provide for our needs in the midst of it, and encourage our hearts with His presence and provision.
4. **The pain of WORRY** – We learned that we are all “worriers”... 100% worry! We also learned that many of our great heroes of the faith were worriers, that worry may be a spiritual symptom of trust, control and lack of faith. We also learned that God is faithful even in our worrying times, faithful to see us through, to strengthen us and provide for our needs in the midst of it, and encourage our hearts.
5. **The pain of FEAR** -

The Christian life is an overcoming life. Even though we will definitely have problems and personal struggles in this life (pains and trials of many kinds), 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.*” And in 1 John 5:4-5, “*For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.*”⁵ *Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*” Christians are overcomers and truly are to live victorious Christian lives every day, but let’s be honest, there are many painful trial and struggles, heartaches and difficulties along that way that can daily steal our joy and paralyze our faith, destroy our relationship and weaken our walk... the painful times and trials can embitter and defeat us if we let them. In this study we want to pay particular attention to the pain of what we are calling the “three d’s”... doubt, discouragement and disappointment.

Some Christians have the mistaken idea that believers/Christians never struggle with and/or should never have doubts, or discouragement or even disappointment. This idea is probably a result of faulty teaching and preaching that would suggest Christian perfectionism, or that such things are unspiritual or not possible for a genuine Christian... that Christians *should never* be discouraged, or down, or have doubts. Not only is this naïve thinking it is not reality.

No one is immune to times of disappointment and discouragement in this life, and even believers may at times struggles with doubt. These may be prompted by circumstances and happenings in in our lives that catch us off guard... the loss of a loved one, a broken relationship, a health crisis, or even job loss, financial loss, or love lost. Disappointment, discouragement, doubt may

also find its way into our life by harsh treatment, unkind words, sharp criticisms, or our own internal feelings of insecurity or low self-worth. At other times these may find their way into our life with no explanation... at least none we can put our finger on or understand. What do we with all of our disappointments in life, our times of discouragement and even our doubt? How can we possibly find gain and growth through these dark times? Let examine them by first looking at disappointment and discouragement, and then we will turn our attention to the subject of doubt and how to turn our doubts into growth.

I. UNDERSTANDING DISAPPOINTMENT AND DISCOURAGEMENT

A Definition of Disappointment: *“Disappointment is a feeling of sadness and displeasure cause by the nonfulfillment of one’s hopes and expectation.”* Some synonyms that may help us to better define “disappointment” are sadness, regret, dismay, sorrow, dispiritedness, despondency, discouragement, disenchantment, disillusionment, displeasure, dissatisfaction, disgruntlement.

A Definition of Discouragement: *“Discouragement is a loss of confidence or enthusiasm, to deprive of confidence, hope, or spirit.”* Some synonyms that may help us to better define “discouragement” are hopelessness, despair, downheartedness, sadness, disillusionment, displeasure, dissatisfaction, disappointment.

Interesting to note is that these words are very close in relation and indeed are synonymous (identical, equal) in some aspects. Each word has as its antecedent (ancestor, precursor) the other. They are very much akin, and used almost interchangeably.

6 Possible Culprits of Disappointment and Discouragement: In spiritual matters, discouragement and deep disappointment cannot be a good thing, especially if one continues in the state without addressing the cause. These may lead to a loss of faith (not salvation), a disillusionment and distrust of others, a backsliding and drifting in one’s life (sin), and even depression and isolation or worse. I think it is important for us to at the least identify what may be some of the causes of disappointment and discouragement in the life of a believers. While the following is certainly not an exhaustive list of the culprits, these are some of what may contribute to these.

1. **Harsh words** – *“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me!”* [] True / [] False Harsh, critical and/or unkind 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. They may discourage us to the point of despondency, can disappoint and disillusion us with others, and cause us to retreat away from community. 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, and words really do hurt us.
2. **Ungodly behavior** – Our own ungodly behavior, and that of others that we expect more from can bring on great disappointment and discouragement. Sometimes even the ungodly behavior that we see in our culture and society can become a source of discouragement and deep disappointment 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, and may cause to become discouraged to the point of despondency and hopelessness.

3. **Undue stress and pressures** - The daily stresses and pressures we face can certainly bring on times of discouragement and disappointment in our daily life, particularly when the daily drone of those pressures drags on, and on, and 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. Sometimes our disappointment may come with ourselves and how we handle or fail to handle the daily pressures we face. At other times we may be discouraged that we just can't ever get a foot up.
4. **Facing hardships** – Hardships in life always carry a measure of discouragement with them and disappointment when things don't turn out like we thought they would... particularly if those hardships involved our loved ones, extreme health issues, loss (personal, financial, loss of life), unexpected catastrophes, etc. In these cases our discouragement and disappointment may further denigrate (degrade, depreciate) into doubt, despondency and even depression.
5. **Persecution** - We don't face extreme persecution for our faith in this part of the world, at least not generally, and certainly not like those in some countries where being a Christian is illegal. We may face a more mild form of persecution 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 assaulted or under attack it can bring on great disappointment and discouragement. Tell me it is not discouraging and disappointing to see what is happening in our own country today and how Christian morals and principles are desecrated and openly blasphemed. As a Christian today you are considered, bigoted, homophobic, narrow minded, hateful, out of touch, hypocritical, unloving, unkind, a simpleton, uneducated and unintellectual. You are laughed at and belittled for even believing in God on some fronts. This can't help but be disappointing and discouraging on some level... and even in a unhealthy way if we let it.
6. **The Enemy** – It is not secret to believers/Christian that the enemy (Satan, the devil) delights in discouraging you in our faith and walk, and filling your heart with disappointment, disillusionment and despair. Paul warns us in Ephesians 4:27 not to "... give place to the devil." And Peter tells us in 1 Peter 5:8-9, *"⁸Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. ⁹Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."* The enemy (the devil) can literally devour us... eat us up with discouragement and disappointment.

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

II. A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF DISAPPOINTMENT AND DISCOURAGEMENT (Luke 22:31-34 & 54-62/John 21:15-19)

One of the most complex characters in all of Scripture would have to be the disciple Peter. I say complex because Peter was all over the place in his faith and walk. His faith and walk seemed solid enough at times to walk on water and at shaky enough at other times to find himself sinking in despair. Peter is also, perhaps, the disciple that seems the most human to us in some ways and the one many may most identify with. He seems bold at times and unsure of himself at other times. He is outspoken, and sometimes sticking his foot in his mouth in being outspoken. He is loyal to a fault and disloyal to the point of humiliation. Committed, and de-committed. Risk-taking and then risk retreat. Like we said, he is complex... and so are we. Peter makes for a great case study in disappointment and discouragement... he has to be, and perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in his time of denial in Luke 22 31-62. Look with me at Luke 22:31-34 and 54-62 first of all (READ).

³¹ And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." ³³ But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." ³⁴ Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."

⁵⁴ Having arrested Him, they led Him and brought Him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵ Now when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. ⁵⁶ And a certain servant girl, seeing him as he sat by the fire, looked intently at him and said, "This man was also with Him." ⁵⁷ But he denied Him, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him." ⁵⁸ And after a little while another saw him and said, "You also are of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" ⁵⁹ Then after about an hour had passed, another confidently affirmed, saying, "Surely this fellow also was with Him, for he is a Galilean." ⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying!" Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." ⁶² So Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Do you think that Peter may have experienced the pain of disappointment and discouragement in this episode of his life? How? Why?

How many of the above 6 culprits of disappointment and discouragement mentioned above can you find in his story? (Name the culprit and how it relates)

(1) Harsh Words – ³¹ And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." ³³ But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." ³⁴ Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me." Peter may have taken Jesus words here as "harsh" especially given that Peter

thought he was willing to even die for Jesus. And Jesus' words may have been perceived by Peter as unkind or critical. I think Peter may have been discouraged by this or even disappointed in Jesus at this point... "I thought He knew me better than that." This may have led to Peter be a bit disillusioned and cause him to second-guess himself. It would have me! Also, we don't know the accusing tone of those who recognized Peter, and how harsh their accusation may have been at Peter. Not only did they prompt his denial, but they may have caused feeling of discouragement and disappointment that cause him to slide into denial.

(2) Ungodly Behavior – In **verse 31** Jesus told Peter, *“³¹ And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.”* We know in hindsight that Jesus was saying that the enemy would attempt to lead him to the ungodly behavior himself of denial. I believe this lead not only to disappointment and discouragement in Peter's life, but also despondency. Also the ungodly behavior of Jesus' treatment by the religious leaders and Jesus captors had to be very disappointing and discouraging to Peter... certainly to the point of despondence and hopelessness.

(3) Undo Stress and Pressure – Do you think Peter might have had undo stress and pressure on him in this situation? Certainly! He found himself in a desperate situation. The stress of this situation had to be unimaginable.

(4) Facing Hardship – No doubt the hardship and life threatening situation Jesus found Himself in was a disappointment and discouragement to Peter and all the disciples. But for Peter, he too may have felt threatened with the same fate as one of his followers and be disappointed and discouraged by this, leading to his denial

(5) Persecution – This entire episode is certainly related to the subject of persecution.

(6) The Enemy – The enemy is actually identified by Jesus as the culprit of this whole episode of disappointment and discouragement in Peter's life in verse 31.

Is there any sign in this entire passage that Peter was the victim of the pain of disappointment and discouragement? **Verse 62,** *“⁶² So Peter went out and wept bitterly.”*

An Ultimate Picture of Help with the Pain of Disappointment and Discouragement:

1. **Our Savior is aware of the disappointment and discouragements even before they come in our life (vv.31-32) -** *“³¹ And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”*
2. **Jesus prays for us in our disappointment and discouragements (v.32) –** *“³² But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”* Jesus was saying to Peter, “Peter, I know what you are about to go through, and I will be praying for you.” The same is true for us as Paul said in **Romans 8:34,** *“...It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes **intercession** for us.”* And it just may be that Peter penned these word himself in **Hebrews 7:25,** *“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make **intercession** for them.”*
3. **His eyes of grace and mercy are on us in our moments of disappointment and discouragement (v.61) –** *“⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, “Before the rooster crows,*

you will deny Me three times.” Many have seen this as a indicting or accusing look from Jesus at Peter for his denial. I don’t think so! This is not consistent with who Jesus is, and His character as demonstrated in Scripture, nor is it consistent with God’s character. I believe that Jesus looked at Peter with eyes of compassion, grace and mercy in the heat of his great discouragement and disappointment with himself for his denial. I believe this is much more consistent with who Jesus shows himself to be and is indeed confirmed later in Peter’s reinstatement by Jesus.

- 4. He restores us from our times of disappointment and discouragement (John 21:15-19)** – As we all know, Peter was later restored by Jesus, in a touching scene at the end of the gospel of John. Jesus asked Peter three times if he (Peter) loved Him (Jesus), and each time Peter got to affirm his love for Jesus. Many have seen this as a parallel to Peter’s three time denial of Jesus, and not a three time affirmation of his love for Jesus and thereby Jesus gracious restoring of Peter from his disappointing and discouraging failure previously. God is so good to restore us from times of great disappointment and discouragement in our life with these kinds of affirmations in our life.

III. VICTIMS OF DISAPPOINTMENT AND DISCOURAGEMENT

Christians should never get discouraged... should never feel disappointment. That's a common attitude from some people and it is decidedly wrong. People who claim Christians should never get discouraged or feel disappointed 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, as is disappointment. **These are very human responses to very human dilemmas.** A whole host of circumstances, some of our own making and some not, may contribute to feeling of disappointment and discouragement. And quite frankly, some of what makes for life’s most discouraging moments legitimately ought to discourage us, and some of what causes life’s greatest disappointment would and should be a disappointment to anyone.

It is not a spiritual failing on the person's part. Some people think faithful followers of God don't experience discouragement or disappointment, but there are many great Christians of our time and in history who were prone to discouragement and disappointment, and many great people of faith... even heroes of faith in the Bible who had moments (sometimes extensive) like these.

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.

Example of great Christian leaders who confessed to great period of deep discouragement and disappointment in their life and ministry: There have been many great leaders, preachers, and missionaries in the history of the Church who have also struggled with periods of discouragement and disappointment... some even to the point of depression and despondency at times. 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

What do you think of this quote? Do you agree or disagree with his assessment of the Christian life? Why or why not? Give examples? What does Billy Graham say is his help/remedy for the discouragements and disappointment in the Christian life?

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

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)

IV. VICTORS OVER DISCOURAGEMENT AND DISAPPOINTMENT

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 Help and Growth in Discouragement and Disappointment:

1. **Recognize that discouragement/disappointment 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 disappointment and 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