

Do Not Give Up

“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.”

—Luke 18:1, New American Standard Bible

There is a natural tendency

among people to become discouraged at times for various reasons. These might include, though are not limited to: difficult life events such as health problems or the death of a loved one; perceived lack of personal progress despite

effort; disappointment; dwelling on past mistakes; receiving negative feedback. The Lord’s followers are not immune from having such experiences, nor from becoming discouraged, while engaged in “the good fight of faith.”—I Tim. 6:12

Discouragement—a Tool of the Adversary

There are times during a Christian’s life when all seems joyful to us, when we are thoroughly stimulated by God’s Word and encouraged by it. Whereas there are other times when the clouds of difficulties hang low and are dark, making us feel discouraged while walking in the narrow way.

This is when the Adversary finds discouragement to be such a powerful weapon against the Lord’s

people. He suggests that we stop walking in the narrow way; stop fighting the good fight of faith and instead, lay down and rest. There is a famous quote which says, "On the plains of hesitation lie the blackened bones of countless millions who at the dawn of victory lay down to rest, and in resting died." This is an apt description of weariness and discouragement.

Many Christians believe resting is okay, because if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, then you are saved. They think they need not be too concerned about doing anything further because, after all, it is merely faith that counts and not works. A commonly heard expression is, "once in grace, always in grace."

However, the words of the Apostle Paul do not support this concept. Rather he wrote, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."—I Cor. 9:26,27

If the great Apostle Paul said he must continue to run and to fight, to bring himself "into subjection;" so as to not be a castaway, then we must conclude that salvation consists of more than just saying the right words at the right point in our life. If Paul would not allow himself to become discouraged, nor to give up the good fight of faith, then we must not do so either.

Parable of the Importunate Widow

Jesus gave a wonderful parable which teaches the lesson to not become discouraged. It is the

parable of the persistent widow who refused to give up. The parable reads: "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, Give me justice against my opponent. For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out. And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry out to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly."—Luke 18:2-8, *NASB*

The law which God had given to the Jewish nation was clear. "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow." (Deut. 27:19) In other words, the rights of those who had no power, such as widows and orphans, were to be protected. However, in this parable the judge did not care about what God commanded. Yet despite this, the widow did get justice, because she never gave up nor became discouraged. She kept coming back. Thus, finally, the judge settled the case and did so in her favor.

The lesson of Jesus' parable can be applied to the consecrated followers of the Lord during the present Gospel Age. Consider the favor which God has shown to those who hear and accept the heavenly calling. The favor which God has given to them is so much more than that which was shown by this corrupt judge in the parable. Consequently, let us not give up, nor become discouraged.

Jesus gave a similar thought to his disciples, when he said, “If you then, imperfect as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Matt. 7:11, *Weymouth New Testament*) In other words, referring back to the parable, if the evil, corrupt judge dispensed justice and favor toward the widow, how much more will our Father in heaven do for us.

Habakkuk Asks God

At times it might seem as if God is tolerating the wrongs taking place around us or others. We might get the impression that our circumstances are becoming more unfavorable, and nothing is going to change.

Such feelings occurred many times throughout the history of Israel. For example, the prophet Habakkuk exclaimed, “How long, LORD, must I cry out for help, but you won’t listen? I’m crying out to you, Oppression! but you aren’t providing deliverance. Why are you forcing me to look at iniquity and to stare at wickedness? Social havoc and oppression are all around me; there are legal conflicts, and disputes abound. Therefore, the Law has become paralyzed, and justice never comes about. Because criminals outnumber the righteous, whenever judgments are issued, they come out crooked. ... Your eyes are too pure to gaze upon evil; and you cannot tolerate wickedness. So why do you tolerate the treacherous? And why do you stay silent while the wicked devour those who are more righteous than they are?” (Hab. 1:2-4,13, *International Standard Version*) Habakkuk is asking

God why he was not immediately doing something about all the corruption in Israel.

God answered the prophet saying, “Write out the revelation, ... For the revelation pertains to an appointed time—it speaks truthfully about the end. Though it delays, wait for it, because it will surely come about—it will not be late!” (Hab. 2:2,3, *ISV*) God’s answer is, I am going to do something at my “appointed time.” God cares very much, and we are assured of this because of the many promises he has provided in the Bible. Therefore, let us not allow ourselves to become discouraged, despite all the corruption we see in the world around us.

Prayer—an Antidote

At the beginning of the parable in Luke chapter 18, verse one states, “at all times” we “ought to pray and not to lose heart.” Thus, we see that one antidote to discouragement is prayer. We should continually realize that our prayers go up to the most righteous, just, and powerful being in the entire universe!—I Pet. 3:12

The closing words of the parable are, “However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8, *NASB*) This is a rhetorical question. It implies that despite the faithfulness of God and of the positive assurances that he will execute judgment on behalf of his elect, the great danger is that his people will grow weary, they will lose faith, and they will stop sending their prayers to God.

There is a wonderful proverb which reads, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick.” (Prov. 13:12, *New International Version*) However, we should always

remember the remainder of the verse, “but a long-ing fulfilled is a tree of life.” If we are “faithful unto death,” we will certainly see the day when our longing is fulfilled and receive the “crown of life.” —Rev. 2:10; James 1:12

A lesson we can glean from the parable of the persistent widow is that, although our prayers might appear to go unanswered, we must persevere. We must not grow weary or discouraged in making supplication to God. May each of us at the end of our earthly course be able to say, as the Apostle Paul said, “I have fought a good fight, ... I have kept the faith.”—II Tim. 4:7

For What Should We Pray?

A proper condition of heart to have when we pray is to feel the need for the Lord’s blessing and assistance. We should go to him with a trustful attitude, present our petitions, and then watch and wait for his time and way to answer our prayers.

We can pray for strength to overcome our flesh, for heavenly wisdom to know how to deal with problems, for strength of character and assistance in developing the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. (James 3:17; Gal. 5:22,23; Eph. 5:9) We can pray for grace and wisdom to keep ourselves unspotted from the world and to put on the whole armor of God. (Heb. 4:16; Eph. 5:27; II Pet. 3:14; Eph. 6:11-18) We can ask for wisdom as to how to understand the Word of God and how to develop the proper spirit of the Truth. (Ps. 111:10; Eph. 5:17; Col. 1:9-11) All these things would be proper subjects of prayer, because they are all part of what goes into the transformation of our heart and mind as a follower of the Lord.

While prayer is indispensable to the Christian, yet it is the Word of God which teaches us his will and plan, and which points out the way for us to go. No amount of praying will make up for a neglect of the study of the Lord's Word, which "is a Lamp" to our feet, "and a light" to help guide us in this long, dark night in which sin has reigned in the world. (Ps. 119:105) "Everything that was written long ago was written to instruct us, so that we might have hope through the endurance and encouragement that the Scriptures give us."—Rom. 15:4, *ISV*

We should "pray without ceasing" and not become discouraged if the good things promised to us and asked for, do not come quickly. (I Thess. 5:17) We must remember that God's Word of promise "is sure," to rest in these promises, and wait patiently and hopefully for their fulfilment.—Ps. 19:7; 111:7; II Pet. 1:19

Consider Jesus

In addition to utilizing prayer as an antidote for discouragement, the Apostle Paul states, "Consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." (Heb. 12:3) Jesus endured much, yet he did not become spiritually weary or disheartened. The "contradiction of sinners" that he experienced is the kind the footstep followers of Christ will also feel as they seek to do the Father's will.

Earlier in the Book of Hebrews the apostle wrote, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." (Heb. 4:15, *NIV*) Surely

Jesus, at times, must have been tempted to grow weary or be discouraged. At the start of the narrow way Satan came to Jesus, suggesting an easier way to obtain his objectives without any sacrifice whatsoever. However, without hesitation, Jesus answered, "Get thee behind me, Satan." (Luke 4:8) Though we find ourselves striving to walk in the sacrificial footsteps of Jesus, we will never endure as much as he did.

One of the Lord's dedicated followers once expressed it this way: "There is a danger of growing weary in well-doing. Well-doing costs something. It means sacrifice. If you are serving the Lord's cause, you are denying yourself in some way. The world, the flesh, and the Adversary are pressing hard to draw us, not exactly from the prize, but from the narrow way that leads to the prize. That would make us faint. That would cause us to say, Oh, I am so tired. I just cannot do any more. Doubtless, we all have had such experiences. If we get faint in body, we can rest. If we get faint in mind, it is much more difficult to become refreshed."

Let us remember, however, that God is faithful. He has promised to never leave nor forsake us. (Heb. 13:5) God raised Jesus from the dead as a divine spirit being, even though he had been put to death as an "evil-doer." (John 18:30, *Revised Version*) God will also do the same for us, if we remain faithful unto death, because he has promised "eternal life to those who strive for glory, honor, and immortality by patiently doing good." (Rom. 2:7, *ISV*) The Scriptures are clear. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." If "we suffer with him," we will "be also glorified together."—II Tim. 2:12; Rom. 8:17

Live in the Future—Not the Past

To avoid becoming discouraged we should live with a view towards our future goals and prospects and not dwell on the past. If we live in the past, we are likely to brood on past mistakes and shortcomings and will surely become discouraged. If we contemplate the future and meditate upon the part we are going to have in bringing blessings to the whole world of mankind, then we will become enthusiastic and renewed in spirit.

Paul wrote, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13,14) He also admonished, “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”—II Cor. 4:17,18, *NIV*

We Shall Reap

In both the Old and New Testaments there are many illustrations and lessons given which use the example of farming. Indeed, farming has been an integral part of life for people throughout history, and there is much we can learn from it.

For example, we are instructed, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Gal. 6:9) The word “reap” is associated with farming, and it means “to harvest.” Farmers know that if they are going to have a successful harvest, they must do more than just

plow the land and sow seed. They dare not grow weary with the constant need to cultivate, feed, and tend to the growing crop. They look forward with joy to the prospect of reaping the fruitage of their efforts, though reaping, too, requires much work. Yet harvesting a crop is the whole point of farming.

Along these lines there is a wonderful proverb, which says, “I went past the field of a sluggard, past the vineyard of someone who has no sense; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man.”—Prov. 24:30-34, *NIV*

The lesson is, if we allow discouragement or weariness to gradually overtake us, they will surely promote the loss of everything which we once thought really mattered. Instead, like a resourceful farmer, let us apply ourselves each day, striving to make our “calling and election sure.”—II Pet. 1:10

Parable of the Sower

The parable of the sower emphasizes that hearing the Gospel and accepting it is only a first step. In the parable, a sower went out and sowed seed. The seed fell in different types of soils, producing different results. Jesus explained, “The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers

to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.”—Matt. 13:20-22, *NIV*

This parable teaches us that receiving the good news of the Gospel and accepting it does not, by itself, guarantee spiritual success, nor fruitage. If we allow troubles, persecutions, the worries of this life, or other wearisome experiences to discourage us, then we will be unfruitful and not pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

Hesitation—a Friend of Weariness

Although the word “hesitate” does not appear in the *King James Version* of the Bible, the thought is alluded to in the book of Ecclesiastes, using again the farming metaphor. The wise man wrote, “He that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.”—Eccles. 11:4

In ancient times, when someone wanted to sow seed, it was necessary to throw the seed. However, if there is wind, it could catch the seed and take it away from the spot where the sower had wanted it to go. Some would be tempted to think, “I will wait until tomorrow, maybe the wind will die down.” Likewise, if there are clouds there is a chance it could rain. Similarly, some would think, “Maybe I will wait for a better day.” Thus, we see the idea of hesitancy contained in this lesson.

We can almost visualize a hesitant farmer out in their field, saying, “No, it does not look good today. I think I will go in and rest.” The result of such thinking is the possibility that no crop at all will be produced. In contrast to this, two verses later we read these encouraging words: “In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper,

either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.”—vs. 6

Hesitation is the friend of weariness. Even if we do not have the strength to get involved with the sowing or reaping that others are doing in the Lord’s vineyard, we are able to support those who are doing such work. We can offer encouraging words, our prayers, or other assistance if the Lord has made it possible for us to do so.

In concluding our thoughts, we quote these words: “Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12, *NIV*) “Every trial, every persecution, every difficulty of life, permitted to come upon those who have made the covenant of sacrifice with the Lord, is intended to prove them, to test their love, to see whether or not their characters are fixed, rooted and grounded in righteousness. ... It puts all these trials, difficulties, and temptations in a new light before us, and greatly assists us in fighting a good fight and overcoming.”—Excerpt from *Daily Heavenly Manna* comment, December 9 ■