

# CHRISTIAN WORKER

“We are workers together with Him...” (2 Corinthians 6:1)

VOLUME 110, NUMBER 3

## WE’VE ALL BEEN THERE!

Andy Baker

I am reminded of the story of the man that approached a little league baseball game one hot, sunny afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy kept his gaze on the field and responded, “Eighteen to nothing—we’re behind.” “Woah,” said the man, “I’ll bet you’re discouraged.” “Why should I be discouraged?” replied the little boy. “We haven’t even gotten up to bat yet!” Discouragement is a state of mind and heart that repeatedly looks at circumstances and says, “this is not the way I expected or wanted things to go!” It can be a result of unmet expectations, repeated failure, or even looking at the future and not seeing any discernible way for things to change in a positive direction. Thus, we become discouraged. Here are some truths about it:

It affects all of us. Discouragement is no respecter of persons. Every Bible character can we imagine has dealt with discouragement at some point in their lives. Job sat in ashes and loss scraping himself with a broken piece of pottery. The prophets preached their hearts out to people who had rejected God and persecuted them. God’s people collectively were discouraged in the report of the spies of the land of Canaan (If you think it can’t happen congregationally, read Numbers 13!) David wrote psalm upon psalm about his troubles and how deeply they affected him. It really is a “common to man” problem that really does affect all (1 Cor. 10:13). Whether patriarch, Israelite, Canaanite, king, prophet, common person, elder, preacher, deacon, teacher, faithful church member, unfaithful church member, or even the lost; WE ALL get discouraged.

It affects all of us in different ways. Jacob was never really the same once he concluded his son Joseph was dead. It seems he withdrew from life in the latter chapters of Genesis. Moses was dealing with the death of his sister and had a group of ungrateful Israelites at his door complaining

against God and against him about a water problem. In his discouragement, he lashed out at them and struck a rock in disobedience to God (Num. 20:1-9). In God’s wisdom, part of the qualifications for elders seems to indicate that they handle conflict (and especially the coming discouragement) in a way that shows them to be mature, peaceable men (1 Tim. 3:1-5; Tit. 1:6-9) Knowing the ways discouragement comes for us, and especially how it affects us is absolutely key to handling it with joy and patience (Ps. 139:23-24; Jas. 1:2-7).

It is often difficult to see in ourselves. One man

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# FROM THE EDITOR:

## WHEN ELIJAH RAN FOR HIS LIFE

Cody Westbrook

First Kings 19 has always puzzled me. It would be hard to imagine a greater victory over false religion than what Elijah accomplished in the previous chapter. The saturated altar being completely consumed by fire and the execution of 450 prophets of Baal brought the people to their knees shouting, “The Lord, He is God!” It was a great moment in the prophet’s fight against idolatry in the land of Israel, yet it was not to last. Once Jezebel received word of the event she issued a death warrant for Elijah and so “he arose and ran for his life” (1 Kings 19:3). What a dramatic turn of events. How could Elijah be on the top of the mountain one day and in the bottom of a valley the next? What can we learn from it?

What was it that troubled the prophet? Was he simply afraid to die? Was he prideful? Did he lack courage? Is this a picture of the Lord helping His servant through a great pity party, or is it something else? Note that Elijah said twice, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts...” (1 Kings 19:10, 14). His life was dedicated entirely to God’s cause. He was concerned about God’s altars, God’s prophets, and God’s covenant, but the people were not. They forsook His covenant, tore down His altars, and murdered His prophets. No doubt he was upset, but it seems he was more concerned about God’s cause than his own. Perhaps it is the case, then, that this context is not so much a picture of a depressed and despondent man so void of hope that he asks for death, as it is a one of a man who feels defeated because he sees his work as a lost cause. He must have felt great joy at what was seemingly a national repentance (2 Kings 18:39) which may have effected even wicked Ahab (2 Kings 18:41-46), only to see it shattered by Jezebel. Perhaps he believed that he had done all he could do. If one wicked woman could overrule the king and upend the cause of righteousness in the land, then the prophet’s work was finished, and if his life were to end then it would end on his terms, not hers. Thus he

set his sights on Horeb and determined to run to His God. Whatever the case, Elijah was a broken man.

Note carefully how God responds. First, He provides for Elijah’s physical needs. Upon hearing Jezebel’s decree, the prophet made his way from Jezreel, approximately 100 miles south to Beersheba, with sights on Horeb, approximately 200 miles further south. A 300 mile journey was no small undertaking and Elijah would need food and drink to sustain him along the way. Thus, the Lord provided—“Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you” (2 Kings 19:7). Second, the Lord provides reassurance—He provides for his emotional and spiritual needs. Elijah was discouraged. He believed that his task was impossible. If Jezebel could prevail after Carmel, then there was nothing more to be done. Perhaps Israel would never repent of their wickedness and the cause of God prevail. But that was not true and his thinking needed to be adjusted. Thus, God reassured Elijah by reminding him that He cared. “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (v. 9, 13) may be more of an invitation than a reproof— a compassionate God giving His weary servant an opportunity to “cast all his cares upon Him” (1 Pet. 5:7). He reassured him of His presence. First Kings 19:11-12 is first, and foremost, a reminder to Elijah that he was not alone—the Lord was with him. He reassured him of His plan. That “the Lord was not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire, but in the still small voice” was Jehovah’s way of saying that His victory would not come through vivid displays of power like what He produced on Carmel but it would still come. God’s Word—God’s Will—still reigns supreme and God would still judge Ahab, Jezebel, and Israel (cf. 1 Kings 19:15-17). He reassured him of His people. “Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal...” (1 Kings 19:18). Elijah needed a reminder that there were others like him in Israel. Remember Obadiah (1 Kings 18:4)? Even in a land overrun by wickedness, God’s faithful few remain.

It should not be difficult for us to place ourselves in Elijah's shoes. The work of the Lord is work, indeed, and there are times when feelings of mental and physical exhaustion and exasperation set in. Discouragement is not a matter of "if" but "when," and we should not be ashamed when it comes. But let it be for the right reasons and let it be resolved in the right way. Like Elijah, we sometimes wonder if God's work is a lost cause. We ask ourselves, "Why won't they listen?" "What more could I possibly say or do?" In such times we must remember that we serve a compassionate and present God. "I will never leave you nor forsake you" is the refrain of Hebrews 13:5. No one and "no thing" can separate us from the love of God but we are "more than conquerors" (Rom. 8:31-39). We must also remember that God's Word is still powerful, His cause greater than our own, and the victory will be won because it has already been won. Elijah thought all was lost! He was the last of a dying breed! No real change could ever be made in Israel! But that was just not true. God's Will always prevails and God's people will always be present.

Whenever you are discouraged in the service of God, remember Elijah. Remember the Lord your God and run to Him that you may find comfort, compassion, consolation, and a reminder of what's true.

CW

## WHY DOES IT HAPPEN?

Daniel F. Cates

There is no earthshaking revelation in the recognition that discouragements come. They come in A.D. 2024 and have likewise in every year since the world was created (unless Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden for an extended period before they fell). In some of the lives of our biblical heroes, discouragements not only came but they were frequent and powerful. David's manifold tears made his "bed to swim" (Ps. 6:6). On one occasion [likely on more than one, but only one is recorded for us], David desired to know the cause of his discouragement; he asked, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? ..." (Ps. 42:5). David did not have his question answered there, but he motivated himself saying,

"... hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Ps. 42:11). While David's question was not directly answered, the Bible does reveal the causes of some discouragements.

A first cause of discouragement is a lack of salvation. There really is no better reason to be discouraged, for a lack of salvation means eternal hopelessness and helplessness unless the Lord is sought. This is why "Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13). It is why Jeremiah would write, "Her [Judah's-DFC] adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the LORD hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy. ... But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us" (Lam. 1:5; 5:22).

A second cause of discouragement is a lack of peace. Whatever the source of the disquiet in David's life, he said, "I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears" (Ps. 6:6). A lack of peace may be associated with guilt or sickness or loss or fear or other such, but the result is the same, incessant sorrow.

A third cause of discouragement is a lack of confidence. Moses' discouragement as he was being commissioned to deliver the Israelites from Egypt was summed up in his concern that he would not be believed or even heard or that he would not be able to say what needed to be said (Ex. 4:1,10).

A fourth cause of discouragement is a lack of faith. The discouragement of the disciples was clear when they could not cast out a particular demon (Matt. 17:15,16,19). Jesus blamed their failure on their lack of faith saying, "Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20). While Christians today are not living in a miraculous age, we still need to have a strong faith and to be motivated by it.

A fifth cause of discouragement is a lack of support. This was a factor in Elijah's sulking under the juniper tree wishing to die and later his thinking that he was alone (1 Kings 19:4,10,14). This was also Paul's complaint, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge" (2 Tim. 4:16).

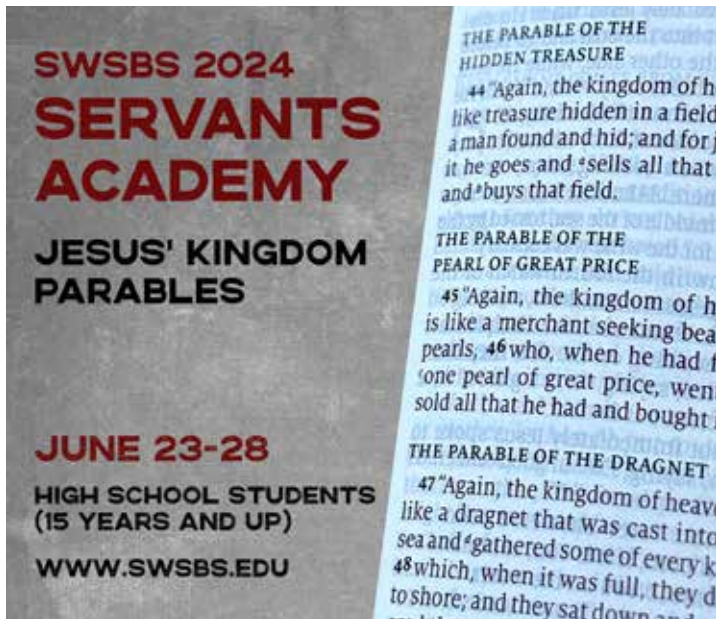
A sixth cause of discouragement is a lack of empathy. This is why Job was unable to be comforted by his friends; when he saw them on the horizon, he expected to be

encouraged, sadly they only provided more discouragement (Job 6:14,15). He had not asked for anything but their empathy and they have failed him (Job 6:21-23).

A seventh cause of discouragement is a lack of love. This was the reason for Hosea's discouragement: His love for Gomer was unrequited (Hos. 2:2,5); sadly, this was also a reason for the Lord's discouragement (Hos. 3:3,4). A lack of love was also the threat to the spiritual safety of the man who the Corinthians had disciplined but who had been restored. Paul charged them after they had duly punished the man, "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him" (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

When we like David would desire to know the cause of our discouragement, may we also know the Solution: "Hope thou in God."

CW



## MY FAVORITE... VERSES

Joey Davis

Christians can get locked into the mentality that faith should always trump discouragement, and that anytime a Christian is struggling mentally or

emotionally they must be lacking the appropriate level of trust in God. In their view, Christians should not get discouraged. The truth is that the probability that a child of God will experience periods of discouragement is just one mishap or disappointment away. Rather than pretend that Christians are immune to discouragement, let's consider what help the Bible offers to Christians when they become discouraged. The Bible is a fountain of knowledge for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Rom. 15:4), even regarding discouragement.

To begin, it would be helpful to consider some causes of discouragement. Given that discouragement is diminished confidence and enthusiasm, or a sense of dispiritedness, there are quite a few biblical examples to consider. Moses' dispirited, "Who am I?" speaks to his lack of confidence regarding the perceived enormity of the leadership burden that God was requiring of him (Ex. 3:11). David experienced daily sorrow and anxiety when dealing with King Saul (Ps. 13:2). What about Peter and his denial of Jesus that resulted in bitter weeping (Matt. 26:75)? Also consider Elijah's rapid descent from his victory over the false prophets to sitting under the broom tree and begging for death (1 Kings 19:4). Just reading Jeremiah's lament is enough to make anyone's heart heavy (Lam. 3:1-20). This is just a sampling of examples of biblical people who are known for their faith; yet they also wrestled with discouragement. The reality is, just as they were not defined by their bout with discouragement, neither must we be defined by ours. Similarly, the authenticity of our faith should not be doubted merely because we have experienced discouragement. Truth be told, these individuals did not remain in their discouraged states. Eventually, their trust and confidence in God brought them through those dark times. The same can be true for us. There are some biblical truths and principles to which we can turn to chart our course out of discouraging storms of life. Following are some passages that might be helpful to you in those dark days.

In Philippians 4:8, Paul wrote, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things." In the counseling world, there is a particular therapy modality known as Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT). This therapeutic framework emphasizes the connection between a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In other words, the way we think about our experiences paves the way for feelings and behaviors. If we frame our experiences negatively, then our feelings and behaviors will

likely be negatively skewed. For individuals who have a negative view of God, their adverse experiences will likely lead them to blame God and assess that He does not love them. I love this passage because it challenges us to frame our experiences correctly. Christians know that God loves them (and all people for that matter) so our experiences should not lead to beliefs and feelings to the contrary. This may not completely satisfy our desire to understand why bad things have happened to us, but Philippians 4:8 thinking will certainly keep us from assigning the wrong meaning to our experience and will be less likely to fuel distorted thoughts, feelings, and resultant behaviors.

If we retrace our steps through the discouraging experiences of the aforementioned individuals, we can see evidence where the individual or God corrected distorted thinking. God told Moses, "I will certainly be with you" very similar to the admonition in Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." David was encouraged by Jonathan when he assured David that Saul would not prevent David from being king (1 Sam. 23:17). This reminds us that sometimes our encouragement through discouragement comes from our contemporaries (1 Thess. 5:11; Gal. 6:2). Jesus reassured Peter of His confidence in him when He told him to "feed my sheep" and "follow me" (John 21:15-19). God helped Elijah out of his discouragement by not letting him sit in the cave and simmer in his stinking thinking. Finally, what about Jeremiah's resolute thought correction? Perhaps his renewed frame of thinking could help us overcome our discouragement. Jeremiah reframed his experience and concluded, "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:21-23).

CW

## HOW CAN I HELP?

Adam Orr

Understanding that discouragement to one degree or another is not a matter of 'if' but 'when' in the lives of Christians or those outside of Christ, what can we do to help one another? As a foundation upon which to build, let us first be clear that it is not optional whether we help one another through times of discouragement. Paul

stated clearly in Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." When we see a brother or sister hurting and experiencing times of discouragement in their lives, as members of the family of God, we must do what we can to help bear their burden. Please consider ways the Bible says this can be accomplished.

### Pray for them specifically

Too often, prayer becomes the 'last resort.' We think things like, "I've tried everything else, so now I'll pray." Prayer is the thread that runs from the beginning to the end of loved ones who are hurting. The last recorded words of Jesus before leaving the upper room with the disciples are His words in prayer to His Father. With an understanding that discouragement was soon to come, He prayed for them specifically,

But I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one (John 17:13-15).

Jesus knew that times of discouragement would come in their lives because they were not of the world, and He prayed for them specifically to the Father. Pray early and often for the discouraged.

### Be Present

How can we bear another's burdens if we are not present? Discouragement can lead to depression very easily when one feels isolated and alone. When you consider the time that Jesus walked on this earth and wore human flesh, how much time do you think Jesus spent alone? Certainly, there were times He would go off by Himself, but Jesus spent the vast majority of His time with others. Jesus spent time with people and He loved people and showed compassion to people who were hurting. Jesus touched the untouchable (Luke 5:13), healed the tormented (Mark 5:1-20), and went into homes ravaged with sorrow (Mark 5:22-43). We help the discouraged with a faith that does not say, "Be warmed and filled" (Jas. 2:16), but follows the example of Jesus in being present in the lives of the discouraged. Make a personal visit, make a personal phone call, or write a personal card. Step out of your comfort zone and be present!

### Help them to Jesus

If Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the

# THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

John Baker

world,” (John 16:33) – then we need to help others find their peace in Jesus. Jesus is the Prince of peace (Isa. 9:6) and the only source of peace between man and God (Eph. 2:14). Do you want to help the discouraged to find peace? Help them to Jesus! For those who are not Christians, show them the compassion of Jesus in being present and having the goal of studying the Bible with them. True peace is only found in Jesus, so help them to see how that is possible in opening the Bible with them. For those who are Christians, consider passages that are found in other articles of this same publication. Help them to remember that Jesus promises to be near to each one of us. Paul was experiencing a time of discouragement as he was in prison and writing that his death seemed imminent. He said that at his trial, no one stood with him, but the Lord stood with him and provided him with strength (2 Tim. 4:17). In the next verse (4:18), Paul wrote, “And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!” If you truly want to help one going through a time of discouragement, have one goal in mind as you pray, and are present – help them to Jesus!

CW

**W**e need to remember that God really is, “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3). As 2 Corinthians opens, the Greek word for “comfort” or “consolation” is found 10 times in just five verses (2 Cor. 1:3-7). Consider the following questions:

## What is “comfort?”

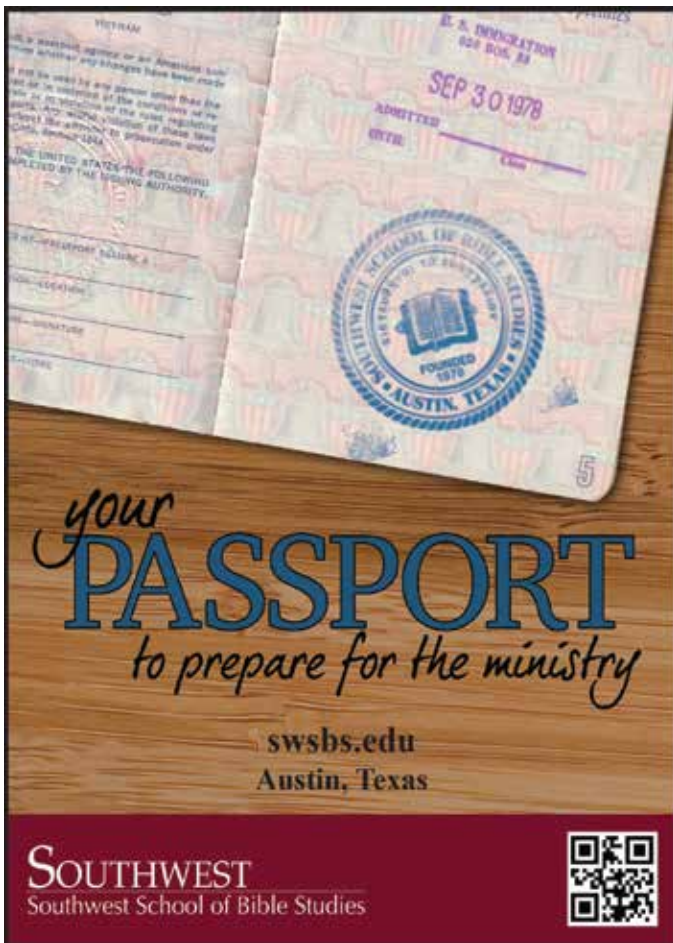
We must make an important distinction between our modern notion of “comfort,” and what the Bible term indicates. In modern English, “comfort” means, “a state of physical ease and freedom from pain, constraint, or distress.” However, the Greek word *paraklesis* (“comfort, consolation”) means, “to embolden another in belief, resolve, and assurance.” To comfort someone in the sense of 2 Corinthians 1 is to say and do things that will fortify their soul, strengthen their spirit, and encourage their heart. To comfort someone is to come alongside them and bless them in practical, tangible ways by means of both words and deeds. It is to refresh one’s heart and to give new strength for serving the Lord faithfully (cf. Phile. 7, 20).

## Who gives comfort?

Second Corinthians 1:3-7 points to one ultimate source of comfort in the life of a believer: God Himself. He is, “the God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3). Through His word, God brings grace and hope to our souls (Acts 20:32; Josh. 1:7-9). Through His divine providence, God uses people and circumstances to encourage and bless His servants (Rom. 8:28-29; Phil. 2:25-30). Even more wonderful, the Scripture says, “Our consolation also abounds through Christ” (2 Cor. 1:5). This means Christians can have assurance that God will continually be a source of strength and encouragement because of what He has accomplished in Jesus. God will never cease to provide abundant strength, encouragement, and blessing to Christians who are in need. All that remains is for us to believe in His goodness toward us, and to look for His provisions on our behalf (Rom. 8:32). Oh, for the faith to trust Him more!

## How does He give comfort?

First, God tends to give strength, encouragement, and fortification in the moments and circumstances when we need it, not before. Paul says, “He comforts us in all our tribulation” (2 Cor. 1:4). This “just in time” approach keeps



us from trusting too much in our own abilities, wisdom, strength, and experience to see us through tribulations. Second, God gives comfort “abundantly” (2 Cor. 1:4, 5). Like the 12 baskets of bread left over when the Lord fed the 5000, God always seems to provide in greater abundance than our capacity to receive (John 6:13; Eph. 3:20-21). Third, sometimes God comforts us by delivering us from affliction, and sometimes He comforts us in our ongoing affliction. At times, Paul found himself comforted, strengthened, and encouraged by God even though he remained a prisoner in chains (Phil. 1:12-14, 19-25). Fourth, God often comforts us by means of His people, the church: “He comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Cor. 1:4). When other Christians express care and concern for us, we are to see it as God’s comfort for our hearts and souls (2 Cor. 7:6-7; 11:28-29).

### Why does He give comfort?

God gives comfort to His people to remind us that He is on our side; He is “for us” (Rom. 8:31). How wonderful to realize that God deeply cares about what we are experiencing (1 Pet. 5:7). God also gives comfort to enable us to bring comfort to others (2 Cor. 1:4, 6). Job’s friends were “miserable comforters” because they lacked sensitivity and mercy toward their friend (Job 16:2). God’s comfort teaches us to be better comforters. We learn how to encourage better because we know what it is like to be discouraged, and we learn how to strengthen people by knowing what it is like to feel weak and frail. A final reason why God comforts us is do deepen our faith in His power. When God brings encouragement and strength to His people, we can say, “When I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Cor. 12:10).

Blessed be the God of all comfort. He never fails to provide just what His

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described discouragement as, “hopelessness with a side of cynicism.” It really is to be dis-COURAGED. Ask someone if they are discouraged and the answer will often be “No! I’m not!” Yet, watching behaviors and speech patterns will often yield a different answer. The Hebrew Christians were obviously discouraged with the difficulty of following Jesus, but the writer showed their

need for endurance as a remedy for the discouraged who were beginning to take their eyes off of Jesus (Heb. 1:1-4; 2:1-4; 12:1-4). Discouragement is something we feel in the moment and stopping to be honest with yourself and with the Lord, “you know, Lord, I really am discouraged about this...” can really yield some godly perspective on how He wants us to consider Him more (Psalm 42).

It is a problem which Jesus personally experienced. Was Jesus ever discouraged? If the Son of God knew what was in man and knew what was in His future, we might be tempted to say, “no, He was never discouraged” (John 2:24-25; Heb. 12:2-3). Yet, as we read His condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23, we can read the discouraged tone of His lament over the hardness of people’s hearts and how they had set themselves against God’s will (Matt. 23:37-39). We appreciate the sentiments of Hebrews 4:14-16 which ought to be an encouragement for all of us, “we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was at all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Jesus experienced discouragement. What is more, Jesus came to deal with and conquer the root of discouragement once and for all (John 12:31-32). If there really is something to keep us going and enduring and not giving up in discouragement, it is this: “My Lord conquered it and if I keep my eyes on Him, I will be with Him forever in a place that will be made sweeter and more beautiful because I endured like Him through my discouragement” (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17-18). What a glorious thought! We’ve all been there. Hang in there!

CW





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## From the Director's desk



Trent Kennedy  
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To close out the great exaltation of Jesus Christ in Colossians 1, Paul turns his attention to the place of preachers in the great mystery (or plan) of God. The work of Paul, and by implication, preachers today, was to put the church first (vs. 24), to serve God's plan as ministers (vs. 25-27), to preach (vs. 28), and to labor (vs. 29). It is through this labor that human beings become “perfect in Christ” (vs. 28).

Focus on Colossians 1:28 and notice four things about Gospel preaching:

First, see the attention of the message: Christ. The “Whom” goes back one verse where we clearly see the antecedent is “Christ.” Having boldly set forth the perfection of Jesus (vs. 13-23), Paul writes that we preach Christ in the fullness of His doctrine. He is the sufficient message to save the world from sin, to call his people to repent, to serve as the standard of morality and worship, and to serve as motivation for family relationships.

Second, see the constancy of the message: we proclaim. This passage was an ongoing verb whereby Paul stated that he was continually or habitually proclaiming Christ. Preaching is never one-and-done. Instead, this word suggests the public declaration or announcement of Jesus' kingdom, redemption, deity, preeminence, headship, sacrifice, and reconciliation.

Third, see the balance of the message: teaching and admonishing in all wisdom. These two participles describe what it means to “preach” or “proclaim.” In preaching there must be a balance between teaching healthy doctrine and warning people about those things which endanger their souls. Unfortunately, we live in a sensitive world that does not desire to hear admonitions or warnings from God or His appointed messenger.

Fourth, see the scope of the message: every man. This phrase is repeated three times in our verse. The gospel should be preached without prejudice or pretense. God has no place for the partial preacher because Jesus did not die for a limited group. Every human being needs only Christ.

These simple “ABCs” of preaching will help each of us as we try to help those around us be perfect in Christ.

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