

“Is Anyone Listening?”

(5/3/20)

→ Share my dream

As I thought about that dream, it wasn't hard to figure out that it was birthed from the nagging feeling deep down inside that I (and many other pastors) wrestle with—that our lives and ministries seem to be growing more and more irrelevant and meaningless.

That as our society becomes more and more secular—that the secular mindset rooted in worldly pleasures and pursuits is pushing out a hunger for the Word of God and the things of God.

And because of it, even though we are trying to be faithful in teaching God's Word—more and more pastors are asking the question—“*Is anyone listening?*” “*Am I really making any difference in people's lives?*”

Like those in that hospital room in my dream—it's not like there's a lack of hurting, wounded people for us to minister to—and yet, I believe many pastors are wrestling with the nagging feeling that—

“What's the point in continuing in ministry when it seems that lives aren't being changed? Marriages aren't being healed. Bondages to pornography, alcohol and drugs aren't being broken. Souls aren't being saved. My church isn't growing. In other words, is the time and energy I put into ministry, the time away from my family and all the stress that's involved—is it worth it when I don't feel it's making a difference in people's lives.”

This has caused more than a few pastors to quit or retire—I have read numerous articles that confirm this.

I have personally known several pastors that have left the ministry because they were discouraged.

I mean attendance was down, enthusiasm was down, a willingness to serve was down—and it just seemed like their ministry was no longer relevant and that no one was listening or taking their teaching to heart anymore.

And look, this doesn't just apply to pastors who are on the 'giving end' of ministry—it also applies to those who sit in the pews and are on the 'receiving end' as well.

In other words, there are many Christians who are feeling like going to church, reading their Bibles, engaging in prayer, and serving the Lord is not fulfilling them like it used to.

That all the effort is not bearing the spiritual and emotional benefit (joy and excitement are missing) it once did and they are left feeling like nothing they do for their own walk or in service to the Lord is bearing any fruit or having an impact.

The result is that discouragement has set into many believer's hearts resulting in what the Psalmist described in Psalm 42 and 43—that their soul is 'cast down' (we would say that emotionally they are in a discouraged or even in a depressed state of mind).

I believe that this discouragement has reached epidemic proportions in the Body of Christ today exacerbated (no doubt) by the forced quarantine we have been subjected to for the last 6 weeks.

But even before the '*shelter in place*' order was put into effect—I was seeing more and more Christians who were feeling drained and discouraged in their walk.

This has caused some to pull away from fellowship and to stop going to church altogether (again, I'm talking pre-COVID 19 quarantine).

For those who didn't stop going the church completely—even some of them cut back on their church attendance and were no longer are serving the Lord the way they used to.

And unfortunately—some have backslidden altogether and gone back to the world (like Demas).

People show me them on Facebook (I'm not personally on Facebook)—holding a beer, dressed inappropriately and hanging out at parties with unsaved friends.

Of course, pastors draw a lot of their strength and encouragement from their congregations—if the people in them become discouraged and walk away, it has a profound effect on their pastors.

As I said earlier, discouragement in ministry has caused many pastors to quit or retire.

This has really hit the mainline denominational churches hard—but even evangelical churches are not immune.

In the last few years, I have seen numerous Calvary Chapel pastors give up and quit the ministry.

Some of the reasons would include a drop in attendance—for many it is a substantial drop.

One Calvary pastor of a large church out east said that he has lost one-third of his church in the last couple of years—and he's not alone.

Of course, when attendance drops so does the financial support which makes it hard to keep funding the various ministries the church is responsible for.

This coupled with the constant spiritual attacks by the enemy (taking the form of emotional pressure, stress and anxiety) along with an overall lack of enthusiasm on the part of their people to get involved and serve in ministry.

All of these factors have worked together to cause pastors to become so discouraged that they have called it quits.

In Illinois we have lost several Calvary pastors—and could have lost two others recently if God hadn't brought two new pastors to take over those Calvary Chapels whose pastors were so gripped by discouragement that they just gave up.

But again, this isn't limited to pastors, as many non-clergy Christians seem to be battling a lack of enthusiasm and passion for the things of God due to discouragement and/or weariness.

I. The Reality of the Discouraged and the Weary

What are the things that make Christians so discouraged and weary that they want to give up?

A. We can become discouraged and weary when we lose sight of the finish line.

We lose sight of the finish line when we get our eyes off the eternal and onto the temporal—

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (NLT)

¹⁶ That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. ¹⁷ For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸ So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

The church of Ephesus was faithful in doing this and so the Lord Jesus commended them when He said to them, "*You have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary*". (Rev.2:3)

One author commented on this—

“People in America have a spiritual disease based on a mistaken view of life. According to it, life is lived on a big bell curve. You go up, up, up, to the age of say, fifty. And then you go down, down, down, until you die. . . In contrast, Scripture teaches that life is meant to be up—all the way to heaven! There is a goal, and the goal determines the process we must go through to get there. Whatever is valued in heaven grows more and more valuable on earth. Whatever matters not in heaven, matters less and less on earth. The longer you live, the more it is so.”

B. We can become weary and discouraged when we try to do the work of God in our own strength and not in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 24:49 (NKJV)

⁴⁹ Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

Acts 1:8 (NKJV)

⁸ But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

I believe that this is the greatest need in the Church today and the single greatest reason why we are losing the culture war to the devil in America when Jesus clearly promised us that against His Church the gates of hell would not prevail.

It's because we are trying to do the work of God in our own strength and not in the power of the Holy Spirit—the result is a lot of activity, a lot of weariness, exhaustion —with very little lasting fruit to show for it.

We have substituted programs for the power of God and theological degrees for the dynamic of the Holy Spirit—

A.W. Tozer—*“If we removed the Holy Spirit from the work of the early church 90% of what they were doing would have come to a stop. If we removed the Holy Spirit from the work of the church today 10% of what is being done would come to a stop.”*

Zechariah 4:6 (NKJV)

⁶ ... "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts.

Hudson Taylor (after he was baptized in the Holy Spirit) said, “*Without the power (baptism) of the Holy Spirit even the easiest things seem hard—but with the power of the Holy Spirit even the hardest things seem easy.*”

When God instituted the priesthood in the O.T., He forbid the priests from wearing wool clothing when they served Him—He mandated that only *linen* was acceptable for them to wear.

The reason—because He didn’t want them to *perspire* in their service for Him (perspiration spiritually spoke of service done in the energy of the flesh and not in in the power of the Spirit).

Service done in the flesh (in their own human strength) would cause them to get *worn out* or grow *weary* in their service to Him—something that displeased and dishonored God (service in the flesh that is).

C. We can grow weary and become discouraged when we try to do too much—overloading and overextending ourselves.

There’s an old saying, “*If the devil can’t make you bad—he’ll make you busy.*”

➔ Mention Martha in Luke 10:38-42 as an example of this

Burnout (leading to discouragement) is the number one reason for pastors leaving the ministry—even more than sexual sin—by far!

Matthew 11:28-30 (NKJV)

²⁸ Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.”

Jeremiah had a phrase he was fond of saying—a phrase God hated, “*The burden of the Lord, the burden of the Lord...*” (Comment)

D. We often become weary and discouraged when we are spiritually drained.

You get spiritually drained when more is going out (ministry) than is coming in (fellowship with the Lord).

If the gas tank in your car is empty you don't sit around hoping it will suddenly fill itself up—you take it to a gas station and fill it up!

The same is true when we're feeling spiritually and emotionally drained—you don't just hope and you'll be filled up—you go to church, get into the Word, or come to the Lord in prayer and get filled up!

Sometimes taking a Sabbatical from ministry to rest and get recharged is legitimate—even Jesus took His disciples away from the rigors of ministry on different occasions to deserted places so they could rest—as He taught them privately (there was still a *spiritual* purpose in it—He didn't take them on a 'Club Med' vacation).

So once in a while, when we sense we have become weary in our service for the Lord taking a little time off to rest is legitimate—but not taking time off from church and from God!

It's never legitimate to take time off from ministry where you stop coming to church and start sitting home watching TV or hanging out with unsaved friends in the world doing *whatever*.

D.L. Moody warned, “*It is okay to be tired in the work but it's not okay to be tired of the work”.*

Before you take that break from ministry you need to ask yourself which category you fit into—if it's the latter and you take a break from church—you may never come back!

It's one thing to be weary in the work—it's another to be weary in your walk.

If it's the former you need *rest*—if it's the latter, you need revival (which means more time with God not less)!

E. We will become discouraged when we feel like failures in our ministry

This is why, so many pastors are leaving the ministry—because their church isn't growing (in fact the numbers are sometimes declining) so they interpret that to mean they have failed in ministry.

Pastors don't ever forget this—Jesus hasn't called us to build big churches—He has called us to make strong disciples.

When a pastor is faithful in making strong disciples by teaching “*the whole counsel of God*”—there will be those who will leave because the Word of God is challenging their lifestyle and they don't like it—this is what some have called “*blessed subtractions*”.

God often subtracts before He multiplies—before He begins to do a greater work.

But Jesus also told us that in the last days many of the largest and wealthiest churches would be apostate churches—those that are no longer standing up for biblical truth (Rev.2 & 3).

When a pastor equates numbers with success in ministry—he has fallen prey to the world's thinking and opens the door for the devil to discourage him—right out of the ministry!

One author illustrated this when he said,

“A number of years ago, a Scottish pastor stood before his congregation and resigned, saying, ‘In the past two years, I have seen only one conversion in this congregation: wee Bobby Moffatt. With such little fruit, I can no longer serve in this ministry.’ And he walked away from the pulpit a broken man. Little did he know that ‘wee Bobby Moffatt’ grew up to be Dr. Robert Moffatt, the missionary who opened the entire continent of Africa to the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

We are not the best judges of our ministries—and we won't know if we've really been a success in ministry until the day we stand before Jesus at the Bema Seat to receive our rewards.

Until then, keep serving the Lord faithfully and keep building into people—they will be the real measure of your success in the ministry.

One pastor had this to say to the weary—to those who feel they are failures in ministry because they haven't accomplished what they set out to do—

“The movie, *Mr. Holland's Opus* [1995 starring Richard Dreyfuss], is a beautiful story of a musician who becomes a reluctant high school music teacher. Not meaning to stay, he remains at the same school for over thirty years. In the end he faces forced retirement because of budget cuts in the school system. All his life Mr. Holland has sought to write a unique opus that would bring him fame and fortune. Because of the demands of teaching high school, he is never able to accomplish his dream. As he sits talking to his best friend, the high school football coach, Holland reflects on all the years of teaching music appreciation, leading the marching band and the orchestra at the high school. He considers himself a total failure because of what he has not done in life.

As he is leaving the school for the last time with his son and wife, he hears a noise in the school auditorium. Entering the auditorium to discover what is happening, he finds a collection of music students from his past years of teaching. They are gathered to give honor to their musical mentor. One of the students is now the governor of the state. In a statement to Holland she puts his life in total perspective. She says, *'Mr. Holland, we are your music. We are the opus that you meant to write.'*

When warriors in the Kingdom of Christ become weary and wounded they should remember that each new believer, each growing disciple and each willing worker who has been mentored by them is a note in the beautiful melody that they are constructing for praise to our Lord. Once we see life from that perspective, we are ready to return to our first love, renew our gift, have our joy restored and return to the battle for the Kingdom of Christ.”

Galatians 6:9 (NKJV)

⁹ And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. [if not in this life then for sure in heaven]

F. We become discouraged when we fail to believe the promises of God.

Joshua 1:8-9 (NIV)

⁸ Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

One author said this about discouragement—

"Discouragement is, by definition, a deficit of courage.

Biblical courage is the ability to face uncertainty, adversity, danger, or suffering with faith-fueled hope that God will keep his word to us, come what may. Paul went so far as to say that since "*all the promises of God find their Yes in [Christ]*," especially the resurrection, we should "*always [be] of good courage*" (2 Corinthians 1:20; 5:6).

But we are not always of good courage. Why? Because unbelief in the promises of God *dis*-courage us. This is the focus of all Satan's massive, multifarious strategies: to *dis*-courage us through *dis*-belief in God's promises. His strategies are disorientingly sophisticated, but his goal is simple: to discourage Christians. Discouraged Christians are immobilized threats. They are diffused gospel bombs. They are silenced evangelists whose faith-anemia can be contagious.

Is it really any surprise that we find discouragement a chronic problem? Daily placed before our eyes, spoken into our ears, and breaking our hearts are reasons to be discouraged — and our indwelling sin is quick to believe them.

That is precisely why right after Paul says, "*we are always of good courage*" (2 Corinthians 5:6), he says, "*for we walk by faith, not by sight*" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Worldly perceptions will tend to sap our courage. But faith perceives a reality so hopeful that even death itself cannot quench the resulting courage."

I. The Reality of the Discouraged and the Weary

II. The Reward of the Discouraged and the Weary

1 Samuel 30:21-25 (NKJV)

²¹ Now David came to the two hundred men who had been so weary that they could not follow David, whom they also had made to stay at the Brook Besor. So they went out to meet David and to meet the people who *were* with him. And when David came near the people, he greeted them. ²² Then all the wicked and worthless men of those who went with David answered and said, "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them *any* of the spoil that we have recovered, except for every man's wife and children, that they may lead *them* away and depart." ²³ But David said, "My brethren, you shall not do so with what the LORD has given us, who has preserved us and delivered into our hand the troop that came against us. ²⁴ For who will heed you in this matter? But as his part *is* who goes down to the battle, so *shall* his part *be* who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike." ²⁵ So it was, from that day forward; he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day.

Do you know that we are all one (one Body in Christ)—whether we are weary or strong?

And so, when the Son of David (Jesus Christ) returns, we shall all be rewarded for our service—but in the meantime let the stronger encourage the weaker and let's bear each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2).

And for those who are weary and discouraged—don't forsake the fellowship of the saints, because you need the fellowship of the strong to help you when you're feeling weak.

And remember not everyone can or is called to be on the mission field—many of us are called by God to stay home and “*guard the supplies.*” (1Samuel 30:24)

In 1Samuel 30, two hundred stayed with the supplies—they guarded the supplies.

It's true they weren't on the front lines—but they were still fulfilling a vital ministry—they were protecting the supply lines.

Maybe you're thinking “*I just can't be a missionary*”—that's okay, you can pray for the missionaries and financially support missionaries as you stay back and oversee the supply lines that help make those ministries possible.

Matthew 10:41-42 (NLT)

⁴¹[Jesus said] If you receive a prophet as one who speaks for God, you will be given the same reward as a prophet. And if you receive righteous people because of their righteousness, you will be given a reward like theirs. ⁴² And if you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded.”

Some are called to the front lines—some are called to the supply lines—both are vital and both will share equally in the reward when the Son of David, Jesus Christ, returns, the One Who said—“*And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.*” (Revelation 22:12)

This has been a word for the weary and the discouraged, so please—comfort one another with these words.

If you're battling weariness, discouragement or even depression—then you must do as David did—*“David strengthened himself in the Lord his God”*. (1Sam.30:6)

Remember dear saint, we are in the last days—and as the Word of God teaches, in the last days we can expect the enemy to ramp up his attacks and he'll use weariness and discouragement as weapons to bludgeon you with.

As you serve the Lord some may *criticize* you—some may *condemn* you—but Jesus *commands* you to let your weariness and discouragement drive you *to* Him not away *from* Him.

He loves you—He is coming back for you and when He does His joy will overflow you—a joy that will be inexpressible and full of glory—and that alone is enough to comfort our weary souls!

And remember, discouragement is not a sign that you are a terrible Christian or that you're carnal and not spiritual.

Some of the people that God has used most powerfully over the centuries (Moses, David, Elijah and others) have fallen into discouragement during the course of their lives—the great Charles Spurgeon, the “Prince of Preachers” himself battled with depression:

“This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry; the cloud is black before it breaks and overshadows before it yields its deluge of mercy. Depression has now become to me as a prophet in rough clothing, a John the Baptist, heralding the nearer coming of my Lord's richer benison (blessing). So have far better men found it.

The scouring of the vessel has fitted it for the Master's use. Immersion in suffering has preceded the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Fasting gives an appetite for the banquet. The Lord is revealed in the backside of the desert, while his servant keepeth the sheep and waits in solitary awe.

The wilderness is the way to Canaan. The low valley leads to the towering mountain. Defeat prepares for victory. The raven is sent forth before the dove. The darkest hour of the night precedes the day-dawn. The mariners go down to the depths, but the next wave makes them mount to the heaven: their soul is melted because of trouble before he bringeth them to their desired haven.”

See your discouragement as a ‘friend’ to drive you to Jesus for strength—as Paul said, “*When I am weak, then I am strong.*” (2Corinthians 12:10)

“*Is anyone listening?*”—Yes! Although it may not seem like it at times.

Sometimes it might seem like you’re a (lone) voice crying out in the wilderness and that no one is listening—but they’re out there so keep faithfully declaring God’s Word.

And if any of you were wondering if, giving how I began this message, I was thinking of quitting—just so you know.

I’m like the ‘poor’—and as Jesus said, “*The poor you have with you always!*” (John 12:8)

So, I’m not going anywhere—but your pastors need your prayers!