

Trusting God With All Your Heart—Even When You're Discouraged

Life's hard, not just your life. It is hard for all of us. From a distance, it can look like many people have it all together all the time. But that's not real.

Charles Spurgeon, the “prince of preachers” from England, was a highly influential pastor. He lived in the 1800s and was the most popular preacher of his day. And yet, despite his very successful life as a minister, he said this:

I would not wish upon my worst enemy the depths of despair and discouragement I often feel for weeks or months at a time.

Billy Graham, who is probably the most respected evangelist of our time, who has seen millions and millions saved through his ministry, said this:

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.”

Everyone at various stages in life will face discouragement. Discouragement doesn't make you a bad Christian. But you will be a poor Christian if you remain discouraged. I don't believe God wants us to live in the place of discouragement.

Personally, I hit the wall in December of 2008. My wife and I were missionaries in Kenya, East Africa, at that time. We had just finished a big prayer event in the capital city of Nairobi. and afterwards. a heaviness came over me and I started feeling deeply discouraged. I felt like a total

failure as a missionary. What followed was the low point of my life. I became depressed and just sat in my bedroom and started watching movies and eating. That was all I did.

Curtains closed, phone off—I didn't want to see anyone.

I was not a fun person to be around in those days, and quickly, tensions arose in my home. My son started stuttering, and my wife and I had conflict. I felt like my life as a missionary was over and I thought it was time for my Plan B: become a dive instructor. Life became too hard and I was unable to cope with it, so I wanted to disappear under water and started looking online for a job.

Thankfully God, didn't leave me there in my discouragement. He was good. He was gracious to me. His love searched me out when I had nothing to offer in return. The Holy Spirit loved me in my darkest moment and started teaching me.

Here are a few things He taught me that lifted me out of my discouragement and which have helped me keep my heart in a healthy place:

1. Give Up the Right To Understand

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Is. 55:9).

I found that, in order to experience the peace that surpasses our understanding, we must give up the right to understand. Gods ways are higher than ours, His thoughts higher than our thoughts. Things will happen that we won't fully understand. And that is OK.

Because if God and His ways were small enough for us to fully understand, He wouldn't be big enough for us to fully entrust our lives to.

I think it is OK to seek understanding but faith comes before understanding. We first choose to trust. And we can only do that if we lay down our rights.

When we worry about our future, we are trying to control the future, and then we're taking back something we had given to Him. God is on our side, and our future is best left in His capable hands.

2. Measure Success By Obedience, Not Numbers

Don't compare yourself to others and don't despise small beginnings, but stay focused on obedience.

"For who has despised the day of small things? These seven will rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the Lord, which survey to and fro throughout the earth" (Zech. 4:10).

Don't despise the days of small beginnings, because God sees your work and rejoices in it.

Instead of seeking encouragement in the number of good things we are accomplishing, true encouragement is found in experiencing God's pleasure over our sincere efforts.

Living and working as a missionary in Africa, I often struggled with discouragement. I had great dreams and wanted to make a real difference, but what I did seemed so small and insignificant.

Of course, I knew God was doing things and I could see Him move, but it was still very small compared to my dreams and what I felt God had called me to do.

When people would visit us and I made excuses for how small the work was, they would mostly try to encourage me by saying they thought it was actually quite a lot that we had accomplished in little time. It never encouraged me though.

Here is what I wish someone would have told me: “Yes, Daniel, what you are doing is small now, but that doesn’t matter. God rejoices in your efforts, and you are successful because you are obedient.”

We don’t have to give false comfort by trying to convince someone that they are doing a big work and that this is it. If it’s small—that’s OK. Let’s agree that there are greater things coming, and keep reaching for it. Instead of pointing someone’s attention to their work for encouragement, help them look at God.

That is what truly encourages: God rejoices in our efforts. We bring pleasure to His heart. Experiencing His pleasure over our sincere efforts for His glory will help us not to despise the days of small beginnings.

3. Value Faithfulness

The New Testament believers mentioned in the letters were often called faithful (1 Cor. 4:17; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2, 7, 4:7, 9; 1 Pet. 5:12). That is important because

“He who calls you is faithful” (1 Thess. 5:24).

Jesus, who is faithful Himself, values faithfulness. And if He values faithfulness, we should do the same.

In Matthew 25, we find that famous parable about the talents. We find that those who worked with the little given them were honored:

“‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things” (Matt. 25:23b).

Instead of waiting to be made ruler over many things, be faithful with the little things—it’s a test. God knows that

“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much” (Luke 16:10). It is not easy to be faithful in what is least. We don’t like doing what is least. We want to be doing what seems important and big.

A little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness in little things is a great thing. –Hudson Taylor

You don’t have to be involved in the “big stuff” to be great. We grow in faithfulness when we feel like quitting but choose to keep going because it’s right.

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not give up” (Gal. 6:9).

A lot of Christians, especially charismatic Christians, are hoping and waiting and praying for a breakthrough moment, a special encounter in which they receive much grace and which takes them at once to where they desire to be. But this often exists at the loss of an attitude that is committed to faithfulness in the little and failing to recognize the importance and fruit of faithful building day-by-day. Waiting for breakthrough has kept many Christians from living a disciplined life of prayer and study of the Word—not giving themselves to building, but only focusing on the desired breakthrough.

Do not dismiss the importance of faithful prayer and study as you believe for breakthrough. Breakthrough is best received by a faithful heart. Faithful hearts will steward the gifts of God rightly.

4. Choose Thankfulness

It is difficult for seeds of discouragement to grow in the soil of a thankful heart.

Though you may not be able to discern what God is doing right now, you can always remember what He’s done in the past.

Encourage yourself in your history with the Lord and His commitment to you.

Paul says in Philippians 1:6:

“I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

Consider the good works He has done and let this assure you that He will continue.

And if you can't think of a good work, let me help you. Consider what Jesus did for you on the cross—how He suffered for you and demonstrated the love of God there perfectly. He found you worth dying for.

“For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and your hearts give up” (Heb. 12:3).

Sit before the cross and watch the dying Savior till faith springs up spontaneously in your heart. There is no place like Calvary for creating confidence. The air of that sacred hill brings health to trembling faith. —Charles Spurgeon

Discouragement is a loss of perspective. In the face of Jesus Christ, we gain perspective.

5. Friendship

We were not created to do life alone. And much of the grace of God comes to us through the people He places in our lives.

Though one may be overpowered two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken (Eccl. 4:12, NIV).

King Solomon, who wrote this, compares one versus two or

three. It compares isolation versus friendship. Alone, you may be overpowered, you are limited by and left to your own strength and ability. When you are connected, you can defend yourself from attack. You will not be overpowered. It becomes hard for the enemy to break you.

If you are isolated and you stumble or fall, then you hurt alone. And you mourn the defeat alone. And in the loneliness, the defeat tends to turn into shame leading to more isolation.

Paul tells his spiritual son Timothy not to do life in God alone:

Pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22).

Pursue God with those who are prayerful and wholehearted.

To hear more on this topic, watch this recent sermon Daniel gave at Forerunner Christian Fellowship, "Loving Jesus through Discouragement."

*Originally from the Netherlands, **Daniel Hoogteijling** grew up on a Youth With A Mission base. After working with Soul Survivor, a European ministry dedicated to equipping young people to love Jesus, he went on to serve throughout the nations. Daniel and his wife, Marlies, served as missionaries in Kenya for eight years before moving their family to Kansas City to be part of the International House of Prayer. Daniel is the director of the One Thing Internship and part of the IHOPKC senior leadership team. His passion is to see revival in the Church and a generation enjoying intimacy with Jesus. Daniel and Marlies live in Kansas City with their children.*