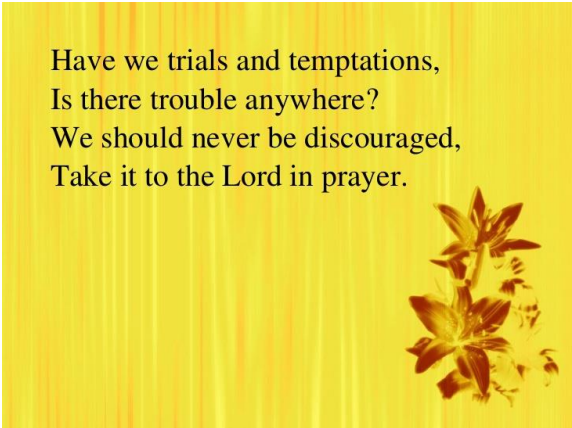


NEVER DISCOURAGED

"We should never be discouraged," goes the line of one of our favorite hymns.

But is it possible to live without ever being discouraged?

There are those who never look discouraged. They wear a cheery smile on the outside even when their hearts are in the slough of despond. That's very noble. At least they're trying to keep their gloom to themselves. But the hymn says we should never even be discouraged. We ought to be always cheerful and confident on the inside.

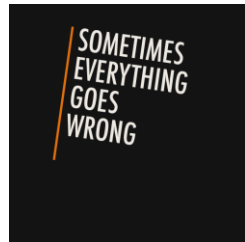


Have we trials and temptations,
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.".....Is it possible?

First of all, let's have a look at why people get discouraged.

People become discouraged because circumstances are against them.



Everything goes wrong. You just get over one operation and have to go in for another. Or the factory you worked for, for twenty years moves to Mississippi and you're too old to get a decent job. Or the family is struck by a series of untimely deaths.

Things happen beyond your control, that seem to tear down everything you built your hopes on. You feel like giving up.

People become discouraged when they face a job that's bigger than they can handle.

If someone took you to a mountain of dirt a mile high and gave you a shovel and said, "Now move it!", you'd look at the mountain and you'd look at your shovel and you'd want to quit right then and there. Sometimes a mother feels like that about raising her family, cleaning the house, getting the meals. She just can't seem to keep up. Or a man might feel like that about his job. "What are they trying to do, giving me all this work, kill me? How can it ever be done!"

People become discouraged when their hopes have been dashed.

A girl who's been disappointed in love will sometimes become so bitter, she'll have nothing to do with men for years. Or a man who has prayed for his child to live, and it dies, may become so bitter that he will have nothing to do with God....for a while.

DISCOURAGED?

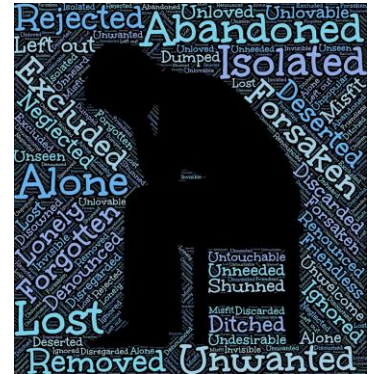


Perhaps these words will fall into the hands of someone who is chronically discouraged.

Long ago something happened to you. You were disappointed, and in that moment of disappointment something broke inside you. You gave up trying. You said to yourself, what's the use? And you haven't really tried in anything since.

You've lived your life since that day protecting yourself against further hurts; keeping out of conflicts; never sticking your neck out; never building up hopes about anything; never putting your whole self into anything that you do. You've settled for a mediocre, half-baked existence, because you don't want to run the chance of ever being disappointed again.

"Well," you may be saying, "I have a right to be discouraged after going through all I've gone through." John the Baptist figured he had a right to be discouraged.



After all, he sacrificed more than any of us ever has. He never tasted a decent meal in all his adult life. He never had the comfort of a good wife by his side. He never had the thrill of a child's voice calling him Daddy. He never knew what it was to sleep in a soft bed. He could have had these things, but he denied himself in order to prepare the way for the Christ.

But now it appeared as if all John's sacrifice was going to waste. He's in prison. And the news he hears about Jesus sounds trivial....It sounds as though Jesus is playing on the surface instead of getting to the real business of the Kingdom. John sends some of his followers to Jesus....,

"Are you the one who is to come, or are we going to have to look for someone else?"

That's the question of a discouraged man. And you'd think that Jesus would have shown John a little sympathy. After all here's Jesus out getting famous, eating with publicans and sinners, while John, who lived so faithfully, is sitting in prison.

But Jesus doesn't give John the Baptist any sympathy. Not a bit of it.

"Tell John again what you hear and see; and tell him blessed is he who is not offended by what I do."

Jesus just doesn't sympathize with discouragement. He never has and he never will. Jesus will forgive our sins and deliver us from evil when we ask him. But when you're discouraged, Jesus will never give you a shoulder to cry on.

As the messengers of John the Baptist walked away, Jesus turned to the multitudes and began to talk about John. "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A piece of grass blowing around in the wind? If the wind blows north, the grass blows north; if the wind blows south, the grass blows south. Is that the kind of man you went to see? If things are going well, he's up in the clouds; if things are bad, he's down in the dumps. That's not the kind of man you went to see, when you went out to John the Baptist!

"Well, did you go out there to see a man clothed in soft clothing? People who wear soft clothing have tender skin. They can't stand irritations. They get upset when things rub them the wrong way.

The only folks who can afford to be like that live in kings' houses. That's not what you went to see when you went out to John the Baptist.

"Come on now---what did you go out to see when you went out to the Jordan? A Prophet? I'll say a Prophet! And more than a prophet! This is the one who was to prepare the way for the Christ. You went out to see a man of God. A man who can take it. A man who can stand up to the whole world. Of men born of women there is none greater than John the Baptist. A prophet indeed! Yet he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John."

Because even prophets get discouraged. When the pressure gets too great, they collapse. Elijah got discouraged when Jezebel was after his life. John the Baptist, the second Elijah, got discouraged when he was taken out of the race and stuck in Herod's prison.

But the children of the Kingdom, the Spirit-born servants of Jesus Christ, are allowed no room for discouragement. Discouragement has no place in the Christian life. When you're discouraged, something's wrong, not with the world, not with other people, but with you.



KEEP YOUR EYE ON GOD



Do you know why Christians get discouraged? Because they're looking in the wrong direction. They're looking down. Looking at themselves. And when you're looking at yourself, you'll always end up being discouraged.

If you want your life filled with the light of God, then keep your eye on God.

David understood this.

**Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so
disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for
I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.**

PSALM 42:5 (NIV)

Look up!

Look at God!

Listen to what God has to say!

Believe what God promises!

Do what he tells you!

And nothing in this world, not even the devil himself, can ever discourage you.

The 11th chapter of Matthew begins with this discouraged question of John the Baptist, "**Are you the one who is to come or do we look for another?**"It ends with Jesus turning to the multitude which had listened to all this and saying,

"Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden

(you who are discouraged)

... and I will give you rest. Get under the yoke with me, and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls."



You'll never be discouraged.

We need to take a close-up look at our Lord's answer to discouragement. Because until we can walk through this world with unshakable confidence, we're not going to walk very far.

In the upper room the night of his betrayal, Jesus spoke a few simple words, which if you will take them and live them, will *drive discouragement from your heart forever*.

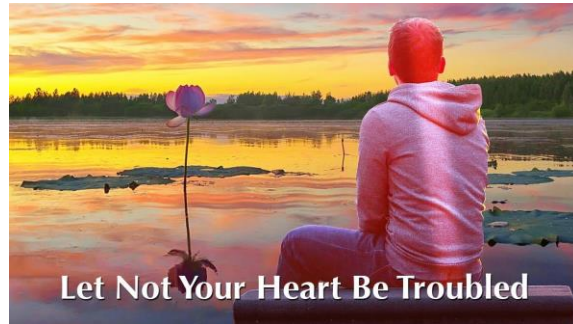
Nobody can take those words and live them and be discouraged.

"Let not your heart be troubled.

Believe in God. Believe also in me.....

If you love me, keep my commandments"

LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED



That's a command. Don't let your heart be troubled. It'll want to be troubled. It'll want to be cast down and disquieted. But don't let it,

If I'd let him, my son would be up on the coffee table jumping up and down. He'd have every book out of the book case. He'd have the detergent mixed with the Spic and Span on the kitchen floor. That childish energy which can so easily become destructive has to be trained. And it's up to me, his father, and his mother, to set limits on him...for his own good.

In a similar way, your heart is like a little child. And, since the fall of Adam, it has a knack of looking for trouble. It can smell a fight a mile away. It can find something to worry about without even trying. But it is within your power to restrain it.

Let not your heart be troubled. Don't let it fly into a panic. Don't let it go down in the doldrums. Don't let it stand at the window and fret. Don't let it run away and quit the game.

As a Christian you have no more right to let your heart be troubled, than as a parent you have a right to let your child set fire to the house.

The troubled heart belongs to the pagan, not to the disciple of Jesus Christ. As far as our master is concerned, there is nothing in this world, no matter how tragic, no matter how gruesome, no matter how evil, to justify a disquieted heart.

Let not your heart be troubled.

BELIEVE IN GOD



If you want to keep your heart on the right track, do something positive with it. And the first thing to do is believe in God.

Now that may sound like a strange thing....to tell church people to believe in God. I'm sure you believe there is a God. You believe there is a "Supreme Being." You believe that God created the universe. You believe that he holds the stars in their courses. But it's quite a different thing to believe in God. You may believe that I exist when you see me standing in the chancel of the church. But that doesn't say you believe in me.

If you believed in me, you'd *trust me*. You'd consider my words reliable enough to *act on them*.....and that's quite a different thing.

Sure you believe there is a God! But do you believe in God? Do you really trust him? Have you truly put yourself into his hands? I'll tell you one thing: If you're walking around with a troubled heart, you're not believing in God.

There's nothing mysterious or difficult about believing in God. The wisest man on earth, or the simplest child can believe in God. You were made to believe in God, just as the birds were made to fly. All you do is, "turn yourself over to him."

Trust yourself to him.

From now on God is going to be my rock and my fortress.

God is going to be the Lord and keeper of all my ways.

No matter what happens, I will trust God. Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

BELIEVE ALSO IN ME



Believe in God, believe also in me.

When you believe in Jesus, your faith comes into focus.

Jesus is a *member of our human race*.

Jesus is *one of us*.

Jesus has *shared every temptation* we can ever know.

He is our Elder Brother. We can get close to him.

For years I didn't know what it was to believe in Jesus. I thought I was believing in Jesus by believing the 2nd article of the Creed. I never realized that I could know this Jesus who was born

of the Virgin Mary, and suffered under Pontius Pilate, until a man showed me how simple it is to know Jesus as a person; to walk with him as a friend.

"What a friend we have in Jesus," That's not a cliché; That's true. He is our friend.

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant doesn't know what his lord does. But I have called you friends, for everything that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you.

John 15:15

I observed this man walking and talking with Jesus in such a simple way. And I said to myself, "That's what I want." And no sooner had I said it than it began to happen. I began to believe in Jesus, and Jesus began to manifest himself to me in a thousand ways.

If this hasn't happened to you yet, it can; It can begin to happen now.

Stop being satisfied to believe a few things about Jesus...
and lift up your heart to Jesus himself.

Believe in him

Call on his name

Worship him

Praise him

Enjoy him!

But friend, if you're going to believe in God and his Son for more than a few minutes beyond the "glow" of your prayers,

You'll have to turn your faith into action. Live it!

IF YOU LOVE ME, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS



Some years ago a famous book came out called In His Steps.

The book created a picture of lives which were revolutionized when people asked, "What would Jesus do?" We have to do better than that.

Don't ask yourself, "What would Jesus do?"

Rather, ask Jesus, "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

He'll show you. He'll make it clear.

"If you love me keep my commandments."

And his commandments are so simple a child can understand them.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

Love your fellow man with the gospel for his empty soul, a shirt for his bare back, money for his empty pocket, bread for his hungry stomach, Are you loving your fellow man like that?

When you have a toothache, do you just resign yourself to it? Do you say, "Oh well, that's what happens when you have teeth." No, when you have a toothache, you know something's wrong. You go to the dentist,

When you have a constant stabbing pain in your stomach, do you just accept it? "Oh well, that's what happens when you have a stomach." No, you see your doctor.



But when you're discouraged, chances are you accept it as part of life.

Friend, discouragement is a symptom that something is radically wrong ...with you.

Discouragement has no place in the life of any Christian.

Bring your discouragement to the Lord.

You won't get any more sympathy than John the Baptist, but you'll get a cure.

This is the cure:

Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God.

Believe also in me.

If you love me, keep my commandments.

Prayer:

Lord, this is a difficult teaching, it is so easy to accept discouragement as part of our lives. To allow our hearts to be troubled, overwhelmed and anxious. Lord of mercy and healing, we beg you for the cure, we lay this scheme of Satan before you now. Release us from the snare of our own feelings. Stop us from looking down at ourselves. Help us to look up at you Lord, our all in all. We adore you for the precious gift that you became one of us and call us friends. Lord, instead of embracing discouragement, may we lift our hearts to you in total adoration. And in that love and adoration, may our hearts not be troubled as we look at you, believe in your promises and do your holy will.

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