

Discouragement and What the Christian Can Do About it

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer

May 5, 1957

Outline

Christian discouragement and its effects.

- Tozer warns against discouragement, recognizing it as a valuable tool for the devil in his war against Christians.
- Discouragement affects Christians of all ages and backgrounds, including the young and old, the sober-minded and the radiant.

Causes and cures for Christian discouragement.

- Tozer: Christians struggle with discouragement despite appearing holy and happy.
- Elijah's loneliness led to discouragement, highlighting the importance of supportive relationships.
- Tozer warns of discouragement in spiritual pursuits, emphasizing shared experiences among believers.

Spiritual encouragement in dark times.

- Tozer emphasizes God's promise of never leaving or forsaking believers, even in times of discouragement.
- Tozer argues that Christians should not be discouraged by the wickedness of others, as it is a normal part of history, and the darkness makes the light of faith more visible.
- Tozer cites Jeremiah as an example of a discouraged prophet who continued to pray and preach despite his feelings and believing men and women have learned how to live and shine in darkness over the past 2600 years.

Feeling trapped and captive despite freedom.

- Tozer expresses feeling trapped and captive despite being an American, citing work and financial responsibilities.
- Tozer reflects on captivity and spiritual growth, citing Ezekiel's experience in Babylon.

- Tozer advises young students to prioritize prayer and spiritual growth alongside academic work.

Christian biography and discouragement.

- Tozer: Discouraged Christians are often gloomy and anticipate negative things, but God's presence can give them rest and courage.
- Tozer: Meeting gloomy brethren can be challenging, but God's presence can overcome their discouragement and fear.
- Tozer argues that many Christian biographers are dishonest by only highlighting the positive aspects of their subjects' lives while hiding their flaws and failures.
- Tozer believes it is the obligation of Christian biographers to tell the whole truth, including both the good and the bad, to their readers.
- Tozer warns against discouragement from reading about great saints, sharing personal experiences to illustrate the importance of understanding their full story.

The importance of God's help in times of darkness.

- Tozer emphasizes the importance of living saints, not just those who have passed away, as they are the only ones God has now to continue His work.
- Tozer encourages believers to trust God and write biographies about them, highlighting their good deeds and magnifying their impact.
- Tozer emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's help during difficult times, citing Psalm 103:1-6.
- Tozer encourages believers to approach the Lord's Supper with reverence, humility, and meek self-assurance, knowing that God is watching over them.

Message

This is Communion Sunday, but I am not going to talk about redemption; I'm going to assume it. And the text is found in Deuteronomy 1:21. Behold, the Lord thy God has set the land before thee. Go up and possess it. For the Lord God of thy fathers has said unto thee, fear not, neither be discouraged. Go up and possess the land and remember that God has said, fear not, neither be discouraged.

I want to talk a little about discouragement and what the Christian can do about it. This topic comes up in cycles of perhaps 10 or 12 years in this pulpit. Perhaps, it should come more frequently, because I know what a perfect nuisance discouragement is. It is one of the Christians worst enemies. Maybe it is not the greatest, I doubt that it is the greatest. I doubt that

discouragement is the greatest enemy the Christian has, but it can easily be the greatest nuisance the Christian has to deal with. And it is a valuable thing to the devil on his war against the saints, because it is seldom recognized for what it is.

When a Christian becomes discouraged, his good, sound, common sense tells him he's just being realistic. And he's forgetting that it's not realism, it is discouragement, and it works when no other temptation will. The Christian that would not be guilty of any sin willingly and who has victory enough that he or she doesn't fall into temptation unwillingly, may yet be visited by this infernal, dark shadow from the pit, this thing we call discouragement, and greatly hindered in the Christian life.

Now, discouragement, as I've pointed out before on other occasions, is a mood. It is an emotion which can easily become a ruling emotion. And it is more than an emotion, it becomes after a while a disposition. It becomes an outlook and an attitude. It becomes a lens through which we see everything; dark glasses through which we behold everything before us. And of course, mood, is mental climate. It isn't the man, it's the weather that the man has on the landscape of his life. Just as weather isn't the field or the farm, but it goes a long way to determine whether the farm shall have a good crop or not.

So, mood is not the man, but it determines whether there shall be a good crop and what kind of plants are going to grow. A joy and power and effective ministry simply can't grow in the climate of discouragement. But fear and self-pity and self-engrossment are found there.

Now, you'd be surprised, I suppose, if you could know how many Christians at any gathering are bothered by a degree, at least of, discouragement, because it spares no class of Christian. There is the young Christian and there's the old Christian. And I find that after serving the Lord, more or less raggedly and spotly, but serving him nevertheless for a long half or two thirds of a lifetime, I am nevertheless as prone to discouragement today as I was when I was 17. So that, if I'm any sample, even a poor sample, it is safe to say that this discouragement spares nobody. The sober minded man that you take to be a solid, well set up and self-assured person, may be suffering from a deep discouragement, so deep, that it's affecting him physically.

And then there's the radiant Christian, the shining Christian. I meet a few of them, not many, but you meet a few radiant Christians. They're shining, ebullient Christians. They overflow. And yet, in the deep of their heart, very often, they also get discouraged. they keep the shine on, and they don't mean to be hypocritical because they've learned to smile and muscles are used more than the other, so they still smile. But if you could get at the root of their lives, you'd find they were deeply discouraged over something.

And there are the very lofty Christians that seem to dwell so very high that you could hardly believe it possible that dwelling as they are, as it were among the angels, that they could be discouraged. But they do get discouraged anyhow. Then there are those practical, down to earth Christians that are followers of the Apostle James, the kind that are practical and salty. And you say, well, surely, they never would be discouraged, but they get discouraged, too.

And if you could know how many right here this morning came to church with heavy feet. Dragging what might not be very big feet, but that seemed to you, like as if each one weighed 40 pounds, dragging them off to church, because you felt you ought to. But you had no particular urge because of the discouragement that's come upon you.

I want to talk a bit about the causes of discouragement and prescribe a cure. You know, the difference between negative preaching and or positive preaching of the Bible kind is, that negative preaching finds out what's wrong and positive prescribes for the remedy. The doctor that would only diagnose, tell you what's wrong and set you on your way, would only be half a doctor. And a book that would only tell us what's wrong with us would only be half a book. But this book tells us what's wrong and then tells us what to do about it. I want to do that myself.

Well, one of the causes of discouragement is loneliness. There was the man, Elijah. And he is a dramatic example of a great man that became deeply discouraged. He was discouraged because there was nobody around him that understood him and nobody that was going his way. He lacked the support of like-minded souls. It may be that in your home or in your office, or wherever you must spend a major part of your time, that you have no like-minded souls with whom you can have fellowship. Now, that may bring to you, as it did to Elijah, a great sense of loneliness.

And here is a little trick that I want to call to your notice. That the loftier and more dramatic the character is, the farther down he can plunge into discouragement. There never was a man I suppose in his lifetime, or perhaps in 1000 years period in Israel's history, that could have gone onto the mount and dared to call the prophets of Baal to make a test. Elijah did it. And Elijah went from that mount where a fire fell, and the victory came straight down to the cave and to the juniper tree.

Now, the higher up you're able to go, the further down you can go. They have a saying in the prize ring that the bigger they are, the harder they fall. And that same thing is true in the spiritual world. The farther up we get, the farther down we can come unless we watch ourselves and take the means of grace to save ourselves from discouragement. And the higher the ideals; some Christians are never very discouraged because they have never had very much to aim at. They don't expect anything and when they don't get it, they just say, well, I didn't expect it anyway. But there are Christians with fine high ideals, higher than they're able to reach. And a month or six months of struggling for ideals that they can't reach, or haven't yet reached, may turn them back on

themselves in deep discouragement; the loftier the ideals, the spiritual aspirations, the wider we are open to the invasion of discouragement.

Now, what is the cure? The cure is simply to remember that your discouragement is based upon an error. You think you're alone, when actually you are not. In the first place, there are 1000s of others just like you. There are merry clubs and redheaded clubs and ball-headed clubs. I wonder why we shouldn't form somewhere, a little club of those who are prone to be discouraged and talk it out with each other. You'd find that there are a lot of people like you.

And if you were to go to heaven and gather around you this morning, a group of the redeemed who have gone there, that there would be 1000 of them, and they'd get up and testify. Let me tell you, that if they told the whole truth, they'd remind you that there were times when they felt pretty blue about this whole business of serving God in a bad world like this.

So, there are 1000s like you, and you're not alone at all. And your discouragement is based also upon a failure to remember that God is with you, and that you're never alone. In the old Methodist church, we used to sing a song I haven't heard it I think since. I've seen the lightning flashing. I've heard the thunder roll. I've felt sin's breakers dashing trying to conquer my soul. And I've heard the voice of Jesus telling me still to fight on. He promised never to leave me, never leave me alone. And the chorus was, no never alone, alone. Well, that's true all right. The song doesn't rate among the great, but it has a truth in it.

And we're never alone. If you keep that in mind, friend, you're never by yourself. Are not the angels sent forth to minister unto them that shall be heirs of salvation? But you say, yes, yes, that's all right. St. Teresa and Francis and Finney and Spurgeon; the angels no doubt helped them. What kind of a mother would it be that gave all of her attention to her healthy, strong children and let the sick ones lie and rot?

And what kind of God would God be if He sent His angels to bless St. Augustine and Julian and forgot us poor people that need it? No, no, He sends His angelic ministers to minister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation, but for our moment are in a tight spot. And wasn't it when our Lord was praying in the garden and was sweating blood that the angels came and ministered unto Him. It was not when He was in Joseph's carpenter's shop, helping his father here and there and getting in the way and growing up to be a big boy. That wasn't when he needed the angels. But it was when blood was flowing from His pores, as it were, sweat, or sweat as blood.

So, if you're discouraged this morning, you're the very one the Lord has pointed out. In fact, I have Scripture for this because it was when Elijah was in deep discouragement, so deep, that he went to sleep, blue and despondent, that God said to an angel, go down and feed Elijah the prophet, and he

went down and baked cakes for Elijah. Not a radiant victorious prophet, but a discouraged, despondent prophet. And an angel had that job to do.

Now, another thing that may discourage us Christians, is the wickedness of the people; and we have Jeremiah for our Bible example. Jeremiah looked around him and every place he looked was wickedness, just every place. He had no newspapers in that day, but if he had, he would have found a whole front page and most of the rest of the paper covered with wickedness, or reports of wicked deeds or wicked plans. And Jeremiah just got plain tired of talking and not having anybody paying any attention to it. He's called the weeping prophet. But he's a long way from being a weeping prophet, but he did get discouraged.

What are you going to do about it now? You remember that man who vexed his righteous soul surrounded by iniquity, the stars in yonder heaven don't shine in the daytime. Why, because there's already light upon the earth. Why do they shine at night? Because the darkness makes them visible.

And so, in all the periods of history that have been reasonably decent, the great saints have not stood out. They have always stood out when the darkness was upon the earth. When our Lord came, there was darkness upon the earth. The church burst into paganism as into the deepest Stygian darkness. And the Wesleys came not at a time when everybody was praying. They came at a time when nobody was praying, except a little handful they called the Holy Club, or at least nobody we know about was praying.

So, my friends 2600 years have gone by since Jeremiah prayed and preached in discouragement. And for 2600 years, believing men and women have learned how to live and shine in darkness. And they've learned it from the very Jeremiah who was so discouraged so much of the time.

Then captivity. Do you ever feel that you were captive? Do you ever shrug cynically, when you heard somebody talk about our free, American way of life, and say to yourself, free? How do you get that way? I haven't been able to get away from these four or five children for months. And I love them, and God knows I would die for them, but sometimes I want to scream. And you fellows that get up and go to your jobs, go to your works, punch the card, and hear the bell ring and then punch it out again and go home and back. And it's repeating in and out, up and down, day in and day out, until you're blue, and the two weeks' vacation they give you it doesn't help you at all, because you take your work with it and carry it back with you. Maybe two months might help you, but the two weeks do not. And you say, I'm captive, I feel I'm captive.

And then, if I've got anything left, I pay out in income tax. And if I've got anything left from income tax, somebody needs an expensive operation or I have to pay that out, and here I am. Call me a free American? Oh, dear friend, you're the freest person in all the wide world even politically yet. I can

stand up here and condemn anybody from the president down to the corner policeman. And not only that, I can have a loudspeaker out in front, condemning the policeman, loudly. He can't do a thing. The freest nation in the world, still. So, let's still thank God for the stars and stripes that are white with the prayers of 1000 saints in red with the blood of 10,000 men who died to keep us free, and blue with the baltic of the skies.

As the poet said, let's thank God. But still, even though you're free, you don't feel you're free. You feel you're captive. And you know, it's possible for preachers to get like that too? Just when I say to myself, now, I can shake my head and be free, I get a special delivery letter. And then there's something to do.

And brethren, this man Ezekiel was captive. He was captive. And he was sitting among the captives by the River Chebar. I don't want to travel. Some people want to travel all the time. I don't want to travel. I could have gone to half a dozen or twenty different countries and had my way paid over the last year and wouldn't go, because I find that almost everything is in Chicago that you will find anywhere else. And if it isn't, you can always read National Geographic.

But I would like to see the river Chebar. I really would. I'd like to sit down there and dangle my toes in the River Chebar and have the old muddy stream flow by. And try to recapture the emotions that must have visited the breast of that young priest of Israel as he sat there despondent knowing that he was now a captive, a slave in a strange land. And everywhere he looked, he saw harps hanging on willow trees and a silence that you could cut with a knife. And except for the sobbing of some old lady or the petulant cry of a child, not a sound.

Ezekiel sat by the River Chebar. He was discouraged because he was a captive. But you know what Ezekiel saw while he was a captive that he didn't see before he was a captive? He saw heaven opened and had visions of God. And you know that it's right from where you are in your captivity. All people want to serve God the hard way. And I never could understand why.

I wrote here some time ago an answer to a question about how a young student going to college can get free so that he can do his college work and can still pray as much as he ought to, and I made several suggestions. And I said among them, why, readjust your life, adjust it so that your praying time fits in with your study time and all the rest. And not only that, sanctify, consecrate your study, so there's something good too. And people wrote me mournful letters as though I had joined the cult of positive thinking and said, what in the world do you mean, Brother Tozer, you mustn't tell young people that they're to readjust their prayer life. Pray whether you make good grades or not. I didn't tell him not to pray. I only told them that they could get victory over their academic captivity if they knew what to do about it. Nobody wanted them to know, I guess.

Well, anyhow, that was Ezekiel. What a captive he was. Just home and back again. The kitchen and the baby, when it isn't needing attention, why, there's something else. Say, I'll lie down in five minutes. And you lie down five minutes, the telephone rings, and somebody's banging on the back door. All he's wanting you to do is to take a package for Mrs. Jones next door. Would you please? And of course, you would please, and you do, but your rest has been broken. So, you feel your captive. If you could only look up, you might see heaven open. And you might have visions of God. For always remember that when we're too free, we get carnal and have our own way. And the fellow who has his own way is not likely to be looking for God's way. But it's when we have our own way taken from us that we get a feeling of discouragement. But out of it all and through it all, the light of heaven may shine.

Then there's the gloomy brethren. It says just a few verses down from the text that I read. It says that the brethren made our hearts to be discouraged. The brethren made our hearts discouraged. Whether shall we go up they said. Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying the people is greater and taller than we. Half my lifetime has been spent, I think, reassuring people that the Anakim aren't bigger than we are. They're just not, that's all. They may rate higher and weigh more, but in God, they're not as big as we are. Nobody's as big as a Christian if the Christian walks in the will of God. He's bigger than anything you can bring against him any time. If God be for us who can be against this, but these discouraging brethren.

I like to meet old Tom Hare because he's never discouraged. Now, I have no doubt, but that Irishman gets discouraged. I have no doubt. He's a human being and as long as he's in the flesh, he'll have his times. But I have never met him when he was, I think. But I meet so many gloomy brethren. They're always anticipating something that is going to happen. Usually, it doesn't happen, but often they think it's going to.

Well, do you know the answer and the cure for the gloom that is shed upon us by discouraged Christians? It is, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give you rest. Now, that's what God said to Moses. The brethren said, we can't go up. And God said to Moses, My presence shall go with thee. And if the presence of God is with you, of whom should you be afraid? You know the answer too well and we'll pass it on.

Then, I want to point out another thing that discourages the people of the Lord if they're conscientious. Reading Christian biography does it. You say, now wait a minute; I've heard you recommend we read Christian biography. I do recommend we read Christian biography, but you have always got to know how to do things. It isn't the doing of a thing that helps you, it is knowing how to do it and then doing it. If we do the right thing wrong, that's not so good at all. And so if we read Christian biography wrong, it may harm us instead of help us. Because we read about the great souls that have lived and then we compare ourselves. And we begin to wonder if we're

Christians at all. And we get very blue as a result. Now, I'll tell you, what causes that and what you can do about it.

Next month, that is in June, I'm to, O Lord, help me. I don't know why I ever promised to do it. But I've got to go to Wheaton and speak at a convention there of editors and writers and journalists' students. And they had two subjects they want me to handle. Neither one of them of which I am capable of handling. But they put a little pressure on. So I said, Yes. And one of them is, the obligation of the Christian biographer to his public.

Well, I have some convictions on that and I'm going to tell you at least one little thing I'm going to tell them, that most Christian biography is just plain not so, because the biographer feels that if he were to tell the truth about his subject, he would discourage the readers or take away something of the glamour from this great character.

So, he tells about all the high days and never mentions the low days. He tells about all the light shining peaks of his life and never mentions the deep hollows in his life. He tells about the time he was victorious and never mentions the time that he got defeated. He tells about the time that he prayed all night, but never tell us about the time that he went and fell asleep by nine o'clock and didn't make it. And tells always the good things and hides the bad. Now, that is intellectual dishonesty. And it isn't fair to the public that reads. And one of the obligations we owe to our public, if we write biography, is to tell the whole truth.

I told almost the whole truth about A.B. Simpson in Wingspread. And some people huffed and puffed and shook their feathers and said, you've sold him short. I didn't sell him nearly as short as I should have. Because though he was a saint, he was a mighty human saint. And there never was a saint yet that didn't have a human side to him. And that's why Thomas a Kempis, himself a great saint said, if thou who would have peace of mind, examined not too closely in other men's matters, and he was talking about Christian men too. Don't dig around for weak spots, you'll find them.

Have you noticed that Christian, that is, biblical biography, always helps you. Whereas the other kind of biography tends to discourage often, but Biblical biography tells the whole story. David wrote a hymn. Sure, he did. David slew the enemy. Sure, he did. David stole Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, and murdered Uriah. He did that. But that would have been kept out of the biography the Christians write, but not the one the Holy Ghost wrote. If you can know the whole thing about a person, you won't be nearly as discouraged as if you only read the very top peak of experience.

Then you will say, well, I never had anything like that. Like the man we heard about, and I've often mentioned, who heard a fellow testify how he had been to sea and there was a great storm, and the ship was ready to sink. And he prayed and the Lord delivered them. He went home and cried

half the night. He said, O God, you've never delivered me from a shipwreck. And God said, have you ever been to sea? He said, no. He had never been to sea, but he wanted to be delivered.

Now, what's the answer about the discouragement that comes from reading about the great saints? I read about St. Francis and the others, and I say to myself If that man is a Christian, I'm nothing. Well, let me tell you. In the first place, he didn't see the other side of it. The second place is, they're dead. They're dead. If A.B. Simpson were to stand up here, I'd promptly shrink down to the height of his shoe. But he's dead. He sleeps on the hillside there at Nyack, and I'm still able to walk. And a living dog is better than a dead lion. And so even though you're not as mighty a soul, as holy; and you're alive and she's dead.

We've gotten to a place here now after nearly 40 years of history back of this little church. We've gotten to a place here now where we get misty-eyed and nostalgic as we talk about the great souls that we once had here in our fellowship. But they've gone to heaven. And they can't win a soul. They can't teach a class. They can't do what you're called on to do. They're not earning money. They can't keep a missionary in Borneo. They're gone. And blessed are they in their reward and their works do follow them. But they're gone. And if God depended on the saints that are dead, the work would grind to a sudden, terrible jolt and all the churches would fall apart. So, God has to take what he's got. And what he's got is you and me; and we're all God has now. So instead of being discouraged, get your teeth sunk in a little deeper and set your chin a little and trust God and say, Father, I thank Thee that though I'm not as great as the great souls of the past, I think, why I nevertheless, love Thee.

Just think what you could do with a biography. If you were to take just any of us here, McAfee here, or me or Brother Chase up here, any of these my eye happens to fall on. Just think what you could do if you'd write a biography about us and never tell one thought we had. Just tell which souls we were. Tell all the good and magnify that and put it in a perspective in a context where it looked shiny. Why, we'd have saints all over the church here, halos everywhere.

The simple fact is, we know each other too well to believe all that about each other. I know this man. I know how he lies on his face and prays by the hour with me and with Brother Moore and others that come in three times a week. We have our prayers up here. I know his love of God and His worship. I also know his faults and tell him so. And he knows mine and just shakes his head. So, my brethren, thank God you're you and not somebody else. A little boy was asked, who would you rather be yourself or Lincoln? He said, myself; why, Lincoln's dead. And there's sense in that. It was good sense.

So, my friends, remember this and then we're through for the morning. Now listen to these words from Isaiah 50:7-10, For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore, shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me;

who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up. Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.

So, if you've been coming through shadows and darkness. And if you've been threatened by the devil or your enemies, you have a perfect right to stand up and say, the Lord God will help me. Wherefore should I be confounded? And hear God say, all of you who walk in darkness and have no light. Trust in the name of the Lord and stay yourself upon your God and you'll be alright. And I believe that's true of me and of you and of this church. Do you believe it. Amen.

So let us come up of the Lord's Supper this morning with cheerfulness, with reverence, humility, but with meek self-assurance as well. Knowing that God didn't call us out to forget us and leave us somewhere along the way, or rust on the highway, but that the Lord is looking after every one of us. He takes care of every one of us. He knows our names, all about us. And we're safe in His keeping though storms around us are sweeping. For He's the Pilot of Galilee.

Now, we will have the communion service to follow. And it is for every child of God. You don't have to be a member of this church. We recognize that this church is an organization, whereas the church of God is an organism. It is composed of all who are members of His body by the new birth. So, from wherever you come and whoever you are, if everything's right between you and God, you join us this morning as we go on into the service to follow.