

Fight for Your Life – How to Defeat the Sins You Battle

Lesson 8 – Battling Hopelessness & Despondency

Fighting Unbelief

- The Thunderbird or staying home with her babies?
- Worked how long? For what?!?!

Genesis 29:14-20 After Jacob had stayed with Laban for a whole month, ¹⁵ Laban said to him, “Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.” ¹⁶ Now ... Rachel (Laban’s younger daughter) had a lovely figure and was beautiful. ¹⁸ Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, “I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.” ¹⁹ Laban said, “It’s better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me.” ²⁰ So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

- Discuss: How was the lady able to give up the Thunderbird she loved so much? How was Jacob able to work so long to gain Rachel as his wife?

The Aim of Our Summer Series

- The aim of the summer series is to feed our faith in the promises of God and help us as Christians battle the opposite, namely, unbelief in God’s promises that leads to Christ-dishonoring sin.

The Focus of this Summer’s Study

- Our focus: The very practical challenge of how to free ourselves from anxiety, pride, misplaced shame, impatience, covetousness, bitterness, despondency, and lust.

The Persuasion of this Summer’s Study

- We defeat the powerful temptation to sin with a more powerful desire to do what is right.
 - Unbelief in the promises of God is the root (power source) that sustains the life of these sins.
 - If we believe the promise that sin offers more than we believe the promise that obedience offers, we will give in to the temptation and sin.
 - Belief in the promises of God is the root (power source) that defeats the temptation to sin.
 - If we believe the promise that obedience offers more than the promise sin offers, we will resist and defeat the temptation to sin and we will obey.

Sample of Sins and Associated Promises of God

- **Anxiety** – Matthew 6:25-26 ““Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow

or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (See also Philippians 4:6, 19; Romans 8:31.)

- **Pride** – 1 Peter 5:6-7 "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you." (See also Jeremiah 9:23-24; Isaiah 51:12-13.)
- **Shame** – Romans 10:11 "For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame." (See also 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; 2 Timothy 1:12.)
- **Impatience** – Lamentations 3:25 "The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him." (See also Isaiah 30:18; Romans 8:28, 32; James 5:7-11.)
- **Covetousness** – Hebrews 13:5-6 "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." ⁶ **So** we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (See also Philippians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 6:6.)
- **Bitterness** – Lamentation 3:18-25 "I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. ²⁰ I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. ²¹ **Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:** ²² Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ²⁴ I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him. ²⁵ The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him. (See also Romans 12:9; Luke 6:35-36.)

Tonight's Focus: The Battle Against the Pull of Despair, Hopelessness & Depression

Causes of these Feelings of Despair, Hopelessness and Depression

- The roots of despondency are not simple. They are complex.
- Root of heredity
 - Mental origin
 - Physical origin
- Root of environment

A Desperate Psalmist

Psalm 73:21-26 When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. ²³ Yet I am always with you; You hold me by my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.

Definition of Despair - "My flesh and my heart may fail" (Psalm 73:26)

- Three Parts to this Person's Despondency (And Ours)
 1. "My flesh" - which means there's a physical component to despondency.
 - The body weakens, there's fatigue, there's a sense of listlessness and sluggishness.

2. "and my heart" - which means there's this emotional and/or spiritual dimension to despondency.
 - Our hearts are discouraged, dejected, gloomy, burned out.
3. "fail" – The word means come to an end, run out, be exhausted of resources.
 - The word for "fail" in Hebrew (*Kalla*) means come to an end, be exhausted, be depleted of resources to handle problems and life.
 - It's like your life is a tank and in it is water that you need for refreshment. And somebody pulls the plug at the bottom and it just all runs out.

Is the Sin of Unbelief the Source of Despondency?

- The answer is yes and no.
 - Unbelief is the root of *yielding to* despondency.
 - Wherever the hopelessness and despair come from, unbelief is at the root of making peace with it, yielding to it, bringing no spiritual warfare to fight it, being negligent in putting on the armor of God and so on.

"But God..."

Psalm 73:26 My flesh and my heart may fail, **but God** is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.

- Literally it's just "fail," not "may fail." There's no "may" implied in this Hebrew verb.
- And then comes the spiritual counter attack in the next phrase: "**but God.**"
 - Wherever this despondency may come from, it's unbelief in our hearts, minds and souls that doesn't say "but God."
 - It's unbelief that puts up no resistance.
 - It's unbelief that doesn't take the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit and fight. That much I think we can say with clarity from Scripture.
 - "My body is shot, my heart is almost dead, but here's the reason I will not yield: I will trust to God though my strength is gone."

Psalm 19:7 "The law of the Lord is perfect, **reviving the soul.**"

- The word of God is given to revive souls.
 - The saints' souls need to be restored and revived.
 - This tells us that when despondency comes, the Word of God is given to restore it.

Satan vs. the Son of God

- Last Supper and then the Garden of Gethsemane
- The single, greatest spiritual warfare in a human soul that's ever happened or ever will happen.

Luke 4:3 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left Him until *an opportune time*.

Ephesians 6:16b "**all** the flaming arrows of the evil one."

Matthew 26:36-38 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go yonder and pray." ³⁷ And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then He said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death."

- What's going on here? Why is Jesus so distressed and troubled and sorrowful?

John 12:27 "Now is my soul troubled. What shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, but for this purpose, I have come to this hour."

- The nature of this temptation
 - Satan was firing volley after volley into the mind of Jesus Christ to get Him to fail to go through with God's/His purpose: salvation through His sacrifice.
 - Satan wants to produce in Jesus a spirit of despondency that sinks unopposed in resignation and says "It won't work, there's no point in pressing on anymore."

Jesus' Battle Against Despondency Compared to the Disciples' Battle

- Jesus is a sinless man. (Hebrews 4:15; 2 Corinthians 5:20)
 - He never sinned at all, neither in thought, emotion, or deed. He was sinless.
 - This means that the emotional turmoil that He was experiencing in the Garden was an appropriate and (most importantly) non-sinful) response to the kind of extraordinary temptation He was enduring.

Temptation – like a nuclear bomb

- Satan drops bombs (temptation) on the peaceful sea of our lives.
- Like nuclear bomb, as soon as it explodes, a massive shock wave hits us before the deadly rays begin to make their way over our lives.
- Absorbing that shock wave is **not sin** in Jesus' life.
- The shock wave of a satanic temptation that the death of the Son of God would be pointless is so powerful that it knocks and rolls Him.

"Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled" (John 14:1)

- The word used in John 12:27 that Jesus was troubled (*tarassesthō*) is also used of the disciples in John 14:1, 27.
 - However Jesus says to the disciples, "Don't be troubled."

John 14:1 "Let not your hearts be *troubled*. Believe in God; believe also in me."

John 14:27 "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you, not as the world gives to you. Let not your hearts be *troubled*."

- Is this a contradiction?
 - It appears as though the sinless Son of God can be troubled—same word—and yet Jesus tells the disciples don't be troubled."
 - It's as though Satan drops this bomb, the same bomb, right in the experience of both Jesus and the disciples.

- Is this a contradiction? Is it okay for Jesus to be troubled and not okay for the disciples to be troubled?

The Disciples' Temptation

- They were about to be despondent because Jesus was going away.
 - To the disciples Jesus is saying,
 - "When the bomb drops in your life and Satan colors the shock wave of this experience with dark hopelessness, don't yield. Believe."
 - In other words, Jesus is telling them, "Counter attack, let not your hearts be troubled, attack, believe in God, believe also in me."
 - He's not saying that this first shock wave that can knock you over or pull the plug out of your life won't be there.
 - He's saying, "When that bomb explodes, when those shock waves hit, when the temptation comes to give up and give in – counter attack by believing Me."
 - "Take my peace, listen to what I've said. Look at the word of God. I will show you the path of life."
 - "Don't hesitate when the temptation to despair comes – fight back immediately by believing in Me."
 - But, regarding Jesus Himself
 - No one knew better than the Son of God that if He didn't immediately counter attack the shock wave of Satan's satanic temptation He'd be done for.
 - And fight back immediately, He did.

How to Fight Unbelief Like Christ When Tempted to Give In to the Pull of Despair

- To get the most benefit from this example of Jesus' fighting this temptation, let's all fix in our minds on what it is that threatens your tranquility most.
 - What it is that causes despondency or disheartened feelings to rise most often in your own life?
 - What's the shell that Satan drops most frequently into your life?
 - Now, as we see these five steps that the Lord Jesus took when the bomb dropped in His life, let's translate them immediately into your experience.

Step 1. Jesus chose some close friends to be with Him.

Matthew 26:37 "And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and troubled."

- Jesus didn't withdraw. He took the inner ring, His most precious and trusted friends, and He pulled aside with them.

Step 2: He opened His soul to them.

Matthew 26:38a "Then He said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.'"

- Even though He is their King, Jesus confessed His weakness. He opened His soul to them.

Step 3: He asked for their help in spiritual warfare.

Matthew 26:38b "Remain here and watch with me."

Luke 22:40 "Pray that you may not enter into temptation."

- "Don't let yourself give into temptation; stay here and fight with me. Fight with me."

Step 4: He poured out His heart to the Father in prayer.

Matthew 26:39 "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

- It's perfectly fine to pray that the bombshell that has dropped into your life be taken away.
 - Whatever it is that Satan fires at you, it's appropriate and it is not sinful at all to say, "Take it away Father. You're stronger than he is."

Step 5: He rested His soul in the sovereign wisdom of God.

Matthew 26:39b "Yet (nevertheless) not as I will, but as You will."

- When Satan drops a bombshell on the peace of your life the initial shock waves of emotional response are not necessarily sin.
- What is sin is not to do what Jesus did when the bomb fell in the Garden.
- Sin is *yielding to* depression.
- Sin is not taking the armor of God. Sin is not waging spiritual warfare.
- But Jesus shows us another way.
- It's not painless, but it's not passive either and Jesus wants us to follow Him in it.

A Plan and a Picture to Defeat the Pull of Hopelessness

• The Plan

1. Find your trusted friends. Who are they? Who are your inner ring?
2. When pulled to giving up, open your soul to them.
3. Ask them to fight with you, to wage war with you, to support you, to watch with you and pray with you.
4. Pour out your soul to the Father.
5. And rest in the sovereignty of His wisdom, come what may. "But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psalm 73:26)

• The Picture

- The lesson of Jesus' life and the lesson of the Psalms is this: "**Every cave** that you're in—wandering along, feeling the rocks, stumbling, stepping, bumping your head—every cave that you are in **is a tunnel that opens into glory**.
- It **opens into a day in Heaven**, with the sun shining, and the grass green, and the waters flowing—**as long as you don't sit down in the cave and blow out the candle of faith.**" (From "*Battling Unbelief*" by John Piper, Multnomah Books, 2007)

Next Wednesday, August 2

Battling the Temptation to Lust – Brandon Mays & Ernie Thigpen, teaching