

Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (10)
The Heart of a True Minister
(Col. 2:1-5)

Last Lord's Day we addressed the paragraph of Colossians 1:24-29. Here the Apostle Paul had set forth his desires and goals for the church at Colossae, to which he was writing. He declared that the primary emphasis of his ministry was to proclaim Jesus Christ to them. He believed that God had entrusted to him a mystery that he was to make known widely among the churches. This mystery had to do with their spiritual union with Jesus Christ, which brought to them all that they needed, so that they could believe rightly and live rightly in God's world. Paul gave himself wholly over to this matter, even "struggling with all His" that is, God's energy. And so, Paul was willing *to suffer hardship on behalf of the church* (1:24), in order *to minister the Word of God to the church* (1:25-27), even *to proclaim Jesus Christ to each member of the church*, to the end that everyone of them may become mature in Jesus Christ (1:28), as he sought *to labor earnestly, being empowered by the Lord to serve the church* (1:29). He then testified of his own effort to fulfill his calling by the Lord into the gospel ministry: "For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me."

We now arrive to the next paragraph, which is contained in Colossians 2:1-5. I suppose if we could call 1:24-29 the "The Calling of a True Minister" we could refer to 2:1-5 as "The Heart of a True Minister", for here we read of Paul laying open his heart to those he had not personally met, but for whom he felt a keen sense of responsibility. Here, I believe, we can detect some traits of a God-called, God-equipped, God-sent, minister of God.

I preached on this passage on at least one occasion in the past, but not in this church. In the early spring of 1994 I served for 5 months as an interim pastor of a community church in the small foothill town of Arnold, California. I found this passage to be particularly appropriate, for that church was in the process of a pastoral search, looking for a man of God to come among them to serve them and our Savior.

Let us read Colossians 2:1-5:

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ²that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Here is an outline for these verses:

1. A true minister has love and concern for his people. (2:1)
2. A true minister has true spiritual concerns for his people. (2:2-4)
3. A true minister of the gospel longs for and rejoices when he sees in his people good discipline and stability in faith in Christ. (2:5)

Now, although a direct application of this passage may be seen for ministers or for guidance to those who desire to become ministers of the gospel, clearly the apostle intended by these words to set before his readers the kind of regard and concern they should have for the people of God. Before us are the kind of desires and goals that we should have for our church as we seek to serve our Lord faithfully.

A. A minister has a genuine love and concern for his people (2:1).

Paul wrote in verse 1, ***“For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face.”*** Here we see the genuine concern that the apostle Paul had for the people of God everywhere. Of course Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ. As such he had responsibility of all of the churches of Jesus Christ with which he had contact. And all of these churches were a heavy burden upon his heart. In 2 Corinthians 11 Paul wrote to commend his apostolic ministry to the church. In doing so the apostle rehearsed the hardships he had encountered for the cause of Christ. In this chapter He wrote these words:

²³Are they ministers of Christ?-- I speak as a fool-- I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. ²⁴From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; ²⁷in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness-- ²⁸***besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.*** (2 Cor. 11:23-28)

Paul may have even placed this matter last for emphasis, to show that among all of his hardships, this was the greatest that weighed upon him.

And Paul was not only burdened for the churches that he had directly begun and established, but he was deeply burdened for even those churches with which he had no direct contact. Again, he wrote, ***“for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face.”*** We had stated earlier that Paul had never visited this church at Colossae nor had he met face to face the members of the church at Laodicea. Both of these cities were east of Ephesus, where Paul had served for several years. Laodicea was about 100 miles east and Colossae about 15 miles farther east than Laodicea. Now this concern and involvement for the churches was particular to the office of the apostle to whom the Lord gave wide influence and responsibility. But certainly we can glean a good and important principle from Paul’s words: ***we should be concerned for all of the churches of Jesus Christ, not just our church.*** We should have a deep affection and concern for Christians and their churches everywhere.

It is common, however, for a church and its pastor to become to self-centered, with little interest and concern outside its own fellowship. But this should not be desired, and it should be avoided. Our concern should be for the broader kingdom of God as it expands and throughout our region, our nation, and the world. Just as the Apostle Paul taught the Gentile churches to have concern for the struggling, suffering saints at Jerusalem, we should be concerned for our Christian brethren and their churches everywhere they exist in the world.

Now this burden that the apostle possessed was not natural to him. This concern was wrought in his soul by the Lord. Paul could write to the church at Philippi, “For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all ***with the affection of Jesus Christ***” (Phi. 1:8). This love for the brethren was a product of God’s grace operative in His life. It was the love of God that had been shed abroad in his heart that resulted in Paul loving the brethren. For we may recall what Paul’s “natural” conception and care was for the churches of Jesus Christ apart from God’s grace. He persecuted the church. Most in our society seem to be indifferent to the church. But Paul was not this way. He was a hater of the people of God. Remember Paul’s former attitude toward the “people of the way”? He had gone forth from Jerusalem “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1). But here we see him expressing the burden of his heart on their behalf, even “struggling” for them, for he was so concerned for their well-being and for their advancement in the cause of Christ.

Now finding a man like this does not happen very often. It is hard to find a minister who genuinely cares for the spiritual wellbeing of the people of God. Paul had written to the church at Philippi,

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. ²⁰***For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.*** ²¹***For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.*** (Phi. 2:19-21).

No, a minister such as this is not commonly found, but they are around, for God Himself has promised to provide His people with faithful shepherds, if His people truly desire His leading. It was in the presence of the failure of Israel's "shepherds", that is, the leaders of the people, that the Lord promised He would call and equip faithful shepherds in Israel. We read in Jeremiah of the Lord's promise to bring His people relief from their corrupt leaders. This is Jeremiah 23:1ff:

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the LORD.
²Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings," says the LORD. ³"But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. ***4 I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,***" says the LORD.

⁵"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD,
"That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;
A King shall reign and prosper,
And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.
⁶In His days Judah will be saved,
And Israel will dwell safely;
Now this is His name by which He will be called:

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

⁷"Therefore, behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that they shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' ⁸but, 'As the LORD lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.' And they shall dwell in their own land."

The Lord brought His people back from the Babylonian captivity. To that remnant God sent His Messiah, the True Shepherd of Israel. The Lord Jesus deposed the leadership of Israel, removing and replacing the corrupt priests and Pharisees and scribes (Cf. Matthew 21:41). He entrusted His people to His apostles, and to faithful shepherds who would care for His people. It would seem that the apostle Peter alluded to this when he gave instruction to "shepherds", that is, pastors, as recorded in **1 Peter 5:1ff**.

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ***2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you***, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; ⁴and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

And so, a true minister of Jesus Christ should have a genuine love and concern for his people. But more is needed than just a love and concern in general for his people, for...

B. A true minister (who is thinking and serving rightly) **has true *spiritual* concerns for his people** (2:2-4)

Again, we read:

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ***2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to***

reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Paul's concerns for these people were spiritual concerns. There are four identified for us. He struggled (1) so as their hearts would be encouraged (2:2a), (2) that they would be knit together in love (2:2b), (3) that they would experience full assurance of their standing before God in Christ (2:2c-3), and (4) that they may be preserved from errant teaching (2:4). Let us consider these.

1. A true minister will be concerned that His people are encouraged in and by the Lord. And of course, each of us should be concerned that the others about us are encouraged in the Lord.

Encouragement seems to be a recurring need. Perhaps some of us need this kind of ministry more toward us than others do, but we all need to be encouraged in the Lord. **Charles Spurgeon** wrote this of the matter:

Fits of depression come over the most of us. Usually cheerful as we may be, we must at intervals be cast down. The strong are not always vigorous, the wise not always ready, the brave not always courageous, and the joyous not always happy. There may be here and there men of iron, to whom wear and tear work no perceptible detriment, but surely the rust frets even these; and as for ordinary men, the Lord knows, and makes them to know, that they are but dust.

Of course the need to be *encouraged* is present for people are easily *discouraged*. Discouragement is a very difficult matter to endure. You recall the clever line at the beginning of the movie, "It's a Wonderful Life." Joseph had summoned the angel, "Clarence." He said to Clarence, "A man down on earth needs our help."

Clarence said, "Splendid. Is he sick?"

Joseph responded, "**No, worse, he's discouraged.**"

Discouragement for the Christian, spiritually speaking, is worse than sickness. Discouragement saps a person of motivation and desire to plan and will to move forward, or to resist that which opposes him. As the cutting of Samson's hair drained him of his strength, discouragement drains people of their strength.

And so, let us consider this matter of discouragement and its cure. I would like us to turn to an Old Testament passage to consider these matters, **1 Samuel 30**. We studied this passage some years ago, in fact it was on Sunday, October 23, 2005, a little over 10 years ago. It is the account of King David and the manner that he dealt with his own discouragement and that of his men. As we look over this passage, we may learn much of the causes for discouragement and some of the remedies that may encourage us.

First let us consider that...

a. There are different causes of discouragement in our lives. What are some of these causes?

1) There may have been a prolonged period of unrealised hope

When a Christian has waited with longing for a desire to be realized in his or her life, but he/she comes to doubt that it will ever come to pass, then discouragement results. Sometimes this occurs when you thought that your desire was in sight, only to have its prospect seemingly shattered.

David must have felt himself in this situation. Let us read **1 Samuel 30:1-6a**.

¹Now it happened, when David and his men came to Ziklag, on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the South and Ziklag, attacked Ziklag and burned it with fire, ²and had taken captive the women and those who were there, from small to great; they did not kill anyone, but carried them away and went their way. ³So David and his men came to the city, and there it was, burned with fire; and their

wives, their sons, and their daughters had been taken captive. ⁴Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep. ⁵And David's two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, had been taken captive. ⁶Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters.

At this point in his life, David found himself in a terrible state of affairs. And this was after having had such a *good and bright beginning early in life*. While but a youth, David was visited by the prophet Samuel. David had learned through him that God had great designs for him. Samuel told him that one day David would become king of Israel.

In those early days of faith God did great things through David. David had slain the giant, Goliath. Soon after David had arisen to be a leader in King Saul's army. The women sang of him, "David had killed his ten thousands." King Saul had even given his daughter to David to be his wife. David's life was blessed of God. It was onward and upward for him. He was the young man in the land everybody would have chosen as "the most likely to succeed."

But *David's hopes had not been realized*. He had not become king. And it did not appear that he would be, humanly speaking. He had to flee from Saul's presence to save his own life. He was a hunted man. His followers were relatively few. And they were not the noble ones who had followed him into battle at an earlier time. Rather, we read at one point that

everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him. (1 Sam. 22:2)

David had become a man without a country. He was a hunted man. He had to live in an obscure corner of the land and found it necessary to consort with the enemies of Israel. Life was tough. He and his men would go on raiding parties, but if the prince of the region found them out, they would be killed.

God takes his people through experiences that in some ways parallel David's experience. Whenever a person has a "dream" on which hope is based, a solid marriage and family, a responsible position in the company, or whatever, and the point comes when that person perceives that dream will never be realized, discouragement results, with all its accompanying effects. The absence of *hope* brings *sadness, irritability, impatience, loss of sleep, loss of appetite, lack of motivation*. *Hope* is that which provides motivation in life. But when hope is not realized, discouragement and even depression results. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12). But a person can hope against hope for some time, providing everything else goes pretty smoothly. But the problem is, that is not the way of the Christian life. David had experienced...

2) A Series of disappointing events

What of those past victories of David? They were past. Samuel, who had anointed him and had encouraged him? He was dead. David was no longer the leader of Saul's army. Saul would hunt him down and kill him, if he could. Saul's daughter, David's wife, was taken from him and given to another man. And now, far removed from the people of God, David was living among the enemies of God's people. And even they had rejected him (1 Samuel 29).

Whenever a Christian suffers repeated disappointments, with seeming no let up, no relief, then discouragement can easily result. But again, some seem to be quite resilient and can come back after each blow to take another. David did. And that is fine, until third...

3) Discouragement results when you suffer a great personal loss or defeat (30:1-3, 5)

One time while away from their home, the Amalekites came and captured David's city and took away all their wives, their children, and their goods. David was at fault. He had left them unprotected. Now his

own men were threatening to kill him. This was a low point in David's life. The little that he had (in comparison to what he had once hoped he would have), which is everything he had, is taken from him in one stroke. Nothing is left. This is the destroying stroke from which appears there is no recovery.

God's people may encounter similar thoughts and manifest similar emotions to what David must have had when a great problem arises in life. It may come to us in various forms:

- (a) Loss of health
- (b) Loss of wealth
- (c) Loss of a loved one

What is the result? Devastation. "Can it get worse?" we think. Well yes, it can. Even one who suffers a major knockout blow such as this can feel some sense that others, his friends, who perhaps have suffered similarly, are and will stand with him. There is some consolation for a sufferer in the thought, "Well, at least I am not alone. We can all help one another through this." But David did not have this, for we see that...

4) Discouragement results when friends fail you; or worse, they turn on you (30:6a)

David was now quite alone, or he thought himself to be so. In this way suffering can become quite acute and depression can become quite deep. Who does he have? What does he have?

Have any of us experienced this kind of loss, to this degree? Have you been blamed for the pain and loss that others feel? And your friends, with whom you walked and communed, do not comfort you or encourage you, but they make your suffering worse in their treatment? I believe that our Lord on purpose removes those things with which we prop up our hopes until they are all gone, so that we would learn to look to Him alone.

But there might be one last prop that may keep a person even in this condition from "running mad into the night." If he can perceive that at least he was blameless in the matter. There is some consolation for David if he could rest in the thought that God in time would vindicate him. But could David feel this way? I think not.

And then we may read of one last cause of discouragement.

5) Discouragement results when you perceive that you yourself *are* blameworthy

David's men thought that he was at fault. And David thought that indeed, he was the one responsible for what happened to him. When this occurs, you are left with nothing. A grave might be welcome at this point. You see, David had *not* been walking as he should. He had been suffering earlier when King Saul was pursuing him. But during those times he could see the power and the providence of God in his life. God had wrought wondrous deliverances while he had been in great difficulty. These occasions could have only encouraged him in his faith and engendered his hope. But David had grown weary of being chased. David had become fearful of his life. He left his land and his people and had travelled to the enemies of God's people. When he had first arrived, the **Philistines** were suspicious of him. He had formerly led the armies of Israel against them. Out of fear, David played the mad man to save his life. We read of this in **1 Samuel 21:10-15**.

And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said unto him, "Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, 'Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'" And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath. And he changed his behavior before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. Then said Achish unto his servants, "Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me? Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"

David had saved his life, but he had lost his integrity and dignity. David had forfeited his good name, having compromised his convictions. He began a pattern of lies in order to live in peace with the Philistine king. He deceived Achish that he had renounced Israel as his people. He then was allowed to dwell in peace in the land of his people's enemies. He had first appeased and then gained the approval of godless persons, but then he experienced, too, their rejection. And he had led his men to follow him in this course. They forfeited their honor and dignity. It would seem that none of them were really walking with God. And now, as they returned to their home in Ziklag, as their homes lay smouldering about them, who was to blame, but David? And whom could David blame, but himself?

For the Christian, this is the worst of situations. When you suffer because of problems that you have brought upon yourself, it is a very difficult matter to deal with. You feel that you *are* alone. Even God has abandoned you. The evidence in your life shouts it before others. You have strayed from His ways and you see that you are suffering the consequences of your past wrong and sinful decisions.

And so, here we see poor David, although he felt the loss as keenly as his men, they at least felt a sense of unity and community in being joined against him. All were united against him. He was alone.

b. How we deal with disappointment and discouragement in our lives.

1) We read of David's initial reaction -- Grief (6:4)

We read, "*Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep.*" Grief is the natural and fitting response to *tragedy*. Our Lord wept with those who wept. It is a human, even a godly thing to do when severe loss is experienced. All people of the world would react in this manner--Christian and non-Christian alike. We may not weep *like* others who have no hope, but we do weep also.

Because all grieve, we can expect the world will come and attempt to assist matters at this point. And they do, or attempt to do so. And they should be *commended* in their desire to comfort, but from a Christian perspective, their *methods* are quite limited. They call in the therapists to deal with grief. "Have a good cry; you will feel better." "You need to go through the grief process." But they have little hope beyond patting you on the shoulder as time passes, until you get farther away from the event. The world pretty much has to stop here in its ability to help. But as we pointed out recently, the world may be able to describe causes quite accurately and fully, and it may stand shoulder to shoulder to comfort, but prescription for action is lacking.

Grief is also the proper and fitting response to *personal failure*. Grief is not enough, but it is a start. Some are so hardened in their sin, they do not grieve when they sin. They sin with a high hand. They actually glory in the very things for which they should be ashamed. There is no hope for them. They are with no remorse, no regret. As the Scripture describes them,

Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eats, and wipes her mouth, and says, I have done no wickedness. (Prov. 30:20)

Grief over sin may lead to restoration. But often it does not. The ungodly grieve over their sin. They are aware of their failure. They see the results. But they are not broken before God. They are ashamed because they know that they have done wrong. But this is not repentance. Paul stated this for us quite clearly when he described the response of the church at Corinth the sin for which it was guilty. He wrote,

For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. (2 Cor. 7:10-11)

Paul described those of the world who have a sorrow for their sin. But that kind of sorrow will not lead to life; rather, the end of mere sorrow over sin is death. But there is a godly sorrow that the people of God have over sin. This godly sorrow leads them to repent from sin.

But there is often a second reaction to discouragement or disappointment.

2) A second common reaction to our disappointments -- Anger (6:6)

This was the reaction of David's men to David. They became angry with him because their difficulty was due to David's failure. **Verses 4** through **6** read,

Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep. And David's two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, had been taken captive. Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters.

You can be sure that if you have wept until you have no more strength to weep, you will have no strength to deal rightly with the matter that troubles you. But though they had no more strength to weep, there is always strength enough to be angry. This is often the second response to disappointment and discouragement.

Anger happens, but do not let anger become bitterness. As the Scripture says, "*Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath nor give place to the devil*" (Eph 4:26f). We are to watch ourselves closely, guarding our hearts against this soul-killing sin. **Esau** dealt with his great disappointment by becoming bitter with his mother and brother. They had cheated him out of his blessing. He believed that he was justified in being bitter toward them. Thereafter his life was set on a course of sin and misery, because bitterness governed him. That is why we are commanded,

Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. (Heb. 11:14-17)

3) Godly response -- resorting to the Lord our God (30:6b)

There is a godly response to that which disappoints us and would discourage us. This is how David responded to what had happened to him. We read in **verse 6a**, "*David strengthened himself in the Lord His God.*" Though he may have been at his wit's end, he was not at his faith's end, wrote Matthew Henry. David resorted to the Lord Who alone could help him. David would later write a psalm, "*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help*" (Psa. 121:1). And in another place, "*But my eyes are unto Thee, O God the Lord: in Thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute*" (Psa. 141:8).

David entrusted himself to His God, and he would not be disappointed in Him. As long as he put his hope or faith in earthly things, strength and hope alluded him. But when he "Strengthened himself in his God", he had renewed strength.

(a) Who may resort to God?

(1) **The non-Christian may not.** There are no covenant promises for an unbeliever in Jesus Christ. The Bible says that they have no hope and are without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). They may be encouraged to repent on sin and come to God in faith through Christ. Oh yes, a non-Christian may pray, and maybe God will answer. But God is under no covenant obligation to do so. He may turn a deaf ear and reject help to the one who has rejected Him.

(2) **May only a godly Christian?** It is true that godly Christians do have special privilege with God. God chooses to bless godliness and obedience. But thankfully He receives all his children, not just His obedient children. There only need be one requirement for coming to God for strength:

(3) **Any humble Christian may resort to God for grace to help in time of need;** he may strengthen himself in God. But he must be humble. God is not foolish in that He would strengthen the hands of a rebellious son. He will let that son squander his living until he comes to himself. But when any child comes to himself, and humbles himself, acknowledging his errors and defections, he may freely come to the Father. Even when your trial has been the result of your own folly and failure, if you humble yourself, you may be strengthened in your God.

(b) How may this be done?

(1) We may be strengthened by our God by reflecting on **the promises of God**. There are promises tied to obedience. If you have been obedient, they are yours, you may claim them. But there are other promises given on the basis of mercy. Plead these. Better still, claim the promises which God has bound Himself to fulfil, those covenant promises which He has promised to Jesus Christ and those in Christ.

(2) We may be strengthened by our God by reflecting on **the character and nature of God**. The promises are only as good as the God Who stands behind them. That God is *faithful* and *righteous* means that He will be *true* to His promises. That He is *merciful* and *gracious* means that He will *fulfil* His promises. That He is *sovereign* and *omnipotent* means that He *can* convey His promises. Some can hold and claim all the promises, but if their faith is in a little God, they will receive little strength from their faith.

(3) We may be strengthened by our God by reflecting on **the acts of God**. What has God done in the past? David could reflect on a number of past deliverances. But so can we. And if for some reason we cannot, we can reflect on those that He performed on behalf of our brethren, for we stand in the same relationship as they and we have the same God as they.

(4) We may be strengthened by our God by reflecting on **the ways of God**. We receive strength (encouragement/hope) as we understand what God is doing in our trials. It is not because He has abandoned us, but because He is working upon us and in us to bring about good things. He allows us to suffer the loss of all things...

(i) That He may humble us, stripping us of pride and independence.

(ii) That He may purify us, weaning us from sin. “for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin” (1 Pet. 4:1).

(iii) That He may shape our perceptions and instruct us. We get a better view of the world, ourselves, each other, what is truly important through the trials we encounter. God would have us set our hearts on eternity. That will not occur if they are fixed on the things of this earth.

(iv) That He may train and equip us. Greater battles lie ahead. Difficulty prepares us for further difficulty. It would seem all of Satan’s Goliaths have more and brothers. Defeating one will train and strengthen you for the next.

(v) That He may exalt us. He does not fill until He first empties. He does not exalt but whom He first humbles. The way to glory for the Christian is downward. Joseph must go down into the prison before he can ascend Pharaoh’s throne. The greater the glory, the greater the sorrow that will precede it.

(vi) That He will alone receive glory. He brings us to nothing so that any and all that comes our way must be credited to Himself alone. “The deeper your trouble, the louder will be your song of praise.”

(5) We may be strengthened by our God by **praying** to God and **seeking His will** (30:7, 8).

Then David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, "Please bring the ephod here to me." And Abiathar brought the ephod to David. ⁸So David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?"

Now that David's faith is strengthened, He considers the options. What would God have me do? Here we see the "former" David, a man after God's own heart ready to do whatever He bids for Him to do. He calls for the ephod, which was the means by which they could assess the will of God.

(6) We may be strengthened by our God by **acting upon faith** in God (30:9ff)

So David went, he and the six hundred men who *were* with him, and came to the Brook Besor, where those stayed who were left behind. ¹⁰But David pursued, he and four hundred men

We see them set out to do great exploits. Are they still discouraged? Are they still weary? Physically, yes. Just as weary as they were formally. But they went onward just the same, weary or not, in the strength of the Lord, for hope was restored to them.

Next week we will consider more ways in which we can serve the spiritual needs of our people.

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 5:10f)
