



Never Discouraged

15 Minutes that will change your life

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you

James 4:8

Irregularly marvel at the Apostle Paul's devotion and zeal for the gospel in light of the myriad of discouragements and disappointments he encountered, from being ignored after his conversion to beatings, rejection and ridicule, and finally desertion by many friends.

Yet Paul was able to say, *"Whatever things were gain to me I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ"* (Phil. 3:8). He said, *"I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am"* (Phil. 4:11).

How did he do it? How did he keep going in the face of all his troubles? Paul's life was characterised by James' words, *"Draw near to God and he will draw near to you"*. What does this mean?

First, it means seeking God's presence. We see this in King David when, with great emotion, he says to God, *"Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice, and be gracious to me and answer me. When Thou didst say, 'Seek My face', my heart said to Thee, 'Thy face, O Lord, I shall seek'. Do not hide Thy face from me"* (Psa. 27:7-9a). You must make an intentional move toward God, seeing your own desperate need for His presence and power.

And second, it means cultivating His fellowship. The writer to the Hebrews says, *"Let us, therefore, draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need"* (Heb. 4:16). What was it that caused you to spend every possible moment with the one you loved prior to your marriage? You enjoyed his or her presence and fellowship. You shared so many things in common. You delighted to be with each other. In far greater measure this is what it means to draw near to God. You come to delight more than anything in simply being with Jesus.

But then consider God's responsibility. Note that it is conditional. If we draw near to God then He promises to draw near to us. As Azariah told King Asa, *"The Lord is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you"* (2 Chron. 15:2). In other words — you must make the first move.

And how do we draw near to God? James tells us to do two things. First, we sinners are to cleanse our hands (clean up our actions, values, attitudes, and words). Though the Old Testament priests were sanctified, set apart by God for His service of sacrifice, they nonetheless washed their hands and feet in the bronze laver before going into the holy place before almighty God (Ex. 30:19-21). We likewise must be cleansed daily of our sins. And, second, though we have regenerate hearts that love God and hate sin, we nonetheless must practice the purification of our innermost being (James 3:14).

I say to you with all earnestness only a hot pursuit of God will handle the discouragement you feel, whatever its source. That's what James is after. So how do you follow in hot pursuit of God? I offer to you the lost art of Christian meditation. The Bible is full of exhortations to practice it, promising success to those who do so (Psa. 1:2-3, 63:6, 77:12, 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 148, 143:5, Josh. 1:8).

What is it? It is not eastern mysticism. It is not Transcendental Meditation. TM empties the mind while Christian meditation fills it. Though Bible reading and study is vital, though Scripture memory is essential, none of these are Christian meditation. It is not quickly reading or passing over a verse, rather it is thinking deeply about a verse or portion of Scripture. It is dissecting it, observing it, cross referencing it with other Scripture, and it is applying the passage practically to your life.

Take, for example, Paul's command in Philippians 2:14, "*Do all things without grumbling or disputing.*" To meditate on this verse means asking yourself, "What does it mean to grumble? What does it mean to be one who disputes what others say or command me to do? What are ways man typically grumbles or disputes? And am I guilty of these things? When I grumble, what am I saying about God?"

Here's my challenge to you — if you want to overcome discouragement, if you want to follow in hot pursuit of God, then spend 15 minutes per day in Christian meditation. You must sit quietly, allowing no distractions. And then as you go on your way during the day, as you drive to work, as you have a moment by yourself in your hectic schedule, think back for a moment on what you meditated on that morning. You will find your intimacy with Jesus growing, and you likewise will find, in due time, greater faith which will allow you to weather the discouragements of life.

Allen Baker

© 2017

www.christianstudylibrary.org