

THE RECOVERY OF LOST JOY - Part six

Sunday, May 7th, 2023 - 5:30 p.m.

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WEARY IN WELL DOING

Galatians 6:7-9 - "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. [9] *And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*"

I love moments of *fresh discovery* in God's Word. I find it absolutely exhilarating when an old verse pops open with truth that had escaped my notice. And this text is a classic example.

Take those first four words - "***Do not be deceived....***" I think every time I've heard them preached or every time I've studied them for my own teaching, they are words that have carried nothing but ***warning***. And there's no escaping the warning note in them. It can't be dodged. There is such a tendency to think that one can splash around his life to the flesh as long as he might like and still be able to scrape up some kind of Christian life with Jesus. And the warning is to ***stop kidding one's self***. You can't fake God out the way a magician can make a card disappear.

So far so good. But how do those words - **“Do not be deceived,”** relate to the **last** part of verse 8 and the encouragement in verse 9? Is there a note of **promise** as surely as there is a note of **warning**? What about the person who faithfully sows his whole life to the things of the Spirit? What about the one who doesn't cave in to the fleeting immediate rewards of gratifying the desires of self? What about the one who doesn't bend to the whim and applause of the world? What about the one who is so faithful to the Lord he's starting to grow **weary** because, try as he might to keep a stiff upper lip, he has **nothing** to show of a harvest for all the good he is faithful in doing?

Yes. That's also the one Paul has in mind when he says, **“Don't be fooled. There's a harvest coming even though you don't see it. Don't lose heart. Don't let the enemy hollow out your dedication to Christ. You will reap if you just keep sowing!”**

The Bible is such a realistic book. We can be grateful that it deals with the way life really is. It doesn't gloss over the full gamut of situations that can face the Christian in this world.

We should never think of Paul sitting at a desk, writing out these essays for the purpose of research. That is not how his letters came into being. He traveled around a lot. He saw all sorts of people. He saw the kinds of situations they faced. He saw some of the mistakes they made. He wrote very practical letters to correct and instruct and help them in the future. Those needs are still with us today. And the Word and Spirit of God are still adequate to solve those problems.

Here Paul addresses a situation where people are doing a good work. They are facing the right way and moving in the right direction. This is not a question of some sinful course of action or immoral activity or doctrinal heresy.

This is a much more common problem than that. This is a dear Christian brother who has faithfully been working for the Lord for years. And he is still working hard for the Lord. But, while he is doing the very same work, he no longer enjoys it - he feels it has become a burden - there's no lightness in it - no thrill - no sense of excitement. ***The ministry begins to drain him.***

In short, he's not doing anything differently, yet he feels very different inside. It can happen to a person. It can happen to a whole group of people. It can happen to a church.

It's what ***Martin Lloyd-Jones*** called the ***danger of the middle period***. In physical terms we call it the mid-life crisis. But it happens in all spheres of life - including the spiritual. It's the time along the road when you're passed the time of initial surprise, and the thrill of newness, but there's still a lot of work yet to be done.

Spiritual youth has its own challenges, but also its own momentum that carries you along. Spiritual old age has a wisdom and mellowness that rejoices in a well run race. But that middle stretch can wear a person down.

In the middle period there's the great danger of becoming accustomed to the Christian life. None of us likes to admit it, but it happens to all of us. We grow familiar with the things of God. We form our routines. The new discoveries are fewer and farther between and thrills begin to diminish.

And there's another factor. Unfortunately, the trials continue to mount. The work continues to pile up. But the zip and enthusiasm that used to carry us over those hurdles begins to cool. The hills seem steeper. The valleys a little deeper. It's the middle period of the Christian walk. It's the period where you've just had enough experience to know that the road isn't likely to turn to chocolate and marshmallows right just around the corner.

- 1) Before we begin to look at the solutions to this problem, I think there are ***three things a Christian must not do***. I will just mention them quickly:
 - a) ***He must not quit or give up in the battle*** - Every Christian, no matter how spiritual, will go through seasons when he must ***resist the inclination to resignation***. Don't quit every time the devil tells you to.

Avoid ***rashness*** - "***In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.***" Note the order. It's not that God gives strength so you will then be able to be quiet and confident. Rather, as you settle your spirit, learn to wait patiently for the Lord, ***then*** He will pour strength into your soul - "***I waited patiently for the Lord and He heard my cry.***"

- b) ***Don't rely on artificial means to perk up your soul*** - The Christian faces, in the spiritual realm, exactly what drugs and sex and alcohol are for people in the physical realm. There is something that needs to be at least questioned in modern day Christianity. You can't even keep up with the new books proclaiming and analyzing the new trends and developments in the church today.

Every once in a while I begin to wonder how many new programs, new concepts for the church, new expenditures of energy, and new trends in theology are simply the last efforts of groups to put some excitement into what went flat in a living, loving, intimate relationship with Jesus through His Word.

I was thinking about some of those words from **Psalm 19:7-10** - **“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; [8] the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;[9] the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. [10] More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.”**

Notice the emphasis on the words ***heart*** and ***soul***. This is not a man who is merely taking up another project or discovered a subject of interest. His life is centered, transformed and nourished by abiding in Jesus like a branch in the vine.

There's nothing rushed or sudden about this life. A branch isn't **noisy** abiding in a vine. The picture Jesus paints is just one of **abiding - remaining - constantly drawing** on the life of the vine. You just **abide** there.

Abide. Resist the scramble for something brand new. Paul reminds the Christians in Ephesus that it's a mark of spiritual immaturity to be constantly tossed about after whatever is the next solution to some down the pike.

But there's still something else that needs to be added, and it's related to this image of a branch abiding in a vine:

- c) ***Don't settle for doing anything for Jesus in a programmed formal fashion*** - "True, I don't feel that close to the Lord anymore. Life seems to be going from bad to worse. But I won't quit, I'll just keep my nose to the grindstone and tough it out. After all, I don't want to be a stumbling block to my kids."

That might **sound** like abiding but it isn't. True, you don't have to scramble for constantly new truths and methods. But you must get genuine spiritual nourishment from rooting your strength in Jesus Christ, not just your self-discipline.

There are two things that will go wrong eventually if your strength comes from your own exerted will-power:

- i) ***Relying on your own self-discipline, you won't be able to keep it up for long*** - You may be strong enough to do a lot of things by sheer will- power, but you can never live the Christian life by sheer will-power.

The power for Christian living can never be pumped up from the flesh. You need to draw on the grace of Jesus Himself for your spiritual nourishment. And abiding in Jesus isn't the same as just "toughing it out."

- ii) The second problem is ***you won't attract anybody to the cause of Christ by the strength of your will-power.*** That will only cause people to admire ***your***, not ***Christ***. Without the genuine life of Jesus in the center of your being, you may win arguments when you witness, but you will never see conversions. Those around you will only see a drab copy of what was once a beautiful original. The church begins to fade.

So when you're weary in well doing, start with those three negatives. Don't quit. Don't fill your life up with artificial stimulants and activities. Don't just try to grin and bear it. Here's what we all ***must*** do:

- 2) **CONSTANTLY PREACH TO YOURSELF ABOUT YOUR OWN HEART** - **Psalm 42:5, 11** - **"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation....42:11.... Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."**

That is always the first step. "Why have I been so restless? Why have I been so hesitant before the Lord. Why have I been so weary in well doing? What is happening at the root of my heart?" These are not *rhetorical* questions. It's not like the Psalmist doesn't probe for an honest answer.

Let me suggest some common sources of trouble for people who are *weary in well-doing*:

- a) ***I could simply be drained physically*** - Not enough sleep. Not eating properly. Not taking any time for rest and nourishment. Or lack of exercise.

There's a great example of this in the story of Elijah, the prophet of God. It's in **1 Kings 19:2-8** - **"Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." [3] Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. [4] But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." [5] And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." [6] And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again."**

[7] “And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” [8] And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.”

This comes immediately after Elijah’s great victory over the false prophets on Mount Carmel. That was a mighty, but incredibly draining time. Then he was threatened by Queen Jezebel. Elijah ran for his life. When God comes to him he’s sitting under the juniper tree feeling sorry for himself. And God is going to speak to him. He has things He wants Elijah to hear. Only Elijah is in no condition to listen to God right now.

Behold the compassion and touch of God. Before He **speaks** to Elijah, He **feeds** Elijah. And He gives him a long break from any kind of ministry at all.

- b) ***Re-evaluate the motives right at the bottom of everything you are doing for the Lord*** - Let me urge thought and honesty at this point. Many Christians **never** look deeply at this though they ***“serve the Lord”*** all their lives.

- * I can serve the Lord because of the appreciation and recognition that comes from doing the job well. People tell you how much they appreciate what you are doing. That’s heady stuff for any Christian.

How important to kneel before the Lord of the Church and say, ***"Lord, it's Your work. I am your servant. I want to do this as though only You knew I was doing it."***

- * Another common danger is to get involved in the work for the Lord because of the excitement in the work itself. The challenge is big. The job seems exciting. There's a natural thrill in doing any job well.

New undertakings have a particular excitement to them. That's why more people will begin in some ministry in any church than you will find staying with it after a couple years.

If you live off the excitement of the work itself, you will find yourself empty sooner or later. Remember, lasting excitement doesn't come from the work itself. It comes from your abiding relationship with the One whom you are serving *in* the work.

Of course it's important to do my best. But if my satisfaction comes from getting good results from my work, then my ego can be very easily bruised when those results don't come. Or my head can be very puffed up when they do. But for sure, spiritual weariness will set in sooner or later because, in one form or another, self is at the center of what I'm doing.

Let me read a passage from **Donald Carson's** great book **"A Call to Spiritual Reformation"** - **"Retirement can sometimes betray where our hearts really are. So can medical incapacity. Bishop Stanway was used by God to multiply churches and strengthen the outreach of the gospel throughout East Africa. In Tanzania alone he was responsible for creating more than twenty dioceses; some referred to him as the apostle to Tanzania."**

"In retirement he helped to found a seminary in North America. But when I met him, he had returned to his native Australia, and Parkinson's disease had so debilitated him that he could no longer talk. He communicated by writing on a pad of paper; more precisely, he could no longer write, but printed his answers in scarcely legible block letters. By the time I got to know him a little better, I felt emboldened to ask him how he was coping with his crippling disease. He had been so active and productive throughout his life; how was he handling being shunted aside? He had to print his answer on that pad of paper three times before I could read it: "THERE IS NO FUTURE IN FRUSTRATION."

"I realized I was witnessing a rare sight. Here was a man who had lived with eternity's perspective before him....He simply had not tied his ego to his service, so that when the active, more outwardly fruitful forms of service he had enjoyed for decades were removed from him, he himself was not threatened. He could still trust his Master, and pursue what was best within the constraints imposed upon him."

"Martyn Lloyd-Jones was one of the most brilliant and influential preachers of this century. A few weeks before he died, someone asked him how, after decades of fruitful ministry and extraordinary activity, he was coping now that he was suffering such serious weakness that it took much of his energy to move from his bed to his armchair and back. He replied as only he could, in the words of Luke 10:20 - "Do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." In other words, do not tie your joy, your sense of well-being, to power in ministry. Your ministry can be taken from you. Tie your joy to the fact that you are known and loved by God; tie it to your great salvation; tie it to the sublime truth that your name is written in heaven. That can never be taken from you."

"The last words he uttered to me were, 'I am perfectly content.'"

My last point follows naturally from this quote:

- c) ***Stay close to Jesus while you work for Him*** - Weariness in well-doing comes from seeing the ***work*** rather than the ***goal*** of the work.

It's worded a number of ways in the Scriptures:

In our text - **Galatians 6:9** - "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season **we will reap**, if we do not give up."

Hebrews 12:1-2 - "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] **looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith**, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

Colossians 3:1-2 - "If then you have been raised with Christ, **seek the things that are above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [2] **Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.**"

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 - "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. [17] For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

These are all different ways of expressing the same truth. We are to be **Christ** oriented in our work, not **work** oriented in our work, even if it's for Christ.

And there's a simple rule to check your own heart. When something isn't getting done - or isn't being done right - if you truly are grieved because you love Jesus, you'll pitch in and work humbly to help get the job done. If you're upset simply because you're a perfectionist, you will become critical and depressed.

Paul tells us there is a harvest. Look forward to **that** time for all your reward. Do your work for the smile of Jesus Christ. Keep things in perspective. Keep your heart pure from bad attitudes. You serve out of love for the one who died for you.

The life of joy that Jesus has for each one of us works like fruit growing on a tree. My first purpose isn't **self-fulfillment**. If my ministry ever becomes a road to self-fulfillment I will **lose** my life while I serve. Jesus said so.

Joy is found, ironically, in ***losing my life in Christ***. As I abide in him and He abides in me, something begins to flow out of me - rivers of living water that touch the hearts and lives of those whom He has called me to serve.