

ENCOURAGEMENT IN WEAKNESS: GOD IS UP TO SOMETHING BIG!

GFA Family Conference 2025, Message #1

Example of William Carey; 2 Corinthians and the Life of Paul

We should be ENCOURAGED in the MINISTRY in the midst of so many things that are DISCOURAGING.

Example: William Carey, "The Father of Modern Missions" (August 17, 1761–June 9, 1834)

In the midst of all his successes [ENCOURAGEMENTS]—and they were many and varied—don't overlook all his DISCOURAGEMENTS: raised in a poor and simple life; an unsaved, ungodly teen (until he was 14 years old); considered a boring preacher, and he failed his first ordination; "Young man, sit down, sit down. You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He'll do it without consulting you or me."; rebuffed by ministers when he proposed organizing a mission society; finally chosen to go, but the church objected, his dad said he was insane, his wife refused to go, there was no money, the East India Company obstacle, five-month journey, terrible living conditions; death of children; malaria; wife Dorothy had severe mental problems; seven years before he baptized his first Indian convert; two wives and several children died; a fire destroyed years of translation work; no furlough in 41 years! **"I can plod. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything."**

2 Corinthians 1:3-11: This first paragraph is a great DOXOLOGY/BENEDICTION in praise of God! Watch for these key words: **comfort/consolation tribulation/trouble/affliction sufferings/suffer**

COMFORT (10x): "one called to your side" with the implication to offer aid/help for the present crisis/distress. Jesus used this word for the Holy Spirit [Jn 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7]; Jesus referred to Himself with this term [14:16]; the Apostle John referred to Jesus with this term [I Jn 2:1].

TRIBULATION: "pressing, pressure, compressing, becoming restricted"

SUFFERINGS

V3 God is the source of all pityings who abounds in compassions, and also the source/fount of all ENCOURAGEMENT.

"All" is "both excluding any other source of comfort and also emphasizing the complete adequacy of that comfort for every circumstance that may arise" [P.E. Hughes, *Paul's 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians*, 11].

V4 Whenever Paul was in one of these "pressure-cooker" (or "pickle-jar") situations, God ENCOURAGED and sustained him. God does this for us to enable/empower us to be His agent to ENCOURAGE others in their "pressure-cookers" with the ENCOURAGEMENT wherewith He ENCOURAGED us!

V5 The sufferings of Christ abound in us, but also the Divine ENCOURAGEMENT [suffering for God's cause see: Mt 10:21-23; 20:23; Jn 15:20; Rom 8:17; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 2:12]. **When the enemy turns up the heat on the pressure cooker, God adjusts the level of our thermostat so we don't blow a gasket but can be ENCOURAGED!**

V6 Paul was willing to endure a lot of pressure-cookers and sufferings to get the Gospel to them because the suffering brought them great ENCOURAGEMENT and eternal blessing. And if he is ENCOURAGED, it is that they might be ENCOURAGED to undergo suffering for others. They saw in Paul's life that he was ENCOURAGED and learned lessons; they can look to God in difficult times and find ENCOURAGEMENT.

V7 They shared with him in suffering and they would also share in ENCOURAGEMENT.

V4 God the Encourager →	enemy turns up → the heat	VV4a,5,9-10 Paul → was encouraged	VV4b,6 God met a need → and equipped to encourage others	V7 Cor would suffer and receive God's encouragement to to meet a need and...
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AD 35/36	41/42	46-48	49-52	52-	55-56	-57
Salvation Acts 9:16	2 Cor 12:7-9 "thorn in the flesh"	1 st Miss Journey 2 Tim 3:11; Acts 13:50-14:19 persecution, stoning	2 nd Miss Journey Acts 16 stripes, prison, stocks	3 rd Miss Journey [penned 2 Cor] 1 Cor 15:32 beasts; Acts 19 riot; 2 Cor 1:8-10 sentence of death		

2 Cor 12:1-10 Paul is referring to himself; occurred 14 years before he wrote 2 Cor; so this happened during his "silent years" [see Acts 9:30; 11:25; Gal 1:21]. He was "caught up" into the third heaven, paradise and heard unspeakable words. V7 The thorn is a consequence of the revelation. Identity of the "thorn": epilepsy, headaches, hysteria, severe eye trouble, malaria, leprosy, speech impediment (stammering), etc. God refused to remove it but promised grace that was more than sufficient! Paul's response: "I will brag in my weaknesses so this power will rest on me; I will take pleasure in my pressure-cookers because when I am weak then am I strong!"

OUR EXTREMITIES BECOME GOD'S OPPORTUNITIES!

Two Observations: (1) Paul had this seemingly disabling condition the entirety of his public ministry life. (2) Thank God we don't know the specificity of the "thorn."

2 Cor 1:8-11 This was a recent (55/56) extreme hardship during which he found ENCOURAGEMENT. We were weighed down excessively beyond normal endurance, thinking we were going to die. What was this? Acts 19:23-41; 1 Cor 15:32; mob violence but not at Ephesus; severe recurrence of "thorn."

2 Cor 4:8-11 Note the beginning and ending of the chapter [VV1,16]: "We faint not" [to throw in the towel!]. God's Word = "we don't become discouraged"; The Message = "We're not about to throw up our hands and walk off the job just because we run into occasional hard times"; V16 "we're not giving up." In VV8-9 there are four pairs of contrasts; V10 intense suffering because of his testimony for Jesus; VV11 constantly faces death because he serves the Lord!

2 Cor 6:3-10 Paul defends his ministry and answers critics who slur his credentials. But he doesn't want to do anything that would cause someone to stumble or cause God's work to be discredited. So, what are his credentials? God's servant, and he heads a list of nine items with "much patience."

2 Cor 11:23-28 Paul gives another list of hardships. Let's combine these with the 2 Cor 6 list and note five categories:

1. General hardships/trials (generic): (6:4) pressure; adverse circumstances with no relief; "tight places"
2. Hardships/sufferings inflicted by men: (6:5) stripes; imprisonments; riots; (11:24-25) stripes; rods; stones; (11:26) perils of robbers, countrymen, heathen, false brethren, city
3. Specific hardships associated with his work but not afflicted by men: (11:25) shipwreck; night and day in deep; (11:26) perils of waters, sea; (11:27) hunger; cold; nakedness; thirst; weariness; painfulness
4. Self-inflicted hardships: (6:5) labors; watchings, fasting; (11:27) fastings; watchings
5. Internal hardships: (11:28) the care of all the churches

These DISCOURAGEMENTS were all part of his calling as he was privileged to be a slave of Christ!

HOW/WHY could Paul be ENCOURAGED in the midst of such DISCOURAGEMENTS??

(1:4) I am a conduit of God's ENCOURAGEMENT.

(1:9) God taught me not to trust myself but to trust in Him!

(4:16-18) I learned to see everything in time against the backdrop of eternity [in the light of eternity].

***The outer man wastes away; the inner man is renewed daily.

***Light, momentary affliction accomplishes an extraordinary eternal weight of glory.

***We don't consider/look at the temporal things we can see; we look at the eternal things we can't see

(2 Cor 12:9) The weaker I am, the stronger Christ shows Himself through me.

DISCOURAGEMENTS will come in the ministry—ask William Carey (or look in the mirror!). Why?

~~Do I think the ministry is all about me when I am only a servant and God is to get the glory?

~~Am I not getting the credit (praise, glory) I am due?

~~Are the people taking more from me than they are giving me?

~~Could it be the result of some of our dumb choices: only I can do it; no one can do it as well as I; giving in to the devil's temptations?

SONG: "Teach Me Thy Way, O Lord"