

Have You Felt Like Giving Up Lately?



David Wilkerson October 1, 1978

A growing number of ministers have been writing to me in recent months, telling of their concern for parishioners who are simply giving up. One minister wrote, "I see my church members trying so hard to cope with problems in their marriages and pressures in their personal lives. Just when it seems victory is within reach, they stumble and fall. Good, honest Christians are so often overwhelmed by guilt and condemnation, it causes despair. And when they can't live up to their own expectations - when they fall back into sin and get involved - they decide to give up. Few know how to pull out of a moral tailspin."

I agree with the assessment of these ministers. Growing numbers of Christians are at the breaking point. None of the talk about giving up has to do with the Lord. Few Christians would even entertain thoughts of quitting on their love for Jesus. Most despairing Christians think only of giving up on themselves. You hear it so often now, "I just can't go on anymore. I can't make it, even though I try so hard. It's hopeless! Why try?"

I hear some ministers today who continually preach only a positive message. To hear them tell it, every Christian is receiving miracles - everybody is getting instant answers to prayer - everybody is feeling good, living good, and the whole world is bright and rosy. I love to hear that kind of preaching, because I really wish all those good and healthy things for God's people. But that's not the way things are for a great number of very honest, sincere Christians. How sad to hear such shallow theology being pushed from pulpits today. It's an insult to a lowly Jesus, who became poor, who died a failure in the eyes of the world. It is the kind of materialistic preaching that has so ill-prepared an entire generation to endure any kind of pain - to be content with such things as they have - to be abased and not always abounding. Serving God becomes a kind of Olympic race in which everyone must strive for the gold medals.

No wonder our young people give up in defeat. They can't live up to the image created by religion, of a happy-go-lucky, rich, successful, always positive-thinking Christian. Their world is not that idealistic. They look in a mirror reflecting a face covered with ugly pimples. They live with heartbreaks, hour-by-hour crises and horrible family problems. Their friends are hooked and dying on all sides. They look into the uncertain future, frightened and worried; loneliness, fear and depression hound them daily.

Positive thinking won't make their problems go away. Confessing these problems don't really exist doesn't change a thing. These "apostles of the positive" dare not exclude the Gethsemane experiences of life. The cup of pain, the hour of isolation, and the night of confusion were all part of the Master's lifestyle. Our great achievements, our successes, ought to take place at Gethsemane, not Fort Knox!

The sawdust trail for many has become the gold dust trail. The Bible has become a catalog, with unlimited order blanks for life's goodies - for everyone who wants to become a "silver" saint. anything having to do with job-like pain and suffering is considered negative living.

God is good, and those who give generously do receive abundant blessings. One should always think on good and honest reports; but pain, poverty and suffering have befallen some of the saintliest of God's people - just like righteous Job.

What do you say to that wife whose home is breaking up, and she seems powerless to stop it? She's been advised by her friends, counseled by her pastor, and has been exhorted over and over again to "Stay on your knees and believe God for a miracle." So she fasts, and she prays. She bends over backwards, to the point of crawling on her knees to her husband. She exercises faith with every intellectual insight she possesses. But, in spite of all her honest efforts, he grows hard and bitter, demanding a divorce. Not all marriages are healed through prayer or good intentions. It takes two to make a marriage work, and even though prayer may bring down the power of Holy Ghost conviction upon a straying mate, that mate can resist all God's efforts and abort the solution.

Some of my friends may be wondering why I am spending so much time talking about marriage, divorce and the home. But the reason is simple enough. In my crusades, I talk to so many kids on the brink of suicide, and an overwhelming majority tell me their depression stems from trouble at home. Dad and Mom are having trouble. Or, they have already gotten a divorce.

Multitudes of husbands and wives are giving up on their marriages. A minister friend of mine, whose divorce had just become final, told me he has become a hero of sorts to some of his closest friends. One friend called and said, "Where did you get the courage to split up? Man, we're having trouble, too, but I guess I'm a coward. Wish I could take that step."

Another called, saying, "Our marriage is a farce. We don't communicate at all anymore. I've given up. But how do you take that final plunge into divorce? I'm so hung up on security and my job - I'm just afraid I'd lose too much."

Still another called and offered, "I admire your courage. You got out of a hopeless situation. I guess I'll go on existing, living in misery. I don't want my kids to turn on me. That's the only thing holding me. I've given up completely on our marriage."

There are many readers of this message who, at this very moment, are on the verge of giving up. You can't understand what is happening to you - to your marriage - to your home. Something is missing, and, try as you will, you simply cannot find the key to making things work out right. How many hours have you spent, all alone, trying to figure out where things went wrong? The magic is gone. The romance is gone. The communication is gone. In its place there are now arguments, questions, suspicions, innuendoes, cutting remarks.

A brokenhearted lady wrote, "Sir, I just can't believe it's happening to me! I was so secure, feeling sorry for all those others who seemed to be having so many problems. But never did I imagine our marriage could crumble. I was too intelligent - too much into giving and sharing. Now, I'm a victim of this curse of divorce. It's a shattering experience."

A successful marriage counselor took me to lunch recently and, before the entree was served, he confessed his own marriage had been in jeopardy. "You just can't take any good marriage for granted anymore," he said. "I find I have to work harder than ever to keep a good thing. I'm convinced Satan is determined to break up my marriage - and every good Christian marriage. It's a well-planned attack on the best of marriages. If Satan can get the strongest, most admired marriages broken up - then weaker ones will be tempted to quit struggling and give up."

The secret struggles in the Christian's personal life are just as critical. The inner battles of the average Christian today are staggering in intensity and proportion. Multitudes are involved in situations too hard to comprehend. Like David the Psalmist, they confess, "My sins have overwhelmed me - they are too high for me to understand."

Paul said, "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened" (2 Corinthians 5:4). I doubt we could even count the great numbers of Christians who groan in secret because of the burdens they carry.

Paul talked about, "...trouble which came to us...we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, inasmuch that we despaired even of life" (2 Corinthians 1:8).

If you pulled back the facade from every great preacher and every admired personality, you would find moments of deep depression. You would find the same infirmities you find in any normal Christian. We all have seasons of despair, accompanied by feelings of failure. At times, we have all thought of quitting. We have all had thoughts of giving up.

Why do we feel like giving up at times? Mostly because we act like God has forsaken the earth. We don't doubt His existence or His reality. But our prayers seem to go unanswered. We cry out for His help in such desperation, and He seems not to hear. We struggle along, making one mistake after another. We make promises to do better; we

get into the Bible; we cry and pray and stay busy helping others and doing good. But we are so often left with an empty, unfulfilled sensation. The promises of God haunt us. We claim those promises - in what we believe is honest, childlike faith - but time after time we fail to receive what we ask for. In the hour of temptation - down we go!

Doubt creeps in and Satan whispers, "Nothing works. Faith in God doesn't produce results. In spite of your tears, prayers and trust in God's Word - nothing really changes. Days, weeks and even years go by, and your prayers, hopes and dreams are still unanswered and unfulfilled. Quit! give up!"

Every Christian on this planet reaches that crisis point at one time or another in life. And in that moment, when the walls seem to be caving in and the roof appears to be collapsing, when everything seems to be coming apart and sin demands the upper hand - a voice deep within cries out. "Walk away from it all. Pack it in! Escape! Why put up with it? Run away. You don't have to take it. Do something drastic."

David, overwhelmed by the evil in his heart, cried out, "Awake, why do you sleep? Cast me not off...why do you hide? Why do you forget?" (Psalm 44:23,24).

Christian - does it amaze you that great men of old faced the same battles you and I face today? The Bible says, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12,13).

Job was a perfect man in God's sight. Yet he, too, experienced a time when he wanted to give up. Job's agony came from a terrible dilemma. He was convinced in his heart God knew where he was and what he was going through. Yet, he himself could not enter into the presence of God. "Behold," said Job, "I go forward, but he is not here; and backward, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him" (Job 23:8,9).

Job was saying to himself, "I know God is there someplace, looking down on me in all my trouble. He knows the way I take - but in spite of all I do to find Him, He keeps hiding from me. I believe God is real, He is there, but I just can't see Him." In total desperation, Job sobs, "I am afraid of him...the Almighty troubleth me" (Job 23:15,16).

And all those fearful and troubled thoughts about God were the result of what Job thought was a divine doing-nothingness. Job argues, "You don't cut me off, yet you don't remove the darkness" (Job 23:17).

The bottom line for Job was simply this: either cut me down or make things right - just don't be silent toward me! Even if You cut me off, at least I'll know You are there.

How can we learn to hold on and live one day at a time? You can begin by forgetting all shortcuts and magic cures. The Christian doesn't need a supposed demon of despair cast out, as if his going would make life easier. Nor will God come down and do our living for us. The tempter will not be destroyed until that day God casts him into prison. Satan will always be here, deceiving, accusing and trying to rob every believer of his faith.

The longer I live for Christ, the more difficult it is for me to accept easy, cure-all solutions. But, in my own struggles, I've found great comfort and help in two wonderful absolutes.

The first absolute is - GOD REALLY LOVES ME. God is not in the business of condemning His children - failures or not. He yearns over us as a loving father, wanting only to lift us out of our weaknesses.

I caught a glimpse of that love recently while walking in the woods around our ranch. Not once did I stop to consider the birds flying about, free and healthy. But suddenly, there on the ground just ahead flopped a crippled little bird. Struggling so hard to fly, the little baby bird could only flip over helplessly in the dust. I stooped to pick it up. It was then a familiar Scripture came flashing through my mind. "Not one (sparrow) shall fall on the ground without your Father" (Matthew 10:29).

I once thought that verse read, "Not a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father knowing about it." But Matthew's version states - "one shall not fall without the Father."

God is with us, even when we fall. We do not fall without the Father. He does not fall into our sin, but He does come down to our fallen condition. He does not abandon us on our way down. He never forsakes a crippled child.

For, you see, we are that sparrow.

David said, "I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop" (Psalm 102:7). David saw the bathing Bathsheba from that housetop - and he fell, a broken, crippled sparrow. But God did not give up on him. Our Lord never gives up on any of us!

Have you also fallen? Do you relate to that crippled sparrow, flopping helplessly in the dust? Are you wounded, hurting and feeling lost and lonely? Do you ever think to yourself, "How can God put up with someone like me? How can He still love me when I've failed Him so badly?"

Oh, but He does love you, my friend. Often, we can recognize His great love only when we have hit bottom and find ourselves in such need of it. You will have won a great victory if you can be convinced God loves you even in your wounded, crippled condition. It was a wound that made me kneel and show compassion for a helpless bird. And it is our wounds, our hurts, our helplessness that causes His love and compassion to overshadow and envelop us. Our strength is renewed by His everlasting love. Just rest in that wonderful love. Don't panic. Deliverance will come. God answers us by showing His love. And when we have learned how weak we are and have learned to trust His love and forgiveness - He will stoop down and gently help us back to the nest.

The second absolute is - IT IS MY FAITH THAT PLEASES HIM THE MOST! "Without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6). The Bible says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3).

God wants so much to be trusted. That trust He counts as righteousness. I know some very holy, sanctified people (at least outwardly) who walk the straight and narrow. They would never once admit to feelings of failure and despair. They think of themselves as saints. But their great sin is doubt. Sometimes I think certain sinners have more faith than many self-righteous Christians.

What do I do when temptation rolls over me like a flood? When my inadequacies overwhelm me and I see the reflections of my weaknesses? Give up? Quit? Never! I bring to God all I've got left - my faith in Him! I may not understand why He seems to take such a long time to intervene, but I know He will. He will keep His word to me.

I am convinced Satan wants to rob me of only one thing - my faith. He really doesn't want my morals or my good deeds or my dreams. He wants to destroy my faith and make me believe God has forsaken this earth.

A fall is never fatal to those who keep their faith intact. In spite of continual struggles and feelings of helplessness at times, I still believe my Lord. In spite of despair and pressures that bog the mind and sap the strength, I believe God. I believe He will "keep me from falling and present me faultless before the throne of glory, with exceeding great joy."

He loves me and He wants me to keep on trusting. So I will accept that love and keep my faith strong.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isaiah 26:3).

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