

“WHERE DOES MY HOPE COME FROM?” – PART ONE

Sermon - Sunday August 17, 2014

Have you ever been disappointed or discouraged in life? Have you ever had friends forsake you or not support you? Have you had parents abandon you or demean you? Have you lost your job at work because you couldn't measure up or because you didn't get along with the boss or co-workers?

Have you ever had a car that constantly broke down? Have you ever run out of paycheck before you ran out of bills? Have you ever been sick enough to question whether you would recover? Have you ever felt like you've been treated unfairly or unjustly?

I'm sure all of us here can relate to at least one of these scenarios. We've all been disappointed in life. At times we have even been disappointed in God, or at least the God we thought we knew.

It's true that sometimes our disappointments come from unrealistic expectations. We expect people we care for to care for us as well. We expect the job we have today will be the job we have tomorrow. We expect the care that ran so well today to also run well tomorrow. But people aren't always who they appear to be or pretend to be or even who we want or need them to be. And businesses downsize, friends move away, mothers and fathers get addicted to something other than their children. And in spite of how it may seem, cars do not purposely break down on the way to an important event to spite and frustrate us. These things happen in a sinful world. The fall destroys both relationships and metal equally.

Concerning friendships, Scripture has a few things to say. Proverbs 17:17 says, *“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”* And Job 6:14 says, *“For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; So that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty.”*

And I believe this is true. It is not an unrealistic expectation to expect kindness from our friends and to be loved by them at all times. If we did not expect this we would not have opened our hearts and befriended them. We should expect that our friends will be there for us, that they will have something positive to say to us, that they will be our biggest encourager and our last critic. When we go to them with hurts or struggles we expect them to support us, to uphold us, to encourage us. But sometimes they don't. Sometimes friends don't always love like we need them to love. Sometimes they can be our biggest disappointment. And we can be theirs.

Have you ever tried to dip your empty bucket into the well of your friendship looking for the waters of encouragement? But when you pulled up your bucket it was as empty as it was when you lowered it in. To your surprise and disappointment, you could find no encouragement in that well.

Or you may have pulled up a bucket full of the waters of your friendships. Only you found the water to be bitter, full of the unspoken words of criticism and correction instead of encouragement.

It's a sad statement but true. Sometimes the sweet water of friendship turns sour or runs dry. What was meant to bring life instead brings disappointment and discouragement. How disappointing it is to find dry land while searching for running streams. How disheartening it is to find the bitter when you expect the sweet.

David wrote in PSALM 55:12-14

“For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear it; Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend; We who had sweet fellowship (intimacy) together within the house of God in the throng.”

David experienced this with King Saul. At first David was Saul's friend, capable of soothing the literal savage beast within Saul by playing his harp. Saul was so pleased with David that he gave his daughter Michael to David to be his wife. But soon jealousy took over and the sweet waters of friendship turned bitter and resentful. What once was a position of honor for David in Saul's household turned into a place of fear until David had to escape this friendship in order to preserve his life.

We know from the story that nothing within David changed. But something within Saul did. There was a shift in their relationship caused by the enemy of their soul, so that bitterness and anger were allowed to grow. Though David sought restitution with Saul, and Saul occasionally repented of his sin, the relationship was never restored because Saul was not willing.

And Saul was not the only relational disappointment for David. He could just as well have written Psalm 55 about his wife Michael who ended up despising him; Or Joab, his sister's husband and the commander of his armies who constantly disobeyed David's orders for his own selfish purpose; Even his own sons, Absalom and Ammon treated their father and their sister with disrespect and degradation, putting their desires and ambitions above those of others. David had people who were both familiar and familial turn against him during his life.

Sometimes the deepest wounds we receive come from our family, friends and companions. And these are often the hardest to recover from. Just think of anyone who has gone through a divorce. The one they trusted the most, the one they gave their heart to and bared their deepest secrets to has turned away from them and broken their pledge of unity. What once was solid bedrock suddenly turned to sinking sand, no longer able to handle the weight of commitment.

“For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear it; Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend; We who had sweet fellowship (intimacy) together within the house of God in the throng.”

David understood the sting of broken trust.

Jesus is also another example of disappointing relationships and broken trust. The Scriptures say, He was a man of sorrows and well acquainted with grief.” In [Psalm 41:9](#) we read: *“Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”*

This of course speaks of Judas, whom Jesus identified at the last supper as the one who would betray him. And with the weight of betrayal fresh on His mind Jesus went in anguish to the garden to pray knowing how much strength he needed to face what lie ahead. But when he needed encouragement the most, His disciples could not even stay awake to pray for Him or for themselves as Jesus had asked them to. In fact Peter would soon deny and all the disciples would flee from Jesus when the time came to arrest Him.

And the Scriptures are full of relational disappointments. Think of Cain and Abel, Abraham and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Jacob and Laban, Samson and Delilah, and all of the evil kings who came into power and caused the nation of Israel to fall into sun. We not only disappoint each other, we disappoint God as well. Disappointment is not unique to the nation of Israel, nor is it unique to us. It is a universal fever.

But I am not so concerned with how this happens - how relationships turn from encouraging to disappointing - because it happens to all of us in some form or another. And I don't want the “how's” to

be the emphasis of this sermon. What I want to address today is what we should do when life and people disappoint is – when we lose hope in our friends or our family, when we lose hope of life itself. How do we move past the disappointment and hurt and find the encouragement we are looking for? As Psalm 121 says, “*Where does my help come from?*”

One of the reasons this is on my mind this morning is because of the recent suicide of Robin Williams, a man who brought hope to many through his laughter but failed to find enough hope in laughter to overcome his own life’s struggles; Now, I am not here to comment on Robin Williams, as so many have done this past week. He is in the hands of the Judge of the universe who alone knows the beginnings and endings of Robin’s past and present life. I only mention him as someone who was disappointed to the point of despair. Wherever his help came from it seemed insufficient to keep him from ending his life.

But we all have our disappointments. I have recently been disappointed and been a disappointment to others as well. And it is through these events that I have come to understand more clearly where disappointments come from and what to do about them. That is the path I want to take us down this morning.

There’s a popular song on the radio now called “Human” by Christina Perri. The lyrics go like this:

I can hold my breath. I can bite my tongue.
I can stay awake for days if that’s what you want. Be your number one.

I can fake a smile. I can force a laugh.
I can dance and play the part if that’s what you ask. Give you all I am.
I can do it. I can do it I can do it

But I’m only human. And I bleed when I fall down.
I’m only human. And I crash and I break down.
Your words in my head, knives in my heart.
You build me up and then I fall apart.
I’m only human, yeah.

I can turn it on. Be a good machine.
I can hold the weight of worlds if that’s what you need. Be your everything.

I can do it. I can do it. I’ll get through it

But I’m only human. And I bleed when I fall down.
I’m only human. And I crash and I break down.
Your words in my head, knives in my heart.
You build me up and then I fall apart.
I’m only human, yeah.

I’m only human. I’m only human. Just a little human.
I can take so much until I’ve had enough.

‘Cause I’m only human. And I bleed when I fall down.
I’m only human. And I crash and I break down.

Your words in my head, knives in my heart.
You build me up and then I fall apart.
'Cause I'm only human, yeah.
I'm only human.

Songwriters: Harris Iii, James Samuel / Lewis, Terry
Human lyrics © EMI Music Publishing, Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., Universal Music Publishing Group

This song is basically saying I can be what you want but I may have to fake it or force it because I can't sustain it. I can't be what you want me to be 24-7. I'm not perfect. I break down. I fall apart. I'll disappoint you because I'm only human.

In spite of stating some obvious truths the problem I have with this song is that it does not present the whole picture. It is misleading in its attempt to be truthful. The problem with this song is that we are not only human. We are not beings consisting of only flesh and blood and emotions. We are also spirit beings, in the process of being regenerated by the Holy Spirit living within us. And this is what we often forget. When we ignore the spiritual parts of ourselves, the only well we seek to draw encouragement from is the well of the human heart. And that, according to JEREMIAH 17:9, is "*more deceitful than all else and desperately sick*". And it's not just the heart of our friends. All hearts are deceitful and desperately sick, including our own.

So it should come as no surprise that when we seek water from a well that is desperately sick and deceitful we come up empty or disappointed. The problem is not the well, it is our expectations. We expect human hearts to provide what only the heart of God can provide. We shouldn't be drawing from the well of human hearts or relationships to gain acceptance, approval or security. We should be drawing from the well of God's Spirit. "*Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord.*"

Let's look at PSALM 121 again.

"I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul. The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever."

The LORD made the heavens and the earth. This fact alone establishes the magnitude of His power and creative force. We are not looking to the hills, to creation for our help. We are looking to the One who created the hills, the Maker of heaven and earth. If He has the power to create, then He has the power to sustain.

Try as we might to seek help from others, the true source of our help is the Lord Himself. As the song we sang earlier said:

He is our Strength in weakness, our Help in sorrow, and our Guide and Keeper. Friends may fail us and foes assail us, but Jesus makes us whole. We may be tempted, tried and sometimes failing, but He is our Strength and Victory. Even when our hearts are breaking, He is our comfort. And when the storms of life rage about us, and the dark night overtakes us, He hears our cry for help and pilots us out of the deep billowing waters into the calm seas of His love.

We don't always embrace what we know to be true. But we do embrace what is familiar. We establish patterns in life and we perpetuate these patterns because they are familiar to us. The problem comes when the familiar no longer works.

EUGENE PETERSEN in his book "A Long Obedience in The Same Direction" gives this illustration:

"A few years ago I was in my backyard with my lawn mower tipped on its side. I was trying to get the blade off so that I could sharpen it. I had my biggest wrench attached to the nut, but couldn't budge it. I got a four-foot length of pipe and slipped it over the wrench handle to give me leverage, and was leaning on that – still unsuccessfully. Next I took a large rock and was banging on eth pipe. By this time I was beginning to get emotionally involved with the lawn mower. Then my neighbor walked over and said that he had a lawn mower like mine once and that, if he remembered correctly, the threads on the bolt went the other way. I reversed my exertions and, sure enough, the nut turned easily. I was glad to have been wrong. I was saved from frustration and failure. I would never have gotten the job done, no matter how hard I tried, doing it my way.

What Psalm 121 is saying to us, in its quiet and gentle voice, is that we, perhaps, are wrong in the way we are going about the Christian life....Psalm 121 is the neighbor coming over and telling us that we are doing it the wrong way, looking in the wrong place for help."

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Like Peter stepping out on the water with Jesus, the only thing that can cause us to sink is taking our eyes off the Lord. When we seek our comfort and strength in created things rather than in the creator Himself, we will surely sink into the depths of despair. But when we know that our help comes from the Lord Himself, the Maker of heaven and earth, we can rise above the storms of life. It is in Him that we find encouragement. It is in Him alone we find true sustaining life. We won't escape the problems of life. But when we pass through the waters, He will be with us. He will sustain us. He will give us the strength to carry on. He is a faithful friend who speaks words of encouragement to us so that we may persevere.

You remember the story of Elijah calling out to the priests of Baal to arouse their god. They did that because Baal was known to take long naps, "and one of the jobs of the priests was to wake him up when someone needed his attention." This is not true of our God. Our God neither slumbers nor sleeps. He guards our going out and our coming in "*from this time forth and forevermore*" – from now until the end of our life."

We just watched the movie "Heaven Is For Real" about the 4 year-old boy who went to heaven. His father was a preacher who worked several jobs in order to make needs meet. The boy said he visited heaven during an emergency operation he had due to a ruptured appendix. As if having your toddler undergo surgery was not enough, prior to that incident, the father had seven months of back-to-back injuries. He shattered his leg playing softball, experienced kidney stones, and went through two surgeries and a cancer scare. One might think his God, which is the same as our God, was sleeping and needed to be awakened. But Eugene Peterson helps us to understand otherwise. Again I quote from his book "A Long Obedience in The Same Direction":

"All the water in all the oceans cannot sink a ship unless it gets inside. Nor can all the trouble in the world harm us unless it gets within us. That is the promise of the psalm: "The Lord will keep you from all evil." Not the (betrayal of friends and family), not the fierce attack of (our enemies), not the malign

influence of the (world) – none of (the trials and disappointments of life) can separate us from God’s call and purpose. From the time of repentance (that delivered you from sin) to the time of your glorification with the saints in heaven, you are safe: “The Lord will keep you from all evil.” None of the things that happen to you, none of the troubles or disappointments you encounter has any power to get between you and God. They cannot dilute His grace (nor) divert His will from you.”

“The Christian life is not a quiet escape to a garden where we can walk and talk interruptedly with our Lord; not a fantasy trip to a heavenly city where we can compare our blue ribbons and gold medals with others who have made it to the winner’s circle. To suppose that, or to expect that, is to go against the grain of life or to “turn the nut the wrong way.” The Christian life is going to God. In going to God Christians travel the same ground that everyone else walks on, breathe the same air, drink the same water, shop in the same stores, read the same newspapers, are citizens under the same governments, pay the same prices for groceries and gasoline, fear the same dangers, are subject to the same pressures, get the same distresses, are buried in the same ground.

“The difference is that each step we walk, each breath we breathe, we know we are preserved by God, we know we are accompanied by God, we know we are ruled by God; and therefore no matter what doubts we endure or what (disappointments we encounter), the Lord will preserve us from evil, He will keep our life.”

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From where do you seek your self-image? From where do you get energized to make it through another day? From what well do you draw when life disappoints you? From which source do you draw the courage to face each day? When friends disappoint, when family forsakes, when jobs are lost, when finances dry up, when material things rot away, where do you look for help?

In [Job 13:15](#) we read, *“Even though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”* In the midst of the loss of his family, the discouragement of his wife, the faithlessness of his friends, and the sores that wracked his body, Job was still able to trust the Lord. He sought His security in God alone.

When David Himself was the source of his own disappointment, he cried out to God because of his sin. This is what he wrote:

PSALM 38:1-15

“O LORD, rebuke me not in Your wrath, and chasten me not in Your burning anger. For Your arrows have sunk deep into me, and Your hand has pressed down on me. There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; There is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. My wounds grow foul and fester because of my folly. I am bent over and greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long. For my loins are filled with burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am benumbed and badly crushed; I groan because of the agitation of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart throbs, my strength fails me; And the light of my eyes, even that has gone from me. My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague; and my kinsmen stand afar off. Those who seek my life lay snares for me; and those who seek to injure me have threatened destruction, and they devise treachery all day long. But I, like a deaf man, do not hear; and I am like a mute man who does not open his mouth. Yes, I am like a man who does not hear, and in whose mouth are no arguments. For I hope in You, O LORD; You will answer, O Lord my God”

He was not afraid to seek help even from the One whom he disappointed. He knew there was help in no other for what ailed him. He knew God would answer the cries of his heart.

David was well acquainted with the ups and downs of life. From tending sheep to slaying giants, from playing his harp for the king to hiding in caves to avoid the King, from sitting on the throne of Israel to being driven out as an exile, He was a man after God's own heart. And he knew the disappointments of life did not last forever. And his soul did not need to linger in the land of despair. Even when his tears became his food day and night, he spoke these words to his soul:

PSALM 42:5

“Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.”

PSALM 62:5

“My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him.”

Where we place our hope will determine our future - not just our eternal one but our immediate one. Our ability to persevere will be determined by where we seek our strength. Our ability to overcome will be determined by where we place our disappointments. And our confidence for the future will be determined by where our help comes from.

As I was attempting to draw the waters of encouragement from a well which came up empty I quickly realized two things. (1) The disappointment I felt was real. There was no encouragement to be found in this well. It was like seeing a mirage. It looked real enough until you actually tried to draw water. Then you realized it was only shifting sand. And (2) there was a well I could draw from that I knew contained the waters of encouragement. It was the well of God. I was disappointed because I had gone to the wrong well.

I didn't need the temporary affirmation of men to satisfy my need to be encouraged, to find the strength to persevere. What I needed was the eternal truth of God spoken to my soul, because my soul was thirsty for God and God alone. The opinion of men may temporarily build me up or tear me down. But the opinion of God is a permanent structure that will not crumble under the weight of my needs. My flesh may fail, my spirit may grow weak, my emotions may be raw, but God remains the strength of my heart (Psalm 72:26).

So when I am in need, when I am in trouble, when I am thirsty for the waters of encouragement, I run to Him. He is my strength and my portion forever. In Him I live and move and have my being.

Earlier I quoted lyrics from the popular song, “I'm Only Human”. I'd like to end quoting lyrics from a more positive and accurate song.

I look to the Shepherd, He meets all my needs;
Beside the still waters He faithfully leads,
Bringing peace to my soul,
As His love makes me whole.

And when in the valley of deepest despair,
I look to the Shepherd, His presence is there

Bringing peace to my soul,
As His love makes me whole.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
Follow me all the days of my life.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All my life

(Words and Music by Walt Harrah, © 1987 Maranatha! Music)

“Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.”

This week I wanted to emphasize that our help comes from the Lord. In so doing I purposely downplayed the role we as fellow believers play in encouraging one another. But the Scriptures say that we are to “encourage one another daily”. So we do have a role to play and we should be a place where people can come to draw out the waters of encouragement.

Next week I will talk about how to fill our wells with the sweet water of Christ and keep the bitter waters from contaminating our wells. If Christ lives in us then others should expect to draw Christ from our well and receive the support and encouragement they so desperately seek. Next week we’ll take a look at how to meet those expectations.

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