

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

### **Sermon - Sunday October 27, 2015**

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 car 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. 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 just to spite and frustrate us. These things happen in a sinful world. The fall destroys both relationships and metal equally.

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.”* These verses tell us that our loved ones should 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 and loved ones don't always love like we need them to love. At times they can be our biggest disappointment. And we can be theirs.

When the struggles of life happen, we search for reassurance. We dip our empty emotional bucket into the well of our friendships hoping to draw out the waters of encouragement. But sometimes all we get is an empty bucket. Other times we may pull up a bucket full of the water of our friendship, only to find the water is bitter, filled with their unspoken words of criticism and correction instead of encouragement.

It's a sad statement but true. Sometimes the sweet water of relationships turns sour or runs dry. What was intended 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 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 him his daughter Michal for his wife. But jealousy took over the mind of Saul and their sweet water of friendship turned bitter and resentful. David's position of honor in Saul's household soon turned into a place of fear as Saul threatened David's life on multiple occasions. David had to escape this “friendship” in order to preserve his life.

We know from scripture 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 jealousy, insecurity, and anger took hold of Saul. Though David sought restitution, and Saul occasionally repented of his unrelenting

quest for David's life, the relationship was never restored because Saul was not willing to change his behavior.

And Saul was not the only relational disappointment for David. He had people who were both familiar and familial turn against him during his life. His wife Michael grew to despise him. His sons, Absalom and Amnon, treated their father and their sister with disrespect and degradation, putting their desires and ambitions above all else. Even Joab, his sister's husband and the commander of his armies, frequently disobeyed David's direct orders in order to serve his own selfish purposes, the most famous being the killing of David's son Absalom.

Sometimes the deepest wounds we receive come from our family, friends and companions. And these are often the hardest from which to recover. It was out of these experiences that David wrote the following:

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.”*

PSALM 41:9

*“Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”*

These are the kind of disappointments that are universally felt by all who have been betrayed by those closest to them. David understood the sting of this kind of broken trust, as did Jesus, and I dare say, as do you and I as well. In our fallen world disappointment seems to be the universal language.

What should we do when life and people disappoint us – when we lose hope in our friends or our family, when we despair of life itself? How do we move past the disappointment and hurt and find the encouragement we are looking for? Where does our help come from? That is the path I want to take us down this morning.

Five years ago this past summer, Robin Williams, a very successful actor and comedian who was loved by millions, committed suicide. He had brought hope to many through his laughter but failed to find enough hope to overcome his own life's struggles. More recently a young pastor committed suicide after suffering from depression for many years. I mention these because they are examples of those who were disappointed in life to the point of despair. Wherever their help came from it seemed insufficient to keep them from ending their life.

We have all had our disappointments but most of us do not end our life because of them. We find someplace or someone to go to and find comfort in our disappointments. None of us are perfect people. We all break down and fall apart at times. We disappoint and will be disappointed by others because we all suffer from the same sickness. We are human beings living in a fallen world.

The problem comes when we fail to realize we are not just human beings, consisting of flesh and blood and emotions. We are also spirit beings, in the process of being regenerated by the Holy Spirit living within us. 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.

It should come as no surprise then, when we seek water from a well that is desperately sick and deceitful, that we would come up empty or disappointed. Our problem is that 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. Let's look at what Psalm 121 says.

#### PSALM 121

*"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 old hymn (Jesus What A Friend For Sinners) says: 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 the 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.”

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 (Isaiah 43:2). 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.

Todd Burpo, a small-town businessman, pastor, and volunteer firefighter, struggled to make ends meet. For a period of seven months he had back-to-back injuries. He shattered his leg playing softball, experienced kidney stones, went through two surgeries and a cancer scare. To top it off, his 4-year-old son had to have an emergency operation due to a ruptured appendix. 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.”

Here is an example of what Eugene Peterson is saying. Toby Mac, a contemporary Christian artist was on tour in Canada this week when he received a call on which he experienced a parent’s worst nightmare. His oldest son Truett had a sudden and unexpected heart attack at home and died within minutes. As a person frequently in the public eye he decided to post some memories of his son on Facebook. He closed by saying this: *“My wife and I want the world to know this... We don’t follow God because we have some sort of under-the-table deal with Him, like, we’ll follow You if You bless us. We follow God because we love Him. It’s our honor. He is the God of the hills and the valleys. And He is beautiful above all things.”*

Toby Mac and his family would not let the waters of despair and grief get into their boat. They remained afloat because they clung to their faith in a loving and merciful God, even while experiencing deep grief and a profound disappointment over the what the future held for their son.

In his difficult situation Job also believed what Toby Mac believed. Job lost everything he had within a few short hours - his children, his wealth and his health. No one had more reason to be in despair. No one would have more reason to be extremely disappointed in the God they serve than Job, yet he never lost hope in God. While experiencing 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 say, *“Even though He slay me, yet will I trust Him”* (Job 13:15). Job’s security was in God alone. Because of that he never stopped communicating with God or seeking solace from Him.

As I mentioned earlier, 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. But 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.”*

David knew that where he placed his hope would determine his future - not just his eternal one but his immediate one as well. Like David, our ability to persevere will be determined by where we find our strength. Our ability to overcome will be determined by the well we use to quench the thirst of our disappointments. And our confidence for the future will be determined by where our help comes from.

Like others, I have attempted to draw the waters of encouragement from a well of friendship. But when I drew close and tried to draw refreshing water from it, I found there was no refreshment to be found. That was when I realized 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). Instead of going to the well of fickle friendship I needed to go to the well which contained the waters of encouragement. I needed to go to the well of a faithful God.

PSALM 121:1

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

What we all need when we are in trouble, when we are thirsty for the waters of encouragement, is to run to God for comfort. He is our strength and our portion forever. In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). He is the true source of living water. When we drink from His well, we will no longer be thirsty. When we are disappointed with friends, with spouses, with life in general, we can come to the well that won't run dry. We can come to Jesus, the friend who will never leave or forsake us. He will restore our soul so that we do not come to the point of taking our life. There is hope to be found in Jesus. And this hope does not disappoint (Romans 5:5).

From where do you seek your help? From where do you get energized to make it through another day? From what well do you draw when life disappoints? 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, when your health deteriorates, when you lose a loved one, from where does your help come?

If you are carrying the disappointments of life with you today, I encourage you to lay them down at the feet of Jesus. Tell Him your story, share your hurts and fears, reveal your deepest needs. He will comfort, encourage, and strengthen you so that you can leave His presence refreshed and restored, ready to continue to fight the good fight, to persevere until the end, and to finish the race of life well.

Though I have emphasized that our help comes from the Lord I recognize that we as fellow believers also have a role to play in encouraging one another. So next week I will talk about how to encourage one another as the scriptures tell us to do; how to fill our wells with the sweet water of Christ and keep the bitter waters from contaminating our wells. For if Christ truly does live within us, then others should expect to draw Christ from our well and receive the support and encouragement they so desperately seek. We'll look at this next week. Today I want to close with a song that reminds us of where our hope comes from.

I LOOK TO THE SHEPHERD

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  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me,  
Follow me, all the days of my life  
Surely good ness and mercy shall follow me  
All my life

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 good ness and mercy shall follow me  
All my life

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