

## Lesson 5

# Overcoming Self Doubt

## Introduction

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually advanced the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard, and to everyone else, that my imprisonment is because I am in Christ. Most of the brothers have gained confidence in the Lord from my imprisonment and dare even more to speak the word fearlessly.

– Philippians 1.12-14

How do you react to the distressing circumstances in your life?

As Paul wrote his epistle to the Philippians, his circumstances could not have been drearier. It would have been easy for him to throw up his hands and quit. Wherever he went, a group of highly motivated individuals trailed behind seeking to impugn his motives and tear down his preaching. He had been constantly subjected to persecution and mistreatment. Now, false charges had landed him in a Roman prison cell. It would have been so easy for Paul to have become embittered. Instead of going the easy route, Paul chose to rise above his circumstances. So, must we.

There are many things we deal with in life. We face financial burdens, family conflict, church conflict, and instability in our career. These circumstances can lead to discouragement and self-doubt. How will we react?

These are the times where trust in God's providence becomes very real. We are not in control of everything. God is. He orchestrates everything to accomplish His purposes. *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose*, Romans 8.28. Paul's life had a quiet calm about it. This is a needed trait for us. If we truly believe God orders all circumstances to accomplish His holy purpose, then we should live in trust, *because everything is under control*.

## Failure is Not a Reason to Collapse

The sooner we can learn to live by this principle, the better we'll be. We've all seen it ... and some of us may have lived it ... failure comes, and it stops all forward momentum. When you live inside it you may be swallowed up by these feelings:

- I'm useless ... I have failed at everything in my life.
- I live under a black cloud. Bad things always happen to me and no one else.
- Nobody cares about me. They don't understand my circumstances or life experiences. I'm totally alone and have no idea what to do.

As we dissect these statements, first notice their primary focus: on self. Beating yourself up over a lack of success or declaring yourself a hopeless cause leads to unhealthy feelings like shame and resentment. And it leads to unproductive behavior.

God's word, however, provides every person with hope. Failure doesn't have to be fatal; it can become a chance for us to thrive. If we'll turn our focus to Him, God promises to use our circumstances for His glory. In order to see this, we must learn to look at how God works through providence to take what is broken and make it beautiful.

## A Look at the Prodigal Son

After the Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating and socializing with the lost and "sinners," Jesus recites three parables in Luke 15. One of the most well-known is the story of the prodigal son. Here Jesus speaks about the younger son of a wealthy man who wanted his inheritance early so he could depart to a foreign country and live the way he wanted to live. The text simply summarizes his actions by saying he *squandered his estate in foolish living*, Luke 15.13. After finding himself in complete desperation he resolves to go back to his father, 15.17-19. The first sentence of v. 20 is powerful. *So he got up and went to his father*. This is where the young man decided not to allow his failure to make him crash.

When he saw his son returning, his father ran out to greet him being *filled with compassion*. It was a total embrace by his father. There was no holding back. And from there the formerly prodigal son is received back with celebration and rejoicing.

### ***What this story teaches us:***

- **There is always hope.** We can *always* go back to God.
- **When our hearts are heavy, we need to keep our focus on God's will.** *God's way always works.* Remember you are sustained by Divine Power. No matter how hard life is, you have a spiritual undergirding. You are attached to the One who is all sufficient. We are inseparably linked to Jesus' life and power, Galatians 2.20. When we have no more human resources, we are given the strength of Christ. In the hardest of circumstances we can experience the greatest contentment, Isaiah 40.29, 31.
- **The one who doesn't wander needs to develop a spirit of compassion and look for the working of God.** That is, live from an eternal perspective. *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth*, Colossians 3.1-2.

### ***We must not allow trials to stop us***

Trials have a way of stopping us and pressing us to stay there. Instead, the darkest part of the trial is where God's work shines so visibly if we will only look for it, pray for help to see it, and not allow Satan to write it off as a coincidence.

When we are in a bad situation, created by our own poor decisions or by no fault of our own, we need to turn our emotions around and ask how God can use us? How we allow God to shine His beauty forth during our time of weakness? This was the attitude Paul had:

Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

– 2 Corinthians 12.9-10

This is a hard thing to say or do, but it is the right way to live.

Horatio Spafford was a Chicago attorney and real estate investor. He lost a great deal of money in the Chicago fire of 1871. Not long after his 4-year-old son died of scarlet fever. He decided he and the rest of his family needed to get away on vacation to England. He sent his family ahead and while crossing the Atlantic, the ship was in a collision and sank. More than 200 people lost their lives, including Spafford's 4 daughters. His wife, Anna, survived the tragedy. Upon arriving in England, she sent word home by telegraph: "Saved alone. What shall I do?"

Horatio immediately set sail for England. At one point during the voyage, the captain of the ship, aware of the tragedy that had struck the Spafford family, summoned Horatio to tell him they were now passing over the spot where the shipwreck occurred. As he thought about his daughters, words of comfort and hope filled his heart.<sup>8</sup> It was with those words that Phillip Bliss put to music that has since turned into a beloved hymn:

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll—  
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to know  
It is well, it is well with my soul.<sup>9</sup>*

There will always be storms to face in life. But with faith in a loving God and trust in His divine help, we can confidently say, *It is well, it is well with my soul.*

Give God control and trust Him no matter what. When you trust Him to give you the strength to get through, you'll be amazed at the good attitude you possess.

## For Thought and Reflection

1. What were some of the bad circumstances Paul faced when he wrote the letter to the Philippians?
2. How did Paul look for the working of God despite his poor circumstances? What can we learn from this?

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<sup>8</sup> Petersen, Randy. *Be Still My Soul: The Inspiring Stories behind 175 of the Most-Loved Hymns*, 1973, p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> "It is Well with My Soul," reproduction of original manuscript, spaffordhymn.com.

3. How does failure remind us we are not in control? Why is it important we be reminded we are not in control?
  
4. How did Paul reach the point to where his life had a quiet calm about it? How can we do the same?
  
5. What are some of the feelings you've had when you've lived inside of failure? In those times where was your primary focus?
  
6. How does the story of the prodigal son communicate hope?
  
7. How does depending on God help us defeat self-doubt? How does Colossians 3.1-2 instruct us to depend more on God?
  
8. If we've never wandered off like the prodigal son did, how conscious must we be of God's working in bringing sinners home? How will this help us defeat any attitudes of bitterness and resentment?
  
9. Why are times of trial a convenient time for Satan to convince us to stop trying & give up?
  
10. What does the story of Horatio Spafford teach us?