PSALM 142 – WHEN YOU ARE DISCOURAGED

Years ago, there was an article in *USA Today* about a guy named John Burns. The article described him as an alcoholic and homeless. He was living in New York City. There was a fire in a building and there were some people trapped inside. John Burns ran into the building without thinking of his own safety and saved a woman named Sonja and her baby from this fire. It hit national media. When he was interviewed, he was asked if he felt like a hero. He said "I'm not a hero, I'm just a drunken bum." Can you imagine the mom and the daughter that were saved, do you think they would describe him that way? No, to them he was a hero. He did something that changed their lives. But this guy had been discouraged for so long that even after doing something great he could not see his own worth in the eyes of God. All he saw of himself was a discouraged drunken bum.

Today we are continuing in our series Godsong looking at the Psalms.

Psalms 142:1-7 I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. 2 I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble. 3 When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way. In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me. 4 Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. 5 I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." 6 Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. 7 Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

This psalm is a prayer that David prayed when he was in a cave hiding for his life. This had to be one of the lowest points in David's life. He must have been discouraged. We will all face times of discouragement from time to time. You cannot dismiss it and think it will never happen to you. The only difference between your discouragement and the person next to you is how severe it's going to hit and how often it's going to hit. Everybody faces it from time to time. The question is, what do you do when it hits you? I want to share with you 4 things about discouragement today;

1. Realize how discouragement affects you

Discouragement sidetracks us from living the life that God intended us to live. Like the story we started with today, discouragement keeps us from recognizing who we are in Christ. It holds us down. It chokes our joy and satisfaction.

I grew up in Sarnia. One of the things my friends and I loved to do was to go swimming under Blue Water bridge in the mouth of the St. Clair River. Just down from the bridge was an old warehouse building (now the casino). You could climb up on to the roof of it and then jump off from about 40 ft into the water. The water there did not have a strong current, but it did have lots of weeds. If you landed in the water and went down too far you could get tangled up in them. If the weeds wrapped around your legs, the only thing you could do was to gently brush them off and push free. What most often happened was that people would panic and try to come straight up. That just made the weeds tighter. They would hold you under until you drowned. Several kids died there because of that, which only seemed to make us want to do it more.

Discouragement can be like those weeds. They can grab you and hold you under. Maybe your discouragement has not led to you become an alcoholic or left you on the streets. Let me ask, has it robbed you of being the person that God wants you to be?

Has it effected your mood to the point where you do not want to have people around you? Has it impacted your relationships? Has it left you cynical, negative and pessimistic? Is it keeping you from celebrating life? Has it sidetracked you from the life God intended you to have?

I worked for a summer at the Yonge St. Mission. I would meet people all the time who were living on the street because of discouragement. They had just given up on life. I met this one guy who lived in an old dumpster. His name was Ray. He used to live in Newfoundland. He was married and had a son. One day they went to the beach. A rip current grabbed his son and swept him out to sea. He could not swim, so he stood there on the beach and watched him drown. He could not handle that loss and the sense of guilt. He turned to alcohol to cope. His wife left him, he lost his home and wound up on the streets of Toronto.

One of the problems with discouragement is that it leaves us open to temptation. When you're discouraged your emotional barriers are low. What that means is you are more likely to give in to temptation. Think about it. You are discouraged that the diet you are on does not seem to be working. So, what do you do about it? You eat a box of donuts and a litre of ice cream. You repeat those 4 very destructive words, "I might as well…" I cannot seem to lose weight, so 'I might as well' eat that. I might as well drink that. I might as well buy that. I might as well steal that. I might as well lie about that. I might as well click on that web site. I might as well engage in that inappropriate relationship. I might as well…." The list goes on and on.

Then, when you give in to temptation do you feel better? No, of course not. It sidetracks you from living. Discouragement makes you sin, and sin makes you discouraged. It is a vicious and destructive cycle. You're sidetracked, you're discouraged, you give in to temptation, you're more discouraged. It just keeps going round and round.

Discouragement is a lonely thing, so many suffer in silence. Discouragement loves to live in the shadows. One of the amazing things about it is that when you talk about it and let others know about it, it really helps. When other people start talking about it you know you're not alone. That's what I want you to hear this morning. You are not alone in this. One of the things that encourages me is when I look at the scriptures and I see them filled with men and women marred by discouragement who were trying to go after God's ways. In this Psalm we see a man after God's own heart who also got discouraged. He is crying out to God from the aching in his heart.

Psalms 142:1 I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. 2 I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble. 3 When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way…

David recognizes here how discouragement was affecting him. He saw that "my spirit grows faint within me." He realizes what it was doing to his life, so he turns to God for help. Realize how discouragement affects you.

2. Recognize why you are discouraged

When you get discouraged, it is important to understand not simply IF you are discouraged but WHY you are discouraged. When you get to the WHY it leads to the HOW to get real hope and help. Maybe it is because there is an area in your life where you are fearful. Maybe it is a result of guilt or shame. Maybe it is a chemical imbalance or seasonal thing. Maybe it is a result of a sin that has been committed against you. Get to the root of the problem.

Many people never take this simple step. They never ask WHY. If you do not ask why you will wind up living a very shallow and superficial life. You miss out on so much.

I have found in my own life that the best way to understand the WHY of discouragement is journaling. It was something we had to do first year seminary and I found it very valuable. That means that you make a habit of daily writing down what is going on in your heart. It allows you to look back and see your ups and downs. To track your moods. To anticipate.

David understood the reason for his discouragement.

Psalm 142:3 … In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me. 4 Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.

No one is concerned for me. No one cares for me. Have you ever felt like that? He felt forgotten and alone. So, what does he do? He recognizes why he is discouraged and then reminds himself that he is not alone, that God is with him.

Psalm 142:5 I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."

Realize how discouragement affects you and then learn to recognize why you are discouraged. Be able to put a finger on the reason behind it. If you are sick and you go to see a doctor, just saying "I do not feel well" is probably not going to be enough information for the doctor to figure out what is going on and prescribe you something that will help. Learn to identify the problem. Realize how discouragement affects you and why it is happening.

3. Receive what God would say to encourage you

David continues his prayer. He is pouring out his heart out to God.

Psalm 142:6 Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. 7 Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

I know that can be difficult. When you are in pain your focus is yourself. You are only thinking about what you are going through as opposed to what others around you are going through. You cry out to God and tell Him what is important to you, but help comes when we hear from God what is important to Him.

Notice David's prayer. He is crying out to God from a place of need, and yet through it all he can still see the light at the end of the tunnel. He sees that after the pain come praise. That after the sorrow comes something good – that people will gather around him and see God's goodness.

This is the power of scripture. This is why we are doing this series on the Psalms. The bible has a way of meeting us in our times of deepest need and lifting us up, reminding us what is important. It reminds us that there is hope;

Psalms 30:4-5 Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name. 5 For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

God's word provides answers to the questions we have. It is good medicine for the soul. When you are fearful, God's word reminds us not to be afraid. When we feel like giving up God's word reminds us to be strong and courageous.

Again, to be able to lay hold of these promises of God you need to be a student of God's word. You have to be reading the bible. If it is simply sitting on the shelf, it will do you no good. Realize how discouragement affects you, recognize why you are discouraged and receive God's encouragement.

4. Refocus on areas where you need to change

This is the positive side of discouragement. When you are discouraged, you are open to change. You are willing to do the work necessary to feel better. As long as your teeth are not hurting, you think you do not have to see the dentist. It is when they start hurting that you make the appointment!

Often discouragement is the result of unfulfilled hopes. It reveals expectations – often these can be unrealistic expectations. Discouragement drives us to address these issues and causes us to focus on areas in our life where we can change.

When we think about changing, we start addressing the basic essence of this. Sometimes you just need to change your surroundings. Maybe it's as simple as that. You need to get out of a certain environment that you are in. Clutter can do this to us. Clean your room. Make your bed. Change the things in your environment that may be discouraging you.

Maybe you need to limit your exposure to discouraging people. You need to change who you hang around with. We all know that discouragement is contagious. There are some people that are always discouraged. You say, "How you doing?" and they tell you! They just emotionally throw up on you. When they do that, how does it make you feel? Often it can make you feel sick as well.

Discouragement can lead to bitterness and that can be contagious. It is like someone with a bad cold. They cough on you and then those germs, those seeds of bitterness, begin to infect your heart as well. That is why you have to be careful about who you hang around with. We have had a number of people who attend this church go through chemotherapy for cancer. One of the things you have to do when you are on chemo is avoid people as much as possible because your immunity is shot. Life can be like that. If your immunity is strong and you want to help people then it is good to try to be a support. However, if you know that your immunity is low, STAY AWAY! Be careful of who you hang around with.

Look at the example of Jesus. Jesus ministered to everyone. However, He limited His exposure and He chose who He hung out with. Make those choices, those changes.

Changing the things around you can help, but intimately you have to change your heart. You have to change your attitude.

Psalms 43:5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

What are your hopes? Sometimes we need to change our hopes. The hope that my kids would never be mean to one another is totally unrealistic. The hope that I will always be healthy or never need money or never be lonely may also be unrealistic. Your hope needs to be centered on God.

Here are some practical steps you can take to help with discouragement;

a. Schedule leisure – find things you enjoy doing and do them

These two words together may seem like an oxymoron. How do you plan leisure? That means that it has to be intentional. It has to be a priority. Too many people never take the time to plan doing things that they enjoy. They come home from work and they never really leave the office.

How does this limit discouragement? When you do not rest become drained. You get physically and emotionally run down. When you are drained you are more vulnerable to discouragement. Remember when Elijah ran for his life after the Prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings? He came to a broom tree and cried out to God, "I have had enough, LORD, take my life." He was physically exhausted. As a result, we see that he was also emotionally exhausted. When one area of your life is affected, every area suffers. People who go through emotional turmoil can also feel physically run down afterwards. They are connected.

When Naomi and I returned from Kuwait in 2009 we were tired. I was pastor of a church in Leamington and I heard about a pastors retreat in Northern Michigan. It was called the Broom Tree retreat. It was a week that pastors could go to and be refreshed. The costs were all covered. We went and found to our delight that there was no program. The first day they met with us and gave us a box of resources to use at our own pace. We met for dinner every night with other pastors for fellowship. The rest of the time we just slept and read and walked around the beautiful woods the retreat center was located in. It was just what the doctor ordered. They were like the angel coming to a weary Elijah, feeding him and letting him rest until he was able to run again.

Where is your Broom Tree? Who do you have in your life that helps you to recharge your batteries? Are you taking the time necessary to rest? This is why it is so important to have a weekly Sabbath, but it is also important to make sure you build margins into your life. Schedule leisure. Learn how to build time into your calendar and learn to say no to things.

b. Speak encouragement – encouraging others encourages you

There is something that is unique about a person who is an encourager. They seem to be different. They go through times of discouragement like everyone, but they seem to ride out the storm better than the average person. That is because they have learned the secret of encouragement.

Everyone loves to receive encouragement. We all want it. We all need it. Nobody ever gets enough of it. You have never met anybody in your whole life who would say, "Stop encouraging me. I've had enough encouragement." No. We need it. So, if we feel better when we receive encouragement why would that person giving it not also feel better.

Proverbs 11:24-25 One man gives freely, yet gains even more … 25 A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

Develop the habit of encouragement. The more you encourage others, the more you encourage yourself. When you encourage others, it becomes part of your vocabulary. It becomes part of your lifestyle. Eventually becomes part of your spirit and who you are.

c. Serve others – get your focus of yourself

A few minutes ago, I said that it is important to limit your exposure to discouraging people. That does not mean that you limit your exposure to everyone. Protect your heart, but do not isolate it.

Again, when you are in pain you often are only thinking about yourself. When you get discouraged, you often are only thinking about your own life, m*y* unfulfilled hopes, *my* needs and *my* way. Notice the direction? The result is self-focus. Myopic vision. It's all about me.

Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

One of the best ways to overcome discouragement is to serve. To find an area of service that you love and then to do it. When you do that, it shifts your focus.

Lift up your eyes. Get your focus off yourself and on to God and ultimately others. The more you shift your focus the more you will be uplifted and encouraged. The more your thinking will shift from the immediate to the eternal. The next time you're discouraged try going from internal to eternal and thinking about God. Thinking about your place with Him. Thinking about your security with Him. Thinking about His love for you. You know what's going to happen? You will plant the seed of spiritual renewal.

A few months ago, I went to Thailand. While I enjoyed the opportunity, I did not enjoy the flight. That 20 hours on the airplane stuck next to a yelling baby was not a lot of fun.

Life can be like that. Sometimes the journey can seem long and tiresome. We can go through seasons of discouragement along the way. As we talked about last week, the promise of heaven lies before us. The destination is worth the distance. There is that old commercial – it's worth the drive to Acton. If you are here today and you are discouraged let me remind you, the destination is worth the drive!

Story of going to Florida as a kid…