

Overcoming Discouragement

Acts 13:13-52

The grand storyline of God's attitude and actions towards His struggling people ought to transform our responses to hardships and disappointments in our lives together as Christians.

"We shall feel sometimes like this battered pine, thrashed by the wind... We who follow the Crucified are not here to make a pleasant thing of life; we are called to suffering for the sake of a suffering, sinful world. The Lord forgive us our shameful evasions and hesitations. His brow was crowned with thorns; do we seek rosebuds for our crowning?" Amy Carmichael

"And John left them for Jerusalem." Acts 13:13

"And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.' Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus." Acts 15:36-39

God often calls us to share the truth of His incredible mercy towards struggling sinners while reminding us that He is the same God for us struggling sinners as well.

Reminder #1: The Incredible Patience of God. Acts 13:16-25

God is incredibly patient with His weak and struggling and sinful people. God patiently "put up" with His people.

"So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: 'Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness.'" Acts 13:16-18

- It was God who chose His people and made them great.

“The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made them great during their stay in Egypt, and with an uplifted arm, he led them out of it.” (Acts 13:17).

- It was God who “put up” with His people for 40 years in the wilderness.

“And for forty years, he put up with them in the wilderness.” Acts 13:18

- It was God settled them in the land and provided protection over them for 450 years.

“And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, He gave them their land as an inheritance. All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.” (Acts 13:19-20)

- It was God who gave them the king that they wanted and then God gave them the king that He wanted.

“Then they asked for a king, God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him, he raised up David to be their king...” (Acts 13:21-22)

- Ultimately, God gave them a Savior Jesus even though they, like John the Baptist, weren’t worthy of Him.

“Of this man’s offspring, God has brought to Israel a Savior Jesus, as he promised... And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’” (Acts 13:23-25)

The history of God's dealing with His people is one of incredible patience towards an unfaithful and unworthy people.

Romans 2:4 “Or do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

When we are discouraged with our own struggles or the struggles of others in our lives we need to be reminded of the long history of God’s incredible patience towards all of us as His people.

Reminder #2 - The Incredible Faithfulness of God. Acts 13:26-35

God never forsook one of His promises (even when His people turned against His prophecies and His Christ). When we aren't faithful, God always is.

"And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.'"

Acts 13:32-33

"For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. " Acts 13:27

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." John 5:39-40

"I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David." Acts 13:34

God blesses those who persecute him. Even when we are unfaithful to God and unworthy, God remains faithful to Himself and to His Son, Jesus and rewards those who trust in Him.

Reminder #3 - The Incredible Grace of God. Acts 13:36-43

"Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses." Acts 13:38-39

Freed and Forgiven: God freely forgives those who put their trust in Christ and frees them from enslavement to sins and addictions that they could not escape in their own strength.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9

"Our only safe course—and may the Spirit of God grant us grace to follow it—is to come to God as we actually are, and ask him to deal with us, in Christ Jesus, according to our actual condition. ...Take my Lord Jesus, as empty-handed sinners take him. Meet him just as he is, and just as you are. God will deal with you truthfully. He will never cast away a sinner that comes to him according to truth. " C.H. Spurgeon

Reminder #4 - The Incredible Power of God. Acts 13:44-52

"And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." Acts 13:48

God ensures the advance of His mission of mercy to the nations even through the means of opposition.

God can change the hardest of hearts as He chooses.

"I do not come to the pulpit hoping that perhaps somebody will of his own free will return to Christ. My hope lies in another quarter. I hope that my Master will lay hold of some of them and say, 'You are mine and you shall be mine. I claim you for myself.' My hope arises from the freeness of grace, and not the freedom of the will." C.H. Spurgeon

Don't be discouraged at resistance to God's Word. God's arm is not too short that He cannot save. He can use resistance to direct His mission and He can overcome resistance whenever it pleases Him.