

Hymns: 5 Count Your Blessings      30 What a Friend We Have in Jesus  
Psalm 46;      Psalm 34:17-22;      Psalm 3

Wow! It's been quite a week! The 57th Presidential Inauguration pulled out all of the stops. Somewhere around a **million** supporters and well-wishers of the president packed the Washington Mall to be a part of that historic event. The previous weekend, I helped a neighbor lady open her car door that was frozen shut from the snow and ice. She told me that she and her children were driving up to be there.

As in any contest, there are both winners and losers. In this case, **a little more** than half of the voters supported President Obama and **a little less** than half supported his opponent. The winners celebrate. While the losers wish the winner well, at the same time, they're often discouraged.

Are you discouraged? Whether over politics or something closer to home, if so, you're not alone. According to the CDC NCHS Data Brief Number 76, October 2011

***Eleven percent** of Americans aged 12 years and over take **antidepressant medication**.*

*Antidepressants were **the third most common prescription drug taken by Americans of all ages** in 2005–2008.... From 1988–1994 through 2005–2008, the **rate of antidepressant use** in the United States among all ages **increased nearly 400%**.*

Discouragement can involve broad issues related to the world or national scene, but most likely, more personal issues like health, finances, and relationships with others hit home the hardest.

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

Discourage: to **deprive** of courage or confidence: dishearten

*American Heritage Dictionary*

To **deprive** of confidence, hope, or spirit.

That definition begs the question, who or what does this *depriving*?---which takes us to the root of the problem.

## Circumstances

Do the circumstances of life get you down? Another way to ask it is, What's your problem? We all have them. Often they involve some form of loss. Odds are, you have one or more problems in the following categories:

### 1. Health

Many, if not most of our health problems relate to aging.

As you may know, we have a puppy. Her name is Grace. (I **love** that name.) She visits here sometimes. Many of you may have seen her. She's a forty-three pound, black doggie with short hair and floppy ears. She's also very friendly. We celebrated her six-month birthday three weeks ago. One of the great things about having a puppy is watching her grow stronger and more capable every day. That's the fun part of aging.

Then there's the other side of the coin. Once we're over the hill, things start deteriorating. A defining

attribute of a man is his strength. Needless to say, we expect to see youthful men vying in strength competitions. But as we age, our strength wanes.

Then there's that migration downward. We start out with a full, thick head of hair, but then things change. The hair moves from the top of the head down to the nose, the ears, the shoulders and back--- everywhere except where it belongs.

In contrast to the man, a defining attribute of a woman is her beauty. Beauty contests generally involve young women because as we age (of course, the lovely ladies present here excluded), youthfulness and physical beauty fade. Everything seems to succumb to the relentless pull of gravity. Once supple skin shrivels as collagen diminishes.

Many never reach the age of eighty, but those who do, both men and women, often find life itself increasingly a daily struggle and even notice that their mind operates more slowly as time races forward ever faster.

But you don't have to reach old age to have health problems. I have a nephew who has faced more physical challenges in his short lifetime than I, and many of you, have faced. As a child, he sustained a serious abdominal injury in a car accident. He fell twenty feet and broken his back, he had a stroke and lost the center third of his field of vision, and most recently lost half of his tongue in a battle with cancer that still wages on.

## **2. Employment**

The employment situation in this country during the past five years has demoralized **millions** of Americans. The relentless flow of jobs overseas and the flood of cheap labor across the border into our country has wreaked havoc with the job picture, where creating new jobs has become a thing of the past.

New college graduates have been particularly hard hit. CBS News reported last May that, fifty percent of college graduates cannot find jobs, and half of those who do manage to land one end up with something below their education level.

As bills mount, certainly the constant rejection related to repeatedly having job applications turned down or simply ignored causes anxiety and discouragement.

Even among people who have jobs, for many, the pressure is enormous and mounting as they're daily pressed to be ever more productive.

## **3. Finances**

Closer to home for us seniors, the crash of 2008 decimated investment portfolios. This hit retirees and those nearing retirement the hardest. In response, the Federal Reserve heaped further woe on most of us by forcing interest rates far below free-market levels and encouraging **a reckless spending spree** in Washington. This assault on capital robs savers of their money and rapes the lifeblood from their income stream.

In recent years, foreclosures and bankruptcies have been epidemic. Bailouts of irresponsible people and corporations (especially banks) have been funded on the backs of the prudent and diligent among us **and** at the expense of future generations. Health care costs continue to soar.

The onslaught against retirees in recent times has been stunning. Pension funds and even annuity companies are also feeling the pain as their capital erodes, and they're forced to take on ever-greater risk.

## **4. Personal Relationships**

Have you lost a friend or loved one recently? This past year, I lost my Dad. Many of you knew him. At eighty-six years old his body was collapsing and his mind was slowing down. In many ways, his passing was a blessing for him as his struggle finally ended, and since he trusted in the Lord, he's assured of a better tomorrow. But the loss still hurts us, and it's especially painful when it involves prolonged suffering.

This year I also learned of multiple marriages of friends and relatives under stress, to the point of separation and even divorce. Having gone down that lonely road myself, I sympathize with those facing this challenge. I've experienced many problems in my life, but none compare to going through a divorce.

Whether death, divorce, or simply division, personal relationship losses can be among the most **discouraging** of all negative circumstances that we can **ever** encounter. Certainly, people can let us down. For that matter, we can even let **ourselves** down.

### What the Bible Says

All of these **circumstances** can bring discouragement. But, what does the Bible say about this? Let's go back through each of these areas of struggle and see what we can learn.

#### 1. Health

Modern medicine has its limits, but the Bible says we who know the Lord have the promise of a new and perfect body.

*So when this **corruptible** shall have put on **incorruption**, and this **mortal** shall have put on **immortality**, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, **Death** is swallowed up in **victory**. (I Corinthians 15:54)*

*For our conversation [citizenship] **is in heaven**; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who **shall change our vile body**, that it may be fashioned **like unto his glorious body**, .... (Philippians 3:20-21)*

These are very encouraging words---especially for those battling failing health.

#### 2. Employment

When we think about losing jobs, we cannot help recall the **ultimate rejection**. Jesus came to earth as prophesied, was heralded by John the Baptist, demonstrated His deity through His perfect life and miracles, plainly stated that He was the Messiah, and yet was rejected, brutally beaten, and killed by the religious leaders of His time.

This same Jesus said:

*“Come unto me, all ye that **labour** and **are heavy laden**, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For **my yoke is easy**, and **my burden is light**.” (Matthew 11:28-30)*

Ultimately, we **who** know Him **serve** the Lord. He knows how it feels to be rejected, and he knows all about carrying a heavy burden. It's comforting to realize that He has promised to give **rest** to those who come to Him in their time of need.

#### 3. Finances

In I Timothy 6:17, we're exhorted to not “*trust in uncertain riches.*” In Proverbs 23:5b we read that “*riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.*”

Jesus put it this way:

*But **seek ye first** the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and **all these things** shall be added unto you. **Take therefore no thought for the morrow**: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. (Matthew 6:33-34)*

While this is not an excuse to idleness, it is a reminder to refrain from worry, and look to God.

#### **4. Personal Relationships**

While man can let you down, the good news is that God will **never** let His children down:

*The **righteous** cry, and the LORD **heareth**, and **delivereth** them out of **all** their troubles. The LORD is **nigh unto them** that are of a **broken heart**; and saveth such as be of a **contrite spirit**. (Psalm 34:17-18)*

Also Psalm 23

#### **Satisfied**

Now, another aspect of **this discouragement condition** relates to being *satisfied*.

Recently, I was confronted with the question, “What in life are you completely satisfied with?” That's very tough to answer. It's that word *completely* that causes the trouble. The only answer that came to mind was “The Lord.” After all, He's perfect. He loves us like none other can. How could I not be satisfied with Him?

We know from scripture that it's not possible to satisfy the senses of man. The pleasure is only temporary. Man **always** wants more:

*All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. ... **the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing**. (Ecclesiastes 1:7-8)*

From my youth, I was taught to strive for excellence in the things that I do. Organizations like Cub Scouts and church, reinforced this thinking. Who among you were members of scouting as a youth? Maybe some of this will resonate with you. From the Boy Scouts of America, the Cub Scout Motto is: “Do your best.” Here are two other scouting staples:

#### Scout Law

*A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.*

#### Scout Oath

*On my honor I will do my best  
to do my duty to God and my country  
and to obey the Scout Law;  
to help other people at all times;  
to keep myself physically strong,  
mentally awake, and morally straight.*

And from the Bible, we read the following:

*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

*Servants, obey **in all things** your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as*

*menpleasers; but in **singleness of heart**, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, **do it heartily, as to the Lord**, and not unto men; (Colossians 3:17, 22-23)*

Certainly, we're exhorted to **excellence** here. We're supposed to **do what's right** and **do it well**. Furthermore, we're told to *redeem [make wise use of] the time* (Colossians 4:5). Here's how it's expressed in Romans 12:11:

*Not slothful in business;*

*fervent in spirit;*

*serving the Lord;*

So we've seen that our human nature cannot be satisfied, yet as Christians, we are to exemplify excellence and **not be satisfied** with less than our best effort. How do we resolve this? We have to tackle each part separately.

### **Contentment**

First, While being completely satisfied is not really possible, we can still learn to be **content** with what we have.

*And having food and raiment let us **be therewith content**. (I Timothy 6:8)*

*Thou [the Lord] openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of **every living thing**. (Psalm 145:16)*

*Let your conversation [behavior] be without covetousness; and **be content** with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will **never** leave thee, nor forsake thee. (Hebrews 13:5)*

### **Aliens**

Then there's that other piece of this that relates to our service to God.

You've heard the expression "he's so heavenly minded, he's no earthly good." Of all of the people who ever lived, one stands far above all others in heavenly mindedness. That one of course is Jesus. And nowhere in the Bible is that so clearly illustrated as in the Gospel of John.

There we see Jesus verbally sparring with His critics over the identity of *His* and *their* father. He speaks of a *spiritual* father and they speak of a *physical* father. He identifies Himself as *spiritual* bread from heaven, but His critics cannot move past the *physical* side of that example.

Along that same line, and in the same Gospel, Jesus prayed for all of His children who are born again, and in that prayer, He calls His children and *even Himself* **aliens**.

*17:14 I have given them your word;*

He's praying to God and referring to God's word.

*and the world has hated them, because **they are not of the world**, even as I am not of the world.*

In verse 16, He even repeats it.

Would you like to know the secret to banishing discouragement? No, it doesn't come from a pill or a bottle. It comes from the Word of God, and it has a lot to do with our point of view.

The hymn writer says it well:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,*

*Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of his glory and grace.*

Here are three scripture passages. Notice as we consider them how critical is our attitude and our point of view. The first fits right in with the theme of the song:

*If ye then be risen with Christ,  
**seek those things which are above,**  
where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

**Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.**

*For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)*

The second gives us some more specifics:

*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are **true**, whatsoever things are **honest**, whatsoever things are **just**, whatsoever things are **pure**, whatsoever things are **lovely**, whatsoever things are **of good report**; if there be **any virtue**, and if there be **any praise**,*

**think**

*on these things.  
(Philippians 4:8)*

The final verse contains a promise:

*But they that  
**wait upon the LORD**  
shall **renew their strength**; they shall **mount up with wings** as eagles; they shall **run, and not be weary**; and they shall **walk, and not faint**. (Isaiah 40:31)*

What a wonderful promise that is.

As Christians we need **not** be discouraged. Whatever **circumstances** distract us are **temporary**. God has promised to sustain us, work all things for our good, and give us a glorious eternity. We simply need to keep our eye on what really matters and our focus on God's higher purpose.

### **Benediction**

II Thessalonians 2:16-17

*Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.*