

January 16, 2020

Dear Members and Friends:

How often do we feel like we are failing? That life is hard? Maybe wondering what the point of trying so hard is all about? Maybe asking ourselves what good is living in the world at this time in the way that we do? Why put forth effort in overcoming, in changing? Maybe we have questions about why life is so mundane and frustrating? Maybe our attitudes take on a negative and depressive nature?

Often times, when these types of thoughts and feelings start to invade in my own life, the only way to overcome them is to meditate on God's Word and start reading the words that are there for us. When these types of attitudes come, it is often due to a lack of closeness to God. The attitudes of this world invade us, even if we don't want them. Therefore, it takes constant effort with our thoughts to work on staying close to God (Colossians 3:2-10). When we do, the Holy Spirit will guard and keep us (2 Timothy 1:14). But if we start to drift away, even the slightest bit, we start to have these issues which Satan constantly broadcasts and with which he tempts us (Ephesians 2:2).

I think that as the end draws to a close, the effort which Satan is using to discourage and get us to want to give up is becoming stronger and with more frequency (1 Peter 5:8-9). The ONLY way to combat this type of mindset and these feelings is to draw closer to God. The only way we are going to be able to face the coming days, weeks, months and years is to make sure we are putting God first and foremost in our lives. Nothing else is going to matter (vs. 6-7, 9-10).

Writing this letter, I couldn't help but think about the letters that Paul and all the early apostles wrote to the churches. They were constantly encouraging and lifting up people. But they were also constantly warning and admonishing. The letters they wrote have endured to this time for OUR admonition. God made sure that what was needed for us was preserved. And that is what we base our preaching on—the Word of God!

As we think about the awful and atrocious things that are currently happening in the world, and the even scarier things to come, it is no wonder that the Bible warns us of falling away from the Truth (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3). Paul wrote in Galatians 1:6 that he was "shocked" that people were turning away from the gospel. They were tired of living this Way of Life. Possibly, they were persecuted. Possibly, they were facing serious hardships and sorrows. Maybe they were battered by feelings of depression and angst. In 2 Peter 2:2, it says that "many will follow their destructive ways because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed." There are things in the world that look seductive. But in the end, they are just destructive.

I have to remind myself of these things as much as anyone else. I don't think that any of us is immune to the pulls of the flesh and the lusts of things that look good. Nor are we those who don't have any trials or issues. Rather, we will tend to have more of them, because we are those who are on the straight and narrow which is NOT an easy path (Matthew 7:13-14). When we are not focused sufficiently on God, then these types of feelings and doubts start to creep in and will take a foothold in our minds and in our thoughts. It is then that we limit what God can do through us.

Worse, when we remain in attitudes of depression, fear and doubt, we are denying the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us, and we are NOT going to God and asking for forgiveness (Hebrews 10:26-31). We are leaning on our own devices and ways. This WILL not do. This is NOT the way we are to live. Instead, we need to be turning to God and seeking His Will in all our ways and our thoughts (Hebrews 10:19-25). Notice the difference between the attitudes here in Hebrews. One is self-centered and destructive, the other is outward-centered, focused on God and others. And the difference is that when we are mentally

healthy, we can reach out and help others. When we are self-absorbed, we cannot help others.

We can ALL come to the place where we can have peace and the correct mental mindset (Romans 12:2, *Amplified Bible*: "And do not be conformed to this world [any longer with its superficial values and customs], but be transformed and progressively changed [as you mature spiritually] by the renewing of your mind [focusing on godly values and ethical attitudes], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His plan and purpose for you])."

This requires letting go. Letting go of what we want and learning to rely on God for everything. This means learning how to place our trust and faith in God. Philippians 4:4-9 speaks about the power behind becoming joyful and the power of faith-based prayer along with the peace that comes when we do such things (John 14:27; Isaiah 26:3). It also speaks about training our minds and meditating on the Scriptures which is what we need in this day and age. Let us not kid ourselves into thinking that we are OK and we will make it, without putting effort into it.

When we study the Bible, we are reminded of our purpose as Christians. We are growing in character, maturing and changing our thinking when we look at God's masterful plan and re-realize that His plan for us is to bring us into His Kingdom to become God beings with Him and Christ. It is when we start to not have this in our minds and our thoughts properly aligned, that we allow ourselves to become open and vulnerable to our enemy's devious ways. Discouragement and self-doubt are the tools of self-destruction. And this is NOT what the Bible prescribes (2 Corinthians 5:1-21). We are told to have courage (Isaiah 41:10; 1 Corinthians 10:28), strength (Deuteronomy 31:6), and to be thankful in all situations (Psalm 69:30; Philippians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

When we sin or fall short of the mark, it is easy to spiral into self-destructive thoughts and anger and frustration. But again, this is not what God wants. He wants us to repent and move forward. To let go of the past and to look towards the future (Philippians 3:8-16). IF we continually draw closer to Him in this way, there is no reason to become discouraged.

We must remain humble. God is humble. Even as the most powerful Being, He is willing to dwell with us. He is willing to allow us to grow. He is willing to allow us to make choices. When we consistently choose Him in all our ways and our thoughts, He will help us more and more. He won't help unless we want His help. When we search the Bible, we see that we are to be seeking Him constantly (1 Chronicles 16:11).

Finally, in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 we read (*Amplified Bible*): "Therefore we do not become discouraged [spiritless, disappointed, or afraid]. Though our outer self is [progressively] wasting away, yet our inner self is being [progressively] renewed day by day. For our momentary, light distress [this passing trouble] is producing for us an eternal weight of glory [a fullness] beyond all measure [surpassing all comparisons, a transcendent splendor and an endless blessedness]! So we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen; for the things which are visible are temporal [just brief and fleeting], but the things which are invisible are everlasting and imperishable."

The return of Christ is close. The choice to turn away is real. The attitudes and mindsets we entertain are very real. God believes each of us has what it takes to make the correct choices and to have the correct attitudes. Let's not let Him, ourselves or others down by choosing anything other than this Way of Life.

With brotherly love,



Kalon Mitchell