

# Despair, Despondency & Doubt

By: Sally Hohnberger

**A Note to the Reader:** In this study outline, I have drawn, in part, from the rich, inspired writings of Ellen G. White, a woman deeply in love with God and well versed in the practical aspects of successful Christian living.

## Despondency

Webster's 1828 Dictionary Definition:

- 1- To be cast down; to be depressed or dejected in mind; to fall in spirits.
- 2- To lose all courage, or spirit of resolution; to sink by loss of hope.
- 3- Loss of courage in affliction, or at the prospect of insurmountable difficulty.

## Despair

Webster's 1828 Dictionary Definition:

- 1- Hopelessness; a hopeless state; a destitution of hope or expectation.
- 2- Loss of hope in the mercy of God.
- 3- To give up...To feel sorry for oneself.

## Causes of Despair

1- Life's cares, perplexities, sorrows, faults of others or myself.

"When the mind dwells upon self, it is turned away from Christ, the source of strength and life. Hence it is Satan's constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Saviour, and thus prevent the union and communion of the soul with Christ. The (1) pleasures of the world, (2) life's cares and perplexities and sorrows, (3) the faults of others, (4) or your own faults

and imperfections, (this is the opposite of Phil. 4:8)--to any or all of these he will seek to divert the mind. Do not be misled by his devices. Many who are really conscientious, who desire to live for God, he too often leads to dwell upon their own faults and weaknesses, and thus by separating them from Christ, he hoped to gain the victory. We should not make self the center, and indulge (allow) anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in Him. Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him. Put away all doubt; dismiss your fears..." Steps to Christ pages 71-72.

2- Overwork- *Messages to Young People* pg. 135 "Overwork sometimes causes a loss of self-control... God desires us to realize that we do not glorify His name when we take so many burdens that we are overtaxed, and, becoming heart-weary and brain-weary, chafe and fret and scold."

3- Heavy burdens—See Moses: Numbers 11:1—15

4- Disobedience—See Saul: 1 Samuel 28:16-25

5- Disappointment—See Ahithopel; 2 Samuel 17:23

6- Impending death—See Haman; Ester 7:7-10.

7- Futility of human things—See Solomon; Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

8- Rejection- See Judas; Matthew 27:3-5

9- Rebellion against God- Revelation 9:6

10- Sickness, bereavement, adversity, loneliness.

11- Pain -See *The Ministry of Healing* pg 251 "Often your mind may be clouded because of pain."

12- Giving way to emotions and feelings--*Mind, Character, and Personality* pgs. 660-1 "If the thoughts are wrong, the feelings will be wrong, and the thoughts and feelings combined make up the moral character.

When you decide that as Christians you are not required to restrain your thoughts and feelings, you are brought under the influence of evil angels and invite their presence and their control. If you yield to your impressions and allow your thoughts to run in a channel of suspicion, doubt, and repining, you will be among the most unhappy of mortals, and your lives will prove a failure..."

13- Seeing only our weaknesses rather than God's strength- Proverbs 23:7

14- Walking in human will power alone = independence of God; rather than divine power united with our effort.

### **Remedies For Despair**

**Testimonies to the Church, Volume 4, pg 632**—"God claims the undivided affections; and anything which tends to absorb the mind and divert it from God, assumes the form of an idol." (In other words, if I am sad and despairing and God speaks to my conscience and says, rejoice and be happy, whom do I obey? I must come to understand which kingdom is ruling over me—God's or Satan's?) Read Romans 6:13-18.

**Psalms 42:4**—"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God."

**The Upward Look pg 314**—"...and make yourself miserable by your own reflections...The direct insinuations of Satan...Dismiss Satan, walk with Christ."

**Hebrews 12:3-11**—Seeing life from God's perspective is true understanding. We can be joyful in correction, it is evidence that God loves us and wants to deliver us from sadness. God can and will change our wrong attitudes, dispositions and even emotions when we give them to Him to change. We cooperate with God by choosing to smile when our emotions say we can only frown and despair. A new heart is given only when this is done with and in Christ. God creates in us a genuine happy heart. Then we can see correction as joyful.

**Vs. 4**—"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." (Warfare against self-In Christ Jesus?)

**Vs. 11**—"now no chastening for the present seemeth joyful, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Victory brings true joy.)

**John 15:5**—"Without Me ye can do nothing."

**Matthew 19:26**—"With God all things are possible."

**1Peter 5:7**—"Casting all your cares upon Him; for he careth for you."

**Jeremiah 32:27**—"I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, is there anything too hard for Me?"

**2 Corinthians 12:9**—"My grace is sufficient for thee; My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory (*choose joy*) in my infirmities, that the power of God may rest upon me."

**Prophets and Kings pg 164**—"Despondency is sinful and unreasonable." (It turns us away from the evidences of Jude 24- that God is able!)

**Prophets and Kings pg 165**—"For the disheartened there is a **sure remedy**-- faith, prayer, work...fear not. Have faith in God...He has all power. His infinite love and compassion never weary."

"Did God forsake Elijah in his hour of trial? Oh, no! He loved His servant no less when Elijah felt himself forsaken of God and man than when in answer to his prayer, fire flashed from heaven... And now, as Elijah slept, a soft touch and a pleasant voice awoke him. He started up in terror, as if to flee, fearing that the enemy had discovered him. But the **pitying face** bending over him was not the face of an enemy, but of a **friend**. God had sent an angel from heaven with food for His servant...In the strength of that food he was able to journey 40 days and 40 nights unto Horeb." (Read of Elijah's choice against despair in Prophets and Kings pg 158-162.)

**Steps to Christ pgs. 52-3**—Read God's attitude toward us weak, erring, sinful followers. Pardon is freely granted to all. "His thoughts are **thoughts of mercy, love and tender compassion...**" See 1John 1:9 & 2:1

**Morning Talks 1**—"God requires that we confess our sins, and humble our hearts before him; but at the same time we should have confidence in him as a tender father, who will not forsake those who put their trust in him. Many of us walk by sight, and not by faith. We believe the things that are seen, but do not appreciate the precious promises given us in God's word; and yet we cannot dishonor God more decidedly than by showing that we distrust what he says, and question whether the Lord is in earnest with us or is deceiving us.

God does not give us up because of our sins. We may make mistakes, and grieve His Spirit; but when we repent, and come to Him with contrite hearts, He will not turn us away. There are hindrances to be removed. Wrong feeling have been cherished, and there have been pride, self-sufficiency, impatience, and murmuring. All these separate us from God. Sins must be confessed; there must be a deeper work of grace in the heart. Those who feel weak and discouraged may become strong men of God, and do noble work for the Master..."

## Weapons Against Despair

Read the following for direction and encouragement:

**Steps to Christ** chapters entitled: "God's Love For Man." and "The Sinner's Need of Christ."

**Desire of Ages** chapter entitled—"Thou Canst Make Me Clean." About a leper and a paralytic—do you feel like one of them? **Desire of Ages** chapter entitled — "Let not your heart be troubled."

**Desire of Ages** pg 664—Read of the relationship the branch needs to have to the vine and how to begin and maintain it.

**James 4:7**—"Submit yourselves therefore to God (#1) Resist the devil (#2) And he will flee from you (#3)."

Have you been resisting the devil or your wrong habits unsuccessfully? **Evaluate the order** of your warfare. If we are not first connecting with Christ and **second** resisting in His power—then failure is a natural by product of the wrong order. We are told every effort in humanity alone must fail. Every battle with self must be waged **with and in Christ**. "Without Me ye can do nothing." John 15:5

If you want success just changed your order, seek dependency upon God and surrender to His will first-- this is our **first** and continual work in meeting any temptations. Now we are prepared in divine power to resist sin, our flesh, the devil, or whatever besets us. Power and victory over self is ours, in Christ Jesus.

**Ministry of Healing** pg. 249— "(Jesus) desires us to lay our perplexities and troubles at His feet and leave them there."

**Ministry of Healing** pg. 254— "Song is a weapon that we can always use against discouragement."

**Ministry of Healing** pg. 251—"It is a positive duty to resist melancholy, discontented thoughts and feelings—as much a duty as it is to pray."

Take hope and courage and wield these weapons with Christ against the Giant Despair. Victory dispels despair and cultivates in courage and hope in Christ Jesus as my General, my Saviour and Friend. Try Him!

## Counsel on Despair

**Phil 4:8**—"Whatsoever things are true... honest...just...pure...lovely...good report...; if there be any **virtue** (power in God to overcome), and if there be any praise, **think on these things**."

Our minds must develop habits to dwell on God and right, and to do this we must discipline the mind to turn away from self and all that represents. This can be done successfully in and with Christ.

**Mind, Character, and Personality** pgs 660-1—"When you decide that as a Christian you are not required to restrain your thoughts and feelings, you are brought under the influence of evil angels and invite their presence and their control..."

**Desire of Ages** pg 679— "... They (His disciples) are to **despair of nothing**, and hope for everything. They are to have power to resist evil, power that neither earth, nor death, nor hell can master. Power that will enable them to overcome as Christ overcame." (We then need as continuous a connection with the Father and cooperation to do His will, as Jesus had.)

**Desire of Ages** pg 662—"But the Saviour's words to them were full of hope. He knew that they were to be assailed by the enemy, and that Satan's craft is most successful against those who are depressed by difficulties. Therefore **He pointed them away from** the things which are seen (as our emotions, our difficulties) **to the things** which are not seen. From earthly exile (we are pilgrims here), he turned their thoughts to the heavenly home."

**Personal thoughts:** I saw God's words were meant to encourage me, but they discouraged me, for I couldn't obey of myself. I saw my need of a Saviour but felt I was too hard of a case for God. I was too weak to save. He could save others but not me. The more I read, the more I saw my sinfulness, my lack and disloyalty. I wrongly thought I could not do God's will. My conscience would prick me--Would he ask you something impossible? So I read more, but more knowledge didn't convert or change me as I had thought. I found my determination to change and obey God were nothing more than promises as ropes of sand. Why?

I found my lack of success was proportionate to my lack of a continual, abiding relationship with Jesus. My experience in true union and communion with God was sporadic at best. I needed to spend time with God and make Him a priority in my life, but circumstances often kept me from this. To walk with God required His hand in mine leading me. Instead I found fear and doubt dominated and kept me from God. This needed to be changed! John 10:27 says, "My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow Me." Yet I didn't think I heard God's voice. I saw God wanted perfect obedience to His will and way, I responded from my experience, it was too hard! Impossible! I experienced my flesh recoil from cooperation with God in changing certain habits. God was far from me and to despair was easy as a result. I saw I needed to go back to the beginning and learn the basics of Christianity (following after

Christ). No wonder my promises to do right were ropes of sand. I was doing it in the flesh alone without Christ. How do I put my hand in Christ's that He will lead and walk with me and lead me through or around the many troubled waters in my life?

II Peter 1:3-8 strikes the keynote of victory. I must become one with Christ in order to partake of the divine nature necessary to walk this walk of right doing. Peter's ladder said, first I must gain faith (know and trust God personally) then second I add to my faith...virtue.

Virtue is the power of God, enabling me to obey. Strongs says--Virtue is a force, a special miraculous power, an abundant ability, mighty strength and power. Webster 1828 dictionary says--Virtue is the efficacy power. The acting power; in a sense it is strength from straining, stretching or extending. Can I change one wrong thought or habit without God's power subduing the sin and self within me? Can I change or advance one more rung of this ladder of virtues without God's virtue within me? No! Patience, temperance, godliness etc. are all a byproduct of *oneness with Christ*.

That means my emotions, feelings, thoughts, must be brought somehow under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That means I must filter all my thoughts feelings before I follow them. This is dependency upon God. I recoiled from the protracted effort this would cost me. To truly say, "Not my will but Thy will be done." That was offensive and seemed impossible to my flesh. Maybe for others but not me. This is the doubt Satan stirs in us to keep us from God and experiencing divine power attending my human effort and decision. God wanted to bring me to the reality I had to go back in my Christian experience and master the basics, before I could walk in His way. I need His touch of virtue!

One day in my kitchen, doing dishes I reached for another cookie. In my mind came the thought, you have had enough, say no to those cookies. This was God speaking to me through my reason and intellect, I sensed it was God but wasn't sure. A struggle ensued now because, my taste and former habits said, "Do it, you like it." What will I choose?

In the past I'd resist the cookies or whatever and choose self-denial for a few minutes or hours, until it was such a heavy drudgery, sooner or later I'd yield to the pull of my fleshly desires. My promises true in heart though they were, became as ropes of sand. With failure come frustration, guilt, despair, and despondency! Why is the Christian life so hard I'd often ask? Later I discovered it was because I was doing the warfare against self in human will power alone, and every such effort must fail. I was independent of God rather than dependent in Him. This time I chose differently.

I will try God! What shall I do Lord? I put away the cookies but couldn't stay in the kitchen. I walked away from the kitchen keenly aware of my desire for those cookies in the cupboard. Distracted I cried out to

God again saying, "What do I do now Lord?" I took my vacuum out and began vacuuming my living room distraught with the temptation. After a time the thought came--"Do you still want those cookies?" My reason thinks, of course I do, this usually takes a long time to go away if it goes away at all. But I looked to my tastes to find if the longing remained. To my dismay it was gone. My wrong desires, tastes, and even the feelings were gone! My flesh was subdued. What made the difference? I called out to God for help and cooperated with Him in obedience. He changed me on the inside. What joy was this experience! God is able to subdue my flesh when I give it to Him and follow His will. God is able! Jude 24. His virtue touched me! God longs to touch you too.

Oh Satan still tempts me to my old ways but following James 4:7--Satan and even wrong feelings must flee from me. It is Jesus that subdued the feelings and from whom Satan flees. The real battle is to surrender my heart to God and go forth cooperating in resisting, after this union is made. Success is guaranteed even over the pull of appetite, in Christ Jesus and as long as I remain in this dependent, obedient position. This connection did not take long, but it does take a decision to depend in Christ and not in me alone. God is able to heal us from our besetting sins.

Friends, I saw a need in my life to master this basic discipline in my Christian life. Whenever I'd surrender to this discipline, success was sweet. Are you gaining success in this way? We all can be living, walking Christians only in Christ Jesus. Despair is the devil's ploy to keep us from Christ and this experience of victory. Won't you try God and turn away from bondage of despair?

## Power for Living



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