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## Have You Felt Like Giving Up Lately?

*By David Wilkerson*

June 17, 1996 Is it possible for righteous, godly, Spirit-filled Christians to become so low and downcast, they feel they can't go on - and they come to the brink of giving up?

Think about it for a moment. I'm talking now about believers who are close to Jesus - who know His heart and mind, have done battle in prayer, have experienced His miracles, have seen victory after victory in their lives. Such people are dedicated to the Lord's work. They present themselves daily as living sacrifices.

So, tell me: Is it possible for such Christians to be so pressed down and troubled, to be in such despair and despondency, they become convinced they're not going to make it?

Absolutely - yes!

Consider Holy Job - a Man Whom God Himself Called "Perfect and Upright"! Scripture says of Job, "...that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1). This man feared God alone. He shunned evil and ran from all compromise.

But now Job faced the crisis of his life: He had lost his entire family, all his possessions, everything. And his body was covered with boils from head to toe. He had come to a place where he could not take any more suffering. And he cried out: "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me.... Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand, and cut me off!" (6:4, 8-9).

Job was saying, "I have only one request - to die! I've had it, God. Cut me off!"

Do these sound like the words of a totally righteous man? Yet Scripture testifies that Job had no known sin in his life. He stood as perfect as any man could be before God. And yet God allowed him to go through such despair that his life became unbearable: "...wearisome nights are appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day" (7:3-4).

Finally, in total despair, Job cried out: "...my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live alway: let me alone; for my days are vanity.... I am a burden to myself" (verses 15-16, 20). Job was in anguish because his problems were unsolvable! He couldn't reason his way out of them. He was completely at wit's end.

About that time, three of Job's friends came along - so-called "comforters" - and tried to figure out why Job was suffering. They couldn't understand why God would allow any righteous man to become as mentally, spiritually and physically afflicted as Job was.

Beloved, this is the perennial dilemma in the church - and also in the eyes of the world: It seems that when you give your life to the Lord, all you get is suffering in return! No one, within the church or without, has ever understood how a loving God could allow those who have given their all for Him to go through such times of trouble and despair.

So, Job's friends kept lecturing him, "God does not afflict the righteous. You must be in sin! "If iniquity

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be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles" (11:14).

I ask you: How would you feel if you heard such words from close friends, when you're trying your best to understand your suffering? These supposed men of God told Job, "You've got some hidden sin in your life. Out with it - confess! Only then will your troubles disappear."

But was God angry with Job? Not at all! Scripture makes it clear that wasn't Job's problem. And Job knew this. He said to God: "Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.... Thou knowest that I am not wicked... My soul is weary of my life..." (10:7, 2, 1).

Let me list several of Job's other complaints before the Lord. As you read them, ask yourself if you've ever had similar thoughts:

- "Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?...I am full of confusion..." (verses 10-15). In other words: "Lord, You've stirred up my life, and I'm going sour. I'm totally confused!"

- "Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?" (13:24). "God, You've taken my children, everything I have. Why have You made Yourself my enemy?"

- "My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death" (16:16). "My eyes are red from crying. My face is like a dead man's!"

Have you ever come to such a point in your walk with Jesus?

Consider Holy Jeremiah - the Weeping Prophet! Jeremiah had the fire of God burning in his bones. This holy man walked with God and was fearless before men. He had an ear attuned to heaven - a pipeline to God's throne - and spoke as the Lord's voice to his generation. No one could stand against his power and authority. He shook his listeners to the core!

Yet Jeremiah also came to a place of total despair. The Lord allowed him to experience a despondency few people have ever touched. And Jeremiah came to the brink of giving up!

The prophet was convinced he had fallen under some kind of deception. Satan had whispered to him that he was being rejected and mocked because he had been deceived by God: "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived... I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me" (Jeremiah 20:7).

Consider these words of Jeremiah - the godly man who thundered prophecies to the nations: "Cursed be the day wherein I was born... Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew... Because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?" (verses 14-18).

Do these sound like the words of a fearless prophet of God? Jeremiah was so overwhelmed by trouble and affliction, he wished he had died in his mother's womb!

His cry echoes Job, who said, "Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul... Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?" (Job 3:20, 22). Job was saying, "God, why did You give me all of this light, only to turn it off suddenly? All I want is to lie

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down and die - to get out of this trouble I'm in!"

So It Was With the Godly Prophet Elijah! Elijah knew the supernatural workings of God firsthand. He had brought a dead child back to life. And now, he stood before Ahab and prayed the very heavens shut. He told Ahab, "I've been on my knees before a holy God. And I tell you, it won't rain again until I say so!"

Talk about power - Elijah first shut the heavens, and then he opened them again! When he prayed later, rain fell on the land once more. But that's not all: Elijah then outran Ahab's chariot - and he was in his eighties at the time! He poured twelve barrels of water over the altar, and called down fire from heaven to consume it. What a sight that must have been!

Elijah's greatest desire was to see revival in Israel. For years he had been saddened by the wickedness of God's people - and now he believed his prayers were being answered. He thought he was witnessing the start of a great reformation in Israel.

But Jezebel quickly stepped in and squashed the revival. Moreover, she threatened to kill Elijah. Suddenly, this once-fearless man was running for his life! He ended up in a desolate spot in the wilderness, where he sat down under a juniper tree, "...and he requested for himself that he might die..." (1 Kings 19:4).

Elijah had literally given his life for revival, both in prayer and in action. And now he believed he was a total failure! He grew depressed, crying, "...It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (same verse).

If you read between the lines in this passage, you can hear Elijah saying, "I gave my all, Lord - I laid down my life. I had no personal agenda. I wanted only to please You. And now it's all blown up in my face!"

This poor, dejected prophet shut down completely for forty days and nights. That meant forty nights of despair - of sleeplessness, waiting for the dawn, trying desperately to figure things out. It must have been one long nightmare of defeat, rejection, hopelessness.

During that time, Elijah lost all memory of every miracle God had ever done for him. Something simply had come over him - a dejection and despondency that brought down his soul. Now, not even the thought of past blessings could comfort him.

You might think, "Surely someone who has seen such miracles wouldn't have any doubts or depression. He would only have to recall the great wonders God has wrought. That would override all his fears." Not so! There comes a time when no past miracle or blessing can help you in your present trial!

I have counseled many Christians - ministers, evangelists, soul-winners who have been mightily used of God - who experienced such a pit of despondency. These people were once powerful in ministry, preaching glorious revelations of God. But suddenly they grew weary. Troubles piled upon them. They were slandered and rejected. And they ended up feeling they'd spent their whole lives in vain. They told me, "There's no use going on. I don't feel I've done anything for the Lord. I'm a failure!"

I was appalled that any Christian could be so defeatist. I answered them almost indignantly: "Snap

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out of it! Have you forgotten all the miracles God has done for you? He hasn't forsaken you. Count your blessings!"

Theologically, I may have been correct. But often that theology simply doesn't work. It certainly didn't work for Elijah. That holy man ended up hiding in a cave - making his home in an utterly dark place of despair!

Have you ever dropped out for a while, as Elijah did? Have you ever gone into hiding - so hurt, so down, you didn't want to see or talk to anyone? Yours may be a cave of silence - a withdrawal from people and responsibilities.

Or, maybe at this point you're still not convinced a Christian can experience such despair. You may say, "All these examples are from the Old Testament. But we live in a day of grace. Surely no Spirit-filled believer should live in fear. There shouldn't be any depression in God's house!"

Is This Merely an Old Testament Experience? I ask you: Can New Testament saints who are full of God's Spirit go through times of deep despair - people who spend time on their knees, who give their lives in service to the Lord, who don't walk in sin but are wholly dedicated to Jesus?

Paul, the apostle, is quick to answer this. He surely was a New Testament saint - a godly, precious man - who had given up the whole world that he might win Christ. He spent every breath in the cause of the Master.

This man had a revelation of Christ as did no other person on earth. Jesus had revealed Himself not just to Paul, but in him. And the Spirit took Paul into heaven and showed him unspeakable glories. Indeed, Paul was given the very mystery of the gospel. His epistles have instructed God's people throughout the centuries.

But the Bible says when Paul went to Asia to preach the gospel, he received only trouble: "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia..." (2 Corinthians 1:8).

God had been using Paul mightily throughout Asia, and especially in Ephesus. A great revival had fallen on the city and lasted for two years: "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (Acts 19:20).

During that time the Lord had worked great miracles: Demons were cast out. The lame and the sick were healed. And Paul was at the center of it all! He anointed handkerchiefs and aprons, which, when laid upon people, brought immediate healing and deliverance: "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" (verses 11-12).

The miracles were so great and the conviction so strong, the Ephesian converts gathered up all their occult books and curious arts - 50,000 pieces of silver's worth - and held a massive bonfire in the city square. Yet, this only enraged the satanic forces in Ephesus!

You see, the goddess Diana was worshiped in that city. Yet now the citizens were no longer buying idols of Diana for worship. This stirred up a group of silversmiths, who made their living by selling the statues they shaped. The men rose up against Paul - riling up the crowds against him!

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Suddenly, in the midst of this great revival, a massive riot broke out. The people dragged Paul into a theater, and the apostle had to defend himself before a raging mob. Eventually, he left Ephesus hearing the taunts and mockeries of the wicked.

Do you get the picture? Paul had given two years of his life to this revival. He had seen a mighty move of God. But then turmoil came into his life so heavily, he said: "...we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life" (2 Corinthians 1:8). In other words: "I thought, 'It's all over - I'm not going to make it. I won't come out of this alive. The sentence of death is on me!'"

I believe I know something of what Paul went through. Years ago, I was at a large meeting with sister Kathryn Kuhlman in Los Angeles. More than 5,000 people filled the place, with standing room only. At the time, my wife was going through a bout with cancer. And I was carrying the burden of Teen Challenge. I had been traveling and writing, and I'd grown weary and tired. Of course, that's always when the enemy comes to you - when you're physically low, with no strength left.

I was sitting on the stage, waiting to preach, as sister Kuhlman directed the worship. The place was full of God's Spirit, and marvelous things were happening. Yet, suddenly, the enemy came in and whispered to my heart: "You are the biggest phony on the face of the earth! You're working with troubled people just to make a name for yourself. And now your wife is going to die. You say you've given your life for the Lord's ministry - but it's all vanity! You don't have the fire of God. You've lost your anointing. You can't preach tonight, because all your words will be fake!"

The voice was so loud, I couldn't quiet it. I kept trying to shake it off, but as I stepped up to the pulpit, it was still screaming in my ears. When I opened my mouth to preach, hardly anything came out. I tried for five minutes to speak - but I just couldn't. Finally, I motioned to sister Kuhlman to take over the service, and I turned and walked off the stage.

Backstage a pastor asked me, "David, what's wrong? What's the matter?" I could only shake my head. "I'm sorry," I said, "I can't go on. I can't preach tonight. I'm a phony!"

Like Jeremiah, it took me weeks to walk through my confusion and anguish of heart. Finally, God brought me out of it. But I discovered that such afflictions cannot be explained physically. Simply put, the enemy came in like a flood, with all the powers of hell arrayed against me. In just a few moments, I found myself in a pit - unable to explain it!

We don't know exactly what Paul spoke of when he said, "...our trouble which came to us in Asia..." (same verse). Some scholars believe he was going through a great physical battle - that he was so sick he was near death. Yet I don't believe Paul's troubles were physical. I don't think he was talking about shipwrecks, stonings or beatings. Rather, I believe Paul was speaking of mental anguish - a deep, spiritual warfare that had left him wiped out!

You may ask, "How could this be? No godly, overcoming believer should ever be fearful or embattled by the flesh." Yet I, for one, am glad Paul spoke so truthfully about his feelings! Otherwise, I might think my own experiences with despair are strange, unique - not shared by other lovers of Jesus.

The fact is, many godly men and women throughout history have testified that Satan has attacked them in this way. He comes bringing lies, discouragement, hopelessness. One day a person can be rejoicing, secure in his salvation. But the next, an unexplainable feeling of worthlessness comes over

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him. Suddenly, for no reason, his peace is gone. He is plagued by restlessness. Despondency sets in. He feels undeserving, unholy, unacceptable to God.

This isn't just a physical sickness or a sense of rejection. Rather, it is an unexplainable mental anguish - something that can come upon you at any time. I don't know what to call it exactly. But women, especially, are plagued with it - and "experts" have tagged it with all kinds of names. One day, things just begin to pile up in your mind. You can't explain it. And nobody can reach you. Suddenly, you don't want to talk to anyone. All you want to do is hide.

Whatever happened to Paul in Asia, it overwhelmed him completely. He was brought so low, all his strength was gone. He wrote, "...we had the sentence of death in ourselves..." (verse 9). In other words: "I couldn't see any way out. It wasn't humanly possible for me to make it through!"

You may wonder, "How could things get that bad for this great man of God? Did Paul really want his life to end?"

The fact is, Paul had taken upon himself the care of overseeing all the churches he had pioneered. He loved those new believers with all his heart. He grieved over their sins and compromises. And he corrected them with great anguish.

This in itself was a tremendous burden for any man or woman of God to bear. Indeed, Paul writes: "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you" (2:4). Paul's anguish at constantly having to correct and direct his flock afflicted him and made him weak. It was like giving birth to a child: It took a great toll on his physical body!

Paul then writes: "For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears" (7:5). You may be saying, "Do you mean, Paul, the great apostle, had fear? Isn't this the same man who spoke so much about having victory over fear? Can this really be Paul talking?"

Yes - absolutely! You see, that is Satan's design - to plant fears in us. He wants us to lose our confidence that God answers prayer - to think that all of our interceding, fasting and seeking Him have been in vain!

Notice what Paul adds to the verse he wrote about feeling "the sentence of death": "...that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (1:9). It was all about faith!

I strongly believe that God allows His people - and especially ministers of the gospel - to go through many difficult things so that their faith may be built from it. Then, when they share or preach, they no longer speak from theology - but from personal experience of God's delivering power. That is why Paul could say, "I don't want you to be ignorant of how the devil tried to overwhelm me in Asia. I want to share with you how God brought me out of it - so that you, too, can be healed and delivered!"

In recent years, Satan has tried to play the same "phony" trick on me - but he cannot succeed! Each time I have rebuked him, saying, "You broke the record last time, devil. I'll never play that one again. And you'll never convince me I'm a phony!"

I Believe I Am Speaking to a Number of Godly People Who Love Jesus With All Their Heart - and Who

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Are at a Point of Deep Despair! Perhaps like Paul, you are being pressed beyond measure - tested beyond your endurance. Your strength is nearly gone, and you are on the brink of giving up. You see no way out. You want to run, but there is no place to go. Now you say with Paul, "This is above my strength!"

So - how do you get out of it? What is the way to victory? All I can tell you is how God continues to bring me out. Here are four important truths He has given me:

1. Don't think you are experiencing some strange, unique battle. On the contrary - you are in good company! Recall Job, Jeremiah, Elijah, David, Paul - even me. What you are going through is common to believers throughout the centuries.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12-13).

2. When you think you can't go on another hour - when everything looks absolutely hopeless - cry out to God with all that is in you, "Lord, help!" Consider the counsel of the psalmist:

- "As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice. He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me: for there were many with me" (Psalm 55:16-18).

- "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears" (18:1-6).

- "O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit" (30:2-3).

Here is a key verse: "For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper" (72:12). Jesus has sent the Holy Ghost to be your helper. And He will not turn a deaf ear to your cry for help!

3. Dive into God's Word, lay hold of your special promise, take it into the secret prayer closet and hold God to it. Here are three of my favorite promises from the Bible. I hold these up to God whenever I cry out to Him:

- "Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:9-11).

Ask the Lord for good things. He is waiting to give them to you! Ask Him to set you free, to take away all your shame, to remove all the stain of sin. He longs to do it for you!

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- "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20).

Take this promise to God every day, saying, "Father, You said You'd do well above everything I ask. Today I'm asking You to overanswer my prayer." God is pleased by such faith!

4. Trust the Holy Ghost, who abides in you. The Father has sent His Spirit to reside in your heart. But you have to acknowledge the Holy Spirit within you! You've got to believe that when you cry out, the Holy Ghost abiding in you will answer. God doesn't have to send an angel to speak to you; He has already put His resources within you - the Holy Ghost Himself!

That is the secret, plain and simple: As you face your present hour of sufferings and confusion, turn everything over to the Holy Ghost. Say to Him, "Holy Spirit, You know the way out of this mess. I don't. It's completely beyond me. So, I'm resigning, right now. And I give up direction of my life to You.

"I know that what I'm going through is not uncommon to believers. And I'm going to call upon the Lord for help. I'll hold Him to His great and precious promises. And I will trust You to do the rest. You know the very mind of God!"

Dear saint, if you make this simple confession, you will know times of refreshing from the Lord. Even when you are ready to give up, He remains faithful to deliver you.

Hallelujah!

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