

## Dealing with Discouragement by Rev. Willis Dowling

Most people are not sympathetic with what the pastor goes through. He does administration, visitation, counseling, youth, committees, board meetings, denominational responsibilities, and community activities. Then he is expected to have a perfect marriage and keep everything in balance. He must come up with a dynamic sermon each week with fresh, keen insights, having put in ten hours of research into the exegetical and applicational issues. He is to be a motivator and a communicator. He is always a people person and genuinely loves everyone he comes in contact with.

All the while, Satan is tempting him to lust, be greedy, and resent people who do not support him. He is under the constant scrutiny of numbers: how large, how big, how much growth, how much vision--all measured in terms of size. He is afraid of stagnation. He is afraid he will be replaced. He lives with an ax hanging above his head. He wants to advance and grow. He wants success.

How does he handle it? He may handle it well and he may not. He is human and he faces many challenges. Maybe the biggest one is himself.

Apostle Paul says: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col. 3:23-24). Also, "Am I trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

It is the Lord Christ we are serving. Sometimes I think it is easier to please God than it is to please people. Jesus Himself did not please everybody, as you well know. And we won't either. In many cases, to do so would not be to please Christ.

Burnout and loss of focus and vision come from unresolved anger and bitterness within our souls. A little criticism goes a long way. We can preach a wonderful, insightful sermon. But just one critical comment from one lady on the way out the door can wreck everything. We are ready to throw in the towel. When the big problems come, all we can think about is getting up our resume or calling the denomination for church openings. We are tempted to flee.

Then the Lord reminds us that it is His church, not ours. It is His battle, not ours. He will bear fruit through us if we are remaining in Him who is the Vine and we are just the branches. He has been where we are and promised trouble in this world, but "be of good cheer for I have overcome the world." He will not let the waters pass over us or allow the fire to burn us. He is not impressed with church growth ratios. He will cause us to bear real fruit, fruit that will remain and last and multiply. He can finance His own kingdom, thank you. We don't have to do it. He wants us to be completely dependent on Him and not self-reliant. He wants us on our knees, not sitting on our thrones, building our empire.

Also, don't let a few small failures discolor all the blessings God has been doing. List on a piece of paper your successes and failures for the year. Be brutally honest with yourself. You will probably find that the year went a lot better than you gave it credit for. I have a tendency to allow one or two things to overshadow all of God's blessings.

Your family too can become more than just a ministry expectation. The home is a place we nurture and bless. We are not trying to get away from it. Our spouse and children need us to be there for them. The returns of our love will be precious, if we will just take the time to love them. Do you ever really take any time off with them and go somewhere? Are you a workaholic pastor who never takes time off? Who is sorry in the end?

We also need to be into God's Word on a daily basis. This may sound like something you have said before to others many times. But that is the right thing to do. You and I do not have all the answers--but God does. When you are surviving on yesterday's victories and insights, you are down to a quarter of a tank and the needle is not going up. God has new insight and blessings for you. Stay connected to the Lord.