

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



Down But Not Out

KEY PASSAGE: Acts 14:18-22 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Acts 7:57-58; 9:4-5; 14:10 | Romans 1:14-16; 8:35-39
2 Corinthians 5:5-8 | Philippians 1:15-16; 4:11-13 | Hebrews 13:5

► SUMMARY

Do you remember the last time you felt down or discouraged? What caused you to feel this way?

None of us want to experience this painful emotion, but so many situations in life have the capacity to make us feel hopeless and helpless. Maybe we're struggling with finances, health, a relationship, or a job. Sometimes discouragement comes because we feel rejected, mistreated, or shut out by other people. Whatever the cause, the most important issue is how we respond to the situation. Perhaps we'd like to give up and walk away or blame God or someone else, but instead of simply reacting to our distress, let's consider how the Lord would have us respond.

► SERMON POINTS

The apostle Paul is an inspiring example of someone who was down but not out.

When he and Barnabas were in Lystra preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, they healed a lame man and caused quite a stir in the town (Acts 14:8-15). The people thought they were gods, and Paul and Barnabas had trouble convincing them not to offer sacrifices to them. But when some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, they won over the crowds, who quickly turned on Paul and stoned him. Supposing him to be dead, they dragged him out of the city (Acts 14:19).

Despite his obedience to God in preaching the gospel, Paul suffered tremendously. He was in such bad shape that everyone thought he was dead. But the disciples stood around him—undoubtedly praying—and amazingly, Paul

got up and entered the city (v. 20). He was down but not out. In fact, the next day he was able to leave Lystra and head to Derbe to continue preaching the gospel.

What helped Paul and can help us get up, too, when we're feeling down?

Christ's teachings were filled with words of encouragement on various subjects.

■ **Paul's Conversion.** No matter what he faced, Paul kept going because he never got over his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 9:4-5). This was the turning point of his life, which radically changed his goals. The light that flashed around him blinded his eyes and caused him to fall to the ground, but Jesus didn't leave him down. He told Paul that he was His chosen instrument to proclaim His name to the Gentiles. After his sight was restored, Paul immediately began proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God.

Whenever we're discouraged, we should remember our salvation experience because that's the point where we began a relationship with Jesus. All our sins were forgiven, and our names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life. No matter what we face in life, the remembrance of God's gracious salvation encourages us to get up, praise Him, and continue serving Him.

■ **Paul's Conviction.** Because he knew God's purpose for his life, Paul didn't stay down. He had been chosen and "appointed for the defense of the gospel" (Phil. 1:16). And through all his trials, Paul had also learned that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him (Phil. 4:13).

We too have been called to be witnesses for Jesus and to represent Him with our lives. This conviction, along with the assurance of His strength, helps us get up when we're down. Many times God uses these situations to equip us to help others when they're feeling discouraged.

■ **Paul's Confidence.** He had complete trust in the Lord and the truths he'd learned from Him. In Romans 8:38-39 he had written, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Paul knew that in his sufferings and trials—and even in death—he could conquer through the One who loved him (v. 37).

If we've been saved by Jesus, we have this same confidence. Instead of staying down and feeling sorry for ourselves, we should remember God's unfailing love and promises. Since the Holy Spirit lives within us, we never have to pull ourselves up alone because He motivates and empowers us to get up.

■ **Paul's Courage.** When Paul was explaining to the Corinthians that death would one day be swallowed up by life, he told them that the Holy Spirit was given to us as a pledge of this reality (2 Cor. 5:5-8). That's why stoning and possible death couldn't get him down. To die meant that he would be instantly present with the Lord.

God doesn't promise us an easy life without persecution, trouble, or pain. However, the same Holy Spirit who gave Paul courage also dwells within us, enabling us to face whatever situations come our way.

■ **Paul's Commitment.** He didn't stay discouraged, because the Lord had given him a ministry to accomplish. He considered himself "under obligation" to preach the gospel because "it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:14, 16).

Like Paul, we too may face situations that get us down temporarily, but we have no legitimate reason to stay down. Having been saved by God, we are now committed to live for Him for as long as He gives us life.

■ **Paul's Companions.** When he was dragged out of the city after being stoned, his friends did not abandon him but came and stood around him until he got up. The next day, Paul left to preach at another city, but he eventually returned to Lystra to strengthen these disciples and encourage them to endure tribulations as he had (Acts 14:21-22). We all need the encouragement of fellow believers who will help us get on our feet again so we can finish carrying out the work God has planned for us.

What should you do when you're discouraged?

The next time you feel disheartened, remember that you don't have to stay there. Then try modeling your response after the apostle Paul's.

We sometimes think that we could never respond as Paul did, but the Spirit who motivated and lifted him to his feet is the same Spirit who dwells within us as well. Paul's life is a pattern for us to follow. And in the same way, our confidence in the Lord in times of discouragement can become an example for other believers who are feeling down because of the difficulties they face.

► RESPONSE

- What kinds of situations cause you to feel discouraged? How do you usually respond?
- When you're feeling down, where is your focus? How would focusing on the Lord change your response to discouragement?
- Who in your life has been an example of perseverance through hardship? For whom are you setting an example?

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