

WHAT TO DO ABOUT YOUR FRUSTRATIONS

Philippians 1:12-14; 18

Frustrate means to baffle, to get in the way of, to thwart, to defeat, or to prevent one from attaining a purpose. To be in a state of frustration means that adverse circumstances have ganged up on you and you have become confused as to the way you should take. The symptoms of frustration are all about us. Irritability is often a symptom of frustration. So is an uncontrolled temper. So also is that sullen look into which so many faces sourly settle when they are in repose. Sarcasm, too, is a mark of frustration. One doesn't have to be an expert psychologist to know that if a person is constantly sarcastic, he is frustrated at some level of his mental or emotional life. Everybody is subject to frustrations at times, and in order to do our best with life we have to know how to handle our frustrations.

Difficulty is an integral fact of God's planning for our lives. We have to have struggle and pain and problems in order to grow and become able to master life. It would be a lot more pleasant and popular to say that we do not have to have difficulties in life, but that would not only be false but injurious also. We develop into strong manhood and womanhood by facing up to difficulty.

I. The Causes of Frustration.

The causes of frustration are numerous. Some feel frustrated because they have not found any adequate outlet for the gifts which they believe that they possess. Others feel frustrated because they are tied to dull tasks in which they do not have any real interest. If there were any skill in the job, they have mastered it long since, and now their imaginations and thoughts are occupied with what they might have been if life had only given them the opportunities which they sought. Other people feel frustrated because they are lonely. In their youth they had the idea that some day they would form a great friendship, and they have held themselves in trust for that hour. But the desired friendship never developed, and never will now. Still others are frustrated because they are the victims of protracted poor health. The body does not match the vigor of the mind or the zest of the will. Faced repeatedly with the opportunity to do the things in which they would take great delight, they have to forego the joy of doing them because of insufficient strength. And still others feel frustrated because they have nurtured great and noble ambitions, but a limited education, the responsibilities of family and home, and various other circumstances have thwarted the purpose, and it remains a dream only.

Frustration is one of the recurring crises of human life. We laugh at some of the characters in the comic strips who are perpetually frustrated. But frustration is usually not very amusing when it develops us. Many a person has succumbed to what was perhaps a slight failure, and given up initiative and the will to succeed, just because he did not believe that ordinary human beings can make frustration fruitful. We need to look at the cause of our frustration or bafflement, try to see what others have done with a similar frustration and see what we can do about ours. If, for example, your pride has been wounded sharply by your failure to achieve acceptance in a certain social group, remember that more than one so-called "social misfit" has developed outgoing interests, and genuine concern to make others feel at ease and happy.

II. The Conquest of Frustration.

I do not know of a better example of a person over coming frustration than that of the Apostle Paul. His salvation, call, dedication, personality, and training eminently qualified him for the work of the ministry. His increasing success and ever-widening opportunities for significant service seemed to lie before him. Then misfortune struck. He was arrested and imprisoned. This ceaseless worker for God, and matchless preacher

of the gospel of Christ, lost his liberty and was placed in jail. Before that he could go and preach where he pleased, but when he wrote out text he was in a Roman prison, chained to a soldier. Seemingly his antagonists had checked and broken his ministry. His enemies had pursued him relentlessly, and now this mighty itinerant for his Lord was a prisoner awaiting trial in Rome, and living in hourly expectation of death beneath the axe of the executioner. Was he inclined to murmur? Was he impatient with his restraints? Was he touched with depression? Was there any unfavorable reaction in his enthusiastic spirit? Of course, his spirit was wounded because he thought that the work of his Lord was being hindered. It would have been natural if he had become embittered, and even morbidly sour, but the glorious truth is that he did not do so.

It is to be remembered that Paul had purposed to preach the gospel in the chief city of the world. He had written an epistle to the brethren at Rome in anticipation of his visit, and in this he informed them that he longed to impart unto them some spiritual gift, and prayed that God would open the way for him to come to them. His prayer had been answered; yet how strangely!

Paul wrote joyfully to his friends at Philippi and let them know that he was utilizing his circumstances in such a way that they had become his servants. The violence of his enemies had not defeated his purpose, but had actually helped to accomplish it. The chain which bound him to a soldier gave him the opportunity for which he had prayed. If he could not preach to large crowds in the Forum, he could and would influence the individual soldiers who relieved guard over him.

Paul had expected only unfriendly issues to his imprisonment, but here he reveals that bright and gladdening issues were appearing. He had expected only bitter things, but he was actually experiencing some things of surpassing sweetness. When he was imprisoned, he could not image anything except that the gospel would be hindered, and here it was actually being furthered by the very means which it had been thought that it would be set at naught.

How did Paul take what happened to him? He took it in stride, of course. He said: "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places." Even though he could not reach the Roman citizen out there in the city, he would witness to each and every soldier who was chained to him inside the prison. Paul discovered that he was reaching people while he was a prisoner who might never have been reached otherwise. He was getting the gospel into the minds and hearts of the members of the picked imperial guard; the elite regiment of Rome was being evangelized from a room. The chain which deprived Paul of his liberty gave him his opportunity.

The guards saw Paul in chains, wondered why, asked him, and he told them. They soon learned that he was a man who was suffering for his faith in Christ and his devotion to Him. His Christian joy and optimism were obvious to all who observed him and heard him. They learned that Christ was the secret of Paul's joy. These guards were impressed by the purity, patience and desire of Paul to get them to receive Christ as their Saviour.

Paul sought to convince the Philippians that God had not made a mistake in permitting the things to happen to him as they had, because they had actually contributed to the progress of the gospel of Christ. He taught them that things come directly from God, or they reach us from some other source through His permissive will. Instead of Paul's imprisonment curtailing his missionary work, it had actually advanced it. His difficulties had become doors. Wherever he was, whether in pulpit or in prison, Paul presented Christ to others as the One Who was sufficient for all their needs. Those whom he introduced to Christ, while they were chained to him, became witnesses for their Lord in the distant areas to which they went.

If there is one thing above all others which the New Testament declares by word and example, it is that happiness and joy are not dependent upon outward conditions or circumstances. Paul was in prison when he wrote this wonderful epistle in which he expressed his joy in Christ. He was not bitter. Nobody can be bitter and happy at the same time. If you are bitter, you are miserable, and not joyous. The things that happen to us make us either bitter or better. Facing the things which came up against him, Paul determined that he would be better because of them.

Paul made his frustration fruitful by using it to create something new and better. For Paul there was no apparent way through that prison, but there was a way to move around in it and a way out of it. His prison bonds had much to do with the production of his character. Paul became a kind of human dynamo from which issued currents of hope and courage, of insights into the truth by which men live.

It is simple astonishing what a positive and Christian attitude toward disappointment and frustration can do. Two young, poor, and ambitious brothers ran a patent-medicine show. One of the brothers acted as a juggler and magician; he drew the crowd and his brother sold the medicine at a hundred per cent profit at least. At last the law caught up with them. They were told that they were practicing medicine without a license. It was a keen disappointment to them. The one thing they could do they were prevented from doing. The elder of the two, Harry, said, "Here's what we'll do. I'll get a job with a carnival, and put you through medical school. In a few years you will have a license to practice, then no cop can order us around. We can go back to this business and clean up!" So one boy went to medical school, and the other into circus and show business. Years later the medical student became Chief Radiologist in a New York Hospital. Harry became known as Houdini, the foremost magician of all time. Often he said, "What seemed like the worst troubles in my life have often paid me the biggest dividends."

What can our Christian faith do for us when we experience the defeat of our chosen plans, and the frustrations of our desires and hopes? In his candid bit of autobiography Paul informed us what he did in such a case. He besought the Lord to remove the "thorn in the flesh." God answered his prayer, but not with deliverance. Instead, God told him, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul discovered that the power of God is the cure for the "blocks" which come.

How does God's power come? It comes in the reinforcement of our wills, in the enhancement of our energies, and in the provision of the necessary strength, when we move out along the line of God's will.

God permits us to be frustrated at times in order to provoke us to greater efforts. It is true that we have to accept the inevitable in this life. A bereavement, a loss, and an illness have to be born. The simple truth is this, that some people believe themselves to be in prison when they are not. The door isn't locked. It is only closed. It would yield to a resolute thrust. When people complain that they don't have a friend in the world, I always like to ask them if that is their misfortune or their fault. It is often their fault. In a love-hungry world like this, there is friendship for most people who will seek it. Emerson's statement is still true, namely, "If you would have a friend, you must be a friend." You need not be a friendless as you are. You need not leave the advances to others altogether.

God uses frustration to lead us into richer fields of service. Paul's long imprisonment enlarged his sphere of usefulness. Confinement to his hired lodgings afforded him time to think, to write, to preach, and to teach, opportunities which were not very plentiful during his years of travel. He used the time of his enforced detention to write some of the priceless treasures of our faith. To his imprisonment we owe the most profound and beautiful of his epistles -- Ephesians, Philipians, Colossians, and Philemon. His

chains confined his body, but spread his influence. Confinement in jail for twelve years in Bedford, England, liberated the brain of John Bunyan, and sent from it "Pilgrim's Progress" to be read around the world and down through the centuries.

Nothing will happen to you that cannot serve the highest interests of your soul. God, Who was so great in creation, is great in transformation as well. What was the worst thing that ever happened in this world? The death of the sinless Christ on the cross was the worst act that was ever perpetrated by men. And yet it was the best thing God ever did. He took man's worst and made it His best. Then, why not take your frustration to God and ask Him: "Father, what can'st Thou do with this?"

Have you conquered your frustration, or has it conquered you? What has been going on inside you? The real things never happen to us, they happen in us. Precisely the same experience comes to two different people. An entirely different thing happens in them. It is what happens in you that matters most. Two mothers each lose a son. One mother sobs it out on the Saviour's breast, dedicates herself anew to God, flings herself into the service of His kingdom, and finds an inward peace and quiet satisfaction which at one time she would have thought impossible. The other turns sour and bitter, and is in arms against the Lord. At the slightest provocation, the bitterness in her soul comes out. Her depressed husband remarks, "My wife never get over the loss of our boy." The same thing happened to the two women, but a precisely opposite thing happened in them. What happens inside you? When Paul was frustrated, he turned to the furtherance of the gospel. Has your frustration furthered the gospel of Christ? It can and it should.