

Isaiah 49:3-7

Isaiah 49:3 ³ God said to Me, “You are My Servant, Israel, in Whom I will show My glory.” ⁴ But I said, “I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and futility; yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD, and My reward is with My God.” ⁵ And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant . . . so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and My God is My strength), ⁶ He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to (only) . . . restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” ⁷ Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One, to the despised One, to the One abhorred by the nation, to the Servant of rulers, “Kings will see and arise, princes will also bow down, because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You.”

All who follow God become deeply discouraged at times. Especially when our attempts to serve God seem to fail, we are tempted to conclude that our service is pointless and futile. How can we recover from this kind of discouragement? This passage gives us some helpful advice.

Who is the discouraged speaker in this passage? He identifies Himself as “Israel” in verse 3, yet He is obviously distinct from the nation of Israel because verses 5 and 6 say that He is the One who will restore the nation of Israel. He is God’s Servant, and this passage is one of four passages in Isaiah 42-53 that speak of Him. The authors of the New Testament tell us that these passages predicted Jesus’ public ministry, death and resurrection (see for example Jn. 1:29; Matthew 12:18-21; Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 2:23).



The first thing we need to know if we want to recover from spiritual discouragement is that Jesus experienced the very same kind of discouragement. At some point (evidently late in His public ministry), He looked at His years of service and felt overwhelmed by this thought: “I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and futility.” He had come to rescue His own people, yet they had despised and abhorred Him (verse 7). How comforting it is to know that Jesus, the One who never sinned, was also overwhelmed with the same despairing thoughts and feelings which sometimes overwhelm us! It must not, therefore, be intrinsically unspiritual to be discouraged in this way.

Notice also that Jesus admitted His discouragement to Himself and to God. It does no good to simply deny your discouragement and put on a happy face. Far better to admit it and bring it to God and pour it out to Him. He can bear it, and He can help you out of it.

Notice also that while Jesus expressed His feelings of spiritual discouragement, He did not capitulate to them. He says in verse 4: “(It looks to Me like I am an utter failure), *yet . . .*” That “yet” reflects His decision to believe what God says about Him rather than to believe His own thoughts and feelings. And what does God say about Him? “You are My Servant . . . in Whom I will show My glory” and “I will . . . make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” On this basis, He affirms concerning Himself: “*Surely* the justice due to Me is with the LORD, and My reward is with My God” and “I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and My God is My strength.” He concluded that He did not see the whole picture, and He chose to trust the words of the One who did.

When you are discouraged, begin by telling God what you think and feel. But be sure to also say “yet” – and then conclude your prayer by affirming to God what He says about you. If you have received Jesus as your Savior, God says many things about you in His Word. He says, for example, that you are His beloved child (Romans 8:14-16), and that you will certainly inherit a wonderful place in His kingdom



(Romans 8:17,18), and that He is working even through this discouraging period for good (Romans 8:28). To choose to trust these words is not just an exercise in positive thinking; it is an affirmation of what is actually true.

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, we see this same pattern. He admitted to His disciples that “My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of death” (Matthew 26:38). He poured out His feelings of depression and fear to His Father, even saying “If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me . . .” (Matthew 26:39). But then He ended His sentence with “yet” – “. . . yet not as I will, but as You will.” He chose to obey His Father’s will because He chose to trust the promises His Father had given Him. And as He prayed in this way, angels came and strengthened Him (Luke 22:43).

No matter how discouraged you may feel today, you can follow Jesus’ example. You can express your discouragements to yourself, to your friends, and (most importantly) to God. And you can tell Him: “. . . yet I choose to trust Your Word.” As you relate to God in this way, His Spirit will (in His own perfect timing) lessen the weight of your discouragement and encourage your heart to go on serving Him!

Lord Jesus, I am amazed and comforted by the knowledge that You have shared in my experience of discouragement. Surely I can draw near to You – not as an unsympathetic authority figure, but as One who has been tempted in all ways as I have been tempted. Thank You for leading the way in choosing to trust Your Father’s words over Your feelings of discouragement. Uplift and strengthen me today as I choose to respond to Your promises.

