

## **Hope in Times of Spiritual Dryness**

**A Message by James R. Newby**

**Text: Psalm 42**

**You cannot imagine my relief and gratitude when I saw the sun rise last Monday morning. It was a brief respite from the gloomy overcast days of winter in the Ohio Valley. The weather has been fitting for me, since I have been going through an experience of spiritual dryness...a feeling that God is distant and that I am just going through the motions. It is not a full-blown “dark night of the soul,” but it can be described as a “twilight of the soul.” I have been through these feelings numerous times in my life, and so I know that they will pass. Perhaps it has been the weather, or the death of a friend. Maybe the events in Washington or the continuous violence in our country, the latest example being the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, have affected me more than I thought. Maybe I am just experiencing the “Winter Blues.” I don’t know...I do know that when such feelings of dryness come over me, the creative process by which I live tends to slow down.**

**During these times of dryness, how does one remain hopeful and continue to grow spiritually through them? I am sure that I am not the only one here this morning who has experienced such feelings and asked such a question.**

To maintain one's faith and hope during times of dryness, I find it helpful to *establish a more disciplined routine*. Discipline has always been an important part of my spiritual growth, but in times of dryness, it is needed more than ever.

One of the most meaningful speeches I ever heard Elton Trueblood deliver was titled, "Learn to Love the Difficult." It was an interesting choice of topic for an audience of over 500 students at Earlham College, who were reared in a society in which comfort, pleasure and freedom from pain and difficulty had become the operating norm.

In his clear and prophetic way, Elton challenged the contemporary desire to get by with doing as little as possible. He asked these students to consider the possibility of finding spiritual fulfillment in the difficult. His suggestions ranged from the study of the intellectual and spiritual giants to the challenge of learning a second or third language, to the practice of a personal discipline of regular times of meditation, spiritual reading, and service to the community. The point he emphasized was that if any growth is to take place, it will involve discipline.

And so, a more disciplined routine is helpful during times of spiritual dryness. Another way to maintain hope and faith during these times is *to*

*connect with others.* It is natural for anyone experiencing a dark night of soul to withdraw into one's self. To connect with others and to be in community with others, however, is a way to keep faith and hope alive.

To be in community here, with one another, where we encourage each other and build one another up, is to help in times of spiritual dryness. It is here where we can laugh together and cry together...A place where our sorrows are divided, and our joys are multiplied. Each of us is called to be an encourager, in a world that is filled with criticism. When we come together in this Meeting place, we all need to know that we are loved and we all need to be encouraged. In times of spiritual dryness, we are especially in need of such love.

A third way to maintain hope when you are feeling spiritually blue, is *to serve others.* Again, it is so much more natural to focus inward during these difficult times. I am convinced, however, that serving others will help us put our own problems in perspective.

For those who want to paint a rosy picture of how well things are going in our economy, I invite them to visit Bethany House in the Fairmount neighborhood of Cincinnati. When you travel through certain areas of our city, you will find more Pawn Shops and Pay Day Lending institutions than

**Burger Kings or McDonalds. The Great Recession may well be over on Wall Street, but it is not over on many of our Streets. In the area of Oklahoma City where I was Minister before coming back to Cincinnati Meeting, the Church of the Savior would receive on average, 3 to 4 calls or direct visits per day from persons who needed food, clothing, shelter or money.**

**It was Lord George Macleod, the founder of the Iona Community in Scotland, who wrote: *“I simply argue that the cross should be raised at the center of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of a church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town’s garbage heap; at a crossroad so cosmopolitan they had to write his title in Hebrew and Latin and Greek...at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where he died. And that is what he died for. And that is what he died about. That is where Christians ought to be and what Christian ought to be about.”***

**Serving others who are suffering...volunteering in a social service agency or hospital...holding the hand of a scared child or family who do not know where their homeless lives will take them tonight, is a way to help recover one’s faith and hope.**

**“As a hart longs for flowing streams,” writes the Psalmist, “So longs my soul for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the Living God.” There are times in my life when I understand the Psalmist’s “longing soul and thirst for God.” I have experienced what he calls “disquieted feelings,” and his sense of being “cast down.”**

**But I also know about hope and how it can be found...In maintaining a disciplined life, spiritually, mentally and physically. It can also be found within a beloved community where we encourage one another and build one another up. And it can be found in service to others, where we share our time, talent and money to help others who are in need of the basic necessities of life. In the end, and at my core, I can say with the Psalmist, “Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.”**