

Facing Our Greatest Obstacle in Life

Have you ever struggled with discouragement? Do you ever tell yourself: “I feel like I’ll never measure up,” or “My prayer life is not what it should be.” Do you ask: “Why am I not truly happy more often?” or “God, why are you not with me in this struggle?” Everyone has faced such things and all of us need help in this area.

One of the greatest obstacles in life is spiritual discouragement. The term spiritual discouragement is not referring to some lofty, complicated matter; nor does it denote, necessarily, reaching a point of deep, dark depression. Father Timothy Gallagher, O.M.V., has published a simple to read and compelling book titled “Overcoming Spiritual Discouragement.” Basic spiritual discouragement affects every person, so it’s helpful to have a definition. As explained in his book: “Discouragement is the main obstacle in our spiritual lives. The main obstacle is not our more obvious failings – our impatience, our slowness to help others, our limitations in prayer, our self-indulgence, our failures to listen. The great obstacle is giving in to discouragement when we see such failings in ourselves” (p. 26). Understanding this key point can be a game changer!

Spiritual discouragement can easily slip into everyday life. People tend to “beat themselves up” when they make the same mistakes and the devil actively exploits this vulnerability, shrewdly leading us time and again into an overwhelming sense of disturbance. Satan seeks to hold us in this discouragement, so we can’t accept the forgiveness and mercy that God has obtained for us. Our enemy tempts us to focus on our failings rather than to look to Jesus and take our faults to Him. This approach does not mean that we just brush aside or forget about our sins, rather it encourages us to turn to Jesus. He is our Savior, He will come to us **right there** when we fail, and allow us to move forward with His grace, away from sin.

The gentle reflections in this book contain so many gems that are abundantly helpful for daily life. In conjunction with our tendency to get down on ourselves, here is one uplifting example that shows us how to change our focus, seeking to move our attention away from our shortcomings and sin and placing our focus on God’s goodness:

I will never think of God as if He were of our condition and grows weary of our wavering, weakness and negligence. Rather, I will think of what is truly characteristic of Him and what He prizes most highly, that is, His goodness and mercy, knowing that He is a loving Father who understands our weakness, is patient with us, and forgives us. If I should fall a thousand times a day, a thousand times a day I will begin again, with new awareness of my weakness, promising God, with a peaceful heart, to amend my life. (*Overcoming Spiritual Discouragement*, p. 18-19)

This advice may seem overly simple, but how many times when we fail, do we begin to “wallow” in our mistakes and never explicitly stop heading down the path of discouragement. All of us have faults. Most of us have subconsciously thought that life is good and God is hard. But this is where

our focus has failed, and we have misunderstood the truth – the truth that life is hard and God is good. He is so pleased when we think about His goodness. He loves us so much that He wants to give us everything that is good. In fact, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down to us from the Father of Lights.” (James 1:17) We can never have too much hope in God, that is, too much confidence in Him. He, in His unconditional goodness and love, is absolutely worthy of our trust.

If these reflections resonate with you, I am pleased to share some great news! We have an opportunity to again hear Father Tim Gallagher in person. After he presented here a few years ago, so many said that he truly has a gift for speaking at a level that everyone can understand, and provides so much practical wisdom. Father Gallagher will present at the annual Witnesses for Christ Conference Friday, Aug. 28 and Saturday, Aug. 29, in La Crosse. The presentations will be interactive, and above all, concrete and applicable for everyday life. With warmth, understanding, and pastoral skill, Father Gallagher provides a hopeful invitation to all who struggle to overcome the greatest obstacle of all in the “everyday” and spiritual life – discouragement. Mark your calendar for this wonderful opportunity to experience personal renewal. Go to diolc.org/witnesses to find further details, download a brochure and register online.

By Ann Lankford



Overcoming Spiritual Discouragement

Freedom from one of the greatest obstacles in life –
the “cage” of everyday discouragement we all experience.