



C H A P T E R T E N



# Prayer and the Inner Life

There was a refreshing beauty of authentic holiness about Armin Gesswein. He was for real, “an Israelite in whom there was no guile.” Prayer and the promises of God’s Word pervaded everything he did. Out of this atmosphere of faith came an anointed vision and burden for revival that was contagious. Persons close to him could not help but feel the love that radiated from his servant heart. Some of that love overflowed on me, and as with so many others, I will be forever grateful for the impact of his ministry upon my life.

—Robert E. Coleman, Professor of Evangelism,  
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

I have never known God to use a discouraged person.

—D.L. Moody

Always give preference to the spirit of contrition.

—Armin Gesswein

**A**rmin was in his element. Having generously helped himself to the salad bar, he was now seated at a table with five or six pastor buddies, a group to which I was privileged to belong. Conversation was loud and animated. Armin was informally instructing us on everything from his healthy dietary patterns to his next trip to Norway.

“Eat living things,” he smiled. “God tells me, ‘Armin, eat living things. They are better for you.’ So every day I have at least fresh fruit and fresh salads for two meals. I have to be careful; I can’t eat as much as I used to.”

Seeing the first lag in conversation, I jumped in. “Armin, do you ever get discouraged?” His eyes immediately looked up from his romaine lettuce. His mouth and countenance smiled. “I mean, as I pray for revival,” I continued, “I get discouraged. It’s almost like I can feel the weight of discouragement holding my prayers against the floorboards.”

He reached his hand across the table, stuck out two fingers and enthusiastically said, “Two R’s! When it comes to discouragement there are two R’s. Recognize it and refuse it.” From the tone of confidence in Armin’s voice, I could tell I had struck oil. Rich, dark oil. Over the next forty-five minutes Armin took me and my pastor buddies to school on this entire matter of discouragement, which is certainly common not only to pastors, but to all pray-ers.

If you think this issue has little to do with revival-prayer, allow me to object. Successfully dealing with discouragement has everything to do with revival-prayer. In fact, as we shall see, God never uses a discouraged vessel. He doesn’t use a discouraged preacher, a discouraged parent, not even a discouraged pastor. And I have been, at one time or another, all of the above. At that infamous salad bar luncheon with Armin, God used this principle of truth to set me free.

Like all practical theology, it starts with a proper understanding of God Himself—in this case, the God of all encouragement. The primary text is Second Corinthians 1:3-4: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any

trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” The phrase “God of all comfort” is translated from the Greek word *parakaleo*, which means “to call alongside, to encourage, to stand next to, to comfort or counsel.” From this we can easily establish the principle that since God is the God of all encouragement, then everything He says and does is encouraging.

We Christians can go one better than that line from the old song “Home on the Range”: “Where seldom is heard a discouraging word.” We can say that from Christ there is *never* heard a discouraging word! This means that if discouraging thought patterns elbow their obnoxious way into our ministry, our prayer life or our family relationships, we can be sure of one thing: They did not originate with God.

Where, then, does discouragement come from? Some would certainly try to pin it on the devil—a “demon of discouragement.” But although demons may foster unbelief and compound our theological errors, it is safer, at least initially, to place the blame for our discouragement at the feet of our indwelling sin nature. We are told, “anything that does not proceed from faith is sin” (see Romans 14:23). Certainly, we can confirm that discouragement is part of the unbelief pattern.

Again Armin stuck his bony finger across the lunch table. “Not only is discouragement a sin,” he added, “it is one of the strangest, strongest, subtlest and sneakiest of sins. It is a strangler and it has a giant effect. It is hard to get hold of. It sneaks up on you when you aren’t looking. We are told, ‘all wrongdoing is sin’ ” (1 John 5:17).

Once we had established that discouragement is a sin that feeds on unbelief and self-pity, it became much easier to deal with. This is where Armin’s two R’s become helpful; while distinct from each other, the two go hand in hand.

First, we quit denying its existence—we recognize it, own it, acknowledge it. We call it what it is: the sin of discouragement, the product of unbelief and self-pity. Then we immediately proceed to the second R: We refuse it. It is intolerable. It didn't come from God—in fact, it is an utter hindrance to the Spirit of God. As D.L. Moody said, “I have never known God to use a discouraged person.” No, discouragement will not send us to hell. But it doesn't help us lay hold of heaven either. It is one of those “sins that so easily entangle” (see Hebrews 12:1).

Since revival-prayer often resembles Elijah's rain-inducing prayer—nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, everything!—discouragement can become a critical issue, keeping us from taking hold of everything. Like a boat hitting a sandbar, our prayer lives can quickly be trapped by the spirit of discouragement. To move forward, we need to soberly and honestly recognize and renounce the spirit of discouragement.

Discouragement is a form of self-life—it feeds off self-pity, self-indulgence, self-sensitivity, self-pampering. It is one of those secret indulgences of self-love to which we are all prone. We all enjoy withdrawing into ourselves and crying on our own shoulders for a while.

For me, discouragement was so prevalent in my life that it became sort of an alter ego. It was like a friend, albeit a lousy friend; for better or worse, it was my companion. I had no problem recognizing it; I had serious problems, however, refusing it. It was like having to amputate a gangrenous appendage: my discouragement smelled bad, looked bad and was bad, but it had been part of my life for so long that it took me a while to accept that it needed to be removed.

I began to realize how tightly and intricately its tentacles had woven themselves around my spirit. There was hardly an area of my life that was unaffected. Like a fog that silently slips

in during the night, my spirit of discouragement had silently slipped into my heart and put my prayer life on the run. It was as if I couldn't take off and get airborne. I can't begin to count how many sermons I have preached, parenting lectures I've given my children and prayer services I've attempted to promote—all out of a spirit of discouragement.

I can vividly remember the afternoon in my study when I slipped to my knees and prayed a simple prayer, then opened my eyes and vividly, unequivocally renounced the spirit of discouragement. It was a watershed moment in my spiritual formation. The words Armin spoke into my life had taken hold. I can confidently and most gratefully say that I have been a categorically different person ever since. My praying is different—and so is my pastoring, preaching, parenting, promoting. And no more pouting! Praise the Lord! The discouragement was never from God in the first place, so once I recognized it for what it was—a product of my sinful self-life—disposing of it was a piece of cake.

Frankly, there have been several times over the past eight years when the spirit of discouragement rolled back in like a fog. Once again, however, I had the distinct pleasure of recognizing it and refusing it.

A few months after kneeling in my study and declaring treason on this alien spirit of discouragement with which I had previously cultivated quite a relationship, I found myself seated in a small hotel conference room in metro Atlanta with a dozen Christian leaders listening to David Bryant wax eloquently about his own story of “being converted to hope.” As he quoted Romans 15:13, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit,” I was like a sponge, absorbing spiritual truths as rapidly as they were being spo-

ken. For me it was, in fact, a crisis conversion—a filling, a baptism and saturation of hope. Having exhaled the toxic spirit of discouragement, I suddenly realized the vital necessity of breathing in the life-giving spirit of hope.

He is never discouraging nor is He ever hopeless. In these days of enormous challenge, we as Christ's servants need a fresh baptism of holy hope. Simply renouncing discouragement is only a half solution. Being converted to hope is the second half. It completes the work so that we can face the issue of ministry both in prayer and in daily experience. The future belongs to the hopeful. Any generation will run to the voice that gives it the most hope. By God's grace, let's be that voice.

## Inspection or Introspection

Another piece of highly practical coaching Armin frequently gave is the subtle distinction between inspection and introspection. Any hungry soul with an ounce of desire to please God has felt the despairing effects of morbid introspection. Scavenging through the catacombs of our inner lives in an effort to rid our hearts of hidden lusts, vanity, selfishness and unbelief is depressing at best. On the other hand, the Scriptures call us to some sort of self-reflection by such verses as these:

A man ought to examine himself. . . . (1 Corinthians 11:28)

Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)

How can a young man or woman deal with moral purity issues without plunging headlong into unhealthy navel-gazing?

Conviction and repentance are always present in genuine prayer-revival. Armin and I have been with countless students, pastors and lay people who freely and openly confess their sins before God and man. In this context Armin felt right at home. It looked, smelled and tasted like the Norwegian revival in the '20s and '30s. He would often say, "Always give preference to the spirit of contrition."

In other words, when people begin to speak much of repentance and confession of sin from a broken, contrite heart, that is God, so *stay there*. Don't sing; don't pray about other things; don't dismiss for lunch; don't worry about the clock. Time stands still when God brings repentance. After all, that is the jewel God is looking for. It is the sacrifice acceptable to Him (Psalm 51:17). When we consider all God does to bring a person to the place of genuine repentance, we quickly understand why we give preference to the spirit of contrition.

In this context Armin would frequently coach participants toward healthy inspection and away from morbid introspection:

Morbid introspection is always lethal. Any of us can find sin within. It is always bleak, dark and dismal when we subjectively look within ourselves. Like picking lint out of our navels, it is usually superficial at best.

Inspection, on the other hand, is the exact opposite. God calls us to look away from ourselves in order to see ourselves. We look into Christ and into the objective mirror of His Word in order to see ourselves. . . . No one can see his own face without looking away from himself; as he looks away to an objective mirror, he can see what he actually looks like.

Similarly, God alone gives us an accurate view of ourselves only as we look to Him. And when He shows us ourselves, it is not only accurate, it is deep. He deals with core,



motivational issues which are of primary influence and importance.

## Christ the Sanctifier

At the core of his being, Armin was a Christ-centered soul. He himself was solidly grounded in Christ and he dynamically led others to rock-solid devotion to Christ. While Armin was an incessant troubadour of prayer, he never induced an unhealthy guilt nor a works-righteousness mindset. He never promoted a treadmill prayer regimen. The reason he not only preached revival-prayer but led people into revival-prayer was because he lived the Christ-life. He was a prayer-dependent, Spirit-led man.

We would often begin prayer summits not knowing where Armin was—and more practically, when he was likely to show up! As the facilitator, it often caused more than a little anxiety in me to know that within thirty minutes I would be expecting Armin to exhort the group. Time after time, Armin would remarkably show up at the precise moment his input was needed. I often joked, “Armin is like the Holy Spirit; he is rarely early but never late. Always just on time!” And he was.

Like a professional golfer, Armin never held the club too tight. His prayer leadership was always strong, but never forced. His teaching was commanding, but never belligerent. His coaching was directive, but never overbearing. His prayers were powerful, at times prophetic, but certainly never lacking humility.

The underlying reason for his grace and power was clearly found outside himself and fully found in the Person of the Holy Spirit. He knew the Holy Spirit and followed His lead. He taught in the Spirit, prayed and walked in the Spirit. He made a good glove and the Holy Spirit a good hand. He was so deeply

broken, contrite, yielded and compliant that there was little left in Armin that hindered the free flow of God's Spirit or distracted from the glory of Christ. As a worthy mentor, for many of us he was "Exhibit A" of a Spirit-filled, Spirit-controlled man whose inner life was permeated by revival-prayer.

## Summary

- When it comes to discouragement, there are two R's: recognize it and refuse it.
- Successfully dealing with discouragement has everything to do with revival-prayer.
- God is, after all, the God of all encouragement.
- Discouragement is not normally a demon. It is a sin that feeds off unbelief and self-pity.
- Discouragement will not send us to hell, but it sure doesn't help us lay hold of heaven.
- After we renounce the spirit of discouragement, God wants to convert us to hope.
- There is a vast difference between inspection and introspection. Morbid introspection is lethal. Inspection, on the other hand, is healthy and freeing.
- In order for inspection to occur, we must look away at something objective outside of ourselves, in order to accurately see ourselves.
- Always give preference to the spirit of contrition.
- When brokenness comes, time stands still. Forget the clock.
- Christ is our Sanctifier.

## Mentoring Group Discussion

1. Why was discouragement so unthinkable to Armin?
2. What does encouragement have to do with the Holy Spirit?
3. What were the two R's Armin gave to deal with discouragement?
4. In your own words, describe the difference between inspection and introspection.
5. What does it mean in a practical way to be converted to hope?