

# How to Overcome Discouragement

By J. P. Moreland

Can we try to get seated so we can begin? Welcome to this evening, dear brothers and sisters. I have been burdened all week about this message tonight. And that's not normal for me. I do a lot of speaking, as some of you know, and I haven't been able to get tonight off my mind all week. Today was especially acute. All day long I have been thinking about this evening. I even spoke in a church this afternoon and three or four times during my message, I was actually thinking of you. I hope I didn't shortchange them. But my heart has been here this evening and I think it's because I want more than anything else that God Himself would say something to you tonight. And I want to ask if you'd do me a favor. Maybe you can't do it where you're seated. I don't know if it's comfortable for you to get on your knees. I'd like to ask you to - if you can't stay seated, if it's possible to get on your knees where you're seated. If you don't mind, I'd like to ask you to for just a second. And if you can't just lean forward and I'd like to ask you to close your eyes, if you would.

And I want you to think of something that you've brought tonight that is really discouraging you. Something that is a genuine burden in your heart. Let's try to think of what that is. Maybe one thing that's especially burdensome to you that you bring into this room. Now, I'd like you to tell the word just quietly where you're seated or kneeled. I want you to tell him what that thing is. So take a minute and tell Him what's bothering you. I don't want to ask you to pray a very specific prayer. I want you to pray these words to yourself. Don't pray them out loud, please. But I'd like

you to pray the prayer Lord Jesus Christ, would you say something special to me tonight? Amen.

You may be seated.

Thank you very much. I appreciate it. I'd like to thank you for something else, too. Before I begin, I've had several of you thank me for speaking up. I'd like to thank you for letting me speak. You have no idea what a privilege I consider this to be. And I will tell you, honestly, there's not a place I would rather be than with you tonight. And I want to thank each and every one of you for giving me the chance to share my heart with you these Sunday evenings. It means a great deal to me. Bless your heart for coming.

You know, anybody can be happy when things are going well. But it takes somebody with a lot of character to be happy when things aren't going well. You know, you don't have to learn to be happy when things are going well, but you do have to learn to be happy when things aren't going well. Paul said that he had learned to be a happy person when things were going well and when they weren't going well. And folks, let me tell you something. When you get to be older, you don't want to be the kind of a person whose happiness depends on whether things are going well, because there are no guarantees that things are going to go well.

You and I have no idea what we're going to face in this country in the future as Christians. We just have no idea. And I don't mean to us here tonight. You understand that even as we speak tonight, there are literally tens of thousands of people murdered every day because they're Christians murdered because they're believers. Parents who have their children slaughtered in front of them. I talked to a fellow recently who went to another country and there were little children who had been murdered because of their Christian faith.

Now we do have problems, but I want you to know that you can learn to be happy even when things aren't going well for you. You really can. And it's not going to happen overnight. But I have some things to share with you that I think if you will write them down and stick them on your mirror and return to them on a regular basis. They'll work. I promise you they'll work. I'm especially concerned for you because as I've told you the first two nights, I think it is terribly difficult to be a teenager, a high school or college student today.

I've said that before. I want to say it again. You all are under constant stress. I don't know if you knew this, but stress is now the number one killer in the adult population. More adults die because of stress-related diseases than anything else. And suicide is the number one killer among people your age. And I think this is an indication of the unbelievable increase that people's experience stress. I see teenagers and college students having stress like I have never seen before. And I think that if you come here tonight feeling stressed, you're normal. At least you're normal compared to your friends. That may not be good news.

I also think that there is an overwhelming loneliness today in American society. It would not surprise me if the number of you came here this evening feeling very lonely. The pace of our lives and the year the arising of television and movies have given us a way to be happy without having to form connected relationships with other people. And I think as a result, especially with brothers, many men in this country are often just not taught how to develop emotional relationships the way we're socialized.

I'll never forget when I lived in Lynchburg, Virginia, there was a little boy, about eight years old that fell off his bicycle and his daddy said to Ed, as he started crying, as Daddy said, Now you toughen up and be a man, stop crying. And, you know, I can understand a little bit of that, but but a little boy who grows up with that kind of message gets to be 19 and 20 years old and doesn't know how to open up to girls. And when he gets into a relationship, he runs the other direction because he's afraid of being vulnerable, because that's the way he's been taught. And, you know, the result of that is a very, very lonely man.

There was a book that came out a while back called *The Friendless American Male*, and it talked about how men in this country are deeply lonely because they don't know how to develop friendships. I happen to think women are lonely, too, because I think there's an awful lot of petty

jealousy and competition among sisters. And I think that guys have our share of it, too. But I think there's a special kind of competition among girls. And a lot of times there is an inability to be tender with one another. As a result, I think there's an awful lot of loneliness. And so you live in a stressful, lonely world. Sorry to give you the bad news. I guess you probably already know that to some degree. But to make matters, I think it's even harder for you.

You're in a period of unbelievable transition. Many of you are in the middle of the process of growing up and you are trying to make decisions about your life. And you wonder what you're going to be like when you get older and you're trying to hold down a job and you're trying to make grades and develop a social life and kind of figure out who's on first. And then you come into the chapel on Sunday night to worship Jesus Christ and you bring a lot of baggage in that door. You bring a lot of hurt and a lot of heartache.

There's another problem that I think we're facing today, if I can just be honest with you upfront. And that's the problem of impatience. We see people's lives solve problems in an hour on Touched by an Angel. And that's a good show. But at least it's better than 30 minute shows. At least you have twice the time to work on it. But you understand that most of us watch problem-solving take place on television and on television, problems get solved in an hour, 30 minutes. And we develop an impatience when we stand in the line at McDonald's and we have to wait more than five minutes. We're upset. And that's we're just a culture that's in a hurry.

And as a result, many of us have problems, especially at your age, and you get impatient to find the solution to the problem. And I want to say at the very beginning that one of the things God may well be trying to say to you, if you'll listen to him, is to try to learn to be happy without getting the problem solved instead of worrying about getting the problem solved. I'll have more to say about that later. But let me give you a tip off right now. If you become addicted to worrying all the time about getting your problem solved immediately, when you get older, you are going to be a person whose happiness is going to depend upon whether everything is going well. And you're not going to be a very functional adult if that's true.

And so you come into the room and you have a lot of things that are counting against you in your culture and you are not abnormal if when you walk through that door, you bring baggage and hurt and heartache here. Now, many people your age try to solve their heartache by turning to entertainment. Entertainment feels good for a short period of time, and there's nothing wrong with entertainment. But when it becomes a way of avoiding facing our problems, it does become wrong. And many people face their empty, anxious, depressed feelings by renting videos and going to the movies or finding other forms of entertainment. Music functions that way. And as a result, they never learn the skill of how to work to through their hurt and heartache. Believe me, there's nothing wrong with music or videos. It's the use of them to cope with emptiness and problems.

This is why, folks, there are so many people hooked on celebrities. You know why people are hooked on celebrities and why they're so interested in reading magazines with pictures of Hollywood movie stars and so on in it, because people no longer have lives of their own. And they spend all of their time trying to live their lives through other people's lives. Another, I think, failed strategy in dealing with problems, not just seeking entertainment, but it's stuffing your emotions. You know, one of the worst things you can do is to simply stuff your negative feelings and act like they're not there, because when you stuff them, when you're discouraged or anxious and all you do is try to pretend they're not there and shove them, they're still down there and they're going to have an impact on you. It may be physical. Many people have their immune system weakened because they haven't learned to handle their anxiety. They stuff their feelings and it ends up having a deeply negative impact on their lives.

Well, how can you learn to handle your anxiety and depression and your trials? That's what I want to talk about with you tonight. Now, you know, last time I talked about turning to Jesus Christ and many people and I, myself included, think that the ultimate solution is to learn to turn to Jesus Christ with your problems. But there is a difficulty here. Many times when people turn to Jesus Christ, they have false expectations about what should happen when they ask God for help.

And I want to talk to you about that tonight. I also think many people have forgotten some important aspects of how to grow as Christians. And next week, I'm going to talk to you about

some very important things, about prayer and about some other things critical to your spiritual growth. But tonight, I want to talk about how to handle anxiety and depression and how to handle your trials and difficulties. I want to begin with how you can learn to handle your anxiety and your depression.

What is anxiety when you feel anxious? It's usually because there is a threat to something that you want. Anxiety is often when a person feels threatened. The reason that you feel anxious is either because you feel threatened or some value that you have is threatened. And if you have something that threatens you, it will often produce a sense of anxiety in your heart. What is depression? What causes depression? There are a number of causes, but basically depression is anger turned against yourself. When a person is feeling depressed, it's because their will has been thwarted. Somehow something that they wanted has been thwarted. They haven't gotten what they will to have and they get angry about it. Anger is almost always a result of a person's will being barred from getting what it wants. And if you get angry and you turn that anger in at yourself, you get depressed. And a depression is almost always the result of anger turned inside. Now, how do you handle depression and anger?

I want to give you four principles that I think will be tremendously helpful to you if you'll practice them. Before I do, let me tell you that you're going to have to practice these things. These are principles that you're going to have to practice each day. But if you will do it, you will learn to get good at them and your life will become more peaceful and calm as a result.

First of all. The first principle about dealing with anxiety and depression is learning to live one day at a time. Learning to live one day at a time. Would you turn in the Old Testament to the Book of Lamentations, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Lamentations? No Lamentations is after the Prophet Jeremiah, after the Book of Psalms and after the Prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was facing a tremendous amount of anxiety and heartbreak, something that he wanted desperately badly had not happened, and he was literally at the bottom of the barrel. And he began to climb out of his discouragement and his anxiety. And he found some things that gave him strength in the midst of his heartache and something that he says in Lamentations chapter three versus twenty one to twenty three. You've sung this before. Excuse me, verses twenty two to twenty four.

But I want to call your attention to them this evening. It says The Lord's loving kindness indeed never cease for his compassions, never fail. For they are new when? Every morning. Great is my faithfulness. You know, in the New Testament, you don't need to turn there. But in the New Testament, in Matthew, six:thirty four. What did Jesus say? He said, don't worry about tomorrow because each day got enough troubles of its own. And what Jesus was saying is the same thing that Jeremiah is saying. And it's this. Try not to be worried about tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. Because God has given you enough mercies to last for today. He hasn't given you enough mercies to last for a week.

Now, I want to illustrate this. I've got a Nissan Sentra. It's an old beat up car. It's not very attractive. Has one hundred and twenty thousand miles on it. Japanese car, it's a great car. You know something about my Nissan Sentra? It's absolutely remarkable. I don't know if it's true of your car. This is the reason I've kept it so long. When you drive that car at nighttime down the mountain do you know that the headlights stay on the car all the way down that mountain? It's unbelievable. I mean, there have been times I have been driving back from Big Bear at night, and I know that roads curvy and my headlights will shine maybe 200 yards ahead of me. And I think to myself, jeez, what am I going to do about a half mile down the road? I can't see that far.

What the Japanese figured out when I'm a half mile down the road. Dadgum it there my headlights there still shine. And two hundred yards down the road. It's unbelievable. Does your car have that same feature? Yeah, I know it does. What's what's the point? The point is I'm counselling a young lady here while back who said, Dr. Moreland, I am worried to death about not getting married. I said, Are you okay? Are you happy right now? Absolutely. I'm happy right now. But it's just I'm worried that if I don't get married in the next two or three years, I'll be miserable. Now, she was using one day's worth of mercies to worry about three years worth of anxiety, and it doesn't work like that. And what you have to do is while you want to plan for the future, folks, you've got to try to get out of the habit of worrying about long periods of time in the future, because Jesus and Jeremiah are telling us that God will give you the grace to live for today.

Try not to be worried about tomorrow, which you can't control. Concentrate your attention on living for today. Now, how can you do this? Let me give you some practical suggestions. I told you this last week, but this is true. Eighty five percent of the things you worry about never happen. So most of the things that you spend your time worrying about are wasted. You could be using that energy to work on today. So when you worry about things down the road, you're wasting your emotional energy on things that are probably not going to happen anyway. So that's why it's important for you to focus your energies on living a day at a time and to try to stop worrying about what's going to happen in two weeks.

You think, man, I got a problem. If that problem is still with me two weeks from now, I'm going to die. Well, can you make it today? Yeah, I'm all right today. Then concentrate your attention on today. And as a guy who is 51 years old, who doesn't look a day over twenty three, I understand that. But as a fellow who is 51 years old, I want to tell you this honestly works. And I've learned the hard way that it does not pay off to worry long haul when when most of the things you worry about aren't going to happen. You know, here's the second thing you can do to help you with this principle. The principle is not to worry about several days, but to take it a day at a time.

And here's the second thing. Try to remember past events in your life that you were worried about. And remember, that they weren't as bad as you thought they were going to be, try to pick

some things like that. There will be some things that you worried about that turned out worse than you thought. I admit that. But the vast majority of them are the other way. That's why I'm giving you 15 percent of the other way. But what you want to do is strengthen your heart on the things that didn't turn out that way. And I will go back, for example, if you don't if you're going have to go to the dentist and you've been before and it wasn't as bad as you thought. Remember that. Try to pick things in your past that, you know, you spent a lot of time worrying about that did not turn out to be that bad. And let that strengthen you right now that you don't have to worry now about what's going to happen if you don't get rid of this problem day after tomorrow.

Jesus said don't be anxious about tomorrow because each day has got enough problems on its own and you need to take your energy and work on today and not bleated off worrying about tomorrow and the next day.

Principle number two: Develop the art of leaving your anxiety with God. Develop the art of leaving your anxiety with God. Please turn to first Peter chapter five. First Peter. Chapter five. Peter, as you know. Was crucified upside down. We know from church history that shortly after he wrote this book, he was taken to Rome and they executed him on a cross, and hung him upside down and he died being crucified upside down. He was a man who had reason to worry. He had a life of hardship. He faced terrible persecution. And yet, at the end of his life, he's got a sweet heart. He's not bitter. He's not a cantankerous old man. He's learned to suffer well, and he's still a sweet man. Man, I tell you, that's not bad, folks. And what he says that first Peter, chapter

five and verse six and seven is this: Humble yourselves therefore, under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you at the proper time.

If you have skin problems, if you have boyfriend girlfriend problems, if you have grade problems and you think God is not answering your call/ your prayer and you're mad at Him, you need to humble your heart and realize that He may know what He's doing and you don't. He may have something He's trying to do in your life that you're unaware of. And Peter says, cast all of your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. And the idea of casting your anxiety is the Greek word for taking a rock and rolling it up on something and leaving it there.

Paul says in Philippians Chapter four that we are to be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication, let our requests be made known to God. And that principle that I want to share with you is that these are not empty words. These aren't just things we put in the songs and sing. These are realities that will change your life. And you need to learn to cast your worry on God and let Him worry about your problems for you instead of you worrying about them yourself. Now, how can you do this? How can you get better at this? I want to give you some tips.

First of all, when you pray about something you're concerned about and you've let you've talked to the Lord about it in detail, you get up off your knees and you get on with your life. Don't sit around stewing about it after you pray. If you've told the Lord about it and if you want to talk to Him about it later, you schedule an appointment. I'm not kidding you. You get up and you pray about it. You go to breakfast and you say, I'm still worried. You say, I'm not going to. I'm not going to think and I'm going to talk to the Lord about it later. I'm going to talk to Him right before chapel or what have you. But you get up and get busy and get on with things. And you refuse to let your mind go back to you. Just get busy and get on with your life. That's principle number one. You talk to the Lord about it, and then you get on with something, get involved in your homework or do something productive. But don't sit around stewing about it after you've prayed.

Number two: Discern surface anxiety from real anxiety. Let me explain. Still with me out there? We've now learned something about anxiety. And here it is. Many times what people worry about is not what's really bothering them. And the reason is this. They don't want to face what's really bothering them because it's too painful. So instead, what they do is create a surface worry and they spend all their time worrying about it because it's safe.

Illustration. I had a roommate before I got married who constantly worried about whether he'd committed the unpardonable sin. That was not his worry. What he was worried about was whether his parents really loved him, but he could not face that question. It was too painful. So

instead, he spent all of his time worrying about the unpardonable sin and he'd pray, Oh, God, if I committed the unpardonable sin, am I really saved or not. And I'd go through the text with him and explain, yes, you are. And he'd say, But how do I read it? Well, it eventually dawned on me that when he went to prayer to ask God to help him with his anxiety, he wasn't being honest with himself and therefore wasn't being honest with God. He was asking God to overcome this surface anxiety. But that wasn't really what was in his heart.

And if you've got something that you're constantly praying about to God and you're getting no relief on it, I want to give you a tip. Try to ask God to help you get in touch with what is really bothering you underneath the surface. And if you can find out what that is, then you give that to God and leave it there. Here's another principle that will help you. You're gonna think I'm crazy about this one: That's OK. A lot of people think I'm crazy. Schedule time each day to worry. Schedule time to worry, let me illustrate.

When my wife and I were dating, when I was in seminary, we went through a courtship of about a year and a half where I could not make the decision to get married. The closer I would get to getting married, the more nervous I got. And I backed off. When I backed off, I wanted to pursue her again and I came, pursued her again and I just went back and forth like a yo yo yo. I did not know it, but it was because my father had died of cancer as a young boy. And as a result I was afraid of intimacy. But I didn't know that was what was bothering me. I'd get up in the morning and I would get in a shower and I literally honest to Jesus Christ before Jesus Christ. I mean this.

I would get in the shower getting ready to go to Class seven in the morning and I would break out into a sweat in the shower when I wasn't even thinking about the problem.

I had so habituated myself to worrying all day long about the problem that I had literally drained my brain of norepinephrine. And that's a certain chemical in your brain that helps you fight depression. I had depleted my brain chemistry of norepinephrine and I had free-floating anxiety in my heart all day long and I didn't know what to do with it. It was not until, one of my dear seminary professors said to me, J-P, are you worried about this all day? And I said, You know to tell you the truth, I really am. He said why don't you do this. Why don't you pray about it this morning and then tell the Lord you're not going to worry about it until four to five o'clock at night. And then when you're tempted to worry about it during the day, you tell yourself, nope, I'm going to come in and treat myself to a little worry later. I'm going to worry from four to five.

I'm going to worry from four to five o'clock. And I'm going to think about it now because I've got time to worry about this later. Now, no kidding. Let me tell you why I say this. You you want to know the truth? Most of us need worry because we're afraid our lives will be bored if we don't have something to worry about. That's the truth. I'll challenge anybody in here. If you want to learn to stop worrying, you can. But most people deep in their hearts don't want to learn to stop worrying because if they do, they won't have any problems to fix and they're afraid their life will be boring. It's like television if there's not a murder solver or something.

You know, what good would TV be? Well, what good would life be if there's nothing to worry about? It'd be really good, but I would be willing to bet you've never thought that thought. You know what many of us have learned to do? We have learned to need worry to feel good about life. Do you really want to stop worrying? OK. If you're worried about something throughout the day, then what you've got to do is schedule times when you'll let yourself worry about it. And when you're tempted to worry about it during the day, you say, no, wait a minute, I've cast it on the lawn. I prayed about it this morning. I'm not going to worry about it again. Instead, I'm going to wait till four o'clock and I'm going to have 60 solid minutes just to fret and stew over this thing. And I'm going to do it then. That's how you do it.

And during the day, if you're tempted, you say, no, no, wait a minute. No, I'm not going there. I'm going to wait until 4:00. Now, if you can't wait till 4:00, schedule it at 11:00 and schedule one at four. It's better than all day long. But what you want to do is to actually weave into your daily scheduled times to worry if you're worried all day long. And pretty soon you'll need those less than less. And you can learn to go through your day without having to worry for one day. Then you can go through two days and golly day. It actually can start getting longer. Then you find the things you worry about are other people, not yourself. And then it's hard to turn those worries about others over to God. You have to learn that one.

Number three, you OK? This is the final one. The first one is to take it a day at a time. And I've reminded you 85% of the things that you worry about never going to happen anyway. I said recall past cases where you've worried and be strengthened by the fact that they weren't as bad as you thought they were going to be. Secondly, learn to tell the Lord what your problem is and leave it there. How do you do that after you've prayed? Get busy and get on with your life. The second thing I've encouraged you to do is to try to find out if the thing you've cast to the Lord is the thing really bothering you or if it's just a surface issue. Is there really something else? That's the deep problem. And if you find what that is, then learn to give that to the Lord. And the third thing I've suggested is that you schedule time during the day to worry so that when you cast it on the Lord and you're tempted to worry about it 15 minutes later, you say, no, I'm going to leave it with you. I'm going to let you worry about it until four o'clock. And then I'm going to worry about it for four to five, and I'll give it back to you.

Do you think I'm nuts? OK. Sort of. All right. All right. Third, you've got to get your sleep and exercise, OK? Yes. You think I'm a pagan and given secular psychology, don't you? Cal, I'm going to show you, turn to First Kings, Chapter 19. You look at me like that. First, King's 19 [inaudible]. Elijah had engaged in worship and serving serving God, and he had been incredibly successful. And after that, you know what he did? He got depressed and started feeling sorry for himself. And he went away and started hiding. And he finally said, you know what? I don't want to live anymore. I'd just as soon die. Life isn't worth living. And so what God does to him. The First Kings, chapter 19, beginning in verse three, says any lie Jr. was afraid and arose and ran for

his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went for a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a juniper tree.

And he requested for himself that he might die. And he said, It's enough. No, Lord, please take my life, for I am not better than my father's poor guy. And he lay down and he slept under the juniper tree. And behold, there was an angel touching him. And he said to him, start praying more and sing some praise hymns? No, he said to him. Arise, arise and eat. Then he looked and behold there was at his head baked breadcake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. So he ate and drank. And what did he do? He lay down to sleep again, and the angel came later and gave him food again. And he rose and drank. And so on. Now the point of this story is very important. And it's this. There is a spiritual war for your ability to sleep. Do you know one of the first acts of trusting God is committing your life to Him enough to where you can go to sleep?

And I will tell you, one of the most important things that you need to learn to do spiritually is to get enough sleep and to not be all constantly depriving yourself of sleep. Brothers and sisters, you may think this isn't spiritual, but it is. If you don't get enough sleep, you're going to you're going to be anxious. And you you know what a lack of sleep does? It causes you to start feeling sorry for yourself and you will not have the strength to not have a pity party. So I want to urge you if you're anxious. One thing you might need is to start going to bed a little earlier and get four or five good night's sleep. I would urge you, if you can get a wife and get 10 hours one night

like Friday night and just sleep in late, get a good long night's sleep. You need it. You need it, OK? Now, don't go to sleep on me right now [audience laughter].

May I suggest a fourth thing? This is all throughout the Bible; develop close friends with whom you can share your anxieties. You know, I've got Walt Russell and I've got a group of very close friends in addition to my wife with whom I can share when I'm anxious. And you know what? You want to pick friends who will allow you to keep sharing your anxiety with them until you work it through. Don't carry your fears by yourself. Men, especially for you. Men have this idea that we've got to keep our stuff inside ourselves. Brothers, I beg of you, if you keep doing that and you become a father, you're going to communicate to your children that the way an adult is supposed to function is to keep everything inside. Please don't do that. Learn to share your heart with your friends.

How do you handle anxiety? You live one day at a time. You learn to cast your problems on God and leave them there. And I've given you some tips. You concentrate on getting enough sleep above. That is critical. And then finally, you've said you seek to surround yourself with close Christian friends with whom you can share. I am so glad you're at Biola because this is a place where you can go to have friendship relationships, where you can learn to open up on your fears. And let's just set a rule. You may already be doing this. OK? If you are great. But let's just to set a rule from tonight on that if you're anxious and worried and depressed about something and

you've been afraid to share it with your friends, you're free to do so. You're free. So start doing it and open up your heart.

Now, I want to close with one final principle, and this has to do with developing a perspective on endurance. I want to turn to a passage that you might not want to look at, but it's important to see anyway, the book of James. You probably some of you knew that I would go to James before the night was over with. You remember what James said? And James, one, two, three, four. And here's what he says. Let's just read it. And would you do me a favor? When I read this. Would you just for a minute pretend that this guy isn't crazy and that he actually is saying something that might be true? That's all I'm asking you to do. Here's what he says. He says, Count it all joy when you encounter all kinds of hardships and trials, when your boyfriend breaks up with you, when your friends reject you. When you apply for a job and don't get it. When you look in the mirror and don't see something that you want to see. Count it Joy.

Now, does this sound crazy to you? Be honest. It probably does. So let's think why? Knowing that the testing of your faith produces what endurance and led endurance have its perfect result that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. I want to ask you a question. Deep down in your heart, do you want to become the kind of person who has developed a sense of patience and a sense of inner strength so that you can literally endure when hard times come your way and you don't panic and become just off the charts? I hope you do want to become that kind of person. Then can I say from working with college students now for thirty one years. That

people grow five times faster through hard times than through good times. And I will tell you that learning to suffer is one of the most important skills you can ever achieve.

And what James is telling us is that if you will learn to be grateful in the midst of your difficulties, instead of spending all of your time trying to get rid of the problem. But if you will learn to rest in the middle of your heart ache, even though it's not going away, if you will learn that you know what will happen. The devil and the evil one will not be able to do anything to you. Can you imagine? What do you do with the apostle Paul? You say, OK, man, if you don't quit preaching about Jesus, we're going to split and we're going to slit your throat. And so he says, well, I'd rather be with Jesus Christ than here anyway.

No, I mean, he actually said that says, OK, we're gonna - he was beaten with a stick. He was he was stoned, left for dead. The guy gets up and goes back in town. What do you do with a guy like that? You know what happens to a person who's developed that kind of character, folks? Nothing can control them. And the mark of your character is what it takes to stop you. And I want to know, how is it going to stop you? What will it take to stop you? You want to be the kind of a person that the people in your community look at you and think there's something very special about that woman. There's something special about that man. When your children look at you and say, I'm proud that this is my parent or the people in the church say, you know, also. And so I just want to get close to them because there's something awfully real. You want to be

that kind of person. The only way that you will learn to be that kind of person is if you go through heartaches at your age.

Ladies and gentlemen, I know I've told you this before, but I had I had acne that was uncontrollable when I was a young teenager. I came to Jesus Christ and it was hideous looking. I would I would go to a party and there would be blood coming through my shirt. I had acne over my chest in my back. It was so bad that you could see blood. I didn't know it was happening. Sometimes I'd be at a party and somebody would tell me. I came to Jesus Christ and I went to serve him in Vermont for three years without virtually any female companionship that could be considered anything other than just very simple friendship. I did not have the opportunity to date from the time I was 22 years old until I was 27, except in the summers, because I was involved in ministry where I was not in a situation where there were sisters my age with whom I could date.

I waited until I was twenty nine years old to get married. And in those days, which was just shortly after Noah's flood [audience laughter and clapping]. You don't need to clap for that or you're going to have trials that you will never get out of. When I got married, the average marriage age was a lot younger than today. So on today's standards, that means I got married about the age of 33 or so. Now, I had the same sexual appetites as anybody did. I had the same desire to be close to somebody. And I know what it's like to be lonely. I know what it's like to feel bad about myself. But I'm going to tell you that I can remember many, many times alone on Friday night in my room by myself getting learning to get on my knees and to cry before the

Lord about my heart ache and then to sense Him come into that room and touch me and to say to me, you're pretty special to Me. I got some plans for you.

And you know what? You're pretty special to him, too. And he's got plans for you. And I don't have a clue what it is. But I'll tell you one thing I do know. God has got bigger plans for you than you do for yourself. That's the tragedy of it. Ladies and gentlemen, don't settle for anything less than greatness with your life. Be great. Learn to be great with your life. And if you have to go through a little bit of trial and trouble between your 18, 19, 20 and 21 on for a few years, I'm going to tell you, as an old codger that's been down the road, it's worth it if you will learn to rejoice in the middle of your heart ache instead of spending all of your emotional energy angry because [thumping] the problem isn't going away.

And if you will practice this and you're not going to get good at it tomorrow. So if you try it tomorrow when you fail, don't feel guilty, just get up and try it again. The goal is by the time you're say twenty four/twenty five. You have learned to handle suffering to where you don't have to have your way and you'll still be happy. And I'm going to warn you right now, if you try and practice this tomorrow, like I said, it's like tennis. You're not going to get good at this overnight. So don't expect to get up tomorrow morning and to say, Ok, I'm so glad I got my problems. Don't. Don't fake it, but at least try to go that direction. And if you do, I will assure you that you will develop a character that is far more precious than getting rid of your problem.

You know, at the end of the day, ladies and gentlemen, the thing that is important for us to never forget is not just that God answers prayers and solves our problems. He does do that. And I could tell you story after story and you keep asking him if you've got a problem. You keep asking him.

But at the end of the day, the hope that we sing about up here is not just that we have a God that will answer our prayers. That's true. But it's that we have a hope that we can become so strong that even if we never get our way, it'll be OK. Because don't you ever forget, anybody can be happy when things are going well. But it takes character to be happy when they're not. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, I love these brothers and sisters, and I look into their precious, precious eyes and I think what an unbelievable force for good they're going to be when we turn them loose on this culture. And I pray that the hard times they're facing right now that you would so teach them to handle their difficulties, that when they meet other people facing the same suffering and problems, they will be an unspeakable blessing to those people because they will know what it's like and they will know by their heart and not by faking it, that you really are a God that sees us through our difficulties. Thank you so much for this hope. And I want to thank you for speaking to us this evening. In Jesus name. Amen.

Moreland: How to Overcome Discouragement

I'll see some of you next week. Thank you.

[End of recording].