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Facing Problems

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I FRUSTRATION

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FRUSTRATION

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Trinity Sermon No. D35(1)

National Library of Australia Card numbers
and ISBNs:

for this address 0 86945 035 2

for this series 0 86945 903 1

Published by the

TRINITY PUBLISHING SOCIETY

87 North Terrace,

ADELAIDE, South Australia, 5000

a non-profit organisation within Holy Trinity Church,
working for the extension of the Gospel by Christian literature.

THE PROBLEM OF FACING FRUSTRATION

"Why is it that everything I do goes wrong?" Everyone asks that kind of question some time or another. We fail and balk at the simple things of life. For many people life is like walking through a jungle and suddenly meeting a lion on the pathway. We balk, we get nervous, we panic, we get totally frustrated, and consequently never do the things we want to do.

Pressures in the business world are all a part of the rat race as the pace of life increases. For some, frustrations arise through a physical handicap, marriage difficulties and adjustments. A mother is frustrated because Jimmy will squirt the toothpaste all over the bathroom, and maybe Jimmy is frustrated because his parents pamper him! The adolescent feels he is not trusted.

Frustrations assail us in many ways. Psychologists tell us they arise because there are certain impulses and desires, whether conscious or unconscious, which have not been gratified. To put it another way, we get frustrated when some goal or desire or need has been interrupted by an obstacle which prevents us from receiving satisfaction and happiness.

That is why we hear people saying they have worked themselves up into an emotional state. They talk about feeling "tense" or "keyed up" or some just shrug their shoulders and say "What the heck!" We all know from personal experience of such feelings, and we know only too well how difficult it is to respond to anything or anyone in a calm intellectual way.

John Dollard of Yale University "believes that severe or prolonged frustrations heighten tensional states and that, as a result, the person may find an outlet in aggressive behaviour." (Encyclopaedia Americana Vol. X P. 298b). This means that such a person will persist and proceed in spite of the obstacle with every bit of energy he can muster. Now matter how strong the obstacle is he is determined to overcome it, and this may involve becoming violent, bad-tempered, and in the end there will probably be some physical and emotional and spiritual harm. Philip L. Harriman, editor of "Encyclopaedia of Psychology" writes,

"senseless acts of vandalism, physical injury to defenceless persons, wanton destruction, self-injury, and crimes that are easily detectable by police officers, are conceived to be the aggressive behaviour of frustrated individuals, motivated by unreasoning rage or hate." This may well explain the vandalism we witnessed recently in the city when people desecrated the War Memorial with red paint. It is another expression of some pent-up feelings of those whose goals in life have not been reached. A similar expression is seen in the young child who, when frustrated, will get up and go outside and kick the poor cat. I know of a woman who does the same! It gives a kind of satisfaction even though you may not have achieved your aim.

We also know that frustration can eat the heart out of a man, and when that happens we react in many different ways, and sometimes our behaviour becomes painful and hard to bear. It robs us of the power to live, and often has drastic results upon body, mind and spirit. If persistent, it may turn into a neurosis or psychosis.

Now, if all this is true, and if persistent frustrations and unresolved tensions cripple a man's life and bring out the worst in him, it is obvious man has to face them honestly and squarely and do something about them; and the encouraging fact is that man can do something about them.

It would be an over-simplification to say "All you need is more faith to attain your goals" or advise prayer to remove the obstacles. Perhaps you have tried that and found it to be futile and even frustrating, for no matter how hard you try you still fail. It has been said by psychologists and sociologists that Western culture has been and still is unduly severe in its demands upon individuals and, therefore, has imposed inescapable frustrations.

THE PROBLEM OF THE EGO or THE SELF:

Theologically speaking, the root of our frustrations lie in the area of our ego, the self. It means we do not reach our goals or fulfil the will of God because we have not trusted God in every aspect and avenue of life. We tend always to look inwardly and rely on our own physical and spiritual resources.

The common response of contemporary man is to blame God when obstacles appear and to intellectually argue ourselves out of any responsibility in respect to our own inadequacies or shortcomings.

That man tends to do this is shown in a poem written this century by Rudyard Kipling which really sums up man's response to his God when man finds himself frustrated by the obstacles of life and the world. In the first verse a primitive man speaks:

I ate my fill of a whale that died
And stranded after a month at sea...
There is a pain in my inside.
Why have the Gods afflicted me?
Ow! I am purged till I am wraith!
Wow! I am sick till I cannot see!
What is the sense of religion and faith?
Look how the Gods have afflicted me!

Then a man of the twentieth-century is heard to say something which sounds very much like the pagan of old:

Money spent on an army or fleet
Is homicidal lunacy...
My son has been killed in the Mons retreat.
Why is the Lord afflicting me?
Why are murders, pillage and arson
And rape allowed by the Deity?
I will write to "The Times" deriding our parson
Because my God has afflicted me.

In all the five verses man states his theology about his God, and in each case he makes a fundamental error in his attitude towards God and the frustrations and obstacles that befall him. For him, God is wrong and to be blamed, and because God is indifferent to man's inner aspirations and desires and physical welfare, He is resented and finally rejected by pagan and scientific man alike.

But hear what Kipling writes in the last verse as he views things from the Biblical point of view:

This was none of the good Lord's pleasure,
For the Spirit he breathed in man is free:
But what comes after is measure for measure,

And not a God that afflicteth thee.
 As was the sowing so the reaping
 Is now and evermore shall be.
 Thou art delivered to thine own keeping
 Only Thyself hath afflicted thee!

I have quoted at length Kipling's poem because it contains the basic idea that what is really the problem of the individual is not that God doesn't act and help, but that basically man is self-centred and sick and deluded by his own power to cope with the goals of his life. It was not a typist's mistake when Kipling added a capital "T" in his last line, "Only Thyself hath afflicted thee!" - for there you have the problem with human nature. In theory God is not the Almighty Lord of this man's life.

There is a very interesting alternative translation of Isaiah, Chapter 6, which underlines what I am saying. "In the year that Uzziah died, I resolved that with the help of God I would think only positive thoughts and so come to believe in myself. And suddenly I saw myself sitting on a throne high and lifted up: and I knew my own strength and power, and I said, 'I will stamp on my mind a mental picture of myself as succeeding', and when I said, 'Who will help me?' the Lord said, 'Here am I, use Me'" (B.D. Napier).

Here is man insisting on his own independence and power and completely ignoring what the Word of God has to say on how to live in a world where pressures upon man are ever increasing.

HOW DAVID FACED FRUSTRATION:

Modern man has to learn what David had to learn in that where there are frustrations all around us and pressures too great for man to bear we have to cast them all upon God. One of David's great spiritual contributions to the happiness of mankind is the way he tells us he threw himself upon the mercies and care of God and, in turn, found peace and release from all the tensions that were within him. He not only knew what every evangelical knows of a God who cleanses from sin and who restores the broken fellowship, but David knew also of a God who shepherds his soul (Psalm 23) for even in the valley of the shadow of death, with

all its uncertainties and dread, he could say 'I shall not fear for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' In such a situation he is, what the modern generation would say, "cool, calm and collected"! David was a man who truly trusted God in every situation that arose, and even when he failed he came back to God and cast himself upon Him.

St. PETER'S ADVICE:

Many of the answers to the frustrations that come our way are found in God and His tender care. St. Peter wrote to a group of Christians whose goals were continually thwarted and who, because of the persecutions of imperial Rome, were disappointed time and time again as they suffered on account of the gospel. And yet, Peter said, "Cast your cares upon Him for He careth for you." (I Peter 5:7).

Christianity is concerned with the emotional aspect of man, and that is why Peter advises such an effort and action on our part, for he knows only too well how crippling the cares of the world in our life can be. Perhaps one of the worst effects of persistent frustration, when we don't attain our goals in life, is when we cease to blame the obstacle and see ourselves as the problem. By that I mean we can begin to blame ourselves as being hopelessly inadequate and we withdraw and repress our feelings and become so self-conscious that we eventually give up trying to attain anything.

That is why frustration is, in the end, self-destructive. The antidote is to turn to God and pour your heart out to Him for, as St. Peter says, 'He careth for you'. We need to make a decisive act of committal of all that burdens us and cast them or throw them upon God. God doesn't say He will remove the obstacles, but He does say He can do something about our emotional reaction to them.

St. PAUL'S EXPERIENCE:

Paul's answer to worry and frustration is prayer to God. To the Church at Philippi he wrote, "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in

Christ Jesus." (4:6-7).

Paul wrote to these Philippians who tended to become daunted, and showed them that there was a power outside of themselves which would ultimately bring peace. That there were pent-up feelings towards other people is obvious from this same Chapter (4:2) because Euodias and Syntyche, two women, could not work side by side. You could imagine almost one of them saying, "She absolutely frustrates me!" No wonder they have been nicknamed 'Odious' and 'Sotouchy'! Paul had to say something about them and about the whole church for he knew that where there are pent-up feelings grave personality difficulties may follow. Careers are ruined and friendships are destroyed. Therefore, believing prayer is the answer.

And Paul also knew that the grace of God was able to meet the probable frustration that arose over his thorn in the flesh. As Paul was thwarted by this handicap (whatever it may have been) God said, "My grace is all you need; power comes to its full strength in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:7-9 NEB).

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARDS FRUSTRATIONS:

But the teaching of Jesus on this subject strikes a new and radical note in respect to human problems, because Jesus outlaws and condemns anything that tends to frustrate man in his effort to find the meaning for his life and his true destiny. He condemned the Pharisees for they laid burdens on the people hard to bear (Matt. 23:4) and therefore had frustrated many in their attempt to find true liberty through the Law of Moses. And when you look at the hundreds of laws present in those days, who wouldn't be frustrated?

Jesus was also deeply concerned for people who were harassed. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless; like sheep without a shepherd." (Matt. 9:36). Before He sent out His disciples into the world, He instructed them in what to expect for He knew they would experience disappointment and frustration because He knew the heart of man was hard as stone. "I send you out as sheep among wolves." (Matt. 10:16). In respect to His earthly departure, He encouraged them and said, "Do not let your heart be

troubled and neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27).

HOW JESUS FACED FRUSTRATION:

There is something about the life of Jesus that we all need to grasp. His goal in life was to do His Father's will, but time and time again He was tempted to do something else. Obstacles were put in His road but have you ever thought how He acted emotionally towards them? You will recall that when He saw Jerusalem it reduced Him to tears. He saw the hostility, the cross, the agony, the death, and yet He was never frustrated. He came to do His Father's will and calmly He walked on down the road as one whose inward strength and peace of mind cannot be undermined by the will of men.

Thomas did his best to stop Jesus from going to Lazarus on account of the Jews who wished to kill them. But calmly He went. This was no real obstacle that would frustrate Him (John 11). And you will recall, He refused to run away from Herod's threat. Under questioning and cross-examination He remained silent. He was "calm as a cucumber" even though the charges were false and their motives wrong.

Jesus was often annoyed and angry, and sometimes wept. The goal of His life was tested when He was smitten, scourged, spat on. In the Garden of Gethsemane He was confronted with the agony of the Cross, and for a moment it almost became an obstacle between Him and His Father's will... In all this He was tested but never frustrated for He came to do His Father's will, and there we find the secret of success. He was not going to let anyone, whether it be disciple or enemy, frustrate Him. Even His critics detected this imperturbable quality about His life (Mark 12:14). He lived a God-filled life. His vessel was possessed by the Spirit of the living God. Therefore, He had real power to cope with situations or circumstances that might come His way.

He lived a life of obedience for He knew of no other will for His life than God's. He was a man of prayer, and sometimes when there was a crisis before Him He would spend all the night in prayer.

Of course, we are very different from Christ Who was perfect

Man, but we have seen something of His attitude regarding frustration. The fact is He wants you to reach your goals. Maybe Christ is trying to teach you that your present goals are too high and that is why you are frustrated. Maybe you are following someone's advice and you find it hard to bear. Maybe you feel crushed and hopelessly inadequate.

How will we face the frustrations and tensions of this week?

In the words of David, "In God, whose word I praise, In God I trust without a fear." (Psalm 57:10-11).

In the words of St. Peter we need to resolve to cast all our burdens upon God for He cares for us.

With Paul we need to commit our goals and aspirations in prayer to God so that we can face obstacles calmly and confidently and we will have something of that peace of God which passes our understanding. We will also know that God's grace is sufficient to meet any need that arises.

And although God does not promise immunity from frustration, as He does not promise immunity from sin in all the storms and pressures of this life, yet He does promise His grace and peace and concern and power in the Person of Jesus Christ, and that becomes a present reality when we conceive of His indwelling Spirit within us.

Under God's sovereign rule, man can find a new orientation for his life, in which God's will controls all our goals and aims. These are some of the Scriptural laws and promises of God which can revolutionise your whole life, and they will make you the kind of person God wants you to be as you face the problem of frustration.

Peace is one of the gifts that Jesus promises to His people. We learn that this peace comes as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, bringing repentance, the assurance of forgiveness, and the confidence that God is watching over us.

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FRUSTRATION

Maybe it is just the Australian temperament. Maybe it is a combination of selfishness and affluence. Whatever its cause, frustration is a widespread problem among God's people and others in Australia today. John Gelding puts it in its proper perspective, and through a look at how some men of God handled the difficulty, leads us to see God's solution in our own personal situation.

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