

# Learning Dependence on God—

# Again

*Like Jesus, we can face opposition if we connect to God in prayer.*

BY GAVIN ANTHONY

SOMETIMES I WONDER IF I WILL EVER learn what God tries to teach me. Just when I think I understand, it suddenly feels as though I know nothing at all.

This happens sometimes, because we never understood the lesson in the first place. At other times, these life lessons open doors to new experiences—God shows us that there is so much more He wants to teach us.

One lesson that God has repeatedly brought to my attention over the past 12 years is complete and total dependence on Him. Each time I think this lesson is forever seared into my understanding, I inexplicably begin to behave as though I never learned anything.

But I share my journey, as I don't believe I am alone in this struggle.

## Trapped in Discouragement

God led me toward greater dependence on Him just recently. Our camp meeting speaker began his Sabbath sermon by announcing that he had suddenly decided to change the topic for the morning. He then made a startling comment: he had been meeting more and more people going through terrible discouragement.

As I sat on the platform with him, I had to turn my head away from the congregation. I felt broken inside, and I couldn't stop my own tears of discouragement from welling up in my eyes.

For the first time in my life I experienced overwhelming

discouragement. In the past, I wrestled with God and persevered. But this year, I didn't want to fight anymore. I recognized that I had all the symptoms of depression, and I didn't know what to do.

I blamed God for failing me, so I angrily told Him I would quit. But then I realized that quitting would not help me change.

## Are We Like Peter?

A few days later, I met Peter, in Gethsemane.

This story is important, because it describes why people crumple under pressure. It also outlines issues and circumstances that we will face as the second coming of Jesus draws nearer.

Why do some of God's most devoted followers fall into discouragement? Consider these three possibilities from the Gethsemane story.

*First*, we may stumble because we underestimate the strength of the opposition. The threats we face as God's people are always supernatural and personal. As Jesus told Peter clearly on the way to Gethsemane, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). This was supernatural opposition, and all of the disciples were targets. Satan wanted to tempt all of Jesus' disciples to prove that they weren't loyal to Him. And God allowed Satan to do so.

This should not surprise us. God had told Israel He would test them: "For I will give the command, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a



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sieve, and not a pebble will reach the ground” (Amos 9:9).

But how does God test His people? Like Jesus in the desert, God allows us to be exposed to Satan’s temptations. Ellen White notes: “To all the testing time will come. By the sifting of temptation the genuine Christian will be revealed.”<sup>1</sup> Peter and the disciples underwent this test in Gethsemane. But they didn’t fully comprehend the strength of supernatural opposition.

*Second*, we falter because we overestimate our strength. As soon as Jesus reminded the disciples that the Scriptures foretold that they would “all fall away” from Him, Peter replied with certainty and conviction: “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will” (see Matt. 26:31-33).

Jesus responded: “I tell you the truth, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” But Peter declared even more forcefully: “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ And all the other disciples said the same” (see verses 34, 35).

But Peter and the disciples were blind. They didn’t realize that under supernatural attack, they were powerless.

This problem is no minor issue. In Revelation 3:17 Jesus explains that blindness is one of the conditions that will cripple the witness of Laodicea, God’s end-time church.

Fortunately, Jesus goes on to say that eye salve—symbolizing the Holy Spirit—heals blindness. But why did Laodicea lack the Holy Spirit?

I suggest that the cause of both Laodicea’s and Peter’s blindness is exactly the same—total overestimation of their

own power and ability against supernatural opposition.

*Third*, we fail because we often do what comes naturally. It is not surprising that the disciples were sleeping “because their eyes were heavy” (Matt. 26:43). It was night, the time for sleep.

But the circumstances demanded something different, unnatural, even uncomfortable. At the very time it was natural to sleep, the disciples had to stay awake.

Three times Jesus urged His disciples to watch and pray, and three times they slept, with tragic consequences (verses 36-46). Having given in to natural impulses, Peter awoke, confused and afraid. As the crowd arrived to take Jesus, Peter whipped out his sword and lashed out at the person in front of him. Then, after Jesus rebuked Peter for this rash act and addressed the crowd, “all the disciples deserted [Jesus] and fled” (verse 56).

### **Standing Firm Under Pressure**

In contrast Jesus did not buckle once. Before Judas and his coconspirators arrived, Jesus stood up and roused His disciples: “Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!” (verse 46). Amazingly, He had found strength to confront His enemies.

What enables people to stand firm in the face of such overwhelming pressure? I think understanding Jesus’ call to “watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation” (verse 41) is critical.

*First*, we will endure when we “watch . . . so that you will not fall into temptation.”

As Jesus prayed with His face to the ground, He clearly saw what was happening. It was Satan's last chance: "Now the tempter had come for the last fearful struggle. For this he had been preparing during the three years of Christ's ministry. Everything was at stake with him. If he failed here, his hope of mastery was lost; the kingdoms of the world would finally become Christ's; he himself would be overthrown and cast out. But if Christ could be overcome, the earth would become Satan's kingdom, and the human race would be forever in his power."<sup>2</sup>

Today, Satan can no longer derail God's plan of salvation, but he can use his power to discourage the faith of God's people. Never forget that "he is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short," and he is most effective when no one is watching (Rev. 12:12).

Second, we will stand firm when we pray. Prayer is our only secure connection to power outside ourselves. How could Jesus endure under overwhelming pressure? He was securely connected: "Behold the Son of God bowed in prayer to His Father! Though He is the Son of God, He strengthens His faith by prayer, and by communion with heaven gathers to Himself power to resist evil and to minister to the needs of men."<sup>3</sup>

As we live out the final hours of earth's history, we cannot forget to pray: "Neglect of prayer leads men [and women] to rely on their own strength, and opens the door to temptation."<sup>4</sup> We will need the power of God even more!

### Not a Coincidence

God used the Gethsemane story to rewire my thinking. My wife and I went to a summer house for a few weeks, and I began to pray. Rather, I pleaded, begged, even wrestled with God for supernatural power.

Gradually, while relearning to exert faith in prayer, I began to experience a new strength building within me. I can't adequately express how dramatically my physical, emotional, and spiritual state of being changed—it was truly miraculous.

My experience is not unusual. Ellen White observed: "God often brings men [and women] to a crisis to show them their own weakness and to point them to the source of strength. If they pray and watch unto prayer, fighting bravely, their weak points will become their strong points. Jacob's experience contains many valuable lessons for us. God taught Jacob that in his own strength he could never gain the victory, that he

must wrestle with God for strength from above."<sup>5</sup>

Two days after returning home, God allowed me to witness the same struggle in a friend's life. As we talked, I noticed a great burden creasing his face. My friend shared his profound discouragement. His depression was so strong, he had just ordered some pills from the doctor. Strangely, the more he talked, the more surprised I became. I thought I was listening to myself only a few weeks before.

"You know, this is a supernatural battle," I offered. "How's your prayer life?" He looked down sadly and replied, "I haven't been able to talk to God for a long time."

I shared with him my recent experience. I had prayed at the beginning of each day, quickly at night, and even during the day. But these were not prayers of real faith that could heal my aching soul. Whenever I thought about praying, I felt paralyzed inside,

even irritated or angry—strange for someone who had been teaching and preaching about the importance of prayer throughout his ministry.

We talked about faith, prayer, and the restoration of the Holy Spirit. The more I shared, the more I could hear my own voice echoing back to me. Yes, God had sent me to my friend, but He was reminding me that He had been at work in me.

As I left, my friend said, "I think God sent you to me tonight." I couldn't help agreeing.

A few weeks later, I visited my friend again. The first thing I noticed was his glowing face. He had been totally transformed.

At the end of time, as Satan prepares his final stand, Jesus urges all of His disciples again: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Matt. 26:41).

<sup>1</sup>*The Great Controversy*, p. 625.

<sup>2</sup>*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 686, 687.

<sup>3</sup>*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup>*Selected Messages*, vol. 2, p. 352.

<sup>5</sup>*Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 454.

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Gavin Anthony is the director of discipleship and youth ministries in the Iceland Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Reykjavik, Iceland.

