

# Don't Give Up

By Rita Langeland

Have you ever felt like leaving a place that you know God sent you? Or were you tempted to give up on a plan, project, purpose or relationship that you are sure God initiated? If so, you are in good company.

Paul the Apostle had a young protégé named Timothy. He referred to him as “my true child in the faith.” As his spiritual son, Paul had enough confidence in him to leave him as the temporary overseer of the church in Ephesus which Paul had planted. Though Paul knew that the Ephesian church had problems with certain men trying to teach strange doctrines (Eph.1:3) he was confident that Timothy was mature enough to handle the situation. Paul wrote a letter to Timothy reminding him of his assignment:

***As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus...***

In our more modern language, Paul was telling Timothy, “Hang in there! Don't give up! Remain at your post!” This letter was a reiteration of what Paul had urged Timothy to do when he first left him in Ephesus. Paul had good reason for repeating his previous exhortation to Timothy about staying at his post. Timothy was a young man (most likely in his early 30's) and it appears that some of the older people in that church were having a hard time respecting his leadership. Paul addressed this issue when he wrote, “**Let no one despise your youth...**” in 1 Timothy 4:12. Facing such opposition had to make remaining in Ephesus especially uncomfortable for Timothy. The temptation to leave a place he felt unappreciated and unwanted was undoubtedly pressing upon him. But Paul's instructions were clear, “Remain on at Ephesus!”

When we are in an unpleasant and difficult situation, the natural, human reaction is to desire to leave. If you have given your best effort for a long period of time to a relationship or to a situation and see no change, the temptation in our “results oriented” society is to “cut your losses.” Yet God does not see things the way man sees things. He told the prophet Isaiah this very thing in Isaiah 55:8 -

***“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.***

God will often require us to stay and pour out love and effort into people or places that appear to be unreceptive to our efforts and unfruitful in response because God can see the END from the beginning. In our humanness, we can only see (and feel) the present discomfort or frustration we are experiencing. Yet God knows it is not a vain exercise. There is divine purpose in all of God's ways.

In 1812, a young missionary named Adoniram Judson set sail for India with his new bride. They faced immediate frustration and seeming failure when they were refused entry into the country where they planned to give their lives as missionaries. But God had a purpose in what looked like disaster, when a door opened for them to begin their missions work in Rangoon, Burma, (now called Myanmar) a place where there was not a single Christian believer. Again, fruitlessness appeared to plague the young couple and the temptation to give up must have been enormous. But after six long and heart-breaking years of witnessing to the Burmese people, they baptized their first convert. They suffered incredible opposition to their message of a hope-filled Gospel from the idolatrous religious leaders in Burma. They accused them of being British spies, resulting in Judson being imprisoned for 21 months. Yet they did not give up. By the time Adoniram Judson died in 1850, a government survey found 210,000 professing Christians, equivalent to one in 58 of the population of Burma at that time.

Often times our efforts may appear to be without fruit, and yet God is working behind the scenes in ways we do not know. This is especially true in the area of relationships. There was a Christian mother who had faithfully raised her children to know and love God. She was widowed when the children were still young. The loss of their father was especially painful for the family, yet she continued to love and care for her children and encourage them to trust God. But her son was embittered at God by the death of his father and began to rebel at every turn. After a stormy adolescence which involved drug use and scrapes with the law, the son left the home to the great distress of the mother. The mother spent years

praying for that prodigal son without hearing a word from him. Then one day, the mother heard a knock at her door. She opened it to find a neatly groomed, well dressed young man standing before her.

She was stunned as she recognized the son who had been gone for nearly ten years and was in such shock she could not say a word. The young man asked gently, "May I come in?" As the two sat in the living room, he began to share the story of his wanderings over the past decade. He told her how no matter how deep in trouble he found himself, he kept remembering her faithful love for him. He told her how in the night he could hear her praying with tears for his life. The day came when he fell on his knees and wept before the Lord and asked for God to cleanse his heart of all the bitterness and anger he had carried over the years. Slowly he rebuilt his life and was now working steadily and wanted to reconcile with the mother he had wounded so deeply by his absence. That mother's faithful love and prayers were not in vain even when they appeared to be fruitless.

It is so important that we do not abandon the work or the relationships that God has given us even when they seem to be futile exercises. We cannot choose to leave because the situation is hard for us, because there are other people - in fact generations of people - that our decisions will deeply affect. I was reminded of this by the Lord through a vivid dream I had four years ago. The dream had to do with the orphanage work in Tanzania.

In the dream, I found myself so discouraged that I had decided to close the orphanage. The dream was painful on every level. I woke up quite suddenly, feeling distraught, emotionally exhausted and horrified at the dream. I immediately prayed, asking God the meaning of that dream, since in reality I was not feeling discouraged about the work nor had I ever considered closing the orphanage. But in my spirit, I heard, "Pay attention to the symbolism. When a person allows himself to become discouraged and hopeless and opens the door to despair so that he gives up and does not fulfill what I have called him or her to do, it not only affects that individual, it has multi-generational impact. Generations I intended to touch are cut off forever. Then the individual, who did not obey Me, loses credibility with others (both believers and non-believers) for not doing what God told them to do."

I am sharing this very personal experience with you to exhort you to not give up on people or assignments that God has given to you. The impact of surrendering to discouragement or despair is much bigger than you know. Trust God that He is working even when you cannot see results, for the day will come that a reward for your faithfulness will be evident to all.

***But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.***

***2 Chron 15:7 NIV***

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