

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Dealing with life's disappointments

Presented by Chris Witts

Dealing with disappointments is part of life for all of us. No exceptions. They can be large or small, come in all shapes and sizes, and most of them come and go without too much problem. If there's a movie we'd like to watch and it's left the theatre we can wait till it's out on DVD. It's not all that important. When we're young our disappointment can be something as simple as not getting invited to a birthday party. But, of course, at that age it *can* be a big disappointment. As we grow older they change in their perspective.

Set backs can't be avoided. And yet it seems to me that so many people struggle with this issue and allow disappointments to ruin their life and sometimes they suffer as a result. Some people I know have had *multiple* disappointments and it hits them very hard. They ask, "why me?"

1.

Having a look at the Christian faith for a few minutes will help us remember that, with God, even disappointments are not final. There are many verses in the Bible that encourage us to keep going even when we feel like giving up or withdrawing because of some big disappointment. Believe it or not, dealing with the let-downs of life can open new ways of finding hope, especially as we invite God to be part of that journey with us. We can always rely on Him for support, love and divine guidance because He understands and wants to assist us work through the issues, if only we'd ask. It's a funny thing that having faith in Him enables us to more effectively deal with the shortcomings of life.

In the Walt Disney movie "The Sword and the Stone", we meet up with Merlin the Magician and King Arthur. Merlin likes to teach young Arthur some lessons through songs. One of the songs says "to and fro, back and forth, that's what makes the world go round". What he was trying to say is that the ups-and-downs of life are with everyone, and for each step forward there will be on step backwards. I've heard people say life is like taking 2 steps forward and 5 backwards. Set-backs face everyone. I read somewhere that "being challenged in life is inevitable – being defeated is optional". You have a choice of allowing disappointments defeat you or allowing something positive to come out of it. We have plans and goals and sometimes these things come to realization, and sometimes they don't.

I heard of the little girl who was asked, "What is a string bag?". She thought about it for a moment and said "A string bag is a lot of holes joined together with string". Disappointment is a bit like that – a lot of sad events joined together with some success, or success joined together with a lot of disappointment. You might have had your fair share of disappointment and feel like "throwing in the towel".

Maybe it's been a divorce, moving away from family or close friend, chronic health problems, or loss of a job. Or you've watched as your dreams crashed and someone you loved let you down. You may have left school early failing important exams, missing out on a good quality education. Or not taking up a particular job offer when you should, and now all you have is lots of regrets. Some disappointments are so huge they never seem to go away.

Life is like a river that keeps flowing regardless of the obstacles in its path. Don't stay trapped. Acknowledge the trouble, give it space, acknowledge the Lord and pick yourself up.

Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a book called "Overcoming Life's Disappointments", his 10th book on how to cope with life. Here's part of what he says: "*I have known too many people who could not enjoy the last third of their lives because the first two-thirds did not turn out the way they had hoped, and they were angry at God. How does a person get over the bitterness, that sense of being cheated by life? The answer is, I believe, involves a delicate balance of remembering and forgetting*".

Then Kushner says, "*Life is tough – let's be strong enough not to be broken by it*".

It seems to remind me that we live in a world that is not predictable and automatic. Sometimes our finest hopes just do not eventuate and we can pray and pray, but it doesn't seem to change the outcome.

Hawaiian teenage surfer Bethany Hamilton started competitive surfing at age 11, and by age 13 was an accomplished surfer and well-respected in the surfing world. Then one horrible day in October 2003 she was attacked by a 14 foot tiger shark and lost her left arm. She amazed everyone 3 months later, back in the surf, telling anyone who'd listen.

Featured widely in the media she said "This was God's plan for my life, and I'm going to go with it". She has inspired millions who see her as a symbol of courage and inspiration. "It's me and my board out in God's ocean". She continues to compete and amazes everyone by achieving the unimaginable. As a committed Christian, Bethany Hamilton believes God wants her to keep going with faith in Him.

2.

Have you ever been seriously disappointed? My guess is you have. At school we learn to face disappointments when we didn't get the teacher we hoped for, or when we suddenly realize that grown-ups are not perfect. Life comes bundled with disappointments. As we grow older we learn not to be so idealistic and learn to accept that life is not perfect.

It's amazing how many successful people lived with a sense of disappointment. *Alexander the Great* conquered Persia but broke down and wept because his troops were too exhausted to push onto India. *Robert Louis Stevenson* wrote words that enriched many people's lives; but what was written for his epitaph? "*Here lies one who meant well, who tried a little, and failed much*". Even great people can't escape disappointments.

I like the story of *Fanny Crosby*, the American woman who suffered blindness at 6 weeks of age when an apprentice doctor applied the wrong remedy and she was left blind. But this didn't prevent her from living a remarkable Christian life. Fanny Crosby lived to 95 years of age and wrote more than 8,000 hymns including the hymn "*Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine*". She preached and spoke to audiences around the world, helping anyone in their troubles. She was a friend to 22 Presidents of the United States. She married but her infant child died. But do you know that she could actually thank God for her blindness? How could anyone do that? Fanny Crosby knew Jesus Christ as a personal Lord and Saviour, and He helped her.

When she as only a child of eight she wrote – "*What a happy child I am, although I cannot see. I am resolved that in this world contented I will be. How many blessings I enjoy that other people don't. To weep and sigh because I'm blind, I cannot and I wont*"

Sometimes we complain about our lot in life, but I think Fanny Crosby is a great inspiration of faith and how to handle disappointments. Even if you're facing loss of health, loneliness, maybe having to sell your home and enter a retirement home, set-backs *can* be a bridge to cross to a happier life, with faith in a loving God.

3.

In the New Testament we meet the apostle Paul, a rugged and tough individual who had his fair share of disappointments. In his letter to the Philippians he spoke of running towards a goal. He put it like this: *"I have not yet reached my goal, and I am not perfect. But Christ has taken hold of me. So I keep on running and struggling to take hold of the prize. I don't feel that I have already arrived. But I forget what is behind and I struggle for what is ahead. I run towards the goal, so that I can win the prize of being called to Heaven. This is the prize that God offers because of what Christ Jesus has done"* (Philippians 3:12-14). Paul had to meet enormous challenges of being misunderstood and betrayed.

He faced hostile congregations who didn't trust him, and plans to get rid of him. But did you know that God had a plan for Paul that would change the course of Christianity? His mission was to take the gospel to the Gentiles. His credentials were impeccable, and yet he faced the toughest challenges anyone could meet. So determined was he to serve Jesus Christ he was prepared to put up with all sorts of hardships and difficulties simply because God had a plan for his life.

He wrote *"Suffering helps us to endure. And endurance builds character which gives us a hope that will never disappoint us. And all of this happens because God has given us the Holy Spirit, who fills our heart with his love"* (Romans 5:4-5)

What it means today is that whatever challenges we face, or obstacles we meet, we can be more than conquerors with God's help. He has an amazing way of bringing good out of our disappointments. Just give him time to show you.

Sometimes I have met Christians who feel their faith has let them down. Let me explain what I mean. We can rely on our family or close friends to help in times of disappointment, or talk to our Minister or counselor. Or we can use relaxation techniques. And of course our faith in God is there to sustain us. We can pray and read verses from the Bible and have faith. But there's a problem here. We often pray for things to happen and when they don't, our feelings of disappointment can deepen. What's happened? Has God abandoned us? Is He still listening?

Like a little child asking for gifts from Santa, we begin to question His existence. Now, God is not Santa. God does listen and answer our prayers, regardless of how things might appear.

Former US President Jimmy Carter was a man of deep faith. He was once asked if he believed God answers all our prayers. He smiled and said "Of course He answers all our prayers. Sometimes the answer is 'yes'; sometimes the answer is 'no'; and sometimes the answer is 'you've got to be kidding me'. What Jimmy Carter was saying is this. We need to be willing to understand that life has many disappointments, but we can *always* rely on Him for support, love, blessings, and guidance. He will help us deal with the daily let-downs if we'll only ask

I'm reminded of the New Testament story Luke tells. Two men were extremely disappointed. They were very sad that their friend and Saviour Jesus Christ had been handed over and sentenced to death and was crucified. That Sunday morning they were walking along the road towards Emmaus from Jerusalem, a

journey of 12 kilometres, very discouraged. Luke says “they looked sad and gloomy”. This Jesus, the miracle-working teacher from Galilee, had come from God as the Messiah. And yet He had been nailed to a cross with two others. His supporters had run away and it looked hopeless. The Saviour was dead – the new Movement was over! They were dragging their feet walking home, tired, disillusioned, dispirited. Their hope had also been nailed to a cross.

But suddenly the *risen* Jesus walked alongside them and because it was getting dark they didn't recognize Him. He asked them what they were talking about there on the road. “Surely you're the only stranger in Jerusalem who has not heard?” But the risen Jesus took time to explain and interpret the Scriptures to them and when they arrived home they shared a meal together. Then, to their amazement, they recognized Him as the resurrected Jesus. Talking about it later to others they said “When he talked with us along the road and explained the Scriptures to us, didn't it warm our hearts?” Their disappointments disappeared as they realized Jesus was with them, and everything would be OK.

Disappointments do hurt, but when we invite Jesus to walk with us, everything makes sense – eventually. It may not happen overnight, but it will.

I heard about a young dancer who was badly hurt in a car accident and she was in hospital for months. Her leg was in a cast and suspended on weights and pulleys and she was immobile for months. She was a dancer – how could she stand that kind of immobility for so long? She said “I would have died except for one thing. Every day, sometimes several times a day, I mentally danced the 23rd Psalm. It's so beautiful. It gave me patience to wait”.

If you're getting frustrated and angry, talk to Jesus today.

Conclusion

Years ago, a young cartoonist lost his job and was told he had no talent. He decided to work for himself and found one customer, a minister who paid him a small amount to draw some advertising for his church. The man had nowhere to live and the Minister let him stay in his old garage which was infested with mice. But while there, he drew cartoons and nicknamed one little mouse Mickey Mouse. From his days of failure and disappointment, Walt Disney became a world-wide success, overcoming obstacles and living his mission with a right perspective.

If you're feeling trapped and disappointed today, let me remind you that God says “I will never fail you. I will never forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). There is hope even when it doesn't seem that way. The more we can stake our security in God's enduring love, the less power disappointments have to undermine our hope. His plans are always bigger than we think and a relationship with Him through Jesus gives us hope, not just for now but into eternity.

Heavenly Father, how great it is to know Your ways are better than ours and that even in the middle of our personal disappointments, You are right there to give hope and guidance. We need that, Lord, for there is no better solution. Help us to take it to heart today and always. Amen.