

Losing Heart: The Christian's Fierce Foe

James McAlister

I face an enemy daily, sometimes hourly. Perhaps you know him too. Many are his names. So ubiquitous, so pervasive, so insidious is he that the New Testament identifies him six times as "Losing Heart." Losing Heart invites us to embrace discouragement, agree to quitting, welcome defeat. His solicitations demand from us an emphatic "No!" Perhaps it would be a boost to see some of the ways Losing Heart finagles a foothold—and the remedy we have in each case.



Unfair Circumstances

Jesus taught a parable about a widow who was being unfairly oppressed. Unfortunately, her only recourse was to repeatedly appeal her case to an unrighteous judge who neither feared God nor respected man. Deciding ahead of time to do nothing for her, he permitted the unfairness to linger exceedingly before eventually relenting to her continued solicitations.

But why did Jesus choose this seemingly peculiar story as an object lesson? To teach his followers to pray—despite tenacious unfairness—without losing heart. Interestingly, encapsulating the lesson in "mathematical" form reveals both problem and solution:

Unfair Circumstances minus Prayer equals Losing Heart.

Unfruitful Labors

As life experience mounts, our eyes adjust to other ways Losing Heart mounts his attacks. Parents toil to instill a particular trait into a child but observe no favorable result. A hard-working employee grieves when the big promotion goes to a less-qualified cohort. A layoff comes, dashing decades of faithful service in a moment. Sometimes labor just doesn't seem to bear good fruit, does it?

The Apostle Paul addressed this issue: "Whatsoever a man sows, that will he also reap." And though the natural inclination is to interpret these words in the negative sense, his next statement proves the thrust to be decidedly positive. "Do not lose heart, for in due time you will reap if you do not grow weary." Persist in sowing good seed even when the fruit isn't immediately manifest; it may come in a different season. Don't surrender. Don't abandon hope.

Unfruitful Labor minus Persistence equals Losing Heart.

Unwanted Suffering

My enemy's third face has proven the most difficult for me, so I've saved it till last. Suffering brings tears, so who wants suffering?

Paul and suffering often traveled hand in hand; they knew each other well. In one passage he reports, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." But the apex comes thusly: "Therefore we do not lose heart, for though the outer man is perishing, yet the inner man is being renewed day by day; the things which we can see are temporary, but the things we can't see are eternal."

That's perspective! What's happening on the inside is of more enduring significance than temporary external circumstances.

Unwanted Suffering minus Perspective equals Losing Heart.

When I shared these thoughts at a high school graduation ceremony not long ago, I knew the graduates couldn't possibly comprehend them until later in life. But I had no idea that within just six months this enemy, Losing Heart, emboldened by my wife's terminal cancer, would be roaring his way through our lives.

To those who may be in similar straits, physical, emotional or spiritual, I offer this: Though your enemy rise up against you a thousand times, resist him. He will back down. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

*But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the Lord;
I will wait for the God of my salvation.
My God will hear me.
Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy.
Though I fall I will rise;
Though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me.*

Micah 7:7-8

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