

Climbing out of the deep black hole

31/8/01

A few years ago, we were digging a well, and I decided to climb down to inspect the bottom. It was already about 12-14 metres deep, and the top third had spikes hammered into the side of the shaft to make climbing easy. For the rest of the way, footholds had been haphazardly cut out of the side walls. So down I went. I had already been quite tired after a long day's work, and by the time I reached the bottom I felt quite exhausted. I had forgotten that I was not as young and agile as I used to be, and as I stood in the bottom of the deep dark hole, the climb back up suddenly looked formidable. I was alone - a silly mistake - and as the late afternoon light was fading quickly, I knew I had no time to spare - I had to climb out.

About 8 metres up I nearly slipped, and a fear gripped me. I clung onto the side, feeling every moment that my strength was ebbing away. That's a frightening position to be in - when you're alone, and it seems likely that you won't make it! I knew I could not afford the luxury of time nor fear. I had to do something - and that very quickly. I sent up a quick prayer - "HELP!" - and summoned all the courage and strength I could to keep climbing. Each foothold was a foothold closer to the top - but also potentially a further distance to fall if I slipped. Up, up, up I climbed until at last I reached the steel pegs. That felt a bit safer, but I still had two more metres to go. Up, up, up until at last I clambered over the edge to safety. I sat there for a while, thanking God for the courage and strength He gave.

I like climbing, and I don't usually get frightened too easily. But there have been some tense moments to be sure - like the time I was very high on a lone rock - my own stupidity for climbing it without ropes.

Realising it was too dangerous to climb back the way I came, I decided to jump across a deep precipice to another lower rock quite a few metres away. A mistake, and I would fall to my death on the jagged rocks far below. I sat for a long time on that rock, contemplating my next move. I was frightened, but I knew I had no alternative. I just had to jump as hard and far out as I could. As frightened as I was, I did it. That time I ended up with two shattered heels and three months in a wheel chair - but I got back to the ground alive - just!

There are times of crises in our lives where we need to summon every ounce of courage and strength we have. Physical times like those I described above are no different from emotional times of fear we sometimes endure - though the emotional times of stress might last much longer. One such time was when my company was very near bankruptcy and the financial pressure was almost more than I could cope with. The reason for my crises was really my own poor financial management, but it was very tough seeing everything go wrong. You are tempted to ask, "Why me Lord?" Those of you who have been there know what I am talking about.

It was at that time that I learnt a vitally important lesson of life. In the early hours of the morning I was praying - calling out to the Lord to help me. In my Scripture reading the following verse jumped out at me, and I knew that God was speaking to me:

Prov 24:10 "If you are slack in the day of distress, your strength is limited."

I knew that with all the praying in the world, I was still going to have to summon every ounce of courage and strength I had, and climb out of that financial hole. Yes God would help me - but not with anonymous gifts! He would rather give me wisdom day by day to plan well and work my way to financial freedom. Miraculously, and with very hard work, ten months later I paid off my last debt and I

was financially free.

The principle I learnt was an old saying that *"God helps those who help themselves!"* Yes we should have faith - and we must exercise that faith in Him. But it also takes sheer determination at a time when all else tells you to give up. And that is the place many of us are at in Zimbabwe (and South Africa).

I travelled up to Kadoma this last weekend, and how devastating it was to see farm after farm burnt out by the so-called war vets. How black the countryside looked! Many farms have lost their entire grazing or at least large portions of it, and to suddenly find grazing for thousands of head of cattle when all your neighbour's farms have also been burnt out, must be devastating. I sympathise with you.

Last weekend I had a major theft at my factory. I own a foundry, and as some might know we use patterns made out of aluminium from which the moulds are made for our castings. The patterns are the foundation of the company. Without patterns there would be no production. Well these thieves came in and stole a large portion of our patterns - representing more than 50% of our production, and worth a few million dollars. On Tuesday I felt quite devastated. Where do I go from here. To replace the patterns could be two years of work.

This was the time to reach down for that inner courage and strength which only God can give. This was the time to refuse thoughts of bitterness and hatred. Like clinging to the wall of the well, we cannot afford the luxury of anger or self-pity. Those things will cause us to lose our grip and fall! We must cling on, look up, and start to climb again, one foothold at a time, one day at a time. We must make sure every decision we take is a solid foothold which will take us higher. Decisions lead to actions, and each action has consequences. Those decisions which have positive long term solutions will tend to lead us higher and higher, so those are the ones we must take.

What is it that gives us hope? Only God's Word - the Bible. Read it. Meditate on it. Hold fast to its principles, and take it for yourself. We do not always understand why things happen to us. If we try to puzzle it out, I think we could go crazy. So don't try. Rather let's keep our eyes focussed on the bigger picture. That is relatively easy to understand. That picture might go something like this :-

- God is a good God and loves us.
- Truth will always win in the end.
- Sin destroys people (individuals as well as nations) and the things we see happening in our land are simply the result of people rejecting God's laws and choosing to do things their own way, ie. sin.
- The closer we get to God, the more sense things will seem to make, and, after all, He **did** say that this old world was going to become worse and worse (*2Tim 3:16*).
- Jesus is coming back again to make all things right.
- However, until He returns, our mission is to be salt in the earth - to make a difference wherever we are - to bring people closer to God.

So, draw closer to God, and keep on climbing dear friend. Don't allow evil to triumph. In your time of distress, don't let your hands become limp. That will cause you to fall. With faith in your Heavenly Father, summon every fibre of courage and strength you can muster, and climb for the top.

With special love to you all.

Henry D Jackson