

## Tricks from the Dark Side

I'm not sure how many times one man must be reminded to stop being discouraged, to stop being afraid. Moses surely needed a lot of encouragement, and it seems that Timothy had a fear problem.

In my own case, I've been doing street ministry in Chicago's Albany Park neighborhood, and sometimes it gets lonely. Even with that, God has found a way to send someone around almost every time I have been there, to let me know all is not in vain. My church and wife back me up too.

But you know some of the tricks of the Enemy. He makes you compare yourself to other ministries. He shows you your unworthiness and reminds you of your past and present failures. He points you to other places that probably need ministry far more than the place in which you serve now. He stirs things up at home and plants the thought: if you can't take care of your own family, how will you ever minister to people as different from you as these people on the street? He lets you know there are people who would be a much better fit for this ministry, and that maybe you should start looking for a replacement. Lie after lie after lie.

Well, let me bring this into quick and clear focus. Like this week. I quote from my journal entry of just a short while ago:

"How embarrassing is this. Spent all day Wednesday trying to have God talk me out of going to Lawrence (the main street of Albany Park). Read through the entire book of Proverbs seeking wisdom from the Lord, or so I said. I was really seeking the wisdom of running away. The wisdom of failure. Why it is good to move on. By the end of the day I was so happy that I had finally 'been released' from street ministry. A long list of verses backed me up.

"Yesterday (Thursday), the nagging returned. I went to the garage and took a long look at the 'Gospel trailer' I had created. I, who practically failed wood shop and am miserable with a hammer and screw driver, had actually built a fine-looking serviceable carrier for God's Word.

"People weren't exactly lining up to get saved, but there was a happy heart here and there all over Albany Park, having received a Bible or a piece of literature in their language, or just a bottle of water. Children recognized the old guy that gives out free candy.

"Somehow it wasn't enough. I had lost the will to move on and as much as told God so. I had wanted to create a class, maybe a church, a following. Nothing at all was happening that could be reported, passed on. No, enough of this. I'll find ministry that is more meaningful, etc etc

"But I finally caved in and said, OK, one more time. The idea was, if God moves, I'll stay. If it rains or some disaster stops me from going, then confirmation! I'm out.

"Not a cloud in the sky this morning (Friday). I had determined to stay all day, fasting to boot. Left here after 8 am. To Lawrence & Kimball. Soon a couple of black ladies come by.

"One says, in response to my 'Free Bibles' sign, 'OK, what's the catch?'

"I say, 'No catch.'

"She says, 'Really, a free Bible?'

"I say 'Yes.' I give it to her. She is all happy.

"She just got out of jail. She cannot afford a Bible but really wants to read one. My first ever hug response.

"Confirmation number one. This was going a way that I had not expected, but I should have.

"Within a minute or so, a Black man comes by, and tells me, with no introduction, no conversation before or after, the verse nearly every seasoned Christian knows, 'Don't grow weary in well doing. You will reap if you faint not!'

"Oh my. How in the world did he know?

"Oh how close I had come to fainting!

"Confirmation number two.

"Shortly after these two, a man looking very Muslim is captivated by my trailer. He is a Muslim convert. Ramon Ra Roman. We talk. Both of us are excited about the other's ministry. He has disciplined many Muslims into Christ. He will send me helpers for my own work, tie me into the Albany Park ministry even more fully.

"Not long ago a woman named Ramona had given me a collection of old and very nice Bibles and books for me to distribute at will. When I showed some of these things to him he jumped for joy. He knows where he can distribute them. Ramon takes Ramona's gifts.

"Ramon confirmed that my approach is a good one. My approach on Fridays, for example, is to visit Mosques with my Gospel-written trailer, and confront Muslims.

" 'If someone had not had the gall to come after me,' says Ramon, 'I would not be a Christian today.'

"One. Two. Three. Three confirmations within a half hour that God wants me on these streets with this trailer, and whatever else I want to do to preach and reach.

"I think about the secular movie *It's a Wonderful Life*. What if I had not been here this morning?

"And last week, when that 82-year-old Filipino man was so excited and praising God because of the Bible I delivered to him? I wonder if his praises got the attention of powers that be? Is this why all the oppression this week? Oh how real is this warfare, this darkness. But how real is the Word of God, too.

"He does send His sons to work in His fields. As in the parable. And if we say yes, we better go. We better not look back once we've set our hand to the plow.

"He does give rewards to those who invest in His Kingdom, and curses those who bury their gifts and do nothing, as in that other parable. Fear will keep us from investing. But more investing in spite of fear will keep us from more fear.

"And we will indeed reap, if we do not lose heart."

How ashamed I am of my unbelief. I had even used the weather for three days straight not to go out. The forecast was for 30 or 40% chance of rain in the middle of the afternoon. All three days, no rain.

Today, I went out with that same forecast. God blessed me abundantly, then sent me through a rain and hail storm. But because of the coverings over my literature (there is no top on the trailer), my losses were minimal and only motivated me to secure things better for the next trip. No more excuses.

I've got to start looking at ministry as I would a job, and not as some retired guy's hobby that he can take or leave. I don't have to like it or enjoy it. Just do it. He will continue to guide into something wonderful.

It wasn't all perfect, even today. (The drenching, I deserved because of my unbelief all week!) While I am sitting in the trailer waiting for Muslims to show up for their meeting, a bicycle whizzes past me.

A snarly voice pierced the walls of my enclosure as the bike kept going...

"Go back to Mexico!" it said.

We can talk about racial prejudice and immigration some other time. Meanwhile, I'll have to remember not to wear that sombrero while on duty. But Chicago summers can get very hot.

What a day.