

GOOD GRIEF: DOMINATING DOUBTS

BY: DR. BILL WEBSTER

Do you ever have doubts? I doubt if there is one person who has not had to struggle with doubts about themselves, their situations, or their decisions. I well remember my Scottish grandfather, quietly listening to some idea or another, and after a lengthy deliberation, imparting his patriarchal opinion in the words, “Well, I ha’e my doubts!” That usually meant the suggestion was not going to be taken seriously.

There’s many an idea or opportunity that has met its demise because of the influence of doubts. William Shakespeare, whose incisive awareness of human nature makes him as much psychologist as playwright, said, “Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt”.

Many people let their doubts dominate them. I remember after the death of my wife, having many doubts: about whether I would make it through the grief process, or wanted to; about how I would manage practically with all the tasks of single parenting and with life on my own. I recall finding decision making difficult, and believe me, there were many decisions I had to make very quickly. Yet, uncharacteristically, I felt a strange lack of confidence, fearing I would make a mistake or do the wrong thing. My loss challenged my self confidence, and I had many doubts about myself and the situation I was in.

Doubt is often connected to a loss of one kind or another. Loss of confidence, loss of relationship or social status, loss of vocation or loss of security are just a few of the secondary losses that can cause us to question our ability, or even ourselves, and leave us dominated by doubts.

How often have we allowed doubt to negatively affect our life situations? Norman Vincent Peale relates the story of an individual they called “The Obstacle Man”. He had earned that name because, no matter what suggestion was made, his mind instantly focused on all possible obstacles connected with it. His firm had a potentially profitable, though somewhat risky, project under consideration. In the executive discussions, the Obstacle Man, with a scholarly air, said, “Now just a minute. Let’s consider all the obstacles involved”.

“Why do you constantly emphasize the obstacles instead of the possibilities?” someone finally asked him. “Because,” he replied, “to be intelligent, one must always be realistic, and it is a fact there are definite obstacles involved here. And what attitude would you take to these obstacles, may I ask?”

“Well,” came the unhesitating reply, “I would just remove them, that’s all, and then I would forget them”.

Are YOU an obstacle person? Do doubts make your hurdles seem like insurmountable barriers? Samuel Johnston wrote, “Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must first be overcome”. Can you think of projects, or dreams, or ambitions that have not been achieved because of an over-emphasis of objections?

I am not suggesting we should eliminate our doubts. They can provide a positive check on the validity of many ideas. Doubts are good when they lead us to a realistic evaluation of any situation, helping us blend wisdom and caution with ambition. Only fools have no doubts. According to Shakespeare, “Modest doubt is the beacon of the wise, the torch that searches to the bottom of the worst.”

The trouble is that many people do not have modest doubts. They have mountainous, monumental doubts that crush them. They allow their doubts to rule their life. In fact, Charles Mayo, M.D., founder of the Mayo Clinic states, “I’ve known many who have died of doubt”.

Is there a solution? Without a doubt! G.K.Chesterton commented, “We have found all the questions that can be found. It is time we stopped looking for questions and started looking for answers.” Let doubt raise its head, and when you have done your best to satisfy the doubt, move on. As one homespun philosopher put it, “Don’t figure out how you CAN’T; figure out how you CAN”. Many centuries ago, Pliny the Elder wrote, “The man who speaks his positive convictions is worth a regiment of men who are always proclaiming their doubts and suspicions.” Only a fool has no doubts, but the wise man never yields to them.

Babe Ruth was the world’s greatest home run hitter. In his career, he hit 714 of them, a record which stood for many years. What most people don’t know is that Babe Ruth also set the worlds record for strike-outs — a total of 1,330. In fact, he struck out almost twice as often as he hit home runs. Yet did that worry him. Not at all! Babe Ruth just went out to the plate and kept on swinging. He didn’t doubt his ability and he didn’t doubt that one in three swings would be a hit.

And today, we remember Babe Ruth for the hits, not for the misses.

So keep on swinging. Enjoy the hits, forget the misses, and dominate those doubts before they dominate you.