

PURSUING GOD'S PRESENCE: OVERCOMING DISCOURAGEMENT

“Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” – Hebrews 12:3

Introduction:

There is a legend that Satan decided to get rid of a number of his tools, so he arranged an auction. There were envy, deceit, malice, sensuality, enmity, thoughtlessness, and many other tools that Satan had used successfully (priced very low). One piece, marked very high, was labeled *Discouragement*. “Why do you want so much for this tool?” asked one bidder. “This tool,” replied the old tempter, “has always been my most useful one. You can see it has had more wear than the rest. It is used as a wedge to get into a man’s mind when all other means fail. Practically every human being has had this tool used on him, although very few know that I’m the one welding it.” As it worked out, none could afford the price Satan demanded for *discouragement*...and so he is still using it.

-Many times when we face discouragement we feel condemned by Satan. “Look”, he says, “you aren’t going to make it. Why don’t you give up?” Jesus did not give up! (Hebrews 12:1-3)

-Many, if not all, of the great leaders in the Bible experienced discouragement:

- a) Moses – Numbers 11:10-15 – Frustrated with the complaints
- b) Elijah – I Kings 19:3-5 – He was being chased by Jezebel
- c) Jeremiah – (“The weeping prophet”) – Lamentations 3:13-27
- d) Paul – II Timothy 4:10 – “*Demas has deserted me because he loves the things of this life and has gone to Thessalonica.*”
- e) Jesus – John 6:67 – “*You do not want to leave too, do you?*” Jesus asked the Twelve.
- f) Personal examples

-Every leader will have discouraging times, often after a great victory. However, it is not God’s will to live in a constant state of discouragement.

Rob Bushway - The word *discouragement* comes from the root word *courage*. The prefix *dis-* means “the opposite of.” So *discouragement* is the opposite of courage. When we are discouraged, we have lost the motivation to press forward. The mountain seems too steep, the valley too dark, or the battle too fierce, and we lose the courage to continue.

A. WHAT ARE ROOT CAUSES OF DISCOURAGEMENT?

There may be numerous reasons why a leader becomes discouraged. We will look at some of these reasons. I don't share this to discourage you but to help us understand where discouragement may start. Below are several reasons for discouragement but later in the outline I want to focus more on how to overcome discouragement.

1. _____ personal quiet time. (Not always the reason)
 - Our theme is: "Pursuing God's Presence."
 - When we become lax in our spiritual disciplines, it becomes an open door for the enemy of our soul.
2. _____ expectations/disappointments
 - It's good to have a big vision but perhaps we may expect too much.
 - Congregations often put too high expectations on pastor.
3. _____ people
 - Unjust and negative criticism and false accusation
 - We can't eliminate negative people but we can pray for them and even confront them when necessary.

George Whitefield on Discouragement

English evangelist George Whitefield (1714-1770) learned that it was more important to please God than to please men. Knowing that he was doing what was honoring to the Lord kept him from *discouragement* when his enemies falsely accused him. At one point in his ministry, Whitefield received a vicious letter accusing him of wrongdoing. His reply was brief and courteous: "I thank you heartily for your letter. As for what you and my other enemies are saying against me, I know worse things about myself than you will ever say about me. With love in Christ, George Whitefield." He didn't try to defend himself. He was much more concerned about pleasing the Lord. (*Daily Bread, August 18, 1992*).

4. _____
 - We see success in other ministries and wonder why we can't have the same results.
 - Must repent and bless others.
 - I Corinthians 13:4 – "*Love is not jealous.*"
5. _____
 - Unconfessed sin breaks communion with God.
 - John 15 – "*Without Him we can do nothing.*"
 - Psalm 51; I John 1:9; Psalms 139:23-24
6. _____

-Discouragement is often an attack of the enemy to weaken our resolve and cause us to lose courage.

-II Corinthians 10:5 - *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

7. _____ among members or leaders

-Dealing with conflicts between individuals or couples who can't seem to ever resolve their issues.

8. _____ (Mental, physical and spiritual exhaustion)

-Ten signs of burnout by Bishop Joseph Mattera

- 1) You lose focus and clarity of thought.
- 2) You lose your passion for work and/or ministry.
- 3) You go from being a leader to being a maintainer.
- 4) You have a continual sense of hopelessness.
- 5) You isolate yourself from others.
- 6) You run from new challenges.
- 7) You don't want to problem solve.
- 8) You dream more about retirement than taking a mountain.
- 9) You lack patience for all things mundane.
- 10) You view ministry as work rather than a calling.

-How to recover

- 1) Honor the biblical Sabbath. Take off one day a week.
- 2) Spend time enjoying the Lord on a daily basis.
- 3) Prioritize the things that are life giving to you.
- 4) Recapture your original calling and vision.
- 5) Stay accountable to others within a leadership community.
- 6) Henry adds: If possible, take an extended break from the ministry

Comments by Rick Warren on why people become discouraged:

Nehemiah 4:10 - *Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."*

a. Fatigue – We must check our priorities. Must learn to take a break.

b. Frustration – What is the rubble in your life?

c. Failure – If you don't reach a goal on time refuse to give in to self-pity. Set a new goal and keep moving forward.

d. Fear – Leads to discouragement. This comes when we hang around negative people. Thoughts of "I can't do this" begin to plague our mind.

B. HOW TO OVERCOME DISCOURAGEMENT (Remember, discouragement happens to the strongest of people but there are ways to overcome.)

1. Confess to God how you _____ feel (God will not be insulted. He like's honesty)
 - David in the Psalms repeatedly is honest with God in times of discouragement. (Psalms 3; Psalm 31)
 - We confess our feeling of discouragement but also place our trust in God.

2. Take time to _____ to God as to why you are discouraged
 - It's good to stop and ask why you are feeling discouraged.
 - (John 10:27; Jeremiah 29:12-13; Proverbs 3:5-6)

3. Seek a fresh _____ with God's Word
 - You may not feel like reading or studying the Bible. However, ask God for a fresh revelation, especially for the discouraging circumstance you are facing.
 - The Word transforms our mind. (Romans 12:1-2)
 - Resist the temptation to only study or read the word in conjunction with sermon preparation.**
 - Read the Bible in an audible voice, declaring its promises. (Psalms 63:1-8; Isaiah 40:30-31; Psalm 55:22)

4. Repent of any _____ that may be causing discouragement
 - Resist the spirit of condemnation but be grateful for the conviction of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 8:1-2; II Corinthians 10:9-10)
 - Overcome repeated temptations by trusting in victory we have through Christ and the cross. (I John 5:3-4; Romans 8:31-32)

5. Cast off the spirit of _____ by putting on the garment of _____ (Isaiah 61:1-3)
 - Take authority over the discouraging spirit by beginning to praise the Lord.
 - Praise gives us access to God. (Psalm 100)

"Praise changes relationships. It changes hearts. It changes mindsets. In praise, our focus shifts from us to the Lord - From problems to The Solution - From pain to promise. From hurt to hope." – Erika Michelle

- Praise defeats the enemy. (II Chronicles 20:22)
- Never underestimate the power of praise to overcome discouragement.
- Listen to and reflect upon worship music that exalts the Lord.

6. Invite a friend to _____ with you
 - We are not called to fight battles alone.

-Proverbs **17:7** – *“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.”*

-If discouragement persists, don't be afraid to seek help from a trusted counselor.

7. Make a _____ to break out of the discouragement

-Psalms 42:11 – *“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”*

-Put focus on the hope we have in God rather than the issues that are causing discouragement.

Barges, Ships, or Liners?

"There are three kinds of Christian workers," said someone with a very vivid imagination, "canal barges, sailing ships, and Atlantic liners." The canal barge needs to be dragged to work. Often they do wonderfully well, but on the whole one volunteer is worth three pressed men.

The sailing ship makes fine going as long as wind and tide are with them, but when things get hard, when "winds are contrary," when work is discouraging, they turn tail and sail away.

But give us the Atlantic liner type of worker, the man who can fight his way through wind and tempest, because within him there burns the hot throb of the mighty furnace of the love of Christ. —Onward.

8. Take _____ of your body

-Lack of sleep, stressful schedule, unhealthy eating habits, etc. may be a root cause for discouragement.

-I Corinthians 6:19-20 – *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”*

-I Corinthians 9:27; Romans 6:13

9. _____ past victories

-I Samuel 17:37 – *“David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.”*

-David turned a discouraging situation for the Children of Israel into a victory by recalling his past victories. We can do the same!

10. _____ someone else

-Sometimes the best way to break discouragement is to ENCOURAGE another person.

-Take focus off of self and reach out to another person that is discouraged to bring them hope.

-Luke 6:38 - *Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*"

12. Choose _____ over _____

-Discouragement often comes when we fear people and/or how we will ever get through a tough situation. We must rest in and trust God's promises.

-Deuteronomy 31:8 – *"The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."*

-Isaiah 43:1 *"Don't fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine."*

13. Realize how I overcome discouragement can be a means to _____ and help others who are discouraged

-We can turn what seems to be a negative into a positive when we "comfort others in the way we have been comforted (II Corinthians 1:3-7).

14. Be alert that discouragement _____ us to rely on God

-God will use desperate and discouraging situations to drive us to our knees (II Corinthians 1:8-11).

15. Turn every negative discouraging situation into a _____ (II Corinthians 6:8-10)

16. _____ GOD'S PRESENCE!

-Every other point comes under this point.

-Psalms 42:1-2 – Do we have a passion to be in God's presence? In his presence we find comfort, support, encouragement, hope, assurance, security, affirmation---everything we need to get us through times of discouragement.

-James 4:8 – *"Come near to God and He will come near to you."* When discouraged, we feel alone. Always know that God is there to support and encourage you.

C. SUGGESTED WAY TO ENCOURAGE THOSE WHO ARE DISCOURAGED

1. Be sensitive to the persons struggle
2. Give a keen listening ear
3. Ask appropriate questions
4. Be led of the Holy Spirit in giving suggestions on how to overcome discouragement
5. Offer words of encouragement along with words of exhortation
6. Pray with the person, demonstrating how to declare the Word of the Lord in prayer
7. Point them to Christ, our Hope
8. Continue to offer support as needed by keeping in touch
9. Continue to pray for the person
10. Give on-going words of encouragement

Conclusion:

Where to Cast Your Net

"Did you ever notice," said the old lady, smiling into the troubled face before her, "that when the Lord told the discouraged fishermen to cast their nets again, it was right in the same old place where they had caught nothing? If we could only get off to some new place when we get discouraged, trying again would be an easier thing. If we could be somebody else, or go somewhere else, or do something else, it might not be so hard to have fresh faith and courage; but it is the same old net in the same old pond for most of us. The old temptations are to be overcome; the old faults are to be conquered, the old trials and discouragements before which we failed yesterday to be faced again today. We must win success where we are, if we win it at all, and it is the Master Himself, who, after all these toilful, disheartening failures, bids us 'try again.'—*Sunday School Times*.

A young woman, because of discouragement, was about to give up an important work for God. One night she dreamed that an angel took her to Heaven and showed her all the beauty and glory of it. The angel then led her to the gate of Heaven where she could look down on the world and see the hearts of men and women torn and broken by sin and careless living. She could see bright spots where the Gospel had worked but they only intensified the darkness of the picture. The awful sight struck deep into the young woman's soul. She burst into tears, and said: "Let me go back to the world quickly and tell them of Jesus! I will never be discouraged again." Then she awoke; it was only a dream, but the vision of the lost world was always clearly before her eyes, and from that time on she realized her personal responsibility in the work of spreading the Gospel.

Indeed we all need to get above the horizon, to get a sight of a lost world, and to reach the "up" of courage in Christian service.

No matter how dark the hour may be, there are still glints of God's love, and if we are faithful, our saddest experience will be changed into sunshine and victory and happiness!

Gospel Herald.

-God is calling us to persevere. By persevering, we can and will overcome discouragement.

-Galatians 6:9 - Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

NEVER GIVE UP!