

Fran and Jesus on the Job - Discouragement

Presented by Mary Lowman

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Day One

I continue our story of Fran and Jesus on the Job. I began these stories several years ago to help us learn to practice the presence of Jesus in our lives, no matter where we are or what we're doing. Fran communicates with Jesus throughout her day, and I hope her story will encourage you to be more aware of his presence in your life.

"Drew, I said, it's time to go to bed right now, and I don't want to hear any more whining from you," Fran says to her son as she wearily tries to get him in bed. At the end of a hard day, the last thing she wants is an argument with her son. Finally, the house is quiet, and she flops down in a chair. "Oh, that I had wings like a dove; I would fly away and be at rest," she quotes out loud from a Psalm, with a sarcastic tone of voice.

As she often does, Fran talks to the Lord about how she feels. She has learned that since he knows everything she's thinking and feeling, she might as well get it out in the open and talk to him about it.

"Lord," she says, "I guess I'm a little discouraged, and I don't really even know why. I guess it's just me; it's probably nothing," and she tries to dismiss the topic. But the Spirit of the Lord keeps probing her mind: "What's causing these feelings of discouragement? Was it something that happened today?"

"Today—yesterday—tomorrow," Fran says with exasperation. "It's just life in general. I lost that account yesterday; they went with a competitive firm. Drew is having some trouble at school—goofing off, his teacher says. I still haven't paid the dentist bill from last month. My friend at church says she can't help me with the children's church this year, like she promised she would. And well, I'm just tired of all the responsibility. I'm tired of being mother and father and career woman and...."

She thinks about that awhile, then says to the Lord, "I guess I'm just discouraged; can you understand that?"

She begins to think about Jesus while he was here on earth, and she remembers that often he would seem to be a bit exasperated and—yes—maybe even discouraged with his disciples. "I guess being discouraged is not necessarily a sin," she concludes. "In fact, you warned us, Lord that in this world we would have tribulations and discouragements. But you also said that we can overcome the world." Quietly Fran prays, "Lord, teach me how to overcome my own discouragements, which are pretty small compared to others, I know. But they seem big to me right now. Please help me, Lord."

Day Two

How do you handle discouragement? Our friend, Fran, is facing some discouraging times right now, and Jesus is trying to help her see how she can defeat that discouragement in her life.

The kids are finally in bed and Fran is having a conversation with Jesus about being discouraged. As she thinks about this further, she recognizes that discouragement is also one of the devil's most effective weapons against believers. "I see lots of believers who never seem to have victory over discouragement, Lord," she continues her conversation with Jesus, "and I wonder why not? When does discouragement become sinful?"

She thinks about all the bad things that have happened to her lately, and the discouraging feelings start to come over her again. "You know, Lord, it's only human to be discouraged when all these things happen, which are beyond my control. I mean, I didn't cause any of them and I don't seem to be able to change any of them."

As Fran thinks about all this, the phone rings and it's her friend, Louise. "Oh, Louise, I'm just so discouraged," she says to her. "Did you hear I lost that account I've been working on; after all that work they went to the competition." She pauses. "Oh, sure, there are more fish in the sea, but tell me where," she replies to Louise in a rather sarcastic tone.

"And besides that, Drew is having problems at school," she says. "And I got my second notice of an overdue bill from the dentist today. I don't have the money to pay that bill this month. And to top it off, Debbie called to say she wouldn't be able to help me with children's church this year. I don't know, Louise, nothing's going right for me."

She spends a few more minutes complaining to Louise, then hangs up. "Well, you sure unloaded on her," she hears that inner voice saying to her.

"Well, that's what friends are for, right?" Fran replies. "I've got to tell somebody."

But as soon as she says it, her heart is convicted. "Why did I unload on Louise like that? She called to have a nice conversation with me—in fact, I don't really know why she called. I didn't give her a chance to say. I just dumped my discouragement on her and probably succeeded in discouraging her, too."

Fran feels so badly about the way she complained to Louise. "Lord," she says, "you are my wonderful counselor, my friend, and I should go to you with my discouragement, not to poor Louise." She remembers the passage from Psalm 142, which says,

"I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble" (Psalm 142:2).

If you're discouraged today, tell Jesus; nobody else, just Jesus. He can handle it, and he can help.

Day Three

Fran is struggling with discouragement. I imagine you've been there at times yourself, so listen in to see how Jesus helps her learn to defeat discouragement.

Last night Fran had unloaded all her problems on her friend, Louise, and Jesus reminded her it was a great deal better to tell him, rather than discourage others by complaining to them. After all, Jesus can handle it, and he can help.

This morning, however, that discouraging feeling still lingers as she gets herself and the kids ready to leave the house. "Come on, kids," she says wearily, "you're both dragging your feet today. We're going to be late."

"Lord, I just can't beat that discouraging feeling," she tells Jesus as she drives to work. "Problems just don't go away that easily," she says. She feels guilty for feeling discouraged, but what can she do? She is discouraged.

At that moment a song comes into her mind: "We give a sacrifice of praise. . ." She hums a few lines. "A sacrifice of praise. . . hmm. I guess I should praise the Lord," she admits to herself. "But I don't feel like praising God right now." As soon as she says it, she knows how wrong she is.

"I don't feel like it," she says to the Lord, "but that's what it means to give a sacrifice of praise—praising when you don't want to. It requires a sacrifice of my emotions."

"Praise God," Fran mumbles to herself. She remembers her alphabet method, and halfheartedly, feeling like a hypocrite, she begins: "I praise you because you are A: Almighty; I praise you because you are B: Benevolent; I praise you because you are C: Caring; I praise you because you are D my Defense." And on she goes through the alphabet, praising God while driving down the road, forcing herself to offer a sacrifice of praise.

As she pulls into the parking lot, she begins to feel a lighter spirit. Things don't look quite so bad. She has made some inroads toward defeating the discouragement that was making her so miserable.

Are you discouraged today? Try a sacrifice of praise. It really does make a difference. The Psalmist said, *"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God"* (Psalm 42:5).

Day Four

Feeling discouraged? Our friend Fran is having some discouraging times. Jesus showed her how offering a sacrifice of praise—praising God with her mouth even though she didn't feel like it—would help her defeat discouragement. As she began to do that, it helped.

Do you have to live or work with people who are discouragers? If you're around discouragers a lot, they can really discourage you. This is one eye-opening lesson Fran has to learn.

Today she is working hard trying to catch up. The last couple of days, as she was fighting discouragement, she really wasn't motivated to work very hard, so now she's paying the price. But she notices that hard work helps her forget the discouragement.

In the midst of her busy day, another coworker interrupts her. "Hey, Fran," Bill says, "did you hear the latest rumor? The company's up for sale and we'll probably be swallowed up by some giant holding company who'll let half the people go."

"Oh, Bill, you're always coming up with rumors that aren't true and just getting everybody upset," Fran says, trying to dismiss him. But Bill is not easily dismissed. "I was right about the layoffs last year, wasn't I?" Fran has to admit he got that one right. "And I'm right about this, too, Fran. Believe me, I've got good sources."

And on and on Bill goes about all the horrors that await them because of this potential buyout. The more he talks, the more discouraged Fran feels. By the time he leaves, she's ready to give up again.

"I've got to learn to ignore Bill," she says to herself. "He's a very discouraging person who never has anything positive to say."

Again, Fran talks to herself: "You just can't afford to let discouraging people bring you down. Remember when Jairus asked Jesus to come heal his daughter, and his friends met them half-way to say never mind, she was dead already. Jesus told Jairus to ignore what they said and just believe. So, there are times when you must learn to ignore the discouraging people who tell you everything's bad," Fran reminds herself. This was something they talked about recently in her Bible study group, and the Spirit of God brought it to her mind just now.

Are there some discouraging people around you? Avoid them; ignore them; tune them out. Certainly, we should never behave in rude ways, but we must protect our minds from the discouragement that others would heap upon us. That's an important step in defeating discouragement.

Day Five

Our friend Fran has been struggling with discouragement this week. You've been there, too, haven't you? Jesus has shown her several steps to take that will help defeat discouragement, including sharing her complaints with him instead of with others, offering a sacrifice of praise, staying away from discouraging people, and just plain working hard.

Now one of Fran's coworkers comes over to talk to her about a billing problem. Just as she is leaving, Fran feels an urge to ask her, "Sue, is everything okay? You look kinda down."

"Huh—oh do I? I'm sorry, it's nothing..." she starts to leave.

"If you need to talk, I'm a good listener," Fran encourages her to open up.

"Oh, you don't want to hear my troubles, Fran," Sue says. But Fran insists that she does. So, Sue tells her about her problems with her husband. "I'm pretty sure he's got some affair going, Fran. He's never home; he makes up all these crazy excuses; and he never touches me anymore. He hardly speaks to me. I expect him to walk out on me and the kids any day now."

"Sue, are you sure you're not just letting your imagination run wild on you?" Fran asks.

"No, that's what I thought for awhile, but a friend saw him in a bar a couple of times with this woman from his office. I think he's having the typical mid-life crisis, and he's going to dump me and the kids for some young bimbo," Sue says drearily.

Fran talks with her a few more minutes, and then says, "Why don't you come over to my house tonight, and we can talk some more." Without realizing what she's done, Fran has reached out to someone else whose problem is much bigger than hers. Sue seems so appreciative. "Fran, I really didn't mean to dump on you, but I sure could use a friend."

"You've got one, Sue. I'll see you tonight." After Sue leaves Fran spends a couple of minutes praying for her. Then she thinks to herself: "What happened to my discouragement?"

"You know, Lord," she says to Jesus, "I almost forgot about the things that were bugging me. I mean, my problems look pretty small compared to Sue's."

She remembers a verse from Proverbs 11:

"A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed" (Proverbs 11:25).

Again, Fran realizes, Jesus knows what he's talking about. And again, she acknowledges what a difference it makes to have Jesus by her side all the time. When she simply obeys him, he can take those discouraging feelings away and give her again the joy of her salvation.

He's by your side, too, if you know him as your Savior. Why don't you practice his presence more every day?