

Defeating Discouragement

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Day One

Do you get discouraged? The answer has to be "yes." If you aren't now, you have been. If you haven't been, you will be. None of us go through life without periods of discouragement. Let's examine practical ways we can defeat discouragement.

Did you realize the Bible is full of discouraged people? Let's think about some of the reasons they were discouraged, because they're very similar to the things that discourage us.

1. David

Oh, that I had wings of a dove! David wrote; I would fly away and be at rest...I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm (Psalm 55:5-6:8). David was discouraged because of an enemy who was jealous of him and trying to destroy him.

Do you have some people in your life who are consciously trying to do you harm? Are there some people close to you who are jealous or mean or vindictive? That can be very discouraging.

2. Elijah

Elijah was discouraged because of exhaustion. After a great spiritual victory, when he called down fire from heaven and destroyed all the prophets of Baal, one little woman scared him to death because she threatened to kill him. And he was ready to give up. *"I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors"* (1 Kings 19:4).

I find I am often discouraged after spiritual victories. How about you? Do you often find yourself discouraged just when God has done something wonderful in your life? It's not unusual.

3. Hannah

Hannah was discouraged because the deepest desire of her heart had not been given to her. And it was a good and worthy desire—to have a baby she could give back to the Lord. Downhearted and discouraged, in bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord for a baby (1 Samuel 1).

Some of you are discouraged because of unfulfilled desires. Maybe it's the desire to be married, but the right person hasn't come along. Maybe, like Hannah, it's the desire to have a baby, but your womb has been closed so far. Maybe it's your dreams of serving God in some special way, but the door hasn't opened yet. It can be discouraging.

We can certainly see discouragement is nothing new; it's been around since the beginning of time.

Day Two

When you're having a problem or a struggle, doesn't it help to know others have faced the same situations? David, Elijah, and Hannah were discouraged. Here are some other discouraged people in the Bible.

4. Naomi

Naomi was discouraged because of financial difficulties and terrible loss. Her husband and two sons had both died, and she was left penniless and homeless. *"Don't call me Naomi,"* she told her friends. *"Call me Mara (meaning bitter), because the Almighty has made my life very bitter..."* (Ruth 1:20-21). It's easy enough to understand her discouragement. Financial difficulties cause a great deal of discouragement for many of us.

5. Mary and Martha

Mary and Martha were discouraged because they lost someone they loved, and they had really expected Jesus to save him. After all, Jesus had been healing all kinds of other people; surely, he would come and save his beloved friend, Lazarus, they reasoned. And when he didn't, they were very discouraged; Jesus had disappointed them. *"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died"* (John 11:21).

Have you ever set an agenda out for the Lord, expecting him to work on your timetable, and then been disappointed when he didn't come through? That can be discouraging.

6. Peter

Peter was discouraged because of his own failure. After he denied the Lord three times, Peter went out and wept bitterly, we are told. I imagine he felt he had blown it for good, and he must have been terribly discouraged with himself. How could he deny the Lord, the one he promised never to deny?

When I look at myself and see how inadequate I am, how often I fail, how I go back and do the same things over and over I know I shouldn't do, I get very discouraged. In fact, that discourages me probably more than anything else, how about you?

7. Jesus

Even Jesus fought discouragement when his friends failed him; when he was misunderstood; when he tried to help, and his help was refused. That really hurts when you have totally good motives, and yet people don't approve or understand or support you. In fact, they may reject you, as they did Jesus. Easy to be discouraged then.

Well, it is encouraging to see even these great people of God went through times of discouragement. But now we want to know how they learned to defeat it.

Day Three

If you've been discouraged lately, you've probably also felt guilty about being discouraged. But it's good to remember everyone goes through periods of discouragement. I think it's important to emphasize being discouraged is not a sin. God uses people who are discouraged; God understands discouragement; discouragement is a normal and unavoidable emotion we must all deal with. It comes to us in different ways, for different reasons, and at different times, but none of us escape discouragement.

However, wallowing in discouragement—that's a different story. Jesus warned us, *In this world you will have trouble. But take heart!* He said, *"I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).

Discouragement becomes sinful when we refuse to take heart, as Jesus told us to do.

What does it mean to take heart? I think we can learn from David, who often fought discouragement. In Psalm 42, David says, *My tears have been my food day and night.* David is obviously discouraged. He continues, *My soul is downcast within me. I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me?"*

Identify the discouragement

David begins to defeat his discouragement by identifying it to the Lord. No need to put on a face and act like everything's okay. Until you get it out in the open and call it what it is, it will just continue to fester underneath. David is open and honest with the Lord, and he says just what he feels. We need to do the same thing. But note David talked to the Lord about his problems; that's the way we should do it rather than dumping it on others.

Talk encouragingly to yourself

But he doesn't stop there. After identifying his discouragement, David talks to himself and says, "*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.*" In the space of eleven verses, David repeats these words to himself three times. He keeps on reminding himself of who God is and who he belongs to.

What do you say to yourself when you are discouraged? More discouraging words? That's what most of us do, and we make a major mistake. Sure, you need to pour it all out, but once you get it said, then start saying the right things to yourself. Give a sacrifice of praise—praising when you don't feel it or you don't even want to.

One great way to do this is to start reciting all you have to be thankful for—out loud if possible. Sometimes I use the alphabet praise method—finding something about God to thank him for with each letter of the alphabet. It's a great cure for discouragement.

Day Four

Are you discouraged? If so, don't feel guilty about it, but don't wallow in it either. It's not a fun place to be. I examine some biblical ways to defeat discouragement.

Encourage others

One way to cure your own discouragement is to encourage others. Proverbs 11:25 says, *...he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.* Instead of looking for someone to pick you up, look around and see who you can encourage. Thank goodness we can be encouragers even when we feel discouraged. And as we become encouragers to others, our own discouragement is lessened.

Get to work

One good cure for discouragement is simply to get to work. Often when we're discouraged, we're unmotivated, so we do nothing. Then because we've gotten nothing done, we feel guilty, and that makes it even harder for us to get something done. Remember, you begin with the first step, so when discouragement seems to be overtaking you, find something that needs to be done. Then start doing it.

Get some rest

Of course, you may be discouraged because you've been going too hard and too long, and your body simply needs a rest. Elijah discovered how vulnerable he was to discouragement when he was physically exhausted, so God put him in a spot where he could recuperate and be refreshed with food and sleep. If your body is constantly on the verge of exhaustion, you can't expect to avoid discouragement.

Ignore the discouragers around you

Are there people around you who are discouraging you with their negativity? Are you listening to others more than you are listening to God? Remember when Jairus pleaded with Jesus to come and heal his little daughter? On the way to Jairus' house some men came from his house and said, "Don't bother coming—she's dead already." But we read in Mark 5, ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "*Don't be afraid; just believe.*"

Others will discourage you if you allow them to. You must learn to listen to Jesus and tune out—ignore—the people who would discourage you. Tune them out; avoid them where possible; change the

subject—whatever you must do—but don't let negative people discourage you. Don't catch their disease. Think about what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable—the good reports, not the bad ones.

Remember, being discouraged is not a sin, but refusing to take steps out of discouragement is. These biblical principles will work if you practice them.

Day Five

I'm examining how we can fight our way out of discouragement and find victory over that common struggle.

Find someone whose faith is strong

Paul wrote to the Romans: *I long to see you...that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith* (Romans 1:11-12). Here's another biblical principle for defeating discouragement: Spend some time with a person whose faith is strong. Let them share their faith with you.

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:25).

We need to get together more often, even in the midst of our busy lives, because we need each other to stay encouraged. If you've been trying to go it on your own, without fellowship with other believers, you will find discouragement lurking at your door.

Stay in the Word

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Romans 15:4).

Make yourself get into the Word of God. Even if it seems dry and lifeless to you, keep reading. It was written for our encouragement, and if you keep reading, it will encourage you.

Focus on Jesus' return

In 1 Thessalonians, we are told of the return of Jesus, and Paul writes to encourage each other. When you think you can't take this old world anymore, when it looks like there is no hope on the horizon, when you're just fed up with everything, start talking about Jesus' coming again. How often do you say, "Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!"? How often do you think, "It may be today!"? The more we think about his second coming, the more we will be encouraged.

Don't fight - show up!

In 2 Chronicles 20 the prophet, Jahaziel said: *Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's...Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.*

You're never going to win your battle on your own. But the good news is, it's not your battle. It's the Lord's. You don't have to fight; just show up. God's victories are waiting for you to claim, but he's waiting to see you exercise faith even before you see the victory.

"Take heart," Jesus said. We have hope; we have a future; we have his presence and power. We are not alone or desolate. Take heart. I pray you will be able to defeat discouragement in your life.