

## Discouragement

Discouragement, the word, has been defined as “the condition of being or feeling discouraged; lack of spirit or confidence,” **World Book Dictionary**.

To get a better grasp of “dis-couragement,” we cite a number of synonyms of the word, such as: hopelessness, pessimism, dejection, depression, downheartedness, melancholy, sadness, the blues, etc.

Perhaps a better approach would be to analyze the verb “discourage.” The word itself involves a coupling together of the prefix “**dis**” with the noun “**courage**.” “Dis,” the prefix, means: (1) opposite of, lack of, (2) do the opposite of, (3) “apart, away.” The meaning of the prefix “dis” may be illustrated by looking at such words as “**dismember**,” “**dishonor**,” “**disconnect**,” etc. Hence, when the prefix “dis” is joined with “courage,” it basically means the opposite of courage. Thus “to discourage” a person is to cause that person to **lose** courage.

However, all who attempt to serve God greatly need courage! This is indicated in the first chapter of Joshua wherein God repeatedly admonished Joshua to “*be strong and of a good courage*,” Josh. 1:6,7,9. Moses at that point was dead; Joshua was given the monumental task of assuming the leadership of the Israelite people, and even that of ultimately leading them into the promise land. Indeed, he needed courage! God surely did not want him to become discouraged!

However, a study of the Bible reveals a number of instances in which God’s people lost courage, or became discouraged. A case in point is recorded in Numbers 13:31, wherein ten of the twelve spies whom Moses had sent to spy out the land of Canaan returned and said “*we are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.*” Three verses later, in Number 14:1, in response to that evil report, the record states that “*all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.*” They were discouraged and they began to complain “*against Moses and Aaron*,” saying, “*if only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness*,” Num. 14:2. Alluding to this same event, Deut. 1:28 states that the ten spies who gave the unfaithful report had “**discouraged**” the “*hearts*” of the Israelites by saying “*the people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified...; moreover, we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.*” In consequence, the Israelites, instead of marching directly to the promised land, had to spend a year wandering in the wilderness for each of the 40 days the spies spent searching out the land! Num. 14:34. In fact, only two of the Jews from age twenty years and above who had left Egypt actually lived to enter the land of Canaan, and those men were Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who had said “*if the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey*,” Num. 14:8; cf. 13:30. Yes, that nation of people paid a tremendous price for allowing themselves to become “*discouraged*.”

Indeed, the Bible records many instances of God’s people becoming discouraged. On one occasion the great prophet Elijah became so discouraged that he sat under a broom tree and “*prayed that he might die*,” I Kings 19:4. David, perhaps in the very midst of distress, said “*My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, where is your God*,” Psalm 42:3. Jeremiah encountered so much derision, mockery, and persecution that he resolved not to “*speak any more*” in the name of the Lord, Jer. 20:9. In short, he was ready to quit preaching! However, to his credit, he then said “*but His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not.*” Even Paul, that great apostle to the Gentiles, cited an instance in his life when he said “*we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life*,” 2 Cor. 1:8.

Many other biblical examples could be cited of people — good people — who became discouraged, but these are sufficient to illustrate the fact that discouragement is very common.

There are many factors which can cause discouragement. Such factors as family issues (trouble in a marriage, rebellious children, etc.), opposition, fatigue, moral failure, disappointment in others, disappointment in one's self, de-motivating talk, ill health, financial difficulties, etc., etc., ad. Inf.

Discouragement, within itself, may not be inherently sinful, but you can be certain that the devil is pleased when God's people become discouraged, for it is in the midst of discouragement that many Christians slack off in their efforts to serve the Lord, especially as it relates to seeking the lost. Becoming discouraged, they conclude that "no one is interested," "it does no good to try to share the gospel," so they turn inward, become cynical, and even become a source of discouragement to others who are still trying to reach and teach the lost. Or they become so depressed with their own perceived failures that they slack off in their attendance, prayer, Bible study, etc, or even "quit the church" altogether!

Yes, life in the flesh is fraught with difficulties and disappointments, and these situations often cause people to become discouraged. So what should we do when this occurs?

#### **Negatively, We Should Not:**

**1. Slack off in our efforts to serve the Lord.** The saints at Ephesus had left their "*first love*," and the Lord commanded them to "*repent*," Rev. 2:5.

**2. Turn away from the Lord**, as some did when they heard what they regarded as a "*hard saying*," John 6:60,66.

**3. Become cynical** and conclude that "no one is interested," or that "all members of the church are hypocrites!"

#### **Positively, We Should:**

**1. "Repent,"** if we have allowed discouragement to hinder us in our efforts to serve the Lord, Rev. 2:5

**2. Re-ignite our efforts to serve the Lord**, or "*do the first works*," Rev. 2:5, the "*works*" we did when we were first converted, and were filled with zeal to worship God and to further His cause.

**3. Pray**, I Thess.5:17. Pray for forgiveness, Acts 8:22. Pray for strength to resist the devil, I Peter 5:8-9. Pray for boldness and courage, Eph. 6:18-19. There is power in prayer, Jas. 5:16!

**4. Learn to "wait on the Lord,"** being fully mindful that in due time "*He shall strengthen your heart*," Psalm 27:4. Weather-wise, draughts are often followed by showers of blessings, and in life hard times are often succeeded by good times. Perhaps what most of us need is more patience, but too many of us are like the man who prayed, saying, "Lord give me patience," and then said "give it to me right now!"

**5. Learn to prioritize.** Jesus said "*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*," Matt. 6:33. Remember this: the Lord will not accept second place in your life!

**6. "Put on the whole armor of God,"** Eph. 6:11. Study the parts of the Christian's armor, as they are outlined in Eph. 6:10-18. It seems that every part of the body is covered except the back, and there is reason for this; we must never turn our backs to Satan! We must "*resist the devil*" with a passion, causing **him** to "*flee from*" **us**, Jas. 4:7!

**7. Look to Jesus!** This involves laying aside “*every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us,*” running “*with endurance the race that is set before us,*” and focusing our attention upon “*Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith,*” For us, He “*endured the cross,*” and ultimately “*sat down on the right hand of the throne of God,*” Heb. 12:1-2.

**8. Remember that God’s grace is sufficient.** Paul thrice prayed for the thorn in the flesh to be removed, but it wasn’t removed. However, God said to him, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness,*” 2 Cor. 12:9. Try as we may, we cannot live a completely trouble free life and, properly understood, this may be to our spiritual advantage! David said “*it is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes,*” Psalm 119:71. Lumberjacks tell us that “the stronger the wind, the stronger the tree, good timber does not grow with ease.” It is a fact that “Peace is not found in the absence of trouble, but in the presence of God.”

**Conclusion:** Don’t expect to live a trouble-free life. That won’t happen — unless you die very young! Face your discouragements with courage; press onward and upward, turn your stumbling blocks into stepping stones of greater usefulness, learn to “*rejoice in the Lord,*” Phil. 4:4, and some day in heaven you will be able to rejoice **with** the Lord! —Bobby Witherington

\*\*\*\*\*