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to turn
to
me

OVERCOMING DISCOURAGEMENT

JOHN R. CHEYDLEUR

(Joshua 1:6-8)

Life is filled with problems, challenges, and disappointments. The school fundraiser didn't go as well as we had hoped. The team finished the season last despite our best coaching efforts. The job presentation did not receive glowing reviews despite all our hard work and late nights of preparation. The report from the doctor was worse than we expected.

Things happen that foil our best-laid plans. Often, we find ourselves let down and discouraged. Sometimes, it's so bad that we just want to give up. Discouragement sets in and says, "Why bother? Nobody cares anyhow." Despite the circumstances, discouragement doesn't have to overwhelm us. We can learn from it, benefit from it, and overcome it.

FACING UP TO DISCOURAGEMENT

Discouragement is not the same as clinical depression. Long-term depression is often the result of unacknowledged anger turned inward upon oneself. By contrast, discouragement comes from a conscious awareness of our lack of ability to overcome a difficult situation.

When we are discouraged, our faith is often put to the test. It is time for us to reassess our goals and reevaluate our responses. In some cases, we will find that there were circumstances that were beyond our control—like the weather, unexpected company, or the emergence of a misplaced bill. While these things aggravate us, they need not overwhelm us. God is also the God of the unexpected. He sees these things before we do and chooses to use them to shape our personal and spiritual lives to our own good: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Discouragement ought to be our first indication that it is time to pray. We often become discouraged because we get busy and neglect prayer. Many believers are discouraged by life's problems and have a lack of confidence that they can deal effectively with life's toughest challenges. We need to call on God to help us understand His guidance in the midst of our circumstances.

UNDERLYING CAUSES OF DISCOURAGEMENT

There are three underlying causes for discouragement: (1) lack of confidence in God; (2) lack of confidence in ourselves; or (3) lack of direction for the future. Joshua faced these same challenges when he led the children of Israel into the Promised Land. God told Joshua, "Be strong and of good courage" (Josh. 1:6). God reminded him that the key to overcoming discouragement was a vital, personal relationship with Him. The Lord told him, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Josh. 1:8).

KEYS TO OVERCOMING DISCOURAGEMENT

Once we really believe that God loves us and cares about us, we can begin to have

confidence in His plan for our lives. The key is lining up our lives and our prayers with the wise and certain promises of God's Word. When we quote the promises of God back to Him in our prayers, we are agreeing with what God has already promised and reordering our lives accordingly. These key thoughts can help:

1. Ride out the storm. Some people never realize their potential because they are beaten down by the storms of life and give up too soon. We must not quit.

2. Realize that God uses ordinary people. We don't have to be spiritual giants to experience God's grace in our lives. He chooses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things for Him (1 Cor. 1:26, 27).

3. Don't be defeated by the negatives. We must keep our focus on Christ and the wonderful possibilities in our lives. Listening to the negative voices that say, "You can't . . ." or "It will never work . . ." will only discourage us.

4. Focus on Christ. It helps to envision what He can do for us and what we can do for Him. No life is meaningless if Christ is at the center of it.

5. Remember that we are special. God uniquely created us and designed us to serve Him. No one else can do what we can do for Him. We are uniquely gifted to minister to people no one else will ever meet or touch. We must not give up just because there are challenges and obstacles.

6. Focus on behavior. We must do what is right, no matter how we feel. We should make sure our behavior determines our feelings rather than allowing our feelings to determine our behavior. This sets us free to be creative, confident, and committed.

7. Be persistent. There is an interesting story in the Bible about a persistent widow who insisted that a judge give her legal protection. He finally granted her request

because she wouldn't give up (Luke 18:1-8). We actualize the impossible when we honor God with our faith.

The answer to discouragement is getting our focus off ourselves and our limited resources and focusing on the unlimited power of God. He can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Even in the face of life's greatest challenges, His grace is sufficient. When we give our discouragement to God, He can encourage and draw us ever closer to Him.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of discouragement include:

- Psalms 25:1-22; 40:1-3; 55:22; 56:1-13; 91:1-16
- Isaiah 41:10
- Jeremiah 15:16; 29:11; 33:3
- Habakkuk 3:17-19
- Zephaniah 3:14, 15
- Romans 8:35-39
- 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10
- Philippians 4:11-13, 19

Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on discouragement at | Peter 5:7 on page 1665. See also the personality profile of Nehemiah on page 605.

Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. ¹⁴If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.^a On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. ¹⁵But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. ¹⁶Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.^a

¹⁷For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸Now

"If the righteous one is scarcely saved,

Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"^a

¹⁹Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

SHEPHERD THE FLOCK

5 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ²Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but

4:14 ^aNU-Text omits the rest of this verse.

4:16 ^aNU-Text reads *name*. 4:18 ^aProverbs 11:31

KEY PASSAGE



Discouragement

GIVE IT TO GOD

(5:7)

Discouragement often occurs when people shoulder their own worries, cares, and fears, and then begin to collapse under the weight. Discouragement is not a godly attitude because it reveals an unwillingness to trust God. Discouragement can be dealt a death blow, however, when we constantly cast all our cares upon God, because He cares for us.

Casting our cares on God takes a great amount of trust and humility. We need to give Him all of our cares—not just the ones we think are big enough or important enough. God will even shoulder the cares that we have brought upon ourselves—we can give them *all* to Him. His shoulders are big enough to carry all of our fears, worries, and troubles. When we give our cares to God, we can brush off our discouragement and get back to work. We have much to do for God!

To Learn More: Turn to the article about discouragement on pages 266, 267. See also the personality profile of Nehemiah on page 605.

SOUL NOTE



Steadfast (5:8–10) The moment a person becomes a Christian, Satan tries to make them ineffective through sin or through struggles with discouragement or suffering. Believers must be sober and vigilant, resisting Satan by remaining “steadfast in the faith.” This is a strong defensive action. Satan is a defeated enemy, so believers need not fear him. When we resist Satan, he will flee (James 4:7). We resist Satan through maintaining our steadfast faith in Christ, wearing the armor that God provides (Eph. 6:10–20), and remembering that we are not alone in our suffering. The same sufferings are being experienced by believers everywhere. Through these sufferings, He will “establish, strengthen, and settle” His people. **Topic: Spiritual Warfare**

NEHEMIAH PRAYS FOR HIS PEOPLE

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.

It came to pass in the month of Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan^a the citadel, ²that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. ³And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."

⁴So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many

days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

⁵And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You^a and observe Your^b commandments, ⁶please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. ⁷We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the

1:1 ^aOr Susa 1:5 ^aLiterally Him ^bLiterally His

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Discouragement

NEHEMIAH—RISING ABOVE DISCOURAGEMENT

(NEHEMIAH 2)

What happens when people are discouraged? Some decide to give up. Others look to place blame. Still others use their discouragement as a slingshot to propel them to new heights. Nehemiah was a member of the last-named group.

Nehemiah was a Jewish exile living in Persia and serving as the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. A cupbearer was a trusted servant with constant access to the king—tasting all food and drink before giving it to the king. Jewish exiles had already been allowed to return and rebuild, so many had gone with Ezra back to Jerusalem. Nehemiah longed for news from his homeland. Eventually he learned that, although those who had returned had rebuilt the temple, they had not yet completed the city wall. Nehemiah was heartbroken when he learned that the wall of Jerusalem was still in disrepair years after the Jewish people had returned to the city.

His discouragement was understandable. In ancient times, a city without walls was vulnerable to attack—it was a weak city. Jerusalem would not be able to stand proud or even begin to reach its former stature without a wall. Instead of allowing his discouragement to lead to despair, Nehemiah set about on a course of action to correct the problem.

After praying and planning, Nehemiah took advantage of his trusted position with the king. When the king asked why Nehemiah seemed disturbed, Nehemiah explained the situation, said a quick prayer, and boldly asked for everything he would need to take a trip to Jerusalem. Obviously, Nehemiah was ready with his request so that, when the opportunity arose, he knew exactly what to ask. The king granted the request of his trusted servant, and Nehemiah was on his way.

Discouragement can cause depression and inability to act. It can also motivate a person, giving renewed determination. Like Nehemiah, we can let discouragement cause us to find a way to solve the problem. We can pray, plan, and then move ahead, knowing that God goes with us.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about discouragement on pages 266, 267. See also the key passage note at 1 Peter 5:7 on page 1665.

before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy,¹³ so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far off.

RESISTANCE TO REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

4 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel,² they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here."³ But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us."⁴ Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building,⁵ and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

REBUILDING OF JERUSALEM OPPOSED

⁶In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

⁷In the days of Artaxerxes also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter was written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language. Rehum^a the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes in this fashion:

⁹ From^a Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions—*representatives* of the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the people of Persia and Erech and Babylon and Shushan,^b the Dehavites, the Elamites,¹⁰ and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnapper took captive and settled in the cities of Samaria and the remainder beyond the River^a—and so forth.^b

¹¹(This is a copy of the letter that they sent him)

To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth:^a

¹² Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations.

¹³Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished.¹⁴ Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king,¹⁵ that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city is a

4:8 ^aThe original language of Ezra 4:8 through 6:18 is Aramaic. **4:9** ^aLiterally *Then* ^bOr *Susa*

4:10 ^aThat is, the Euphrates ^bLiterally *and now*

4:11 ^aLiterally *and now*

SOUL NOTE



Overcomers (4:4, 5) Believers can expect opposition when doing the work of God. In this case, the people of Judah simply wanted to rebuild their house of worship. Their neighbors were opposed to this and responded by discouraging and intimidating them. Rather than allow this opposition to paralyze them, God's people asserted their legal rights to allow the building process to continue. Believers have faced opposition in every age. With God's help and the support of other believers, we can overcome fear and discouragement and complete the work to which God has called us.

Topic: Discouragement

speech!³⁰ Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.”

³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because **the Father is with Me.**

³³ These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will^a have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

JESUS PRAYS FOR HIMSELF

17 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ² as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should^a give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. ⁴ I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵ And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES

⁶ “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. ⁷ Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. ⁸ For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they

have received *them*, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.

⁹ “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. ¹⁰ And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ Now I am no longer in the world, but these

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

JOHN 16:33

are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me,^a that they may be one as We *are*. ¹² While I was with them in the world,^a I kept them in Your name. Those whom You

gave Me I have kept;^b and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by *the* truth.

16:33 ^aNU-Text and M-Text omit *will*.

17:2 ^aM-Text reads *shall*. 17:11 ^aNU-Text and M-Text read *keep them through Your name which You have given Me*. 17:12 ^aNU-Text omits *in the world*. ^bNU-Text reads *in Your name which You gave Me. And I guarded them; (or it);*

JESUS PRAYS FOR

²⁰ “I do not pray for those who will perish; ²¹ that they should not perish, *are* in Me. ²² I have given them to You, that You sent Me, that they may be glorified through My name, and that they may believe that the world has believed in Me, and have glorified Me.”

²⁴ “Father, I do not want to give Me; ²⁵ that they may believe in You; and these things I have declared in the world, that they may believe in You, and have glorified Me; for You have loved Me, and I have glorified You.”

BETRAYAL AND A

18 When Jesus had said these things, He went forth from the Brook Kidron, which He and His disciples crossed, where Judas, who betrayed Him, was also. ² Judas, who betrayed Him, had a troop of Pharisees and Sadducees, and some of the Jews. ³ Judas went to them, and said to them, “Jesus said to me, He is the Christ; and I have followed Him, and I have seen His signs, but I do not know how I should betray Him.”

⁵ They answered Him and said, “Why are you saying these things? We know that Jesus said to us that He is the Christ; and we have not believed in Him.”

SOUL NOTE



Victorious and Joyous (16:33) Jesus warned His followers that living as a Christian in the world would not be easy. Hardships, troubles, even persecutions would come. Some tribulations are part of living in a fallen world and happen to everyone; others occur as Satan assaults people's faith. Believers are to be prepared for these tribulations but not overwhelmed or discouraged by them. The world gives tribulation, but Jesus gives peace. We can “be of good cheer” because we know that Jesus has overcome the world. Christ has already won the ultimate victory over Satan, sin, and evil. **Topic: Discouragement**



doubt from their unfaithfulness of us that n

such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. ⁵For each one shall bear his own load.

BE GENEROUS AND DO GOOD

⁶Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.

⁷Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

⁸For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. ⁹And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. ¹⁰Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

GLORY ONLY IN THE CROSS

¹¹See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! ¹²As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these *would* compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. ¹³For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. ¹⁴But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom^a the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵For in Christ Jesus neither circumci-

sion nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

GALATIANS 6:7

BLESSING AND A PLEA

¹⁶And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy

be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

¹⁷From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁸Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

6:14 ^aOr by which (the cross)

SOUL NOTE



A Heart for the Harvest (6:9) Hurting people everywhere need the healing touch of God's servants. Paul encourages believers to "not grow weary while doing good." Continuing to do good and never seeing a harvest can be discouraging and frustrating. At times, loving words fall on deaf ears and hard work on thankless hearts. But no work for God is ever wasted: "In due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." We will reap a harvest of blessings as the Holy Spirit works in our lives. We must never allow discouragement to make us grow idle. Our good works are valuable to God.

Topic: Discouragement

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