

# Dealing with Discouragement

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Twenty-seven years is not a very long time, but it has been long enough for me to see that life is a series of peaks and valleys, ups and downs, times of joy and times of sorrow. Just when you think that all the pieces are falling into place and everything is going exactly the way you had planned, the bottom falls out from underneath you or disaster strikes from an unexpected source. Such an experience can quickly turn the cheerful into the discouraged, the hopeful into the pessimistic, the energetic into the depressed. But it helps to know that you are not the only person who has ever had to deal with feelings of discouragement.

Two of the Lord's greatest leaders became so overwhelmed by the seemingly dreary and dismal outlook of the future, they requested that He take their lives and deliver them from their anxiety and uncertainty. When the children of Israel grew tired of eating manna in the wilderness and craved for the meat that was once bountiful in Egypt, Moses cried, "I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. So if Thou art going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Thy sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness" (Num. 11:14-15). And Elijah ran for his life after Jezebel threatened to kill him, "and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers'" (1 Kings 19:4).

If you have ever felt discouraged, disheartened, depressed, or downtrodden, then you are going to have to stand in line behind Bible characters like Moses, Elijah, David, Jeremiah, and Paul; in other words, you are in good company. Our problem is not that we experience these emotions, our problem is how we deal with them and how we attempt to overcome them. I'm not asking you, "why are you discouraged?" I want to know what you're doing about it.

I offer the following three-step program on how to effectively deal with discouragement. At least, this is what we seem to think works best. But please observe the warning label. Caution: This program is not aimed at those who are actually attempting to overcome discouragement but is solely intended for the people who love misery's company.

1. **Worry more, pray less.** That's the first thing that goes, isn't it? Our schedules are so filled, our spirits so oppressed, our problems so complicated that we forget what is most important. I saw quote a couple of weeks ago that went something like this: 'If it's not worth taking to the throne of God, it's not worth the worry.' Yet, even when we have experienced the power of answered prayer in the past, we are still not convinced. We have seen how it has changed our attitude, our disposition, our hope for tomorrow, yet we do not fully utilize this direct communication line to Him who can change the night to

day. And when we are buried in depression and need His assurance the most, we shut Him out and seek comfort in the things of this world. Severing ties with the Lord doesn't solve any problems, it only makes them worse. And he who kneels before God can stand before any man.

**2. Find an alternative to the worship service.** That's the next thing that goes, because if prayer won't help you, worship won't either. Those who forsake the assembly because of their despondency and despair are missing the whole point of the worship service. "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds" said the writer of Hebrews. What is a way in which we can do that? By "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more, as you see the day drawing near" (10:24-25). When praising God is engaged collectively by people who are of like faith and like persecution, one of the inevitable results is the building up and edifying of the members. Worship is a stimulant and the best encouragement for the discouraged. If you find no pleasure participating on this side of eternity, what makes you think you will on the other side?

**3. Cut yourself off from those who love you the most.** When you get to feeling like you are the only one who is suffering or the only one who has to bear as much as you have to bear, you just want to isolate and insulate yourself from the rest of the world. Elijah cried that all of the prophets had been slain and that he was the only one left who was zealous for the Lord. But God answered, "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (1 Kings 19:10-18). Facing discouragement by yourself, without help from anyone, doesn't make you courageous or brave, it succeeds only in making lonelier the lonely. Don't turn your back on one of God's greatest blessings to His children: one another.

Perhaps Paul Earnhart has said it best: "godly people may suffer from depression, but they do not yield to it." God has created the possibility for such emotions as well as a way of overcoming them. Instead of being beaten down by them, let's use them as stepping stones to bigger and better things. And, no matter what, don't ever forsake Him who has promised He will never forsake you.