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Cure for Discouragement

Everybody experiences discouragement of some kind - maybe often. It Hurts! But there's a lesson to be learned that will change everything, bringing in light and joy...



“Cure for Discouragement”

By Dr. Robert A. Cook



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You say to yourself or out loud, "Oh, I'm so discouraged."

The reasons for your being in that state of mind may be entirely valid. Moreover, you may admit quite readily that discouragement comes to everybody at one time or another in varying degrees of intensity.

But that knowledge does not do much to lessen the sharp hurt you are feeling today, does it? Your sense of frustration and hopelessness is very real. The important issue is this: can discouragement be conquered? Can that strong foe of happiness actually be moved out of the way?

In searching for answers, the place of beginning is all important: we must learn the "why" of our trouble.

Determine the Cause

"Oh," you say, "there are many causes of discouragement, as many as situations that could be named."

This is true. But there are at least three underlying factors that we would do well to look at because they appear again and again.

Cause #1 - exhaustion

The classic illustration of this condition is found in 1 Kings, chapters 18 and 19. There Elijah's remarkable triumph at Mount Carmel is recorded. You know the story, but I will sketch it briefly in order to refresh our memories.

During the reign of that evil king Ahab, a devastating famine raged in Samaria. Parched fields cried for rain. In that setting God said to his servant Elijah, "Go, show thyself unto Ahab; I will send rain on the earth." Elijah obeyed.

When the two met, that wicked schemer addressed the prophet with these words: "Art thou he that troublest Israel?" And Elijah countered:

"I have not troubled Israel: but thou, and thy father's house in that YE HAVE FORSAKEN THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE LORD and hast followed Baalim." (1 Ki. 18:18)

Fearless before this power-wielding monarch, Elijah commanded “all Israel” to assemble at Mount Carmel. He demanded that all the prophets of Baal - 450 of them-come too, along with another 400 of the prophets of the groves.

See Elijah taking charge! Hear him shouting:

“How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.” (v. 21)

Two bullocks were brought, two altars erected, two ideologies pitted against each other. All day long Baal’s followers prayed to their god. They endured jibes and mocking. They cut themselves with knives.

But nothing happened to the offering on Baal’s altar.

Then Elijah strode forward. The second altar was ready, the offering placed upon it. Barrels of water were poured over and around it. Jehovah’s trusting representative prayed:

“Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that THOU ART THE LORD GOD. (v. 37)

And the fire fell! It consumed the burnt sacrifice and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water in the trench. What a triumph!

Now note what followed. In a flash, Elijah took care of the false prophets. With the same authority he announced to Ahab that “abundance of rain” was on the way.

From the top of Mount Carmel Elijah watched as the storm gathered. After a while a little cloud appeared, and Elijah told his servant:

Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. (v. 44) What did Elijah do?

“He ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel” (v. 46), a distance of some 27 miles!

When Jezebel, Ahab’s wicked wife, heard what had taken place on Mount Carmel, her fury boiled. She immediately sent a message to the prophet stating in effect, “Elijah, I’ll get you yet.” A stalwart before hundreds of Jehovah’s foes, Elijah now saw himself as defeated and inadequate before one woman.

So he ran ... and ran ... and ran.

Finally, his strength gone, he sank to rest under a juniper tree. So indescribably weary was he that his words must have come in short gasps: "O Lord, take away my life," he prayed. Did God chide His servant for whimpering and running away? No. Elijah's discouragement (ours, too) had roots in physical and emotional depletion. The Great Physician prescribed an always-effective remedy.

First, God gave Elijah food and rest - repeated doses, graciously provided.

Next, God met Elijah, privately and alone, for a special revelation of His power - greater than that held by any Ahab or Jezebel. He spoke through the great wind, through the earthquake, through the fire, and finally through the still, small voice.

Thus restored and strengthened, Elijah was commissioned by God to new and important tasks. He was told to anoint two kings as well as the prophet who would be his own (Elijah's) successor.

What about you?

Dear child of God, are you discouraged? The cause may very well be that you are just tired out! Get some rest. (Oh, yes, you can.) Ask your Heavenly Father to help you find a time of quietness in which He can minister to your body and your soul.

Many years ago I talked with Frank Phillips, who at that time was in charge of a work among young people that extended from Oregon to the Mexican border. He was a tremendous worker; he had to be, with an assignment like that.

I said, "Frank, how in the world do you do it?" "Well," he replied, "every now and then I take a day off. I will fast and pray and wait on God and then go to sleep early at night. And you know what? I get up the next morning feeling as though I had enjoyed a week's vacation!"

You say, "I couldn't do that. I have little children. There are responsibilities that can't be shunned."

I know! Maybe you couldn't spare a day. But could you plan for freedom for say half a day? Or for even a few hours? The question is: How much do you WANT this refreshment from the Lord? If your desire is strong enough, you can find a way to obtain what you need.

Then, get some nourishment. The enjoyment of a well-balanced meal can go a long way toward brightening one's outlook on life. You mothers, with a thousand household tasks to attend to often forget your own needs in caring for those of others. You need food. Maybe you need additional vitamins. These are simple steps you can take toward attacking discouragement at its root causes.

If you are seeking to learn from the experience of Elijah, there are a couple of other things you can do.

Get some encouragement. In other words, spend some time with your Lord with the specific purpose of hearing Him speak only and directly to YOU -the "still, small voice." Take advantage of any time you can to be alone with God. Let Him refresh your soul. Let Him speak to you, directly and personally. Do this for a day, for even an hour, and you will find discouragement dispelled and heaven-sent encouragement taking its place.

Finally, let God give you a new task. Elijah's new assignment involved kings and a prophet whom the Lord told him to appoint. Your commission may be very different. But it can be new and fresh from God, as Elijah's was. And when you receive that commission, and begin to carry it out in God-provided strength, you will find discouragement long gone! In our day we hear a good deal about "burn out" - physical and emotional exhaustion. Have you experienced that malady? If you are a child of God, you don't have to stay burnt out, Beloved. Take time off, even if it can't be very much. Let God rest you. Let Him refresh you-physically, and from His Word. Let Him speak to you and give you a new touch.

Cause #2 - delay

Slowed progress is always hard to accept. Let us say that you have made certain careful plans. But you are stymied at every step; nothing turns out right. You know the feeling! The Bible is not unacquainted with that kind of frustration. Psalm 119:82 says: *"Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?"*

The classic illustration of discouragement caused by delay is in John 11. You remember the story. Lazarus fell ill, and his sisters Martha and Mary sent a message to the Lord Jesus: "He whom thou lovest is sick."

The unspoken plea was, of course, "Come right away and heal him."

But we read, "Jesus abode two days in the same place where he was." Lazarus grew worse, and finally died and was buried. He had been dead four days when Jesus arrived.

Martha spoke her mind. She said, in effect, "Lord, You blew it. You're too late. You should have been here; then our brother still would be alive. You made us suffer by Your delay."

What Jesus had in mind all along to give to His beloved friends was not merely evidence of a healing, but of a resurrection—something far greater than they envisioned.

The cure for discouragement brought about by delay is to get to know God's exquisite timing, to discover that He always gives us something better than we could possibly conceive ourselves.

Jack Hamilton, who had a wonderful ministry among young people years ago, told me about an experience he once had while driving across some of the great open spaces of Kansas. He said that one day he was surprised to find he had run out of gas. There was nothing to do but for him to start walking up the hill to the next town. He thought briefly about how much more quickly he could cover the distance in his car - he liked to move right along!

When he got to the crest of the hill, suddenly he saw a tractor trailer jack-knifed across the road, completely blocking the two-lane highway.

"If God hadn't let me run out of gas," Jack said, "I could have been decapitated by that failed equipment."

We are not always aware of how many times our delays are really tokens of God's kindness to us.

The next time you miss a plane, or are slowed by a stop light or frustrated by missing a section of a revolving door, just remember that God's delays are part of His beautiful timing. Jesus came to Bethany too late for a healing, but right on time for something infinitely better - a resurrection.

Am I talking to someone who feels like saying, "Lord, hurry up?" I have done that many times. We find it hard to wait on the Lord. But He is working according to a plan for us; He knows the end from the beginning!

In the beautiful account of Christ's feeding of the five thousand, we are given this intensely meaningful insight: "*He himself KNEW what he would do.*" (John 6:6) Yes, He knows all about your situation, dear child of God. Not only so, but He is working all the time for your good and God's glory.

"I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jer. 29:11, Living Bible)

Trust Him, Beloved! His "best" is worth waiting for-rejoicing while you wait. In our search for causes of discouragement we have looked at two areas: our possible physical exhaustion and our adjustment to delay. There is one other "cause" that we would do well to explore.

Cause #3 - neglect

Some of you who read these lines are very busy for the Lord. You are in the mainstream of life, and happy to be there. But there are others who can only look back upon years of such activity. Now you are crippled or weak or otherwise housebound.

People forget you. They stay away or come merely from a sense of duty. Discouraged? Of course you are!

I have good news for you. The key to getting over the bitterness of being neglected is to get interested in what GOD is doing and direct your energies (though they may be limited) in that direction.

If you will let the Lord fill your heart with His Word and with a knowledge of His will, it is certain that you will be relieved of the discouragement that comes from being set aside and neglected.

What is God doing? He is individualizing His children, dealing with each one with specialness and love. He said:

"He calleth his own sheep BY NAME and leadeth them out." (John 10:3)

You can follow Him in this practice. You can learn to know and use the names of the people with whom you have contact. Dale Carnegie used to say: "The sweetest sound in any language is a person's name, correctly pronounced."

What else does our dear Heavenly Father do, in which you could join Him? He listens. Are there young people in your life (other age groups as well) who pass you by, paying no attention to you? Try listening to them, not advising, not reminiscing, not scolding, just listening. Your discouragement, rooted in other people's neglect of you, is likely to disappear.

We have seen that in our battle against discouragement we must first determine the cause.

We named three of the possible sources of our discontent: exhaustion, delay and neglect. Now, having learned where our discouragement is coming from, we need to deal honestly with forces within ourselves that contribute to our unhappy state.

Evaluate Criticism

How do we adjust to long-term discouragement, situations that seem to go on and on without improvement? One of the chief causes of this condition is harassment by unsaved individuals. You may be the only Christian in your family, or in your office or shop. Your loved ones ridicule you. Your peers shun you or call you “reverend.” You try hard to surmount the taunts, but you see no improvement.

Maybe you are passed over for a promotion.

If he were here, the Apostle Paul could tell you that he knows exactly how you feel. He spoke of “the offense of the cross.” He knew and you know too - that unless you are up against an out-and-out atheist, you can talk about God to the average person and encounter little or no opposition. But when you begin to speak of Jesus Christ-the Christ of the Cross you find a strange and powerful resentment developing.

Why is this true? Paul answers:

“For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. 2:14)

Harassment From Christ’s Enemies

You can expect harassment from unsaved people. It is not so much that they dislike you, but because they are against what you stand for. They are enemies of the One who is the Lord of your life.

When unbelievers harass you, try to find the root cause of their opposition. It is against your blessed Lord (and against you only in proportion to your loyalty to Him).

Remember, too, it is not the words that unbelievers speak - cutting though they may be - but it is the truthfulness of what is being said that matters. Mere words and human feelings count for very little.

The words of other people, especially those who harass us, may be incorrectly interpreted,

or downright wrong. You need to pay attention only to God's everlastingly accurate compass, His Word, and the radar of His revealed will to guide you. These never fail.

Scheming by "other people"

Sometimes the harassment you must endure goes further than the mere utterance of words. Somebody may actually be out to get you, or your job, or your relationship with someone dear to you.

"The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law ... they persecute me wrongfully They had almost consumed me upon earth." (Psalm 119:85-87)

You can feel with the psalmist as he utters those words, can't you? But commiseration with one another is not enough.

Each of us, when faced with a situation of this kind, must, first of all, do away with the "they/me syndrome." Whenever we have our eyes on other human beings-on what they say or do or contrive to accomplish against us-the focus of attention is on people: "they" and "me."

We must deliberately change the relationship to give God a prominent place in it: "Thou" (God) and "me." That is: what is God wanting to do in this situation? What is He wanting to do for and with me?

When we perceive the situation as "they" working against "me" it is strictly human, with endless possibilities for hurt, misunderstanding and bitterness.

But when it is "you and I and God," everything is gloriously different. Harassment from other people may stem from a variety of causes. If we are honest with ourselves we must admit that much that we suffer is generated by ourselves, as our own faults and foibles rub against others. Or the reason for harassment may be something imagined by the other person. Or it may be because of one's allegiance to the Lord Jesus whom that other person steadfastly refuses to accept.

In our effort to master discouragement, we have seen that it is important, first, to determine the cause. Then we must evaluate the criticism. Now we come to a third step:

Take The Cure

To deal with all the situations that distress us-all the causes of discouragement-there are certain initial requirements we must meet.

Give God time

You will be surprised how God can work things out for you if you don't try to finagle the solution by and for yourself.

You will find that you must take time, too.

You will almost always do poorly if you make a decision when you are tired or angry or ill. My dear Christian worker, you are not always treated fairly. I know that. Even Christian people often disappoint you. But if you are God's trusting child, you don't get bitter about what is happening to you. You don't lash out at people. You don't try to straighten things out yourself. Nor do you sulk and pout and whimper.

No. You turn the whole matter over to your loving Lord. He cares about what happens to you. He warns you to stay out of "traps" set for you by those who would hurt you and your ministry.

Live in God's Word

The key to dealing with the schemes and attacks of others is found in the psalmist's words:

"All thy commandments are faithful But I forsook not thy precepts." (Psa. 119:86, 87)

How are you to attain victory in every situation? Know ... and obey ... and stay close to the Word of God. To do that is a matter of self preservation. Once you see that, you will be careful to have the quiet time that you so much need, with your Lord in His Word, every day.

It is not a matter of your being "religious," or satisfying the dictum of some pastor who tells you that you must read your Bible daily. Only by your "living in" the Word of God are you enabled to stay out of the "traps" that may be laid for you by some unbelieving schemer. The Word of God in your heart and mind and memory will be your sure guide.

Be a specialist in knowing and obeying the Scriptures and you will stay clear of destructive mines set by the Evil One.

The blessed Holy Spirit, who indwells your personality if you are a child of God, controls your thinking and your actions—all on the basis of God's eternal Word. Memorize it. Meditate upon it so that you will have the promised "good success" that Joshua knew about (Josh. 1:8). Did you notice that the psalmist comes rather quickly to confident assertion?

He said: "I forsook not thy precepts."

While he did acknowledge the trouble he faced - "They [his accusers] persecute me wrongfully" - he did not stop there. He moved on to center his faith in God Himself and His infallible Word. You must do that, too, if you would overcome discouragement.

There is a certain couple I see about once a year. Every time I meet them they are sure to bring up the fact that somebody cheated them out of some thousands of dollars years ago. What actually happened I do not know. It seems that someone whom they trusted with a rather large sum of money swindled them - and they will never forget it!

That couple had a right to deplore what happened. But their continuing bitterness helped no one, least of all themselves. There is a well known chorus that applies in cases like this:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face;
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.*

Experience God's life-giving touch

Let us say that you have been so deeply hurt that you cannot feel anymore. You can shed no more tears. It is hard to pray, hard to read the Bible, hard to obey God. Something within you dies when you are deeply discouraged. Clouds seem to be low and threatening and all of life is painted in shades of grey.

What to do? Pray the psalmist's prayer:
"Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth." (Psa. 119:88)

God can give to your life a new touch. That is what he did for Elijah. The prophet had settled down under a juniper tree and had asked that he might die. God rested him and fed him and he went in that strength on a forty-day journey into the mountainous wilderness. There God met him. There God gave him a new vision and a new challenge and a new touch.

Would you please think of that sequence in relation to your own life? Are you at a place where you need - you must have - God's quickening touch?

Notice the words: "Quicken me according to thy lovingkindness." He loves you so much that He is delighted to be kind to you! "He waits to be gracious."

How is one to receive this divine quickening? First, set aside some time for God. Most of us

do our praying on the run. We have a decent short time of evening and morning devotions, but the rest of the time we are on the go, and if we pray at all, we do it in a hurry. We ask God to help us or keep us or guide us or protect us-or whatever our need may be.

That practice is good, of course. I am not against praying on the run. But if you want to be quickened, if you want God to give you a new touch, you have to set aside time for Him alone. On occasion I have rented a motel room and stayed there with my Bible, praying and waiting on God because I needed a new touch from Him.

You say you can't do that? That may be true.

But surely there must be some place in your home, or in your vicinity, where you could go to be alone with God if you wanted to - for an hour, or half a day, or whatever length of time you choose. Maybe you could give Him an hour or two when the house is quiet and everyone else is asleep.

Wait on Him. Confess your sins and shortcomings and failures. Plead the blood of Jesus for cleansing. Center your attention on God's Word. As you read - and as you wait - you will find the dear Holy Spirit whispering to your heart some things He wants you to know.

Have a pad and pencil handy to write down what you are learning, for you will forget these things otherwise.

Second, fill your mind and heart with the Word of God.

The writer to the Hebrews says:

"The Word of God is ALIVE and powerful ... and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb.4:12)

God's Word becomes alive in you as you read it ... meditate upon it ... and obey it. As you read, look for God's message to YOU. It will delight you to find that God Himself actually is speaking to you.

Third, realize you don't have to stay discouraged! Let's visualize your case. You come to God in a childlike expectation. Guided by the Divine Helper, the Holy Spirit, you give yourself and your problems into God's hands. What is sure to happen? Discouragement disappears.

Circumstances may not change immediately, but you have the confidence that you and God are working together and that every promise He has made to you will be fulfilled.

I want to go back to our original illustration: the case of Elijah. We touched upon some of the

dramatic events of the prophet's life. We are looking now for an answer to our question, "Does discouragement have to go on and on?"

The debate on Mount Carmel is over. The waiting and the resting and the physical renewing are accomplished. The wind and the earthquake and the fire demonstrate to the prophet God's mighty power. Then there comes the still small Voice of direction. Elijah was to do something. He was to anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, Jehu to be king of Israel, and Elisha to be his own successor as prophet of Jehovah. If you want to banish discouragement, start obeying what God has told you to do. These are the steps to take:

Wait on God

Listen for His word to you

Obey Him fully, starting NOW.

God will give you light for the next step you are to take, though you may not see far down the road. When you determine to lay aside self pity, when you choose rather to give your attention to eternal values, God Himself will meet your every need and discouragement will disappear.



