

DISCOURAGEMENT

1. In what circumstances have you been discouraged? _____

2. How can discouragement affect our faith? _____

3. Why may we at times ignore our discouraged state? _____

4. What may result if we do not deal with discouragement? _____

WHAT CAUSES DISCOURAGEMENT?

Psalm 73:2-3 . . . As for me, I came so close to the edge of the cliff! . . . For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.

We become discouraged when we stop looking at all God has given us and focus on the success of others.

1 Kings 19:3-4 . . . "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." Discouragement often comes after a great spiritual experience.

HOW CAN I HANDLE DISCOURAGEMENT?

1 Peter 5:8-9 . . . Watch out for attacks from the Devil . . . Take a firm stand against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that Christians all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.

When we are discouraged, we are particularly vulnerable to Satan's attacks. We must be especially careful to stay close to God's Word and other believers during these difficult times.

1 Kings 19:10 . . . I alone am left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.

Discouragement makes us feel sorry for ourselves. We must guard against thinking we are the only one who is going through troubles. It is encouraging to realize others are going through the same thing we are.

2 Chronicles 20:15-17 . . . Don't be discouraged by this mighty army, for the battle is not yours, but God's.

It would have been easy for the people of Judah to see only the vast enemy army and not God standing over it to destroy it. We must be careful to disconnect our feelings of discouragement from our assurance of God's love for us. Discouragement can cause us to doubt God's love, drawing us away from the source of our greatest help.

WHAT COUNSEL DOES THE BIBLE GIVE FOR RESPONDING TO DISCOURAGEMENT?

BIBLE READING: 1 Samuel 1:1-28

PRAYER IS THE KEY TO HANDLING DISCOURAGEMENT.

Hannah had good reason to feel discouraged and bitter. She was unable to bear children; she shared her husband with a woman who ridiculed her (1:7); her loving husband could not solve her problem (1:8); and even the high priest misunderstood her motives (1:14). But instead of retaliating or giving up hope, Hannah prayed. She brought her problem honestly before God.

Each of us may face times of barrenness when nothing "comes to birth" in our work, service, or relationships. It is difficult to pray in faith when we feel so ineffective. But, as Hannah discovered, prayer opens the way for God to work (1:19-20).

OTHERS CAN ALSO HELP IN HANDLING DISCOURAGEMENT.

Earlier Hannah had been discouraged to the point of being physically sick and unable to eat. At this point, she returned home well and happy. The change in her attitude may be attributed to three factors: (1) she honestly prayed to God (1:11); (2) she received encouragement from Eli (1:17); and (3) she resolved to leave the problem with God (1:18). This is the antidote for discouragement: tell God how you really feel and leave your problems with him. Then rely upon the support of good friends and counselors.

REMEMBER THAT GOD IS ABLE TO DO WONDERS EVEN IN DISCOURAGING SITUATIONS.

Nehemiah 4:14 "As I looked over the situation, I called together the leaders and the people and said to them, "Don't be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, and fight for your friends, your families, and your homes!" Accomplishing any large task is tiring. There are always pressures that foster discouragement-the task seems impossible, it can never be finished, or too many factors are working against us. The only cure for fatigue and discouragement is focusing on God's purposes. Nehemiah reminded the workers of their calling, their goal, and God's protection. If you are overwhelmed by an assignment, tired, and discouraged, remember God's purpose for your life and his special purpose for the project.

GOD CAN USE DISCOURAGING SITUATIONS TO BRING GLORY TO HIMSELF.

Philippians 1:14 "Because of my imprisonment, many of the Christians here have gained confidence and become more bold in telling others about Christ."

Being imprisoned would cause many people to become bitter or to give up, but Paul saw it as one more opportunity to spread the Good News of Christ. Paul realized that his current circumstances weren't as important as what he did with them. Turning a bad situation into a good one, he reached out to the Roman soldiers who made up the palace guard and encouraged those Christians who were afraid of persecution. We may not be in prison, but we still have plenty of opportunities to be discouraged-times of indecision, financial burdens, family conflict, church conflict, or the loss of our jobs. How we act in such situations will reflect what we believe. Like Paul, look for ways to demonstrate your faith even in bad situations. Whether or not the situation improves, your faith will grow stronger.

PROMISES FROM GOD:

Joshua 1:9 . . . Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Psalms 34:18 . . . The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; he rescues those who are crushed in spirit.

Galatians 6:9 . . . Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time.

Revelation 21:4 . . . He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain.