

When Discouragement Comes - Exodus 5:22-23

Introduction: I was 14 years old. I had a major case of Pupititus Crushitus. There was this girl in my school whom I wished she would notice me. Well, one day, she gave me an invitation to a sweetheart party at the church she went to. Now really, she gave invitations to several others in the class, but I thought I was the only one who got an invitation. Well, it set my little heart to fluttering. Brimming with confidence, I told her I would come, and asked her if she would meet me at the door at a certain time. She said yes! I couldn't believe it. She was finally going to fulfill all my hopes and dreams.

Well the night came, and I got my brother to drop me off at the church. I followed the signs to the basement where the party was, waited for a few minutes until the time arrived, and then I knocked on the door. Someone opened it. It wasn't her. I asked for her, and the lady said she would try to find her. For thirty minutes I waited. Where was she? Was something wrong? Did I misunderstand? Was I at the wrong door? All these things were going through my mind.

Finally, I decided that I had been stood up, so I left. Dejected, Disappointed, Discouraged, and heartbroken, I just started walking. Then it started raining. And I realized I was stranded. So I walked for two miles, down to the shopping center to call home. I never told her how that made me feel, because I was afraid of being rejected again, or laughed at, and ridiculed. I just kept all that hurt and disappointment to myself.

Now, I didn't tell that story to get you to feel sorry for me. I told it to paint a picture of the hurt of discouragement.

Moses was a man who knew the meaning of discouragement. He had surrendered to God's call to lead His people out of Egypt, and then found himself meeting Pharaoh face to face to convince Pharaoh to let the people go. But when Pharaoh refused and actually made things worse for the Hebrew slaves, Moses became depressed and extremely discouraged. Our text this morning reflects the discouragement he felt in his heart.

Exodus 5:22-23 (NIV) *"Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all."*

Discouragement is a disease unique to human beings, and eventually everyone gets it, even people in ministry. I have no doubt you've experienced discouragement at times, maybe many times. You might even be discouraged at this very moment.

Do you know how often I have wanted to quit and just walk away from this position? Good, because I'm not going to tell you.

But the bottom line is, when you're in the pits of discouragement, it's a battle. And engaging in this kind of battle will leave you weak, wounded and wiped out, so this morning, I want to look at some causes but then discover some cures for discouragement. It is a winnable battle. First:

1. The Causes of Discouragement

"Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.'" Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go." Exodus 5:1-2 (NIV).

One cause of discouragement is:

A. Rejection - When Moses approached Pharaoh with the command of God to let the people go, he was met with a resounding "no." Not only did Pharaoh turn down the request, he also showed contempt for Moses' God in vs. 2. You see, this Pharaoh thought of himself as a god, and in his eyes, there was no one equal to him. Egypt was the dominant world power, and he was the all-powerful one. If anyone was going to be worshipped, it was him. This God of Moses was a subordinate in his estimation.

Rejection can be a major cause of discouragement. Nobody likes to be rejected. It hurts because we take it so personally. When we're rejected, we start to think, "*What's wrong with me?*" and all the negative feelings about ourselves are brought to the surface. But in this case, we must remember that it wasn't Moses who was being rejected, it was God.

Another cause of discouragement is:

B. Retaliation - When Pharaoh showed his contempt for God, he took it out on His people.

10 Then the slave drivers and the foremen went out and said to the people, "This is what Pharaoh says: 'I will not give you any more straw. 11 Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all.'" 12 So the people scattered all over Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. 13 The slave drivers kept pressing them, saying, "Complete the work required of you for each day, just as when you had straw." 14 The Israelite foremen appointed by Pharaoh's slave drivers were beaten and were asked, "Why didn't you meet your quota of bricks yesterday or today, as before?" Exodus 5:10-14 (NIV). Pharaoh retaliated to God's Command by not only making the Israelites work harder, but actually adding more work. Now, instead of having the straw used for brick-making delivered to them, they had to gather it themselves. Then, if they didn't meet their quota, they were beaten.

The result was discouragement for the Israelites. The hopes of freedom had turned to the harsh reality of continued slavery and cruelty.

Retaliation can be a source of discouragement because of the fear and pain it brings. Not just physical, but mental and emotional pain as well. But there is hope for the persecuted for Jesus said that the persecuted, insulted, and falsely accused would be blessed. "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me." **Mt. 5:10-11 (NIV)**

Another cause of discouragement is:

C. Renouncement - When Pharaoh retaliated by making the Israelites' work harder, the Israelites began to grumble and complain. They first went to Pharaoh and appealed for relief, claiming that it was his taskmasters

who were causing their productivity to decrease. But Pharaoh saw it different. He said they were the lazy ones, so he ordered them to work harder.

Finding no relief from Pharaoh, the Israelite foremen went to Moses and blamed the Israelites for their own troubles (21). In effect, what they were doing was renouncing Moses' leadership.

Oppression from without often causes grumbling from within. Hardship and difficulties are circumstances that often beg for someone or something to blame whether justified or not.

If the bills aren't paid, and we won't take responsibility for overspending, we blame the creditors. If that doesn't work, we blame our employer for not paying enough.

If the church attendance falls off, it's not your fault for not visiting, it's the preacher's fault. If the budget isn't being met, it's not your fault for not tithing, it's the leadership's fault for spending too much.

Renouncing leadership is the easy way to assign blame. And it can be a real source of discouragement for the leader. If you want to run a leader off, don't pray for him or her, and constantly blame him or her for everything wrong.

Those are some of the causes of discouragement but what can be done about it? Are we to just tough it out and hope to get over it? Do we give in to it and resign ourselves to failure and fear? Or is there a cure? Is there anything we can do to beat the blues?

I believe there are some ways to overcome discouragement and the resulting depression. Here are a few suggestions:

2. The Cures for Discouragement

A. Remember Whose You Are - I didn't say remember who you are. That's not the issue. The issue is WHOSE you are. Nehemiah was another man who faced discouragement in his life. He had a burden to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem toward the end of the period of Jewish exile, but when he was met with opposition and retaliation, and he saw the fear in His people's eyes, he became discouraged. But eventually, he remembered whose side he was on and said, "...*Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome...*" (**Nehemiah 4:14 (NIV)**).

Nehemiah remembered who he belonged to and who had commissioned and equipped him for the task. In other words, he remembered who he worked for, and it made all the difference in his attitude and outlook.

How do we remember the Lord? Like Joseph, we remember that He is with us, always. Like David, we remember that His goodness and mercy is following us all the days of our lives. Like the Apostle Paul, we remember that God's grace is sufficient for us. And like Peter, who had failed the Lord so many times, we remember that God's love is always abundant. When we're discouraged, instead of focusing on the problem, we need to focus on the person of God. Remember the Lord. Remember His promises and remember His Power.

Another cure for discouragement is to:

B. Reorganize Your Priorities - When discouragement comes, it begins to break apart the fragile fabric of peace and stability in our lives. Things that once were handled with no problems, can gradually become sources of worry and frustration. Our world seems to fall apart. Things begin to appear hopeless. And the discouragement seems relentless.

Reorganizing our thoughts and attitudes can go a long way toward breaking the hold of discouragement. Instead of asking, “*Why me?*” we need to start asking “*What can I learn from this?*” Instead of grumbling and complaining, we need to pray to God. Instead of giving up, we need to change your priorities. Instead of withdrawing and curling up in some dark room, we need to get out and find someone who is in worse shape and pour our lives into theirs. If you start to do these things, you’ll find discouragement becoming less of a problem.

Finally, to cure discouragement in our lives, we can:

C. Resist the Devil - In order to overcome discouragement, we must wage a battle against it. Discouragement is one of the devil’s weapons. He wields it often. And the only way to defeat it is with spiritual weapons.

In Eph. 6:10-18, Paul describes the Christian’s armor in waging battle against the devil and his army. The first thing he says is to “*put on*” this spiritual armor so that you will be “*able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.*” That term “*stand firm*” (*histemi*) is the root of the word James used when he said in 4:7, to “*resist (antihistemi) the devil and he will flee from you.*” Don’t give in to discouragement and say “*Woe is me.*” Stand against it with all your might. Don’t quit, resist! Discouragement is a choice. If you feel discouraged, it’s because you’ve chosen to feel that way. Really, no one is forcing you to feel bad, so hang on and hang in there. Stand up and stand firm in the grace of God. The attacks will diminish if you’ll resist. The dark clouds will dissipate if you’ll resist. Victory will be declared if you resist.

Conclusion: Yes, you may be like Moses and face the discouragement of rejection, retaliation, and renouncement. But if you’ll remember God and his promises to you; if you’ll just take a step back and reorganized your priorities, and follow God’s plan; and if you’ll resist the urge to wallow in your discouragement and depression, God will ultimately gave you the victory. God can and will come through for you when discouragement comes.