

Sunday, November 19, 2023 am

CLOSER TO GOD (60)

Challenges (6)

Discouragement

We are continuing to address challenges to our pursuit of drawing closer to God. We have addressed some worldly challenges – worldliness, materialism and busyness. Today, we go in a different direction.

I. Discouragement and its consequences

- a. What is discouragement? The condition of being disheartened. To lose hope, confidence, enthusiasm or courage. It is the temptation to quit because of frustrations.
- b. Discouragement is something we have all faced from time to time. It comes from many different sources.
 - i. It could be the result of physical maladies – disabilities, illnesses or inabilities, or exhaustion. You simply get tired of being tired, sick or weak all the time.
 - ii. It could be the result of personal weaknesses, failures or struggles – you fail to accomplish some task or goal – whether you try or not, OR you give in to a weakness or sin – e.g., losing your temper or something you are struggling to overcome, etc. An addict that slips up. OR someone hopelessly lost in a given situation and you don't know what to do.
 - iii. It can be the result of the disappointments of others –
 1. You see others that are not what they ought to be
 2. OR someone who is continually critical, belittling or even slanderous of your or others.
 3. Example: Colossians 3:21 – an example, Fathers are not to provoke their children, lest they be discouraged. An abusive or overbearing parent can be a discouragement.
 4. Example: Ezra 4:4 – the people around Jerusalem tried to *discourage* the people from rebuilding the temple. It worked! For about 16-20 years, the temple complex was left incomplete. Similarly, Nehemiah 4 & 5 describes how enemies tried to discourage them from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. They mocked the work being done. And then some of the Jewish businessmen in greediness exploited the people. Nehemiah dealt with the discouragements.
 - iv. Sometimes it leads to disappointment in God because things do not work out the way we expected it to happen. And this is where we need to be careful where we tread.
- c. Consequences can include:
 - i. A divided mind – you may be dealing with internal conflicts – what to do next; frustrations and debating giving up, etc. Discouragement, especially in spiritual matters, is often a matter of weak faith. Consider James 1:5-8 – when we doubt, we are double-minded.
 - ii. Blaming – often discouragement causes us to think rashly. Because of our frustrations, we blame God or others or yourself.
 - iii. We might act rashly – cf. Moses at Kadesh when he struck the rock. Numbers 20.
 - iv. Anger, bitterness, etc. - at what is going on. There are many ungodly attitudes knocking at the door of discouragement. When we open that door, it leads us into dark places
 - v. If not addressed, it can lead to depression or even abandoning our faith. 1 Timothy 1:19 speaks of the faith of some having “suffered shipwreck”.
 1. Consider Israel in the wilderness. They were constantly complaining and ungrateful. Numbers 21:4 records that as they journeyed they became discouraged and

complained. God sent fiery serpents in their midst. An example of discouragement due to ingratitude.

2. Numbers 32:7-9, as Israel is approaching Canaan to enter, some tribes request permission to remain east of the Jordan. Moses challenges them, *Now why will you discourage the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the Lord has given them? Thus your fathers did when I sent them away from Kadesh Barnea to see the land. For when they went up to the Valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, so that they did not go into the land which the Lord had given them.* Note in vs. 9, he references their refusal to enter Canaan the first time. Numbers 13 records the occasion as 10 of the 12 spies bring back a bad report and say the people are too big and too strong. Num. 14:1-3 shows the peoples discouragement as they blame Moses and God. They are so discouraged they want to return to Egypt to their bondage. Vs. 11 described this as rejecting God. Deuteronomy 1:28 will remind the people of this event describing the action of the 10 spies as having “discouraged our hearts.”

II. Examples of dealing with discouragement

- a. Elijah – after his great victory against the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, Jezebel seeks to kill him. 1 Kings 18-19. In the wilderness he wants to give up. He even tells God that he’s done. While God will grant his petition, he first gives him instructions to carry out.
- b. Job felt discouraged from his friends and wife.
- c. Was Peter discouraged after he denied the Lord 3 times? He went out and wept bitterly. When Jesus is challenging him about his love, Peter hesitates. What he did was devastating. In John 21:15-17, he hesitates to answer when Jesus asks him, “Do you love Me?”
- d. Was John the Baptist discouraged when he sent disciples to Jesus? Matthew 11:2-3
- e. Paul’s thorn in the flesh – 2 Corinthians 12:1-9, His constant concern for brethren – 2 Corinthians 11:28. As he faces death, he is alone – 2 Timothy 4:10, 16.
- f. Jesus at times – John 6:67-70 – after some hard teaching, Jesus asks His disciples if they want to leave too. Consider his being condemned to the cross and all that surrounded that – His friends forsook Him, Peter denied Him, the Jews hated Him, Pilate cowardly sentenced Him, etc.

III. Dealing with discouragements

- a. ***As always, it begins with attitude.*** And attitudes are something we CAN control.
 - i. Discouragement is a choice – “you should rule over it”. cf. Cain - Genesis 4:6-7
 - ii. Determine you will NOT let it define you, or even the moment.
 - iii. Consider that you are not alone. Even Jesus suffered so that you would not become discouraged – Hebrews 12:3.
 - iv. Consider the good things. Be thankful – count your blessings, etc.
- b. ***Face what is causing your discouragement***
 - i. Examine yourself – 2 Corinthians 13:5. Look inward. What is causing discouragement?
 - ii. Often, courage is identified as the answer to discouragement – see Joshua 1:9 – take courage and do not be dismayed. Sometimes it takes courage to be honest with yourself about where you are and what you need to do about it.
 - iii. Address the cause if you can – if you can, deal with it. See Hebrews 12:1-2 lay aside every weight and the sin which ensnares us.
- c. ***Resist the devil*** – understand he is the cause of discouragement.
 - i. Do NOT blame God when you are discouraged. It may be your frustrated efforts to please Him that is causing your discouragement, but He is NOT the cause!
 1. Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was a “Messenger of Satan” (2 Corinthians 12:7)
 2. Job’s afflictions were caused by Satan

3. Elijah's discouragement was because of Jezebel's wickedness (she was a tool of Satan)
 4. Who put John in prison? It was not God! Etc.
- ii. Like so many other mental troubles, is a tool of Satan. In fact, it is one of his most effective tools. Recall Peter's denial of Jesus – Luke 22:31 – Satan had asked for him to sift him as wheat.
 - iii. James 4:7 – realize that if we resist him, he will flee from us. Do NOT give in to his lies!
 - iv. 2 Cor. 2:10-11 – do not be ignorant of his devices.
- d. **Change your environment– even if it's temporary.**
- i. If something is causing a discouraging attitude right now, you may need to do something different for a while. If it's a bad habit, you need to quit it! If you are in a toxic environment, do what you can to leave, ASAP.
 - ii. Cf. 2 Timothy 2:22 – Timothy was told to flee youthful lusts. Imagine what a difference David's life would have been if when he saw Bathsheba on that roof, he had not stopped to look!
 - iii. Take care of yourself – a healthy lifestyle helps dealing with mental challenges.
- e. **Pray about it** – prayer is always part of the solution to dealing with the troubles of this life.
- i. Nehemiah went to God, Jesus prayed often.
 - ii. James 5:13 – if suffering, pray! Matthew 6:13 – lead us not into temptation...
 - iii. 1 Peter 5:7 – cast your cares on Him; Romans 8:26 – be reminded that the Spirit helps with our weaknesses.
- f. **Read your Bible.** Take time to LISTEN to God. His precepts give me understanding, His word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path – Psalm 119:104-105. The Bible is filled with words of encouragement as we face the troubles of life. Acts 20:32 – the word of His grace is able to build you up.
- g. **Associate with the godly** – Hebrews 12:12 – strengthen the hands that hang down... God gave us each other to be there during the times we are struggling and discouraged (cf. Galatians 6:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:14).
- h. **Get up and keep going** – don't settle & don't quit!
- i. 1 Corinthians 15:58 – be steadfast, immovable...
 - ii. 2 Thessalonians 3:13 – do not grow weary in doing good.
 - iii. You CANNOT live in the past – Philippians 3:13-14 – forget it and reach forward.
- i. **Trust in God** –
- i. One of the most challenging things to do in troubling times is to turn it over to God and leave it there. If something is happening that we cannot control, do what you can do and then put it in God's hands.
 - ii. 2 Corinthians 7:5-7 – God comforts the downcast
 - iii. Prov. 3:5-6 – Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding...
 - iv. Matthew 11:28-30 – remember the invitation and promise of Jesus!

Most of us, if not all face discouragement from time to time. These are some practical considerations to help us deal with those times. The key to remember that they do not need to define you. Instead, let us work through them and let them make us better on the other side. Remember James 1:2-4, *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.* Do not let this, or any other attitude keep you from drawing closer to God. Think about it!