

MORNING DEVOTIONS

New Hope for the Discouraged

Discouragement is like a wet blanket. It's uncomfortable, slows you down, and you want to get rid of it as quickly as possible. Each of us must struggle with some level of discouragement.

And I can't give you an easy answer to avoid it. Sometimes a negative circumstance in life causes discouragement, and at other times we don't even know the cause.

You work hard, try your best, and still things don't work out as you hoped. What happened? All the planning in the world can come to a grinding halt when a huge obstacle comes along. Where did that come from? You were totally unprepared, and suddenly there's fear and lack of confidence. You feel alone and without hope. Nothing is going right. Know the experience?

The word "discouragement" literally means "without courage". Somehow, we lose that "fighting edge" to keep going, unable to face the challenge of each day. We lose heart. Is it really worth all the effort? What do I do next? One thing we do need, I believe, are special "encouragers" along the way – people who will step into our lives and lend a listening ear. They can give you some helpful feedback and down-to-earth advice.

We all need friends like that. It could be just what you need at that difficult time. Let them into your private world and share how you're really feeling. Most people will be only too happy to support you. Don't let your negativity stay around too long. Don't retreat and withdraw from others.

Have you taken time to explore why you feel discouraged? Make a list of the reasons why you feel defeated. It's an important task. You can't take control of something you don't understand. What is the source of your discouragement? Have I let myself down? Trying to look at the bigger picture of your life circumstances is a good step also. It's about gaining perspective. Am I physically exhausted or need a holiday?

It was the famous Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh who said,

"In spite of everything, I shall rise again. I will take up my pencil, which I have forsaken in my great discouragement, and I will go on with my drawing."

I know that discouragement comes most often when you do all the right things but experience poor results. It's not what you intended happening – but I'm afraid that's life.

Often during these sad times, we look inwards to our problems and frustrations. Here's a better solution. Look upwards to a God who has not abandoned us. He is with us and accompanies us all the time. He is a present-tense God. Can you imagine the difference it would make to your outlook if you consciously remembered He is with you? It means, no matter what you have to do, your Heavenly Father holds your hand. And He will give you courage, strength, tenacity, and perseverance.

Also remember to count your blessings. That means to make a special effort to appreciate the good things in your life. One author expressed it like this: “Man only likes to count his troubles; he doesn’t calculate his happiness.” And that is true as I have observed life over many years. There is no greater gift in life than to know the God of steadfast love – and that love is never more important than in the changing seasons, circumstances, and conditions in life. Our health may waver, but God’s steadfast love for us never does.

The Bible has many verses to explain this valuable truth. We also want to be careful in looking at someone else and say, “They’re better off than me”. We may be wrong in our assessment of someone else’s situation or our own. The good news of God is that you’re not something or someone that has been forgotten. The God of steadfast love and faithfulness still remembers and knows you and you can know the Lord and that is really great.

In our bad times we tend to focus on the one thing that’s bothering us – it’s wrong to overlook the 99 things that are going well in our lives. Charles Stanley said, “Discouragement is a choice. You don’t have to remain discouraged no matter what is going on in your life.”

God is weaving a tapestry of your life. You can’t see the whole pattern. But He has a plan for your life and He won’t allow discouragement to stop His divine plan for you. In the OT the Psalmist spoke to himself in very blunt terms as a prayer in Psalm 42 (The Voice):

Why am I so overwrought?

Why am I so disturbed?

Why can’t I just hope in God?

Despite all my emotions, I will believe and praise the One who saves me...

My God...

And Psalm 34:19 (GNT) says:

The Lord is near to those who are discouraged;
he saves those who have lost all hope.

Jesus does not want us to stay discouraged because He says, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me” (John 14:1 - ESV). This wasn’t a suggestion to His followers – it was a command to take seriously. God’s wisdom and knowledge are infinite, beyond our knowing and understanding. Our limited ability to solve our problems and think of solutions is eclipsed by God’s ability to help us. David said in Psalm 42:11 (Living Bible):

“But, O my soul, don’t be discouraged. Don’t be upset. Expect God to act! For I know that I shall again have plenty of reason to praise him for all that he will do. He is my help! He is my God!”

Joshua 1:9 (NIV) says:

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”