

Bible Studies for Life Series for August 12: Handling discouragement

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Handling discouragement

- 1 Kings 19:1-13a; 15-18

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An old legend says Satan became discouraged and began auctioning off his tools. First sold was his hammer of hate, which he used to pound souls into whatever shapes he desired. Next, he sold his pliers. They had grabbed souls, and twisted and pulled them until they followed him. His drill of fear had pierced the best of the saints. Among other tools auctioned were pride, anger and gossip.

A customer noticed a polished, sharpened wedge. "Will you sell that?" he asked. "No," answered Satan. "It's the wedge of discouragement, my very best tool. Even Christians having won victory over sin and guilt will tumble into despair once I drive my wedge of discouragement into them."



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Discouragement can strike anyone at anytime. Discouragement is experienced in all areas of life, including the spiritual realm. Many of God's greatest heroes in the Bible suffered from periods of darkness and discouragement—Elijah, David, Jeremiah and Simon Peter.

Spiritual discouragement can come quickly and leave slowly. Has Satan used his wedge of discouragement on you? Have you been wounded by a word spoken from someone? Has someone tried to destroy the very reputation you have built your life upon? We ask many questions when discouragement comes, but mostly we wonder, "What should I do when I become discouraged in serving God?"

Recognize it as possible (1 Kings 19:1-3)

Our lesson is a study of Elijah. In 1 Kings 18, Elijah experienced a great victory for the people of God. What often happens to God's people following a great victory? Defeat and discouragement. Elijah's victory in 1 Kings 18 quickly turned into fear and discouragement. Jezebel stood against Elijah and vowed to kill him. Elijah, a great man of God, ran for his life.

We should recognize that even the strongest believers are subject to fear and discouragement. We should also recognize that following a great spiritual victory, we too will face opposition and be vulnerable to discouragement.

Refresh yourself in God's provision (1 Kings 19:3-9)

Elijah traveled to the wilderness. Elijah assumed his ministry was fruitless, prayed to die and then fell asleep. While sleeping, an angel was sent by God to care for Elijah in his time of need. The angel provided food and water for God's prophet. Elijah rested and ate before his 40-day journey to Horeb.

Elijah was cared for and loved by God. The great prophet needed to rest and refresh his life. A second time the angel came to him and cared for his needs. "He arose and ate and drank and went in the strength of that food 40 days and nights to Horeb, the mount of God" (1 Kings 19:8).

Like Elijah, we need to find time to relax and refresh our bodies. Like a car needs fuel, we also need to find the right fuel to live and serve.

We cannot continue to neglect times of rest and nourishment for long periods of time.

Reevaluate your purpose (1 Kings 19:9-13)

At Horeb, the Lord spoke to Elijah. God gives Elijah his wake-up call.

"What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9). God was not needing information. Rather, wanted Elijah to reevaluate his relationship with God and his purpose for living.

Observe Elijah's responses to God. Notice carefully his language which reflects his discouragement. Elijah uses "I" and "me" pronouns to describe his stance with God: "I have been very zealous ... I alone am left ... and they are looking for me to take my life." (1 Kings 19:10).

God confronts Elijah with a command, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the Lord’s presence” (1 Kings 19:11). The Bible declares, “the Lord passed by” (1 Kings 19:11). With power and might, God unleashes a series of reminders of his power, majesty and glory. A whirlwind, lightning, an earthquake and a fire—God is present in none of these.

There was only silence and stillness and God’s still small voice.

These dramatic experiences serve as a reminder to us that not all worship experiences are alike, nor need be. What is God looking for in his people? God desires that we have a listening heart. Listen for God’s guidance; it may come when we least expect it.

Reengage in God’s activity (1 Kings 19:15-18)

Elijah’s discouragement was met with God’s presence and purpose. Elijah needed to be reengaged with God’s activity in his own life. Back at home, Israel needed leadership, but Elijah was absent. God’s assignment to Elijah was to go back home and anoint three men—Hazael as king over Aram, Jehu as king over Israel, and Elisha as the successor to Elijah. Then the Lord assured Elijah there were 7,000 in Israel who had not worshipped Baal.

Elijah was refreshed and reengaged to do ministry for the Lord. God still had a plan and purpose for his life. Are you tempted to quit like Elijah? What can you do with such discouragement? Realize that God’s greatest servants have been there, too. Allow God to refresh and replenish you with needed fuel—physically, emotionally and spiritually. Reevaluate your spiritual walk with God. Retrace your steps and listen for God’s guidance. Finally, reengage. Listen for God’s commands. Be obedient to him.

Discussion questions

- What refreshes you to serve Christ in a more effective way?
- How can we listen for God's still small voice in our daily lives?
- In what ways has God reengaged you to serve him?
- What are some ways God has guided you to avoid the pitfall of discouragement?

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