

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for August 19: Rise above discouragement

August 6, 2012

Sometime back, a lady came to my office and proclaimed she wanted to resign from being a parent. She was tired and discouraged by the actions of her children. One more event in a lengthening list of transgressions had just taken place.

All the clichés related to discouragement came rolling out of her mouth—“reached my limit,” “final straw,” “pushed to the edge” and “had enough.” I understood what she was saying, because most of us parents have been at that same point on at least one occasion.

Parenting is not the only area in which we can become discouraged. Our jobs, our friends, our world and even our hobbies can sometimes become sources or locations for discouragement. One area harder to acknowledge is we can experience discouragement while we are living in the midst of God’s will. Paul wrote to the church at Galatia “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9).

Jeremiah would have benefited from hearing those words from Paul. Jeremiah had faithfully proclaimed the message God had given him even to the point of prophesying in the temple. One of the priests who also was in charge of temple security heard Jeremiah and had him arrested.

What followed was a series of punishments including beatings, being placed in stocks, and being humiliated by placing the stocks at the temple gate. This was the punishment Jeremiah received from the religious

establishment for prophesying God's message.

Many of us might have gone for vocational counseling at this point in the hope of finding a new line of work. But when Jeremiah was released, he continued with the same message but with greater detail. In Jeremiah 20:1-6, after his punishment has ended, he proclaims the nation that will be used to punish Judah is Babylon. He clarifies that the extent of the punishment will destroy Judah with many of her people and treasures being taken to Babylon.

For thought: When you have gone through a time of persecution because of your faith or have faced a lack of outward response when doing what God has entrusted to you, what has been your reaction? Have you given up, or have you remained faithful?

Most of us have a public side and a private side. Jeremiah's public side was expressed in his continued sharing of God's message despite the punishment and warning he received. However, in Jeremiah 20:7-10, we get to see Jeremiah's private side. Jeremiah lashes out at God venting all his frustrations. Jeremiah believes God has tricked him or deceived him to get him involved in this ministry that has met rejection at every point.

Jeremiah's discouragement is no different than the discouragement many of us face. He was tired of not having any positive responses to his message. He was weary from the criticism and negativity that came his way. He had reached the breaking point from the names he had been called and the physical and emotional pain he had suffered. He was ready to quit like some people you know also are ready to quit.

What kept Jeremiah going? In Jeremiah 20:9, he states that when he decides to quit, it is as if God's message becomes a fire burning inside of him. It is so intense he cannot stay retired. Rather, he must speak the message. In less visual language, Jeremiah cannot turn his back on the call

of God within his life.

For thought: Many times I have faced discouragement in my ministry. There only has been one thing that kept me from walking away and doing something else—the call of God within my life. What keeps you doing what God has given you to do? Remember that geography, prestige, family and income will at some point not be sufficient answers.

Eventually, we all must realize, as Jeremiah did, that we are not the ones in control. This life is not about you or me. It is all about God. In Jeremiah 20:11-13, Jeremiah enters into genuine worship of God. As he does so, he is reminded God is in control. He ultimately will be victorious. The enemies that have stood against Jeremiah and God will be defeated.

Jeremiah's role was to be obedient to God and to the calling God had placed upon Jeremiah. God's role is to take care of the outcome. With this realization, Jeremiah could openly praise God and accept his own role in God's plan.

For thought: Overcoming discouragement once does not give us a protective coating against ever being discouraged again in serving God. However, the answer to overcoming discouragement is the same each time. As you consider your own situation, whose desires and will are most important to you—your own or God's? Who is at the center of your world and activities? When you experience discouragement, whose perspective are you using—yours or God's?

For someone who lived 2,600-2,700 years ago, there are many things we can learn from Jeremiah in 2012. Overcoming discouragement is one of the major insights we gain from this Old Testament prophet.