

DEALING WITH DISCOURAGING MOMENTS

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INTRODUCTION:

- A. Every individual and every church goes through good times and bad times – so discouragement and depression are real and strong emotions we must face:**
1. Sometimes life feels like a roller coaster ride – Complete with ups & downs, twists & turns, high speed moments & sudden jerks – Sometimes we wonder what'll come next!
 2. While being a Christian gives us many reasons to rejoice we still must face low points, times when things don't go as we think they should... Very discouraging moments
- B. While we may feel alone when discouragement sets in we aren't – In fact, God has been very open about revealing such struggles in some of the Bible's biggest heroes:**
1. Consider some of the men who faced struggles of discouragement and depression:
 - a. Moses, Jonah, Job, & Paul - I believe even Jesus faced discouragement!
 2. This tells us is discouragement does not necessarily indicate a lack of faithfulness or that we've done something wrong so we shouldn't beat ourselves up about getting down
 3. I want us to study about another great man of faith who struggled with discouragement and learn lessons from him about discouragement and facing it (**I Kings 19:3-5a**)

I. THE DAY ELIJAH JUST WANTED TO DIE:

- A. Let's begin by introducing the characters that are involved in this event:**
1. First of all there is Ahab – The wicked king of Israel (**I Kings 16:32-33**)
 2. Next we have Jezebel – The even more wicked wife of Ahab (**1 Kings 18:4; Rev 2:20**)
 3. Then we have Elijah – A courageous and heroic prophet of God (**I Kings 17:1**)
 - a. When Elijah introduces himself by name it shows uncompromising conviction – In a setting ruled by Baal worship his name resounds: “My God Is Jehovah!”
 - b. Elijah stands as a bright light during a bleak time in Israel's history – King after king had been very wicked, spiritual complacency set in, & idolatry commonplace
 - c. As the spiritual chasm between God & His people had reached its widest breadth, Elijah stood alone in that gap with boldness and courage! A ray of hope!
- B. The Background – A Great Spiritual Victory At Mount Caramel**
1. After three years of special training from God away from Ahab Elijah returns & demands a “Battle Of The Gods” at Mount Carmel: (**1 Kings 18:1, 17-20**)
 - a. Remember its been 3 years since Ahab & Elijah have met face to face! The last time they talked Elijah pronounced a drought on Israel & it was still ongoing!
 - b. Imagine what Israel may have been like – Every brook had dried up, fields marked by the carcasses of dead animals, disease & pestilence, people are sick & Ahab is sick of hearing complaints – Then up walks Elijah... THE wanted man!
 - c. Elijah doesn't waver! When Ahab, the most powerful man there, points a finger of accusation at Elijah, Elijah just points it right back, pointing out his sinfulness!
 2. The Battle Of The Gods – Jehovah Stands Alone! (**1 Kings 18:22-26, 30-38**)
 - a. The prophets of Baal would put a bull on their altar, Elijah would build an altar for a sacrifice to Jehovah - The TRUE God send fire from Heaven to consume it
 - b. For hours the prophets of Baal are crying out, dancing around, and even cutting themselves to the point blood is gushing out; however, nothing happens!
 - c. Then Elijah basically says “It's Jehovah's turn!” – He not only prepares the altar & sacrifice but soaks it down with 3 barrels of water – He left no room for doubt!

- d. When God sent down His fire He left no doubt – It burned not only the sacrifice but also the wood, stones, & dust and consumed all the water that was around it
- e. With all questions answered they gave honor to & worshipped the Lord! **(vs. 39)**
- 3. During this battle we find Elijah standing firm with great boldness! **(1 Kings 18:21, 27-29)**
 - a. Consider how ALONE he was – Many Israelites were gathered there but they had no real conviction... It was Elijah → 1 prophet of God vs 450 prophets of Baal!
 - b. Elijah looks to the people and bluntly rebukes them for their spiritual indifference
 - c. He mocks the prophets of Baal – They are crying out to their god for hours on end without receiving an answer! Is he away? Should leave a message? Is he asleep? Maybe they need to wake him up! What if he's using the bathroom!
- 4. Even when the contest is and Jehovah stands alone as God, Elijah still is not finished... he gathers the 450 prophets of Baal and executes them! **(1 Kings 18:40)**
 - a. We may think this is extreme, but these prophets were destroying the God's people
 - b. **Illustration:** Doctor finds cancer: "Let's do minor surgery & see if we can't remove a couple cells, it won't be as prevalent." No... Get it all! Do major surgery!
 - c. Sin is serious – In individual lives, churches, and nations – Elijah understood that!

C. From the mountaintop to the valley - Discouragement sets in

- 1. Not long after Elijah's victory at Mt Carmel Jezebel sets out to murder him! **(1 Kgs 19:1-2)**
 - a. Notice she doesn't just say she wants to kill him but makes it known she is going to do it by the next day – This is an angry ungodly woman with lots of power
 - b. Don't forget this woman had done this before – In fact, had without Obadiah's efforts she would've killed all God's prophets – He hid 100 prophets from her
 - c. Jezebel had no morals to stop her, the means to carry out her threats, & was angry
- 2. What we see take place after this is a deep state of discouragement and even depression set in – Emotionally Elijah hit bottom and says that he just wants to die! **(1 Kings 19:3-5)**
 - a. The same man who stood boldly in the face of Ahab, outnumbered 450 to 1 by the prophets of Baal is now running for his life having become overcome by fear
 - b. Elijah seeks to be left all alone... He doesn't even take his servant with him
 - c. As we read his words it becomes apparent that he is exhausted physically and emotionally, he is in a state of self-pity, & focusing on unrealistic expectations
- 3. Elijah later in speaking to the Lord shows that in his discouragement he lost touch reality:
 - a. Twice Elijah shows discouragement has clouded his thinking **(1 Kings 19:10, 14)**
 - b. Elijah wanted to start a major national spiritual reformation; but, he feels like he has failed – He was God's messenger and no one seemed to be listening! It hurts!
 - c. He feels like he is the only one left standing for what's right – This was far from true
- 4. So what caused Elijah to enter into such a discouraging state?
 - a. **NKJV verse 3** → "Saw" – Hebrew ... "to gaze upon or consider" - He took his eyes off the Jehovah his God who answered by fire & focused on Jezebel's threats
 - b. He had put all of his strength and mind into working Israel out of this state of spiritual indifference & idolatry – He was worn out emotionally and physically
 - c. He was caught in the backwash of a great spiritual victory – Mt Carmel was now a memory, his emotions had peaked & was now on the descent from that high
 - d. His great dream was shattered – He had these high hopes of great spiritual growth & a change in Israel... He probably envisioned the people rejecting Ahab & Jezebel → When what he longed & worked for didn't happen he got down!

D. God's Answer – A Sure Cure For The Blues

1. Before we consider God's answer to Elijah's discouragement we need to remind ourselves of some important training God had given him in the past: **(1 Kings 17)**
 - a. God taught him by the Brook Cherith – There God called him away to be alone and hide at this brook where his only food & water was provided by God
 - b. His training continued at a widow's house in Zarephath – Here God uses a poor widow who was about to starve to death to train Elijah – He miraculously gave them plenty of food then when her son died God raised him from the dead
 - c. What Elijah learned → God is in control in this life... He can provide for his needs and will provide... That no situation is impossible for God to work through.
2. God responded to Elijah by providing him a time of rest and nourishment **(1 Kings 19:5-8)**
3. God next responded by dealing with spiritual needs increasing his faith **(1 Kings 19:11-13)**
4. For Elijah to be raised from his pit of pity God had to get him back to work! **(vs. 15-18)**
5. God then encouraged him by showing him the real picture he'd lost sight of **(vs. 18)**
6. God finally answered Elijah's discouragement by providing him a faithful friend & protégé to help him in his work: **(1 Kings 18:16)**

II. LESSONS WE LEARN ABOUT DEALING WITH DISCOURAGEMENT:

A. Consider some things we learn from Elijah about the sources of discouragement:

1. Discouragement often comes following great victories physically and spiritually:
 - a. When we are on the mountaintops in life we can understand that it from that point we can only go down – Those times only last so long... they are temporary
 - b. It seems when discouragement hits during these times they can hurt the most!
2. Discouragement also comes when we are emotionally, physically, or spiritually exhausted
3. Discouragement can be caused because we are focused on the wrong things
4. Discouragement can be the result of things not working out like we thought they would:

B. Now consider some lessons we learn about how to deal with discouragement:

1. While it is very difficult to do we must not allow discouragement to cause us to lose touch with reality, thus creating false circumstances in our own minds: **(Phil 4:6-7)**
 - a. **Illustration:** Family left – Thoughts... "How are we ever going to grow... things are gonna get bad!" → Its 1 family & we've still got a nice group that is great!
 - b. **Illustration:** Family facing financial trouble and think there's no way out – Fears losing everything they have! They panic until they pray and make a plan!
 - c. Spiritually speaking losing touch with reality is especially bad because it can...
2. If we find ourselves getting discouraged we need to make sure we surround ourselves by people who can encourage and support us! **(Ecclesiastes 4:12)**
 - a. There are some people who we must avoid – Those people who either might give us advice from the world's perspective or those who further discourage us
 - b. We must also avoid the tendency to be alone! It is good to get alone and spend quiet time in prayer with God... but that is different from going away to sulk
3. Take time for physical, emotional, & spiritual rest & nourishment: **(Mark 8:31-32, 46)**
4. When discouragement sets in we must remember the same lessons God had to reinforce in Elijah – God is in control and will provide our needs! **(Matthew 6:25-34)**
5. Finally, as we learn from Elijah that we have to get back to work and focus ourselves back on God's purpose for our lives! **(1 Peter 4:7ff)**