

Discouragement: The Way Out – Romans 15:4 / 1 Kings 19:1-18

Romans 15:4, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

I. The Ways Into Discouragement and Depression

Ahab had organized a religion that combined the worship of Baal the fire god with the female goddess Astor and worship of Jehovah. What Ahab had done with the union of these two opposing religions is syncretism! Syncretism is the union of different or opposing principles, practices, or parties, as in philosophy or religion.

A. No Revival

The discouraging aspect of this event is that nothing changed in the nation--no revival and no turning back to Jehovah. Additionally, Ahab and Jezebel became even more determined to destroy Elijah.

There are many biblical characters that went through problems and suffered with discouragement. David is an example as we read of his discouragement in **Psalms 51:12** where he repents and asked God to “...*restore the joy of Your salvation.*” Jesus went through stressful times, particularly in the garden just before His crucifixion. Jesus prayed, “*Not my will but Your will be done.*”

If you serve the Lord you can expect times of dismay and can expect attacks from the demonic world designed to put God’s people into discouragement.

B. Stress

Elijah believed he was taking this stand alone and was the only remaining voice of reason and the only representative of Jehovah God.

Stress can be imposed on us or self-imposed. Self-imposed stress comes from unfortunate events past or present in our lives that influence our thinking in a negative way. Most unfortunately, the past stays with us longer than we believe and can torment us longer than we recognize. Psychologists have determined that self-imposed stress can be caused by personal driven-ness or the opposite – laziness.

C. Misplaced Trust

In Elijah’s case, misplaced trust was the result of the drain of extreme leadership, naive expectations, and the result of success, followed by unreal expectations of what should be happening next.

He probably believed that after the great victory on Mt Carmel:

- Things should have been better
- Life should have been easier
- He should have had more support and followers
- His words should have had more of a positive and greater impact
- King Ahab should have repented

D. Poor Decisions

Misplaced trust leads to poor decisions. Elijah’s misplaced trust did exactly that; he chose to run and isolate himself.

If we isolate ourselves during times of discouragement and depression we tend to continue following the ways that led us into despondency.

E. Exaggerated Thinking

Elijah’s downward spiral became evident in his exaggerated thinking, in verse 4 he said, “... *it is enough now, let me die.*” and “*I am no better than my father.*” This is exaggerated thinking; he had just stood in the gap more than anyone else in his entire nation, more than anyone had done during this great crisis of religious heresy. Yet, he sees himself as a failure.

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When a person is suffering from discouragement and depression logic and reason don't usually engage. It seldom helps to point out their illogical thinking because their thoughts are being distorted by the emotional distraction and pressure of discouragement.

It is helpful to seek out fellow believers in Christ who can pray for us, encourage us, support us, and serve us during times of trouble, and love us in Christ Jesus.

A second problem of exaggerated thinking, as in Elijah's case is arbitrary comparison – “*I'm no better than my fathers.*” We're not to compare ourselves to others, we're to compare ourselves to Christ Jesus. He is our mediator, counselor, the Almighty God! He does not want us to remain depressed or discouraged.

II. The Ways Out of Discouragement and Depression

A. Take time to recover (Vs. 5-7)

Sometimes we need to start recovery by addressing physical problems before we address spiritual problems (rest, nourishment, sleep, exercise.) Elijah probably could not have dealt with his spiritual problems (lack of faith) until he was in better physical shape.

Often we underestimate the physicality and the effect in our body from stress, discouragement, and depression.

B. Start Listening to God (Vs. 9, 19)

Times of discouragement can have value: they can teach us to be willing to hear God. Unfortunately, sometimes that is the last action we take; we tend to turn to other remedies first. Listening to God is something we can do during those times of rest while recovering.

Notice that for Elijah, God was not in the great wind, nor the earthquake, nor the fire, but God spoke in a small quiet voice (vs. 11-12). God isn't going to always knock us down to get our attention. For a true, close relationship with God we need to stop, be still and be with God in solitude. *Psalm 46:10* instructs us to, “*Be still, and know that I am God.*”

God wanted Elijah to listen on his own; God wasn't going to shout. It is through His word and meditation on God's Word, and even sometimes through others God tells us some difficult truths we need to hear.

Sometimes He has to present some harsh realities we need to hear in order to make it out of the pit of discouragement and despair. We have to be willing to listen, not just hear God's word. Listening is controlled hearing.

C. Trust In God Again (Vs. 14-16)

Elijah had trusted God before. However, that doesn't help him in his current situation; he must trust God presently. We also cannot depend on our past trust in God; it requires a daily trust, and we must trust God every day, moment by moment, on an ongoing basis, if we're going to be in His Will and find our way out of trouble and discouragement. *Isaiah 26:3* “*You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever.*”

D. Reinvest in Life Again (vs. 14-16)

Reinvesting in life is not easy after suffering with depression or loss. It is normal to miss what we've lost in life which is often the onset of depression. However, to begin concentrating on tomorrow's opportunities we will begin to move away from depression and move toward normalcy.

Elijah sets the example for us; Elijah returned to service for God. God encouraged him and promised to give him new tasks to do. He was given the task to train a new protégée and the next generation of leaders. God gave him people to serve and do the work (7,000) prophets.

Serving God is an excellent way to overcome discouragement and depression. With God's help we can reinvest in life and emerge with a greater understanding of ourselves, others, life, and God's plan for our life.