

# Facing Discouragement

**Introduction.** Comedian and actor Jim Carrey once said in an interview, “If we all acted the way we really felt, four out of eight people at a dinner table would be sitting there sobbing.” It is not difficult for people to imagine themselves in circumstances so bleak, distressing, and discouraging that they became so despondent or depressed they actually lose their will to live. Proverbs 15:13 says, “A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.”

Battles with depression and discouragement are struggles that everyone faces, usually multiple times in their lives. Solomon said there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh” (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Therefore, it will be helpful to look at the teaching in the Bible for assistance with these kinds of moments in our lives.

## ***I. A Lot Of Godly People Were Discouraged***

- A. There was time in Moses’ life when he was so discouraged he was ready to die (Numbers 11:11-15).
  - 1. It is hard to imagine a great hero like Moses feeling so overwhelmed and discouraged but on that occasion he was.
  - 2. Israel was like a little child. It was really hard work being nursemaid to them all day. He thought it better to die than to have to look after them alone.
- B. Job was another great person who endured such crushing experiences that he wished to die (Job 3:20-22; 6:8-9).
  - 1. Recalling what Job went through (loss of children, property, and health) you can understand how he could become that despondent.
  - 2. But whether you can understand it, the Bible makes it clear Job really was that discouraged and depressed.
- C. Elijah was another great Old Testament hero who went through a time of similar discouragement and depression (1 Kings 19:1-4).
  - 1. An old saying goes, “Beware of human reactions after holy exertions.” Sadly, Elijah was willing to retreat before a defeated enemy.
  - 2. God had answered his prayer (18:36-37), and God’s hand had been on him in the storm (18:46), but now he was walking by sight and not by faith.

## ***II. Why Does God Tell Us This?***

- A. If we ever go through times of depression and discouragement it helps to know that even the most godly people had such moments.
  - 1. Make no mistake, I am not saying that to be godly you must be so depressed you wish you were dead.
  - 2. But the fact that men like Moses, Job, and Elijah had such feelings reminds us that being godly does not exempt us from wrenching experiences, or make us immune to moments of despair during those experiences.
    - a) Perhaps we should pause to mention that the way these great men faced their despair reminds us that self destruction is never an option for godly people. Although the pressures they went through made them wish they could die (and they told God how they honestly felt), they never tried to take their own lives. There are seven recorded suicides in the Bible:

- (1) Abimelech (Judges 9:54).
- (2) Samson (Judges 16:30).
- (3) Saul (1 Samuel 31:4).
- (4) Saul's armor-bearer (1 Samuel 31:4-6).
- (5) Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23).
- (6) Zimri (1 Kings 16:18).
- (7) Judas (Matthew 27:5).

- b) Although the Bible tells us about various people who committed suicide, not one suicide in the Bible involved a godly person.
- B. Another lesson these great men show is that godly people can come through discouragement and serve God afterward.
1. After Moses came through that low point in his life he went on to lead the Israelites through the wilderness for another 38 years (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).
  2. After Job emerged from his terrible trials he was accepted by God and had to offer prayers for his friends (Job 42:7-9).
  3. After Elijah left the cave in the desert he went back to the work God assigned him until he was miraculously taken by God into Heaven (2 Kings 2:1-11).
  4. If we ever feel like these individuals felt, we need to remember that on the other side of our darkest days and discouraging circumstances lies years that can be full of service, accomplishment, and salvation if we hold on to God.

### ***III. Three Ways Of Dealing With Discouragement***

- A. From Moses we learn that we should tell God our feelings in prayer.
  1. Moses poured out his feelings to God. God's answer to Moses' prayer was to give him 70 elders to assist him in managing the affairs of the camp. Moses was a great leader and a spiritual giant, but even he could do only so much.
  2. The New Testament reminds us that one way godly people deal with discouragement and despair is by committing their feelings to God through prayer (Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6-7; Jude 20).
- B. From Job we learn that when everything seems to be going wrong, we can remember that God never loses control, that God has reasons for what He allows, and that God can change circumstances when the right time comes.
  1. Each one of those lessons are very clearly seen in Job.
    - a) The opening chapters make it clear that God was always in control and always limited what Satan could do no matter how it seemed to Job (Job 1:12; 2:6).
    - b) The opening chapters also make it clear that God had reasons for letting Job go through those experiences. Although Job did not know why those events were happening, we know God had a greater lesson to teach, which is that the godly walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).
    - c) The closing chapters make it clear that when God's purpose was accomplished He reversed the adverse circumstances (Job 42:10-17).
  2. In mentioning this I am not saying that if we go through difficult times the behind-the-scenes details will be exactly as Job's, but the three previously mentioned lessons are true. Even if, like Job, we do not know all the details, knowing these truths can help us through the dark times we face.

- C. From Elijah we learn that we often make despondency worse by dwelling on the negative and imagining that events in our lives are worse than they are.
1. There are several observations we can make about Elijah's despondency.
    - a) It happened after a time of intense emotion and conflict — his life and death struggle on Mt. Carmel with Baal's prophets (1 Kings 18:20-40).
    - b) It happened after whatever optimistic hopes he had were shattered by the reality of continuing evil (1 Kings 19:1-2). King Ahab would not stand up to the idolatrous queen Jezebel.
    - c) It was made worse by a self-imposed isolation from his servant who could have encouraged him (1 Kings 19:3).
    - d) It can be made worse by physical infirmities (1 Kings 19:4-8). Elijah was physically exhausted from his lonely journey into barren desert.
  2. Elijah illustrates how easy it can be to become discouraged.
    - a) His repeated complaint to God seems to be all he was thinking about (1 Kings 19:10, 14; cp. Proverbs 4:23; 23:7).
    - b) He forgot that life can seem worse than it really is. He said, "I only am left." This dejected attitude has been called "The Elijah Complex".
    - c) He also forgot that good can be happening that he did not know about (1 Kings 19:18; cp. Psalm 18:21; Isaiah 38:3).

**Conclusion.** So once again the Bible shows itself "true to life" and as relevant to our modern problems as it was for people who lived long ago. This is one way God helps us through the scriptures: by not only picturing the triumphant moments in lives of great men and women, but also how people of faith endure dark times of despondency.

From Moses we learn to turn to God in prayer. From Job we learn that God has reasons for whatever He does and can change conditions when the right time comes. From Elijah we learn not to exaggerate the negative or forget that your life may not be as bad as it may seem.

Finally, remember that the help God holds out for those going through discouraging times is for those who have turned to Him, not for those who have turned their backs against Him. Although becoming a Christian does not mean you will not have problems — it does mean God is there to help you through your life (Psalm 46:1) and save you when your life is finished (2 Timothy 1:12). For those of us on the upswing, we need to help and show compassion to the struggling ones (Romans 12:15; 1 Peter 3:8).

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