

Discouragement

Discouragement is one of the most powerful and devastating emotions known to human beings.

Discouragement can leave us feeling weak, helpless and lifeless.

Discouragement is a negative force that stifles mental and spiritual growth, drains enthusiasm, inhibits drive, disorients our mind and leads to failure in life.

Of all the causes of failure, discouragement is probably the most difficult to overcome for the reason is often elusive and hard to trace.

We can readily identify some reasons such as sickness, criticism, rejection, loss of job, etc., but other causes seem to appear out of nowhere.

In this article I plan to isolate some of the hidden causes of discouragement and offer solutions that will work.

Once we understand the subtle workings of the enemy, we will be much better prepared to cope with it.

What is discouragement?

The word is made up of two parts, “*dis*” means without or absence and the second part “*courage*”, so discouragement means to be disheartened – lacking the courage to try or to go forward.

Many people when problems strike they become fearful, lack courage, thinking the worst will happen, run from their troubles and leave the results to chance, or afraid that they will **not** measure up and eventually fail.

Obviously this approach only leads to more discouragement because nothing was done to remove the cause, and the problem still exists.

Let us look at some of the hidden underlying causes of discouragement, this destructive emotion.

1) Satan, the devil, is the prime instigator of discouragement –

Ephesians 2:2 [Amplified Bible] “... *you were following the course and fashion of this world, were under the sway of the tendency of this present age, following the prince of the power of the air. You were obedient to him and were under his control, the demon spirit that still constantly works in the sons of disobedience, the careless, the rebellious and the unbelieving who go against the purpose of God.*”

Satan watches and waits to ensnare us in our weakest moments when we least expect his attack.
[1 Peter 5:8-9]

More often feelings of guilt, shame, failure and despair are direct attacks of Satan, as he relentlessly tries to undermine our faith in our Creator God and destroy our feelings of self-worth.

Satan’s objective is to cause us to lose heart, think ourselves as failures and forsake the influence of God in our lives.

Our greatest defence against Satan’s power is to recognise who he is, our greatest enemy and to turn to God for help to resist Satan’s attacks of negative thoughts and moods.

James 4:7-8 [NIV] *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”*

A powerful Holy Spirit given resolve and firm commitment to our Saviour, Jesus Christ, will drive this influence of Satan out of our lives.

Next time we feel discouraged for no apparent reason it may be Satan trying to gain access to our minds.

2) Goals or tasks that seem too overwhelming –

As a Christian we seem to have so many problems to overcome, so many bad habits to break, so much knowledge to learn and retain and so little time to do it all.

Our access to the Kingdom of God, His created family, seems so ethereal and far way, that its future reality is hard to grasp in everyday physical life.

We look at our shortcomings and doubts and in our mind's eye the giant goal God has placed before us is beyond us.

One of Satan's devices is to negatively use this great goal to cause us to become discouraged and give up even before we start of the path towards that Kingdom.

There is one physical law, that as a pilot in the RAF I know by personal experience really works.

The law of aerodynamics, which is just as sure when applied in the spiritual realm.

We can sit in a plane all day and never “lift off” until we make the first move forward using our own power. Once we make this move the “lift” comes free and we begin to fly.

We also find it is easier to accomplish our goal than we first thought, when we step out in faith expecting our Creator God to give us the “lift out of discouragement” we need.

3) Discouragement comes when we have no goals in life –

When we have no minor goals in life on our way towards our major goal, entrance into the Kingdom of God, we tend to become a person who is just lazily drifting along, whiling away our lives.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 [NIV] *“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”*

The Hebrew word translated “eternity” is “*ôlâm*” meaning the desire for something that is just out of reach, that is, a goal or achievement.

Growth is a principle that is manifested throughout all physical creation.

When we fail to grow in character or develop our talents we experience a deep sense of emptiness, futility, failure and hence discouragement.

The key to overcoming the cause of discouragement is to embark on a programme of small positive goals that can be accomplished in a short period of time.

Ecclesiastes 7:8 [Amplified Bible] *“Better is the end of a thing than the beginning of it ...”*

One reason for this is that one success will encourage us to have another goal and a gradual growth in confidence.

Matthew 6:34 [Living Bible] *“So don’t be anxious about tomorrow ... live one day at a time.”*

If you resist a temptation for one hour, such a success will encourage you to continue on to two hours, then a whole day, which will lead to your goal of complete freedom from that temptation.

4) Banishment of discouragement can only come through Jesus Christ in our lives –

John 15:1-5 [NIV] *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. **If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.**”*

Lasting success is the result of spiritual powers at work within our lives.

Ephesians 3:20-21 [NIV] *“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”*

With Jesus Christ working in and through our lives we can accomplish far more than we could ever imagine and thus banish discouragement.

John 14:15-18 [NIV] *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*

Jesus Christ lives His life again in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 4:11-13 [NIV] *“I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”*

Paul had learned to be content in every situation in life, so was never discouraged, knowing that he could accomplish all things through the power of Jesus Christ in him. [**Philippians 2:13**]

5) Sin in our lives breeds discouragement –

Why?

Isaiah 59:2 [NIV] *“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”*

Sin cuts us off from the Power of God, the Holy Spirit, in our lives.

1 Peter 5:8-10 [NIV] *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”*

Sin will leave us wide open to Satan’s attack that leads to failure and discouragement.

So if we feel discouraged we should examine our lives to see if there are any sins we have not confessed to God and asked for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Saviour to be a substitute for our deserved death. [**1 Corinthians 15:3**]

1 Corinthians 1:26-30 [NIV] *“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God, that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”*

God wants to use us inspite of our weaknesses. In fact the humble realisation of just how dependent we are on our Creator God to accomplish anything of lasting value makes it easier for Him to use us and thus dispel all discouragement.

Romans 8:28-39 [NIV] *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died, more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Belief in these promises that the Creator God inspired His apostle Paul to make should eradicate all discouragement from our lives.

Remember this was written to the Christian Church at Rome who were suffering under the evil Emperor Nero.