



A Quick Reference and Lesson Guide

Dealing with Discouragement

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1 Scenarios and Assessment

Scenarios/Case Studies

A. Scenario #1

Amy and Marcus had finally decided to take the next step in their relationship and get married. While preparing for their new life together, it had been decided that Amy would move to where Marcus lived. Six weeks before the wedding date, Marcus decides he does not want to marry Amy anymore. He calls off the wedding and breaks up with Amy on the same day.

B. Scenario #2

Gregory has always taken pride in being the breadwinner. Recently, Gregory was offered a position that would triple his salary; however, he received confirmation that God was taking him in another direction allowing more time at church and with family. Enticed by the idea of being financially secure, he took the promotion. A year later he is wavering in his faith and has almost compromised his marriage. He cannot understand why what seemed like a blessing turned out to be a curse. Gregory feels as if he let everyone down, including himself. He isolates himself from family and friends.

C. Scenario #3

Darren has always had a taste for expensive things even though his income does not agree with it. One day he saw the latest pair of jeans in his favorite store. He looked at the price tag and took mental stock of his bank account. Deciding he could not afford them, he casually folded the jeans and placed them in a bag that he had from a different store. He knew immediately of his wrongdoing, but his desire to remain fashion forward outweighed his conscience. Now sitting in a jail cell, he wholeheartedly regrets his decision.

Definitions and Key Thoughts

A. Facts

1. Discouragement is “a loss of confidence or enthusiasm; dispiritedness” (Merriam-Webster).
2. Discouragement, like all feelings, comes and goes. If one stays discouraged too long, it could turn into despair which could lead to depression.
3. Most suffering in life has no direct link to any personal cause (Rankin, pg. 66),
4. Disappointment can sometimes reveal itself as a blessing in disguise.
5. The feeling of disappointment can often serve as a catalyst to create change for the better.
6. Anhedonia is the loss of interest in pleasurable activities; this sometimes occurs when one is discouraged.
7. Condemnation feeds discouragement; conviction leads to change.
8. The feeling of failure oftentimes stems from perception and not reality.

9. In the midst of disappointment, it is important to release negative thoughts because they contribute to the cycle of unhealthy beliefs.
 10. Holding on to unhealthy thoughts and feelings can lead to angry outbursts and physical manifestations.
 11. The life we long to live begins with our thoughts. If we want a change in our lives, it starts with a change in the way we think...in the way we talk to ourselves (Rothschild).
 12. No one is exempt from feeling discouraged. The difference is shown by the response to it.
 13. When we become “disappointed” we must learn to become “re-appointed” to keep from becoming discouraged, then devastated (Meyer, pg. 4).
- A. Christian vs. Societal Norms
1. Some Christians believe because they are followers of God they should not experience discouragement or feel disappointment.
 2. The world sees medication as the cure for depression; however, believers have experienced being delivered from it by the power of God.
- B. If Discouragement becomes Depression
- According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders – fifth edition (DSM-5), although there are various types of depression, the following are common signs for the presence of depression in which a professional may need to be consulted:
1. Depressed mood most of the day
 2. Diminished interest in all/almost all daily activities nearly every day
 3. Significant changes in weight and/or appetite over an extended period of time
 4. Major changes in sleeping patterns
 5. Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day
 6. Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt nearly every day
 7. Diminished ability to think or concentrate
 8. Any level of recurrent suicidal ideation
 9. Impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of daily functioning not related to a pre-existing medical condition

Assessment (Interview)

- A. Ask about any increase or decrease of sleep habits, eating habits, and interest in daily activities.
1. Have you had an increase or decrease in your appetite during this time?
 2. Have you had trouble going to sleep, staying asleep, or staying awake?
 3. When was the last time you participated in an enjoyable activity?
 4. When you wake up in the morning, do feel like getting out of bed?
 5. Would you say you have been more happy or sad over the last two weeks?
 6. Would you say that you have been irritable or have had angry outbursts over the past two weeks?
- B. Information About the Event
1. What has brought you in here today?
 2. Why is this a devastating event?

This allows for exposure of related feelings and emotions. This also can highlight any irrational thoughts which may need to be corrected. Do not be afraid of silence; sometimes it is needed because the person is processing.

3. Was there a point where you felt you were making a bad choice?
 - a) Could you have turned the situation around?
 - b) If so, what stopped you?
4. Has this situation occurred before?
 - a) If so, how was it handled in the past?
 - b) Is it possible to resolve the situation in the same manner?
 - c) What preventative actions can be taken to avoid a repeat of the situation?
 - d) If not, what specific factor do you believe turned the situation into a disappointing event for you?
 - e) If that aspect was not part of the equation, do you feel you would view your circumstance differently?
 - f) *Answers to these questions can highlight possible patterns of behavior.*
5. How does this incident relate to your overall quality of life/future?
Putting this into perspective will allow the person to look at the event as a temporary setback. Encourage the long-term perspective.
6. Has this situation had a negative impact on the relationship between you and your family or friends?
 - a) If so, do you have plans to work towards reconciliation?
 - b) How would you know the relationship has been restored?
7. Do you feel your actions reflect your character?
 - a) How do you feel they agree or are outside of your normal character?
 - b) *Answers to this question expose how a person views himself/herself. If there is persistent negative self-talk this can reveal low self-esteem/worth.*
 - c) *Validate actions (accept them); however, separate the action from the person (i.e. a person may refer to himself as being "incompetent." A response would be "your actions may have been unwise, but that does not make you an incompetent person. Everyone makes mistakes.").*
8. Is there any connection with this event and something you have experienced in your past (i.e., the counselee could have experienced similar emotions which led to response to the current situation or could have responded to situation because he did not want to experience repeat of past hurt)?
 - a) If so, what do you think it is?
 - b) What role did that factor play in your decision to take the specific course of action which led up to this point?
 - c) If you had not had that past experience, how do you think you would have responded?
9. Can you think of anything that could have been done differently to produce a positive outcome? *This allows for self-examination and space for the person to take accountability for his/her actions.*
10. How would you know that you have conquered this situation?
Elicit specific actions to identify goals. For example, "I would not go to bed crying," "I would want to spend time with my family."

2 Critique and Counsel

Biblical Insight

A. Feeling discouraged is the result of an undesired outcome to a situation. Although the Bible does not specifically mention discouragement, there are many examples of those who experienced it for various reasons and were overcomers. Followers of Christ are not exempt from encountering this; however, there is hope for believers because God is sovereign. Three reasons for becoming discouraged are listed below:

1. Self-inflicted Discouragement

- a) David experienced discouragement because of sin. He and Bathsheba had an affair after he intentionally sent her husband to be killed in war because of his fleshly desires (II Samuel 12:9-10).
- b) Human nature is inherently sinful; because of this the flesh and the spirit constantly war against one another (Galatians 5:17). When we are concerned with gratifying the flesh, temptation becomes an issue and can lead to behavior that is contrary to God's Word.
- c) The power of the Holy Ghost is available to guide and direct our actions, and it will provide a way of escape (I Corinthians 10:13). However, the choice is up to us.
- d) Giving in to sin brings about death as found in James 1:15, but death is not always physical. It can be relational, spiritual, or any other type where a breach occurs.
- e) God is merciful, and He forgives us when we sin. After repentance has taken place, restoration and redemption follow (I John 1:9).

2. Discouragement Because of Disobedience

- a) Jonah received explicit instruction from God, but chose to do the opposite (Jonah 1:1-3). When specific instruction is given by God, it is beneficial to obey, as the Holy Spirit will never lead in the wrong direction.
- b) He will allow a chance for redemption when we ask for forgiveness just as He permitted Jonah to have a second chance after he repented.

3. Discouragement from External Forces

- a) Paul experienced discouragement even though he was in the will of God. Some of the situations and setbacks he encountered were from the enemy trying to thwart God's plan, but other times it was "life" and God allowed it to happen. (See John 16:33; II Corinthians 4:17.)
- b) It is important to remember that no one is exempt from facing disappointment. Our response to discouragement makes the difference.

- c) Going through difficult situations does not make one a failure; however, it produces character and fruit essential for being a disciple of Christ and provides a testimony for others.
- d) When “life” happens, it is important to remember God’s sovereignty. In addition, the Bible states everything we experience will work out for the good of those who love Christ (Romans 8:28).

Wise Counsel

- A. Remind the person God is sovereign.
- B. Have them reflect on what part they played in the situation.
 - 1. Was it out of disobedience, sin, or an external factor?
 - 2. Allow space for them to take responsibility for their actions.
 - 3. Make a list of the actions taken as well as the actions that should have been taken. (Having a visual aid will help the person to see the misstep.)
 - 4. If disappointment is a result of an external factor, bring to light that no situation catches God by surprise. Only we are surprised.
- C. Validate, normalize, and empathize.
 - 1. Validate expressions of frustration, hurt, anger, embarrassment, etc.
 - 2. Normalize feelings. Explain that discouragement happens to everyone and that the feelings associated with it are normal.
 - 3. Empathize by striving to understand their response to the situation.
 - 4. Allow negative feelings to be expressed. Try not to be quick to soothe emotions that need to be released.
- D. Reflect on alternative responses to the situation.
 - 1. Explore the responses to adverse situations in the Bible and the blessings that resulted.
 - a) Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1)
 - b) Daniel being sentenced to the lion’s den (Daniel 6)
 - c) Paul and Silas being thrown into prison (Acts 16:25-34)
 - d) God walked with them through their time of discouragement, so that He could get the glory and others could be saved.
 - 2. Encourage them to view their situation through the lens of the Bible. (Highlight redemption.)
 - 3. How do they feel God is speaking to them through this situation?
 - 4. Have them reflect on whether the desired outcome was the best one for the situation.
 - a) If so, what are some steps that can be taken to progress towards it?
 - b) If not, explore what would the ideal resolution would be and work toward that.
- E. Have them verbalize the positives that came from the situation.
 - 1. If there are no positives, strive to normalize feelings by stating that sometimes life creates challenges, but they can be overcome.
 - 2. Highlight the strengths of the person.
 - 3. Examine how the person can prevent a repeat of the situation.
 - 4. If it was an external factor, examine how they can respond differently in the future.
 - 5. Empower them with the decision of how to respond to the situation. They can choose to either be bitter or become better because of it.

3

Application and Prayer

Application

- A. Encourage the person to reflect on the situation.
 - 1) What ways have they grown or matured from the situation? (*This fosters hope.*)
 - 2) What have they learned about themselves because of the situation?
- B. Explore ways to regain control of their life (*empowering them instead of being controlled by emotions/circumstance*).
- C. Have them establish a routine to stay busy and keep their minds off the situation.
- D. Make a list of enjoyable activities to participate in (*preferably ones that do not involve cost or travel*).
- E. Encourage them to spend time with others and surround themselves with a support system. (*This creates a positive environment.*)
- F. Have the person select Scripture verses to recite to create a spirit of faith and hope within themselves (*so their heart will not become hardened toward God*).
- G. Remind them not to dwell on the situation. It is in the past, and there is nothing that can be done. (*Ruminating thoughts will keep them in a state of discouragement.*)
- H. Stress the importance of expressing difficult emotions when experiencing them. Holding them in will only create inner turmoil.
 - 1) Make a list of two or three people they can call to talk to.
 - 2) Encourage them to write feelings down.
 - 3) Pray and be candid with God; He can handle our hurt.

Prayer

- A. Begin by thanking/applauding individual/family member(s) for having courage to seek help and support.
- B. Acknowledge individual/family member(s) is/are striving to live for God and do things God's way.
- C. Address in prayer the struggles that have been addressed in the meeting.

God, thank you that your arm is never too short to reach down and touch me and your ear is never too far to hear my cry. Your Word says that I will have trials, but you also said not to be dismayed because you have overcome the world and I can overcome this situation. I pray my weeping will be turned to laughter, my mourning turned into gladness, and that joy, peace, and strength will be my garment. Turn this situation into a blessing and this trial into triumph so that You alone may receive the glory, honor, and praise that is due your name.

4 Recommended Resources

- Cloud, H. & Townsend, J (2011). *Beyond boundaries: Learning to trust again in relationships*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Cloud, H. & Townsend, J. (2005). *What to do when you don't know what to do: Discouragement & depression*. Brentwood, TN: Integrity Publishers.
- Greenfield, G. (2002). *The wounded parent: Hope for discouraged parents*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc.
- Macdonald, G. (2004). *A resilient life: You can move ahead no matter what*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Maltby, T. (2012). *The god who sees you: Look to him when you feel discouraged, forgotten or invisible*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook.
- Meyer, J. (1998). *Straight talk on discouragement: Overcoming emotional battles with the power of god's word!* Fenton, MO: Time Warner Book Group.
- Moriarty, G. (2006). *Pastoral care of depression: Helping clients heal their relationship with god*. Binghamton, NY.
- Pope, W. (2016). *Wait and see: Finding peace in god's pauses and plans*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook (for women).
- Rankin, P. (1980). *Yet will I trust him*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
- Rothschild, J. (2007). *Me, myself and lies: what to say when you talk to yourself*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers.
- Stone, Howard (1998). *Depression and hope: New insights for pastoral counseling*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers.
- Warren, R. (2002). *Purpose driven life: What on earth am I here for?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Welch, R. (2011). *Depression: Looking up from the stubborn darkness*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press..
- Wilton, D. (2009). *A hope and a future: Overcoming discouragement*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group.

5 Taking it to the Church

“A Broken Spirit Brought to Life”

Nicole Jones, BA, MACC

Discouragement is a product of failure. Even though we experience disappointment, it is not God's will for us to remain in this state. The Word of God makes it clear that we will experience troubles. However, Jesus overcoming the trials He faced during His time on earth is evidence we can do the same because His Spirit lives within us.

Focus Verse

Psalm 42:5 KJV

“Why art thou cast down, O, my soul? And why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.”

Lesson Text

Job 3:20-21; 24-25 KJV

“Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures. For my sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters. For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.”

When we experience discouragement, we become overwhelmed by a sense of hopelessness. Our reason for existence seems to become altered by a specific event. Life no longer seems to matter or have purpose. All hope, joy, and life seem to disappear. A lack of joy represents mourning, and a body without a spirit is a corpse. During these times of brokenness, we must turn to God.

Hezekiah felt it when he was told that he was going to die; the Bible states that he “wept sore” (Isaiah 38:3). Esther became acquainted with it when she was informed about a plan to annihilate her people (Esther 4:4). Mary and Martha experienced it at Lazarus's death when they grieved (John 11:31-32). There was nothing they could give in exchange for their hurt, except to give their heart to God.

Psalm 51:16-17 KJV

“For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

David was at his lowest when he sinned against God with Bathsheba. He exposed himself to God in his Psalm 51 prayer of repentance. Although our discouragement may not be a result of sin as it was for David, his brokenness is what turned the ear and heart of God, just as it did for Hezekiah, Esther, Mary, and Martha. They all became familiar with discouragement because of their circumstances. Sometimes we can be so hurt by our situation that we depend on our emotions to make us feel better and turn our situation around. However, whatever the cause of distress may be, God is the only one who can mend the heart and restore the spirit. He knows we will try to barter and bargain everything except our heart in exchange for healing, but how can He heal our heart if we will not give it to Him? Our brokenness, transparency, and willingness to give of ourselves is the only sacrifice God will accept for our healing.

Job 14:7-9 KJV

“For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old into the earth, and the stock there die in the ground. Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant.”

In what were believed to be dead situations, Hezekiah, Esther, Mary, and Martha held on to their hope in God. Their problems were not resolved overnight, but God’s promises allowed them to believe God was setting them up to be in a better position than before. Hezekiah prayed, and God added fifteen years to his life (Isaiah 38:5). Esther sent word to all those who were a part of the decree to fast, and they were spared (Esther 4:16). Mary and Martha believed Jesus could heal Lazarus, and he was brought back to life (John 11:43-44). To the natural eye these were lifeless situations; however, their hope in Christ was the first step to their prayers being answered.

Romans 12:12 KJV

“Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer.”

Once we surrender our hurt, loss, grief, pain, embarrassment, frustration, and any other emotion associated with our discouragement, we are able to see the light amid our darkness. Giving our cares to God enables us to walk through the storm with Him, instead of allowing hurt and fear to consume us. In surrendering the weights blocking the path for God to come in, we place ourselves in a position to receive life again. Recognizing the hope that we have in Christ elevates our circumstance to a level where our spirits hunger to see the work of God manifested in our lives. This only comes through praying consistently to keep the Spirit of God activated within us. It is because of this we can endure with hopeful expectation and not give in to despair.

Pushing Through the Pain**1 Peter 1:6-7 KJV**

“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto the praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

David encouraged himself in the Lord despite what was happening in the natural realm. The city and its inhabitants were destroyed by fire. Part of the challenge was choosing either to allow his situation to separate him from God because of his discouragement or turn to God. He responded by looking beyond the death of his circumstances, understanding that if he accepted it, God would not be able to move on his behalf. Therefore, he had to speak life to himself. His response dictated his outcome. In the end, he recovered all that he had lost.

Sometimes when we have exhausted all of our “feel-good” resources, we have to speak life into ourselves. As Christians, we must learn to trust in God to bring us out of our despair rather than just our fellow believers because there will be times when we others cannot provide what we need. Having confidence and faith in God will allow us to respond as David did in his time of distress. We will be able to speak life and strengthen ourselves.

New Perspective

Matthew 6:33-34 KJV

“But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all of these things shall be added unto you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

We can experience discouragement and still glorify God in the midst of pain because we trust in Him. The process of becoming Christ-like requires pruning, molding, shaping, and reforming. When we place His agenda ahead of our own, our disappointment pales in comparison to what He has planned for our lives. He will add to it everything we need and more because of our submission to His will. The Word of God is clear in stating that burdening ourselves does not change the outcome. It only fosters disappointment. In all things, situations, and circumstances we must believe that God is sovereign and “all things work for the good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Having faith in God allows us to have hope in hopeless situations. When we declare, “I want to be like Christ,” we surrender the right to be in control of our lives. Thus, we must learn to respond to discouraging moments like Christ did. While Jesus’ accusers were attacking Him, He did not respond in a hostile manner. He did not abandon His mission though many rejected His message. When He walked through the garden and found his disciples sleeping instead of praying as He requested, He allowed none of these things to distract Him from His purpose. During difficult seasons, we must adhere to the leading of God’s Spirit and Word to direct us to a place of life, peace, and joy. Christ came so that we would have an abundant life. That means being in a state of joy despite our circumstances and finding that scent of water in the desert.

Psalm 42:5 KJV

“Why art thou cast down, O, my soul? And why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.”

Psalm 34:18 KJV

“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”