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Christian Living

Dealing with Discouragement

**"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."
Proverbs 4:23**

Have you ever wanted something really badly, but it just never worked out? Perhaps you were stuck in a horrible job and just knew you needed a new one. But you turned in resume after resume, only to be rejected time and time again. Or maybe you were turned down for a promotion or a raise, and you could never figure out why. Or maybe you were married and realized that your spouse had cheated on you - and there was nothing you could do, no matter how hard you tried, to keep the marriage alive.

Or perhaps you're single and just can't find that person God wants you to "click with." As many of you can relate, it can be hard when the ones you are interested in have no interest in you. After the 30th time, you don't just easily shake it off and move on with a happy song. You become discouraged. You wonder if God wants you to stay single forever. You start thinking it will NEVER work.

When discouragement takes root in your heart, it changes the way you think about yourself. It can eat at your self-esteem. Discouragement can also affect your ministry. You become so focused on yourself that you no longer have the energy to encourage others. And finally, discouragement can have a terrible impact on your relationship with God. You want to give up on praying. You become bitter toward God and develop a wedge between you and the One who loves you the most.

Just look at Joram, king of Israel. He was in the middle of a famine that was so severe, women were eating their children. And he said,

"This disaster is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" (2 Kings 6:32b).

Joram did not trust God. He wanted to quit waiting on God and wallow in his discouragement. Eventually he became so hardened that even news about a boy raised from the dead was not enough to stir his heart.

For an opposite reaction, turn to 1 Kings. Here, Elijah prayed and God brought a drought that lasted 3 ½ years. Then, God moved Elijah to pray for rain again:

"Elijah said to Ahab, 'Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.' So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. 'Go and look toward the sea,' he told his servant. And he went up and looked. 'There is nothing there,' he said. Seven times Elijah said, 'Go back.' The seventh time, the servant reported, 'A cloud as small as a man's hand is

rising from the sea." 1 Kings 18:41-44a

SEVEN times Elijah prayed! For the first six times, he saw NOTHING. He knew God told him it would rain again, but every time he prayed, his servant reported that NOTHING was happening. If I were in Elijah's shoes, I would have given up. I would have started wondering if I had heard God wrong.

What if Elijah had succumbed to discouragement? What if he had given up on prayer?

Friends, discouragement is a BIG tool Satan uses to drag us down. When God is telling you to "wait," Satan can use discouragement to stop you from praying. When God is telling you "no," Satan can use discouragement to bring bitterness in your heart and drive out the hope that God has a better plan.

This week, try a new tactic. Don't stop praying and asking God for the desires of your heart. But also start praying AGAINST discouragement. What is bringing discouragement into your life? Ask Jesus to counter it with HIS encouragement. He can put a fire in your life that you NEVER imagined.