

DEALING WITH NEGATIVE SITUATIONS

Do you have a lot of negative going on in your life right now? Do you like it? If you are like most of us, you hate it. It seems to take strength out of you instead of putting strength into you. It seems to keep your mind on it all of the time. Even things that maybe you should be able to let go. That negative situation nags at you, draws things away from you, depletes you. Maybe you are one of those people that say, "I don't even know how to handle it. It just keeps going on and that drives me crazy, but I don't know how to handle it." You may be one of those people that say, "I am afraid to handle it. What if I handle it the wrong way and things get worse?" Sometimes in life things have to get worse before they get better. Sometimes in life you have to confront things you wish you just did not have to talk about. Today, we are going to talk about three different areas of negativity that can occur in your life and how you handle it. Remember, sometimes in dealing with the negative you are going to have to be uncomfortable before it changes. For things to change, you have to change.

The first one is comparing yourself and coming up short. That is a negative one. (Look at this picture. See these scales. I call them the scales of comparison, because you weigh yourself against people you work with, against your friends and what they are doing with their life. You could get really negative about yourself.)

The first negative situation is you being negative about you. That is really bad because in life there are plenty of people that like to be negative about you to you. You do not have to go looking for them. They can find you. You being negative about yourself stops the ballgame before it ever gets started, doesn't it. We all look at people and say "How am I doing compared to them?" A lot of the time, we compare our worst fault with their best one. Of course, we are going to come up short. We do not say "Well, yes, but they also have this." If we are wise, you will because people do have strengths and weaknesses. Have you ever looked at someone and wished you could look just like them or have just the life they live.

Someone gave me a really wise piece of advice. It was a man and woman that, each time I was around them, would say something that I would chew on for a couple of years. It was during a time when I was comparing myself to other people and coming up short. He said, "Things are not always as they seem, Betty." That was all he said. He saw that I was looking at people and saying, "We are not doing that. We are not doing as well as they are. We can't seem to get there. What is wrong with us?" He said, "Things are not always as they seem." So, I say that to you. Maybe you have a situation right now in your life and you are looking at that thinking, "If I could just be there. If I could just have that kind of life, everything would be great." It is not true. You could be king of the world. You could be the most important person in this world and you could have things that money could not buy, that your importance could not buy no matter how important you were. Yet, we look at those people and think, "They have it. I don't, but they do." We sell ourselves short. We compare ourselves, cut ourselves down. Have you ever wished that you were as smart as someone else, or on the same social level as someone else. What does God say about it? God says, "Consider others better than yourself." You think, "I am supposed to do that? I thought that would pull me down." God says, "You are to be a servant to people. I put you on this earth to be a servant." Jesus, the king of the universe, said, "I did not come to be served. I did not come to be ministered to. I came to minister." You need to be like that with all of these people that you feel like make you look less than. Just serve them. Look for ways to serve them. Do you know what that does to you? It builds up your self-esteem. It makes you feel good about yourself because you are doing things the way God wants them done.

Do not compare yourself with someone who is good at what you are weak at. Look around. There are things you can do that no one can do as well as you can, because God has a call on your life. The first negative situation we all find ourselves in is comparing ourselves with someone else. There is even a Scripture about it. It is in Isaiah 45. "What sorrow awaits those who argue with their creator." Have you ever argued with God, "Why did you make me like this?" Right there it says, "Does the clay pot argue with its maker? Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it saying 'Stop you are doing it wrong.' Does the pot explain 'How clumsy can you be?'" I can tell you right now we all have stuff we wish we did not have. I have really big feet, and I am a short woman. I am only 5'3". My feet are not in proportion to the rest of my body. When I was in the 8th grade, I was so self-conscious about it. I remember one time a guy put on my moccasins and said, "Look, Betty's feet are as big as my feet." I was only in the 8th grade. I remember going to the man that sold me shoes and saying, "Can I cut off my toes?" He said, "Betty, you

remember going to the man that sold the shoes and saying, "Can I eat on my toes?" He said, "Becky, you can't walk without your toes." I thought, "All of these girls have these little dainty feet and I have big feet. God, why do I have big feet?" Guess what. They have gotten bigger and bigger. The older you get the bigger your feet get. One day it occurred to me why I have big feet. I love to play tennis. My dad was a tennis coach and I was a tennis coach. I am still playing tennis, and I do not lose my balance very often. I have a good base of support. I can tell you another one. I love shoes, and my shoes are always in the 75% off sale because no one has feet like this. Learn to recognize that God has called you to be who you are and to look like you are. If you could improve your looks, do it. There is nothing wrong with that. Get your teeth fixed or whatever you need to do. When it comes to comparing yourself to others and looking short in terms of talents and abilities, you need to realize you need to only do what only you can do. If someone else can do the job, let them do it. Then find out what is the only I can do in this situation. Then that greater fulfillment comes to you.

Now we are going to deal with the second negative situation. Dealing with obstacles that seem to hold you back. (Look at this picture of this obstacle course.) Do you ever feel like that is your life? You get going and suddenly there is an obstacle and it stops you dead in your tracks. You try to take off again and there is another obstacle, then there is another one. You can get so discouraged that you think, "Why is it so hard? Why is it taking so long? What do I do about it? I want to give up." Look at Hebrews 12:2, "Keep your eyes on Jesus who both began and finished this race we are in." Study how He did it. Did He have obstacles? Yes, He did. He never lost sight of where He was headed to that exhilarating finish in and with God. He could put up with anything along the way because of it. Study how Jesus dealt with His obstacles. He had people who could have promoted Him. Instead they put Him down and put Him back. They did not want Him in there with their business. They thought up ways to get rid of Him. They shamed Him. They lied about Him. They tried to get the people not to follow Him. Talk about obstacles. You have a call from God and all of that is going on. Then how would you like to be Jesus. At the end of all of it, after you got through all of the obstacles, was a cross and He died. We do not understand that, do we? You see, Jesus looked beyond the cross. He knew that was what only He could do. He did what only He could do. Only Jesus was perfect and sinless. Only Jesus could take us to heaven and say, "Father these people have received salvation through Me. These people are spotless because I paid the price for them." He looked toward that. Maybe this obstacle in front of this, this current obstacle, is something that you just want to give up and throw the towel in. What is your final goal? Where are you headed? What are you trying to do? Get your eyes back on that and you can keep moving forward.

Is there any kind of wisdom for dealing with obstacles? You can pray, "Lord, I have isolated and figured out these are the obstacles in my life. What do I do about each one?" Then listen. If you have to get away for a day or go off by yourself during your lunch hour, sit in your car with your Bible and say, "Lord, these are the obstacles. I am going to go over them one by one. Tell me what to do with each one." God will tell you. According to James 1:5, He says, "If you do not know what to do, ask God. He will gladly tell you and He won't resent it."

What are you going to do with people that are an obstacle? How are you going to deal with them? Let me give you some guidelines. One thing you can do is to buy into their program. If they are bigger or more powerful than you and they are doing it in a way you do not think it should be done, go along with it. In your heart say, "God, I know you have a plan for my life. I will do this and have a good attitude about it, and I will be better than I was before." Another thing you can do with someone who is opposing you is to get them on your side. How do you do that? Go to them and ask their advice. Just say, "I am trying to do this. Could you give me some advice?" You might be surprised. People are not always what they seem to be. Sometimes people that are an obstacle to you have great problems in their own life. They are not even really thinking about you. They are just trying to do what they need to get done.

What do you do when they are a genuine obstacle and they are an immovable obstacle? You figure out a way to go around them. You figure out a way to tunnel under them. You figure out how to get around this obstacle. Some people set themselves up to stop you, but you have God on your side. Aren't you glad you are a Christian? Do you realize when you have God on your side that you have someone that is going to work in ways that no one can stop Him. You cannot stop God. Another thing to do is to ask God what to do with this immovable obstacle. His answer might surprise you. Pray and ask Him, "Okay Lord, I can't make this one go away. Nothing I do makes it go away. I can't tunnel under it, can't go around it, and can't go over it. What do I do? I am going to do what You tell me to do." Then listen. It might surprise you.

There is another thing you can do with obstacles. If they are negative people, avoid them. Stay away from them. Get around people who will encourage you, support you and believe in you. They will keep you going while this other situation is going on. Does God ever allow obstacles to be put in your path? I really think He does. Sometimes, they are there to keep you from going off the track. You think, "I am supposed to be doing this." But, you cannot hear God because you are stubborn or strong willed or self willed. Think about Balaam in the Old Testament. God said, "Do not curse these people. They are My

people.” A king kept saying “I will give you money. I will give you big money.” Balaam deceived himself. He kept trying to find a way that he could do. He wanted to look like he was obeying God but at the same time get the money. God had to send an angel to speak and the donkey saw the angel. The donkey said, “There is an angel there that is going to kill us.” Balaam had to be stopped. That was an obstacle that stopped Balaam from doing something that would have destroyed him. Sometimes those obstacles are there and God is not going to remove them because he is trying to get you to go in the right direction.

Is there another reason God would leave obstacles there? That would be to develop your muscles, to develop your wisdom, and to develop your strengths. When they need to be moved at the right time, God can move them within one hour. They are gone. Think about Joseph and the obstacle of being in the prison. He thought, “God told me I was going to be in charge of big things and my whole family was going to come and bow before me. These men have forgotten me again. I am in prison again.” In an instant, God promoted him to prime minister. God is so in control of your life, so much more than you think he is. Cooperate with that.

The third negative situation is confrontation and conflict with people around you. (Look at this picture of these people arguing. If that had voice to it, everyone would be shouting, no one would be listening to everyone else. They are venting and saying what they always wished they could say. They are just going at it.)

In II Corinthians 13:11, “Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words. Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.” When you get in those conflicts with people, you say things you should not say. You say things you regret. You say things they will remember five years later. There is unforgiveness and lack of harmony. It is a bad place to be. I want to give you one piece of wisdom about dealing with confrontation and conflict. Sometimes, in a work or ministry situation, there is really one person causing it call. The Bible says “Drive out the mocker and strife will cease.” I have seen it happen in two situations myself. The person was underhanded, behind the scenes gossiping and stirring up strife. When we tried to talk to that person in a nice kind way, it did not do any good. She kept doing it anyway because she had an agenda and she thought she was right. Finally it came to the place that we had to let her go. We felt bad about doing it. We wanted to live in peace and harmony. The way to get peace and harmony in that situation was to let her go. The minute she left, instantly, everyone calmed down and it was peaceful. I have seen that in a ministry situation, too. The minute the trouble maker was released, immediately the harmony came all over again.

I am sure you hate confrontation. I do not like it either. You can get to where you like it better than you used to. Why? Because it gets all the cards laid out on the table and everyone says what they really feel. Even if it gets heated, if you do it the right way, you are closer than ever. You can find new ways to work together and you appreciate people better. Also, you learn how to look at situations in different ways. That is when confrontation is good. My pastor said he hated confrontation so much he would run around a building to keep from having to do it. He says now he loves it. I have tried to learn how to love it. It is not easy.

Let’s talk about some ways to deal with the negative situation of confrontation. The first thing is to relax and let God lead it. Pray about it. Just say, “Okay, God. This needs to be done and I am going to do it. Tell me how to do it.” Really pray ahead of time and ask God what is the need of the person with whom you are having conflict. What do they really need? God will tell you what it is. You have to listen, but He will tell you. Then, when you meet with them, slow down. Do not do it in anger. Wait until your anger calms down. If you confront in anger, you will say things that either you should not say or you will say in the wrong way. Just say, “Let me tell you what I feel about this situation. This is what I see. Is that right? Is that what you mean? Is this what is really going on?” It might not be. They might surprise you and say, “No that is not it.” Take your time and try to look at it from every angle that you can. We all try to see things just from our angle but there are other ways of looking at it. Maybe you are not looking at that. Think it out from all of the angles. Then (now this is the hard one) try to look at it from their point of view and feel what they are feeling. That is not easy but you can do it.

Another thing that is really important is to make sure you cover it completely before you get up. That is not always easy. Sometimes it is so serious that you have to say, “Okay, I believe we need to take a break. We need to get back together in a few days. Let’s all think about it and think of new ways to look at this.” For instance, if you have a problem in your marriage, he says this, I say this, she says this, I say that. We are fighting and we are against each other. If you can ever get together and put the problem out in front of both of you and say, “This is the problem. Let’s work together and let’s talk about it and figure out what we need to do to solve the problem.” Then it takes you out of the problem and you can solve it better. Make sure you cover it completely.

Another thing is not to rehash the old stuff. If you have dealt with it before, it is just under the water. Let it go. If it is still in the current, if it is still going on, people usually need examples because they cannot see what they are doing. You are going to have to give them specific examples. Think those out ahead of time. "When you said this, when you did this, this is what I am talking about." I can tell you that when I have been confronted about my stuff, I have had to say, "Can you give me some examples. I don't know what you are trying to tell me. I don't see it." We all have blind spots and people have to give examples. When you are giving these examples, use the sandwich method. Jesus did the sandwich method in Revelation. He says to those churches, "You are good at this, but I have this against you and this is what you need to correct or I am going to have to come in and do something." People do not like being corrected or confronted. Your teenagers do not like it. No one does. Spend time saying, "This is what you are doing well. I do feel like we are doing well with this. I do feel like this is an asset. I do feel like this is moving all of us forward. But, I do need to talk to you about an issue or two that I feel like we need to deal with." If you zero in too soon with "I just need to tell you this is what I think," it will be like splashing cold water on them. Sometimes you have not even prepared them and said "Could we get together and talk? I need to talk to you about some stuff." Now do not forget, tell them the ways you appreciate them, build them up, tell them where they are doing it right, and do not come in so harshly on the negative unless it is just flat out serious and you have to do it. Even then you can do it with kindness. God does it with kindness.

Do you ever read the Old Testament and think, "God was so mad at all of those Jews. Why?" Because they were stiff necked and headstrong. They were worshiping Gods He did not want them to worship. He wanted them to worship Him and Him alone. How did He deal with it? He kept coming in and coming in, dealing with it, confronting it, naming it, discussing it. Only when there was no other way to deal with it did He have to deal with it harshly. He did not have any other choice. I do not think anyone likes to be corrected.

Do you like people to tell you what you are doing wrong? You do if they do it the right way. I have to lead a lot of people so I have to correct people. I decided long ago that I was going to do it like a good basketball coach would do it. You have watched them when they are coaching on television. They call their team over and talk to them, then they say "You can do it, go." The team says, "Okay" and they are back out on the court again. Just be like a good coach when you are doing this correcting, and be open to their input. If they do not give you feed back, you may think you are right. Let them tell you, "I see this and this is a problem with me." Pick the best time to do it, where it is as comfortable as it can be. Give them an opportunity to respond. I want to tell you something that is real important that most people do not do. When you have to confront someone and everything happens like I just described, call them back later and say, "How are you doing with what we talked about? I just wanted to know. I know you have had time to think about it." They might have been so surprised or caught off guard that they did not say what they really felt. Give them time to say it. Just say, "If you don't think I am right, tell me."

You can deal with negative situations in your life. You can do it even if they are hard.

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. List the three areas of possible negativity.
2. What is the danger in comparing ourselves to others?
3. What does scripture say about how we should consider ourselves in relationship to others?
4. Describe how God uses obstacles in a positive way.
5. How should we handle confrontation and conflict God's way?

To watch the video on DEALING WITH NEGATIVE SITUATIONS, Pillar Six, Leadership Skills, go to www.bettyswann.com.

