

Your Greatest Enemy, Discouragement

How is your life going today? Have you got a song in your heart? Are you praising God or are you confronting your greatest enemy? You say, "Well, I have got a lot of enemies, Betty, which one are you talking about today?" I am talking about the greatest one you have. Is it some big bad sin you are doing? No, that is bad but that is not your greatest enemy. Is it somebody? Well, that could be bad but that is not it. What is your greatest enemy? Your greatest enemy is discouragement. It will stop you in every one of those situations I just talked about. Maybe when the situation cannot stop you, discouragement can cause you to shut down, shut people out and not even talk to people. I have a friend who in earlier years, before she matured as a Christian, when life got really, really bad I always knew it because she did not come around and she did not call. Maybe I would notice, oh, it has been about two weeks, what is going on I wonder. I would call her and eventually she would say, "Well, let me tell you what I have been going through and I just could not handle it. I did not want to be with people. I wanted to get away from everybody and I did not want to talk about it." The problem was, she did not grow by doing all of that. It did not help her to do all of that.

So many times when your greatest enemy hits you, what do you usually want to do? Pull in, get away and hide. Did anybody in the Bible act like that? Elijah did. I want to talk to you about Elijah. Think about this. On the Mount of Transfiguration when Jesus was transfigured and became glowing like probably how He looks in heaven now, Peter saw two people with Him. He knew who they were. How did he know that one was Moses and one was Elijah? How did he know that? They had lived thousands of years ago and there were no pictures of them. How did he know? Because in the spirit, when the Holy Spirit is really working in a situation, you can know things that there is no way you could know them. You can know people's names. That happens to me a lot in prophesying to people. I hear a name. I do not know how I hear that name. I just know there is a name and I am to say that name. Recently, I was on a prophetic team prophesying and a lady came up for a prophetic word. We taped them so she can examine it and be sure. I heard in my head, "Tony." Just like that. I spoke to her and I said, "Is there anybody in your life named Tony?" She said, "Does it have to be a man or can it be a woman?" I said, "I do not know. I do not guess it matters. I just know that God wants to speak to you about somebody named Tony in your life." She said, "My boss's name is Tony." That was pretty surprising to me. It was like, "Wow, I did hear God." It happens a lot.

God knows your name when you are struggling. He does not forget about you. Elijah struggled with discouragement. We are going to talk about when it hits. But what you need to realize is that discouragement does not mean you are a bad Christian or that you are a weak Christian. It does not even mean that. It does not even mean that you are an immature Christian, even though when I was talking about my friend I said, it was during her more immature years. Elijah was a far cry from being an immature Christian. Even though he suffered what he did in discouragement, in the Mount of Transfiguration he was there. I have thought about it a lot and if I were God who would I have put there with Jesus. Why did He not put Abraham? I could see why He put Moses, but why did He put Elijah? Part of it is because when Jesus was prophesying about John the Baptist, He said, "Someone is coming in the spirit of Elijah. He will turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children and He will turn disobedient people back to doing the wisdom of the wise." This man is highly special in God's eyes. He suffered from discouragement just like you and me. It was his greatest enemy.

The devil can see to it that certain people cause you to feel a lot of discouragement. Sometimes it is people who are just mean or they are just not a very good person. They say and do things that bring about tremendous discouragement. That is what happened to Elijah. In I Kings 19, it talks King Ahab, and he had this wife, Jezebel, who just ran him around and told him what to do. "When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel what Elijah had done and that he had slaughtered the prophets of Baal." So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah. "May the gods also kill me if by this time tomorrow I have failed to take your life like those whom you killed." This is a woman. Elijah was afraid. He was afraid of her. He knew she was a mean woman. You get on her bad side and you are probably going to die. Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah and he left his servant there. He wanted to get away from everybody, even his servant. He just wanted to get away, get away, get away from everybody. Then he went on alone into the desert traveling all day. He was really tired.

Another way discouragement comes is when you are very tired. It says that he sat down under a solitary broom tree. Out in this desert, all of this dry land, no vegetation, he finally finds this little broom tree and he sits under it and what does he pray? You have to remember, he had just done tremendous miracles, unbelievable, never been done before. You should read about the miracles he did, especially this one that made Jezebel so mad that she wanted to have him killed. You would think after a time of serving God like that in a mighty way you would be so full of excitement and energy and thrill at what you had seen God do and how He used you, but sometimes there is a tremendous let-down after a great success. It is because your hormone level can alter so you could have a big drop. He had that. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and he prayed to die. "Let me die, God, just let me die. I have had enough." He probably thought, "You know what. I have really worked hard for you God and I have put up with that woman, I have put up with that king and I have put up with all of these people and nobody loves You like I do and I am tired and I have put up with enough, just take my life and let me die. I am no better than my ancestors." Then, he lay down and slept.

There is something about sleep that restores the serotonin in your brain. While he was still sleeping an angel touched him. That would be an experience, have you ever had an angel touch you? He told him, "Get up and eat." You know, God is so practical. He did not stand there and say, "Hallelujah, I come in the name of the most high God, get on your face and worship God." There would not have been anything bad about that, it would have probably been good. Instead, he got right to the point. That angel said, "Get up and eat." He knew that Elijah was worn out, tired, discouraged, depressed and he needed to eat. There is something about eating that restores you too. It is pretty hard to go without eating for very long. Where is he going to get food in the desert?

He did not bring anything with him. He did not bring his servant to cook for him. He looked around and saw some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water. There is an exclamation mark in my Bible right there. Where did that come from? He ate, drank, lay down again and slept some more.

He was exhausted. You need to watch how hard you push yourself, how little rest you allow yourself. It says in Psalms that God gives His beloved sleep. In this world today, things move at such a fast pace and if you could read Daniel 11, it says "In the last days Satan will come to wear out the saints." Wear them out. How do you feel? Right now, how is your world? Do you feel worn out?

I am tired. I am tired of dealing with the people. I am tired of dealing with the problems. I am tired of it all. Stop and rest. It is not a sin to rest. Do not get in that mentality of thinking, I have got to stay busy or I am not serving God. Sometimes when you are sitting and resting, you are doing more good than when you are up and moving. Sometimes when you are quiet and in the presence of God, just drinking in His presence, His sweet spirit, His quietness, it is the most active thing you could be doing. Remember, Satan is coming in the last days to wear you out. Do not let it happen to you. Do not let discouragement begin to attack you because you are tired, you are worn out.

Elijah goes to sleep again. The angel comes and touches him again. Many times you need a touch from God just to keep going. You can tell Him that. "Lord, I am discouraged. I am sorry. I am.

Some of it is my own fault. I push myself too hard. I got in over my head." Whatever your situation is, just say, "Lord, I just need You to touch me." Maybe once is not enough. The angel came and touched him again. It took more than one time. Then he said, "Get up and eat for there is a long journey ahead of you." God knows that there is a time in your discouragement that it is time to get up and get moving. Eat, do what you have to do in the practical way to get your life back on track and start eating again. He got up and he ate and drank. The food gave him enough strength to travel 40 days and 40 nights to Mt. Sinai, the Mountain of God. He came to a cave where he spent the night. We just heard about a miracle. That is a miracle. First of all, there was no place to get hot baked bread. There was no place to get a jar of water. An angel appears, talks and then the little that he ate was enough to sustain him for 40 days and nights. Still having a problem with discouragement? I am not talking about depression. That is its evil twin. I am talking about your greatest enemy, discouragement. If Satan can get you discouraged, he has got you. You are less effective. You will not try things for God. You will not step out for God. You will retreat, draw in and withdraw from people. It is a great tool. I could have called this lesson Satan's greatest tool, discouragement.

There is a story C. S. Lewis told in one of his books about the demons who all got together and said, "We have got to do something about these Christians. They are winning the war. We have got to do something." Satan said, "Who can come up with an idea." One of them said, "How about if I get them to sin real bad?" He said, "Well, I do not know. They all want to serve God so much they do not want to get around into sinning." "How about if I get them into alcohol and drugs and they are messed up for life." "No, they do not want to do that either." "Who can think of something?" One little demon said, "I know what I could do. I could discourage them. They would give up and quit."

The devil said, "It is a good idea, go for it." The Lord said to him in that cave, "What are you doing here Elijah?" Why did He say that? Because he was called to a big ministry, what was he doing in

that cave? Elijah got real honest with God. He was not right, but he got honest. You have got to learn how to do that. You have to be able to go to God and say that this is how I really feel. I am just going to level with you God. This is how I feel. God is able to talk you out of that.

What did Elijah say in this great discouragement? "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty, but the people of Israel have broken their covenant with You. They have torn down Your altars. They have killed every one of Your prophets. I, alone, am left and now they are trying to kill me too." It can be like that when you get into discouragement. You think I am the only one doing this deal. There is not anybody else trying. I am it. What was God's answer to him? This is God's answer to you about dealing with discouragement. "Go out and stand before Me on the mountain." As Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by and a mighty wind storm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose. The Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there was fire. The Lord was not in the fire. After the fire, there was the sound of a gentle whisper. "Elijah, Elijah." Can you hear me on the television? Am I saying it too low? It was a gentle whisper, "Elijah, Elijah." When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and he went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. He is moving out of that discouragement, slowly, slowly. He is not jumping out, heading off and saying, "Okay God, here we go." He is standing there at the edge and the voice says, "What are you doing here Elijah? What are you doing here?" He replied again, "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty." He had that little litany going in his mind. He had been thinking for days, "I have zealously served the Lord God and the people do not care." There is no telling how many times he thought that sentence. He probably got really into that zealous. He did not realize the Lord God was listening. He was just nursing and rehearsing. "The people of Israel have broken their covenant with You, torn down Your altars, killed every one of Your prophets. I alone am left and now they are trying to kill me too." He had already told this once to the Lord.

The Lord told him, "Go back. Go back the way you came." That is what God tells you. Get on back in there and "Travel to the wilderness of Damascus." Go back, but listen to my new plan. I have another plan. "When you arrive there (He already has a job for him to do. He is not saying bless your heart, bless your heart, I am so sorry you are so discouraged. You know, I am God but I get discouraged too. I tell you, dealing with these people; you ought to have My job. You think you are discouraged, you ought to have My job. No no.) God said, "Go back. I have a job I want you to do. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be the King of Aram, then anoint Jehu son of Nimshi to be King of Israel and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat to replace you as My prophet. Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha. I have preserved 7,000 men in Israel who have never bowed to Baal or kissed him." Elijah was saying, "I am the only one Lord. Nobody loves you like I do. Nobody God." God says, "By the way, I have preserved 7,000 men that have never bowed to Baal." They would have died for not bowing to Baal if they had been caught. Elijah got up and went. That is the secret to coming out of discouragement. It is finding something to do to help someone else.

One time I got real discouraged. I do not even remember why I did. I just remember being down and discouraged and thinking, "I just do not know if I want to do this or not. Lord, you have got to help me. I am so discouraged." I thought the same thing that God would say, "Bless your heart, Betty. I understand." It was not like that. He said, "You know Mary over there? She is really discouraged. She is really low. I want you to go buy some geraniums and take them to her house. She loves flowers. She loves a garden. I want you to take her some geraniums." I got some money together, bought the geraniums and went to her house. She was overjoyed that somebody would give her a gift for no reason. I said, "This is from the Lord. He told me to do this." It made her day. She said, "He cares about me." It made my day. I thought, "I am back in the action again. That is where I need to be."

Discouragement has a base to it. Do you know what it is? Fear. Fear is always at the base of discouragement. You feel like if this happens, I am going to die. Elijah said, "Kill me." Remember, in one of the previous lessons I said, "The root of all fear is the fear of death. If this happens I will die." It will be awful. There is no way this is going to be good. It can come from your own mistakes and failures. It can come from your faults. It can come from unfulfilled expectations. It can come from delays. Why has it not happened Lord? It can come from a disappointment in people, like with Elijah. It can come from tiredness. I talked about that. I will tell you what else it can come from, lack of time with God. You may be in the ministry watching this right now, preaching your sermons every Sunday, but I want to ask you a question. How much time do you spend with God, just for God's sake, just to be with God? You have a job to feed people but you have to have your own time with God, just you and Him. I got up this morning and I prepared these lessons that I am filming today, but I stopped first and said, "Lord, would you speak to me, just for me", and then I read something that had nothing to do with anything that I am teaching today. Why did I do that? Because I know if

I do not do that I am going to pay the price down the road.

Another thing is some personalities are more given to discouragement than others. Some people never get discouraged. Another thing, the more you are filled with the Spirit and walk in the Spirit in a consistent way, the less problem you have with discouragement because the Holy Spirit is never discouraged. He is the encourager. He is in there in control. It is a major tool of the devil. It is your greatest enemy. Be prepared for that and watch out. When can it come? It can come right before God wants you to do something and you do not know what God wants you to do it because you cannot see the future. Discouragement hits you hard and you want to just run away. If you can hang in there, then you see why the discouragement came. It was a tool sent to stop you.

Remember, another time can come after you have done something great for God. You are exhausted, have that hormone level drop from the excitement and you are down. You are low. One thing I have learned after doing something like speaking at a conference, going to Africa, leading somebody to the Lord or praying for somebody to get the baptism of the Holy Spirit and their prayer language is that afterwards I try to get on my guard. Discouragement can happen then. It catches you off guard. Be prepared. Be ready.

When you are overwhelmed with a problem and you are saying, "Betty, you do not understand. This is a serious problem. I do not know what to do." Consider prayer and fasting. Consider going without some kind of food or water. Let the Lord tell you how to do it. Let the Lord give you an encouraging word. Say, "Lord, I need an encouraging word. I need somebody to give me some kind of encouragement from You. Could You send somebody across my path?" One time I was going in a hospital in the lower part of Texas. I was there with a family member and that family member was really acting badly, just embarrassing. I did not want to be there but I had to be there. I did not have a choice. I called my husband and I said, "I want to get out of here. I do not want to stay here. I cannot stand this. I want out." He said, "You have got to stay there. They need you." I said, "Well, it is hard." He said, "Pray and ask God to put somebody across your path that can encourage you."

I hung up the phone, prayed, went downstairs to the waiting room and sat down. There was a lady reading her Bible right by me. I said, "Oh, do you like the Bible?" She started preaching me a sermon. Wow! It was wonderful! When she got through and I was saying, "Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, God. Thank you. I can handle this."

You can handle discouragement. Do not let it be your greatest enemy. Let it want to run from you because you know how to handle it. You know what to do when he starts trying to come to you.

Fight it. Do not run. Fight it with praise. Fight it with prayer. Fight it with God sending somebody to help you, but you can do this. God bless you. God bless you and keep you.

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. What are the causes of discouragement?
2. How does Satan use discouragement against God's people?
3. What is at the base of discouragement?
4. How did God help Elijah with discouragement in 1 Kings 18-19?
5. When does discouragement usually occur?
6. How important is spending time with God and being filled with the Holy Spirit in terms of battling discouragement?
7. What are some tools you can use when feeling discouraged?

To watch the video on YOUR GREATEST ENEMY DISCOURAGEMENT, Pillar Five, Relational Skills, go to www.bettyswann.com.

