

HOW TO DEFEAT DISCOURAGEMENT¹

By Dr. Pierre J. Samaan

*3 Must I forever see these evil deeds?
Why must I watch all this misery?
Wherever I look,
I see destruction and violence.
I am surrounded by people
who love to argue and fight.
4 The law has become paralyzed,
and there is no justice in the courts.
The wicked far outnumber the righteous,
so that justice has become perverted. (Habakkuk 1:3-4 NLT)*



From the very youngest of children to the most elderly, all will experience discouragement at some point in their life. For most, discouragement lasts only a short time, while others can not seem to shake themselves from it. Unfortunately, discouragement can lead to two categories of negative escapes; Pain and Self-indulgence.

PAIN – DESPAIR

In scripture the word “pain” can refer to physical, mental, or emotional suffering. Despair is the emotional negative escapes that some will most often turn to when in conflict. The synonyms most associated with the word despair are anguish, depression, desperation, dejection, despondency, hopelessness, and misery. Other words that come to mind are affliction, betrayed, mistreated, resignation, sorrow, suffering, unloved, worthless, bitterness, and the list could go on and on.

We may start to see this in our children through their emotional temper tantrums when they are not getting what they want. With the feeling of despair the temper tantrums have turned inward and the child implodes. This inner conflict leads to intense negative emotions as well as chronic illnesses as the immune system is stressed. If you have ever felt this way I am sure you did not like

it or entertain the thought of how much you miss it once its gone.

By the end of our earthly lifetime everyone will have experienced despair. Cain knew of despair when God pronounced judgment on him for his murderous *act against Abel*.

13-14 "Cain said to God, 'My punishment is too much. I can't take it! You've thrown me off the land and I can never again face you. I'm a homeless wanderer on Earth and whoever finds me will kill me.'" (Genesis 4:13,14 MSG)

The story of Hagar when she was ejected from Abraham's household because of Sarah's bitter jealousy.

14-16 "Abraham got up early the next morning, got some food together and a canteen of water for Hagar, put them on her back and sent her away with the child. She wandered off into the desert of Beersheba. When the water was gone, she left the child under a shrub and went off, fifty yards or so. She said, "I can't watch my son die." As she sat, she broke into sobs." (Genesis 21:114-16 MSG)

The Israelites knew of despair on account of their cruel bondage at the hands of the Egyptian Pharos.

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9 "But when Moses delivered this message to the Israelites, they didn't even hear him—they were that beaten down in spirit by the harsh slave

hard that he collapsed in the wilderness from exhaustion.

3-5 "When Elijah saw how things were, he ran for dear life to Beersheba, far in the south of Judah. He left his young servant there and then went on into the desert another day's journey. He came to a lone broom bush and collapsed in its shade, wanting in the worst way to be done with it all—to just die: "Enough of this, God! Take my life—I'm ready to join my ancestors in the grave!" Exhausted, he fell asleep under the lone broom bush." (1Kings 19:4,5 MSG)

Jonah seemed to remain in despair during his defiance to God in giving the Ninevites God's prophecy of a second chance.

3"So, God, if you won't kill them, kill me! I'm better off dead!" 7-8But then God sent a worm. By dawn of the next day, the worm had bored into the shade tree and it withered away. The sun came up and God sent a hot, blistering wind from the east. The sun beat down on Jonah's head and he started to faint. He prayed to die: "I'm better off dead!" (Jonah 4:3,7-8 MSG)



Remember the story of the sailors who were carrying Paul on his journey to a hearing with Caesar. They thought they were done for.

18-20 "Next day, out on the high seas again and badly damaged now

conditions." (Exodus 6:9 MSG)

Elijah knew despair all too well after running from Jezebel's murderous plot to kill him. He ran so far and so by the storm, we dumped the cargo overboard. The third day the sailors lightened the ship further by throwing off all the tackle and provisions. It had been many days since we had seen either sun or stars. Wind and waves were battering us unmercifully, and we lost all hope of rescue." (Acts 27:20 MSG)

Of course there are many more examples in the Bible of people who have reached their limits of emotional endurance. Discouraged, hopeless, and abandoned is not where anyone wants to be. And I believe that God doesn't want us to be in such depths of depression.

However, God uses these moments of utter hopelessness to draw us closer to him. He affirms his presence to us by snatching us out of these deep, dark, valleys of despair. Faith takes a giant leap forward as we endure one of many trials of despair in our earthly lifetime.

God was there lifting them out of their despair and back into life and hope – that is after the lessons have been learned of course. Cain could no longer be in the presence of God which must have been total despair for Cain.

But, God's goodness even encompassed Cain. God decreed that Cain was not to be murdered and put a mark on him so others would easily recognize him and not kill him in retribution or by act of malice. (Genesis 4:15)

21-22"With our appetite for both food and life long gone, Paul took his place in our midst and said, "Friends, you really should have listened to me back in Crete. We could have avoided all this trouble and trial. But there's no

need to dwell on that now. From now on, things are looking up! I can assure you that there'll not be a single drowning among us, although I can't say as much for the ship—the ship itself is doomed."

23-26"Last night God's angel stood at my side, an angel of this God I serve, saying to me, 'Don't give up, Paul. You're going to stand before Caesar yet—and everyone sailing with you is also going to make it.' So, dear friends, take heart. I believe God will do exactly what he told me. But we're going to shipwreck on some island or other." (Acts 27:21-22; 23-26 MSG)

SELF-INDULGENCE

Self-indulgence is the behavioral negative escape that many will most often turn to when in conflict. This is not to be confused with our good Catholic brothers and sisters use of the term *Indulgence*. For the Catholics the term means a remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, the guilt of which has been forgiven.²

In our use of the term Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines self-indulgence as "*excessive or unrestrained gratification of one's own appetites, desires, or whims.*"³ The American Heritage Dictionary⁴ defines the word as "*Excessive indulgence of one's own appetites and desires.*"

When using "the escape" of self-indulgence you would avoid conflicting and discomforting feelings by sedating the emotional pain with pleasure or numbness.

A bubble bath could be considered a self-indulgence, but

²The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume VII. Published 1910. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Nihil Obstat, June 1, 1910. Remy Lafort, S.T.D., Censor. Imprimatur. +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York, retrieved.

³<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary> - 2007-2008 Merriam-Webster Dictionary, retrieved.

⁴The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

unless your spending six hours soaking that's not what we're talking about.

The child with self-indulgent escapes may hide – from stress or parents arguing – in his room reading comic books or playing a video game. The adult on the other hand, has fewer restraints in holding him/her back from excessive self-indulgence.

So, the adult may feel used and unappreciated at work or by a partner resulting in rewards of self-indulging on food, substances, buying sprees, gambling...etc.

Solomon made it very clear that he was not restrained from the enjoying of life's indulgences.

"And whatever my eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my portion and reward for all my toil." (Ecclesiastes 2:10)

The Message Bible may take this passage a little too far, but the way they have translated this passage certainly accentuates the point I am trying to make.

"Oh, how I prospered! I left all my predecessors in Jerusalem far behind, left them behind in the dust. What's more, I kept a clear head through it all. Everything I wanted I took—I never said no to myself. I gave in to every impulse, held back nothing. I sucked the marrow of pleasure out of every task—my reward to myself for a hard day's work!" (Ecclesiastes 2:10 MSG)

WORDS OF OTHERS

The words of others are most often the sources of discouragement.



Parents will communicate to their children ten non-affirming statements for each affirming statement.

Teachers will communicate to the same child seven non-affirming statements for each affirming statement.

It will take four affirming statements to negate the effects of one non-affirming statement.

The following are oppressive words which are often first heard in childhood.

Words of Criticism; "You should have gotten an 'A' in that course."

Words of Failure; "You keep making mistakes! What's wrong with you?"

Words of Anger; "You are driving me crazy!"

Words of Ridicule; "Your grandmother could have lifted that bag!"

Words of Sarcasm; "Well excuse me for not being as perfect as you!"

WHAT DO YOU DO ABOUT IT?

Mother Teresa, when asked if she ever grew fainthearted while working among the poor said;



"No, I do not become discouraged. You see, God has not called me to a ministry of success."⁵

⁵Morgan, Robert, Editor, *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories Illustrations & Quotes*, p 225, Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2000.

1. Release the discouragement to God through prayer. (Nehemiah 4:4)

Composer and singer Bill Gothard once said of discouragement or disappointment as being; "God's way of dimming the glamour of the world and deepening our ability to enjoy Him."⁶ (Psalm 119:37)

A relationship is a specific connection between two persons. When you pray you are having a connection with God. This connection is the relationship you can have each and every day.

2. Confess God's plan and take action towards its completion. (Nehemiah 4:6)

During a church sermon on "Overcoming Discouragement," John Yates says:

Dr. Karl Menninger, the famous psychiatrist, once gave a lecture on mental health and was answering questions from the audience. Someone asked, "What would you advise a person to do if that person felt a nervous breakdown coming on?"

Most people thought he would say, "Go see a psychiatrist immediately," but he didn't. To their astonishment, Dr. Menninger replied, "Lock up your house, go across the railroad tracks, find somebody in need, and help that person."⁷

3. Guard against renewed discouragement. (vs. 7-9)

We guard against discouragement by changing our negative perceptions into Self-talk that is fruitful – Thoughts of love, joy,

⁶Ibid, p220.

⁷Larson, Craig, *750 Engaging Illustrations*, p 139, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002.

peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. (Galatians 5:22)

Guard against renewed discouragement by keeping away from Others who are unhealthy, negative, cynical, critical, or just down right mean.

You can guard against discouragement by not allowing Fatigue to tire you out. Get 6 to 8 hours sleep every night; catch-up with your sleep on the weekends. Pay attention to your schedule so you will not overdue yourself while running those errands.

Discouragement can grab hold of you when your Hunger makes you more impulsive. Eat right and get a medical exam at least once a year. I had one client whose thyroid was deficient. He felt discouraged that he was not losing weight. Instead of seeing the physician he ate and drank more out of desperation. It can take several years to make up the damage you do to your body in just a few months.

4. Seek after the encourager. (v. 14)

Christ Jesus can be a source of encouragement as we pray, read the Bible, and worship as often as possible.

Friends and family are important to keeping us encouraged.

"Many of our daily conversations are actually mutual counseling sessions whereby we exchange the reassurance and advice that help us deal with routine stresses."⁸

An actual occurrence in South Windsor, Connecticut had people feeling encouraged. In 1993, the

⁸Segal, Julius, *Winning Life's Toughest Battles*, p 18, Ivy Books, NY, 1896.

police pulled over motorists in larger than normal numbers.

Lori Carlson, according to Reuters news service was one of the motorists pulled over. She wondered what she had done wrong as the policeman approached her car. She was amazed as the officer wrote out the ticket that read "Your driving was Great? – and we appreciate it."

In a Hartford suburb on Wednesday, June 9, the authorities began a new program to give safe drivers a two-dollar reward for obeying the speed limit, wearing safety belts, having children in protective seats, and using turn signals.

As shocking as this was to the pulled over motorists, the first thing others should expect from us is encouragement. If you want someone to respond well, correct them when they do wrong but thank them for doing right.⁹

"14b...encourage the timid and fainthearted, help and give your support to the weak souls, [and] be very patient with everybody [always keeping your temper].

15See that none of you repays another with evil for evil, but always aim to show kindness and seek to do good to one another and to everybody.

16Be happy [in your faith] and rejoice and be glad-hearted continually (always);

17Be unceasing in prayer [praying perseveringly];

18Thank [God] in everything [no matter what the circumstances may be, be thankful and give thanks], for this is the will of God for you [who are] in Christ Jesus [the Revealer and Mediator of that will].

*19Do not quench (suppress or subdue) the [Holy] Spirit;"
(1 Thessalonians 5:14b-19 AMP)¹⁰*

⁹Larson, Craig, 2002

¹⁰Bible scriptures were retrieved from, www.biblegateway.com

The Pastor and/or Pastoral Counselor can help you “find your song” in life. Heal the wounds and new direction will appear. Blessings are just around the corner.

EVEN IN PAIN, FINDING OUR SONG



All alone, she sat in the back of the church. The rest of the 500 women at the women's conference that weekend had already exited the auditorium. I was gathering up my books, papers, and props when I saw her at the back of the room.

I walked over to where she was sitting; her head was bowed low, and her shoulders were drooping. I sat down, and she began to tell me her story.

She was the mother of three. Her oldest son, suffering from muscular dystrophy, had been confined to a wheelchair for most of his 17 years. Her other two children had a variety of learning and emotional challenges.

With her head still bent, she whispered, "I'm married to a mean, hateful man who makes my life miserable. He won't help me with our son. He even refuses to help while I hold our son when he goes to the bathroom.

"I buried my father this week," the woman continued. "At the funeral I learned that my father had disinherited me from his estate because he hated my husband."

Then she told me something that still haunts me: "I came this weekend with one prayer," she said. "I asked God to kill my husband. I prayed, 'Lord, I need a way out! I feel like a bird in a cage.' "

Finally she lifted her eyes and said, "When I prayed that prayer, God spoke to me as clearly as I've ever sensed His voice. He said, 'Even a bird in a cage sings.' "

With tears running down her face she asked, "What am I supposed to do with that? How do I live with that answer?"

Feeling utterly impotent, I replied, "If God says, 'sing,' you need to find your song."¹¹

GOD IS THERE FOR US WHEN THE GOING GETS ROUGH

In life there will always be periods of contentment and happiness followed by adversity and struggle. It is up to us to be prepared to make the most out of whatever situation comes our way.

In Christian faith I have the hope to know that my God loves (Ro. 5:5) me very much; so much in fact, that He created us to fellowship with Him in love and peace.

Instead of seeing obstacles in my way, I prefer to see them as new challenges that God has allowed me to face. Each new challenge will give me experiences to be wiser, stronger and better prepared.

It is God who knows our future and what we will need so that we are prepared.



¹¹Chapman, Annie, "Even In Pain, Finding Our Song," Decision, October 2002, p 9.

If it wasn't for Goliath, David would never have become King of Israel. What appeared to be a hopeless situation was actually the instrument God used to thrust David into the hearts and minds of God's people.

Even in the depths of despair David would pick himself up with a psalm to God reaffirming his trust in his Creator.



In Psalm 3, when David was escaping for his life from his son Absalom he wrote;

1 LORD, HOW they are increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me.

2 Many are saying of me, There is no help for him in God. Selah [pause, and calmly think of that]!

3 But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.

4 With my voice I cry to the Lord, and He hears and answers me out of His holy hill. Selah [pause, and calmly think of that]!

5 I lay down and slept; I wakened again, for the Lord sustains me.

6 I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me round about.

7 Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheek; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly.

8 Salvation belongs to the Lord; May Your blessing be upon Your people. Selah [pause, and calmly think of that]! (AMP)(Underline added)



David's relationship with God goes back to his long days and nights tending his father's sheep. Can you imagine the long talks he must have had with God the Father? I am certain He will help us just as he helped David.

My wife and I will often remind each other when times are tuff that there must be a big blessing right around the corner.

A match that is used to light a fireplace brings warmth and comfort to those in the home. But, a match that lights a tree in the forest burns all the trees resulting in a calamity.

Our thoughts are like that match. Will you be like David who used his thoughts to believe, obey and love God? Or, will you use your thoughts to remain discouraged resulting in depression, anxiety and perhaps calamity in your life?

May God's grace and peace be multiplied in you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord (2 Peter 1:2).