

CHAPTER 10

THE HIDDEN CAUSES OF DISCOURAGEMENT

Discouragement is one of the most powerful and devastating emotions known to man. Like the withering affect of a scorching wind, it can leave us weak and helpless, fruitless and "dead."

Discouragement is a negative force that snuffles growth, drains enthusiasm, inhibits drive, and disorients one's mind. Of all the causes of failure in life, it is probably the most difficult to overcome.

The irony of it all is that discouragement is oftentimes elusive — hard to trace or get a handle on. Some causes we can readily identify such as loss of a job, sickness, criticism, rejection, etc. But other types seem to appear out of nowhere from causes unknown.

In this discussion, I plan to isolate some of the hidden causes of discouragement, and offer solutions that will work. Once we understand the subtle workings of this enemy, we will be much better prepared to cope with it.

WHAT DISCOURAGEMENT MEANS

To begin, let's examine the word "discouragement" itself. The prefix "dis" means without, to do the opposite of, deprive of, exclude or expel from, opposite or absence. Discouragement, then, means **WITHOUT COURAGE!** To be disheartened — lacking the courage to try or go on.

Here's where many people come up short. When problems strike they become fearful, think the worst will happen, run from their troubles and leave the results to chance. They may be weak-willed, lazy-minded or simply afraid to face reality — afraid they will not measure up and fail. Obviously this approach only leads to deeper discouragement because nothing is done to remove the cause — the problem still exists.

Let's now look at some of the underlying causes behind this destructive emotional disease.

SATAN THE PRIMARY INSTIGATOR

Satan the Devil is the foremost cause behind discouragement. He is man's greatest foe. To overthrow man and wear him down, Satan has saturated this world and all of its social systems with his diabolical lusts and venom. Like a devious snake studying its prey, Satan watches and waits to ensnare man in his weakest moment — when he least expects it or is caught off guard.

Often as not, the feelings of guilt and shame, failure and despair are direct attacks of Satan. He relentlessly tries to undermine man's faith in God and to destroy his feelings of self-worth. His objective: to cause us to lose heart, think lowly of ourselves, throw in the towel, give up and forsake God.

The Apostle Paul says that Satan **WORKS** in the hearts and minds of people. "...wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now **WORKETH** in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:1-2). This means that he's constantly trying to get at us — "Because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom me may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Our strongest defense against Satan's power is first to recognize who he is (man's greatest enemy) and turn to God for help in order to resist his evil, negative thoughts and moods.

A powerful resolve and a firm commitment to stand steadfast against Satan will drive him out of your life. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

The next time depressing moods fill your mind for no apparent reason, stop and think. Satan may be seeking a door of entrance.

THE MOUNTAINS WE PACE

Another major cause for discouragement is that some people see the goals and tasks they would like to achieve as being so big, awesome and overwhelming as to be virtually impossible to reach.

They become frightened with the complexities of life and wonder if they can make the grade. It seems there is so much to do, so many problems to overcome, so many habits to break, so much knowledge to learn and inculcate, that there's not enough time to do it all. The Kingdom itself is so ethereal and far away, that it's hard to grasp its reality and bring it down to everyday life.

It's like trying to scale a rugged cliff which towers into the sky. The climber sees himself, weak and small, at the base of the mountain. His goal is to reach the top — but the summit is high and far away. The footing is unsure — not to mention the unseen obstacles along the way. The journey is threatening — forboding.

On the spiritual plane, people look at their shortcomings with inner misgivings and doubts. They see in their mind's eye the giant goal God has placed before them — that of becoming sons of God in His Kingdom. One of Satan's devices is to use this great goal to cause doubt and apprehension in our minds — the "climb" is too steep, or the "path" is too rough. The tendency is to give up and quit before one even starts.

The reason: "It's easier to stay on ground level than to advance forward and fail." But such individuals have failed already by exerting no effort and standing still.

The key lies in the meaning of faith and courage. When one steps forward and faces all obstacles, he learns a great lesson. Not only can he advance, but it's far easier than what appeared.

DISCOURAGEMENT COMES FROM HAVING NO GOALS AND FAILING TO GROW

While some people become fearful at the enormity of their goals and responsibilities, there are countless scores of others who get depressed because they have no goals at all. They are lazily drifting along, whiling away their lives. They are like a ship at sea, jostled by the waves, with no tangible ports in sight.

Deep inside such people is a lingering, nagging frustration. They're downcast and miserable because they are accomplishing nothing worthwhile.

The reason for this type of discouragement: GOD CREATED IN MAN A DESIRE TO GROW, A DESIRE TO ACHIEVE, A DESIRE TO SUCCEED. Growth is the principle that governs life. It's a principle that you see manifested in all of creation. From the sprouting of a seed, to the birth of a child, life starts small but ever grows and progresses through many stages of development until it reaches maturity. Life is an active, ongoing process — forever reaching upward and onward to higher levels of growth and usefulness. A quick glance at the glories of creation will prove that God who created and sustains all things is a moving, progressing, dynamic God.

Now the Creator placed within man the same creative urges — a fundamental desire to grow and achieve!

Whenever man fails to grow in character and develop his life, he experiences a deep sense of emptiness, futility and failure.

How vital it is, then, to embark on a program of positive goal setting in order to grow and be happy, and to lead a rich and productive life.

BRING GOAL ATTAINMENT INTO EACH DAY

We need to think in terms of reaching our goals on a daily basis. This will prevent us from being overwhelmed with the "bigness" of our tasks and reduce them to steps we can easily manage. By approaching our goals with this in mind, we will grow in courage and confidence — one step at a time.

Success breeds success. One step leads to another, and on to the next until finally our goals are reached. The joy and pleasure that comes from succeeding will serve as a stimulus to push us forward.

The most rational way to face mountain-size tasks is simply to shovel them away one scoop full at a time. It may be a huge mountain that will require a lot of scoops, and many hours of diligent effort. But each shovel full will bring us that much closer to final victory.

The key is to begin. You have to start before you can finish — and be determined to follow through.

Remember, it's standing still — failing to take hold of life and grow — that causes discouragement.

Once you start moving in the direction of your goals, you will lay down a track record of success. As you continue to progress, even if only a step or two, you will gain confidence and self-respect. Thus, with a success pattern firmly established, you will eventually achieve a full and satisfying life.

You will no doubt meet with hardships and obstacles on your journey. But those who are positively determined, look on obstacles as challenges or opportunities — not as roadblocks that stop them cold. They become bolder, wiser and stronger with each new trial.

Take a step forward with renewed determination, and before you know it, you will have reached your glorious quest.

SUCCESS COMES THROUGH PERSISTENT EFFORT

Once we have firmly established our goals (and only we can determine which are important to us) we must set sail in their direction. This calls for one hundred percent commitment, hard work, raw determination and persistent effort. Only those who start the journey and keep sailing onward will ever reach their destination!

Most people have good intentions and resolve to go all out. But when they meet with unexpected problems, they get discouraged and quit.

Thus they fail! They stop trying! A little more push, a higher reach, a stronger and more powerful self-command would likely have made the difference between present failure and the next success.

Either they feel incapable of bearing the pain from exerting effort or they lose confidence in their abilities to forge ahead. The result? They slip backward into a lifestyle that's more comfortable and less demanding.

But such backsliding brings a penalty — a penalty of deep depression and doubt. The innate desire God placed in them for growth and development has been stifled. The curse of failure then takes its toll in forms of guilt, despondency, and varying degrees of self-contempt.

Clearly, the only sure cure to master discouragement is to establish meaningful goals and grow daily toward their fulfillment.

THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

It's interesting to know that God gave mankind the basic formula for success clear back in the Garden of Eden: *"The Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it"* (Gen. 2:15).

Here God gave man a meaningful activity — a program of work to keep him busy. Adam was not put in the garden simply to lay back under the trees, eat bananas and apples, and play with the monkeys.

He was to dress the garden — to cultivate it, nurture it, enlarge it and guide the growth of the plants. Here was a tangible plan of action to enable man to use his mind and grow — to achieve, to produce, to succeed and find fulfillment.

But in addition to working the garden and expanding its size, God also gave Adam something else to do. HE WAS TO KEEP IT. That is, he was to maintain and preserve its beauty lest the garden grow up in weeds and fall into disuse.

How demoralizing it would have been for Adam to have invested time and energy into developing each plot of ground, only to come back later and find it ragged and ugly and choked with weeds. Not only was it necessary for him to work — dress the garden — but also to maintain his successes along the way.

And so it is with a Christian. If we fail to secure our steps and build on solid ground, we too may look back some day and discover our work has rusted away. Jesus Christ said to the Philadelphia Church: "Hold that fast which thou hast, let no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11).

How vital it is to protect our successes lest in our eagerness to experience new challenges we allow our foundation to rot away!

The formula God gave Adam: "Dress the garden and keep it" is an excellent motto to keep in mind.

TRUE SUCCESS COMES THROUGH CHRIST

In the final analysis, the secret of success lies in the power and might of Jesus Christ. We have our part to play, and much is required — but we can only go so far. If we are to accomplish goals that bring lasting success, we must be spiritually united to Christ. This is a vital key!

Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine no more can you, except you abide in me ... for without me, ye can do nothing" (John 15:5-6) "For in him we LIVE, and MOVE and HAVE OUR BEING" (Acts 17:28). "But THOU SHALT REMEMBER THE LORD THY GOD: for it is he that GIVETH THEE POWER to get wealth (Deut. 8:17-18).

And again, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, ACCORDING TO THE POWER THAT WORKETH IN US ..." (Eph. 3:20).

These scriptures clearly prove that human strength alone is insufficient — the power of God is vitally needed.

What does God's Spirit do? It enlightens our minds, opens our understanding, impowers our wills and imparts the courage and motivation to press forward. God's Spirit is an added force or energy, just like the flow of electricity, that infuses new life.

Here lies another great pitfall of discouragement. The influences of the devil and the trials of life can undermine our efforts and desires — if we allow it. But, God is able to circumvent these forces through imparting to us the power of His mighty Spirit. With this new energy which God's Spirit gives, "all things are possible." God will see us through any problem or circumstance as we continue our journey, if we will but believe and act on His Word.

SIN BLOCKS GOD'S SPIRIT AND PRODUCES FAILURE

Sin is a force that produces discouragement because it breaks our contact with God and the flow of His Spirit.

Remember, it is God who's the source of our strength and imparts to us the confidence and power to accomplish our goals — that is, the vision, the courage and inspiration to move ahead in spite of all odds. "For it is God which worketh in you, both TO WILL and TO DO of His good strengthens me" (Phil. 2:13). "I can DO ALL THINGS through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

Walking with God, then, in a spirit of willing obedience produces success. But when we sin and break His laws, we cut ourselves off from His power. "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:2).

Thus sin not only blocks the flow of God's Spirit (His life and energy in us) which is vital to our success, but it also creates negative attitudes that bring failure. When we sin, we condemn ourselves and fall prey to depressed moods and syndromes of guilt. Subsequently, we lose interest in our goals and direct our energies to other pursuits. Instead of repenting and getting our lives in harmony with God, we run away and hide (escape) to deaden the pain of guilt.

Clearly, then, sin produces failure because it inflicts guilt and destroys our purpose for living. The growth principle essential to life has been interrupted.

If we are discouraged, we would be wise to see if sin has entered in and broken our relationship with God.

SIN MAKES US NEGATIVE AND CRITICAL

A subsequent problem which sin causes is that it transforms one into a negative and critical personality. This condition naturally follows when he has broken the growth principle.

The subconscious realization that he is sinning, and cut off from God, leads to self criticism and disrespect. Because he is unhappy with himself, he reacts by being negative and critical of others. Instead of correcting his mistakes, he starts to blame others for his problems in life.

On the other hand, one who's growing and overcoming is genuinely happy and reflects a positive outlook. He expresses an outward concern for others, and attracts to himself many friends. He's a real inspiration to be around.

What is your overall bent toward life — negative or positive? Be honest with yourself. For there is no way you can experience total fulfillment unless you are walking with God and are routing sin out of your life.

SUMMARY

These are the hidden causes of discouragement. To overcome them, we must remember that: God created in man a desire to achieve, to grow, to succeed. To fulfill this desire, we must set firm goals. The Spirit of God will help guide our minds in determining what they should be. Goal attainment must be brought into each day and is a step-by-step process. Success is attained through "bite-sized accomplishments." The little daily steps of progress we make — no matter how small — will give us joy and confidence because they bring us closer to success.

Success comes through diligent effort — there is no genuine achievement without it. Just one more push, a higher reach, a second effort may make the difference between success and failure.

The overall achievement of a successful life is like weaving a beautiful tapestry. The final product is made up of many little fibers. The threads of and by themselves may not seem that important, but put together, they're all necessary and form a beautiful masterpiece.

And, the Spirit of God blends everything together for the right result. As God works in us, and unites us with His mind — we cannot help but be successful. It's guaranteed.

This, then, is the secret to overcoming discouragement and experiencing a fruitful life.

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