

Cleopas and Friend

Luke 24:13-33 NIV

Discouragement is one of the best tools that the enemy uses to defeat us. All of us, even the most gifted men and women of God, experience discouragement from time to time.

The following are a few, possibly daily, nameless situations:

- A Christian wife of an unbelieving and unfaithful husband yields to discouragement and the result is a broken marriage; suffering children and broken hearts.
- A student failed to overcome discouragement due difficulties in school and the result is poverty and unemployment.
- A new believer became discouraged due to repeated failure to overcome his old habits and vices; the result is stagnant growth and unstable faith.
- A poor man stops believing that his situations will change. He accepts this and refuses to risk anything and therefore stays in his poverty until his death.

Discouragement is not limited to individuals:

Israel yielded to discouragement and paid a great price. 10 Israelite Spies sowed seeds of discouragement and the whole nation paid with 40 years in the wilderness.

Maybe one of the greatest times of discouragement that any group of people faced was when the Roman guards rolled the stone and sealed Jesus body in a tomb.

What a weekend it had been for the followers of Jesus. When all the rest of Jerusalem was celebrating, it seemed as if the bottom fell out of their lives. For the enemy, everything was in place for discouragement: fear, failure, frustration, and fatigue; all of their hopes and dreams had seemed to vanish on Friday when Jesus had died on the cross. They were in a state of shock and confusion. Everything had happened so fast.

Early on that particular Sunday morning, the women that had went to the tomb that held the body rushed back to the disciples with the news that they had seen angels who had told them that Jesus was risen. At first, the disciples dismissed it as hysteria. But two of the disciples, Peter and John, ran to the tomb and discovered that it was empty.

Now leaderless, the disheartened group was beginning to unravel; to fall apart. At least two of them were already on their way home; we assume that it was their home. The very afternoon of the report of the empty tomb, two of the discouraged and frustrated believers, Cleopas and friend, an

unidentified companion, set out for their home in Emmaus. With the news of an empty tomb fresh in their ears, were these two accepting defeat; were they so confused and discouraged that they were throwing in the towel and going home?

On the way home to Emmaus, they met a stranger. We know who it was, but they did not recognize Him. Part of the joy of this story is that we as the readers know what the characters do not. Doctor Luke tells the story.

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him. (Luke 24:13-16)

Unless there was something absolutely pressing to return home for, wouldn't you think that the report of Jesus tomb being empty would have captured the curiosity of these two disciples and delay their return to their village?

But, the enemies' tools of frustration and discouragement can cause us to move away from one of our best sources of strength; the

fellowship of believers. When Christians allow themselves to become preoccupied with their dashed hopes and frustrated plans, they often withdraw.

Satan decided that he was going to retire and have a going out of business sale. All his diabolical tools were displayed and priced for a quick sale; all except three. These tools, a well worn hammer, wedge, and pry bar, were displayed on a separate table and were priced much higher than all the rest. When asked about these tools, he explained:

“These three are the most productive of my arsenal. If I can drive the wedge of separation far enough to insert the pry bar of discouragement, then any of the rest of my tools I choose to use become much more effective.”

As the two disciples walked and talked, a stranger joined them.

He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

¹⁹ “What things?” he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over

to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.” (Luke 24:17-24)

These two may have been doing what could be called ‘verbal volley ball.’ One would take an idea or prophesy and knock it over the net to the other. Then that one would put his particular spin on it and send it back. People do this all the time. They were not arguing, but intensely discussing what all this meant.

The stranger, Jesus, joins them and asks them what they are discussing and why they are so obviously sad.

Why did Jesus draw near to two obscure disciples? We can take heart today in the fact that Jesus often made His most remarkable revelations to the least remarkable people. Here we see two people who are possible not mentioned before in scripture and never mentioned again after this. Which just points out there are no unimportant people to Jesus. With his question Jesus allowed these disciples to express their deepest hurts, angers and frustrations. He draws near today in the same way.

He knew their hearts and knew their needs. But he still asked them a leading question, and gave them opportunity to pour out their confusion and disappointment. And He has not changed.

Notice the answer given by the two in verse 21. “But, we had hoped...” The death of hope is a very powerful weapon in the hands of the enemy. The well worn hammer, wedge, and pry bar was doing its work.

But, now it is time for their traveling companion, Jesus, to frustrate the pry bar and remove the wedge.

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27)

Notice the three-letter word ‘all’ mentioned twice in the three verses just read. Had these two disciples missed part of the prophesy concerning Messiah? Or could it be that after three days, Rome was still in charge?

Could it be that even though they had spent time with Jesus, that their focus was on the physical and material rather than the spiritual? That’s how we humans are, though, isn’t it. If we are asked; if we are put on the spot, we don’t like to admit it.

but, that is how we are. Most Christians are more concerned with the physical and material rather than the spiritual.

Even though they know that it could be 'lights out' for this body at any time, and that the soul is going to live forever, they will still devote more time and energy to take care of their physical and material needs over the spiritual.

Human nature: but the disciple has to learn to think and live with a new nature, one with a future and a hope.

From the promised sacrifice in Genesis to the messenger of the covenant in Malachi, the stranger, Jesus, explained himself to these two from the Scripture.

How did this impact these travelers?

³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32)

Luke's record of these two travelers does have a happy ending. They saw Jesus a second time when they returned to Jerusalem and told their story to the disciples there.

But, not all stories have a happy ending, do they? In my introduction, I mentioned a Christian wife whose marriage ends in divorce; a student given to discouragement; a new Christian dealing with repeated failure; a poor man who had given up hope.

Listen to this story and see if it sounds familiar:

"I hit the ground running. Immediately, I volunteered for everything, anything that I felt vaguely interested in and marginally qualified for. I led the youth group; I helped with the music, I taught Sunday school; I wrote the church newsletter; I became a camp counselor; I served as a mentor to several young men.

But something, somewhere, went awry. The zeal fizzled. The fire in my bones became only an ache in my joints. My running became plodding. My lightness became heaviness. My joyfulness became jadedness. I joined the ranks of the murmurers and faultfinders – those that did not like the music or the sermon or the color of the azalea's behind the church – and I found their number legion." [Mark Buchanan. Your God Is Too Safe. (Multnomah, 2001) p. 9-10]

Earlier I used as an illustration Satan's retirement. If only it were true-but it was only an illustration. The following illustration may be more accurate as to Satan's activity.

Satan is speaking at a demon convention. After a few jokes, he got down to serious business. He said:

As long as Christians stay close to God, we have no power over them. But here are 12 things that I have found that work well to divert their attention away from God and into our kingdom.

1. Keep them busy with non-essentials.
2. Tempt them to over spend and live in debt.
3. Entice them to work long hours to support an empty lifestyle.
4. Discourage them from spending family time; for when the home degenerates, there is no refuge from work.
5. Over stimulate their minds with T.V. and computers so they can't hear God speaking to them.
6. Fill their coffee tables and night stands with news papers and magazines so they have no time to read the Bible.
7. Flood their mail boxes with sweepstakes promotions and get rich quick schemes; keep them chasing material things.
8. Put glamorous models on T.V. and magazine covers. Keep them focused on outward appearance. That way they will be dissatisfied with themselves and their mates.
9. Make sure that couples are too exhausted for intimacy; and tempt them to look elsewhere.
10. Emphasize Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny; divert their attention away from the real meaning of these holidays.
11. Involve them in good causes; that they have no time for eternal ones.
12. Entice them to be self sufficient. Keep them busy working in their own strength; that they never know the joy of God's power working through them.

Do these things faithfully and our kingdom will grow.

I know that there are those who say not to pay too much attention to Satan; to focus more on Jesus. I agree with the focus on Jesus part.

But, if you ignore the enemy, pretend that he doesn't exist, or foolishly think that you can defeat him, then your story, like so many, may not have a very happy ending.
(Read)

Revelation 12:1-12: (On screen...)

We have good news to share along with a warning. I close with this: As long as Christians stay close to God, Satan has no power over them.