

FINDING ENCOURAGEMENT IN DISCOURAGING TIMES**By Rick Boxx**

Being an optimist by nature, troubles must stack up very high before I begin to feel discouraged. Usually, I can find a bright side to any dark time. However, I had one of those weeks recently when my optimism was no match for the daunting challenges I was facing.

Our upcoming event was becoming overwhelming with one problem arising after another. We were experiencing some online communications and registration problems, and I learned of some customer issues that had to be resolved quickly if the conference were to be a success.

With my discouragement building, I did not know the solutions to the difficulties we were facing, but I did know one thing: I needed solitude. I decided to get away for a while by retreating to my automobile.

While riding in my car, I prayed and fervently asked God for direction and wisdom. I was desperate for answers, and despite my discouragement felt confident the Lord would provide the answers we needed. These moments of personal reflection reminded me of a passage in the Bible's New Testament which says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance" (James 1:2-3).

Joy was not the emotion I had been feeling, but pausing to remember and embrace that promise dramatically affected my attitude, as well as the approach I would take in addressing those seemingly insurmountable issues. My discouragement eased when I realized God had a purpose behind all these challenges. With this new sense of peace, I and those working with me were able to take a fresh look at problems we were dealing with and find satisfactory resolutions. God's Word encouraged me during that time of great discouragement. It can do the same for you.

The Bible has much to say concerning our times of adversity and discouragement. Here are just a few of the simple but straight-forward assurances we can find in the Scriptures:

Trust that God knows what He is doing. During major problems, we might have trouble believing God has any idea what we are facing. However, the Bible assures us that He does know and understand. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

Trust in God's direction. One of the wonderful things of a walk of faith is the assurance that when we have made wrong decisions or have gone off course, God is able to redirect us. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

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Trust in God's wisdom. When we seek God and His wisdom, He can and will provide in many ways. The key is not only to ask, but also to trust that He will provide what we need and when we need it. "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind" (James 1:5-6).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions*

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1. People are different, but how likely are you to experience times of discouragement? What is your typical reaction at such times – where do you turn for encouragement?
2. Describe a time when you felt especially discouraged. What were the circumstances, and how did the problems you were confronting get resolved?
3. How would you respond to someone who says, "I never get discouraged. I never have to deal with feelings of being depressed"?
4. When you read that we should turn to the Bible and its promises for help and reassurance during discouraging times, what thoughts come to your mind?

Challenge For The Week

Do have someone, or a small group of people, with whom you can confide during difficult, discouraging times. If you do, make a point of calling or meeting with them this week, even if you are not dealing with any overwhelming problems. It is important to continue building relationships like that, rather than waiting until an emergency arises.

If you are in a CBMC group, such as a Connect 3 team, a Young Professionals group, or Trusted Advisors Forum, this can be an excellent setting for mutual encouragement. Also, let someone know you are available when they find themselves feeling discouraged or disheartened.

NOTE:

For more about what the Bible says, consider the following passages:

Psalm 37:1-7,25-34, 46:10; Proverbs 2:6, 3:13-15, 10:14-15; Matthew 6:25-34

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