

A spot from the interim moderator

Conquering Discouragement

BY DR PHIL PAUL

How often do you hear the words “I quit!”, “I’m fed up!”, “I can’t take any more!”, “nobody seems to care!”. They are the kind of words which may go through your mind when you feel discouraged.

Discouragement is found in schools, in businesses, in government, in homes, in churches and aged care facilities. Many people, including Christian leaders, often go through times of discouragement in their lives. This was also true for one of the great Old Testament prophets, Elijah, who was once so discouraged that he wanted God to take his life. As you may recall from the Biblical account in 1 Kings, Chapter 18, God had used Elijah to win a great victory over the prophets of the false God, Baal at Mount Carmel. But Elijah’s life was then in grave danger as King Ahab’s wife, Jezebel, had vowed to kill him. In response, Elijah was afraid. He appeared to lose his confidence in God and ran for his life and hid in a desert and prayed that God would take his life. In 1 Kings 19:1-21, we see how God helps Elijah deal with the problem of discouragement.

First of all, you need to recognize the causes of discouragement. Sometimes discouragement can arise from physical causes such as tiredness or hunger. For instance, Elijah had run 27 kilometres from Mount Carmel to Jezreel and then journeyed another 200 kilometres to Beersheba. To avoid discouragement, you need to look after your body and know its limitations.

Discouragement also has spiritual roots. Discouragement can arise when you feel a failure, especially when you compare yourself unfavourably with others. This is a form of self-righteousness or pride where you impose false standards on yourself rather than accept God’s grace in your life by trusting in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord. It can also arise when you fear others or look for their approval of your actions rather than trust in God. This was the case with Elijah who not only compared himself with his ancestors but also feared Jezebel’s threat to take his life.

Discouragement also has negative consequences. It can cause you to lose sight of God's perspective in your life. Elijah could have encouraged the people after they had turned to the Lord at Mount Carmel and challenged the murderous intent of Jezebel. Instead, Elijah was sitting under a juniper tree, some 200 kilometres away, praying that he might die. Not only did he fail to challenge the forces of evil, but he had a false perspective of the world causing him to be full of self pity.

How then do you deal with discouragement? Firstly, you should renew your trust in God and remind yourself of how He has worked in the past and in the present to love and sustain you – especially in sending Jesus Christ to be your saviour



and friend. Elijah found that the Lord tenderly reached out to him and provided for his needs, even though God could have sternly rebuked him. Secondly, you need to have a renewed grasp of God's sovereign presence and power. God can intervene in the world when you pray, as he did in the case of Elijah, even when your situation may look impossible from a human perspective. Thirdly, you need to see that God still has a purpose for your life and desires

to use you in his service. Even though Elijah failed, God re-commissioned Elijah to his service and asked him to carry out a number of important tasks. Fourthly, you need to be challenged by the broader universal picture. Just as Elijah witnessed God overcoming the power of evil by humiliating the prophets of the false God, Baal, so we see how God overcame the forces of evil and death by raising Jesus Christ from the dead. His resurrection provides hope that we too can be resurrected and be with Christ in eternity and not be over-

come by our present circumstances.

Yes – discouragement is one of the devil's chief and most effective weapons

which he uses against people, especially those who trust in Christ. But it can be conquered through God's strength. You do not need to resign if you are a follower of Christ. You simply need to be renewed through the power of his spirit and re-commissioned to his service. God is willing for that to happen. Are you?