

BOOK OF EZRA
MOVING BEYOND DISCOURAGEMENT
EZRA 5:1-17

Introduction

How many of us have ever been discouraged? That's like asking, "*How many of us in this room are human?*" I know that I certainly have! And we're not alone! I personally know of some great men and women of God who battled periods of discouragement in their lives!

Why do we become discouraged? Sometimes discouragement can stem from a physical cause. We might simply be tired and worn out from working too long and too hard without a break. (SWA commercial "*Wanna get away!*")

Or we might have an illness or injury or even just the natural effects of getting older that prevents us from living life fully and makes us susceptible to depression and discouragement.

Another area deals with spiritual matters. We can become disappointed with God over something in our lives. Maybe we prayed and worked for something, but it did not work out according to OUR expectations. As far as we could tell, it would have been for God's glory if it had come about according to OUR expectations, but it fell apart!

The bottom line is there are times when we all get discouraged and we need to learn to move beyond our discouragement!

God's people, the returning remnant of Judah, became discouraged! (Ezra 4:4) Consequently, the work on rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem stopped for about 15-18 years!

We saw in Haggai 1:4-9, the people's focus shifted to building their own houses, and they neglected building God's house. If the subject came up, they responded, "*Not now, the time is not come yet!*"

How could the Lord's people put their discouragement behind them so that they could finish the task of rebuilding the temple?

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To turn things around, we saw how the Lord raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, who spoke to the people in the name of the God of Israel! **(Ezra 5:1)**

Under the renewed leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the people began to rebuild and in spite of further opposition, the work was finished in a little over four years. So I believe that this chapter can give us some great pointers on how to move beyond discouragement in our work for the Lord:

To overcome and move beyond discouragement we need several things:

I. TO MOVE BEYOND DISCOURAGEMENT, WE NEED A FRESH ENCOUNTER WITH GOD'S WORD!

We find that spiritual advances in Scripture began with a Word from the LORD! (e.g. Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Elijah, Paul)

We know that the Old Testament prophets did not so much expound on God's already-written Word; but rather, they received new revelation directly from God for His people! When these prophets spoke, the Jewish people were to realize that God was speaking through those prophets! ("*Thus saith the LORD God...*")

We no longer have prophets to give direct revelation from God! The revelation of God has been completed in the old time prophets' messages preserved for us in the Canon of Scripture we possess!

When we are discouraged, the thing that will refresh us most is to hear God speaking to us in our particular circumstances through His Word!

Although some will testify that the "*open the Bible at random*" method has worked, I would not recommend it. I recommend reading the Word systematically! I have often found that the passage of Scripture that I'm reading or studying has particular relevance to the very circumstances I am going through at the time!

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There are a number of ways that we can have a fresh encounter with God's Word, but in every case, we must have exposure to that Word!

In other words, **it won't happen if you never open your Bible or never sit under the teaching and preaching of the Word!**

When we are discouraged, we may not feel like getting into the Word, but we must go against our feelings, if need be, and expose ourselves to the Word!

We can listen to the Bible on tape or CD.

We also can find great help from the sermons of men of God.

We can also get help with sermons from old time preachers of the past, like Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, or John Bunyan.

Sometimes we may need to schedule a special time to take our Bible and just get alone with God. God speaks to us through His Word, and so we must take the time and effort to expose ourselves to it!

When we do, God's Word will do at least four things:

A. GOD'S WORD CONFRONTS OUR SIN!

That was the main thrust we saw in the Prophecy of Haggai! He directly confronted the people with their sin of building their own houses while neglecting God's house!

God used him to stir up Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the people so that *"they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God"* (Haggai 1:14).

You may be thinking, *"When I'm discouraged, why would I want to be confronted with my sin? That doesn't sound very encouraging!"* It may not be pleasant at the moment, but it's the medicine we all need!

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Sin destroys us and damages those who are close to us! To neglect the Bible because it confronts our sin is like avoiding the doctor when we know that we have cancer or some other serious life threatening illness! It may not be pleasant to go through the treatment, but without it we will die.

Remember that Paul told Timothy that the Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness! (2 Timothy 3:16)

GOD'S WORD CONFRONTS OUR SIN...

B. GOD'S WORD CONFIRMS HIS GRACE IF WE WILL REPENT!

While Haggai confronted the people's sin, Zechariah gave them hope that God would remember them and keep His covenant promises to send the Messiah.

Even *Zechariah's* name means *"whom the Lord remembers."* His father was *Berechiah*, which means *"the Lord blesses."* His grandfather (mentioned in Ezra 5:1) was *Iddo*, which means *"at the appointed time."* Those three names sum up the message of Zechariah: *"Whom the Lord remembers, He blesses at the appointed time."*

Although Zechariah was the prophet of hope and encouragement, we saw how he began his message by talking about God's fierce wrath because of His people's sin! (Zechariah 1:2).

But immediately we saw how he followed it with the Lord's gracious invitation in *Zechariah 1:3*—*"...Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts."*

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If we will repent, God will be gracious to us!

This is illustrated in our text: Ezra 5:1 is a new, new beginning! The first new beginning was in chapter 3, when the returned exiles gathered in Jerusalem, set up the altar, celebrated the Feast of Booths, and laid the foundation of the temple! That's when the opposition discouraged and frightened them, resulting in 15 to 18 years of doing nothing about the temple.

But now, we have a second new beginning. Thank God that He allows for new, new beginnings, and new, new, new beginnings! Do you need a new beginning? God has one waiting for you!

GOD'S WORD CONFRONTS OUR SIN...CONFIRMS HIS GRACE IF WE WILL REPENT!

C. GOD'S WORD REORIENTS OUR PRIORITIES UNDER HIS LORDSHIP!

Haggai exhorted them to get their priorities in order by putting God's house first! Zechariah exhorted them to get their priorities in order by returning to the LORD!

A great portion of God's Word confronts our skewed priorities! We're all prone to let the things of this world crowd the things of God out of first place in our lives!

However, the Word keeps calling us back to the basic priority: *Matthew 6:33—“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”*

D. GOD'S WORD SHOWS US HOW TO LIVE IN A MANNER PLEASING TO HIM.

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Without the Word from these two prophets, most of the Jews back in the land probably thought that they were doing okay!

They may have even congratulated themselves for giving up their comfortable lives in Babylon and making the long and dangerous journey across the desert.

Perhaps they thought, “*Sure, we don't have a temple yet, but these things take time. The Jews back in Babylon don't have a temple, either. We're better off than they are. At least we came back to the land!*” But then the prophets spoke and the people realized that to please God, they needed to commit themselves to rebuild His temple!

It's easy to think that we're doing okay in the Lord if we compare ourselves to other Christians! We always seem to compare ourselves to those who aren't quite as committed as we see ourselves!

But then if and when we come to God's Word, it exposes the true thoughts and intents of our heart!

It is then that we realize that God wants purity in our thought life. He calls us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We learn that Christ loves the Church sacrificially so much so that He gave Himself for it!

Then the Holy Spirit uses God's word to help us come to realize that we don't love His Church like that! So the Word shows how we need to adjust our thinking, our priorities, and our behavior to please God!

So, *TO MOVE BEYOND DISCOURAGEMENT, WE NEED A FRESH ENCOUNTER WITH GOD'S WORD!*