

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?

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

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 they "*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!

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

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!

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

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."*

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

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.

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

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!*

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

II. TO MOVE BEYOND DISCOURAGEMENT, WE NEED TO GET BACK TO WORK FOR THE LORD! (Vs 2)

Discouragement had led the people to abandon work on the temple for 15 - 18 years. However, these two prophets of God called them back to work!

There is something encouraging about serving the Lord, especially if you've been on the sidelines for a while! There is the encouragement that He can even use us, in spite of our previous failures!

Whether it's physical labor for the LORD or being used spiritually in someone else's life to bring them to the LORD or to help them back to the LORD or to help them, there is joy in knowing that we are laboring for God's eternal kingdom, and that someday we will hear Him say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*"

One cause of discouragement is that we often become **focused on ourselves and our problems!** Often that **self-focus generates self-pity and self-justification** for why we quit serving the Lord!

We can become like Elijah in *1 Kings 19:10*—"*And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.*"

Self-focus prevents us from seeing the needs of others and ministering to those needs!

If we just sit around thinking about our problems rather than staying busy for the LORD, we're much more likely to get depressed and stay depressed and stay inactive because of the depression!

In fact, self-focus can spiral us into a pit of depression and inactivity!

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

If folks would just find something to do for the Lord and get back to doing something and staying active for Him, I sincerely believe that they would find that it does wonders for helping them move beyond their discouragement! Get back to work for the Lord!

III. TO MOVE BEYOND DISCOURAGEMENT, WE MUST LEARN TO PERSEVERE IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION!

As we have seen previously, the enemy will not be idle when we make a new beginning with the Lord!

No sooner had the people begun to build than Tattenai, the governor over Israel, and his sidekick and their colleagues came and challenged them **(5:3)**.

Now, in their defense, they were only doing their job. They reported to King Darius, who began his reign with a number of challenges to his rule. These men were making sure that the Jews were not plotting rebellion against the king. But even so, the enemy was using them to threaten the people to abandon the work again!

But in this case, they did not demand that the work stop until a word came from the king. Rather, they permitted the people to continue building until such a word came back, which would have taken possibly up to four or five months.

The reason given is in verse 5, "*But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius...*"

The eye of the enemy and the eye of God are continually upon us in all that we do! Knowing that the eye of God is upon us, we can persevere even when the enemy is watching and trying to get us to quit!

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

Tattenai sent a letter to Darius, which our text quotes. It reveals several interesting things.

For one, it is surprisingly accurate. Unlike the letter we saw in 4:11-16, which distorted the truth to make the Jews look worse than they were, this letter just states the facts, asking for verification.

I don't know whether the governor assumed that the Jews' story was so far from the truth that the king would easily disprove it, or whether he was a man of integrity who was just doing his job. But he states the Jews' claims accurately and asks the king to confirm or deny those claims.

Also, **the letter shows that the Jews gave a strong testimony to Tattenai and his colleagues of God and His ways.** They let them know that they were servants of the God of heaven and earth (5:11).

They give a brief history of Israel, that formerly they had worshiped at a temple which a great king of Israel [Solomon] had built. But because of their sin, God had given the nation into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed the temple and deported the people to Babylon. But King Cyrus had issued a decree to the Jews to return and rebuild the temple. He had even restored the gold and silver utensils and entrusted them to Sheshbazzar (Zerubbabel).

We don't know but perhaps the Jews even showed these utensils to Tattenai as proof. But the point is, **the Jews had given Tattenai and his colleagues a strong witness about God and His covenant faithfulness to His people!**

There is an application here for us in moving beyond discouragement. **One way to persevere in the face of opposition is to give a strong witness of our faith in Jesus Christ.** That commits us so that we know others will be watching us.

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

If we will be bold for the Lord, we can know that His eye is upon us in whatever response our enemies come back with!

So, the first thing we need to move beyond discouragement is a fresh encounter with God's Word...secondly, we need to get back to work for the LORD....thirdly, we need to learn to persevere in the face of opposition, knowing that God's eye is upon us. Finally,

IV. TO MOVE BEYOND DISCOURAGEMENT, WE NEED TO TRUST OUR SOVEREIGN GOD TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL THROUGH US!

Behind these events of the renewal of God's people, God was sovereignly at work.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah constantly reiterate God's providence in the life of his people!

The fact that this governor allowed the work on the temple to continue while inquiry was sent to Darius was due to God's eye on His people!

In order to fulfill his purpose, God used and coordinated the preaching of His prophets, the work and leadership of the leaders of the remnant, the determination and work of the remnant, as well as the decisions of 'pagan' government officials!

It's also obvious that the Jews saw God's sovereign dealings with them in history, and this knowledge enabled them to put the current opposition into a proper perspective.

The Christian faith is tied to the fact that God made promises and he fulfills them in history! The greatest example is Jesus, who actually came, died, and rose again.

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

Remember that although God is sovereign, the decisions we make are important and do affect history!

As Paul exhorted in *Philippians 2:12-13*—“*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. 13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*”

We can know that as we work for the Lord, we are working in harmony with the sovereign God who is working out His purposes in history through His people.

Conclusion

When we move beyond our discouragement and we are turned back to encouragement, it is because of God! He gets all the glory!

1 Corinthians 15:58—“*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*”