

## Helping the Discouraged

By Mary Lambrecht, M.S. LMFT

We are all discouraged from time to time. Let us look at how God has addressed this, and how we can help ourselves and others when we face discouragement.

*“He arose and ran for his life...I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts...and they seek to take my life.” (1 Kings 19:3 & 14).*

The story around this scripture passage, illustrates a number of important principles when we experience discouragement. Elijah is afraid, lonely, and depressed. He was questioning his extremely hard-fought actions on behalf of the Lord and the people of Israel. After being strengthened by God to confront King Ahab and then defeat 450 prophets of Baal, Jezebel was now threatening Elijah's life. It seems Elijah was also wondering if his efforts for the Lord were in vain; “...the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant...I alone am left.” (vs. 10 & 14). Elijah was so discouraged, that he lay down and “prayed that he might die” (vs. 4).

In today's society, families can experience Elijah-like discouragements. Circumstances which bring discouragement can be broad and varied. Whether it's a teenager's temporary mood-swing, or whether an entire family is torn apart from an extra-marital affair, discouragement can stifle energy, reduce motivation, and paralyze plans and hopes for the future. How we respond to the discouraged is important. Here are key steps that the Lord used in encouraging Elijah.

1. **Touch.** Loving touch and meeting basic physical needs can begin to heal discouragement. When Elijah had given up and was sleeping, twice the Lord sent an angel to first *touch* him, and then to give food (vs. 5-7).
2. **Caring Words.** Use words that validate feelings and communicate care. After touching Elijah and providing food, the angel spoke: “Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.”
3. **Timing.** Only after Elijah had rested, did the Lord then ask him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (vs. 9). At some point, it could be important to challenge the discouraged person to consider options for healthy change. But timing is crucial. Usually a person needs to feel loved, listened to, and cared for, before she can move toward solutions.
4. **Presence.** “Go out and stand in the presence of the Lord.” Don't underestimate simply *being present* with your loved one. Also, ask God to make *His* presence very real to her.

*“A great wind...tore into the mountains, but the Lord was not in the wind; then an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and then a fire; and after the fire a still small voice.” (vs. 11& 12)*

**5. Small but Powerful.** Scripture often refers to God's awesome, mighty power. Parting the Red Sea, and raising Lazarus from the dead, are two examples. Interestingly however, in Elijah's lowest point of despair, God made Himself known to him not in the powerful forces of nature, but in "a still small voice." The order of the words and concepts in this scripture seems to *give power to the assumed powerless element* (God's voice) and *decrease the power of the assumed powerful elements* (wind, earthquakes, and fires). Sometimes, the very thing that seems to be so powerful and cause so much distress is, in reality, not that powerful. In contrast, God sometimes uses seemingly powerless, insignificant elements to bring encouragement to the discouraged.

"Amy" had a lot of anxiety around her aunt's loss of employment. The aunt was Amy's caregiver. In one counseling session, Amy her aunt and I walked through these steps. Amy was afraid, anxious, and worried. She was also using alcohol and drugs to medicate her emotional pain. But as Amy was given opportunity to put words to her thoughts and feelings (step 2), she named her worst fear; that they would be homeless, "just like my mom was when she no longer could take care of me." The aunt turned toward Amy; she "stayed present" with her (step 4). She gently reminded Amy that their house was paid for; they would not lose it. She sat close to Amy (step 1). She gave Amy strong, caring messages through reflecting feelings and eye contact. Though this family was not Christian, I asked; "would you consider asking God for help?" (step 4). They agreed. Only after Amy had ample time to feel heard and be emotionally supported, did I move toward the "what are you doing?" aspect, (step 3), in regard to her substance abuse. Amy was very open to considering healthier ways of coping. Also, the assumed powerful element (loss of aunt's job) decreased, and the seemingly small, less powerful element (her aunt's reassurance, caring words and presence) were quite powerful in strengthening Amy.

Had the session begun with me addressing her behavior rather than her emotional pain, Amy most likely would have felt her thoughts and feelings were not important. People close themselves off and refuse help when they feel not heard or judged.

Sometimes, God whispers. This still, small voice desires to touch our pain. Though our problem may feel as strong as the wind, or as frightening as the earthquake on Elijah's mountain, God our Father wants us to turn. When we turn toward that whisper, He responds with love, He listens to us with compassion, and He provides direction toward a solution.

*Compliments of Practical Family Living, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1676, Appleton, WI 54912 (920) 720-8920*

*You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute our articles in any format provided that you credit the author, no modifications are made, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you include Practical Family Living's web-site address (<http://www.pfl.org>) on the copied resource. Quotations from any article are also permitted with credit to the author and citing the web-site. Any use of other materials on this web-site, including reproduction, modification, distribution or republication, without the prior written consent of Practical Family Living, Inc., is strictly prohibited.*