

Overcoming Discouragement

By: David Burruss

Do you ever get discouraged? If we're honest, the answer is yes. Moments of disappointment and weariness are a universal part of life, even for Christians. Yet, the Bible offers guidance to rise above discouragement and walk in victory.

The Apostle Paul's words in Philippians 4:4-9 provide profound encouragement: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you."

Paul's exhortation to rejoice always might seem unrealistic, especially amid trials. But consider his circumstances, writing from prison while suffering for the gospel. His joy was rooted not in external conditions but in Christ. If Paul could rejoice under such trials, so can we. The key lies in applying biblical principles to overcome discouragement.

Even in my own life, I've faced seasons of discouragement, particularly in ministry. At times, I've wondered if our evangelistic efforts were making any difference. But recently, I looked back and saw that our average attendance has nearly doubled since the beginning of 2022, an increase of 94.74%. This growth reminds me that God is at work, even when we don't immediately see the results. Moments like these encourage me to trust Him more deeply and continue pressing forward.

Here are four biblical principles to help us overcome discouragement:

1. Take Ownership of Your Life: The first step to overcoming discouragement is taking responsibility for your life.

Stop Blaming Others: When we're discouraged, it's tempting to blame others or external circumstances. But this mindset leaves us feeling powerless. If the problem is always "out there," the solution seems out of reach.

Scripture reminds us that we can choose how we respond. In Deuteronomy 30:11-14, God tells the Israelites that His commands are "very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart." This principle also applies to emotions, we can respond to challenges with faith rather than despair.

Accept Responsibility for Your Problems: Many of our struggles stem from our choices and attitudes. Jeremiah 17:9-10 reveals, “The heart is deceitful above all things.” Accepting responsibility is empowering; it’s not about self-condemnation but recognizing that we can change how we respond to difficulties.

Remember Your Forgiveness in Christ: Guilt over past mistakes can discourage us, but the gospel offers freedom. First Peter 1:18-19 declares we are redeemed by Christ’s precious blood. Romans 8:32 reminds us that if God gave His Son for us, He will continue to care for us. In Christ, we are forgiven and free to face life’s challenges without the weight of guilt.

2. Stop Trying to Be Someone You Are Not: Striving to live up to false expectations, our own or others’, can lead to discouragement.

Reject False Identities: Our culture pressures us to find identity in success, beauty, or wealth. But these fleeting standards lead to emptiness. Galatians 6:3 warns, “if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”

Overcome Pride: Pride often fuels our attempts to gain approval from others or appear more successful. Psalms 36:2 warns against self-deception, which blinds us to our need for God. True fulfillment comes from humility and reliance on Him.

Find Your Identity in Christ: Galatians 2:20 proclaims, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” When we embrace our identity in Jesus, we are freed from the pressure to conform to worldly expectations.

3. Give Yourself Away to Others: Discouragement thrives on self-focus. Shifting our attention outward can bring healing and purpose.

Stop Focusing on Yourself: James 3:14-16 warns against selfish ambition, which leads to disorder and negativity. Turning our attention to others breaks the cycle of discouragement.

You Were Created to Love Others: Jesus teaches that the greatest commandments are to love God and others (Matthew 22:37-40). Acts of love and service often bring unexpected joy and renewal, even in discouragement.

Make Life About Others: True religion, James 1:27 tells us, involves caring for those in need. Matthew 25:34-36 shows that serving others reflects our love for God. When we make life about blessing others, we find purpose and overcome discouragement.

4. Put Your Trust in Jesus: Ultimately, the most important step in overcoming discouragement is trusting in Jesus.

Trusting in Self Leads to Discouragement: Proverbs 16:25 reminds us, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Our limited perspective often leads to frustration, but God’s guidance is perfect.

Take Ownership Before Giving It to God: Before we can surrender our struggles to God, we must acknowledge them. First John 1:8-9 encourages confession, allowing God to forgive and restore us. Taking ownership enables us to place our trust fully in Him.

Pray with Trust: Prayer is a powerful way to overcome discouragement. Mark 11:24 urges us to pray with faith, trusting in God’s ability to work in our situation. Even without immediate results, we can trust His timing and plan.

Obey Christ: Trusting Jesus involves following His commands. Hebrews 5:8-9 reminds us that obedience leads to salvation. When we walk in His ways, we experience peace and victory, even amid trials.

Discouragement is a universal experience, but it doesn’t have to control us. By taking ownership of our lives, rejecting false identities, giving ourselves to others, and trusting fully in Jesus, we can overcome it. Philippians 4:7 promises, “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

If you are struggling with discouragement today, remember that God offers hope. Trust Him, lean on His strength, and find joy in His presence. He is always at work, even when you don’t immediately see it. Will you respond to His call today?