

SMALL GROUPS

LIFE IS BETTER TOGETHER

“Three Ways to Defeat Discouragement: Joseph”

ICEBREAKER |

What is your favorite way to start each day?

INTRODUCTION |

Starting the day is a lot like starting the year off right. We all have big plans to get a head start. But most days, we end up hitting snooze too often or encountering unexpected problems. You may be in the same boat this year, having set a resolution that is already off the tracks. But God’s process of transformation for you is never instant. God changes us one day at a time. For Joseph, God promised him something early on in life, but it took years and years to reveal it. Joseph took it one day at a time and found ways to defeat his discouragement.

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There were many days that Joseph woke up after having a dream that God would make something great of his life. He believed it, but he wasn't very humble about it. In fact, his attitude about his God-given success may have gone to his head. Read how his brothers (and even his mother and father) interpreted his joy:

His brothers responded, "So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them.

Genesis 37:8 (NLT)

Sometimes it's our own attitudes and behavior that get us into a bad situation. We face discouragement, not because someone is out to get us but because we undermined ourselves. The first step to defeating discouragement is to be humble about God's grace in our lives.

Has there ever been a time where your attitude or ego led you into a bad situation? (Example, a boss overhears you complain or your bragging gets you in trouble)

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When we face discouragement because of a difficult situation, an unmet expectation, or maybe even a goal we didn't achieve, we have a choice to make. When we make the right choices, we are on our way to defeating that discouragement. Let's look at those 3 ways once more.

The first way to defeat discouragement is: **Get better, not bitter.**

Joseph could have gotten really mad at his brothers for what they did to him. And it didn't end there. It seems that at every turn in his life, he had reason to be upset. Someone else did something that hurt him. But instead, he committed to being better instead of bitter.

The key to going from bitter to better is a willingness to forgive. Those who hurt Joseph meant to harm him. He couldn't change their mind or change his situation. But he could accept God's grace and forgive.

In *Matthew 18:21-35*, Peter asks Jesus how many times he has to forgive his brother. Seven times? Seventy times? Jesus says, "*Seventy times seven!*" In other words, if you're going to count you better keep on counting and keep on forgiving. Then he tells a story about a king who forgave a servant of his debts that run into the millions! But this servant went out and harassed someone who owned him just a few hundred dollars. That man was not only ungrateful, he was sinful for doing that.

We have been forgiven so much, and we should be willing to forgive others. Think of a time when you held onto unforgiveness. Was it worth it? How did it feel once you finally forgave?

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The next way we defeat discouragement is: **Change What You Can Change. Accept What You Cannot Change.**

We don't get to choose what happens to us, but we always have control over how we react. *Philippians 4:4 (ISV)* says "*Keep on rejoicing in the Lord at all times. I will say it again: Keep on rejoicing!*". When we choose to be joyful, we are choosing to accept what we cannot change.

We need wisdom to know what can and cannot be changed. Sometimes you are in a job that allows you flexibility or a position of power that enables you to make changes. Other times, you are stuck in a spot with no way out. Once you recognize that you cannot change your situation, it should shift how you see it.

What are some practical ways you change your situation or accept the areas of your life you cannot change? (Example, found a job where your skills were appreciated or prayed for someone who upset you)

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Finally, the third way to defeat discouragement is: **Remember the Lord is with You and His Favor is with You!**

No matter where you are, the Lord is with you and wants the best for you. Do you believe that? When you're facing down discouragement, it may seem that God has left the building. But He hasn't! Take a look at what the Bible says about Joseph at his lowest:

But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the warden of the prison.

Genesis 39:21(NASB)

Did you catch that? The Lord was with Joseph, extended kindness to Joseph, and gave Joseph favor...while he was in prison! When he was at his lowest, he could look to the highest for help. And his God was within reach.

When we face discouragement, it's easy to get off track in our minds. What are some practical ways to remember that the Lord is with us in our worst?

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

You may be facing down discouragement right now. The Lord wants the best for you, and that includes victory! You can defeat discouragement by:

- **Choosing to get Better, not Bitter**
- **Changing what You Can and Accepting what You cannot change**
- **Remembering the Lord is with You**

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your guidance through all of life's ups and downs. When we face discouragement, we know we can turn to You. And when it gets difficult, You remind us why we are here in the first place. Help us be strong in the struggle no matter what life brings. Help us to choose to get better, not bitter. Give us the strength to change what we can change and be willing to accept what we cannot change. Finally, remind us that You will always be with us through it all. In Jesus' name we pray, amen!

SCRIPTURES FOR S.O.A.P.

Day 1: *Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*

Ephesians 4:31-32 (NLT)

Day 2: *Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.*

Hebrews 12:15 (NLT)

Day 3: *I've commanded you to be strong and brave. Don't ever be afraid or discouraged! I am the LORD your God, and I will be there to help you wherever you go.*

Joshua 1:9 (CEV)

Day 4: *The Lord your God is in your midst, a Warrior who saves. He will rejoice over you with joy; He will be quiet in His love [making no mention of your past sins]. He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.*

Zephaniah 3:17 (AMP)

Day 5: *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.*

Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)