

KEEPING IN TOUCH

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Have you ever been discouraged? What a dumb question, right? There isn't one of us who has escaped it. Is that normal? I guess so because I counted over 16 verses in the Old Testament where God instructed His people to not be "dismayed" (discouraged). I noticed in Deuteronomy 1:21 that "fear" and "being dismayed" seem to go together quite often. I also noticed in Deuteronomy 1:19-32 that are some interesting characteristics in discouragement. God commanded His people to take the Land (1:21). Who wants to be "commanded". Oh, be honest. You don't either. God's people did not want to do it God's way so they suggested a plan of their own - to send in spies (1:22). Moses went along with it. The spies brought back a good report but the people refused to enter the land. In fact, they rebelled against God (1:26), grumbled in their tents (1:27), and blamed God for their troubles (1:27). They then became confused and blamed the spies for their plight (1:28). They saw the problems facing them as even too big for God, so they couldn't trust Him (1:28,32). Major discouragement set in. The Hebrew word for "dismayed" in Deut. 1:21 means "to break down"; in Deut. 1:28 it means "to melt". Every time I face a challenge or a major trial, I find myself trying to devise a plan of my own. Then when it does not work, I get "ticked" and blame God for all of it. I do the same stupid things the Israelites did in this passage. I then get depressed and become worthless to all around me.

Well, God always has the last word. This passage is not over yet. God told them to not be afraid (1:29). Without verse 30, those words would have no comfort for me. "The Lord will go before you, and He Himself will fight for you" (1:30). He fought for them in the past (in Egypt & in the wilderness), and He continued to fight for them. God "carried"

them (1:31), got them to the destination, showed them the way, guided them day and night, and went ahead to prepare the rest stops (1:32).

I am ashamed to say that many times I complain to the Lord that the problems are too big, I cannot go another step, and I am terrified. I am in good company. The Psalmist had those same sentiments; so have you.

Let's encourage each other. God goes before us every single day. He has proven Himself true and faithful every moment of our lives. He does not dwell on our past foolishness; he "carries" us now; He fights for us now; He goes before us now. At the end of every day He has led us to the destination - no, not the destination you're thinking of. He has led us to the one for today. We goofy people think too far down the dusty road. Our Wonderful God goes on ahead and finds a rest stop for the night. When we finally arrive there, it is all ready. How thankful we are to stop for a while. Is the journey still ahead of us? Yes. Is there still pain and weariness? Yes. Are we sick of it all? Yes. Are we discouraged sometimes? Yes. Do we just want to run the other way and not deal with it all? Yes. Can't you just hear God saying to enjoy the rest stop? "I will never fail you nor forsake you" (Deut. 31:8).

I have had to stop and realize that every hug, every sermon, every kind word, every listening ear, every verse of Scripture, every contact with a friend, every phone call, every chance to serve, every ray of sunshine, every cool breeze, every time I had to stop for a rest - IT WAS GOD there to greet me - "MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN [YOUR] WEAKNESS."

Bruce Leary