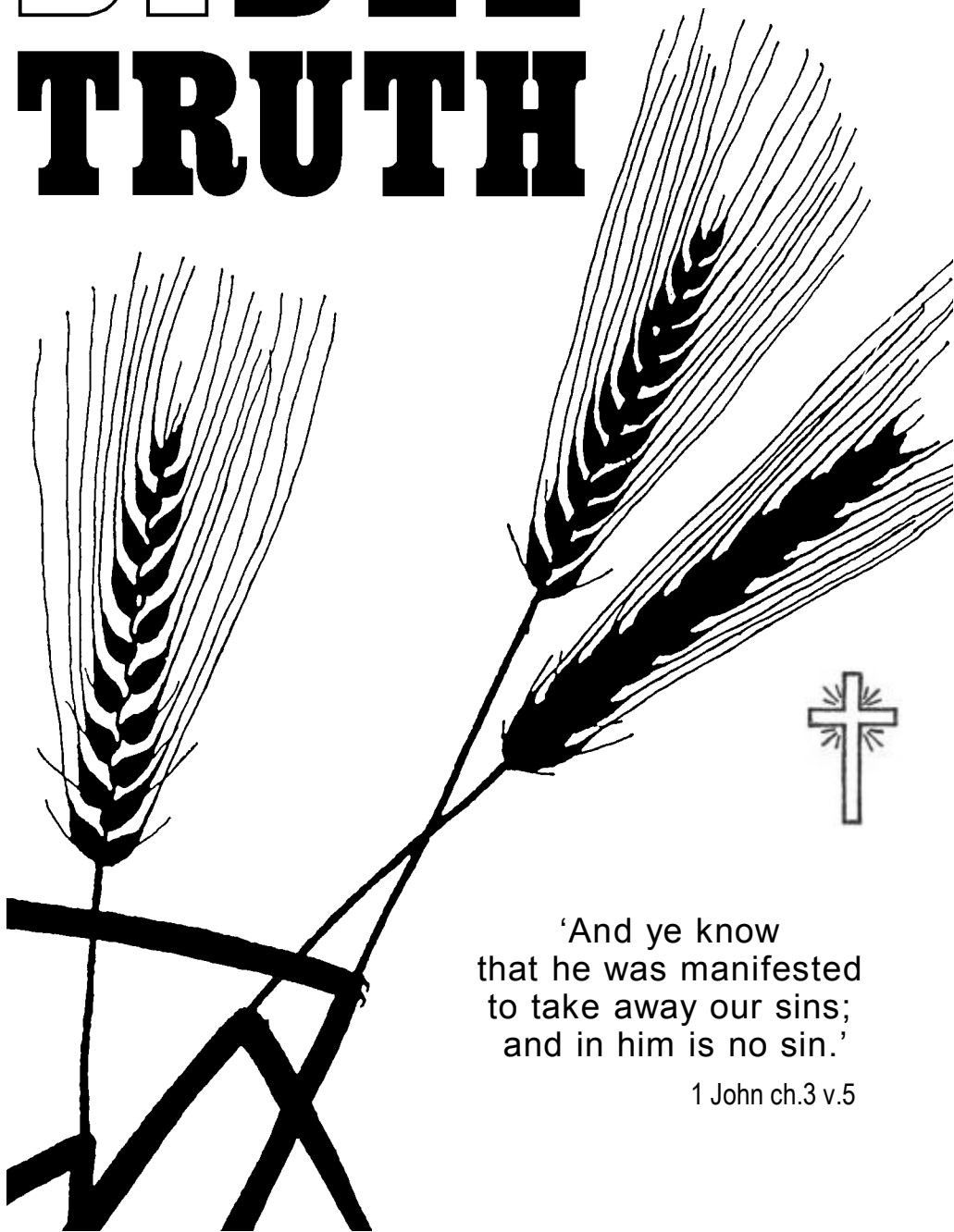


# BIBLE TRUTH

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‘And ye know  
that he was manifested  
to take away our sins;  
and in him is no sin.’

1 John ch.3 v.5

# **HOW TO OVERCOME DISCOURAGEMENT**

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Discouragement has been a problem with God's people down through the ages. It is the chief mental disorder of our modern times, which only now we call depression.

The first man Adam demonstrated symptoms of depression in the Garden of Eden when he hid from God. Adam was fearful and blamed his plight on others. From that first incident, millions of good people have suffered pangs of discouragement with blame.

In fact, when Bible heroes are analysed, some universal types of depression are discovered that are still prevalent among good people today. Take Moses, for example. When the Lord called him, this meek man replied, 'Who, me?'. Moses had all the valid reasons for neither wanting nor feeling qualified to ask Pharaoh to let God's people go. He had once lived in Pharaoh's palace and enjoyed the luxuries of royalty, but in a time of frustration and anger, Moses killed a man who abused a slave. He had to flee the country. From a prince in Pharaoh's court, he became a fugitive from justice, an unknown herdsman in the wilderness. When God was ready to deliver Israel out of Egypt, He called Moses, the discouraged, fearful, withdrawn, obscure man to be the deliverer, and Moses asked, 'Who, me?'.

Moses' successor, after the Exodus and forty years of wandering, was Joshua, the strong military leader of great courage. In fact, the admonition to 'be strong and of good courage' is used more for Joshua than any other Bible character. Moses named him as his successor and encouraged the people not to be discouraged (see Deuteronomy ch.1 v.21). Then Moses introduced Joshua to them and said, 'encourage him!' (See v. 38). Later, the Lord tells Moses,

'... charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see'.

Deuteronomy ch.3 v.28

After Moses died, the Lord said to Joshua,

'Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel'.

Joshua ch.1 v.2

Four more times Joshua is told to be strong and of good courage. Why all this encouragement of Joshua, was it because he was a very courageous man? No, but because he was not! He was discouraged, disappointed, and downhearted. Who would not be after forty years of getting nowhere in the wilderness. All the refugees from Egypt had died off and still they were not in the Promised land. Joshua was depressed, and he had every earthly reason to be discouraged, and say, 'Woe is me!'

Then there was Gideon, the young farm boy who had to thrash grain secretly in order to hide it from the Midianites. When the Lord called Gideon, his reply was, 'Show me!' (See Judges ch.6 v.17). Gideon was a discouraged youth who made this reasonable observation, 'If God is with us, then why all this trouble? Where are the miracles we are supposed to have? The Lord may have brought us out of Egypt once, but now He has forsaken us (see v.13). So Gideon asks for a sign of God's sanction, 'show me a sign' and when God did demonstrate His presence and promise, Gideon was afraid he would now die (see v.23). Twice the fleece was put out and twice the Lord proved Himself to Gideon, but he still suffered a feeling of inferiority, a low self-image, just plain lack of courage and trust.

Or look at Elijah, the great prophet of the Lord, and all the wonderful deeds he did. But Elijah's life was full of discouragement. Even after a tremendous triumph over the false prophets of Baal, Elijah feared Queen Jezebel and fled for his life to hide in a cave. Then God said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' (See 1 Kings ch.19 v.9). The depressed prophet complained that the whole country was going to the dogs, he was the only one left, and they were after his life (see vv.10-14). Elijah was often discouraged and asked 'Why me?'

Jonah was asked to go on a 'Mission Impossible' to preach to Nineveh, and Jonah's reply was 'No way, not me!' In fact, he immediately boarded a ship heading in the opposite direction. After a storm, being swallowed by a great fish, his escape and finally doing his duty, Jonah was successful in saving the city of Nineveh, but he was still discouraged and wanted to die (Jonah ch.4 v.8).

Job was another one (Job chs 6 v.9 & 10 v.19). David was discouraged many times (see 1 Samuel ch.30 v.6). Jeremiah lamented over many things. Even the Disciples were disappointed over the crucifixion, and at the Ascension of Christ. Peter and Paul both were discouraged at times. The saints had their times of trouble and days of depression, whether their reasons were valid or not. All of us feel it sometimes. Yet the still small voice that spoke to Elijah still whispers in our ears to be strong and very courageous. The Lord is with us. He will not fail. He cares. He is faithful. We all need that encouragement to carry on. Sometimes our discouragement stems

from our failures, failure to trust and obey, to believe and act on our faith. Sometimes it comes from self-pity, rejection by others, feeling inferior, fear of failure, or just plain cowardice.

The cure is Christ. Take Him for your example. Look at His life, and the way the world treated Him. Jesus said, '... The servant is not greater than his lord' (see John ch.15 v.20). Discouragement can be overcome by looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

Moses overcame by obeying God in spite of the discouraging signs of horrible plagues. Moses obeyed and believed God until 'Who, me?' became 'Use me!'.

Though Joshua lacked courage at first, he was encouraged by his fellow men. We can overcome discouragement by encouraging others where in our positive approach to strengthen them, we strengthen ourselves. Cheerleaders and home fans shouting encouragement from the stands have often turned mediocrity into victory. Churches are built when Christians help their neighbours and every one says to his brother, be of good courage (see Isaiah ch.41 vv.6-7).

Practise the power of positive thinking. Remember the story of 'The Little Engine That Could'. Never parade your faults, but profess your faith. Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have it, and it will come (see Mark ch.11 v.24). Whatever is true, honest, just, pure, lovely; if anything is good, virtuous, or praiseworthy, think and talk about these things (see Philippians ch.4 v.8). Forget the past, look forward to those things to come with great expectation (see Philippians ch.3 v.13). If you are on the motorway, do not spend your time looking in the rear-view mirror. But keep your eye on the road ahead (see Luke ch.9 v.62).

List your assets and count your blessings. God loves you and cares for you enough to die for you. He not only cares, but He knows you and He keeps you, so cast your cares on Him (see 1 Peter ch.5 v.7). Start being grateful for what you already have and be content with little or much (see Philippians ch.4 v.11).

Finally, listen principally to God. Read His Word more than the newspaper, hear Him speak to you in church, by radio, through His messengers and angels. Keep your eye on the Lord more than on the television. Talk to Jesus more than you do to others about your troubles. Claim God's promises instead of mourning over broken promises. Forget all the excuses like 'Who, me?', 'Why Me?' or 'Woe is me!'. Rather remember the encouraging invitation of our Lord, 'Follow Me!', 'Even me!'. You are something special to God. He has something special for you. Take courage in the fact that many Bible heroes were also sometimes discouraged, but they did not give up. They obeyed God even when it did not seem to make sense; and He did reward them.