

ENCOURAGING YOURSELF

“David was greatly distressed, for the men spoke of stoning him because the souls of them all were bitterly grieved, each man for his sons and daughters. But David encouraged and strengthened himself in the Lord his God.” (1 Samuel 30:6 - Amplified)

Last Sunday evening Marty Blackwelder taught on the importance of laughing in the face of adversity. He also confirmed that we are in a “turnaround season.” But as things are turning around, and as we’re coming into this fullness of that which God has promised us, there are some things He wants us to remember to do. I would like to pick up from where Marty left off and get some insight into what it means to **encourage yourself**. There will be times in your life when there is no one around to encourage you; times when discouragement tries to grip you and somehow you need to find strength to carry on. If that happens, what should you do? Imitate David... **Encourage yourself!**

Our opening verse clearly states that David encouraged himself in the Lord. All of us will face difficulties in our lives. However, we can have victory over them if we keep our eyes on God. Psalm 16:8 says, ***“I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”*** David had revelation of this truth because he wrote Psalm 16. In 1 Samuel 30, David and his band of soldiers had just returned home only to find that Ziklag had been burned to the ground, and their wives and children carried off by the Amalekites. “Discouraged” is not a strong enough word to describe how they felt. The Bible says they wept bitter tears until they simply had no more strength to weep (verse 4). Not many of us have experienced as bad a day as this - have we? David returned home only to discover that his enemies had destroyed or stolen everything that was important to him and his men.

As their leader, it was even worse for David. He knew that he must take full responsibility for this tragic situation and find a way of turning things around. Notice that verse 6 says, ***“Now David was greatly distressed.”*** The loss of his family had seriously effected him. So as he sat among the ruins of Ziklag, and his grieving men spoke of stoning him, he had a choice to make. He could allow grief and bitterness to overcome him and sink into the black hole of despair; or, he could not give up and pursue his enemies. But before he was able to do anything, he would have to get his strength and courage back. As David looked around him, he saw nothing but discouragement, everyone was downcast and forlorn. There wasn't one person there to encourage him. So he had only one option: ***“He encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”***

David chose to encourage himself because there was no other option. The most important thing to notice here is that David did not encourage himself “in himself.” Rather, the Scripture says that he encouraged himself in the Lord his God. You see, this was not just about David and his family, for David had a covenant with God, and therefore, that made this tragic situation God's business also. Likewise, we should call on our covenant “rights” in times of trouble. We too must fully comprehend the significance of having a covenant relationship with the Almighty God. A few chapters earlier (in Samuel 17) the Philistine Goliath had cursed David by his Gods, so David was able to call on his covenant rights. He said, ***“You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel; whom you have defiled”*** (verse 46).

From what we know of David, it is easy to imagine how he went about encouraging himself. He probably took his harp, retreated to a solitary place, and began to sing songs of praise to God. No doubt David didn't feel like singing, but he did it anyway. And he didn't sing a sad lament.

Instead, he sang of the majesty and awesome power of God. He sang of the Creator who had spoken the worlds into existence. He sang of the deliverer who had already given him improbable and impossible conquests - victory over the lion, victory over the bear, and victory over the Philistine giant Goliath. Through praise, David was able to instantly change his focus. On the wings of a song his spirit was lifted above his present circumstances, into the presence of the One who is high and lifted up. The melodies from David's harp filled the air as the psalmist sang praises to a God who transcends human limitations.

I can easily imagine David sitting in the ashes of what was once his home town with harp in hand singing these words: ***"I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear of it and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears"*** (Psalm 34:1-4). David sang, *"I will bless the Lord at all times."* All times? That means the good times, bad times, great times and terrible times. Even on the worst day of your life, God is still worthy of praise. Never forget that!

David sang praises to the Lord from the ashes of Ziklag. Praising God is a pathway to encouragement. When praise is in your mouth, there can be no grumbling, no complaining and no negative speaking. Praise is the language of **faith**. If you want to strengthen your faith, begin to praise God. Then, David sang another phrase: *"Oh, magnify the Lord with me."* "Magnify" means 'to enlarge or make bigger in perspective'. When you magnify any object with a magnifying glass, a microscope or a telescope, you are not changing its reality. You don't in fact make the object you are observing any bigger than it is; however, you do change your perception of it. Magnification makes it appear bigger!

Likewise, you cannot make God any greater than He already is, yet you can magnify (or reduce) your perspective of Him. Note your perspective can determine whether you are encouraged or discouraged. I ask you this, "Are you magnifying your despair, or are you magnifying your faith?" Refuse to magnify the devil's work in your life and you will have a correct view of him. Refuse to magnify your present negative circumstances. Don't analyse every problem with a magnifying glass, because that will lead you into pitiful discouragement. Instead, magnify the Lord your God. Speak of His greatness, His power, and His might. Talk about how awesome and powerful God is; about the many times He has delivered you from the brink of destruction. 2 Corinthians 1:10 says, "***He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us again. On Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us.***"

God wants us to be free! But He also wants us to be encouraged at all times. For that reason, He has given us the means by which we can **encourage ourselves** in Him. Here are three pointers:

1. Accept the truth that you do not have to stay discouraged. You can change that right now! It's like a bird that flies over your head, you don't have to let it nest in your hair. You can brush it away at any time! Also, if you change your perspective (view) you will immediately see a more encouraging sight. So remember, you can be discouraged or you can be encouraged, and you can also encourage yourself!
2. Stop giving voice to your discouragement and start giving voice to your encouragement. Stop repeating the lies of the devil and start speaking the promises of God. Stop speaking out of fear and start speaking in faith. Stop talking about the problems and start talking about the solution. Find out what the Word of God has to say about your situation and then speak it out boldly.

3. Meditate on the Lord. One of the Hebrew words for “meditate” literally means to murmur, and implies a moving of the lips. Another word means to converse with yourself. It is your “self-talk,” the way you speak to yourself (in your head) about things in your life. Everybody meditates on something, but often it is on the wrong thing or with the wrong focus. Practice meditating on the Lord and you will find peace. Meditation can also bring about success and prosperity. Joshua 1:8 says, ***“Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success.”***

Observe, true meditation is not a matter of positive thinking, yet neither is encouragement. Rather, they are both matters of **faith**. It is not about us, but about Him. Let your meditation be about the Lord; about His love, His Word, His promises, His goodness and His deeds of power. As you do that, you’ll be able to cast your cares on Him, with the assurance that He cares about everything that’s going on in your life (1 Peter 5:7).

Discouragement will tell you that you have nothing going for you, and everything is going against you. Encouragement tells you that you have everything going for you; and, it doesn’t matter what you have going against you. God is on your side; with the provision for your every need and the answer for every problem you may have. That is why Jesus came, and why (like King David), you too can **encourage yourself in the Lord your God** at all times. So remember this, if you can encourage yourself in the Lord during hard times, learning to govern your emotions and maintain your joy, then in the end you will always have the victory. This is a promise of God! Therefore, ***“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go”*** (Joshua 1:9).

Let's end by examining what David did after he **encouraged himself** in the Lord.... The first thing he did (verse 7) was to ask the priest to bring the ephod to him. The ephod was an outer garment worn by the high priest, however, it was also worn when an oracle was required. The oracle represented the voice of God. Here, (verse 8) David enquired of the Lord, *"Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overthrow them?"* And God said, *"Pursue, for you shall surely overthrow them and without fail recover all that was stolen."* After you have encouraged yourself in the Lord, and you have regained your strength, you must remember to ask God what you should do next. Even as things are being turned around to your advantage, you need to hear from God!

Having heard from God, David was able to pursue his enemies and overthrow them. Verse 18-19 declares, ***"David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back."*** The NKJ says, ***"David recovered all."*** If this is the "turnaround season," then there are many of us who must expect to recover all! Do whatever God tells you to do and you won't be disappointed!

But David didn't just get back what he and his men had lost, he got back much more! So much so that he was able to bless all his friends and even those men who stayed behind. Hallelujah! The "turnaround season" is a season of abundant prosperity! Let's start thanking God for that right now....