

David Encouraged Himself in the Lord—So Can You

David's name appears in the Bible 971 times, more than any other individual except Jesus. David went through many struggles, failures and battles, yet he stayed faithful to God. He knew how to keep spiritually strong even when his trials overwhelmed him.

David's worst day is described in 1 Samuel 30, when the Amalekites raided his camp at Ziklag. These terrorists kidnapped the women and children, torched the city and looted everything. To make matters worse, David's own warriors blamed him for the disaster. They were so angry they talked about stoning him.

This type of pressure can trigger nervous breakdowns, angry outbursts or abrupt resignations, but David didn't quit—even when his friends turned against him. First Samuel 30:6 says: "But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."

How did he do that? The Bible doesn't give specifics. All we know is that after he found supernatural strength, the battle turned and David and his army killed the marauders and recovered everything they had stolen. A really bad day turned into an astounding victory.

I know people who've been traumatized by the events of the past two years. Some of them quit ministry jobs; others have withdrawn from friends; many have plunged into depression. Stress has the power to derail us. I can't say I've faced anything as traumatic as an Amalekite raid, but I've learned a few secrets about how to find encouragement during hard times. Here are a few pointers:

Take a praise break. When Paul and Silas found themselves in a Philippian jail, they sang hymns and praised God until an

earthquake rocked the building and their chains fell off. Praise has power. David wrote in Psalm 27:6: "And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me, and I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy." You must learn to sing when you don't feel like it, because praise resets our souls and unlocks heaven's answers.

Withdraw from the stress. When I was younger, I learned that a warrior's bow must sometimes be unstrung in order to be effective in battle. If your bowstring is always taut, your arrows won't hit the target. You can't stay in the heat of battle day after day. You must learn to withdraw, rest and recharge. Unstring your bow, take a walk or sit on your back porch and drink some iced tea. While you relax, remind yourself that God is fighting your battles, not you.

Recall moments of God's goodness. You can't remember all of God's benefits unless you write them down! When you are tempted to doubt God's faithfulness, savor all the moments He answered prayers in the past. The same God who helped you 15 years ago can repeat the same miracle. He has not changed!

Wage war with your promises. Timothy faced dark, demonic resistance when he pastored the church in Ephesus. That's why Paul told him to "fight the good fight" using "the prophecies made concerning you" (1 Tim. 1:18). When I face discouragement, I recall the promises God gave me in the past. These words are like anchors that hold me steady in rough seas. Prophetic words boost my faith so I can gain a second wind.

Remember what friends have told you.

First Samuel 23:16 says: "Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God." I suspect Jonathan's comforting words lingered in David's soul long after his friend spoke them. When David encouraged "himself" in 1 Samuel 30:6, he could have been meditating on what Jonathan said many months prior.

I'm grateful every time a friend sends me an encouraging text, or calls me with an uplifting message. In every case I save the words because I know I will need them later. A friend's encouragement is not like manna that spoils after a day, or dew that evaporates in the morning sun. The words of a Jonathan are like engraved jewelry, and if you keep them locked in a treasure chest you can pull them out on your worst days.

Don't faint. Don't quit. Don't sink into despair. Learn to encourage yourself in the Lord. If you practice these habits of David, you will find the strength to fight every battle.

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