

How to Encourage Yourself in the Lord

All of us face difficulties in our lives. But we can have victory over them if we keep our eyes on God.

Not many of us have experienced as bad a day as David did when he returned to his home in Ziklag after a journey and discovered that his enemies, the Amalekites, had destroyed or stolen everything that was important to him—and his own men turned against him (see 1 Sam. 30). However, we can imitate his response when we do face difficulties.

As David sat among the ruins of Ziklag and mutinous men spoke of stoning him, he had a choice. David could allow grief and bitterness to conquer him; he could sink into the black hole of depression and give up and quit. Or he could fight back.

But before David could fight, he would have to get his strength and courage back. As David looked around him, he saw nothing but discouraged and downcast men. David had no one to encourage him, so he had only one recourse: He “encouraged himself in the Lord his God” (v. 6, KJV).

From what we know of David, it is very easy to surmise how David went about encouraging himself. He 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, anyway.

And he didn’t sing a sad lament bemoaning his situation. Instead, he sang of the majesty and 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 victories—victory over the lion, victory over the bear, and victory over the Philistine giant Goliath.

Through praise and worship, David changed 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 of David's harp filled the air as the sweet psalmist of Israel sang praises to the God of heaven, who transcends human limitation and is forever seated upon the throne of the universe.

The Bible states it very matter-of-factly: "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." There was nothing about the circumstance that was encouraging, and if David had limited his focus to the present circumstance, he would surely have gone into a deep depression. But David encouraged himself *in God*.

In times of uncertainty and upheaval, God was David's constant. Why? Because God doesn't change. No matter what the circumstance, God is above it, seated upon the throne of sovereignty and holding the scepter of dominion. Through praise and worship, David changed his focus so that by the eye of faith he beheld *El Shaddai*—the almighty God.

How did David praise God? Maybe he sang Psalm 34. I would find it hard to believe that this particular song did not come to David's mind as he sought to encourage himself. David had written it just two years earlier when God had delivered him from the Philistine king Abimelech.

I can easily imagine David sitting in the ashes of what was once his home 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" (Ps. 34:1-4, NKJV).

David sang, "I will bless the Lord at *all* times." All

times—good times, bad times, great times and terrible times. Even on the worst day of your life, God is worthy of praise. David sang praises to God from the ashes of Ziklag.

He sang the amazing lyric, “His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” Praising God is part of the path 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 lyric: “Oh, magnify the Lord with me.” “Magnify” means “to enlarge or make bigger in perspective.” When we magnify a small object with a magnifying glass, a microscope or a telescope, we don’t change its reality. We don’t make the object we are observing any bigger; we change our perception of it.

We cannot make God any bigger than He already is—you can’t increase omnipotence—but you can magnify (or diminish) *your perspective* of God. Perspective has everything to do with whether you are encouraged or discouraged.

Refuse to magnify the devil. Refuse to magnify the present negative circumstance. Don’t analyze your trouble with a magnifying glass—this exercise will lead to deeper discouragement.

Instead, magnify the Lord! Speak of His greatness, His power, His might. Talk about how big and powerful God is. My Nigerian preacher friend, Bishop Goddowell Avwomakpa, is in the habit of saying, “When you make God bigger, you make your trouble smaller.” It’s simple but true.

A thousand years before David’s disaster, the young but wise Elihu reminded Job (who was facing his own worst day) that God gives songs in the night (see Job 35:10). That is an encouraging word.

In the dark night of the soul, God will give you a song that will bring a dawn of faith and encouragement. So, in the dark night of his personal anguish, David sang a song of praise to the God who can make a way where there is no way.

Paul and Silas did the same thing a thousand years later. They had been arrested for the good deed of casting a spirit of divination out of a young slave girl. After a sham of a trial, they were beaten with rods and imprisoned in the innermost dungeon with their feet in stocks.

How did they respond? In a most remarkable way. At midnight, instead of despairing and crying themselves to sleep, they sang hymns of praise to God. Paul and Silas made the exceptional choice to encourage themselves by praising God.

Luke tells us that while Paul and Silas sang, the other prisoners were listening to them. No doubt they were! I'm sure the prisoners were amazed at such surprising behavior.

Truly these men were different—they had something the other prisoners didn't have. They possessed a remarkable faith in their God, and God responded to their remarkable faith by delivering them from the dungeon of despair through a miraculously timed earthquake. The Bible tells us "the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed" (Acts 16:26).

Paul and Silas were simply following in the tradition pioneered by David when he encouraged himself with songs of praise. Indeed, as David sang his songs of praise, a change came over him. A spark of faith brought a glimmer of hope, and David could feel himself becoming encouraged.

Encouraging yourself in the Lord is part of how you go about recovering your joy—not the shallow, mercurial feeling of happiness, but deep, abiding joy, which can be present even in the midst of sorrow.

I know the idea of having joy in the midst of sorrow may seem paradoxical, but truth is in the paradox. If you are going to recover from the worst day of your life, among the first things you have to recover is your joy.

The devil knows he must steal your joy to defeat you. Satan is quite aware of the spiritual truth concerning joy revealed in Nehemiah: " 'Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength' " (Neh. 8:10).

What the devil is after through excessive grief and lingering depression is your strength—the strength that is found in the joy of the Lord. Peter talks about the devil utilizing a stalking strategy analogous to a lion stalking its prey. The devil "walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

The devil may be like a lion—not as a metaphor for majesty but as an opportunist seeking to prey upon the weak and feeble. Satan does not want a confrontation with strength; he seeks to exploit weakness.

Understanding that the joy of the Lord is the strength of the believer, the devil seeks to steal your joy, thereby reducing you to weakness. The believer who can retain his joy is destined to triumph in the end.

This is a powerful principle. If the devil cannot steal your joy, he cannot ultimately defeat you. The moment David began to encourage himself in the Lord and recover his joy, he placed himself on a trajectory to turn his whole situation around. Joy is not just a preferred emotional state; it is a necessary element in attaining full recovery.

In the first chapter of his epistle, the apostle James gives some vital information about how we are to respond in the midst of a trial. He says we are to "count it all joy when [we] fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of [our] faith produces patience." If we allow patience to have

its perfect work, we will “be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4).

James teaches us that the redeemed should respond to the trials of life completely differently from those who do not have a Christian perspective on life. He says that when we encounter them, we should “count it all joy.”

The word translated “count” is *hegeomai*. It is an accounting term that means we are to place trials in the joy column of our emotional ledger.

Hegeomai also means “to rule or exercise authority.” So when you are thrust into a trial, you must take authority, rule over your feelings and choose joy as your dominant emotion.

If you can remember to encourage yourself in the Lord during hard times, learning to govern your emotions and maintain your joy, then in the end you will have victory. This is the promise of God!

Want to read more about overcoming in the face of trials? Order Pastor Brian Zahnd’s new book, *What to Do on the Worst Day of Your Life*, [here](#).