

Strategically Strengthening Your Spirit in the Middle of Maddening Chaos

David, the great Old Testament figure, was no stranger to discouragement, fatigue, fear, confusion, doubt, bad decisions and second chances. Like refreshing rain on parched ground, his raw humanity, disarming transparency and persevering pursuit of God give us encouragement in the occasional, even frequent, valleys of our own lives.

In one of the strangest chapters of his journey, running from Saul with his band of disenfranchised loyalists, David lived for 16 months in the territory of one of Israel's fiercest enemies. He enjoyed the protection of the Philistines and even joined them in the fight against Saul and his armies. During this season, the Philistine King, Achish, gave David the town of Ziklag as his home base.

One day while going out to war with the Philistines, David and his men were required to return home to Ziklag. The Philistine generals were not too comfortable with the presence of David and his men in their ranks. Upon returning to Ziklag, they discovered that the nomadic aggressors, the Amalekites, had destroyed Ziklag and taken all the women and children hostage—somewhere.

Read the following passage and sense the deep emotion of the moment:

“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 Sam. 30:6, AMPC).

Finding Encouragement in Discouraging Moments

Discouragement is a temporary loss of perspective, usually incited by an emotionally difficult circumstance. Conversely, encouragement is a recapturing of proper perspective, granted by the Lord in accordance with His wisdom and truth. Paul testified of this very encouragement that New Testament believers experience in Jesus (2 Cor. 1:3-7).

Somehow, in the midst of David's miserable tragedy, the Bible indicates he was able to encourage and strengthen himself in the Lord. We are not told how he did this, but we can glean some ideas that might just help us today in the midst of our own discouragements. Here are four basic points of perspective.

The Situation is Seldom as Bad as it Seems

David and his men returned to a city that was burned to the ground and families that had disappeared. Our God-given power of imagination is a beautiful thing, but sometimes it can conjure up unrealistic scenarios and conclusions. In David's case, he and his men were eventually able to rout the Amalekites and retrieve their family members unharmed. Yet, in the moment, the combined chemistry of emotion and imagination created a flash point of horror.

One of my elders once said, "Emotions have no brains." Although they are a helpful enhancement to life, emotion can spin us into a pit of overblown despair. Today, as you face a difficult moment in a relationship, a circumstance that seems overwhelming or a personal struggle that is defeating you, seek the Lord's help to think clearly. Embrace His gift of hope to look beyond the present moment to the possible positive outcomes.

We are Not Defined by People or Circumstances

David's men (600 of them) suddenly morphed from friends to enemies. One moment they were following him in the calm waters of everyday life. The next, they were ready to stone him after

encountering the storm. But David did not allow himself to be defined by the fickle and intense emotions of his men. Instead, he turned to the Lord.

Too many times, our sense of identity and well-being is triggered by the opinions and attacks of people. Our security is frequently threatened by difficult circumstances. We need to understand that our true identity was settled at the cross. The noise of the crowd, the attack of friends, and the put-downs of family may tell us we are bad, worthless, defective, inferior, and rejected. The truth of our new life in Jesus Christ says we are loved, accepted, empowered, secure, righteous, valuable and destined for an eternal reward. We have to choose the voice we will listen to. When we choose rightly, we live a secure and hopeful existence.

The Presence of the Lord is Our Assurance

As David strengthened himself in the Lord, he turned to God's presence. This is the significance of the term, "in the Lord." He turned from the situation and the prattle of the crowd to the presence of the Lord. This was confirmed by the next verse: "Then David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, 'Please bring the ephod here to me.'" The ephod was the garment of the priests and often a key to knowing God's direction. David understood the empowering presence of the Lord.

David wrote, "You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11a). He also affirmed, "May my sentence go out from Your presence; may your eyes see rightly" (Psalm 17:2).

When we are discouraged, it is common to turn to other people, television or some kind of escape. This is folly and usually provides a temporary anesthesia but not a solution or real deliverance. We must take time, make it a focus and rest in the reality of a triumphant, indwelling Christ through

meaningful prayer and His Word.

Positive Obedient Action Disperses Negative Emotion

In seeking the Lord's direction, David asked the priest, "'Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?' The priest answered, 'Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all'" (1 Samuel 30:7-8).

As the story unfolds, David and his men eventually overtake the Amalekites, safely retrieve their loved ones, and recover all of their goods, and then some. David did not fall into the subjective "sit, soak, and sour" mode. He moved ahead in faith, obeying the promise of the Lord.

I've heard it said that when you are going through a dark valley—don't stop. Each of us must embrace the proven promises and powerful provision of the Lord. We may not feel like it. We may not have any sense of certainty about the outcome. Still, we do have trust. We know our Christ knows the way, shows the way and goes the way with us. This too shall pass as we move ahead in His grace. He rewards the obedient, strengthens the weak, guides the confused and fulfills His word.

So today, my friend, encourage yourself in Jesus. It is possible and brings meaning to our madness and glory to our God, regardless of our circumstances. {eo}

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