

## **David Encouraged Himself in the Lord His God**

Someone has rightly said that if the Devil had to give up all his weapons except one, the one he would probably keep is discouragement. Because all the other things he would like to use on you – deceit, jealousy, fear, malice, bitterness – you can overcome when you yield to the Word of God. However, discouragement causes you to give up fighting, to give up trying, and never even know that Satan was the one behind it.

Discouragement causes you to admit defeat before you've entered the battle. It's something you've probably faced at some point this year. How do you deal with it? How are you dealing with it? Often when look into a new year, we come at it with a mixture of hope and guilt. We may feel guilt over our failures in the last year. We may, and should, be thankful for the progress and the victories. And we should go into it with hope that we will grow, and develop, and be used by God.

But for many of us, our Christian lives feel like a car with really dirty insides. It lurches along, gets a punch of injection, and then returns to a near dead-stop. Christians who do not know how to deal with the temptation to discouragement will look that way: stop, start, move. Today they're up and going, and tomorrow down in the dumps. Today they love their church, tomorrow they want to leave it. Today family life is great, tomorrow it is a huge failure.

Now I admit that some of this is personality. Some people are more tempted to go between extremes than others. Some people are gifted with sunny temperaments. But when all of that is put aside, God expects His children to not be discouraged. That's right. God expects His children to not choose to embrace and live in discouragement.

One of the very best examples of how to deal with discouragement is David, in 1 Samuel 30. Here we find a man who had, from a sinful, human point of view, every reason to be discouraged, but we see three things that he did. These three approaches, if we make them our own, will take us a long way towards being consistent, fruitful Christians, who deal biblically with negative circumstances.

Let's set the scene so we understand how David was tempted in this situation. In the space of a very few years, David had gone from shepherd-boy to national hero to hunted renegade. He had been secretly anointed by Samuel as king, but not yet coronated.

David arrived on the battlefield where Goliath was mocking the Israelites, and taking up faith-based courage, childlike trust, and useful experience, he killed Goliath, and became an overnight legend and champion. His reputation and stature in Israel began to grow as a successful general, until Saul was filled with envy. Soon enough, Saul began trying to kill David, until David was forced to flee for his life.

What had he ever done? All he had done was serve King Saul, win battles, and put his neck on the line for Saul's kingdom. And now he was chased away from home, family, comforts, and living off the land with a growing group of down-and-out castaways and oppressed people. On the run continually, David had more than one chance to kill Saul, and still chose to obey God.

Finally, driven by absolute desperation, David did what would have been unthinkable a few years earlier. He went to live among the Philistines and became a servant of king Achish. He fought battles for him, though he had never had to fight against his own people – the Israelites. The king gave David and his men and their families a city to live in called Ziklag.

One day, the Philistines are about to go out to battle, and David and his men are called to join them. The lords of the Philistines are upset, and do not trust David. So King Achish sends him back. Upon returning to Ziklag, they find that the Amalekites have seized the opportunity to attack the land with all the soldiers gone. These enemies have carried off all the woman and children, the spoil, and burned everything else.

Now, after all David has done, after all the sacrifices for Saul, all the victories for Israel, all the ways he tried to do right, even for this group of a few hundred down-and-outers, his own men speak about stoning him.

He has hit rock bottom. He has lost his position in Israel. He went over to the other side, only to find that they do not trust him. Now the whole thing seems to have blown up in his face. He couldn't fight for Israel, he couldn't fight against Israel – rejected by Saul, rejected by the Philistines, sent home, only to find that other enemies have destroyed the very things they have been fighting for – their homes and families.

David has no friend to comfort him, his wives are gone, no Samuel to turn to, no family. The men are furious at David – he should have killed Saul when he had the chance, he is a fool in their eyes, and it's his fault that this has happened. He has lost everything, he has nowhere to turn, no support, no one to cheer him up. He feels great pressure, a sense of being completely cornered.

The reaction of the other men around him is bitterness. But David's reaction is the difference between victorious Christian living and defeated Christian living. What he did when at rock bottom is the reason David was the man he was. It was what separated David from the rest of the people. And it is what will separate you from the mass crowd of grumblers and complainers.

Here then is a model for us to follow. Very few of us have faced a situation as dire as David's. And yet we see David emerging from this, encouraged and ultimately victorious.

Different kinds of discouragement may be present with us here today: relationship not working out, job situation very unsatisfactory, unfair boss, financial trial that seems to have gone on and on, battle with a sin or sins that doesn't seem to let up, a child who does not seem to be responding to your correction or discipline, a spouse seems disinterested in the Lord or in you, someone you have witnessed to for ages and no response, a ministry that seem to demand more than it ever returns, a health affliction that goes on and on.

## **I. David Took Responsibility for His Own Encouragement**

*And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.*

**1 Samuel 30:6**

David's heart was drooping – there was some doubt perhaps, there was sadness, grief, unhappiness. There was weakness. There was a feeling of being overwhelmed – the tasks seemed too big, the obstacles too much to overcome. Consider the word *dis*-courage. When you *dis*allow something you do not allow it. When you are discouraged, courage has fled. There is less courage to go on and walk the walk and fight the fight and press forward. You'd rather give up, or sit back, or rest, or retreat.

Now how does David find encouragement in the Lord – what does this look like? I think of the words of Nehemiah, "the joy of the Lord is your strength." David found some kind of joy that strengthened him, that encouraged him in the face of things that were not encouraging at all.

The end of **1 Samuel 30:6** says, “but David encouraged **himself** in the Lord his God.” We might expect the text to say, and David was encouraged by the Lord. Or we might expect the wording to be more passive, David became encouraged, David received encouragement. But it does not say that. The wording is emphatic – “himself.” David (subject) encouraged (verb) himself (object). Who did the encouraging? David did.

Now, as we’ll see, David did not encourage himself with himself. He didn’t look at himself and say, “cheer up, Davey boy! Don’t be so glum! Tomorrow’s another day! Up and at ‘em!” He didn’t mutter motivational speaker clichés to himself and just try to get going, or just try to be positive. But what I want us to see is that David encouraged himself. He took the initiative to make sure he was encouraged.

David knew the truth: you are responsible for your own joy. It’s no one else’s fault. Do you know that nobody ruins your day? David knew the truth that while other people may do things against you negatively or for you positively, either way, your joy and encouragement is your responsibility. You are as spiritual as you want to be.

David did not *listen to* himself, he *preached to* himself. He refused to heed the voices of despair and doubt and gloom and doom. Instead, he preached to himself. Learning to preach to yourself is one of the fundamental characteristics critical to living a victorious Christian life. You need to address yourself, rebuke yourself if necessary, question yourself, and tell yourself what to do on the basis of the Word of God.

Those who listen to the various thoughts floating around their heads will inevitably be discouraged. Those who live entirely on looking at circumstances will be discouraged. But to encourage yourself is to preach to yourself the truths of the Word of God. As **Psalms 42:11** says: *“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”*

Discouragement is not an excuse to stay flat on your face. It is in fact a call to address yourself.

Now when someone else encourages us, it is a mercy. When God Himself encourages us one way or another, it is a mercy. But if those mercies do not come our way, we find here what a believer is to do. Because if we do not, if we refuse to encourage ourselves in the Lord, there is a sin waiting at the door, and it is the sin of self-pity.

Self-pity can pretend that it is no sin at all. It acts the part of the wounded, the hurt, the victim. How could you kick me when I’m down, says self-pity. But don’t be deceived. Self-pity is simply pride wearing another mask. Self-pity is pride in its weakness.

Pride in its strength boasts, ‘Look what I have, what I did for myself. Shower me with attention in the form of praise.’ Pride in its weaknesses pout, ‘Look how bad things are for me. Feel sorry for me. Shower me with attention in the form of compassion and talks and cheer-me-ups.’

Boasting says, ‘Admire me because I have achieved much.’ Self-pity says, ‘Admire me because I am suffering much.’ Boasting is where we are self-centred and beaming. Self-pity is where we are self-centred and hurting. But either way, we are saying, ‘I ought to be the recipient of special attention, because I am down, I am wounded, I am sick, I am hurting, I am discouraged.’ And self-pity says, ‘I won’t make moves in the right direction until someone comes and acknowledges how bad things are for me.’

Now, am I saying we must not be compassionate toward one another? No, obviously the heart of God is compassion to those suffering, needy, weak, sick or discouraged. I am not saying that whenever someone is sick or discouraged or in pain or grieving all we say to them, “Pull yourself together!” Nor am I saying when you are feeling pain or going through hard times or discouraged or in pain that it is self-pity to tell people about it.

On the contrary, to tell the Christian or church body what you are feeling or going through is part of church body life. You can feel some kind of pain or need or suffering, and let the Body know – ‘I am in need! Help me, strengthen me, assist me, pray for me.’ This is good and healthy and necessary.

But there is a difference between feeling pain and feeling self-pity. Self-pity is where we really don’t care about what the Body does to try and help us, we don’t want to change and move on, we just want the attention. The attention kind of strokes our self-centredness, while we do not make any efforts to change. Pain can turn out for your good. But self-pity never will.

Now notice, David felt distress. He was greatly distressed. David wept. David cried till he could no longer cry. But David’s pain stopped short of self-pity. It is legitimate and right to feel the pains of this life. It’s legitimate to tell others of your pains at times. It’s legitimate to seek help. But when our pride turns our pain or discouragement into an opportunity for others to focus on us, where we have no aim to actually change or get better or get up and go.

I’m reminded of some soccer players. They get a kick in the shin or an elbow in the face, and you’d think they were being eaten alive by fire ants. When others help them to their feet, they collapse in a heap. I’m not always convinced they even want the help that the medical attention will bring to them, I think sometimes they just want the attention. Beware self-pity. And consider David, who didn’t fall into this trap.

## II. David Found Encouragement in Who His God Was

Our verse says, “...but David encouraged himself **in the Lord his God**” (1 Samuel 30:6). Consider how impractical that seems. Here is David surrounded by hostile men who are furious at him. He’s sitting in the ashes of Ziklag, his wives and children carried away. The men are looking for some action. They want answers. He’s surrounded by problems. And what does he do? He begins to think about His God.

Now many Christians, sad to say, would shout at David, ‘Enough with the spiritual daydreaming. Let’s fix the problem! You’re so heavenly minded you’re of no earthly good!’ But David knew better. He knew the most important thing in every situation is your relationship with God. The most important person in every situation is God. So David began to think and meditate on who his God was to him.

Now notice the phrase ‘the LORD **his** God.’ David’s joy was based not on the fact that God was simply God. It was based on the fact that God was God, and God would be that God to him, because he was *his* God.

*Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

**Psalm 43:4-5**

*Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee.*

**Psalm 118:28**

Consider the difference between knowing about Barack Obama, and being his relative. If there is no way that you can claim Obama as 'my something', then all of his influence and wealth is meaningless to you. You can admire it, be glad for him that he has it, but as far as your own life goes, there is no impact. However, if you were Michelle Obama, you could say, 'Barack Obama is *my* husband, and all that he has, I have.'

In the same way, some Christians act toward God as if there is no '*my*' connection. They believe God is good – He is loving, kind, tender, patient, merciful, giving, gentle. They believe God is great – He is all-knowing, all powerful, present everywhere, unchanging, eternal, sovereign. But they do not seem to put the two together. It's as if they are living a kind of practical atheism, where they do not have such a God like that in the moment. In a way, it's simple: A God who is great and good, who is *my* God, adds up to joy.

If you can't access that joy, there are only two possibilities:

1. You think God is good and great, but He is not good and great *towards you*. In this way, you act and think like He is not '*my God*'.
2. You believe He is your God, but you do not think He is great and good.

Both possibilities are answered by being in the Word of God. There we find that in Jesus Christ, God is continually *for* His children. God will not allow anything to separate us from His love. God is working everything together for our good. God will never leave us nor forsake us. God did not spare His own Son and gave Him up for us, and so with Him freely give us all things. God will regard every promise toward us in Jesus Christ as 'yes' and 'Amen.'

The heart of David's recovery was that he began to think, 'God is like this in His nature. He is *my* God. I am in a relationship with Him. Therefore, this is going to work out for His glory and my joy. All my problems are *part of* His plan.' Thinking about who His God was as far as the situation went. He did not need full assurance of *how* it would work out, it was enough that His God was the faithful God He had always been.

It almost goes without saying that as David meditated on his God, he prayed as well. He spoke to God. He thanked God for always being that kind of God. He thanked God in advance for a good outcome. He no doubt praised God for his mercy, for His sovereignty. And having done that, he no doubt asked for grace. It's not unusual to read one of the Psalms where David begins with discouragement. By the end of the Psalm, he has considered what kind of a God he has, who He is to David, and David is again rejoicing in his God.

### III. David Obeyed God's Next Step

*Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelek, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him, and David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?" "Pursue them," he answered. "You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue."*

**1 Samuel 30:7-8**

Once David had restored his own joy in the Lord, he now tackled the situation. Notice, his first move was to say, what is God's will in the matter? In our day and age, we turn to the Word of God to find out the will of God. But the principle is, once David's heart had regained strength, he did not sit in the ashes. He said, 'What does God want? What is the next step that God wants me to take?'

David first got his heart right, then focused on his duties. In fact, for him to hear the voice of God so as to know what to do, he first had to get his heart encouraged in the Lord. Many times, we try to fix a situation in the flesh, depending on ourselves and neglecting the Lord. First, encourage your heart in the Lord. Meditate on the

Word of God as far as who your God is to you *in* Jesus Christ. Get to a place of praise. Pray and thank God. Then ask God for wisdom as to what to do next. Follow the will of God as revealed in the Word of God.

The problem with discouragement is that it can often turn into disobedience. David encouraged himself in the Lord with a view to changing. He didn't just want an emotional pep-me-up, he wanted to be pleasing to his God, to be obedient.

God will not send encouragement to the heart that is discouraged *and* rebellious. The heart that says, 'I'm discouraged, but I won't do what God tells me to do' – that heart should not expect encouragement from God. As **James 1:7** says, let not the double-minded man think he will receive anything from the Lord. Encouragement comes from beholding our God and then behaving accordingly. Those who merely behold God and do not obey are like those who look into the mirror and make no changes.

So, where do I start? What is the next step God wants you to take? God's will is not a roadmap, it's a relationship. God always tells His children what the next step is. It could be 'phone that person.' It could be 'get up and clean.' It could be 'get some rest' or 'go share the Gospel.' It could be pray, or read, or visit so-and-so, or even wait.

I'm convinced the Holy Spirit will always let a yielded child of God know the next step God wants you to take through the Word of God and His presence in your heart. And the joy comes not only in beholding and believing, but in behaving. Not only in seeing the glory of the Lord filling the temple, but also saying, 'Here am I Lord, send me!'

It starts with taking responsibility for your joy. Preach to yourself. Preach the truth of who your God is to yourself. And then get up and do the first thing, the next thing, that God wants you to do.