

ENCOURAGE YOURSELF IN THE LORD



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LifeinJesus.net

‘Encourage Yourself in the Lord’

by

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Preface

God’s Word is so much more than just words.
It is powerful
and it will build you up in the truth of who He is,
all He has done and won for you through Jesus
and who you are in Him.

Use these declarations regularly
to be assured of His truth for you
and to be better equipped to deal with life.

ENCOURAGE YOURSELF IN THE LORD

Do you need encouraging? We all do sometimes, but it maybe that you're really struggling with what's going on in your life right now and you don't know what to do. We're going to look at an event in the life of David before he became King of Israel. If things are difficult at the moment, David's story will encourage you to keep going. And if everything is rosy, it will encourage you to build a firm foundation to stand on, ready for when life becomes more tricky.

What Had Gone on Before

Samuel had anointed David king when he was between 10 and 15 years old and was still a shepherd boy. Samuel had done this under God's instruction even though King Saul was still reigning over Israel. David spent the next 10 or so years of his life fleeing from Saul who was out to kill him. He was living in caves with the 600 men who were standing by him and was forever on the move, trying to escape from Saul and his army. Eventually he and his men went to live in the land of the Philistines who were enemies of Israel. He thought he would be safe there. He asked the king of the Philistines if they could have their own city to live in and he gave them the city of Ziklag.

But eventually the Philistines set out to fight the Israelites – David's own people. He and his men went with them, but some of the Philistines didn't trust them – they thought they would switch sides and fight for their own nation of Israel. So the king sent them back to Ziklag. We'll never know which side David would have fought on. What happened when David and his men went back to Ziklag is told in 1 Samuel 30:1-19.

The Return to Ziklag

1 Samuel 30:1-6 – ‘When David and his men had come to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid on the South and on Ziklag, and had struck Ziklag and burnt it with fire, ²and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great. They didn’t kill any, but carried them off and went their way. ³When David and his men came to the city, behold, it was burnt with fire; and their wives, their sons, and their daughters were taken captive. ⁴Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voice and wept until they had no more power to weep. ⁵David’s two wives were taken captive, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. ⁶David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the souls of all the people were grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters;’

I don’t know how quickly you read that, but in case you didn’t take in the full horror of what David and his men returned to, I’ll recap it below.

- The Amalekites had attacked Ziklag and burnt all the buildings so David and his men had lost all their homes.
- They had also carried off everyone who was in the city including all the women and children. David and his men had lost their wives and all their children and other family members. And they had no idea what the Amalekites would do to them.
- Then David’s men blamed him for what had happened and talked about stoning him to death.

Suddenly David had lost both his wives, all his children and family and his home, and his own men were threatening to kill him! No wonder he wept until he had no power left to weep.

So What Did He Do?

First, imagine the absolute horror of the situation David found himself in. What would you do in such a terrible situation? Let's look at what David chose to do.

1 Samuel 30:6 – *‘but David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.’* The King James Version says – *‘but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.’* He strengthened himself by encouraging himself in the Lord. He didn't try to do it by discussing things with others or getting other people to pray for him. No, he encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

How Did He Do It?

1 Samuel 30:7-8 – *‘David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, “Please bring the ephod here to me.” Abiathar brought the ephod to David.⁸David enquired of the LORD, saying, “If I pursue after this troop, will I overtake them?” He answered him, “Pursue, for you will surely overtake them, and will without fail recover all.”’*

David refused to give up hope. He didn't accept defeat, but neither did he rush off after the Amalekites in a fit of rage or blinded by grief. After he had wept for his loss, His first thought was, ‘What does God want me to do?’ He knew that the Lord was God and that He was his God. Who else should he turn to but the Lord his God?

So he asked the priest to bring him the ephod. This was a special garment the high priest wore in Old Testament times. It held the Urim and the Thummim. These were used somehow to learn what God wanted the Israelites to do when they were faced with a decision. It's the equivalent of us, as New Covenant believers, going to God's Word for help and guidance. David wanted to go

after the Amalekites, but instead of just doing what he wanted to do, he asked God if it was the right thing to do. God assured David that, if he went after the Amalekites, he would rescue every single person that had been captured and bring them back. David encouraged himself by going to God and making sure that he was doing what God wanted him to do.

What Happened when David Obeyed God?

1 Samuel 30:9-15 – *‘So David went, he and the six hundred men who were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those who were left behind stayed. ¹⁰But David pursued, he and four hundred men; for two hundred stayed behind, who were so faint that they couldn’t go over the brook Besor.*

¹¹They found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he ate; and they gave him water to drink. ¹²They gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. When he had eaten, his spirit came again to him; for he had eaten no bread, and drank no water for three days and three nights. ¹³David asked him, “To whom do you belong? Where are you from?” He said, “I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days ago I got sick. ¹⁴We made a raid on the South of the Cherethites, and on that which belongs to Judah, and on the South of Caleb; and we burnt Ziklag with fire.” ¹⁵David said to him, “Will you bring me down to this troop?” He said, “Swear to me by God that you will not kill me and not deliver me up into the hands of my master, and I will bring you down to this troop”

David had obviously been able to calm his men, because once again those who still had enough energy, followed him as he set off in search of the Amalekites. He went in the assurance of God’s promise that he would be successful.

They came across an Egyptian man who the Amalekites had abandoned because he was sick. God provided someone who could lead David and his men straight to their enemies. They didn't have to waste any precious time or spend any more energy searching for them.

What Was the Result?

1 Samuel 30:16-19 – *‘When he had brought him down, behold, they were spread around over all the ground, eating, drinking, and dancing, because of all the great plunder that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah. ¹⁷David struck them from the twilight even to the evening of the next day. Not a man of them escaped from there, except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled. ¹⁸David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives. ¹⁹There was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither plunder, nor anything that they had taken. David brought them all back.’*

The Egyptian led them to the Amalekites who were celebrating their victory and were totally unprepared for an attack. We know how weary David and his men were and they were only 401 men against a much bigger army. But David and his men were able to fight the Amalekites for all of 24 hours and totally defeat them and rescue all the people they had abducted, because God was with him. I love the last sentence – *‘David brought them all back.’* Read it again, emphasising the word ‘all’. Just five words which are so full of victory and joy and peace.

What Happened Next?

Two days after David returned to Ziklag, a messenger came to tell him that King Saul had been killed by the Philistines.

2 Samuel 2:1-4 – ‘After this, David enquired of the LORD, saying, “Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?” The LORD said to him, “Go up.” David said, “Where shall I go up?” He said, “To Hebron.”’² So David went up there with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite.³ David brought up his men who were with him, every man with his household. They lived in the cities of Hebron.⁴ The men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.’

When David heard that Saul had been killed, once again he didn’t just jump at it. He asked God if he should return to Judah – his home area of Israel. When God said yes, he then asked Him exactly where he should go and God told him to go to Hebron. Again David obeyed, taking all his family and all his men with their families and they came to Hebron to live in the cities there.

When the people of Judah heard that David was back, they came to him and made him their king. Probably within a short period of time after the heartbreak of returning to Ziklag, David was officially King of Judah. And 7½ years later, aged 30, he was finally crowned king of all Israel. At last David could be the king God had anointed him to be about 17 years earlier and could start his reign over the whole nation.

What If?

If David had given in to all his anguish and grief and not encouraged himself in the Lord, he may well have been killed by his own men. At the very least, they would probably have abandoned him. He would not have been reunited with his wives and children and maybe wouldn’t have been made king a short time later.

What About Us?

You may be facing disaster at the moment, but very few people are in a situation as bad as the one David found himself in when he returned to Ziklag. Remember, for many years before that awful day at Ziklag, he had been living in caves trying to escape from King Saul who wanted to kill him. Yet David still made the right choice – he decided to encourage himself in the Lord.

Let me ask you and me some questions. Do you believe you would have made the same good choice as David? Or would you have spiralled down and down in your grief until you were incapable of doing anything? Or would you have been so angry that you couldn't think straight and your anger settled deeper and deeper in your heart until it impacted every area of your life? Or would you have just gone straight after the Amalekites without thinking anything through, putting yourself in real danger? Or would you have turned your anger on your men who were blaming you for all that had gone so terribly wrong? I don't ask any of these questions to condemn you or me – they are all human reactions. But I want these questions to make us think about our relationship with God. Is it so firmly established that He is our first thought and the One we turn to before anyone or anything else? Let me encourage you whatever your answer is to these questions.

We are in a Better Place than David

This might seem a strange thing to say because we know that David was an amazing man of God. He killed the giant Goliath with just five stones and his shepherd's sling; when Saul was being tormented mentally, he calmed him by playing his harp; he was anointed King of Israel by God and later by the people; he had many victories in battle. He wrote many songs in which we

can see how much he loved God and His Word. And in 1 Samuel 13:14 God called him – *‘a man after his own heart.’* How can we be in a better place?

2 Corinthians 3:11 says – *‘For if that which passes away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.’* David lived under the old covenant. We live under the new covenant. This means he lived under the law which passed away with Jesus, while we live under grace which still remains today from when Jesus died and came back to life. The glory of living under grace is far, far greater than the glory of living under the law. Once Jesus had died, taking the punishment for all our sins, and came back to life, God’s grace became freely available to everyone. But we do have to receive it by faith in all Jesus has done and won for us – to be born-again by accepting Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. This is available to anyone and everyone who will receive it and that includes you.

As born-again people, we live with a far greater glory than David did, so we are in a much better place than he was. Let’s look at the reality of this by comparing what we have through Jesus with what David didn’t have under the law.

What We Have that David Didn’t Have

The law that David lived under was based on how you performed, while the grace we live under is based on our unconditional love relationship with God. There is a huge difference between the two ways of life. David was unusually close to God’s heart under the old covenant, but we have Jesus living in our heart. We have the certainty of forgiveness for all our sins – past, present and future. We know that nothing we do or don’t do can separate us from God’s sacrificial, unconditional love for us. All God’s blessings are available to us.

John 1:12 says – *‘But as many as received him (Jesus), to them he gave the right to become God’s children, to those who believe in his name.’* Our relationship with God is personal – He is our loving Father and we are His beloved child. It is surer than David’s was. Jesus promises us in Matthew 28:20 – *“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* And, talking about those who are born-again, Jesus says in John 10:28-29 – *“I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”* ²⁹ ... *No one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”* Jesus will never leave us and no-one can separate us from Him. That’s such wonderful good news.

David wasn’t born-again – he couldn’t be because Jesus hadn’t yet come to earth to die in our place. God gave him revelation about what living after Jesus would be like, but he couldn’t experience it. And because he wasn’t born-again, he didn’t have the Holy Spirit living inside him to guide him and comfort him and equip him. Nor did he have the fruit of the Spirit; nor the gifts of the Spirit or the power of the Spirit always available to him like we do when we are baptised in the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 1:20 says – *‘For however many are the promises of God, in him is the “Yes.” Therefore also through him is the “Amen”, to the glory of God through us.’* David would have known about many of the promises of God, but Jesus hadn’t yet said “Yes” to them. But we live on the other side of that resounding “Yes” so now we can say “Amen” (so be it) and see those promises become reality in our lives. We can walk forward no matter what is going on, in full assurance. All we have to do is believe – say “Amen”.

If David was able to encourage himself in the Lord while living under the law, then we can too. It is far easier for us as born-again believers, than it was for him because we are in a much

better place living under grace. Unlike David, we have a love relationship with God through Jesus which is established on and held by what Jesus has done, not on what we do. Not does it depend on how we feel – it depends on the truth of God’s Word. God is not distant – He’s inside us; God isn’t angry with us – He’s loving us; God isn’t judging us – He’s blessing us.

When You Return to ‘Ziklag’

When problems arise or disaster strikes and all you can do is cry until you can’t cry anymore, remember David at Ziklag and choose to encourage yourself in the Lord. Don’t give up hope or accept defeat. Don’t become passive, but don’t act rashly either. Just as David turned from his tears and called for the ephod, take your eyes off all that’s gone wrong and go to God’s Word.

Read about all that Jesus has done and won for you. Find God’s wonderful promises which Jesus has said “Yes” to for you. Read them out loud. Make them personal. Put your name in them or use “I” and “me” instead of “you”. Thank Him for them and start to make thanking God a way of life.

Get to know God’s Word. Things may be fine in your life at the moment – that’s wonderful. But that means it is a great time to start storing up the truth of all Jesus has done and won for you and all God’s promises, so the truth is there for you as a firm foundation to stand on when trouble comes. They will encourage you whenever you focus on them, whether things are good or not. Jesus illustrated it like this in Matthew 7:24-25 – *“Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it didn’t fall, for it was founded on the rock.”*

Go to God's Word

Don't underrate the power of God's Word. Hebrews 4:12 says – *'For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart.'* God's Word will help you decide what to do. It is alive and powerful. It never stops working. It will show you the difference between your own human thoughts and what God is saying to you.

Seek to understand it – ask the Holy Spirit to show you what it means. In John 16:13 Jesus said – *"when he, the Spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit), has come, he will guide you into all truth."* Take a verse which God leads you to in whatever situation you're in, and personalise it. Then write it on your heart by reading it out loud. Keep doing it. It's not about just saying words like some kind of magic. It's getting the truth firmly established in your heart. Romans 10:17 says – *'faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.'*

Let's look at an example. Say you have financial problems and don't know how you're going to cope. Go to Philippians 4:19 which says – *'My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.'* Read it out loud and then personalise it saying, "My God will supply all my needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Thank Him for His promise saying, "Thank You my Father God that You will supply every need of mine according to Your riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Keep doing this until you know the truth is settled in your heart and then continue to remind yourself.

Then ask God what you should do, just like David asked God. Because you have the truth of the Word in your heart, you will

be asking from a place of faith rather than fear. In Mark 11:24 Jesus says – *“all things whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you have received them, and you shall have them.”*

God may tell you to involve other people in what He directs you to do. David took 400 of his men with him to help him defeat the Amalekites. But he encouraged himself. I think this is powerful. Let's get things the right way round. We need to depend on God, not on others. Let's go to God first and then follow His leading in what to do and how to do it, trusting we will see the victory just as David did. God may well then use other people to stand with us and help us, just as He used David's men to help him rescue all the people.

Encourage Yourself in the Lord

Decide now to encourage yourself in the Lord. Decide to make it a way of life, so you can be ready to make it the first thing you do whenever difficulties come, be they great or small. When we do this, God will always guide us and direct us and assure us of his love and His presence. He will strengthen us in His Word and through His Holy Spirit.

We all want to be firmly established on the rock just like that house that Jesus described in Matthew 7:25 – *“The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it didn't fall, for it was founded on the rock.”* Start encouraging yourself in the Lord and keep on doing it through thick and thin and you can be like that house, standing strong and coming through victorious by encouraging yourself in the Lord, just like David did. Thank You Lord!

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and all He has done and won for us
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*Then David and the people who were
with him lifted up their voice and wept
until they had no more power to weep.
but David encouraged himself
in the LORD his God.*

(1 Samuel 30:4&6)



Katherine Hilditch has been teaching in local churches for many years. In 2013 she wrote her first booklet and since then has written many more. She created her website to make all the booklets freely available to everyone. They can be read online or printed out. Katherine's threefold purpose is to help people understand more about Jesus and all He has done and won for them, to encourage them to go deeper in their relationship with God and to provide material to help them share their faith with others. To read her story and find all the booklets go to –

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