Encouraging Ourselves

SUMMARY

All believers need encouragement in difficult seasons of our lives.

Many times, that strength may come from another person—maybe a friend or just someone who cares enough to get involved. But other times, nobody is available. Perhaps no one is on your side of a conflict. Or maybe the situation is simply too personal to share with anyone else. And sometimes a wound is so deep it can only be healed alone in God’s presence.

That’s why it’s important that you and I know how to encourage ourselves spiritually. Although we need fellowship, the foundation of the Christian life is a personal relationship with God. Every believer should know how to find encouragement directly from the Lord.

SERMON POINTS

David knew how to encourage himself in the Lord (1 Sam. 30:1-20).

Before he became king, David had a falling-out with King Saul, who was jealous of David’s success in battle. Six hundred warriors had sided with David and settled together in a town called Ziklag. Returning home one day, the men found their town burned, their livestock and possessions stolen, and their wives and children taken captive by the Amalekites. In their anger and grief, the men turned against David, blaming him for their loss. They began to talk of stoning him.

David was truly alone. No one was available for consolation and advice. With his own home burned and his family taken, he could have just slipped into despondency and given up. However, the leader had a history with God. He had seen the Lord’s faithfulness again and again: when he faced the giant Goliath, King Saul, and warriors from other nations. So David turned to the Lord for strength (1 Sam. 30:6) and found the encouragement he needed.

David also asked the Lord for direction. God revealed to David that he should lead his men to pursue the Amalekites and promised he would be victorious (1 Sam. 30:8). And that’s exactly what happened. David and his men defeated their enemy and recovered their wives, children, possessions, and livestock. Because David sought the Lord for encouragement and guidance, God brought him successfully through the trial.

How can we encourage ourselves?

- **Be quiet before the Lord.** Oftentimes, when we get into difficult situations, we want to make a quick decision to relieve the pressure. When we take time to wait on God, the anger, greed, or resentment we feel has time to dissipate. Then we have time to consider our response instead of simply reacting to a stressful situation.

  The Lord wants us to run to Him in times of adversity. Martin Luther, one of the fathers of the Protestant Reformation, understood this principle. His hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” praises the Father for being a faithful refuge and emphasizes the importance of depending on Him to experience spiritual victory. When you and I fail to wait on God, we will usually fail to rely on Him.

- **Ask for God’s guidance.** Seek the Lord about your decision. There is no such thing as a predicament too complex for God. He knows ahead of time what
problems you will face, and He knows exactly how best to handle them. Any time you and I are willing to acknowledge our inadequacy and seek His guidance and direction for our lives, He will be sure to answer. Matthew 7:7 says, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” If answers are slow in coming, make sure your heart is clean, then continue to seek His will. If we are walking in obedience, He will be faithful to guide us.

**Open God’s Word.** Sometimes, we may not sense any direction from the Lord until we read His Word. He may use a passage you have read many times before, or He may lead you to something new. Once God has revealed His will to us, we must be faithful to obey, even if we don’t understand or agree with Him. Too often, we question God’s leadership and don’t obey because we trust our own abilities and wisdom instead of His. The Creator of the universe is available to guide and counsel us; our responsibility is to listen and obey.

**Recall God’s help in the past.** One of the most powerful ways to encourage yourself is to remember how the Lord has been faithful to you in the past. When I was new to First Baptist Atlanta, a church-wide conflict arose. The first time it happened, I hid in the back under the balcony. When something similar happened years later, I sat up front beside the pulpit. I remembered how God delivered me in the first battle, and I believed He would give me victory again.

When people forget their history, they make the same mistakes over and over. So make a practice of recording how God brings you through difficulties. Teach your children to do the same. The Father doesn’t change. He was faithful to bring you through past trials, and He will lead you and guide you through future ones as well.

**Obey God.** The Lord may ask you to do something that doesn’t make sense from a worldly perspective. Financially, it might not be the most profitable choice. Or it may seem foolish. But if we seek to please people instead of God, we are asking for trouble. In contrast, when we choose to obey the Lord, we can trust He will work all things together for our good. Obedience always brings blessing.

**Take time to do what you love.** It’s important for us enjoy recreation, hobbies, and leisure. When my heart is heavy, sometimes an afternoon of photography is just what I need. You might think, That doesn’t sound very spiritual, Dr. Stanley. But it is. God wants us to be joyful Christians, people who take time to enjoy the good things He has given us. Of course, that doesn’t mean we will never experience pain. However, in the midst of our struggles, we can have an underlying joy because we know we are God’s children. When life’s struggles bring you down, allow yourself time for wholesome recreation.

**RESPONSE**

**Think about the last significant problem you faced.** How did you respond? Did you turn quickly to God, or did you try other resources first? Why do you think this is so?

**How has the Lord been faithful to you in the past?** Describe a time you encouraged yourself in Him. Then, list some circumstances where you witnessed His faithfulness.

**What hobby or pastime do you enjoy?** Do you devote the right amount of time to recreation? If needed, how could you bring balance to that area of your life?