

Strengthen Yourself in the Lord

Steven Bockmiller

When you think of King David in the Bible, you may recall his battle with Goliath, or his friendship with Jonathan, or the fact that he was a man after God's own heart, or his grave mistake with Bathsheba, or the beautiful Psalms he wrote. But there is a story that is often overlooked that is particularly beneficial for us in these challenging times. The story begins in 1 Samuel 18. David is praised for his warrior skills in verses 7-9 "and the women sang to one another as they celebrated, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands." And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?" And Saul eyed David from that day on." The next day Saul tries to kill David by throwing his spear at him. Saul's aggression towards David continues and in chapters 19 through 26 Saul pursues and tries to kill him. David flees to Ramah in chapter 19, Nob in chapter 21 (with the help of Jonathan), and Gath later in chapter 21. He hides in the cave of Adullam in chapter 22, gains an army of men who were described as distressed and bitter, flees to the forest of Hereth, and then is pursued by Saul in wilderness of Ziph at Horesh in chapter 23. Saul again pursues David in the wilderness of Engedi while David is hiding in a cave as described in chapter 24 and then again in the wilderness of Ziph as described in chapter 26.

Through all of this, Saul is unsuccessful in killing David. But the 4 year journey took its toll on David. In chapter 27:1-4, we see the distress David was under. Instead of recognizing the grace of God through this struggle, David tries to solve the problem himself. "Then David said in his heart, "Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand." So David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow. And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him." Notice the last sentence where it shows that his plan worked. Achish then allows David and his men to abide in the town of Ziklag.

During his time with Achish King of Gath (Philistine city), David attacked the heathen nations around him including the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites. David would leave no one alive in these cities and would report back to Achish saying that he attacked his own people from the land of Judah. He even brought back spoils and garments to prove the attacks. 1 Samuel 27:12 shows us David's success in this deception. And Achish trusted David, thinking, "He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant."

In chapter 28, we see that the Philistines were preparing to attack Israel. Achish includes David and his men in this war preparation and together they travel to Aphek to

meet the other Philistine armies. 1 Samuel 29:4-5 says “But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, “Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here? Is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances, ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands?’” So Achish sends David and his men back home.

When David and his men get back to Ziklag, they find the city has been raided by the Amalekites; the city was burned with fire, and all of the women and children were taken captive. David’s men’s response to this dreadful situation is seen in 1 Samuel 30:4-6; “Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep. David’s two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters.”

David finds himself in the poorest of positions. He was tired of running from Saul so he moved to the Philistine side with a distressed and bitter rag tag army. He was living a lie in order to keep his cover, and now he finds himself with not even enough strength to weep. Beyond that, he is alone because his family has been captured by the enemy and his own army wants to stone him. Do we find ourselves in an impossible position right now? And do we find ourselves feeling all alone in this trouble? We are fighting a virus that you can’t see and has no current cure. You can’t get away from it either because the spread is worldwide. You are self-isolating, washing your hands 30 times a day, holding your breath at the grocery store, and praying for toilet paper. At the same time, you are trying to hold it all together in your mind and get through the day, all the while wondering when this will end. At times it feels like an insurmountable task. This is where we can learn from what happens next in our story of David.

We find the answer in the last sentence of 1 Sam 30:6; “But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.” What does it mean that he strengthened himself in the Lord? First, notice David strengthened himself. God made us a social people and taught us to help each other. In Galatians 6:2 Paul says, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” But sometimes it is necessary to fight the battle alone. You need your own strength and trust in God to get through this pandemic. Your families depend on you. Joshua said in chapter 24:15, “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” Your brethren depend on you. Deuteronomy 31:6 says, “be strong and courageous.” God expects you to have your own faith. Philippians 2:12 says to “work out your own salvation.” Second, notice with whom David strengthened himself. It was in the Lord. He found courage in God. Maybe he realized that he had been trying to fix the problem himself and then remembered there is only one true place to turn in times of distress. In Psalm 56:3 David says, “when I am afraid, I put my trust in you.” Are you afraid right now? Let that fear cause you to turn to God and put your trust in him. In John 6:68 we read, “Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” I have been repeating that phrase often in my prayers concerning the virus pandemic. “Father, we need you. Where else can we go except to you, for you have the power and save us, to heal, and to see us through.” I can’t see how this virus

pandemic will end, or how it will affect our jobs and daily life. But what I do know is we can trust in God for resolution and deliverance.

David's confidence then turned into certainty. He asks Abiathar the priest to bring the ephod and he prays to God for direction. God answers in 1 Samuel 30:8, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue." David takes 400 men and pursues the enemies. We see in 1 Samuel 30:17-20, "and David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day, and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled. David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken. David brought back all. David also captured all the flocks and herds, and the people drove the livestock before him, and said, "This is David's spoil." David was done wavering and when he turned to God, he got clear direction and he followed through. Notice the grace of God in this story. The Amalekites did not kill any of the women and children. Nothing was missing whether great or small. David through God's grace won the battle and got everything back. It feels like we are living in a world with less certainty than ever before. I can't even be certain that if I touch the wrong thing, I won't get the virus. The economy is crumbling, jobs are disappearing, and I worry I won't get food and supplies. Don't forget that with God we can have certainty and remember the words in Matthew 6:30-31, "if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"

David's courage and his certainty result in compassion. After coming back from battle, he shares the spoils of war with the 200 men who were too distressed to fight. He also shares with friends and the Elders of Judah as seen 1 Sam 30:21-31. It's hard to be compassionate towards others when your own life is a mess. If you can't get yourself together, you certainly can't focus on others. Once David turned to God and appealed to His wisdom and His direction, we see this story turn around. David strengthened himself in God, listened to God's direction, and God granted him success. This then allowed David to proceed with showing compassion to others. Through that compassion, glory was given to God. Others need us in these times of distress. They need to see us weather this storm with a resolute trust in God. This does not mean you won't be scared and worry at times. It means even though the boat rocks and rolls, the anchor stays put. Steady yourself in God and then reach out and help those who are drifting in the distress of this pandemic.

We don't think of this story when we think of David but there is much to learn and apply to our current situation. We all need to pause and strengthen ourselves in the Lord. We need him more than ever as we fight a fight that is larger than any we have faced in our lifetimes. But remember no fight is too big for God. He knows what we are going through, and He will guide us through. Don't ever doubt that fact, no matter how bumpy this ride gets.