

## THE ART OF SELF-ENCOURAGEMENT

"But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."  
I Samuel 30:6.

Of all the benefactors that we meet in life, few are more helpful than the courage bringer. Blessed is the person who is able to put heart into the despairing. The courage bringer is a benefactor because courage is essential to the business of living. It is more than a luxury; it is a necessity. When we lose courage, we lose our joy and our zest. Courage is essential to our usefulness. Elijah was a mighty man. He towered above the men of his generation as a majestic mountain towers above an anthill. But one day he fell under the juniper tree with hope and courage all gone out of him. He told the Lord frankly, "I have had enough. Take away my life. I am no better than my fathers. They suffered Israel to go into idolatry. I have not been able to bring it back." So what? God could not use this mighty man for any further service until He had enabled him to recover his courage.

We ought to be deeply grateful to God for the record of the life of His servant David. It was a vigorous and great life spent in many positions and conditions. David was greatly distressed. His city was burned. His wives were gone. The sons and daughters of his comrades were all captive. Little Ziklag, where they had made a home, smoked before them in blackened ruins. The men of war, wounded in heart, mutinied against their leader, and were ready to stone him. David's fortunes were at their lowest ebb. David was greatly distressed for he had been acting without consulting God.

David's soul was overwhelmed within him. Every prospect was doleful. Black skies frowned over his head. He was exhausted. It seemed that all the springs had dried up. We, too, are one with David in the deep and dire need of encouragement.

Our text says, "But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." That strikes us as an unusual and important use of the word "encouraged." To encourage means "to put heart into"; "to help a fellow to his feet again when he has failed or fallen"; "to embolden"; "to incite to further endeavor." And the usual use of the word is in the active sense of one individual encouraging another. Indeed among the virtues which most people practice is this of encouragement. Every man knows his own need of encouragement. He knows the devastating effect upon himself of discouragement. We all understand that life is tough for some people all the time; and for all people some of the time; and therefore it is an elementary social duty to live as an encourager of our fellow-men, ready with a helping hand, an inspiring word, and a friendly smile.

Has it occurred to us that there can be a parallel duty, possibly a prior duty, of self-encouragement? It is our duty to address to ourselves those stimulating and heartening things in some dark hour of the spirit, or on some steep and hazardous face of the mountain, which we would assuredly try hard to say to another in a like situation.

David was a great encourager of others. Few have lifted up the downcast souls of men as David did. Sometimes David received wonderful encouragement from others. Now, alas! there is no encourager near. To escape the relentless hatred of Saul,

David had actually fled to the Philistines. When war broke out between the Philistines and a neighboring tribe, David was ordered back to the encampment where he and his followers had been given permission to live, with the command to remain there for the duration. In the meantime, however, the enemy had raided the place. When David and his men arrived, there was nothing but a heap of smoldering ruins. The women and the children had been captured. So appalling was the desolation that David and his men "lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep." Yet worse was to come. Fury and terror demanded an object on which to vent their awful power. So David's own men turned upon him as the cause of their calamity, threatening to stone him.

By all normal calculations, David was down and out. But there was the incalculable element of the spirit to be taken into the reckoning. This man, despite the stains upon his character, was not an ordinary man. He had interior resources to fall back on. "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." The fact that he encouraged himself adds to the worth and gallantry of David's achievement rather than detracting from it. Happy is the man who learns the fine art of encouraging himself. By encouraging himself he not only helps himself, but he is able to bring courage to others as well. We cannot give to others that which we do not possess.

It was spiritual encouragement which David ministered to himself. "In the Lord his God" he found the fount of healing. Even though he was at his wit's end he was not at the end of his faith. David's encouragement of himself in God was the fruit of a spiritual relationship. If he had not been in previous relation to God, he could not have found such sudden and sweet relief in God. Those around him sorrowed as he did, but they did not have his source of consolation.

David knew the depressing experience of failure. A kindred experience comes to all sooner or later, bringing with it an urgent call for courage. David needed to encourage himself because of what his failure had cost him. The first price that David had paid for failure was loss of popularity. He had a wonderful capacity for winning the hearts and confidence of people. Approving him, they approved what he did. But now all this had changed. His popularity had now become antagonism. The hurrahs of his fellows had changed to hisses. His onetime friends and followers were now threatening to stone him to death. He was in positive danger of his life. A second price that David had paid for his failure was the loss both of his goods and of those whom he loved.

David needed to encourage himself in order to keep from giving way to bitterness and resentment. How did David encourage himself? He refused certain methods that we are sometimes prone to try. For example, he did not encourage himself by getting his feelings hurt and washing his hands of the whole business. He refused to encourage himself by threatening to quit. He began to take stock of what he had left, the possibilities that were still his. He brought his desperate plight into the presence of God. That is a source of encouragement that is always open to all of us, and one that never fails.

We need to encourage ourselves in the Lord our God because of the powerlessness of human help. How little we can do for ourselves, and how little others can do for us in the critical hours of life! It is not in man to strengthen himself with effectual strength.

If we are to encourage ourselves in the Lord, we must do it by prayer. Prayer renews all our powers— physical, mental, and spiritual. Prayer causes the blessings

of God to flow into our lives. To dwell on any of the divine attributes is a sure method of renewing our strength. Benjamin Jowett said, "When we feel ourselves weakest, it is a new strength to think of the unchangeableness of God." To think of God's love, patience, wisdom, and power gives us a new strength.

There are numerous benefits accruing from the art of self-encouragement. They reap a wealthy harvest who encourage themselves in the Lord their God. Solid comfort is theirs. When we address ourselves to God He wonderfully soothes our sorrow. John Trapp said, "It is no marvel that God remembered David in all his troubles, since in all his troubles David remembered God." The Lord is to us, in this matter, as we are to Him.