

Prayer

Dear Father God,

You have called me to yourself and adopted me into your family so that I can come to you at any time, even as I come to you now.

Thank you for your steadfast love that endures, and your compassion that is new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.

Song: *by Joseph Hart*

1. This, this is the God we adore, our faithful, unchangeable Friend;
Whose love is as great as his power, and neither knows measure nor end.
2. 'Tis Jesus, the First and the Last, whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
We'll praise him for all that is past, and trust him for all that's to come.

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Scripture

- 2 Samuel 30:1-25

Message: All alone?

Sometimes things in life do not go well. Sometimes the chips are down. Sometimes there's nobody to turn to. You feel all alone. Sometimes your situation is so personal you can't tell anybody. No one will understand, or even worse, no one cares.

And just when you thought they couldn't get worse, they do.

The Bible of course has quite a bit to say about this, both with instruction and examples, often in some detail. There's the despair of Psalms 13, 77, 88, 102. Think of Moses when the whole community grumbled against him, or Elijah when the threat of execution came from the royal household.

And we read it in our Bible reading from 1 Samuel 30.

David ben-Jesse, has 600 men and their families with him. They have fled from Saul and are living with the Philistines in Gath, under a king called Achish who also lived in Gath.

From here David and his men go on various raids against pretty much whoever he wants to: Amalekites, Geshurites, Kenites and others, and on those raids he kills everybody – men and women and by inference, children. Achish is quite impressed with David's raiding, so as a reward he hands over a town called Ziklag, about 20-30KM east of Gath, to David, and from now on Ziklag belongs to the kings of Judah.

Eventually the inevitable happens. Achish and his Philistine army goes on the offensive against Saul and the Israeli army. Surprisingly David and his men tag along no doubt with the intent of joining in the battle with the Philistines against Saul.

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Unsurprisingly, the Philistine commanders object to David's presence. After all wasn't it David who killed their hero Goliath. And wasn't it David of whom it was said "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands". So they complain, and their complaining prevails. Even though Achish supports David, he reluctantly tells David to take his men back home to Ziklag. So David and his 600 men return to Ziklag.

So we come to chapter 30.

When the men return home they find that Ziklag has been raided by a group of Amalekites. (When reading through the Biblical history of Israel, it is sometimes quite uncomfortable. Towns are wiped off the map, citizens are killed, individuals are murdered – it's pretty rough, and that's how societies lived and died. These are violent times.) Ziklag has been burnt to the ground. And all the people have been taken captive – both young and old.

Surprisingly they are not killed. Unsurprisingly David's men are not happy. For two reasons:

- They'd been rejected from engaging in battle. From other accounts elsewhere such rejection was considered an insult (eg. Judges 8:1).
- And now they discover their homes are gone and their families kidnapped.

Then in their anger and pain they turn against their leader, David, who by the way has also lost house and family – he is not exempt from the pain.

How often does that happen? The one who cares the most, loves the most, leads the best becomes the object of anger and resentment, and worse, by the very ones who have been helped. You've seen it. Maybe you've experienced it. Moses did. Jesus did. Paul did. And David does. His own men want to stone him.

Think about what David has to deal with: ongoing animosity from Saul, rejection by Achish, kidnapping of his wives, destruction of his home, death threats from his own men. Even Michal, his first wife, had been taken from him by Saul and given to another man (1 Sam 25:44)

How does he cope?

That's not all. In addition, his considerable support network has vanished. There was no Samuel who chose and anointed David as future king, who David went to when in trouble (19:18). Samuel is now dead.

There was no Abigail, whose words of wisdom prevented David from massacring Nabal's family (25) and who had subsequently become his wife. She's gone, kidnapped.

There was no Jonathan, who had provided friendship and life-saving counsel and encouragement. He was with Saul and his army.

There were no women singing how David had "slain his tens of thousands". Their voices were just a distant memory.

And now there was no Achish who had provided security for David and his 600 men. He's gone, at war against Saul's army.

He's all alone and "greatly distressed". What resources does he have to look after his mental health?

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The answer is both simple and effective. We are told in verse 6 of this chapter “David found strength in the Lord his God”. That’s all we are told. Actually that’s not strictly true. There is more! Let’s be careful that “finding strength in the Lord” is not used as a magic formula which if applied will resolve all issues. Scripture would suggest there are some things that need to be in place before “finding strength in the Lord” can be realised.

There are at least three preconditions which apply in David’s situation:

1. **David already knew his God.**

He had learnt much about his God and had been heavily influenced by what he had learnt. Right back when he was young he knew that to “defy the armies of the living God” (1 Sam 17:26) was the height of arrogance and that he, even as a young shepherd, could confront the source of that arrogance with confidence because of the skills he had learnt. With God’s help he could slay bears, lions and even Goliaths. He didn’t wait till now to find out about God. He already knows his God.

2. David already had **experience in dealing with pain.**

While the present circumstance at Ziklag are obviously extreme, he’s already had experience with emotional and mental pain. He was the object of sarcasm and ridicule by his older brothers. His first wife Michal had been taken from him by Saul and given to another man. Saul had tried to kill him several times. The priests of Nob were killed by Saul because they had helped David, and the memory of that would have been painful.

3. David had been previously **encouraged by a close friend** to do exactly what he needs to do on this occasion at Ziklag.

We find the story in chapter 23 of 2 Samuel. Saul was pursuing David with “all his forces for battle” to attack and destroy David and his men. It was a hard time for David, but David had a God-fearing friend called Jonathan who came to him at that time and helped him “to find strength in God” (1 Sam 23:16).

This is profoundly important. David received encouragement to develop his relationship with the living God by a friend. And now at Ziklag that relationship is being tested.

Don’t wait until the really bad times come to try for the first time to find strength in the Lord. Don’t wait for the bad times to come to all a-sudden start praying, when you have not learnt how to pray. Learn how to pray now. Prayer needs to be learned. Why else did the disciples say “Lord, teach us how to pray”? Do you spend time learning how to pray?

And learn to find strength in the Lord your God now. Don’t wait until life goes pear shaped and then say I don’t know how to find strength in the Lord.

Of course it’s not just knowing how to “find strength in the Lord”, it’s knowing how to “find strength in the Lord *your God*”. It’s personal. It’s a relationship. Yes it is “the Lord” but more importantly it’s also “your God”. David had a friend who encouraged him in this aspect of life.

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But it may not be so much that you need a friend like that. It may be that you need to be a friend like that. We each one have a responsibility to encourage one another, especially our Christian friends to find “strength in the Lord your God”. And to do this when things are going OK. Don’t wait. Learn now, and it will greatly help in times of distress. It’s not automatic, and it’s not a magic pill. Develop that relationship. Just like David did.

So there are three preconditions for David to find strength in the Lord under this particular circumstance at Ziklag:

1. David already knows his God.
2. David already has experience in dealing with pain
3. David was previously encouraged by a close friend

So when you are alone, when you think the people in the church have let you down, or those that you have so relied on till now are no longer around, when the troubles of life arrive, when life gets too much to cope with, there is always the way open to “find strength in the Lord your God”.

But you need to know Him first. And you need encouragement.

So David finds strength in the Lord his God. But note what happens next. His first go to person is the man of God, Abiathar the priest, and together they enquired of the Lord for direction. This was no pity-party, no woe-is-me time! David went to enquire of the Lord to find out what he needed to do. A bit like Elijah we mentioned before, when Jezebel shouted at him. He complained to God. (Make no mistake, God is the best one to complain to if you need to complain.) “It is enough!” he said. “O Lord now take away my life.” How did God respond? He gave him jobs to do.

In David’s case, he is able to resume leadership of the very men who not so long before had threatened to stone him. A complete turn around. But be careful to remember that David’s troubles didn’t end there. There is more deep soul searching to come for David in the years ahead, but he has obviously learnt something about finding strength in the Lord.

He learnt it from his friend Jonathan. He learnt it from experience. And he continued to practice it in his life.

We’ll leave the story there. Let’s leave our focus on this one point – you as a child of God, you as a citizen of heaven, you as a saint, have this wonderful resource available. Practice it. Encourage others to do so. Whether with others or alone, do as David did and find strength in the Lord your God.

Prayer for suffering Christians in Bangladesh (*from Barnabas Prayer 18/10/25*)

Pastor “Abir” and his family have suffered greatly at the hands of Islamists in their region of Bangladesh. Extremists have waged a campaign of threats and intimidation to try to force Abir, his family and the local church to convert to Islam.

Worst of all, Pastor Abir’s daughter was abducted and abused for three months. “They did not renounce their faith,” says a Barnabas Aid contact. “Their courageous stand for Christ in

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the face of such profound suffering is a stunning display of the Holy Spirit's power at work.”
Praise God for the steadfast faith of His people. Pray for His protection over them and ask that their witness will glorify Christ in Bangladesh.

Song: *Stewart Townend*

1. In Christ alone my hope is found, He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace when fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all, Here in the love of Christ I stand
2. In Christ alone, who took on flesh, fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness acorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died the wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid here in the death of Christ I live
3. There in the ground, His body lay, Light of the world, by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day up from the grave, He rose again
And as He stands in victory sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine, bought with the precious blood of Christ
4. No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from His hand
'Til He returns or calls me home here in the power of Christ I'll stand

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Benediction:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

This service was prepared by Warren Mack for HopeNet SA