

## **ENCOURAGE OURSELVES!!**

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Probably most of us from time to time have our “ups and downs” in life.

Sometimes it seems the wind’s behind us — propelling us along — but sometimes the wind seems to be in our faces ... and progress seems a bit more arduous.

Maybe we’ve got health trials ... financial challenges ... in-law problems ... look around at the world ... or at the Church of God ... and it is easy to get disheartened!

If we just focus on ourselves ... our abilities and strengths ... we may get even more disheartened!

It would help if we really understood that we are actually never alone ... that in every situation we face ... we have an all-powerful supernatural Protector and Provider with us ... as we saw in Psalm 91.

Well ... we all sort of “know” this ... intellectually but ... hard to remember ... or lean on ... when the going gets tough ... when everything seems dark and gloomy.

There is an illustration in King David’s life. He knew what to do. The same thing that you and I need to do.

### **1 Samuel 30:1-6 (NKJV)**

**1 Now it happened, when David and his men came to Ziklag, on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the South and Ziklag, attacked Ziklag and burned it with fire,**

**2 and had taken captive the women and those who were there, from small to great; they did not kill anyone, but carried them away and went their way.**

**3 So David and his men came to the city, and there it was, burned with fire; and their wives, their sons, and their daughters had been taken captive.**

**4 Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep.**

5 And David's two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, had been taken captive.

6 Now **David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved**, every man for his sons and his daughters. ***But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.***

Hebrew: Became strong ... became resolute ... grow firm  
Amplified: "Encouraged and strengthened himself"

David was in a bad situation! On the run from Saul for many years ... just finished a 75 mile hike in 3 days ... got home and finds their houses had been burned down ... their families abducted ... and the soldiers held David "responsible" ... and wanted to stone him!!

This was a very low point in David's life. (Maybe the lowest point in his life up until now?)

What we see around us is temporary ... always subject to change. In no time at all ... David and his men recovered their wives and families and lots of booty. Saul was killed a week or two later ... and David progressed rapidly to become accepted as king over Israel. What if he'd given up at this low point?

When times look grim for us ... humanly ... we need to do what David did ... encourage ourselves in the Lord. Take time ... go to the Word ... the scriptures. See what God has done for others. And believe He's still the same ... for us.

### **Psalms 139:1-12 (NKJV)**

**1 O Lord, You have searched me and known me.** *(God knows us ... and His presence is everywhere)*

2 You know my sitting down and my rising up;  
You understand my thought afar off.

3 You comprehend my path and my lying down,  
And are acquainted with all my ways.

4 For there is not a word on my tongue,  
But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.

5 You have hedged me behind and before,  
And laid Your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
It is high, I cannot attain it.

7 **Where can I go from Your Spirit?**

**Or where can I flee from Your presence?**

**8 If I ascend into heaven, You are there;  
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.**

9 If I take the wings of the morning,  
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
10 Even there Your hand shall lead me,  
And Your right hand shall hold me.  
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me,"  
Even the night shall be light about me;  
12 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,  
But the night shines as the day;  
The darkness and the light are both alike to You.

Good news! There is no place where God is not able to watch us and protect us (two-edged sword? God sees whatever we're "up to"!!)

**Psalms 23:1-6 (NKJV)**

**1 The Lord is my shepherd; (a Good Shepherd ... not absentee!)  
I shall not want.**

2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;  
**He leads me beside the still waters. (He LEADS ... there's contact with us)**

3 He restores my soul;  
**He leads me in the paths of righteousness**

For His name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil;

For **You are with me;**  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table (***a feast***) before me in the presence of my enemies;  
You anoint my head with oil;  
My cup runs over.

**6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
All the days of my life;  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
Forever.**

When we're in trouble ... He's with us.

**Psalms 27:1-6 (NKJV)**

**1 The Lord is my light and my salvation;**

***Whom shall I fear?*** (Why should we fear?)

***The Lord is the strength of my life;***

***Of whom shall I be afraid?*** (We are supposed to be walking the same path)

2 When the wicked came against me

To eat up my flesh,

My enemies and foes,

They stumbled and fell.

3 Though an army may encamp against me,

My heart shall not fear;

Though war may rise against me,

In this I will be confident.

4 ***One thing I have desired of the Lord,***

***That will I seek:***

***That I may dwell in the house of the Lord***

***All the days of my life,***

***To behold the beauty of the Lord,***

***And to inquire in His temple.***

5 For ***in the time of trouble***

***He shall hide me in His pavilion;***

***In the secret place of His tabernacle***

***He shall hide me;***

***He shall set me high upon a rock.***

6 And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me;

***Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle;***

***I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord.***

Why should we fear? God will hide (protect) us.

We may treat the Psalms as just poetry ... songs ... mostly ... nice religious platitudes? But we shouldn't! They are part of God's inspired Word. Actually ... Psalms is the most quoted book in the New Testament. It's the book that Jesus quoted from the most (perhaps that was His favourite?)

Most people find the Psalms encouraging. No doubt partly why they were inspired.

**Hebrews 13:5-6 (NKJV)**

5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For **He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."**

6 So **we may boldly say:**

**"The Lord is my helper;  
I will not fear.  
What can man do to me?"**

"We may boldly say" ... remember Psalm 91:2 ... "I will **say of the Lord**".

The literal Greek of verse 5: "**I will not ... I will not ... I will not let you down. I will not ... I will not ... let you go**".

But it does take a spiritual mind ... rather than a carnal ... worldly mind. Our mind needs to be renewed ... which means spending TIME "IN GOD'S WORD".

Many people in trouble ... turn to alcohol ... drugs ... TV distractions ... dwell on negative outcomes ... becoming anxious and worried.

A spiritually renewed mind does what David did ... encouraged himself in the Lord.

### **Psalms 3:1-6 (NKJV)**

**1 Lord, how they have increased who trouble me!**

**Many are they who rise up against me.**

**2 Many are they who say of me,  
"There is no help for him in God."**

Selah

**3 But You, O Lord, are a shield for me,  
My glory and the One who lifts up my head.**

**4 I cried to the Lord with my voice,  
And He heard me from His holy hill.**

Selah

**5 I lay down and slept; (peacefully)  
I awoke, for the Lord sustained me.**

**6 I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people  
Who have set themselves against me all around.**

Psalms are a part of God's word ... designed to encourage us ... but not if we ignore them.

God's word also shows us how others have faced difficult circumstances.

### **Daniel 3:13-30 (NKJV)**

13 Then **Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.** So they brought these men before the king.

14 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "**Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?**"

15 Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But **if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?**"

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

17 If that is the case, **our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king.**

18 **But if not, (IF YOU DON'T THROW US IN) let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.**"

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.

20 And he commanded certain mighty men of valour who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

21 **Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.**

22 Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counsellors, **“Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?”**

They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.”

25 **“Look!” he answered, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like a Son of God.”**

26 **Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here.” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire.**

27 And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king’s counsellors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

28 **Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!**

29 Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this.”

30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon.

These three young men were living right (as “believers”) ...yet they were facing death. Would they compromise? Would we?

They seem to comprehend that they were not alone. There was a supernatural companion with them... Jesus or an angel. The three men were not “extra special” compared to us — WE’RE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF THE MOST HIGH. Quite encouraging!

### **Daniel 6:10-23 (NKJV)**

10 Now when **Daniel** knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And **in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.**

11 **Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.**

12 And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: "Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter."

13 So they answered and said before the king, **"That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."**

14 And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

15 Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed."

16 **So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you."**

17 Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.

18 Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him.

19 Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions.

20 **And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"**

21 **Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever!**

22 **My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you."**

23 Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. **So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God.**



Again ... Daniel was in a pickle for obeying God. Daniel was in the lions' den. But he had an invisible (?) companion ... supernatural help.

The situation could have looked hopeless. But ... Daniel trusted God.

We know that God is no respecter of persons ... so what if we feel like we're in a lion's den? ENCOURAGE OURSELVES WITH STORIES LIKE THIS.

### **2 Timothy 4:9-18 (NKJV)**

9 Be diligent to come to me quickly;

10 for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.

11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.

12 And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.

13 Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments.

14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works.

15 You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.

16 At my first defence no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.

17 But ***the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.***

18 ***And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.*** To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

Jesus stood with Paul. He strengthened him (even Paul didn't have sufficient strength). He delivered him.

Paul understood that he was never really "alone".

Sometimes we can see troubles coming ... sometimes we're in them before we know ... or we've just got a protracted period when the wind is in our face.

But ... God sees ahead ... always. And scripture shows **He'll be faithful to stand by us ... to give us help.**

Scripture also shows that not only is God faithful ... but He is actually also our friend.

**Proverbs 18:24 (NKJV)**

24 **A man who has friends must himself be friendly,**

**But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.**

A true friend loves us despite who we are! Recognises our weaknesses ... but willing and keen to help. We may not always have such friends in the flesh ... but all of us have such a friend in Jesus.

There is a very well-known hymn: “What a friend we have in Jesus”.

Depending on how it’s sung ... it can be a bit overly sentimental ... but the lyrics are fairly encouraging ... and based on Bible truth.

Final Stanza:

“Can we find a friend so faithful  
Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness  
Take it to the Lord in prayer”.

**John 15:12-15 (NKJV)**

12 **This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.**

13 **Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.**

14 **You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.**

15 **No longer do I call you servants,** for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but **I have called you friends,** for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

Servant first — then “upgrade” to friend.

But you and I can see ourselves as Jesus’ friends. And Jesus is a faithful friend ... who loves us and will be with us ... even knowing our frailties (we’re an “open book” to Jesus).

**Hebrews 4:14-16 (NKJV)**

14 **Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.**

15 **For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.**

16 **Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

Jesus sees ... and “sympathises” ... He’s been on earth and seen it all!

We can COME BOLDY ... CONFIDENTLY ... to the place of grace ... for help. Jesus is our friend and brother. We shouldn’t see Him as remote and far off.

The world may have to turn to drugs ... alcohol ... gambling ... TV ... to cope with problems and try to “lift themselves” up ... where else can they turn? But a believer has a better option. To encourage or strengthen themselves in the Lord.

Moses’ advice at the end of his eventful life was ... “Don’t fear ... God is with you!”

#### **Deuteronomy 31:1, 6-8 (NKJV)**

1 **Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel.**

6 **Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”**

7 Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “**Be strong and of good courage**, for you must go with this people to the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it.

8 **And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.”**

Because we are so close to this world ... it’s in our faces 24/7 ... so many distractions ... plus God is invisible ... it’s difficult for most of us to remember our God ... and be fully aware of His presence ... that God is with us. That Jesus sees us as His friends ... we can GO BOLDLY FOR HELP!

Psalms and other scriptures can help. If they’re “real” to us.

#### **Psalms 46:1-3 (NKJV)**

1 ***God is our refuge and strength,  
A very present help in trouble.***

2 ***Therefore we will not fear,***

Even though the earth be removed,

And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

3 Though its waters roar and be troubled,

Though the mountains shake with its swelling.

Selah

Who is our refuge? God! He is a very present help in trouble!

***Psalms 46:7-11 (NKJV)***

7 ***The Lord of hosts is with us;***

***The God of Jacob is our refuge.***

Selah

8 Come, behold the works of the Lord,

Who has made desolations in the earth.

9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;

He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two;

He burns the chariot in the fire.

10 Be still, and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth!

11 ***The Lord of hosts is with us;***

***The God of Jacob is our refuge.***

Selah

The challenge for most of us is that God rarely seems “real” to us? We’re so plugged into the world ... our time (TV?) ... finances ... interests ... hobbies etc.

How much quality time do we invest in familiarising ourselves with God ... what He’s done ... what He says He will do? It’s all in the Book!

Our choice. We can bemoan the fact that God sometimes seems very “far away” or ... we can get busy and get into the Word ... and strive to come to better know the God who is our refuge and our strength ... and that’s one good way **to encourage ourselves in the Lord!!**