

David: A Man After God's Own Heart, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: Strengthening Himself in the Lord: Crisis at Ziklag

1 Samuel 30:1–8

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This brief passage captures one of the darkest moments of David's life and one of the most instructive. Historically, David has been living among the Philistines to escape Saul, and while he and his men are away, the Amalekites raid and burn Ziklag, carrying off all their families. David faces total loss compounded by the threat of mutiny, as his grief-stricken men speak of stoning him. The hinge of the passage is verse 6: "But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God." He then inquires of God and, with God's direction, recovers everything. The doctrinal and spiritual stakes are where God's people find strength when every human support fails, the right ordering of crisis response (strength from God, then direction from God, then action), the way grief turns to blame, and the cultivation of a relationship with God from which strength can be drawn, supremely in Christ.

The teacher should help the class feel the weight of David's situation so that verse 6 lands with full force. This is not strength found in a manageable difficulty but in a total collapse with no human comfort available. The phrase "strengthened himself in the LORD" deserves careful attention, because it is active. David did something. He deliberately turned his soul to God and laid hold of God as his strength when there was nothing and no one else. This is a learnable practice, not a personality trait, and it is the difference between despair and recovery.

Aim at formation. Most students will face, or have faced, some version of Ziklag. The lesson equips them to turn to God when human supports fail, to seek God before springing into action, to bring grief upward rather than outward into blame, and, crucially, to cultivate now the relationship with God they will need to draw on later. Then lift their eyes to Christ, who is Himself our strength and apart from whom we can do nothing. Press these home so the class leaves with a practice, not merely an admiration of David.

Question 1

Student Question:

In the lowest moment of his life, with his family gone and his own men talking of stoning him, "David strengthened himself in the LORD his God" (30:6). What does it mean to strengthen yourself in the Lord, and what does this teach us about where God's people are to find strength when every human source of comfort has failed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 6 is the heart of the lesson, and it rewards slow attention: “But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.” Note the contrast marked by “but.” Everything before this verse is loss, weeping, and the threat of death. The “but” turns the whole scene. In the midst of total collapse, David does something decisive with his soul.

The teacher should unpack what strengthening yourself in the Lord involves. It is active and deliberate, not a passive waiting for feelings to lift. It means turning the soul Godward: rehearsing who God is, recalling His promises and past faithfulness, pouring out the heart to Him, and laying hold of Him as one’s strength. The Psalms, many written by David himself, show this practice in motion, talking to one’s own soul and preaching God’s truth back to it.

Stress the situation in which David did this. He had no sympathetic friend, no family to comfort him, no good news. Every human source of strength was gone, and his own men were against him. This is precisely the point: when every other support is stripped away, God remains, and He is enough. David found in God alone what he could find nowhere else.

Apply it as the believer’s great resource. There will be days when no person can help us and nothing in our circumstances offers comfort. On those days the question is whether we have learned to strengthen ourselves in the Lord. The teacher should present this not as a vague encouragement but as a real, available practice for the hardest moments of life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Strengthening oneself in the Lord as an active, deliberate act
- Turning the soul Godward: rehearsing His character, promises, and faithfulness
- Preaching God’s truth back to our own souls (as in the Psalms)
- God as sufficient when every human support is gone
- Finding in God alone what we can find nowhere else

Discussion Prompts

- What does it actually mean to strengthen yourself in the Lord?
- How might the Psalms model this practice for us?
- Why is this so hard to do, and so essential, at our lowest moments?

Question 2

Student Question:

David could not lean on his family or his men; he had only God to turn to. Where have you been depending on people, circumstances, or your own resilience for the strength that ultimately only God can give? What would it look like for you to strengthen yourself in the Lord this week rather than in those things?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question asks where students have been drawing strength from sources that cannot finally bear the weight. The aim is honest examination of our true supports.

Help the class see that the things we lean on, people, circumstances, our own resilience, are gifts but not foundations. They can fail or be removed, as David's did at Ziklag. When we have made them our ultimate strength, their loss leaves us with nothing. God means to be the strength beneath all lesser supports.

Then call for a reordering. Strengthening ourselves in the Lord is built by practice before the crisis and chosen deliberately within it. Invite each student to name where they have leaned on a lesser source and one concrete way they will turn to God for strength this week, perhaps by a specific practice of prayer, Scripture, or remembering God's faithfulness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Examining the true sources we lean on for strength
- Good gifts (people, circumstances) as supports, not foundations
- The danger of making a lesser strength ultimate
- God as the strength beneath all lesser supports
- Building the practice of turning to God before and within crisis

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you been depending on people or circumstances for strength only God can give?
- What happens when those supports fail or are removed?
- What is one concrete way you could strengthen yourself in the Lord this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Before David acted, he "strengthened himself in the LORD," and only then did he inquire of the LORD, asking, "Shall I pursue?" (30:6, 8). What does the order of David's response, first finding strength in God, then seeking God's direction, teach us about how we ought to face a crisis?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question highlights the order of David's actions, which is itself instructive. First he strengthened himself in the LORD (v. 6); then he inquired of the LORD, "Shall I pursue?" (v. 8); only then did he act. Strength first, direction next, action last. This sequence is a model for facing any crisis.

The teacher should draw out why the order matters. A soul in panic or despair makes poor decisions. By first finding strength in God, David steadied himself enough to think and to seek

God's will rather than reacting from raw emotion. Many disastrous crisis decisions are made in the unsteady moment before the soul has been anchored in God.

Note that David inquired before acting even though the action seemed obvious. Of course he wanted his family back; of course pursuit made sense. Yet he asked God first. This reveals a habitual dependence that did not assume but sought God's direction even in an apparently clear case. The teacher can commend this as a mark of mature faith.

Apply it as a pattern for the class. In a crisis, the instinct is to act immediately. David teaches a better sequence: first steady your soul in God, then seek His direction, then act in dependence on Him. The teacher should help the class see this not as delay for its own sake but as the path to wise, faithful, God-directed action.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The order of crisis response: strength, then direction, then action
- Why a steadied soul makes wiser decisions
- Seeking God's direction even when the action seems obvious
- Habitual dependence that asks rather than assumes
- God-directed action as the fruit of God-given strength

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the order of David's response matter so much?
- What goes wrong when we act before our souls are anchored in God?
- Why did David inquire of God even when pursuit seemed obvious?

Question 4

Student Question:

When trouble hits, many of us react first and pray later, if at all. Think about how you typically respond in a crisis. What would change if, like David, you deliberately turned to God for strength and direction before springing into action or making decisions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question applies David's sequence to the student's own crisis habits. Most of us default to reacting first and praying later, if at all. The aim is to help students notice their pattern and consider a better one.

Encourage honest reflection on recent crises. Did they spring into action, fire off the angry message, make the fearful decision, before turning to God? Or did they freeze? Either way, the unsteady, unconsulted response usually makes things worse.

Then call for a practice. What would it look like, the next time trouble strikes, to pause and strengthen themselves in the Lord and seek His direction before acting? Invite each student to name their typical crisis reaction and one concrete way they will reorder it this week, even in small troubles, so the pattern is ready for large ones.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Examining our default crisis reactions
- The tendency to act first and pray later
- Reordering response: God first, then action
- Practicing the pattern in small troubles for the large ones
- Wise action as the fruit of seeking God

Discussion Prompts

- How do you typically respond in the first moments of a crisis?
- What might change if you sought God for strength and direction first?
- How could you practice this reordering even in small troubles this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

David's men, overwhelmed by grief, turned on their leader and looked for someone to blame (30:6). What does this reveal about the human heart under the weight of loss and pain, and why are grief and suffering so often turned outward into blame and bitterness rather than upward to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns to the behavior of David's men, which exposes something universal. Overwhelmed by grief, they looked for someone to blame and turned on their leader (v. 6). Pain, left to itself, so often flows outward into blame and bitterness rather than upward to God.

The teacher should help the class understand this human dynamic without condemning the men too quickly. They had just lost their families; their grief was real and crushing. Yet grief unmanaged becomes accusation. It seeks a target, and the nearest one will do. This is why suffering so often damages relationships, as wounded people wound others.

Explore the alternative the passage implies by contrast. David, who had lost just as much, did not turn on others or on God; he turned to God. The same grief that drove the men to blame drove David to his knees. The difference was not the size of the loss but the direction the pain was sent. Grief can be carried upward to God or hurled outward at others.

Apply it directly. The teacher should help the class see that what we do with pain matters enormously. Pain is not sin, but it pressures us toward blame, bitterness, and accusation. The discipline of bringing grief to God, as David did and as the Psalms so often do, keeps suffering from souring into bitterness and protects the people around us from becoming the targets of our hurt.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- How unmanaged grief flows outward into blame and bitterness
- Suffering as a pressure that wounds relationships
- The choice of direction: pain sent upward to God or outward at others
- David's contrast: the same loss driving him to God, not blame
- Bringing grief to God (as the Psalms do) to keep it from souring

Discussion Prompts

- What does the men's blame reveal about the human heart under loss?
- Why does grief so often turn outward into blame rather than upward to God?
- What is the difference between David's response and his men's?

Question 6

Student Question:

Pain has a way of looking for someone to blame, and we can wound others, or God, when we are hurting. When you are in pain, do you tend to lash out, assign blame, or grow bitter? How might you bring your grief upward to God instead of turning it outward onto the people around you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question applies the dynamic of grief and blame to the student. The aim is honest awareness of how each person handles their own pain, since most of us have a characteristic direction we send it.

Help the class recognize their patterns: some lash out and assign blame, some grow quietly bitter, some turn the accusation toward God Himself. None of these is the path of healing, and all of them damage either our relationships or our walk with God.

Then point toward the upward path. Bringing grief to God means actually telling Him the pain, the confusion, even the anger, as the Psalms model, rather than venting it on others or letting it harden into bitterness. Invite each student to name how they tend to handle pain and one way they will bring their grief upward to God this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest awareness of how we handle our own pain

- Common outlets: lashing out, bitterness, blaming God
- Why these paths damage relationships or faith
- Bringing grief to God honestly, as the Psalms do
- Protecting others from becoming targets of our hurt

Discussion Prompts

- When you are in pain, do you tend to lash out, grow bitter, or blame God?
- How does that pattern affect the people around you?
- How could you bring your grief upward to God this week instead?

Question 7

Student Question:

David did not let his distress paralyze him or drive him to reckless action; strengthened in God, he sought God's will and then acted in dependence on Him, and God granted full recovery (30:8, 18–19). What does this teach us about the relationship between trusting God and taking responsible action, and about how faith works itself out in a crisis?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question addresses the relationship between trusting God and acting responsibly. David neither collapsed in paralysis nor charged off in reckless, prayerless action. Strengthened in God and directed by God, he pursued the raiders and recovered everything (vv. 8, 18–19). Faith and action worked together.

The teacher should correct two common errors. One error treats trusting God as an excuse for passivity: I will just pray and wait and do nothing. The other treats action as a substitute for trust: I will fix this myself by frantic effort. David shows the biblical integration, depending on God and then acting in that dependence. He inquired, and then he rode hard after the enemy.

Stress that David's action flowed from his dependence rather than competing with it. He acted because God had directed and strengthened him, not in place of seeking God. This is how faith works itself out in a crisis: not as inactivity, and not as self-reliant scrambling, but as God-dependent, God-directed responsible action.

Apply it to the class. In a crisis, believers must both trust God and do the next right thing. The teacher should help the class see that trusting God does not cancel responsibility, and responsibility does not replace trust. The two belong together, as they did at Ziklag, where David's faith led to vigorous, obedient action and God granted full recovery.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The integration of trusting God and acting responsibly

- Against passivity that does nothing in God's name
- Against reckless, prayerless, self-reliant action
- Action flowing from dependence rather than competing with it
- God-directed responsible action as faith in motion

Discussion Prompts

- What two errors does David avoid in his response?
- How does trusting God relate to taking responsible action?
- Which error do you lean toward, doing nothing or doing everything yourself?

Question 8

Student Question:

It is easy to swing between two errors in a crisis: frantic, prayerless activity on one side, or passive paralysis that does nothing on the other. Which way do you tend to lean? How might David's example, strength from God leading to God-directed action, correct your particular tendency?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question helps students identify their own tendency between the two errors. Some default to anxious, frantic activity; others to paralysis and avoidance. Naming the tendency is the first step to correcting it.

Help the class see that each error has a deceptive comfort. Frantic activity feels productive and lets us avoid sitting with helplessness before God. Paralysis can masquerade as trust while really being fear or avoidance. David's example exposes both and offers the better way.

Then call for correction in the direction each student needs. The activist needs to slow down, strengthen themselves in God, and seek His direction before acting. The paralyzed need to let God's strength move them to obedient action. Invite each student to name their leaning and one concrete corrective step.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying our default: frantic activity or paralysis
- The deceptive comfort each error offers
- The activist's need to seek God before acting
- The paralyzed person's need to move in God's strength
- David's pattern as the corrective for both

Discussion Prompts

- In a crisis, do you lean toward frantic activity or toward paralysis?

- What deceptive comfort does your tendency offer you?
- What corrective step does David's example call you to take?

Question 9

Student Question:

David's ability to strengthen himself in the Lord did not appear out of nowhere; it was the fruit of years of knowing God in the wilderness, the harvest of a long-cultivated relationship. This points us to the deeper truth that our strength in the day of trouble is drawn from God Himself, supremely from Christ, who says, "apart from me you can do nothing," and through whom Paul could say, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (John 15:5; Philippians 4:13). How do we cultivate, before the crisis comes, the kind of relationship with God that we can draw strength from when it does, and how is Christ Himself our strength?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it asks where the strength to strengthen ourselves actually comes from. The teacher should make an important observation: David's ability to turn to God at Ziklag did not materialize in the moment. It was the fruit of years of knowing God in the wilderness, of crying out to Him in caves, of writing psalms in the dark. The reservoir he drew from in the crisis had been filled long before.

Draw the practical principle clearly. We cannot suddenly produce deep trust in God in the worst moment if we have not been cultivating that relationship in ordinary times. The time to build the habit of strengthening ourselves in the Lord is now, in seasons of relative calm, through prayer, Scripture, worship, and the daily practice of leaning on Him. Then, when Ziklag comes, there is a real and known God to turn to, not a stranger.

Now lift the class's eyes to Christ, who is Himself our strength. Jesus said, "apart from me you can do nothing," and Paul, who had faced many a Ziklag, testified, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (John 15:5; Philippians 4:13). The strength the believer draws on in trouble is finally the strength of Christ Himself, supplied through union with Him. We strengthen ourselves in the Lord by abiding in Christ, drawing on His life as a branch draws on the vine.

Be careful to keep this God-centered, not a technique. Strengthening ourselves in the Lord is not a self-help method but a turning to a Person we have come to know. The teacher should urge the class to cultivate that relationship now, through the ordinary means of grace, so that the strength of Christ is available and familiar when the hard day arrives. The depth of our resource in crisis is set by the depth of our communion with God in the everyday.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Crisis-strength as the fruit of a long-cultivated relationship with God
- Filling the reservoir in ordinary times for the day of trouble

- The ordinary means of grace: prayer, Scripture, worship, daily dependence
- Christ as our strength: apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5)
- Strength through union with Christ (Philippians 4:13)
- Strengthening in the Lord as turning to a known Person, not a technique

Discussion Prompts

- How do we cultivate, before the crisis, the relationship we will draw on in it?
- Why can we not suddenly produce deep trust in the worst moment if we have neglected God?
- What does it mean that Christ Himself is our strength?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across these eight verses, the smoke, the weeping, the threat, and the man who turned to God. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through David's response at Ziklag. What is the single truth about strengthening yourself in the Lord that you most need to carry into the next hard day you face?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the lesson and turns it toward response. The class has stood in the ashes of Ziklag, felt the threat and the grief, and watched David turn to God when there was nowhere else to turn. Now the aim is one specific, personal step.

Encourage concreteness. One student may need to begin cultivating the relationship now that they will draw on later; another to reorder their crisis response; another to bring grief upward instead of outward; another simply to learn the practice of strengthening themselves in the Lord. The value is in one real step.

Close by lifting the class's eyes to Christ, our strength in every Ziklag. We are not left to manufacture courage from within; we draw on the life of the One who has overcome. Send the class out having learned not merely to admire David's resilience but to know the God in whom David, and we, can be strong.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from the ashes to a specific step
- Naming one concrete way to strengthen ourselves in the Lord
- Christ as our strength in every crisis
- Cultivating the relationship now for the trouble later
- Letting one truth take hold this week

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this lesson is God pressing on you most directly?
- What is one specific way you will strengthen yourself in the Lord this week?
- How does knowing Christ as your strength change how you face the next hard day?