

David: A Man After God's Own Heart

Lesson 6: Strengthening Himself in the Lord: Crisis at Ziklag -- 1 Samuel 30:1–8

David and his men came over the last rise expecting to see home, and they saw smoke. Ziklag, the town that had finally felt like a place to belong after years on the run, was a smoldering ruin. While they had been away, raiders had swept in, burned the city to the ground, and carried off everyone they had left behind: their wives, their sons, their daughters, every person they loved. The mighty men, hardened warriors all, stood in the ashes of their homes and did the only thing left to do. They wept until they had no more strength to weep.

And then grief curdled into something darker. Someone had to be blamed, and David was the leader who had taken them away. The whisper spread through the broken men, and David, the text says quietly, was “greatly distressed,” for the people spoke of stoning him. Read that slowly. His own men, his loyal band, the ones who had followed him through the wilderness, were now talking about killing him with their own hands. He had lost his home, his family, and now the trust of the only people he had left. This was rock bottom. If there was ever a moment when a man would be justified in giving up, this was it.

What David did next is one of the most quietly heroic sentences in all of Scripture. “But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.” He did not have a sympathetic friend to lean on; the men were against him. He did not have his family to comfort him; they were gone. He did not have good news to cheer him; everything had gone wrong at once. He had only God, and he turned to God, and he found there the strength he could find nowhere else. Then, strengthened, he asked the LORD what to do, and only then did he act, pursuing the raiders and recovering everything that had been taken.

There is a kind of valley that the David and Goliath story does not prepare us for. Not the dramatic battle with the obvious villain, but the day when everything collapses at once and there is no one to lean on and the people you counted on have turned against you. Most of us will see a Ziklag. The marriage falls apart, the diagnosis comes, the job ends, the friend betrays, and it all seems to happen on the same gray afternoon. In that moment there is one thing that makes the difference between despair and recovery, and David shows us what it is. When you have nowhere else to turn, you can still turn to God, and you can strengthen yourself in Him.

Group Discussion: We all face seasons when trouble comes not one piece at a time but all at once, and the people we would normally lean on are unavailable or even against us. After reading how David responded at Ziklag, what do you think it actually means to “strengthen yourself in the LORD,” and why is that so much harder to do when we are at our lowest?

Personal Reflection: Think about your own lowest moment, the closest thing you have had to a Ziklag. When everything seemed to collapse at once, where did you turn for strength? Did you strengthen yourself in the Lord, or did you reach for something or someone else to numb the pain or carry you through?

Read 1 Samuel 30:1–8

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 46:1, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”; Isaiah 40:29–31, those who wait on the LORD renewing their strength; Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me”; 2 Corinthians 12:9–10, God’s power made perfect in weakness; Psalm 27, David’s confidence that the LORD is his light, salvation, and the stronghold of his life