

Encouragers Needed!

David was running for his life. He was hiding in every cave, crevice and woods he could find. King Saul wanted him dead. Saul's son, Jonathan was David's best friend and at one of David's lowest moments it must have seemed Jonathan was his only friend. The Bible records: "*And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God*" (I Samuel 23:16). "Strengthen" means to make stronger, to fortify, to encourage, to establish, to recover and to repair. We all need a friend like Jonathan and a worthy goal in life would be to be a friend like Jonathan to God's lonely people. The Bible promises, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*" (II Timothy 3:12). In reality, it is not if, but when we will need a friend or we shall need to be a friend like Jonathan. Jesus said in John 15:12 and 13, "*This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*" Since we have determined from Scripture this noble goal, let us examine our hearts and ask the Lord, how may we be a Jonathan and strengthen a brother or sister's hand in God?

1. See the struggle and partner with God.

I Samuel 23: 12 says, "*And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand.*" Not unlike David, the Bible says of us in the New Testament, "*As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter*" (Romans 8:36). As we observe that the godly shall suffer for Jesus' sake, we also need to realize that when we come to the relief of a brother or sister that we are partnering with God! Saul was seeking David every day and Paul tells us that we are killed all the day long, but we see in I Samuel 23:12 that God did not deliver David into Saul's hand. Although Romans 8:36 says we are to be like sheep for the slaughter every day, it says in the preceding verse, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*" (Romans 8:35). Then afterwards the Scripture promises, "*Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 8:37-39).

God is dedicated to taking care of His people in the direst circumstances. What an honor to be one of God's vessels of mercy to His hurting people. Jesus said in Matthew 25:34-40, "*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a*

stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Ezekiel wanted to experience what the captives felt. The Bible says, *"Then I came to them of the captivity at Telabib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days"* (Ezekiel 3:15). At first Job's friends sat where he sat, but when they arose, they began to try to explain from their human view why God had allowed the pain in Job's life. They did not see the greater purpose of God working through the circumstances. They did not see the challenge Satan had made to God in which he tried to shake the righteous Job off his foundation. Let us be like Ezekiel, who looks at the big picture; let us sit where they sat, then partner with God in helping the hurting overcome!

2. See the danger and be willing to take a risk.

In my imagination, I see Jonathan going far into the wilderness and finding the wood in which David was hiding. You might say David was not quite "out of the woods" yet, for he was still in a heap of trouble. Round about David were a faithful few. In David's experience, the faithful friends he had were usually a sordid bunch. The Bible says, *"And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men"* (I Samuel 22:2). Jonathan was not like the rest; he was a prince, the heir apparent of the throne of Israel. Humanly speaking, David was his competition, but Jonathan not only recognized God's choice in David as king, but also was willing to put his life on the line to assure that he became the king.

As I see Jonathan approaching in the darkness, I visualize one of David's troubled soldiers, raising his spear to throw at the approaching Jonathan. I can imagine that one of the men cries out, "Captain (David), there approaches a man; may I take him out?" Hiding just out of sight from Jonathan, David comes to the guard and peers into the darkness. I imagine David saying, "Wait, I recognize that gait, that walk; why that's...Jonathan! Jonathan, is that you?" "David!" the voice answers back, "I've found you!" Yes, *"...there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother"* (Proverbs 18:24).

A friend sees past his own risk and sees the hurting friend and steps out and steps up to be a comfort. We see that David is encouraged! "Encourage" literally means to place courage into. This was just what David needed. He was losing heart and Jonathan came to lift his heart. I wonder if David was reminiscing on this experience when he wrote, *"I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living"* (Psalm 27:13). It is great to have prayers answered, but our Christian service is magnified when we become part of God's answer: *"In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me"* (Psalm 86:7). Are you willing to take the risk and be God's answer to someone in trouble?

3. Just be there.

Upon finding David, Jonathan said, *“And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee...”* (I Samuel 23:17). Sadly, Jonathan did not live to see his goal, but his intention was to place David on the throne and be there with David to assure his reign. I love the wording of Jonathan, *“...I shall be next unto thee....”* He was saying so much more than that he will be there as his right-hand-man; he was saying, “David, I will be there...I will be there when you need me. I’ll get you what you need. I will be there to fight your enemies. I will laugh with your joy and cry with you when your heart breaks.” Jonathan was the precursor of Romans 12:15: *“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”*

In about an hour and a half, I shall be flying up to Oklahoma to be with one of our most faithful missionaries, Dr. Jerry McDonald. He has given his life to pull wayward boys up out of their darkness and place them into God’s marvelous light. He has Lou Gehrig’s disease and an advanced form of cancer. David Gibbs has asked preachers from around the country to come up for a banquet tonight. I have not been asked to speak. My sole purpose of being there is simply to be there. Many years ago, my preacher father gave me this advice: “Son, you will find yourself in the hospital one day with some church members who are suffering tremendously. You are going to think you have to say something or do something. No, you don’t have to say or do something. Just be there and pray for them. Years will go by and the greatest thing someone can say, is that he was there with me, he was there for me.” Dad was right. When people forget what eloquence you may use in the pulpit, or big days when the attendance was broken at church. They may forget those days, but they won’t forget who was there when they needed someone to just be there.

-Pastor Pope-