

ENCOURAGE YOURSELF

- A. Introduction: We live in a fallen world and many things come into our life that can shake our trust in God and potentially weaken our commitment to Him. So, for a number of months, we've been discussing how to remain unmoved by life's challenges. I Cor 15:58
1. As part of our discussion we're talking about the fact that when we encounter difficulties in life, it's not just the hardships themselves that challenge us.
 - a. The thoughts and emotions that are generated by the difficulties also challenge us, and they can sometimes be as overwhelming as the circumstance itself.
 - b. Therefore, to become and remain unmovable in the face of challenging circumstances, we must learn how to deal with the thoughts and emotions that come to us when trouble strikes.
 2. For the past several weeks we've been examining an automatic process that takes place in all of us when we see or hear something that stimulates our emotions.
 - a. When emotions are generated by circumstances, thoughts come to our mind regarding the situation. Then we start talking to ourselves (self-talk). As we talk, we can fuel the thoughts and feelings to the point where they drive us to ungodly actions (unbelief and or disobedience).
 - b. To keep from being moved from trust in and obedience to God by our emotions and thoughts, we must learn to exercise self-control in the way we talk to ourselves.
 - A. James 3:2-4 compares the tongue to a bit in a horse's mouth and the rudder on a ship. The point is that in the same way a tiny object can control and change the direction of a horse and a ship, so the tongue can change the course of a man.
 - B. If you can learn to talk to yourself about the way things really are according to God, and not just about what you see and how you feel in the moment, it will keep you from being dominated by your thoughts and emotions and possibly doing things you later regret.
 3. A critical part of learning to control your emotions and thoughts is learning how to encourage yourself, in the midst of life's challenges, through your self-talk. That is our topic in this lesson.
- B. I Sam 30:6--Israel's great king, David, is identified as someone who encouraged himself in a horrific situation. Keep in mind that David was and is a real person whose life and problems were as real to him as ours are to us. He faced real danger and experienced genuine emotions.
1. Before David took the throne (while he was on the run from the reigning King Saul who wished him dead), he went to live for a time among the Philistines with six hundred of his men and their families. At one point the Philistine king, Achish, gave David the town of Ziklag for himself and his men.
 - a. While David and his men were away, the Amalekites raided Ziklag, burned it to the ground and carried off everyone in town, including all the women and children. I Sam 30:1-3
 1. v4-6--When David and his men returned and saw what had happened, they wept until they could weep no more. David's men were so emotionally distraught that began to blame him and talked about killing their leader.
 2. These men were all feeling real emotions due to genuine losses. Then process of emotions, thoughts, and self-talk went to work in each of them. Their thoughts and self-talk are clearly revealed by what happened next.
 - A. In addition to their grief, David's men had thoughts and talk of blame: This is David's fault. If we hadn't been out with him we could have protected our family. Then their thoughts turned to revenge. Let's kill David.
 - B. This is what happens if the process of emotions, thoughts, and self-talk isn't controlled when our emotions are raging. Their thoughts got more outlandish and their behavior more damaging. In addition to being an unrighteous action, killing David would not have helped anything. It would have hurt them because, with God's direction and help, David recovered all their families.

- b. David would have experienced the same process of emotions, thoughts, and self-talk. But he took control of it by encouraging himself in the Lord (v6).
1. The Hebrew word translated encouraged comes from a root word meaning to fasten upon; hence, to seize, be strong, to strengthen, to be courageous; to overpower.
 2. Encouraged and strengthened himself in the Lord (Amp); relied on the Eternal his God and took courage (Moffatt); laid hold on the Lord his God (Berkeley); found refuge in (Knox); but with renewed trust in the Lord his God (NAB).
2. Although how David encouraged himself in this situation is not specifically stated in the passage in I Samuel 30, we have numerous other examples in the Bible of how he did it.
- a. Many of the psalms were written when David was facing formidable circumstances as he was relentlessly slandered and pursued by his enemies.
 - b. Over and over, we see that David encouraged himself by calling to memory, by speaking out, who God is, what He has done, is doing, and will do. And that renewed his faith, his trust in God, which encouraged and strengthened him and gave him hope.
 1. In Ps 56:3,4 David wrote: When I feel afraid, I choose to trust you. I will praise your word. Praise comes from a word that means to shine, to make a show; to boast. David harnessed his emotions, thoughts, and self-talk by boasting about God and His promises.
 2. In Ps 42 David expressed emotional anguish over being unable to return to Jerusalem due to his circumstances. But he took control of the process of emotions, thoughts, and self-talk by encouraging himself, by speaking to his soul, to his mind and emotions.
 - A. v5--Why art thou so full of heaviness (PBV); Why moanest thou within me (JPS); Why be downcast (Harrison); Why be discouraged and sad (Living Bible)?
 - B. Put your trust and expectation in God because He is my salvation. v5--His presence is salvation (Literal); Wait patiently upon God; for I shall yet give Him thanks; My present Salvation, and my God (Spurrell).
 - C. v6-9--My soul is cast down, I am deeply discouraged, but...(NLT); Therefore: I will remember, I will meditate upon your kindness to this lovely land (Living Bible).
 1. The Jordan River and the Hermonites -- the ridges of Mount Hermon -- were the two most striking physical features of Canaan.
 2. The hill Mizar means the little hill, possibly where he was when he wrote the psalm.
 - D. Although I feel sad I will remember, v8-- "Day by day the Lord also pours out his steadfast love upon me, and through the night I sing his songs and pray to God who gives me life (Living Bible).
 - E. v11--But O my soul, don't be discouraged. Don't be upset. Expect God to act! For I know I shall again have plenty of reason to praise him for all that he will do. He is my help! He is my God! (Living Bible)
3. The troubles of life draw out an emotional reaction from us. Then the thoughts begin to fly. With our self-talk we either fuel our emotions or strengthen our trust in God. And, we can make it harder for God to help us because we aren't in a position to hear His voice and follow His direction.
- a. In Gen 42 Jacob was told by his sons that they had to leave Simeon in Egypt and that to get him back and get more food they would have to take Benjamin to Egypt as well.
 1. Jacob's reaction came out of his emotions, thoughts, and self-talk: Everything is against me (v36). And, according to what Jacob could see, he was in a bad situation. However, behind the scenes, God was at work and Jacob was on the brink of a tremendous change in circumstances. Instead of remembering God's past help, discouraged himself by what he said.
 2. Although Jacob's reaction did not thwart the plan of God for his life, it did stop God's plan for Israel at the edge of the Promised Land. Their emotional reaction to what they saw and heard made it easy to talk themselves out of obeying God in their situation. Num 14:1-3
 - b. In David's case, because he got himself under control, he was able to compose himself and seek

the Lord for help. The Lord told him what to do David and his men recovered their families.

- C. If you don't get control of this process of emotions, thoughts, and self-talk you are much more vulnerable to the tactics of the devil. Remember, he goes about seeking men to destroy. I Pet 5:8
1. We've discussed this in some detail in previous lessons, but remember these points. Nowhere does the Bible tell us to beware of the power of the devil. For every Christian, he is a defeated foe. Jesus defeated the devil for us in His resurrection victory. Jesus' victory is our victory. Eph 1:22,23; etc.
 - a. However, we are repeatedly told to beware of the devil's mental strategies (Eph 6:11; II Cor 2:11; etc). Because he cannot make us do anything, he works to influence us through thoughts. His purpose is to steal the Word of God from us and thereby influence our behavior (Mark 4:15-17).
 - b. Attacking God's character is one of the devil's primary tactics as he attempts to undermine our trust and confidence in God. He has used this strategy since the beginning, when he implied to Eve that God deprived her and Adam of good by not permitting them to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Gen 3:1-6
 2. In this series, we've looked at a number of people who were moved by their emotions from a place of trust in God. Note the common denominator in each one.
 - a. All of them expressed doubt about God's care for them. Whether they realized it or not, wrapped up in those thoughts and emotions was an accusation against God that He was doing a poor job taking care of them..
 1. Deut 1:27; Num 14:1-3--When Israel heard the report about walled cities and giants in the land of Canaan, they were greatly afraid, cried all night long, and accused God of bringing them to this place to kill them.
 2. Mark 4:38--When the disciples encountered a horrific storm while crossing the Sea of Galilee, their first words to Jesus were: Don't you care that we are about to die?
 3. Luke 10:40--When Martha felt she was being mistreated by her sister and appealed to Jesus, her first words were: Don't you care?
 - b. These reactions are too similar to be mere coincidence. There's something in fallen human flesh that instinctively wants to blame someone or something when things don't go well for us. The devil is well aware of this tendency and takes advantage of it.
 1. Our flesh gets angry with God and the devil feeds this tendency. One of the reasons we must learn to control our thoughts and emotions is so that we don't fall prey to this trait in our flesh and the tactics of the devil. Anger at God is a faith destroyer.
 - A. If you believe God is responsible for your troubles either directly or indirectly how can you confidently turn to Him for help in your trouble? Heb 4:16; Ps 9:10
 - B. Anger at God also makes it easier to justify sin: After what He did or didn't do I deserve to do this.
 2. Anger at God arises when we believe He has not done things the way we think He should and that our difficulties are due to His mishandling of things.
 - c. We could do an entire lesson on the topic of anger at God. But for now, consider these thoughts.
 1. We get angry at God because we misunderstand the nature of life in a fallen world. Nobody has a problem free life in the world because it has been infested with a curse of sin, corruption, and death.
 2. We get angry at God because we misunderstand His purpose in the earth. His purpose is not to make this life the highlight of our existence. We are eternal beings and this life is only a tiny part of our existence. The greater and better part is ahead after this life.
 1. God's number main goal now is to gather people to Himself through faith in Christ so they can be transformed from sinners into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God.
 2. He uses the hardships of life in a fallen world to further this purpose. The ultimate stage for the reversals of life's pain, suffering, loss, and injustice is in the life to come, first in

the present Heaven and then on the new earth.

3. God is a just God. That means He has never been unfair in His handling of any circumstance or situation. We struggle with that thought because we don't understand that the sufferings and troubles of this life don't come from Him. They are part of life in fallen world where men make free-will choices that bring troubles to many people (going all the way back to Adam).
 3. We must make the decision that we'll never allow circumstances (ours or someone else's), emotions, thoughts, or self-talk to move us to accuse God of wrong doing. That is the quickest way to be moved from trust and faith in God.
 - a. Gen 39:9--We need to be like Joseph when he was falsely accused of rape by Potiphar's wife. How unfair is that! He could have gotten out of the situation by sleeping with the women. Yet his unmovable stance was: How can I do this wrong against God?
 - b. Dan 3:17,18--When Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego were threatened with being burned alive for refusing to bow to an idol they refused. They knew that whether they lived or died, it wasn't bigger than God. He would deliver them out of the fire or he would deliver them from death through resurrection of the dead (Dan 12:2). to deny God and bow down to an idol.
- D. Conclusion: We have repeatedly referred to Paul as an example of a man who was unmoved by life's hardships (Acts 20:22-24). He had to face the same process we face: emotions, thoughts, self-talk.
1. II Cor 6:10--In the context of the many trials he faced as he preached the gospel to the known world, Paul talked about being sorrowful, yet rejoicing. This can't be an emotional response because Paul said he rejoiced when he felt sorrowful.
 - a. Rejoicing comes from a word that means to be "cheer" ful. Cheer is a state of mind. When you cheer some you give hope and urge them to continue on. In other words, you encourage them. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, to encourage means to give courage, hope, or confidence.
 - b. When Paul felt sad (or angry or afraid), he encouraged himself with the reasons he had hope. He focused on God's goodness and help and fed his faith rather than his feelings. Rom 12:12
 2. We said last week that once of the reasons we talk to a trusted friend when we're struggling is so that they can encourage us. There's nothing wrong with that, but there comes a time when we must encourage ourselves against the onslaught of emotions, thoughts, and lies from the devil.
 - a. If you want to be unmovable, you must learn to get control of your emotions, thoughts, and self-talk by encouraging or strengthening yourself in the Lord.
 - b. Nothing can come against me that is bigger than God. God will get me through until He gets me out. The joys of the life ahead far outweigh the best this life has to offer. Therefore, it's worth it to stay faithful, to run my race and finish my course, no matter what I have to do.