

When the Encourager Needs Encouragement | Rebecca Barlow Jordan

There are times when the encourager needs encouragement. Occasionally, all of us experience times when depression or discouragement creeps in unannounced.

Is a writing deadline crushing you? Has new technology left you behind? Are you struggling to maintain your responsibilities at work or at home because of increased pressures? Is your energy level running on empty? What do you do when you're the leader, the teacher, the parent, the grandparent, the friend or the spouse—and you can't seem to find the motivation or energy to encourage those under your care? Where do you find encouragement for yourself?

Through the years, I've learned to find strength and encouragement in several ways. If you're the encourager, and you find yourself in need of encouragement, here are three simple ways that might help you, too:

1. Encourage Yourself in the Lord How do you do that? I'm not referring to self-talk, but to "God-speak." 1 Samuel 30 describes this secret practice that the Psalmist David obviously learned while he was just a shepherd boy, composing songs on his harp. David later encouraged King Saul with music, trying to soothe the king's depression.

David, the Encourager, Needed Encouragement

One day David returned home from a battle to find that another enemy, the Amalekites, had raided his town and kidnapped all the women and children, including his own loved ones. David and his men wept so much, they had no tears left. Grief can do strange things to people's hearts. David's men turned on him, blaming him for the tragedy.

Verse 6 describes what David did next: "And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Another translation says that David found strength in the Lord. It was obviously a practice David knew well.

Identifying with David's laments and struggles in the Psalms, I discovered this principle as a young mother. Following the birth of our first baby, I experienced a severe case of post-partum depression, brought on by sheer emotional and physical exhaustion. It only lasted 7 weeks, but to me it seemed like an eternity. I remember some days I felt like I was hanging by a thread. But in between the needs of a new baby and a husband in seminary, I grabbed moments alone with the Lord and read the Psalms repeatedly, clinging to those powerful words like a lifeline. I believe those moments of hearing God speak to me were the key that brought the healing and encouragement I needed.

2. Rest and Recharge. That's right. Get away if necessary, but allow your body to catch up physically. If you haven't had a physical check-up in a while, it wouldn't hurt to schedule one. When our bodies are run down, our emotions and even our spiritual focus may suffer. No one expects you to give beyond what you are able. Saying yes to too many activities or responsibilities can leave your body and spirit in dire need of recharging.

Both your productivity and relationships will suffer if you can't handle stress well. You may even need to delegate responsibilities to a family member or co-worker. Just like a car, you can't run on empty very long and get very far.

One year after major surgery I felt discouraged when my body took longer than I wanted to recover. But a friend gave me some praise tapes and encouraged me to rest without guilt and just "let God love me" for awhile. Each time I hear one of those tunes, I still remember what a healing balm that music brought to my body and soul.

3. Talk to a Trusted Friend or Loved One Most of us don't like to admit weakness. What will people think? Swallow your pride and expectations of yourself, and find a good friend who will listen objectively. We have this mistaken notion that people will think less of us as Christians if we can't handle every situation in our lives perfectly. But the Bible reminds us that in our weakness we are made strong. "Each time he said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.' So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me" (2 Corinthians 12:8-10, NLT).

John Donne's famous quote, "No man is an island," is true. Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor." That's why it's so important to be part of a body of people who love the Lord, ones who will pray for you, and help share your burden. Even the ones in leadership need accountability friends: non-judgmental servants who can listen objectively and offer encouragement.

If you're married, your own spouse can be an encourager for you. Too often, couples try to hide their flaws and weaknesses from each other, instead of admitting and working on them together. Learn how to build each other up, to listen without being defensive, and to offer gentle encouragement that leads to helpful solutions, without feeling the need to bring a permanent "fix."

Only God can bring the healing our minds, bodies, and spirits need. But He also uses people as His instruments to guide us in the right direction.

Whether you're struggling with work related stress, family challenges, physical problems, or other personal issues, you can't carry your own burdens for long without buckling under the weight. Give yourself a break. Soak yourself in God's Word and let Him "love" on you awhile. Take time to rest, recharge, and seek out the encouragement you need for yourself from someone you trust. You'll feel the difference—and others will, too.