

“Strengthening Ourselves in The Lord”

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Dr Evan Kane was Chief of Surgery at Kane Summit Hospital, in Pennsylvania, in the early 1900's. He is famous for multiple innovations, but none greater than his insistence that surgeons were too reliant on general anesthesia. He firmly believed that in certain instances local anesthesia was sufficient. This was a new concept and while it sounded great, finding a trial patient was another matter!

In 1921, after years of trying to persuade patients to use local anesthesia, he finally found a willing patient. Dr. Kane prepped the patient, administered the anesthesia and he successfully removed the patient's appendix. The patient's name...was Dr Evan Kane.

Nine years later he would again administer local anesthesia and remove his own hernia in a case that received worldwide attention.

Dr. Kane strengthened himself

The Bible talks a lot about the strength we can receive from others.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 reads, “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.”

In 1 Samuel 23:16, “And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God.”

It's not hard for us to understand the benefits of friendship or community. In fact, Scripture repeatedly challenges us to love one another, forgive one another, prefer one another...over 50 times we are encouraged to focus on others. It's been said that, “The primary job of the early church was one-anothering one another.”

That's why we put such a strong emphasis for all of our members and regular attenders to connect with a Life Group. We know that according to Genesis 1, we are made in God's image. GN 1:26 says, 'let us make man in our image' – in other words, God begins scripture with the theological idea of plurality in oneness. God, when rightly defined and understood, is community. Since we are made in His image, he created us with a “community gene”, an inborn, inescapable, intentional part of what it means to be human. It's how we are made...we can't help it. All of us have a need to:

- Know and be known
- Love and be loved
- Serve and be served
- Admonish and be admonished
- Celebrate and be celebrated

However, there are times when we are alone. Or at least we feel alone. And for some reason we don't get a text or we don't get a call...and we are just...alone. Alone with our thoughts and our fears.

Earlier I shared about the encouragement Jonathan brought David in a time of need. But just a few chapters later we find David in a stressful situation...and this time, Jonathan is nowhere to be found. David is all alone.

Let me set up the story:

23: 16 = *And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God.*"

27 = Because David is on the run and has no idea when God is going to fulfill His promise that one day he will become king of Israel, David aligns with the enemy: Achish, the king of the Philistines

29 = the Philistines are preparing to go out to battle and David is with them. The Philistine military leaders confront King Achish, letting him know they don't trust David. V4 "Send the man back that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle."

Look with me at 1 Sam 30:1-6

1 Samuel 30:6, *"And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God."*

Now, on one hand it's hard to relate to this moment in David's life...at least I hope so! But on the other hand, we can all relate to feeling alone. We know what it's like to feel isolated, alone, fearful...so how do we do what David did? In those moments, how do we strengthen ourselves in the Lord?

I wonder – just maybe – if David reminded himself of a poem he had written earlier in his life. I wonder if he began to recite the lines of that poem or hum the lyrics to that little song. We don't know specifically "how" he strengthened himself in the Lord...we just know that he did.

The little poem I'm thinking of is one that you know as Psalm 23

- V1 "The Lord": speaking of Yahweh/ I AM: almighty, unchanging, self-sustaining, self-existent
 - "IS" connotes EXISTENCE: if something IS, then it exists
 - it connotes PRESENT TIME FRAME: (not 'was' my shepherd or 'will be' my shepherd); not a future promise, but a present fact. His presence is instant, immediate and accessible every moment.
 - PS 27:1 *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?*
 - Ro 8:31: *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*
 - JN 10:11: *I am the good shepherd.* Jesus is my shepherd; I am his sheep, under his care
 - "MY": 28 personal pronouns in this poem – ¼ of the text

- V2 Green pastures and still waters remind us that our needs are met in Him. The Lord is my shepherd, so I am provided for.
 - In other words, our emotional, relational, material and spiritual needs can be met in Him
 - Green pastures are a picture of PROVISION – our needs are met
 - They are also a picture of PEACE – our minds are content. Contentment (Latin) CONTENTIO = to hold together. Contentment comes as we realize that He is all we need & He meets all our needs

- V3 He restores my soul
 - From SIN: Micah 7:19 *"He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."*
 - Psalm 40:2-3 *"He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God."*

- He also restores my soul from focusing on the everyday CONCERNS in my life. In other words, in Him I find restoration, regain my balance, His promises are life-giving
- And He also restores our souls from GRIEF: In John 16:20, Jesus said he would turn our sorrow, or grief, into joy. Some of you know this to be true. In the midst of your loss, God's presence and His peace has helped restore your soul.
- He leads me in paths of righteousness for His namesake
 - One of my favorite authors and Bible teachers is Robert Morgan, and in teaching this verse, he says that "RIGHT PATHS" are the decisions and directions He leads us to make or leads us to walk in. In other words, these paths are right for us...they enable us to fulfill His will
 - Dr. Morgan goes on to say that He also leads us on "RIGHTEOUS PATHS". Your loving, heavenly Father desires for us to have a daily relationship – a daily walk - that is pleasing to Him. And as we strengthen our daily walk, our behavior patterns, will correspond more and more with His nature.
 - Why does He do this? For His "Namesake" – not ours, but his. So that He will be glorified when others see how He is guiding us
- V4 The emphasis is on "THROUGH" – which indicates a temporary state, a transition; it reminds us that a brighter path is in front of us
 - "FEAR": Paul undergirds this truth in one of his brief letters to his mentee Timothy - 2 Tim 1:7 *"God hasn't given you a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind."*
 - "YOU" are with me.
 - This is an interesting transition because David moves from using the 3rd person tense, to 2nd person, making the remainder of this poem even more personal and intimate.
 - I believe that the truth of the presence of God in our lives was one of David's most loved anchor points because he wrote about it so frequently, for instance, in 46:1 he writes: *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."*
 - Similarly the author of the letter to the Hebrews writes in Heb 13:5-6 *"I will never leave you or forsake you, so we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"*
 - David mentions two features of a shepherd's crook or staff
 - "ROD": to drive away predators & enemies...providing protection
 - "STAFF": to snag or snatch me if I get too close to the edge; providing security
 - Whether the danger comes from outside myself (where a rod is needed) or due to my own foolishness (where a staff is needed), I have a shepherd who is watching carefully & guiding constantly
- V5 table: fairly level region – a plateau; again the key idea here is God's protection and provision for the flock
 - This verse speaks to what God does for us. How He gently cares for us.
 - The intended picture of "anointing our heads with oil" is one of setting us a part
 - When I think of how God provides, protects and sets us apart, I think of the powerful passage in Col 1:11-14
 - *"May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from*

the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

- V6 SURELY – no doubt about this; it's cant fail!
 - This reminds me of Romans 8:38-39
 - *"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from my love for you."*
 - WHAT A PROMISE!
 - Two sheepdogs called Goodness and Mercy
 - Goodness: God's protective & proactive care
 - Mercy: keeps us encouraged & from losing our way

We have no way of knowing exactly how David strengthened himself in the Lord. It could have been by remembering one of the many songs, that he had written...we don't know. But whatever came to mind, David strengthened himself, by reminding himself, of WHO God IS and WHAT God had DONE in his life. AW Tozer said that the most important thing you think about, is what you think about, when you think about God. And, somehow, despite the pain of losing his family and his possessions, despite the anger of being rejected by the men at his side, despite the questions about how God was ultimately going to fulfill His promises to David...David strengthened himself in the Lord.

As we begin a New Year, I hope this will be our ultimate objective. That when we face difficult circumstances (and we know we will), that because of what we have hidden in our heart, because we have "set our minds on things above, not earthly things", because we have determined not to "conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but have transformed our thought-life by renewing our mind", that in that moment of tension, loneliness or hurt, we will be able to strengthen ourselves in the Lord.

It can be as simple as praying something like this:

- Lord, I receive your LOVE
 - I believe you won't love me more today or more tomorrow if I'm perfect, so I just want to receive your love.
- Lord, I receive your OVERSIGHT
 - You are the shepherd of my soul & I believe nothing can get to me unless it has your permission on it. 1 COR 10:13 says, *"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to every other man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."*
- Lord, I receive your VICTORY
 - When I don't feel victorious, help me remember that my victory over death and my victory over sin can never be taken away – *"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* 1 COR 15:55-57
 - It feels good to feel like a winner!
- Lord, I receive your ENERGY
 - I know that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in my heart and only You can restore my soul. I believe I can do all thing through Christ who strengthens me because You will never leave me or forsake me.
 - 2 COR 4:16 says, *"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day."*

That is what strengthening ourselves in the Lord looks like: the LOVE of God. Meditating on, reminding ourselves of, renewing our mind about...the LOVE of God.

“Father, thank you for the promises and reminders in Your Word revolving around Your presence in our lives, Your mercy in our lives and Your love, oversight, victory and energy that You willingly share with your us. May we be found faithful in renewing our minds with Your truth so that we can reach the redemptive potential that You have planned for us.”

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.