

Title: 2021 – May God Give Us the Year of Encouragement

Text: 1 Samuel 23:16

Date: Jan 10, 2021 at FBCW

INTRO.

Those of you who know anything about my recent history in life and leadership will know that I don't do any annual, "New Years Resolutions."

- For me, they never stuck. They never worked long term.

I learned from author and speaker Jon Gordon back in 2012 about, "the power of a single word" → literally to give yourself one word for clarity, prayer, and zoom focus.

And by the discipline of focusing on this word – daily – God has a way of causing everything in your life to rise and improve.

And before you knock it...why not try it this year?

For example, it was in 2013 → when I selected the word "prayer" – that I really became a man of prayer. I'm not saying I pray as much as I should, but in 2013 God gave me the pattern of prayer that still guides me every day:

- PACE...P,P,P,P...
- Monday Ministry, Tuesday Times, Wednesday Witness, Thursday Troubled, Friday Friends and Family.

2014 – it was my first year in a new city and I focused on the word "relationship" – it was amazing how God gave me meaningful relationships all over town.

2015 – my word was healthy: I started the daily discipline as an adult of being conscious of fitness, exercise and nutrition.

One year I chose the word "silence" – and I asked God to help me learn to keep my mouth shut.

In 2018, I was focusing on the word "deeper" – I wanted depth in Christ, significance as a man spiritually...that was the year God brought me to FBC Woodstock.

Last year I had the word "unhurried" → and the Lord put you, and me, and the whole world in the middle of a pandemic.

You see my point? A word for focus, prayer, spiritual depth/growth → it works! God uses it!

This year, in 2021, I struggled for quite a while to settle on my word. It took me a while to get confirmation in my heart (it's never taken me so long).

I thought about the words: others and evangelism.

- I want to be a bold witness for Christ.
- So many people are disengaged from church right now.

I prayed about the word “revival.”

- I can’t recall a darker, more spiritually depressing time in our nation’s history since I have been alive.
- Many churches are struggling and sputtering...oh God...send revival.

I thought about the word “prioritize” – I’ll be 40 this year.

- What does God intend to do in the second half of my life?
- How can I even now prepare for it and get my priorities in line as a man, husband, dad, and servant leader?

Each of these words are very good and important – but I couldn’t get a peace about these words...and I kept on praying.

And after a while, God led me to the narrative of young King David in the Bible...specifically David’s life from 1 Samuel 16 to 1 Samuel 23.

Here is a brief biographical sketch of David’s story:

David began as unlikely king (1 Samuel 16).

- David was the son of Jesse.
- He was the youngest of eight sons...he was a lowly shepherd boy.

Everyone was looking at physical potential (sons 1-7).

But God was interested in looking at the interior; the heart (1 Sam 16:7).

Samuel Anoints David, and there is an unexpected transition in leadership (1 Sam 16:14).

God’s hand was on David...David was anointed by the holy priest, Samuel.

1 Sam 16:13, *The Spirit of God came powerfully upon David, from that day forward.*

After David was anointed...we see this transition.

- God’s hand of favor is removed from King Saul.
- God’s hand of blessing is placed upon the young leader, David.

1 Sam 16:14, *Now the Spirit of the Lord had left Saul, and an evil spirit sent from the Lord began to torment him.*

Saul’s servants looked for a skilled musician to come in and play the lyre (harp, guitar).

- Music soothed Saul and calmed his violent tendencies.

- David was a gifted harpist...so he was regularly brought in to perform.
- Saul loved David at first.
- Saul bestowed on David gifts/armor...but David was young, uncomfortable in the unfamiliar clothes, and unable to move.

David becomes famous as a brave warrior (1 Samuel 17).

- The wicked Philistines torment Israel every morning/evening for 40 days.
- Goliath of Gath is 9 ft. 9 in. tall – he issues the daily challenge for someone to rise and fight him.
- No Israelite has the courage to step up!
- David is in town visiting his brothers...and he hears Goliath's challenge.

1 Sam 17:45-46, David said to the Philistine: "You come against me with a sword, spear, and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD of Armies, the God of the ranks of Israel – you have defiled him. Today, the Lord will have you over to me. Today, I will strike you down."

David's national success continues to grow (1 Samuel 18) – but it was costly.

- Women came from all of the villages of Israel.
- "Saul has slain his 1,000s...but David has killed his 10,000s."

1 Sam 18:9, Saul became very jealous of David, from that day forward.

Two times when David was playing his harp...Saul threw his spear at him to kill him (God protected David, and Saul missed).

Saul promoted David to the front lines in battle, thinking he will die – but David became even more successful.

Saul said, "David, I will give you my daughter in marriage...but you must first kill 100 Philistines."

- David was reluctant and didn't feel worthy to join the royal family.
- But then David went out and killed 200 Philistines...100 more than necessary!

Saul: paranoid...insecure...jealous.

David: pure hearted...humble...man of integrity.

But now here is the story from 1 Samuel 19-23 → young David was humble, pure-hearted, obedient, seeking God, and serving others.

And even while doing this...he was forced to run for his life!

- David discovered that the obedient path isn't always the easiest path!

Saul was the powerful man in Israel – but through paranoia and rage – he turns on the young, vulnerable David.

1 Sam 19:1 → Saul ordered his son Jonathan to kill David (but Jonathan refused; he loved David).

1 Sam 19:11 → Saul sent agents to kill David at he and (wife) Michal's house in the middle of the night...but David narrowly escaped out a window.

1 Sam 20 → David was invited to eat at Saul's dinner table...but it was only an ambush.

1 Sam 21 → David's life is one of a fugitive! He was totally on the run.

- Flees to the priest of Nob...can barely get bread to stay alive.
- Flees to Gath and wicked King Achish...pretends insanity...drool...fingernails on gates.

1 Sam 22 → David is hiding in the desert of Adullam...living as a refuge in caves.

- He is a refuge in the wilderness.
- The only people who will befriend him are the poor and indebted.

1 Sam 22 → Saul goes to the priests of Nob – hears that they gave David bread.

- Saul kills 85 priests for helping David.
- Destroyed the whole village of Nob: men, women, children, livestock, oxen.

Question the narrator is posing: Things are going almost as horrible as any one human being could possibly imagine for David...can he possibly stay alive?

In 1 Samuel 23, we see David still trying to serve and be helpful. David hears that the village Keilah is under attack by the Philistines.

- David asks God what he should do?
- The Lord says – launch an attack against the Philistines and deliver Keilah.
- 1 Sam 23:5, *David rescued all the inhabitants of Keilah.*

But then Saul hears David is in Keilah...so he brings his army there to capture David.

In a riveting scene in 1 Sam 23:10, David gets alone to seek God, and discovers:

- Lord, is Saul going to try and kill me? (Yes, he is).
- Lord, will Keilah turn me over to Saul? (Yes, they will).

Wow! David and his 600 men, literally, are running for their lives → David and his men are in the Wilderness of Ziph in Horesh...Saul has come to kill him.

No wonder: David the giant slayer...the great king...the man after God's own heart...wrote:

Psalm 3:1-2, *LORD, how my foes increase! There are many who attack my life! Many say about me, "There is no help for him, even in God!"*

Psalm 12:1, *Help, LORD, for no faithful one remains; the loyal have disappeared from the human race.*

Psalm 13:1-2, *How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long will I store up these anxious concerns within me?*

Psalm 6:6-7, *I am weary from my groaning; with my tears I dampen my bed and drench my couch every night. My eyes are swollen from grief...they grow old because of all my enemies.*

Psalm 142:1, 6, *I cry aloud to the LORD; I plead aloud to the LORD for mercy. Listen to my cry, for I am very weak.*

But out of nowhere, in David's wilderness experience, Saul's son, Jonathan, appears, at just the right moment.

1 Sam 23:16, *Then Saul's son Jonathan came to David...and encouraged him in his faith in God.*

FACT. When David was at his lowest point, God sent Jonathan to encourage David's faith.

Encourage = (Chazak) = to fasten, to connect, to hitch, to add strength or strengthen.

- Jonathan connected with David, to help David connect with God.

Jonathan wanted to connect his heart to David...and through encouragement...that they would both connect their hearts to faith in God.

David knew what 2020 taught many of us – even on the pathway of obedience, life can throw you a curve ball.

- And what your heart needs in these low, painful moments:
- Is someone to show up...to join you...
- Not to judge you, question you, or try to fix you.

Just a loyal friend – that through their encouragement – they strengthen your faith in God!

Jeremy's Big Idea for 2021 – Many people I encounter seem low; may God help me to be a man of Christlike encouragement.

- May I connect with people...to connect them with Christ.
- May I join my heart to others...through encouragement...looking to God for strength!

I plan to encourage myself, daily, in the Lord (ILLUS: the preflight safety message on Delta flights – get your own oxygen mask before you attempt to help others).

Every day this year I plan to: personally read God's Word, to pray, and to sing to the Lord.

Daily reminder: I am saved...Christ is my hope...He knows where I am...Soon He is coming!

I pray God helps me encourage Carrie and my children.

- Carrie's health...Zeke will turn 13...Madie and Abe and their growing needs.
- "Because he's my husband...because he's my dad...I am encouraged to seek the Lord."

If you can be a good Christian at home, you can be one anywhere. If you are not a good Christian at home, you really aren't one anywhere.

I pray the Lord helps me encourage our church staff.

- Leading in the pandemic has been taxing.
- The mental and emotional stress on people is taking its toll.
- My work environment "encouraged" me in the Lord.

I want to be a pastor that encourages our congregation to put their faith in the Lord.

- I can't make you attend church (or participate online).
- But I will prayerfully encourage you to consider how much better your life, heart, marriage, and family will be by connecting with your church family.

I pray to encourage your generosity.

- I can't make you give...but I want to encourage you to give...
- Because when you give...you will learn that you cannot outgive God!

I pray to encourage you to consider serving, giving back of your talents/time.

- There's something God has for you. We are a "Body" and you are an important part!

I pray to encourage you to share your faith like never before.

- The world needs Jesus! He will save. People need to be saved. Are we telling/sharing?

Encouragement!

- Everyone you know is fighting some battle...so be kind!
- The devil, the world, and sin make things hard enough – let the church be encouraging!

2020 took something from us – but God has known all along what He was doing.

- David suffered early on...but it shaped him to become the greatest king in history.
 - Ark of the Covenant...founded Jerusalem...funded Temple...wrote Psalms.

Encouragement: what you are going through is preparing you for God's greater works.

- What you lost or messed up...if you'll bring that to Jesus –
- Jesus Christ can make it sweeter and better!

The world: takes, abuses, politicizes.

The devil: steals, kills, destroys.

But Christ – forgives...heals...loves...restores...makes all things new! (2 Cor 5:17).