

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 1 – The Birth of Samuel
1Samuel 1:1-2:11

“GOD WITH US” is more than just a title for our thru-the-Bible series. It is a lens through which we may experience the personal presence of “Immanuel” (God with us) through every section of the divine story. As you engage with this series, by reading the Bible, studying the notes, and listening to the messages, ask God to apply these sacred Scriptures to your personal story and your daily walk with Him. He *IS WITH YOU*, and wants you to experience Him more and more intimately, even as you read of His passions and actions with people in biblical times.

Review of Parts 1 and 2 of GOD WITH US:

In Part 1, the **Pentateuch** (Genesis – Deuteronomy) we saw how God chose Abraham and promised to make of his descendants a great nation that would bring blessings to the whole world (Genesis 12:1-3). Some 400 years later, the people of Israel were called forth from the womb of Egypt to be a “kingdom of priests” that would learn to walk in relationship with their God, Yahweh, and represent Him to the world (Exodus 19:5,6). Laws were given to Israel, through Moses, to set apart their behavior so as to provide a true witness to the character of Yahweh. As the Pentateuch concluded, Israel was poised to enter the land of Canaan, the very land promised by God to Abraham.

In Part 2, **Joshua**, **Judges** and **Ruth**, Israel took possession of the land granted to them by God. The land was divided among the 12 tribes of Israel and the nation began representing God to the world. Sadly, Israel conformed to the ways of the surrounding nations instead of faithfully representing Yahweh. Repeated cycles of sin, oppression, repentance and rest followed, with God raising up new “judges” or “deliverers” to rescue Israel from the sequence of foreign oppressors. The book of Judges ended with the phrase: “*Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*” The nation was reeling in anarchy and lawlessness. They were trying to navigate

their way without a true compass. The solution *should have been* a complete submission to Yahweh their KING; but that was not the path that Israel chose. Yet, there was a faithful remnant. The story of Ruth showed us people who *did* walk with God: Boaz, Naomi, and Ruth the Moabite woman. And we saw God's faithfulness to His promises: the son of Boaz and Ruth was in the line of Christ.

Introduction to Part 3, 1 and 2 Samuel:

Samuel is a key transitional character. The last of the judges of Israel, he was used by God to transition the nation into the period of the monarchy. God intended for Israel to be a "theocracy" (rule of God), with Yahweh serving as the one and only KING for the nation. Yet, the people clamored for a human king so that they could be "*like the other nations.*" The books of 1 and 2 Samuel record how Samuel anointed the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. The narrative follows the careers of both kings, with the major focus being on David, the "man after God's own heart."

Hannah's Struggle to have a Child: 1:1-8

The story opens with the struggle of a woman named Hannah, who was childless. Her struggle was intensified by the fact that her husband, Elkanah (a Levite priest) had taken a second wife in order to raise up offspring, and this other wife, Peninnah, was successful in bearing many children.

He had two wives: the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children (1:2).

Yearly, Elkanah would take his entire family to one of the annual religious festivals in Shiloh. He tried to soothe Hannah's pain by giving her double portions of food at the sacrificial meal.

"When the day came that Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters; but to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, but the Lord had closed her womb" (1:4,5).

The situation was made much worse by Peninnah's hostile disposition toward Hannah.

"Her rival, however, would provoke her bitterly to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. It happened year after year, as often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she would provoke her; so she wept and would not eat" (1:6,7).

For Hannah, the annual religious ‘celebration’ was a nightmare, as Peninnah took the opportunity to rub in the (false) implication of childlessness: *The Lord must be against you*. This caused Hannah great grief because she was not aware of any specific sin in her life that might be resulting in such divine discipline.

So often we make a false connection between suffering and the displeasure of God. Job’s three friends made this mistake, in the midst of his great suffering: accusing him of hidden sins. Yet, Job was chosen by God to go through his ordeal precisely because he was the most righteous person on earth, not the most sinful! Yes, there are times when our suffering is connected to the discipline of God in our lives; but there are other, more mysterious times, when our trials are part of a beautiful plan that God is weaving, not just for our own benefit, but also for the good of others. The barren woman Hannah would, in the end, bring forth one of the greatest leaders in all of Scripture, and God would bless her with many more children. Be careful not to jump to the conclusion that you (or someone else) are suffering because of God’s displeasure.

Elkanah acted in somewhat typical and misguided male fashion: he tried to ‘fix’ the problem instead of ‘entering into’ his wife’s hurting heart with attentiveness and empathy. In doing so, he uttered one of the most insensitive statements a man could make to a hurting, childless wife:

Then Elkanah her husband said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep and why do you not eat and why is your heart sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?” (1:8).

In our course, *Listening Well*, we learn how to listen with empathy and respect, instead of offering quick answers to those who are speaking with us. Elkanah broke nearly every rule of *Listening Well*: He questioned Hannah’s tears instead of affirming them; he showed that he did not empathize with her sorrow; he scolded her for not eating; he gave her pat answers and reasons she should be happy. Men . . . we need to learn to LISTEN and ENTER INTO our women’s hearts, instead of offering quick fixes and judgmental responses. If you want to learn how to better do that, sign up next time our *Listening Well* course is offered. It will revolutionize the way you have conversations, AND it will change the way people feel about opening up to you. If you’re not sure you need help in this area, try asking the females in your life if you are prone to be like Elkanah (and welcome constructive criticism).

Hannah's Prayer: 1:9-11

Hannah was mocked by her rival, and misunderstood by her husband; but she knew that GOD would SEE and HEAR her heart.

Then Hannah rose after eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She, greatly distressed, prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. She made a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head" (1:9-11).

Pouring out her heart to God, she made a vow: IF God would give her a son, then she would place him under a lifetime Nazirite vow to be a special servant of the Lord. (On the Nazirite vow, see p.241 of notes, and also Numbers 6). The fact that Hannah specifically prayed for a SON seems to indicate that she may have had a sense that this son would be used in some very special way during this particularly turbulent period of Israel's history.

There are many times in life when God is our only refuge. People may misunderstand us, or fail to adequately empathize with us; but God is our sympathetic High Priest who really 'gets us' (Hebrews 4:15,16). Hannah could have sought some form of temporary 'relief' for her pain. She could have become bitter and hardened toward God (and people). She could easily have become an angry, defeated woman. Instead, she fully surrendered her life and her pain to the GOD who was WITH HER . . . and she became part of His greater story for the world. When no one else listens or understands, pour out your heart to Him. He will hear your cries and answer according to His perfect will. "Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us" (Psalm 62:8).

Hannah defends herself to Eli the High Priest: 1:12-18

It was enough to be chided by her rival, and misunderstood by her husband; yet, the praying Hannah was also accused and rebuked by her spiritual leader for being a drunken woman!

Now it came about, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli was watching her mouth. As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice

was not heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. Then Eli said to her, “How long will you make yourself drunk? Put away your wine from you” (1:12-14).

Eli failed to pause and “check his assumptions” (a lesson in our Living Well course). He jumped to false conclusions, probably based on his regular experience of watching other women carousing with his wild sons at the Tabernacle (see 2:22,23). It was a minor miracle that Hannah did not respond with anger or hostility; rather, she spoke with humility and respect:

But Hannah replied, “No, my lord, I am a woman discouraged in spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord. Do not consider your maidservant as a worthless woman, for I have spoken until now out of my great anguish and sorrow.” Then Eli answered and said, “Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him.” She said, “Let your maidservant find favor in your sight.” So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad (1:15-18).

Eli did not apologize; but he did use his priestly office to bless her request and to ask God to grant her petition. Her hope in God restored, Hannah took food again and wiped away her tears.

The Birth and Early Life of Samuel: 1:19-28

God soon answered Hannah’s prayer, giving her a son. The name “Samuel” means “God hears,” or “asked of God.” How fitting a name for this child, given Hannah’s intense prayers to God.

It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, “Because I have asked him of the Lord” (1:20).

While Elkanah and the rest of the family continued to go to the yearly feast in Shiloh, Hannah remained at home nursing little Samuel for several years. In that day, children were typically weaned by age 3. Thus, it was at this very young age that Hannah took her little boy back to Shiloh, to present him back to the Lord (about 4 years after her previous, prayerful visit).

Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull and one ephah of flour and a jug of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord in Shiloh, although the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and brought

the boy to Eli. She said, “Oh, my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the Lord. For this boy I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition which I asked of Him. So I have also dedicated him to the Lord; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the Lord.” And he worshiped the Lord there” (1:24-28).

Hannah “dedicated” her child to the Lord. In a similar way, here at Oak Pointe Church we regularly conduct infant “dedication” ceremonies. This is a special occasion where parents do three things: 1) Acknowledge that the child is a gift from the Lord (Psalm 127:3-5). 2) Commit to raise the child in the ways of God (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). 3) Dedicate the child to the Lord, to be used for His purposes in the child’s lifetime (Acts 13:36). While Hannah’s use of a Nazirite vow was unique, her example of offering her child back to God is something to be emulated. If you would like to dedicate your child to the Lord, in this fashion, get in touch with your Community Pastor to make arrangements. We believe it is important to include this kind of ceremony in the spiritual life of your family.

It is important to note the *faith* of both Elkanah and Hannah in presenting their son to Eli at the Tabernacle (where he would stay and serve for the rest of his life). As we will see, the spiritual and moral environment within Eli’s own family was disastrous. Yet, these parents were able to place their hope *in God* for the protection and wellbeing of their precious son. They fulfilled their vow in spite of circumstances that might have caused them to back down. They offered sacrifices prescribed for those who were fulfilling special vows to the Lord (see Numbers 15:9,10).

Hannah’s Song of Praise to God: 2:1-11

Hannah’s song to God is a model of praise and thanksgiving. Many of her themes are reflected in later personal songs of praise, such as the one Mary the mother of Jesus uttered upon hearing that she would bear a special child from God (Luke 1:46-55). Hannah’s song is quoted in full here, from the New Living Translation, with brief comments inserted between the stanzas:

“My heart rejoices in the Lord! The Lord has made me strong. Now I have an answer for my enemies; I rejoice because you rescued me.

GOD was the strength of her heart. She had been rescued not just from barrenness; but also from the bitter taunts of Peninnah, her rival.

No one is holy like the Lord! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.

She ascribed worth to God for being uniquely HOLY and SOLID. All around Hannah there was un-holiness and uncertainty; but God was her firm refuge.

“Stop acting so proud and haughty! Don’t speak with such arrogance! For the Lord is a God who knows what you have done; he will judge your actions.

She saw the futility in people’s boasting and posing. Her God knew all the secrets and carefully judged the hearts and actions of each one.

The bow of the mighty is now broken, and those who stumbled are now strong. Those who were well fed are now starving, and those who were starving are now full. The childless woman now has seven children, and the woman with many children wastes away. The Lord gives both death and life; he brings some down to the grave but raises others up. The Lord makes some poor and others rich; he brings some down and lifts others up. He lifts the poor from the dust and the needy from the garbage dump. He sets them among princes, placing them in seats of honor.

Hannah praised the Lord for being a God of surprising and sudden REVERSALS. She observed that not just in her own situation, but in all of life, it is the LORD who chooses when to bring one DOWN, and when to lift another UP. No one is ‘locked into’ a position of lowliness and futility. God has the power and sovereign authority to reverse the tables at any moment that He so chooses.

For all the earth is the Lord’s, and he has set the world in order. He will protect his faithful ones, but the wicked will disappear in darkness.

He is, after all, the Creator and Sustainer of the whole earth! It is not some monumental task for the LORD OF ALL to look after my one, solitary life! Perspective on the majesty of God changes how we see the mountains and valleys we are facing.

No one will succeed by strength alone. Those who fight against the Lord will be shattered. He thunders against them from heaven; the Lord judges throughout the earth. He gives power to his king; he increases the strength of his anointed one.”

Hannah knew how foolish it was to take pride in human strength or resources, and to resist or ignore the Lord. He gives power to the king who yields to Him . . . yet He thunders from heaven against all those who proudly resist Him.

Additional Thoughts on Hannah, the woman of God . . .

Hannah’s story started with little hope. She was barren, misunderstood, mocked and accused. She could have become a

bitter woman (recall how Naomi renamed herself ‘Mara’ – bitterness – Ruth 1:20). She could have tried to find some form of ‘relief’ – some way of escaping or numbing the pain of her life. Instead, Hannah turned to God as her true companion and her only source of comfort and hope. As a result of her deep and persevering dependence upon God, she ‘released’ the greater God-story that He had waiting for her life, and for the life of Israel as a nation. Hannah the hopeless became Hannah the heroine, as God heard her cries and gave her a son, Samuel – “Heard of God.” Samuel would rise to bring stability and hope to an entire nation reeling in chaos. He was the last judge, a faithful priest, and the founder of the school of prophets. He was a steady, righteous, praying leader at a time when Israel desperately needed one like him at the helm. To put it simply: God used a simple, suffering woman named Hannah to change the course of history.

God uses simple men and women of faith and dependence to bring His plan into our lives and our world. Hannah was a woman who maintained her faith in God in the midst of many obstacles and heartaches. It was her pain-filled prayer that was used by God to bring Samuel into the world. Then, Samuel became the man through whom God brought stability and change into the nation of Israel. He was a faithful, praying leader, who trusted and obeyed God, instead of bowing to the pressures of the culture. How about you? Are you allowing God to use YOU to advance His purposes in your own life, and the lives of those around you? How will the world be impacted because of your time here on earth? YOU can make a difference, IF you let God be the KING in your heart and your life. When HE is on the throne in a human heart, amazing reversals take place, and things happen that we never could have dreamed of. He does “above and beyond all that we could ask or think, according to His power that works within us” (Eph.3:20).

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 2 - Eli's fall and the Ark Captured
1Samuel 2:12-4:22

Introduction

As the book of 1Samuel opens, Eli was the current high priest in Israel. This would be the equivalent of a pope or an archbishop. Going back to the days of Aaron, the brother of Moses, we recall that the high priest was *the* spiritual leader in Israel, responsible for maintaining the purity of the worship life in the nation. The nation's well-being: their security, strength, prosperity and privilege to live in the Promised Land God had given them, was tied directly to the closeness of their relationship with Yahweh, their God. This meant Levite priests needed to model a love and devotion for God, and carefully obey and enforce the covenant requirements given to them by God, through Moses, at Mt. Sinai. It was *more* imperative for the high priest and his sons (heirs to the role), to maintain the purity of Israel's spiritual and worship life at the sacred Tabernacle by modeling, teaching and requiring the people to do the same. Eli led Israel as high priest for 40 years (4:18); but failed to honor God in his role. Even Hannah had experienced an insensitive and rude reaction from Eli when praying (1:13, 14). Sadly, this high priest brought judgment, not blessing, to his own household and to the nation as a whole.

The Sin of Eli's sons: 2:12-17

The root of Eli's failure as a high priest was not so much in his *own* wickedness; rather, in his negligence. As a father, *he reprov*ed but failed to *restrain* his wicked sons Hophni and Phinehas. They showed contempt for the worship rituals at the sacred Tabernacle in Shiloh, as they recklessly violated the prescribed routines for the purpose of their own selfish gain.

“Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the Lord and the custom of the priests with the people . . . The sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for the men despised the offering of the Lord” (2:12 and 17).

The book of Leviticus was essentially a manual giving very specific instructions as to how each kind of offering was to be made by the priests, in order to worship and honor God. Hophni and Phinehas trashed the God-given instruction book and made up their own, in order to suit their personal preferences and satisfy their own sinful appetites. This was *completely* dishonoring to the Lord, for whom these sacrifices were intended. The first and last lines really get at the heart of the matter: *They did not KNOW the Lord (v.12) . . . they despised (treated with contempt) the offering of the Lord (v.17)*. Hophni and Phinehas remind us of the 2 self-willed sons of Aaron- Nadab and Abihu, who recklessly offered up strange fire before the Lord in the sight of all Israel and were destroyed by an outburst of divine wrath (see Leviticus 10). This pattern of having ungodly priests would continue throughout the Old Testament. About 500 years after Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah of Eli's day: "*The priests did not ask, 'Where is the Lord?' Those who deal with the law did not know Me*" (Jeremiah 2:8).

Additional blessings for Hannah: 2:18-21

The narrative continues in contrast with the young boy Samuel. It emphasizes the continuing close relationship Samuel had with his devoted mother Hannah, and the blessing of the Lord upon Hannah in giving her 5 more children!

***"Now Samuel was ministering before the Lord, as a boy wearing a linen ephod. And his mother would make him a little robe and bring it to him from year to year when she would come up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, "May the Lord give you children from this woman in place of the one she dedicated to the Lord." And they went to their own home. The Lord visited Hannah; and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew before the Lord"* (2:18-21).**

Hannah remained active in Samuel's life no doubt through prayer, concerned for his wellbeing and personal development in light of the unhealthy environment. She also blessed him each year with a larger robe when she visited him at the annual feast. It was Eli the priest who initiated a blessing over Hannah, that God would grant her more children in place of her son she had dedicated fully to the Lord. In turn, *the Lord delighted* in giving back to Hannah 3 sons and 2 daughters!

Hannah fulfilled her promise to give Samuel back to the Lord as a priest and a hopeful future leader in Israel (with no expectations that God would give her more children in his place). Perhaps she was inspired by Jochabed the mother of Moses, who also weaned her son and then took him to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter in Egypt (Ex 2:9,10). Both women invested into their sons while they had the time with them. Then they had to ENTRUST their sons to a faithful God without knowing their future outcomes. Mothers (and fathers) have limited time to invest in the formative development of their children. This is a solemn responsibility. The time is SHORT so use it wisely!

Eli's failed attempts to discipline his sons: 2:22-26

As Israel's high priest, Eli should have removed his disobedient sons from their duties at the Tabernacle. Instead, he feebly reproved them; yet allowed them to continue in their roles. These sons had the practice of hearing and then dismissing the voice of their father without guilt.

“Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. He said to them, “Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people? No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the Lord's people circulating. If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?” But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the Lord desired to put them to death” (2:22-25).

Correction begins with gentle verbal words. “A wise son heeds his father's instructions” (Prov. 13:1). Sometimes repeated verbal corrections go unheeded. “A fool despises his father's instructions” (Prov.15:5). Then, with continuing ignoring, there must be increasing consequences so the person feels the weight of their actions: loss of opportunity, restriction of privileges, lowering of responsibility, limiting of resources, loss of pay, etc. Finally, if the person still refuses to ‘get the message,’ there comes an end to the correction process: “A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy” (Prov.29:1). Eli failed to follow through in this process of disciplining his sons. If you are the one in authority, follow God's wisdom for dealing with the continued consequences of unheeded correction. If you are the one being corrected, take to heart what is being said FOR YOUR GOOD. God uses others to show you your blind spots and areas of needed change and development.

In stark contrast to Hophni and Phinehas, a short note is given about Samuel's continued growth. *"Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the Lord and with men"* (2:26). This EXACT summary was given of JESUS during his silent years (Luke 2:52).

"Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the Lord and with men" (2:26).

Judgment pronounced on Eli's house: 2:27-36

The high priesthood was a hereditary office, passing from father to son, remaining in the same lineage. Here, God sends an unnamed prophet to announce the removal of the high priestly office from Eli's family line and the transfer over to another family line.

Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Did I not indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in bondage to Pharaoh's house? Did I not choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me; and did I not give to the house of your father all the fire offerings of the sons of Israel? Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?'" (2:27-29).

(How Eli's high-priestly dynasty came to an end: 2:30-33)

The prophet forecasted the end of Hophni and Phinehas, but more specifically, the complete end of Eli's priestly lineage (2:30-33).

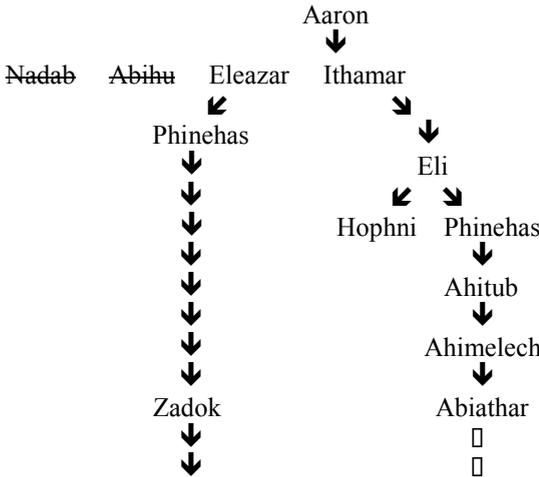
"This will be the sign to you which will come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them will die. But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always" (2:34,35).

God predicted through the prophet that the high priestly office would be given to *"a faithful priest who would obey God fully"* and, in turn, be given *"an enduring house lineage"*. The immediate reference might seem be to Samuel, who did serve as a faithful Levite priest after Eli. But Samuel was actually not in the official 'high priest' lineage of Aaron, nor did his sons continue as priests after him. Who, then, is this future "faithful priest?"

If we go back to the original high priest, Aaron, we find that he had 4 sons. The first 2, Nadab and Abihu, died when they offered strange fire before the Lord. The younger 2 sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, went on to serve as high priests, *and they both* provided family lines for future high priests. Eli was a descendant of Ithamar, as the chart below shows. In Eli's day, the high priesthood was exclusively from the line of Ithamar.

After the judgment upon Eli's house, however, *the line of high priests gradually shifted over to the line of Aaron's other son, Eleazar*. During the time of king David, there were actually 2 high priests serving concurrently, one from the line of Eleazer and the other from the line of Ithamar. But it was Solomon, David's son, who finally dismissed Eli's descendant, Abiathar, as high priest. After that time, the line of high priests followed Eleazer's descendants and specifically Zadok. Thus the importance of Eli's line vanished forever as had been prophesied.

“So Solomon removed Abiathar from the priesthood of the LORD, fulfilling the word the LORD had spoken at Shiloh about the house of Eli” (1Kings 2:27).



The way we walk with the Lord (or fail to) has high stakes, not only for our own lives, but also for the lives of those who follow after us. We need to learn the skill of long-range thinking because the Bible teaches that "we reap what we sow" (Gal 6:7). Take some time to think long-range about your own life. How are your present actions (or inactions) going to impact not only your life and relationships, but also the future generations who will follow you? What kind of legacy are you building? What will grandchildren and great grandchildren say when they examine the pages of your story? "May all who come behind us find us faithful. May the fire of our devotion light their way. May the footsteps that we leave, lead them to believe; and the lives we live inspire them to obey . . . May all who come behind us find us faithful." Song by Steve Green: "Find Us Faithful"

The Lord begins to speak to Samuel: 3:1-21

Chapter 3 focuses on how the Lord began to speak to young Samuel as a prophet. While Samuel slept in the Tabernacle by the ark of the Lord, the Lord spoke to him on 3 consecutive nights. Samuel, however, was not accustomed to hearing the voice of the Lord and he thought it was Eli the priest calling for him. Finally, on the 4th night, Samuel was able to recognize and receive God's direct communication to him. While this was the beginning of great prophetic blessings for Samuel, this first message from God was not positive or comforting! Rather God predicted again the complete judgment and end of Eli's lineage forever due to his sins.

The Lord said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them. Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever" (3:11-14).

On the next day, young Samuel reluctantly reported this sad message to Eli who, in turn, accepted the news as "from the Lord."

And he said, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seems good to Him" (3:18).

The chapter closes with a summary of Samuel's primarily SILENT YEARS (3:19-21), noting how the Lord continued to speak to him, and how the entire nation recognized that God had raised him up to be His prophet (mouthpiece) through the on-going revelation of HIS WORD.

“Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail. All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, because the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord (3:19-21).

The ‘silent years’ until 30 years of age are common in the lives of many biblical figures. Always there was much training and formation in the lives of these people. There is little mentioned of the roughly 26 years that Samuel was growing and serving in the presence of the Lord at Shiloh, but God was developing him as he continued to mature, to become the next powerful judge after Samson. Initially 'Samuel served the Lord' by doing basic daily routine tasks that were age-appropriate; lighting the 7 candles each night (3:2; Lev 24:1-4), and aiding Eli. As he grew, he was learning the 1st five books (scrolls) of Moses from Eli and other older priests and common skills from the men and women serving in the tabernacle. HE WAS FAITHFUL IN THE LITTLE THINGS (Luke 16:10) desiring to please God and Eli. God was pleased to continue a mutually satisfying and intimate relationship with Samuel that blessed and ministered to all Israel.

Regardless of what age or stage of life you are in, God wants you to be growing to know Him and love Him. Learn those lessons that He has for you in whatever particular stage of your spiritual journey you are with Him. Samuel was taking his relationship with God seriously. Hophni and Phinehas were not. As a follower of Christ, your spiritual growth and ability to enjoy Him and serve Him will be in proportion to how much you prioritize time with Christ and others who share your hunger to grow and serve. You might feel like you are still in the ‘silent years’. If so, you are in good company! Don't waste any experience or opportunity to learn. Like Samuel, your faithfulness to learn and grow will result in more and more opportunities with your growing maturity. Pray that you will continue to learn and be more prepared for God's present and future purposes that will bring you enjoyment and ultimately God's glory.

The Philistines Capture the Ark of God: 4:1-11

The Philistines were tormenting Israel for decades. Now they attack Israel once again. The Israelites were soundly defeated on the first day of battle, causing them to question why God was not fighting for them. At this point, they made the fateful decision to carry the sacred ark of the Covenant into battle with them:

When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies." So the people sent to Shiloh, and from there they carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts who sits above the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God (4:3,4).

The elders of Israel probably discussed how the ark had gone before Israel in parting the waters of the Jordan River, and bringing down the strong walls of Jericho. Surely the ark could rout the Philistine army for now. *"They did not realize that God's very present help depended not on the presence of a material symbol (the Ark) but on moral and spiritual conditions which they should have set themselves to understand and fulfill."* F.B. Meyer

Ironically, the Philistines had more reverence for the power and holiness of God than the Israelites did. When they realized that the ark had been brought to the battle lines, they trembled.

The Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who shall deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who smote the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness" (4:7,8).

Sadly, the presence of God did *not* go with Israel into battle. Instead, they were severely defeated *and the ark was captured!*

"So the Philistines fought and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent; and the slaughter was very great, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died" (4:10,11).

Ponder the gravity of this moment in Israel's history. Recall that the sacred ark contained the tablets with the Laws of God given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. It also contained the staff of Aaron, which had been used to deliver Israel from Egypt, and some manna, commemorating the 40 years during which God faithfully fed Israel in the wilderness. This ark was kept in the Most Holy Place within the Tabernacle at Shiloh. It was not even *seen* by most Israelites, as only the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place, one time each year, to make atonement for the sins of the nation. The very *glory of God* rested upon this sacred box! And now . . . the ark is lost . . . taken into the hands of idol-worshipping Philistines. The very glory of God departed from Israel on that day!

So significant was this day that, years later, the psalmist writes about it with these words:

“Then He abandoned His dwelling at Shiloh, the Tabernacle where He had lived among the people. He allowed the ark of His might to be captured; He surrendered His glory into enemy hands. He gave His people over to be butchered by the sword, because He was so angry with His own people - His special possession. Their young men were killed by fire; their young women died before singing their wedding songs. Their priests were slaughtered, and their widows could not mourn their deaths” (Psalm 78:60-64).

How foolish for Israel to imagine that they could somehow manipulate God to work for them by carrying the ark into battle. How foolish of us to imagine that we can move God by going through the external motions of religious performance – placing ourselves in the right building at the set time, wearing the right jewelry, grafting the right symbols on our bodies, touching the right shrines, saying the right words. God is not some impersonal force that can be manipulated to perform magic tricks. He is a PERSON who made us to live in a love relationship with Himself. The ONLY thing that moves the heart and hand of God in our direction is our sincere devotion to Him. Jesus said, “Anyone who loves Me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and We will come to them and make our home with them” (John 14:23). It is your HEART, beating in sync with God's HEART, that moves Him to fight your battles with you.

The Death of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas (4:12-22)

Eli the high priest sat on a stool by the road, waiting for good news to come from the battle line. Surely the ark of God would guarantee a great rout of the enemy. Instead, the messenger brought grievous news.

“Israel has fled before the Philistines and there has also been a great slaughter among the people, and your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been taken.” When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell off the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for he was old and heavy. Thus he judged Israel forty years (4:17,18).

There was much bad news; but when Eli heard that the ark had been taken, he literally dropped dead. Such was the sad day on which the sins of Eli came crashing down upon him. His failure to faithfully lead the nation and his own family cost him everything, and cost Israel the very presence and glory of the Most High God.

Yet, this was not the end of the trouble for Eli’s house on that day. Phinehas’ wife was pregnant with their second child at the time. When she heard the news about her husband, her father and the ark of God, she, like Eli, went into shock leading to her premature labor. She died giving birth to a boy, but not before giving him a name suitable for the day: “Ichabod” means, “NO GLORY.”

And she called the boy Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel,” because the ark of God was taken and because of her father-in-law and her husband. She said, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God was taken” (4:21,22).

The “glory of the Lord” came upon the Tabernacle in the wilderness of Sinai, on the first day it was set up by Moses, some 400 years before this fateful day:

“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34,35).

The glory of God’s personal presence remained with Israel from that day until this sad day, in spite of periods of Israel’s sin. But this day was different. It was a fork in the road. It was as if God said to His chosen people: *“I’m taking a break from you. I’m leaving. We need a separation.”* God moved out of Israel!

Surely, Israel's loss of the "glory of God" was something unique. The most sacred piece of Israel's religious 'furniture,' the ark of the Covenant, was gone . . . and with it went the visible, tangible presence of God. But in many parallel ways, each of us forfeit "the glory of God" when we fail to enthrone Him in our hearts and walk in a true love-relationship with Him. Every day that we spend outside of living fellowship and union with our God is a day of lost glory. Jesus said that we are branches and He is the Vine. He said: "Apart from Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Every day that we live without connection to God is a day without real fruit ... a day of lost glory. It is hard for us, on this side of eternity, to estimate the cost of these days of lost glory, because we cannot see what could have been had we lived in close fellowship with our Lord. Someday, however, we will know, when God shows us all of "the good works that He had prepared in advance for us to walk in" (Ephesians 2:10). He will show us a storehouse of lost glory: faith mountains that could have been moved; fruit that could have come forth; lives that could have been changed; pain that could have been avoided; healing that could have occurred; victories that could have been won. Friends, do not let the glory of the God slip away from your life. Learn to walk in close harmony and fellowship with the LOVER of your soul. He has much glory to display, through His Spirit Who lives and dwells in you.

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding THE GLORY OF THE LORD, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of GLORY to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2Corinthians 3:18).

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 3 – God Upholds His Own Glory
1 Samuel 5-7

Introduction

Israel was defeated by the Philistines at **Ebenezer** (4:1;5:1). Ironically, Ebenezer means “stone of help;” but Israel did *not* receive help from Yahweh at that time. Their great loss, along with the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas and the capture of the ark of the Covenant, was a low point in Israel’s history. God’s glory departed from Israel. In Philistine territory for 7 months, God’s powerful presence in and around the ark was manifested to the idol-worshipping Philistines. When they finally sent the ark back to Israel, everyone *knew* and *feared* the awesome God of Israel. At the same time, God remained *faithful to His promises*. Though He separated Himself from Israel for 7 months, He finally allowed His glorious presence to return to His chosen people.

Yahweh in Dagon’s Temple: 5:1-5

The Philistines routed Israel in war and captured the ark of the Covenant, taking it from Ebenezer to Ashdod, the center of their worship system. Then, they attempted to allow their god, Dagon, to stand in triumph over Israel’s God.

“Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon” (5:2).

The word “dag” meant “fish.” Dagon was part fish and part man. This came from an old Babylonian story about a being, part man and part fish, emerging from the sea. Here we find the earliest seeds of modern evolutionary theory, for Dagon enshrined the belief that humans and fish had somehow both evolved together from the waters of the sea. Dagon, thus, personified the forces of nature, from which it was believed all things had been birthed.



When the Philistines went to their temple the next morning, they were shocked to find that Dagon had fallen flat on his face before the ark of Yahweh. They stood Dagon up in his place again; but on the second morning, Dagon had fallen again, and this time his head and hands were cut off, lying on the steps leading up to the altar. They sensed that Yahweh was declaring supremacy over Dagon and removed the ark from the house of Dagon.

The Ark moved from city to city: 5:6-12

The hand of God was severe upon the people of Ashdod. People everywhere were breaking out with tumors. They demanded that the ark be moved to another city.

“The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god” (5:7).

The Philistine lords (v.8) decided the ark should be moved to Gath.

“After they had brought it around, the hand of the Lord was against the city with very great confusion; and He struck the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them” (5:9).

When they sent it to a 3rd city, Ekron, the inhabitants feared for their lives.

And as the ark of God came to Ekron the Ekronites cried out, saying, “They have brought the ark of the God of Israel around to us, to kill us and our people” (5:10).

Yahweh’s reputation was going before Him! Finally, after 7 months of pure havoc, they could bear God’s presence no longer.

They sent and gathered all the lords of the Philistines and said, “Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, so that it will not kill us and our people” (5:11).

The last line of ch.5 shows that God heard their cries for mercy and determined to bring an end to their suffering.

“And the cry of the city went up to heaven” (5:12).

While Israel failed to represent God’s glory to the nations (Exodus 19:5,6), Yahweh did not leave them without a witness. Yahweh showed the Philistines that HE, not Dagon, was the supreme Creator and Sustainer of life. He displayed His power and might, His holiness and separateness, His sovereignty over people everywhere. Finally, He showed them that He was a prayer-answering, merciful God. By the time they sent the ark back to Israel, the Philistines were honoring Yahweh with “guilt offerings” (6:3)! God often allows us to experience hardship in order to weaken our grip on our idols. Then, when we turn to Him (repentance), He hears our cries, and justice gives way to mercy.

The ark returned to Israel: 6:1-18

The Philistine lords consulted their religious leaders to determine *how* to send the ark away without incurring further judgment.

They said, “If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but you shall surely return to Him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you” (6:3).

Though they were priests of Dagon, they were aware of the rules for Yahweh’s priests: *“If a person acts unfaithfully and sins unintentionally against the Lord’s holy things, then he shall bring a guilt offering to the Lord ... the priest shall make atonement for him ... and it shall be forgiven him” (Leviticus 5:15,16).*

There were 5 major cities in Philistia, and 5 lords. Thus, they decided to make 5 golden tumors and 5 golden mice to represent the plagues that Yahweh had brought upon their cities.

“So you shall make likenesses of your tumors and likenesses of your mice that ravage the land, and you shall GIVE GLORY TO THE GOD OF ISRAEL; perhaps He will ease His hand from you, your gods, and your land” (6:5).

It is interesting to note that the judgment God had brought upon Egypt, some 400 years before, was still very fresh on the minds of people in that day (v.6). They feared suffering the same fate as Egypt under plagues that *increased* as Pharaoh hardened his heart.

The priests of Dagon also advised as to the means of transport: a new cart and two young cows that had never been yoked before.

“Take the ark of the Lord and place it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you return to Him as a guilt offering in a box by its side. Then send it away that it may go. Watch, if it goes up by the way of its own territory to Beth-shemesh, then He has done us this great evil” (6:8,9).

Just as God had supernaturally directed animals to Noah and his boat (Genesis 7:8,9), so now the young, unsupervised cows were divinely directed toward the city of Beth-shemesh in the land of Israel (6:12) The Philistine lords watched from a distance as the Levitical priests removed the ark from the cart and offered sacrifices to Yahweh. Finally, the lords returned to their cities, *knowing* that it WAS Yahweh who had visited their land in such a powerful way.

Even the Philistine priests and diviners (6:2) knew that Israel’s God deserved to be given glory. They needed to admit their guilt with sincerity, with the hope that He would show them mercy. Every human being has been made in God’s image – with a ‘God-conscience.’ If these Philistines recognized God’s holiness and mercy, how much more we who are followers of Jesus Christ? Are you at a point where you are ready to admit your sins and ask God for His mercy and forgiveness?

The ark at Beth-shemesh: 6:19-21

The inhabitants of Beth-shemesh were, at first, “*glad to see the ark*” returning to Israel (6:13). However, they were not prepared to treat the ark with the requisite reverence as prescribed in the Law of Moses. In fact, many treated the ark as if it were a sort of tourist attraction to be observed, to their own demise:

He struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the Lord. He struck down of all the people, 50,070 men, and the people mourned because the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter. The men of Beth-shemesh said, “Who is able to stand before the Lord, THIS HOLY GOD?” (6:19,20).

The Israelites, like the Philistines, cried out for the ark to be moved to another city in order to escape the severe hand of a HOLY God!

All throughout the Bible, God declares that He is HOLY. He also exhorts His people to live holy lives, as we represent Him in our own behavior (1Peter 1:15,16). God's "holiness" is hard to understand. So, too, is the "wrath" of God, which is, essentially, the outbreak of His holiness against sin (un-holiness). Our best glimpse into the holiness (and wrath) of God comes through Jesus, God's perfect Son. He "became sin" for us and was, thus, the object of the Father's wrath (2Cor.5:21). On the cross, He accepted the judgment of a Holy God against sin, and became the "guilt offering" for all mankind. (For further study, see: Romans 3:22-26; Ephesians 2:1-5; Galatians 3:13,14.)

God wants us to learn about His HOLINESS and revere Him for it. We need not fear His wrath, because Jesus has absorbed that for us. When Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me," He was experiencing the wrath of God against sin. When He cried out, "It is finished," the guilt offering had been completely consumed and accepted by the Father. The wonderful cross invites us to humbly and daily say: "Thank you, Father, for your MERCY, and thank you Lord Jesus for bearing the Father's HOLY WRATH against my sin.

The ark at Kiriath-jearim: 7:1-2

"From the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim, the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord" (7:2).

For some 20 years the people lamented. Yet, the way forward was always near at hand. *"For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said, 'In repentance and rest you will be saved; in quietness and trust is your strength'" (Isaiah 30:15).*

Oh what years we waste lamenting the loss of God's closeness and favor, while "He longs to be gracious to us and waits on high to have compassion upon us" (Isaiah 30:18). If there is distance between God and me, it is not because He is unwilling to draw near; it is because I refuse to humble myself so that He can draw near. "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up in honor" (James 4:8-10).

Samuel calls Israel to repentance: 7:3-6

Having disappeared into obscurity for many years, Samuel now emerges as Israel's new leader – prophet, priest and judge. We can piece together some of these 'silent years.' We know that he was married and had two sons, whom he named Joel: "Yahweh is God" and Abiah: "Yahweh is Father" (8:2). He settled in Ramah, where he formed a 'school of prophets,' the first of its kind in Israel's history (19:18-24). He likely travelled throughout the tribes of Israel bringing God's prophetic words to the people (3:19-21). Thus, Samuel was a unifying voice for Israel all throughout the 20 years they were *"lamenting after the Lord."*

It was likely that God's words, spoken through Samuel, caused Israel to lament after the Lord. When God's truth falls upon receptive human hearts, sincere hearers will lament over their sins and desire a restoration of fellowship with God. Jesus spoke of such hearts/hearers as "good soil" that receives the Word deeply and brings forth fruit abundantly (Mark 4:20). Is your heart tender and receptive to God's Words?

It is no surprise, then, that it was Samuel who sensed it was the time to call Israel to unite at Mizpah for a ceremony of national repentance. The nation heeded the voice of the man they had come to respect as the herald of God.

"If you want to return to the Lord with all your hearts, get rid of your foreign gods and your images of Ashtoreth. Turn your hearts to the Lord and obey him alone; then he will rescue you from the Philistines." So the Israelites got rid of their images of Baal and Ashtoreth and worshiped only the Lord (7:3,4).

The mention of *"images of Baal and Ashtoreth"* reminds us of the book of Judges where Israel repeatedly tried to mingle the worship of Canaanite idols with their worship of Yahweh, to their own demise. (Samuel was, in fact, the last of the "judges" of Israel.)

"So they gathered at Mizpah and, in a great ceremony, drew water from a well and poured it out before the Lord. They also went without food all day and confessed that they had sinned against the Lord" (7:6).

At Oak Pointe Church we have an annual day of prayer and fasting. We call it **"Ezra 8 Day"** because Ezra, like Samuel, called the nation of Israel to a day of prayer and fasting at a critical time in their history. Many times in the Old Testament narrative you will find Israel coming together for a special day of repentance and prayer, as they sought God's hand for healing, blessing, protection, favor and provision in their journey. These days are like special markers on our journey with God. On our annual Ezra 8 Day we come together to: 1) lament and confess our self-sins; 2) give humble thanks for Christ's atoning sacrifice; 3) consecrate ourselves fully to follow Him in the coming year; and 4) go away KNOWING with CONFIDENCE that we have sought Him with our whole heart . . . and that He has HEARD OUR CRIES. We invite you to make our Ezra 8 Day part of your spiritual disciplines.

God helps Israel overcome the Philistines: 7:7-14

At Mizpah, suspecting that this was a *military gathering* to prepare for war, the Philistines quickly moved to break up the gathering.

When the sons of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. Then the sons of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry to the Lord our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines." Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it for a whole burnt offering to the Lord; and Samuel cried to the Lord for Israel and the Lord answered him (7:7-9).

Israel asked Samuel to PRAY. Their hearts were humbly dependent upon the Lord. Before Samuel prayed, however, he offered a lamb sacrifice, knowing that only a burnt offering would make atonement for the sins of the people (Leviticus 1:1-4). *"If I did not confess the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened"* (Psalm 66:18). Having offered the sacrifice, he pleaded for God's help. *"And the Lord answered him!"*

"The Lord thundered with a great thunder (voice) on that day against the Philistines and confused them, so that they were routed before Israel. The men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as below Beth-car" (7:10,11).

Jesus made the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Thus, we only need to confess our sins (1John 1:9) before we can "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). Confess – be cleansed – draw near. This is the divinely prescribed pattern.

The Philistine army was swiftly routed, giving Israel a turning-point victory in their long struggle to overcome Philistine oppression. Samuel erected a stone monument in honor of God’s help in this decisive victory over the Philistines. He named the monument **EBENEZER** – “stone of help.”

It is significant that the site of this monument was the very place the Israelites had camped 20 years earlier, and suffered the devastating defeat (compare 7:12 with 4:1 and 5:1). God took His people right back to their place of failure and shame, giving them an experience of His help and victory. How fitting to name the stone “Ebenezer” – “Thus far the Lord has helped us!” (7:12).

The narrator gives us a sense for the importance of this moment in Israel’s long struggle against the Philistines:

“So the Philistines were subdued and they did not come anymore within the border of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel” (7:13).

Ask the Lord: “Is there anything hindering the flow of Your holy love and will for me, and a new hope and future with You?” Then, be still (Psalm 46:10) and allow Him to speak to you. Give thanks for all the ways God has “thus far” been your Ezer – your “help.” Confess (admit) the sins that have kept God from partnering with you to bring about a great reversal. Oh that it might not take 20 years (as it did for Israel) to “get it!”

Samuel’s annual circuit: 7:15-17

Samuel had previously been depicted in his roles as **priest** and **prophet** in Israel. Now he is described as the last **judge** (v.15) or “deliverer” who was raised up by God to overcome the yoke of foreign oppression. As a judge, he also moved about the country rendering major decisions for the people.

“Now Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. He used to go annually on circuit to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah, and he judged Israel in all these places. Then his return was to Ramah, for his house was there, and there he judged Israel; and he built there an altar to the Lord” (7:15-17).

In so many ways, Samuel was the ideal leader. As a **priest**, he maintained a close walk with God and faithfully interceded for the people. The “glory of God” returned to Israel, largely because of

the quality of Samuel's walk with God. As Israel's **judge**, he handled issues uprightly, refusing to take bribes or pervert justice in any way (12:3). As a **prophet**, he remained an open channel for the ongoing revelations of God. The guidance of God returned to Israel, because Samuel was a pure enough vessel through whom God could pour the treasure of His words for His people.

We all are called to lead others, at various levels. We can learn much from Samuel as a leader. Ask God: "Am I a vessel through whom You can pour Your Word? Am I allowing anything to block the flow of Your truth to me?" As Samuel prayed: "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening" (3:10). Through His written Word and through the still small voice of His Spirit within you, God will speak to you. What IS the Holy Spirit revealing to you?

EBENEZER: Some final thoughts on this section . . .

Twenty years was a very long time for God to wait on the Israelites. But He was very active during this period of waiting. He sent Samuel throughout the land to bring His Word to bear on the hearts of His chosen ones. While they lamented, He was preparing to bring them to Mizpah, and a great reversal.

During that same 20-year period, God was waiting for the Philistines to turn to Him, after their 7-month experience of His strength and supremacy. Sadly, they did not turn to Yahweh; rather, they continued to worship Dagon. Thus, as Dagon fell before the ark, so the Philistine army fell before Yahweh's thunderous power at the battle of Mizpah. Jumping forward a few decades more, the Philistine giant Goliath taunted the God of Israel. He, too, fell before the young man David, who overcame him "*in the name of the God of the armies of Israel*" (17:45). The Philistines hardened their hearts against God.

EBEN-EZER is a bookend at the beginning (4:1;5:1) and end of this section (7:12). God is always our HELP (ezer); but often there are many years (20+) of maturing and "life" that stand between us and our stone of victory. God is NOT in a hurry to form His followers. He patiently shapes us into His glorious likeness (2Thess.3:18; Romans 8:28 **and 29**). And remember . . . He will often take you back to your defining "defeats" in order to display His *AMAZING GRACE* and *PROFOUND MERCY*. He delights in showing His glory through our reversals. When He does this for you, raise *your* Ebenezer – the stone of God's help.

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 4 – Samuel Anoints Saul as the first King:
1Samuel 8-12

Introduction

God knows what it feels like to be rejected. Yahweh, the great “I AM,” was to be Israel’s one and only KING; yet, the people craved and demanded a human king so that they could be “like all of the other nations.” Yahweh accepted their rejection of Him and, through Samuel’s mediation, gave them the desire of their hearts in the form of a man named Saul. Be careful what you crave in life ... God may just let you have your way.

Samuel and his sons: 8:1-6

Samuel had grown old (early 50s) and his two sons were Israel’s judges in the far south. They perverted justice and took bribes, departing from the good example of their father (12:3-5).

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to him, “Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations” (8:4,5).

Why did Samuel’s sons fail to follow his example? We do not know for sure, but there are several possibilities: 1) Samuel travelled extensively. He may not have been home enough to properly train his sons. 2) Joel and Abiah had their own free will. Though Samuel was a godly, praying father, he could not control the free wills of his adult sons. 3) They could have started off well as younger boys; but older influences may have corrupted their morals during their more independent years (1Corinthians 15:33).

And how did Samuel handle the very direct criticism of his sons by the leaders of Israel? He was “displeased,” but he did not react in anger. ***“And Samuel prayed to the Lord” (8:6).***

Samuel had normal emotions when the elders spoke to him about his sons and their demand for a king (disappointment, rejection, sadness, hurt). How do we normally react when confronted like this? We often defend, deny, argue, make excuses, or attack back. Samuel did none of these; rather, he was “slow to speak and slow to anger” (James 1:19). He processed his emotions with God – “he prayed to the Lord.” Then, he responded to the elders rather than reacting to them. This is what Jesus did when he was attacked by His accusers (1Peter 2:23).

Yahweh the rejected KING: 8:7-9

Israel was to uniquely represent Yahweh to the surrounding nations as His Kingship was displayed through their lives; but now they desired to be “*like all the nations.*” Samuel may have been surprised by the Lord’s response to his prayers.

The Lord said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being King over them . . . they have abandoned Me and served other gods” (8:7,8).

God has been rejected by His people since the beginning of time (Genesis 3). His entire relationship with Israel, up to this point, had been one of constant rejection. Even when He came in person, He was “*despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering*” (Isaiah 53:3). In His final hour, Jesus was rejected. “*Everyone deserted Him and fled*” (Mark 14:50).

God understands rejection and abandonment. When you experience criticism, rejection or abandonment take your feelings to God. “*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*” (Hebrews 4:15).

Warnings concerning the ways of human kings: 8:10-22

God had given Moses very clear commands as to how kings should conduct themselves operating under the ultimate authority of Yahweh (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Now, God warns that they would rule with severity. Instead of serving Yahweh, the gracious KING, the people would end up slavishly serving a dominating and demanding human king. Yet, the people blindly insisted that they *must* have their king.

Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, “No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also

may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles” (8:19,20).

So often in life we decide we “must have” something or someone, because we think that this will make life better for us. This was Satan’s lie that first caused Adam and Eve to turn away from God: “The fruit that God is withholding from you WILL make your life better” (Genesis 3:4,5). At the deepest level, obeying God is a TRUST issue. Do you trust that He truly loves you and wants what is best for you? Learning to believe that GOD IS GOOD is a critical step in our journey of obedience. Do you have difficulty believing (trusting) that God is FOR YOU? If so, take time to ask God to reveal the roots of this lack of trust in Him.

Saul meets Samuel: 9:1-25

Saul, the son of Kish now enters the story. At the very outset, he is noted for his outstanding physical appearance. He will, on the outside, be *everything* the people hoped for.

“He had a son whose name was Saul, a choice and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people” (9:2).

Saul’s father had lost some donkeys, so Saul was sent out to recover them. In the process, he came to the city where Samuel was visiting. God had told Samuel, the day before, that he was about to encounter the man he should anoint as Israel’s first king:

“About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel; and he will deliver My people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have regarded My people, because their cry has come to Me” (9:16).

After meeting Saul, Samuel spoke encouraging words to him; but Saul had trouble accepting such lofty words concerning him.

And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father’s household?” Saul replied, “Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak to me in this way?” (9:20,21).

Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, which had been decimated in battle by the other tribes (Judges 20). Only 600 men survived at that time. Thus, Saul’s tribe *was* the smallest in Israel.

Samuel anoints Saul: 9:26 – 10:13

Samuel took Saul aside and poured oil on him, anointing him as Israel's first king. He then gave Saul a series of 4 confirming signs that would happen during his journey back to his father's house, the most important being the Lord's Spirit coming upon Saul and changing his heart (10:6). Finally, Samuel gave Saul *one clear command* to follow at the end of this sequence of signs.

"It shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasion requires, for God is with you. And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do" (10:7,8).

God placed just 1 restriction before Saul, to test his obedience. After the confirming signs, Saul could *"do for himself whatever the occasion requires, for God is with him"* (v.7). This implied freedom to act in many different ways. Yet, there was one very clear restriction: *"Wait 7 days until I (Samuel) come to offer the offerings."* Saul's failure to heed this restriction becomes a key turning point later in his story.

In the Garden of Eden, God said to Adam and Eve that they could have great freedom: "From any tree in the Garden you may eat freely" (Gen.2:16). Yet, there was one clear restriction: "But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (2:17). God gives all of us great freedom to make decisions; but when He places a restriction before us, He is doing it for two reasons: 1) Our response to His commands is a test of our love for Him. 2) His restrictive commands are intended to protect us from something harmful. Don't resent or ignore God's "No." Like a parent telling a child NOT to touch a hot stove, God is lovingly trying to keep you from 'getting burned.'

All of the confirming signs happened during Saul's return trip to his home (10:9-13). When the Spirit of God fell upon Saul, giving him the ability to prophesy, word quickly spread that a great change had happened to him:

It came about, when all who knew him previously saw that he prophesied now with the prophets, that the people said to one another, "What has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" (10:11).

God gave to Saul an “investment” of His Spirit that was truly life changing and powerful. From that point forward, it was Saul’s responsibility to walk in step with God so that the powerful force of the Spirit could operate in and through Him, for God’s greater purposes. Similarly, at the moment of conversion (the ‘new birth’), God gives to each of His children the gift of His indwelling Spirit. From that moment forward, we are to “walk in step with the Spirit” so that the “fruit of the Spirit” may be revealed through us (Galatians 5:22-25). This requires that each of us allow the Holy Spirit to be “president,” not just “resident.” Make it a regular habit to invite the Holy Spirit to empower you, enabling you to live for God’s greater purposes in your world. (Check out Charles Stanley: *The Wonderful Spirit-filled Life.*)

Saul’s report to his uncle: 10:14-16

When Saul returned home, his uncle asked him specifically about his encounter with Samuel.

Saul’s uncle said, “Please tell me what Samuel said to you.” So Saul said to his uncle, “He told us plainly that the donkeys had been found.” But he did not tell him about the matter of the kingdom which Samuel had mentioned (10:15,16).

Why did Saul reveal only *part* of the truth of what Samuel said to him? He likely thought it would appear ridiculous to even suggest that *he* would be picked for such a high honor. We detect here the first signs of fear and insecurity within Saul. He feels ‘inferior.’

Saul publicly anointed as king: 10:17-27

Samuel called for a national gathering at Mizpah, where he publicly announced God’s selection of Saul as Israel’s first king. Yet, when it came time to introduce Saul, they could not find him! It took a special revelation from the Lord to locate him.

So the Lord said, “Behold, he is hiding himself by the baggage.” So they ran and took him from there, and when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward (10:22,23).

Again, his sense of inferiority kept him from believing that he could be God’s choice for this role. Saul was a giant of a man on the outside, but a fearful little boy on the inside; “*a reluctant ruler who followed his emotions instead of building his faith*” (W. Wiersbe, Bible Exposition Commentary, p.231).

True “security” and “self-esteem” grow out of our relationship with our heavenly Father. It is HIS acceptance, love, approval and affirmation that allow us to walk with our heads high. “See how great the Father’s love is for us, that we should be called the children of God. And such we are!” (1John 3:1). Our value cannot be derived from changing standards such as: what I think of myself; what others think of me; how much I am producing; what I own; what role I occupy; how fit I am. Ultimate value is derived from what the unchanging GOD, my FATHER thinks of me. He loves me and accepts me like no one else ever can!

Saul defeats the Ammonites: 11:1-15

Saul’s leadership role was quickly confirmed as he led the nation in battle against Nahash the Ammonite king, who had threatened to humiliate and enslave the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead. Saul, moved by God’s Spirit, rallied Israel to defend their fellow countrymen. Even Saul’s detractors were silenced by this display of God’s Spirit working in the new king (see 10:27 with 11:12,13).

God gives “spiritual gifts” to each of His children. It is important for each of us to discover, develop and deploy these God-given gifts. As you take on early “assignments” from the Lord, you will discover the unique gift mix He has placed within you. 1) You will enjoy serving in this area of giftedness. 2) You will bear fruit for God’s glory. 3) You will receive affirmation from other people. And remember . . . a spiritual “gift” is just that – a gift (ability) from God, placed in you, for the benefit of others. Humbly accept the gift(s) God has given to you, use it to serve His purposes in the world, and give HIM all the glory.

Samuel’s address to Israel: 12:1-25

Samuel’s address was a major ‘state of the union’ moment for Israel. They had demanded a king, and God had given them the (sinful) desire of their hearts. Still, the future depended upon the people living under the KINGSHIP of Yahweh.

- **In defense of his conduct (1-5).** Samuel first invited the people to charge him with any crimes of misconduct during his lifelong service to the nation as priest, prophet and judge. He called God to be his witness that the people found no fault in him.

He said to them, “The Lord is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day that you have found nothing in my hand.” And they said, “He is witness” (12:5).

Much like Samuel, the apostle Paul called God to be his witness as to his conduct as a leader: "For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord" (1Corinthians 4:4). Do you have a clear conscience before God and men, as to how you are living your life? Are you inviting the Lord to examine you and transform you into the man/woman He wants you to be? "Search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Psalm 139:23,24). Living with a clear conscience before God and people can greatly reduce your internal stress level.

- **God's provision of past leaders (6-11).** Samuel reminded Israel of *all* the leaders that God had raised just when they needed them (in spite of their unfaithfulness to Yahweh):

"Moses and Aaron . . . Gideon, Bedan, Jephthah and Samuel . . . and (they) delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around, so that you lived in security" (12:11).

- **God's provision of Saul (12-13).** He brings them to the present moment and God's provision of Saul as Israel's new king.

"Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for, and behold, the Lord has set a king over you" (12:13).

- **The charge to fear (serve) the LORD (14-15).** Yes, Israel now had a human king that they could trust to lead them and fight their battles. Yet, the key to their future was their ultimate submission to Yahweh as their KING.

"If you will fear the Lord and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the Lord, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God. If you will not listen to the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the command of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you, as it was against your fathers" (12:14,15).

As followers of our King, Jesus, it does not matter who we work for. Our ultimate responsibility is to do ALL of our work as if we are doing it for the Lord. "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve" (Colossians 3:23,24).

- A thunderstorm confirms the peoples' sin (16-19).

Samuel asked God to bring about a special sign to *confirm* the fact that they had *sinned* against the Lord by demanding a king.

So Samuel called to the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. Then all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil by asking for ourselves a king" (12:18,19).

- Samuel intercedes for the people (20-25).

Samuel reassured the people that God would not abandon them (even though they had abandoned God).

"For the Lord will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the Lord has been pleased to make you a people for Himself" (12:22).

Then, Samuel promised to faithfully pray for the people.

"Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way (12:23).

It is the duty of leaders to PRAY for those under their charge. Fathers, mothers, teachers, mentors, coaches, business owners, department heads, pastors, government officials, public safety officers, military leaders, judges, doctors, lawyers . . . we ALL are responsible at various levels for the leading of other souls. To fail to PRAY for those under your charge is to "sin against the Lord" (12:23), because we are failing at the most critical point: Claiming God's strong hand of blessing, protection and favor over those He has placed under our care. Make it a habit of praying for the 'flock' He has called you to shepherd.

He concluded with a final charge:

"Only fear the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away" (12:24,25).

Summary Thoughts:

Israel wanted a king in place of THE KING. This was a great sin against the Lord. In fact, much later in the history of Israel, God reflected back upon this sad moment through the prophet Hosea:

“I gave you a king in My anger and took him away in My wrath. (Hosea 13:11).

“I gave you a king in My anger . . .”. As the story of Saul unfolds, we will see how his appointment was not so much a “gift” to Israel, as a “judgment” upon Israel. Saul was precisely what the people wanted: A king who would be impressive on the outside, thus establishing Israel’s honor among the surrounding nations. The nation wanted to “look good” in the sight of all the other nations. So, too, their new king was all about external appearances – “looking the part.” As the story progresses, we will see Saul being set aside in favor of another man who is “the least” among his brothers, the “most unlikely” in terms of physical stature; but this one will be “a man after God’s own heart.”

There are many valuable lessons throughout this section of Scripture; but one overriding message stands out: *Be very careful what you demand from God ...because He might just give it to you.*

When you turn on your GPS to get directions, you are instantly linked to a Global Positioning System that knows your precise location and can provide you with accurate guidance. If, for some reason, you are unable to connect to the satellites that provide this guidance, your journey will be more difficult. You may get lost.

God’s Kingship was, sadly, rejected by Israel. In essence, they were cutting off their connection to their GPS – God’s Positioning System. Thus, they lost their way and ended up suffering greatly.

Today, we reject God’s Kingship when we refuse to allow Him to rule in our lives. We lose our connection to our King and our Guide, and we get lost.

If you have been trying to find your own way, to lead your own life, you can confess your waywardness and invite THE KING to take His rightful place in your life: “Lord, I acknowledge that I have been trying to run my own life. I have been acting as my own king. Thank You that You are a merciful, forgiving God. I now ask You to now take over. I yield to Your sovereignty over every aspect of my life. Help me to learn to live in daily, humble submission to You.”

Now . . . stay tightly connected to Him on a daily basis. Let God’s Positioning System take you in His wise direction.

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 5 – Jonathan’s Faith and Saul’s Fear:
1Samuel 13-15

Introduction

Chapters 13-15 narrate the story of the sad downfall of Saul, Israel’s first king. While Saul’s son, Jonathan, shows great *faith* and *courage*, Saul displays much *fear* and *foolishness*. (This is the 3rd consecutive character in 1Samuel where father-son issues come into play: *Eli* with Hophni/Phinehas; *Samuel* with Joel and Abiah; *Saul* with Jonathan.) While there have been hints of an inferiority complex within Saul, the events of chapters 13-15 bring into full light the deep, deep insecurities within him. He shows an incessant need for the approval of men. Ultimately, this would lead him to heed the voices and desires of men *over* the voice and decree of God. The king cannot bring himself to submit to THE KING, thus, he is unworthy to continue as God’s vice-regent.

War with the Philistines: 13:1-5

Saul and his son Jonathan had a force of 3,000 men; 2,000 with Saul and 1,000 with Jonathan. The Philistines were very much in control of Israel at this time. They had military units stationed throughout Israel, while Israel was unarmed and vulnerable.

In this context, Jonathan took bold action against the Philistine unit in the city of Geba, thus provoking a war.

Jonathan attacked and defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, “Let the Hebrews hear” (13:3).

It is interesting to note that the text says, “*All Israel heard that SAUL had attacked and defeated the Philistines*” (13:4). This is the beginning of a pattern with Saul: If there is a victory, he will somehow pin his name to it. If there is a defeat, it will have every name *but his* on it.

The Israelites tremble: 13:5-7

In response to Jonathan's attack, the Philistines rallied a massive army, "30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen and people like the sand on the seashore in abundance" (13:5). At the sight of this force, the hearts of Israel's warriors melted in fear:

"When the men of Israel saw that their situation was critical (for the people were hard-pressed), then the people hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in cliffs, in cellars, and in pits. Also some of the Hebrews crossed the Jordan into the land of Gad and Gilead. But as for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling" (13:6,7).

Fear is a common emotion; but it can take us down two very different paths. On the one hand, fear can cause us to HIDE. This is what the Israelites did in the face of the Philistine threat. This is also what Saul did when he felt insecure about being anointed king. On the other hand, fear can cause us to TRUST. "When I am afraid, I will put my TRUST in You. In God whose word I praise, in God I TRUST. I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?" (Psalm 56:3,4). It all comes down to how you process your fear. If you sit before the Lord with your fear, He can transform your fear into the faith to walk forward with Him at your side.

Saul's sins by acting like a priest: 13:8-14

Previously, Samuel had specifically commanded Saul to "wait seven days" for him to come down and offer burnt offerings and sacrifices prior to engaging the Philistines at Gilgal (see 10:8). Yet, as Saul saw his troops scattering from him, he panicked and made a fatal decision to make offerings that *only* Levitical priests were allowed to make.

So Saul said, "Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering (13:9).

Sadly, Samuel arrived *immediately* after Saul had made the offerings! Saul tried to justify his unlawful actions in light of the extenuating circumstances; but there was *no excuse* for compromising God's holy standards and acting like a priest.

Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, for now the Lord would have established your

kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you” (13:13,14).

It would be several decades before David would take over the kingship from Saul; yet, the Lord had already “*appointed him*” to be that next ruler.

A ‘WAIT’ TEST? Samuel did come on the 7th day, just as he had promised he would. The fact that he came late in the day seems to indicate that God was testing Saul to see if he would wait in faith and prayer, and continue down the path of OBEDIENCE. Often God shows up “in the last hours of the night” (note Jesus doing this with his disciples – Matthew 14:25). He tests us to see if we are willing to wait on Him to show up, rather than taking matters into our own hands and “acting foolishly” out of fear, shame or impatience. Is there an area of your life where God is testing your obedience by making you WAIT? If you are tempted to run away and take matters into your own hands, don’t do it! Keep waiting and obeying. God will come to you . . . in His time.

A desperate situation: 13:15-23

The Israelites were severely outnumbered and out armed. Saul’s force had dwindled to just 600 men. To make matters worse, the Philistines had disarmed Israel (13:19-23). Only Saul and Jonathan had weapons. The Philistines, on the other hand, had a massive, well-armed force (13:5) divided into three separate companies coming at Israel from all directions (13:17,18)!

Yet, Israel’s sacred history was *full* of stories of God’s mighty deliverances in similar situations. Moses overcame Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea. Joshua overcame forces much greater than his own. Gideon fought with just 300 men, and prevailed. Samson single-handedly defeated the Philistines. Deborah led Israel in triumph over Sisera. Most recently, Samuel had called forth God’s mighty hand against this very same Philistine army (ch.7).

Will Saul summon his faith and add another major God-victory to the Israelite record book . . . or will he remain paralyzed by fear?

Jonathan’s step of faith: 14:1-15.

Jonathan decided to move by faith (14:1) while his father sat under a pomegranate tree in fear (14:2). Why did Jonathan not inform

his father of his intentions? Likely because he knew his father would want to get involved in ways that would thwart the plan.

Then Jonathan said to the young man who was carrying his armor, “Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the Lord will work for us, for the Lord is not restrained to save by many or by few” (14:6).

Jonathan exhibited deep FAITH in Yahweh’s ability to bring about a victory, regardless of the daunting circumstances. He may have recalled Samuel’s words spoken the last time Israel defeated the Philistines: *“If you direct your hearts to the Lord and serve Him alone, He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines” (7:3).*

Jonathan was certain of God’s abilities to do something amazing, IF He determined to do so. So, Jonathan decided to “set a fleece” before the Lord. He offered himself as a servant through whom the mighty current of God’s power might flow, IF God so willed.

Then Jonathan said, “Behold, we will cross over to the men and reveal ourselves to them. If they say to us, ‘Wait until we come to you’; then we will stand in our place and not go up to them. But if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ then we will go up, for the Lord has given them into our hands; and this shall be the sign to us” (14:8-10).

It is impossible to steer a ship that is anchored to a dock. But when the ship begins to move, the captain is able to steer it in the direction he chooses. Saul was sitting under a pomegranate tree trapped in fear. God could not ‘steer’ Saul toward something special. Jonathan, in contrast, was moving by faith in a direction that he believed would honor God. At the same time, he left room for God to open or close the door in front of him. God could ‘steer’ Jonathan according to His will.

Faith (trust) pleases God (Hebrews 11:6). We cannot “tell God what to do.” Yet, we can try to discern His will and His movement in a given situation, and then “step out by faith” in the direction we believe He wants us to go. Then, we can trust Him to direct our steps and open or close doors as we move. How about you? Are you sitting in fear of your challenges; or moving by faith toward God-given victories?

As it turned out, God *was* ready to use Jonathan to destabilize the Philistines. He and his armor bearer struck down 20 enemy warriors (perhaps with slingshots – 1Chronicles 12:2). The Philistines panicked thinking that Israelites were about to appear from everywhere!

“When both of them revealed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines, the Philistines said, “Look, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves” (14:11).

But God did something even bigger in that moment:

“And there was a trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. Even the garrison and the raiders trembled, and the earth quaked so that it became a great trembling” (14:15).

Recall earlier when Samuel prayed and God “*thundered with a great thunder against the Philistines*” causing them to lose heart (7:10). Now, God made the earth quake beneath the feet of the Philistine army and they melted away in dread!

God is always looking for hearts that are fully surrendered to Him, through whom He can display His glory. “For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His” (2Chronicles 16:9). On the other hand, a divided heart will hinder His movement. “Their heart is divided. Now they are held guilty” (Hosea 10:2). Has God been speaking to you about any ways that your heart is divided?

Saul’s reaction to the Philistine’s flight: 14:16-23.

Saul was shocked to see the Philistine army suddenly melting away in fear. He quickly numbered his troops to see *who* was absent, and found out that his son, Jonathan was gone.

Then Saul said to Ahijah, “Bring the ark of God here.” For the ark of God was at that time with the sons of Israel. While Saul talked to the priest, the commotion in the camp of the Philistines continued and increased; so Saul said to the priest, “Withdraw your hand” (14:18,19).

Saul’s impatience thwarted even his prayer to discern God’s will. He moved into battle with his small force, bolstered by all who had previously fled and those who were slaves to the Philistines.

“So the Lord delivered Israel that day, and the battle spread beyond Beth-aven” (14:23).

Recall the people's plea for a king: *"Give us a king who will fight our battles for us"* (8:20). Here, Israel was reminded again that it was still THE LORD who fought their battles for them.

Saul's foolish oath: 14:24-30

Prior to the battle, Saul had placed all of his troops under an oath.

"Cursed be the man who eats food before evening, and until I have avenged myself on my enemies" (14:24).

The emphasis on *"my enemies"* reveals Saul's self-focus. This battle was about *him*, not *the Lord*. Furthermore, placing fighting men under a food ban until Saul had *his day*, was an unwise move.

Jonathan was not present to hear about his father's oath; thus, he ate some honey in order to strengthen himself (14:27). When informed of the absolute ban on food, Jonathan responded with words that reveal a deep divide between father and son.

Then Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. See now, how my eyes have brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more, if only the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great" (14:29,30).

Saul's oath causes the people to sin: 14:31-35

Because of the severe hunger of Saul's troops, they killed animals and ate raw, bloody meat in direct violation of God's laws.

"The people rushed greedily upon the spoil, and took sheep and oxen and calves, and slew them on the ground; and the people ate them with the blood" (14:32).

Eating bloody meat was forbidden from Noah's day onwards (see Genesis 9:4). Under Moses, this rule became part of the Laws of Israel, based on the fact that "life" was associated with "blood" and was very sacred in the sacrificial system (Leviticus 17:11,12). Saul's rash "no food" command caused Israel to sin against God's "no blood" command! Yet, he never acknowledged *his part* in this transgression.

Then they told Saul, saying, "Behold, the people are sinning against the Lord by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have acted treacherously; roll a great stone to me today" (14:33).

He tried to remedy the situation by setting up his own ‘food preparation station’ and, following this, by erecting an altar to the Lord (14:34,35). Saul appears to be scrambling as a leader to fix a massive offense to God; though he seems blind to his own self-sins that caused put the people to stumble.

Saul had an uncanny ability to find fault with everyone else; but not with himself. Jesus warned against focusing on the sins of others instead of our own sins: “First remove the LOG out of your own eye; and then you will see clearly enough to remove the SPECK out of your brother’s eye” (Matthew 7:3-5). Be slow to point the finger at others. Learn the habit of asking first: What have I done to contribute to this situation. Become “self-aware” as you live and relate with other people.

Saul attempts to execute Jonathan: 14:36-46

Saul proposed that Israel should pursue the Philistines and totally destroy them. Notice the 3 ‘voices’ telling Saul what to do.

Then Saul said, “Let us go down after the Philistines by night and take spoil among them until the morning light, and let us not leave a man of them.” And they said, “Do whatever seems good to you.” So the priest said, “Let us draw near to God here” (14:36).

- Saul said: Let’s just DO IT!
- The people said: Do what YOU want to do.
- The priest said: Let’s ask GOD what we should do.

The ‘self voice,’ and the ‘crowd voice’ always try to drown out the ‘God voice.’ It takes a determined effort to make sure this DOES NOT happen when facing major decisions. Who have YOU been listening to lately? Are you making a concerted effort to LISTEN to God’s voice before you move forward?

When Saul inquired of God, he heard nothing but silence, indicating that there was un-confessed sin that was blocking God’s movement toward Israel.

Saul inquired of God, “Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You give them into the hand of Israel?” But He did not answer him on that day (14:37).

This silence from God led Saul to look for more sin in *other people*. He decided that it was *the sin of his son*, Jonathan, in

violating the ban on food that caused God's voice to be silent. Thus, Saul sought to have Jonathan put to death so that God would remove His hand of judgment Israel.

In one of Saul's lowest moments as Israel's leader, he declared before all the people that Jonathan *must* die for his great sin of tasting a little honey (14:44). But the people overruled him, *honoring* Jonathan as God's instrument of victory.

But the people said to Saul, "Must Jonathan die, who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Far from it! As the Lord lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people rescued Jonathan and he did not die (14:45).

Summary of Saul's wars and his family: 14:47-52

While Saul's "personal issues" stand out in the detailed narratives, this summary indicates that he was successful in freeing Israel from the oppression of many enemies.

" . . . he fought against all his enemies on every side . . . wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment . . . he acted valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them" (14:47,48).

Like other flawed leaders before him (Gideon, Samson, Jephthah), God used Saul in spite of himself, for the good of Israel.

The list of Saul's family members (14:49-51) reads like one big happy family portrait. Yet, when read against the backdrop of the wider story, it is a tragic and sad collection of lives that would be *destroyed* because of their connection to Saul:

- Saul's sons die with him in battle against the Philistines, because the Lord had pronounced judgment against their father (31:2).
- Saul's older daughter, Merab, bore 5 sons, all of who were hanged by the Gibeonites because of her father's sins (2Sam.21:8).
- Saul's younger daughter, Michal, became King David's 1st wife, but was estranged from him after mocking him and, thus, was childless to her death (2Sam.6:20-23).
- Saul own wife, Ahinoam, was labeled by him a "perverse and rebellious woman" (1Sam.20:30).
- Saul's cousin and army captain, Abner, was vengefully murdered by Joab, captain of David's troops (2Sam.3:27).

In short, if you were in Saul's family portrait at 1Samuel 14, you might have thought you were riding the wave of greatness and glory; but the reality was that you were riding on a ship destined for total calamity.

A prayer for my family: "God, when I look at my 'family portrait' I see a group of great people with tremendous God-given potential. Help me to live and lead in this clan so that the longer-term picture for everyone will bring honor and glory to You, and great joy to everyone involved, including future generations not yet in the picture. Give me, God, the grace to walk more closely with You, so that my life might be an instrument of family blessings, not a conveyor of family curses. In Jesus powerful name, Amen."

Saul's disobedience with the Amalekites: 15:1-35

The events recorded here are not only decisive for Saul as a king, they are also incredibly revealing about Saul the man.

- **God's decision to punish the Amalekites: 15:1-3.** To understand the *severity of Saul's sin* in this matter, we must first understand the history and severity of God's curse upon the Amalekite nation.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey'" (15:2,3).

The Amalekites were the first to attack the infant nation Israel *just after* they had come out of Egypt into the desert of Sinai (Exodus 17:8-16). God rescued weary Israel from the Amalekite attack; but He also pronounced His intention to wipe out the Amalekites at some future time.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven" (Exodus 17:14).

God's resolve in this matter was made even clearer when Moses, near the end of his life, brought up the Amalekite issue again.

"Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and

attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall come about when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget" (Deuteronomy 25;17-19).

Israel was faint and weary. Amalek moved in for the kill. God did not take this lightly. Now, in Saul's day (some 400 years later), God had determined that it was time to call the Amalekites to account for their actions. Saul was God's chosen instrument to bring judgment upon the Amalekites. It was *critical* that Saul *do* exactly what *God* had commanded him to do.

- **Saul's partial obedience: 15:4-9.** Saul did make war and defeat the Amalekites; but he *did not* utterly destroy them as God had commanded him to do.

"But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed" (15:9).

Saul's motto was: "THY will be done ... as it seems best to ME." Partial obedience was his undoing. The sad irony of this whole story is that Saul's partial obedience evoked the same consequence as the Amalekites' total disobedience to God - LIGHTS OUT! Are there areas of your life where you have 'negotiated' a partial obedience to what God has asked of you? Learn from this story about Saul that partial obedience is no less offensive to God than total disregard of His will and word.

- **Judgment pronounced upon Saul: 15:10-23.** How odd that Saul would be setting up a monument *in his own honor* (15:12) on the very day he would experience the greatest dishonor of his entire life! Samuel confronted Saul on his failure to obey God's orders fully; but Saul (as usual) acted as if *he* had obeyed, but *the people* were the ones who had compromised God's command.

Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the Lord! I have carried out the command of the Lord." But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best

of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed” (15:13-15).

Samuel’s rebuke and Saul’s response gives us great insight into the inner-life of Israel’s first king.

Samuel said, “Is it not true, though you were small in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the Lord anointed you king over Israel, and the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated.’ Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord?” (15:17-19).

What a summary of Saul’s career. A self-declared ‘small’ man was given the ‘big’ honor of being called by God to be Israel’s first king; yet, he squandered that honor by failing to fully live in submission to the GREAT KING. True to form, however, Saul tried to shift the blame to others.

“I did obey the voice of the Lord, and went on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal” (15:20,21).

Saul is now brought to *the end* of his clever excuses and well thought-out rationalizations. Samuel calls him on his root sin and tells him that it will cost him the kingship.

“Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king” (15:22,23).

Rebellion and insubordination: These sins were, in God’s eyes, as bad as consulting demonic spirits or worshipping idols (especially for Israel’s leader/king!). Thus, since Saul could not bring his heart into submission to the GREAT KING, he was no longer fit to serve as the vice-regent over God’s people.

God prefers obedience to burnt offerings and sacrifices. In other words, He is not impressed by our acts of religious observance when our obedience to His Word is faltering. This is precisely what Jesus meant when He said to the religious people of His day: “This people honors Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me” (Matthew 15:8, in citation of Isaiah 29:13). Don’t ever try to ‘go through the motions’ with God. He sees right through it . . . and doesn’t like it at all.

- **Saul’s response: Please honor me! 15:24-35.** Saul finally cracks open his heart a tiny bit and reveals his greatest fear:

Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice” (15:24).

Saul craved the approval of people. This caused him to heed their voice over God’s voice. Like a later group of flawed leaders, he “loved the approval of men more than the approval of God” (see Jesus’ indictment of the Pharisees, John 12:43). Even in this sad and solemn moment, facing his own sin before Samuel, his greater concern was to ‘save face’ before the elders. He immediately kept demanding that he been seen publicly *with Samuel* so that the people would not think poorly of him.

“Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship the Lord.” But Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.” As Samuel turned to go, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. So Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you. Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.” Then he said, “I have sinned; but please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me, that I may worship the Lord your God.” So Samuel went back following Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord (15:25-31).

“Honor me now before the elders ...” Sadly, that pretty well sums up Saul’s life – desperation for validation.

Samuel personally executed God's judgment against the wicked Amalekite king, Agag (whom Saul had spared). His remark to him before killing him reveals something of God's justice:

“As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women” (15:33).

Finally, Samuel departed from Saul for the last time.

“Then Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord grieved that He had made Saul king over Israel” (15:34,35).

Final thoughts on Saul's decline . . .

Saul's value had never become rooted in God's love and approval. Thus, he spent much energy manipulating people and situations in order to cover his fear and shame, and to appear confident and competent. Often, such 'self-protective strategies' are not so obvious to acquaintances. They can feel intimidated by the person, believing that they *are* strong, confident and 'in control.'

In a family, however, it is more difficult to mask this sort of self-validating behavior. **Jonathan**, Saul's son, was well aware of his father's insecurities and strategies. He was not threatened, even by his own father, because his worth and value was firmly rooted in his God. Thus, his faith remained active and strong, unimpeded by the opinions or actions of others.

“The unexamined life is not worth living” (Socrates). Who do you see yourself more like – Saul or Jonathan? If you are more like Saul, then ask God to reveal the roots of your hidden insecurities. Ask Him to show you the strategies you use to subtly manipulate in order to ‘gain honor’ in the eyes of others. Invite God to take you on a journey to the place where HIS love and affirmation are the foundation of your self worth.

If you are more like Jonathan, then ask God for increasing humility and faith to ‘live for an audience of One.’ Invite Him to unleash the power of His Spirit within you to bring about another great God-victory in your life. God is ready to steer . . . when you are ready to move.

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 6 – The Rise of Young David
1Samuel 16-18

Introduction

Saul was rejected as king because of his insubordination and rebellion against God’s commands (15:23). He was told, through Samuel, that the kingship would be given to a “*man after God’s own heart*” (13:14). Now, we are introduced to young David, who will become Israel’s 2nd king. In these early scenes from David’s life we see a level of connectedness to God that was lacking in Saul (though very much evident in Jonathan). David will manifest a true heart for God in many ways, most notably in defeating the Philistine giant, Goliath, for the glory and honor of God’s name.

Samuel anoints David: 16:1-13

Samuel had been mourning greatly the failure of Saul as God’s anointed king (15:35 and 16:1). God told Samuel that the time of mourning was over, and he must go the house of Jesse in Bethlehem, to anoint Israel’s 2nd king.

There is a time for mourning, fasting, praying, and crying over losses of dreams, relationships, opportunities, etc. (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Loss is a form of death, thus grieving is a necessary step in the healing process. The length of time for grieving depends on the severity of the loss. But there also comes a time when we must embrace God’s signal to begin to “landscape around the loss” and “walk in the new normal.” As we do this, God promises to give us healing, comfort and strength to move forward.

Samuel had legitimate fears that Saul might hear of his trip to Jesse’s house and put him to death (16:2). He asked: “*How can I go?*” In response, God gave Samuel a way to move forward, and he obeyed without hesitating or wavering. As we have seen before, *fear* is a normal reaction to danger. It is what we *do* when we are afraid that determines whether we remain paralyzed, or move forward.

Note: It is common, as Samuel did, for us to ask God HOW He might work in some situation. Yet, there are 2 very different kinds of HOW questions: the HOW of faith and the HOW of doubt. Mary, the mother of Jesus, asked God HOW He would cause her to bear His son (Luke 1:34). Like Samuel, she was given a simple answer, and she was immediately willing to obey. On the other hand, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, asked HOW the promise of a son could be fulfilled for him, since they were old (Luke 1:18). His question was tinged by doubt, thus God disciplined him with muteness (inability to speak) for the entire 9 months of his wife's pregnancy. When we question God as to HOW He might work in the concerns of our lives, let us make sure we are asking with the HOW of faith, not the HOW of doubt.

After properly consecrating Jesse and 7 of his sons, the candidates were brought before Samuel, beginning with the oldest, Eliab.

When they entered, he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (16:6,7).

Samuel must have been surprised that *none of them* were God's choice. David, the youngest son, was not even considered to be a worthy candidate, thus he was not invited to the anointing feast.

But Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here" (16:11).

Samuel had performed the purification ceremony to prepare Jesse's sons for the feast. David came in directly from the fields, 'unclean' because of his contact with animals. Yet, God did not wait for all of the religious purification rites to be performed again. The Lord immediately revealed to Samuel that *this* was His choice.

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah" (16:13).

Why was David invited right into the feast without purification rites being performed? Because, unseen to human eyes, God saw that David's heart was already purified and consecrated. His love for God and trust in God, as "his shepherd," was an everyday experience (Psalm 23).

David serves as Saul's healing musician: 16:14-23

While the Spirit of the Lord came upon David, an evil spirit "from God" came upon Saul, tormenting and terrorizing him. As we learn from other Scriptures, evil spirits sometimes gain permission from God in order to carry out their malevolent schemes (see Job 1:6-12). It was decided that a skillful musician might be able to soothe Saul, bringing relief from the influence of the evil spirit. Enter David, the "sweet psalmist of Israel."

Then one of the young men said, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the Lord is with him" (16:18).

David was described as a heroic warrior, with a reputation of having been used powerfully of the Lord. Thus, it is possible that the record of David's battle with Goliath (ch.17) had already occurred. If this is the case, then ch.17 is a flashback narrative, intended to show *how* David rose to prominence in Saul's eyes, thus being chosen to serve in his court as musician and armor bearer (ch.16).

Then David came to Saul and attended him; and Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor bearer. Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David now stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight" (16:21,22).

Goliath taunts Israel: 17:1-11

Goliath, the Philistine champion, was one of the remaining descendants of the giant Anak (Joshua 11:21,22). He was roughly 9 feet tall! He came forth on 40 consecutive days defying Israel to send one man out to engage with him in a 'winner-take-all' fight.

"Am I not a Philistine and you are servants of Saul? I defy the ranks of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together." When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid (17:10,11).

Israel's reputation at this point was that they were "*servants of Saul*," not *servants of God*. Not even Saul, who was a head taller than anyone in Israel (9:2), dared to take on Goliath. Why did Jonathan not step forward, given his heroic faith-deeds in previous settings? Perhaps Saul would not permit Jonathan any further opportunities for success, since the people already regarded Jonathan more highly than his father (see 14:45).

David's questions: 17:12-30

David is introduced again, as if we had not already become acquainted with him (17:12-14; perhaps another clue that the entire 17th chapter is a flashback.) David was sent back and forth from his father's house to the battlefield to check on his 3 oldest brothers and to bring them provisions. On this particular occasion, David began to ask questions about Goliath's taunt and *why* someone was not acting in God's strength to defeat him.

Then David spoke to the men who were standing by him, saying, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?" (17:26).

In David's eyes, Goliath's taunt was not merely against Israel, but against *the God of Israel*. He inquired as to the reward promised to the man who not only "*kills the Philistine*" but, more importantly who "*takes away the reproach from Israel.*" For David, the glory and honor of God was at stake. Further, he knew that "*everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; assuredly, he will not be unpunished*" (Proverbs 16:5).

David's bold questions and fearless faith were not well received by all. In particular, he incited the fierce anger of his eldest brother.

Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab's anger burned against David and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your insolence and the wickedness of your heart; for you have come down in order to see the battle." But David said, "What have I done now? Was it not just a question?" (17:28,29).

David's 2 questions in response to his brother's attack are revealing: *"Now what have I done! Can't I even ask a question?"* It seems that such scornful attacks were a common experience for David, the youngest of 8 brothers. As for Eliab, his anger reveals a lot of buried bitterness toward David. Was he angry that Samuel had passed over him (the firstborn) in favor of his youngest brother? Was he jealous over the evidence of the Spirit's anointing on David's life? Was he angry at himself that he lacked the courage to face Goliath? Two things are clear: Eliab was harboring bitterness toward David . . . and David had become accustomed to being put down (verbally abused.)

We often minimize the impact of our family of origin on our lives. Yet, "family patterns from the past are played out in our present relationships without us necessarily being aware of it" (Pete Scazzero, Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, p.96). David's life story will continue to reveal some of the roots of being the youngest and being left 'alone' to watch the family's sheep. David definitely attached emotionally to His God; but he never seemed to attach well to those in his family, or to others (except Jonathan). See EHS ch.5 for an excellent discussion of the impact of your family of origin on your present experience. (OPC's EHS course, Living Well, goes into all of this material in excellent detail, helping you process and apply these concepts.)

David kills Goliath: 17:31-54

David was brought before Saul, who immediately noted that he was *"too young"* to fight Goliath (17:33). David responded by telling how, as a shepherd, he had killed a lion and a bear with his bare hands. He was certain that the Lord would help him again.

And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (17:37).

Saul then clothed David in his own armor; but it was far too big and bulky for him. David chose instead his usual weaponry and his mastered skills: his shepherd's staff, his sling, and 5 smooth stones. With these he was fully equipped to face Goliath.

We cannot 'wear someone else's armor' as we seek to live out God's plan for our lives. God has given a S.H.A.P.E. to each of us: Spiritual gifts; Heart/passions; Abilities; Personality; Experiences (Rick Warren, Purpose Driven Life). When we live and move in keeping with our God-given S.H.A.P.E. we are putting on our own armor, and then we are most useful and most fulfilled. Are you being true to who God made you; or are you trying to wear someone else's armor?

When Goliath saw young David, he scornfully mocked him; but David, confident he was fighting with GOD on his side, would not back down:

Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands" (17:45-47).

David contended for God's glory, not his own. He fought in defense of the Lord's name and the Lord's honor. By doing so, he was letting "all the earth know that there is a God in Israel."

Note: When the first Christians encountered persecution, they took a page from David's songbook as their inspiration while praying together: "Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed" (Psalm 2:1,2 – See Acts 4:25,26). The persecuted Church knew that their "Goliath" (the Jewish Sanhedrin and the Roman authorities) was fighting against not just themselves, but against the all-powerful, sovereign Lord and His Christ. Thus, they gained courage to stand in the face of overwhelming odds, just as David had done.

Saul inquires as to David's identity: 17:55-58

After routing the Philistines, Saul inquired about David's identity, specifically *who his father was*. This could again indicate that this

chapter is a flashback and that Saul's first exposure to David was the Goliath incident. On the other hand, it may simply indicate that Saul did not know who David's *father* was, and that he was making good on his pledge to give 'tax-free' status to *the father* of the one who would conquer Goliath (see 17:25).

Jonathan befriends David: 18:1-4

Jonathan, son of Saul, continued to shine as one of the heroic, yet humble, figures in this portion of Israel's history. As Jonathan meets another passionate warrior like himself, he initiated a soul-connection and pledged his loyalty to David. He even gave David his royal robes and weapons. David had found a "true brother!"

"Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself. . . . Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt" (18:1-4).

God allows many different kinds of people to come into our lives in order to shape and grow us. Some of these people act negatively toward us, while others act positively: 1) David's family seemed to IGNORE and MARGINALIZE him. 2) David served as a HEALER and COMFORTER to Saul. 3) Eliab was a MOCKER and ACCUSER to David. 4) Jonathan became a beloved FRIEND and SUPPORTER of David. Regardless of whether people act negatively or positively toward you, know that they are there, by God's design, to grow, refine and shape you for His purposes.

David's military success and Saul's anger: 18:5-9

Saul appointed David as one of his key generals, and he quickly had tremendous military success. However, the songs that people were singing about David aroused great jealousy in Saul's heart:

The women sang as they played, and said, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on (18:7-9).

This was the beginning of a *long* struggle (spanning 10+ years) between Saul and David. The tension was driven by Saul's

jealousy and rage. Yet, God used this prolonged struggle in many ways to shape and refine David for His purposes.

Jealousy is a God-given emotion. 'Good jealousy' is a healthy desire to protect something that is rightfully ours and very dear to us. God has 'good jealousy' toward each of us (Exodus 20:5; James 4:5). 'Bad jealousy' is when we envy another person (their popularity, status, talents, skills, opportunities, position, etc.). When we have good jealousy, we are imitating our Father in heaven. When we have bad jealousy, we are imitating the Devil, who first fell from God's favor when he became jealous of God's glory (see Isaiah 14:13,14). For more on this, see Cry of the Soul, by Dan Allender and Tremper Longman. The authors discuss how even our 'negative' emotions can teach us a lot about our God.

Saul attempts to kill David: 18:10-16

In fits of rage, Saul twice attempted to kill David with his spear, even as David played soothing music for the king. David escaped both times; but this marked the end of his service as Saul's 'medical musician!'

“Therefore Saul removed him from his presence and appointed him as his commander of a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people” (18:13).

Outside of Saul's court, David's God-given successes continued to pile up, and the nation grew in their love for their new champion.

“David was prospering in all his ways for the Lord was with him. When Saul saw that he was prospering greatly, he dreaded him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, and he went out and came in before them” (18:14-16).

Note the progression in the language describing Saul's emotions toward David: suspicion (18:9), fear (18:12); dread (18:15); more afraid (18:29a); he was David's enemy continually (18:29b). This downward spiral likely had its beginning in Saul's deep insecurities (see p.306 of these notes). Saul's emotions swelled, however, into a murderous rage when the evil spirit was allowed to come upon him, as David played his harp in the king's court.

Saul invites David to marry his daughter: 18:17-28

“Jealousy is very inventive of methods of executing its cruel purpose” (F.B. Meyer, *Samuel*, p.176). Saul twice tried to have

David killed *by the Philistines*. First, he offered Merab to be David's wife, in exchange for David's promise to fight the Philistines for him (although Saul should have already given Merab to David for killing Goliath – see 17:25).

For Saul thought, “My hand shall not be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him” (18:17).

David humbly refused this offer, however, on the grounds that he was not of high enough standing to marry into the royal family. Yet, when Saul offered his 2nd daughter, Michal, to David, he took the offer. The dowry, this time, required David to risk his life by shedding Philistine blood.

“The king does not desire any dowry except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to take vengeance on the king’s enemies.” Now Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines (18:25).

David took his men and swiftly killed double the required number of Philistines, much to Saul's dismay.

“When Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michal, Saul’s daughter, loved him, then Saul was even more afraid of David. Thus Saul was David’s enemy continually” (18:28,29).

David's rising reputation: 18:30

“Then the commanders of the Philistines went out to battle, and it happened as often as they went out, that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants (officers, NIV) of Saul. So his name was highly esteemed” (18:30).

Additional thoughts: A “man after God’s heart.”

We will certainly learn, as David's story unfolds, that he was *far from perfect*. In fact, he was by his own admission, a “sinner from the womb” (Psalms 32,51,etc.). Yet, there were qualities that made his heart attractive *in God's eyes*. Note these contrasts:

<u>David (and Jonathan)</u>	<u>Saul (and Eliab)</u>
Abandoned to God	Focused on self-importance
Desiring God to be great	Maneuvering to stay on top
Living for an audience of One	Enslaved to people's opinions
Exercised faith in God	Paralyzed by fear
Obedied God at all costs	Obedied only as they saw fit

The following comments by Charles Swindoll, on “Becoming a Man or a Woman after God’s Own Heart” are excellent:

“When God scans the earth for potential leaders, He is not on a search for angels in the flesh. He is certainly not looking for perfect people, since there are none. He is searching for men and women like you and me, mere people made up of flesh. But He is also looking for people who share the same qualities He found in David. God is looking for men and women “after His own heart” (1Samuel 13:14).

What does it mean to be a person after God's own heart? It means your life is in harmony with the Lord. What is important to Him is important to you. What burdens Him burdens you. When He says, "Go to the right," you go to the right. When He says, "Stop that in your life," you stop it. When He says, "This is wrong and I want you to change," you come to terms with it because you have a heart for God . . .

When you are a man or woman after God's heart, you are deeply sensitive to spiritual things. 2Chronicles 16:9 explains it this way: "For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His."

What is God looking for? He is looking for men and women whose hearts are His – completely. That means there are no locked closets. Nothing's been swept under the rugs. That means that when you do wrong, you admit it and come to terms with it. You long to please Him in your actions. You care deeply about the motivations behind your actions. God is not looking for magnificent specimens of humanity. He's looking for deeply spiritual, genuinely humble, honest-to-the-core servants who have integrity . . .

We live in a world that says, in many ways, "If you just make a good impression, that's all that matters." But you will never be a man or woman of God if that's your philosophy. Never. You can't fake it with the Almighty. He is not impressed with externals. He always focuses on the inward qualities, like the character of the heart...those things that take time and discipline to cultivate."

Charles R. Swindoll, "Becoming a Man or a Woman after God's Own Heart," Insights (April 1997).

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 7 – Jonathan Helps David Flee Saul
1Samuel 19-22

Introduction

Samuel anointed David when he was about 15-16 years old. David actually began to reign as king at age 30. During the intervening 14-15 years he was running for his life, trying to escape the murderous hand of Saul. We see some different sides of David during this period of his life. He may have been a giant-killer and a man after God's own heart; but he was also a human being subject to emotions such as fear and terror. He may have been very strong in his concept of God; but he could also lapse into moods of great uncertainty as to God's plan for his life. He may have been a man of faith; but he also repeatedly resorted to human means (deception, pretending, fleeing) to protect himself. The superscriptions to a number of David's Psalms suggest that they were written during these years on the run (Psalms 34, 52, 56, 59). These musings help us gain insight into the David's struggle to stay on track with God's agenda for his life.

Jonathan reconciles David to Saul: 19:1-7

After David's defeat of Goliath and subsequent military victories, Saul grew increasingly jealous (ch.18). He even commanded his son Jonathan and his officers to *put David to death (19:1)*. Jonathan, however, refused and warned David. He then interceded on David's behalf. Jonathan's case to his father was simple: *David has not sinned against you; but you are sinning against David:*

Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Do not let the king sin against his servant David, since he has not sinned against you, and since his deeds have been very beneficial to you. For he took his life in his hand and struck the Philistine, and the Lord brought about a great deliverance for all Israel; you saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by putting David to death without a cause?" (19:4,5).

Jonathan challenged his father with courage and truth. He did not act afraid of him. He was able to change Saul's intentions *temporarily*. However, Saul's desire for vengeance was the "fruit" of deeper root issues that were left unaddressed. Thus, although Saul *vowed* in the moment that he would *never* kill David, his "beneath-the-iceberg" issues – fear, pride, jealousy, insecurity, self-love, rebellion against God – would rise up again, causing him to break his vow and seek to destroy David.

It is easy to say to someone who is behaving badly: "Just stop it!" That rarely works, however, unless the underlying issues driving the behavior are brought out into the light. Most often, "above the iceberg" behaviors are the strategies that we employ to alleviate "beneath the iceberg" pain. It takes time, under the loving guidance of the Holy Spirit (who knows everything about us) to bring to the surface the hidden wounds and lies that are driving our negative behavior. This is why self-awareness ("thinking beneath") is so important. Until we get to the real roots of our reactions and negative behaviors, we will continue to fall into the same patterns over and over again. OPC's Inner Healing Prayer Ministry is designed to help you gain the Spirit's insight into these hidden areas of your heart and experience His deep healing.

Saul again tries to kill David: 19:8-10

David continued to amass great military victories over the Philistines, causing them to flee (19:8). David's success, however, caused Saul's unaddressed heart issues to surface again. The combination of jealousy and spiritual oppression (19:9) moved Saul to abruptly break his vow and attempt to kill David again. Now David, who regularly caused the enemy Philistines to *flee*, was himself *fleeing* in fear from his enemy, Saul.

"Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, so that he stuck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night" (19:10).

Michal helps David escape from Saul: 19:11-17

David had married Saul's daughter, Michal. Now it was her turn to rescue David from the murderous hand of her father. Saul sent men to watch David's house one night, hoping to kill him in the morning. Michal gave her husband a grave warning that appears to have been a game-changer for David:

Michal, David's wife, told him, saying, "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be put to death" (19:11).

Michal aided David's escape with the help of the household idol! He fled his home that night . . . and never returned.

"So Michal let David down through a window, and he went out and fled and escaped. Michal took the household idol and laid it on the bed, and put a quilt of goats' hair at its head, and covered it with clothes" (19:12,13).

Saul blasted his daughter for betraying him (19:17). Michal lied, saying that David had threatened to kill her if she did not help him.

Psalm 59 has been connected to the night that David sat in his house, surrounded by Saul's officers. The following selections show how desperate David was for the protection of God.

"Rescue me from my enemies, O God. Protect me from those who have come to destroy me. Rescue me from these criminals; save me from these murderers. They have set an ambush for me. Fierce enemies are out there waiting, Lord, though I have not sinned or offended them. I have done nothing wrong, yet they prepare to attack me. . . . They come out at night, snarling like vicious dogs as they prowl the streets. Listen to the filth that comes from their mouths; their words cut like swords. But as for me, I will sing about Your power. Each morning I will sing with joy about Your unfailing love. For You have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress. O my Strength, to You I sing praises, for You, O God, are my refuge, the God who shows me unfailing love" (Psalm 59:1-4,6-7,16-17).

David's prayer reveals a different "lens" through which he viewed his enemies. In a previous crisis, Goliath was an "enemy of God" who didn't stand a chance against a God-empowered David (17:26,43-46). Now, however, Saul's men are fear inducing, treacherous murderers waiting to kill him at sunrise. David knew WHO God was, and WHOSE he was; yet he often had difficulty exercising the same fearless faith as he had toward Goliath and other enemies. His faith and courage were subject to the same ups and downs as all of us.

The struggle of FAITH in times of CRISIS is to believe that God IS Who He says He IS . . . even as the circumstances threaten to undo us. Psalm 59 reveals David vacillating between faith and fear. Half the Psalm is about the fierce enemies poised to murder David. He is disturbed because he “has done nothing wrong.” Yet, the other half is about God, Who was David’s refuge and strength, his source of unfailing love. As humans with “fallen natures” we will always vacillate between faith and fear. We should seek to uncover the deepest roots of our recurring fears so that fear does not so easily gain a hold on us. At the same time, we must learn to cling what is true about our God, Who is greater than our greatest crisis, keeping our eyes on Him in the midst the storm.

David flees to Samuel: 19:18-24

David fled first to Samuel, the one who had anointed him as Israel’s next king (16:1,12,13). David undoubtedly needed assurances that what Samuel had told him was *true*, and that he *would* indeed someday succeed Saul. At the same time, he was able to receive prophetic guidance from Samuel as to the steps he should take. Samuel took David to Naioth in Ramah, where a school of prophets was located. Saul sent men to arrest David; but *“instead of seizing David, they were themselves seized”* by the Spirit of God (Matthew Henry). Saul’s officers were overpowered by God’s presence, and they began worshipping and praising God. Some ancient Jewish commentators thought that Saul’s men began prophesying *that David would overtake Saul as Israel’s next king!*

When his officers returned empty-handed, Saul decided he himself would go and capture David. Yet, as he approached the city of Naioth, the Spirit overpowered him also, with strange results.

“. . . the Spirit of God came upon him also, so that he went along prophesying continually until he came to Naioth in Ramah. He also stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (19:23,24).

Even after David saw God’s power over Saul and his men, it was not enough to call him out of his “fight-flight” mode. Since Saul was now in Naioth, David departed, fleeing back to Jonathan and demanding to know *why* Saul was so intent on killing him.

Jonathan follows through on his covenant: 20:1-42

Jonathan had previously bound himself to David in a covenant relationship (18:1-4). Now, he renewed his covenant with David (20:12-17) and took specific steps that proved his love and commitment to his closest friend.

Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said to Jonathan, “What have I done? What is my iniquity? And what is my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life?”

“What have I done wrong?” This was David’s question when his oldest brother Eliab accused him of conceit and wickedness in the Goliath incident and lashed out at him with harsh words (17:29). This was David’s protest again in Psalm 59:4 – “I have done nothing wrong . . . their words cut like swords.” Now, his question to Jonathan was the same: “What have I done? Why is he seeking to kill me?” David was deeply hurt by unjust accusations, so hurt in fact that it overshadowed his ability to “step out of the situation” and take an honest look at his accusers. Their accusations really said more about the insecurities within them (Saul’s jealousy; Eliab’s bitterness; etc.) than David’s issues. In fact, David was the scapegoat for the issues brewing deep inside of others. Perhaps you are the subject of unjust accusations. If so, ask God for insight into what might be driving your accusers. It might be more about what’s brewing inside of them . . . than you.

Jonathan was being kept in the dark as to his father’s murderous intentions (20:2,3). Thus, he did not understand why David was so terrified of his father. David asked Jonathan to go and *test* his father’s intentions so that they could both know for sure.

“Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I ought to sit down to eat with the king. But let me go, that I may hide myself in the field until the third evening. If your father misses me at all, then say, ‘David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city, because it is the yearly sacrifice there for the whole family.’ If he says, ‘It is good,’ your servant shall be safe; but if he is very angry, know that he has decided on evil” (20:5-7).

David was asking Jonathan *to lie* concerning his whereabouts. Here we see signs of David *taking matters into his own hands* in order to secure his safety. Jonathan did as David requested. When Saul asked where David was, Jonathan offered up the lie that he had asked permission to go to Bethlehem. At that point, Saul erupted with abusive speech and violence toward his son.

Then Saul's anger burned against Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you are choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Therefore now, send and bring him to me, for he must surely die" (20:30,31).

Jonathan was stunned by his father's verbal outburst. But Saul went a step further: he threw his spear at Jonathan and tried to kill him! It was then that "*Jonathan knew that his father had decided to put David to death.*"

Then Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did not eat food on the second day of the new moon, for he was grieved over David because his father had dishonored him (20:34).

The next morning, Jonathan went to where David was hiding in the field, and informed him that he must flee because his father was trying to kill him. As they parted from one another, the two men were extremely grieved that they would not be able to serve God's purposes alongside of one another.

"And they kissed each other and wept together, but David more" (20:41).

A "covenant relationship" is when two people bind themselves to one another in a very special way. There are typically 3 elements involved: 1) Symbols of the covenant. 2) A sacrifice that each party makes for the other. 3) A spoken commitment regarding the terms of the covenant (Beth Moore, *A Heart Like His*, ch.10). Jonathan initiated this relationship with David, which is interesting because he was actually about 10 years older than David. In these early years of David's flight from Saul, it was Jonathan who primarily fulfilled "his part of the bargain." It would be after Jonathan's death that David would fulfill his part of the covenant, by caring for Jonathan's last remaining descendant (2Samuel 9).

Jonathan was the "true" older brother that David never had. He supported, encouraged and protected David in ways that Eliab never did. Jonathan is the best example of a "true friend" in the entire Bible! Who do you have in your life that you are in a covenant relationship with? Marriage is the most common such relationship today; but there can be others IF you choose to form them. Who might you be a true brother or sister with you?

David flees to the priest at Nob: 21:1-9

David was now on the run, and will be until Saul's death. His first (and most tragic) stop was the city of Nob, the home of Ahimelech the high priest and the entire clan of priests. When Ahimelech asked why David had come, he concocted a lie that he was on a 'secret mission' from Saul.

David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has commissioned me with a matter and has said to me, 'Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you and with which I have commissioned you; and I have directed the young men to a certain place'" (21:2).

David and his men received provisions from Ahimelech, including the *sword of Goliath*, which David had taken from the giant on the day of his defeat. In the midst of the account of David's visit to Ahimelech, there is an ominous note recorded about the presence of a certain servant of Saul who was watching everything closely.

"Now one of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord; and his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds" (21:7).

This random observer, Doeg, becomes central as the story unfolds.

David flees to Gath: 21:10-15

Surprisingly, David fled for refuge into *Philistine* territory twice during his exile years (see later in ch.27). We recall that the Philistines were the *archenemies* of Israel. Further, *Gath* was the city from which *Goliath* had hailed. Now, David was seeking refuge in Goliath's hometown! Very quickly, however, the officers of Achish, king of Gath, reminded their king of the song that the Israelites sang about David: "*Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.*" At that point, David feared that the Philistines might put him to death. In order to escape, David brought out his best acting skills, pretending to be insane.

"David took these words to heart and greatly feared Achish king of Gath. So he disguised his sanity before them, and acted insanely in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard" (21:12,13).

The king of Gath scoffed that he didn't need another madman in his country. Thus, David narrowly escaped from this predicament.

Psalms 34 and 56 are connected with the occasion of David's narrow escape from the Philistines in Gath. While David was playing the madman, he was inwardly praying for his deliverance from his own misguided movements. He was "brokenhearted" inside, while using his best acting skills to get out of Gath alive! Following are selections from these Psalms.

"I prayed to the Lord, and He answered me ... This poor man cried, and the Lord listened; He saved me from all my troubles... The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; He rescues those whose spirits are crushed. The righteous person faces many troubles; but the Lord comes to the rescue each time" (Ps.34:4,6,18,19).

"O God, have mercy on me, for people are hounding me. My foes attack me all day long. I am constantly hounded by those who slander me, and many are boldly attacking me. But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. I praise God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me? You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book. This I know: God is on my side! I praise God for what he has promised; yes, I praise the Lord for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?" (Ps.56:1-4,8-11).

According to the account in 1Samuel 20:12, David was "greatly afraid" of the king of Gath. Yet, in Psalm 56 he writes, "I trust in God, so WHY should I be afraid?" We can hear David vacillating again between fear and faith. This represents the ongoing human struggle to keep our eyes on God and His promises in the midst of our struggles and pain.

Who would have ever guessed that David was writing songs and prayers to God while at the same time playing the madman at Gath? Outward appearances can be deceiving. Don't let outward appearances stop you from really exploring another person's heart. They may be "managing" the situation on the outside; but crying out on the inside. True "Soul Talk" is where you explore another person's inner condition. OPC's Listening Well class will help you learn the skills of exploring the deep heart of another.

David in the cave of Adullam: 22:1-5

Returning to Israelite territory, David made the cave of Adullam his hideout. There, his family joined him, along with many unlikely, misfit warriors.

“So David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; and when his brothers and all his father’s household heard of it, they went down there to him. Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him” (22:1,2).

David took his parents to Moab, where he left them in the care of the king (22:3,4). Here at Adullam, we first hear of “*the prophet Gad*” who became a lifelong advisor to David. Perhaps he was sent by Samuel (from the school of prophets at Naioth) to accompany and advise David. In any case, Gad was God’s means for direct communication with David for the rest of his life.

The prophet Gad said to David, “Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah.” So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth (22:5).

David’s openness to hearing and heeding the voice of God determined whether things went well or poorly with him. There were many times when David “managed” his flight with his own ideas and strategies (lying, deception, hiding in Philistine territory, etc.) instead of listening for God’s voice. Today, God has given us His Word to speak into our lives. His Word, applied very specifically to each of us by His Spirit, is His way of guiding us into His will. “You will do well to be attentive to this (Word) as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2Peter 1:19).

Saul slaughters the priests: 22:6-23

Saul complained to his officers that none of them were truly supportive of him, since they were not informing him of Jonathan’s moves to protect David. Doeg the Edomite, who had previously witnessed Ahimelech the priest assisting David (21:1-9), decided it was time to speak up and show his loyalty to Saul.

“I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. He inquired of the Lord for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine” (22:9,10).

Doeg’s report made it sound as if Ahimelech was *intentionally* aiding David in escaping from Saul. His skewed testimony was a death sentence for *all* of the priests in the city of Nob. Saul commanded his officers to kill all 85 priests. When none of them would obey, Doeg was more than willing to be the executioner.

“And Doeg the Edomite turned around and attacked the priests, and he killed that day eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. And he struck Nob the city of the priests with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and infants; also oxen, donkeys, and sheep he struck with the edge of the sword” (22:18,19).

The death of these priests fulfilled an earlier judgment from God pronounced upon the house of Eli and his relatives (1Samuel 2:31 and 3:13,14). Thus, we can see in this terrible incident the actions of human evil *merging with* the sovereign judgments of God. This is similar to the death of Jesus, brought about by a combination of the wicked hands of men *and* the sovereign purpose of God (see Peter’s explanation in Acts 2:23). The humans who exercise their wills to do evil *will be held accountable* for their actions. At the same time, the plans and purposes of God *will be fulfilled* even as humans use their will to do evil.

Abiathar escapes and reports to David: 22:20-23

Of the priest slaughtered by Doeg, only 1 survived. Abiathar made his way to David with somber news of the massacre. David owned his responsibility in the matter, going so far as to admit that the minute he saw Doeg on that fateful day with Ahimelech at Nob (21:7) he *knew* there would be trouble ahead for the priests.

Then David said to Abiathar, “I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have brought about the death of every person in your father’s household. Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life, for you are safe with me” (22:22,23).

This surely must have been one of the lowest points of David’s life, as he came to grips with the fallout from his own sins and self-protective strategies.

David’s flight from Saul will continue, consuming nearly a decade of his life until the death of Saul (1Samuel 31). During these early years (chs. 19-22) he learned some hard lessons about how FEAR could cause him to try to MANAGE his own life and PROVIDE for his own protection; rather than TRUSTING God and moving in OBEDIENCE to His revealed will. David had a clear promise of God hanging over his life: *You WILL BE Israel’s next king*. Still, it was hard for the “man after God’s own heart” to believe that God’s word was true and His promise sure. And so it is for all of us.

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 8 – Saul Pursues David
1 Samuel 23-26

Introduction

David continued to flee from Saul. What sets these chapters apart is the way that David *listened* to the right voices and made right choices to walk in God's ways. If we were to isolate a main idea here, it would be this: *How to find joy in God while living in dark caves and dry deserts.* Once again, the superscriptions to a number of David's psalms tie them to this particular part of his journey (Psalms 54,57,63,142). The opening lines of Psalm 63 serve as a fitting introduction to this period of David's life: "*O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water*" (63:1). Only God could satisfy David's soul during this difficult period of wandering, wondering and waiting.

David rescues Keilah: 23:1-6

David was on the run from Saul, yet, he still acted as a protector of his people, Israel. The Philistines had attacked the southern city of Keilah, and David desired to rescue them. He did not move, however, before he sought the Lord's direction . . . twice.

So David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the Lord said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and deliver Keilah." But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the ranks of the Philistines?" Then David inquired of the Lord once more. And the Lord answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand" (23:2-4).

Abiathar the priest had brought "*the ephod*" with him when he had escaped from the slaughter of the priests at Nob (22:19-23). The ephod was a special vest that the high priest wore (Exodus 28). On it were 12 stones representing the 12 tribes of Israel. It also

contained two special objects – the Urim and Thummim – that were used by God to give Yes/No answers to questions (Exodus 28:30). While we do not know specifically the procedure for how the priest used the ephod to determine God’s will, it is clear that *David had access to God’s voice and he was listening.*

We also see David modeling a good leadership principle. *“Rather than shame his men for questioning the word he had received from God, David went back to God and reconfirmed His direction”* (Moore, *A Heart Like His*, p.92). David showed more concern for leading his men in the direction of God’s will, than in defending his own spirituality in response to their doubts.

Sometimes people will try to steer us in directions other than the one God has called us to walk in. We can learn from David. First, go back to God and listen again for HIS instructions. Second, determine to obey God’s voice above all others. Is anyone trying to lead you in a direction other than the one God has called you to? Once you have received God’s marching orders, move forward and do not let other voices deter you.

David leaves Keilah: 17:7-13

While David was tuning his heart to hear God’s directions, Saul was misreading God’s will through circumstances.

When it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, “God has delivered him into my hand, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars” (23:7).

“Not every opportunity is sent from God. We may want something so much that we assume any opportunity to obtain it is of divine origin. As we see from Saul’s case, however, this may not be true... When opportunities come your way, double-check your motives. Make sure you are following God’s desires, and not just your own.” Life Application Study Bible, p.477.

Again, David called for the priest, with the ephod, and twice inquired of the Lord. Note the contrast between Saul (above) and David in their attempts to discern the will of God.

Then David said, “O Lord God of Israel, Your servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard? O Lord God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant.” And the Lord said, “He will come down.” Then David said, “Will the men of Keilah

surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?” And the Lord said, “They will surrender you” (23:10-12).

David did not rely on what he had “heard” (v.10). Nor did he rely on the fact that he had just rescued Keilah from the Philistines, (thus, logically they should have been on his side). He earnestly sought the Lord for *His voice and direction*.

So many voices call out to us: peers (v.3), logic (v.5), circumstances (v.7), sources (v.10). All of these voices provide us with information; but this information must be taken before the Lord in times of concerted prayer as we ask Him to help us ‘interpret’ the data correctly, and to give us the necessary guidance to move in step with His Spirit. Don’t just try to figure things out on your own. Instead: “If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and He will give it to you” (James 1:5).

Having been warned by God that the inhabitants of Keilah *would* betray him and hand him over to Saul, David departed with his troops into the southern wilderness areas of Israel.

Imagine how David felt, after he had risked his life to rescue Keilah from the Philistines, only to have them turn right around and betray him to Saul! Nonetheless, David did not take revenge against the people of Keilah. He committed his betrayers to God’s hand of justice (eg. Psalm 54:5) and went his way. Has someone betrayed you? Can you take your pain to the Lord, rather than taking it out on the one who has betrayed you? It is a major step of spiritual maturity to let God deal with those who have hurt you.

A summary of David’s flight from Saul: 23:14

What was daily life like for David and his men during this extended period of running from Saul? A helpful summary verse paints the picture for us:

“David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds, and remained in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand” (23:14).

David was in the desolate southern wilderness areas of Israel, moving from cave to cave. He had to remain constantly vigilant against Saul’s constant attempts to capture him. Yet, GOD was faithfully watching over David every single day.

Psalm 63 is associated with these ‘desert years’ of David’s life.

Notice how David contrasts the dryness of the desert with the richness of his relationship with God.

“O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory. Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise you! I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer. You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with songs of joy. I lie awake thinking of you, meditating on you through the night. Because you are my helper, I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your strong right hand holds me securely. But those plotting to destroy me will come to ruin. They will go down into the depths of the earth. They will die by the sword and become the food of jackals. But the king will rejoice in God. All who swear to tell the truth will praise him, while liars will be silenced” (Psalm 63 - NLT).

Joy, satisfaction and security are recurring themes here. It was only “in the shadow of God’s wings” that David could sing for joy.

God is always at work to mercifully detach our “joy” from exclusive dependence upon our circumstances, teaching us instead to draw on our relationship with Him for our deepest satisfaction. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote these words from a Roman prison cell: “I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:11-13). Ask God to help you “learn the secret” of finding your deepest contentment and joy in Him alone.

Jonathan encourages David: 23:15-18

In the midst of his wearisome struggle to stay alive, who should come and encourage David but his dearly beloved friend, Jonathan.

“Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father will not find you, and you will be king over Israel and I will be next to you; and Saul my father knows that also.” So the two of them made a covenant before the Lord; and David stayed at Horesh while Jonathan went to his house (23:17,18).

Notice the specific words Jonathan spoke to David. *Do not be afraid. My father will not find you. You will be king over Israel. I will be next to you. My father knows it.* Of all the words that Jonathan spoke, only one line would go unfulfilled: *I will be next to you.* It was Jonathan's sincere hope that he would someday serve next to David in his kingship over Israel; but that would not be God's will. Instead, Jonathan would die next to his father and brothers in battle. At this time, Jonathan and David renewed their *covenant of brotherhood* with one another for the 3rd time (see also 18:3; 20:8; 20:16,17).

The word, "encourage" means to "breath courage into." Jonathan made the effort to: 1) sense his friend's need, 2) find him, and 3) breath specific words of courage into his heart. Who needs your words of encouragement, today? When you choose your words for that person, be specific. "Therefore, encourage one another, and build up one another" (1Thessalonians 5:11). Your words might just give your friend the courage to face another difficult day.

David narrowly escapes Saul's grasp: 23:19-29

The men of Ziph went to Saul and told him that David was hiding in their area. Saul set out with his army to capture David; but God protected him just as he was being surrounded.

Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain; and David was hurrying to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men to seize them. But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid on the land." So Saul returned from pursuing David and went to meet the Philistines; therefore they called that place the Rock of Escape (23:26-28).

Psalm 54 is connected to the occasion of the Ziphites betraying David's whereabouts to Saul. Here David pours out his heart to his only *true* "ROCK of escape" . . . GOD.

"Save me, O God, by Your name, and vindicate me by Your power. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers have risen against me and violent men have sought my life; they have not set God before them. Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the sustainer of my soul. He will recompense the evil to my foes; destroy them in Your faithfulness. Willingly I will sacrifice to You; I will give thanks to

Your name, O Lord, for it is good. For He has delivered me from all trouble, and my eye has looked with satisfaction upon my enemies” (Psalm 54).

David used many words to describe the people that were against him: strangers, violent men, foes, trouble, enemies. He also used many words to describe God: helper, sustainer, faithful, good, deliverer. David was able to elevate God’s character above his troubling circumstances.

This is one of the great lessons that God wants us all to learn. No matter who or what the source of our troubles might be, God is greater still. This does not mean that we will experience life as ‘easy’ or ‘safe.’ Remember, David was surrounded by Saul’s army, and only escaped because Saul was suddenly called away to repel a Philistine invasion (23:27). Yet, it does mean that we can experience the faithfulness and provision of God in the midst of our “narrow escapes.”

David spares Saul’s life: 24:1-22

Some of the caves where David hid were large enough to hold over 3,000 people. While hiding with his 600 men in the dark recesses of one such cave, Saul strolled in to take a rest. David’s men tried to persuade him to seize the moment and eliminate his enemy.

“Behold, this is the day of which the Lord said to you, ‘Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you’” (24:4).

He refused, however, to lift up his hand against “God’s anointed” king. Nor would he allow his men to harm Saul.

So he said to his men, “Far be it from me because of the Lord that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the Lord’s anointed.” David persuaded his men with these words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on his way (24:6,7).

David cut off a corner of Saul’s robe and then waited for him to leave the cave. After Saul had gone some distance, David shouted out after him and held up the corner of his robe to prove that he could have killed him. Saul admitted that David was more righteous than he was. He also acknowledged that David would someday be the king of Israel.

Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. So now swear to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants after me and that you will not destroy my name from my father's household." David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold" (24:20-22).

Psalm 142 is connected to one of David's times hiding in a cave.

"I cry out to the Lord; I plead for the Lord's mercy. I pour out my complaints before him and tell him all my troubles. When I am overwhelmed, you alone know the way I should turn. Wherever I go, my enemies have set traps for me. I look for someone to come and help me, but no one gives me a passing thought! No one will help me; no one cares a bit what happens to me. Then I pray to you, O Lord. I say, "You are my place of refuge. You are all I really want in life. Hear my cry, for I am very low. Rescue me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me. Bring me out of prison so I can thank you. The godly will crowd around me, for you are good to me" (Psalm 142 - NLT).

"Hear my cry, for I am very low." Where do you turn when you are "very low?" So often, we seek relief . . . with some kind of diversion, or something to help numb the pain. Or, we vent on other people, hoping to find comfort and sympathy. We need to learn the discipline of crying out to God, Who understands our pain and can provide the comfort and assurance we need. The apostle Paul wrote: "God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others" (2Cor.1:3,4). When no one else will give you a passing thought, remember that God's thoughts toward you are beyond measure (Psalm 139:17,18). He can comfort you like no other.

The Death of Samuel: 25:1

There is just one short verse noting the death of Samuel. The passing of Samuel may have had an emotional impact on David, since Samuel was the link to David's promise of kingship.

David and Abigail: 25:2-44

In the midst of David's long and difficult struggle to escape from Saul, we find the story of David's encounter with the noble woman Abigail, who would become his wife. Nabal, Abigail's husband, was an extremely wealthy man; but he was also very foolish.

"This man's name was Nabal, and his wife, Abigail, was a

sensible and beautiful woman. But Nabal, a descendant of Caleb, was crude and mean in all his dealings” (25:3).

God does not condemn having wealth. In fact, He encourages hard work and productivity (“My Father and I are always working,” said Jesus – John 5:17). However, God does command the wealthy to be generous and willing to share (Matt.5:42; 1Timothy 6:17-19). He also commanded “masters” to do what is right and fair because we all answer to our MASTER in heaven (Colossians 4:1). Nabal did not respect those who were under him, those whom he did business with, or the fugitives in his region. He was a successful, yet greedy and self-centered man. How do you treat the people who work under you? Those you do life/business with you? Do you use your wealth to glorify God and bless others?

While David and his men were in the area of Nabal’s shepherds, they provided protection to them (a “*wall by day and night*” v.16). David sent word of his goodwill to Nabal, asking in return for provisions for his men on some special day (25:8). Nabal, however, treated David’s messengers with contempt and even mocked David as an insubordinate man of insignificant origin. David, in turn, was outraged and commanded 400 of his warriors to put on their swords and get ready to exact revenge (25:13).

“Surely in vain I have guarded all that this man has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good. May God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave as much as one male of any who belong to him” (25:21,22).

David was deeply triggered by Nabal’s disrespect of him. This may go back to David’s history of being disrespected and put down by others (recall Eliab, his oldest brother). Interestingly, he would not take revenge on Saul when he had many opportunities to do so; but he was instantly ready to exact his own vengeance on Nabal. God tells us not to take our own revenge (see Romans 12:17-19 and 1Peter3:9). How about you? Are you seeking to “even the score” with someone? Can you give this situation to God and let Him have His way with that person?

It was only Abigail’s swift intervention that kept David from actions that he would later regret. She moved quickly to bring David the food gifts that he had requested, and to appeal to his better sense of judgment. Her entire appeal is quite amazing for its wisdom and wording.

“Should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling” (25:29).

Note how she used a slingshot analogy with a man who was really good with that particular weapon. (Read her entire speech to see how wise she was with words.) David not only thanked Abigail for her prudent intervention; he sent her a marriage proposal after her husband, Nabal, died 10 days later!

Then David said to Abigail, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand” (25:32,33).

Abigail was an incredibly wise and resourceful woman that we can learn much from:

- She knew her God. She was devout and yet humble.
- She respected her servants.
- She knew the character of her husband and how to handle him.
- She knew how to approach David with respect and confidence.
- She reminded David of God’s past faithfulness and His promises.
- She knew how to encourage godly behavior in others.
- She made him think through the consequences of his actions.
- She provided the food that David had requested.
- She took the blame for Nabal’s offense against David.
- She inspired David to protect his own reputation in Israel.
- She affirmed that he would have a lasting dynasty.
- She assured David that his life was secure in God’s hands.

Abigail’s story is in Scripture to inspire all women young and old. (This IS the longest and most detailed chapter in the Bible devoted to one woman’s exemplary behavior in a crisis situation.) Although she was a very wise, faithful, God-honoring woman, she did not shame David in the way she sought to ward off his revengeful spirit. She was clear, direct, honest and respectful, making her heart and beliefs known. Yet, she was not demanding of David to do it “her way.” She inspired correct thinking, leading to a change in his behavior. Her hope was in God to convict David, to give him ears to hear her wisdom and a repentant heart. Take time to meditate on this woman’s approach to her husband, her servants, and David. Maybe there is something in Abigail’s example that can guide you as you handle a crisis situation of your own, today.

David spares Saul's life again: 26:1-25

David had returned to one of his hideouts near Ziph. These people had betrayed David's location to Saul previously, and now they repeated their betrayal. Saul gathered his army and pursued David.

One night, while Saul's army was in a "deep sleep," David had a renewed opportunity to kill Saul. Again, he refused to do so, even against the advice of his leading warrior, Abishai.

Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand; now therefore, please let me strike him with the spear to the ground with one stroke, and I will not strike him the second time." But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be without guilt?" David also said, "As the Lord lives, surely the Lord will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed; but now please take the spear that is at his head and the jug of water, and let us go" (26:8-11).

Notice the other ways that David reasoned God could remove Saul: *the Lord will strike him, he will die of natural causes, or he will die in battle.* David knew that God had plenty of tools at His disposal to accomplish His will. God did not need David's help to get Saul out of the way!

So often we subtly take matters into our own hands and help 'move along' God's agenda for our lives. Yet, God does not need our help. He is in complete control of the timing and the details of what He wants to accomplish with you. Are you trying to move God's agenda along via your own means . . . or are you leaving it in God's all-powerful, sovereign hands?

As before, David took physical evidence that he had the chance to kill Saul; this time, his spear and water jug. After Saul departed, David called out to Abner, Saul's general, indicting him for failing to protect his master from those who could have killed him.

"Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came to destroy the king your lord. This thing that you have done is not good. As the Lord lives, all of you must surely die, because you did not guard your lord, the Lord's anointed. And now, see where the king's spear is and the jug of water that was at his head" (26:15,16).

Saul admitted his sin against David, and promised not to pursue him anymore. This would, in fact, be the last time Saul and David would speak to one another before Saul's death.

Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will not harm you again because my life was precious in your sight this day. Behold, I have played the fool and have committed a serious error . . . Blessed are you, my son David; you will both accomplish much and surely prevail" (26:21,25).

How ironic (and sad) that it was not until the end of their relationship that Saul began to refer to David as "my son" (24:16; 26:17,21,25). He always saw David as an enemy and threat to his own position and significance. He missed the opportunity to enjoy life with a strong ally who would, no doubt, have served him with utmost loyalty and faithfulness – a true 'son.'

Psalm 57 is linked to one of David's narrow escapes from Saul.

"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I look to you for protection. I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until the danger passes by. I cry out to God Most High, to God who will fulfill his purpose for me. He will send help from heaven to rescue me, disgracing those who hound me. My God will send forth his unfailing love and faithfulness. I am surrounded by fierce lions who greedily devour human prey - whose teeth pierce like spears and arrows, and whose tongues cut like swords. Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens! May your glory shine over all the earth. My enemies have set a trap for me. I am weary from distress. They have dug a deep pit in my path, but they themselves have fallen into it. My heart is confident in you, O God; my heart is confident. No wonder I can sing your praises! Wake up, my heart! Wake up, O lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn with my song. I will thank you, Lord, among all the people. I will sing your praises among the nations. For your unfailing love is as high as the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds. Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens. May your glory shine over all the earth" (Psalm 57).

The best of David's character was revealed in the worst of his circumstances. Surrounded by fierce lions ready for a kill, David steadfastly cried out to God, whose purposes would stand against all enemies. David was "a man after God's heart" because, above all else, he wanted God to be exalted in his life . . . from the remote recesses of the deepest cave . . . to the highest of the heavens.

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 9 – David’s Faith Fails
1 Samuel 27-30

Introduction

The Bible provides snapshots of David’s life to encourage us in our own faith journey. In chapter 17, David was a young man of great faith who defeated Goliath. By chapter 21, however, he was lying to the high priest (leading to the death of their clan) and fleeing to Philistine territory (escaping only by acting insane). In chapters 23-26, he prayed often, heeded wise advice, and spared king Saul’s life twice, finding his refuge under the protection of God. Now, in chapters 27-30 we see his faith growing tired. After close to a decade of running from Saul, the “*man after God’s own heart*” hit a low point and decided to again seek refuge with Israel’s #1 enemy – the Philistines. The walk of faith is never a straight line. There are many ups and downs.

David flees to the Philistines: 27:1-7

Then David said to himself, “Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape into the land of the Philistines. Saul then will despair of searching for me anymore in all the territory of Israel, and I will escape from his hand” (27:1).

Even with the most devout man or woman of God, there are times when faith grows weary, when the presence of God seems far off and the promises of God feel like a false hope. At these times, we have a choice: We can look to God and find strength and a way of escape, or, we can look within ourselves and try to come up with our own plans to escape. David did the latter: he cast aside the *promises* of God, as well as the evidences of God’s *past protection*. He did not pray about this decision; rather, he “*said to himself.*” Had David inquired of the Lord, he would have been given God’s direction and protection.

Ironically, David moved to Gath, the hometown of Goliath the giant. Now we find David, wearing Goliath's sword, walking Goliath's streets, fighting for Goliath's king. *David had become the new Philistine champion ... the very thing he once so vigorously opposed in the name of Yahweh!*

We need to practice the self-awareness to know when our faith is growing tired. We need to ask some honest questions: How did I get here? Am I taking enough time to tend the flame of my own passion for God? Who am I letting speak into my life and hold me accountable? If you KNOW that your faith is tired right now, what steps are you taking to prevent looking within yourself for a way to escape? The very first step should always be to ask God for direction. Also ask trusted friends to pray for you.

For the time being, it seemed as if David's decision had achieved his purpose:

“Now it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, so he no longer searched for him” (27:4).

Stepping off God's path and going our own way usually appears like an attractive idea . . . and it often works for a while. In the end, however, it is always costly. “There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death” (Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25). In the short run, David's decision seemed like a win. Yet, as the weeks turned into months, he paid a steep price for his decision to step outside of the umbrella of God's protection.

After an unspecified amount of time in Gath, David asked Achish for a city of his own where he could settle down with his men and their families. He was given the city of Ziklag, which was on the border between Philistia and Israel.

“The number of days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months” (27:7).

Sixteen months. God can leave us on our own path for as long as it takes for us to finally realize the cost of our choices. He is always inviting us to join Him on His path.

David's raids: 27:8-12

From Ziklag, David and his men made regular raids on southern tribes that were hostile to Israel. He lied to Achish, telling him that he was making raids against Israel's allies (v.10). In order to conceal his lies he was forced to adopt cruel policies.

David did not leave a man or a woman alive to bring to Gath, saying, “Otherwise they will tell about us, saying, ‘So has David done and so has been his practice all the time he has lived in the country of the Philistines’” (27:11).

Imagine the impact of David’s ruthless extermination policies on his wife, Abigail, who earlier had kept him from this very same sort of needless bloodshed! David was no longer heeding wise counsel from godly people like her.

So Achish believed David, saying, “He has surely made himself odious among his people Israel; therefore he will become my servant forever” (27:11,12).

David deeply betrayed Achish, the very man who had provided him a safe refuge from Saul. Often we do not think through the cost of how our actions impact other people, and their ability to trust again.

One step away from God usually leads to another. Soon, we are in way deeper than we ever imagined. Sin is rarely just a single step . . . it is more often a series of steps in the wrong direction. Soon, it becomes the trajectory of one’s life. “Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.” Be very, very careful about those first few ‘little’ steps away from God’s will. They can lead you further off course than you ever imagined.

David’s predicament: 28:1-2

When the Philistines decided to make war against Israel, David suddenly found himself being called by Achish to accompany him into battle against his own people. David may have given a somewhat ambiguous answer because he *did not know what to do!*

Achish said to David, “Know assuredly that you will go out with me in the camp, you and your men.” David said to Achish, “Very well, you shall know what your servant can do.” So Achish said to David, “Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life” (28:1,2).

Saul visits a spirit medium: 28:3-25

How ironic that while David was taking his future into his own hands, God was preparing for David’s future by removing Saul. The looming Philistine threat terrified Saul. He tried to consult the

Lord, but received no answer. Thus, he turned to a spirit medium in order to try to communicate with the departed spirit of Samuel. Saul had banned all sorcerers from the land of Israel; nevertheless, he found a spirit medium in the city of Endor and disguised himself so that she would not fear his punishment. He asked her to bring up the spirit of Samuel, which she did. Samuel solemnly announced that Israel would be defeated, and that Saul and his sons would be with him (dead) by the next day!

“The Lord has done accordingly as He spoke through me; for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David. As you did not obey the Lord and did not execute His fierce wrath on Amalek, so the Lord has done this thing to you this day. Moreover the Lord will also give over Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines, therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. Indeed the Lord will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines!” (28:17-19).

David had no idea that God was at work preparing a way forward for his future kingship. He had lost sight of God’s sovereignty and was too busy trying to manage his own life. At an earlier stage, David had commented as to all the different ways that God *could* remove Saul, when He was ready to do so (26:10). Now, God was at work to actually remove Saul . . . and He was simultaneously at work to let David experience some hard consequences for his own bad choices.

It is hard to learn to be patient. We so often grow impatient and don't realize how close we are to God moving in our lives in a powerful way. God is patient (2Peter 3:9). The first quality of true love is patience (1Corinthians 13:4). A fruit of God's Spirit in us is patience (Galatians 5:22). The ability to be patient for God's timing is an issue of trusting His character. He gives us just enough light for the step we are on. He asks us to patiently trust Him for tomorrow, rather than impatiently doing our own thing.

About sorcery:

There are only two sources of spiritual power – God and Satan. When appeals are made to Satan for help, this is “sorcery” (also called witchcraft, black magic, spiritism, occultism), which is strictly forbidden in Scripture (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Galatians 5:19; Malachi 3:5; 2Chronicles 33:6). Satan and his demons are the evil counterparts to God and his angels. They *are* capable of

counterfeiting the works and ways of God. Satan will even “*disguise himself as an angel of light*” in order to lead people astray (2Corinthians 11:14). Recall how Pharaoh’s sorcerers were able to partially duplicate the miracles performed by Moses and Aaron (Exodus 7:11,22; 8:7,18). Thus, while there are many hucksters who only pretend to tap into dark powers, there are others who actually have aligned themselves with Satan and are able to tap into his evil power (eg. Acts 13:4-12).

In the case of the witch at Endor, she seems to have had some real connection with Satanic powers (although she would not have recognized Satan as the source). However, it was GOD, not Satan, who allowed the spirit of Samuel to “arise” from Sheol (the place of departed spirits in the O.T.) to communicate with Saul. This may explain why even the witch herself was terrified by the appearance of Samuel (v.12). What happened, in essence, was a momentary “resurrection” of Samuel, without a body. God sent Samuel’s spirit with a message of judgment for Saul.

In practical terms, it is unwise to dabble in any modern forms of occultism (psychics, spirit guides, tarot cards, Weegie boards, astrology, etc.). By doing so, you are opening yourself up to the possibility of contact with evil spirits, of which there are many (1/3rd of the angels fell with Satan and became demons). If an evil spirit does ‘assist’ you in some way, you may be deceived into thinking this is a benevolent (good) spirit, and you may become hooked on the help provided by that spirit. In the end, however, you are cooperating with an army of spirit-beings, headed by Satan, that are bent only on opposing God and enslaving and destroying people. Satanic activity is still very visible in parts of the world (village with doctors, etc.). In the West, his strategies may be more disguised, yet they are no less dangerous.

David sent away from the Philistine army: 29:1-11

David had been called into the service of the Philistine king, and performed well; but he had never been called to fight against Israel. Now, found himself in a predicament as he and his men were called upon to accompany the Philistine army in a battle with Israel. If he fought *against* Israel, he would have forfeited the right to be Israel’s future king. If he fought *for* Israel, he likely would have helped Saul remain as king, thus making his own rise to kingship an even more distant hope.

Fortunately, God intervened in an unexpected way to get David out of this predicament. The Philistine commanders were moved in their spirits to question David's allegiance. They were skeptical enough that they demanded Achish send David away.

“Make the man go back, that he may return to his place where you have assigned him, and do not let him go down to battle with us, or in the battle he may become an adversary to us. For with what could this man make himself acceptable to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of these men? Is this not David, of whom they sing in the dances, saying, ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands’?” (29:4,5).

Thus, David and his men returned to Ziklag, while the Philistines continued on in their march toward war with Israel.

The faithfulness of God toward David: 1Chronicles 12

The faithfulness of God toward His servant, David, stands out in many ways during this period of David's crisis of faith. While David was in Philistine territory for 16 months, God was adding to his number a long list of mighty warriors who would help David when his kingship finally became a reality.

“For day by day men came to David to help him, until there was a great army like the army of God” (1Chronicles 12:22).

- Many of Saul's kinsmen joined David at Ziklag:

“They were equipped with bows, using both the right hand and the left to sling stones and to shoot arrows from the bow; they were Saul's kinsmen from Benjamin” (12:2).

- Men from Manasseh joined David at the most surprising time:

“From Manasseh also some defected to David when he was about to go to battle with the Philistines against Saul” (12:19).

The apostle Paul wrote: “Even if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself” (2Timothy 2:13). It should encourage us greatly to know that God's faithfulness toward us far exceeds our faithfulness toward Him. Even when we are weak in faith, He loves us and moves toward us. How should we respond to such love? The kindness of God should move us toward repentance (Romans 2:4). The amazing grace of God should cause us to run toward Him, not away from Him.

David returns to find Ziklag destroyed: 30:1-6a

All of David's self-made plans came crashing down in a horrible way when he and his men returned to Ziklag.

Then it happened when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negev and on Ziklag, and had overthrown Ziklag and burned it with fire; and they took captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great, without killing anyone, and carried them off and went their way. When David and his men came to the city, behold, it was burned with fire, and their wives and their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep. Now David's two wives had been taken captive, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters" (30:1-6).

Think of it: their city was gone, their wives and children were gone, David's men were so disillusioned by his leadership that they wanted to stone him to death. This was one of the lowest points of David's life up to this point. (Note also the mention of David's two wives – Ahinoam and Abigail. He had already begun to violate God's command to NOT multiply wives [Deuteronomy 17:17]. David will further depart from God's will in this regard when he becomes king [2Samuel 5:13].)

David was given a taste of his own medicine. God could easily have allowed all the women and children to be killed (as David had done to his enemies repeatedly); but in His mercy toward David He allowed them all to be taken alive. God does not typically give us "what we deserve." Rather, He lovingly disciplines each of His children "so that we may share in His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10).

God's mercy and David's repentance: 30:6b-8

"But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God" (30:6b).

David was a flawed man who made great mistakes in life. Yet, one of his best qualities was that he kept coming back to a place of brokenness and repentance before God. Here, as his men spoke of stoning him, he went to God to renew His spiritual strength. The first evidence that he is "back on track" was that he called for the

high priest to “inquire of the Lord” – something David had not done for the past 16 months. Finally, David is seeking God again.

Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, “Please bring me the ephod.” So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. David inquired of the Lord, saying, “Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?” And He said to him, “Pursue, for you will surely overtake them, and you will surely rescue all” (30:7,8).

David was given not only direction; but also the merciful assurance from God that he *would rescue all* of the lost women and children.

David pursues the Amalekites: 30:9-25

David and his men chased down the Amalekites with the help of a sick Egyptian slave that had been left to die by his Amalekite master (30:11-15).

God can answer our prayers and fulfill His will in many different ways. While David was repenting and praying (30:6), God was preparing a sickly Egyptian castoff slave who would assist David in tracking down the Amalekite raiders. Someone put it this way: When we pray, ‘coincidences’ happen. When we don’t pray, they don’t happen. Pray about your situation, and let God delight in His ways to answer your prayers. This will assure you of His personal presence in your story, and build your trust in Him.

Having caught up to the Amalekites, David defeated them and took back all that had been lost.

So David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and rescued his two wives. Nothing of theirs was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that they had taken for themselves; David brought it all back” (30:18,19).

David sends gifts to the leaders of Israel: 30:26-31

From the spoils of war David sent gifts to many of the elders of Israel. By doing so, he was showing his people that they were in his heart and, hopefully, in his future. A proverb points to the practical wisdom of how a timely gift can open important doors:

“A man’s gift makes room for him and brings him before great men” (Proverbs 18:16).

What can we learn from David's struggles?

David's faith-struggles are unashamedly recorded in the Bible to give us all hope. He was prone to bad choices, just as we all are. Yet, his story also shows us the love of God toward His flawed children . . . and the power of brokenness and repentance to bring us back onto God's agenda. There are many lessons we can learn:

1. Preparation: God often touches a person's heart to become a follower and future influencer for His glory. However, He lovingly uses many people, choices (good and bad) and challenges to prepare them for their God-given assignments later in life.

2. God's presence: God always delights in being our personal, ever-present heavenly Father as we walk through life. Even when we drift from Him and go our own way, He mercifully reaches out to reconnect with us and draw us back onto His path.

3. Deeper issues: At times, David's deeper fears and emotional reactions overruled what he "knew" in his head about God. Intellectual knowledge about God is not enough. We need daily disciplines of faith to keep us from gravitating toward our own self-centered and self-protective strategies of "escape."

4. Mercy: God's mercy always triumphs over our greatest failures. Yes, there are consequences for our choices; but God's love for us is without restraint and condition. He loves messed up people like David . . . and He loves each one of us. Do not be afraid of God when you fail. Run to Him in a spirit of humility and find refuge again in His love and faithfulness.

5. Forgiveness: Jesus Christ, the ultimate "son of David," bore our shame and sin on the cross. Take time to think about the amazing price that the sinless Son of God paid, so that the justice of God could be satisfied and the mercy of God could flow freely to you. Shame and guilt no longer keep us from God. We are forgiven!

David's failures in future chapters will be *even greater* than the ones we have just surveyed. Have hope . . . and be resolved: to love God and walk in brokenness with Him is the greatest decision you can make. It is *that* decision (not living a perfect life) that qualifies you to be called, like David, a man or woman *after God's own heart*.

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 10 – David King of Judah
1Samuel 31 - 2Samuel 4
(1Chronicles 12:23-40)

Introduction

No one likes to wait . . . especially when the goal seems to be within reach. It was a long, arduous journey for David from the time he was anointed to be Israel's 2nd king and his actual rise to power (roughly 15 years). Most of that time was spent as a fugitive trying to escape the murderous hand of Saul. Now, however, the life of Saul comes to a sad ending and David's pathway to the kingship seems to be clear. Yet, the transition will not be smooth; rather, it will involve another long, 7-1/2 year struggle between the remaining loyalists to "the house of Saul" and those of "the house of David." The path toward our divine assignments is rarely quick and easy. God invites us to learn patient trust as we wait for the next stage of His plan for our lives.

Saul's bitter end: 31:1-13

The final chapter of 1 Samuel narrates Saul's sad ending in the battle against the Philistines (the same battle that God spared David from fighting in). Every line of the narrative is tinged with tragedy:

- The men of Israel fled and fell slain (v.1).
- The Philistines killed 3 of Saul's 4 sons, including Jonathan (v.2).
- The battle went heavily against Saul; he was badly wounded (v.3).
- Saul committed suicide, falling upon his own sword (v.4).
- Saul's armor bearer also fell upon his own sword (v.5).
- Saul died with his sons, his armor bearer, and all his men (v.6).
- Israel fled and the Philistines took over their cities (v.7).
- The Philistines found Saul and his sons dead on Mt. Gilboa (v.8).
- They cut off his head and sent the good news to their idols (v.9).
- His weapons were sent to the temple of their idol (v.10).
- His body was hung on the wall of their city (v.10).

This may be the saddest ‘final chapter’ of any life recorded in Scripture. Yet, this was the consequence of Saul’s continual rebellion against the Lord.

“Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord; he did not keep the word of the Lord and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the Lord” (1Chronicles 10:13).

Sadly, even Jonathan, who was a great man of God, had his life cut short as a result of his father’s sins. The *sovereign hand of God* decrees that some truly great ones die, seemingly, before their time: Jonathan, Stephen the disciple (Acts 7), James (Acts 12). The only positive note in the chapter is that the valiant men of Jabesh-Gilead, who previously had been saved by Saul (many years before), honored him by traveling through the night to courageously retrieve his and his 3 sons’ bodies to give them a proper burial.

It is wise to live ‘with the end in view.’ How do you want the final chapter of your story to read? What would you like to be remembered for? Many people just drift toward their life’s end, with no real goals or priorities – other than a ‘bucket list’ of crazy things to do. Here’s an exercise based on 1Samuel 31. After praying for God’s impressions to guide you, write in 100 words or less how you want your ‘final chapter’ to read. What do you want to accomplish before you reach the end of your God-given journey?

David honors Saul and Jonathan: 1:1-27

The Bible teaches us *not* to celebrate the fall of our opponent. *“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles” (Proverbs 24:17; also 17:5). “Do not gloat over the day of your brother’s misfortune” (Obadiah 12).*

When David heard of Saul’s death, he did *not* gloat; he mourned.

“Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so also did all the men who were with him. They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and for the people of the Lord and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword” (2Sam.1:11,12).

David then wrote *The Song of the Bow*, in which he speaks of Saul as a national hero, not a lifelong opponent. Following are key lines in which David praises both Saul and Jonathan. As you read these lines, note the underlined phrases, recalling that this was the same Saul who created untold trouble for David for more than a decade.

“Your beauty, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen . . . The bow of Jonathan did not turn back, and the sword of Saul did not return empty . . . Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their life, and in their death they were not parted; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan is slain on your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!”

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls . . . Have you done that? If so, it likely reveals that there is buried bitterness in your heart. That needs to be released and healed. Instead of celebrating the fall of one who has opposed or hurt you, consider these other more God-honoring options: 1) Mourn over the power of sin that has taken hold of that person. 2) Pray for their restoration to God’s way of living. 3) Let them know that you have forgiven them for the impact they have had on you. 4) In future conversations, find something good to say about that person.

David made king over Judah: 2:1-7

After the death of Saul, it may have seemed obvious to David that he would be crowned king over *all* of Israel. This was not the case, however, as the country remained divided in its loyalties. David’s *first move* was to seek the Lord in specific prayer as to when, where and how he should offer himself to Israel as king.

Then it came about afterwards that David inquired of the Lord, saying, “Shall I go up to one of the cities of Judah?” And the Lord said to him, “Go up.” So David said, “Where shall I go up?” And He said, “To Hebron” (2:1).

Prayer is one of the constant themes of David’s life, when he was “on track” in his relationship with God. It is such an easy thing to “commit you ways to the Lord” so that “He will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:6). Why, then, do we fail to pray about our everyday decisions? Are we too busy? Too distracted? Too rushed? Too self-confident? Or, do we just forget to include God in the conversation? No matter what decision(s) you face, remember to “inquire of the Lord.” In His own way, He WILL give you the direction you need to stay in line with His plan for your life.

The large, southern tribe of Judah immediately welcomed David as their king. Yet, the remaining northern tribes united under the leadership of Abner, Saul's former general (and cousin) who proclaimed Ish-bosheth (Saul's last son) to be the new king. This division between north and south lasted for the next 7-1/2 years.

David's first act as king was to bless the men of Jabesh-gilead for their honorable deed in giving Saul a proper burial (2:4-7). In doing so, he seemed to send a subtle 'hint' to this northern city that the south had proclaimed him king (v.7). Yet, the northerners ignored the hint and chose to remain loyal to the house of Saul.

Ish-bosheth made king in the north: 2:8-11

Abner, Saul's former general, was the power-broker in the north. Ish-bosheth, Saul's only surviving son, was a puppet-king who was completely controlled by Abner. It appears that Abner was trying to prolong his own position of authority in Israel, thus resisting David's rise to power.

Civil war between the north and the south: 2:12-3:1

David made his nephew, Joab, commander over his army. It was not long before Abner moved with his northern forces against Joab's southern army in an initial test of strength. A 12 versus 12 death match was held at the pool of Gibeon (2:12-16), after which Joab's forces soundly routed Abner's forces in a one-day battle.

“That day the battle was very severe, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David” (2:17).

Yet, the David's army suffered one great loss. Joab's brother Asahel was killed as he tried to chase down Abner. Joab would avenge Abner of his brother's death in time. A summary is given that covers the 7-1/2 year power struggle between north and south.

“Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; and David grew steadily stronger, but the house of Saul grew weaker continually” (3:1).

David likely did not foresee this prolonged struggle against the house of Saul for an additional 7-1/2 years. Had he not struggled long enough against the hand of Saul himself? Yet, he did not take matters into his own hands in order to force his way into power. He learned to patiently wait for God's timing for his full appointment to kingship over Israel. At the same time, he learned

valuable lessons on how to manage a ‘smaller kingdom;’ lessons that would be useful once the scope of his leadership was multiplied many times over in the coming years.

It is always difficult to wait; but even more so when a difficult situation seems to be near the end . . . when the goal seems to be within our reach. This is when we are most tempted to jump ahead of God, to seize the prize by our own means. Yet, we should always be “inquiring of the Lord” as David did, so that we might move according to God’s pace, not our own. “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you” (Psalm 32:8). Do you recall a time you resisted the urge to jump forward, and waited for God’s will just a little bit longer? Or, you didn’t wait and jumped ahead of God?

David multiplies wives at Hebron: 3:2-5

While David learned patient obedience in *some* aspects of life, there was one area in which he disobeyed, following custom instead of Scripture: he multiplied wives. As to the custom of polygamy by royals: *“In David’s time, political strength was increased through alliances that were sealed through marriage. Polygamy was the oriental way of establishing a royal house” (Myrna Alexander, With Him in the Struggle, p.28).* Yet, this practice was directly prohibited by God: *“He (the king) shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself” (Deuteronomy 17:17).* In the long run, David’s family life would be marred by sibling rivalry and even murder, as the descendants of different wives vied for power.

There are often “customs” or “traditions” that we inherit that are not necessarily good for us. Just because something has been passed down through your family line does not make it right. Are there any customs or traditions that you have inherited that need to be reevaluated in light of God’s Word?

Abner abandons Ish-bosheth: 3:6-11

As noted earlier, Abner was the true powerbroker in the north, while Ish-bosheth was a puppet king. When Ish-bosheth accused Abner of having relations with one of Saul’s concubines (in effect, an accusation of trying to assume Saul’s throne) Abner became furious and vowed to hand the kingdom over to David.

Ish-bosheth said to Abner, “Why have you gone in to my father’s concubine?” Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth and said, “Am I a dog’s head that belongs to Judah? Today I show kindness to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hands of David; and yet today you charge me with a guilt concerning the woman. May God do so to Abner, and more also, if as the Lord has sworn to David, I do not accomplish this for him, to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and to establish the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba.” And he could no longer answer Abner a word, because he was afraid of him (3:7-11).

From that day forward, Abner abandoned Ish-bosheth (making him a ‘lame-duck’ king) and moved to unite the country under David.

Abner acted in ways that remind us of Saul. He was very controlling, using anger and intimidation to bring people into submission. As long as Ish-bosheth suited his purposes, he allowed him to remain “in power.” Yet, the moment he opposed him, Abner threw him aside like a useless object. At times we can “objectify” people (use them as a means to your end) rather than respectfully treating them as truly and fully human. Pete Scazzero talks about this problem of treating people as objects toward our goals (I – It) rather than as fully human beings made in God’s image (I-Thou) *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, pp.181-83. This is a powerful concept worth our attention. It can truly change the way we treat other people.

Abner moves to bring all Israel under David: 3:12-21

Then Abner sent messengers to David in his place, saying, “Whose is the land? Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring all Israel over to you” (3:12).

Abner had meetings with the key leaders in the north and persuaded them to accept David as their God-given king.

“In times past you were seeking for David to be king over you. Now then, do it! For the Lord has spoken of David, saying, ‘By the hand of My servant David I will save My people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies” (3:17,18).

As part of the unification deal, David demanded that his first wife, Michal (Saul’s daughter) be given back to him (3:13-16). After

all, he had fought hard to win her. She was taken away from Paltiel, her distraught husband, and given back to David. Now David had a total of 7 wives (and more were added later!).

It appears from Abner's own words (v.18) that he knew all along that the Lord would make David king over all Israel. Why, then, did he resist this process for 7-1/2 more bloody years? It is foolish to resist the will of God, once He has made it clear to us. Being strong-willed can be an asset in many situations. But the strong-willed must make sure they are listening to God's voice, yielding in spirit to His promptings, and checking with other wise people.

Joab kills Abner: 3:22-30

In many ways, Joab tried to control David like Abner had controlled Ish-bosheth. When Joab learned of David's pact with Abner, he essentially called his 'king' a fool for trusting Abner.

Then Joab came to the king and said, "What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you; why then have you sent him away and he is already gone? You know Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive you and to learn of your going out and coming in and to find out all that you are doing" (3:24,25).

Joab went a step further, however. Acting as his own authority, Joab tracked down Abner and killed him, *completely against David's will*, avenging his brother Asahel's death.

"When Joab came out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the well of Sirah; but David did not know it. So when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the middle of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he struck him in the belly so that he died on account of the blood of Asahel his brother" (3:26,27).

David mourns Abner's death: 3:31-39

When he heard what Joab had done, David tore his clothes and went into mourning over the death of Abner (much like he had done for Saul and Jonathan).

So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the will of the king to put Abner the son of Ner to death. Then the king said to his servants, "Do you not know that a

prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah are too difficult for me. May the Lord repay the evildoer according to his evil” (3:37-39).

The “sons of Zeruiah” (Joab, Abishai and Asahel) were nephews of David. While Asahel died early on, at the hands of Abner, Joab and Abishai continued to serve as David’s key generals. Joab would prove to be a very capable general; yet, he was extremely strong willed and sometimes directly ‘went over David’s head’ and exerted his own will. We will later see this power struggle between David and Joab play out most tragically in the death of Absalom, David’s own son.

If you are a leader, it is a blessing to have high-level, capable co-workers who are loyal to you. Yet, some (like Joab) can twist loyalty into an excuse to decide independently what is best for their leader and take matters into their own hands. This can do great damage to your reputation as a leader and to your organization as a whole. Notice how David had to do public ‘damage control’ because of Joab’s murder of Abner. Make sure your key co-workers know 1) that you greatly appreciate their loyalty to you and your cause; but 2) that you really do want to be included in the key decisions that will impact your work together.

The murder of Ish-bosheth: 4:1-12

When Abner was killed, the northern tribes were left in a state of confusion as to what to do next. Even Ish-bosheth had no clue what to do.

“Now when Ish-bosheth, Saul’s son, heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage, and all Israel was disturbed” (4:1).

Rechab and Baanah, two northern army officers, decided to take matters into their own hands by killing Ish-bosheth and delivering the northern tribes over to David. They thought they were doing David a big favor; yet they were not aware of the extent to which David *honored* even the last remaining elements of the house of Saul, and refused to take such matters into his own hands. They came to David with their good news:

“Behold, the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; thus the Lord has given my lord the king vengeance this day on Saul and his descendants” (4:8).

David’s reply was not good news for them:

David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother . . . “As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from all distress, when one told me, saying, ‘Behold, Saul is dead,’ and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him in Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news. How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood from your hand and destroy you from the earth?” (4:9-11).

Thus, through 7-1/2 confusing years, the way was finally paved for David to become king over *all* of Israel (chapter 5 onward). Yet, throughout this entire period, David refused to take matters into his own hands in order to extinguish the remaining flickers from the house of Saul. David was willing to let God pave the final steps to his installment as king over *all* of Israel.

The most important lesson from this period of the life of David is that he was able to resist the temptation to try to control events and maneuver his way forward. Others were maneuvering, controlling and manipulating all along the way (Abner, Joab, Rechab, Bannah, etc.) but David was able to maintain his hope in GOD, not in his own schemes or powers. He was faithful within the scope of what God had entrusted to him. He made good decisions and won the approval of the people. He honored even his opponents. He learned valuable lessons managing a portion of the kingdom. Thus, at the end of these difficult 7-1/2 years, he was able to give the glory to God for taking him through this transitional period: “As the LORD LIVES, who has redeemed by life from all distress” (4:9). I recall that in 1980 Shirley and I were ready to move overseas as missionaries. Yet, God took us on an unexpected 4-year detour, so that we did not actually get overseas until 1984. Everything in those ‘detour years’ was absolutely necessary for our preparation for the overseas years. Again, in 1994 we were taken unexpectedly into a 2-1/2 year transitional detour that eventually led to the launch of Oak Pointe Church. Everything we learned during those transitional years was, again, necessary for the roles we would occupy later.

Learn to trust God in the “in between,” when God unexpectedly invites you to learn a few more lessons before you “arrive” at the next chapter in your journey. There are no wasted seasons in God’s agenda for your life.

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 11 – David King of Israel
2Samuel 5-10

Introduction

Often in life, God makes us *wait* for things that He wants to give us. During such times, He seeks to build our trust in Him, as well as to teach us valuable lessons while we wait. David had to wait nearly two decades to become king over *all* of Israel. In the last section (2Samuel chs.1-4) we saw how David was made king over just the tribe of Judah in the south of Israel. This lasted for 7-1/2 years. Finally, the rest of Israel decided it was time to make David king over the whole nation. The moment he had been waiting and preparing for had finally come.

David made king over all Israel: 5:1-16

“So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them before the Lord at Hebron; then they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years” (5:3,4).

The elders knew all along that David was to be the king. In their words: *“Previously, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and in. And the Lord said to you, ‘You will shepherd My people Israel; you will be a ruler over Israel’” (5:2).*

Psalm 78 reminds us that David was *God’s chosen king*:

“He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep He brought him to be the shepherd of His people Jacob, of Israel His inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them” (Psalm 78:70-72).

Moses had previously instructed Israel: *“Be sure to appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses” (Deut.17:15).* Saul was ‘the peoples king’ that God had given them to satisfy their craving to have a king *“like all the other nations.”* David, on the other hand, was “God’s king,” the *“man after His own heart.”*

One of David's first moves was to choose the city of Jerusalem as the capital for his new kingdom. He had to expel the Jebusites who held the city as their stronghold. Once they were removed, he began to build Jerusalem ("the city of David") to suit his purposes (5:6-10). All the while, his sphere of influence was expanding.

"David became greater and greater, for the Lord God of hosts was with him" (5:10).

With gifts of cedar wood from Hiram, king of Tyre, they built a royal palace for David to live in. All of this rapid expansion came as a result of God's unique favor upon David.

"And David realized that the Lord had established him as king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for the sake of His people Israel" (5:12).

Sadly, he continued to sin by multiplying wives (5:13-16).

David defeats the Philistines: 5:17-25

One of the major signs of God's favor upon David was his military success. In particular, the Philistines, who had been thorns in Israel's side for the past 50+ years, were finally subdued. Cities that had been taken by the Philistines were returned to Israel. David's fame began when he defeated Goliath, the Philistine giant. Now his fame continued as he defeated the entire Philistine nation. His battle strategies came as he "*inquired of the Lord*" (5:19,23).

David fought 2 successive battles against the Philistines. Both times he asked God for specific guidance, and both times God gave very different strategies. Don't presume to know what God wants you to do just because it seems obvious or familiar to a former situation. Ask God . . . and seek advice and prayer from others on ALL your big decisions.

The Ark is brought to Jerusalem: 6:1-23

David's heart for God comes out in many ways; but here we see it in his desire to bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. He gathered 30,000 leaders of Israel for this massive transport ceremony. The only problem was: he failed to follow God's specific instructions when it came to moving the sacred Ark. Thus:

"When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and

God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God” (6:6,7).

David ran through an intense range of emotions when this happened: He was angry (v.8), afraid (v.9), and unwilling (v.10) to continue the movement of the Ark. He did not ask the Lord at this time *why* this happened. Instead, he parked the Ark there at the house of Obed-edom, where it remained for 3 months.

Either through personal study, or through the word of a priest or prophet, David realized that they had violated God’s specific instructions as to *how* the Ark was to be transported (on the shoulders of the Levitical priests). When they tried to move the Ark again, he said to the priests:

“Because you did not carry it at the first, the Lord our God made an outburst on us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance” (1Chronicles 15:13).

The “outburst” referred to above was the holiness of God breaking forth against sin. This had happened before in Israel’s history when people tried to approach God in ways that violated His stipulations (see 1Samuel 6:19 or Leviticus 10:1-3). God is a PERSON. He has revealed to us both the nature of His being, and the ways we are to approach Him. We cannot make up our own ideas about God and then form our own handbook for how to interact with God. It is He, not we, who sets the terms for our relationship with Him. When we “do our own thing” with God, it is a bit like doing our own thing with fire – we can get burned. On the other hand, when we come to know God for who He really is, and when we seek to approach God in the ways that He has made available to us, then we are met with an outburst of His love and mercy, not His holiness and judgment.

As the Ark came into Jerusalem, David celebrated with his whole heart. He passionately worshipped God, unafraid to display his *emotions* in the moment.

“David was dancing before the Lord with all his might, and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouting and the sound of the trumpet” (6:14,15).

Michal, David’s first wife, looked out the window and saw David dancing. She had no appreciation for his unabashed display of love toward God.

When David returned to bless his household, Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, “How the king of Israel distinguished himself today! He uncovered himself today in the eyes of his servants’ maids as one of the foolish ones shamelessly uncovers himself” (6:20).

David, however, told her that he was *not* worshipping for anyone’s eyes but God.

So David said to Michal, “It was before the Lord, Who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel; therefore I will celebrate before the Lord” (6:21).

All of life is to be an act of “worship” (ascribing worth) to God. Do you get intimidated to openly express your love for God? If so, take some time to ask: Why? Ask God to remove your fear of what other people think so that you can “worship” freely and without inhibition. On the flip side – I must be careful that I do not judge another person who is sincerely worshipping God in a way that might be awkward for me. Don’t become a Michal who looks with disdain on the sincere worship of others!

It is instructive to notice how David showed kindness and blessed other people throughout this period of his life. For example, when the Ark arrived in Jerusalem, he blessed the people with a gift:

“After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord Almighty. Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes” (6:18,19).

He also was kind to Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan (ch.9), and he extended kindness to Hanun, king of Ammon (ch.10).

A genuine heart of gratitude toward God should result in a desire to bless others. “And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also” (1John 4:21). David clearly demonstrated that the two greatest commandments always go together: 1) You shall love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. 2) You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

God’s promise to build David’s house: 7:1-29

Along with bringing the Ark into Jerusalem, David’s desire for

God was shown by his heart to replace the temporary tent he had erected for the Ark with a permanent temple for God.

“See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains.” Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your mind, for the Lord is with you” (7:2,3).

That same night, Nathan the prophet received a revelation from God, indicating that it was *not God’s plan* for David to build Him a house; but in response to David’s desire to honor God, God would honor David and build a “house” for him.

“The Lord also declares to you that the Lord will make a house for you. When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever” (7:11-16).

This important passage is known as the **Davidic Covenant**. It has 2 major provisions. 1) An immediate son of David would be raised up to build the Temple that was on David’s heart. This was fulfilled in Solomon, the son of David and next king of Israel. 2) Generations of “sons of David” would occupy Israel’s throne permanently (forever). He was promised an everlasting dynasty. Even if his sons disobeyed God, they would be disciplined; but his dynasty would never be cut off (as Saul’s was).

David’s prayer of thanksgiving is beautiful (7:18-29). He was stunned and overwhelmed that God would choose one like himself to bless with such incredible promises. David expressed two key themes in his prayer:

1) His own unworthiness of such a blessing.

Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and he said: “Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that You have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in Your sight, Sovereign Lord, You have also spoken about the future of the house of Your servant – and this decree, Sovereign Lord, is

for a mere human! What more can David say to You? For You know Your servant, Sovereign Lord” (7:18-20).

2) The greatness of His God.

“How great You are, Sovereign Lord! There is no one like You, and there is no God but You, as we have heard with our own ears ... (You) perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before Your people, whom You redeemed from Egypt ... Do as You promised, so that Your name will be great forever ... Sovereign Lord, You are God ... Sovereign Lord, You have spoken, and with Your blessing the house of Your servant will be blessed forever” (7:22,23,26,28,29).

It is clear that David had much more than a “formal” or “functional” relationship with God. He was in a “love affair” with His God. The exchange of love between David and God was evident not only in the way he desired God’s presence in his life; but also in the way he served and worshipped God. Known as “the sweet psalmist of Israel,” David wrote roughly half of Israel’s songbook (Psalms)! His true desire for God can be summarized in his own words from Psalm 27 . . .

“One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple” (Psalm 27:4).

“God’s exceeding desire to be loved comes from loving exceedingly” (Chrysostom, 4th Century A.D.). God made each of us for a love affair with Him, not for some dutiful subservience to a set of rules. How do we cultivate that sort of relationship with God? Like any relationship, it takes time. It is a matter of daily seeking Him; becoming more and more acquainted with His ways and His character; learning to hear His voice and respond to His promptings; learning to “walk in step with His Spirit” in the circumstances of life (Galatians 5:25); walking with Him in the “good works He has prepared for us beforehand to walk in” (Eph.2:10). It involves our entire being: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5; Mark 12:30). For an excellent study on Passion for God, see A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*. I have included a few quotes from Tozer at the end of these notes.

The Major Covenants of the Bible

The *Davidic Covenant* was the 3rd major covenant that God had made with humanity, as recorded in the O.T. history. As we understand the covenant structure of the Bible, we can better see how God's plan to save the world was unfolding, stage by stage:

The Abrahamic Covenant: I will make you a great nation; a blessing to all other nations (Genesis 12:1-3).

The Mosaic Covenant: I will make you a holy nation; a kingdom of priests to represent Me to the world (Exodus 19:5,6).

The Davidic Covenant: I will give you an ultimate “son of David” who will rule over a forever kingdom (2Samuel 7:11-16).

Later, through Jeremiah, God would add a 4th and final covenant to His plan – **The New Covenant** (Jeremiah 31:31-34) – where He promised to give people new spirits, writing His laws on human hearts instead of on tablets of stone (a promise of the “new birth”).

All throughout history, devout Jews have looked for this promised “son of David” who was also called “the Messiah” (literally, “anointed one”). The messianic hope was that God would send this special person who would help the Jews achieve supremacy in the world and establish a kingdom that would endure forever.

Note: The royal line of David *seems* to disappear toward the end of the Old Testament. Israel went into Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.) and had no Davidic kings after that. However, the record of David's *royal line* was carefully preserved even when there was no “king” in office. For example, when Israel returned to their land after the Babylonian captivity, Zerubbabel was the “governor” (Haggai 1:1). He was, in fact, a descendant of David and *would have been a king* had the Jews had been allowed a king by their oppressors. Even so, God *viewed* Zerubbabel as the *conveyor* of the Davidic promise (see Haggai 2:20-23). Notice how Zerubbabel appears in the genealogies of Jesus (Matt. 1:12,13 and Luke 3:27).

Ultimately, the Davidic Covenant was fulfilled when Jesus arrived. This is why Matthew introduces Jesus with these words:

“The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham . . .” (Matthew 1:1).

During His public ministry, Jesus was repeatedly hailed as the son of David (eg. Matt.9:27; 12:23; 15:22; etc.). Most notably, when

He entered Jerusalem at the beginning of His final week, they sang: *“Hosanna to the Son of David”* (“Save us now, Son of David” Matt. 21:9). He claimed to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, and He gave evidences to support His claim through His words and deeds, especially His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:3,4).

David’s kingdom expanded: 8:1-18

This chapter outlines Israel’s triumphs over her adversaries. David, through God-inspired leadership, brought Israel to national unity. Israel was now recognized as a powerful nation-state at the beginning of the 10th century B.C.

“So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and righteousness for all his people” (8:15).

The promise to Abraham was now coming to fulfillment: *“I will make you a GREAT nation, and your name shall be GREAT” (Genesis 12:2; also 15:18-21).*

David knew that it was *“the Lord giving him victory wherever he went” (8:6,14).* He dedicated the spoils of war back to the Lord.

David is an amazing example of humbly acknowledging that his opportunities, victories, and all he acquired was ultimately God’s . . . and that it was God Who had enabled him to succeed. In the same way, I must dedicate my life, my home, my resources, my family, my possessions, talents and opportunities . . . to the Lord. Apart from His providence and blessings, I would have nothing. Of course, my relationship with Him is His greatest blessing to me!

David’s kindness to Jonathan’s son: 9:1-13

David was forever grateful to Jonathan for his friendship and support during the years of trial with Saul (Jonathan’s father). Even though Jonathan had died in battle, David sought to honor Jonathan’s family, remaining loyal to the covenant they had made with one another many years before. Jonathan had said:

“You shall not cut off your lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.” So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the Lord require it at the hands of David’s enemies.” Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life” (1Samuel 20:15-17, also v.42).

David found one remaining son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, who was just 5 years old when his father Jonathan had died in battle. As his nurse fled with the little boy, she dropped him and he was badly injured in both legs (see 2Samuel 4:4), remaining crippled for the rest of his life. David invited the disabled Mephibosheth (now married with a son of his own, 9:12) to dine at his table as a son of the king. He also restored to him all the land that had previously belonged to his grandfather, Saul.

“It is better to not make a vow, than to vow and not fulfill it” (Ecclesiastes 5:5). Vows are promises that we make to other people. When making a vow, we should consider what it will take to fulfill it. There are unknowns in the future, and we will be tempted to break our vows. Yet, when our feelings are telling us to break a vow, we can draw on God’s strength to remain faithful to our word. What vows/promises have you made to people? Take time to reflect on how you are doing in fulfilling your vows. We are most like our faithful God when we are faithful to our vows.

David defeats Ammon and Syria: 10:1-19

David sought to show kindness to Hanun the Ammonite king, since Hanun’s father, Nahash, had previously shown kindness to David. Hanun suspected David of sending in spies, and responded by humiliating his goodwill ambassadors:

“Hanun took David’s servants and shaved off half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle as far as their hips, and sent them away” (10:4).

David did not retaliate; yet, the Ammonites and Arameans feared that he would, so they formed a coalition to fight against David. Joab and his brother Abishai led David’s army and successfully defeated this coalition. The result was, again, that David’s kingdom expanded even further as these formerly hostile nations submitted to his rule.

“When all the kings . . . saw that they were defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and served them” (10:19).

Summary: These first 10 chapters of 2Samuel describe a “golden period” of David’s life when he was exemplifying life lessons such as: faith, courage, kindness, patience, worship, generosity, prayer and humility. To put it simply – David was walking closely with his God and, as a result, he was experiencing incredible blessing from God upon not only his own life, but also flowing outward to

the entire nation he was called to lead. Be sure that you spend time pondering this section of David's life, learning all of these positive lessons on how to do life with God. Sadly, it will all come to an abrupt end at the beginning of chapter 11, when David lets down his guard and his self-serving passions take over.

Extra thoughts on cultivating our Passion for God

A. W. Tozer's classic work, *The Pursuit of God*, may be the single best book ever written on the subject of passion for God. I encourage you to get it and study it in your own devotional reading time. Following are a few quotes to whet your appetite:

"God is a Person, and in the deep of His mighty nature He thinks, wills, enjoys, feels, loves, desires and suffers as any other person may. In making Himself known to us He stays by the familiar pattern of personality. He communicates with us through the avenues of our minds, our wills and our emotions. The continuous and unembarrassed interchange of love and thought between God and the soul of the redeemed man is the throbbing heart of New Testament religion." (And, may I add, Old Testament religion.)

"I want deliberately to encourage this mighty longing after God. The lack of it has brought us to our present low estate. The stiff and wooden quality about our religious lives is a result of our lack of holy desire. Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth. Acute desire must be present or there will be no manifestation of Christ to His people. He waits to be wanted. Too bad that with many of us He waits so long, so very long, in vain."

"The tragic results of this spirit are all about us. Shallow lives, hollow religious philosophies, the preponderance of the element of fun in gospel meetings, the glorification of men, trust in religious externalities, quasi-religious fellowships, salesmanship methods, the mistaking of dynamic personality for the power of the Spirit: these and such as these are the symptoms of an evil disease, a deep and serious malady of the soul."

"What God will do for the plain man or woman who seeks His face I believe I do know and can tell others. Let any man turn to God in earnest, let him begin to exercise himself unto godliness, let him seek to develop his power of spiritual receptivity by trust and obedience and humility, and the results will exceed anything he may have hoped in his leaner and weaker days."

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 12 – David and Bathsheba
2Samuel 11-12

Introduction

David had many victories in life. As a young shepherd boy he defeated a lion and a bear. In his teens, he defeated Goliath. In his 20s he overcame Saul's efforts to kill him. As a king he defeated the Philistines, the Moabites, the Syrians, the Ammonites and many more foes. Yet, after all these victories, David suffered his greatest and most costly defeat when he fell to the enemy within. The seeds for his moral failure had already been planted in previous years as David multiplied wives and concubines (5:13) in disobedience to God's word. Now, however, in one unguarded moment, he crossed a moral line that would impact his family and his kingship for the rest of his days.

David's sin with Bathsheba: 11:1-5

“Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem” (11:1).

In David's day, kings went out to war in the spring because the weather was conducive to the movement of armies, including heavy animals and supply wagons. If the army had chariots, it was all the more imperative to have firm ground to travel on.

On this particular spring, David sent his army out to resume the campaign against the Ammonites (ch.10). David, however, chose to stay at home while his army went out to war. Thus, while all his men were occupied with work, he was idle. He had too much time on his hands. Further, he was isolated from those who typically held him accountable for his actions.

“Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance” (11:2).

Note that David arose from his bed “*when evening came.*” The impression given is that he was lounging around doing basically nothing all day. When other men were going to bed after a long day’s work, David was just getting up. Something is wrong with this picture. He seems to be living an undisciplined and lazy life. In David’s case, the saying was true: *Idleness is the devil’s workshop* (Proverbs 16:27 – *The Living Bible*).

Taking a casual evening stroll on the rooftop of his palace, he saw Bathsheba bathing. There is no indication that she was being indiscreet. This issue was that David’s elevated view allowed him to see more than he needed to see in the courtyards of the neighboring homes.

Concerning temptation, Martin Luther said: “You can’t keep the birds from flying over your head; but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.” Temptation will, inevitably, come to us in many ways. The issue is: Are we ready to defend against it when it comes? Or, like David, are we already so compromised in our behavior that we are a sitting duck for temptation? None of us should naively suppose that we will never fall. What areas of temptation are you most susceptible to?

So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, “Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” (11:3).

Uriah was not just one of David’s warriors; he was one of David’s 30 “mighty men” (2Samuel 23:39). The simple fact that Bathsheba was *married* should have been enough to stop David. The further fact that she was married to one of his most valiant, trusted warriors should have been a further incentive to stop. David’s moral compass (sexual lust) was so compromised, however, that *nothing* would stop him from taking this woman.

“David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, “I am pregnant” (11:4,5).

Never was the saying truer: “*Your sin will find you out*” (Numbers 32:23). But instead of confessing his sin and halting the downward spiral, David went a step further and tried to cover up his sin.

The attempted cover-up: 11:6-13

David called Uriah home from the battlefield, hoping that he

would sleep with his wife. In this way, the pregnancy of Bathsheba could be ascribed to Uriah, and David might evade guilt. Though David tried to get Uriah to go to his home (on two successive nights), Uriah would not be unfaithful to his God, his commander, or his army.

Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing” (11:11).

Uriah’s uprightness stands in stark contrast to David’s folly. It is instructive to see that David could be the example of godliness in one season of life, and then the example of self-centered, sinful behavior in another season.

A death-sentence for Uriah: 11:14-25

David was not moved by Uriah’s upright character. He could have, at this point, confessed his sin and accepted the consequences. Instead, David sinned even further. He sent Uriah back to the battlefield *with his own sealed death sentence in hand*. Joab was instructed to place Uriah in a vulnerable spot in the battle and then to withdraw from him. Joab did so and, as David hoped, Uriah was killed in battle. Once David received the news that Uriah was dead, he moved forward with his cover up his sin.

Sin usually spills over and impacts many lives. David involved many people in his sinful behavior: the servant, Bathsheba, Uriah and Joab. When lust has consumed us, our tunnel vision for what we want prevents us from seeing the wider impact that our choices will have on other people.

David marries Bathsheba: 11:26-27

After Bathsheba mourned the death of her husband, David took her as a wife. It seemed to him that he had successfully covered up his sin. Perhaps he had, to the eyes of men; but the eyes of God see even our best-concealed secrets.

“But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord” (11:27).

Nathan the prophet confronts David: 12:1-12

Nathan the prophet and Gad the seer were the two spiritual

advisors to David. These men were given direct revelations from God pertaining to the life and work of David. In this case, Nathan was given specific insight into David's sin. Thus, he came to David with a 'case' concerning two men and a lamb. A rich man had many flocks, while a poor man had one lamb that he loved dearly, "like a daughter." When a visitor came to the rich man, he took the poor man's beloved lamb and killed it to feed his guest. David was *enraged* when he heard this story. He demanded justice.

Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion" (12:5,6).

Then Nathan lowered the boom on David's heart:

Nathan then said to David, "You are the man!" (12:7).

God had made David like the rich man in the story. Yet, David had stolen the one treasure of the poor man (Uriah) by taking Bathsheba from him.

When trying to communicate something very important to another person (a problem, a personal issue, a blind spot, a truth that is hard to accept) it is good to use analogies or stories that the other person can relate to. This is why Jesus used "parables" (comparisons) to explain spiritual ideas. This is why Nathan used a story that David could relate to – involving sheep.

The judgment upon David's house was severe:

"Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun'" (12:10-12).

- Conflict and death among David's household members.
- Opposition against David from within his own household.
- David's wives given to another man (usurping his kingship).
- Public humiliation before all of Israel.

The devastation and relational pain that would follow in David's house was the greatest ongoing defeat in his life. He would

experience the pain arising from this sin all the way to his final breath.

The fact that the knowledge of David's sin went beyond "all Israel" is evident in that his sin was recorded in Scripture for people in every generation to read and learn from.

While God offers to us forgiveness from the guilt of even our greatest sin, this does not mean that all consequences arising from our sin will disappear. We may have to live with serious consequences for the rest of our lives. Yet, God can help us to live for His glory even in the midst of the chaos and wreckage that our sin has brought about.

David's repentance: 12:13-15

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die." So Nathan went to his house (12:13-15).

David did not deny, minimize or excuse his sin. He owned it, acknowledging that not only had he sinned against Uriah and Bathsheba; but he had also sinned against his God who had so richly blessed him with the very power and position he had abused. He wrote psalms of confession on this occasion (see notes at end of this section).

The death of the child: 12:15-23

Bathsheba's baby was born with a severe illness. David fasted for 7 days, thinking that perhaps God might have mercy and spare the child. When the child died on day 7, he ended his fast.

"David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate" (12:20).

His servants were puzzled as to why David stopped fasting when the child died. When they asked, he answered with words that have given assurance to millions who have lost little ones early in life:

"While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may

live.’ But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me” (12:22,23).

David knew that he would someday go to be with the child *in the presence of God*. From this passage we gain the assurance that children who die are taken immediately into the presence of the Lord. There is no indication of a clear “age of accountability” after which children must make their own volitional choice to love God. We must trust in God’s mercy and wisdom to deal with every individual in line with His perfect and complete knowledge of their situation in life and their ability to make an informed decision concerning Him.

Solomon born to David and Bathsheba: 12:24-25

“Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her; and she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon. Now the Lord loved him and sent word through Nathan the prophet, and he named him Jedidiah for the Lord’s sake” (12:24,25).

The name “Solomon” is related to the Hebrew term “Shalom” – Peace. The name “Jedidiah,” however, means “beloved of the Lord.” It is significant that this child, born of such a sin-infested union between David and Bathsheba, should be “loved by the Lord.” It is even more astonishing to human sensibilities that the Lord would choose *this child* to carry on the Davidic kingship *and* that Solomon would inherit the privilege of building a house for the Lord.

There’s a reason it’s called AMAZING grace. In the New Testament, a murderous Christ-hater became the example of God’s mercy and grace (the apostle Paul, see 1Timothy 1:12-16). In the Old Testament, there is no greater example of God’s amazing grace than David. Not only was he forgiven and restored after his great sins; but God chose a child arising from this sinful union to carry on His promise to bring a Savior into the world. Notice how Bathsheba, “the wife of Uriah,” appears on the first page of the New Testament, in the genealogy of Jesus – Matthew 1:6! There is NO sin that is a match for God’s AMAZING grace.

David’s confessional psalms: Ps. 32 & 51

David wrote many “confessional psalms” (6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). Two in particular were written at the time of his

repentance over his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah (Ps. 32 and 51). Psalm 32 has become a paradigm for how we should (and should not) deal with the sin that accumulates in our lives.

The blessing of a forgiving God: (1-2)

How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!

To be a forgiven sinner is liberating. To have the weight and shame of guilt lifted is a blessing beyond comparison. To stop hiding in deceit, and to ‘come clean’ feels wonderful.

The folly of trying to hide our sin: (3-4)

When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.

To hide sin (as if we can “hide” anything from God) and fail to acknowledge it to God brings a heaviness that is unbearable. The weight of God’s convicting Spirit remains heavy when sin is left un-confessed. Our very life vitality feels like it is draining away.

Confession brings forgiveness: (5)

I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”; and You forgave the guilt of my sin.

We make forgiveness so complicated. I need to do penance. I need to earn forgiveness. I need to do more good than I did bad. No! God simply asks us to *acknowledge our sin*, and then He will remove our guilt immediately (see 1 John 1:9). Forgiveness is a *gift* not a reward. God wants a broken and contrite heart (see Ps.51:17). In fact, the Greek word for “confession” in the New Testament means: “To agree with.” When we confess, we are agreeing with God concerning the guilt of our sin.

The admonition to seek Him: (6-7)

Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance.

Having experienced the freedom of forgiveness, David admonishes others to seek God in times of failure and brokenness. The flood of great waters (shame, trials, consequences) will not be able to overwhelm the one who takes refuge in the arms of a loving, restoring God.

God's response: (8-9)

I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you.

God promises to teach the repentant sinner. We must not, however, be “suborn as a mule” to God’s corrections. We need to submit to His loving discipline and guidance.

The goodness of walking with God: (10-11)

Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but he who trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness shall surround him. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones; and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.

David concludes by reminding us of how much better it is to do life *with God* than apart from God. A life of wickedness is beset with sorrows. A life that is upright is surrounded by the faithful love (lovingkindness) of the Lord.

Is there some sin, some failure, some defeat that has brought a halt to your progress with God? If so, you need to know that you can bring it to the cross, where the Son of David, Jesus, died so that you could be forgiven. God waits for us there, at the cross, where we can lay down any and every burden, and walk away with the guilt and shame of sin lifted from our hearts. He died for ALL of your sins. Don't insult the Savior by insisting that one of your sins is greater than His love. If God can forgive, restore, love and use David . . . then he can do the same for you.

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 13 – Bitter Fruit in David’s Family
2Samuel 13-14

Introduction

After David’s sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah her husband, God told David the serious consequences that would come upon him. The first would be conflict and turmoil within his own household (12:10). In fact, from this point forward in David’s life, almost *all* of his troubles and sadness arose from strife within his family. Although David confessed his sin in the case of Bathsheba and Uriah, he did not have the kinds of vulnerable, open conversations about the impact of his sexual sins on everyone else. In particular, he *should have* had many honest, open conversations with *his many sons* as to the wreckage his own lack of restraint had caused, not only in regard to Bathsheba, but also in regard to the many wives that David had taken, contrary to God’s prohibition against multiplying wives (Deuteronomy 17:17). He seemed to have very little concept of fatherly influence in the family. Had he done more in the way of correcting his own behavior, he might have had a stronger voice as the father of a very large clan.

Amnon lusts after Tamar: 13:1-7

“Now it was after this that Absalom the son of David had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar, and Amnon the son of David loved her. Amnon was so frustrated because of his sister Tamar that he made himself ill, for she was a virgin, and it seemed hard to Amnon to do anything to her” (13:1,2).

According to Jewish law, Amnon could not marry his own half-sister (Leviticus 20:17). Yet, he lusted after her so much that he made himself sick. In like manner, David had desired a woman that was “off limits” (Bathsheba). He also had *many* wives and concubines. Had David set an example of restraint, he could have given guidance to his son. Instead, David’s example empowered Amnon to follow his sinful desires. *“Can you imagine the confusing messages David’s children received as they grew up?”*

They had siblings, half siblings, and siblings born to David's concubines. They grew up in a household saturated by sexual excess and lacking any example of parental restraint. We can't and must not excuse Amnon, but we can certainly understand." (Beth Moore, A Heart Like His, p.198).

Jonadab (son of David's brother, thus cousin to Amnon) came up with a deceptive plan so that Amnon could get close to Tamar. He should pretend to be sick and ask his father David to send Tamar to be his nurse. David seemed to be unaware of the heart condition of his son(s). It was he who sent the order for Tamar to go to Amnon.

Then David sent to the house for Tamar, saying, "Go now to your brother Amnon's house, and prepare food for him" (13:7).

Sadly, Tamar was walking into a trap set by 3 unsafe men: the lustful brother Amnon, the deceptive cousin Jonadab, and the out-of-touch father David.

Jonadab appears almost like a devil. He tempted Amnon to go ahead and 'touch the forbidden fruit.' A true friend would have warned Amnon to stay away from Tamar, and to fulfill his desires in the right way with a wife. Instead, Jonadab encouraged Amnon to move toward the object of his lust. Be careful WHO you listen to. There are many voices and advisors that will tell you to 'just do it,' to 'have it your way,' rather than encouraging you to honor God and walk in His ways. The advice of Jonadab the 'friend' would end up costing Amnon everything, including his life.

Amnon rapes Tamar: 13:8-14

There is so much sadness in this narrative. Tamar was the lovely and obedient daughter of David. She did as she was commanded and baked cakes for the 'ailing' Amnon with her own hands, as he looked on. She brought the cakes to her brother as he lay on his sickbed. She was full of dignity, beauty, innocence and goodwill. Her brother, however, was filled with evil, lustful intent. The name "Amnon" means "trustworthy." Yet, this Amnon was *anything but trustworthy*.

As Amnon began to force himself upon Tamar, she appealed to his righteous sensibilities; but his lust would not be stopped:

When she brought them to him to eat, he took hold of her and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." But she answered him, "No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not

done in Israel; do not do this disgraceful thing! As for me, where could I get rid of my reproach? And as for you, you will be like one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you.” However, he would not listen to her; since he was stronger than she, he raped her (13:11-14).

Rape is an epidemic in America. Studies show that 1 out of 5 women have been victims of rape. 1 out of 4 young girls will be sexually abused before they turn 18. What can we do? 1) Protect women and children from sexual abuse. We ALL must be active protectors of women and children. Men, in particular, should be highly alert and active protectors. 2) Women must exercise caution as to who they spend time with. Date rape and drug rape are on the rise. Do not allow yourself to be isolated by a stranger. 3) Report any act of sexual abuse to the authorities. 63% of sexual assaults are not reported to police; and ONLY 12% of child sexual assaults are reported to police. 4) Heal from the damage of sexual abuse. Seek counseling that promotes emotional, psychological and spiritual healing. Do not allow another person's sin to become your burden for the rest of your life. It is possible to find healing and freedom.

Amnon hates Tamar: 13:15-19

Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred; for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, “Get up, go away!” But she said to him, “No, because this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you have done to me!” Yet he would not listen to her. Then he called his young man who attended him and said, “Now throw this woman out of my presence, and lock the door behind her” (13:15-17).

No story in the Bible better illustrates the *difference* between lust and love. The moment that Amnon's sexual lust was satisfied, he "hated" Tamar and wanted nothing more to do with her. Why? Because lust is *never* satisfied. By tomorrow, Amnon will want someone else and something more to satisfy his lustful cravings. As the apostle Paul wrote: "*Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more*" (Ephesians 4:19). Lust always has you grasping for just a little bit more.

Judith Orloff, M.D. describes the difference between love and lust (Psychology Today, Aug.15,2011). **Lust:** You're totally focused on a person's looks and body. You're interested in having sex, but not in having conversations. You'd rather keep the relationship on a fantasy level, not discuss real feelings. You want to leave soon after sex rather than cuddling. You are lovers, but not friends.

Love: You want to spend quality time together other than sex. You get lost in conversations and forget about the hours passing. You want to honestly listen to each other's feelings, make each other happy. He or she motivates you to be a better person. You want to meet his or her family and friends.

An excellent book dealing with love and lust is: Joshua Harris, Sex is not the Problem – Lust Is (Multnomah Books, 2003). This is a very practical book for all ages. I highly recommend it!

Tamar's devastation: 13:18-22

Tamar tried to appeal to any vestiges of goodness in her brother; but he was hopelessly and recklessly self-centered. He had her forcibly thrown out of his room, and the door locked behind her. Tamar tore her virgin's garment, put ashes on her head and went out from Amnon's presence wailing. Immediately, her blood brother Absalom asked a question that seems to indicate his suspicion that something like this *could have happened*:

Then Absalom her brother said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? But now keep silent, my sister, he is your brother; do not take this matter to heart." So Tamar remained and was desolate in her brother Absalom's house (13:20).

Absalom, on the surface, appears like the protective brother. Yet, he did little to protect and/or heal his sister: 1) He seems to have suspected that Amnon presented a threat to her, but he did nothing about it. 2) He told her to "keep silent" about the rape. 3) He seemed to prefer Amnon's right over hers – "He is your brother." 4) He told her to *not* take it to heart (seriously?). 5) He allowed her to "remain desolate" in his house. 6) He was more concerned with his own revenge than with his sister's healing.

A true 'healer' sets aside personal agendas in order to fully enter into the suffering of another. He/she listens at a heart and soul level to what the sufferer is thinking and feeling. We must resist the temptation to offer advice and quick fixes. Empathy is entering into another person's suffering and helping them to process their own pain. The sufferer needs to feel heard and understood. Consider taking OPC's course, Listening Well.

David's anger/Absalom's hatred: 13:21,22

“Now when King David heard of all these matters, he was very angry. But Absalom did not speak to Amnon either good or bad; for Absalom hated Amnon because he had violated his sister Tamar” (13:21,22).

Both David and Absalom remained *silent* about this tragic incident. David displayed anger; but he *did nothing about it*. He did not call his own firstborn son to account for this atrocious act, likely because he felt like a hypocrite (his own sin of adultery and murder was worse). David was compromised in his ability to “father” his sons because of his own past behavior (not to mention the present fact that he continued to have numerous wives and concubines).

Absalom remained *silent* for another reason. From the moment this happened, he was looking for a way to kill Amnon. The murder did not take place for 2 full years; but murder was lurking in his heart the entire time. Jesus spoke clearly about how anger is the breeding ground and basis for murder (Matthew 5:21,22).

Aside from the fallout in our own lives, we need to realize that our leadership of others will be compromised by our sin. It is very difficult to lead others with credibility and conviction when our own lives have been marked by compromise. This is especially true in the area of sexuality. If parents and other role models are indulging, this gives sons and daughters every reason to do the same. David was not only compromised as a father, he also had failed to take corrective steps that could have restored his ability to act as a father to a large clan of sons and daughters. Because he failed to do so, the chaos in his household increased over time.

Absalom murders Amnon: 13:23-39

It took 2 full years, but eventually Absalom managed to lure Amnon away to a feast, where he had him assassinated. How ironic: David had instructed his men to dispense with Uriah. Now, Absalom commands his men to dispense with Amnon. Like father like son. At first, David was told that *all* of his sons had been killed by Absalom. Ironically, it was Jonadab (who had advised Amnon at the outset) who told David that *only* Amnon had died:

Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother, responded, “Do not let my lord suppose they have put to death all the young men, the king's sons, for Amnon alone is dead; because by the intent of Absalom this has been determined since the day that he violated his sister Tamar” (13:32).

Jonadab apparently knew *all along* that Absalom was intending to murder Amnon; but *he did nothing to dissuade him*. Again, Jonadab appears much like a devil in this story: He lures a man into sin, does nothing to help him deal with the ugly consequences, and then matter-of-factly reports his death.

After killing Amnon, Absalom fled to Talmi, King of Geshur, who was his grandfather (2Samuel 3:3). He was there for the next 3 years, alienated from his father and from the kingdom of Israel.

Thus, 5 years elapsed during which David lost 2 sons and 1 daughter: Amnon was dead, Absalom was departed, and Tamar was desolate. As God had said, the sword had arisen in David's household (12:10) and he was experiencing the bitter fruit of his own sinful choices.

When I was in a high school driver education class, they showed us a movie entitled, Death on the Highway. It was intended to scare us away from drinking and driving by graphically showing accident scenes where policemen were putting bodies in body bags. The message was clear and unforgettable: If you drink and drive, you might end up like this. Similarly, the Bible paints a graphic and disturbing picture of the fallout of David's sins in his family life. This was to serve as a warning to all of us: If you choose to indulge your lusts as David did, you might end up like this. It is GOOD for some scary pictures to remain firmly lodged in our heads and hearts!

Joab moves David's heart to bring Absalom back: 14:1-20

Joab saw that David's heart was inclined toward Absalom (14:1), but that he was *not* moving toward reconciliation. He cleverly used a woman from another city to present a "case" to David that closely resembled the Amnon-Absalom situation. She told David that one of her sons had killed the other son, and that now the rest of her family wanted to execute her one remaining son, thus extinguishing her hope for an heir to carry on the family name. David promised her that he would protect the life of the remaining son and not allow him to be put to death.

The woman then began to press David as to why *he* was not moving to protect the life of *his own son*, allowing him instead to remain banished to a far off land (a 'death-sentence' in effect). David quickly perceived that Joab was behind this entire conversation, and the woman confirmed that it was so.

“Indeed, it was your servant Joab who commanded me, and it was he who put all these words in the mouth of your maidservant; in order to change the appearance of things your servant Joab has done this thing” (14:19,20).

Joab brings Absalom back to Jerusalem: 14:21-24

David called Joab in and gave him permission to go to Geshur and bring Absalom home. Joab was delighted for this opportunity, fully expecting that David would meet with him. However, when Absalom came back Jerusalem David made another *relationally unhealthy* move.

The king said, “Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face.” So Absalom turned to his own house and did not see the king’s face (14:24).

What a terrible way to deal with an estranged son. Instead of making things better, David’s actions made matters much worse. Absalom felt even *further estranged* from his father because he was physically present with him in the same town; but emotionally abandoned by him. This continued estrangement lasted 2 more years, leading to dire consequences for this father and son.

A relational rupture cannot be patched over with half-hearted measures. It takes time, honest communication and emotional healing to bring about a true reconciliation of wounded souls. When you do something half-hearted, it makes the other person feel like you are just doing what suits you, rather than truly seeking to understand and heal the relationship. Such measures just drive the wound in even deeper as the perceived message becomes a reality: “I don’t really matter to this person; they will always seek to control this relationship in a way that serves them.” On the other hand, when you move toward another person seeking to understand, not to be understood . . . the healing process can begin. David could have brought Absalom home, confessed his own sins to his son and then taken a listening position: “Tell me my son how my actions have impacted you. I really want to understand.” He also could have honored Tamar’s desire for righteousness, and invited he to dine at his table (as he had done with Jonathan’s son, Mephibosheth).

Absalom demands to see David: 14:25-33

After 2 more years of waiting, Absalom was fed up with his father’s ways. He demanded that Joab pave the way for him to see David. Joab, however, ignored his requests. Absalom then

showed how serious he was by burning Joab's field down! Finally, Joab persuaded David to allow Absalom to see him.

“Thus he came to the king and prostrated himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom” (14:33).

On the surface, it appeared that reconciliation had been made. On the contrary, too much time had passed and too much emotional damage had been incurred. Absalom was a very bitter son. His father had failed to act with justice in the case of Amnon's rape of Tamar. Absalom was forced to take matters into his own hands. Then, he was forced to flee to a safe haven for 3 years. Again, he was forced to remain separate from his father, while living in Jerusalem with him. Finally, he had to force his way back into his father's presence.

With all of that buried bitterness between son and father, it is not surprising to find, in the coming chapters, that Absalom was the one who ultimately fulfilled God's earlier words of judgment over David's future:

“Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun” (12:11,12).

As Absalom bowed before his father and felt his kiss on his cheek, he was already thinking in his heart that David was not only an unhealthy father, but also an unworthy king.

Nothing challenges us to maturity more than having younger people following in our footsteps. “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1Corinthians 11:1). How do those under your leadership perceive you? Have you set them up for bitterness and rebellion because you have acted inconsistently? Or, are you seeking to live with “integrity” – integrating what you teach with what you model in your attitudes, words and behaviors.

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 14 – Absalom’s Rebellion
2Samuel 15-20

Introduction

After his sin with Bathsheba, David repented toward God and was forgiven. He failed, however, to do the hard work of estimating and repairing the *relational damage* his sin had caused. Family strife came to a head when Absalom, his son, mounted a coup. David had been forewarned of this kind of uprising after his sin with Bathsheba: *Thus says the Lord, “Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household . . .” (12:11)*. Absalom managed to overthrow his father and assume the throne briefly. David was able to retake the throne; but in doing so, he lost another son. Psalms 3,4 and 5 (Psalms of lament) are associated with this painful period of David’s life.

Absalom maneuvers to overthrow David: 15:1-6

“It came about after this that Absalom provided for himself a chariot and horses and fifty men as runners before him” (15:1).

Absalom methodically *“stole away the hearts of Israel”* (v.6). He appealed to people’s unmet needs, persuading them that it was the failed policies of his father that had led to their problems and *he* was their only real hope for change. Beneath the surface of his actions, we can detect his great anger. He was a bitter son who wanted to make his father pay for ruining his own life and the life of his sister, Tamar. Seeking revenge was the path that Absalom chose. Sadly, this path would cost *Absalom* more than any other.

Bitterness and revenge stole away 11 years of Absalom’s life. He could have surrendered his heart to God (Romans 12:1,2), escaped the prison of bitterness and left room for the justice of God (Romans 12:14-19). Instead, he let bitterness consume him. “Forgiveness may be excruciating for a moment, but anger and bitterness are excruciating for a lifetime.” (Beth Moore, A Heart Like His, p.213). It’s a choice: bitterness or forgiveness.

Absalom proclaimed king: 15:7-12

Absalom knew the best place to initiate the overthrow of his father. **Hebron** was a safe distance away from Jerusalem. It was also the very city where David was first made king over Israel (2Sam. 5:1).

Ahithophel, one of David's key advisors, defected to Absalom's side. He may have had unspoken resentment toward David for stealing *his granddaughter*, Bathsheba, from Uriah and then having Uriah killed in battle. Perhaps he wanted to remain *the* key advisor to the new king. As will later see, his *role* was his *identity*.

“The conspiracy was strong and the people continually increased with Absalom” (15:12).

Psalm 55 describes a time in David's life when he was betrayed by the closest of friends (see 55:12-14). Many commentators believe this was written during the betrayal of Ahithophel, David's friend.

“As for me, I shall call upon God, and the Lord will save me. Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, and He will hear my voice. He will redeem my soul in peace from the battle which is against me, for they are many who strive with me. God will hear and answer them – even the one who sits enthroned from of old . . . Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken” (55:16-19,22).

Betrayal can shake us to the core and cause us to believe many lies: ‘No one is safe.’ ‘I am not worth loving.’ ‘I deserve this.’ ‘I must never open myself up to relationship again.’ Yet, when we place our deepest trust in God (Who will never betray us) and find our attachment and security in Him, we can learn to open ourselves up to people again . . . because they no longer have the power to define us or shatter us. “HE will never allow the righteous (those who trust in HIM) to be shaken” (Psalm 55:22).

David flees Jerusalem: 15:13-18

When David heard about Absalom's coup, he went into “emergency management mode.” He moved swiftly to avert an even greater disaster. He *knew* the extent of Absalom's rage and did not want to risk the calamity of encountering his son face-to-face. Thus, he moved his people to a place of safety.

“Arise and let us flee, for otherwise none of us will escape from Absalom. Go in haste, or he will overtake us quickly and bring

down calamity on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword” (15:14).

As David fled Jerusalem with his people, he stopped at the last house and made sure that everyone was safely out of town.

“The king went out and all the people with him, and they stopped at the last house. Now all his servants passed on beside him, all the Cherethites, all the Pelethites and all the Gittites, six hundred men who had come with him from Gath, passed on before the king” (15:17,18).

David was not just fleeing; he was *leading* an *orderly* exit and making sure that everyone was accounted for. Captains are supposed to be the last to abandon ship. David was not panicking; he was leading *through* the crisis. This gave his people confidence and hope.

David’s friends: 15:19-37

Even as David was fleeing Jerusalem, God’s mercy was evident, providing him key strategic partners that chose to risk their lives to help him in this crisis. **Ittai the Gittite** (a Philistine from the city of Gath) was loyal to David. He would not be dissuaded from going into exile with his king. As a result, Ittai was later promoted to be a commander of 1/3rd of David’s army, along with Joab and Abishai. **Zadok and Abiathar** the priests came to David carrying the Ark of the Covenant. David sent them back, however, believing that IF God was for him, he would return to Jerusalem and worship in the presence of God. It was an act of faith for Zadok and Abiathar to return; for in the past priests had been slaughtered (by Saul) when they were suspected of being friends of David. **Hushai the Archite** was David’s friend and most trusted advisor (2Samuel 15:37). He was sent back to Jerusalem with the hope that he could thwart the counsel of David’s former advisor, Ahithophel, who had defected to Absalom’s side. In fact, it would be the advice of Hushai that would eventually lead to the defeat of Absalom and David’s return to the throne.

In times of crisis, it is important to have trusted friends that you can depend upon. Call those friends to your side and share your situation with them. Let them walk with you through the crisis. They can pray with and for you; but they may also help bear your burdens. Who is on your emergency management team? “Bear one another’s burdens . . . ” (Galatians 6:2).

If we wonder where David's *heart* was at in the midst of this crisis, we find clues in his own words and songs. When Zadok the priest came to David with the Ark of the Covenant, David revealed his trust in the sovereign hand of God.

“Return the ark of God to the city. If I find favor in the sight of the Lord, then He will bring me back again and show me both it and His habitation. But if He should say thus, ‘I have no delight in you,’ behold, here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him” (15:25,26).

Psalm 3 also reveals David's *wrestling* with God during this crisis.

“O Lord, how my adversaries have increased! Many are rising up against me. Many are saying of my soul, “There is no deliverance for him in God.” But You, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the One who lifts my head” (Ps. 3:1-3).

Have you ever been in a situation like this? Many have risen up against you. Many have given up on you. Many are saying that you are finished. In such times, you **MUST** turn your eyes away from the predictions of men to the faithfulness of God. He **WILL BE** a shield around you. HE will lift your head up from the shame of your failure and defeat. HE will give you the strength and hope to move forward. Do not let the negative voices of men define and defeat you. God's plan for your life will prevail . . . if you cling to HIM and keep your hope fixed on HIM as you walk through the fire.

David walked barefoot up the Mount of Olives, weeping and praying as he went. His repentant demeanor indicates his awareness of his own sins that had led him to this sad crisis.

And David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went, and his head was covered and he walked barefoot. Then all the people who were with him each covered his head and went up weeping as they went. Now someone told David, saying, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” And David said, “O Lord, I pray, make the counsel of Ahithophel foolishness” (15:30,31).

The Son of David, Jesus, would later walk up this same Mount of Olives with His disciples, weeping and praying on the way to His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (see Matthew 26:30).

Psalm 4 gives us more insight into David's heart during this time:

“Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the Lord . . . In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, O Lord, make me to dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:4,5,8).

Pete Scazzerro writes about “enlarging your soul through grief and loss” (EHS, ch.7). David seems to have done this. Through weeping, praying and journaling, he wrestled with God in the course of his trials. It is unhealthy to minimize, deny or rationalize grief and loss. We must let the full weight of our losses fall upon us. Only then can we learn what God has for us and deepen our walk with Him. We learn the most about God IN our darkest hours.

An opportunist and a hater: 16:1-14

While some came to David’s side in his time of turmoil, others seized upon his downfall to pursue their own agendas. **Ziba** was the servant of Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s crippled son. He lied to David about his master, alleging that Mephibosheth wanted David to be overthrown. He was an opportunist seeking to advance his own welfare at the expense of others. David, not knowing the truth behind these allegations, granted to Ziba all the property that had formerly belonged to Mephibosheth (16:1-4).

In a crisis, our pain can cause us to make rash decisions. David did not have access to the information necessary to make a wise decision about Ziba’s issue. He made a false assumption about Mephibosheth, who had never betrayed him before. Avoid making rash decisions during a crisis. This will only make matters worse.

Shimei, from the family of Saul, came out cursing David as he fled from Jerusalem (16:5-14). He was filled with hatred toward David for overthrowing the dynasty of Saul.

“Get out, get out, you man of bloodshed, and worthless fellow! The Lord has returned upon you all the bloodshed of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom” (16:7,8).

David’s general, Abishai, wanted to kill Shimei on the spot. David would not let him. David preferred to look for the movement of God in his own life.

“Let him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him. Perhaps the Lord will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day” (16:11,12).

It is tempting to want to lash back against those who hurt you. David chose a different path. He chose to search for the movement of God even in his worst experiences. Larry Crabb writes much about this idea of seeking to discern God's movement in our lives, particularly as we journey through trials and pain. The Soul Talk questions are: What is God saying to me through this situation? What is God up to in my life? How is God coming to me?

Absalom takes Jerusalem: 16:15-23

Now that his father was in exile, Absalom took over the city of Jerusalem and quickly asserted his authority. At the advice of his counselor Ahithophel, his first move was to have sexual relations with his father's concubines. This was the ancient way of saying that you had completely triumphed over a vanquished king.

“So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and Absalom went in to his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel” (16:22).

Recall that David's sin with Bathsheba had started on that very same rooftop (see 11:2). Now, the words of Nathan the prophet, spoken to David after his sin, were coming to pass:

“I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun” (12:11,12).

Absalom had inflicted the ultimate humiliation upon his father.

Hushai's advice helps David escape: 17:1-29

Ahithophel advised Absalom to quickly rally 12,000 troops to pursue David while he was weary. Hushai (the counselor that David had sent back to Jerusalem to thwart Absalom's rebellion) contradicted Ahithophel's advice, arguing that David would easily defeat such a small force. Instead, he advised Absalom to wait and rally a massive army from all of Israel and mount a full-scale attack. In reality, Hushai was just buying time for David to escape.

Then Absalom and all the men of Israel said, “The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel.” For the Lord had ordained to thwart the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring calamity on Absalom (17:14).

When his advice was rejected, Ahithophel was so devastated that he went home, put his house in order, and killed himself.

Ahithophel's significance was defined by his role as the king's most trusted advisor. Once that role was taken away from him, he had nothing left to live for. In his book, *Scary Close*, Donald Miller talks about the difference between the roles we occupy in life, and the real person that we are. If we try to live in our roles, we end up presenting a false self to the world. On the other hand, when we acknowledge who we really are, apart from ANY roles, we open up our authentic self to relationship with others. We cannot hide behind our roles. We must step out of those roles in order to allow our true selves to get 'scary close' to others. A must-read book!

Absalom killed by Joab: 18:1-33

As the opposing armies prepared to meet, David gave specific instructions to his generals as to how treat Absalom when they encountered him.

The king charged Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king charged all the commanders concerning Absalom (18:5).

David asked *for his sake* that Absalom be shown mercy. David knew that God, *for HIS sake*, had to exercise this same kind of mercy toward him: "*For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great*" (Psalm 25:11).

It is clear that, in spite of Absalom's treachery and rebellion, David had forgiven his son. He also saw his own sins that had contributed to his son's angry rebellion.

In his book, Forgive the Unforgivable, David Stoop contrasts the path of bitterness with the path of forgiveness. Deep forgiveness, in the face of a great offense, is neither quick nor easy. We must grieve the pain and loss at the deepest level, allowing forgiveness to gradually and repeatedly wash over the offense(s). Quick forgiveness minimizes the pain caused by another's sin. Bitterness poisons your own soul for a lifetime. Deep forgiveness, on the other hand, can heal your hurt while allowing the offender to move forward free from the burden of their sins.

Tragically, Joab again proved to be a self-willed general who was not afraid to usurp David's authority. When Joab encountered Absalom, with his head caught between tree branches, he killed him. David was shattered at the news of Absalom's death.

The king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the

gate and wept. And thus he said as he walked, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (18:33).

David felt that it was *he* who should have died instead of Absalom. He *knew* that his own sins had, in part, set his son up for failure.

Joab reproves David for lamenting: 19:1-7

Joab often appears as if *he* is the one really *in charge* of David. Here, he reproves David for lamenting the death of Absalom and warns him that an even worse coup will soon result if he does not immediately change his demeanor.

“Now arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the Lord, if you do not go out, surely not a man will pass the night with you, and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now” (19:7).

The surprising thing is that David did as Joab commanded him; even though Joab had *not* done as David had commanded him (he killed Absalom against David’s orders).

We have no right to try to control or manage another person’s emotions. Each person must be given the right to process their own pain on their own timetable. OPC’s Listening Well course teaches us how to listen with empathy, rather than trying to ‘fix’ another person’s emotions and/or thought process. Joab was a rude intruder into David’s emotional life. He demanded that David stop being a ‘person,’ and quickly return to his role as a ‘king.’ Those kinds of friends are “sorry comforters” (Job 16:2).

David reunites the country: 19:8-15

After Absalom’s death, Israel was greatly divided. The northern tribes had followed Absalom, while the southern tribe of Judah had remained loyal to David. David began the process of calling key leaders together to reunite the nation.

Thus he turned the hearts of all the men of Judah as one man, so that they sent word to the king, saying, “Return, you and all your servants” (19:14).

A divided entity (a family, a business, a church, a school, etc.) cannot move forward if disunity is allowed to remain within the ranks. We must work to restore unity by appealing to the hearts of all involved. “Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

David settles some scores: 19:16-39

David forgave **Shimei**, the man who had violently cursed him as he fled from Jerusalem (see 16:5-14). He came to David confessing his sin and begging for mercy and David gave him his request (19:16-23). **Ziba**, the servant of **Mephibosheth**, had falsely accused his master of siding with Absalom (16:1-4). After David heard the truth of the matter from Mephibosheth himself, he decided to split evenly the land that he had previously granted to Ziba (19:24-30). **Barzilla** was an 80-year old man who had given critical provisions to David and his men when they were forced into exile (17:27,28). Now, David rewarded Barzilla by allowing his “servant” Chimham (probably his son) to live in Jerusalem with David (19:31-39).

It's ALL about PEOPLE. When you strip down the story of David and Absalom, there is more involved than simply a struggle for a throne. The greater struggle is the struggle to LOVE WELL. It is important to remember that ultimately, we are not human doings, we are human beings. What matters most is how we love God and people along the way, no matter what kind of road God calls us to walk. The greatest commandments were NOT: Defeat your opponents and win at all costs. Instead, they WERE: Love God will all of your heart, soul, mind and strength . . . and love your neighbor as yourself. In the end, life is not a game of thrones. It is an opportunity to LOVE WELL.

Sheba's Revolt: 19:40 – 20:26

Absalom's rebellion had divided Israel. While David tried to restore unity, there were some who bitterly resisted. **Sheba** was from the tribe of Benjamin (Saul's tribe). All the tribes followed him in a backlash revolt, except for David's own tribe of Judah.

“So all the men of Israel withdrew from following David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri; but the men of Judah remained steadfast to their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem” (20:2).

David had appointed **Amasa** (Absalom's former general) to be over the men of war and to put down Sheba's revolt. Amasa was slow to follow orders, however, so David put **Abishai** (Joab's elder brother – see 1Chronicles 2:16) in charge in order to move quickly to put down the rebellion. **Joab**, true to form quickly usurped the chain of command and took charge of the mission to find and

destroy Sheba. Joab first murdered Amasa, and then he did away with Sheba. Joab seems to be the one man that David feared and could not exercise his authority over. In any case, Sheba's revolt was shut down, and David was restored to full kingship over Israel.

God had made a firm *promise* to David, that his royal dynasty would *last forever* (2Samuel 7:16). If David (or his sons) disobeyed God, then divine discipline would ensue; but God would remain faithful to His promise to keep David and his descendants on the throne of Israel *forever*. Thus, David lost the throne for a time; but the promise of God brought him back. God IS faithful, even when we ARE faithless (2Timothy 2:13)!

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 15 – David’s Final Acts
2Samuel 21-24

Introduction

We have come to the final chapters in the story of one of the most significant characters in the Bible – King David – the “man after God’s own heart.” The Holy Spirit has taught us, through the life of David, that even a flawed human being can be an intimate with the Almighty, and greatly used for His purposes. God uses ordinary people to accomplish the extraordinary things *He* has planned. You might expect the final chapters of David’s story to read like a glorious crescendo to his life and work. On the contrary, David keeps ‘falling forward’ all the way to the finish line. If there is any character that stands out, it is GOD, whose mercy carries David to the end of his journey and to an altar of sacrifice.

The Gibeonite revenge: 21:1-14

Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David sought the presence of the Lord. And the Lord said, “It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he put the Gibeonites to death” (21:1).

God has a long memory. He does not forget the vows that we make and He holds us accountable when those vows are broken. Some *400 years earlier*, Joshua had entered into a covenant with the Gibeonites, without asking God first (see Joshua 9). Joshua vowed *never* to destroy them. About 350 years after Joshua, king Saul had violated this vow and sought to destroy the Gibeonites. Now, during David’s reign, the people of Israel were being held accountable for Saul’s breach of Joshua’s vow.

“When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, ‘My vow was a mistake.’ Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?” (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6).

The famine lasted 3 years and finally David was told of the connection between the famine and the broken vow. As a result, 7 sons from the household of Saul were handed over to the Gibeonites to be executed. Rizpah (a concubine of Saul and mother of 2 of the sons) acted with love and courage by caring for the exposed bodies of all 7 men throughout the harvest season (21:10). Her noble example reminded David that the bones of Saul, Jonathan and his brothers had not been given a proper burial. Thus, David took all of the remains of Saul and his sons and buried them together in the family tomb of Saul's father, Kish.

God takes seriously ALL vows that we make – marriage vows, business vows, vows to fulfill certain duties of office, etc. And time does not weaken the strength of vows from God's point of view. "Never forget, God can outwait you. Time is always on His side." (Beth Moore, A Heart Like His, p.232). Take some time to consider: Are there vows that you made in the past that you have failed to keep? Has God been trying to get your attention concerning these broken vows? If so, there are 3 steps you can take: 1) Repent of the sin of breaking your vow. 2) Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the deeper issues that caused you to abandon your vow. 3) Recommit to keeping the vow, with God's help.

Giant-killers: 21:15-22

Recall that David killed Goliath, the Philistine giant, in one of the opening scenes of his story (1Samuel 17). Now, near the end of his story, we learn that Goliath had 4 giant sons that also were killed by 4 of David's mighty warriors. The old rivalry remained between the giants of Philistia and the warriors of Israel.

"These four were born to the giant in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants" (21:22).

All of the heroic activity in Israel did not center just on King David. There were many other mighty warriors and giant-killers who performed acts of great faith and courage. In his book, Good to Great, Jim Collins uses many case studies to show how the greatest organizations are not led by one super-hero; rather, they are led by lesser known leaders who empower, release and celebrate the great deeds of other people in their organizations. Great leaders gather and empower great warriors; they do NOT kill all of the giants by themselves. How about you? Are you empowering other giant-killers? Are you celebrating the achievements of others? Or, are you trying to do it all by yourself?

David's song: 22:1-51 (same as Psalm 18)

This “song of David’s life” is found both here and at “Psalm 18” in the Hebrew songbook, making it one of *the most important* Psalms that David wrote. It encapsulates most of the major themes of his life and walk with God. It can be regarded as the *one song* that David would have people read if they wanted to learn about his walk with God. We will give this Psalm special attention when we come to our final chapter on the life of David.

A song celebrating David's leadership: 23:1-7

This short song celebrates the blessing David was given to be the king of Israel. At the core of the song is God’s description of the God-fearing leader and his/her impact on those being led:

“The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me, ‘He who rules over men righteously, who rules in the fear of God, is as the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, when the tender grass springs out of the earth, through sunshine after rain.’ Truly is not my house so with God?(23:3-5).

Take some time to consider the impact of your own leadership on other people. Would they describe their experience under your leadership as a sunny morning with new grass sprouting everywhere? When was the last time you allowed those you lead to speak into your leadership strengths and weaknesses? What can you do to improve your leadership so that your “house” feels blessed under your care?

David's 3 mighty men: 23:8-17

Among all of David’s warriors, 3 were distinguished by their exceptional acts of valor: Adino, Eleazar and Shammah. One of their acts was done specifically to show their loyalty to David:

David had a craving and said, “Oh that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate!” So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water from the well of Bethlehem which was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless he would not drink it, but poured it out to the Lord; and he said, “Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?” (23:15-17).

If David had drunk the water, this might have been regarded as a case of hero-worship. Instead, David gave the offering to the Lord, who *alone* deserved the honor and glory for all that David had accomplished, and for all of the mighty men he had been given.

The thirty mighty men: 23:18-39

The 30 mighty men are listed, along with their leaders. Notable in this list are: **Uriah** the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba (whom David had killed) and **Eliam** the father of Bathsheba and son of Ahithophel. Now we can understand why, when David sent to find out who Bathsheba was, the messenger had replied: *“This is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite”* (2Sam.11:3). Eliam and Uriah would have been well known to David. Add to this the fact that Ahithophel, Bathsheba’s grandfather, was David’s close friend and counselor. David’s sin with Bathsheba involved a significant network of very close friends and fellow servants whom he transgressed against.

Who are the mighty men and women that support you in life? Who do you call on in times of battle? It is important to have people who will pray for and with you, who will point you to God’s Word and encourage you to remain steadfast. Once you see who they are, do not take the privilege of their friendship and support for granted. Who might you need to go to and be humble before?

David numbers his troops: 24:1-15

Several of Israel’s leaders fell victim to the sin of pride. They wanted to assess the greatness of their life’s work and, in various ways, sinned against the Lord by doing so (Hezekiah - 2Kings 20:12-19; Saul - 1Samuel 15:12; Absalom - 2Samuel 18:18.) David wanted to number his troops in order to assess the strength of his kingdom. Joab and the commanders of the army tried to talk David out of this action; but they were unable to persuade him. It took 9 months and 20 days to complete the numbering, so David had *plenty of time* to repent of his decision; but he did not.

Who have you given permission to speak into your life, even to speak difficult words of correction when necessary? Are you open to such words of correction? Proverbs reminds us: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy” (Proverbs 27:6). A true friend will tell you what you NEED to hear, not what you WANT to hear. Are you keeping an open ear to the reproof of your friend(s)?

When we compare the two accounts of this sin, we see the involvement of David, God *and* Satan. Notice how 2Samuel and 1Chronicles look at it from different angles:

“Now again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, “Go, number Israel and Judah” (24:1).

“Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel” (1Chronicles 21:1).

God never tempts anyone to sin (see James 1:13). On the other hand, God sometimes allows Satan to tempt one of his children (eg. the case of Job). This is what happened with David. God allowed Satan to tempt David to number his troops. He knew there was hidden pride that needed to be brought into the light and dealt with. At the same time, God was seeking an opportunity to discipline *the nation* as a whole for some undisclosed sin. (The prophets would later disclose *many* of Israel’s specific sins.) Thus, the sovereign purposes of God were woven together through the actions of Satan and David.

We cannot pretend to know the will and ways of God. There are MANY things that happen in life that we will never fully understand; but we must TRUST God’s wisdom and sovereignty. He knows exactly what He is doing. He makes no mistakes. We are not told in this instance WHY God was seeking an occasion to discipline Israel. We just know that He was. Are you able to allow God’s ways to be “higher than your ways,” and His understanding to be “higher than your understanding?” (Isaiah 55:9).

When David had to choose between 7 years of famine, 3 months of fleeing from an enemy, or 3 days of pestilence, he chose the last because he knew the *mercy of God* and would far rather allow his just and merciful Shepherd be the one to measure out discipline.

Then David said to Gad, “I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man” (24:14).

God is just and merciful. We must continue to grow to know Him in both attributes, for He alone knows how to blend justice and mercy into perfect balance for every situation. David shows us that desiring God’s hand in our lives is by far the best choice, no matter how it will end up. God’s character is worthy of our trust.

David builds an altar: 24:16-25

The 3-day pestilence resulted in the deaths of 70,000 in Israel. God stopped the hand of the destroying angel as it was raised over Jerusalem, more specifically, over the threshing floor of Araunah.

When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who destroyed the people, "It is enough! Withdraw your hand!" And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (24:16).

There may be more here than just God's grief over Israel's destruction. Going back into history to the story of Abraham and Isaac, we recall the moment when Abraham placed his only son on an altar and lifted his hand in order to slay him (Genesis 22:10-12). The voice of God stayed the hand of Abraham in that very moment. *The site where God stayed the hand of Abraham was the exact same site as here, where God stayed the hand of the destroying angel – Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem.*

Was God moved by the memory of a father being willing to sacrifice his one and only beloved son? For Abraham and Isaac, God provided a substitute sacrifice in the form of a ram caught in a thicket nearby. Abraham offered that substitute sacrifice on the altar before God.

Was God further moved by the fact that in this same city, Jerusalem, His own Son would die as a substitute sacrifice for the sins of the world? God would *not* stay His own hand of justice against His *own Son*. *He would slay Him for the sins of the world.*

David purchased the plot of ground from Araunah and built an altar on it. This later became the very spot on which Solomon would build the Temple. Substitute sacrifices would be offered perpetually on this very spot, showing God's mercy toward sinners.

No wonder God was moved with grief in this moment. Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem was *the most important geographical place in Israel's history*. It was the place depicting the truth that a holy God grieves over the sin of humanity, and is thereby moved to provide a sacrifice on the altar that will remove mankind's sin and allow fellowship with God to be restored. Mt. Moriah = God's Mercy!

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 16 – David and the House of God
1Chronicles 22-29

Introduction

David's heart for God came out in many ways, but his greatest display of love for God was his desire to build a glorious house for God. The roots of this desire were found in his early years of building out the city of Jerusalem to be the capital of Israel. *Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the Lord had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains" (2Samuel 7:1,2).* At that time, God told David that it was not His desire for David to build Him a house; but that God would build a house (an enduring dynasty) for David. Nevertheless, David retained his passion for God's house. Toward the end of his life, he spent much of his energy making preparations for his son, Solomon, to build a magnificent house for the glory of God.

David's offering at Ornan's threshing floor: 21:26-30

After the 3-day plague following the numbering of his army, David purchased the threshing floor of Ornan and built an altar there.

"David built an altar to the Lord there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. And he called to the Lord and He answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering" (21:26,27).

It was on this spot that David decreed the future house of God should be built.

Then David said, "This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel" (22:1).

David makes preparations: 22:1-5

David made every effort to prepare for the building of the temple so that Solomon would have success in the project. He had the

wisdom to foresee that the task could be overwhelming for Solomon as a new and young ruler over Israel.

David said, “My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house that is to be built for the Lord shall be exceedingly magnificent, famous and glorious throughout all lands. Therefore now I will make preparation for it.” So David made ample preparations before his death (22:5).

David was trying to set the next generation up for success. What can you do to set the next generation up for success in their life with God and their work for God? Of course, you can't determine what they will do with their lives; but you can make every effort to prepare the way before them. Ask God what He wants you to do to set up others for future success.

David's charge to Solomon: 22:6-19

David reminded Solomon how much he had wanted to build a house to magnify *God's name* (22:7,8,10,19). Clearly, David wanted to make God's name great in his world. Through the temple project, he wanted the world to receive a clear witness concerning the glory and uniqueness of his God. God wants HIS glory to shine through our lives. *“I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images” (Isaiah 42:8).*

The field on which Oak Pointe Church sits was named “Gloria Deus Field” (God is glory) long ago by the woman who owned it. She believed that a Spirit-filled church would someday be built on her field, from which the glory of God would shine out to the surrounding communities. Her dream became a reality. In what ways are you seeking to allow the glory of God to shine forth from your life and your work? If you ask God for the opportunity to display His glory to your world, He will give you opportunities to do so. Just make sure that you keep the focus on HIS glory, not your own, because He “will not give His glory to another.”

God had not allowed David to build the temple because he was a man of war. Solomon, on the other hand, was a man of peace (the name “Solomon” is based on the Hebrew word “shalom,” or peace). Thus, God had called Solomon to build the temple. David charged Solomon *and* Israel's leaders to set their hearts on the work of building the house of God.

“Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God;

arise, therefore, and build the sanctuary of the Lord God, so that you may bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord and the holy vessels of God into the house that is to be built for the name of the Lord” (22:19).

Our hearts are usually “set on” some purpose, pursuit or project. David asked Israel to make a choice to set their hearts and souls on the work of God in their day – building His temple. What is your heart set on these days? What is occupying most of your heart and soul energy? Is there something the Lord has been calling you to set your heart on? Is there something that will bring glory to the name of the Lord that He has been asking you to do?

Organizing the kingdom: 1Chronicles 23-27

A grand vision is one thing. A strategy and an organization to fulfill the vision is another thing. Before his death, David did the hard work of organizing the kingdom of Israel so that Solomon’s rule would be efficient and effective.

- 24,000 Levites to oversee ministry at the temple of the Lord.
- 6,000 Levites to serve as officers and judges.
- 4,000 gatekeepers.
- 4,000 worship leaders!
- 288 specially trained singers and songwriters.
- A trusted group of men to guard the treasury.
- 4,400 men to oversee affairs in lands west of the Jordan.
- 24,000 men *per month* to serve all the kings affairs.
- Princes for each of the 12 tribes of Israel.
- Directors of various departments: Of storage houses, agricultural workers, vineyard workers, wine cellars, olive and sycamore trees, olive oil storehouses, cattle in Sharon, cattle in the valleys, camels, donkeys, flocks.
- Jonathan, Jehoida, Abiathar and Hushai as counselors to the king.
- Jehiel to serve as tutor to the king’s sons.
- Joab as commander of the army.

David’s charge to Solomon and Israel: 28:1-10

“As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever. Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be courageous and act” (28:9,10).

The Lord searches our hearts and understands all our inner motives. He knows when we are serving Him with all of our heart and mind, and when there are other loves that are standing in the way of our devotion to Him.

If God were to describe the condition of your heart right now, what would He say? You can ask God, as David did, to reveal the condition of your heart. "Search me O God and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Psalm 139:23,24). Spend some quiet moments before the Lord listening for His voice. Ask Him what needs to change so that you can "serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind."

David gives Solomon the plans for the temple: 28:11-21

God gave the exact architectural plans for the temple to David.

"All this," said David, "the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, all the details of this pattern" (28:19).

This is one of the clearest descriptions of how the process of "inspiration" must have worked for all the biblical writers who were inspired by God's Spirit to write the words of God (though David was, in this case, drawing plans instead of writing words).

Are you asking God for HIS plans for your life? "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5,6). If we sincerely ASK God for His plans, He will begin to unfold them, one page at a time.

David's delight in giving \$ to the project: 29:1-9

David spoke of the *delight* he had in giving generously to the temple project. Moreover, he challenged other leaders to follow his example and to give generously.

"In my delight in the house of my God, the treasure I have of gold and silver, I give to the house of my God, over and above all that I have already provided for the holy temple, namely, 3,000 talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and 7,000 talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the buildings; of gold for the things of gold and of silver for the things of silver, that is, for all the work done by the craftsmen. Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord?" (29:3-5).

The leaders responded to David's example and gave massive gifts to the temple project.

“Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly, for they made their offering to the Lord with a whole heart, and King David also rejoiced greatly” (29:9).

God loves it when we give to Him with a whole heart. “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2Cor. 9:7). In fact, God is much more interested in the heart that lies behind each gift than in the size of the gift. Sometimes the smallest gifts are given with the greatest love and sacrifice (see Luke 21:1-4).

David's prayer over the offering: 29:10-20

David's final prayer is worth meditating on in full. It is a model of praise and thanksgiving.

- He praises God for His character as ruler over ALL.

“Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name” (29:10-13).

David remembered WHO was really KING in his life, and in the life of the world. ALL power and sovereignty belong to God. ALL riches and honor come from Him. If we have anything at all in life that seems worthy of praise, we must recognize that it has ALL come from GOD.

- He thanks God for the privilege of giving.

“But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You. For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours” (29:14-16).

How many times do you hear a person thanking God for the privilege of giving???. David realized that even *the ability to give generously* was a gift from God, for *everything that we have (own)* is actually granted to us by the God *Who owns it all*.

David realized something very important about earthly treasures: We are managers, not owners. We are managing someone else's wealth and resources. The real "owner" is God, not me. If I have time, talent and treasure to give back to God, it is because He has first granted me the right (privilege) to manage these resources on His behalf. When we come to the place where we realize we are managers, not owners, then the question of giving changes. It is no longer: How much shall I give? Rather, it is: How much shall I keep for myself.

- He dedicates the offering to the Lord.

"Since I know, O my God, that You try the heart and delight in uprightness, I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these things; so now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here, make their offerings willingly to You. O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Your people, and direct their heart to You; and give to my son Solomon a perfect heart to keep Your commandments, Your testimonies and Your statutes, and to do them all, and to build the temple, for which I have made provision" (29:17-19).

He ends by committing the people, the gifts and the future work to the Lord. He ties this great moment in history back to the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel), the fathers of the nation, who first received the promises from God. To those fathers, God had first announced His intention to raise up one nation from whom *His glory could shine out to all nations*. Now, this glorious house of the Lord was to become the centerpiece from which God's glorious name and presence would shine out to a watching world. How fitting that David's final efforts were centered on bringing the glory of the GREAT KING to the whole world. David was more concerned with God's great name living on, not his own great name.

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 17 – The Song of David’s Life
Psalm 18 (also 2Samuel 22)

Introduction

David was known as “*the sweet psalmist of Israel*” (2Samuel 23:1). Besides being a warrior and king, he was a musician and songwriter, responsible for composing half of the Hebrew songbook (75 of the 150 Psalms are attributed to David). Psalm 23, the “shepherd’s Psalm,” is certainly the most well known of David’s songs; but Psalm 18 may be the most important. It is found also in 2Samuel 22 as the *summary Psalm of David’s life* (the *only* Psalm actually included in the narrative portion of his story). Its placement at the end of David’s story makes it a fitting summary of David’s experiences with God. It also serves as David’s grand song of praise and thanksgiving, so that the nations might know his amazing God. He was putting God on display by writing about His awesome attributes and actions. “*I will give thanks to You among the nations, O Lord, and I will sing praises to Your name*” (Psalm 18:49).

David shows us how to be very specific when we praise and thank God for who He is and what He has done in our lives. The words he chose were very personal to his own experiences with God. We might not have a literal “enemy” as David describes, but we do have very real things that we battle against. Like David, we can learn to invite God into the struggles of our lives, and to praise and thank Him for His intervention and protection.

God was David’s Rock: 18:1-6

There were many times when David felt as if *the cords of death were wrapping themselves around his neck* (18:4). During the first 15 years after being anointed as a youth, Saul repeatedly tried to kill him. Then, during the first 20 years of his rule, he faced other nations that were fighting against him. He could not have survived without God’s ongoing protection. For this reason, David began his singing of his love for his “rock” of refuge and safety.

“I love You, O Lord, my strength.” The Lord is my ROCK and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my ROCK, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies” (18:1-3).

When David spoke of God as his “rock” he had two different ideas in mind. The first was that of a stable place to stand above the threats of an enemy. In Psalm 40 David says: *“He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm” (Ps. 40:2)*. The second idea is that of a rocky cave or a hiding place. This is the meaning in Psalm 18:1-3 where David praised God for being his rock, fortress, stronghold and place of refuge. He was recalling the many years fleeing from Saul in the wilderness when he was forced to hide in caves and strongholds (i.e. “rocks”). There, God saved David from the murderous hands of his enemy.

“So David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam” (1Samuel 22:1).

“David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds, and remained in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand” (1Samuel 23:14).

What personal “enemies are you now facing? Is it a personal weakness where you need God’s strength? Is it a potential loss where you need God’s provision? Is it a person that is attacking you and you need God’s protection? Are you finding your “hiding place” in God? In Psalm 62, David encouraged himself and others to trust ONLY in God as the ROCK of refuge in times of trouble. “My soul, wait in silence for God ONLY, for my hope is from Him. He ONLY is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken. On God my salvation and my glory rest; the rock of my strength, my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us” (Psalm 62:6-8). What, or who do you trust in for your security in life? Can you declare with David that GOD is your rock of refuge?

God was David’s Warrior: 18:7-19

David was known as a mighty warrior who subdued all of Israel’s surrounding enemies. Yet, he was quick to acknowledge that it was actually GOD who was *his* warrior, the One who came to his defense and gave him victory in the great battles of life.

“He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me” (18:17).

God is not limited in the means of His intervention in our lives. David here vividly pictures God rushing from heaven onto the battlefield of his life. He used imagery to describe how God showed up in his time of need: like a violent earthquake, a volcanic eruption, a terrifying thunderstorm, a devastating hailstorm, and an overwhelming flood. (There were some battles where God *literally* intervened on David’s behalf with the forces of natures.)

“Then the earth shook and quaked; and the foundations of the mountains were trembling and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke went up out of His nostrils, and fire from His mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down with thick darkness under His feet . . . The Lord thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out His arrows, and scattered them, and lightning flashes in abundance, and routed them. Then the channels of water appeared, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at Your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils” (18:7-15).

Sometimes we need God to show up in power to deal with enemies that are too strong for us. Other times, we need Him to show up with gentle tenderness to comfort us in times of hurt or loss. Still other times, we need Him to come as a wise counselor, giving direction and counsel to us. Or, He may arrive as a loving Father to discipline us and shape our character. Our job is to call upon the Lord and invite His involvement in our lives. His job is to choose the means by which He will come to us.

If you have been calling out to God for help, He has been at work in your life. Think back through predicaments and hardships you have been in. How has God shown up for you? Did a person just “happen” to stop and help. Did you suddenly remember something you had forgotten to do that would have been a disaster if it had not been brought back to your mind? Did a friend call you “out of the blue” when you were struggling? Did a solution just come out of nowhere? God is always at work in our lives. We often fail to take notice and give Him thanks. Consider how He has been coming to you. What metaphor would you use to describe the ways that God has been showing up in your life?

God was David's Vindicator: 18:20-27

The language in this section sounds as if it came from the earlier period in David's life, before his major failures. He makes a strong connection between his own righteousness and the Lord's favor in his life.

“The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His ordinances were before me, and I did not put away His statutes from me. I was also blameless with Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity. Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His eyes” (18:20-24).

Keeping in mind the context of the entire Psalm (David's struggles against his many enemies), it is likely that David was referring to the “reward” of God's *vindication* from the attacks of his enemies. David was *not* saying: God has rewarded me because I am a perfect man. He *was* saying: God has vindicated me (given me victory over my opponents) because I have tried to live with integrity in my heart.

Some of David's other Psalms are prayers for vindication against enemies. In these other passages, David connected God's vindication of him to his personal integrity of heart:

“Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Examine me, O Lord, and try me; test my mind and my heart. For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, and I have walked in Your truth” (Ps. 26:1-3).

“Hear a just cause, O Lord, give heed to my cry; give ear to my prayer, which is not from deceitful lips. Let my vindication come forth from Your presence; let Your eyes look with equity. You have tried my heart; You have visited me by night; You have tested me and You find nothing” (Psalm 17:1-3).

Thus, in Psalm 18 David was praising God for seeing every situation *as it truly was*, not as wicked opponents made things out to be. God was the One Person who knew David inside out, and came to His defense against unjust and ungodly accusers.

We cannot expect God to be our vindicator if we are not walking with integrity in our hearts. On the other hand, if we have been living from a genuine heart, we can expect the reward of God's vindication. Is there some situation in your life where you are being unjustly accused, attacked or maligned? Call upon God to be your vindicator. He knows the real truth behind every situation, and the real motives beneath every action. Trust God to bring your vindication forth from His presence (Psalm 17:2).

God was David's Strength: 18:28-40

“He makes my feet like hinds’ feet, and sets me upon my high places. He trains my hands for battle, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You have also given me the shield of Your salvation, and Your right hand upholds me; and Your gentleness makes me great. You enlarge my steps under me, and my feet have not slipped” (18:33-36).

David uses several different metaphors to picture the strength that God gave to him in different situations. The most unusual is the metaphor of a female deer (hind) walking securely on high places. The deer David refers to is extremely sure-footed, able to run among rocks and cliffs with elegance and efficiency. The fluctuating terrain does not throw her off, nor is she at all terrified by the heights of the mountain cliffs. She moves on high places with the same kind of sure-footedness and security that she traverses the level paths of the lowlands.

David knew that life is not some smooth, easy road; rather, it is full of unevenness, uncertainty and danger. Yet, he experienced the strengthening hand of God that made him able to navigate the treacherous terrain of life with skill and security.

This metaphor of the hind on high places was later picked up by the prophet Habakkuk in his description of how God enabled him to handle the great difficulties of his life:

“The Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds’ feet, and makes me walk on my high places” (Hab. 3:19).

Are you currently walking through some treacherous terrain in high places? Do you have difficult decisions to make? If you ask Him to, God will guide your steps so that you will not stumble and fall. Do not try to navigate this dangerous terrain on your own. HE is the One who can make your feet like hinds’ feet. HE can take you safely through the unsafe passages of life.

God was David's Savior: 18:41-50

In the concluding lines, David used the Hebrew word “salvation” three different times. He was using the word not in reference to *spiritual salvation*; rather in terms of *deliverance* from the trials and troubles of life. First, speaking of his enemies:

“They cried for help, but there was none to SAVE, even to the Lord, but He did not answer them” (18:41).

Where there is no *relationship with God*, there can be no expectation that He will suddenly ‘show up.’ Second, David refers to his own experiences of God’s saving works in his life:

The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of MY SALVATION” (18:46).

Finally, he summarizes the entire picture of his life with God as a life of “salvations” (plural – repeated deliverances from peril):

Therefore I will give thanks to You among the nations, O Lord, and I will sing praises to Your name. He gives great SALVATIONS to His king, and shows lovingkindness to His anointed, to David and his descendants forever.

As you reflect upon your own life with God, what “salvations” has He brought about for you? When has He rescued you? Come through for you? Provided a way forward for you? Vindicated you? Fought for you? Given you a way of escape? Is it time for you to write your own “song of deliverances” in praise to your God for all He has done in your life?

Takeaways from the Song of David's Life:

1. Life is full of trials. Even the “man after God’s own heart” lived amidst daily turmoil. *“Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all” (Ps. 34:19).*

2. Invite God into your trials. He wants to do the journey of life with you. *“In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry for help before Him came into His ears” (Psalm 18:6).*

3. Celebrate God's character. When God shows up for you, give Him praise and proclaim His mighty deeds to your world. *“I will give thanks to You among the nations, O Lord, and I will sing praises to Your name” (Psalm 18:49).*