

1 Samuel 21:1-9

Man on the Run

Then David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David, trembling, and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one with you?" And David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, 'Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.' I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place. Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here." And the priest answered David, "I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread—if the young men have kept themselves from women." And David answered the priest, "Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?" So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.

Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord. His name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsman.

Then David said to Ahimelech, "Then have you not here a spear or a sword at hand? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." And the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck down in the Valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it, for there is none but that here." And David said, "There is none like that; give it to me." – 1 Samuel 21:1-9 ESV

The following ten chapters of the Book of 1 Samuel chronicle the life of David as he spends the next years of his life running from King Saul. Having received the news from Jonathan that Saul was out to kill him, David made his way to Nob, which was about two and a half miles southeast of Gibeah. There, he sought out Ahimelech the high priest. David was running out of options. He could no longer go home. His relationship with Samuel, the prophet, had reached an end. He most likely knew that turning to Samuel was the worst thing he could do, because that would be what Saul expected. The king would have had Samuel under surveillance. David had said his final goodbyes to Jonathan, knowing that they would probably never see one another again. So, in need of food and shelter, he turned to the high priest.

His arrival at Nob caught Ahimelech off guard. He was surprised and a bit scared to see David arrive by himself, without his usual allotment of troops. It seems that Saul's volatile nature was well-known and justly feared. Ahimelech jumped to the conclusion that David had shown up as an agent sent by Saul to wreak havoc on the priests of God. This would ultimately prove not to be a far-fetched idea, because in the very next chapter, Saul commands the execution of every priest in Nob for aiding and abetting David (1 Samuel 22:6-23).

David assured Ahimelech that he was not there to do them harm. He lied to the high priest, assuring him that he was on a top-secret mission for the king, the nature of which he was not free to divulge. This deception was used to obtain food and to keep the high priest from asking further questions. It also reveals a certain sense of fear and distrust on David's part. He was not yet willing, ready, and able to put all his reliance upon God. He was in a tight spot and was willing to lie to preserve his life. As time passed and David began to see God's miraculous provision and protection, he grew increasingly more confident in God's capacity to care for his every need. However, at this point in the story, David was fairly new to the fugitive lifestyle and was doing whatever he had to do to stay alive.

When David asked Ahimelech for bread, the only thing the high priest had available was the showbread that was put on display in the Tabernacle as part of a weekly sacrifice to God. The Book of Leviticus provides important details regarding the showbread. It was to be changed out weekly, and the old bread was to serve as food for the priests. However, they were required to eat it in a holy place and only while in a state of purification because it was considered holy.

"You shall take fine flour and bake twelve loaves from it; two tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. And you shall set them in two piles, six in a pile, on the table of pure gold before the Lord. And you shall put pure frankincense on each pile, that it may go with the bread as a memorial portion as a food offering to the Lord. Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the Lord regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the Lord's food offerings, a perpetual due." –
Leviticus 24:5-9 ESV

Ahimelech's reticence to share the bread with David and "his men" was based on the fact that the bread was holy and not to be eaten by anyone impure. David was able to assure that his soldiers were ceremonially pure because there were no soldiers to begin with. David was alone and had not had sexual relations with Michal that day because he had been forced to leave her several days prior. David took the bread, and, according to Jesus, he was not wrong in doing so.

"Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?" –
Matthew 12:3-4 ESV

Jesus referred back to this historical, real-life event, comparing what David did with the disciples eating the heads of wheat on the Sabbath. The Pharisees, with their legalistic mindset, had accused them of "harvesting" grain on the Sabbath. For Jesus, the actions of the disciples were justified because they were simply meeting the normal human need for nourishment. Jesus used the same reasoning on another occasion when He said to the Pharisees, "If you had a sheep that fell into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn't you work to pull it out? Of course you would. And how much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Yes, the law permits a person to

do good on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:11-12 NLT). According to Jesus, David was simply trying to stay alive, so his actions were necessary and, therefore, justified.

But what David didn’t know was that his actions were being observed by someone who was on Saul’s payroll. Doeg the Edomite was in charge of all of Saul’s flocks and just happened to be in Nob that day. It may be that Doeg had it in for David because he was jealous of his success. After all, David had started out as a shepherd but had risen to a place of power and prominence in the king’s court and had even married into the king’s family. Perhaps Doeg hoped that by exposing David’s whereabouts, he would be elevated up the royal food chain and move from the pasture to the palace. But regardless of his intent, Doeg made his way to Saul with news about his enemy’s presence in Nob. David’s respite would prove brief, and the role Ahimelech played in helping David would prove deadly.

Having been forced to leave Gibeah in a hurry, David was unarmed and defenseless. So, he inquired of Ahimelech whether there were any weapons in the priestly compound. It just so happened that the sword of Goliath, the Philistine champion whom David killed in hand-to-hand combat, was in the Tabernacle wrapped in a priestly robe. This was the very same sword David had used to cut off the giant’s head. David, having retrieved the sword and with his five loaves of ceremonial showbread, said his goodbyes to Ahimelech and began a long and difficult period of running, hiding, and learning to trust in God.

In the years that lay ahead, David would encounter a wide range of life lessons that would deepen his faith in God and strengthen his resolve to serve Him faithfully. The king that David eventually became was the byproduct of the trials and tribulations of this less-than-pleasant phase of his life. For David, the phrase “no pain, no gain” could have been the theme for his life. He would discover that persecution would precede his coronation. Years of suffering would come before his crowning. The daily experience of loss and pain would preface his eventual reign.

Years later, when David had finally experienced release from Saul’s dogged pursuit and had been crowned the king of Israel, he was able to write:

*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. – Psalm 18:1-3 ESV*

1 Samuel 21:10-15

Temporary Insanity

And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?"

And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?" – 1 Samuel 21:10-15 ESV

The question that should immediately come into your mind when reading these verses is, "What was David thinking?" There seems to be nothing rational or logical in his behavior. Why in the world would David, the very man who killed Goliath, who was *from* Gath, choose to seek refuge *in* Gath. Not only that, what would possess David to waltz into Gath while carrying the sword that once belonged to Goliath? What kind of flawed logic did David use to think that he would be welcomed with open arms?

After all, it was David who, in an act of over-achievement, killed 200 Philistines to obtain the 200 foreskins Saul had demanded as a dowry for his daughter, Michal. It was David who had served as a commander in Saul's forces and had won significant victories over the Philistines. So, why would he think they would offer him refuge? From what we know about David's faithfulness to God and his hatred of the enemies of God, it seems pretty unlikely that David had gone to Gath to offer his services as a warrior to King Achish. David was not switching sides and choosing to fight against his own people. So why did he go? The text does not tell us. We can only conjecture that David was desperate to escape from Saul and any troops that might be pursuing him. He knew the last place Saul would look for him was in the land of the Philistines. However, David didn't think his strategy through completely. Under duress, he made a rash decision, and now found himself in a very dangerous spot.

Unsurprisingly, the Philistines immediately recognized David, referring to him as "the king of the land" (1 Samuel 21:11 ESV). They had heard the songs sung about David, which celebrated his military exploits and lauded him as greater than Saul. It is doubtful that they had heard about David's anointing, but they most likely viewed David as the true leader of the Israelites. At the affair in the Valley of Elah, Goliath had challenged Saul and his men to send a champion to face him in hand-to-hand combat, but no one would step forward. Day after day, he taunted them, but Saul remained in the background, afraid to take up the challenge and face Goliath. At that moment, the Philistines likely lost all respect for Saul as king, and when David went on to slay Goliath, they saw him as the true king of Israel. They knew that the man standing before them was an enemy and a threat.

The text matter-of-factly states, “And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath” (1 Samuel 21:12 ESV). It was as if David woke up from a bad dream and realized the gravity of his situation. The stupidity of his decision to go to Gath suddenly dawned on him, and he was “much afraid.” He was petrified, terrified, and mortified that he had ever conceived this doomed plan in the first place. So, finding himself in a jam, David resorted to deceit. Here was the man who killed Goliath, defeated hundreds of Philistines in battle, slaughtered 200 Philistines just to pay the dowry for his wife, and who carried the sword of Goliath in his hand, and yet he chose to feign madness rather than trust God and fight his enemies.

David somehow forgot all about his anointing and the fact that God had been by his side during all the conflicts of his life. The young man who once shouted, “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Samuel 17:27 ESV), and then took the life of Goliath with nothing more than a sling and a stone, was now so fearful in the face of his enemies. He resorted to acting like a madman. *The Message* paraphrases verse 13 this way: “So right there, while they were looking at him, he pretended to go crazy, pounding his head on the city gate and foaming at the mouth, spit dripping from his beard.”

What a scene, and what a sad situation for the future king of Israel to find himself in. This is the same David who would later write:

*Blessed be the Lord, my rock,
who trains my hands for war,
and my fingers for battle;
he is my steadfast love and my fortress,
my stronghold and my deliverer,
my shield and he in whom I take refuge,
who subdues peoples under me. – Psalm 144:1-2 ESV*

*He trains my hands for war,
so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. – Psalm 18:34 ESV*

God would use this ill-timed, poorly conceived plan of David to teach His young king-in-waiting an invaluable lesson in faith. In the future, David would learn to place his trust in God rather than his rash plans and flawed attempts at self-preservation. David would escape with his life, if not his dignity, and he would never forget that day. In fact, he ended up penning the words of Psalm 34 as a result of this encounter with King Achish.

*I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me.
He freed me from all my fears. – Psalm 34:4 NLT*

*In my desperation I prayed, and the Lord listened;
he saved me from all my troubles. – Psalm 34:6 NLT*

*The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help.
He rescues them from all their troubles. – Psalm 34:17 NLT*

*The righteous person faces many troubles,
but the Lord comes to the rescue each time.
For the Lord protects the bones of the righteous;
not one of them is broken! – Psalm 34:19-20 NLT*

It is interesting to read these statements in light of what happened that day. There is no indication that God intervened. David didn't take the sword of Goliath and slaughter King Achish and all his soldiers. No lightning bolt from heaven struck down the Philistines and allowed David to walk away safe and secure. There is no mention of any miraculous intervention on God's part. What happened was that David resorted to acting like a madman, complete with drool dripping from his beard. Faced with the prospect of death, David took matters into his own hands and escaped with his life because he was willing to throw away any sense of pride or dignity he had.

Yet, when looking back on that day, David saw his rescue as having come from God. Despite his actions, God had rescued him. While he had run from Israel to the land of the Philistines, God remained with him. Even at one of his worst moments, God did not abandon him. Regardless of how badly David's poor attempt at self-preservation turned out, God was the one who rescued David from himself. And that is what God does for His own. God had said David would be the next king of Israel, and he would be. Even David, at his worst moment, couldn't screw up God's plan. He could make things harder on himself, but nothing he did would make it too difficult for God to fulfill His divine plan for him. Even our bouts of temporary insanity cannot prevent the future fulfillment of God's plans for us.

1 Samuel 22:1-5

Off to a Great Start

David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them. And there were with him about four hundred men.

And David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab. And he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother stay with you, till I know what God will do for me." And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. Then the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not remain in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth. – 1 Samuel 22:1-5 ESV

David left Gath in a hurry, the drool still clinging to his beard and the laughter of the Philistines ringing in his ears. He had managed to escape with his life, but had been forced to leave his dignity behind. He had put himself in a very dangerous predicament and had been forced to feign insanity when his plan fell apart. However, as a result of this painful predicament, David began to learn to trust in God rather than himself. It would prove to be a lifelong lesson, but with each passing circumstance, David would lean less on himself and more on God. This would not be the last time David found himself in a tight spot. In fact, he would later write in one of his psalms:

*But I am a worm and not a man.
I am scorned and despised by all!
Everyone who sees me mocks me.
They sneer and shake their heads, saying,
"Is this the one who relies on the Lord?
Then let the Lord save him!
If the Lord loves him so much,
let the Lord rescue him!" – Psalm 22:6-8 NLT*

David knew what it was like to be despised and dejected. He experienced many moments of doubt and despair. But through it all, he discovered the reality of God's presence and power, and what it means to trust Him.

After having escaped from Gath by the skin of his teeth, David headed to an area called Adullam, the former site of an ancient Canaanite city. Adullam was not far from the valley of Elah, where David killed Goliath. The area is pockmarked with caves, many of which are large enough to hold up to 400 men. It was in one of these caves that David sought refuge. But he would not be alone for long. Somehow, his father and brothers received word that David was there, and they made their way to him, along with their entire households. David's cave was filling up fast and it would soon be standing room only, because the text tells us that "all who

were down on their luck came around—losers and vagrants and misfits of all sorts” (1 Samuel 22:2 MSG). David suddenly found himself surrounded by people with financial problems, malcontents, and a diverse assortment of misfits. They were all individuals who shared one thing in common: A general dislike for King Saul. In one way or another, this man’s reign had impacted them negatively, and they were willing to risk all to throw in their lot with David, a man with a bounty on his head.

Just hours earlier, David had been surrounded by hostile Philistines. Now, he was surrounded by disgruntled and desperate Israelites, who were looking to him for leadership and direction. The text states that 400 men allied themselves with David and viewed him as their commander. David was no longer alone, but he now found himself responsible for the well-being and protection of hundreds of men and their families. How would he feed them all? How was he going to protect them from the professional soldiers Saul would send to hunt him down? Whether he liked it or not, David suddenly found himself as a leader of men. Yes, it was a motley crew of misfits, and they would put David’s leadership abilities to the test, but this was the crucible in which God had chosen to purify and perfect the man whom He had chosen to be the next king of Israel.

One of the first decisions David made was to send his father and mother to stay in the land of Moab. He arranged with the King of Moab to provide his parents with safe haven, “until I know what God is going to do for me” (1 Samuel 22:3 NLT). David’s great-grandmother, Ruth, had been a Moabitess, so there was a familial connection that explains David’s decision. His parents would remain in Moab until he had a better idea as to what God had in store for him. David was slowly learning to seek God’s will. His adventure in Gath had been a painful and memorable lesson. Taking matters into his own hands and trying to determine his fate apart from God was a dangerous game to play. He had no idea what the future held, but he was eager to know what God would do, and he wouldn’t have to wait long.

One day, a prophet appeared at the Cave of Adullam and gave David a word from God. He was to leave immediately and return to the land of Judah. This would not be the last time during David’s wilderness wanderings that God would speak to him through a prophet. God had not left David alone, and He would not leave him directionless.

We have to remember that David had been anointed by Samuel to be the next king of Israel. It is still not clear whether David was aware of this fact. Up until this point in the narrative, there is no indication that Samuel had ever explained the meaning behind David’s anointing. David has shown no signs that he knew he was the king-in-waiting. He had been content to be a commander in Saul’s army. He had shown no aspirations of being king or any expectations that God would remove Saul and put him in his place on the throne. And yet, we know that God was God’s plan all along. So, when we read this story, we can’t help but wonder why God chose to do things the way He did. Why did He allow Saul to persecute and pursue David? Why was David forced to run for his life and live like a fugitive? Why was God willing to let Saul, a man He had rejected as king, remain in power? None of it seems to make sense. It all appears illogical and unnecessary. But God’s ways are not our ways. His plans rarely make sense to us. His methods,

more often than not, come across as little more than madness to us. But the life of David is meant to reveal to us the sovereign, all-powerful, all-knowing will of God. David was receiving it one day at a time but we get to see the whole picture. We are given access to the entire story and know how it ends. And we can see that God was with David every step of the way.

David was going to experience many dark days. He would know what it means to despair and feel the loneliness that comes with leadership. There would be moments when all seemed lost. There would be days when he felt abandoned by God. He would later write:

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.*

*Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame. – Psalm 22:1-5 NLT*

But through it all, David would discover the holiness and faithfulness of God. And this lesson, while painful, would be crucial in his transformation from shepherd of sheep to shepherd of the people of God.

1 Samuel 22:6-13

Self-Pity and Paranoia

Now Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men who were with him. Saul was sitting at Gibeah under the tamarisk tree on the height with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him. And Saul said to his servants who stood about him, "Hear now, people of Benjamin; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, that all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day." Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who stood by the servants of Saul, "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, and he inquired of the Lord for him and gave him provisions and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

Then the king sent to summon Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests who were at Nob, and all of them came to the king. And Saul said, "Hear now, son of Ahitub." And he answered, "Here I am, my lord." And Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in that you have given him bread and a sword and have inquired of God for him, so that he has risen against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?" – 1 Samuel 22:6-13 ESV

These verses present a stark contrast. David was in a cave surrounded by misfits and malcontents, while Saul was sitting under the shade of a tree surrounded by his servants. The contrast doesn't stop there. David provided protection for his family by sending them to the king of Moab for refuge. Yet Saul was busy accusing his own son of treason and of conspiring with David to kill him. David was surrounded by men who were willing to die for him. Saul was surrounded by men who feared him. Some had even abandoned him to join forces with David. However, the greatest contrast between these two men lies in their relationships with God. David received a prophetic word from God instructing him to leave the Cave of Adullam and return to Judah. But for Saul, God had gone silent. In fact, he had no relationship with God at all because God had removed His Spirit from him. Saul was on his own and was, by all accounts, God-less. The result was a growing paranoia. He truly believed everyone was against him. His daughter and son had turned on him. His servants were disloyal. No one could be trusted. And his paranoia led to a heavy dose of self-pity. He was all alone. His little speech to his servants reveals the extent of his self-pity.

*"Has that son of Jesse promised every one of you fields and vineyards? Has he promised to make you all generals and captains in his army? Is that why **you have conspired against me?**" – 1 Samuel 22:7-8 NLT*

*"You're not even **sorry for me.**" – 1 Samuel 22:8 NLT*

Saul even accused Ahimelech the priest of treason, seeing his actions to help David as a personal attack.

*“Why have you and the son of Jesse **conspired against me?**” – 1 Samuel 22:13 NLT*

Without God in his life, Saul was susceptible to all kinds of irrational and unrighteous thinking. His lack of God’s presence greatly hindered his capacity to process the circumstances of his life mentally. He had become a fool, lacking reason and the capacity for rational thought. He could not even process the fact that all of this was the outcome of the prophet’s warning. Samuel had clearly warned Saul that God was removing His hand from his life and giving his kingdom to another. Saul was in a state of denial and suffering from delusion, believing that he could somehow prevent the inevitable and stay the hand of God. But his unwillingness to accept the will of God would simply cause him to sin against God, committing greater and greater transgressions, all in a hopeless attempt at self-preservation.

Standing among Saul’s servants that day was Doeg the Edomite, who might be better known as Doeg the Snitch. He had hurried back from Nob, eager to share the news that David was there and had been given food and the sword of Goliath by Ahimelech the priest. When Saul heard this report, he immediately sent for Ahimelech, his family, and all his fellow priests who served alongside him. If Ahimelech had been scared when David showed up in Nob (1 Samuel 21:1), he must have been petrified at the news of a summons from the king, and any fears he had would prove to be justified.

Saul was a man possessed, both figuratively and literally. He was constantly beset by a “harmful spirit,” the result of God’s removal of the Holy Spirit from his life. Without the influence of God’s Spirit, Saul’s reasoning was impaired. He became self-absorbed and suspicious of everyone and everything. Over time, he would become obsessed with the idea of destroying David, unable to think of anything else. Essentially, he would no longer act as the king of Israel. His whole life would be focused on one thing: David’s death. His kingship, the very thing he was trying to protect, would get lost in his obsessive-compulsive quest to kill off the competition. Sadly, Saul would be unable to enjoy the benefits of a king because he lived in constant fear of no longer being king.

One of the sad realities of godlessness is that it always results in joylessness, discontentment, fear, jealousy, and anger. In fact, the apostle Paul outlines the characteristics or “deeds” of a godless or flesh-based life in his letter to the Galatians.

...sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. – Galatians 5:20-21 NLT

Saul was miserable, not because he was losing his kingdom, but because he had lost his faith in God. His unhappiness, paranoia, self-pity, and misguided attempts at self-preservation were driven by his lack of a relationship with Yahweh. His decision-making was totally flesh-based,

driven by his own sin nature, and devoid of godly wisdom. He had lost his capacity to see things from God's perspective. Everything had become all about him. He was no longer concerned about the good of Israel or the honor of God's name. His only thoughts were for himself.

The life of the godless is not a pretty picture. And the truly sad thing is that many who have a relationship with Christ can end up living godless lives, refusing to seek His will, listen to His Word, or heed His direction. Rather than living God-centered, God-directed lives, they become self-absorbed and susceptible to the flawed input of their own sinful natures. While the Spirit of God never leaves them, they quench and grieve the Spirit through disobedience and willful, unrepentant sin. Rather than enjoying the fruits of the Spirit and the joys of sanctification, they become obsessed with self-preservation and paranoid about protecting what they are afraid to lose.

Jesus said, "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life" (John 10:10 NLT). Satan had deceived Saul into believing that joy could be found in pursuing and eliminating David. But nothing could have been further from the truth. And Satan is constantly attempting to deceive us into believing that our way is preferable to God's way. But the way of the flesh eventually robs us of joy, kills our capacity to love, and destroys any hope of having a rich and satisfying life. Satan offers what he cannot give. Jesus promises what He died to make possible. The God-less life is a paranoid, self-pitying, joyless life. But the godly life brings joy amid sorrow, peace in the middle of the storm, hope when all looks hopeless, contentment in the face of loss, and strength despite our own weakness.

1 Samuel 22:14-23

Dark Days

Then Ahimelech answered the king, "And who among all your servants is so faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, and captain over your bodyguard, and honored in your house? Is today the first time that I have inquired of God for him? No! Let not the king impute anything to his servant or to all the house of my father, for your servant has known nothing of all this, much or little." And the king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house." And the king said to the guard who stood about him, "Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because their hand also is with David, and they knew that he fled and did not disclose it to me." But the servants of the king would not put out their hand to strike the priests of the Lord. Then the king said to Doeg, "You turn and strike the priests." And Doeg the Edomite turned and struck down the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five persons who wore the linen ephod. And Nob, the city of the priests, he put to the sword; both man and woman, child and infant, ox, donkey and sheep, he put to the sword.

But one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. And Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the Lord. And David said to Abiathar, "I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house. Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you shall be in safekeeping." – 1 Samuel 22:14-23 ESV

The moral, spiritual, and mental state of King Saul was on a steep and rapid decline. His animosity toward David was insatiable, and he would not let anyone or anything stand in the way of his quest to eliminate David. So, while his treatment of Ahimelech and the priests of Nob may shock us, it should not surprise us. Even the priests of God were fair game and subject to Saul's wrath. But while Saul seemed to have lost all fear of and respect for God, his troops had not. He was unable to recruit any of them to carry out his vindictive order to kill the priests. But there was one man who was more than willing, most likely driven by a desire to see himself promoted and rewarded for his efforts. Doeg the Edomite, the man who had been at Nob when David showed up, had made a beeline to King Saul with the news. This Edomite, a foreigner, was more than willing to carry out Saul's command. Doeg was "the chief of Saul's herdsmen" (1 Samuel 21:7 ESV), and, like any other ambitious individual, was probably seeking a way to get out of the pasture and climb the palace social ladder.

By carrying out Saul's command when no one else would, he hoped he would ingratiate himself with the king and secure his favor. So, Doeg slaughtered 85 priests of God, and then he killed every living inhabitant of Nob. It was a bloodbath – a senseless, sinful, and Satan-inspired act that would turn the remaining priests against Saul. Abiathar, a solitary priest, miraculously escaped the carnage that day and made his way to David with the news of what had happened. David was wracked with horror and guilt. He felt responsible for the deaths of Ahimelech and his fellow priests. It was his deception that had led to their destruction. He had lied to

Ahimelech by telling him he was on a secret mission for Saul. His rash decision to seek refuge with the priests and then lie to secure their help had put them at great risk. And Saul, in his paranoid state, saw them as traitors and had them summarily executed.

David most likely assumed that Saul, as the king and a servant of Yahweh, would show the priests the respect they were due. He never imagined that Saul would dare lift his hand against the priests of God, but he had been proven wrong. And David was furious. His respect for Saul all but disappeared that day. We get a good idea of David's mental state at the time because he wrote a psalm to commemorate the event. In it, he reveals his feelings about Saul.

*Why do you boast about your crimes, great warrior?
Don't you realize God's justice continues forever?
All day long you plot destruction.
Your tongue cuts like a sharp razor;
you're an expert at telling lies.
You love evil more than good
and lies more than truth. – Psalm 52:1-3 NLT*

David was a warrior himself, but he was appalled by Saul's actions. He was shocked at the heinous behavior of someone he once admired and idolized. He could not believe that Saul, the king of Israel, could do the things he had done. But he knew that God would not let Saul's actions go unpunished.

*You love to destroy others with your words,
you liar!
But God will strike you down once and for all.
He will pull you from your home
and uproot you from the land of the living. – Psalm 53:4-6 NLT*

David was confident that God would bring justice and retribution against Saul. He would not allow this immoral act to go unpunished. While David was in no position to do anything about it, he knew that God would.

*The righteous will see it and be amazed.
They will laugh and say,
"Look what happens to mighty warriors
who do not trust in God.
They trust their wealth instead
and grow more and more bold in their wickedness." – Psalm 53:6-7 NLT*

Through the misguided and unrighteous actions of Saul, David learned valuable lessons about those who fail to place their trust in God. He saw in King Saul a stark portrayal of the once godly man who abandons his faith in God for reliance upon his own strength and resources. Saul's

blatant betrayal of God was difficult for David to understand. But it deepened his commitment to place his trust in and maintain his reliance upon God, whatever happened.

But I am like an olive tree, thriving in the house of God.

I will always trust in God's unfailing love.

I will praise you forever, O God,

for what you have done.

I will trust in your good name

in the presence of your faithful people. – Psalm 52:8-9 NLT

Abiathar, the sole remaining priest, would find refuge with David. The future king of Israel and the future high priest of Israel were suddenly united by one man's hatred for them and God's divine plan for them. Neither David nor Abiathar knew what God had in store for them. David had no idea what the next few years of his life would hold. Abiathar only knew that he was alone and could no longer exercise his priestly duties. Neither man was aware of what God was doing behind the scenes. There was no silver lining to the dark cloud that hung over them. There was no light at the end of the foreboding tunnel in which they found themselves. But they would learn to trust in God by having to place all their hope in Him.

1 Samuel 23:1-14

Rejected Savior

Now they told David, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors." Therefore David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the Lord said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and save 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 armies of the Philistines?" Then David inquired of the Lord again. And the Lord answered him, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand." And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines and brought away their livestock and struck them with a great blow. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand. Now it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah. And Saul said, "God has given him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars." And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him. And he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." Then David said, "O Lord, the God of Israel, your servant has surely heard that Saul seeks 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, as your servant has heard? O Lord, the God of Israel, please 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." Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition. And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand. – 1 Samuel 23:1-14 ESV

There are many ways in which David served as a type of Christ, providing a foreshadowing of the Messiah who was to come. Jesus would be a descendant of David and would be born in the city of Bethlehem, just as David was. David had been a shepherd, and Jesus was the Good Shepherd. Like David, Jesus had been the king-elect, sent by God to become the King of kings and Lord of lords. But also like David, He experienced a time of waiting, in which He would minister on behalf of the people of Israel, but not necessarily receive their full appreciation for His efforts.

In this passage, David, though pursued by his enemy, would continue to fight against the Philistines. He was on the run and living in hiding with his rag-tag group of malcontents and misfits, but he had not given up his desire to destroy the enemies of Israel. Jesus, too, lived his life as a man without a home, with no place to even lay His head (Luke 9:58). A motley crew surrounded him made up of fishermen, tax collectors and other less-than-impressive individuals. And Jesus was constantly pursued by his enemies, the Pharisees and Sadducees. Both David and Jesus were fighting the same unseen enemy, Satan, whose every desire was to

cut short their rule and reign, and to thwart the plan of God. Even the people of Israel, who greatly benefited from the efforts of both men, would, in many ways, turn their backs on them. David would rescue the people of Keilah, only to learn that they would betray him to Saul if given the chance. Jesus would offer the people of Israel salvation from death and freedom from sin, but the majority would turn their backs on Him, rejecting Him as their Messiah. They would prefer the darkness of their lives over the light of life being offered to them (John 3:19).

David, like Jesus, was faithful to God. He still saw himself as a servant of God and was willing to fight the enemies of God even while living on the run. When David received word that the Philistines were harassing the inhabitants of the Israelite city of Keilah and robbing their threshing floors, he immediately determined to do something about it. But not before he sought the will of God. David had learned some valuable lessons from his decision to flee to Gath and then deceive the priests at Nob. The first one had almost cost him his life. The second one had resulted in the slaughter of hundreds of innocent people. And in neither case had he sought out the will of God. So, this time he did, and God gave His approval. David and his growing band of men went to Keilah, attacked the Philistines, and “struck them with a great blow” (1 Samuel 23:5 ESV). They saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

But news of David’s good deed made its way to Saul, who saw this as just another opportunity to trap David and destroy him. He was not grateful for David’s help against Israel’s enemies. He refused to see David as an ally, instead viewing him as a threat and an enemy to his way of life. Similarly, the Pharisees refused to recognize Jesus as a fellow minister to the people of Israel. He was a threat to the status quo, and they were jealous of His growing popularity. They refused to view His miracles and victories over demons and disease as having come from God. As far as they were concerned, He was the enemy and they were willing to do anything to get rid of Him.

Saul, true to form, made his way to Keilah with a large force to capture David. He was willing to destroy the city and everyone in it if necessary, to get his hands on David. But David was well acquainted with Saul’s unbridled hatred for him and knew that he would show up at Keilah. So, David sought the will of God once again. This time he used the Urim and Thummim.

The Urim and Thummim were a means of revelation entrusted to the high priest. No description of them is given. The Urim and Thummim were used at critical moments in the history of God’s people when special divine guidance was needed. The civil leader was expected to make use of this means for all important matters for which he needed direction. – *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*

The book of Exodus provides us with an explanation of their function.

Insert the Urim and Thummim into the sacred chestpiece so they will be carried over Aaron’s heart when he goes into the Lord’s presence. In this way, Aaron will always carry over his heart the objects used to determine the Lord’s will for his people whenever he goes in before the Lord. – Exodus 28:30 NLT

These were evidently two stones that were placed in the pocket of the high priest's ephod. It is thought that one was light in color and the other was dark. When a decision was necessary, each stone was assigned a different answer or opposing outcome. Whichever one was pulled out was believed to provide a divine answer from God. We are told that Abiathar, the only priest to have escaped the slaughter at Nob, had brought along the high priest's ephod, and now David determined to use the Urim and Thummim to ascertain God's insight and direction. David wanted to know if Saul was coming and if the people of Keilah would betray him to Saul. God affirmed both questions. So, David and his men left Keilah and "went wherever they could go" (1 Samuel 23:13 ESV).

David returned to the caves, but was far from alone. His entourage had grown to more than 600 men. But more importantly, He was accompanied by God. Even though Saul "sought him every day," God was with Him and "did not give him into his hand" (1 Samuel 23:14 ESV). The people of Keilah had rejected David as their savior, but God had not rejected him. His deliverance of them did not keep them from betraying him to Saul. The very same thing happened to Jesus. In John's gospel, we read the sobering words, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11 ESV).

David would continue to experience rejection by his own people. He would find himself under constant threat from Saul, but he would remain faithful to God and committed to standing against the enemies of God. He would suffer greatly, but his suffering would eventually lead to his exaltation as the king of Israel. Jesus, too, would suffer, even to the point of death, but as the apostle Paul reminds us:

...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:8-11 ESV

1 Samuel 23:15-29

Rock of Escape

David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this." And the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home.

Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon? Now come down, O king, according to all your heart's desire to come down, and our part shall be to surrender him into the king's hand." And Saul said, "May you be blessed by the Lord, for you have had compassion on me. Go, make yet more sure. Know and see the place where his foot is, and who has seen him there, for it is told me that he is very cunning. See therefore and take note of all the lurking places where he hides, and come back to me with sure information. Then I will go with you. And if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah." And they arose and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. – 1 Samuel 23:15-29 ESV

Verse 14 of this same chapter stated that Saul sought David every day. He was on a relentless, obsessive mission to destroy David because he knew that as long as David was alive, his crown was in jeopardy. He had even warned his son, Jonathan, "For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established" (1 Samuel 20:31 ESV). It seems that Jonathan had taken those words to heart. He risked the wrath of his father and his own life by covertly arranging to see David one more time. At that reunion with his best friend, he made the following disclosure:

"My father will never find you! You are going to be the king of Israel, and I will be next to you, as my father, Saul, is well aware." – 1 Samuel 23:17 NLT

Jonathan had seen the handwriting on the wall. He somehow knew that it was God's will for David to be the next king of Israel. The text states that Jonathan "strengthened his hand in God" (1 Samuel 23:16 ESV). He encouraged David to trust God. Not even his father, Saul, would be able to stop what God had ordained. Jonathan knew his father was in the wrong and would eventually fail in his attempt to thwart God's will. It had become increasingly clear that Saul's obsession with David's death was not only uncalled for but would prove unsuccessful. These words from his best friend, who was the rightful heir to the throne, must have encouraged David greatly. Jonathan was abdicating any right he had to be the next king because he believed David was God's choice for the role.

God sometimes uses others to reveal to us information that has escaped our notice. All David seemed to know was that Saul was out to kill him. He had not yet put two and two together and concluded that Saul's obsessive-compulsive behavior toward him *did* have a reason. It took

Jonathan to add up the facts and present David with what should have been an obvious conclusion: He was going to be the next king of Israel. Jonathan assured David that Saul's actions were based on that reality. We are not given insight into David's reaction to this news, but it had to have been an epiphany for him; a light-bulb-over-the-head moment. Suddenly, everything began to fall into place. The anointing, spear-throwing, raging, and running all began to come together into a clear picture of what God was doing. The last time the two of them had met, David had asked Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?" (1 Samuel 20:1 ESV). Now he knew the answer. He was Saul's God-appointed replacement.

But even with this eye-opening, riddle-solving news, David's lot in life didn't undergo any kind of remarkable change. Jonathan would return home, and David would still find himself living as a wanted man. In fact, it wouldn't take long for reality to set back in when David's location in the wilderness of Ziph was disclosed to Saul by the area's residents. They ratted David out, informing Saul of his whereabouts and promising to turn him over to the king.

To gain insight into David's thoughts at this stage of his life, we need only turn to Psalm 54, which was written during this very time. In this psalm, David bares his heart and calls on God to save him. He promises to offer sacrifices to God when he finally receives deliverance.

*O God, save me by your name,
and vindicate me by your might.
O God, hear my prayer;
give ear to the words of my mouth.*

*For strangers have risen against me;
ruthless men seek my life;
they do not set God before themselves. Selah*

*Behold, God is my helper;
the Lord is the upholder of my life.
He will return the evil to my enemies;
in your faithfulness put an end to them.*

*With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you;
I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good.
For he has delivered me from every trouble,
and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies. – Psalm 54:2-7 ESV*

One of the revealing statements in this psalm is David's conclusion that those who were seeking him and those who would betray him "do not set God before themselves." The *New Living Translation* puts it this way: "They care nothing for God."

The actions of Saul and the Ziphites had nothing to do with God's will. David describes them as strangers, ruthless, and enemies, and he refers to their actions as evil. David realized that this was a spiritual battle between those who care nothing for God and God Himself. So, David calls on God to do what only He can do. He pleads with God to save and vindicate him, to avenge and deliver him, to hear and help him. David knew that his life was in God's hands. God had anointed him, and it would be God who would have to protect and deliver him.

David would receive yet another timely example of God's ability to deliver. When Saul heard that David and his men had relocated to the wilderness of Moan, he set out in hot pursuit. The passage tells us, "Saul and David were now on opposite sides of a mountain. Just as Saul and his men began to close in on David and his men, an urgent message reached Saul that the Philistines were raiding Israel again" (1 Samuel 23:26-27 NLT). Just in the nick of time, God stepped in. It would be tempting to write this off as nothing more than a very timely coincidence. But to David, it was the very well-timed, miraculous intervention of God. Just when Saul and his men were closing in, God stepped in and provided a way of escape. And God used the enemies of Israel to deliver the next king of Israel.

The Philistines had chosen that moment to raid Israel, forcing Saul to abandon his pursuit of David and return home. The name of that place became known as the Rock of Escape. God had become a rock of escape for David, protecting him from his enemies and providing a miraculous, perfectly timed deliverance. But notice that God did not eliminate Saul. He did not provide a permanent victory over Saul by allowing David to kill him in battle. He simply removed the immediate threat and gave David a glimpse of His capacity to save. God was not interested in removing the difficulties from David's life as much as He was in getting David to trust the One for whom no problem was too difficult. Saul was not going to go away, but neither was God. David's life was not going to be problem-free, but David was going to learn that nothing in his life was free from God's all-seeing eye. Which is why David, years later, would pen these words:

You are my rock and my fortress.

For the honor of your name, lead me out of this danger.

Pull me from the trap my enemies set for me,

for I find protection in you alone.

I entrust my spirit into your hand.

Rescue me, Lord, for you are a faithful God. – Psalm 31:3-5 NLT

1 Samuel 24:1-10

Opportunity Versus Authority

When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, “Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi.” Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats’ Rocks. And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. And the men of David said to him, “Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, ‘Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.’” Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. And afterward David’s heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. He said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord’s anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord’s anointed.” So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way.

Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, “My lord the king!” And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. And David said to Saul, “Why do you listen to the words of men who say, ‘Behold, David seeks your harm’? Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, ‘I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord’s anointed.’” – 1 Samuel 24:1-10 ESV

Distracted by a surprise attack from the Philistines, Saul was forced to call off his pursuit of David, allowing him time to escape to the wilderness of Engedi. But it was not long before Saul was back on the war path, accompanied by 3,000 highly trained soldiers. His mission: Capture and kill David. But chapter 24 is going to provide a striking contrast between Saul, the current king of Israel, and David, the God-appointed king-elect of Israel. Time and time again, we have read of Saul’s relentless pursuit of David and his obsessive compulsion to take his life. Now we the tables turn. This time around, David will have the chance to take matters into his own hands and eliminate the threat of Saul once and for all.

As David and his men hid in one of the caves in the wilderness of Engedi, Saul entered, seemingly alone, and placed himself in a very vulnerable position. Little did he know that the very man he pursued was there in the darkness, watching his every move. And when David’s men saw Saul walk into their hideout, they spied what they believed to be a God-ordained chance to end this madness.

“Now’s your opportunity!” David’s men whispered to him. “Today the Lord is telling you, ‘I will certainly put your enemy into your power, to do with as you wish.’” – 1 Samuel 24:4 NLT

Their assessment of the situation was quick and incredibly clear – at least to them. God had obviously sent Saul into the cave for the sole purpose of David taking his life. What else could it be? The timing was perfect. Saul was alone and defenseless. Of all the caves in the wilderness of Engedi, he had chosen this one. What else could it be but a divinely ordained opportunity for David to put an end to this nightmare?

There was only one problem: Nowhere in the text does it indicate that God had given His permission for David or anyone else to take the life of Saul. Regardless of the picture-perfect circumstances and the seemingly serendipitous nature of the opportunity, what was missing was the divine authority for David to lift a finger against Saul.

But David, emboldened by the advice of his men, crept forward and, in the darkness of the cave, sliced off a section of Saul's robe. He had chosen to spare Saul's life, but his action was intended to send a deliberate and crystal-clear message to Saul that he could cut his reign short at any time. What David did was an act of rebellion, and he soon had second thoughts. The text tells us:

But then David's conscience began bothering him because he had cut Saul's robe. He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this to my lord the king. I shouldn't attack the Lord's anointed one, for the Lord himself has chosen him." So David restrained his men and did not let them kill Saul. – 1 Samuel 24:5-7 NLT

His action had been presumptuous and without divine authority. God had not given him permission to do what he did. Earlier, when Jonathan had told David, "You shall be king over Israel" (1 Samuel 23:17, ESV), those words must have resonated in David's mind, giving him the confidence to believe that God had anointed him to be the next king of Israel. However, God had not revealed to David when or how his reign would come about. Saul was still the king, and technically, the anointed sovereign over the nation of Israel. God had chosen Saul, and at no time had God instructed David to take his life to speed up the process of his own coronation.

David was susceptible to the same thing we all face as followers of God: believing that the end justifies the means. It was far too easy for David to assume that if he were to be the next king, then removing the current king must be part of God's plan. But God had not disclosed to David how He was going to bring about the transition of power from one man to the next. That was God's concern, not David's.

The Scriptures are full of warnings about confusing our plans with those of God.

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.

– Proverbs 19:21 ESV

We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps. – Proverbs 16:9 NLT

We can make our own plans, but the LORD gives the right answer. – Proverbs 16:1 NLT

LORD, we know that people do not control their own destiny. It is not in their power to determine what will happen to them. – Jeremiah 10:23 NET Bible

David had no shortage of well-meaning friends providing well-intended advice. But what he really needed was a word from God. The opportunity may have looked right, but without God's approval, the outcome was going to turn out wrong. It is interesting to note that David would eventually admit to Saul, "the Lord gave you today into my hand in the cave" (1 Samuel 24:10 ESV). This is not an admission on David's part that he believed God had given him permission to kill Saul. He was simply saying that this encounter had not been a coincidence. He had been put to the test by God. David's own men had made that test even more difficult by counseling David to murder Saul. But he didn't. David even saw his cutting off of the section of Saul's robe as an act unsanctioned by God. He had overstepped his bounds.

Opportunity means nothing without God-given authority. In fact, there is an interesting side story that involves Saul himself. In the early days of his reign, when he had been king for only two years, he found himself besieged by the Philistines. He was outnumbered. He had 3,000 men, but was facing 6,000 Philistine cavalry, 30,000 chariots, and infantry "as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude" (1 Samuel 13:5 ESV). Needless to say, his troops were terrified. In fact, the passage reveals:

When the men of Israel saw that they were in danger (for the people were distressed), then the people hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits. And some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. – 1 Samuel 24:6-7 ESV

Here's the point. Saul had been instructed by Samuel the prophet to wait in Gilgal for seven days. When the seven days passed and the prophet was nowhere to be found, Saul took matters into his own hands. He and his demoralized troops were facing a formidable foe. Saul seized the opportunity, and commanded his servants, "'Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me.' And he offered the burnt offering. Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came" (1 Samuel 13:9-10 ESV).

Saul thought that he had done the right thing. They were in trouble, and the prophet wasn't there. Somebody needed to offer a sacrifice to God before the battle ensued. However, while Saul had the opportunity, he lacked the authority. And he would have to suffer the consequences for his disobedience.

When confronted by Samuel, Saul tried to defend his actions.

"The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the Lord.' Therefore, I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering." – 1 Samuel 13:12 ESV

Saul's compulsion was not to be confused with God's permission. His urge to react was situation-induced and self-authorized. As a result, his offering brought God's wrath and not blessing. Acting on behalf of God, but without the permission of God, is a sign of disobedience, not faithfulness. God had a plan but Saul got impatient. He took matters into his own hands. Just because an opportunity presents itself does not mean God is in it or has given His permission for it. God's will can only be done God's way. Opportunity without authority will almost always result in calamity.

1 Samuel 24:11-22

A Heart-to-Heart Talk

“See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, ‘Out of the wicked comes wickedness.’ But my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! May the Lord therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand.”

As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, “Is this your voice, my son David?” And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, “You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. Swear to me therefore by the Lord that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father’s house.” And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold. – 1 Samuel 24:11-22 ESV

Some struggle with the Bible’s references to David being “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). After all, this is the man who committed adultery with Bathsheba, then had her husband killed so he could marry her. He was far from perfect morally or spiritually. So why the lofty designation as a man after God’s own heart? Today’s passage provides a glimpse into the very heart of David. Under the worst of conditions and after a great deal of stress and emotional duress, David reveals his true heart and provides a stark contrast to the dark and hardened heart of Saul.

David has just passed on the opportunity to take Saul’s life. He had the motive, the means, and the full support of his men. But he refused to act, telling his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do this to my lord the king. I shouldn’t attack the Lord’s anointed one, for the Lord himself has chosen him” (1 Samuel 24:6 NLT). He allowed Saul to walk out of the cave with his life, but missing a small section of the hem of his royal robe. When Saul stepped out of the cave and into the light of day, David followed and confronted him. He called out to Saul, addressing him as “my lord the king!” (1 Samuel 24:8 ESV). David treated Saul with honor and respect. There was no screaming, no angry accusations, and no claim that he held the moral high ground. All David wanted to do was assure Saul that he had nothing to fear from him; he was not attempting to usurp his throne or take his life. He was still a loyal servant of the king and recognized Saul as the Lord’s anointed (vs. 10).

David started out his address to Saul by referring to him as king. But then he shifted his emphasis, calling Saul, “father” (vs. 11). David was Saul’s son-in-law, but he also viewed Saul as a mentor. He had been Saul’s armor bearer and court musician. He had lived in the palace, served at the king’s side, and ministered to Saul in some of his most dark and lonely moments, playing his lyre to calm Saul’s tormented soul. David had proved himself faithful, serving as one of Saul’s commanders and successfully defeating countless enemies, even while on the run. He had faithfully served Saul even while Saul obsessively sought to kill him. So, David told Saul, “May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you” (1 Samuel 24:12 ESV).

This is probably the most logical explanation for David’s designation as a man after God’s own heart. Despite all he had been through and the countless reasons he had to justify attacking Saul, he responded with restraint. He focused his attention on God, rather than on Saul. At no point does he judge or accuse Saul. David even gave Saul the benefit of the doubt, excusing his actions as nothing more than the result of bad advice. David was going to leave any judgment up to God. If any avenging needed to be done, David was willing to leave that up to God. He trusted Yahweh to do the right thing.

The psalms of David also provide insight into his heart. Psalm 57 was written during the days in which David was hiding in the caves, seeking refuge from the relentless pursuit of 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. – Psalm 57:1-3 NLT*

Psalm 142 was written during at the same time.

*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.” – Psalm 142:4-5 NLT*

David had a heart for God. He sought after God. He trusted in God. In his darkest moments, he called out to God, seeking deliverance and guidance. And he let Saul know that he had nothing

to fear from him. As far as David was concerned, Saul was the king and would remain so until God deemed otherwise.

Saul was legitimately moved by what he heard. Even he saw the stark contrast between his heart and that of David's. Perhaps it was the words of the ancient proverb that David quoted: "Out of the wicked comes wickedness." Saul may have been given a sobering glimpse into the darkness of his own heart.

The Proverbs of Solomon say, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23 ESV). Jesus told His disciples, "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person" (Matthew 15:18-20 ESV). As David stood before Saul that day, he provided Saul with a less-than-flattering reminder of all that he had become. David served as a stark counterpoint to Saul's godlessness, heartlessness, faithlessness, and self-centeredness. And Saul could only respond, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil" (1 Samuel 24:17 ESV).

These two men, one the official king of Israel and the other the anointed king-elect, could not have been more different. However, the greatest contrast between the two was not external, but internal; it was the spiritual conditions of their hearts. David was committed to seeing his life through the lens of God's sovereignty. He was going to trust in God's will and leave his life in His all-powerful hands. Saul was committed to preserving his own legacy at all costs, even attempting to thwart the revealed will of God. He was a man after his *own* heart, not God's. He was consumed by himself and overly obsessed with doing whatever it took to protect his way of life. And as he stood there that day, face-to-face with David, he got a glimpse into the condition of his heart. He was convicted and even showed remorse. He feigned repentance and then walked away. But his heart remained unchanged.

In His sermon on the mount, Jesus spoke the following words concerning false prophets, which also apply to the situation between Saul and David.

"You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions." – Matthew 7:16-20 NLT

David's actions revealed the true nature of his heart. And Saul's heart was exposed as what it really was: Dark, diseased, and devoid of a healthy relationship with God.

1 Samuel 25:1-8

Suffering Fools Not-So-Gladly

Now Samuel died. And all Israel assembled and mourned for him, and they buried him in his house at Ramah.

Then David rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran. And there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel. The man was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved; he was a Calebite. David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. So David sent ten young men. And David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal and greet him in my name. And thus you shall greet him: 'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. I hear that you have shearers. Now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing all the time they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.'" – 1 Samuel 25:1-8 ESV

This chapter will serve as the centerpiece between chapters 24 and 26, linking the two stories it contains. In chapter 24, David passed on what appeared to be a God-given opportunity to take the life of King Saul. He refused to raise his hand against the Lord's anointed. Chapter 26 presents a very similar story, in which David is afforded another tempting and seemingly divine opportunity to eliminate Saul once and for all. Sandwiched in-between these two chapters is the story of David's encounter with Abigail and Nabal. The central figure in the story is Abigail. Her relationship with her wealthy, yet foolish, husband, Nabal, will provide a timely comparison to that of David and Saul. Intentional hints will be dropped along the way, revealing the similarities between Saul and the character of Nabal. And Abigail will provide a poignant illustration of how one is to handle the "fools" in their life.

However, before we address David's encounter with Abigail and Nabal, we must first deal with David's loss. The chapter opens with the announcement of Samuel's death. This would have come as a shocking blow to David. Samuel the prophet was the last of the judges of Israel, and had played an integral role in the nation's transformation into a monarchy. He had witnessed and overseen the establishment of Saul as Israel's first king. He had done so reluctantly, viewing their demand for a king as an indictment of his own judgeship. But there was more to the story. We're told in 1 Samuel 8 that Samuel had two sons, Joel and Abijah, who both served as judges; however, they didn't have sterling reputations.

Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice. – 1 Samuel 8:3 ESV

The thought of these two men judging over them moved the people to demand a king. But Samuel took offense. He had served as their God-appointed judge and ruler for years. He had served as God's mouthpiece, dispensing judgment and providing direction for the people. But with the appointment of Saul as king, Samuel's role changed dramatically. He became a counselor to the king and a prophet to the people. He still had a vital role to play, presenting Saul with the difficult news that his kingdom was coming to an end and that God had already chosen his replacement. He was the one to anoint David to be the next king. But now, as the nation stood on the brink of a significant change and the transfer of power from Saul to David drew near, Samuel suddenly died. The last judge of Israel passed off the scene. A new era was beginning.

The period of the kings was about to begin in earnest, and it would represent one of the most volatile and unstable periods in the history of the nation of Israel. David and Saul would ultimately represent the two diametrically opposite extremes of kingly conduct and character. Over the centuries, the people of Israel would know what it was like to have godly kings and godless, foolish, immoral kings.

That is where the story of Abigail and Nabal comes in. David and Saul had parted ways after their encounter outside the cave in the wilderness of Engedi. Saul had shown remorse over his treatment of David and acknowledged his realization that David was going to replace him. It was God-ordained. But David did not return with Saul. He continued to live in the wilderness with his men. The transfer of power from Saul to himself was up to God and according to His timing. David would have to continue to wait, and that brought him into the wilderness of Paran, where he had a "chance" encounter with Nabal.

We're told that Nabal was rich, having 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats. He also had a wife named Abigail. The text states, "The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved; he was a Calebite" (1 Samuel 25:3 ESV). We are immediately presented with the contrasting characters of these two individuals. They have been joined together in marriage, but could not be more dissimilar in their natures and behaviors. Later in the story, Abigail will rather bluntly share with David, "I know Nabal is a wicked and ill-tempered man; please don't pay any attention to him. He is a fool, just as his name suggests" (1 Samuel 25:25 NLT). Nabal's very name meant "fool." It's an odd name for any parent to name their child, but it seems well-suited to Nabal's temperament. Nabal was a surly, egotistical, arrogant, and unwise man who had made a name for himself in the world and enjoyed a life of relative wealth.

In the Bible, the designation "fool" had nothing to do with intelligence. It was a spiritually oriented label. David would one day write in one of his psalms, "Only fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good!" (Psalm 14:1 NLT).

In Psalm 10, we are given an even more descriptive assessment of the fool, but in terms of their wickedness:

*The wicked are too proud to seek God.
 They seem to think that God is dead.
 Yet they succeed in everything they do.
 They do not see your punishment awaiting them.
 They sneer at all their enemies.
 They think, "Nothing bad will ever happen to us!
 We will be free of trouble forever!" – Psalm 10:4-6 NLT*

David and his men had encountered the shepherds of Nabal while hiding out in the area of Paran. Because of their presence there, David's men had made the area safe from Amalekites and Philistines. They had served as a kind of military presence in Paran, ensuring the safety of its residents, and this included Nabal's shepherds and their flocks. So, David determined to seek aid from Nabal, expecting him to gladly extend courtesy out of gratitude. He sent his men with a message for Nabal.

"Peace and prosperity to you, your family, and everything you own! I am told that it is sheep-shearing time. While your shepherds stayed among us near Carmel, we never harmed them, and nothing was ever stolen from them. Ask your own men, and they will tell you this is true. So would you be kind to us, since we have come at a time of celebration? Please share any provisions you might have on hand with us and with your friend David." – 1 Samuel 25:6-8 NLT

But David was in for a rude surprise. His kind words were going to be met with stubborn defiance. This encounter would push David to the limits. He was already struggling with his ongoing feud with Saul. He had been hiding and running for years, and he had just heard the devastating news that his mentor, Samuel, had died. He was not in a good mood, and was not a man to be trifled with. At this low point in his life, David found himself coming face-to-face with Nabal the fool.

David would receive an invaluable lesson on how to handle the fools in his life, and it would come from an unlikely source, the wife of Nabal. This unexpected character lesson would serve David well in his ongoing relationship with Saul.

1 Samuel 25:9-17

Fear Foolishness

When David's young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David, and then they waited. And Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" So David's young men turned away and came back and told him all this. And David said to his men, "Every man strap on his sword!" And every man of them strapped on his sword. David also strapped on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage.

But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to greet our master, and he railed at them. Yet the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them. They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know this and consider what you should do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him." – 1 Samuel 25:9-17 ESV

These verses reveal that Nabal was a man who lived up to his name, which happened to mean "fool." He had all the classic characteristics of a biblical fool.

*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,
but a wise man listens to advice. – Proverbs 12:15 ESV*

*The wise don't make a show of their knowledge,
but fools broadcast their foolishness. – Proverbs 12:23 NLT*

Short-tempered people do foolish things... – Proverbs 14:17 NLT

He was arrogant, full of himself, quick-tempered, resistant to counsel, and oblivious to the consequences of his behavior. He treated David, a mighty warrior, as if he were a nobody. He showed him no honor or respect. He looked down his nose at him, foolishly saying, "Who does this son of Jesse think he is? There are lots of servants these days who run away from their masters. Should I take my bread and my water and my meat that I've slaughtered for my shearers and give it to a band of outlaws who come from who knows where?" (1 Samuel 25:10-11 NLT).

He knew exactly who David was. Even the Philistines had heard about David's reputation as a mighty warrior. But Nabal, knowing that David was a man on the run, made a very foolish decision to treat David with disrespect and disdain.

When one of Nabal's shepherds witnessed what his foolish master had done, he ran and told Abigail, Nabal's wife. Even his words reveal the depth of Nabal's problem: "He is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him" (1 Samuel 25:17 ESV). Nabal's foolishness ran so deep that he couldn't recognize the folly and danger of his actions. He refused to listen to the counsel of those who tried to protect him, and he would pay dearly for his stubbornness.

What would have possessed Nabal to act so foolishly and risk the wrath of someone as powerful as David? According to the Bible, foolishness is not a mental or psychological problem; it is a spiritual one. At the heart of Nabal's folly was a lack of respect for and fear of God. He had placed himself at the center of his own life, treating himself like a god and the sole arbiter of his fate. Ultimately, foolishness is characterized by a lack of wisdom.

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.* – Psalm 111:19 ESV

Scripture repeatedly warns that a person who denies, ignores, or neglects God lacks wisdom and inevitably displays the characteristics of a fool.

- He acts thoughtlessly: He gives little or no thought to God and refuses to consider the truth about God. His treatment of others is simply a byproduct of his lack regard for God's holiness and judgment.
- He becomes dull-minded: When a man fails to consider God, his mind becomes dulled by the things of this world. He begins to lose the ability to see clearly, having his spiritual vision clouded by materialism, success, comfort, and pleasure. His thoughts about God become blurred and distorted. His mind becomes intoxicated with the things of this world and sluggish toward God.
- He becomes senseless: A man who neglects God finds himself lacking in wisdom and acting contrary to common sense. Because he is deficient in his thoughts about God, he becomes unable to think clearly and sensibly. He may be smart and successful, but he will be plagued by senseless decision-making and the harmful outcomes it brings.
- He will be without understanding: Because he fails to grasp or comprehend God, he will end up with wrong conclusions or thoughts about God. He will wrongly assume that God is not there or that God does not care about what he is doing. He will make godless decisions because he is essentially living a God-less life.
- He will exhibit an ignorance of God: He won't know God. Because he has left God out of his thought processes, he will display behavior that reveals his faulty understanding of God. He won't fear God's holiness. He won't worry about God's judgment. He won't seek God's wisdom. He won't see a need for God's forgiveness.
- He will be unwise: Without God in his life, he will lack wisdom. In fact, regardless of what he tries to do, he will act contrary to wisdom. His behavior will make sense to him, but it will lead to dangerous and foolish outcomes.

These characteristics, while true of the lost, are just as susceptible to the believer. Even those who claim to be God-followers can exhibit these same qualities at any time. All it takes is for us

to neglect God in our lives, to fail to fear Him or treat Him with the honor, respect, and worship He is due. When we leave God out of our lives, we open up the door to foolishness. Foolishness is nothing more than a lack of wisdom, and, as the psalmist said, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Nabal was a fool because Nabal was ungodly. If he had no fear of God, why would he fear David? If he was willing to treat God with disrespect, what would prevent him from treating David the same way?

In the Proverbs, there are five types of fools mentioned. They seem to run on a continuum, moving from bad to worse. There is the simple fool, the silly fool, the sensual fool, the scornful fool, and the stubborn fool. A different Hebrew word characterizes each. The last one, the stubborn fool, is associated with the word *nâbâl*, which just happens to be the name of the character in this story.

According to the Proverbs, this is the most dangerous type of fool. A stubborn fool rejects God and His ways. He is self-confident and close-minded. He is his own god, freely gratifying his sinful nature and excusing his godless behavior as acceptable. It is his goal to justify his actions by drawing others to emulate his ways. His behavior tends to impact those around him. The innocent often suffer because of a fool's unwise and selfish actions. As the story of Nabal makes clear, the fool's decisions can have a detrimental and even deadly effect on others.

The Proverbs make it clear that only God can reprove a stubborn fool, and we will see in this story that, while David had a heart for God, he ran the risk of acting foolishly himself. He was going to let the foolish actions of Nabal cause him to respond in a godless, thoughtless way. But wiser heads would prevail.

1 Samuel 25:18-31

Wisdom from God

Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared and five seahs of parched grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys. And she said to her young men, "Go on before me; behold, I come after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal. And as she rode on the donkey and came down under cover of the mountain, behold, David and his men came down toward her, and she met them. Now David had said, "Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him, and he has returned me evil for good. God do so to the enemies of David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him."

When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, "On me alone, my lord, be the guilt. Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him. But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent. Now then, my lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, because the Lord has restrained you from bloodguilt and from saving with your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal. And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. Please forgive the trespass of your servant. For the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live. If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God. And the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling. And when the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you and has appointed you prince over Israel, my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause or for my lord working salvation himself. And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant." – 1 Samuel 25:18-31
ESV

These verses provide a stark contrast between Nabal and Abigail, and it shows up in their choice of words. When Nabal first encountered the men sent by David, he responded rashly and rather harshly.

"Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" – 1 Samuel 25:10-11 ESV

Nabal treated David's men with disrespect and dishonor. His words were flippant and filled with disdain. All the time his shepherds had been tending his flocks in the wilderness of Paran, David

and his men had provided protection. One of Nabal's shepherds confirmed this fact when he appealed for Abigail to intervene.

"These men have been very good to us, and we never suffered any harm from them. Nothing was stolen from us the whole time they were with us. In fact, day and night they were like a wall of protection to us and the sheep." – 1 Samuel 25:15-16 NLT

And yet, Nabal refused to acknowledge any of this and treated David with contempt rather than gratitude. He was a fool and fit the biblical definition.

Wise words bring approval, but fools are destroyed by their own words. – Ecclesiastes 10:12 ESV

*Fools' words get them into constant quarrels;
they are asking for a beating.*

*The mouths of fools are their ruin;
they trap themselves with their lips.* – Proverbs 18:6-7 NLT

Nabal was about to get a beating from David. Frustrated by the arrogant and disrespectful attitude of this pompous blowhard, David planned to wipe out Nabal and every one of his men.

"A lot of good it did to help this fellow. We protected his flocks in the wilderness, and nothing he owned was lost or stolen. But he has repaid me evil for good. May God strike me and kill me if even one man of his household is still alive tomorrow morning!" – 1 Samuel 25:21-22 NLT

But wiser minds prevailed. When Nabal's wife Abigail was apprised of the situation, she stepped in and determined to right the wrong her husband had done to David. This was probably not the first time she had been forced to intervene in her husband's affairs. She was well aware of his reputation, and as his wife, she had firsthand experience with his foolishness. She was extremely blunt when describing him to David.

"I know Nabal is a wicked and ill-tempered man; please don't pay any attention to him. He is a fool, just as his name suggests." – 1 Samuel 25:25 NLT

But it was her words of reconciliation to David that provide the greatest insight into the difference between Abigail and her husband. Her words and actions were marked by wisdom and integrity. What she exhibited was far more than mere human intelligence. She was not just a wise woman; she was godly.

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.* – Proverbs 9:10 ESV

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding. – Psalm 111:10 ESV*

Abigail was wise because she was godly. She feared the Lord. She saw the hand of God at work in David's life. God had provided her with insight into the circumstances surrounding David's life. While Nabal saw David simply as a man on the run and a fugitive from justice, Abigail saw him as the next king of Israel.

"The Lord will surely reward you with a lasting dynasty, for you are fighting the Lord's battles." – 1 Samuel 25:28 NLT

"When the Lord has done all he promised and has made you leader of Israel, don't let this be a blemish on your record." – 1 Samuel 25:30-31 NLT

Abigail was not just flattering David, stroking his ego in an attempt to win his favor. She had divine insight from God. She had been given wisdom from God that enabled her to assess the situation and recognize that David, as God's hand-picked successor to Saul, would not want to do anything that would blemish his future reputation or dishonor the name of God. Her words and actions reveal her wisdom.

*From a wise mind comes wise speech;
the words of the wise are persuasive.*

*Kind words are like honey —
sweet to the soul and healthy for the body. – Proverbs 16:23-24 NLT*

Every aspect of Abigail's handling of this delicate and dangerous situation reveals a divinely inspired understanding of human nature and the keys to successfully mitigating difficult circumstances. Her provision of food for David's men and her choice of words for David's ears were both divinely inspired. One of the most insightful things Abigail did that day was to get David to see things from God's perspective. She knew David would be upset, and rightfully so. She fully understood how her husband's foolish actions and words would cause David to take offense and be tempted to seek revenge. But what would God have David do? She wanted David to understand that God was working through her to prevent the unnecessary slaughter of innocent people, an action that would place a permanent stain on David's reputation. It is impossible to think about this scene without not fast-forwarding to a future event in David's life when he failed to heed the words of Abigail.

"When the Lord has done all he promised and has made you leader of Israel, don't let this be a blemish on your record. Then your conscience won't have to bear the staggering burden of needless bloodshed and vengeance." – 1 Samuel 25:30-31 NLT

Years later, after David had become king of Israel, he had an affair with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his soldiers. When she became pregnant with his child, he arranged for her husband,

Uriah, to be exposed to enemy fire on the front lines. With Uriah's death, David would be free to legally marry Bathsheba. But he would also know what it was like to bear the staggering burden of needless bloodshed on his conscience.

The words of Abigail were wise because they were godly. And they were godly because they came from the mouth of a godly woman. Thankfully, David will recognize the hand of God in the actions of Abigail. Yahweh would use this woman to accomplish His will for David and prevent the next king of Israel from acting like a fool.

1 Samuel 25:32-38

The Subtle Snare of Self-Salvation

And David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand! For as surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male." Then David received from her hand what she had brought him. And he said to her, "Go up in peace to your house. See, I have obeyed your voice, and I have granted your petition."

And Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk. So she told him nothing at all until the morning light. In the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And about ten days later the Lord struck Nabal, and he died. – 1 Samuel 25:32-38 ESV

David knew the hand of God when he saw it. As he and his men stood there with their weapons at the ready, prepared to wipe out Nabal and every male in his household, Abigail had shown up with a gift of food and a word of wise counsel. She bowed down before David and begged his forgiveness, appealing for him to refrain from doing something he would later regret. Nabal was a fool. He was insignificant and not worth the time and effort it would take to enact revenge. She wisely warned David, "When the Lord has done all he promised and has made you leader of Israel, don't let this be a blemish on your record. Then your conscience won't have to bear the staggering burden of needless bloodshed and vengeance" (1 Samuel 25:30-31 NLT).

Her words were like a cold glass of water thrown in his face, waking him up to the reality and danger of what he was about to do. And he was grateful, not only to her, but to God for having sent her. "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you to meet me today!" (1 Samuel 25:32 NLT). He knew this was a God-ordained encounter with Abigail, and sensed that God had sent her to prevent him from doing something he would later regret. Killing Nabal would have been an act of vengeance, but not an act of God. David had not sought out or received any permission from God to take the life of Nabal or anyone else. But the temptation of self-salvation and taking revenge on those who offend is powerful. David had been offended by a rich fool, and he was man enough to do something about it. But a man after God's own heart would leave vengeance up to the Lord. And that is exactly what Abigail encouraged David to do, because God had bigger plans for David. He was going to be the next king of Israel. Nabal was a bump in the road on the way to the throne room, and David would be better off letting God deal with him.

When David had been given the opportunity to kill Saul, he refrained from doing so. He even told Saul, "May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you" (1 Samuel 24:12 ESV). At that point, David was willing to

leave Saul's judgment up to God. But when it came to Nabal, David suddenly determined to take matters into his own hands. Only the words of Abigail prevented David from doing the unthinkable and committing an act of fratricide against fellow Jews.

When David heard Abigail's words, he immediately recognized the gravity of his intentions. He said to her, "Thank God for your good sense! Bless you for keeping me from murder and from carrying out vengeance with my own hands" (1 Samuel 25:33 NLT). This statement provides the key to understanding the exchange between Abigail and David. His sin was not his anger with Nabal, but his desire to avenge himself against Nabal. What he was about to do was an act of self-salvation, but not self-preservation. Nabal was no threat to David. All he had done was offend David by treating him with contempt and disrespect. He had hurt David's pride, and David had been willing to slaughter Nabal and everyone associated with him in a needless act of revenge.

Years later, when David was king, he had another opportunity to take revenge on someone who treated him with disdain and disrespect. It was when his son Absalom took over Jerusalem and forced him to flee for his life. On his way out of town, he was confronted by a man named Shimei, a member of the clan of Saul. As David and his men made their way out of the city, Shimei threw stones at them and loudly cursed David.

"Get out of here, you murderer, you scoundrel!" he shouted at David. "The Lord is paying you back for all the bloodshed in Saul's clan. You stole his throne, and now the Lord has given it to your son Absalom. At last you will taste some of your own medicine, for you are a murderer!" – 2 Samuel 16:7-8 NLT

David's men offered to kill Shimei, but David restrained them, saying:

"My own son is trying to kill me. Doesn't this relative of Saul have even more reason to do so? Leave him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to do it. And perhaps the Lord will see that I am being wronged and will bless me because of these curses today." – 2 Samuel 16:11-12 NLT

David's encounter with Abigail had taught him a valuable lesson: to leave vengeance in the hands of God. He was to do nothing without God's expressed permission. Taking Nabal's life might have assuaged David's damaged pride, but it would have irreparably harmed his reputation. A close study of David's life reveals that he was a man prone to impulsive behavior. He was prone to giving in to his inner impulses and failing to consider the consequences. His affair with Bathsheba is a prime example. He let his physical passions override his reasoning. He saw her, desired her, and took her. He didn't think it through. When his actions got him in trouble and she became pregnant, he threw reason to the wind and went into self-preservation mode. He attempted to cover up his indiscretion with a carefully thought-out plan to have Uriah, her husband, return from war so that it might appear that the child was his. When his plan failed, he escalated his self-preservation efforts and had Uriah murdered, so he could take Bathsheba as his wife.

Self-salvation is tempting, but it never turns out as we expect. Taking matters into our own hands may feel good for the moment, but the repercussions can be devastating. Too often, our desire for revenge is based solely on our own damaged pride. There is no real threat to our safety, but we find ourselves offended by something someone has said to us or about us. Perhaps it's a false rumor that someone has spread about us. It could be a simple case of someone disrespecting us or treating us in a way we find distasteful. Our first impulse is to get even, to teach them a lesson. But what would God have us do? How would He prefer we respond? For David, the best course of action was no action at all. He was to leave Nabal in God's hands. Rather than seeking revenge, he was to rest in the sovereign will of God.

Jesus gave us some similar advice in the Beatitudes.

"You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow." – Matthew 5:38-42 NLT

We are to be driven by a bigger purpose than our own self-salvation and preservation. God doesn't us worrying about what others think and wasting our time attempting to protect our reputations. He had more important plans for David than eliminating a fool who happened to offend him. There were greater enemies to fight and more significant wars for David to wage. He was to leave Nabal in God's hands. And because he did, David would see God deal with Nabal as only God could. When Abigail told Nabal all that had happened and how David had been planning to destroy him, "he had a stroke, and he lay paralyzed on his bed like a stone. About ten days later, the Lord struck him, and he died" (1 Samuel 25:37-38 NLT). God avenged David and dealt with Nabal. In the end, David learned that God's salvation is preferable to self-salvation every time.

1 Samuel 25:39-44

Driven by Desire and Distraction

When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Blessed be the Lord who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from wrongdoing. The Lord has returned the evil of Nabal on his own head.” Then David sent and spoke to Abigail, to take her as his wife. When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, “David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife.” And she rose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, “Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.” And Abigail hurried and rose and mounted a donkey, and her five young women attended her. She followed the messengers of David and became his wife.

David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives. Saul had given Michal his daughter, David’s wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was of Gallim. – 1 Samuel 25:39-44 ESV

These closing verses of Chapter 25 provide a glimpse into an area of David’s life that would prove to be an ongoing problem for him throughout his life. He loved women, and this attraction to the opposite sex would be a constant thorn in his side even after becoming king. He would eventually pass on this propensity to his son, Solomon, who took David’s obsession with women to a whole new level.

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh’s daughter, he married women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and from among the Hittites. The Lord had clearly instructed the people of Israel, “You must not marry them, because they will turn your hearts to their gods.” Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway. He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. And in fact, they did turn his heart away from the Lord. – 1 Kings 11:1-3 NLT

All of this, as the passage reflects, was in direct violation of God’s commands.

The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the LORD. – Deuteronomy 17:17 NLT

Yet, after David became king, he continued his practice of accumulating wives, clearly disobeying Yahweh’s prohibition.

After moving from Hebron to Jerusalem, David married more concubines and wives, and they had more sons and daughters. – 2 Samuel 5:13 NLT

David was a man after God’s own heart, but he was far from perfect. Women were his Achilles’ heel, and he found Abigail highly attractive. Not only was she beautiful, but she was also godly, wise, assertive, brave, insightful, and a take-charge kind of woman. It didn’t hurt that she was

recently widowed. In fact, David didn't seem to give Nabal's body time to cool off before he made the move on Abigail, asking her to marry him.

The text ends with the statement that "David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives" (1 Samuel 25:43 ESV). It also references Michal, David's first wife, whom he had to leave behind when he fled from Saul. She was eventually given to another man, but David was probably unaware of that fact. So, effectively, he had three wives at one time. Again, in direct disobedience to the will of God.

Why is this important? It provides an important insight into the life of this man who would prove to be Israel's greatest king and who, as has already been pointed out, was declared by God to be a man after His own heart. David loved and longed to serve God. He had a deep desire to honor and obey God. But he also had a sin nature, just like the rest of us. One of greatest weaknesses was his attraction to women. Satan would repeatedly use this flaw to his own advantage, tempting David to give in to his overactive libido. However, David would learn to justify his actions, excusing his sexual obsession as natural and normal. Yet, this sinful proclivity was a spiritual weakness, a chink in his armor that would make him an easy target for the enemy.

When it comes to this issue, there are some less-than-flattering similarities between David and the Old Testament judge, Samson. During a time when the Philistines were tormenting the Jews because of their disobedience, God raised up Samson to be their judge and deliverer. He was a powerful man, but he had a particular weakness.

One day when Samson was in Timnah, one of the Philistine women caught his eye. When he returned home, he told his father and mother, "A young Philistine woman in Timnah caught my eye. I want to marry her. Get her for me." – Judges 14:1-2 NLT

Like David, Samson couldn't keep his eyes or his hands off women. His mother and father tried to reason with Samson and talk him out of choosing a wife who was a pagan, but he would not listen.

"Get her for me! She looks good to me." – Judges 14:3 NLT

His obsession was relentless and demanded gratification. The text goes on to reveal how addictive this behavior was.

One day Samson went to the Philistine town of Gaza and spent the night with a prostitute. – Judges 16:1 NLT

Some time later Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the valley of Sorek. – Judges 16:4 NLT

Each of these women proved to be a thorn in Samson's side, causing him much grief and sorrow. His dalliance with Delilah would even result in his death.

David, too, struggled with a lustful, almost lascivious attraction to women. The most infamous story concerning David and his love affair with the opposite sex involves his affair with Bathsheba. David was the king. He was rich, powerful, and happily married to several women already. But one day, as he walked on the rooftop patio of his palace, he spied Bathsheba bathing alfresco next door. David was in the wrong place at the wrong time. The passage states, "In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites...However, David stayed behind in Jerusalem" (2 Samuel 11:1 NLT).

David wasn't where he was supposed to be. He was the warrior-king, but instead of doing battle with the Ammonites, he ended up fighting a losing battle with his own lusts. His attraction for Bathsheba quickly turned to action, and he had sex with her. When their affair resulted in her pregnancy, he began a cover-up campaign that eventually led him to have her husband, a faithful soldier in his army, purposely exposed and killed on the front lines of battle. All so David could marry his wife and cover up his illicit affair.

James provides a stark explanation of how this entire process works.

Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. – James 1:14-15 NLT

David was a man after God's own heart, but he had a problem. His heart was divided. He loved women and saw them as a source of satisfaction, comfort, pleasure, and self-worth. They made him feel good. They provided him with companionship. Perhaps they helped fulfill his need for conquest. Whatever drove his love affair with women, it would ultimately distract him from his primary focus: his love for and dedication to God.

The chapter ends with the statement, "Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Paltiel the son of Laish, who was of Gallim" (1 Samuel 25:44 ESV). This is important because, while it might be easy to use this as an explanation why David took Abigail to be his wife, it falls short. Years later, when David became king and Saul was dead, he would send for Michal, demanding that Ish-bosheth, the sole remaining heir to Saul's throne, hand her over.

So David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, to whom I was betrothed for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines." Ish-bosheth sent and took her from her husband, from Paltiel the son of Laish. But her husband went with her, weeping as he went, and followed her as far as Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go, return." So he returned. – 2 Samuel 3:14-16 ESV

Even though David had married multiple wives since his departure from Saul's palace, he had not stopped thinking about Michal. He had to have her. So, he had her forcibly removed from her husband. Like so many of David's decisions regarding women, this one would prove to be less than ideal. Michal would end up despising David and his God, and their marriage would produce little in the way of love and no offspring.

David had a propensity to be driven by desire, and that flaw proved to be a problem throughout his life. Even in his old age, near the point of death, an attractive woman would play a significant role in his life.

King David was now very old, and no matter how many blankets covered him, he could not keep warm. So his advisers told him, "Let us find a young virgin to wait on you and look after you, my lord. She will lie in your arms and keep you warm."

So they searched throughout the land of Israel for a beautiful girl, and they found Abishag from Shunem and brought her to the king. The girl was very beautiful, and she looked after the king and took care of him. But the king had no sexual relations with her.
– 1 Kings 1:1-4 NLT

We all have weaknesses. Each of us has our spiritual Achilles' heel, which Satan, our enemy, knows about and takes full advantage of at every opportunity. He tempts, lures, and entices us. He baits the hook with the very thing we find most attractive. It may be sex, popularity, material possessions, pleasure, a sense of accomplishment, or power. In essence, our weakness is nothing more than an insight into what we have made an idol in our life – a god that serves as a stand-in or substitute for the one true God. For David, women were his go-to for satisfaction, self-worth, and a sense of joy. Sexual pleasure was his idol of choice. What is yours? What do you turn to other than God? What do you worship in place of God? Anything that we allow to rob God of glory is a weakness in our lives that must be confessed and removed. When God said, "You must not have any other god but me" (Exodus 20:3 NLT), He meant it. And David was going to have to learn to believe it.

1 Samuel 26:1-12

The Fool on the Hill

Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the east of Jeshimon?" So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, David sent out spies and learned that Saul had indeed come. Then David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, with Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Saul was lying within the encampment, while the army was encamped around him.

Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Joab's brother Abishai the son of Zeruiah, "Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?" And Abishai said, "I will go down with you." So David and Abishai went to the army by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the army lay around him. Then Abishai said to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice." But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?" And David said, "As the Lord lives, the Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go." So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head, and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them. – 1 Samuel 26:1-12 ESV

Chapter 25 provided us with a brief respite from the ongoing conflict between Saul and David. But chapter 26 picks up where chapter 24 left off. When we last left Saul, he was headed home after his near-death encounter with David. He had unknowingly walked right into an ambush, choosing to relieve himself in a cave where David and his men had been hiding. But David had spared Saul's life, choosing instead to confront him face-to-face and assure Saul that he posed no threat to his kingdom. He was not going to lift his hand against Saul. As a result, "Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold" (1 Samuel 24:22 ESV).

Chapter 25 introduced us to a new character, Nabal, who displayed all the classic characteristics of a biblical fool and whose unwise actions almost caused the unnecessary deaths of everyone associated with him. But Abigail, his wife, had intervened and prevented David from doing something he would long regret. Nabal's rashness and ungodliness were going to be the death of him – literally. This fool would die a fool's death. But while David had been able to walk away from Nabal with his integrity intact, he soon discovered there was yet another fool in his life. Saul may have gone home, but he wouldn't stay there for long. While he had shown signs of remorse in his last encounter with David, he had not given up his quest to see David put to

death. When the Ziphites betrayed David's whereabouts to Saul a second time (1 Samuel 23:19), he mustered 3,000 soldiers to hunt David down.

Verse three states, "Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon." Saul's stubborn refusal to give up the hunt is genuinely remarkable. His remorse-filled words, spoken to David during their conversation outside the cave had sounded so sincere.

"You are a better man than I am, for you have repaid me good for evil. Yes, you have been amazingly kind to me today, for when the Lord put me in a place where you could have killed me, you didn't do it. Who else would let his enemy get away when he had him in his power? May the Lord reward you well for the kindness you have shown me today. And now I realize that you are surely going to be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will flourish under your rule." – 1 Samuel 24:17-20 NLT

But Saul was a fool just like Nabal. In fact, Nabal's very name meant "fool." The Hebrew word *nabal* refers to a particular type of fool, one who is overly self-confident and particularly close-minded. He tends to act as his own god and freely gratifies his own sinful nature. This type of fool is the worst kind and can only be reproved by God Himself. The prophet Isaiah describes this type of fool (*nabal*):

*For fools speak foolishness
and make evil plans.
They practice ungodliness
and spread false teachings about the Lord.
They deprive the hungry of food
and give no water to the thirsty. – Isaiah 32:6 NLT*

This kind of fool is typically godless in nature. It is not that they don't believe in God, but that they live their lives as if God does not exist. This was Saul's problem. He kept pursuing David even though God had ordained him to be Saul's replacement. Saul refused to accept God's will and was willing to risk anything and everything in his attempt to circumvent God's divine authority. He was so busy chasing David that he had no time to meet the needs of his nation or its citizens. David had become much more than a distraction; he was an obsession.

So, Saul and his troops set up camp on the hill of Hachilah. He *foolishly* thought he was in the right. He *foolishly* considered himself safe, falling asleep that night, surrounded by his 3,000 well-trained soldiers. But David and Abishai, his nephew, snuck into the camp that night and crept right up to Saul as he and his crack troops lay fast asleep. Samuel goes on to qualify that their heavy sleep was God's doing: "a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them" (1 Samuel 26:12 ESV).

Once again, David found himself in a tempting situation where his archenemy was seemingly handed to him on a silver platter. Even Abishai recognized a golden opportunity when he saw

one, begging for permission to put Saul to death right then and there. But David's response was firm and crystal clear:

"No!" David said. "Don't kill him. For who can remain innocent after attacking the Lord's anointed one? Surely the Lord will strike Saul down someday, or he will die of old age or in battle. The Lord forbid that I should kill the one he has anointed! But take his spear and that jug of water beside his head, and then let's get out of here!" – 1 Samuel 26:9-11 NLT

David had learned a lot from his encounter with Nabal and Abigail. While the timing seemed perfect and his justification for killing Saul seemed reasonable, he knew he had not been given no green light from God to take the king's life. If vengeance were necessary, it would be up to God. If Saul was meant to die an untimely death, that too was God's prerogative. David refused to make evil plans or practice ungodliness. In other words, he refused to act like a fool. He wasn't going to lower himself to the same level as Nabal or Saul. Instead, he chose to do the godly thing, and determined to leave his destiny and the fate of his enemies in God's hands. The Book of Proverbs contains several verses that provide apt descriptions of David's actions:

*One who is wise is cautious and turns away from evil,
but a fool is reckless and careless.* – Proverbs 14:16 ESV

*The anger of the king is a deadly threat;
the wise will try to appease it.* – Proverbs 16:14 NLT

*Don't be impressed with your own wisdom.
Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil.* – Proverbs 3:7 NLT

But the Scriptures also provide insights into the nature of Saul's perplexing behavior.

*Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes?
There is more hope for a fool than for him.* – Proverbs 26:12 ESV

Wisdom is better than foolishness, just as light is better than darkness. For the wise can see where they are going, but fools walk in the dark. – Ecclesiastes 2:13-14 NLT

Two men stood on a hill. One was a fool, the other was wise. Both knew God. Both had been appointed and anointed by God. But one was living his life as if God didn't exist, the quintessential trademark of a fool. As this chapter unfolds, the stark contrast between these two men will become increasingly evident. Their lives were inseparably linked, but the outcome of their lives would prove to be radically divergent. Wisdom and folly. Two ways of life that lead to two very different outcomes.

1 Samuel 26:13-25

A Case of Déjà vu

Then David went over to the other side and stood far off on the top of the hill, with a great space between them. And David called to the army, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, "Will you not answer, Abner?" Then Abner answered, "Who are you who calls to the king?" And David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord. This thing that you have done is not good. As the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the Lord's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is and the jar of water that was at his head."

Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king." And he said, "Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands? Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the Lord, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains."

Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake." And David answered and said, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it. The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the Lord, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation." Then Saul said to David, "Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them." So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place. – 1 Samuel 26:13-25 ESV

Once again, David found himself with a prime opportunity to take the life of Saul and end his nightmarish existence as a fugitive. He and Abishai had made their way into the camp of Saul as he and his troops slept. They stood over Saul's sleeping form, and Abishai begged David for permission to take his life. But just as before, David refused to lift his hand against the Lord's anointed. But he did take Saul's spear and water jug.

Now, David stood a safe distance away and gave Abner, Saul's commander, an unexpected wake-up call. David yelled across the valley, accusing Abner and his troops of dereliction of duty. He informed them that while they slept, someone had snuck into their camp and could have killed their king, because they had failed to do their jobs. David held up Saul's spear and water jug as proof. This was not only an assault on Abner, but a clear statement to Saul that David had more respect for the Lord's anointed than Saul's men did. When Saul's armed guards

failed to provide the king with protection, David was the one who prevented Abishai from taking his life. David was still a faithful servant of the king.

Not only that, there was no proof that he had done anything to deserve the treatment he had received from the hands of Saul. He even asked Saul to produce evidence. If Saul could provide David with a specific crime he had committed that violated the law of Moses, David would do the appropriate thing and offer a sacrifice as atonement. But if, as David suspected, Saul's actions against him were based on nothing more than the bad advice of men, then David asked God to call down a curse on them. Why? Because David had not only become *persona non grata* in the kingdom of Israel, but he no longer had access to the Tabernacle. That meant he was unable to offer sacrifices for his sins and receive forgiveness. David's despair over this matter was evident in his words to Saul:

"For they have driven me from my home, so I can no longer live among the Lord's people, and they have said, 'Go, worship pagan gods.' Must I die on foreign soil, far from the presence of the Lord?" – 1 Samuel 26:19-20 NLT

The Tabernacle was where the presence of God dwelt, and the Israelites were the people of God. David struggled with having to live apart from his people and without access to the Tabernacle. In effect, David was being forced to seek another god to worship, and the thought of that was too much for him to bear. David craved community with the people of God and restored access to the Tabernacle of God. This is reflected in one of the psalms he wrote during his days in the wilderness.

*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! – Psalm 63:1-3 NLT*

*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. – Psalm 63:6-7 NLT*

David's passion-filled words seem to elicit a compassionate reaction from Saul. Just as he had before, Saul appears to see the error of his way and confesses, "I have sinned. Come back home, my son, and I will no longer try to harm you, for you valued my life today. I have been a fool and very, very wrong" (1 Samuel 26:21 NLT). But David was no fool; he knew better than to

trust the words of Saul. He had heard this speech before and learned that “The mouths of fools are their ruin; they trap themselves with their lips” (Proverbs 18:7 NLT). David knew Saul had no intention of calling off his manhunt. Which is why, after their conversation ended, “David went his way, and Saul returned to his place” (1 Samuel 26:25 ESV).

David’s exile would continue, and his longing for God’s presence would increase. His desire to be with the people of God would grow with each passing day. But during those dark days of the soul, God would be with David. He would guide him, protect him, teach him, and continue to mold him into the kind of king He desired David to be. Taking Saul’s life would not have ended David’s problems. It would have simply created bigger issues for David because he would have violated God’s law. He would have been guilty of taking matters into his own hands and trying to accomplish God’s will his own way.

So, David returned to the wilderness but he would learn he was not alone. Contrary to what David and the people of Israel believed, God was not restricted to the Tabernacle. His presence was not bound to a building. He was right beside David every step he took in the wilderness. He was with David as he sought sanctuary in the caves. He was watching over David as he slept under the stars. He was David’s constant companion, ever-watchful protector, wise counselor, and faithful guide. It was David’s experiences in the wilderness that led him to pen the words of his most famous psalm:

*The Lord is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.
He lets me rest in green meadows;
he leads me beside peaceful streams.
He renews my strength.
He guides me along right paths,
bringing honor to his name.
Even when I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me.
Your rod and your staff
protect and comfort me.
You prepare a feast for me
in the presence of my enemies.
You honor me by anointing my head with oil.
My cup overflows with blessings.
Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will live in the house of the Lord
forever. – Psalm 23 NLT*

1 Samuel 27:1-12

Detours and Delays

Then David said in his heart, "Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand." So David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow. And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him.

Then David said to Achish, "If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be given me in one of the country towns, that I may dwell there. For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?" So that day Achish gave him Ziklag. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. And the number of the days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months.

Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as Shur, to the land of Egypt. And David would strike the land and would leave neither man nor woman alive, but would take away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the garments, and come back to Achish. When Achish asked, "Where have you made a raid today?" David would say, "Against the Negeb of Judah," or, "Against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites," or, "Against the Negeb of the Kenites." And David would leave neither man nor woman alive to bring news to Gath, thinking, "lest they should tell about us and say, 'So David has done.'" Such was his custom all the while he lived in the country of the Philistines. And Achish trusted David, thinking, "He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant."— 1 Samuel 27:1-12 ESV

David was human. He was a flesh-and-blood man who had a sin nature like everyone else and constantly struggled with his own inner fears, feelings of doubt, and the nagging questions regarding his fate. He loved God and wanted to be obedient to the will of God, but he was also driven by an innate desire to stay alive. And the longer his feud with Saul continued, the more he must have struggled with believing God would one day make him king.

This chapter provides a glimpse into one of David's weaker moments. Nowhere in the chapter is God mentioned. At no point do we see David seeking God's will. In fact, it would appear that David's decision to find refuge in the land of the Philistines was made without any input from God at all. He might have received well-meaning advice from his men, but his choice to return to the very place where he had resorted to saving his life by acting like a madman was not something God told him to do. But thankfully, God was still in control.

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.
– Proverbs 19:21 ESV

David's last journey into Philistine territory, recorded in chapter 21, nearly got him killed. To escape the pursuit of Saul, David had shown up in Gath, seeking refuge from Achish, the king of the Philistines. It just so happened that David was carrying the sword of Goliath, the Philistine champion he had defeated in battle. When the Philistine officers questioned the wisdom of providing sanctuary to David and hinted to the king that he would be better off dead, David feigned madness and "pretended to be insane, scratching on doors and drooling down his beard" (1 Samuel 21:13 NLT). Unwilling to kill a lunatic, Achish let David escape with his life.

Now, here was David seeking refuge among the Philistines again. His doubts and fears clouded his thinking and, evidently, erased his memory of what had happened the last time he attempted to use this questionable strategy.

This time, David was welcomed by Achish with open arms and even given his own city, Ziklag, within the territory of the Philistines. David relocated his 600 men, along with their families, to their new base, complete with houses, walls, and protection from Saul. This would have been a welcome upgrade from the caves in which they had been hiding for so long.

While living in the land of the Philistines, David employed a strategy that allowed him to go out and attack the enemies of Israel, of which there were many. The text mentions the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites. All of these nations occupied the land of Canaan and were part of the people groups that God had commanded Joshua and the people of Israel to completely remove from the land when they occupied it. But they had failed to do so. The Israelites' failure to fully obey the command of God is repeated throughout the Book of Joshua.

But the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the people of Judah could not drive out, so the Jebusites dwell with the people of Judah at Jerusalem to this day. – Joshua 15:63
ESV

However, they did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites have lived in the midst of Ephraim to this day but have been made to do forced labor. – Joshua 16:10
ESV

Yet the people of Manasseh could not take possession of those cities, but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. – Joshua 17:12
ESV

Their unwillingness or inability to drive out the inhabitants of the land left them with a constant threat of war and the risk of committing idolatry. These nations proved to be a constant source of temptation and trouble. So, David used his new headquarters in Ziklag as an outpost from which he sent raiding parties against the enemies of Israel. His strategy included the complete annihilation of every man, woman, and child, so no one could tell Achish what he was up to. In

fact, David left Achish with the impression that he was fighting the Philistines' enemies, falsely reporting the locations of his raids.

When Achish asked, "Where have you made a raid today?" David would say, "Against the Negeb of Judah," or, "Against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites," or, "Against the Negeb of the Kenites." – 1 Samuel 27:10 ESV

So, what are we to make of all this? David appears to have gone to the land of the Philistines without God's permission. Yet, while he was there, he continued to fight the enemies of Israel, clearing the Promised Land of the nations that Joshua and the people of Israel had failed to remove. However, to do what he did, David had to lie to King Achish. Everything he did while living in Ziklag was based on subterfuge and deception. So, was he in God's will? Was he doing what God would have him do? The text doesn't provide an answer, but in the next chapter, it will become clear that David's plan eventually placed him in a very difficult position. It would seem that David's decision to seek refuge among the Philistines was not the will of God, but it did not thwart or derail God's plan. The Proverbs have much to say about the relationship between the plans of man and the plans of God.

We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps. – Proverbs 16:9 NLT

The Lord directs our steps, so why try to understand everything along the way? – Proverbs 20:24 NLT

The prophet, Jeremiah, prayed these powerful, self-disclosing words to the Lord:

*I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself,
that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.
Correct me, O Lord, but in justice;
not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing. – Jeremiah 10:23-24 ESV*

Years later, even David would pen the following words:

*The Lord directs the steps of the godly.
He delights in every detail of their lives.
Though they stumble, they will never fall,
for the Lord holds them by the hand. – Psalm 37:23-24 NLT*

We can't thwart God's plan, but we can certainly cause ourselves a great deal of pain and suffering when we attempt to replace his plan with our own. We can complicate our lives by introducing detours into His divine will for our lives. Abraham and Sarah came up with the great idea to use Hagar as a means to fulfill God's promise to give them a child. But in doing so, they tried to do God's will man's way. Saul sought God's aid by offering sacrifices to Him, but he failed to do it God's way. Instead, he took on the role of the priest himself and brought down God's wrath rather than His blessing. Peter tried to dissuade Jesus from fulfilling God's will

concerning His death. He forbade Jesus from carrying out the Father's command. But Jesus accused him of siding with the enemy and seeking the will of Satan rather than that of God.

We must be very careful to keep our wills from taking precedence over God's will. It is not that we can stop what He has planned, but we can certainly make the path He has laid out for us more difficult. Like a driver who refuses to use their GPS, we can wander off the path and find ourselves seemingly lost and delayed in our journey. Still, God continues to recalibrate our way, providing us with another route to reach the destination He has in store for us. Thankfully, many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.