

Confronting Life's Giants

Lessons From David In Facing Tough Times

Studies in 1 & 2 Samuel

STUDY 2: MOVING FROM FEAR TO FAITH

INTRODUCTION

A Love So Deep

Willem Ten Boom and his family lived above his watch-making shop in Haarlem, Holland. They were a devoted Christian family, opening their home to those in need. During WWII, when Jews were fleeing from Nazi soldiers, the Ten Boom family put their faith into action. They hid fugitives—Jews and members of the Dutch underground—in the spaces between their walls. Willem and two of his daughters, Corrie and Betsie, became heavily involved with the Dutch underground. In addition to hiding fugitives in their own home, they arranged for fugitives to be hidden in the homes of their friends. It is estimated that the lives of at least 800 Jews and members of the Dutch underground were saved through them.

In 1944, the Ten Booms were betrayed. The Gestapo subsequently raided their home. Corrie and Betsie, along with their siblings and those who visited their home that day, were arrested. The Gestapo searched their home but never found the fugitives safely hidden behind a false wall. Two days later, the Dutch Resistance managed to relocate the fugitives to other safe houses.

Corrie and Betsie were moved to the Ravensbruck Concentration Camp near Berlin. They spent their time witnessing to other inmates, many of whom became believers amidst their deplorable conditions. Four of the Ten Boom family members died in concentration camps, including Betsie. Shortly after Betsie's death, and after spending ten months in Ravensbruck, Corrie was released. She was 53 years old. Upon her release, Corrie began a world-wide ministry. Her message was simple: God is victorious. She spent nearly four decades traveling to more than 60 countries, sharing the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

In 1947, three years after her release, Corrie took the gospel message to Munich, Germany. She mentioned Ravensbruck in her talk. A former guard from Ravensbruck attended her presentation. Afterwards, Corrie anxiously watched this man approach her. The man told her that he had been a guard there. Although she remembered him well, he did not remember her. He shared his testimony with her, explaining that he had become a Christian and that he knew that God had forgiven him for the things he had done while at Ravensbruck. He asked for Corrie's forgiveness as well. Despite feeling horrified at his request, she asked Jesus to help her forgive this man. As she clutched his hand, God was once again victorious: through Him, Corrie Ten Boom forgave her former prison guard.

From 1 Samuel 19-24, David becomes a fugitive. As you experience David's dire circumstances, think back on the words of Corrie Ten Boom: "There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still."

1 Samuel 19:18-24

18 When David had fled and made his escape, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went to Naioth and stayed there. 19 Word came to Saul: "David is in Naioth at Ramah"; 20 so he sent men to capture him. But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came upon Saul's men and they also prophesied. 21 Saul was told about it, and he sent more men, and they prophesied too. Saul sent men a third time, and they also prophesied. 22 Finally, he himself left for Ramah and went to the great cistern at Secu. And he asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" "Over in Naioth at Ramah," they said. 23 So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. 24 He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why people say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

1 Samuel 21

1 David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?" 2 David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. 3 Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find." 4 But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women." 5 David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" 6 So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.

7 Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd. 8 David asked Ahimelech, "Don't you have a spear or a sword here? I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king's business was urgent." 9 The priest replied, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here; it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one." David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

10 That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. 11 But the servants of Achish said to him, "Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances: " 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands?'" 12 David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath. 13 So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard. 14 Achish said to his servants, "Look at the man!

He is insane! Why bring him to me? 15 Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?"

1 Samuel 22:1-5

1 David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. 2 All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him. 3 From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and said to the king of Moab, "Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?" 4 So he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him as long as David was in the stronghold. 5 But the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah." So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.

1 Samuel 23

1 When David was told, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors," 2 he inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" The LORD answered him, "Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah." 3 But David's men said to him, "Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!" 4 Once again David inquired of the LORD, and the LORD answered him, "Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand." 5 So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. He inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah. 6 (Now Abiathar son of Ahimelech had brought the ephod down with him when he fled to David at Keilah.)

7 Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah, and he said, "God has handed him over to me, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars." 8 And Saul called up all his forces for battle, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. 9 When David learned that Saul was plotting against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod." 10 David said, "O LORD, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. 11 Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O LORD, God of Israel, tell your servant." And the LORD said, "He will." 12 Again David asked, "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will." 13 So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there. 14 David stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands. 15 While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. 16 And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. 17 "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this." 18 The two of them made a covenant before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.

19 The Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and said, "Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hakilah, south of Jeshimon? 20 Now, O king, come down whenever it pleases you to do so, and we will be responsible for handing him over to the king." 21 Saul replied, "The LORD bless you for your concern for me. 22 Go and make further preparation. Find out where David usually goes and who has seen him there. They tell me he is very crafty. 23 Find out about all the hiding places he uses and come back to me with definite information. Then I will go with you; if he is in the area, I will track him down among all the clans of Judah."

24 So they set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the Desert of Maon, in the Arabah south of Jeshimon. 25 Saul and his men began the search, and when David was told about it, he went down to the rock and stayed in the Desert of Maon. When Saul heard this, he went into the Desert of Maon in pursuit of David. 26 Saul was going along one side of the mountain, and David and his men were on the other side, hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his forces were closing in on David and his men to capture them, 27 a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land." 28 Then Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to meet the Philistines. That is why they call this place Sela Hammahlekoth. 29 And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of En Gedi.

Psalm 27:1-4; 14

- 1 The LORD is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?
- 2 When evil men advance against me
to devour my flesh,
when my enemies and my foes attack me,
they will stumble and fall.
- 3 Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then will I be confident.
- 4 One thing I ask of the LORD,
this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.
- 14 Wait for the LORD;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.

Psalm 31:1-5

- 1 In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame;

- deliver me in your righteousness.
- 2 Turn your ear to me,
 come quickly to my rescue;
 be my rock of refuge,
 a strong fortress to save me.
- 3 Since you are my rock and my fortress,
 for the sake of your name lead and guide me.
- 4 Free me from the trap that is set for me,
 for you are my refuge.
- 5 Into your hands I commit my spirit;
 redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.

OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

1 Samuel 19:18-24

David fled . . . and came to Samuel to Ramah. Samuel was living in virtual retirement in Ramah, about three miles northeast of Saul's capital of Gibeah. Saul, having found out David's asylum, sent three successive squads of soldiers to seize him. The emphasis of the account is on the contagious nature of this form of ecstatic prophetism. Here it is a group phenomenon and contagious and that the source is "the Spirit of the Lord." But why the demented Saul should be so responsive to the divine impulse is unexplained. Is Saul also among the prophets?—"Saul among the prophets" has been treated as if it is an allusion to proverbial expression. If there was such a proverb, it meant to convey something most improbable, like a "fish out of water." The thought is that such ecstatic actions are not Israelite. It is not like the form of prophecy we call charismatic. It is closer to the performance of the Canaanite prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:26-29) than to that of any major Hebrew prophets.

1 Samuel 21

David is heading southward, fleeing like an escaped convict, alone. Nob was perhaps four or five miles southeast of Gibeah. Scholars believe that the great sanctuary at Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines immediately after their crushing defeat of the Israelites at Aphek when the Ark was captured. The families of priests who had served at Shiloh then moved to Nob, where, as this chapter shows, a major sanctuary had been established. Ahimelech was the son of Ahitub and now chief priest of the Nob sanctuary and grandson of Eli. The priesthood in Israel was hereditary, as it was in Egypt, Assyria, Greece, and Phoenicia. The eighty-five priests at Nob were probably closely related by blood, forming a priestly community. The professions and the craft skills tended to be passed along from generation to generation, with most male members of families performing the same function in society. David could appear at such a place for food and a weapon, more easily than he could knock on the door of a typical Israelite home. He was still several miles from his hometown, Bethlehem. Probably he dared travel only at night. Sanctuary was normally expected at a worship center, but the demented Saul violated all such custom when he slaughtered the Nob priests for helping David (1 Sam. 22:16ff). Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David. The circumstances of the sudden

appearance of the military hero, who was alone, suggest that something is wrong in Israel.

Here begins a complicated “cover story,” a complete falsehood. There is no errand for the king; there are no men accompanying him. He embroiders the deceit in 21:5. David probably supposed, like others before him and since, that a lie is excusable if told for the purpose of saving one’s life.

Twelve cakes of pure wheat flour were laid out in two parallel rows of six each, on a table standing in front of the holy of holies. On each Sabbath the priests (and they only) then ate the replaced. Before entertaining the idea that this bread could be lawfully given to David and his squad of men (whom he claimed to rendezvous there), Ahimelech seems to have consulted the oracle (cf. 22:10) as to the course to be followed in this emergency. He then suggests that the bread may be eaten if the men are ritually “clean”—i.e., have gone through the usual purifying preparations for participation in a sacrificial meal. Sexual relations with a woman, even a wife, required purification, not only prior to participation in a sacrifice, but also at the start of a military campaign. It is not known whether Ahimelech’s ruling was justifiable under ritual law or custom, or was just a generous decision, making the ordinance yield to the great law of necessity and mercy

David, having indicated that he has men somewhere in the neighborhood, while really wanting all the bread for his own present and future needs, plunges ahead. His men, he says, obey the sexual taboo before a battle; but then, since no battle is imminent now, he has to add that the men maintain the taboo on sex even when their mission is peaceful and routine. Finally, he suggests there is something specially holy about his present mission, so Ahimelech should have no worry on the question of their purified condition.

So the priest gave him hallowed bread—This is the phrase used in modern translations for “the bread of presence” or “shewbread.” Presumably it was an unleavened bread, seasoned with salt; it was baked the day before the Sabbath and kept warm overnight. The substitution of the new bread was done on the Sabbath.

Doeg, an Edomite—probably a warrior in Saul’s army may have been stationed at Nob as a herdsman for the shrine.

The giant’s sword had apparently been deposited in the sanctuary at Nob as a memorial of the divine goodness in delivering Israel. One wonders whether Ahimelech did not think it highly strange that David, on a mission for the king, did not have his own sword with him. The quality of the metal in the sword would be superior to that of any sword made in Israel, for the Philistines had learned how to produce and use a harder, more durable iron. And of course it was a great prize, and something David could well feel he had grown up to during the days since the man-to-man combat between Goliath and himself.

Achish the king of Gath—one of the five federated cities of the Philistines and the most southerly. It lay well in from the Mediterranean Sea, just outside the southwestern border of Judah. To venture there, he (their greatest enemy and wearing the sword of Goliath) seems to have been foolhardy, and he was

immediately identified. Why he went to Gath is not stated, but he knew that Saul would not pursue him there. David feigned himself mad—The success of such a deception would seem to have rested upon the popular belief of the time that lunatics were possessed by spirits and were not dangerous to normal folk, but simply persons to be avoided as unpleasant. Drooling and foaming at the mouth are symptoms of an epileptic attack.

1 Samuel 22:1-5

David . . . escaped to the cave Adullam—Thousands of caves have been discovered in the limestone and sandstone hills of Palestine and the Transjordan region, some of them showing evidence of continual use in every age, going back to ancient times. Some of the largest are in the region between Bethlehem and the Dead Sea; here the Dead Sea scrolls were found. As places of refuge, caves had, previous to the incident here, been used by Lot (Genesis 19:30) and by Israelites in times of oppression (Judges 6:2; 1 Samuel 13:6). They were also frequently used as tombs (e.g., Genesis 23:11-16) and today they are still used as shelters by shepherds and their flocks. Adullam—a border town in the foothills of west Judah, about twenty miles west southwest of Bethlehem. David's brothers and all his father's house . . . went . . . to him—to escape Saul's reprisals; Saul's rage seems to have sought outlet against all the members of David's family. Every one that was in distress—i.e., malcontents and drop-outs. They probably engaged in forms of banditry. David then went to Mizpeh of Moab. The king of Moab was an enemy of Saul (14:47), and David of course had Moabite connections through Ruth (Ruth 4:22). David therefore felt that an asylum for his parents in Moab would prove safer than their continuing the rough life of outlaw society.

1 Samuel 23

Verses 1-6 Keilah—a fortified border town in the west of Judah, about four miles south of Adullam and eight miles northwest of Hebron. Its inhabitants were Calebites, the clan that ultimately was fully integrated into the tribe of Judah (cf. 1 Chronicles 4:19). David inquired of the Lord—Abiathar brought the Nob ephod with him. It certainly seems that David (and whoever else consulted the oracle), with the priest's participation, asked one or more questions, one at a time, which could be answered by a yes or a no. The sacred lots (Urim and Thummim), kept in the ephod, gave answers in a manner we do not know for certain: perhaps the lots were marked in some way, giving either a yes or a no answer. The significant fact is the complete belief of all participants that it was God who gave the answers.

To repel unprovoked assaults on innocent people who were engaged in their harvest operations was in small part altruistic. Second came the patriotic motive, the deep-seated hatred of the Israelites toward their oppressive, uncircumcised neighbors to the west. Third, to defeat the Philistines would increase David's reputation among his people as a leader and as a man fit to be king. Last, but not least, there would be material rewards, especially food supplies and clothing, from the people of Keilah. David's band was at least part of the time asking for and receiving protection money for providing security to towns and individual farmers in Judah against Philistine raids.

David's band appears fearful, even though by now they must have exceeded four hundred which prompts a second request of God.

Throughout the period of the conquest and the judges, and throughout David's reign, the wars of Israel against outside enemies were the wars of the Lord, or holy wars. Among other ritual acts (e.g., sacrifice, purification) the Lord was to be consulted: his was the decision as to whether the war should be undertaken. Israelite troops were his troops. David, perhaps especially because he had no royal commission to undertake this action, seeks divine guidance, in the same way as would a judge or a king, to provide assurance for his troops and to obtain legitimacy for his action. David routs the Philistines, rescuing Keilah.

Verses 7-13 Here begins the cat-and-mouse game in which Saul attempts to catch David, and the latter artfully escapes time after time. Saul apparently thought he could surround Keilah and catch David while he and his band were enjoying their victory. David is trying to ascertain Saul's response to his presence at Keilah. It became evident, through the ephod, that Saul was coming and that the residents of Keilah would turn David over to Saul, perhaps fearing their town would suffer the same fate as Nob. Some of the militia of Keilah may have joined David, since his band is reported to be about six hundred (23:13).

Verses 14-18 A "wilderness" is any large tract of land or a region that is uncultivated and uninhabited, whether forest or desert, mountain terrain or vast open pasture land. Most of the wildernesses of the Bible took their name from the nearest permanently inhabited center of population. Ziph the town was nearly five miles southeast of Hebron, in the hill country of Judah. The wilderness named after it lay mostly to the east, toward En-gedi (23:29). At great risk to himself, Jonathan comes to see David, apparently to affirm his support for him to become king (23:17).

Verses 19-29 Why the Ziphites remained loyal to Saul, a Benjamite, and were ready to turn over David, one of their own tribe of Judah and already to many a tribal hero, is not known. Were David and his six hundred followers perhaps upsetting their lives? We do not know. Saul seems reluctant to chase David, and asks the Ziphites to obtain more detailed information (23:22,23).

APPLICATION

1. Sometimes the Christian life includes a deep, dark cave.
2. The process of moving from fear to faith begins when you are hurting enough, honest enough, and humble enough.
3. It is not whether we will stumble but where we stumble to that will make a difference.

