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*“Out Of The Pit, In The Spirit”*

*1 SAMUEL 22:1-5*

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## At A Glance

David wasn't always fearless. In 1 Samuel 22, the future king hits rock bottom—hiding in a cave, surrounded by distressed and desperate men, learning the hard way what happens when we rely on ourselves instead of the Lord. Yet even there, God meets him, restores his trust, and guides him forward. This sermon explores how God leads His people not by removing danger, but by walking with us through it.

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## Introduction

Have you ever woken up one morning, laid in bed and wondered to yourself how you ever let things get this bad? You ever think to yourself, how in the world did I get here? How did my world, which once seemed so bright and hopeful come to feel so dark and empty? If so, I think you can relate pretty well to David in today's passage.

In 1 Samuel 22:1–5, the anointed king is humbled—humiliated even. He's hiding, hunted, and surrounded by desperate men. Life must have felt like the “pit” David would later write about in the Psalms. And yet, this cave was not the end of David's story. Mercifully, the Lord met David there, turned his heart from self-reliance to submission, and began to lead him out of the pit like a shepherd through the valley.

If life feels like the pits right now, it doesn't have to always be that way. But what got you in there isn't going to be what gets you out. Let's read our passage and see what and who ultimately drew David out of the cave.

### 1 Samuel 22:1-5

**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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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.” <sup>4</sup>And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. <sup>5</sup>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.**

### How Did He Get Here?

**Verse 1a David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam.**

David departed from where? From Gath—the slain Goliath’s former hometown. Why David thought he would find safety there while carrying Goliath’s sword is beyond me. Fear makes otherwise godly men do strange things.

But if we back up one step further, we see something even more troubling. David is no longer inquiring of the Lord. He is making decisions on his own, taking steps in the flesh to protect himself and provide for himself.

This is a sharp contrast from the David we saw earlier—the David who stood before Goliath with nothing but a sling and a stone and declared, *“I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts.”* 1 Samuel 17:45 This is the David who once trusted God openly and publicly. The David who led armies in and out of battle for the glory of God.

At Nob, David deceived the priest. Scripture records the action without commentary, but we will soon see the devastating consequences and David will acknowledge that what happened as a result was his fault. From there he fled to Gath, where matters went from bad to worse. He pretended to be insane—allowing spit to run down his beard, a sign of humiliation and curse in his world, the same beard that Samuel’s anointing oil would have likely run down.

And now David finds himself hiding in a cave. Caves in the ancient world were often places of burial and concealment. While not every cave functioned as a tomb, the biblical imagination consistently associates “going down,” “the pit,” and “the depths” with death and despair. Later, David would use this language to describe seasons like this one:

*“O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol... you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.”* Psalm 30:3

*“You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep.”* Psalm 88:6

## A Spiritual Purpose

David’s physical location reminds us of his spiritual reality. From all appearances, David is at rock bottom. Biblical authors often include details that serve a spiritual purpose. We shouldn’t allegorize everything we read, but as we study David’s life, it seems right to notice patterns that develop.

We’re seeing a pattern here—David takes matters into his own hands, and the results are humiliation, hiding in a cave, and, as we’ll soon see, decisions that even he later admits contributed to the unjust killing of an entire village at Saul’s command.

David is not morally neutral in this moment. He took matters into his own hands and those actions had devastating consequences, both for himself and innocent bystanders. In real time David was learning what God required of a leader. In hindsight, you and I get to learn it in hindsight.

Now let me be clear: Saul bears enormous guilt here. He is a tyrant pursuing an innocent man. But this is not *the Life of Saul*—it is *the Life of David*. And Scripture does not excuse David’s choices simply because Saul sinned against him. The Bible consistently holds two truths together: You can be sinned against, and still be responsible for your own responses.

## A Gathering of the Broken

**Verses 1b and 2** And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. <sup>2</sup>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.

It is ironic that it would be at David's low point that he suddenly finds himself the commander of a misfit army of **four hundred men**.

David was responsible for the actions he took which led to this. He'll state his responsibility in the passage that follows. But despite that, God had chosen him to be king and He wasn't through with David yet.

Both of these can be true: You are responsible for your life's decisions and the consequences that follow. And God is sovereign over how He uses those consequences to serve His purposes. It doesn't mean that God is guilty of your sin nor does it mean you're less culpable for it.

Joseph told his brothers, *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."* Genesis 50:20

Notice the qualifiers of these people who found refuge in the cave with David – **distress, debt, and bitter in soul**. Sounds to me like the down and out, the lost, the hopeless, the desperate.

David enters the depth of the pit alone and emerges as the leader of a rag-tag Army of misfits. This is a great reminder that God is not the author of sin—but He is the Redeemer of sinners.

### Turning of the Heart

**Verses 3–4 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." 4 And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold.**

Why would David think he would find safe harbor for his parents among the Moabites? For one, an enemy of my enemy is my friend. Certainly the king of Moab was no friend of Saul's. Second, and perhaps more importantly scripturally and providentially, David has Moabite blood in his veins. His father, Jesse, had even more. Jesse was the son of Obed. Obed the son of Boaz. Boaz the husband of? Ruth, the Moabitess.

We should observe the sovereign hand of God in the lives of Elimelech and Naomi, their two sons, their daughters-in-law, namely Ruth. We should see how God moved people in time and space a hundred years earlier and how the fruit of that was protection for David's parents.

What David told the king clues us into this pivotal moment. **"...till I know what God will do for me."** I see a turning point here. This appears to me to be more than a statement; I see a heart change. I see a mindset shift from taking things into his own hands to once again seeking the Lord. From trying to control the outcome, to "letting go and letting God."

David is no longer grasping for control. He is waiting. Once again, we see David trusting in the Lord. The reader should feel a sense of relief that the one chosen by God to lead God's people is once again looking to God for guidance. This is what repentance looks like—not just feeling sorry, but reorienting the heart back toward God.

David was living according to the wisdom that his own son would later pen – *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."* Proverbs 3:5-6

And in His mercy, God guided him—not by removing the danger, but by leading him through it, like a shepherd through the valley of the shadow of death.

**Verse 5 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.**

We know very little about this **prophet Gad**, but we will see him again. Near the end of David's life, God again spoke through Gad—this time to warn David and pronounce judgment for the census. Otherwise, we don't know much about him. Narratively, it's as though God just shows up out of the blue in the presence and guidance of Gad.

In telling David to leave the **stronghold** and **go into the land of Judah**, the Lord was inviting David to stop trusting in himself and start trusting in Him. This is a lesson David must have learned, for later he wrote, *"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."* Psalm 18:2

We cannot expect to experience God as our rock while sheltering in our own stronghold.

## Walking by the Spirit

Scripture never reduces sanctification to a formula, but it does describe patterns.

Paul says, *"Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."* Galatians 5:16

The flesh is not merely bodily desire—it is every impulse to live independently from God. Control. Fear. Pride. Self-protection, all of these are desires of the flesh. When David walked in his flesh, he grew desperate and people suffered. When he walked by the Spirit, he found clarity, courage, and peace—even in danger.

And this struggle is not unique to David. Romans 7 tells us it is the normal Christian fight. The fight for faithfulness is real. When David followed the Spirit, he acted righteously and honorably. When he walked in the flesh, he ended up in the pit. If we glean anything from David's life, we should glean this. The Spirit of God never left David as He did Saul. But there were seasons of David's life that it sure didn't look like he was a man after God's own heart. And the truth is, there are seasons in my life when it doesn't look like that. And there may be seasons like this in your life.

This week I couldn't stop picturing David in that cave—rock bottom, surrounded by desperate men, all of them looking to him to lead. David was afraid, humiliated, and desperate himself. And now the weight of leadership was on him. That pressure will either drive a man to God or break him. And it made me think about modern American families.

## A Word to Men

I'd like to speak carefully—but directly—to men. As I framed David's situation the way I did, in a pit of despair surrounded by bitter, distressed people drowning in debt, I wonder how many of you resonated with that.

Men, I want you to connect the dots here. Ultimately, David put himself in that pit by taking matters into his own hands rather than trusting in the Lord. At this point in his life, David apparently feared man more than God. Not that he shouldn't have left Saul's house, but that in doing so he should have consulted the Lord. We're left believing he did not. And that's where it all began to go wrong.

The lesson for us all is that when we take matters into our own hands, when we walk by the flesh, when we live by fear, pride, control, safety; when we just try to keep the peace in our home rather than accepting the God-given calling to lead, what we can expect is that we, along with our family, pay a price.

But here's the beautiful reality—David didn't need a dramatic performance. A simple, humble trust—**"until I see what the Lord will do for me"**—was enough to turn his heart back toward God. Once again, he was ready to follow the Lord's lead.

I think a lot of men imagine that the path to the right track is too difficult and too complex; that they'll have to undo every failure and right every wrong; that it's too intimidating and it feels easier to just stay in the pit. But what becomes clear from this story in David's life is that a man filled with the Spirit of the Lord is never that far from God, no matter how far away He seems.

It may be that the Lord is letting you take matters into your own hands and allowing you to reap the consequences to show you the inadequacy of self-reliance. But I can tell you this, He is standing ready to lead you when you humble yourself.

Stop trying to control your situation. Stop guarding your pride. Stop leading from a place of fear — whether that's fear of conflict, rejection, or failure. Embrace a little risk and see if the Lord will fail you.

History reminds us we need not fear that. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding and in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make straight your paths.

You very well may have work to do once you leave the pit. There's no magic pill that suddenly makes everything better. But there is something that makes everything, everything, worse: staying in the pit feeling sorry for yourself.

I acknowledge this isn't every husband. Many of you are faithfully trying to lead your family with remarkable grace, even when leadership isn't always welcomed or trusted. The Lord sees you. He sustains you. Pray that you would lead more like Christ, in a way that invites trust and reflects His love. Be patient. Be kind. Love like Christ.

### A Word to Women

Now, let me also speak gently – but directly – to women. Scripture calls you to something equally challenging. Submission is not subservience. It is not weakness, or inferiority. Jesus submitted to God the Father though they are perfectly One. Biblical submission is a Spirit-enabled posture of trust in God's design.

Some women carry immense frustration that has become a root of bitterness because leadership in your home has been inconsistent, immature, misdirected, or misapplied. That's real pain. The people who fled to David had real concerns that required David's real Spirit-led leadership.

But let me caution you: taking control does not heal your pain—it often only deepens it. You were designed to submit to your own husband who was designed to lead you in love. Healing comes when you both humble yourself before the Lord and trust in His good design. God's design for the family is not improved by rejecting it.

And I know this isn't every wife. Many of you are faithfully supporting your husbands with remarkable grace. The Lord sees you. He sustains you. Pray for your husband's growth, trust the Lord with what you cannot control, and keep showing him the kindness and respect of Christ.

### A Word to Singles

If you're single—this is a warning and an invitation. Marriage lived in the flesh is miserable. Marriage lived by the Spirit is hard, but by God's grace it is full of glory. You'll never find a perfect spouse, but you should be looking for a repentant one.

Look for a man or woman with humility. Look for someone who consistently lives with the heart of David when he said, “until I see what the Lord will do for me.” Genuine contrition, genuine desire to follow God’s lead.

### Christ Connection

David’s story points beyond him. Hundreds of years later, another King entered a tomb—not for His sin, but for ours. He didn’t just go into the pit; He conquered it. And the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead now dwells in believers—not to shame you in the pit, but to lead you out of it.

David wrote later, “*He drew me up from the pit of destruction... and set my feet upon a rock.*” Psalm 40:2-4  
That’s not self-help. That’s redemption.

### Final Appeal

Some of you may feel like you are living in a cave right now. There’s no peace. No clarity. No strength. The call today is not to fix everything—but to humble yourself before the Lord. For David, it looked like honoring his parents and waiting on God. For you, it may look like confession. Prayer. Repenting of sin. Letting go of control. No longer fearing man or woman, but fearing God.

To you I say, submit to Jesus. Walk by the Spirit. And trust that the God who meets His servants in the pit is still willing to lead them out in the Spirit.