

---

*“God’s Will, God’s Way”*

*1 SAMUEL 24:1-22*

*FEBRUARY 22, 2026*

*PASTOR BRIAN SMITH*

*WILDWOOD CHURCH*

*EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS*

---

## AT A GLANCE

David had the perfect opportunity to eliminate his greatest enemy. Saul was alone, vulnerable, and within reach. No one would have blamed him for taking the throne by force. But David refused. In this message from 1 Samuel 24, we explore what it means to trust God’s promises without grasping for control. When opportunity looks like permission, how do we know whether it’s providence...or temptation? The will of God must be accomplished in the way of God.

---

## FAITHFUL RESTRAINT

Have you ever had the perfect opportunity to eliminate your biggest problem? The kind of moment where everything lines up — timing, location, leverage — and no one would blame you for doing it? But it felt wrong?

In 1 Samuel 24, David has that moment. The man hunting him enters a cave alone. He’s vulnerable. Exposed. Within reach. David could end it all with one strike. Instead, he chose faithful restraint.

This passage begs the question: When faced with an opportunity, how do you know whether it’s providence...or temptation? One thing is certain, God’s will is *always* done God’s way.

**1 SAMUEL 24:3B-4**

**<sup>3b</sup> Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. <sup>4</sup> 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.’”**

## COVERING HIS FEET

**Verses 1-3a When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, “Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi.” <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself.**

It’s hard to imagine the leader of a nation in a more vulnerable position. He entered the cave to “cover his feet,” a euphemism for defecating.

The only other place this euphemism was used was in Judges 3, the story of Eglon, king of Moab. Killed by Israel’s deliverer, Ehud, he was found dead after his servants waited an embarrassingly long time thinking he was “covering his feet” in his chambers.

With this euphemism, the narrator draws our attention to that story and causes us to wonder, “Will David be the Ehud of his day?” Will Saul die while “covering his feet”?

## TWISTED SCRIPTURE

**3b-4a Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. <sup>4</sup> 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.’”**

David’s men saw this exactly the way you’d expect soldiers to see it – an opportunity to defeat an enemy. Kill the man who has come to kill you.

They lacked spiritual vision, but pretended to have it saying, **the LORD said to you, ‘Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand...’** This statement isn’t recorded anywhere in Scripture. Did they misinterpret or make it up?

## SYMBOLIC ROBE

**Verse 4b Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe.** David responded to his men’s prompting, but not as they had envisioned. Rather than cutting Saul’s throat or running him through with a sword like Ehud, David snuck up and cut off the corner of his robe.

The robe was symbolic. It represented authority. Saul grabbed the corner of Samuel’s tunic and tore it. (1 Sam 15:27) Samuel responded, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you...” (15:28)

Jonathan transferred his royal robe to David, and with it symbolically his right to the throne. (18:4) Here, David cuts the robe. And it pricks David’s heart. This was more than destroying a piece of clothing.

## CONVICTED IN HIS HEART

**Verses 5-7 And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. <sup>6</sup> 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.” <sup>7</sup> 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.**

Cutting the robe likely rendered it ceremonially deficient, symbolically invalidating Saul’s kingship. Even in his restraint, David’s heart convicted him. Who was he to even touch the king’s robe, let alone the king. The kingdom was not David’s to take. It was God’s to give.

David was able to persuade his men and keep them from killing Saul. But many commentators agree **persuade** is too soft a word. He literally “tore his men” with his words. That took some guts.

Meanwhile, Saul, the oblivious recipient of David’s grace, simply gets up and walks out of the cave.

Nevertheless, David recognized the sin of his actions, and he did what the godly do when they know they’ve sinned against the Lord: repent. **LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord.**

Then he *acted* in his repentance.

## DANGEROUS HUMILITY

**Verse 8 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.**

Talk about humility. Saul was hunting David’s life. He tried to pin him to the wall with his spear twice! And rather than falling upon Saul with a sword in the cave, he fell on the ground in contrition.

But this was risky. By going outside the cave, he was making himself vulnerable to Saul’s attack. Nevertheless, David, trusting fully in the Lord, stepped outside and made himself vulnerable.

**Verses 9-11 And David said to Saul, “Why do you listen to the words of men who say, ‘Behold, David seeks your harm?’ <sup>10</sup> 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.’<sup>11</sup> 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.**

David's primary concern was to convince Saul that whatever he thought or heard about him was untrue. He skillfully blames unnamed men rather than Saul. Then like an expert lawyer, he presented material evidence to the contrary. He even calls Saul as his own eyewitness, **your eyes have seen...**

David is vindicated. He's not seeking Saul's life. The proof is in the robe in David's hand and Saul's own eyes. He even refers to Saul as **my father**, and **the Lord's anointed**, both terms of humble respect and deference.

**Verse 12 May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you.**

David is no weakling, trembling in fear. He's humbly standing firm in his faith. He stands upon his conviction of God's promise, and he trusts in God's vengeance. Justice must be done, but David will leave it to the Lord.

#### WHAT ELSE DO YOU EXPECT?

**Verse 13 As the proverb of the ancients says, ‘Out of the wicked comes wickedness.’ But my hand shall not be against you.** Not only is David disavowing himself from the wickedness of killing the king, but he's also subtly calling out Saul's wickedness.

The wicked are going to act wickedly. What else do you expect? But the godly do not have to respond in kind.

**Verse 14 After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea!**

David was saying he's a nobody, a dead dog...no, a flea on a dead dog. And truthfully, apart from God's grace, that was true. There was nothing special about David from a human perspective. But since it was God who chose David to be king, the Lord would have to be one to see it through. That's exactly what David asked for.

**Verse 15 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.”** David said to Jonathan that if there was something he had done deserving death, he wished Jonathan would just put him to death right then. (cf. 1 Samuel 20:8)

But the fact is, he hadn't done anything deserving death. Therefore, he fully entrusted himself to the Lord to deliver him. He's got a clear conscience – something regular confession fosters. And he's got a strong conviction – that the Lord has chosen him to be king and will affect that when it's time.

#### MY SON DAVID

**Verse 16 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.**

Notice an important shift in Saul's demeanor. Ever since Saul tried to pin David to the wall, his favorite way to refer to David was pejoratively as “the son of Jesse,” rather than his name. Now Saul calls him not only **David**, but **my son**. That's interesting, but Saul didn't stop there.

**Verses 17-19 He said to David, “You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.**

Saul had a moment of lucidity in the swirl of paranoia. He's spoken true words, even if these words don't continue to direct his actions. We'll read soon of another search party to seek David's life. (Cf. 1 Samuel 26) But in this moment, he's won over by David's integrity. Saul acknowledges David's righteousness in seeking his good and acknowledges the irony of David's grace toward him. He asks the Lord to **reward David with good**. But he goes further than asking a blessing.

## THE KINGDOM CONCEDED

**Verse 20 And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.** In the previous chapter, Jonathan told David that he would be king over Israel and even his father knew it. (cf. 1 Samuel 23:17) Now Saul confirms it himself.

David was holding a piece of the royal robe in his hand. With it, the kingdom. It was only a matter of time before the Lord established it in fact. The only thing left for Saul to do was beg for terms of peace.

**Verse 21 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."**

Saul knew his days were numbered as king. His only request was that David not cut off his name and lineage. David agrees. Why? Because David is a godly man who trusts the Lord. He didn't need to kill his enemies. Leave vengeance to the Lord.

## PEACE, BUT NOT REALLY

**Verse 22 And David swore this to Saul.** In swearing this oath, he was likely ratifying the oath he previously made with Jonathan. He would fulfill it by showing grace to Saul's offspring Mephibosheth. (cf. 2 Samuel 9)

**Verse 22 concludes Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.** We should notice something important here. David cleared the air with Saul — but he did not return to Saul's house. There is righteousness in that kind of shrewdness. Jesus told us to be *"wise as serpents and innocent as doves."* *Matthew 10:16*

David forgave. David honored the Lord's anointed. But he did not put himself back in the orbit of a man who had repeatedly tried to kill him. That matters.

## FORGIVENESS AND DISTANCE ARE NOT CONTRADICTIONS

To the person who is being threatened or abused: God sees you. He is not indifferent to your suffering. There is no verse in Scripture that commands someone to remain in physical, sexual, or emotional abuse in the name of godliness.

Entrusting yourself to the Lord does not mean eliminating all protective boundaries. David trusted the Lord — and he **went up to the stronghold**.

Hear me carefully: not getting your way is not abuse. Disagreement is not abuse. Firm leadership is not abuse. Accountability is not abuse.

Abuse is abuse. Abuse is a pattern of sinful behavior in which one person uses power, control, or coercion to harm, dominate, or exploit another person. And when that is present, seeking safety and wise counsel is not faithlessness. It is prudence.

If you are in danger, involve appropriate authorities. If you are being harmed, seek help. Bring it into the light. God works in the light. I cannot speak to every situation, and every case carries complexities I cannot address from the pulpit.

But this much is clear from David's life: forgiveness and distance are not contradictions. You can trust the Lord while taking wise steps to protect yourself from harm. David did. Jesus did. Paul did. Here's the facts: Saul wept. Saul said the right words. And then Saul tried to kill David again. Tears do not equate to trust, nor are words always reflective of repentance.

You should pray for transformation. You should hope for redemption. But do not confuse momentary remorse with trustworthy safety. Your Father in heaven does not require you to reenter harm to prove your faith.

Let's wrap up with three points of application and a Christ Connection.

### CLEAR CONSCIENCE

David stepped out of the cave in humility fully entrusting himself to the Lord with a clear conscience. Why? Because when his heart struck him, he repented in his heart and confessed with his mouth.

David neither took advantage of the opportunity nor did he make excuses for what he did. He was sensitive to the Spirit's conviction. Is this not the promise Paul wrote of in his letter to the Galatians? *"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."* Galatians 5:16

How does that work? Sometimes when you're tempted the Spirit says, "Ope. Better not." And you don't. Other times you give in to temptation and the Spirit says, "Ope. You shouldn't have." And you agree.

The more this happens, the more confident you walk through life knowing you're following the Spirit. The more confident you become in making yourself vulnerable in relationships. The more confident you become in giving Jesus your "yes" and waiting for Him to move.

That's the power of a clear conscience. It both leads to, and flows from...

### STRONG CONVICTION

David knew his life was in the palm of God's hand. He knew he was anointed to be king. Jonathan reminded David of this and strengthened David in the Lord. David's strong conviction is what allowed him to exercise uncommon restraint.

The soldiers in the cave must have thought David was insane to not take out his enemy! Surely the Lord has given Saul into your hand!

David was steady. He could have. The robe in his hand was proof. But he didn't. Because wickedness comes from the wicked. David knew the kingdom was not his to take; it was God's to give. Strong conviction governed his actions.

That's the power of strong conviction and it rests in...

### PROVIDENTIAL VENGEANCE

The call to leave vengeance to the Lord is no wet noodle, limp-wristed, sissy response. Listen to some of the prayers of these imprecatory Psalms:

*"...in your faithfulness, put an end to them..." Psalm 54:5*

*"Break the teeth of their mouths, O God..." Psalm 58:6*

*"If only you would slay the wicked, oh God!" Psalm 139:19*

Did you know you can both forgive people and hope in God's real righteous justice?

The hope of a Christian in this unjust, wicked world is that God is a God of justice who has power to slay the wicked. When the Bible says there will be no more suffering, no more pain...and He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, (cf. Revelation 21:4) it's because God has not only welcomed

you into His perfect kingdom forever, He has also destroyed the wicked who caused your pain and tears and suffering. What is the pray-er of these prayers doing except exactly what God commands of us: leaving vengeance to Him.

Jesus tells us to pray for those who persecute us. Pray what?! ‘Lord, bless their families. Bless their businesses? Give them favor?’ No. Lord, bring justice. And if you will, give them mercy unto their salvation. And if they refuse mercy, vindicate Your name.

What do you think the book of Revelation is about? It’s an epic thunderous exclamation of God’s righteous judgment of the wicked and vindication of His people.

To us it may be an enigma to be decoded. But to the persecuted church, it is a drink of cold water for a parched soul. In the words of Dale Davis, “We commit vengeance to the *Lord*, but we commit *vengeance* to the Lord.”

Ah, yes, “There but by the grace of God go I.” Indeed. Had it not been for the grace of God, the wrongs I have committed would be avenged by our righteous God. The hope of grace must be extended even to our enemies because it abounds to us, who were at one time enemies of God. Which brings us to the...

### CHRIST CONNECTION

As we reflect upon this episode in David’s life, we’re confronted with a question. Was this an act of God’s providence...or a test?

I’m not sure we can be certain either way, but it sure appears to be a test of David’s faithfulness. Dale Davis is once again insightful when he states, “The Lord’s will must be achieved in the Lord’s way. The end that God has ordained must be reached by the means that God approves.”

David was presented an opportunity to take the kingdom the easy way – by killing Saul in the cave. Jesus was tempted to take the kingdom the easy way – by submitting to Satan in the wilderness. Satan promised a crown without a cross. Jesus refused it.

David made himself vulnerable, stepping out of the safety of the cave, submitting to the man he called **father**. Jesus stepped out of heaven, submitting to His Father in heaven.

David trusted the Lord with his life. Christ “...continued entrusting Himself to Him to judges justly.” 1 Peter 2:23

David’s reign was established through Saul’s death.

Christ’s reign was established through His own.

Not long after this episode, people bowed before David as king.

The day is coming, and is nearly here, when “*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 2:10-11*

### CONCLUSION

David walked out of that cave with a clear conscience — and an unchanged enemy. He had the opportunity to seize the kingdom. Instead, he chose to wait for God to give it.

The will of God must be accomplished in the way of God. Jesus did the same. He did not grasp the crown. He entrusted Himself to the Father — even unto death — and God established His reign forever.

So when your moment comes, when you could take matters into your own hands, remember: Keep your conscience clean. Stand on the conviction that God will accomplish His promises in His time. And leave vengeance to the Lord.