
“When The Faithful Live By Fear”

1 SAMUEL 27:1-12

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AT A GLANCE

What you do when you're spiritually exhausted and fear wants to take over matters more than you realize. Learn from David's life – when faithful men live by fear, people pay the price.

ROLLER COASTER RIDE

As we continue our series called *Life of David*, we're about to read what I argue might be one of the lowest points of David's life. If you've been paying attention, David's life feels like a roller coaster ride with crazy highs and even crazier lows.

We've already seen an entire village be slaughtered due in part to David's actions. We've seen David lose his ever-loving mind and set out to kill every man of Nabal's house because of disrespect. We've seen David take a second wife against God's law.

And today we're going to see what fear does in the life of a faithful man. Let me just tell you, it's not pretty. But I don't think I need to tell you that, do I? You've experienced it yourself.

As we study through David's life, think of how fear might be influencing your own right now. The smart learn from their mistakes. The wise learn from the mistakes of others.

1 SAMUEL 27:1

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.”

BE SLOW TO JUDGE

I'll be honest, when I first read this, I thought, “Man, come on David!” He saw how God worked things out with Nabal. He saw how God turned things around with Saul, twice! But here he goes letting fear lead him again!

But before we go judging David, let's think about what we just read. **Then David said in his heart...** V. Philips Long says, this “conveys a sense of emotional exhaustion after two recent interactions with Saul.” In other words, David was emotionally broken. He was spent. Have you ever gotten to a place that you were so low you had nothing left? That's where David was right here.

So, let's be slow to judge David because it's easy to judge a man. It's harder to sympathize with him and learn from his mistakes.

SPIRITUAL BURNOUT IS REAL

Listen, we need to recognize spiritual emptiness, spiritual burnout, spiritual exhaustion for what it is. And men especially, we have a hard time admitting weakness. We deny it. But the truth is it's real and most of us in this room have experienced it or are walking in it right now.

What you do from that place of spiritual burnout, that brokenness matters more than you could possibly know. If you say in your heart, fill in the blank...whatever it is you fear or dread, and then you take steps to deal with that in your own strength and understanding, you're going to pay the price and others may also pay the price.

You need to be very careful not to listen to a broken, empty heart. David had just experienced a spiritual highlight in his life. God had dealt with two major enemies in ways he'd never imagine. And right there on the tail end of those victories comes a fall. David knew God was for him. But fear told him something else.

Here's our first lesson:

1. FEAR DISTORTS WHAT WE KNOW TO BE TRUE

David talks himself into a future God already ruled out – that Saul would kill him. When fear takes over, you start making decisions based on imagined outcomes instead of God's promises

Let's not miss the pressure David was facing. He's got the pressure of providing for and protecting his family, as well as his men and their families. So, you've got a husband and leader, and everyone is looking to him for direction and guidance and protection.

That's a ton of pressure. And pressure can make people do things they regret. Things they wish they hadn't. It can lead people to chart a path into dangerous territory, which is exactly what David did.

VERSES 2 – 4

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. ³And 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. ⁴And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him.

This is like de ja vu. David already escaped to Achish. And it ended in his humiliation. So why is he returning? Why does any man return to his old patterns of destructive behavior? Why does anyone go back to the things that nearly destroyed them?

Fear has a way of blinding us to the consequences we endured last time and more importantly to the potential consequences we may face this time. Fear puts blinders on us and all we can see is the threat or the anxiety or the possible disappointment or the loss and it causes us to ignore everything else.

VERSES 5-7

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?" ⁶So that day Achish gave him Ziklag. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. ⁷And the number of the days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months.

The first time David went to Gath by himself. This time he went with an army and their families. Achish saw an opportunity to use David and his army as a mercenary force.

More than that, Achish was now aware of the tension that existed between Saul and David. He likely perceived David as an outlaw, a usurper to Saul's throne. This was good for Achish, because "An enemy of my enemy is my friend."

Ziklag had been assigned to the tribe of Judah already, but the Israelites failed to conquer it when they entered the land. Now that David occupies it, it has come into its proper possession of the **kings of Judah.**

HOW PRAGMATISM DECEIVES US

Let's just pause here and acknowledge that our lives are rarely a clean, smooth line of clearly right or clearly wrong actions and consequences. Sometimes the Lord allows something good to happen even when we're bad.

What comes to mind immediately is out of wedlock pregnancy. It is not God's will that two people have sex outside of marriage. But when they have a child, you don't look at that child and think – bad. You think – blessing. That child's life is a blessing. That child matters. God has a purpose and plan for that child.

But that doesn't negate the sin. And we need to be able to discern these things. Just because God used this to achieve His purpose and worked it out for the good of His people doesn't mean that the actions, or motives, were right.

This is where pragmatism deceives us. Pragmatism says, "It worked out ok, so it must have been ok." No, God is not primarily concerned with outcomes, He's primarily concerned with the heart.

This is a classic example – David let fear drive him back into the realm of God's enemies and God used that to deliver to Judah land that they failed to capture. And we need to see that David was wrong for it.

VERSES 8-10

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. ⁹And 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. ¹⁰When 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."

Let's pause here briefly and acknowledge the ban was given to Israel against God's enemies in Deuteronomy 20. Many of these tribes were supposed to be slaughtered as God executed His judgment upon them. That may be hard to swallow. Listen, every person who has ever lived is going to be subject to God's judgment one day. Except by His saving grace, all humanity is condemned already, to quote Jesus in John 3:18.

So, the fact that God would use His people, chosen only by His grace, to execute judgment upon these people is His prerogative. He's the holy Creator God.

But is that what David was doing? Is David fulfilling the ban? No, he's compromising his integrity in order to protect himself.

This is our second lesson:

2. FEAR DRIVES US TO COMPROMISE FOR CONTROL

Instead of waiting on God, David manufactured his own safety. The fact that this move works out, makes it all the more dangerous. Fear says: *"Do whatever it takes to feel secure now."*

Let's pick back up in **verse 11. 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.**

This wasn't a one-time thing, it was **his custom**. This is what David did over and over again, and the author tells us why he did it – so he wouldn't be caught. David brought goods and animals back to Achish as a sort of tribute for letting him live in the land and he killed every man and woman alive to cover his tracks.

This is our third and final lesson:

3. FEAR TRAPS US IN PATTERNS WE HAVE TO MAINTAIN

One compromise leads to another: raid → lie → cover tracks. Because David felt the need to appease Achish with goods and supplies, he had to make raids. Because he made raids on Achish's own people, he had to kill everyone alive. Fear doesn't just lead you somewhere—it locks you into a system you have to keep feeding.

Remember, this key feature in 1 & 2 Samuel. When David seeks the Lord, God shows up and David does what is right. When he doesn't, things go sideways.

So, when David does something questionable, the first thing you and I ought to ask is, "Where is the Lord?" If the Lord is absent from the narrative, you can pretty much bank on the fact that this was not right.

And was God here in this passage? No, David didn't "say to the Lord." David "said in his heart."

Brother's and sisters, this is everything! Where did David look for answers? Who did he consult?

The answer is his own broken, fearful heart. That's a dangerous thing to follow. And this last verse shows us what could have been, had the Lord not intervened.

VERSE 12

And Achish trusted David, thinking, "He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant."

David was on the path to perpetual slavery to his new master Achish. He traded one selfish king for another. Was David actually doing what Achish thought? Nope, but it reveals Achish's heart and mind. He's brought David into his own land, did David a "favor" by giving him Ziklag, and now we know why. Achish was thought he was using David for personal gain.

Folks, we don't have to pretend this story in David's life was pretty. It wasn't. It's another reminder that leaders fail us. They disappoint us. They act without discernment. They act without wisdom. Even faithful leaders, like David. They have great victories one moment, then walk into great failure the next.

Once again, we see when David operates according to his own understanding, people suffer and die. What's the natural conclusion? I don't want to be too simplistic, but it seems to be: live by faith and you and everyone in your realm of responsibility is most likely going to thrive. Live by fear and you can expect suffering and even death.

HOW DO WE MAKE SENSE OF THIS?

David is still learning what it means to walk with God. He's still growing in his faith and faithfulness. And sometimes, like in this story, David just fails. If there's a way to make sense of this story in David's life, Romans 7 seems to be it.

So let's look at Romans 7 as we wrap up. In verse 15 Paul says, "*For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*" *Romans 7:15*

You ever feel that way? Conflicted. Defeated. Broken.

“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.” Romans 7:18-19

The same destructive habits. The same vices. The same sins. The same decision-making process.

“For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am!” Romans 7:22-24a

“Captive.” “Servant forever,” Achish thought. Maybe you think so, too. Maybe you think you’re just doomed to this cycle of disappointment and failure. “Wretched man!”

But that’s not the end of the chapter. No, Paul asks a question, *“Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Romans 7:24b*

WHO WILL DELIVER YOU?

If this is you today; if you’re resonating with David and you know you’ve let fear drive you, you hate it, you wish you could do something about it, you’re feeling like a loser, this is the question you should be asking today. Who will deliver me? Because you know you can’t do it. You’re getting exactly what you’re capable of producing.

You need someone else. You need a deliverer, don’t you? Who is it? *“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Romans 7:25*

Brother and sister, we are awful when it comes to following our hearts. We feel something and fear sets in and we scramble to protect ourselves or provide for ourselves or comfort ourselves, whatever it may be. And we wonder why we keep ending in up in our own preverbal Gath and why we keep doing what we hate.

So what do we do with this? We don’t excuse David—and we don’t distance ourselves from him either. Because if we’re honest, we’ve all had moments where fear took the wheel and we ended up somewhere we never thought we’d go.

The warning is clear: when we stop trusting God, we don’t just drift away, we drag others with us. But our hope is just as clear: God is not finished with fearful, failing people. He is a deliverer.

So don’t listen to your fearful heart. Preach to it. And when you feel trapped in patterns you hate, don’t ask, “How do I fix this?” but “Who will deliver me?”

And the answer is the same for David, for Paul, and for you: Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE LORD’S SUPPER REMINDS US

David, a man after God’s own heart, still let fear drive him—and people suffered for it. But Jesus, the true and better King, never once gave in to fear. He trusted the Father perfectly, even when it led Him to the cross.

And at this table of the Lord’s Supper, we’re reminded of two things:

- His body was broken for our failures
- His blood was shed for our compromises

So we don’t come here pretending we’ve consistently lived by faith—we come confessing that we haven’t. But we also come remembering that where we failed, Christ was faithful. When you take the bread and the cup do so with that in mind—not trusting your heart, but trusting your Savior.