

The Life of David: When Fear and Desperation Ruled

I Samuel 21:9-15/Psalm 56

None of us know what will be written across the pages of life tomorrow. So God invites us to cling to Him, since He already knows what lies ahead. We cling to God more and more through His promises, as we see how precarious life can get. If we don't start a habit of clinging to the promises of God, sooner or later we'll end up falling apart during times of living fear and desperation like David did.

As we turn to James 4, we will see the spiritual principle David had to learn the hard way. How swiftly David's life changed from unbelievably good, to incredibly bad. Everything had become a disaster. When we look after a while in I Samuel 21, we will find David is all alone and afraid. David never anticipated the turn of events he was facing. In quick succession: he lost his job, he was separated from his family, he lost his closest friend, he lost all feelings of security, and he was facing great danger. David was feeling the upheavals:

When Life Suddenly Changes

This sudden reversal of his life led David into a time of great fear and desperation. David failed because he momentarily took his eyes off the Lord, just like we often do; but he snapped out of his tailspin into fear, and got back on course in a short time by clinging to the promises of God. What made David God's man was the truth of God in his heart to which he held tightly.

Tonight when sudden reversals hit us, and our perception of our security gets shattered, and fears lurk around each turn in the pathway of life—be sure that like David, you are clinging to the promises of God!

But before we turn back to David's life, look with me at James 4:13-17¹, a strong reminder that God's Word asks us to each pause and reflect upon the brevity of our life; and then ponder how God wants us to live each day.

James 4:13-17 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; 14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a

¹ 080106AM GEM-09

vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

We like David have a choice to live a life by faith or by sight. If we live just humanly, with what little we can see, we will often be fearful, confused, anxious, and desperate. But, if we live by faith, like David learned to do, we can live through each day's unexpected twists and turns:

Clinging to God's Promises

A few months ago I stood with a group of Bible students looking over the birthplace of King David. We were just five miles south of Jerusalem in Bethlehem, hometown of David. As we looked across the hills of Bethlehem we were standing on one of the most sobering spots in all of the Holy Land.

We had climbed up the artificial mountain fortress built by Herod the Great as his own monumental tomb. That third largest palace of the ancient world, called the Herodion, had hidden the exact burial place of Herod for over 2,000 years—until May 7th, 2007; when an Israeli archaeologist's persistent thirty-five years of diggings finally found Herod's burial place.

King Herod, infamous for his murderous reaction to Christ's birth, had gained the whole world in his day. Humanly speaking, he was at the pinnacle of human success:

- He was a trusted and rewarded friend of Augustus Caesar, ruler of most of the world in that day;
- He was a world-class builder, held in awe during his lifetime, and still holding world records in architectural accomplishments;
- He was fabulously wealthy, held absolute power of life and death over his people—and did just about anything he wanted to do for most of his 69 years of life on earth.

But at his death, what of all that wealth, power, and status—that he had held onto so tightly, did he take with him? The answer we all know deep in our souls is that: **Herod took nothing into the Grave.**

Death stripped everything away from him, just like it does all humans. We all are stripped of everything at our last breath except one thing—the promises of God to which we cling by faith. Nothing else stays with us.

Our bodies are destroyed by death. All of our friends, family and possessions are left behind—and we hurtle out into eternity with nothing, **except the promises of God.**

Standing on that mountainside, surrounded by the dust and rubble of Herod's Tomb, I asked each of those Bible students:

- What promises of God are you holding onto today?
- Have you made those promises of God your very own by faith?
- Which ones do you plan to you cling to, as you leave this life?

Our Life is But a Vapor

David's fear at the unexpected and swift change in events is a reminder to all of us. We are just as sturdy as a wisp or smoke, or a swirling vapor. James said it well that none of us know what lies ahead; none but God.

You see as we get older, or when we get sick, or if we get terribly hurt in an accident and lay in a hospital bed somewhere, nearly everything is taken away. Health, strength, mobility, freedom all are gone for the moment. It is often then that we realize how frail, weak, and fragile we are. It is then, as we think through our life that we feel around for what we are really holding onto.

Don't wait for the doctor's office, or the emergency room, or the ambulance. Why not pause for a moment and ask your self what promises of God's Word YOU are holding onto, that you have instantly available.

Here are a few of the handful of promises that I personally cling to by faith. See if you know them too:

- John 3:16. Why not say that one with me now? "For God so loved—"
- Psalm 16:11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence *is* fullness of joy; At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore.
- Psalm 23:4 "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
- Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all—"
- Hebrews 13:5 For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
- I John 1:7: and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin

Remember that you get to pick up as many of those as you care to hold onto. You can carry them through life, using them as often as you want. They never wear out or get old. And, in your weakest moments, and darkest days they will shine brighter and brighter.

As we pick up with David's life in I Samuel 21, we are coming to a time when fear and desperation are ruling, instead of God and His promises.

And just like we find when we fail, so David lived to regret his words and actions here.

But the blessing is that His God is our God who forgives, restores, and loves us the same whether we obey or not.

When Fear Rules Bad Choices Lurk

The setting for this next event of I Samuel 21 is after stopping at Nob to get food and a sword. David with Goliath's sword in hand, runs from Saul, departs the borders of Israel, and tries to hide in the enemy territory of the Philistines.

The fear and desperation that would make a man run into the most dangerous place he could ever go, to escape other danger, is hard to comprehend. But note what David does, as we stand to read vs. 9-15:

I Samuel 21:9-15 So the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it. For there is no other except that one here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me." 10 Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. 11 And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying: 'Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands?'" 12 Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. 13 So he changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard. 14 Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? 15 Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"

Life is full of unexpected twists—those sudden changes we never see coming.²

Unanticipated changes often lead to a gnawing loneliness, one of the most powerful human emotions. If you live long enough you will lose your spouse, your job, your best friend, or your health. None of these are expected, they just happen. What we see in David's life is:

When the Unexpected

² 050806AM COR-10 WN-31; 050806PM COR-11 WN-32

Became Overwhelming

Just because we love and serve the Lord doesn't mean we will miss the storms and skids of life. When the unexpected becomes overwhelming, and we feel as if we can't go on any longer, what can we do? We can remember that David has shared his spiritual secrets in divinely inspired psalms to help us be victorious in our own unending struggles.

As he continued to run for his life, David ended up in the Philistine city of Gath—not by choice, but under duress. He was soon captured, and the intense fear he was suffering caused Psalm 56 to literally pour out of him by the inspiration of God, please turn there with me.

First, if we carefully consider this psalm's superscription, which is like a map to David's life, you'll find it quite insightful:

Psalm 56

To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Silent Dove in Distant Lands."

Most Bible commentators believe Psalm 56 was actually written while David was imprisoned.³ The title of the song—"The Silent Dove in Distant Lands"—is reminiscent of Psalm 55:6 when David said: ... *"Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest."* That provides a valuable insight into what David was feeling during this dangerous time. He longed to escape from the pain of his troubles!

What could be better than having wings like a dove in a circumstance like this? The God who *made* the dove—the God who could give David wings! For David was convinced it was better to have the Lord *with* him than to merely escape his problems.

Real victory is not escaping all our problems; real victory is not evading every difficult situation we can possibly evade. The greatest triumph comes from glorifying God as we go through each difficult trial *with* Him. That's what David did; he sought the Lord. David cried out to Elohim—the Creator of the dove and everything else—because he had confidence that God cared for him!

A Michtam of David when the Philistines captured him in Gath.

"Michtam" is a Hebrew word for cutting or engraving; it means "something that penetrates." So David was saying, "This is something that went really deep in my life!" The Michtam's description of David being "captured" doesn't just mean "came across him"; it actually means "caught him, bound, and imprisoned him"—David was a captive in Gath.

³ I recommend noting 1 Samuel 21:10-12 beside the Psalm 56 title in your Bible.

¹ *Be merciful to me, O God, for man would swallow me up; Fighting all day he oppresses me.* ² *My enemies would hound me all day, For there are many who fight against me, O Most High.*

David was all alone—feeling desperate. He was in a foreign situation with no family, no friends, and no other human support base during this unexpected twist in his life.⁴ What type of fear would make someone run away from home and into the hometown of the very person you killed in public, before thousands of witnesses? That's right, this is Gath, the hometown of the best known fighter of the Philistine nation—Goliath. For David to walk into the city where his picture was on a thousand "Most Wanted" posters means that he was utterly desperate:

³ *Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.* ⁴ *In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?*

David was afraid—he knew he'd made a huge mistake. He had just fled the priestly city of Nob and now here he was, all alone, walking into Gath with the accent of a Hebrew from Judea and carrying the one-of-a-kind sword that had been held by Gath's champion, Goliath! He probably figured that with Goliath's sword on his shoulder he could handle anything—all he had to do was wait it out until things cooled down back home. But David had no idea what he was walking into! So the Philistines quickly spotted him, caught him, and imprisoned him. What David was really saying is that humans can't do anything to us that God isn't superintending and in control of. He therefore appealed to the Lord to rescue him:

⁵ *All day they twist my words; All their thoughts are against me for evil.* ⁶ *They gather together, They hide, they mark my steps, When they lie in wait for my life.* ⁷ *Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, O God!*

In the midst of all the evil assailing him, David cried out, "You're the One who's in control, O God!"

⁸ *You number my wandering Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book?*

The "*tears into Your bottle*" phrase speaks loudly of God's promise to never leave us, never forget us, and never be indifferent to the cares of any of His children. Nothing is too small for God! Not even the tears we shed. The Lord is so compassionate that He keeps track of all our wanderings—and all our tears! Wow! Don't you find His compassion *amazing*?

⁹ *When I cry out to You Then my enemies will turn back; This I know, because God is for me.*

That was David's triumphant reality. He said, "It doesn't matter if everybody else is against me because God is FOR me!"

¹⁰ *In God (I will praise His word), In the LORD (I will praise His word),* ¹¹ *In God I have put my*

⁴ David had no army at this time because they didn't start joining him until after he'd escaped from Gath and hid out in the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1-2).

*trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?*¹² *Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God; I will render praises to You,*¹³ *For You have delivered my soul from death. Have You not kept my feet from falling, That I may walk before God In the light of the living?*

What a testimony! Psalm 56 has been very popular over the years. In fact, this Psalm was quoted by the writer of Hebrews 13:6 (Psalm 56:4, 11); and by Paul in Romans 8:31 (Psalm 56:9); and most of all by Jesus Himself when He said: ... *"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life"* (John 8:12).

Real life is only lived in Christ; real light comes only by the sunshine of His face; real peace is only in His Presence—and that is what David found! The real lessons of this incredible Psalm are found in the:

Spiritual Resolves Of Psalm 56

How did David survive the crippling fear and desperation he felt in this horribly foreign place? By clinging to the promises God had made. In Psalm 56 David frames his resolves—which are the expressions of his choice to cling to the promises of God, no matter what.

Here they are, why not mark them in some way in your Bible. Then when fears and unexpected reversals come your way, you can remember what David learned:

1. *Whenever I am afraid, **I will trust in You*** (v. 3). Being all alone and afraid makes for a very volatile situation. David was saying, "When I feel fear coming on—that cold wave of terror that floods my soul—I choose to trust in You, oh God!"
2. *In God **I will praise His word*** (4a). How much of God's Word did David have? He had the Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.⁵ While some may consider the first five books of the Bible as boring, they were David's passion—the very words of the God of the Universe speaking to him! Thus he chose to completely trust such a powerful God—no matter what.
3. *In God **I have put my trust*** (4b). David was saying, "Lord, I made a huge miscalculation in coming to Gath, and I shouldn't have carried Goliath's sword with me. But I've been caught off guard and desperately need Your help because I don't know what they're planning to do to me. However, I do know this: I choose to put my trust in You!"
4. ***I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?*** (4c). Jesus said to not fear those who can merely destroy our bodies, but to fear the One who can cast both our bodies and souls into hell.⁶ Martin Luther put it this way: Fear the Lord and you won't have to fear anybody else. So David said, "I choose to fear You, oh Lord. No one

⁵ He may also have had the history of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and some of Samuel that was still being worked on.

⁶ Matthew 10:28

else is as awesome!”

5. *When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this **I know**, because **God is for me*** (v. 9). When a person applies for a job, a scholarship, an appointment to a military academy, or any other position, it’s common to look for someone “on the inside” with enough clout to pave the way. But David already knew the One “on the inside” who was for him—GOD. Can you find anyone higher or more powerful than the Lord? A wise person once said: God plus one equals a majority. In other words, ... *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:31). You never have to feel alone, even if the majority in your situation is against you: GOD plus YOU equals an unbeatable MAJORITY.
6. *In God **I will praise His word*** (v. 10a). Rather than letting fear defeat him as the Philistines ranted and raved around him, bragging that they caught the Goliath-killer, David chose to focus on praising God for his Word and a safe refuge.
7. *In the Lord **I will praise His word*** (v. 10b). What Word was David holding onto while he was in prison? He was probably recalling 1 Samuel 16 when God anointed him to be the next king. He therefore said to God, “No matter how it looks right now, I know I’m going to get out of this because You said I’m going to be the king someday. That has to mean You will rescue me in this terrible situation!” So in faith, choosing to trust the Lord, he praised God’s Word because he knew he could count on it.
8. *In God **I have put my trust*** (v. 11a). This is a renewal of the same choice he made in verse 4.
9. ***I will not be afraid**. What can man do to me?* (v. 11b). This is a renewed choice to keep his eyes on God rather than his circumstances!

Now back to where we started:

Clinging to the Promises of God

What promises of God are you holding onto this moment? If everything you have on earth was suddenly snatched from you—family, house, money, job, health, friends, and possessions, what would you have left? Take it a step further, because that is what death does. So think for just a moment about the instant of your death.

At the instant of death EVERYTHING is stripped away from us, including our body—except for one thing. We still have one thing we can hold onto at death and that is God’s promises. They can never be taken away from us.

Knowing God’s promises give us what the author of Hebrews calls an “anchor for our souls” (Hebrews 6:19). That is what keeps us from being blown around, dashed upon the rocks by every storm of life or confused by every new teaching we hear.

Lives anchored in the Word of God are stable, balanced and usable for God.

With that in mind, how many of His promises are you holding onto right now?

Those promises can never be taken from you.

Those promises are the anchor for you soul.

Those promises help each of us through the unexpected reversals that can lead to fear and desperation, or peace and spiritual growth.

Why not bow your heart before God, look inside and do a promise inventory.

Quietly repeat to the Lord in your mind the verses that you find in your soul, that you use to cling to God through His Word.

The choice to cling to God's promises is yours.