

# Great Distress vs. Great Distress

David the Fugitive Pt.13  
1 Samuel 29:1-30:20 6-7-2009

Summary: David was rejected by the Philistine commanders because they (rightly) assumed he would turn on them in battle. Then Ziklag was burned and his wives taken along with all the other women and children, and his men speak of stoning him. This brings David to the same Great Distress as Saul in chapter 28. But Saul turned to Endor and David strengthened himself in the Lord. The result for Saul was loss of strength; the result for David was not only strength, but also guidance, hope, favor with men, kindness, success, courage, restoration of all that was lost, wisdom, enduring impact, and generosity. It seemed at the time that Saul was to be envied and David pitied, yet the big picture of Scripture shows it was just the opposite.

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**1 Samuel 29:1** The Philistines gathered all their forces at Aphek, and Israel camped by the spring in Jezreel. **2** As the Philistine rulers marched with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish. **3** The commanders of the Philistines asked, "What about these Hebrews?" Achish replied, "Is this not David, who was an officer of Saul king of Israel? He has already been with me for over a year, and from the day he left Saul until now, I have found no fault in him." **4** But the Philistine commanders were angry with him and said, "Send the man back, that he may return to the place you assigned him. He must not go with us into battle, or he will turn against us during the fighting. How better could he regain his master's favor than by taking the heads of our own men? **5** Isn't this the David they sang about in their dances: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'?" **6** So Achish called David and said to him, "As surely as the LORD lives, you have been reliable, and I would be pleased to have you serve with me in the army. From the day you came to me until now, I have found no fault in you, but the rulers don't approve of you. **7** Turn back and go in peace; do nothing to displease the Philistine rulers." **8** "But what have I done?" asked David. "What have you found against your servant from the day I came to you until now? Why can't I go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" **9** Achish answered, "I know that you have been as pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God; nevertheless, the Philistine commanders have said, 'He must not go up with us into battle.' **10** Now get up early, along with your master's servants who have come with you, and leave in the morning as soon as it is light." **11** So David and his men got up early in the morning to go back to the land of the Philistines, and the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

**1 Samuel 30:1** David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, **2** and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way. **3** When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. **4** So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. **5** David's two wives had been captured--Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel.

6 David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God. 7 Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him, 8 and David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?" "Pursue them," he answered. "You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue." 9 David and the six hundred men with him came to the Besor Ravine, where some stayed behind, 10 for two hundred men were too exhausted to cross the ravine. But David and four hundred men continued the pursuit. 11 They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave him water to drink and food to eat-- 12 part of a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins. He ate and was revived, for he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and three nights. 13 David asked him, "To whom do you belong, and where do you come from?" He said, "I am an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me when I became ill three days ago. 14 We raided the Negev of the Kerethites and the territory belonging to Judah and the Negev of Caleb. And we burned Ziklag." 15 David asked him, "Can you lead me down to this raiding party?" He answered, "Swear to me before God that you will not kill me or hand me over to my master, and I will take you down to them." 16 He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah. 17 David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled. 18 David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. 19 Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back. 20 He took all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock, saying, "This is David's plunder." 21 Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow him and who were left behind at the Besor Ravine. They came out to meet David and the people with him. As David and his men approached, he greeted them. 22 But all the evil men and troublemakers among David's followers said, "Because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered. However, each man may take his wife and children and go." 23 David replied, "No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us. 24 Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike." 25 David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this. 26 When David arrived in Ziklag, he sent some of the plunder to the elders of Judah, who were his friends, saying, "Here is a present for you from the plunder of the LORD's enemies." 27 He sent it to those who were in Bethel, Ramoth Negev and Jattir; 28 to those in Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa 29 and Racal; to those in the towns of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites; 30 to those in Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athach 31 and Hebron; and to those in all the other places where David and his men had roamed.

## David's Distress

Last week the writer took us right up to the brink of the war with the Philistines. But once again the writer leaves us with a cliffhanger so that he can go back and resolve the last cliffhanger. Back in chapter 27 we left David in a very tight spot with the Philistines. He had been running this great scheme where he was living among the Philistines so Saul could not get to him, raiding the enemies of Israel, and making the Philistine king think he was raiding Israel. So he is winning favor in Israel, he is winning favor with the Philistines, and he is a safe distance from Saul. He is having his cake and eating it too. He is gaining favor with the Philistines and with the Israelites at the same time.

But then we get a big "Uh oh" at the beginning of chapter 28. The Philistines decide to go to war against Israel, and they tell David, "You will be joining us." Now what? If David refuses, he will be exposed as being loyal to Israel. If he goes along, he would be forced to fight against his own people. David goes from playing both ends against the middle to being caught between a rock and a hard place. What is David going to do here? How is he going to get out of this?

## Disappointing Discharge

**29:1 The Philistines gathered all their forces at Aphek, and Israel camped by the spring in Jezreel.**

So we have backed up a few days before the battle, the Philistines are still at their staging area in Aphek, which is near Nederland on our Denver map. Saul is gathering his troops up in Jezreel – which is the Fort Collins exit of I-25.

**2 As the Philistine rulers marched with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish.**

Here you just cannot believe your eyes. The man who was conscience stricken when he just cut the hem off Saul's robe, is now marching with the uncircumcised Philistines against God's anointed in battle? Ever watch a movie where the hero goes totally bad? And you are thinking, "Surely this is not what it seems" and yet there is no way to explain what he is doing any other way?

Was that what David was thinking? It does not say. Throughout the book the narrator frequently tells us what people are thinking and what their motives are for what they do. But for now he keeps the suspense and intrigue of the story going by just telling us what David said and did, and not what his motives were.

In verse 3 all the Philistine rulers are having a big meeting about the upcoming battle. They are just about to launch operation Shunem Storm, and the five Philistine kings gather for a top-level summit to strategize for this war. As the soldiers see the five great kings of Philistia all gather together in one tent they might have thought, *Boy I'd love to be a fly on the wall in that tent.* Well guess what? That is exactly where the narrator is going to take us.

**3 The commanders of the Philistines asked, "What about these Hebrews?"**

Philistia was ruled by the five kings of their five major cities.<sup>1</sup>

**3 ...Achish replied, "Is this not David, who was an officer of Saul king of Israel? He has already been with me for over a year, and from the day he left Saul until now, I have found no fault in him." 4 But the Philistine commanders were angry with him and said, "Send the man back"**

In the Hebrew that is a very strongly worded direct order.<sup>2</sup> These kings are mad, and they make an ultimatum.

**4 ... "Send the man back, that he may return to the place you assigned him. He must not go with us into battle, or he will turn against us during the fighting."<sup>3</sup> How better could he regain his master's favor than by taking the heads of our own men? 5 Isn't this the David they sang about in their dances: "'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'?"**

That song the women sang about David had become an international hit. "Every kid in Ekron Elementary School knows the song about David killing tens of thousands of Philistines – and you want to take this guy into battle with us?" So these kings are furious with Achish.

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<sup>1</sup> These men referred to as the commanders of the Philistines were the rulers of the five major cities in Philistia. We read about them in chapters 5-7<sup>1</sup> (remember when they returned the ark they gave a gift of five golden tumors and five golden rats? They gave five because there were five rulers). The Philistines had five major, fortified cities, and then various villages situated around those five cities and the kings of those cities ruled the nation. Achish is one of the five.

<sup>2</sup> Normally when making of request of a king the protocol would be to use a jussive ("Let the king send them back") rather than an imperative.

<sup>3</sup> These rulers may be remembering what happened the last time the Philistines had the upper hand against Saul – back in chapter 14. They had overrun Israel, and had Saul completely pinned down and cut off, and most of Saul's remaining army defected and many Israelites went over to the Philistines. But then Jonathan attacked them, God granted success, and the Philistines fled. And once they were on the run, the Israelites who had gone over to the Philistines jumped back over onto Saul's side (I Sam.14:20).

So who is right – Achish or the other rulers? The writer leaves it up to us to figure out where David’s true loyalties lie based on David’s past activities. I think I have to go with the other rulers.

For one thing, Achish has never been right about anything. He fell for David’s insane act and let him go back in chapter 21. He fell for David’s line about not being worthy to be in the royal city and ended up handing him Ziklag. And David has been pulling the wool over his eyes for over a year with his raids that were supposedly against Israel but in reality were against Israel’s enemies. Achish is always wrong. The writer has consistently presented him as gullible and easily and constantly fooled by David.

And the writer has also given us every reason to believe that those other four rulers are exactly right in what they are saying. David had never been disloyal to Saul or to Israel, and he has never done anything to benefit the Philistines. The only thing David has ever done to the Philistines is lie to them and kill them. But his loyalty to Saul was so tenacious that he would even tear into his own men if they ever wanted to harm Saul. There is no reason to assume a total, 180 degree reversal in everything that has been happening up to this point. I am convinced the four rulers are right – David’s plan was to march behind the Philistine army, and once the fighting started, attack them from the rear and wipe them out. It makes sense – that is the only way out of David’s impossible dilemma.

But there is a problem. We know something David does not know. In chapter 28 the writer took us ahead in time to the night before the battle, and sent Samuel to tell Saul that the Philistines are going to win this war going away. What seems like an impossible situation is even more impossible than we thought. David was between a rock and a hard place – because if he agreed to fight it would mean fighting against Saul and Jonathan, but if he did not agree to fight he would blow his cover, so the only way out of it is to follow the very risky and scary plan of marching out with the Philistines into the battle and then turning on them in the midst of the battle and hoping to win with his little 600 guys. That is David’s only way out, but now we know that that is not an option either, because we already know the Philistines are going to win this battle, which means if David turns against them he will have to be defeated. So now David is between a rock and an even harder place.

So how is David going to find a way out of this one? He isn’t. God is.

**6 ...From the day you came to me until now, I have found no fault in you, but the rulers don't approve of you. 7 Turn back and go in peace; do nothing to displease the Philistine rulers."**

### *David argues*

That was a close one. David almost marched into disaster, but the Lord rescued him by providing a way out. Now he is home free – all he has to do is pack up and head home. But look at verse 8.

**8 "But what have I done?" asked David. "What have you found against your servant from the day I came to you until now? Why can't I go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?"**

David sounds angry. He does not like this one bit, and he is fighting it. It is like he can taste this victory. He can just imagine the battle starting, and Saul having his usual success at the front line, and then David gives the order and starts tearing into the Philistines from behind, and the whole Philistine army panics, Israel wins big, Saul and everyone else see David’s loyalty – it would be so perfect. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And he was so close – and now it is going to be taken away? No way! David is not going to stand for this. And so he argues.

At this point you want to just yell into the story and say, “David – leave it alone! These people who you think are messing up your plan are actually unwittingly doing you a huge favor. This is a perfect way out of a terrible situation – don’t rock the boat! Trust me - you don’t want to be in this particular battle - just let it go.”

So many times when our plans are derailed by some clueless person we get agitated and squirm and resist and complain and God is in heaven saying, “Trust me – even though that clueless person doesn’t know what he’s doing; I know what I am doing. That road that looked so good to you – you don’t want to go down that road. It looks so good to you, and seems like it would be so ideal, but I can see the end of that road and I am telling you it is not the right road for you.” What an unspeakable blessing that we can trust in a God whose providence controls everything that ever happens. So when some Philistine rulers who do not care anything about God or His kingdom do some things to foul up your great plans – that is just as much the work of God in your life as anything else.

Reading accounts like this can be a big help in learning to deal with the disappointments in life. Do you teach your kids how to deal with disappointment? They are looking forward to some wonderful event, and then it gets cancelled, and they are crushed – what do you say to them? What do you say to yourself in those times when something seems so perfect – so ideal, and God allows it to fall through? And you wonder *Why*? This seems like such a perfect situation – why would God say no?

It is not enough to just say, “Oh well – something else will come along.” We need to teach ourselves – and our children – that God’s providence is perfect, and when He takes something away it is a good thing. When God says no to what looks like a perfect scenario – trust Him. Remember David’s situation here – what looks like a perfect opportunity is not always as perfect as it looks.

### ***Exoneration of David***

God is judging Saul and He does not want David anywhere near that. Knowing the history between Saul and David, and all Saul’s accusations, when Saul ends up dead the natural question that comes up is going to be, “Was David involved?” I am sure the Israelite Bureau of Investigation knocked on David’s door at some point after Saul’s death and asked him, “Where were you on the afternoon of the battle at Jezreel when Saul died? This whole thing just seems really suspicious, David, because you certainly had both ability and motive to kill Saul. And even if you were not the one who ran him through with a sword, that still leaves the question of where you were? If you were so loyal, why were you not fighting to protect Saul?”

We got the answer to that back in chapter 27 – David was not there to protect Saul because Saul had driven him away. But then that brings up another question. If David had been driven to the land of the Philistines, and David is friendly enough with the Philistines to live there in peace, that does not look good either. Did David help them? Did the Philistines defeat Saul because of support from David? And this section is answering that question. No – at the time Saul was killed, David was 100 miles away fighting the Amalekites.

And even if someone said, “Well, even so – still, David should have tried to help Saul. He should have pretended to be with the Philistines and then attacked them from behind in the middle of the battle.” It appears as though that is exactly what David attempted to do, but was prevented. God did not allow it to work because it was time for judgment to fall on Saul, and not even David can protect Saul from God.

But David does not know any of this is going on. He just wants to march with the Philistines, so God prevents that by means of the Philistine rulers.

**9 Achish answered, "I know that you have been as pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God; nevertheless, the Philistine commanders have said, 'He must not go up with us into battle.'**

It is interesting both Achish and Saul totally misjudged David. Saul thought David was his worst enemy, and in reality David was his most loyal subject. And Achish thought David was his most loyal subject, but in reality he was his most dangerous enemy.

Achish works hard not to offend David, but he stand firm: “Look, my hands are tied here. The rulers have made their decision.”

**10 Now get up early, along with your master's servants who have come with you, and leave in the morning as soon as it is light."**

That sounds kind of urgent. You wonder if those other rulers were angry enough that if they saw David’s face that next day something ugly might happen. Achish tells David to be gone at the first light of dawn.

**11 So David and his men got up early in the morning to go back to the land of the Philistines, and the Philistines went up to Jezreel.**

So David gets an honorable discharge and is sent home. His discharge is honorable in the mind of Achish, but more importantly, it was truly honorable. David is not guilty of helping the Philistines, nor is he guilty of failing to try to help Saul. What happened was a wonderful blessing from God, but it did not feel like a blessing to David at the time. For David is just a giant disappointment. A perfect opportunity slipped through his fingers.

So David and his men pack up, and first thing in the morning the Philistines march north to fight Saul and David and his men head south to go back home. If you compare the last verse of chapter 29 with the last verse of chapter 30 you get perfect symbolism for comparing David with Saul at this point. Chapter 29 ends with Saul going off into the night, and chapter 30 ends with David stepping out into the morning. That is a great picture of what was ahead for each of these men. Saul is headed for doom and David for glory. Although – not immediate glory. Before getting to glory David is about to drop into his lowest pit yet.

## **Loss of Loved Ones**

### **30:1 David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day.**

It takes David three days to get down to Ziklag, which catches us up to the time frame of the flash-forward in chapter 28 that we studied last week. If it took David three days to travel the 50 miles down to his home in Ziklag, that is about how long it would have taken the Philistines to march up to meet Saul at the Jezreel Valley when Saul freaked out and went to Endor.

We do not know how long David has been away from home – at least six days and possibly weeks or even months. But even if it was only for a couple weeks, that is still a long time to be away from home – away from your wife and kids – so no doubt David and his men were in a pretty good mood as they started seeing the familiar landmarks near Ziklag that signaled their long journey was almost over. But as they got closer they started to sense something was wrong. Why wasn't there anyone going anywhere on the roads? Why is it so quiet?

And then they start to notice the smell. They had fought enough battles to know this is a smell you do not want to smell when you are approaching your own hometown. Deep concern begins to form in their hearts, and some of them begin to run. Soon all of them are running, and when they come up over the ridge so they can see Ziklag, their worst fears are confirmed. As they stand there on the hillside they look out over the black, charred ruins of what used to be their city. It is gone – burned to the ground.

They go racing down as fast as they can run toward their homes, and each one of them makes the same, horrific discovery. Not one soul left. Everyone is gone. Their children, their wives – everyone.

What happened? David has no way of knowing, but the narrator is going to tell us. It was the Amalekites.

### **1 ...Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag.**

The Negev is southern Israel – the area David told Achish that he had been raiding.

Some of you may know what it is like to have your house burglarized, and no doubt most all of us have had something stolen at one point or another. It is a horrible feeling – even when it is something relatively small. You just think, “I can't believe someone would come into my house or my garage and just take my stuff!” It is worse than other kinds of loss. If you lose that stuff because it breaks, or gets rained on or you misplace it or whatever - that bothers you, but it is not as bad as having it stolen. There is just something about having someone take your belongings that is especially hard to take.

And if that is true about a few trivial items in your garage, imagine having someone burn your house to the ground – on purpose. And you have no insurance.

That would really be tough. But as distressing as all that would be, I am sure that was nothing compared to the real calamity. Not only is all their stuff gone, but their wives and children were taken.

**They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, 2 and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way. 3 When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive.**

Again – it is worse than other kinds of loss. If your wife and children were killed in a car accident, that would be hard enough to handle. But if you had the knowledge that right now they are suffering the unthinkable abuses that captured slaves went through, and you think about what is probably happening to your

wife, and the terror your little kids are going through at this moment; it is no surprise at all when we see how these men respond.

#### **4 So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep.**

Not very many people have ever experienced that kind of sorrow. Most of us have wept from grief a little bit at some point, and a few know what it is like to weep bitterly for an extended period of time. But not many people are ever crushed to the point of running out of strength to weep. Literally crying out loud for so long that you get to the point where you do not even have the strength to cry any more. It does not take very much strength to cry. If you don't have the strength to cry you do not have the strength to do anything. I picture these men on their faces on the ground – unable to do anything for a while, until the shock subsides somewhat.

This is what I meant when I said David was about to plunge down into the pit. First the frustration of lost opportunity. Then the loss of all his possessions. And now the unbearable agony of the loss of his wives, and the knowledge that they were in the hands of some very bad characters. And that sorrow is multiplied by the sorrow of his men. It is hard to be around someone who has just lost his family. And I cannot imagine being around 600 men who all just lost their families. David had such a compassionate heart that his sorrow for his men may have been even greater than his sorrow over his own loss. This is a pit of despair that few if any of us can even imagine. And it is about to get even worse.

### **Murderous Mutiny**

Eventually the men begin to regain enough composure to stop crying and begin to think through their situation. When people get hurt – especially when they get hurt really bad, the reaction of the flesh is to hold someone responsible. When pain is inflicted on you the first thing your flesh wants is to assign blame somewhere. That is just built into our sinful hearts. You stub your toe on something and what is the first thing out of your mouth? Is it, “Why am I so clumsy?” No, it's “Who left that thing laying there?” My toe is hurting, and I need someone to blame! You walk into a post that's been there for 20 years and you say, “What kind of a moron would put a post right there?”

That is just the way the sinful flesh responds to pain – “Who's to blame for this?” And usually we want to find someone nearby, so that we can dump our anger on them. Just blaming whoever conducted this raid is not going to work, because those people are long gone. There is no way to lash out in anger at them. So where do you think the blame went? When people are looking for someone to blame, more often than not their anger gets directed toward whoever is in leadership.

These men get to thinking – “This is all because of David. David and his raids! He thinks he can just raid all these surrounding people all the time and suffer no consequence? And David with his buddying up with Achish. It's because of his palling around with the Philistines that we were gone for so long. In fact, if David had his way we would still be gone! We have had it with the leadership of David!” And all their sorrow and agony and loss is transformed now into anger. And all their anger and rage is directed at David.

So David is sitting in his tent, mourning the loss of his wives, turning the dirt into mud with his tears. And Abishai or Joab or one of his more loyal officers comes in to talk to him. David asks, “Have you talked to the men?”

“They're pretty upset, David.”

“How bad is it? Do you think some of them will defect? If they do – I don't even blame them. Tell them...” - Joab interrupts, “David – they aren't talking about defecting. They're talking about killing you. They're saying you deserve to be stoned to death. Some of them are already gathering some stones.”

### **Great Distress**

So on top of the disappointment of lost opportunity and having his great plans fouled up, and then the loss of all his possessions and the loss of his wives, now even his own men have turned against him and want to kill him.

#### **6 David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters.**

Several times when I was a youth pastor – and a few times as a senior pastor I have experienced what it is like for a heartbroken parent to blame me for something terrible that happened to their child. And when a parent does that – they decide you are at fault for the greatest heartbreak of their lives – the irrational rage can be absolutely brutal and merciless. I know what it is like to have one parent do that, but for David it was hundreds. Verse 6 says **each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters**, and all the bitterness became anger and was focused on one man – David.

And it says **David was greatly distressed**. He had been run out of his home, exiled from his beloved Israel, cut off from access to the presence of God in the Tabernacle, falsely accused, lied about, mistreated, rejected by his king, rejected by the Philistine rulers, a man without a country, all he had left are his wives and his men. And now his wives are taken away, and his men want to stone him to death. It is no surprise that he is **greatly distressed**.

## Contrast with Saul

Does that phrase **greatly distressed** ring any bells? They are the exact same words used to describe Saul in chapter 28.

**1 Samuel 28:15 Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said.**

Why do you suppose the writer used the exact same phrase to describe Saul's distress and David's distress in back-to-back sections?

One thing it tells me is the writer of 1 Samuel did not buy in to the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel. It sounds to me like the author of 1 Samuel had not been listening to Joyce Meyer and Andrew Womack and Joel Osteen and Benny Hinn. When God rejects you and turns His face away from you the result is you drop into a horrible bit of great distress. But when God blesses you and loves you and turns His face toward you, sometimes the result of that is you drop into a horrible pit of great distress. This is what Job's friends did not understand. They were the original health, wealth and prosperity heretics.

But what is the writer's purpose here? Is he trying to say that there is no real difference in having God turn toward you in favor or turn away from you in judgment? No – just the opposite. God's favor does not exempt you from trouble, but the difference between trouble with God's favor and trouble without God's favor is *massive*.

It is the difference between night and day. For one thing, your heart's response to the pain is different. What was Saul's response when he was in great distress? He was in great distress so he turned to the occult. His distress drove him to disobey God. What effect did that same kind of great distress have on David?

**6 David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.**

David ran to God for strength. If all you care about is avoiding pain and suffering, then you read these chapters and think, "Saul and David are in exactly the same boat. They both suffer horrible agony." But if your eyes are opened to what truly matters you can see that David and Saul are opposites. Saul suffers and runs away from God; David suffers and runs toward God.

If David had wanted to get into the blame game it would have been really easy, because we find out later that the people who did this were the very people God had commanded Saul to completely exterminate. Saul failed to do it, and now David pays a big price for Saul's sin. But David does not concern himself with blaming Saul – he focuses on seeking strength from God.

## David's Strength

And what was the outcome? Saul turned to another source for strength – how did that work out for him? Did he get strength and courage from this alternate source he turned to?

**28:20 Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. His strength was gone**



Saul was greatly distressed, it drove him away from God into disobedience, and the result was his strength was gone. David was greatly distressed, turned to God, and ultimately found strength in Yahweh his God.

How did he do it? It does not say. He does not want to focus on that. His focus is to show us the results of David strengthening himself in God.

## **Guidance & Hope**

**7 Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him, 8 and David inquired of the LORD**

This is going on possibly on the very day Saul is consulting the medium at Endor – David is consulting God through the priest.

**8 ... "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?" "Pursue them," he answered. "You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue."**

Saul got no answer from God – David got an immediate answer. In fact, God tells him more than he even asked. I have heard it said that when inquiring with the Urim and Thumim they could only get yes or no answers. But here God volunteers extra information – you will succeed in the rescue.<sup>4</sup> As a result of his turning to God for strength, God spoke to him and guided him and gave him hope. He told him what to do (guidance) and then let him know that he was going to succeed (hope).

## **Favor with men**

**9 David and the six hundred men with him came to the Besor Ravine**

Wait a minute – what happened to the mutiny? We don't know. David took care of it. We don't know how – it does not matter how. What matters is in verse 6 they were about to stone him to death and in verse 9 they are risking their lives to follow him, and what happened in between is David strengthened himself in the Lord. So another one of the blessings that can come from strengthening yourself in the Lord is favor with men. You get strength and guidance and hope, and you get favor with men.

## **Kindness**

**9 David and the six hundred men with him came to the Besor Ravine, where some stayed behind, 10 for two hundred men were too exhausted to cross the ravine. But David and four hundred men continued the pursuit.<sup>5</sup>**

### *The hungry Egyptian*

David's men are understandably exhausted, but they are about to come across a guy in a lot worse shape than them.

**11 They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David.**

Why is there a random Egyptian in a field? We find out later that he was a slave, but he got sick and so his owner just left him for dead in the field – three days ago.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, however, God does not say anything about who the raiders were, or where they could be found. To discover that David has to revert to normal use of military intelligence gathering. God does what only God can do, but He generally leaves to us to do what we are capable of doing. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead but leaves it to the bystanders to take off the grave clothes. Jesus fills the nets with fish but leaves it to the Disciples to haul them in to the boat. In His grace God grants us what Paschal called "the dignity of causation." He lets us be involved in ways that really matter. They head south to begin with, which is a pretty safe bet – but other than that they have no idea where to go.

<sup>5</sup> After the 50+ mile trip from Aphek, then all the emotional distress when they got back, and now the trip south from Ziklag in which they were moving as fast as they could – after all that even these mighty warriors are going to be tired. Two hundred of them don't have the strength to keep going, and of course the other 400 are dead tired too, but they can at least keep moving.

**11 ...They gave him water to drink and food to eat-- 12 part of a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins. He ate and was revived, for he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and three nights.**

It is funny – so many details are left out, but the writer wants to include the entire menu they served this guy. He always does that. Sometimes I wonder if the writer of 1 Samuel was hungry when he was writing this book, he pays so much attention to food. But there really is a purpose. The point is they give him really good food. I am sure this guy would have been thrilled to get any food at all, but they give him delicacies.

This sort of kindness to a foreigner – especially an Egyptian – is commanded numerous times in the law of God.

**Exodus 23:9 Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.**

**Leviticus 19:34 The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt.**

**Deuteronomy 23:7 Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you lived as an alien in his country.**

Boy, the logic of grace is sure a lot different than the way we naturally think, isn't it? Our logic says, "If someone oppressed you and mistreated you and enslaved you, they owe you big time. But God's logic is the opposite. You know what it was like to be mistreated when they had the upper hand, so now that you have the upper hand, show kindness.

And showing kindness to this Egyptian was David's first impulse. Even in the midst of what may have been the most agonizing sorrow of his life up to that point, David still does not become so self-absorbed that he would fail to show kindness to someone in need. (And if you are thinking David just did this to get information about the raiders, keep in mind where we are in the story. David does not know this guy has anything to do with the raiders until verse 13. The only thing David knows is he is a sick, hungry Egyptian.)

I want to have a heart like that – compassion on a hair trigger – even when I am in the middle of hard suffering. When I suffer even a little bit I tend to become selfish. I forget about the needs of everyone around me and just think about my own pain. But David has a gracious heart even in the midst of severe suffering. Seek grace from God and you not only get strength and guidance and hope and favor with men, but you also find you are able to overcome selfishness, and your heart swells and enlarges and becomes capable of amazing acts of selfless love and compassion.

## **Success**

So David is kind to a random Egyptian and it just so happens that this person can lead David to the raiders.<sup>7</sup> Man, this is some great luck, isn't it? It would be if there were such a thing as luck – but there isn't. This is God granting David success. Things just fall into place. David just happens to come across a guy who can take him right to the raiders. And it also just so happens that when they get to the raiders, they find them in a very vulnerable state.

**16 He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah.**

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<sup>6</sup> Remember it took David three days to travel home from Aphek, so the burning of Ziklag probably took place right around the time David was being discharged from the Philistine army.

<sup>7</sup> With both the Israelite and Philistine armies occupied in the battle against each other up north, the southern regions of both nations were completely unprotected, and the Amalekites took advantage. They raid Israelite and Philistine areas, but it sounds like the only place they burned was Ziklag. You get the feeling the Amalekites weren't crazy about David. They just raid everywhere else, but when they get to David's town they burn it. And this man admits to participating in the burning of Ziklag. I am guessing he wouldn't have done that if he knew he was talking to the king of Ziklag.

They do not have any guard up at all. Both the Israelite and Philistine armies are gone – and David marched out with the Philistines. They think they are home free – what could possibly threaten them? It does not even cross their minds that David might get kicked out of the war and come home early.

So David catches the Amalekites out of battle formation (to say the least). And so even though David and his men were extremely tired, David seizes the opportunity and attacks.

## Courage

**17 David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled.**

The language here makes it sound like David wiped out almost all of them. First he says **none of them got away**, and then he throws in the little footnote – “Oh, except a little group of 400 who escaped on camels.” That tells us something about how big the Amalekite army was to begin with. How big would an army have to be for a leftover group of 400 to be only a tiny remnant hardly worth mentioning? Probably thousands, wouldn't you think? Now, how big was David's army? Four hundred. David's whole army is the size of the tiny group that got away on camels. Can you imagine being a group of 400 exhausted, broken men and looking out and seeing the entire countryside blanketed with Amalekite soldiers as far as the eye can see? And yet they don't hesitate to attack – outnumbered probably at least 10 to 1 (if not 50 to 1).

Saul does not get what he wants from God right away so he reverts to an alternative for dealing with his great distress. But David seeks strength from God alone, and the result is not only strength but also guidance and hope and favor with men and a heart of kindness and obedience to God's Word, and success, and on top of all that – courage. David and his 400 let loose on the Amalekites and just about wipe the Amalekites off the face of the earth. He deals them such a severe blow that they are never heard from again in David's lifetime – or Solomon's. In fact, they do not re-emerge as an enemy of Israel again until the time of Hezekiah – 300+ years later. And in the process David suffers no casualties! We see in a minute when they return they are still 400 – not 150 or 300.

## Restoration of what was lost...plus

So God grants great success and courage and then more success, and in doing that God restores everything they had lost – and then some.

**18 David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. 19 Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back.**

David recovers all the POWs, as well as every single thing that had been taken.

**20 He took all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock, saying, "This is David's plunder."**

So now David not only has all the stuff that had been taken from Ziklag, but all the other stuff as well – all the plunder from where the Amalekites had raided in Judah and in Philistine territory. The list of benefits that result from David strengthening himself in God is getting so long that if I keep repeating it it is going to make the sermon monotonous. And God is still not done!

If we had time we could add to our list – kindness, justice, and wisdom in verses 21-24, enduring, long-term impact in verse 25, and generosity in verses 25-30.

## Who would you rather be?

Let me ask you something – if you had lived back then, whose shoes would you rather be in – Saul's in chapter 28 or David's in chapter 30? They are both in great distress. Think of how it would have looked living back then – without the benefit of reading ahead in 1 Samuel.

At the moment when both men run into their great distress, Saul had everything; David had nothing. The only thing David owned at the moment of his great distress was the clothes he was standing in. His family was gone, all his possessions, his home is a pile of ashes, his friends all hate him – he has nothing. Saul has riches, power, fame, family – all the best of what this world has to offer. And yet who would you rather be? From a temporal perspective everyone would envy Saul and pity David. They would probably plead with God to make their situation more like Saul's and less like David's. And yet if you were here last week you know that even if you hate Saul's guts, you cannot help but to feel sorry for him in chapter 28. He could not be worse off. And we look at David and envy him. Isn't it amazing how seeing the big picture changes your perspective? Oh that we could learn to read our lives the same way we read Scripture.

**Benediction - 1 Thessalonians 3:12,13 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.**

# Devotionals

## Day 1

David almost marched into disaster. His plan to march with the Philistines and then turn on them in the battle would not have worked, because God had decided the Philistines were going to win this battle. But the Lord rescued David by providing a way out. Now he is home free – all he has to do is pack up and head home. But look at verse 8.

**1 Samuel 29:8 "But what have I done?" asked David. "What have you found against your servant from the day I came to you until now? Why can't I go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?"**

David sounds angry. He does not like this one bit, and he is fighting it. It is like he can taste this victory. He can just imagine the battle starting, and Saul having his usual success at the front line, and then David gives the order and starts tearing into the Philistines from behind, and the whole Philistines army panics, Israel wins big, Saul and everyone else see David's loyalty – it would be so perfect. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And he was so close – and now it is going to be taken away? No way! David is not going to stand for this. And so he argues.

At this point you want to just yell into the story and say, "David – leave it alone! These people who you think are messing up your plan are actually unwittingly doing you a huge favor. This is a perfect way out of a terrible situation – don't rock the boat! Trust me - you do not want to be in this particular battle - just let it go."

So many times when our plans are derailed by some clueless person we get agitated and squirm and resist and complain and God is in heaven saying, "Trust me – even though that clueless person does not know what he is doing; I know what I am doing. That road that looked so good to you – you do not want to go down that road. It looks so good to you, and seems like it would be so ideal, but I can see the end of that road and I am telling you it is not the right road for you." What an unspeakable blessing that we can trust in a God whose providence controls everything that ever happens. So when some Philistine rulers who do not care anything about God or His kingdom do some things to foul up your great plans – that is just as much the work of God in your life as anything else.

Reading accounts like this can be a big help in learning to deal with the disappointments in life. Do you teach your kids how to deal with disappointment? They are looking forward to some wonderful event, and then it gets cancelled, and they are crushed – what do you say to them? What do you say to yourself in those times when something seems so perfect – so ideal, and God allows it to fall through? And you wonder *Why*? This seems like such a perfect situation – why would God say no?

It is not enough to just say, "Oh well – something else will come along." We need to teach ourselves – and our children – that God's providence is perfect, and when He takes something away it is a good thing. When God says no to what looks like a perfect scenario – trust Him. Remember David's situation here – what looks like a perfect opportunity is not always as perfect as it looks.

*Good morning, dear, sovereign Father,*

*Thank You that You are here in this room with me at this moment, and that I am about to experience the greatest thing that it's possible to experience – communion with my precious Lord Jesus Christ, in which You speak to Your servant and I take in Your words like choice food and digest them and am changed by them and am thus enlightened so I can see a bit more of Your glory, which causes my soul to delight more in You, which glorifies You by magnifying Your great glory! Lord, let me not squander this grand privilege of these moments at Your feet.*

*I love Your reign, dear Lord. Teach me to love it more – much, much more. Lord, I want it to be my food and drink, satisfying and nourishing and thrilling my soul.*

*Let me be still and know that You are God. In the midst of all the raging of the nations and the chaos of a fallen world, let my heart be still before You, knowing that You do all You please. Father, let me not react to pain with emotions of rejection of the blessed circumstances that are the very acts of Your Lordship. Let me not have a rebellious heart in those moments when Your reign means pain or disappointment for me.*

*Let me not be like Job, who darkened Your counsel with words without knowledge when he questioned Your sovereign rule over him. Let me instead be like the psalmist who did not concern himself about matters too wonderful for him (Ps.131). It is fitting that such a great and glorious God would be seen by specks of dust like me as mysterious. How fitting it was for You, instead of getting into a debate with Job and trying to explain the infinite to a finite mind, that You simply reminded Him of the vast distance between him and You. Teach me too, dear Lord, that I might stand in submissive awe of Your hard providence.*

## Day 2

**1 Samuel 30:6 David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters.**

On top of the disappointment of lost opportunity and having his great plans fouled up, and then the loss of all his possessions and the loss of his wives, now even his own men have turned against him and want to kill him. Several times when I was a youth pastor – and a few times as a senior pastor I have experienced what it is like for a heartbroken parent to blame me for something terrible that happened to their child. And when a parent does that – they decide you are at fault for the greatest heartbreak of their lives – the irrational rage can be absolutely brutal and merciless. I know what it is like to have one parent do that, but for David it was hundreds. Verse 6 says **each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters**, and all the bitterness became anger and was focused on one man – David.

And it says **David was greatly distressed**. He had been run out of his home, exiled from his beloved Israel, cut off from access to the presence of God in the Tabernacle, falsely accused, lied about, mistreated, rejected by his king, rejected by the Philistine rulers, a man without a country, all he had left is his wives and his men. And now his wives are taken away, and his men want to stone him to death. It is no surprise that he is **greatly distressed**.

Does that phrase **greatly distressed** ring any bells? They are the exact same words used to describe Saul in chapter 28.

**1 Samuel 28:15 Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said.**

Why do you suppose the writer used the exact same phrase to describe Saul's distress and David's distress in back-to-back sections?

One thing it tells me is the writer of 1 Samuel did not buy in to the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel. It sounds to me like the author of 1 Samuel hadn't been listening to Joyce Meyer and Andrew Womack and Joel Osteen and Benny Hinn. When God rejects you and turns His face away from you the result is you drop into a horrible bit of great distress. But when God blesses you and loves you and turns His face toward you, sometimes the result of that is you drop into a horrible pit of great distress. This is what Job's friends did not understand. They were the original health, wealth and prosperity heretics.

But what is the writer's purpose here? Is he trying to say that there is no real difference in having God turn toward you in favor or turn away from you in judgment? No – just the opposite. God's favor does not exempt you from trouble, but the difference between trouble with God's favor and trouble without God's favor is *massive*.

It is the difference between night and day. For one thing, your heart's response to the pain is different. What was Saul's response when he was in great distress? He was in great distress and so he turned to the occult. His distress drove him to disobey God. What effect did that same kind of great distress have on David?

**6 David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.**

David ran to God for strength. If all you care about is avoiding pain and suffering, then you read these chapters and think, "Saul and David are in exactly the same boat. They both suffer horrible agony." But if your eyes are opened to what truly matters you can see that David and Saul are opposites. Saul suffers and runs away from God; David suffers and runs toward God.

If David had wanted to get into the blame game it would have been really easy, because we find out later that the people who did this were the very people God had commanded Saul to completely exterminate. Saul failed to do it, and now David pays a big price for Saul's sin. But David does not concern himself with blaming Saul – he focuses on seeking strength from God.

(From Ps.4)

*Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.*

*Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?" Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD. You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound. I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.*



## Day 3

Saul turned to another source for strength – how did that work out for him? Did he get strength and courage from this alternate source he turned to?

**1 Samuel 28:20 Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. His strength was gone**

Saul was greatly distressed, it drove him away from God into disobedience, and the result was his strength was gone. David was greatly distressed, turned to God, and ultimately found strength in Yahweh his God.

How did he do it? It does not say. He does not want to focus on that. His focus is to show us the results of David strengthening himself in God.

**1 Samuel 30:7 Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him, 8 and David inquired of the LORD**

This is going on possibly on the very day Saul is consulting the medium at Endor – David is consulting God through the priest.

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**9 David and the six hundred men with him came to the Besor Ravine**

Wait a minute – what happened to the mutiny? We don't know. David took care of it. We don't know how – it doesn't matter how. What matters is in verse 6 they were about to stone him to death and in verse 9 they are risking their lives to follow him, and what happened in between is David strengthened himself in the Lord. So another one of the blessings that can come from strengthening yourself in the Lord is favor with men. You get strength and guidance and hope, and you get favor with men.

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The logic of grace is sure a lot different than the way we naturally think, isn't it? Our logic says, "If someone oppressed you and mistreated you and enslaved you, they owe you big time. But God's logic is the opposite. You know what it was like to be mistreated when they had the upper hand, so now that you have the upper hand, show kindness.

And showing kindness to this Egyptian was David's first impulse. Even in the midst of what may have been the most agonizing sorrow of his life up to that point, David still does not become so self-absorbed that he would fail to show kindness to someone in need. (And if you are thinking David just did this to get information about the raiders, keep in mind where we are in the story. David does not know this guy has anything to do with the raiders until verse 13. The only thing David knows is he is a sick, hungry Egyptian.)

I want to have a heart like that – compassion on a hair trigger – even when I am in the middle of hard suffering. When I suffer even a little bit I tend to become selfish. I forget about the needs of everyone around me and just think about my own pain. But David has a gracious heart even in the midst of severe suffering. Seek grace from God and you not only get strength and guidance and hope and favor with men, but you also find you are able to overcome selfishness, and your heart swells and enlarges and becomes capable of amazing acts of selfless love and compassion.

*What a delight, dear Lord God, to be guided by Your hand. The fact that You grant me what You denied Saul is a grace beyond words. And the agony of Saul when Your guidance was removed shows how good and essential and necessary Your guidance is. The greater the Guide the more wonderful the experience of being guided. Being guided by You is the difference between ultimate agony and ultimate joy.*

*What a gift to receive hope from You. When my work seems futile it becomes oppressive. But through Your great and precious promises I can take joy in what is guaranteed regardless of how things appear.*

*And what a delight to receive soft-heartedness and kindness from You. I never have compassion or show kindness to anyone unless that love is placed in my heart by Your Spirit. Fill me up with Your love, dear Lord, that I might bring joy into the hearts of Your people as they enjoy Your love through me.*

## Day 4

So David is kind to a random Egyptian and it just so happens that this person can lead David to the raiders. Man, this is some great luck, isn't it? It would be if there were such a thing as luck – but there is not. This is God granting David success. Things just fall into place. David just happens to come across a guy who can take him right to the raiders. And it also just so happens that when they get to the raiders, they find them in a very vulnerable state.

**16 He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah.**

They don't have any guard up at all. Both the Israelite and Philistine armies are gone – and David marched out with the Philistines. They think they are home free – what could possibly threaten them? It does not even cross their minds that David might get kicked out of the war and come home early.

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Saul does not get what he wants from God right away so he reverts to an alternative for dealing with his great distress. But David seeks strength from God alone, and the result is not only strength but also guidance and hope and favor with men and a heart of kindness and obedience to God's Word, and success, and on top of all that – courage. David and his 400 let loose on the Amalekites and just about wipe the Amalekites off the face of the earth. He deals them such a severe blow that they are never heard from again in David's lifetime – or Solomon's. In fact, they do not re-emerge as an enemy of Israel again until the time of Hezekiah – 300+ years later. And in the process David suffers no casualties! We see in a minute when they return they are still 400 – not 150 or 300.

So God grants great success and courage and then more success, and in doing that God restores everything they had lost – and then some.

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If we had time we could add to our list – kindness, justice, and wisdom in verses 21-24, enduring, long-term impact in 25, and generosity in verses 25-30.

*Forgive me, dear Lord, for imagining my successes are my doing. In one sense they are, because You work them through me. But in the greatest sense they come from You. No matter how diligent or skilled I am, I do not have the power to control enough factors to make anything a success. So when success comes it is because of Your surpassing power.*

*And greater than success in itself is success in a task of great importance and honor. Thank You, Father, for giving Your servant a calling. Thank You for assigning a task to me that is of eternal significance, and at which I can have success through Your grace.*

## Day 5

If you had lived back then, whose shoes would you rather be in – Saul’s in chapter 28 or David’s in chapter 30? They are both in great distress. Think of how it from how it would have looked living back then – without the benefit of reading ahead in 1 Samuel.

At the moment when both men run into their great distress, Saul had everything; David had nothing. The only thing David owned at the moment of his great distress was that clothes he was standing in. His family was gone, all his possessions, his home is a pile of ashes, his friends all hate him – he has nothing. Saul has riches, power, fame, family – all the best of what this world has to offer. And yet who would you rather be? From a temporal perspective everyone would envy Saul and pity David. They would probably plead with God to make their situation more like Saul’s and less like David’s. And yet if you were here last week you know that even if you hate Saul’s guts, you cannot help but to feel sorry for him in chapter 28. He could not be worse off. And we look at David and envy him. Isn’t it amazing how seeing the big picture changes your perspective? Oh that we could learn to read our lives the same way we read Scripture.

*Father, when there is an account in Your Word about one of Your servants, and trouble comes into his life, I never fret. Even if I don’t recall how that story ends exactly, still there is no real alarm in my heart because I know You will do something great. When the synagogue leader is so distressed because Your delay results in his daughter’s death, I do not share his distress. I simply think, “OK, this will be a resurrection story instead of a healing story.” Oh Lord, teach me to read my life like I read Your Word. Teach me never to despair because the God of the pages of Scripture is the God of the pages of my life.*