

Let's open our Bibles tonight to 1 Samuel 23. We're going to have communion as well, so we want to get right into it and just look at chapters 23 and 24 today together.

Saul had been set aside by the LORD thirty-three years or so into his reign. God had given Saul lots of opportunity. He had great potential. He set it all aside for his own way of life. When the LORD chose David, He sent the old prophet Samuel to his house, anointed David. He was probably still a teenager, but he was slowly brought along. He was anointed for a while, and nothing seemed to change. Then he was invited by some of the king's servants to come and play musical instruments for the king who was being harassed by an evil spirit from the LORD, and it calmed Saul. And so for a time David was introduced to the palace, if you will, by just coming to play the harp.

When the LORD set up David to come to the army at a time when Goliath was spending six weeks, twice a day, chastising them and mocking their God, David all of a sudden came into his prominence. He was upset over what he heard. He couldn't believe that no one would fight this big giant. In the name of the LORD, he volunteered, as a young man, to do it himself. You know the story. We went through it in detail. But needless to say, he came upon the scene in a big way. Then everyone knew his name, including Saul. For a while he thought, "Gosh, this is a great guy to have on our army, put him in charge of the forces." But it didn't take long for Saul, who was already hanging on to his throne - not because the LORD had given it to him but because he was unwilling to let go of it - tenaciously hanging on; and when everyone began to notice David, so did Saul, and it wasn't long before Saul began to plot privately to kill David, remove this threat to his power.

By the time that David is sure of that, and his best friend - who happens to be Saul's son, Jonathan - told him, "Yes, indeed, that's what my dad intends to do," David, in chapters 21 and 22, ran off in fear. He was a young guy. We know from 2 Samuel that David was 30 years old when he came to power. He would have been 22 or so years old here. And he began to run for his life. He went by the priestly city of Nob. He picked up food, and he also picked up Goliath's sword - which was

put on display before the LORD there to honor God's giving him victory. And he told the priest he was on a secret mission for the king. He lied. He was scared. He didn't know what to do. He didn't pray, he ran. Relying on his flesh, he headed out to go to (of all places) Gath, which was one of the five Philistine cities. It was hometown to Goliath, the guy he had killed; and then he came into town wearing his sword. Not a lot of planning here. He was quickly arrested. He didn't know what to do. They went to get the king, and David decided he would just act like he was crazy, like who else would have come into town like that unless you were nuts. So the king looked through the door, saw David spittin' on himself and runnin' into the wall and said, "Just let him go. This is disgusting." David got out, and it worked. But it really wasn't God's will. David headed back to the caves of Adullam, which were kind of on the border between the Philistine area and Judah. He went to the cave. He was so sorry for his sin of trusting in himself. He wrote several psalms there (we mentioned them to you when we went through those chapters); just asked the LORD to help him, to forgive him, to use him. And God began to bring him men that were discouraged and discontented and those who were really on the run, and David began to teach them God's Word. They would become his army and the biggest support that he would have for the next forty years or so. He would lead these folks to a faith in God, and God gave to David great favor - not because David always did the right thing, but David had a really soft heart.

A couple of things you can write down about David: he forgave quickly - didn't keep a long record of wrongs, and he was quick to admit - well, usually quick to admit - his sin. With Bathsheba, he went fourteen months of just, "I'm not tellin' anybody," and then the LORD came and knocked on his door.

So last time we left David in returning to that cave. The problem was, though David had repented, there was consequence of his sin - not the least of which was when Saul found out about it, he sent a man to kill those priests and their families that had supposedly helped David. The priest wasn't guilty; he didn't even know where David was going. He even asked him, but he wasn't told. So David ends up with a fellow named Abiathar, who was the only priest that escaped that slaughter, at his side to really seek God's heart in the years to come. But God forgives, but the consequences oftentimes remain.

Tonight we want to pick up with David in chapters 23 and 24, which is really the flip side of the despair that David found in chapter 21. Because having repented and said, "Whatever's gonna happen to me, I'm gonna do this the LORD's way, I'm

gonna be faithful to him," you find David at a strong point in both of these chapters. And they're good chapters to learn. The tests are extremely severe. They are different. I don't know how you handle betrayal or thanklessness from people that you've helped and how you determine what God's will is when everything seems to be going in your favor, that must be the LORD, or not. But there're some good lessons for us to learn here, not the least of which is - can I love my enemies and leave vengeance to the LORD? Well, tonight we find David - at least a young 22- or 23-year-old young man - learning to stand in his faith and practice what he preaches and what he has learned there back in chapter 21.

So verse 1 of chapter 23, it says this, "Then they told David, saying, 'Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are robbing the threshing floors.' Therefore David inquired of the LORD, saying, 'Shall I go and attack these Philistines?' And the LORD said to David, 'Go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah.' But David's men said to him, 'Look, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?' Then David inquired of the LORD once again. And the LORD answered him and said, 'Arise, go down to Keilah. For I will deliver the Philistines into your hand.' And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines, struck them with a mighty blow, and took away their livestock. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah. Now it happened, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech" (the priest who had been killed there in Nob) "fled to David at Keilah, that he went down with an ephod in his hand." So, while Saul now has determined for the last seven years of his life only one thing, "I'm gonna kill David at all costs," the Philistines continue their aggression against the nation of Israel kind of unhindered. It's not a godly nation at this point. Saul's effect has been minimal, and, certainly, spiritually it lacked completely. But David is told of the assault, and notice what David does - so unlike Saul - he seeks the LORD for direction. And we are told, in verse 6, how he was able to find God's will. The ephod which he carried, Abiathar (son of the high priest who had been killed) had joined David there with this ephod. The ephod was that thing that was worn by the priests; inside it was kept what was called the Urim and the Thummim - the words mean light and perfections. It is usually believed, though not adequately explained in the Scriptures, there were two stones - one white and one black - and that those who would go to seek the LORD through His priests who would represent Him in the Old Testament (we find it happening a lot of times, hundreds of times), that God would then direct, based upon the willingness of the people seeking Him, to obey His direction. And so David had a man with him that could speak for the LORD, and David, unlike Saul, was a young man now determined to do things God's way and to wait for God's direction. So he

hears that Israel's in trouble. He's to be their king. They're under attack. Saul is too busy with murder plans. But David's got a heart, a true shepherd's heart, for the people, and so he is seeking the LORD, and notice that the LORD tells him that he's able to go. It's interesting that, if you have been with us, David early on now has had a prophet. His name is Gad. And now he has a high priest named Abiathar. He's kind of like plugged into the LORD Old-Testament style. Right? He has a prophet and a priest. He has the access to God and to His Word and a heart that wants to be led. We have the Holy Spirit, and we have His Word. We have the same thing, don't we, that God can direct our steps.

So the place that he had heard about was a place called Keilah. It's in the western lowlands of Judah. It's northwest of Hebron, if you have a picture of Israel in your head. It was a walled city. And so the people, when they grew their crops, would go up to the neighboring hills because there was wind, and they would thresh their grains and all, and then they would take it home for food. But the Philistines waited for them to harvest, to bring it up to thresh the wheat, and then they would just attack and take it from them and leave the people without any kind of food at all; so, left them to starve.

David, notice in verse 2, back on track with the LORD after that chapter 21 debacle, wants the LORD to show him what to do, and so he asks the LORD to show him. 1 Samuel 30 and 2 Samuel 5 are really good illustrations of going to the priest and getting some direction from the LORD. There're a lot of them, but those stand out in my mind. So David goes to pray which, by the way, is always a good thing to do. Better that you pray before you act. Pastor Chuck used to say to us young men that would be pastors, "Until you pray, you can't do anything. After you pray, you can do anything. But not until you pray." And that stuck with me all of these years. But praying eliminates impulsive behavior because to pray means to slow down. Right? It removes, kind of, the emotional presumptive mistakes that sometimes we make when we're just sure we know what God wants, and it looks so obvious - like everyone would vote with us - and yet not at all what God wants. So David, in his mind, is a king. "I gotta go help these people. They're being robbed by the Philistines. They're losing their food. They're starving." Makes every bit of sense. He might have just said, "Let's just go!" But David is wise enough now to just first seek the LORD. The more we seek Him, the more the benefits of knowing Him. And God doesn't leave us ignorant if we ask. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and" what happens? "He'll direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:6). It's a promise, right? So seek Him. And David did. How refreshing David is from Saul. What a good story to be at. Saul was just a bummer, wasn't he? Always. But

David is here.....he's a wanted man, he's being hunted by the king with all of the resources of the government, and he still takes great concern for God's people. And this is why the LORD chose him to be the king. A true servant puts others' needs ahead of his.

Well, verse 3 tells us (and I think it's logical) that these men that had come to David, these guys that nobody wanted - six hundred of them now - would say to David, "That's a bad idea." In fact, verse 13 tells us there are six hundred. "It's a bad idea. Look, we're afraid here." (I was going to say 'afrightened' here, but that's not a good word.) "We're 'ascared' here in Judah. What if we get out there in the middle of nowhere, and now we're surrounded? First Saul's chasin' us, then there're the Philistines. Man, that's a bad idea!" And David, I think, understood that this motley crew that had been gathered together didn't know the LORD as David did yet. They thought that this was just gonna get worse, and so he understood their worries. And he does something that I think is pretty interesting. He goes back to pray again, and I suspect, although it doesn't say, that this time he took these men with him. "All right. Let's go check with the LORD because I did that, and I think He said we should go. But we can do that again because if it's the LORD, we'll get the same answer." And so he took these men who were learning to trust God with him. He loved them, he led by example, he addressed their hesitancy of faith, if you will. He wanted them to grow. And so he prays again. And notice that, in verse 4, we read that as he asked again that the LORD again gave him basically the same direction. "I'll go with you, I'll deliver them into your hands, you'll save the town. There's nothing to be worried about. This is God's will." So these men still had their eyes on the situation. David wanted them to have their eyes on the LORD. And so he leads them. And notice, in verse 5, it says, "And David and his men went." Whatever their hesitation was, prayer and example won them, I think, back to the things of God, and they go out to be doers not just hearers of God's Word. But I want you to notice - seek direction and then act obediently. Don't just be hearers. Be doers of what you hear. And, as they go, God uses them, and, indeed, without any information beyond that, the city is delivered, the enemy is thwarted, the food is returned, and God is honored.

We read, in verse 7, "And Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah. So Saul said, 'God has delivered him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars.' Then Saul called all the people together for war, to go down to Keilah" (not to save them from the Philistines but) "to besiege David and his men. When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, 'Bring the ephod here.' " I don't know how word gets back to

Saul, but, man, I'm tellin' ya. It has to be as bad in those days as it is in our days - when it comes to, "Somebody said something to somebody, and that's what I heard, and that's all I heard. I don't know who I got it from." Amazing. They're like fifteen, twenty miles apart, and people are goin', "Yeah, David's over there." "Yeah, Saul's comin' over there." It's amazing to me. So Saul doesn't rejoice that the Philistines are defeated. He doesn't rejoice that his people in his kingdom have been spared their suffering. He just sees it as an opportunity to wipe David out. "He's in a walled city. He'll never get out." And notice Saul and his wonderful spiritual language, "Oh, the LORD blessing me. I can kill him now." He somehow can make that sound spiritual, a guy that lived in open defiance against the LORD. But I read once that spiritual language is usually the last thing to depart from a life that has departed from God long before; the last thing to go is the language itself. So Saul sees this as a work of God. But let me just say to you - it isn't. One good lesson of these chapters is how careful we have to be to interpret circumstances and understand whether the LORD is in them or not. Now, in a minute, when they find Saul in a cave, asleep, and David's guys go, "Heh, heh, the LORD is with us, let's kill him," they do the same thing. They misread the circumstance and ascribe to God an action that God's not interested in. David gets it right. Here Saul, blinded by his sin, ascribes to God a benefit to himself; also absolutely wrong. Because sometimes circumstances, even though they seem to be leaning our way, are no assurance God is with us. And whether they are new believers like those with David or veteran believers like David himself, you have to be able to look at the situation and apply all that you know about God and not just limit those things to what your desires might be. So here's Saul. He has a wicked heart, he has evil motives, he could care less about the will of God. He concludes, foolishly, "This must be God's will." But, you know, when you're livin' in sin, discernment goes out the window. "In all your ways acknowledge Him." What happens if you don't acknowledge Him at all? Then God cannot direct your path. So word gets back. Saul hears about it, and he goes, "Ah, this is great. I'm gonna get..."

But, in verse 9, we're told, "When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him," (I don't know how this gossip....I guess they had the Internet) "David said," verse 10, " 'O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant.' And the LORD's answer was, 'Yep, he's comin'.' Then David said, 'Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?' And the LORD said, 'Yep. They will deliver you.' " Now, in contrast to Saul, David only wants God's will. And I love his heart. Young guy. Usually when you're young,

you're stubborn. You get older, you just.....well, then you're stubborn, too, I guess, but....(Laughing) you're louder when you're young. He's willing to just, "God, whatever You want." He risked his neck, brought his guys, obeyed the LORD, delivered the city, found God's strength.....only to hear that Saul was coming and he would even destroy the whole city to get to David because he could surround a walled city, starve the people out, destroy everyone. They couldn't go anywhere. Put his army all around the walls. David was notified, sought the LORD on it, and the LORD said, "Yes, he's coming." So, he just wants to serve the LORD. Now how do you think David felt, hearing what the people would do to him? Because it seems to me you're in one of those positions where you've done all that you can for someone and they're about to turn on you. Now, I will argue that the people were more afraid of Saul than they were appreciative of David. Because he's been there to deliver them. That's over. But Saul's a very present-tense danger. But that had to go to David's heart, I would think. David decides he will leave the city so Saul can't destroy the whole place looking for him. But how would you feel when you're being betrayed by those you've risked your life to serve? This wasn't like he just sent them some help; he put his life on the line! They fought the Philistines. There're no tougher guys in town to fight. That was as bad of a people as you could go up against, and he had done it to save their lives.

"So David," verse 13, "and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah and went wherever they could go." (No real direction given by the LORD, just, "Get away from there!") "Then it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah; so he halted the expedition. And David stayed in strongholds in the wilderness, and remained in the mountains in the Wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand." Six hundred guys are hard to hide. Six hundred guys on the run. Sometimes God, indeed, would have us to just do our best. And, as much as the LORD's goin', "They're comin', you'd better go," then they go wherever they could. The LORD doesn't go, "Go left at the light, two blocks down." They just had to go. They used common sense. God leads in very natural ways. And notice what you read in verse 14, that though David positions himself, the Wilderness of Ziph, by the way, is where he lived - this is where he grew up (familiar territory, if you will). But I like the last part of the verse because it said even though Saul was after him every day, God protected David. We're not told how. We're not told how spectacular it might have been. But just every day David got away. Just like David heard Saul was comin'. The LORD works in the most natural ways. We like when the lights go down, and the voice quivers, and your hair stands up on your arm, "Oh, the LORD's here." But that's usually not the way it happened with David. It's kind of like, "Man, we

survived today! Thank You, LORD!" But we really don't see how He did it. We just know that He did. And so David went wherever he could. He stayed in the strongholds in the middle of nowhere. He remained in the mountains. He did what he could, and God was able to watch over him. This Judean wilderness - especially the area between the Dead Sea and the Judean mountains - is inhospitable, it is rugged, it is isolated, extremely hot (being below sea level), lots of caves, lots of ravines, lots of conies and ibexes and not very many people. Horrible place to go. It was in this area that the Jewish zealots fled from the Romans in the 1st century and made their stand at Masada. It was here that David would write Psalm 63. You can go read it on your own or put it in the margin. Saul will oftentimes come to this area looking for David, and David just has to run and hide. God was with him, but it did mean that David had to run and hide. It didn't just come naturally. He just had to run, and God was with him. He would write, in Psalm 34:19, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all." He learned that on the road, though. You read Psalm 34, and you can learn it. David had to write it.

Well, we're told in verse 15, "So David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. And David was in the Wilderness of Ziph in a forest. Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, 'Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that.' So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. And David stayed in the woods, and Jonathan went to his own house." So Jonathan came up from Gibeah, which was about 25 miles from here; found his friend David. Saul couldn't find him, but his buddy could. And he was living in the woods of Ziph, hiding. Came at a time when David needed it, man, because David....look, in chapter 21, remember, he was spittin' up on himself and running into a wall. He came in to just say, "LORD, I'm gonna do things Your way." He put his life on the line for his own people only to have them turn on him; hadn't been goin' well. Now he can go wherever he could, not really any place to go. And so you can just imagine David needing a spiritual encouragement. I think one of the best reasons to go to church is we need to be encouraged. Our faith is not always so strong, and it helps to hear from people. And I think one of the best reasons you stay in fellowship is just that - we need the encouragement. We need to do this together. We need to hang on to one another and get from here to there, waiting for the Lord to come. I'm sure that David thought, "This is never gonna end. He's never gonna quit until I'm dead. I don't know what to do." And Jonathan showed up and said, "Hang in there, bro. You're gonna be fine. I know God's chosen you. I know I'll be with you. My dad

knows it, too. God'll take care of you." That's easy to say to people that are running, but it's the running guy that's gotta believe that. I always remember that Scripture early on, in Acts 4, where the early church had started to be a witness. And, for a while, everything went fine, but then the world quickly turned against God's work. And you find them, at the end of chapter 4, together in fellowship - assembling, praying, and then it says "the place was shaken where the people were gathered, and the Holy Spirit fell upon them, and they spoke the word of God with boldness" (verse 31). They had been filled in chapter 2. They were filled again in chapter 4 and again in chapter 7. You can continue to read - God continued to fill the church. David couldn't have had a better friend, and certainly this was a time when he needed it - maybe more than any other time. So God's good timing giving David some encouragement. From all biblical accounts, this is the last time that Jonathan and David meet face-to-face. I don't know that that's true because six-seven years are going to pass. But biblically we don't have any account of them meeting again this side of heaven. But the fellowship with their faith greatly lifted David up. They acknowledged each other's work, they acknowledged the work of God, they made an agreement together before the LORD. And so there would have been a prophet and a priest there witnessing this allegiance and alliance and just a commitment to one another. So the two of them made a covenant, verse 18. David went back into the woods; Jonathan went home.

Well, meanwhile, verse 19, "Then the Ziphites came up to Saul" (I don't get it, the gossip channel) "at Gibeah, saying, 'Is David not hiding with us in strongholds in the woods, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand.' And Saul" (spiritual man that he is) "said, 'Blessed are you of the LORD, for you have compassion on me.' " Again, David's place of hiding is betrayed to Saul. But this time they are Ziphites which, by the way, are David's own countrymen. This isn't another tribe; this is his people. And if you've been betrayed once by people who don't know you, and you've sacrificed for them, how much worse is it now when your own family turns against you, your own relatives, your own people? It must have broken David's heart. He must have wondered if anyone could be faithful to the LORD at all. How hard is betrayal to your face. Now, again, I would argue that the people of Ziph were more afraid of Saul than they would ever be of David. David was kind and merciful, and though he had been chosen to be king, this wasn't a very spiritual time in the nation's history. And maybe they didn't see it - they just wanted to survive. But whatever they wanted to do, lacking a spiritual relationship with the LORD, they were willing to put a good man in the crosshairs of a wicked king. "Come and do

whatever you want to him." That sounds pretty horrible. I think they were just afraid. Again, like I said, Saul uses his fake spiritual language. David flees. He writes Psalm 54 (you can put that in your margin there, if you will) as a result of this. We know that because it's in the header of the psalm, saying that he trusted the LORD, that the "strangers had risen up" against him, "oppressors are seeking my life, they haven't set the LORD before their eyes, so, LORD, help me, be my helper," he writes. He just knew he was on his own. There was no one there he could look to and depend upon. But he ends that psalm, and it's only seven verses, by saying, "The LORD has delivered me out of all trouble; and my eye has seen its desire upon my enemies." "I know that I'm going to see God come through." But this is all lessons from the road. It's like the lessons you learn, you know? You hear God's Word, but then you have to apply it.

So "Saul said" (back to the people), verse 22, " 'Please go and find out for sure, and see the place where his hideout is, and who has seen him there. For I am told he is very crafty. See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hides; and come back to me with certainty, and I will go with you. And it shall be, if he is in the land, that I will search for him throughout all the clans of Judah.' " ("I'll find him whether he's among his own people or another people.") Verse 24, "So they arose and went to Ziph before Saul. But David and his men were in the Wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon." In other words, David got wind of it again, and, for the second time in as many stories, he has to pack up and go. Saul doesn't want to go on a wild goose chase. He's a mean guy, but he's lazy. And he's worried about how he looks in the eyes of the people. So he says to the Ziphites, "Well, just pinpoint him. He's kind of a crafty fella. I'll come when you tell me where he's hidin', and if he gets away, then I'll go everywhere lookin' for him. I'm committed." And all this to kill an innocent man. By the time the men return home, David has moved further south.

Verse 25 says, "When Saul and his men went to seek him, they told David. Therefore he went down to the rock, and stayed in the Wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued David in the Wilderness of Maon. Then Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. So David made haste to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were encircling David and his men to take them. But a messenger came to Saul, saying, 'Hurry and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!' Therefore Saul returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; so they called that place" (David did) "the Rock of Escape." Verse 29, "Then David went up from there and dwelt in strongholds at En Gedi." So, desperate Saul decides he's bringin' all

kinds of guys to get David, and it sounds like he almost got him, doesn't it? Like it was pretty close. He was encircling...David was just one step ahead and running with all of his might, "God, where are You? God, You'll deliver me. God, You've promised." And he could hear them breathing down his neck. And, at the last minute, Saul gets a message, "You've got to come home right now. We've got bigger problems than David." And so it's comforting to know when God will move armies for you, isn't it? But David, realizing God's deliverance, called that whole area the Rock or the Cliffs of Escape to honor God's deliverance. And David moved further into the wilderness, down towards En Gedi. And in En Gedi there was higher ground than where he was hiding in the wilderness.

Verse 1 of chapter 24 says, "Now it happened, when Saul had returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, 'Take note! David is in the Wilderness of En Gedi.'" I don't know who these talkers are. But I get it. Verse 2, "Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks of the Wild Goats" (which is exactly what the words "En Gedi" mean). Verse 3, "So he came to the sheepfolds by the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to attend to his needs. (David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.)" We don't know how many months all of this covered. We will guess that it isn't years. We will quickly get, in just a couple of chapters, where it'll be the last two years of Saul's pursuit of David. So God doesn't give us much to go on for those seven-and-a-half years, but these stories are, I think, instrumental because they say here's David learning to walk by faith and trust the LORD. Sometimes he just has to go wherever he can; sometimes he's delivered at the last minute; sometimes he suffers the treachery of people he's loved or family that he's trusted in. But he continues to grow. And David will come to the throne at 30 years old. So it's between 22 and 30 years old that all of these things are taking place in his life. Would he trust the LORD completely? Well, he had when people betrayed him. He did when his own family turned against him. But how about now? So, he's put into another situation - En Gedi, the Rocks of the Wild Goats. It's an oasis in the desert. If you've gone with us to Israel, everyone seems to like to go there. It's nice when it's not hot; it's brutal when it's 110 degrees. But we usually go in March so it's not 110 degrees. But it could be. En Gedi has been around since Genesis 14:7. You will find it there under the name Hazon Tamar. If you were in En Gedi in Bible days, you could have watched the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. So that's where it's located, in the plains below. It's in the northern Negev. It's where the Dead Sea is, where Masada is. David is hiding in a very difficult place to live, but he's running for his life. Saul shows up with three thousand of his finest soldiers. He is older (Saul is). He is

much older. The place where he is hunting is 1400' below sea level, and because of the heat at noon, he just goes into a cave, I suspect just to get out of the heat. Because though his soldiers are tough, I don't think Saul was all that tough. He was in his day, but he's kind of a lazy guy, and he's old! So he takes a break in a cave to get out of.....but in the recesses of the cave. Big place. There're six hundred guys hiding! Have you ever been in a car and you just know someone's lookin' at you? Well, there're like 1200 eyes on Saul, and he's just dead to the world. He's completely imperceptible, this guy. But he goes in to rest, falls asleep, and David's young trainees - his men with him - see this situation as the absolute perfect example of God's blessing. "David, you've been telling us if we wait upon the LORD, He'll deliver us. And here he is. Look, he's sleeping. Kill him! Ill kill him! We should all kill him! Thank You, God! This is the coolest. I'm glad I'm a believer!" They saw this as a God-given opportunity to remove Saul.

Verse 4, "Then the men of David said to him, 'This is the day of which the LORD said to you, "Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you."' And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Now it happened afterward that David's heart troubled him because he had cut Saul's robe. And he said to his men, 'The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.' So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul. And Saul got up from the cave and went on his way." Now, remember Saul jumping to conclusions based on circumstance? Well, here're David's men quoting back to David what he had told them. "The LORD told me one day He's going to deliver us from the enemy. This is the day!" David said, "Yes! This is the day." To these men and to David, what did it mean? No more running from hardship, no more army hunting to kill you, no more price on your head. This would be the road to the throne. "Come on, David. Kill this guy, and let's go home! Thank God! I'm so glad I'm with him." And David advances, and he cuts the skirt off of Saul, if you will, as he's sleeping; no doubt in his mind, if he's a young guy, flashes of vengeance. "This is for throwin' the javelin at me. This is for raiding my home. This is for giving me your daughter and then taking her away again. This is for all those plots that you've had to kill me. This is for slaughtering all those priests. Oh, thank You, LORD. I've got plenty of reasons to run this guy through. All those hard nights where I was sleepin' with my head on a rock? Thank You, LORD!" You don't think that was runnin' through his head? I have to believe it all was running through his head. And though reason said "Amen," by the time he cut his robe, his conscience said, "No way" somewhere in the middle there. The motive was vengeance. That's sin. Never good. You can't be

driven by vengeance. That's the LORD. To do what these men suggested would be to sacrifice his faith in the LORD, commit murder, take the throne in his own hands, follow a path not approved by the LORD. He hadn't made Saul king; the LORD had. "That's the LORD's king, not mine. And God forbid that I should step in and remove him." It would mean forgetting all that he had learned about God's provision and God's guidance and God's promises, and he would dishonor the LORD. And he would set a bad example for these men that he had been teaching. It would be to betray the very things that David had been telling them all along. So, passion in his veins, vengefulness in his heart, but the Spirit of God putting on the brakes. Can't do this.

Remember what we said. Circumstances do not always say this is the LORD. You've got to know the heart of God. Be careful how you interpret circumstance and God's providence. And I think that you have to ultimately have a thorough knowledge of God's character and not just try to isolate it into one thing. Because things are not always how they seem. That's why we are worried about being deceived and knowing God's Word - because we can be deceived. The Lord said, there in Romans (12:19), "Do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath. 'Vengeance is Mine.' " So David, if nothing else, because that's an Old Testament verse, could have said, "I'm doing this for the wrong reason if nothing else. So I can determine that this isn't God's will. Oh, He might have been brought in here to show these men that God was in charge, but He didn't bring him in here for me to kill him. Vengeance is the LORD's." "Love your enemies," Jesus will say (Matthew 5:44), "Bless those who curse you and hate you and despitefully use you and persecute you." And as the men concluded, "This is the LORD," David, as a leader, says to the people, "This isn't the LORD. Not what you're asking me to do, it isn't. At all." It's always, I think, wise - at least from my own life in trying to figure out if the LORD's in something - to look at your motive for doing whatever it is you're doing. Here, vengeance certainly played a part. Sometimes it's ambition - just want to promote myself. Sometimes it's impatience - LORD, I've been waiting long enough. Sometimes it's not the LORD's way at all - I haven't got a clue as to what He might be doing. There's that verse in Isaiah 28 that says, " 'I lay in Zion a foundation stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation;' " and then it says, " 'whoever believes will not act hastily' " (verse 16). In other words, if you know that God's in charge, you don't have to hurry. But if your decisions are made with, "I gotta do this right now," probably not the LORD either. So, wait on the LORD. That's hard, isn't it? Wait on the LORD. Because I would rather do anything than wait on the LORD. This isn't the LORD. Well, David's a pretty cool leader for such a young man with these very tough guys, verses 6 and 7 would tell me. He's able to

slow these guys down - and they're street fighters - and explain to them God wouldn't work like this. They agree to sit back and let Saul walk out. Not one guy out of line. Eventually Saul wakes up. The man who hated David the most walks out of the cave.

Well "David," afterwards, when he'd gotten away a bit, verse 8, "also arose, went out of the cave, and called out to Saul, saying, 'My lord the king!' And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed down. And David said to Saul: 'Why do you listen to the words of men who say, "Indeed David seeks your harm"? Look, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and someone urged me to kill you. But my eye spared you, and I said, "I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed." Moreover, my father, see! Yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the corner of your robe, and did not kill you, know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it. Let the LORD judge between you and me, and let the LORD avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, "Wickedness proceeds from the wicked." But my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea? Therefore let the LORD be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand.' So it was, when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, 'Is this your voice, my son David?' And Saul lifted up his voice and wept." David's words to Saul were convicting, convincing. Having read ahead, I know that Saul is only moved by it for a moment - because he's not a spiritual man, he's not a godly man. He's living in sin. He's got an unrepentant heart. But David says to him, "Why are you listening to a bunch of liars about me? You're listening to the lies that they've told. Here's a slice of your robe. This could easily have been your head. In fact, I've got a guy over here who's volunteered.....about three to six hundred of them. Let this be proof to you I'm not out to hurt you. And so here's what I want to do - let the LORD decide between us. God's will is not for me to get even. You've got to answer to the LORD. You're fightin' Him." And David just commits it to the LORD. Exactly what he had written in Psalm 37. "Commit your way to the LORD.....He'll bring it to pass" (verse 5). David said, "Here, have it." So Saul realizes how close to dying he had come. For the moment, he's sorry as could be. He cries, in verse 16, tears that.....not very sincere ones, I suspect.

"Then he said to David," in verse 17, " 'You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil. And you have

shown this day how you have dealt well with me; for when the LORD delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely? Therefore may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. Therefore swear now to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father's house.' So David swore to Saul. And Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold" into the woods, back into the caves. See that twice, right? Jonathan came, "Hey, the LORD's gonna be with ya." Jonathan went home. David went out into the woods. Saul said, "I just know the LORD's gonna call you to be king." Saul went to the palace. David went out into the woods. David's the only guy walkin' by faith. Everybody else seems to be livin' out their life. So, Saul realized how close he had come to dying. For the moment, he admits it. It's the first time, by the way, publicly he acknowledges that David is going to be the king; says so out loud. Asks for clemency for his family when David comes to the throne. David promises it, and David delivers on it. If you go to 2 Samuel 9 and 21, you'll see David taking care of some of Saul's children and descendants. So Saul shows emotion, but he doesn't change his heart. If he had, he would have said, "Hey, by the way, here's the key to the palace. You can move in right now." He could have given up then. Instead, he goes back, and David goes back into hiding. And probably that will be the case for the next five more years. Poor guy. But livin' by faith isn't easy, is it? It can be so hard - betrayal, threats, having to look at situations and determine the heart of God, and, "Is this really the LORD?" People say to me all the time, "Oh, the LORD told me to tell you....." And I don't know how to argue with that. Even if I think what they're tellin' me is nonsense, I can't go, "Well, the LORD probably didn't tell ya." I can just leave it. You've got to kind of answer for yourself. We have to determine - is the LORD speaking, or is it the burrito I had for dinner? (Laughing) Is it the LORD tellin' me to go to Hawaii to be a pastor, or is it just me wanting to witness off the surfboard? I mean, you gotta determine where God is speaking. What is He saying to you? And circumstances don't define God's will, and they don't approve God's will. It's misread here in several verses. The only guy who gets it right is David. He gets that far along and stops and goes, "That's not the heart of God, that's not the way of God, that's not the will of God." It's easier. It's a definite solution. "I have the majority opinion. I've got six hundred guys that will vote me in right now, and no one will be the wiser." But he couldn't do it. Somethin' about knowing God's heart, isn't there? That we should learn. And it isn't easy. I mean, seven-and-a-half years of this, and he's doin' the right thing,

and he's in the right place. He's just gotta learn to be a compassionate man, and he's gotta learn to trust God.

I don't know what the LORD is taking you through tonight, but I trust that the long road in the wilderness that you travel is so that you might learn faith firsthand and be ready for the work God's got planned for you. There's no way to get out from that. You want to say, "LORD, use me." The LORD says, "Well, all right, I'll use you but first I'll prepare you." "No, no. I don't want to prepare! I just want to be used!" (Laughing) It's kind of like playin' in the band, you know? You've got to practice. "I don't want to practice, I just want to play." I don't want to study, I just want to preach. I don't want to learn and go to school, I just want to operate. Not very good. So God is at work preparing you tonight for something. How exciting! Who knows what you'll do. But practice learning the voice of the LORD and the Spirit of God and to know God's heart so that you're not interpreting things so wrong all the time.

I had someone a couple of months ago call - I don't know who it is but they made a list of all the things that had gone wrong - and they said, "God is mad at me." And I go, "Really? Why do you say that?" "Well, look what I just told you?" And I go, "So how do you know that's the LORD being angry with you?" And then they started telling me, "Well, this happened and that happened." I said, "Are you livin' in sin?" "No." "Are you doing your best?" "Yeah." "Are you praying?" "Yeah." "I don't think the LORD's mad at you. You've told me nothing that He should be mad." "Yeah, but my life's fallin' apart." "Well, that's just livin' in the world. Welcome to the planet." So help us, LORD, to see things clearly, don't you think? God could make it clear. And He's got things for you to do, and I'm excited to see how David comes out of this. But I'm tellin' ya, I read, and it's so easy to just read their words and close the book. But here's a king that is ruling from exile - under tremendous pressure, in his 20's - having committed himself to the LORD. He's in the place that God is richly blessing, and yet he's learning all these hard lessons because sometimes you have to learn to walk before you can run. And faith is precious enough to the LORD that He'll invest whatever it takes to have you grow in faith in Him.

Next week we'll chase David down some more. So read ahead. In fact, in chapter 26 - I don't know if we'll get there next week - but David has a second opportunity to kill Saul, and he lets him go again. But by then his guys are saying "Amen" with him; at least some of them are.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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