

IN SEARCH OF A HIDING PLACE

One of the most difficult lessons we learn in the Christian life is that GOD ALONE is our hiding place! The temporal security that we instinctively want is not found in other people. It is not found in earthly position, power, and prestige or in our possessions! It is found in God alone! Learning this lesson of faith is often a painful one because in order to understand it, God must take us through the shadow of loss into the valley of desperation, which is exactly what God did with David, his future king of Israel. David was a man God was shaping to become a man after His own heart. To do this, God enrolled David in his divine school of hard knocks, and once in class, there was one test after another.

We previously saw how David fell into desperation. God removed David's human support system. First, God removed from David's life his job and prominent position as commander of the army. Then he removed his wife Michal, the king's daughter. Next, he removed David's spiritual mentor and protector, the prophet Samuel. Finally, God removed his closest friend, Jonathan, the king's son from his life. When all that happened, David discovered what some of us have also discovered - it is not always easy to walk with God by faith! As fear began to grip David's thoughts, he began to doubt God's purpose and promise. The first sign of that can be seen in his previous comment to Jonathan:

“But truly as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, there is hardly a step between me and death.”
(1 Samuel 20:3)

David is telling his friend that his life is almost gone, over, done! In the development of Christian character there sometimes come moments when darkness seems to fall, the sun seems to set, and to the man himself everything seems lost. Other people, observing his life, wonder if he is sinking beyond all hope of recovery. It is to such a moment in David's life that we now come. Here was David, chosen to be king, destined to be master over great lands and wealth, but living in exile and begging for bread. David was anointed by the Spirit of God, but was running for his life from his enemies and destitute of all his friends. So it happens that there are times in our lives when the providence of God seems to run completely counter to His promises. God's purpose for such times is always strategic, though not necessarily easy. In such seasons, God tests our faith so that He may ultimately accomplish His purpose for our lives in a way that He could not do if the path were always smooth.

It is when problems and difficulties seem to be overwhelming that the man of God learns some lessons that he could never learn otherwise. It isn't easy to walk with God, for the air at that height is somewhat rare. It is pure, but sometimes it is hard to breathe, and faith almost gives up in the attempt to keep pace with God's way with His child. This is a strange story in David's experience, yet perhaps not so strange, because it is so true to human experience.

When all of David's earthly support was taken away from him, the fear of life replaced David's faith in God. This is the final step into desperation! Fear is always the enemy of faith. This is the battleground of Christian experience. A man grows and triumphs as his faith overcomes his fear. To believe God, to rest in the Word of God, to enjoy the promises of God is to conquer our fear. But to doubt God and to question His motives causes our faith to shrink until we literally cease to be a believing believer! At that point in our spiritual journey, we are believers in name, but not in practice or in action. At this particular point in David's story, he was going through this situation, not because of any failure or sin that he had committed, but simply because of God's purpose in proving the reality of His love, His devotion, His faith. This crucible of testing was to prepare David for a throne for which he had already been chosen, and in token of which he had already received the anointing of the Spirit.

I want you to understand that what is happening to David at this point is all in the will of God, to make of him a man of God. As someone once said, it takes but a moment to make a convert, but a lifetime to manufacture a saint. David should not have feared, but he did. Neither should we fear during hard times, but we do. We are

just like Jesus' disciples in the storm-tossed boat. It is during such times that the threatening winds and big waves are far more real to us than the presence of our Lord saying, "be of good cheer, it is I, don't be afraid!"

When David told Jonathan that there was only one step between him and death, it was because he was looking at God through the threatening clouds of opposition and trouble. He was no longer looking down at his circumstances through the rainbow of God's love. It is so easy to lose 20/20 spiritual vision. It is easy to develop a spiritual squint, to see things in the wrong perspective and start to panic. But how does it all begin? How do you think it began in David's life?

What was the cause of this man's panic when he was in the will of God, but surrounded by bewildering circumstances? Could it have been the same as ours is so often in similar surroundings, that we have relied too much on past experience? Whenever we neglect the daily renewal of God's grace and power in our lives, we are prone to fear. When God thrusts us out into some uncertainty and problem to test our faith, our faith is overcome by fear and begins to shrivel. Do you ask God daily with hunger of heart and soul for a new anointing of the Spirit for the needs of each day? Remember, that is the lesson and focus of the Lord's Prayer. It is all about us recognizing our need for daily dependence on God! This is the lesson that faith learns as it matures, but a lesson that fear can never learn.

So what do the faces of fear-based living look like in practical terms? When we choose to live our life by fear rather than faith in God, we set in motion an entire course of life actions, reactions and responses. David found himself in a cycle of life that literally drove him down to the next level. And at each level, there was a place along the way that David tried, which brought with it a corresponding feeling that he had to confront!

Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest; and Ahimelech came trembling to meet David and said to him, "Why are you alone and no one with you?" (1 Samuel 21:1)

Fear's first face is hiding in self-imposed exile! Fear drives us to cut ourselves off from people because fear exaggerates bad stuff and minimizes good support. When our emotions become twisted, intentions get misinterpreted. Everything is churning inside us out of control, and we want to escape and get away. That is what David did! Of course, with that self-imposed separation comes loneliness. David was by himself and was out of sync with God, so he didn't trust anyone. David, running scared, made his way to the village of Nob which belonged to King Saul's tribe of Benjamin. There, the tabernacle was pitched at this time, and in the sanctuary lived 86 priests. I doubt whether much disturbed their quietness except an occasional visitor who came to perform his vows before God. They had no weapon of defense because they didn't need any. To this secluded place David came seeking food and weapons. But as soon as he walked in, the head priest knew something was wrong. The fact that David was not right with God was detected the moment he entered God's sanctuary. He was found out and he knew it! So what did David do? He did what most of us do when we are on the run from God; David lied and embraced the second face of fear.

David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has commissioned me with a matter and has said to me, 'Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you and with which I have commissioned you; and I have directed the young men to a certain place.' Now therefore, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found." (1 Samuel 21:2-3)

Fear's second face is self-protecting deception! This face will bring guilt into your life as you find yourself doing things that later you will be embarrassed about. We tell lies we know in our heart are wrong, but we do them anyway, driven by fear, rather than being drawn by faith!

David said to Ahimelech, "Now is there not a spear or a sword on hand? For I brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's matter was urgent." Then the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, behold, it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you would take it for yourself, take it for there is no other except it here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me." (1 Samuel 21:8-9)

But even while David was lying to the priest, a chill of guilt went through his heart when he noticed that they were not alone.

Now one of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord; and his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds. (1 Samuel 21:7)

Later, this man would bring great calamity to this innocent group of priests, but David wasn't thinking about how his actions would impact others. His only thoughts were for himself. As fear drove David down to the next level, he conned Ahimelech out of Goliath's sword and ran. But David ran to God's enemies, the Philistines!

Then David arose and fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath. (1 Samuel 21:10)

Do you see what is happening here? David lost confidence in God and in the fulfillment of God's purpose for his life which had been revealed to him. He went to God's house for comfort and help and guidance, but he was detected as being wrong in his soul. Instead of acknowledging the truth to the only one who could help him and confessing that he had been telling a lie, he ran for his life again down to the next stop on the path of fear!

But the servants of Achish said to him, Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of this one as they danced, saying, 'Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands'? David took these words to heart and greatly feared Achish king of Gath. So he disguised his sanity before them, and acted insanely in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man behaving as a madman. Why do you bring him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this one to act the madman in my presence? Shall this one come into my house?" (1 Samuel 21:11-15)

Fear's third face is self-abasing scheme, which brought David great shame. No doubt fear had taken the edge off of David's reasoning skills, so he showed up at Gath hoping no one would recognize him, but he did so with Goliath's sword hanging in his belt! Remember where Goliath's hometown was, and where Goliath's widow and orphaned kids and friends lived? At Gath! And what was the last thing these warriors saw of David? They saw him holding Goliath's sword in one hand and Goliath's decapitated head in the other hand. David instantly knew that he was in big TROUBLE! So he threw away what remained of his self-respect and acted crazy. When you stop to think about this path, isn't that how we act when we are on the run from God? We act like we are crazy, like we don't know any better. But in the end, such behavior only brings shame upon us along with the loneliness and guilt. These are some of the faces that fear causes us to wear, and before we are tempted to think he got away with it, notice the consequences of David's fear – innocent people suffered.

Then Doeg the Edomite, who was standing by the servants of Saul, said, "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. He inquired of the Lord for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine." Then the king sent someone to summon Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's household, the priests who were in Nob; and all of them came to the king. Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub." And he answered, "Here I am, my lord." Saul then said to him, "Why have you and the son of Jesse conspired against me, in that you have given him bread and a sword and have inquired of God for him, so that he would rise up against me by lying in ambush as it is this day?" Then Ahimelech answered the king and said, "Do not let the king impute anything to his servant or to any of the household of my father, for your servant knows nothing at all of this whole affair." But the king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's household!" Then the king said to Doeg, "You turn around and attack the priests." And Doeg the Edomite turned around and attacked the priests, and he killed that day eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. And he struck Nob the city of the priests with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and infants; also oxen, donkeys, and sheep he struck with the edge of the sword. (1 Samuel 22:9-19)

One day, Saul found out where David ended up and wanted to know who helped him, and this was the outcome. How would you like to be David and have to live with that on your conscience? This is what fear and doubting God's provision and promises caused! David covered up before God, instead of acknowledging his fears and doubts, and no man who covers his sin can prosper. David's sin led to tragedy.

God was not done with David, as we shall see in future lessons. God remains faithful to each of us, His children. But we should beware... sin is expensive! God will forgive and restore us, but the consequences of sin may involve not only us, but others who are innocent. And perhaps its results may continue for years to

come. A bitter harvest may be reaped in the lives of other people because of our departure from living in faith and obedience. So let us remember that reliance upon past blessings is not enough. Coming to God for comfort, without being willing to face up to doubts and fears and unbelief, and admitting them to be sin, is not enough. If God has put you into some dark place and into some trial, it is not to drive you into sin, but to deliver you by your daily, repeated surrender and commitment to His will as you abide in Him. He wants to be your living Savior today, not merely the God Who met you years and years ago.

POINT TO PONDER: One of the most difficult lessons we learn in the Christian life is that GOD ALONE is our hiding place!

QUESTION TO ANSWER: How has God taught you this faith lesson?

Thanks for your intercession in this vital ministry!
Pastor Dave