

OVERCOMING THE PIT OF DESPONDENCY

Years ago, when I was in a seminary class, discussing all the consequences of sin in the world, one of my professors made the comment that it was his observation that all the birds of creation chirped their many songs in the minor key and none in the major key. So all of the birds' chirping was done with a tone of sadness to it, and he theorized that before man fell into sin and God cursed creation, that maybe the birds sang their songs in the major key of gladness and celebration, rather than the minor key of depression and sadness. While it's fun to speculate on what might have been true then, as well as what will be true in eternity future, at present our task of living in the present means facing what is true: a sinful world filled with imperfect people and unfair circumstances, a world in which it is impossible for any of us to escape from the occasional grip of discouragement, despondency or depression. Each of us has, no doubt in some past season of life, fallen into the pit of discouragement and wallowed around in its darkness until we reached out to God for help! This is the story before us in 1 Samuel 27-30 in the life of David. But first, before we consider it, notice the inner thoughts of David's heart that he reflected on during this time in the Psalms.

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?
(Psalm 13:1-2)

Have we ever felt like David did? SURE WE HAVE! Here was a man on the edge of falling off into a deep, deep dark hole. And contrary to what some may think, there is nothing morally or spiritually wrong with those feelings of despair that chill us to the bone, like an unexpected downpour does when we get caught without an umbrella. Such feelings are simply part of being human in a fallen world that Satan is controlling. This is all part of his strategy to torment creatures made in God's image. And when we feel such feelings, it doesn't mean that we are a bad Christian, or that we don't love the Lord. It is just a reflection of real life in a sinful world. The key issue is what do we do with such feelings? David made the wrong choices and reaped the consequences. God has preserved his story so we can learn from it and not make the same wrong choices. David's despondency came as a result of three wrong moves on his part.

Then David said to himself, "Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape into the land of the Philistines. Saul then will despair of searching for me anymore in all the territory of Israel and I will escape from his hand." So David arose and crossed over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. (1 Samuel 27:1-2)

When David ran for cover into the camp of God's enemies, his slide into disobedience had begun. Why did David, a man after God's own heart and champion over Goliath, do that? It was because he approached his dark feelings from **the humanistic viewpoint of self-reliance!** Before this, when David faced tough choices, he listened to God, Samuel and Abigail. Realize that every victory over sin makes us more vulnerable to the seductive voice of self-reliance and to what I THINK is best! So David used himself as his counselor, and having a fool for a counselor (God says there is wisdom in many counselors), David looked at life strictly from the horizontal. He didn't stop to ask God for direction. He just looked at life from his viewpoint, and notice how he looked at life... he looked with **the fatalistic reasoning of self-pity!** He thought, "I am a goner anyway. It's only a matter of time before Saul hunts me down and kills me." But wait a minute, David. Didn't God, Samuel, Jonathan, Abigail, and even Saul himself say that you are going to be the next king of Israel? "Yeah, but what do they know? That isn't how I FEEL right now! I feel sorrow of heart and alone. I feel cutoff and tired out. I just can't do it anymore: feed these 600 men and their families while trying to outfox Saul. He is going to get me." So David the faithful became David the doubter and denier in his heart, saying, "I am a dead man!" Maybe if one of his friends had been there, they would have asked, "David, are all God's promises to be discarded? Is your previous conviction of faith and commitment of trust to be completely denied? Are you going back upon all that?" In his depressed mood, David was saying, in effect, "I am afraid the Lord has undertaken something more than He can accomplish. I know that He has kept me so far, but the situation is getting too tough for Him; sooner or later Saul is going to get hold of me. After all, it is stupid to attempt the impossible. I

have waited for the Lord long enough, and I'm tired of waiting. It is time I took things into my own hands and used my own wits to get out of this situation."

So where does self-reliance and self-pity eventually lead us in life? To a better place? It led David into **the rationalistic logic of self-justification!** David concluded that there was nothing better for him to do, because he only had two choices—either live in pain or compromise his faith, so there was nothing better than to desert God and head out for the world. How many of us have been tempted to follow David down this path of FREEDOM? In his heart, I believe David knew this was wrong because his last attempt at living in Gath ended in disaster. But there he went again, only this time, leading 600 men into a life of compromise and unbelief, living in Gath under the shadow of the idol of Dagan, their god of filth! So did he get away with that choice?

And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, each with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's widow. Now it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, so he no longer searched for him. (1 Samuel 27:3-4)

The immediate result of David's decision was a **false security was created.** David gained peace. Disobedience ought to bring remorse, but more often, at least initially, it brings exhilaration. That's what David felt. His plan worked, Saul called off the search. And David let out one huge sigh of relief! Sin has its pleasures, but they are passing! David felt safe in Philistia, but destruction was just around the corner. David still had to live, his problems haven't gone away. They have just moved to a different locale. David changed his external circumstances by jumping from the frying pan into the fire! You don't live in the enemy's camp unless you buy into the enemy's philosophy. So the **enemy's cause was adopted out of fear!**

Then David said to Achish, "If now I have found favor in your sight, let them give me a place in one of the cities in the country, that I may live there; for why should your servant live in the royal city with you?" So Achish gave him Ziklag that day. (1 Samuel 27:5-6)

Here was David, the anointed king of Israel, submitting to a foreign pagan king. This was freedom from fear that was a greater bondage than he had faced before. The Bible says bad company corrupts good character, and that became true in David's life as a **destructive life was begun with guilt as the result.**

Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites and the Girzites and the Amalekites; for they were the inhabitants of the land from ancient times, as you come to Shur even as far as the land of Egypt. David attacked the land and did not leave a man or a woman alive, and he took away the sheep, the cattle, the donkeys, the camels, and the clothing. Then he returned and came to Achish. Now Achish said, "Where have you made a raid today?" And David said, "Against the Negev of Judah and against the Negev of the Jerahmeelites and against the Negev of the Kenites." David did not leave a man or a woman alive to bring to Gath, saying, "Otherwise they will tell about us, saying, 'So has David done and so has been his practice all the time he has lived in the country of the Philistines.'" (1 Samuel 27:8-11)

David's life became one big lie, a double-standard of half-truths and cover-ups. In his heart he was a Jew, but in his life, he was trying to be a Philistine. His life was a disaster as he attacked the tribes who were historical enemies of Israel, but were currently neutral in Israel's war with Philistine. He knew that would not go over well with the Philistines. So he slaughtered entire villages—a 'scorched earth' policy. He didn't even leave their clothes on the ground to incriminate him and his men. Then he went to report to his new king and lied to him! "I have been attacking Jews in the south land, along with the Israel's allies." What a lie, but the king believed him. Here is the cycle of life you can expect when you do your own thing and leave God behind. When we stop waiting on God for His timing and just live life in our flesh, the pleasures and peace sin brings quickly passes, leaving behind greater fear, ugly embarrassing guilt over the choices we've made, and an increasing mess.

In hindsight, the saddest thing about David's life was not the negative impact his example had on his family and friends. It wasn't the seeds of disobedience and destruction sowed into their lives and that David reaps along with them in future years. The saddest consequence was the impact all of this had on his spiritual life and personal relationship with God during this time. During David's 16-month stay in the land of the enemy, the sweet-voiced singer of Israel was silent! His hymnbook, our Bible, contains no psalms from this period of his life. David's life was a barren, spiritual desert with no oasis of water, shade or food. Remember where it all

started? The deadly life cycle started with how he faced those feelings of despondency. The final steps of David's devastation happened when the Philistines decided Saul was weak enough to start a major campaign of war against him. David had by now been appointed as the captain of Achish's personal bodyguard, and he was ready to do that, but his past practice had not fooled everyone.

Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek, while the Israelites were camping by the spring which is in Jezreel. And the lords of the Philistines were proceeding on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were proceeding on in the rear with Achish. Then the commanders of the Philistines said, "What are these Hebrews doing here...But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him, and the commanders of the Philistines said to him, "Make the man go back, that he may return to his place where you have assigned him, and do not let him go down to battle with us, or in the battle he may become an adversary to us." (1 Samuel 29:1-4)

David may have seen his actions as self-justifying, but the Philistine generals saw him for what he was, a **DESERTER!** Nobody trusts a deserter for obvious reasons. In the heat of battle, who will David fight for? So **David became distrusted**, and that led to him **becoming disillusioned**.

Then Achish called David and said to him, "As the Lord lives, you have been upright...Nevertheless, you are not pleasing in the sight of the lords. Now therefore return and go in peace, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines." David said to Achish, "But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant from the day when I came before you to this day, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" (1 Samuel 29:6-8)

Wait a minute, David, who is your lord? Who is your enemy? David was a mess, and having an identity crisis of the first order: "Who am I? What is real anymore? I am losing my self-respect and everyone's respect!" David put his trust in the world to protect him and provide for him, and when the deal fell through, backfiring on him, he had no backup plan. He had no "Plan B" and no guarantees! But his story continues and gets worse! **David became displaced** as his enemies decided the time was ripe for revenge!

Then it happened when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negev and on Ziklag...behold, it was burned with fire, and their wives and their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep. Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters. (1 Samuel 30:1-6)

David was now a man without an identity, a family, a home, a country, or followers, as they were getting ready to stone him. This was the level of morality that David had reduced them to. You kill enough women begging and screaming for mercy, it takes away your dignity, hardens your heart, and makes you a killing machine instead of a man! They said, "we are hurting, mad and sad. Someone is responsible, let's kill David!"

David became desperate! David had exhausted every avenue of help except one—the one source of help and peace that he left at the beginning of his whole journey down into darkness—the God of peace! God alone is the answer. He is the solution to life's discouragement, fears, threats, and crises—including physical death and the reality of eternal condemnation by a holy God.

But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Please bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?" And He said to him, "Pursue, for you will surely overtake them, and you will surely rescue all." (1 Samuel 30:6b-8)

The biblical solution for David's deliverance, and for ours, is God! David looked back to God for direction and strength, and David obeyed God. And what did his faith and obedience lead to?

So David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and rescued his two wives. But nothing of theirs was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that they had taken for themselves; David brought it all back. (1 Samuel 30:18-19)

What a testimony of God's grace, mercy and love! David, doing it his way, in less than two years brought him and his 600 men to the bottom of life, weeping until they had no tears left. And at the bottom of that pit, David came back from the madness and stupidity of compromise, disobedience and sin, turned to God and prayed "Help me, God!" And our God, who could have said, "Forget it David! I can't trust you! You are on probation! Don't call me, I'll call you! David, let me show you how I felt when you rejected me!" No, God said, "David, I am with you, and I will deliver them into your hands. I am going to restore what your sin took away!" What a good God we serve! During this whole time, God was not far from David! He was watching over David, even in his compromise and sin. He kept David from destroying his life fighting his own people, and kept their women and children safe, allowing David to recover all!

Let's learn the obvious lesson! It's a tragedy in the lives of God's children when they yield to the pressure of Satan, and God leaves them to their own reduced to scheming and planning. David exchanged trust in the promises of God for the walls of Ziklag, which soon were burned by fire! Don't do that with your life or family. Don't take that first foolish step in trusting the power of your own foolishness and strength. Our lives will face unfairness, bitter problems, and tragic crises. There is only one solution, and David found it at the bottom of the pit of desperation!

Point to Ponder: The saddest consequence was the impact all of this had on David's spiritual life and personal relationship with God during this time.

Question to Answer: Can you relate to this season in David's life? What brought you back to God?

Thanks for your intercession in this vital ministry!
Pastor Dave