

WHEN LIFE GETS OUT OF CONTROL, PART 2

1 Samuel 22

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Today, we will look at 1 Samuel 22. Last week, my intentions had been to take chapters 21–24 in one week, under the theme “When Life Gets out of Control.” What are we to do when life gets out of our control? I’m finding I’m getting so absorbed in the text I can’t take it as fast as I’d planned. So, we had part one last week, part two this week, and part three next week. We’re going to look at chapter 22:1–5.

Saul, David’s nemesis, is not eating milk and cookies or taking a peace nap in the afternoon. Saul is clutching his fist and heart at David, rather than holding David’s hand. I’m suggesting there are times in all of our lives when we are not going to find life idyllic, docile, or peaceful. It is going to be tumultuous, difficult, and unforeseen circumstances are going to cloud our vision and our path. There are going to be moments when hot tears lie on our face and when we are confused, distressed, and upset with God, circumstances, other people, family, and friends.

We’re going to be upset when things are not in our control—not in line with our personal choice. What do we do in those times?

Last week, we looked at lesson one—just know at the outset you’re going to make some mistakes. You’re not going to go through that time of trial perfectly. David made some really bad mistakes. He lied. He feared, and he just made dumb blunders. He wandered into Goliath’s hometown seeking refuge, forgetting Goliath’s sword was tucked under his clothes. He’s in big trouble. We’ve all done stupid things. We understand.

Today, I want to begin looking at the things David did right. They become an example for us of what we should be doing when life gets out of control. This message today, therefore, can either

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be a lifeline to you—a rescue line if you’re going through trouble. Or it can be a preventative word—to file away when things get out of control. Three things I want to look at in these five verses that David did right.

I. David did not go through his problem alone.

He did not remain alone. “David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father’s household heard about it, they went down to him there. All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him” (1 Samuel 22:1–2, NIV). David didn’t stay alone long. There’s an old gospel spiritual “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen.” I’ve sung that with relish at times. That’s so true—nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen. Unfortunately, while those words may be a wonderful sentiment, they do not express reality. Of course others know the trouble you have seen. Others around David know the same kind of situation he’s going through, and they gather to him. Scriptures tell us in 1 Corinthians 10:13, “Not a single temptation has seized you except what is common to man.” So, while it is a fact that every one of our experiences may be different, the kinds of issues we have to deal with in life have commonality to them. We need to seek the association and company of others who can identify with us and give us strength. And in turn, we must strengthen others also.

So, gathered around David are what I call the three D’s—the debtors, the distressed, and the discontented. These people, who know who they are and what they’re suffering from, become a mighty band of people in the company of one another. They go to that cave, and they are licked. They are wounded, they are struggling, and they are suffering. But they emerge as the vanguard of a new kingdom—as a powerful, healing agency for good in the world.

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I think, by the way, that is one of the reasons why Alcoholics Anonymous has been so successful. People gather together who have the same problems and who admit it. They talk about it and begin to ask God for healing. They begin to encourage one another, and above all, they stay honest with themselves.

One of the dangers we have in the church is—on the one hand, we're trying to press toward sanctification and perfection, and we don't want to admit that we've somehow fallen short. But on the other hand, we have this desperate need to be honest. If we elevate one side of the dimension—sanctification—ahead of the other, what happens is we gradually become a people where none of us will ever admit we're going through any trouble or difficulty. We become embarrassed to share, lest somebody think we're not spiritual. We look around the church and say, "All these people look like they've got it put together. I'm the only one here. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Surely these good people wouldn't know what it is I've gone through." But nothing could be further from the truth. The church must always remember it is to be Adullam's cave. It's gathering the debtor, the discontented, and the distressed.

I want to give this church the name that's probably held by no other church in the world—no church I know of is called "Adullam's Christian Center." But that's what the church always needs to be—a place of refuge for the three Ds. Those in debt, distressed, and discontented. God has called us into the company of one another. And He's not called us to communicate an attitude that anyone is perfect other than Jesus.

God is with us now in our own Adullam's cave here in the twentieth century. He is still taking those in debt, those in distress, and those who are discontented. And He's making them a wonderful band of healing, strength, and health for the world.

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David found solace in the company of others. He was strengthened by not going inward—by not crawling turtle-like into his personality shell and withdrawing from others.

II. Second, David did not become self-absorbed to the exclusion of taking care of his responsibilities when his life got out of control.

One of the things that happens when life gets out of control is we go inward. We start focusing on our own problems. Anyone who has had an operation knows what that's about. We get self-absorbed when we're going through health situations. We get self-absorbed when we're going through emotional problems or spiritual problems. More and more of our time is focused on ourselves, and that's understandable—that's natural. But we need to fight that tendency to be so totally self-absorbed. We need to come out of that and also be concerned with other people. We need to be concerned with the legitimate responsibilities we have in life.

David does that. Verses 3 and 4, "From there David went to Mizpah in Moab [which is on the eastern side of the Dead Sea] and said to the king of Moab, 'Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?' So he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him as long as David was in the stronghold" (NIV). David, for all the personal concerns he had for his own safety, said, "My parents are also in an exposed position." If his parents remained at Bethlehem, they were subject to Saul's slaughter. They couldn't go with David down to Adullam—they were old people, and they couldn't trek like David could. They needed to get to a safe place. David comes out of his own self-absorption and is concerned about providing a haven for his parents. He takes care of his responsibilities.

There's an interesting side note here we should not miss. And that is where David takes his parents—to Moab. Does that ring a biblical bell of recognition? It was four generations before David—his great-great-grandmother and great-great-grandfather were two people named Naomi

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and Elimelech. One day at Bethlehem after a long famine, they'd had enough. They didn't feel they could stay in that land anymore. They couldn't trust God for rain anymore. Their food had run out. Naomi, whose name meant "pleasant" and "beautiful," and Elimelech, whose name meant "God is my king," leave their ancestral home and journey down southeast to Moab—to heathen territory where there will be food. In Moab their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, grow up, marry, and die. Then Elimelech dies, and Naomi is left alone. Only one thing good happens to her in Moab—her daughter-in-law, Ruth, comes back to Bethlehem with her. When Naomi gets back, she thinks God is finished with her life. She says, "Don't call me Naomi anymore, which means pleasant. Just call me Mara, meaning bitter." But had there not been that experience of going down to Moab, there would have been no Ruth. And had there been no Ruth, there would have been no marriage to Boaz. And had there been no marriage between Ruth and Boaz, there would have been no Obed. And had there been no Obed, there would have been no Jesse. And had there been no Jesse, there would have been no great-great-grandson David. As Paul Harvey said, "Now we know the rest of the story." Now we know what God was doing those days when Elimelech and Naomi were wandering down with their sons into Moab land—away from family and friends. They didn't see it at the time, and they thought God had abandoned them. Naomi felt it the most—she lost Elimelech and her two sons. She came back a widow—grieved and bitter. "God's abandoned me."

God has made a promise to us that He is going to work all things for the good. But He never said that promise would be fulfilled in our own lifetime, necessarily. There are some things that God is working for the good in your life that you may never see. But that doesn't mean He isn't going to work it for the good. It's understandable why David goes down to Moab. He's got Moabite blood flowing in him, and there are distant relatives there. His parents will be safe. So he takes

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time out of his own personal saga of life to care for his family—to take care of his responsibilities. I encourage you, when life is out of control, don't neglect the important responsibilities you have in life.

III. The third thing David did right—he kept his heart open to God.

Verse 5 says, “But the prophet Gad said to David, ‘Do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah.’ So David left and went to the forest of Hereth” (NIV).

I suggest to you there are three ways David kept his heart open to God—through the prophet, the priest, and the psalm. Those are the three ways David keeps in vital contact with God. They may not be the particular way you will keep relationship with God, but they are the way David did.

A. Through the prophet—David didn't have the written Word of God. He depended upon the living voice. There was a prophet named Gad who comes to him and says, “You've got to get out of here. Get to the wilderness of Judah.” So he does. He let people, who God had used and who could be depended upon for advice, have entrance into his life. He heard God's word through them. We don't always hear God's word directly. Sometimes, we hear it through someone else.

B. Then, another way of receiving guidance and of keeping his heart open to God was through the priest, Ahimelech. Ahimelech was the descendant of Eli the high priest. See 1 Samuel 23:2,4, and 9–12. Those verses have four separate occasions when David, when in doubt about a decision, went to a priest and said, “I need to know from God if I should do this or not.” Those were the times David's human wisdom had run out, and he could not make the decision on his own. He wanted a yes or no answer. The Old Testament had a way for the priest to give a yes or no decision. The way may shock you. It may strike you as not being spiritual. See Exodus 28:30. The high priest had something called the Urim and the Thummim. These were stones which were carried in the vest the priest wore. They were stones that were somehow used in discerning

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God's will. No one is quite sure exactly how they were employed. The best guess is in the meaning of the words themselves—Urim means “cursed” and Thummim means “shining.” Evidently, these two stones had two faces on them. One, the Urim face which was dull. And two, the Thummim face which was shiny and glistening. Whenever it came time for a king to ask for God's will, he could go to the priest and inquire of the Lord, “Shall I go to battle or not?” The priest would take the stones out and, in some way, would cast the lot—if both sides came up Urim, that was a no. If both sides came up Thummim, the answer was yes. If he had one Urim and one Thummim it was “What do you want to do? God will be with you either way.” It's not a very spiritual way of knowing God's will. Yet, if we look at Acts 1, that's exactly how the church selected the apostle to replace Judas. They cast lots—like Proverbs 16:33. The lot was cast, and the decision was holy and from the Lord. Am I suggesting one of the ways you can get guidance is to flip coin? No, I'm not suggesting that. But I am saying there are times when we run out of our ability to humanly rationalize a decision. And David didn't simply cast a lot, he inquired of God. He went through the process of asking the Lord, “What is Your will?” And then he let a circumstance happen in which he could discern God's will. He didn't cast the lot without asking God first. The principle for us is that we need to keep coming to the Lord and asking for direction on a moment-by-moment basis when we feel our life is out of control.

C. The third way he kept this heart opened to God was through his psalms. All through this experience of wandering, he writes these psalms which express his faith in God. When he is acting like a madman at Gath, he is composing Psalm 34 and 56. When he is in the cave, probably the cave of Adullam, he is writing Psalm 57 and Psalm 142. When he receives word that Doeg has murdered all the priests, he writes Psalm 52. When he is betrayed, something we'll look at next week, he writes Psalm 54. And when he's in the wilderness of Judah, during 1

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Samuel 22:5, he is writing Psalm 63. In that Psalm he is expressing the vital themes of a person who's in fresh relationship with God. He's expressing hunger for God. He is remembering past times of spiritual victory. "It wasn't always difficult like this," he's saying. "I have seen You in Your sanctuary and beheld Your power and glory." We need to remember in our down times that we have had up times too. He recalls that God's love is more important than life. He continues to worship in song and with upraised hands. Through the watches of the night, he is concentrating on God and praying to Him in his sleepless times. He has the bedrock confidence that God is going to use him. So, he even closes the psalm by referring to himself as the king. And he hasn't even yet become king. He already is saying, "God will uphold me."

There are times in life when all we really have is God. One of the things that happens to us when the circumstances of life are out of control is that we may become embittered. We may say, "Why is God letting this happen to me?" David could have said that. "I didn't ask to be king. I didn't ask for Samuel to show up and anoint me. I didn't ask to kill Goliath. I didn't ask to be Saul's son-in-law and one of the chief men in his court. God, you did all this. You put me there. Why are You now letting this happen to me? Why am I now running for my life? Why am I so unfulfilled?" I've known people who had difficult experiences happen in their life, and they took it as a sign that God no longer loved them and cared for them. Today, they're as bitter and as away from God as you possibly can be.

David is at that crossroads when life gets out of control. "Am I going to still believe and trust in God when my circumstances are pounding my senses with the idea that God doesn't care about me?" That's what makes it so special that David kept his relationship with God. David could have had a heart bitter to God, but he chose to keep his heart tender when he had every reason to be bitter.

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You may not see it now in your life circumstance. Things haven't worked out the way you thought they were going to. Life is not pleasant—it's difficult. In the midst of that kind of time, you can say, "God's forgotten me. God's abandoned me. Why should I serve Him?" You can make that decision, and you can withdraw into a shell with bitterness and regret. Or you can say, "I don't understand, God. But I know because Jesus Christ has risen from the dead that everything He says is true. You say, Lord Jesus, You're David's Son. You will never leave me nor forsake me. And you give me the assurance that You are working for the good in my life. Lord, even if I don't see it in the days that I live, I will die trusting that every event of my life You're going to work for good. And rather than being bitter, withdrawing, and becoming rebellious—I will serve You. And I will love You and believe You and trust You." That was David's critical key for staying true in trial. He kept a heart that was close to God.

Closing Prayer

Our Lord, we pray for those in our midst among us right now for whom this word comes as a rescue. We pray they may reach out a hand and feel Your hand gripping theirs. We pray for everyone whose life circumstances are out of their control. Decisions have been made for them, which they didn't make for themselves. The decisions have been painful, and the consequences were not just for twenty-four hours. The consequences permeate their life. They don't go away by just wishing them away. They're there. We have to deal with them daily.

Lord, we need You. If we needed You in our calm times, then we need You now more than ever. We find, as did David, You are our hiding place. You always fill our heart with songs of deliverance. May we trust in You. May the weak say, "I am strong in the strength of the Lord." You are no respecter of persons. If you were for the biblical David, You are for us too. We trust You for that. Help us, in every life circumstance, to keep cleaving to You—to keep coming back

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from our mistakes and our failures, to keep coming to Your side and saying, “No matter what, Lord, I’m going to stand with You. I’m going to be upheld by You.” We seek this, Lord Jesus, in Your name. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.