

## **WHEN LIFE GETS OUT OF CONTROL**

### **Part 4**

#### **1 Samuel 23-24**

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Our scripture today is once more taken from 1 Samuel. Today chapter 23 and 24. We're in this series on Samuel. We have been in kind of a subsection called "When Life Gets Out of Control." I intended to do this in one message to cover chapters 21-24. But we've slowed down and this is the fourth and last in this series.

As we have gone through these chapters we have seen there are some things that we're probably going to do wrong when circumstances are not pleasant. I suggested that David did three things wrong. We are human, we have frailties and faults and sins and God knows that. That doesn't mean that God is through with us when we do fail or err or when we make mistakes.

David did three things wrong in his time of trouble. He lied. His faith failed him – that is he doubted or feared. He also made a really stupid blunder. He wanders into Goliath's hometown seeking refuge, not the best place to go. A dumb mistake.

All of us in life can think of at least one really stupid thing we've done or said that we wish we hadn't. We also notice that David did some things right. We've looked at three things he did right. Today we're going to look at three more.

The things he did right. First he did not remain alone. He gathered others around him. It's important when we're going through time of difficulty that we not try to do it as a solitary lone ranger without support and strength and counsel and prayer and help of others. The second thing that David did right was he did not become so self absorbed in his own problem that he left off taking care of his legitimate responsibilities. He had responsibility especially toward his parents to make sure they were safe. He could have stayed in his cave and said, I'm only concerned about my life and my safety. But he came out of his own problem long enough to take care of his own responsibility. We need to do that when we're in difficulty. Get up and face our responsibilities. The third thing that David did right is he kept his heart open to God. By prophet, priest and song. He kept his life open to the Lord.

Today we look at the fourth thing he did right. And five and six. Samuel 23 and 24.

The fourth thing that David did right is he did not demand reward for doing the right. He did the right thing in chapter 23, verses 1-14. He was in a situation. Once more he was hiding from Saul. That's what these chapters are about. He was in a place called Keilah. He gets word that the citizens of Keilah have had their grape harvest robbed by the Philistines who have taken the harvest at threshing time.

That may not ring a bell with us. We'd say So what? But if someone attacks or garnished your wages without cause for the next six months believe me you would be alarmed and you would want somebody to come to your defense and help you. In an agricultural community where a grain harvest was everything that meant six months work of sowing and weeding and growing and cutting and harvesting and threshing. That was all stolen. David could have set back and said, It's too dangerous for me to get involved. That's what Saul, the king is for. It's his realm. He can come to their defense. But he says I've got a group of people here that can deliver these

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people. I'll come to their aid. After helping them he winds up in their city. Then he begins to realize, I'm in the walled city! Is Saul going to get me. I'm not free like when I'm in the wilderness. Maybe I'll get trapped here. Maybe this town will turn me over to Saul. I'm trapped.

So he goes to the Lord and inquires. Will these people turn me over? And the Lord says to him, Yes they will. So David gets out of there.

What is striking about this is if anybody shouldn't have turned him over to his enemy it shouldn't have been these people. They should have been like Rahab of old, been willing to hide him for the good that he had done for them. They are ready to receive the benefits from him but they are not ready to say thanks.

What do you expect when you've done something real nice for someone? You expect a thank you. If you've given a gift, a thank you note. A word of commendation. A word of approval. A returned favor. Those kinds of things we expect when we've done something nice for someone. Then when we've done something nice and not only not rewarded but turned against we begin to have our problems. We chaff at that.

You perhaps have faced that. Perhaps at work, the person you helped learn he job gets promoted over you. The child in the family that you helped the most is the most ungrateful sometimes. Or the husband you helped to put through school is the one who when he gets his diploma runs off with someone else. Or among friends, you've had some close friend with whom you've shared your inner life, your thoughts, your secrets, your perspectives and they've turned around and communicated that to others and used that information against you. You say, I can't cope with that.

What are our options when these kinds of things happen to us? David could have retaliated. He could have said, You people are not going to do that to me and I am going to punish you severely. I'll kill you, set fire to your town or whatever. But had David done that he would have been no different than Saul who killed the innocent priests in the situation we looked at last week – 1 Samuel 22. What then would make David's behavior any different from Saul's behavior who killed Ahimelech. No, David is not going to adopt the personality of his enemy.

He also does not resort to rage. Rage is simply uncontrolled anger. If that had happened to your or me maybe we'd had a sense of ferocity. How dare they do this? I risked my life for these people and they turn around and do this to me!

When we get into rage then we lose our ability to be rational and calmly work our way through a situation. David kept his peace. Maybe he put himself in their shoes. He realized how really scared they were of Saul. They knew him. They knew David well enough that they didn't have to fear him that he wasn't going to do anything mean to them. That wasn't his trademark, his habitual manner of working. But Saul had killed all these innocent priests. Surely the word had got out that if we help David at all that when he leaves Saul will kill all of us. I think David justifies their action because they're afraid.

I remember a sermon by my pastor in which he took the text "*I sat where they sat and I was astonished,*" from Ezekiel. He said so often we in our own shoes turn around and judge other

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people. If we only lived with the circumstances they lived with we'd be a lot more kind and a lot more understanding. I've tried to remember that.

David had that kind of attitude toward these citizens I think he said I understand why they're afraid. He did not rage. He did not retaliate. He is not going to let his personality be changed when he is not rewarded for doing right. If we begin to develop an attitude of hostility and bitterness when we have not been rewarded for doing right then we're sitting on an emotional volcano that could someday really bite us. David avoids consuming himself when he is not rewarded for doing right. Right is its own reward whether or not it is externally rewarded.

The fifth thing that David does right when life is out of control is he did not commit the negative actions and words of others or unfavorable circumstances to define what he thought of himself or what God thought of him.

I know there's a lot in that statement. We need to break it down. He was dealing at the end of chapter 2:153-28 with a group of people called the Ziph. David had not done anything nice for the Ziph but also there was no imminent danger the Ziph were under for David being in their midst. Yet they actively betray him and go to Saul and say to him, He's hiding in our midst and we'll turn him over to you.

By reading Psalm 54 he reflects upon the fact that they think mean things about him. It is often the case that we interpret our own life, we interpret God's view of us by our circumstances and by what other people are saying about us. So everything's going our way and we've got a good boyfriend/girlfriend, a happy home, or good children or money in the bank and we say God's pleased with me. I'm happy. Life's wonderful. God smiles in heaven upon me. I must be a good person. But if we're having trouble of any kind we immediately look around and we're tempted to say, What did I do wrong? What's God angry with me about? Why am I experiencing this? Or it's also the truth that if we have a person who has a lot of influence in our life whether it's a parent or friend or spouse and they're feeding us a lot of negative information about ourselves we can so easily then begin to think that God thinks of us that way. It's often true that a person who has had a bad human father has the most difficult time understanding that the scriptures talk to us about a good heavenly Father. We interpret ourselves and God's attitude toward us by the data we're being fed either by our circumstances or from other people.

That's a tremendous hurricane against the good development of our emotional souls. Adverse circumstances blow like a tremendous gale against the tiny tree of our own life, standing taking that assault and we will tip over. We'll begin to say that's what God thinks of us as well.

David did not confuse the Ziph's opinion of him with God's opinion of him. He didn't meld the two so he was saying, If that's what they think of me then that must therefore be what God thinks of me.

That's been part of my whole objection to the positive confession in the charismatic community. Just at the time when we most need good mental health, when we're pressed hard upon or when we are ill, then we're told that your problem is a sign that somewhere along the line you've displeased God or sinned or failed to have faith. We are therefore told to interpret God's view of us by the circumstances we are in. David did not do that and that is one reason he stayed so healthy in this time of adversity. God loved us while we were yet sinners. We must not interpret

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our adverse circumstances as a sign of God's abandonment or displeasure. The rain, scripture says, falls on the just and the unjust. The ill wind blows on the wise builders house and on the foolish builder's house without discrimination.

Sometimes sin and unbelief can have something to do with what's wrong with us but not, the scriptures teach as a general rule. I think we need to take a steady diet of Romans 8 verse 30 to the end of the chapter. It says to us, "*What can separate us from the love of God?*" The answer is nothing. "*If God is for us who can be against us?*" The answer: no one. God is for us, nothing can separate us. We need to keep taking that on a daily basis into our system until the truth not only is intellectual but becomes emotional as well. God is for us.

Jesus has already paid for our sins. We bear them no more.

Advanced age may be a time when we relive the circumstance that perhaps God's love for us is not as strong or as complete as it was when we were younger and working and before retirement. Now that we're suffering illness and difficulty, now we're reading that as a sign that God Himself has abandoned us. There are those of you who may be struggling with that. Perhaps God's view of you in light of the years you are at in your own life. Such a reading would not conform to the very nature of the God who love you. God loves us not because we are useful to Him but He loves us just because of who we are.

When life's circumstances aren't pleasant in advancing age I will grab hold of the realities that are in God.

David did not let the circumstances or the negativity of the Ziph alter his understanding of God's love for him. He explicitly says it in Psalm 54, which he writes when the Ziph had gone to Saul and said "Is not David hiding among us?" He says words like these "*Strangers are attacking me. Worthless men seek my life. Men without regard for God. Surely God is my help. The Lord is the one who sustains me.*"

What's he saying here? People are against me, God's not. He says the same thing in Psalm 142. In that Psalm are praises like "No one cares for me." Then immediately matched by "*I cry to You, O Lord. You are my refuge. If no one cares, Lord, You care.*" That's letting God's truth stand stronger for us than our external circumstances. David kept his mental health by remembering that. Just because the climate was negative didn't mean God was negative.

The sixth thing that David does in his day of trouble, his day of evil, is that he did not lose control of himself when life was out of control.

He did not lose control within himself. We see this in 1 Samuel 24 where David is in the cave at Engedi. That's a beautiful place. It's just north of the Dead Sea in the Judean wilderness. The floor of the dead sea is the lowest spot on earth. Back up again is this hidden oasis, back in those barren hills is the gorgeous oasis and these wonderful gushing springs that are watering Engedi.

David's hiding out. The modern translations tell us that actually what Saul did was go into a cave to go to the toilet. David with his men is back in the cave. Back in the inner recesses of the cave and Saul doesn't know that they are there. David has Saul's life within his hands. He has every reason seemingly and every human excuse to lose control at that moment and to attack

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Saul. There's plenty of reasons. Saul had repeatedly sought his life. Saul had alienated David from David's own wife and from his best friend Jonathan. Saul had absolutely made David's life miserable for months and years on end. He had forced him into hiding. He had displaced David's family. He had cost him immense amounts of pleasure and success and tranquillity. So if David had attacked Saul we'd have said, We can certainly understand the feeling. But he doesn't lose control of himself. Why doesn't he? I want to advance to you these things we see in David about how he maintained self-control in a situation where he could have lost control.

One of the reasons why he kept self control was he did not accumulate anger. We have made this reference a number of times in our journey through 1 Samuel. I think that's one of the great struggles of life. Gaining control and letting Christ help you with your anger. If you gunny sack anger too much and storing it it's going to wind up not only storing it and biting somebody else but biting you. You've got to find ways to release it. Whether it's hitting a pillow or whatever. I recommend you try some other ways. I'm not sure that gets rid of it. It may help act out some of those things but we do it both from the heart and verbally and to God in prayer. It's never necessarily an easy thing to do. We need to keep watching that level of anger in our life and not let it accumulate. David was not angry with Saul. Incredibly as much as Saul had done to him he had kept coming to the Lord enough and saying help me deal with this. Help me not hold this against this man. He bore him no malice. In spite of all that Saul had done toward David, David would not lift a finger against Saul. He may have been disappointed with Saul and many times his righteous anger flared up. But he didn't let his bad side of anger get in control in his dealings with Saul. When Saul actually dies David in his eulogy comments about how lovely and pleasant he was in his lifetime. That's how much he didn't hate this man. He was able to say a good word about him.

Jesus says of our enemies that we're not only to pray for them and do good to them but we are to bless them. The word "bless" them is a Greek word that means to speak well of. It means we've got a choice in the matter of speaking ill of or speaking well of. David would speak well of his enemies. It was his way of coping with his anger.

That's not easy is it? That's what Christ is calling us to do.

The second reason why he was able to keep control within himself was he submitted his thoughts and his actions to the Lord. He didn't plunge ahead in emotion. He submitted his plans and actions to the Lord. How do I know this? Verse 4 you'll find that the men who were with David in the cave said "*This is the very day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, I will give your enemy into your hands for you to do with as you wish.*" They said, "It's a favorable circumstance. God must have put him here. Now you can have your vengeance on him." But back in chapter 23:7 Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah and said God has handed him over to me for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars. Same identical thing. Looks like favorable circumstance.

What are we going to conclude if we've got favorable circumstance? God gave us this circumstance. So we act. I'm amazed at how many times we blame God for our decisions when really it turns out that events will justify that God wasn't in them at all. Saul says the fact that David is holed up in a city with walls must mean God gave him to me. David is tempted to say Because Saul is holed up in a cave where I can get him, God gave him to me. That's what David's friends are saying: use the logic of Saul. Providential circumstances. It must be God's

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will. David knows no matter how favorable the circumstances are if your heart's not right with God, you can't go ahead. You've got to keep a right heart.

Saul totally misread God's will because although the circumstances seemed right his heart wasn't right. David read God's will because although the circumstances seemed favorable David knew it was wrong to go ahead. He let his life be monitored by the will of God and not by his own quest to simply do something and simply justify it on the basis of "God spoke to me." You can't always determine God's will by what appears to be a favorable circumstance. If your heart is not in the right place you could start reading God's will wrongly.

David kept in control because he left judgment to God. Saul goes out of the cave David comes out and calls him, "I've got a piece of your robe, Saul. I could have killed you. But I won't touch the Lord's anointed. May the Lord judge between me and you on this matter. He left the judgment to God. That's not an easy thing in our life because we'd like to force circumstances to fit. We're uncomfortable with loose needs. With ends in our life that we can't immediately straighten up. We'd like to cure all the defaults in our life and all the problems in our life and all the people who give us problems in our life. Sometimes we have to let things just work out. And let God work them out and we can't force them. It's in God's hands.

David has this recognition. It's in God's hands. "Saul, you put a big scar in my life. You've made my years of youth traumatic years. But I'm not going to let those years be ruined because of you. I'm not going to turn into a person I'm not because of you. I'm going to come out of this time stronger and more healthy and more vitally plugged into God than I've ever been. You will not take this time and this scar in my life and devastate me with it." He did that by leaving it to God to sort everything out.

The story is told of a king who owned a beautiful large diamond of which he was very proud. It was a diamond that had no equal anywhere in the world. But somehow it sustained a deep scratch. The king called in his most skilled diamond cutters to see if they could in some way save the wholeness of the diamond and cure the defect. But all of them looked at it and said, "The only way to deal with it is to make the diamond into smaller units. We can't cure that defect." Finally one of the diamond workers came in and he told the king "I can take the scar in the diamond and do something with it. I can make this diamond more beautiful than it ever was." The king was impressed with the man's confidence as well as his apparent skill and gave the diamond to him. The man proceeded to work on it. With superb artistry he engraved a lovely rose into the diamond and for the stem of the rose he used the scratch. He transformed the marring thing into an instrument of beauty, which fit a pattern of design that enhanced the diamond rather than diminished.

One can imitate this craftsman. When life bruises and wounds you, you can use even the scratches to etch a portrait of beauty and love. God is at work on the deep faults, the deep scratches of our life if we leave the issues to Him to resolve. He'll work it for His glory.

David kept control of himself also because he had a forgiving heart. We touched this when we came to anger. But he literally bore no malice toward Saul. Saul was always safe in David's hands. At the same time David was not careless or passive. He took pains to make sure he was secure and away from Saul. Saul comes to know and even admit You're more righteous than I am. You treated me well. I treated you badly. David you're going to be king some day. I know

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that now. Please take care of my family. Don't let anything happen to them when you become king. Saul's pleading because he knows the integrity of David and knows he can even trust the man he's made his enemy. He's able to trust him because David's kept a forgiving heart.

I'd submit to you that Christianity is a lot of hard work. Grace is free and it's through faith. All you've got to do as a Christian is open your life to Jesus Christ and receive His forgiveness and His love. But part of the implications of being a Christian is you start walking with Christ. You take up the cross and follow Him. You don't take up the cross and do works in order to be saved. That's already a gift. But being a Christian is not something you can do as passive floater, something that requires the highest amount of energy and discipline you'll ever imagine in your life. Part of the high cost of being a Christian is the cause of Jesus Christ is calling us to forgiveness. One of the hardest things we struggle with as human beings – to give forgiveness. Not just once but many times over. David sets the example for us in practicing the regular giving of forgiveness. He's healthy because of it.

David kept forgiving Saul and Saul never received the forgiveness. But he kept on forgiving him anyway. From David and from David's son the Lord Jesus we learn that we can survive tough moments in life if your heart will declare, "I forgive you." So Christ did on the cross. His whole world was seemingly out of control. He was stretched and nailed to the cross. Yet his first words on the cross reflects his life instincts. "Father forgive."

How did David survive when life was difficult, when his life was out of control? We have reviewed six things from these chapters – chapter 21-24. Let's put them to work in our own life. He did not go through his difficulty alone. He gathered others around him to comfort and encourage and share life with him.

Two, he did not become self sorbed to the exclusion of taking care of his legitimate responsibilities.

Third, he kept his heart open to God.

Fourth, he did not demand being rewarded for doing the right thing.

Fifth, he did not permit the negative actions and words of others or unfavorable circumstances to define what he thought of himself or what God thought of him.

Sixth, he did not lose control within himself and he kept self-control because he did not accumulate anger. He submitted his thoughts and his actions to the Lord. He left judgment to God. And he forgave.

Our Lord we bring now to You our own lives and our own moments where we have needed a special grace and help from You. We simply ask that Your will will be done in our own lives. We thank You for the pattern that the scriptures give to us to help us through those moments when we are lonely, when we are hurting, when we are hunted, when we are crushed, when our emotions are so bruised we hardly know what to do. You are there with us. Your promise is true. I will not leave You. I will not forsake You. Lord, let every person in this auditorium today know that that word is not only true in general. It is true for us as a specific person and individual. Help each one of us to live for You. Rather than

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letting life's circumstances find ourselves being crushed to let them instead be the scar in our life which You make to be the stem of a rose, a thing of beauty, a thing of strength, a thing of help. We ask through Christ our Lord. Amen.