

David

A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

How To Survive the Bad Times 1 Samuel 18-23

The cave was cold and damp. Moisture collected on the roof and then dropped to the hard, cold floor. David pulled his cloak more tightly about his shoulders and shivered. Hunger pangs gnawed at his stomach. The greatest cold, however, was not in his body, but in his soul; his greatest hunger was not hunger for food, but hunger for compassion and concern. David's only crime had been in doing his best and trusting in God, but Saul's love had turned to a maniacal jealousy. Now David was a hunted animal—and all alone.

In that dark, dank den, David began to sing. His high, clear voice, soft as the wind and charged with emotion, filled the cave. He sang of his loneliness, his prayers, and his faith. The song that wafted out of the cave of Adullam has been preserved for us today as Psalm 142. The emptiness of the cave and the yearning of David's heart have echoed down through the years:

I cry aloud with my voice to the Lord;
I make supplication with my voice to the Lord.
I pour out my complaint before Him;
I declare my trouble before Him. . . .
In the way where I walk
They have hidden a trap for me.
Look to the right and see;
For there is no one who regards me;
There is no escape for me;
No one cares for my soul (vv. 1-4).

It is possible that many of us can identify with David. Bad times may have come into your life—

and you think no one cares. It is frightening, isn't it?

The question we are asking is "How can we *survive* the bad times?" In this lesson, we will continue our study of the time David was a fugitive running from King Saul. By seeing how David survived, perhaps we will see how we can too. Let us note ten "do's" and "don'ts" for surviving the bad times.

I. DON'T BE SURPRISED WHEN BAD TIMES COME (18:1—20:42)

The first "don't" is "Don't be surprised when bad times come." Let me expand that: "Don't be surprised when bad times come—even when you are doing your best." Let me expand it once more: "Don't be surprised when bad times come, even when you are doing your best—and God has been with you every step of the way."

That statement will strike some as strange. We may think, "Surely if one is doing his best and pleasing God, bad things are not going to happen to him!" I am afraid my statement is true. The life of David proves it is true.

In our previous lesson, we moved quickly over some events so we could get to the passages on Jonathan's friendship for David. Let us back up and look again at those events to see how God was with David each step of the way and still bad times came.

You will remember that after David killed

Goliath, he was invited to become part of the royal household. Saul was his mentor and greatest admirer. David still sang for Saul in the king's hours of dark depression. He was Saul's armor-bearer and personal bodyguard. Saul might have thought, "If David can kill a giant, he can handle anybody!" David was made a commander in Saul's army. He was popular and well known.

Then, however, the women sang the song that aroused Saul's hatred: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (18:7). No disrespect was meant to Saul in this song. "Thousands" and "ten thousands" were both poetic ways of saying "a great number." In the parallelism of Jewish poetry, the two superlatives meant the same thing.¹ In fact, Saul was shown the greater honor by having his name mentioned first. If Saul had been more mature and secure, he would have realized this. Saul, however, was neither mature nor secure, so we read:

Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" And Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on (18:8, 9).

The monarch became a maniac, filled with an unreasoning fear (three times in chapter 18, it is said that Saul was afraid of David²). Twice Saul tried to pin David to the wall with a spear as David played the lyre for him. He elevated David in rank in the army, pretending to honor him, but really hoping he would be killed in battle.³

Saul concocted several plots regarding the promise he had made to give his daughter in marriage to the man who killed Goliath.⁴ He first offered his older daughter, Merab, to David. When David modestly said he was not worthy of the offer, Saul gave Merab to another.⁵ When Saul learned that his younger daughter, Michal, loved David, he thought, "I will give her to him that she may become a snare to him" (1 Samuel 18:21). The word "snare" translates a Hebrew word that suggests the trigger of the trap with the bait on it. Michal would be the cheese on Saul's mousetrap!

When Saul offered Michal to David, he replied, "I am a poor man" (18:23). In other words, he could not pay the bride-price.⁶ Since David had killed Goliath, Saul should have made David rich and given him one of his daughters without

worrying about a bride-price (1 Samuel 17:25)—but Saul had not kept his word. Now Saul said, "But I don't want any money. All I want is proof that you have killed one hundred Philistines."⁷ Saul hoped David would be killed in the attempt. The offer appealed to David's sense of adventure. He and his men attacked the Philistines and brought back proof, not of one hundred deaths, but two hundred. Saul had no choice but to give Michal to David.

Saul's frustration steadily increased. First Jonathan had sided with David; now Michal was on his side too! In Saul's paranoid eyes, David had turned his own children against him. It was more than Saul could take. "Thus Saul was David's enemy continually" (18:29). The NIV has "he remained his enemy the rest of his days." Can you imagine having a father-in-law who wants you dead? (Why are some of you nodding your heads?)

We noticed in our last lesson that Saul commanded Jonathan and his officers to kill David, but Jonathan interceded for his friend and there was a brief respite in Saul's efforts to eliminate David. It was not long, however, before Saul forgot his promise not to kill David and again threw his spear at David. First Samuel 19:10 says, "And David fled and escaped that night." "Fleeing" and "escaping" summarize David's life for the next ten or so years; you will find those words again and again in our text.⁸ David had been doing his best; he had been blessed by God; but still the bad times came.

David first fled to his home and told his wife Michal what had happened.⁹ Knowing her father better than David did, Michal told her husband he had no time to lose. Feeling sure the house was being watched,¹⁰ Michal let David down out of a window.¹¹ David was never to return to this home or to Michal's love. The bad times were getting worse.

To buy time for David, Michal put a large idol¹² in his bed, put goat's hair at the head, and covered it with bed clothes. She told Saul's messengers David was sick. By the time her deception was discovered, David was with Samuel in Ramah, where the old prophet lived. Samuel took David to Naioth,¹³ the colony of the prophets in the city, where David could find sanctuary. When Saul learned he was there, he sent a group of assassins, but God protected David. When

Saul's men burst in on the prophets, God sent His Spirit on them and they began to prophesy. Saul sent two more groups—with the same result.

We can see a touch of humor in this scene. It might be compared with a dozen thugs in leather jackets, with brass knuckles and bicycle chains, bursting in on a church service, planning to kill the preacher. Then—POW—a funny look comes over their faces and they pick up a song book and begin to sing loudly “Amazing Grace.”

Saul could not imagine what had happened, so he came to investigate. When he reached the prophets, however, God rendered Saul helpless by again sending His Spirit. The chapter ends with the ludicrous scene of Saul lying naked all day and all night, prophesying (19:24)!¹⁴ It was obvious Ramah was not safe, and once more David had to flee. Never again would he see his mentor, Samuel. The bad times got even worse.

As we noted in our last lesson, David then fled to Jonathan. Imagine the frustration in his voice as he cries out to his friend, “What have I done? What is my iniquity?” (20:1). When the bad times came, perhaps you, too, cried out, “What have I done to deserve this?” The point is that David had done nothing to deserve Saul's hatred—but still the bad times came.

When Saul tried to kill Jonathan, no doubt was left. Saul would not rest as long as David was alive. The two friends parted with tears. The bad times got worse still.

Again, I stress that (1) David was doing his best—physically and spiritually—and (2) the Lord was with him in all he did. Still the bad times came. If it happened to the man after God's own heart, it can happen to you. You can be an elder, a deacon, a preacher, or a Bible class teacher—and your children can get on drugs and break your heart. You can be a loving Christian wife or husband, doing all you can to make your marriage work, and your mate can leave you for someone else. You can be an honest Christian businessman, doing your best to make your business a success, and you can lose everything. You can be a faithful Christian, putting your heart and soul into serving God, and the doctor can tell you, “You have three months to live.”

Don't misunderstand me. Being a faithful Christian will improve our opportunities to have a good marriage, a happy home, and even financial security and good health. We need to under-

stand, however, that even faithful children of God are not immune from the bad times. Don't be surprised when bad times come.

II. DON'T BE SURPRISED IF YOU ACT FOOLISHLY AT FIRST (21:1—22:1)

Think about this question for a moment: Why did David flee? He had stood up to lions and bears. He had faced Goliath. He had won many battles against the Philistines; in fact he was a military hero. Why then didn't he stand up to Saul instead of running for his life? Let me suggest it was because for the first time in his life, he did not know how to handle the situation. To this point, his way of handling opposition was to kill the opposition. He killed the lions and the bears. He killed Goliath. He killed Philistines. Saul, however, was God's anointed king. David could not kill the Lord's anointed.¹⁵ David did not know what to do, so he ran.

It is significant that as David began his life as a fugitive, he ran desperately, without much plan or purpose, doing some really foolish things.

He first headed south about two miles to Nob. The tabernacle had been relocated there after the destruction of Shiloh¹⁶; it had become a town of priests and their families. David was without food or weapons and maybe he thought, “Priests are always good for a handout.” When he got there, however, the first one he ran into was the high priest, Ahimelech, who had strong ties with Saul.¹⁷ Ahimelech was uneasy when he saw David. David had come often to the tabernacle in the past, but he always had a royal party or a group of soldiers with him. Now he came alone. To save himself and get help, David invented a gargantuan lie about Saul's sending him on a super-secret mission. The priest gave David five loaves of consecrated bread¹⁸, the only bread they had available. Later, he gave him Goliath's sword that had been on display in the tabernacle. Scheming and lying to get what he wanted,¹⁹ David was acting more like Saul than a man after God's own heart!

As David talked to Ahimelech, he noticed uneasily that Doeg was there.²⁰ Doeg was Saul's chief shepherd. (Tuck that fact away for the moment.)

As soon as he could, David took off again. This time he headed thirty miles southwest to

Philistia, to the city of Gath. David realized that he had more to fear from Saul than from the Philistines. (Unfortunately, it is often true that we have more to fear from our “brethren” than from our “enemies”!) He ran to Gath to seek asylum, which was a really dumb thing to do! Do you remember where Goliath was from? Gath!²¹ Here came David—who had killed Goliath, who had killed two hundred Philistines and mutilated their bodies to get the bride-price for Michal, who had killed so many Philistines in battle the people sang, “David has killed his ten thousands”—and he marched into the heart of Philistia, strode boldly into Goliath’s home town (with Goliath’s sword at his waist), and asked to be taken to the king!²²

David perhaps thought he could remain incognito, but there was no mistaking his red hair! The servants of Achish even knew the number one song on the Israeli hit parade: “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands”²³—ten thousand Philistines, that is. David had to be at the top of the “most wanted list” in Philistia!

They seized David,²⁴ and he panicked. “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” (21:13). God’s chosen one, the next king of Israel, was acting like a lunatic!

Achish was disgusted. “Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this one to act the madman in my presence?” (21:15). They let David go. (Many ancient people believed crazy people had been touched by the gods and were not to be harmed.²⁵)

I have mixed emotions as I read of this incident. I admire David’s quick thinking—and David gave the Lord credit for delivering him²⁶—but if David’s thought processes had not gone askew in the first place, he would never have been in a situation which required him to act like a madman to save himself. It makes me sad to see God’s anointed rolling his eyes . . . raving and shouting nonsensical phrases . . . digging his fingernails in the wood of the gate and raking his fingers down²⁷ . . . drooling on his beard.²⁸

How much lower could David get? About all that was left was for David to find a hole and crawl in it—and that is exactly what he did. From Gath, David ran to the cave where our lesson started—the cave of Adullam.²⁹

Adullam was a city in Judah, halfway between Gath and Bethlehem.³⁰ It is a desolate area, rocky and barren. Nearby is a hill known for its caves, not with one entrance, but with thousands of openings that lead to hundreds of tunnels that extend for miles. It is filled with water snakes and other venomous creatures. Today guides will not take tourists there because the caves are a favorite hiding place of robbers and terrorists. Lynn Anderson calls it “the armpit of the world.”³¹ This is where David was hiding when he said, “No one cares for my soul” (Psalm 142:4). It was one of the lowest moments of David’s life.

Again my point: If bad times happened to David, they can happen to you and me. A few years ago, a friend of mine, a young banker, was diagnosed as having juvenile diabetes. He was (and is) a bright, cheerful, active, athletic young man—and the diagnosis hit him like a runaway locomotive. For several weeks, he became irrational and depressed. Here is an illustration of his irrationality: As he watched a soccer game on TV, he began to cry. “I’ll never play soccer again,” he wept. He had never played soccer before, had no intention of ever playing soccer, but that made no difference. He saw himself as a cripple, whose sports-playing days were over. With the help of the Lord and the support of loving family and friends, he soon recovered and is now his old self again. He can now look back on his initial reaction and laugh, but he admits that for a while he acted foolishly.

We may think we would never become irrational if disaster struck, but we just don’t know. I know how I would *like* to react, how I *hope* I would react, but it may not be that way at all. I’m saying this so we will not give up if at first, when the bad times come, we act foolishly. Understand that it can happen to anyone—and understand that with God’s help, we can survive. David did; my friend did; you and I can too.

III. DO ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN ACTIONS (22:1–23)

Apparently Psalm 142 was composed when David first reached the cave of Adullam, for 1 Samuel 22 notes that David did not remain alone for long.

So David . . . escaped to the cave of Adullam; and when his brothers and all his father’s household heard of it, they went down there to

him. And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented, gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him (22:1, 2).

First, God gave David emotional support. He provided David with his family. "His brothers and all his father's household . . . went down there to him." No doubt David's family was also in danger from Saul.³²

Then God gave David practical support. He gave David a job to do. Instead of sitting around feeling sorry for himself, God gave David the challenge of organizing one of the most unlikely armies imaginable. Our text says the "three d's" began to gather around David: The distressed, the debtors, the discontented. The Hebrew word translated "distress" indicates that this group had been oppressed. Those "in debt" had been unable to pay the heavy taxes levied by Saul; they had fled lest they or their families be sold to pay the debt they owed. The word translated "discontented" indicates that this group had been wronged and mistreated and were eager for a change. David was not the only one hurting; the whole nation was groaning under the burden of Saul's rule.

These were not men trained for battle. This was group of malcontents, many of whom could probably not get along with anyone. (Later in the story, we read of "the wicked and worthless men among those who went with David."³³ At one point, the men even desired to stone David to death!³⁴) How would one even start to shape this group of misfits into something resembling an army? I do not know, but David accepted God's challenge. Soon David was busy again, active in fulfilling the will of the Lord. He was building the power base for his kingdom. He was developing leadership that would stay with him throughout his reign. When 2 Samuel 23 tells of David's "mighty men," we read, "Then three of the thirty chief men went down and came to David . . . to the cave of Adullam" (23:13). When David became king, his "cabinet" came from those he had trained and learned to trust as they fought side by side in the wilderness.

When the bad times come and we act foolishly, one of the best ways to get our heads back on straight is to concentrate on the challenges God places before us—to get busy helping others

and stop feeling sorry for ourselves.

Finally, God gave David spiritual support. First Samuel 22:5 notes: "And the prophet Gad said to David, 'Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah.'" So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth." At some point Gad joined David's forces and became one of his advisers. After David became king, Gad was his "seer."³⁶ Eventually, Gad was one of the chroniclers of David's reign.³⁷

Even as the situation began to improve for David, however, he began to see the consequences of his foolishness. One day, as Saul was sitting under a tree outside Gibeah, his chief officials around him, the king was wallowing in self-pity. "There is none of you who is sorry for me" (22:8), he wailed. Doeg the Edomite was standing near. (Remember him? He was the one who saw David at the tabernacle in Nob.) Doeg spoke up: "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the Lord for him,³⁸ gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine" (22:9, 10). Doeg did not mention Ahimelech's initial reluctance nor David's deception. Saul once more went berserk. He sent for Ahimelech and the other priests and had them killed. Then he had the entire city of Nob destroyed: men, women, children, babies, even the animals!³⁹

One priest—Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech—escaped.⁴⁰ Abiathar came to David and told him what had happened. It would have been easy for David to blame someone else for this tragedy. He might have said, "It's all Saul's fault! If he had not tried to kill me, this would never have happened!" Or, "if Saul had not overreacted, your family would still be alive!" Again, he might have blamed Ahimelech: "If your father had not challenged me, I wouldn't have been forced to lie." David might even have said, "It was just bad luck. I mean, if Doeg had not been there, this wouldn't have happened, would it?" David, however, placed the blame nowhere else and made no excuses. Brokenhearted, he said, "I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have brought about the death of every person in your father's household" (v. 22). The NIV has, "I am responsible for the death of your father's whole family." David did not say, "Saul is responsible" or "Ahimelech is responsible" or "Doeg is responsible," but "I

am responsible.”

Any of us might act foolishly when the bad times come—but that does not mean we are not responsible for our foolishness. At some point, I pray, we will allow the Lord to work in our lives again and will get our thinking straight. When we finally arrive at that point, let us be honest enough and big enough to accept the responsibility for our own actions. Let us not blame others for how we act; let us not blame the situation; let us accept personal responsibility.

It is possible we may need to face someone we have hurt, as David faced Abiathar.⁴¹ We may need to say, “I’m sorry, but I lost my head. I acted

**God is present in time of trouble;
He is there with you in your problems.**

a bit foolishly for a while; I have no excuse for what I did or said. I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me.”⁴² We cannot survive the bad times with our integrity intact without accepting responsibility for our own actions.

IV. DON’T BE SURPRISED IF PEOPLE LET YOU DOWN (23:1–29)

David was finally out of the cave, a band of supporters around him, but that did not mean the bad times were over. It was not long until David learned again the hard lesson that when the bad times come, people often let you down—people you have never harmed, maybe even people you have helped.

The next chapter begins: “Then they told David, saying, ‘Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah’” (23:1).⁴³ Keilah was an Israelite city behind enemy lines,⁴⁴ thus doubly vulnerable to attack. It was Saul’s job to fight the Philistines,⁴⁵ but he was wasting his time looking for David instead of fighting the enemy. Therefore, the people came to David seeking help.

“So David inquired of the Lord, saying, ‘Shall I go and attack these Philistines?’” (23:2). David’s men had increased to six hundred men,⁴⁶ but as far as the record goes, they had not yet been in battle. Since Keilah was behind enemy lines, they could easily end up surrounded with all means of retreat blocked. “So David inquired of the Lord” regarding going into battle.

Let us pause a moment to stress the signifi-

cance of the phrase, “inquired of the Lord.” Remember that Abiathar had fled to David for protection after Saul killed all the other priests. Since Abiathar was the son of the high priest, and since all the other priests were dead, Abiathar was now high priest. David became the protector of the priesthood, another significant step in his becoming king.

Further, when Abiathar came to David, he brought the ephod (23:6, 8).⁴⁷ The ephod was a sleeveless vest that was worn over the priestly garments. All priests wore an ephod,⁴⁸ but there was one ephod that was *the* ephod; this was the one worn by the high priest. It was associated with the Urim and Thummim, which were placed in (or near, or under) the high priest’s breast-

plate.⁴⁹ The Urim and Thummim were used to discern the will of God. We are not told exactly what the Urim and Thummim were, nor what they looked like. Perhaps they were part of the stones described in Exodus 28. Perhaps they were separate colored stones placed in a pocket of the ephod. They may have been used much like the flipping of a coin⁵⁰ (except the outcome was determined by the Lord, not by chance). They were evidently used to answer questions that could be answered “yes” or “no.”

God had given David additional spiritual support: Now David had with him the high priest and the ephod with the Urim and Thummim! Thus David was able to “inquire of the Lord.”

To David’s question, “Shall I go and attack these Philistines?” the Lord answered “Yes.”⁵¹ “So David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines; and he . . . struck them with a great slaughter. Thus David delivered the inhabitants of Keilah” (23:5). Having saved the city, David and his army camped in Keilah, perhaps planning to make it their headquarters. They had every right to expect the citizenry to be appreciative and protective. It was not long, however, before Saul learned they were there and made plans to come after them. Again David inquired of the Lord. One of the questions he asked was, “Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?” The Lord answered, “They will surrender you” (23:12).

This had to hurt! Here was a city delivered by David—their city was intact; they still had their produce and livestock; their families were safe—and yet they were ready to betray their deliverer. Perhaps they had heard of Saul’s destruction of the city of Nob and knew he would not hesitate to destroy them if they sided with David, but it still was a bitter pill for David to swallow. David, however, did not retaliate. “Then David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah” (23:13).

David and his company went next to the desert of Ziph in Judah. The Ziphites were from the tribe of Judah,⁵² the same tribe David was from. These were his own people! No doubt he felt safe here. Again, however, David was betrayed by people he had never harmed, perhaps had even protected.⁵³ The Ziphites went to Saul and told him where David was, and offered to surrender David into the king’s hand.⁵⁴ Only by divine intervention did David escape. A few chapters over,⁵⁵ the Ziphites betrayed David again.

It was not the first time David had been betrayed, nor would it be the last time; but no matter how many times it happens, it still hurts. You probably know exactly what I am talking about. You put your confidence in someone. You would have trusted him with your life. Then he betrayed your trust. He let you down, and you were filled with pain.

Times like these impress upon our minds that our reliance must not be in men, but in the Lord. Paul, the battle-scarred warrior of the cross, once said, “At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; . . . But *the Lord* stood with me, and strengthened me, . . .” (2 Timothy 4:16, 17; emphasis mine).

V. DO BE THANKFUL FOR FRIENDS WHO DON'T LET YOU DOWN (23:15–18)

Verses 15 through 18 of chapter 23 stand in sharp contrast with the rest of the chapter. While Saul was madly pursuing David to take his life, while the men of Keilah and the Ziphites were ready to betray David, we have the brief account of Jonathan coming to David to “encourage him in God.” Friends that will stay with you no matter what are few and far between. If you have a friend like that, thank the Lord for that friend.

VI. DO BELIEVE GOD WILL NEVER LET YOU DOWN (23:14, 25, 26)

How does one escape when the resources of an entire nation have been mobilized to destroy him, when those around him are eager to betray him? We read in 23:14 of how David escaped: “And David . . . remained in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand.” David did not escape Saul’s traps because he was the most clever and resourceful fugitive that ever lived, nor because he had six hundred well-trained men to protect him. David escaped because “*God* did not deliver him into his hand”!

Look through the chapters that tell of this period of David’s life, and see the number of times it is said or implied the Lord was with him.⁵⁶ When David had nowhere else to turn, he could always turn to the Lord. Many of David’s psalms relate to this turbulent period of his life. Notice the introductory notes before those psalms:

Psalm 59: “When Saul sent men, and they watched the house in order to kill him.”

Psalm 56: “When the Philistines seized him in Gath.”

Psalm 34: “When he feigned madness before Abimelech, who drove him away and he departed.”

Psalm 57: “When he fled from Saul, in the cave.”

Psalm 142: “When he was in the cave.”

Psalm 52: “When Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said to him, ‘David has come to the house of Ahimelech.’”

Psalm 63: “When he was in the wilderness of Judah.”

Psalm 54: “When the Ziphites came and said to Saul, ‘Is not David hiding himself among us?’”

In times of stress, some people keep a daily journal that helps them to keep things in perspective; David wrote songs!⁵⁷ At a time most of us would have been overcome with despair, David expressed not only his fears but also his faith in unforgettable poetry. In the first psalm attributed to this period, David voiced his bewilderment:

For behold, they have set an ambush for my life;

Fierce men launch an attack against me,
Not for my transgression nor for my sin,
O Lord,
For no guilt of mine, they run and set them
selves against me (Psalm 59:3, 4a).

Then, however, he proclaimed his confidence in God: "O my strength, I will sing praises to Thee; for God is my stronghold, the God who shows me lovingkindness" (59:17)!

In the last psalm attributed to this period, David cried to God concerning his betrayal by the Ziphites. David said:

Save me, O God, by Thy name,
And vindicate me by Thy power.
Hear my prayer, O God;
Give ear to the words of my mouth.
For strangers have risen against me,
And violent men have sought my life; . . .
(Psalm 54:1-3).

Did God answer that prayer? Look at the last of 1 Samuel 23. After the Ziphites offered to deliver David to Saul, the king asked them to tell exactly where David was, so David would not slip away again. Led by the Ziphites, Saul and his army went unerringly to the right spot. Soon Saul was on David's trail: "And Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain; and David was hurrying to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men to seize them" (23:26). Saul's army of thousands was encircling the mountain from both directions; David and his six hundred were squeezed in the middle. It looked as if there was no way David could escape. Then God stepped in. "But a messenger came to Saul, saying, 'Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid on the land.' So Saul returned from pursuing David, and went to meet the Philistines" (23:27, 28a).⁵⁸ It is impossible to read those words in the light of verse 14 and say, "It just happened." Or, "Wasn't David lucky?" Everyone understood *God* had helped. Later a memorial was set up at the spot. "Therefore they called that place the Rock of Escape" (23:28b).

No matter how dark the night, keep your faith in God. David, who fieldtested this truth in the wilderness, wrote: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). Underline the word "present." God is present in time of trouble; He is there with you in

your problems. You may not see this right now, but stay close to the Lord. Five years from now . . . or ten years . . . or twenty . . . you may be able to look back and see God's hand clearly. Hold on to the Lord; He will not let you down!

VII. DON'T BE BITTER

We can learn many other principles from David's survival of the bad times. In our next lesson, we will study chapters 24 through 26 in detail to see how David dealt with revenge. One of the great dangers of the bad times is that our hearts will be filled with bitterness. It is important to keep the "root of bitterness" from "springing up" in our hearts (Hebrews 12:15).

VIII. DO BE FORGIVING

The way to escape bitterness is to learn to be forgiving. The challenge of our next lesson, "When the Heart Cries for Revenge," could be summarized in these words: "Let all bitterness . . . be put away from you, . . . And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, . . ." (Ephesians 4:31, 32).

IX. DO UNDERSTAND THAT NOTHING LASTS FOREVER

It also helps to realize that nothing lasts forever, whether good times or bad times. In the next issue of *Truth for Today*, we will see David become king after ten years of running. Hang in there; the bad times will not last forever. We could dwell on these and other points—but for the moment let us close with one last suggestion on surviving the bad times:

X. DO UNDERSTAND THAT GOOD CAN COME FROM THE BAD TIMES

Never forget Romans 8:28; grip it tightly: "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Consider what God was doing in David's life during those dark days: God was continuing to shape David, preparing him to be king. Taking care of sheep was the undergraduate course. Fleeing for his life was the graduate course.

We cannot know God's plans and purposes,⁵⁹ but it is possible that one thing God was doing was removing all the things David depended on (all the "crutches" he leaned on), to teach David

to depend *solely* on Him. We have followed David as he lost his home and Michal's love; as he saw Samuel for the last time; as he parted tearfully from his friend, Jonathan; as he was separated from God's tabernacle. We heard his plaintive cry in Psalm 142: "No one cares for my soul" (v. 4).

Look, however, at the verses that follow in Psalm 142. In verse 5, David said, "I cried out to Thee, O Lord; I said, 'Thou art my refuge, My portion in the land of the living.'" (Emphasis mine.) David may have lost his other sources of strength, but he still had his God, and he lifted his voice to Him: "Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low; deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me. Bring my soul out of prison, so that I may give thanks to Thy name" (vv. 6, 7a).

David concluded the psalm with these confident words: "The righteous *will* surround me, for Thou *wilt* deal bountifully with me" (v. 7b; emphasis mine). Verse 4 ("no one cares for my soul") and verse 7 ("the righteous will surround me") are separated by only two verses in the text, but they are a million miles apart in sentiment. David was moving up to a new level of trust in His Lord!

These lessons are important lessons for us—and sometimes we are so hardheaded that the only way we can learn them is for disaster to strike our lives. Probably the only way we will learn to be gracious and forgiving is to first have someone mistreat us. Perhaps the only way we will learn to trust completely in God is to lose everything we hold dear. When the person of the world loses everything, he says, "I might as well end it all." When the Christian loses everything, he looks up to God and God says, "Your hand is empty? Good! At last you are ready to receive My greatest blessings!"

I am not saying we should desire the bad times to come and look forward to them. I am rather saying that, when they do come, our attitude toward them can make all the difference in the world. We can come out of those times bitter or better, shattered or shaped. Let us try keep a positive attitude when the bad times come, because good *can* come from them.

CONCLUSION

It makes no difference who you are; the bad times can come. Memories flood in: An elder

sitting on his couch weeping because of serious problems in his marriage; parents with red-rimmed eyes telling me their unwed daughter was pregnant; parents, grandparents, friends crowded into a small hospital room, waiting for news of the baby who had fallen into a swimming pool; a godly Christian woman, filled with pain, telling me her son was a homosexual. Possibly many of you are going through bad times right now. If that is the case, learn the lesson of David's wilderness experience: If we do our best and rely on the Lord, we will survive. David did; we can too.

SERMON NOTES

Ten "do's" and "don'ts" are named in this lesson (four are mentioned only briefly). You could do a "countdown" on a "top ten list" of "do's and don'ts for surviving the bad times." If you use this approach, since the last item mentioned should be "number one" on the list, the last item discussed should be the fact that *God* will help us through the bad times.

As noted in the lesson, many psalms are attributed to this turbulent period in David's life. Many of these would make excellent supplementary sermons. (In my first sermon book, *The Day Christ Came Again* and *Other Sermons*, the lesson on "No Man Careth for My Soul" applies Psalm 142. Some of the phrasing from the first part of this sermon was taken from that one.)

NOTES

¹Note Deuteronomy 32:30; Psalm 91:7; Micah 6:7. When a mother says, "I've told you a thousand times" and "I've told you a million times," she is saying the same thing both times.

²1 Samuel 18:12, 15, 29.

³1 Samuel 18:17.

⁴1 Samuel 17:25.

⁵Possibly, this was a plot to goad David into rebellion so Saul would have an excuse to kill him, but it did not work.

⁶See Genesis 34:12; Exodus 22:16.

⁷Saul asked for the "foreskins" from one hundred uncircumcised Philistine males (1 Samuel 18:25).

⁸1 Samuel 19:12, 18; 20:1; 21:10; etc. Ten times in the next few chapters, it is said (in one form or another) that David fled.

⁹Michal found out about it some way (1 Samuel 19:11); perhaps through David, perhaps in some other way.

¹⁰The house *was* being watched (1 Samuel 19:11).

¹¹This may indicate that their house was built on the wall of the city, as Rahab's was (see Joshua 2:15).

¹²Heb.: *teraphim*. This usually referred to an idol, and

thus it is translated in the NASB. What was an idol doing in David's household? Since the text gives no details, we cannot be dogmatic, but Michal probably brought it from her father's house and David probably did not know it was there. Primitive idols did not necessarily *look* like idols; this could have been a decorative pillar in the corner of a room.

¹³"Naioth" means "habitation" or "dwellings." Here it apparently refers to a complex of houses where the prophets lived.

¹⁴Since "naked" can mean either "without clothing" and "without adequate clothing," we do not know what Saul's state of undress was. Burton Coffman noted, however, that either way, when Saul first came to himself, he was more interested in finding his clothing than in finding David.

¹⁵1 Samuel 24:6; etc.

¹⁶1 Samuel 4:2, 3; Jeremiah 7:12.

¹⁷Ahimelech was a descendant of Eli. He was either the brother of Ahijah, who had joined Saul as his spiritual adviser after Samuel left Saul (cf. 1 Samuel 14:3; 22:9), or he was Ahijah (i.e., Ahijah is another name for Ahimelech). Either way, David could not trust him.

¹⁸Twelve large loaves of unleavened bread were placed on the table in the tabernacle each Sabbath (Exodus 25:23–30; Leviticus 24:5–9). The next Sabbath, twelve new loaves were placed on the table and the priests ate the old loaves. The priest gave David some of the old bread. Jesus used this story to teach that it is always lawful to do good and save life (Matthew 12:3, 4; Luke 6:9). Consider this application for today: If one were going to worship (which is commanded—Hebrews 10:25) and came across a car wreck, it would be lawful to stop and help the injured even though he missed the service to do so. This is not, however, to be taken as a license to "do evil, so good may come."

¹⁹Please understand that it is not necessary to defend David's dishonesty and other foolishness. The Bible gives a factual account of many things it does not approve of. God does not approve of lying (1 John 2:21; John 8:44).

²⁰The text says Doeg was "detained before the Lord" (1 Samuel 21:7). This may have been some disciplinary action—which would help explain Doeg's later animosity toward the priests.

²¹1 Samuel 17:23.

²²Note that David went "to Achish king of Gath" (1 Samuel 21:10) and apparently wanted to come "into his house" (note 1 Samuel 21:15). First Samuel 27:1 probably gives some insight into his reasoning at this time.

²³1 Samuel 21:11. Note that they called David "the king of the land." They probably meant "the one who rules the hearts of the land." People today speak of "the king of rock and roll," etc.—that is, one who is a dominating force.

²⁴See the introductory note on Psalm 56.

²⁵More than one traveler in the American West escaped from Indians by pretending to be mad.

²⁶Read the opening note of Psalm 34, then the message of the psalm.

²⁷Some translations have "he scratched on the gate." Also, David may have used his sword to make marks.

²⁸See the Amplified Bible.

²⁹1 Samuel 22:1. The word "Adullam" means "refuge."

³⁰Scholars are divided on the exact location of the original Adullam. The one described is the traditional location.

³¹Lynn Anderson, "Man On the Run," (N.p., n.d.), sound cassette.

³²David took his mother and father to Moab so they would be safe while he was a fugitive (1 Samuel 22:3, 4).

The family had ties with Moab; David's great-grandmother was a Moabitess. Also, Saul had warred against Moab (1 Samuel 4:47), which would make the king of Moab look favorably on Saul's "enemy."

³³1 Samuel 30:21.

³⁴Cf. 1 Samuel 30:6.

³⁵The word "stronghold" is used frequently in the story of David's flight. It does not refer to one location, but any place that was inaccessible or easily defended. In this verse, it refers to the cave.

³⁶1 Chronicles 21:9.

³⁷1 Chronicles 29:29.

³⁸First Samuel 21:1–9 does not mention that David inquired of the Lord, but he may have (see 22:15).

³⁹1 Samuel 22:18, 19. These tragedies had been foretold (cf. 1 Samuel 2:31).

⁴⁰Perhaps he had stayed in Nob "to mind the store" while the others answered Saul's summons.

⁴¹Note Matthew 5:23, 24.

⁴²Whether he does or does not forgive us, we will have done what we could (Romans 12:18).

⁴³The Philistines were "plundering the threshing floors"; apparently the purpose of the raid was to steal food.

⁴⁴Note 1 Samuel 23:3: They would have to leave Judah to go to Keilah.

⁴⁵Cf. 1 Samuel 9:16.

⁴⁶1 Samuel 23:13.

⁴⁷Some use 1 Samuel 23:6 to say that Abiathar did not originally come to David until David was at Keilah, but verse 6 probably means Abiathar stayed behind when David's army fought to capture Keilah and did not rejoin David until that feat had been accomplished. The most natural meaning of David's "inquiring of the Lord" in verse 2 is that he did so in the same way he does in verse 9.

⁴⁸1 Samuel 22:18.

⁴⁹Exodus 28:30.

⁵⁰Maybe the Urim and Thummim were exactly the same except for the color—with one stone standing for "yes," the other for "no." Perhaps, after the question had been given, the high priest reached in and pulled out one stone, thus giving the answer. It has also been suggested that the Urim and Thummim were flat and that each had one color on one side and a different color on the other side. They were tossed in the air. After they landed, if both sides showing were one color, that was an unqualified "yes"; if both sides showing were the other color, that was an unqualified "no"; if both colors were showing, the outcome was uncertain. One Jewish tradition says that they indicated God's will by *glowing*.

⁵¹Because of the fear of his men, David asked the question twice to reassure them. Both times God said to go.

⁵²Joshua 15:55.

⁵³Possibly, David and his men survived by receiving gifts from grateful owners whose property they protected (see 1 Samuel 25:14–16).

⁵⁴1 Samuel 23:19, 20.

⁵⁵The second betrayal of David by the Ziphites is found in 1 Samuel 26.

⁵⁶1 Samuel 18:12, 14, 28; 23:2, 4; 25:26, 28ff., 34, 39; 26:12, 24; 30:6, 23; etc.

⁵⁷We do not know if David wrote his songs at once or composed them in his mind and wrote them down later.

⁵⁸Since Saul had not previously seemed overly interested in Philistine raids (1 Samuel 23:1ff.), this one may have been on property owned by Saul!

⁵⁹Isaiah 55:8, 9.

□