

What's so Great about Guidance?

David the Fugitive Pt.4

1 Samuel 22:23-23:18 3-29-2009

Summary: Because of Saul's disloyalty and David's loyalty to the true King, David enjoys (and Saul forfeits) the priceless gift of guidance. Three benefits of God's guidance: If you follow God's guidance God will... 1) use you, 2) protect you, and 3) strengthen you. We have in Christ a greater version of all that they had (Prophet, Priest, King).

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22:23 Stay with me; don't be afraid; the man who is seeking your life is seeking mine also. You will be safe with me."

23:1 When David was told, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors," 2 he inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" The LORD answered him, "Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah." 3 But David's men said to him, "Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!" 4 Once again David inquired of the LORD, and the LORD answered him, "Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand."

5 So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. He inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah. 6 (Now Abiathar son of Ahimelech had brought the ephod down with him when he fled to David at Keilah.)

7 Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah, and he said, "God has handed him over to me, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars." 8 And Saul called up all his forces for battle, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. 9 When David learned that Saul was plotting against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod." 10 David said, "O LORD, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. 11 Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O LORD, God of Israel, tell your servant." And the LORD said, "He will." 12 Again David asked, "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will." 13 So David and his men, about six hundred in number,

left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there.

14 David stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands. 15 While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life.

16 And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. 17 "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this." 18 The two of them made a covenant before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.

Introduction: The value of guidance

The first time Saul ever gets any intel about where David is, the trail is extremely cold. After a lot of cajoling Saul finally squeezes something out of one of his men. Doeg says, "I spotted him at Nob." But by this time David had left Nob. He has been in and out of the country twice, he has traveled all over the place, was captured, escaped, stayed in a cave, gathered an army, fought and won one of Saul's battles, and after all that, just now Saul finally gets word – "Hey, David was seen in Nob!"

The reason for that is Saul is not chasing him yet. Instead he is trying to establish proof of a conspiracy against him that includes Jonathan, David, many of Saul's own officials, and the entire priesthood. And by accusing the priests, and punishing them, Saul declared war on God. Actually, the one thing Saul was right about in this whole mess was the fact that God was against Him. God really was against him because God was the true King, and Saul was disloyal to Him.

But David was loyal to the true King in heaven, and in return for his loyalty God grants David a priceless gift. God gives David one of the most valuable treasures a person could ever have in this world.

The form of guidance: the priesthood

Saul attempted to exterminate the entire priesthood and influence of Yahweh. But he failed in that attempt, and at least one of the priests escaped.

22:20 But Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech son of Ahitub, escaped and fled to join David.

But what Saul seeks to destroy David welcomes.

22:23 Stay with me; don't be afraid; the man who is seeking your life is seeking mine also. You will be safe with me.¹

Saul is the enemy of the priesthood and David is the protector of the priesthood. But the protection David provides for the priest is nothing compared to what David receives from the priest. What David receives is that priceless, invaluable gift from God that I mentioned a minute ago.

23:6 Now Abiathar son of Ahimelech had brought the ephod down with him when he fled to David at Keilah.

That ephod was the tool God used to provide guidance and David now has access to it. And guidance from God is a priceless treasure.

And it is a treasure that Saul has now forfeited. Saul will never hear from God again as long as he lives. He keeps the throne for the rest of his life, but he also spends the rest of his life stumbling around

¹ The two scenes in chapter 22 – Ahimelech before Saul and Abiathar before David – are parallel to each other. They follow the same form. Saul listens to the priest, draws his conclusion, and that section ends with Saul telling the priest, "You will surely die." David listens to the priest, draws his conclusion, and that section ends with David telling the priest, "You will be safe with me." So Saul is the exterminator of the priesthood and David is the protector of the priesthood.

without any guidance from God. The lesson we learn from Saul is if you are rejecting something in God's Word do not expect God to give you any further guidance in your life. And do not expect God to speak to you unless your heart is already willing to accept whatever He says.

Humanly speaking Saul has every advantage, but he always comes up short. It does not matter how rich you are, how fast you are, how smart you are, how many friends you have, how much education you have, or training, or resources; without divine guidance you are lost.

And with it you have everything you need – no matter what else you lack. When David gains the priesthood here that is not just one extra asset he now has in his back pocket. That is everything. David has Gad the prophet and Abiathar the priest with him. That is how God spoke back then – through the prophets and priests. So now David has the guidance of the true King who sees and controls all, and Saul stumbles around in the dark until the day he dies.

Last week we studied the marks of good and bad leadership, and I told you the most important one of all was the one we will study today. The #1 question for a good spiritual leader is simply this – Do you follow God's guidance? When your instincts say that way is best, but God's Word says this other way is best, which way do you go? How much do you really love God's guidance?

You have probably heard a lot of sermons about how to discover God's guidance and how to know God's will, but this sermon is not so much about how to find it. The purpose of this chapter, I believe, is to show us the *value* of God's guidance, so we will love it. So our focus this morning is simply this: What is so great about guidance? What I would like to accomplish in this sermon is to expose to you the attractiveness of God's guidance for two reasons.

1 – so you will be motivated to follow it and prefer it over any other way.

2 – so when you see how wonderful God's guidance is, it will cause you to have greater love for God Himself.

So my aim today is to show you three amazingly wonderful things about having access to guidance from God.

God will use you to accomplish His work (Rescue of Keilah, 23:1-5)

23:1 When David was told, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors,"

So David immediately seeks God's guidance.

2 he inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" The LORD answered him, "Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah."

Watch for God's guidance right now

Prior to this God had already situated David to get him just a mile or two away from Keilah. And when the crisis arises God makes it clear that David is to go save Keilah. This is how God guides you – by placing specific tasks in front of you for you to do. In the long-term big picture David's calling was to be the king of Israel. But for right now his calling is to go rescue this town.

Sometimes God will give you an idea of your long-term, big-picture calling. But do not forget about what you are called to do right now. He is always calling you to do something, so don't sit around and wait until you are king before you start serving Him. Just take a look at what God has set before you right now, and do it. Of all the ministry opportunities that are available to you right now, which one best fits your abilities and desires? That is God's calling for you for right now – jump in and do it. And if you do not see how that fits in with the big, overall plan in your life – don't worry about that. Just let God lead you step by step.

Even though David had access to a prophet and a priest, still he had no idea what lay in the road ahead of him. He had no idea what the next day or week or year had in store. All he knew was right now his calling was to go to rescue Keilah. Once that is done he can worry about what is next.

Show others God's will

But when you discover which way God is leading, the people around you are not always as excited about it as you are.

3 But David's men said to him, "Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!"

Even in that hiding place in the forest, if Saul found them they would be in big trouble. So they are already scared, and now David is telling them to leave the hiding place, go right out into the open, draw national attention to themselves, fight the Philistines, and then end up in a city where they would be sitting ducks for Saul. That did not sound like God's will to them at all.

Most people's method of discerning God's will is this – "If it sounds good to me, it must be God's will. If it sounds really hard, it couldn't be God's will." So David's men hear the plan and say, "Sounds dangerous; count us out. It is too risky."

They cared more about safety than about God's work. They wanted guidance to safety, not guidance into God's will. When you say, "God, guide me" the question is, "Guide you where?" If you stop at a gas station and ask directions, they will not be able to give them to you unless you can tell them where you want to go. When you tell God, "Give me guidance" you only do that because you have a destination in your heart. You are asking God for guidance in your life right now, guidance to where? You are trying to decide about a big purchase and so you say, "God, please show me Your will. Guide me." Guide you where? Into financial prosperity? Into comfort? Into pleasant circumstances? Are you seeking His guidance because you treasure His will above all, or are you seeking it because you want Him to keep you from making a decision that will result in hardship? Are you really seeking to follow Him, or are you just using Him to get what you really want?

David's men are not seeking God's will, because they are not really interested in serving God at this time. They are under attack and so they want to take a break from serving God until things settle down. But the work is too urgent to have that kind of approach. Jesus said we must work while it is still daytime, because night is coming when no man can work (Jn.9:4). You might be struggling with all your might just to stay alive, and God might still call you to go rescue Keilah from the Philistines.

Service is a gift from God

And if that sounds harsh or burdensome keep in mind that serving God is a privilege and gift from God, not a burden. Remember what David said to the king of Moab?

1 Samuel 22:3 Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?

What did God do for him? He sent him to go rescue Keilah. Serving God and fighting the enemies of God and rescuing the people of God was not a gift David offered to God. It was a gift God gave to David.

That is one reason why God does not accept grudging service. If the work you do for God is burdensome to you that shows that you think you are doing something for Him rather than Him doing something for you. Serving God is a high and glorious privilege that should fill us with joy and energize us and feed our souls. And if it does not we are probably not really serving Him.

David understands that, and he is ready to go fight. But so far all his men have voted no. So how is David going to persuade them? Is he going to give them a list of arguments for why this is likely to be successful? No. What he does is show his men that it is God's will.

4 Once again David inquired of the LORD, and the LORD answered him, "Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand." 5 So David and his men went to Keilah and fought the Philistines

This time they do not argue. Evidently this time David inquired right there in front of the men so they could see for themselves what God's answer was.

When someone has a message from God for you, tell them to show you from Scripture. If they cannot do that, do not listen. David does not say, "Just take my word for it and don't ask questions!" He lets them see for themselves what God's direction is.

The battle

So now they are willing. No doubt David had been training these men ever since they showed up in Adullam – but that was probably just a matter of weeks. But God says the time is now so they gather up their weapons and take off toward Keilah. When word came to David, the Philistine raid was already in progress, so whatever strategy David came up with he had to develop on the run down to Keilah. Keilah was a walled city, but most likely the Philistines were not trying to take the whole city. Verse one says **they were looting the threshing floors**. The farm areas would lie outside the city walls. The farmers would have lived in the countryside on their farms, and would just run into the walled city if there was an attack. But that left the farms vulnerable.

Keilah was located very close to Philistine territory so at harvest time the Philistines would show up almost like street gangs in an area where the police never go. So they were at the mercy of Philistine raiding parties that would come and take their harvest. In fact, in verse 5 we see the Philistines brought their livestock. Evidently the Philistines were feeding their cattle on the harvest of the people in Keilah.² It would be like a gang coming into a defenseless little town and looting the stores, taking whatever they wanted, and no one dares say anything about it.

5 So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines. He drove away their livestock and struck them down with a great blow and saved the people of Keilah.

David takes their livestock. This merciless, intimidating gang comes in to town and says, "We're letting our cattle graze on all the fruits of your harvest. Anyone here man enough to try to stop us?" And all of the sudden this young, college-age kid appears out of nowhere and says, "Yeah - me. In fact, I think I'll just take all your cattle, because I could go for a nice T-bone." **And so the Philistine gang leader says, "Big mistake cave man..." and a fight ensues, and David struck them down with a great blow.**

Before he arrived David gave some instructions to the various leaders, sent one group over there, another group over there, utilized whatever military strategies he knew that fit a situation like this, and when the fighting starts this nobody Philistine warlord just makes a basic head-on attack and the next thing he knows David's men are hitting him from behind and this side and that side and in a very short time it is already obvious that he is losing big and tries to retreat, but is cut off and David and his men just drop the hammer on these Philistines. And when it is all over, and the dust clears, David's men (who had been scared to death to even fight this battle), look around and say, "Hey – we won!"

God's purpose for David

Who in his right mind would ever leave the safety of the stronghold in Moab to come back into Israel, and then take the risk of fighting the Philistines? Who would do that? Someone who understands that until God is finished with you in this world you are indestructible. Remember the psalm he wrote in the cave?

² Other possibilities are that they are spoils that they looted from some other Israelite city they attacked, or perhaps they just needed them to haul all the plunder back home.

Psalm 57:2 I cry out to God ... who fulfills [his purpose] for me.

God will fulfill His purpose for you, and until He does you are indestructible as long as you are obedient to Him and you walk in wisdom. And then after His purpose for you is accomplished, you go to heaven.

Acts 13:36 For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers

You are indestructible until after you have served God's purpose for you in your generation. That is not to say you should be reckless or foolish. David was wise to take cover in the forest and to take precautions. But it is to say that there is absolutely nothing to be afraid of when you are obeying God and following His guidance. As ideal as Moab seemed to be, David is actually safer in Israel than in Moab, because God called him to Israel. And David understands that your safety is calculated not in terms of how far you are from danger, but by how near you are to God.

But more important than that is the fact that if you follow God's guidance He will use you to accomplish His work. He will situate you and place you where you need to be and then use you as a tool in His awesome hand. It is a great privilege and joy to serve a God who grants us the high and holy honor of being the tools He uses to accomplish His mighty works. And as long as you are following His guidance, you can be assured you are being used to do the very works of God.

God will protect you from bad possibilities (Escape from Keilah vv.6-13)

So while the people of Keilah are rejoicing and thanking David for saving them, here comes a guy huffing and puffing coming down the road from the north. It is a priest – and he is carrying something.

6 (Now Abiathar son of Ahimelech had brought the ephod down with him when he fled to David at Keilah.)

The ephod was the tool God used to speak through the priests to reveal His will. And it is a good thing he brought it, because once again David needs guidance from God, because of verse 7.

7 Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah

David is getting intelligence reports about the Philistines while Saul is getting intelligence reports about David.³ Saul does not come down to protect Keilah, but he does come when he hears David is there.

Be careful what you interpret as divine favor

7 ...and he said, "God has handed him over to me, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars."

The phrase “imprisoned himself” literally means “has delivered himself up.” David has served himself up on a platter to me. And Saul gives credit to God.

This is the flip side of what Job's friends did. They believed calamities are always a sign of God's disfavor. They were wrong about that. Saul makes the opposite mistake here. He interprets things working out well as God's favor. That is not always the case either.

³ The wording is identical at the beginning of verse 1 and verse 7.

1 David was told, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah"

7 Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah

Sometimes people will disobey God's Word, and then whenever things work out well they say, "See, I have God's favor." No you don't. What you have is God's patience. There is a huge difference. When someone is disobeying God and God is being patient, the whole time God is being patient His wrath against that person is piling up like a river behind a dam.

Romans 2:4 Do you show contempt for the riches of his ... patience?

5 Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

If you do not repent, then when the dam breaks you get all the stored up wrath. Do not ever confuse God's patience with His blessing or approval.

OK, so here comes Saul.

8 And Saul called up all his forces for battle, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.

Saul called up all his forces. Thousands of soldiers to go after 600 men. Saul was right about one thing – David is trapped. From a military strategy point of view, this will be like shooting fish in a barrel.

But there is one thing Saul does not take into consideration – the ephod. Once again in verse 9 David seeks guidance from God. He sought God's guidance when he was safe in Moab and when he was in trouble in Keilah. David sought guidance from God at every turn regardless of circumstances.

9 When David learned that Saul was plotting against him,⁴ he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod." 10 David said, "O LORD, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. 11 Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O LORD, God of Israel, tell your servant." And the LORD said, "He will." 12 Again David asked, "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will." 13 So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place.

David has picked up another 200 men since the cave – a fifty percent growth rate already. However it should still be regarded as a very small number for an army. In fact, that number (600) should ring a bell. Remember back in chapter 13 when Saul had sent almost his entire army home? He only kept a small, token force of 3000. Then when the Philistines cut him off at the pass below Micmash 80% of Saul's little force got scared and defected, leaving him with only 600. So 600 soldiers is really, really small for an army.

Human decision making matters

I find the end of verse 13 to be fascinating.

13 ...When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there.

When David said, "If I stay in Keilah will Saul come?" God said, "Yes, he will." But God knew all along that Saul was not going to end up coming to Keilah. He says "yes" to David's question because if David had stayed there, Saul would have come.

The Bible is clear that God is in total, absolute, 100% control of everything, and He not only knows the future but He determines the future. His perfect plan is going to play out exactly as He has decreed it,

⁴ In the Hebrew the phrase **against him** is emphatic. If you underline those two words in your Bible you will get the feel of the original Hebrew. David seems amazed that instead of retaliating against the Philistines for this raid, Saul is plotting against David.

and not one detail will be different from what He has foreordained to happen. Predestination is a biblical doctrine.

However, we do not want to let our Calvinism run ahead of what the Bible says so that we become fatalists. The hyper-Calvinist will say, “The future is already determined, *therefore it doesn’t really matter what you do or do not do*. Nothing you can do can change the future in any way.” That is where human reasoning takes you when it is not guided by Scripture.

But in this passage we see that is not true at all. God clearly states that if David decides to stay one thing will happen and so David decided to leave and a different thing happened. Our actions do matter. What we decide does determine what happens.

The reason Saul did not come was because David did not stay, which means, God wants us to look at the future as changeable – based on what we do.⁵ (Except for the events God has already announced, of course.)

So God knows not only everything that is going to happen, but also everything that would happen if people made different decisions. So if you follow the guidance of God He will not only use you as a tool to accomplish His mighty works, but He will also protect you from all the infinite possibilities and contingencies that you have no way of knowing about. One person can wake up five minutes late and as a result the traffic pattern is slightly different, and different people hit the red light than would have otherwise, the timing is all changed, different people run in to different people through the day – conversations are different, moods are different, and every one of those changes ultimately affect 10,000 other contingencies, and the ripple effect is exponential. So there might be hundreds of millions of changes in what would have happened had the guy gotten up five minutes earlier. And you can multiply that times every decision every human being makes every single moment of every day.

And how much of all that you are in control of? Very close to zero. But if you follow God’s will He will guide you through the infinite maze of a billion, trillion possibilities and see to it that all things work together for good for you. He will not just make the best of what happens. He will see to it that out of all the billion, trillion different things that could have happened every day, the combination that would be best for you is what actually ends up happening. But if you do not have God’s guidance then you are just like a leaf in a hurricane, and there is no meaning or direction to anything. The promise of God’s guidance in a world full of six billion decision-making human beings absolutely boggles the mind.

God will strengthen you (Jonathan at Horesh vv.14-18)

So David leaves Keilah and heads further south.

14 David stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph.

⁵ The reason that fascinates me is because I have long been interested in the question of how God relates to time. Usually people think of God being outside of time. I have never signed on to that teaching because I have no idea what it even means to be outside of time. It might be just because of my lack of intelligence, but the phrase “outside of time,” to me, is just words that carry no actual meaning that I can discern. Is God bound by time? Or limited by time? No. That I can understand. God can look into the future and control what will happen. Sometimes for us time passes by too fast, and we miss some things that are going on. That is never the case with God – for Him a day is like 1000 years (which means each minute is like 8.5 months and each second is over 100 hours to God). So God never has a situation where time passes by too fast and He cannot get something done quickly enough, or He misses something. Another way we are limited by time is sometimes it passes too slowly for us. We are eager for something to happen, but that thing is off in the future and right now time is just dragging on. And as a result of the slowness of time we lose perspective of the big picture and get caught up in trivia. But that does not happen to God either. To Him 1000 years is like a day. He has the big, overall perspective. Nothing is so far in the past that it is foggy in His memory, and nothing is so far into the future that it is beyond His conscious attention.

God is not limited by time like we are. But is He outside of time? Even if it is true that God is outside of time in some sense, it is also true that He is inside time in His dealings with us. Those who say God is outside of time will sometimes say that for God everything is happening simultaneously. So that for God, everything is in the present. The creation is right now, Jesus is dying on the cross right now, the Second Coming is right now, etc. But I do not see that in Scripture. What I see in Scripture is God dealing with us in time – where some things are in the past and some things are present and some things are future. And this has significance for the way we understand the future. Those of us who believe in the total sovereignty of God believe that God not only knows everything that is going to happen in the future, but He has full control over it. And nothing could ever happen to change what God knows is going to happen. Nevertheless, God wants us to think of the future as changeable from the perspective of the present. And God deals with us within the perspective of time.

David keeps moving deeper into the rugged high country. Then comes a key sentence at the end of verse 14. When you are interpreting a Bible story, always pay very close attention to statements like this where the writer stops and tells you how to interpret what he is saying.

14 ...Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands.

That statement is a summary not only of this chapter, but of the final 10 chapters of the book. You have got to love the “but God” in that verse.

Saul searched...but God...

That reminds us – this is not Saul versus David; it is Saul versus God. David does not escape by being crafty or smart; he escapes by being loyal to the true King, who then protects him from Saul.

Nevertheless, this is a very hard time for David. He is in great need. And God is about to provide for him exactly what he needs. That is another benefit of following God’s guidance – God supplies you with what you need.

But what God provides is a little surprising. What would you naturally think was David’s greatest need at this point? If you were in God’s position as David’s caretaker, what would you have supplied for David? My first thought would be that David could use a couple hundred thousand more men. He could use a good hiding place. He could use some good intelligence so he could track the movements of Saul – a satellite surveillance system wouldn’t hurt. I am sure there were plenty of material needs David had – food, supplies, weapons.

But then again, maybe those things would not really do David much good. Maybe David is at a stage now where he needs to learn how to command 600 men before he has the responsibility for 200,000. Maybe a good hiding place would diminish his dependence on God, or keep him from being at the right place at the right time. Maybe none of those things are what David really needs. Only God knows for sure what David really needs at this time.

David is distraught

And that thing that David really needs – God is about to provide. The wording and structure of the first phrase of verse 15 is almost identical with verse 9.

9 David knew that Saul was plotting against him...

15 David saw that Saul had come out to take his life...

The phrase is identical except in verse 9 it says David “knew” and in verse 15 it says David “saw.” David saw some evidence with his own eyes that made it really hit home. David has known that Saul was after him all along. That is why he is on the run. But there is something about when you are exposed to direct evidence of someone being against you that really hurts. Sometimes you hear about something and in the back of your mind you are thinking, “*Maybe it isn’t quite what it sounds like. Maybe something got lost in the translation.*” But then when you see it firsthand, it really hits you hard. It sounds like that is what is happening here.

Surprise!

So David is deeply troubled. The worst imaginable scenario has proved true, and the evidence for it has become painfully clear. And in his weakness and discouragement David comes in one night after a long, hard day of marching and hiding and leading all these 600 difficult people, and he takes his usual precautions before retiring to his tent or cave or whatever shelter he was using. He starts his nightly routine of scouring the horizon in every direction, sits silently in hiding for a while, listens, watches, makes sure

all the guards are at their posts - every angle that any enemy or scout could possibly sneak in is covered, everything is secure. And once he is satisfied he backs into his tent and just about jumps out of his skin when someone behind him says, "Hello David."

I am guessing Jonathan might have had to block a killer blow from Goliath's sword at that moment. David is not the type you really want to sneak up on – unless you are Jonathan. Jonathan once defeated an entire Philistine stronghold single-handedly, so he might be the only one in Saul's entire army who could pull something like this and live to tell about it. And once David gets done smacking him in the head for scaring him so bad, he gives his best friend an embrace that has the feel of a man at the end of his rope clinging to a life line.

The writer of 1 Samuel is a great storyteller. Jonathan was a main character for much of the book, but recently he has not been mentioned at all. After he and David separate in chapter 20 we get no update or any kind of comment about him. And so just about the time you forget about him, he pops up in David's hiding place.

What was it that David needed most at this time? Someone to help him find strength in God. In verse 9 when it says David learned about Saul's plotting, he just simply took action to protect himself. But in verse 15 when it says he saw it, it does not say he did anything. It just says this:

16 And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.

When David heard about it he needed guidance on what to do. But when he *saw* it was really happening and it really started to sink in, and he felt the impact of it, he needed someone to help him find strength in God. And so God sent Jonathan.

It is interesting to me that Saul has an entire army searching everywhere for David and cannot catch up to him. And Jonathan just goes right to him. It is a good thing Jonathan was not helping his father, because if he were, David would be captured right here. Jonathan was good. He was older and more experienced than David, and we saw what he was capable of back in chapter 14. So he is able to do what his father's entire military fails to do and gets to David – not to kill him, but to strengthen him. A third benefit of following God's guidance is God will strengthen you for the journey.

Jonathan's encouragement

I would love to take a whole sermon here on Jonathan's strengthening of David. I won't, because I already did. Back in chapter 20 we did two sermons on that, so I won't repeat it all now. But I will say this – every believer should be striving to improve in this skill of knowing how to help someone find strength in God.

What do you do when a friend or loved one is discouraged or afraid or depressed? Do you do the old hit and run advice dump? "Oh, you're depressed? Well, my advice is that you try this.... Oh, look at the time. See ya next Sunday."

Other people lean more toward a flattery Band-Aid and just say all kinds of really nice things about the person so he will cheer up. Others revert to positive thinking. "It'll be OK. You aren't going to have to endure anything really hard or painful."

When you are discouraged you do not need my shallow advice or my praise or my wishful thinking. What you need is to find strength in God. That is the essence of counseling. Our culture says counseling is for the professionals. But Hebrews 3:13 says encourage one another.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom

That word translated **admonish** is *noutheteo* – it means to counsel. And if you think that is for the professionals, and you are not really competent as a lay person...

Romans 15:14 You yourselves are ... complete in knowledge and competent to admonish one another.

If someone comes to you with an anxiety problem or depression or bipolar or an eating disorder or a mood issue or behavioral problem, if you know the Scriptures you have what it takes to help someone find strength in God. I would love it if as many of you as possible would come with me this Fall to the NANC conference in South Carolina October 5-7. That is the best way I know of to learn how to become a Jonathan.

And if you cannot do that, at least learn from Jonathan. Make an intentional, concerted effort. Jonathan traveled many miles and risked his life to do this. Make sure you help them find strength in God, not in anything else – including your friendship. Most people, if they had been in David's position, would tend to find strength in Jonathan. They would cling to his companionship and be needy of his friendship and his presence. If David had done that – found strength in the friendship of Jonathan rather than in God, then he would have been strong for however long Jonathan was there, and then when Jonathan left and went home they would go right back to being lonely and weak.

18 The two of them made a covenant before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.

That is the last time David will ever see his friend. But verse 18 is not as tragic as it sounds, because when Jonathan leaves, who is still there with David? God. David's strength and comfort and companionship and joy are ultimately from God, not Jonathan. So when Jonathan left, David's strength did not leave. So the next time David gets discouraged, but Jonathan isn't there...

1 Samuel 30:6 David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him ... But David found strength in the LORD his God.

When you help someone find strength in God, eventually they learn to find that strength even when you are not there. Strengthen the person by pointing them to God's great and precious promises.

17 "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this."

For more on that go back and listen to those last two sermons of chapter 20.

The Guidance of Christ

The good ol' days?

You might hear a sermon like this and think, Guidance from God sounds wonderful – if you are David, and you have Gad and Abiathar and the ephod. A lot of people read 1 Samuel and think, "Man, I'd give anything to have that ephod. Should I take this job – yes or no? If I buy this stock will it go up over the next year, yes or no?" Wouldn't it be great to have access to a priest like Abiathar or a prophet like Gad today? But we don't have any Levitical priests today.

Christ, our Prophet/Priest/King

Who is better off – you or David? David is God's chosen King, and with David are God's prophet and God's priest. Those three offices are the representation of God in the world. The prophet speaks to us the words of God. The priest intercedes between us and God. And the king is the one through whom God guides us, protects us, provides for us, and rules over us. David was God's anointed, and he had Abiathar and Gad. All we have is...Christ.

Who is better off? To ask the question is to answer it. Jesus Christ is God's anointed (in fact – that is what the word “messiah” means – anointed one). He is the King of kings. And in Acts 3:22 Jesus is identified as the great Prophet like Moses who was prophesied back in Genesis 18. He reveals God to us in far greater ways than any Old Testament prophet ever did.

Hebrews 1:1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son

Jesus is the King of kings and the Prophet of prophets. And He is a greater Priest too.

Hebrews 9:11 When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle

A large percentage of the book of Hebrews is devoted to showing how the priesthood of Christ is greater than the Old Testament priesthood. Those people had Gad, Abiathar, and David; we have Christ, who is the Prophet of prophets, and the Priest of priests, and the King of kings.

Does Jesus give you yes and no answers to all your questions? No. He gives you something a whole lot better than that. He gives you His holy Word, which tells you absolutely everything you need to know about God. And He gives you His Spirit Who uses Scripture to speak to you and guide you through life. What we need is not to know what is going to happen in the future. What we need is not yes or no answers. What we need is someone who is in control of the future watching out for us and guiding us where we need to go. What we need is a Guide who uses us as tools to accomplish the very work of God, and who guards us from all bad possibilities, and who supplies the strength we need in Him. And that is what we have in Christ.

Benediction: Hebrews 3:1 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

Devotionals

Day 1

God had situated David to get him just a mile or two away from Keilah and when the crisis arises God makes it clear that David is to go save Keilah. This is how God guides you – by placing specific tasks in front of you for you to do. In the long-term big picture David's calling was to be the king of Israel. But for right now his calling is to go rescue this town.

Sometimes God will give you an idea of your long-term, big-picture calling. But do not forget about what you are called to do right now. He is always calling you to do something, so don't sit around and wait until you are king before you start serving Him. Just take a look at what God has set before you right now, and do it. Of all the ministry opportunities that are available to you right now, which one best fits your abilities and desires? That is God's calling for you for right now – jump in and do it. And if you do not see how that fits in with the big, overall plan in your life – don't worry about that. Just let God lead you step by step.

Even though David had access to a prophet and a priest, still he had no idea what lay in the road ahead of him. He had no idea what the next day or week or year had in store. All he knew was right now his calling was to go rescue Keilah. Once that is done he can worry about what is next.

This is a wonderful gift from God. Remember what David said to the king of Moab?

1 Samuel 22:3 Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?

What did God do for him? He sent him to go rescue Keilah. Serving God and fighting the enemies of God and rescuing the people of God was not a gift David offered to God. It was a gift God gave to David.

That is one reason why God does not accept grudging service. If the work you do for God is burdensome to you that shows that you think you are doing something for Him rather than Him doing something for you. Serving God is a high and glorious privilege that should fill us with joy and energize us and feed our souls. And if it does not we are probably not really serving Him.

Who in his right mind would ever leave the safety of the stronghold in Moab to come back into Israel, and then take the risk of fighting the Philistines? Who would do that? Someone who understands that until God is finished with you in this world you are indestructible. Remember the psalm he wrote in the cave?

Psalm 57:2 I cry out to God ... who fulfills [his purpose] for me.

God will fulfill His purpose for you, and until He does you are indestructible as long as you are obedient to Him and you walk in wisdom. And then after His purpose for you is accomplished, you go to heaven.

Acts 13:36 For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers

You are indestructible until after you have served God's purpose for you in your generation.

That is not to say you should be reckless or foolish. David was wise to take cover in the forest and to take precautions. But it is to say that there is absolutely nothing to be afraid of when you are obeying God and following His guidance. As ideal as Moab seemed to be, David is actually safer in Israel than in Moab, because God called him to Israel. And David understands that your safety is calculated not in terms of how far you are from danger, but by how near you are to God.

But more important than that is the fact that if you follow God's guidance He will use you to accomplish His work. He will situate you and place you where you need to be and then use you as a tool in His awesome hand. It is a great privilege and joy to serve a God who grants us the high and holy honor of

being the tools He uses to accomplish His mighty works. And as long as you are following His guidance, you can be assured you are being used to do the very works of God.

Holy Father, You are pleased to use the lowly things in this world to do Your mighty works that it might be clear that the power is from You. What a blessed thing it is to be weak enough and lowly enough to be selected as an instrument of Your power! Teach me the blessedness of being used by You. Let me glorify You by desiring and longing to be weak and lowly enough to be used as the tool that carries out Your mighty work. Oh Lord, let me not desire to be used by You or empowered by You because I want to be made much of. Let me desire it because of a longing to experience that kind of fellowship with You – the kind that comes from being a tool in the grip of Your blessed hand.

O Yahweh, our Adonai, how greatly You are to be praised! What gracious condescension that You would stoop to use lowly man to do Your great work! What condescension that You would use an infant like me! But not only did You stoop to use infants, You stooped even lower. You became an infant. You took upon Yourself human weakness and limitation and walked on this earth as one despised and rejected by men.

Forgive me for the times when I disparage the mighty works You do through me as insignificant. From the natural point of view they seem small and meaningless. Through the eyes of faith I can see that they are eternally important and mighty beyond imagination, but so often I close my eyes of faith and am governed by the blindness of my natural eyes.

Thank You, dear Lord, for using Your servant. Teach me to love the feeling of being a tool in Your great hand – no matter what the task is.

Day 2

8 And Saul called up all his forces for battle, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.

Saul called up all his forces – thousands of soldiers to go after 600 men. Saul was right about one thing – David is trapped. From a military strategy point of view, this will be like shooting fish in a barrel.

But there is one thing Saul does not take into consideration – the ephod. Once again in verse 9 David seeks guidance from God. He sought God’s guidance when he was safe in Moab and when he was in trouble in Keilah. David sought guidance from God at every turn regardless of circumstances.

9 When David learned that Saul was plotting against him,⁶ he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod." 10 David said, "O LORD, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. 11 Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O LORD, God of Israel, tell your servant." And the LORD said, "He will." 12 Again David asked, "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will." 13 So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place.

David has picked up another 200 men since the cave. However it should still be regarded as a very small number for an army.

13 ...When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there.

When David said, “If I stay in Keilah will Saul come?” God said, “Yes, he will.” But God knew all along that Saul was not going to end up coming to Keilah. He says “yes” to David’s question because if David had stayed there, Saul would have come.

The Bible is clear that God is in total, absolute, 100% control of everything, and He not only knows the future but He determines the future. His perfect plan is going to play out exactly as He has decreed it, and not one detail will be different from what He has foreordained to happen. Predestination is a biblical doctrine.

However, we do not want to let our Calvinism run ahead of what the Bible says so that we become fatalists. The hyper-Calvinist will say, “The future is already determined, *therefore it doesn’t really matter what you do or don’t do*. Nothing you can do can change the future in any way.” That is where human reasoning takes you when it is not guided by Scripture.

But in this passage we see that is not true at all. God clearly states that if David decides to stay one thing will happen and so David decided to leave and a different thing happened. Our actions do matter. What we decide does determine what happens.

The reason Saul did not come was because David did not stay, which means, God wants us to look at the future as changeable – based on what we do. (Except for the events God has already announced, of course.)

So God knows not only everything that is going to happen, but also everything that would happen if people made different decisions. So if you follow the guidance of God He will not only use you as a tool to accomplish His mighty works, but He will also protect you from all the infinite possibilities and contingencies that you have no way of knowing about. One person can wake up five minutes late and as a result the traffic pattern is slightly different, and different people hit the red light than would have otherwise, the timing is all changed, different people run in to different people through the day – conversations are different, moods are different, and every one of those changes ultimately affect 10,000

⁶ In the Hebrew the phrase **against him** is emphatic. If you underline those two words in your Bible you’ll get the feel of the original Hebrew. David seems amazed that instead of retaliating against the Philistines for this raid, Saul is plotting against David.

other contingencies, and the ripple effect is exponential. So there might be hundreds of millions of changes in what would have happened had the guy gotten up five minutes earlier. And you can multiply that times every decision every human being makes every single moment of every day.

And how much of all that you are in control of? Very close to zero. But if you follow God's will He will guide you through the infinite maze of a billion, trillion possibilities and see to it that all things work together for good for you. He will not just make the best of what happens. He will see to it that out of all the billion, trillion different things that could have happened every day, the combination that would be best for you is what actually ends up happening. But if you do not have God's guidance then you are just like a leaf in a hurricane, and there is no meaning or direction to anything. The promise of God's guidance in a world full of six billion decision-making human beings absolutely boggles the mind.

No sheep knows what is over the next ridge. Left to myself I would wander into quick and certain destruction. But I have a Guide! While thousands around me are hopelessly lost and imperiled without any shepherd, I am on the path that leads to His pasture. What cause this is for joyful singing and shouts of praise to You!

Teach me, Father, to enjoy You as my Guide. Teach me to enjoy walking along the path of life behind such a wonderful Guide, who loves me and who knows where He is leading me and who knows what kind of guidance I need. You understand my blind spots and which things are likely to lure me off the path. You know not only where I need to end up but what route I should take to get there. You have all power and total willingness to guide me, and You have promised to do so. What a blessed promise!

Teach me to follow You out of love for You. Let my seeking be love in motion and my waiting be love at rest. Let my cry for guidance be fueled by passionate desire, and my waiting strengthened by settled delight in both present and future grace.

Day 3

14 ...Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands.

That statement is a summary not only of this chapter, but of the final 10 chapters of the book. David does not escape by being crafty or smart; he escapes by being loyal to the true King, who then protects him from Saul.

Nevertheless, this is a very hard time for David. He is in great need. And God is about to provide for him exactly what he needs. That is another benefit of following God's guidance – God supplies you with what you need.

But what God provides is a little surprising. What would you naturally think was David's greatest need at this point? If you were in God's position as David's caretaker, what would you have supplied for David? My first thought would be that David could use a couple hundred thousand more men. He could use a good hiding place. He could use some good intelligence so he could track the movements of Saul – a satellite surveillance system wouldn't hurt. I am sure there were plenty of material needs David had – food, supplies, weapons.

But then again, maybe those things would not really do David much good. Maybe David is at a stage now where he needs to learn how to command 600 men before he has the responsibility for 200,000. Maybe a good hiding place would diminish his dependence on God, or keep him from being at the right place at the right time. Maybe none of those things are what David really needs. Only God knows for sure what David really needs at this time.

And that thing that David really needs – God is about to provide. The wording and structure of the first phrase of verse 15 is almost identical with verse 9.

9 David knew that Saul was plotting against him...

15 David saw that Saul had come out to take his life...

The phrase is identical except in verse 9 it says David "knew" and in verse 15 it says David "saw." David saw some evidence with his own eyes that made it really hit home. David has known that Saul was after him all along. That is why he is on the run. But there is something about when you are exposed to direct evidence of someone being against you that really hurts. Sometimes you hear about something and in the back of your mind you are thinking, "*Maybe it isn't quite what it sounds like. Maybe something got lost in the translation.*" But then when you see it firsthand, it really hits you hard. It sounds like that is what is happening here.

What was it that David needed most at this time? Someone to help him find strength in God. In verse 9 when it says David learned about Saul's plotting, he just simply took action to protect himself. But in verse 15 when it says he saw it, it does not say he did anything. It just says this:

16 And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.

When David heard about it he needed guidance on what to do. But when he *saw* it was really happening and it really started to sink in, and he felt the impact of it, he needed someone to help him find strength in God. And so God sent Jonathan.

It is interesting to me that Saul has an entire army searching everywhere for David and cannot catch up to him. And Jonathan just goes right to him. It is a good thing Jonathan wasn't helping his father, because if he were, David would be captured right here. Jonathan was good. He was older and more experienced than David, and we saw what he was capable of back in chapter 14. So he is able to do what his father's entire military fails to do and gets to David – not to kill him, but to strengthen him. A third benefit of following God's guidance is God will strengthen you for the journey.

What a treasure is a strengthened, established heart! Thank You, dear Lord, for the strength You have given me. Forgive me dear Lord for taking it for granted when I am strong. Forgive me for imagining it was a strength of my own. All the strength I have enjoyed has come from You. Teach me to appreciate it more. When I am sick or injured or tired, let the weakness cause me to long for and treasure Your strength. Let the pain cause me to rejoice over the perseverance it is working and over the eternal weight of glory it is producing, and over the paradoxical strength that it is (when I am weak, then I am strong). Let it produce in me humility by reminding me of my creatureliness and dependence upon You.

Day 4

16 And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.

Every believer should be striving to improve in this skill of knowing how to help someone find strength in God.

What do you do when a friend or loved one is discouraged or afraid or depressed? Do you do the old hit and run advice dump? “Oh, you’re depressed? Well, my advice is that you try this.... Oh, look at the time. See ya next Sunday.”

Other people lean more toward a flattery Band-Aid and just say all kinds of really nice things about the person so he will cheer up. Others revert to positive thinking. “It will be OK. You aren’t going to have to endure anything really hard or painful.”

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17 "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this."

For more on that go back and listen to those last two sermons of chapter 20.

Oh Lord, teach me how to find strength in You so I can help others do so. And give Your servant a heart of love for my brothers and sisters, so that I will passionately beseech You for power because I so desperately want them to experience the benefits they will experience when Your power flows through me. And give me a heart of love for You, so that when You offer me an experience of Your grace, that offer excites and motivates my heart more than any other desire.

Day 5

You might study a passage like this and think, Guidance from God sounds wonderful – if you are David, and you have Gad and Abiathar and the ephod. A lot of people read 1 Samuel and think, Man, I would give anything to have that ephod. Should I take this job – yes or no? If I buy this stock will it go up over the next year, yes or no? Wouldn't it be great to have access to a priest like Abiathar or a prophet like Gad today? But we do not have any Levitical priests today.

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Thank You for giving Your servant breath this morning to rise for another day. Now I stand at the threshold of another day – another full day of being led by You into Your presence and Your way – a path that will involve all kinds of experiences with You. On this path today, if I am alert to what is going on, I will experience being protected by You, being taught by You, being fed and nourished by You, being sustained by You, being encouraged by You, being sheltered and refreshed by You, being disciplined by You, being forgiven by You, being kept and preserved by You, being sanctified by You, being used by You, ruled by You, being listened to by You, being treasured by You, being exalted and glorified by You, being restored by You, being vindicated by You, being healed by You, being watched by You, being provided for by You, being spoken to by You, being delighted by You, being rewarded by You, being understood by You, being interceded for by You, being thought about by You, being enabled and empowered by You, being quieted and stilled by You, being delivered from evil by You, being repaid by You, being visited by Your presence, and being satisfied by You! I can hardly wait to experience this day!

Lord, let me be aware of as much of that as possible today. Please enable Your servant to commune with You. What a wasted day it will be today if You do all that and I fail to even realize it or enjoy it all

day long. What folly it would be if I were more interested to think about temporal things than about those things. Please help me, Father.