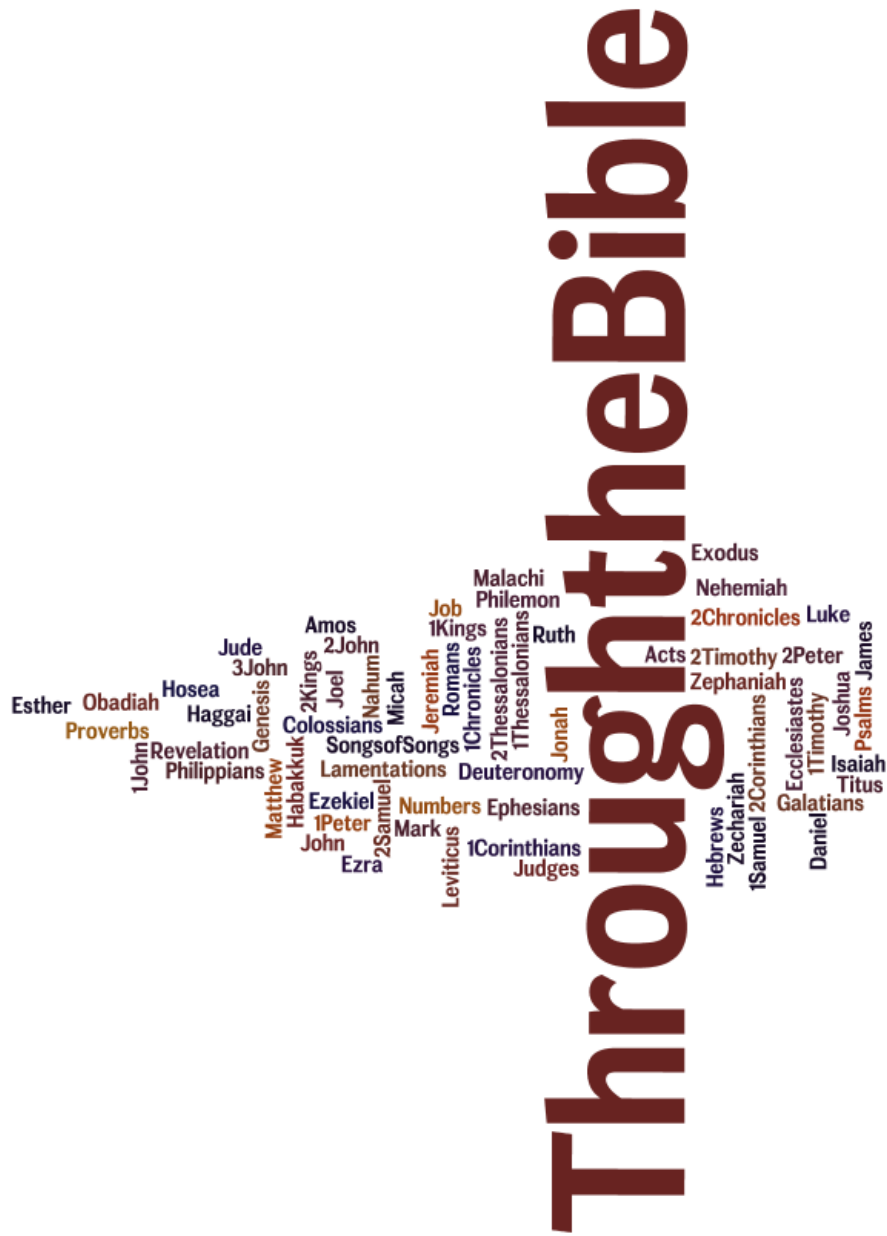




Cornton Baptist Church

Demonstrating God's love in action

in the community of Cornton



September 2011

“Do not be afraid,” Samuel replied. “You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart.” (v.20)

In May of 1998, the failure of a control processor on board the Galaxy IV communications satellite caused it to rotate out of position and turn away from the earth. In an instant, 40 million pagers became useless pieces of plastic. Hundreds of retail stores and scores of radio and TV stations were also affected - all because one satellite turned the wrong way.

How many people would be affected if you or I turned away from God? Few of us realise the extent of our influence, but our obedience to God is vital because of our role in the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-17) and the world (1 Peter 2:9-12). God charged His people to be faithful to His covenant *‘Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God, . . . make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.’* (Deuteronomy 29:18).

Here in 1 Samuel 12 Samuel has reminded the people of their sin in asking for a king. It was not that this request was wrong in itself...just that it was way ahead of God’s timing. God was their king. The people call on Samuel to pray for them and Samuel says do not let this sin turn you away from God – rather serve God. Sometimes our sin and the guilt that comes with it causes us to believe that God could no longer love us. That is complete nonsense. Yes it’s true that God detests sin. Yes it’s true that we turn away from God. But God never turns away from us. We are reminded in Romans 5:8 *‘While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.’*

If you have sinned don’t run from God – turn to him and confess your sin; then follow him wholeheartedly.

Pray: confessing your sin and asking God to forgive you and restore you.

Reflect: does the guilt of my sin turn me away from God? Follow Samuel’s advice...do not turn away but serve the Lord with all your heart.

But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command. (v.14)

Picher, Oklahoma, is no more. In mid-2009, this once-bustling town of 20,000 went out of business. In the first quarter of the 1900s, Picher was a boomtown because of its abundant lead and zinc. Workers extracted the ore, which was used to help arm the US during both World Wars.

The town faded as the ore began to run out - but the biggest problem was that while the lead and zinc brought wealth, they also brought pollution. Because nothing was done to deal with the pollution, Picher became a toxic wasteland, and the government condemned the land.

What happened to Picher can happen to people. Prosperity can look so good that it's hard to think about possible downsides. Actions that are detrimental to long-term spiritual health are accepted, and unless the problem is corrected, destruction follows. It happened to King Saul. Saul learned the high cost of disobedience. He faced the prospect of fighting a huge well-equipped Philistine army with his small band of frightened and untrained followers. While waiting for Samuel to come and offer a sacrifice before going to battle, Saul became impatient and offered the sacrifice himself, even though he knew that God had given that right only to the priests. It was a costly mistake.

Saul had begun his reign with humility and compassion, and he gave God the credit (1 Samuel 11). And the prophet Samuel told him that God would have kept the kingship in his family if he had obeyed God's command (13:13-14). But that one act of disobedience changed the course of his life. From that point on, it was a sad downhill journey.

Never forget that disobedience has consequences. And some of them may be very costly.

Pray: asking God's forgiveness for any sin in your life.

Reflect: do I lack patience and try to do things on my own?

*Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few.
(v.6)*

We often think it takes many people to make a difference. We long for more people in the church in order that we can go out there into the community and make a difference. The truth is it only takes one who is willing to serve God with all their heart, soul, mind and being.

Here in 1 Samuel 14 Saul is hiding under a tree while Jonathan sneaks away to see what is happening on the enemy side. Jonathan finds a narrow passageway between two sharp crags to the north and south named Bozez and Seneh. He gets the idea that such a narrow entry could be a tactical advantage. The two of them might very well be able to fight the Philistines a few at a time. If God is with them, they could very well be victorious. I love what Jonathan says in verse 6 *‘Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few.’*

God often doesn't want to save by many. When He does that, the men get the credit rather than the Lord. Remember that the Lord pared down Gideon's army of 32,000 down to just 300 men (Judges 7) so all would know the victory was the Lord's doing. It doesn't matter how small, how few, how weak, how unimpressive you are. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:31 *‘What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?’*

And don't you just love Jonathan's armour bearer? He says do what you think is best and I'm with you all the way. He was committed to support what God was doing.

Do you see a need that you can meet? Trust God and start doing something about it. You can be one of the people through whom God will save others.

Pray: asking God to show you how you can serve Him today.

Reflect: do I see a need that I can meet? Is God calling me to follow him and serve him? Trust Him and start doing something about meeting that need.

I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions. (v.11)

When my children were younger I often gave them instructions for when they were outside playing and for when they were walking somewhere to meet friends or play in the park. They were to stop at the end of the pavement and look carefully both ways before crossing the road. It didn't matter if they were walking, on their bikes or roller-skates, or chasing a football. They knew to stop and look. I expected them to obey those. If I caught them not following those instructions they were not allowed to play outside. Why? Because I knew that just one careless step could jeopardise their safety.

In 1 Samuel 15, the Lord instructed Saul, '*Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them.*' (verse 3). As the instrument of God's judgment, Saul was not to let anyone or anything escape. Did Saul obey God? No! He spared the king's life and kept the best animals and '*everything that was good.*' (verse 9). When confronted by Samuel, Saul lied, made excuses, and insisted that he had obeyed the Lord (verse 20-21). He was guilty of doing what he wanted and expecting God to approve of his incomplete obedience.

We too sometimes choose not to obey the Lord completely. Then we try to justify our own sinful behaviour by telling ourselves that it doesn't really matter to God, or that other Christians are far more sinful than we are. But God demands total obedience.

The Holy Spirit uses God's Word to reveal to us what the Lord wants us to do. Let's stop making excuses and honour Him with our complete obedience.

Pray: asking God to help us follow him completely.

Reflect: is there some area of my life where I am only partially obeying God and His word? Sort it out and give God your complete obedience.

The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. (v.7)

I don't think I will ever forget the night in April 2009 when I was watching Britain's Got Talent and Susan Boyle appeared on stage. The judges' faces said it all – another waste of time. The crowd looked and giggled as this 48 year old lady in a frumpy dress stood on stage. Even I thought this would be a laugh. Then the music began playing and she opened her mouth to sing – and what a voice she had. I, like thousands of others, judged her by her appearance. And how wrong we were. Susan Boyle has gone on to be a huge success.

This same lesson of not judging appearances was learned by Samuel in 1 Samuel 16. He has been sent by God to Jesse to find which of his sons would be the next king. As Jesse's sons entered the place where they had gathered to eat, Samuel fixed his eyes on Eliab. Tall, well built, handsome - surely this was the next king of Israel, Samuel thought. But while Samuel was looking on the outside, God was looking on the inside, and didn't like what He saw. Instead David is chosen and he is described in Acts 13:22 as a man after God's own heart.

Looks can be deceiving. So much so that something we place great value on and respect is something that God actually does not like! Most often, God would rather use the despised thing. God would rather use the weak thing. God would rather use short ugly guy. Why? Because when it is successful, glory is given to God rather than the instrument He used! Paul wrote about this in 1 Corinthians 1:25-29.

When it comes to making decisions we ought to ask for God's leading and guiding. And we ought not to jump always to the external appearance but rather consider the heart. If we judge others only by their outer appearance, we might miss the wonderful surprise of what's in their heart.

Pray: asking God to help us have a heart like his.

Reflect: do I judge things by outward appearances? Ask God to help you consider the heart.

The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine. (v.17)

I love the kids song we sometimes sing ‘*Our God is a Great Big God*’. The words are so true and David, the young shepherd boy knew it well. He loved God, was later described as a man after God’s own heart, had experienced God’s power at work in his own life, and trusted God to overcome anything.

And this was so needed in our passage today. If ever anyone needed a champion, the Israelites did. As their army camped in the Valley of Elah, they were held at bay and embarrassed daily by the tauntings of the Philistine strongman Goliath. David, the young shepherd son of Jesse, had brought provisions for his brothers in the army. When he heard Goliath mocking the Israelites, he was furious and asked for permission to go out and fight him. David was confident that the God who had delivered him from the lion and the bear (verses 34-37) would give him victory over the giant - and He did.

What qualifies you to be a giant slayer? Well you need to be a David. You need to be “beloved” (the meaning of his name) by God. You need to know God loves you. And the Scriptures are full of verses that remind us of this. You also need a Big God. David wasn’t just going to feed Goliath’s body to the birds, but the entire Philistine army! God holds the whole world in his hands. No matter what we are facing God is bigger. And you also need a little experience. David was still a young man but he had experience. He had never faced a giant before but God had delivered him from the lion and the bear – fancy fighting one of them?

How do you slay the giant? Faith. David wasn’t confident in his own abilities. He was confident in God’s abilities. He also used unusual weapons – his sling and a stone. We have the unusual weapons of prayer and the Word of God. And of course you have to go. David went into battle and with God’s help the giant was slain.

Pray: asking God to help you face the giant in your life just now.

Reflect: what “giant” am I facing just now? Am I trusting God to help.

And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. (v.3)

Friends are a wonderful gift. One of the real blessings from my time at college were the friends I made. We spurred each other on through our college days; we pray for each other and we speak regularly to encourage one another to keep going and to keep serving God faithfully and to the best of our ability. This is the kind of friendship we find between David and Jonathan – probably more so. Jonathan loved David’s soul as his own. This is a rare kind of love that should be much more common than it is. After all, it is, as Jesus said, the second greatest commandment Matthew 22:39 *‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’*

But how many of us have strived to love with this kind of love. After all, think about it: how much do you love yourself. Don’t you always make sure that your needs are met? Don’t you pamper yourself and look out for yourself? Don’t you take care of yourself and feed yourself? When you look at how much you really do love yourself, and then look at how you treat your neighbour, it really pales in comparison.

This love that Jonathan had for David is the example of love that we must have for one another. It is a self-sacrificing love, a love that puts others first. Look at how Jonathan’s love for David was demonstrated: Verse 4 *‘Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.’* These were more than just presents. They were statements. They were the provisions of a covenant.

Jonathan is demonstrating his love for David by giving him his own badges of honour. Jonathan is the crown prince of Israel, yet he has no problem with giving his own robe to this young man. David is also a poor shepherd boy and was ill-equipped for what was ahead of him. Jonathan is equipping David for being a military leader. May we be humble enough to love our friends as ourselves.

Pray: thanking God for your friends.

Reflect: do I love my neighbour as myself?

Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have brought good to you. (v.4, ESV)

Saul is jealous of David and afraid of him. He has tried during chapter 18 to find subtle and secret ways of getting rid of David but none of them have worked. Here as we start chapter 19 he bluntly and directly instructs Jonathan to kill David. He wants an end brought to the matter. Jonathan as we thought yesterday was very fond of David and loved him as himself. Instead of killing David he goes and warns him what his father is up to. He tells David to go and hide and he will speak to his father. This takes great courage from Jonathan. He is willing to stand up for his friend and stand against the king.

Saul has no reason to be jealous or afraid of David as Jonathan his son reminds him here in verse 4. Sometimes though, irrational thoughts take over our mind and nothing can make us shake them. Jealousy is not very rational. In reality, David hasn't done a single thing for Saul to be afraid of. David had only done things that benefit Saul. He's only helped Saul. Saul ought to be extremely thankful for David. But Saul isn't being very rational. Jealousy isn't rational.

Jonathan talks to his father Saul and reminds him how David has been nothing but a blessing to the king. He had not sinned against Saul, he had laid his life on the line by fighting Goliath, and he has led his thousand men in many victories against the Philistines. Jonathan says do not let the king sin against David. Jonathan tells it as it is. What Saul is planning is sin – pure and simple. And Jonathan deals with it lovingly but firmly.

Oh that we would have people in our lives who would lovingly but firmly point out our sin to us and help us to turn from it. And that we would have the courage to do likewise to those we love and serve alongside.

Pray: asking God to place people in your life who will point out your sin and point you toward the Saviour.

Reflect: do I have people around me who will honestly speak to me about sin in my life?

Jonathan said to David, 'Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD.' (v.42)

In G. K. Chesterton's novel *The Man Who Was Thursday*, an undercover policeman infiltrates a lawless group that is dedicated to throwing the world into chaos. He is gripped with fear until he discovers an ally within the group. Chesterton writes of the policeman's feelings at finding a friend: "Through all this ordeal his root horror had been isolation, and there are no words to express the abyss between isolation and having one ally. It may be conceded to the mathematicians that four is twice two. But two is not twice one; two is two thousand times one."

David knew what it was to have a true friend. When David was being pursued by the jealous and irrational King Saul, he had a friend who risked great danger to stand with him. Jonathan, Saul's own son, pledged his loyalty to David and warned him of his father's intention to kill him (verses 31-42). And Jonathan stood by David through thick and thin. He is almost killed by his father's own spear as Saul threw it at him intending to kill him for protecting David (verse 33). Jonathan was willing to defend David in front of his father; he was willing to protect him and stand up for him even in the face of danger.

A good friend is one who is willing to defend you, even in front of your enemies. A friend is not two-faced, saying nice things to you but speaking badly behind your back. Or when others are speaking badly of you, a friend will not join in with the criticism.

What a wonderful gift we give by standing faithfully with a friend in need! There is incredible encouragement and power when two people are allied in life. Whose hand can you strengthen by being a friend today?

Pray: for a friend in need today and then go and stand with them.

Reflect: who faithfully stands by me in difficult times? Thank God for them. Who of my friends is in need currently? Go and support them.

David took these words to heart and was very much afraid. (v.12)

The trouble with being famous is that you are instantly recognisable the world over. Ask any celebrity who tries to go shopping or the cinema...there is always paparazzi following looking for a snap or autograph hunters wanting a signature. David was famous now – after all he was the shepherd boy who had slain the giant Goliath. His fame spread. People knew who he was. And here he is running away from Saul and he ends up in Gath. The servants instantly recognise him and they remember the song that was sung about him ‘*Saul has slain thousands, and David his tens of thousands.*’

Now Gath was the very city Goliath had come from. The people here might see an opportunity for revenge or at least that is what David fears. So he acts like a madman in the hope they will let him go. Broken and utterly humiliated, David fled to Adullam in Judah. Close by was a hill honeycombed with caves. Into one of those holes he crept - alone.

As he experienced the solitude of that cave, at this low point of his life and surrounded by enemies, David began to reflect on God’s tender, faithful love. In that cave he wrote Psalm 56 – go and read it now and reflect on David’s words as he sat in that cave anxious and worried. ‘*When I am afraid, I will trust in you*’ he wrote in verse 3. He knew God’s presence with him.

Perhaps you are in a cave today, perhaps life’s worries are overwhelming you, perhaps family problems are tearing you apart, perhaps you feel your enemies are all around you – take courage from David who wrote in Psalm 56:11 ‘*in God I trust; I will not be afraid.*’

Pray: through Psalm 56 today asking God to help you in your hour of need.

Reflect: what are my fears and concerns? Is not God greater than them all? Then say with the Psalmist ‘*in God I trust; I will not be afraid.*’

All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered round him, and he became their leader. (v.2)

I wonder if your home is like mine. It seems that every other day there is another plastic bag through the door from some charity or other asking for those items in the house we no longer want or use – clothes and other household bits and bobs. The meaning is straightforward and simple: Whatever you don't want, we'll take. Those household items you call rubbish, rejects, throwaways, and junk, we'll use to help people in need.

As I thought on that I thought on the passage before us. As David spent time in that cave a group of men came to him and gathered around him. We read that they were those who were distressed, debt ridden and discontented. They all faced difficulty and discouragement. But this bunch of unwanted men, rejects and throwaways, gathered around a man on the run and he became their leader. How remarkable.

And as I thought on that I thought on us in the church. People that gather here tend to be those that are distressed, those that are in debt, those that are discontent with what the world has delivered them. We're one big, dysfunctional family! And I think that's great. Jesus came to call the distressed, the indebted, and the discontented. He came to call people like you and me.

But notice this: When these guys spent time with David, they became more like David. Soon, these same people will become known as "David's mighty men." They will be the most fearsome fighters around - a top-notch military unit. The same is true for us: the more time we spend with Jesus, the more we become like Him.

Pray: thanking God for welcoming sinners like you.

Reflect: am I spending time with Jesus, in the Word and praying? Am I becoming more like Jesus? If not, then spend more time with him!

Once again David inquired of the Lord, and the Lord answered him. (v.4)

We used to sing the children's chorus 'Prayer is like a telephone for us to talk to Jesus...pick it up and use it every day.' And that is sound advice for people of all ages. We can talk to God about anything. We ought to take all our concerns to him in prayer. David is a man who inquires of the Lord. We find that he prays to God 3 times in this chapter alone.

David finds out that the Philistines were attacking Keilah, a city in the land of Judah, and stealing their grain from the harvest. David inquired of the Lord as to whether he should attack the Philistines. This became a regular routine for him when he became king, almost always being faithful to inquire of the Lord. David's example is that we should always inquire of the Lord before making a decision. What decisions do you face in life? The first thing we ought to do is pray to God asking for his leading and guiding.

When you're leading a group of people as a David, a Moses, or a pastor, you hear from God and tell the folks, "This is what I believe that God's telling us to do, the direction He's leading us, or the stand He wants us to take." At that point, one of two things happens: the people either agree with you or they don't. And when they don't, there's no point in arguing. One of two things has happened: either you've heard wrong or the people are hearing wrong. Either way, the situation won't be resolved in debate. It'll be clarified in prayer. Here the men come to David and ask if they are doing the right thing. David didn't argue with them, he just inquired of the Lord again.

A good, godly leader will always pray again. When David prayed again, the Lord told him that He was on the right track. Pray, pray, and then pray some more. Wise advice.

Pray: thanking God for the gift of prayer.

Reflect: do I inquire of the Lord or do I go my own way? Take time to pray through a situation you face.

The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him. (v.6)

The relationship between David and King Saul is one of the strangest and most volatile recorded in the Bible. David came to Saul's rescue on several occasions (as a harp player and as a warrior), he was best friends with the king's son, and he married the king's daughter. Now, don't you think such a person would be in pretty good standing with the monarch? Not David. Saul was out to get the former shepherd boy. Twice Saul tried to spear David while he was playing the harp for him. And later, Saul sent his troops after the young man to try to kill him. In light of this how would David react and what would he do if he found himself alone with Saul? Humanly speaking we might expect him to strike first and kill Saul. But not David, the man who is described as being a man after God's own heart.

Here in chapter 24 we find Saul going into a cave to relieve himself. David and his men are at the back of the cave. When Saul was alone and vulnerable in the cave, David's men told him this was a God-given opportunity to take the kingship that rightfully belonged to him. But David refused, saying, '*The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him.*' David could have acted in his own strength and time and dealt with the matter but he didn't. There are times when it's best to wait for God to act instead of trying to make things happen ourselves.

David would become king but it would be in God's time and by God's doing. After Saul left the cave, David called out to him, '*May the Lord judge between you and me. May the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you.*' (verse 12). David knew that God had chosen him to become king. But he also knew that killing Saul was not the right way to make it happen. He would wait for God to remove Saul from the throne.

Pray: asking God's forgiveness for times you have rushed on ahead of him.

Reflect: what am I in a rush to get or achieve? Decide now to wait for God's timing which is perfect.

He has paid me back evil for good. (v.21)

Playwright and US Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce (1903–1987) once said, “No good deed goes unpunished.” Sadly, it sometimes seems as if this maxim is true. David can certainly attest to this.

David had been forced to live in the countryside to escape King Saul’s jealous wrath. A group of about 600 men and their families had gathered around him. For several months they camped near Carmel where the flocks of Nabal were grazing. David’s men had helped Nabal’s shepherds protect the sheep from robbers. Now the shearing time had come, and David sent messengers to request some compensation from Nabal, who was a wealthy man. But he refused and treated David’s men with disdain. David recognises the unfairness of this in verse 21 ‘*He has paid me back evil for good.*’

In anger David rashly decided to kill Nabal and all the men in his household. When Abigail (Nabal’s wife) heard what had happened, she quickly gathered a large supply of food, intercepted David and his fighting men, and humbly apologised for her husband’s surly behaviour. She was a real peacemaker. David immediately realised that she had prevented him from carrying out a vengeful decision, and he praised God (verse 32). Soon, God struck Nabal dead. Then David praised God for keeping him from evil and for dealing with the matter.

Perhaps you’ve had an experience when kindness was repaid with ingratitude, a generous gift was treated as an entitlement, kind actions were interpreted as an attempt to control, or well-intended advice was received with scorn. David’s story reminds us that even when it seems as if we’re being repaid with evil for doing good, we don’t have to take matters into our own hands; we can trust God with the outcome.

Pray: asking God to help us trust him with a situation where we feel unfairly treated.

Reflect: what matter am I trying to take into my own hands to resolve? Hand it over to God.

Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? (v.9)

The recent riots in London and other major cities in England were a dreadful sight to behold. The attitude of some of the looters was terrible. One young lad claimed he was simply getting his own back on a shop that had turned him down for a job. Another young lady claimed she was getting her taxes back. These are simply flimsy reasons for sinful behaviour.

In 1 Samuel we read how David was being hunted by King Saul. One night, David and his companions went to Saul's camp and discovered that the king and his men were asleep. Abishai asked permission to kill Saul, saying that this opportunity had come from God. David could have easily agreed. He undoubtedly remembered the last time he spared Saul's life when he could have killed him. At that time Saul had wept when he learned of David's mercy. He had declared David's fitness to be Israel's next king, and had quit the chase (1 Samuel 24).

But Saul had resumed his grim pursuit. David could have reasoned, "I spared him once. God is giving me this second opportunity." David rejected such thinking because he believed it would be wrong to kill the man God had anointed to be Israel's king. So he refused to do it. David was not willing to use flimsy reasons to commit a sinful act.

When you are treated unjustly, it's easy to excuse your own hatred, impurity, dishonesty, and cruelty. When someone mistreats you it is easy to do something harmful and spiteful in exchange excusing it away. But don't give in to the temptation. Like David, do what's right.

Pray: asking God to forgive you for times you have acted sinfully and made flimsy excuses for it.

Reflect: in what ways have I been treated unfairly recently? How am I tempted to react? Don't give in to temptation – hand it over to God.

But David thought to himself... (v.1)

David has just had a mighty spiritual victory. He has resisted the opportunity to kill Saul and left Saul in the hands of God. It would seem that, of all times, this would be the time when David would be walking securely with the Lord with no problems of faith. God has just demonstrated his adequacy and David has just made an extraordinary statement of faith. So what happens next? David takes his eyes off the Lord and looks at the circumstances.

For eight years now he has been on the run, fleeing from Saul and trying to stay alive. He's had enough. He reckons to himself that Saul will get him one of these times. He can't escape forever. David decides to escape to the land of the Philistines where Saul will not come looking for him. He ends up back in Gath. And from there he wanders from God and does his own thing – killing, stealing and lying.

Instead of talking to God, David is now talking to himself. There is no worse way to make a decision than enter into a conversation with yourself when you are fearful, depressed, or angry. Unfortunately, David has left the mind-set of seeking the Lord. He is seeking counsel in himself, and will pay the price of it for years. He has decided to leave the land of Israel, the land “governed by God,” and go into Philistine territory - the land of the flesh, the world, and false gods.

Too many of us have also made decisions in this way. Decisions to leave a marriage, to leave a job, to leave a church. Although at one point, we knew God had brought us into that land, in the flesh we decided to leave it. In our own understanding, we were overwhelmed by the circumstances and decided to bail out. Many people have paid the same price David did - years in the wilderness apart from the Lord.

Pray: asking for God's strength to keep trusting in him.

Reflect: are you about to make a decision out of hurt, anger, frustration, or depression? Pray and seek the Lord for guidance and strength.

He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him. (v.6)

While David seems to have stopped talking to God, God had stopped talking to Saul. In the past, the prophet Samuel had communicated God's heart to the king, but now that Samuel was dead, Saul was at a loss. He knew the king had to be led by the Lord, and the Lord wasn't speaking to him. Saul needed to hear from God because the Philistines were mounting a massive attack, camping at Shunem. Israel was taking up a defensive position in Gilboa, and needed direction from the Lord.

It is sad that so many people enter into strife in their lives before they begin to pray. But once you're in a storm, it's too late to learn how to sail a boat. Once you're in a battle, it's too late to learn to use your sword. During his lifetime, Saul had not cultivated a relationship with God. Now, he is trying to hear from God in desperation. He'd fall asleep, asking God to give him dreams. None came. He went to the priests, seeking the plan of God by the Urim. No answer. He inquired of the prophets, but they had no word from the Lord for him.

Saul had lived in his sin as long as it was convenient for him, and now he's trying to hear from God. That's not the way for a believer to live. Too many are enjoying their sin, forsaking the conviction and calling of God until they get their fill. They know they'll turn back someday, but not today. That's a dangerous game to play, for you see, a time will come that God will not answer them.

Today is the day to repent, while the Lord is still calling you. Return to the Lord now, not once you've had your fill of sin. It was too late for Saul when he finally sought the Lord.

Pray: confessing your sin to God and asking for his forgiveness.

Reflect: am I cultivating a relationship with God or am I playing the waiting game? Get praying now. Get reading the Word now.

What about these Hebrews? (v.3)

David, the man who slew the giant from Gath who taunted the armies of the living God, the man who could not lift his own hand against Saul, the Lord's anointed, now finds himself in league with the king of Gath going out to fight the armies of Israel, which included his dear friend, Jonathan! Incredible! David has been playing a con game, and now he's trapped. He must have been having some serious hesitations, but he couldn't refuse Achish or he would have jeopardised his and his men's lives.

At this point, God graciously intervened through the Philistine warlords who asked a very pertinent question (verse 3): '*What about these Hebrews?*' Good question! What were they doing there? When a Christian runs with the world, those in the world often are aware of the inconsistency of the situation. They will often ask, "If you are a Christian, then what are you doing here?" The question is from God to bring us to repentance. Because these Philistine commanders didn't trust David and his men, Achish was forced to send David home from the battle.

We often think that we must mix with the world in order to win the people of the world. We think that by compromising we will win them to the Lord. But it rarely works out that way. Disaster often follows. Keep following God and God's ways.

God in His mercy has His way of keeping a person from going completely to ruin. David was dismissed from the army by Achish, and this dismissal was his way out. Achish was satisfied with him, but the other princes of the Philistines were not. This was how God made it possible for David to escape from this great dilemma. God kept David from falling into the greater tragedy of actually fighting against his own people.

Pray: thanking God for his continual leading and guiding.

Reflect: am I compromising my faith in order to try and win others to Christ? Is this the right way to go? Keep rooted in God.

But David found strength in the LORD his God. (v.6)

Charles Plumb was sitting in a restaurant when a man came up to him and said, “You’re Plumb. You flew jet fighters in Vietnam. You were on the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk. You were shot down!” “How in the world did you know all that?” asked Plumb. The man, who had been on the same ship, replied, “I packed your parachute.” Then he added, “I guess it worked.” “Indeed it did,” said Plumb.

That night Plumb thought of this man who had stood at a table in the belly of the ship carefully folding parachutes for men whose lives might depend on them. Plumb was saddened and humbled as he thought, “How many times might I have passed this man but didn’t even say good morning because I was a jet pilot and he was a low-ranking sailor?”

Here in chapter 30 David is getting back on track. Verse 6 tells us he has found his strength in the Lord. He is back to inquiring of the Lord when it comes to decisions. The situation around is still difficult and some want to stone him. But with the Lord on his side he goes into battle and wins – recovering everything the Amalekites had taken.

Some of the men, 200, had been too tired to march on and go into battle. They remained behind to watch the supplies. When David returned from battle a dispute arose about sharing out the plunder. David settled it by reminding them all that they were in it together. He said in verse 24 ‘*All will share alike.*’

Friends, in the Christian life we are all in it together. There are no high people and no low people, no high tasks and no low tasks. We all depend on each other. We all need each other. The body is made up of many parts Paul tells us in the New Testament.

Pray: thanking God for all who are part of your local fellowship.

Reflect: do I treat everyone equal? Do I think I am better than others? How can I encourage someone else in their service today?

When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard...all their valiant men journeyed through the night. (v.11)

Israel had rejected God's leadership through the prophet Samuel. They had demanded a king to rule over them. God had given them over to their wicked desires, reminding them that if they and their king would turn to the Lord, things would work out wonderfully. But they and their king had gone their own way. Now they are paying the ultimate price. God is allowing the Philistines to overrun them, bringing death and destruction. Saul's life tragically comes to an end. His sons are killed in battle and he is mortally wounded. Saul then falls on his own sword. A sad and tragic end to Saul's life.

The Philistines cut off Saul's head, took off his armour and displayed both his body and armour in one of their temples. Interestingly the people of Jabesh Gilead hear of this and remember Saul. Saul when he was first crowned King came to the rescue of the people of Jabesh Gilead. Because of this, they were deeply indebted to Saul. When they heard what had been done to him by the Philistines, they walked all night to Beth Shan, took the bodies of he and his sons back and burned them. They buried their bones, then fasted for a week. They remembered Saul and appreciated his kindness. Now in death they wanted to honour him.

When David heard of this act, he sent messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead, thanking them for their chivalrous devotion to the memory of the fallen king, and promising to requite the kindness as one done to the entire nation, and to himself.

Are we careful enough of the honour and name of our dear Lord? He has done for us spiritually all that Saul did for Jabesh Gilead, and more. He has delivered our soul from death, our eyes from tears, and our feet from falling. Let us be swift to maintain the honour of His name among those who are so apt at making it their scorn.

Pray: thanking God for all he has done for us.

Reflect: am I careful enough of the honour and name of Jesus?

Saul and Jonathan – in life they were loved and gracious. (v.23)

I still never get used to death, bereavement and organising funeral services. The call often comes from the funeral director explaining that someone has died. They pass me some brief details that sum up the deceased and then they hang up. I will then spend time with the family, building up a picture of the person's life. With this information, gleaned in a few short visits, I prepare a tribute of the person's life. It is only a brief overview. After all how can you sum up a person's life in five minutes? Life is too big for that.

After David received news of Jonathan's death, he spent time recalling the life of his friend - even writing a lament that others could sing as a way to respect Jonathan (verses 17-27). David recalled his friend's courage and skill, and he spoke of the grief that caused him to lament deeply. He honoured a rich, pleasant, heroic life. For David, it was an intense time of mourning and remembrance.

In the midst he also speaks highly of Saul. Instead of pointing out Saul's faults and failures, he commended what was good in him: his courage, his military victories, and his prosperous kingdom. I am challenged here in my own life when I look at others and judge their flaws and failings; how often I dwell on the bad and negative aspects of a person's life. God could so easily have done that with our lives yet he looks on the good and has provided for our bad.

When we grieve for a loved one, it is vital to recall the cherished details and shared experiences of our lives together. Those memories flood our hearts with far more thoughts than a short tribute can bring. The day that grief visits our hearts is not a time for short summaries and quick snapshots of our loved one's life. It is a time to remember deeply, giving God thanks for the details, the stories, and the impact of an entire life. It's time to pause, reflect, and honour.

Pray: giving thanks for the life of one who has recently passed away.

Reflect: do I look on the bad in people and not the good?

In the course of time, David inquired of the Lord. (v.1)

Now that Saul was dead, David realised that there was no longer a need for living outside of the land of Israel. But this time, he wasn't going to move without seeking the Lord. So he inquired of God, praying, *'Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?'*

This is something that we neglect far too often. If we've been walking with the Lord for awhile, we have learned to seek God's help when we don't know which way to turn. But we should also be inquiring about the things that seem obvious. Sure, it was clear that moving to the land of the Philistines was a disaster. Sure, Saul was dead and there was no more reason to avoid the land of Israel. But David prayed anyway. What decisions are you facing in your life? Inquire of the Lord. It's not just in major things, like whether to take a different job, or step out in ministry. It should also be the obvious or insignificant things.

When he returned to Hebron, the people anointed David king. David had already been anointed by the prophet Samuel to one day be king (1 Samuel 16:13). But it has taken quite a few years for this to take place. It has taken a few years for men to realise what God had already done.

After this we read that David learned of what the people of Jabesh Gilead had done in burying Saul. He was grateful for their kind act and sent word to them of this. He prayed that the Lord would show them kindness and faithfulness too, promising to do likewise himself. I wonder how often in life we show our appreciation of what others do and have done. We hear of a kind act and reflect on it but do we actually go out of our way to say thanks. Sometimes a simple act like this goes a long way.

Pray: thanking God for the kindness someone has shown in recent days.

Reflect: What decisions are you facing in your life? Inquire of the Lord. Has someone acted kindly in recent days? Then send them a note of thanks.

Do not come into my presence unless you bring Michal daughter of Saul when you come to see me. (v.13)

This chapter begins with the news that the house of David is growing stronger while the house of Saul grew weaker. David's children are then listed as they were born in Hebron. The interesting thing here is it appears he has six wives. Women are a weakness for David. Another woman is then reintroduced to us – Michal.

Abner was very powerful, and the Israelites' loyalty was to him. But he says that if David makes a covenant with him, then he will direct their loyalties to David. David agreed with one condition: Saul had given his daughter Michal to David in marriage. Then, when David ran from Saul's murderous intentions, Saul gave Michal to another man to marry. David is telling Abner to bring her back.

Now, I don't know what David's motivation was here. We do know that Michal loved David (1Samuel 18:20). But the Scriptures never say what David's feelings towards her were. So as to whether David was asking for her to come back because of love, I do not know. There could have also been a very strong political motivation to do this. Michal was King Saul's daughter. If he were married to her again, he would again be the king's son-in-law, giving him legal right to Saul's throne. As to whether or not this entered David's mind, I do not know. At any rate, Abner agreed to this proposal.

The key thing for us to grasp here is that one wife is enough. I don't mean this in a funny or demeaning way at all. God's original plan for marriage was one man and one woman – Deuteronomy 17:17. David was setting a dangerous precedent that his son Solomon would follow recklessly. Learn satisfaction in your mate. Love your spouse and show it often in practical ways. If you learn to follow God's ways, marriage only gets better and better.

Pray: giving thanks for your spouse and praying for married couples.

Reflect: how can I show my spouse that I love them today?

As surely as the LORD lives who has delivered me out of all trouble. (v.9)

Every morning on their way to school two children and their mum prayed. When mum asked the three-year-old to pray one day he promptly said “God, please help Sissy not to suck her thumb.” To which Sissy quickly added “And, God, please help my brother to stop reminding me!” The young boy was judging his sister for sucking her thumb and she snapped back at him.

We like to judge one another. We like to take moral high ground and put others down. Here in chapter 4 Ish-Bosheth who had been made king over Israel when his father Saul died heard the news of Abner’s demise. He was frightened and lost courage. Two of his right hand men were concerned.

Apparently the food stores for the army were being kept at Ish-bosheth’s house. Being captains of their regiments, Rechab and Baanah went to the house supposedly to pick up the next day’s rations for the men. But instead of getting wheat, they went in and killed their king. They took his head and headed for David. They wanted to ingratiate themselves to him and save themselves. They thought David would like the head of an enemy who had tried to kill him.

David did not believe in killing his Jewish enemies. He figured that was for God to do. He had said regarding Saul, 1 Samuel 26:9-11 ‘...*who can lay a hand on the LORD’S anointed and be guiltless?*’ David also said, ‘*As surely as the LORD lives, the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD’S anointed.*’ David didn’t need or want this kind of help. Not against Saul, not against Ish-Bosheth. He has Baanah and Rechab killed for their treason against their king.

Ours is not to judge...that is the work of the Lord. Ours is to turn to God and allow him to lead and guide and direct.

Pray: asking God to help us be less judgemental.

Reflect: who am I judging just now for their actions? Stop it!

They anointed David king over Israel. (v.3)

Some things take a long time to come. Just ask the child waiting for Christmas morning; or the bedraggled lady waiting on the bus; or the tired couple waiting for their summer holiday. My journey into ministry took many years. Morag always wanted to be a minister's wife. People always said to me I should be at Bible College. I couldn't see it. But the day did come when God clearly called me, having taken all those years to prepare me for the role to which he was calling me.

David is finally made king over all of Israel. Before David had become king of the tribe of Judah, before David had become a mighty man with his own army, before David had killed the giant Goliath, he had met the prophet Samuel. How many years earlier - at least eight - he had been anointed by the Lord (1 Samuel 16:13)! What seemed like an impossibility had finally come to pass! We might get upset at the people of Israel for taking so long to finally realise that David was to be their king. Yet sometimes God requires time to take a shepherd of sheep and make him a shepherd of men.

Don't be impatient when the things you think God has promised you don't happen overnight. Godly men have their years in the wilderness. That's how they become godly men! Joseph had his time in prison. Moses had his years in Midian. David had his years in En Gedi. But they were all exalted after they endured.

Today, if you are in a wilderness experience, remember, James 4:10 *'Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.'* You have not been abandoned into the wilderness. It is simply your training ground.

Pray: thanking God for the time of training he gives us. Thank him for being the great shepherd of his sheep.

Reflect: am I in a wilderness experience? Is God preparing me for service in some shape or form? Keep trusting and faithfully following.

I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this. (v.21)

I remember organising a concert in Crieff with a man called Sammy Horner. Sammy was a Christian who played Celtic rock music. One of the songs he sang concerned me a little. It was a new worship song by Matt Redman ‘I will dance, I will sing to be mad for my King. Nothing Lord, is hindering the passion in my soul. And I’ll become even more undignified than this.’ I wondered about being mad for the king and then about being undignified. I was brought up to be dignified in church and life. Then I read this chapter in 2 Samuel.

David and his men brought the ark of the Lord into the city. They were celebrating its return and David was dancing as they went. He did not have his royal robes on but a simple linen ephod (an apron). He did not care what people thought of him for all he wanted to do was praise God. Michal told him he was a fool but the Lord had the last word for her.

I think that sometimes we are way too concerned about what others are thinking when we worship at church. I know that at some churches, people get way out of hand. I’m not advocating that we go cart wheeling down the aisles of the church, waving ribbons and stuff. I do believe that we ought to do all things “decently and in order” in a *‘fitting and orderly way.’* (1 Corinthians 14:40).

But if I were to “evaluate” our times of worship, I would have to say that some of us tend to err on the side of being too cautious. I think we’re a little too afraid of what Michal thinks. I think we ought to be more concerned about what God thinks. I think we ought to be a tad more like David. I want you to know that it’s okay to raise your hands during the worship service. I think its okay to stop looking at the words on the screen, close your eyes, and worship God.

Pray: singing a song of praise to God where you are right now.

Reflect: do I worry about what others think or do I simply worship God in my own way?

Here I am living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent. (v.2)

I remember many times saying “no” to the requests of the children. Sometimes the no was to protect them, other times because they did not deserve whatever it was they were asking for. It was not always because it was a bad thing they were asking for but just that the timing was not right.

Here in 2 Samuel 7 we see David coming with good intentions but God saying no to him. David was living in his house, but the ark of God was in a tent. This seemed wrong to David. He told Nathan the prophet how he felt this was wrong. At this point, the tabernacle was over 400 years old (1 Kings 6:1), but David’s house was brand new. The tabernacle was covered in porpoise skins, but David’s house was paneled with cedar.

I really love what this shows us about David’s character here. During this time of rest and relaxation, his heart really shows through. He could have spent his time planning his next holiday, but instead, he is planning to build a house for the Lord. He could have occupied his thoughts with self-indulgence, but instead his heart is on the things of God. He could have surrounded himself with partiers, but instead is fellowshiping with Nathan the prophet.

The Lord spoke to Nathan that night regarding David’s plans. It was not for David to do. Don’t read into the Lord’s words any anger. God was not angry with David - his heart was right. As Solomon later said in 1 Kings 8:18 *‘Because it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart.’* Although God had never requested a house from the people of Israel, it blessed Him that David desired to do this. He told Nathan to tell David that his offspring would build his house.

Is your heart set on the things of God?

Pray: asking God to keep your heart set on him.

Reflect: is my heart set on the things of God?

The LORD gave David victory wherever he went. (v.14)

David is king. He has united the Kingdom, moved the capital to Jerusalem and established the Ark of the God in Jerusalem. David has come to a place in his life where he longs to serve the Lord. He will now confront his enemies, subdue his enemies and expand Israel's borders. David has matured. David has grown up. David has become strong.

Here in this chapter we read of many victories David has over his enemies. He could so easily get puffed up thinking how good he was and how strong he was. Yet he didn't. We read in verses 6 and 14 that '*The LORD gave David victory wherever he went.*' David recognised God's hand with him wherever he went. So much so that instead of capturing the chariot horses and keeping them he hamstrung all but one hundred of them. Victors usually kept all these spoils and gloried in them...not David.

When it comes to the silver and the gold that they captured from their enemies whom they overcame, David dedicates these to the Lord as well. David publicly declares everything to be God's victory, and all the spoil is holy to God. Once again, David's righteous heart was displayed for us.

David became great in all the land due to the victories and also I suspect because of what we read in verse 15 '*David reigned over Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people.*' David acted justly. He looked after the people. People respond to people they respect and trust.

Let's ask ourselves, "If the Lord increased my wealth, to what purpose would I use it? If the Lord gave me victories, who would they benefit? Would I dedicate them to the Lord's house, for the Lord's use? Or would I increase my standard of living by getting a bigger house, a better car, etc.?"

Pray: thanking God for his many blessings.

Reflect: do I treat everything I have as a gift from God and am I willing to use all I have in his service?

I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. (v.7)

A British factory worker and his wife were excited when, after many years of marriage, they discovered they were going to have their first child. According to author Jill Briscoe, who told this true story, the man eagerly relayed the good news to his fellow workers. He told them God had answered his prayers. But they made fun of him for asking God for a child.

When the baby was born, he was diagnosed as having Down syndrome. As the father made his way to work for the first time after the birth, he wondered how to face his co-workers. "God, please give me wisdom," he prayed. Just as he feared, some said mockingly, "So, God gave you this child!" The new father stood for a long time, silently asking God for help. At last he said, "I'm glad the Lord gave this child to me and not to you."

The father willingly loved and cared for the child given to him as a gift from God. In our passage today we find David finding his dear friend Jonathan's son and caring for him. Mephibosheth was crippled in both feet. Some may have rejected Mephibosheth because he was lame, but David's action showed that he valued him.

David assured him of a place at his table always. He gave Mephibosheth the land that belonged to his grandfather Saul and he allocated servants to tend the land on his behalf in order that he was provided for. David could have killed him since he was part of Saul's family but he didn't. He could have ignored him and forgotten all about due to his condition but he didn't. We truly see David being a man after God's own heart.

In God's eyes, every person is important. May we look out for those whom society looks down on and shuns.

Pray: for someone you know who suffers from a terrible illness or affliction.

Reflect: do I love everyone as I love myself? Do I treat people as God would?

I will show kindness to Hanun...as his father showed kindness to me. (v.2)

Although we don't know biblically when David and Nahash, the king of Ammon, had the beginnings of a friendship, we assume that it was during his days in the wilderness. At some point, Nahash had showed kindness to David, and now, upon his death, David desired to extend that same kindness to his son, Hanun. David in an attempt to express sorrow and comfort sent a group to him. He also wanted to establish a relationship with Hanun as he had with his father Nahash.

He sent some servants to extend his sorrow and consolation to the son grieving the loss of his father. Unfortunately, the Ammonites were suspicious of David's intentions. They convinced Hanun that he had sent spies in the guise of comforters. Hanun had the beards of David's servants shaved half off. He had their upper garments cut half off as well. Understand that to the Jews, the beard was the symbol of manhood and freedom. To cut off half of their beards was the greatest of insults, and terribly humiliating. David actually told them not to return to Jerusalem until their beards grew back. And so David went to war against them and defeated them.

All this because they misunderstood David's intentions. Sometimes, no matter how hard we try, people are going to misunderstand us. And no matter how hard we try at times we will misunderstand another's intentions toward us. The challenge for us is to listen carefully to what the other is saying, not to prejudge them as they speak or pre-empt what they are about to say but waiting until they finish. And if we don't understand we ought to ask some questions rather than jumping the gun. And likewise when we are sharing with another it is wise to explain ourselves carefully and well.

Pray: for peace in a situation where you have misunderstood someone else or where they have misunderstood you.

Reflect: do I listen carefully to other people?