DAVID:
A SYMPHONY OF GOD'S GRACE

Moses C. Onwubiko

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Leading the Way Back to the Bible

DAVID:
A SYMPHONY OF GOD'S GRACE

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Dedication

To Gloria, my wife, the virtuous woman who,
by God's grace, has quietly and diligently—through
the study and application of God's Word—acquired the
attributes of virtue as described in
Proverbs 31:10-31.

Table of Contents

Foreword **xi**

Prologue **xiii**

Introduction **1**

1 David's Historical Background **9**

Ruth: The Moabite 9
Magnifying Grace 11
Legalism in Focus 15
Legalism vs. Obedience 17
Misinterpretation of Grace 18

2 Overview of David's Mindset **19**

The Impact of God's Word on David 23
David Consecrated....24
David's Journey to the Throne 27

3 Facing Your Giant **29**

David: On Time, On Target 29
David Before King Saul....31
Revisiting David's Mindset 32

4 Applying God's Word Under Pressure **35**

David Meets Goliath 38
Jubilation in Victory 41
Temptation for Glory....41

5 Satan Counter-attacking Success **45**

Job Attacked....45
Peter Attacked 46
David Attacked....47
Demons & Church Age Believers 51
Mental Illness & The Believer 52

6 Rugged Road to Royalty **55**

Saul's Plot to Kill David 57
David's Promotion 61
Discernment 62
Saul Offers His Daughter to David 64
David's Humility 65
Another Dubious Offer....66

7 Saul's Resolve to Kill David **71**

Plot to Kill David Foiled 72
Killing David By Any Means....74
Saul's Messengers' Prophesy 75
Saul's Anger Burns Against Jonathan....76
Jonathan's Integrity 77

8 David's Spiritual Failure 79
Defining Spiritual Failure 79
David's Lie to a Priest....81
David Fakes Insanity....81
Examining Fear....82
Man's Corrupted Nature 87
David at Keilah 88
9 The Ministry of Encouragement 91
God Uses Prepared Vessels 92
Jonathan Encourages David....95
Saul Continues to Pursue David 96
Saul in Engedi....96
David Continues to Spare Saul's Life 97
10 David's Act of Overflowing Grace 101
David's Great Temptation 102
David is Gracious Toward Saul 103
David Appeals to Saul's Conscience 104
Saul's Response to David's Grace 106
11 Saul's Last Installment of Grace 109
Saul's Final Attempt to Kill David....110
David Spares Saul's Life—Again....111
Saul Visits a Witch 115
Saul Asks for the Dead Samuel to be Summoned....116
Eternal Security of the Believer 116
Saul Hits the Panic Button....117
The Reality of Death 118
Fear Caused By Uncertainty....118
Saul Dies the Sin Unto Death 120
David's Grace-Orientation 122
Grace in the Distribution of Spoils 123
God's Grace and Fairness 123
Reflection 125
Appendix 127
The Shepherd's Love for His Flock....127
Tend 128
Guard 129
Feed 130
Publications Available 133

Foreword

It has been both a privilege and a blessing to read the works of Reverend Moses Onwubiko. Each time I engage with his writings, I am profoundly challenged and inspired by his deep love for the Word of God. This volume emerges from his sustained and prayerful study and meditation on Scripture.

Readers of this book on David will undoubtedly encounter valuable spiritual insights and be edified through Reverend Moses' thoughtful reflections. His meditations reveal a scholar and servant who approaches Scripture with reverence, depth, and devotion, seeking always to draw others into a more intimate knowledge of God and His truth.

May the Lord continue to bless Reverend Moses and use this work as an instrument of spiritual renewal and encouragement to all who read it.

Joseph Park, Ph.D.
Professor of Missiology
Chongshin University and Theological Seminary
Seoul, South Korea.

Prologue

This is book one of a two-part series on the life of David and its revelation of God's grace. What we are about to study is loaded with grace principles.

We hope that its truths will cause you to become more appreciative of the riches of God's marvelous grace. We can hardly wait to see what God has in store for us as the Holy Spirit shines His illuminating light on this account. David's life touches on so many important ideas about grace and spiritual growth and lays down a rich legacy for the New Testament. To capture as much of this as possible we will be taking some brief side trips to look at these topics and the valuable instruction they provide.

At this point, it is of paramount importance, as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, that you acknowledge any known sins to God before you proceed with this study. This action will give the Holy Spirit access to your soul so He can make the truth clear to you. Accordingly, we have this promise: "If we confess our [known] sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, emphasis added). You may wish to pause and follow God's instruction.

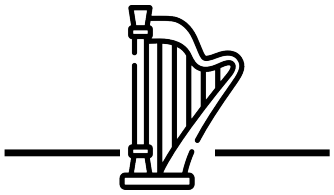
Introduction

Grace! How many times have you read or heard this word? Perhaps countless times. As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, can you remember how often you have pondered over the biblical meaning of this majestic word? Grace was defined in our previous work, *Overview of God's Grace,* which has received much appreciation from believers around the world. Nevertheless, I am still of the opinion we have not done justice to the subject. Grace is such a subject that it will take all of eternity to learn. If you have a grasp of it in time, it will rock your world as a Christian and cause you to face the reality of how God deals with mankind: *grace in every aspect, in every situation of life*. When you understand God's grace has made all the difference in your life, you will be compelled to stand in awe and reverence of His majesty. Simply put, it will cause you to wrap yourself with a blanket of humility and a cloak of gratitude to our Great God.

Understanding God's grace will expel arrogance—the most dangerous and sinful course of action in angelic and human history—and keep us from looking down on anyone for any reason.

As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, do you think your spiritual life is superior to other believers? When you hear of a believer's spiritual failure, do you make them an object of maligning, judging or ridicule? Do you entertain a tiny thought that God will do something for you because of who you are, or what you've done for Him? Do you ever conceive the thought your salvation depends on your doing something? Do you think you have what it takes to keep your salvation to the end? Right now, do you think you can lose your salvation? Or do you think you can do something to impress God? Do you think God's blessing depends on how much you give to Him? Do you think a believer can commit an unpardonable sin? Do you have power lust? What about approbation lust? If you say yes to these questions or even if you answer yes to fewer than three, welcome to the house of legalism. But if you answer yes to more than three, you need a major tune-up with the tools of the biblical doctrine of grace.

In any case, becoming a grace-oriented believer does not happen overnight. However, it will happen if you are humble enough to call on your Heavenly Father to guide you to His pasture, and feed you with the whole realm of His truth. Ask Him to enable you, through the mentorship of His Holy Spirit, to grow with respect to your progressive sanctification resulting in your development of a mental attitude of grace; the essential ingredient of spiritual growth.



You cannot possibly honor God in your spiritual life unless your thoughts and actions are motivated by the love and blessings you have received from the riches of His grace.

On the other hand, it is concerning that so many believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are not even close to living the spiritual life, a life that is seasoned with grace-orientation. How do we know that? Just look around and you will see those who teach salvation by works, lordship-salvation, and salvation by baptism, and your question will be put to rest. It is sad many do not even know we are under the umbrella of grace; and that legalism is against the plan of God.

The Mosaic Law came through Moses in the Old Testament, but grace and truth, the foundation of biblical truth, came to full light through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). And yet many believers have not discovered this phenomenal truth. The Apostle Paul adamantly affirmed, "We are not under law, but under grace. 'For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for anyone who believes'"(Rom. 6:14b; 10:4). That is it! Herein lies the foundation for our spiritual heritage—*grace.* Let me draw a line here: You will never honor God as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, if grace is not the compass of your spiritual life. Grace or legalism, which one? It cannot be both. (Rom. 11:6).

Let me be emphatic and say it in another way: If your spiritual life is not marked by grace-orientation, you will undoubtedly arrive in heaven as a loser-believer, not in the sense of losing your salvation, but *losing great rewards* (1 John 2:28; 1 Cor. 3:11-15). Indeed, there is no better way of saying it, other than that you cannot possibly honor God in your spiritual life unless your thoughts and actions are motivated by the love and blessings you have received from the riches of His grace.

We all fail. Even the best of the best fail, including King David, "a man after God's own heart." We shall see King David did the most abominable things in the eyes of the Lord. Decades later, King Solomon, David's son, wrote, "There are six things which the Lord

hates, yes, seven which are abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood [murder], a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers [in the Lord]" (Prov. 6:16-19, amplification added).

Ordinarily, without biblical knowledge, if a fellow believer were to quiz me to name the sin God abhors most, I would probably say, adultery. Ah, I would have been wrong. It's not even on God's list. But hold that thought. I am in total agreement with you in that adultery or fornication[1] is a heinous sin, but the truth of the matter is it didn't make the list. Just because you are not guilty of adultery or fornication, does not mean you should sit on your pedestal with 'haughty eyes' [proud heart or self-elevation], and use your wand of 'discord' [vilification, maligning or gossip] to render judgment on those who have committed your so-called forbidden sins.

Our doctrinal exposé on *David, a Symphony of God's Grace,* (and the second part of our work, *Rise, Fall and Restoration of David*) are designed to challenge you and to take a closer look at the matchless grace of God. I hope by the end of this study you will have an entirely new and deeper understanding of, and gratitude for, God's grace, that you will come face to face with the dynamic truth that God deals with us on the sole basis of His unfathomable grace; and never on any other grounds. You may have been one of the self-righteous believers who asked the following questions: How could God allow a man who committed murder, which made the list of His abominable sins, to be in the lineage of the Wonderful Savior Jesus Christ? Of all the good people in the world, why should King David, who did despicable things in God's eyes, be called, "a man after God's own heart"? Many wonder why God didn't revoke his salvation for his colossal act of evil and send him straight to hell where they think such people belong.

If the rule is "a life for a life," why did God not take David's life when he took Uriah's? Why did God allow him to live after disgracing His holy name through such heinous acts of adultery and murder? These are just two of the sins the prophet Nathan mentioned. When we examine David's spiritual failure, as a believer in the Lord and as King of Israel, it will be a troubling picture. He abused his power as the Commander in Chief, trampling on God's justice.That is more than a sin; it's evil! And in spite of his obvious record, God promoted and blessed David in an unprecedented manner. How could God do that? The answer in one word—*Grace*. That's how!

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[1] Fornication: Sexual intercourse between unmarried male and female, and adultery involves married individuals.

We come face to face with David and his spiritual dilemmas and failures to encourage those who might think their failures are bigger than the grace of God. Everyone has tasted spiritual failure. We all depend on the holiness of our Lord Jesus Christ—the Perfect Lamb of God. We may be surprised in heaven to see those whom the Lord will give greater grace rewards. They will be the believers who recognize their inadequacies in time—and constantly drink from the fountain of God's amazing grace! Take heart: We have all failed.

In light of the power of the Sin Nature, chances are we may fail again and again and perhaps again. I seriously think the foremost beneficiary of grace was the great Apostle Paul, whose life we have examined in our book, *Paul, A Trophy of God's Grace*. Even though he was the greatest apostle the world has known, he had his moments of failure, too. In his pre-salvation experience, he said, "…Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am the foremost of all" (1 Tim. 1:15); and in his post-salvation state, he screamed, "'Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death [Sin Nature]'" (Rom. 7:24, emphasis added). That is the lamentation of one who was caught in the crossfire of Sin Nature rebellion.

The Bible says that no one is good: "…there is none who does good, there is not even one" (Rom. 3:12b), "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins." (Eccl. 7:20). Not one.

Question: Are you a good person? Do you continually honor God in words and actions? Have you ever failed in a miserable way? We all have. Do not be a loser in the spiritual arena; get down from your pedestal of self-righteous arrogance and crawl to kneel at the Feet of God's Abundant Grace! Stay put there, for that is the only station where you can fuel up with His Super Abundant Grace in order to run the race that is set before you.

Indeed, it soothes my soul with great comfort to know grace pours down from God's throne and rains hard on those whose steadfast mind is fixed on His mercy in the midst of their colossal failures. It follows then that abundant grace is for those whose failures are colossal. The apostle expressed it well: "And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more…. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be [God forbid]!" (Rom. 5:20; 6:1, 2a, emphasis added). The point is this: often when we hit rock bottom in our spiritual lives, it opens our spiritual eyes to behold who we really are—wretched sinners, saved by grace.

Occasionally when believers or ministers start concentrating on their successes, rather than on God, He often allows them to hit bottom. Charles Spurgeon, one of the greatest pastors, said,

> God teaches His people every day, by sickness, by affliction, by depression of spirits, by the forsaking of God, by the loss of the Spirit for a season, by the lackings of the joys of His countenance, that He is God, and that beside Him there is none else. And we must not forget that there are some special servants of God raised up to do great works, who in a peculiar manner have to learn this lesson. Let a man, for instance, be called to the great work of preaching the gospel. He is successful; God helped him; thousands wait at his feet, and multitudes hang upon his lips; as truly as that man is a man, he will have the tendency to be exalted above measure, and too much he will begin to look to himself, and too little to his God….
>
> [Often] if God gives us a special mission, we generally begin to take some honor and glory to ourselves…. Poor Paul might have thought of himself as a god, and been puffed up above measure, by reason of the greatness of his revelation, had there not been a thorn in the flesh. But Paul could feel that he was not a god, for he had a thorn in the flesh, and gods could not have thorns in the flesh…. Very frequently, God teaches this to the minister, by leading him to see his own sinful nature. He will have such an insight into his own wicked and abominable heart that he will feel as he comes up the pulpit stairs that he does not deserve so much as to sit in his pew, much less to preach to his fellows. Although we feel always joy in the declaration of God's Word, yet we have what it is to totter on the pulpit steps, under sense that the chief of sinners should scarcely be allowed to preach to others. Ah, I do not think he will be very successful as a minister who is not taken into the depths and blackness of his own soul, and made to exclaim, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." There is another antidote which God applies in the case of ministers. If He does not deal with them personally, He raises up a host of enemies, that it may be seen that He is God and God alone.[2]

[2] Spurgeon's Sermons, Volume 1 (Bakers Books: 1999), pp10-12

Indeed how true it is that God uses every tool at His disposal to rid us of self-glorification, as He works to conform us to "the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29).

And as for David, the focal point of our study, God bountifully served him grace heaped upon grace, as we will see later in our work. But, remember: David really disappointed the Lord, committing adultery and murder. The Mosaic Law required nothing less than his execution by stoning. Do not be so fast to cast your rock at King David or blaspheme God for that matter: "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at [him]" (John 8:7, emphasis added). If you've not dropped the stone of your self-righteousness and legalism as the religious Jews did when confronted by our Lord(v. 9), you need to enroll in the Lord's Grace College in a hurry and begin to expose yourself to sound Bible teaching on a regular basis.

What is intensely sad is many legalistic believers always view their sins as minor or inconsequential while spending time analyzing, and enlarging, someone else's sins. They log astronomical amounts of time in criticizing and judging those who have committed their list of so-called forbidden sins. To these I say, my friends, come out of your closet of self-righteousness. The insurance policy of grace does not cover those who sit on their sins while they examine the sins of others. It never has, and never will. As far as God is concerned, such a lifestyle reveals arrogance. God will bring judgment on believers who operate in this mode.

The goal for this study on David, the grace-made shepherd boy, is to enlighten you so you can behold the depth, the width, and the height of God's grace toward the human race.

I urge you to meditate on these five principles and make them points of reference as this study develops:

- If God were to do something for you because of your goodness, it would erase the true meaning of grace.
- Whatever comes your way is by the grace of God; whatever comes to you apart from God's grace is not of God.
- Human viewpoint always seeks to eliminate a flawed man from God's service; but God's viewpoint welcomes such a fellow with open arms.
- Only God has the monopoly on how to equip flawed individuals to serve Him effectively.

- "For by the grace of God, I am what I am [and man is what he is]." (1 Cor 15:10, emphasis added).

> *It is my heartfelt prayer that this book will make a deep and lasting mark of grace upon you, resulting in your deeper appreciation of His unsurpassing grace, which will result in a mental attitude of grace toward others—moral, immoral, amoral, worthy or unworthy. To God alone, I lift my prayer in the name of the One who loved us and offered up His life as a sacrifice and substitute for us, namely, our Savior Jesus Christ—the Lord of Lords. Amen.*

Chapter 1

David’s Historical Background

Beloved or Chieftain was the Hebrew or ancient Mari meaning of David. He was born around 1040 B.C., and was the youngest of eight sons of Jesse. The birthplace of David was Bethlehem, a town five miles southwest of Jerusalem in the hill country of Judea, on the main highway to Hebron and Egypt. This tiny town also happened to be where our Savior Jesus Christ was born. Scripture is silent as to when David believed in the Lord, just as it was about his great-grandfather Abraham (Gen. 15:6). However, the exact date is nonessential.

David, the musician, poet, soldier, shepherd and king, had a long genealogy going back ten generations through the line of Jesse. Since our biblical exposition is centered on grace in relation to David, it is fitting to take a side road through David’s fascinating ancestry. His genealogy is through Jesse, as we mentioned, but it further extends through Obed, Boaz, Salmon, Nashon, Amminadab, Ram and Hezron of Perez, who, according to Genesis 38, was the son of Judah by Tamar. This remarkable genealogy highlights God’s grace policy in action. But the irony of David’s genealogy will not be complete without mentioning a brief story of Ruth, for therein grace is showcased.

Ruth: The Moabite

Ruth was a Moabite, a heathen girl, who became one of the daughters-in-law to Elimelech and Naomi. As God would have it, Elimelech and his sons died in Moab, leaving no family-redeemer as per God’s Law in Leviticus 25:25-28 and Deuteronomy 25:5-10. With their death, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, and she encouraged Ruth and her other daughter-in-law to stay behind. Ruth refused to stay. She persisted and followed Naomi, despite the fact that she had no hope of

remarriage in Elimelech's family as per God's Law. The author of the book of Ruth wrote,

> *And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and me. May the Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.' Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept [bitterly]. And they [Ruth and Orpah] said to her, 'No, but we shall surely return with you to your people.' But Naomi said, 'Return my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 'Return my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone against me.'*
>
> *And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law [good-bye], but Ruth [the persistent one] clung to her. Then she said, 'Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods, return after your sister-in-law [and to your own gods as well].' But Ruth said, 'Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 'Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.' (Ruth 1:8-17, emphasis added).*

What a remarkable lady!

Ruth traveled to Bethlehem with Naomi, where she put her trust in Yahweh as the only true God. As a result, God caused her to be at the right place at the right time to meet Boaz, whose field she gleaned though she had never met him. Boaz, a close relative to Elimelech, had the rights, according to Mosaic Law, to be a Kinsman-redeemer and marry Ruth.

Jesse became King David's father. I do not want you to miss any piece of God's grace puzzle. Note that Boaz' mother was Rahab. She was a notorious prostitute in Jericho (Josh. 2:1b). Boaz married Ruth, who gave birth to Obed, who fathered Jesse, David's father. Providentially, the great-grandparents of the royal Messianic line had roots outside Israel. And more than that, how fitting that our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David, descended from such a lowly family—a heathen, Ruth, whose marriage to Boaz, the son of a prostitute, resulted in the lineage of our wonderful Savior. Who would have thought that? What a marvelous sense of humor our Father has! What a clear and graphic picture of God's amazing grace!

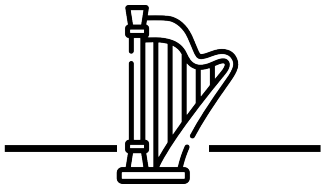
Magnifying Grace

It is fitting to ask an important question to stimulate our minds regarding the dynamic power of grace. Of all the finest genealogies in the world, why did God send His uniquely born Son through a mediocre genealogy traced back to David, an adulterer and a murderer; to Bathsheba, David's kidnapped wife, and all the way to the former notorious prostitute, Rahab? A self-righteous believer would likely be angry with God's choice, and probably say, "David and Rahab do not deserve eternal life, let alone to be in the genealogy of our Messiah!" But such an attitude would inevitably collide with the statement of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself: "…It is not those who are well [self-righteous ones] who need a physician [grace], but those who are sick [David, Rahab, and others like them]" (Luke 5:31, emphasis added). Furthermore, "I have not come to call the [self] righteous but sinners [to change their mind about Me and anchor their faith alone in Me alone as their Savior]" (v. 32, emphasis added).

It is the height of self-deception to harbor a thought that you are better than David and Rahab. Do you really think you are better than these graced-out believers? You are not! Just because you have not been guilty of their brand of sin does not make you more holy than they are. We have alluded to this before, but let me be point blank: When you operate in self-absorption, when you think you are better than anyone else, or look down on others, remember it was the sin of arrogance that cost Satan and his demons a permanent place with God in heaven—a sin that's guaranteed to have a head-on collision with God's justice.

Some of us are like the self-righteous, self-centered Pharisee who prayed to God from his arrogant heart, saying:

"God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers [like King David], even like this tax collector who was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven [like me because his sin is so great], but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me [shower me with your grace—I am a wicked sinner!]'" (Luke 18:13). [As for me—the Pharisee] I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all I get [I am so righteous—these are my reasons why *you* should answer my prayer right now!]" (18:11, 12, emphasis added).



When it comes to helping the fallen saints, we must do so with love, gentleness and great care.

What a blind, self-righteous man this Pharisee was. Of course, we know the Lord's stance on both prayers: "I tell you, this man [the unworthy one] went down to his house justified rather than the other [self-absorbed Pharisee]; for everyone [without exception] who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted" (v.14, emphasis added).

That is the truth of Scripture. That is the Supreme Court verdict! Sooner or later, God will take you down when you think you are better or superior to others or puff yourself up in any way. As long as we are trapped in this body of sin, we will continue to be spiritually weary and need to humbly stoop down and drink without ceasing from the fountain of His grace. We ought to spend more time examining and correcting ourselves rather than others. On the other hand, when it comes to helping the fallen saints, we must do so with love, gentleness and great care (Gal. 6:1).

If you take a glance at what is happening in Christianity today, you might be shocked to see we have written some people off as undeserving of eternal life. Come judgment day, many will be stunned to see some believers, whom they thought were not living the spiritual life, receiving their decorations. These self-elevated spiritual winners will be bowled over to find they are without decorations; that they, in fact, are the losers. Don't wait until then to find out whether you will be among the winners or losers. You can take time right now, by examining your own life in light of God's Word. Stop wasting time examining other people's lives.That is God's prerogative. That's His job. When you spend your time monitoring other people's lives, you

will lose your spiritual balance. You place yourself on a pedestal of self-righteousness and arrogance. It is a precarious place to sit in God's Courtroom. But that's exactly where many believers are sitting today—judging side by side with God. What boldness! Ask yourself if you are on a self-righteous pedestal. Only believers on those pedestals would react to God's choice of those in our Lord's genealogy.

> *'For My thoughts are not your thoughts [of legalism], neither are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways [of abundant grace] higher than your ways, and My [compassionate] thoughts [full of mercy] than your thoughts [lacking grace-orientation]' (Isa. 55:8, 9, emphasis added).*

Sadly enough, legalistic believers cry out, "David and Rahab are not worthy to partake in the genealogy of the Bright Morning Star!" These believers who inadvertently operate in carnality—out of fellowship—will be busy reporting to the Lord on who is unworthy of eternal life, let alone to serve in His Kingdom. Such assertions will be firmly met with God's response: "I have made him worthy!" Not only did God promote a down-to-earth person and make him worthy, He also elevated him beyond measure. That is what grace is all about—elevating a sinner like King David to a place of honor.

This Bible exposition may present a challenge to those whose minds are still guided by arrogance and legalism. I do not know where we get the idea that we are worthy, even after our salvation, to merit anything of intrinsic good from God. We do not have any merit of our own—even after our salvation—that is exactly what the Bible teaches. All our merit is Christ's merit!

Jesus said of himself, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:32) And the Apostle Paul cried out:

> *For that which I am doing [now that I am saved] I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do [as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ]. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of good is not .... Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free [Greek: Rhuomai = snatch out of danger with a force, or to liberate—set me free] from the body of this death?....Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ*

> *our Lord [who has set me free from the eternal consequence of sin]! (Rom. 7:15, 18, 24-25a, emphasis added).*

And so with a sense of his own destiny he proclaimed, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). Without a doubt, daily deliverance from sin comes, not through legalistic effort, but through our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit." (Gal. 5:16).

The issue of whether the Apostle Paul is describing a believer's or an unbeliever's experience in Romans 7 has been hotly debated for centuries. However, when the text is thoroughly examined, it becomes apparent his description depicts a believer in Christ. This is not our subject; however, what Paul wrote in regard to his struggles after his conversion should never be misconstrued as an attempt to escape moral responsibility, but a warning of the great control sin can have over a believer's life.

So, be honest with yourself, and see if the Apostle Paul's description fits. Let us re-emphasize that God has never used, and will never in the future use, anyone on the basis of the individual's merits. Put simply, you and I will *never* be successful in our spiritual lives until we completely overhaul the chambers of our soul and detach ourselves from the spirit of arrogance through the consistent use of God's grace provision, namely, the Holy Spirit and the 'sword of the Spirit'—the infallible Word of God. Arrogance was Satan's original sin and thus so easy for man to fall into, so we must always be vigilant to combat arrogance whenever it rears its ugly head, or else it will rob us of our blessings in time and in eternity and expose us to the wrath of God's eternal justice.

It is erroneous for believers to think arrogance can easily be spotted in others. That is a dangerous assumption, for Satan who invented it is the master of disguise. The Apostle Paul brought Satan's disguise to light when he lambasted the Corinthian believers for their arrogance, and thus we read, "And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). Arrogance comes in a form so subtle it often fools the believer who functions under its influence. That is why the Apostle Paul issued this somber warning: "Therefore let him who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

You and I ought to take this warning to heart. Almost always, legalistic believers are guilty of the sin of arrogance. We have talked so much

about legalism—the master distorter of salvation and the spiritual life—we think it's time to iron out the remaining wrinkles. It is essential we get a thorough understanding of legalism. This is necessary to expose our dark side and perhaps cause us to pursue with all diligence the mental attitude of David. We will see how it brought him closer and closer to God as he recognized his inadequacies and shortfalls as compared to God's righteous standard.

Legalism in Focus

Generally, people use the word legalism in contrast to grace. Some denominations and churches have been labeled as being legalistic because of their doctrines, or simply by the way their church operations are set up. Many in evangelical churches accuse each other, but legalism disguises itself so well it can hide in any denomination.

Let us first define legalism as it relates to Christendom: Legalism is an enslavement of one's will to the Mosaic Law or a tangle of taboos, whereby one's approval or acceptance by God, either for salvation or blessing, is claimed to be solely based on human works or the works of the Law.

The Greek word, *katadouloo*, which means absolute enslavement, closely depicts it. Legalism in a nutshell is anti-grace—anti-God's plan in its entirety. Wherever it is found, it is nothing but Satan's handiwork. What is really sad is millions of believers unknowingly operate in a legalistic model. Many flood churches with a false sense of salvation based on their self-righteous struggles or commitment to doing their best, such as keeping the law and being sweet to everyone. All these things are virtually the same as morality, which, in itself, cannot save anyone.

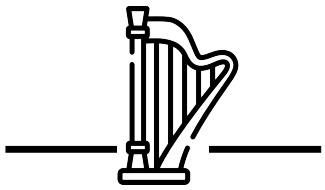
No one has been – or will ever be – saved by his own works! The Bible is clear about that: "Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law [legalism] but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified (Gal. 2:16, emphasis added). There you have it documented in God's Word.

Again, many people, especially ministers who are still not saved, give a list of taboos for gaining salvation or approbation from God. To

them, the Bible fires back: It can't work! We are saved by grace—faith alone in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8, 9)—never by good works or any combination thereof! The Scripture is so lucid and adamant about faith alone in Christ alone as the *only* means of securing salvation. In light of this truth, I urge you to cease and desist from whitewashing the tomb of your dead works for salvation. No matter how impressive your handiwork is to others, it cannot and will not impress God. The fact is no matter how hard you strive with your own effort, you will never be able to muster up what it takes to impress God for salvation. In short, it is the quintessence of human arrogance to substitute our own work for salvation apart from the efficacious sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. Such a mindset is nothing, but arrogance in a polished state. And anyone who dies in that status quo would come up shortchanged of spending eternity with God in Heaven.

Often believers lose their spiritual common sense when they ignore simple doctrinal logic. I ask: What did you do to receive the Lord's perfect righteousness, which resulted in your eternal adoption into

God's family? Nothing! However, if you believe you worked for it, you are probably not yet saved. The second question is similar: Salvation and daily blessing, which one is greater? Salvation, of course. So if you did nothing to receive the *greatest gift* or 'Indescribable gift' as Paul describes it in 2 Cor. 9:15, why would you need to work to get the lesser gift? The scriptural logic is apt: "He who did not spare His own Son, but [freely] delivered Him up for us all, [logic:] how will He not also with Him [or through Him] *freely* give us all things [including our blessing in time and eternity]?" (Rom. 8:32, emphasis added). Our blessings in time and eternity flow from His everlasting grace, simply on the account of who and what Christ is—no more, no less. However, conveyance of God's "above and beyond blessing" to us in time and eternity are contingent on our spiritual growth through the use of God's grace provisions.



The Christian way of life does not run on our own energy, but rather on God's.

We can identify legalistic teachings by paying attention to biblical teachings that emphasize

taboos[3] and human efforts. We ought not to lose sight of the fact the Christian way of life does not run on our own energy, but rather on God's (Zech. 4:6). Understanding this, the Apostle Paul summoned the believers in Ephesus, and his message is still vividly alive today, "… Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might" (Eph. 6:10). It is not in our strength—not in our might—it is in His might and in His strength. Period. He instructed them further to, "Put on the full armor of God [not self-made weapons], that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (v. 11, emphasis added). So, any teaching that does not stress total reliance on God for a spiritual lifestyle and execution of His plan for your life is nothing but legalistic teaching and we ought to reject such a yoke outright.

Legalism vs. Obedience

The phenomenal truth found in God's inspired, inerrant and infallible Word fascinates me as I dig deeper into its well of spiritual information. However, as I interact with fellow believers, the reality of Satan's being the master of deceit becomes apparent. He knows most believers have a measure of understanding of what it means to be legalistic. To this effect, he twists and tricks the unwitting believer to buy his lie, namely, labeling any teaching that requires a believer to fulfill divine commands as being legalism. Satan is a genius. He takes something we concretely know, such as legalism, and turns it as a weapon against us. His evil work among believers needs to be exposed so every believer can clearly see it. He is acutely aware doctrinal believers abhor the word legalism, and so he works hard to label and camouflage every imperative in Scripture as legalism. I ask you, If obeying God's commands is legalism, how is one to apply the Word of God? And what in the world are we doing here after our salvation? Make no mistake about it, the reason some believers are not applying God's Word is because of their misconception of legalism and the grace of God.

If obeying God's commands is legalism, how is one to apply the Word of God?

[3] Taboos: Man-made religion superimposing one's ideologies on others as if they were God-ordained; for example, forbidding believers from wearing certain dresses, or outlawing women from wearing pants or trousers, or prohibiting them from beautifying themselves with moderate apparel and makeup.

Misinterpretation of Grace

Many believers assume grace means letting God do everything for you. It is true God does change us from the inside out as we internalize and obey His Word. But some go so far as to teach that applying the imperative commands of God's Word would be tantamount to legalism. Of course, that's a ridiculous assumption. But that's exactly how some heretical teachers interpret imperative moods in Scripture. Sadly, this has even led some to feel they need not take seriously the mandate to assemble themselves together, to attend church, even though we have the command: "Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have made a habit" (Heb 10:25 BSB).

James zeroed in to counteract falsehood:

> *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:21-25).*

Chapter 2

Overview of David's Mindset

> *He [Samuel] said, 'In peace, I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.' He also consecrated Jesse [David's father] and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they entered he [Samuel] looked at Eliab [and because of his outward appearance] thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him.' But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart' (1 Sam. 16:5-7, emphasis added).*

Man's inclination is to judge a book by its cover. That is man's nature. We are often too quick to draw a conclusion by sight, as the prophet Samuel did. He took just one glance at Jesse's firstborn and concluded without a doubt, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." How surprised he was when the Omniscient One spoiled his enthusiasm: "No, Samuel, not so fast! 'For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, *but the Lord looks at the heart*.'"

So the parade of Jesse's sons went on until seven sons had passed by the Prophet Samuel; but still no approval from the Lord. How could it be? Everyone was disappointed, including Jesse. Who, then, could it be? I can sense Jesse saying to the Prophet, "Sam, I am as totally flabbergasted as you are; I had my eye on Eliab, too. He's accomplished and well built—certainly material for the people's king. Are you sure you are at the right house? These are all my sons, except one who does the lowest job of the household. He is off tending sheep. It surely cannot be him." Then the Prophet Samuel said, "Send and

bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here*"* (1 Sam. 16:11). But we will see the lowly shepherd boy was indeed God's choice.

Understanding David's mindset is critical to understanding why God bypassed others in the family. His mindset has not been fully explained yet. Using God's grace assets, which are available in every generation, His Word and the mentorship of the Holy Spirit, David grew rapidly in his spiritual life. The Apostle Paul underscores this timeless truth:

> *Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. (2 Tim. 2:21-22)***.**

His spiritual growth caused him to become God centered, humble and grace oriented. Through his knowledge of God he came to love him passionately. He was preoccupied with God, which made him stand out in his family. Why did God choose the shepherd boy, the lowly one of the family, and make him the finest king in Israel's history?" The answer is in one word: *grace*.

Let us focus on grace from the standpoint of how God dealt with David. God's grace surrounded the life of King David, who responded with an awesome gratitude to God and grace toward others. David's grace and generosity can be seen in his refusal to accept Araunah the Jebusite's offer of free land. David insisted on paying for this land, which was to be offered to God: "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing" (2 Sam. 24:24).

What an expression of a mental attitude of gratitude to God. This is a man who spent his youth hiding from King Saul (who wanted him dead), but rejected a golden opportunity to retaliate in kind: "...Far be it from me because of the Lord that I should do this thing to my lord [kill Saul], the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the Lord's anointed" (1 Sam. 24:6, emphasis added).

Again we ask: "Who was this King that reached out and touched the heart of God?" Why was he so precious in the sight of God? Why is his name cited more often in God's Word than any other? The Lord Himself in His humanity is many times referred to as the Son of David.

Even the Lord Himself ended His revelation to man with these words: "I am the root, and descendent of David, the bright morning star" (Rev. 22:16).He could have said, "I am the King of kings, Lord of lords, the bright morning star!" Rather He ended by paying tribute to David! What a man! What an object of God's awesome grace!

David was, indeed, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). "Why did God open Heaven and pour out His blessing on David in such a stunning way?" The truth is we do not know God's thoughts until He reveals them to us. He is Omniscient and we are not. We cannot ascertain what goes on in His mind or in His decision making. In His Sovereign will and purpose, He assembled the entire life of David and decided to elevate him beyond measure. It's all grace! That's God's prerogative.

Scripture reveals David was a man yearning for God's heart and did so until death. This can be seen in some of the songs he wrote:

> *My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my fl esh cry out for the living God (Ps. 84:2 NIV).*
>
> *O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water (Ps. 63:1 NIV).*
>
> *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God*
> *(Ps. 42:1-2 NIV).*
>
> *One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life (Ps. 27:4 NIV).*

"My soul yearns, even faints" are perfect words to describe a man whose mindset was heavenward. David yearned for God's heart "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16), and it shaped his heart and made him a symphony of God's grace. He had the right mindset. "One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life." His priority was centered on just "one thing." Nothing else mattered to him. All he ever wanted in life was a deep and meaningful relationship with God. In other words, David's

mindset was saturated with God's heart. Consequently, God's heartbeat, God's love, God's passion, and God's grace flowed through David and caused him to demonstrate a lifestyle of humility toward God and grace toward man. Could this be the main reason he attracted God's blessing?

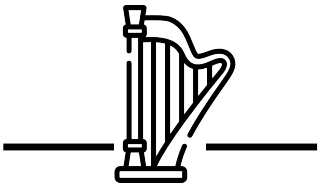
> *But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it [Scripture] says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE [Prov. 3:34]" (James 4:6 emphasis added).*
>
> *Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you at the proper time (1 Peter 5:6).*
>
> *For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him (2 Chron. 16:9 NIV).*
>
> *For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly (Psalm 84:11).*

There's no one in all of Scripture who was more frequently used as a reference point of obedience to God's Word than David. He raised the bar of obedience to God's Word so much that some believers who were obedient to God were compared to David and his spiritual integrity. For instance, a few of the fine kings of Judah, men like Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 17:3), Hezekiah (29:2), and Josiah (34:2) were all likened to King David. These men had their share of blessing, too, because they: "did right in sight of the Lord, according to all that [their] father David had done" (2 Chron. 29:2).

"Say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns; indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity'" (Psalm 96:10). God is always fair! Judging all equally is the mark of God's justice. He is no respecter of persons. What He did for others, He will do for you. While none of us could ever be David; we can have the same mindset he had and attract God's overwhelming blessing both in time and eternity.

The Impact of God's Word on David

The Word of God made a huge impact on David and changed him inside out. David's home was the springboard for his spiritual journey. Under the teaching of his father Jesse, he came to know about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and David was born again into the family of God by faith alone, in Yahweh alone. Thereafter, his desire grew to know God in a personal way. He began to immerse himself day by day, in the teaching of God's Word, whenever and wherever God's court was opened for fellowship. He could not get enough of God's Word, saying it was more wonderful than eating honey (Psalm 19:10), and:



Mastering Bible knowledge, and having a reservoir of God's Word in our souls, is important, but using this Truth in life's experiences is the real power of the Christian life.

One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to meditate in His temple (Ps. 27:4). For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God, than dwell [in a worldly mansion] (Ps. 84:10, emphasis added).

Mastering Bible knowledge, and having a reservoir of God's Word in our souls, is important, but using this Truth in life's experiences is the real power of the Christian life. Hearing about or reading a passage of Scripture like: "I will never desert you; nor will I ever forsake you" (Heb. 13:5b) is one thing, but applying its Truth when our lives fall apart and confidently saying: "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid [of what the future holds] what will man [or circumstances] do to me?"(Heb. 13:6, emphasis added) is totally different.

David immersed himself in the Word and, therefore, his thinking was influenced by the Word. God was real to him, simply because the Word was real to him. He took every bit of God's Word to heart and applied it to his life. Many passages of Scripture had an impact on him. Passages such as Isaiah 41:10 would have greatly strengthened him: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

David took the commands and the promises of these words to heart and mixed them with his own thinking. He obeyed the commands and claimed the promises and applied the doctrines to his life. "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear (Ps. 27:1-3 NIV). "When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. In God whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man [dust] do to me?" (Ps. 56:3-4).

He developed a personal relationship with God and a supreme love for Him through his consistent time in God's Word. He learned to apply God's Truth in a dynamic way, in both his relationship with God and man. His grace orientation was supreme! In essence, the Word of God affected him and made him an honorable servant in God's household.

Oh that we would all follow in the footsteps of David! For we forfeit the enormous blessings the Almighty God has for those who love Him when we do not immerse ourselves completely as we should in His Word.

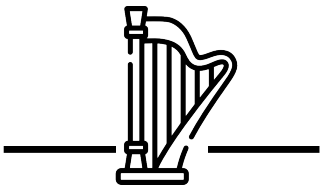
- We forfeit a wealth of blessing because we take for granted the development of our personal relationship with God.
- We forfeit our blessing because our mediocre relationship with God has yielded a mediocre love for Him.
- We forfeit our blessing because it comes to us through His Word.

David Consecrated

God uses prepared people (2 Tim. 2:20-21). David was one. You can be one, too. God saw how His Word had affected David's life and knew David was prepared to be used mightily. He was the man of the hour.

Preparation is one thing; being used by God is an entirely different thing. God in His Omniscient, infinite wisdom and grace determines how He will use each member of His family. That is His prerogative. When we are prepared, God will use us in His perfect time and for his

own purpose. We need to resist the temptation to launch ourselves into service. We need to be patient and wait on the Lord, for only then are we truly used by God.

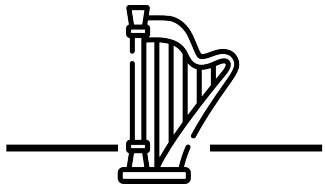


We need to resist the temptation to launch ourselves into service. We need to be patient and wait on the Lord, for only then are we truly used by God.

No two individuals are alike, so no two are used in the same way. Common sense tells us not everyone will be Charles Spurgeon, Billy Graham or Mary Slessor. Likewise, not everyone's ministry of Christian service will make the front page of *USA Today* or *The New York Times*. Some will be called to serve in what I call "Behind-the-Scenes Ministries," where their labor for the Lord may not be noticed by men. Others will be called to "Center Stage Ministries," where their Christian service/labor will, of its nature, be highly visible or may even make the news. All weigh equally before God, who in total fairness rewards us based not on the perceived prestige of our service or assignment, but on our careful execution of whatever His plan and accompanying spiritual gift or gifts for us prescribe. Our reward is based on our obedience and faithfulness.

The Apostle Paul reminds us, in 1 Corinthians 12:12 and following, Christ is the head of the body, His Church. Some of us are ears, some eyes, and many other parts—*all* parts are necessary for proper body function. So it is with believers and our assignments in the plan of God.

Equally important to our preparation is the power that goes with our spiritual convictions. God will not leave those He calls to serve him empty-handed. He always strengthens them with power from on high. In the time of David, God's power was limited to the elite servants, but today His power is available to all believers. On this ground, when David was called for a special task, God gave him the power. This we read from Scripture.



Our reward is based on our obedience and faithfulness.

> *So he [Samuel] sent and had him [David] brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; he is the one.' So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power (1 Sam. 16:12-13 BSB, emphasis added).*

The empowerment of the Holy Spirit is not only essential, but a prerequisite for the fulfillment of God's plan. God's chosen servants of the Old Testament could not do without it; and Church Age believers are no exception. For instance, in the Old Testament, God called Saul: "And the Spirit of God came upon him mightily" (1 Sam. 10:10).

He called David, and: "from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power" (1 Sam. 16:13 NIV). Today every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). When there is no unconfessed sin in the believer's soul, he is filled by the Holy Spirit and thus empowered by Him (1 John 1:9). On top of that, everyone has at least one spiritual gift. Our spiritual gift may, or may not, be apparent to us. It functions with or without our knowledge. We do not need to be rocket scientists or necessarily be masters of the original languages of Scripture: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, to excel in God's service. All that is required of us is that we grow in grace to spiritual maturity which is more precious in God's sight than human credentials. The Scripture is very clear on this:

> *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate [mature], equipped [and sent forth] for every good work.... Although He was a Son, He [the humanity of Jesus Christ] learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, [having been brought to maturity] He became to all those who obey Him [who trust in Him] the source of eternal salvation (2 Tim. 3:16-17; see also Heb. 5:8-9, emphasis added).*

Scripture is silent regarding David's academic or religious training; but it is not silent when it comes to the edification of his soul through the infallible Word of God. By means of consistent study and application of God's Word, David advanced rapidly to spiritual maturity; thereby, he was equipped for every good work. Having been prepared in his soul, having been secretly anointed and empowered by God, David

was on his way to the throne of Israel. God uses mature and prepared people to the maximum!

David's Journey to the Throne

David had secretly been declared king, but the road to the throne would not be a bed of roses. One thing was certain: Sunshine, thunder, rain or snow—no matter how treacherous the road would get, the Lord of history would bring about His plan. God had spoken through the prophet Samuel and it must come to pass, no matter what! Take note, the road to the throne would not be all that easy. Just because God had made a promise to David does not mean its fulfillment was to be served on a golden platter. David would encounter many obstacles and assaults that nearly prevented him from reaching the throne, as we shall see in our study. However, we can be certain of one thing: No matter how treacherous the road, the Lord crowned David as king at the appointed time. God will also bring His plan to fruition in our lives at exactly the right time! It is comforting to know God never fails.

So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it…. "Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure;' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it"…. God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? (Isa. 55:11, 46:9-11; Numbers 23:19).

God is always ready to use us for greater tasks when we master facing our obstacles with the weapon of divine viewpoint thinking.

God is always ready to use us for greater tasks when we master facing our obstacles with the weapon of divine viewpoint thinking (2 Tim. 2:20-21). In reality, God searches for those who will view their obstacles through the filter of His Word. He searches for those who have become proficient in applying His Word under pressure—the mature believers. Those who can look at "giants" and come to the same conclusion as did Joshua and Caleb, saying: "They [the giants] will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them" (Num. 14:9); or as David said:

> *"This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands" (1 Sam. 17:46-47).*

Chapter 3

Facing Your Giant

Sooner or later we shall all face obstacles or a "giant" as David did when he faced Goliath as we will see in the next chapter. David killed Goliath, but we all face other inevitable "giants" yet to be defeated: layoffs, death or disability of loved ones, bankruptcy, terminal sicknesses, and false accusations, to name just a few. These are the "giants" of life!

Anyone who judges only from what can be seen on the surface may infer that Goliath was like an impassible obstacle on David's road to the throne. Or was he? Goliath was God's instrument of punishment to the Israelites because of their spiritual failures. He also used David to reveal King Saul's cowardice, while displaying David's awesome courage.

David: On Time, On Target

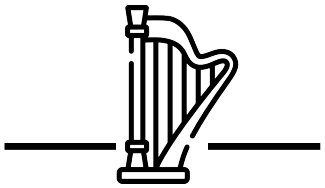
David came to the war zone and heard Goliath lashing out and intimidating Israel's army, as the giant had been doing for forty days:

> *"Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us." Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified (1 Sam. 17:8-11 NIV).*

Everyone, including King Saul, hit the panic button! The sight of Goliath alone sent everyone to their hideout—even David's eldest brother, Eliab, the man Samuel thought was the right candidate (1 Sam. 17: 13-24).

I encourage you to read the entire 17th chapter of the book of First Samuel to acquaint or reacquaint yourself with the story of David and Goliath. It is fascinating. Moreover, reading it afresh leads us to appreciate God's infinite wisdom and the power of His Word when it is applied courageously and confidently. Let me reiterate: Becoming mature in Bible truth, and having a reservoir of God's Word in our souls, is important, but using it in life's experiences is the real power of the Hearing or reading a passage of Scripture like Isaiah 41:10 is especially important."Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you; surely I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:10).

But we need to apply its truth when things fall apart in our lives to confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid [of what the future holds]. What will man [or circumstances] do to me?" (Heb. 13:6, emphasis added).



We need to apply the truth of Isaiah 41:10 in our lives when things fall apart in our lives.

This is the strength for Christian living. David exemplified this timeless truth. He devoted himself to the Word of God, and allowed his thinking to be influenced by the Word, as we have noted. God was so real to him, simply because the Word was so real to him. He believed all of God's Word meant just what it said, it became a part of who he was, part of his thinking, and he applied what he learned as opportunities presented themselves. Consequently, David was quick to respond to Goliath's taunting words and said, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam. 17:26).

The Israelites saw a giant, but David saw an uncircumcised blasphemer. The Israelites ran away from Goliath in fear; David faced

him with confidence in God. Though he first sought King Saul's permission.

David Before King Saul

David's courage to take on the giant undoubtedly stemmed, not from military prowess or experience, but from a total reliance on God. God has what it takes to handle every "giant," no matter how huge or how threatening. David was not afraid. He knew his God. "The people who know their God will display strength and take action" (Dan. 11:32). The assurance in his soul compelled him to come to a sound conclusion that "the battle is the Lord's." David stood before King Saul and said, "Let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant [David] will go and fight with this Philistine" (1 Sam. 17:32).

King Saul wasn't all that convinced that David, with his lack of military training, should take on the giant. What's more, David's physique compounded his doubtfulness. David, a youth, probably weighed about as much as Goliath's helmet and coat of scale armor, which weighed about 5,000 shekels (roughly 125 pounds). On top of that, Goliath was a giant and a seasoned warrior. That explains Saul's bewilderment. Different scholars show Goliath at various heights—but in any case he truly was a giant! Then Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth" (1 Sam. 17:33).

He was just a shepherd boy, the youngest of the family, forgotten in the fields for most of the time. Notwithstanding, he took the challenge to fight the giant; an arrogant man who had become a terror to all the soldiers of Israel, the king and his court. With what shall David fight the world's best? Do you think he will fight with Israel's best weaponry or King Saul's armor? Not so. "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses" (2 Cor. 10:4).

David mentally had given the battle to the Lord and the Lord alone. His confidence was sobering. Then David said to the Philistine, "You

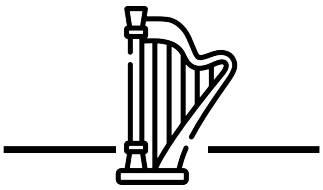
come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted*"* (1 Sam. 17:45). David's eyes were on the Lord, not on the giant as Saul's eyes were. What a contrast!

Revisiting David's Mindset

David's mindset is indeed a feast for our soul:

> *But David said to Saul, 'Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear [David's resume]; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God.' And David said, 'The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.' And Saul said to David, 'Go, and may the Lord be with you' (1 Sam. 17:34-37, emphasis added).*

God holds us accountable when we fail to factor in His faithfulness to us. That is the primary reason for Israel's destruction at Kadesh Barnea, where they failed to recognize that God, who had been faithful to them all those years, would take care of the reported "giants in the land" for them. That was a grave mistake. It is even more frightening that today, several thousand years later, we seem to be doing the same thing again. It is mind boggling how often we short-circuit our frame of reference when we are face to face with our "giants."



God holds us accountable when we fail to factor in His faithfulness to us.

In view of what happened at Kadesh Barnea, the Psalmist wrote:

> *And they forgot His deeds, and His miracles that He had shown them [time after time]. He wrought wonders before their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan [see Ex. 7-12; Num. 13:22]. He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and He made the waters stand up like a heap [see Ex. 14:21]. Then He led them with a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night [see Ex. 13:21; 14:24]. He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them abundant drink like the ocean depths [see Ex. 17:6; Num. 20:11]. He brought forth streams also from the rock, and caused waters to*

> *run down like rivers [see Num. 20:8, 10, 11]. Yet [they failed to connect], they still continued to sin against Him [by not trusting Him], to rebel against the Most High in the desert [see Deut. 9:22]. Then they spoke against God; they said, 'Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?' [see Ex. 16:3; Num. 11:4; 20:3; 21:5] [What a sarcastic statement in spite of God's goodness to them.] 'When your fathers tested Me, they tried Me, though they had seen My work. For forty years I loathed that generation, and said they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know My ways. Therefore I swore in My anger, truly they shall not enter into My rest.' (Ps. 78:11-19; 95:9-11, emphasis added).*

When these Israelites came to their test—giants in the land—they forgot who was on their side. They forgot the Omnipotent Sovereign God was in their midst. They forgot His faithfulness. They refused to place their trust in Him.

What about us? What do we do when we find ourselves facing a similar test? Or, what do we do when we find ourselves confronted with the test of terminal illness or unemployment? What test are you facing now? How are you handling it? Do you remember the faithfulness of God? Are you focused on His Word or are you focused on the problem?

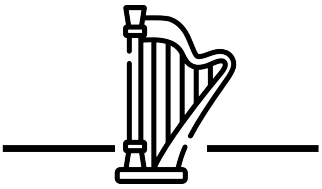
The Jews, God's chosen people, failed their spiritual test when God brought them to the "giants in the land" test. When David came to a similar test, his reaction was decidedly different than that of those Jews. One road was the "Kadesh Barnea Road" (no trust in God), which he refused outright. David instead turned to the "In God We Trust Road." David remembered the negative consequences suffered at Kadesh Barnea when the Jews failed to remember the faithfulness of God. Armed with this knowledge, David placed his trust firmly in God.

David took time to consider what he had learned, counted his blessings and came to the conclusion the same Lord who had been faithful in times of danger would not fail him this time, no matter what. And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

That is a perfect example of how to view your current circumstances in light of Scripture; you know to make God-honoring decisions. That is the *only thing* God is asking of us in times of testing. No more, and no less. He wants us to trust him, no matter the predicament. Which do we believe is greater, God or our situation? "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?" (Jer. 32:27).

We demean God when we magnify our problems beyond God, when we fail to trust Him to solve them. The Israelites missed their first golden opportunity to enter the Promised Land simply because they did not believe God and did not trust in His salvation (Ps. 78:22).

Some of us are profoundly proficient in intensely studying the infallible Word of God. Some can exegete the Scripture from Genesis to Revelation in a breathtaking manner. Others can even boast of their ability to memorize the entire Bible. Thank God for all these abilities. However, gaining great skill at dissecting Bible Truth, and having a reservoir of God's Word in our souls are important, but applying this truth is even more important! Again I say application of Bible Truth, stored in our soul to life's experiences, is the power of the Christian life.



We demean God when we magnify our problems beyond God, when we fail to trust Him to solve them.

We come short of glorifying God each time we fail to realize and remember God's grace toward us, and use the scriptural thinking we have learned, as David did. Read his words again: "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." Can we confidently make David's words our very own? They are a glorious display of faith.

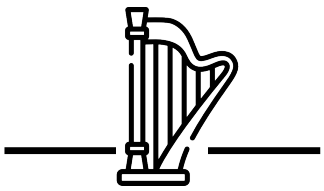
David acted on what he learned. He applied the truth in his soul. David was a man of application and obedience. At this juncture we ask: What is application? It is fitting to answer this vital question before we meet up again with David, a man of courage, as he advances toward Goliath in the valley of Elah.

Chapter 4

Applying God’s Word Under Pressure

God’s Word in our souls by itself does not produce power in life; the power is in its application which is the driving force of spiritual growth. More than that, without it we will forfeit the opportunity to make an impact in the devil’s world, much less to glorify God.

Application dramatically separates believers. Without application, one is saved, but with minimal blessings in time and eternity; but those who apply the truth they learn will receive many blessings in time and a super abundance of blessings in eternity. An alarming number of believers do not understand what application is. Some assume applying God’s Word is a matter of rule keeping (legalism) and strict avoidance of taboos. Still others think the spiritual life is only about attending church and Bible study consistently and ensuring their notes are up to date. Attending Bible study regularly and taking good notes are essential, but they are not the end in themselves. They are the means to the end: application.



What are we doing with what we know?

The core question is what are we doing with what we know? “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (James 1:22). Deluded! That word defines us when we fulfill only half the mandate; it is what we are when we make ourselves available to the teaching of the Word of God, but do not obey the command to be doers of the Word.

So, what is application of biblical truth? I offer a succinct definition to help us get a better grasp on why David was the only one applying scriptural knowledge to Goliath's challenge; why David was alone on the battlefield to face him. Application of God's Word is the thought process under the filling of the Holy Spirit whereby the believer takes inventory of God's faithfulness in his life and comes to the conclusion that the same God will see him through in a difficult situation. The believer applies right thinking in every exigency of life.

When it comes to this principle, the Spirit-filled believer evaluates the situation. Simultaneously, he analyzes the Word of God categorized in his soul, and responds to the circumstance, trusting that *"faithful is He who has promised"* (Heb. 10:23).

Application of God's Word can be classified in two categories: inward and outward.

• Inward Application

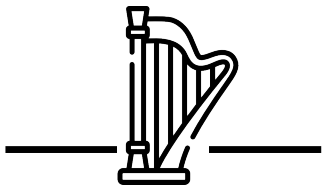
This has to do with examining oneself. The believer grabs whatever predicament is confronting him and handles it with correct thinking, thereby winning the battle in the soul, and thus God is glorified.

Depending on the nature of the problem, inward application may, or may not, be noticeable to others. The only way we can know is through observation or individual testimony. We know the story of Job, courtesy of the grace of God, who has preserved Job's testimony for our benefit. We see how Satan ambushed him with every imaginable disaster and how magnificently he handled each one. For instance, when everything he had worked for all his life was swept away, his response was sobering:

> *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord…." "But He knows the way I take; When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold…." "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him" (Job 1:21; 23:10; 13:15a).*

We see how Job responded when Satan struck him with festering boils from head to toe. He was reduced to scraping himself with a pot shard. He reviewed the biblical treasures categorized and stored in his soul, and rationalized God had a purpose for his life, and if that purpose

included his present experience, so be it. He knew it was for God's glory![4]



Winning the biggest battle – the battle of the soul!

Job knew he was a sojourner on his way to his eternal home. He knew everything he had, including his health and wealth, was temporary. He knew that God, in His sovereignty, had ordained the manner, the place and the time of his death. He concluded if his present condition was how God planned his earthly departure, so be it. More than that, he was encouraged with the assurance one day, he would meet his Savior: "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and He will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God!" (Job 19:25-26 NLT).

We see how Job handled every situation by applying what he knew to be true from Scripture. He could confidently say, "But it is still my consolation, and I rejoice in unsparing pain, that I have not denied the words of the Holy One" (Job 6:10). Job was not running around doing the so-called "great things for God." He was quietly using inward application. That's winning the biggest battle—the battle in the soul! This prepares us to examine the next category of application.

• Outward Application

It is true outward application has its roots in inward application. Both of these are initially processed in the soul. However, with outward application, other people are generally the beneficiaries (Phil. 2:4). It includes bearing each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2), encouraging one another (1 Thess. 5:11), helping the needy (1 John 3:17), as well as fulfilling all the office of ambassadorship (2 Cor. 5:20), and the priesthood (1 Peter 2:9) prescribe. This is where David's application fits. He was an ambassador for the Lord of Israel. He took the challenge of demonstrating to Goliath, and the world at large, just who the God of Israel is.

[4] Paul responded similarly to his Roman imprisonment, Phil. 1:12-14; cf. Rom. 8:28

David Meets Goliath

We have seen that David came to a spiritual crossroad, similar to the one his ancestors encountered at Kadesh Barnea. They failed to trust God; consequently they became spiritual losers, which is the cost of *not* trusting God (Ps. 78:21-22). But David, remembering their mistake, chose to trust God. He counted his blessings, and when he was finished, he was amazed as he factored in God's faithfulness toward him, which his forefathers had failed to do in the wilderness. David took their mistake as his warning and he firmly placed his faith in God! Today the same principle applies and the same fate awaits us when we fail to trust God (Heb. 3:18, 19; 4:1-2).

As for David, his choice was clear. His application could have been something like this: "My life was exposed to two vicious beasts, the bear and the lion, and my God faithfully rescued me from their paws. He has given me victory in various encounters. Without doubt, God who has been so faithful in keeping me from harm, this unchanging God of mine, who has seen me through all these years, He alone will fight this battle for me!"

This shepherd boy, the future king, reached out and placed his trust in God's Word as he recalled Deuteronomy 31:6: "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them [or Goliath], for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."

David's attitude was a perfect illustration of outward application, namely, the thought process whereby the believer under the influential power of the Holy Spirit puts the Word of God into operation with the ultimate confidence God will always be faithful to His Word. What Word is that? "For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."

Armed with the confidence only God's Word brings, "He [David] took his stick in his hand and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, even in his pouch, and his sling was in his hand; and he approached the Philistine" (1 Sam. 17:40, emphasis added). David fearlessly walked toward Goliath. The army of Israel literally shook in their boots as they peered from behind their tents at this unbelievable spectacle. David's brothers

were horrified, wondering how they would explain to their father why they had allowed their baby brother to be slaughtered by the giant.

Goliath couldn't believe his eyes. He saw a lad approaching him purposefully, with a sling. What a joke! He saw a mere lad, but didn't see the God of the universe on David's side. What a grave miscalculation!

> *Then the Philistine came on and approached David, with the shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance. And the Philistine said to David, 'Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?' And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine also said to David, 'Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field' (1 Sam. 17:41-44).*
>
> *Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands [confidence], and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands' (1 Sam. 17:45-47, emphasis added).*

Undergirding David's response was a mental attitude of humility. He was not arrogant. There was no sign of self-inflated pride. He never mentioned his previous record to Goliath. Why? Because Goliath was an unbeliever; David's miraculous deliverances would not have made sense to him. Besides, David's objective was crystallized, namely, God's glory.

The thought of being called a hero was foreign to David. He was only preoccupied with God's glory. That's the epitome of application of the Word of God. That should characterize us, too. Our thoughts, words and deeds should all be for God's glory. Applying God's Word is not for self-praise, but for the glory of God. We are here on planet earth for

His glory. That is why the apostles Paul and Peter were not hesitant in exhorting all believers everywhere, respectively saying:

> *Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name [glory] of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father…. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves, is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Col. 3:17; 1 Peter 4:11).*

Whenever our objective is to glorify God, whether in business, in the workforce, in Christian service or in life experiences, God will respond in a way that will leave us breathless. In David's case, He was swift and decisive. God manifested Himself in such a way every observer knew "this was the finger of God." This phenomenal concept is captured here:

> *Then it happened when the Philistine rose and came and drew near to meet David, that David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand into his bag and took from it a stone and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone sank into his forehead, so that he fell on his face to the ground. Thus David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and he struck the Philistine and killed him; but there was no sword in David's hand. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his [Goliath's] sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it [his own sword]. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled (1 Sam. 17:48-51).*

Yes, they fled! The battle was over. David had killed the giant Goliath, the Philistine champion, Israel's nightmare. Victory!

Have you ever noted success or victory in life seems to come with a threefold bundle: jubilation in victory, temptation for glory and the enemy's counter-attack? These are the facts of life. They are inevitable! The question is not whether we will face these three after we embrace a victory; for we will, but more importantly how will we respond to these tests?

Jubilation in Victory

Thank God for the gift of emotion. He gave us emotion, and we should use it properly. It is designed to respond with appreciation or compassion, but it cannot think and should not be used for making decisions. The Apostle Paul told us to rejoice with those who rejoice and to mourn with those who mourn (Rom. 12:15). It is proper to celebrate success. We saw an outburst of emotion after David's victory over the Philistine. With word of Goliath's death, the nation of Israel hit the streets in jubilation:

> *It happened as they were coming, when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy and with musical instruments. And the women sang as they played, and said, 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands' (1 Sam. 18:6-7).*

The message was crystal clear: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." The people were sober, and so were their words. King Saul understood clearly what they meant. To him the people were saying, "Saul is finished, David is our man!" We shall see David's reaction to these words when we get to the third increment of the triple bundle that accompanies success.

Temptation for Glory

Do you think David, knowing he would one day be king of Israel, would seize this moment and hit the road on the campaign trail? That would be tempting, of course. But not for David. He knew God had given him the victory in His perfect timing, and likewise would bring him to the throne of Israel when the time was right. He did not hesitate to return glory to God alone. We read the expression of his thoughts both in songs and in prayer:

> *Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all (1 Chron. 29:11).*
>
> *The king is not saved by a mighty army; a warrior is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a false hope for victory; nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength.... For I will*

> *not trust in my bow, nor will my sword save me. But You have saved us from our adversaries, and You have put to shame those who hate us. In God we have boasted all day long, and we will give thanks to your name forever.... Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope for His lovingkindness (Ps. 33:16-17; 44:6-8; 33:18).*

Here we have it on record for all eternity, an example for us, no matter the generation. Herein is a cup of water for the thirsty soul of anyone who wonders why David was nicknamed "a man after God's heart." God gave him grace to the maximum, and he responded to God's grace with such an extraordinary attitude of humility and grace orientation.

This temptation for glory is so deceptive and subtle that often we succumb to it before we realize its ramifications. If we fail this test, God who does not share His glory (Isa. 42:8), will meet us with discipline. It is easy to want to think our success in life has everything to do with us. It is easy for us to glory in our success because of our hard work, to toast with our champagne glass and glory in the success of our businesses because of our expertise. We glory because of our indomitable will to succeed. These are all self-deception. We forget, were it not for the grace of God, we would not be in good health, let alone be able to work hard. We would not be in the position to excel; we would not be alive for that matter, let alone achieve success. That is why the Apostle Paul wasted no time in ridding himself of any thought of self-glory with these words:

> *For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me (1 Cor. 15:9-10).*

David, when he had the victory of his life, cleared his mind of any trace of self-glory; after all, he had earlier identified "the battle is the Lord's" (1 Sam. 17:47). He knew the Source of his victory and during his life he did not hesitate to return glory to God alone. "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory"(1 Chronicles 29:11).

The third element in the bundle needs an in-depth look. We will take an entire chapter to fully examine the counter-attack of the enemy. We want to be on guard, for the Bible warns us, "Pride comes before a fall" (Prov 16:18).

Chapter 5

Satan Counter-attacking Success

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, finding our niche in life and success in any field or profession is wonderful and cause for jubilation. However, Satan hates progress in the spiritual life. He will use our success as a platform to launch an attack to neutralize our joy. Satan and his minions do not share our joy. The only thing they enjoy is our unhappiness. We see this throughout Scripture.

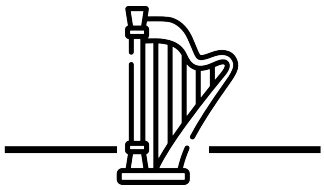
Job Attacked

Job was the richest man of his day. He had everything going for him. His spiritual integrity was without question. Daily worship of God was his delight; what's more, he was a blessing to his country (Job 1:1-5). His success became an opportunity for Satan's counter-attack. Satan saw Job as an enemy who must be prosecuted in the Court of Heaven for his enormous success. So Satan, the enemy of success, did exactly that!

> *The Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.' Then Satan answered the Lord, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face' (Job 1:8-10).*

Satan obtained permission to attack Job, not because of his spiritual failure, but because he had been blessed beyond measure. Satan destroyed him materially, including everything from cattle to his

children. Satan also afflicted him, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, with the worst kind of disease that left Job looking like a rotting carcass. Did Job follow Satan's plan and curse God? *No*! He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed [praised] be the name of the Lord." Through all this, Job did not sin nor did he blame God (Job 1:21-22). In the midst of his surmounting pain, he testified, "But it is still my consolation, and I rejoice in unsparing pain, that I have not denied the words of the Holy One" (Job 6:10). What a child of God! This is a challenge to us all.



Affliction however, is a test given in God's laboratory to see what type of specimen we are.

On one hand, God permits Satan to run his course so God may prove that a believer can lose everything as Job did and still remain faithful to the Most High God. Affliction, however, is a test given in God's laboratory to see what type of specimen we are. "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small" (Prov. 24:10). Job proved to be a viable specimen! He applied the Word of God precisely. Job won the battle of both prosperity testing and people testing. Simply, he was a monument to God's glory.

Peter Attacked

Job was not the only one Satan accused in the Courtroom of Heaven. The Apostle Peter was another perfect example. He, too, had everything going for him in his new career as a fisher of men. On top of that he gave a profound testimony about Jesus Christ as the Messiah (Matt. 16:15-16), which drew an astonishing pronouncement from the Lord Himself.

> *Blessed are you Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:17b-19).*

The last statement, "I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven," means Peter has received a promotion. He has gone from

zero to an elevated position, which is cause for celebration. The same way Satan incited David to take a census in opposition to God's law (1 Chr. 21:1), he also incited Peter to oppose God's plan for His Son to go to the cross. Jesus told His disciples that He would die a substitutionary death, Peter immediately rebuked Him. "Never, Lord… this shall never happen to you" (Matt. 16:22 NIV).

Shortly thereafter, the Lord rebuked Peter sharply because Satan had influenced his thinking. "But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's'" (Matt. 16:23).

None of the others received a rebuke, only Peter. Why? Success! The Lord had not finished showering blessings on Peter. He had yet another blessing: Christ was transfigured before him. This experience left Peter elated beyond measure (Matt. 17:1-5)! That did it for Satan. He went straight to Heaven for permission to test Peter's faith. In light of this, Luke recorded our Lord saying, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32).

The Lord prayed for Peter because He knew Satan's objective was to ruin Peter's life and make him miserable. Satan is a genius; he always goes after the elite (Acts 19:15). He detests believers who succeed in their spiritual life! Think of it. The only reason he sought permission to ambush Peter was because of his success and promotion.

David Attacked

What about David, the man after God's own heart? How did he handle the enemy's counter-attack? We previously saw an outburst of emotion after David's victory over the Philistine. Now Goliath is dead, the nation of Israel went to the street in jubilation. We saw King Saul vividly understood the lyrics of their song: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands," and interpreted them to mean, "Saul is out! David is our new King." Because Saul had lost touch with his spiritual life, those words became a winepress in his soul that produced the wine of bitterness, hatred, envy and jealousy which would be poured on David without measure. We ask again, why? The answer is simple: David's success.

King Saul had already wrecked his own spiritual life. He had lost the Old Testament temporary empowerment of the Holy Spirit and was under great divine discipline (1 Sam. 16:14). Satan would use Saul to work on David, the rising star.

> *The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, 'I'll pin David to the wall,' but David eluded him twice. (1 Sam. 18:10-11).*

Twice! King Saul, a trained soldier, used his spear point blank on David twice and missed. Was that because he was drunk? No, my friend, God is in control! God had a plan for David and God alone would bring it to pass. The Psalmist said it best: "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation" (Ps. 33:11). That should be comforting for you. God will bring about His plan for your life, no matter what. The treacherous road had just begun for David, but the Lord would be there to lead him through and around all the obstacles until He brings him to the Palace, as promised. Faithful is He who promised.

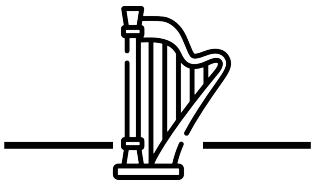
David later sang this hymn of praise:

> *Blessed [praised] be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, the God who is our salvation…. Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all…. The wicked plots against the righteous, and gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him [the wicked]; for He sees his day [of reckoning] is coming…. God is to us a God of deliverances; and to God the Lord belong escapes from death. (Ps. 68:19; 34:19; 37:12-13; 68:20, emphasis added).*

David realized all his escapes from the deadly spears of King Saul were not related to his training. Rather, it was God who, on each occasion, orchestrated his deliverance. Likewise, whether we live or die, the decision is totally in God's hand. He holds the key of life and death (Rev. 1:17-18). But Saul erroneously thought he could destroy David at will. How wrong he was!

Saul was a nightmare to everyone around him, including David, the shepherd boy. Here we vividly see the fate of a believer who took his

spiritual life for granted. Any believer who ignores his spiritual life and rejects truth opens his soul to Satan's lie. King Saul's experience should serve as a warning to us (1 Chron. 10:13-14). We know Saul was a believer who once was empowered by the Holy Spirit as revealed in Scripture.



Any believer who ignores his spiritual life and rejects the truth opens his soul to Satan's lie.

> *Then it happened when he [Saul] turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day. When they came to the hill there, behold, a group of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them (1 Sam. 10:9-10, emphasis added).*

That spiritual experience was short lived because of his reckless spiritual life which caused him to lose the Holy Spirit, his power source. Consequently, he was terrorized by an evil spirit (1 Sam. 16:14).

It is important to pause for a moment and discuss the issue of Saul's experience with an evil spirit. The debate among believers today is not really whether King Saul was a believer (because he was, 1 Sam. 10:10), but rather, the question is whether a believer can be demon possessed or indwelt by an evil spirit.

•Saul's Demonic Influence

A believer in the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be indwelt by a demon. Demon influenced, yes! Demon indwelt, no. Some have often used the passage above to justify their stance that a believer can be indwelt by demons.

Let us keep in mind the indwelling of the Godhead in the body of believers is a privilege for Church Age believers. Indwelling was totally foreign to the Old Testament saints, and Saul was no exception. Rather, in that era, God, through His Holy Spirit, empowered a few believers who were instrumental in carrying out His unique assignments. He empowered people like Bezalel (Ex. 31:1-7), Othniel (Judges 3:9, 10) Gideon (Judges 6:34), Samson (14:19), Saul (1 Sam.

10:10) and David (16:13), just to name a few. God used these people in a mighty way to accomplish extraordinary tasks. The Holy Spirit's presence in their lives was to provide power to do the Lord's work fearlessly, boldly and with exactness.

In scrutinizing Scripture, we noticed the phrase "the Spirit came upon" was used in almost every case where a believer had this unique experience of empowerment. The phrase literally means "rushed upon."[5] It was never indwelling; for God never indwelt anyone before the Church Age. This "rushing of the Holy Spirit experience" upon a selected few was temporary, and could be lost due to sinful behavior. Saul was a perfect example. He lost this influential power when he turned his back on God's Word (1 Sam. 16:14). This was equally true of Samson (Judges 16:19-20). That's why when King David was involved in a chain of sin (pride, adultery and murder), he cried out to God for mercy. Do not cast me away from Thy presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me (Ps. 51:11).

This is a prayer we cannot correctly pray in the Church Age, since we cannot lose the indwelling of the Holy Spirit! We can only lose the filling or control of the Holy Spirit by sin (which breaks fellowship with God).

• Was Saul Demon Indwelt?

Back to the real question — was Saul demon indwelt? The answer is NO! Hypothetically, he could have been, because his body was never a temple of the Holy Spirit as believers are today. Nevertheless, on the basis of Scriptural insight we can rule out the possibility that Saul was indwelt by a demon.

The phrase "came upon" used in association with Saul's experience with the Holy Spirit was the same phrase used with his demonic experience. With the good experience, the Holy Spirit "came upon" him (1 Sam. 10:10); and with the tormenting experience, an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul (1 Sam. 18:10). In other words, whether the experience was of the Holy Spirit or of the evil spirit, it was said to be "rushed upon," not indwelt. In like manner, both influential powers accomplished different purposes. The empowerment

[5] NASB Bible notes on Judges 14:19)

of the Holy Spirit guided Saul's thinking to do the work of God, but the influence of an evil spirit caused him to be both paranoid and irrational. Also, the demon tormenting Saul was a source of divine punishment.

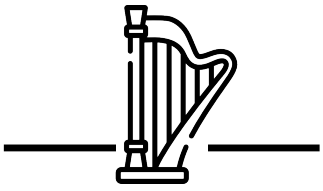
Who was the source of Saul's experiences? Amazingly, God was responsible. Both influential powers came from God! We ask, "Is God the origin of evil?" The answer is *No. No*! But He surely knows how to use fallen angels, which are evil spirits, to accomplish His purpose. This is where sovereignty comes in! Everything that is created under the sun is God's servant (Ps. 119:91; 103:20). He is ever poised to use any means, including disasters, to accomplish His purpose (Amos 3:6). For instance, God used an evil spirit to intensify the negative volition of King Ahab. This we know from 2 Chronicles:

> *Micaiah said, 'Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing on His right and on His left. The Lord said, "Who will entice Ahab king of Israel to go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?" And one said this while another said that. Then a [an evil] spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, "I will entice him." And the Lord said to him, "How?" He said, "I will go and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." Then He said, "You are to entice him and prevail also. Go and do so." Now therefore, behold, the Lord has put [authorized] a deceiving spirit in the mouth of these your prophets; for the Lord has proclaimed disaster against you' (18:18-22).*

Demons & Church Age Believers

Let us now turn our attention from Saul to the Church Age believer. Scripture shows why a Church Age believer cannot be demon indwelt. There's no single case in the entire New Testament to suggest a believer could. On the contrary, the Apostle Paul asks, "Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols [demons]? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people'" (2 Cor. 6:16).

God never shares a temple with a demon. To say a believer in the Church Age indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16) can be demon



God never shares a temple with a demon.

indwelt is to say Satan can be God's roommate. The Holy Spirit underscored this phenomenal Truth—and so penned these words through the Apostle John.

You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He [the Lord] who is in you [Who indwells you] than he [the devil or demon] who is in the world [outside the believer's body] (1 John 4:4, emphasis added).

The above passage emphasizes the separation which exists between the Godhead and demons. The Godhead indwells a believer (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Col. 1:27), but the demon is on the outside! That is the teaching of God's Word. That's not all. We deduce from our Lord's teaching the only way a demon can reoccupy an unbeliever who was delivered from demonism is if the individual refuses to trust the Savior for his complete deliverance in Christ.

> *"Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man [an unbeliever], it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied [no Holy Spirit], [rather he finds it] swept, and put in order [by human effort]. Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation" (Matt. 12:43-45).*

There we have it on record. A demon cannot enter a sanctuary that's occupied by the Godhead. We have also settled the issue in our passage concerning Saul's experience with demonism. He was never demon indwelt. Rather, he was demon influenced.

Mental Illness & The Believer

This discussion about demon attack, demon influence and demon indwelling would not be complete without considering what the Bible has to say on the subject of madness—which is often overlooked.

Today we often find believers' involvement in so-called "deliverance services." This is a disturbing trend because a believer casting out demons from fellow believers is a direct violation of what the Bible teaches, and this practice reveals those involved are either ignoring the Word of God or are demonstrating they do not know what the Bible teaches on this subject. Some believers are totally blind to the fact many mental disorders are truly a disease. We are not talking about depression, which is rarely medical and most often self-induced. But rather we are talking about a bona-fide mental illness.

A careful examination of Scripture shows God classified madness (or mental illness) as a disease. In Deuteronomy 28, God, speaking to Israel through Moses, clearly showed the road to blessing and cursing. He promised to make them a progeny of blessing if they obeyed His mandates (28:1-15). Likewise, God promised to make their lives miserable if they turned their back on His commandments. He will punish them (if they become disobedient) by bringing on them "all the diseases of Egypt," (28:60) which included madness or mental illness (28:27-28). These awful diseases were known to them since they had just been delivered from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. In other words, when the Lord mentioned the word "madness," the Jews recognized it as one of the diseases they were familiar with in Egypt.

We should note not all mental illnesses are due to genetic mutation in the brain. Just as a healthy person can bring on the disease of diabetes by eating improperly, so a healthy person can reject Bible truth, which results in thinking Satan's lie, and thereby work themselves into mental illness. In rare cases, mental illness is induced by a demon. Psychiatrists refer to mental illness as chemical imbalance. The simple truth is mental illness is a disease according to Scripture.

A believer with mental illness could manifest a symptom such as hallucination, but we should be careful not to conclude such a person is indwelt by a demon. This is where some believers have drifted off course, conducting deliverance services for fellow believers. We do not argue some mental illnesses have been miraculously healed by God (as have other diseases, like diabetes or cancer). However, these believers were healed from a mental disease, not delivered from a demon.

Fear not, Scripture emphasizes a believer cannot be indwelt by a demon. **"**You are from God, little children, and have overcome them;

because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4). Demons are on the outside; God is inside the believer. They cannot share the same temple (2 Cor 6:16).

What is even more heartbreaking is the attitude many believers have toward those who suffer from mental illness. We often treat them without any sympathy. Most treat those affected as outcasts, assuming they might have done something to ruin their life. But I wonder how our Lord would treat them were He physically present today. For one thing, He would be compassionate to them just as He would to someone dying of a chronic disease, such as cancer. He would treat them with love! So should we, if we claim to be His followers.

We must have discernment between demon influence and demon possession. We must also consider what the Bible has to say about madness and not mistake it for demon possession. Satan attacks on so many fronts but God is greater and knowledge of His truth will protect us. Scripture tells us:

"Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Always remember Satan's objective: to rob you of your blessing in time and eternity. He follows you around. Be watchful when you are successful. Success can be a platform used to launch an attack against God's children. "Resist him and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Chapter 6
Rugged Road to Royalty

> *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread? When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh, my adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell. Though a host [army] encamp against me, my heart will not fear; though war arise against me, in spite of this I shall be confident. One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to meditate in His temple. For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; in the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock (Ps. 27:1-5, emphasis added).*

It is wonderful to spend time every day in the Word of God acquiring biblical truth. But the real proof of what is in our soul is not revealed until we are tested by pressure, the acid test that reveals our true nature. To say it in another way, good times are not enough to reveal the character and spiritual maturity of a person. In this portion of our study, we shall see how God used pressure not only to refine David's character (Isa. 48:10), but also to reveal the inner beauty of his soul.

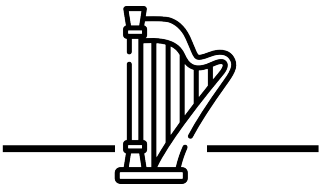
"A cross comes before a crown" is a timeless biblical principle. The sooner we understand there can be no glory without a measure of God-orchestrated suffering in our lives, the sooner we will concentrate on mastering the spiritual skills necessary to handle suffering as a spiritual giant would. Suffering is inevitable in the spiritual race (Phil. 1:29). James exhorts us to count it joy and a privilege when we are hit by missiles of various trials (James 1:2). Suffering is a blessing in disguise (James 1:3-4). The idea that we can go through life without suffering is totally foreign to Scripture. In fact, our Lord's road to glory took Him

right down the rugged highway of "hell on earth." The author of Hebrews said:

> *Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect [matured through suffering], He became to all those who obey [who trust in] Him the source of eternal salvation (Heb. 5:8-9; comp. with 12:3-4, emphasis added).*

The Apostle Paul said:

> *Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:6-11).*



The idea that we can go through life without suffering is totally foreign to Scripture.

In view of this, both the Apostle Paul and the author of Hebrews challenged us, respectively saying, "Have this attitude in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5), and "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy [crown] set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2, emphasis added). That is the principle of "a cross before a crown." That is the Bible's way. That is God's way. The only way!

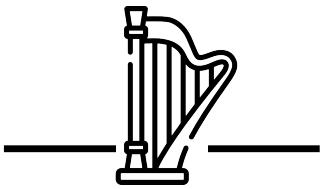
David's road to the palace as Israel's finest king was not going to be easy, as we shall see. But one thing was so crystal clear in David's mind: God will keep His Word, no matter how treacherous the road would be. Oh, how I wish David's confidence in his God could be ours in abundance. Later on in his life, he sang:

> *For He spoke, and it was done [faithfulness]; He commanded, and it stood fast. The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation (Ps. 33:9-11).*

We cannot stress this point enough. It is impossible to know the progress a believer has made spiritually until he is caught up in suffering. We cannot see the character of a person's soul until he is pressed by suffering, as Job was. To this end, God permitted King Saul, a carnal believer, to put pressure on David, which allows us to see his pure humility, total confidence in God and grace-orientation which poured out of his soul to be recorded for us in Scripture.

Saul's Plot to Kill David

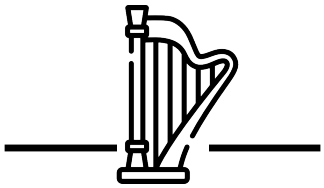
David had just returned from a victorious battle. He never danced in the street with jubilation or campaigned to overthrow Saul. He never allowed himself to be carried on people's shoulders as a national hero. He simply came home as every other soldier did. But in the eyes of the nation of Israel, he was a hero, which prompted the women to compose a song in his honor. That praise ignited a fire of hatred, bitterness and intense jealousy which burned in King Saul's soul. He tried to do everything within his power to stop a repeat of such praise. He attempted a premeditated murder. Yes, a believer in Yahweh plotted murder. The more the women sang as they played, and said, "Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands," the more Saul burns within with the flame of hatred, which is a heinous sin tantamount to murder (1 John 3:15).



Believers with troubled souls do not have the capacity to rejoice in the success of others.

Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he rightly said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" Believers with troubled souls do not have the capacity to rejoice in the success of others. They cannot stand others' success, let alone commend them.

David, by the will of God, was on his way to take the kingdom according to God's timing. Could Saul stop him? No! Not if you believe in God's sovereignty. When God declared David would be King, no one, not even King Saul, could prevent it. Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on (1 Sam. 18:9).



Never take your own revenge, but leave room for the wrath of God.

At one time or another, we all have been viewed with suspicion or been victims of jealousy; we have been objects of hatred and targets of evil, as David was. Welcome to the harsh reality of life. We cannot get around it. Many of us have been wounded by malicious attacks from those who desire to bring us down. Some who would go further are held back from using lethal force, for they fear being caught and suffering the consequences. But for Saul, he was not restrained. He was under the influence of an evil spirit when he threw a spear at David, as we have seen.

By contrast David, a young musician, who despite Saul's evil eye on him came and played his harp to provide momentary relief for his master. He was not bitter or jealous toward Saul. All he wanted at this point was his master's total serenity of mind. This demonstrates an important application of God's Word: Never take your own revenge, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written,

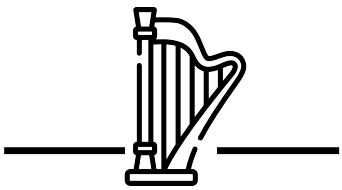
> *"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him [serve him in any way you can], and if he is thirsty, give him a drink [or even some cookies to go with the drink]; for in so doing you will heap burning coals [of self-induced guilt] upon his head." (Rom. 12:19-20, emphasis added).*

What a man of grace! David never even prayed God would hasten His promise and crown him king sooner rather than later. He was only focused on how to help Saul get well. But Saul was obsessed with thoughts of how to get rid of David, the secretly anointed one of God. "Saul hurled the spear for he thought, 'I will pin David to the wall [and by so doing end the plan of God for his life].'" But remember, David escaped. God directed Saul's spear away from David. Not just once, but *twice* as Saul tried to pin him to the wall another time (1 Sam.

18:11). David later sang, "Blessed [praised] be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, The God who is our salvation. God is to us a God of deliverances; and to God the Lord belong escapes from death" (Ps. 68:19-20).

Any time you miss what could have become a fatal accident, these verses should be on the forefront of your mind. To God the Lord belong escapes from death. "For He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, lest you strike your foot against a stone" (Ps. 91:11-12). That's just a small sampling of God's immeasurable grace.

Why did God protect David? Because His plan for David was still unfulfilled. Let me keep on saying this until its truth becomes part of our thinking: God will not let go of you or me until we have fulfilled His plan for our lives. There is no type of disease known to man that has enough pathogens to stop God's plan; there is no circumstance real or imagined that has enough power to shut down God's plan. You ask, "Why does God care so much about that?"

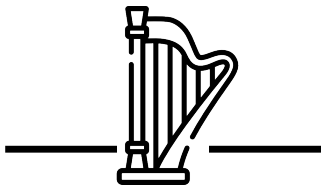


God will not let go of you or me until we have fulfilled His plan for our lives.

The answer is buried in one word: *veracity*! It is not about us—it's all about the integrity of God. "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Num. 23:19).

Satan is waiting and watching like a hawk to see if he can catch God in a lie. What is at stake? Everything! If God would fail to uphold a promise from His Word, just once, that would mean He lied. His veracity would be cancelled. He would no longer be absolute Truth. What a mess that would be for the entire world! This totally explains why God watches over and safeguards His Word to ensure every jot (smallest letter) is fulfilled (Jer. 1:12). Our Lord assures us, saying, "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18).

Not even the minutest stroke shall pass away. That should give you comfort as it did David. God will fulfill His Word not because of who and what we are, but because of His character. That's comforting! So next time you pick up your Bible, just remember every Word, every promise, every decree will come to pass. God's character guarantees it, because His integrity depends on it. "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you [take My eyes off of you until I am finished with you]" (Heb. 13:5, emphasis added), being one of His many promises destined to be fulfilled. God will shield His own.



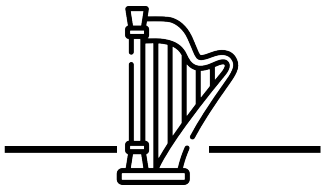
God will fulfill His Word not because of who and what we are, but because of His character.

Because of God's faithfulness, He protected David. King Saul could not believe what he saw. How could he have missed? He was a professional soldier and he had used spears over and over with resounding success. Because of this expertise, Saul assumed, from the moment the spear left his hand, David was dead. But to his utter amazement, David dodged it. Saul could not believe it. A distant throw, possible to dodge, but point blank—no way! He concluded this must be the finger of God. From that day forward, Saul became afraid of David, for the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul (1 Sam. 18:12). But it did not stop there. Saul would, from this point on, begin a massive plan to end David's life. "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent decay" (Acts 13:36).

God is faithful! We see from this verse that God's plan for David's life took precedence over Saul's desire to kill him. Sovereignty means when God speaks, all debates — human and angelic, fallen and elect — are promptly adjourned. I wonder where we got the slightest idea terminal illness or Satan and his cohorts are capable of ending God's plan for our lives. If you are consumed by such a thought, you need to get rid of it now. God will fulfill His plan for your life, no matter life's outlook, as long as you are on course spiritually.

David, too, endured many trials and much discipline. In spite of all this, God kept Him alive until the plan He had for his life was fulfilled

to the fullest measure. Often Satan works tirelessly to terminate God's program for our lives, only to find out he has helped to advance God's cause. This is because God is in total control of our lives—from the beginning to the end. I want you to grasp the breadth, and the depth, of this resounding truth of His infallible Word. God will fulfill His plan, no matter how huge the hurdles. What better way to underscore this sublime truth than to look at the correlation between the sovereignty of God and the dubious dealings of King Saul toward David.



God is in total control of our lives—from the beginning to the end.

David's Promotion

> *Therefore Saul removed him from his presence, and appointed him as his commander of a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people (1 Sam. 18:13).*

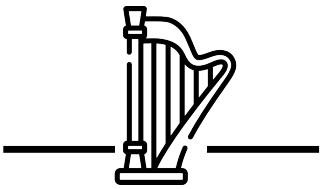
Pay close attention to the next verse: "David was prospering in all his ways for the Lord was with him" (1 Sam. 18:14). What a contrast. Saul dreaded David, but all Israel loved him (1 Sam. 18:15-16). God's eye was on David wherever he went. God followed him around with a shield of protection. God's providence will continue to provide, shield and protect you until His plan for your life is fulfilled.

Meanwhile, we follow Saul's trail of dubious work and that of God's faithfulness. On the one side, Saul promoted David, hoping David's constant exposure to the battlefield would eventually bring about his death. On the surface, the promotion appeared so good, but on the inside it was so evil.

Saul had an ulterior motive in David's promotion, but David apparently did not know this when he took the assignment. Despite David's ignorance of Saul's intentions, God still protected him. Repeat: God will fulfill His Word, not because of who and what we are, but because of Who and What He is. This assertion, however, does not negate our responsibilities with regard to discernment.

Discernment

Discernment is an area where we believers seem to fall short. Often people come into our lives and we cannot seem to discern why. Are they in our lives to take advantage of us? Are they in our lives to hurt us? Has God sent them that we might help them? Are they a source of blessing to us? Just because someone is smiling with sparkling teeth does not necessarily mean the inside is sparkling, too. That appealing exterior may be disguising a hidden evil intent. Discernment is so crucial in the spiritual life.



We as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ ought to be a people of discernment.

The word *discern* is the Greek verb, *anakrino* it means "to scrutinize,""investigate," "determine," "ask," "question," "discern," "examine," "judge" and "search."[6] Armed with the knowledge that not all that glitters is gold, we as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ ought to be a people of discernment. We should be quick to hear, but slow to action (James 1:19). We should be a people who scrutinize our words and actions under the light of God's Word and the mentorship of His Holy Spirit. This can be achieved through investigation, asking pertinent questions, examining the situation at hand under the guiding light of God's Word in our souls (Heb. 4:12). We should be a people who constantly pray for wisdom in all we do (James 1:5). We cannot get around this. Scripture underscores its importance. This we learned from the Apostle Paul's epistle to the Philippians:

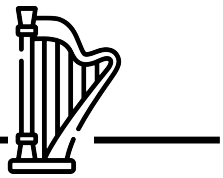
> *And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge [rather than emotion] and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ (Phil. 1:9-10, emphasis added).*

Without discernment it would be impossible to "approve the things that are excellent." To put it in another way: To have an abundance of

6 James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Thomas Nelson, 1995, Nashville, Tennessee #350

biblical knowledge is critical, but the ability to apply this knowledge to our lives with discernment is the true test of excellence.

One may call it naiveté, or something similar, but in my opinion, David seemed to have failed the test of discernment. I would think that he could have questioned, "What is King Saul up to with this grand promotion? Twice he had wished me dead!" God overruled and mercifully delivered David from Saul's deceitful promotion!



To have an abundance of biblical knowledge is critical, but the ability to apply this knowledge to our lives with discernment is the true test of excellence.

Though David might have failed, we, who are better positioned than he was in terms of the availability of God's Word and biblical insights ought to be diligent in applying the principle of discernment. "To whom much is given much is required" (Luke 12:48). So next time, before you consider an offer that looks too good to be true, before you rush to sign on the dotted line for something called "the deal of your life," be sure you have prayed for discernment. And, to you, my dear lady, before you say, "Yes, I do," to that young man with the big smile, be sure you have prayerfully asked God for discernment. Before we act on any matter, large or small, let us be sure our action, both in the short and long run, would be pleasing and honoring to God. That is discernment.

Now we can read Psalm 140:8 with greater appreciation. "Do not grant, O Lord, the desires of the wicked; Do not promote his evil device, lest they be exalted." David literally cried out to the Lord to rescue him from those who devise evil things in their heart, Saul being one of them (Ps. 140:1-4). Evil men sleep like a dog; they barely close their eyes in bed.

Saul would continue to come up with devices, one after another, to end David's life. Saul meant his promotion of David for evil; but God meant it for good (Ps. 76:10; Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28). God used the occasion to strengthen David's ability to handle pressure and become a better leader as he, slowly but surely, step by step, marched toward the palace. Saul was not finished. There were more dubious offers to

come. He would present David with more offers, hoping one of these would bring an end to David's life.

Saul Offers His Daughter to David

> *Then Saul said to David, 'Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife, only be a valiant man for me and fight the LORD's battles' (1 Sam. 18:17).*

Sure. Right! "Be a valiant man for me and fight the LORD's battles." How spiritual this sounds; but look at who is talking—a man who had lost all spiritual vitality. Here is a man who had lost contact with the Holy Spirit, as previously noted. On the outside, he was a "whitewashed tomb, but on the inside, he was full of dead men's bones."

This is where discernment needs to come into focus. Many deceitful believers have cheated their fellow believers by sweet-talking them into believing they are spiritual. Not all who use spiritual sounding phrases are spiritual. My point is, we should be wise when we are around those who use pious phrases such as, "Praise the Lord, brother," "Hallelujah, sister," and the like. We need to carefully determine their motives. Just because someone invokes God's name in his speech does not necessarily mean the individual is spiritual. Politicians are good at this, such as saying, "God bless you," at the end of every speech. Remember: "all that glitters is not gold."

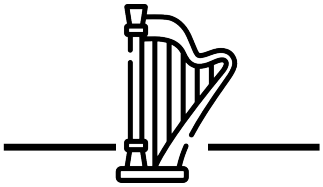
Saul's offer had another side to it, "For Saul thought, 'My hand shall not be against him, but let the hands of the Philistines be against him'" (1 Sam 18:17). Literally, "I am not going to kill David [though he had tried it before]; let the Philistines do the job for me."

Talk about hypocrisy; Saul had it perfected! Let us set aside Saul's ulterior motive for a moment and consider the offer itself. Imagine, David marrying the daughter of a king. Who wouldn't want to be an in-law in a Royal Family? But David's reaction to this amazing offer revealed his humility. "But David said to Saul, 'Who am I, and what is my life or my father's family in Israel, that I should be the king's son-in-law'" (1 Sam. 18:18).

David's Humility

Humility is a magnet to super abundant grace; "But He gives greater grace. Therefore it says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives [super abundant] grace to the humble'" (James 4:6, emphasis added).

David was showered with grace because he was a man of great humility. This question of unworthiness permeated his thinking throughout his life's experiences. We see this question, "who am I?" time and again. For example, when he reflected on God's grace upon man both in creation and thereafter, he posed this question, "What is man, that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him?" (Ps. 8:4). That is a question of humility, an expression of a humble heart. When he thought of giving unto the Lord, his reaction was the same, "But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You" (1 Chron. 29:14).



Failure makes or breaks us; it stiffens arrogant necks but brings the humble back to God.

When he thought of how far he had gone in life, and how God had granted him grace in every sense, words of humility flooded from his soul unto the page of Scripture, "Who am I, O God, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far?" (2 Sam. 7:18).

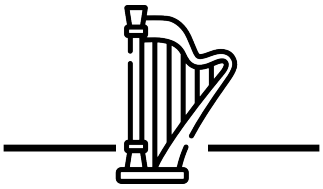
It is true; David occasionally failed in his spiritual life. But each time, he bounced back. That's humility. Failure makes or breaks us; it stiffens arrogant necks but brings the humble back to God. David reflected on the ups and downs of his life's journey and saw the magnificent fingerprints of God at every turn. It was too much for him to take in. That is humility! Such a thought ought to be ours, knowing apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). On the one hand, David undertook Saul's offer of fighting the Philistines. On the other, Saul failed to deliver as promised (1 Samuel 18:19). Surprised? No, not at all! Words of unstable people are like a tossing wind; they cannot be trusted. Saul was not finished with his untrustworthy offers; he had another inviting one on the horizon.

Another Dubious Offer

> *Now Michal, Saul's younger daughter, loved David. When this was reported to Saul, the idea was agreeable to him. Saul thought, 'I will give her to him that she may become a snare [trap] to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.' Therefore Saul said to David, 'For a second time you may be my son-in-law today' (1 Sam. 18:20-21).*

Saul told his servants to sweet talk David into believing the lie that Saul greatly admires him and desperately wants to have him as his son-in-law (1 Sam. 18:22).

Who in his right mind would give the hand of his beloved daughter in marriage and at the same time wish her husband dead? Nobody! More than that, we ask, "Where is the discernment? Why is David still hanging around this unstable king who is out to get him?" I do not know the answer to this question. Nevertheless, whatever the reason, David accepted the offer. His reply to Saul's servants is enlightening, "Is it trivial in your sight to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man and lightly esteemed?" (1 Sam. 18:23).



God has the monopoly of turning the world of the hopeless upside down for good.

David was not exaggerating; he was a poor man, indeed. We see his humble heart emphasized, calling himself "lightly esteemed." His assertion reveals, though the people of Israel had already put him on a pedestal, it had no effect on him. He still considered himself lowly esteemed.

We should not forget that, "He [God] raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with nobles, and inherit a seat of honor" (1 Sam. 2:8). The good news for David—and for anyone else, for that matter—is God has the monopoly of turning the world of the hopeless upside down for good.

It is fitting David's confession regarding his family's economic status was recorded for us, so we can appreciate God's grace upon his life. David scored a point. He had no riches to hold an elaborate wedding in

a royal way; he was just a shepherd boy who kept his poor father's flock. The servants did what servants do best: They reported David's feedback to Saul, their master. But Saul was not willing to take no for an answer. He begged David with his reply: "Saul then said, 'Thus you shall say to David, "The king does not desire any dowry except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to take vengeance on the king's enemies"'" (1 Sam. 18:25).

Here we go once more. On the surface, the offer looked appealing. He was challenging David, now a warrior, to go and make these Philistines pay for insulting the king and God's kingdom. Do you believe that is what Saul had in mind, revenge against the Philistines? Hardly. "Now Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines" (1 Sam. 18:25).

Saul, all along had been ceaselessly seeking ways to end David's life. But not a chance! God would continue to safeguard him until His plan for David's life is carried to fruition. That's sovereignty, that's grace. In reality, Saul is asking David for his life as a dowry for his daughter, Michal. David would accept Saul's offer.

> *When his [Saul's] servants told David these words [of the king regarding the hundred foreskins of the Philistines], it pleased David to become the king's son-in-law. Before the days had expired David rose up and went, he and his men, and struck down two hundred men among the Philistines. Then David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law (1 Sam. 18:26-27).*

What a brave man. I must admit, there's so much about David's mental attitude we cannot fully understand. Trap after trap, he keeps marching on. He was acutely aware the termination of his life had been foremost on Saul's mind. Later David would ask Saul bluntly why he had wanted him dead all along (1 Sam. 24:11). Of course, God gave David victory, for the Lord was with him wherever he went (1 Sam. 18:14). On top of all this, David doubled Saul's request. Saul asked for a hundred foreskins, but David brought two hundred. Saul was overwhelmed by David's response. Essentially, Saul said, "I asked for a hundred and he brought two hundred?" Saul could not believe his eyes! He had no choice but to give his daughter to David in marriage

with the dowry paid in full (1 Sam. 18:27). The marriage was finalized. David had proven to be an all-time warrior, so we might expect that now Saul would cease his pursuit of David. Right? Wrong!

"When Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter loved him, then Saul was even more afraid of David. Thus Saul was David's enemy continually" (1 Sam. 18:28-29). Saul had every reason to be afraid. It is arrogance in its highest state to attack God head-on. An attack on God's servants or His plan is a direct attack on God Himself which begs for maximum discipline from the Eternal Bar of Justice (Isaiah 54:17; see also Zech. 2:8-9). But as for Saul, he was racing toward the point of no return. He had allowed himself to go on the wrong path without repentance, without a change of heart. "Saul was David's enemy continually." He would continue the course of his deceit and treachery until such a time when the Lord would call him home and he would go to heaven with no reward in eternity (1 Cor. 3:11-15). Yes, Saul will be in heaven. Don't drop the book. Read on.

An attack on God's servants or His plan is a direct attack on God Himself which begs for maximum discipline from the Eternal Bar of Justice

In all this, and in every battle against the Philistines, David continued to "behave himself more and more wisely than all the servants of Saul. So his name was highly esteemed" (1 Sam. 18:30). As David marches on, one step at a time toward the throne, the conflict intensifies. Of course, God uses prepared vessels (2 Tim. 2:20-21). If David is going to be Israel's best commander in chief, both militarily and otherwise, God would have to prepare him through military exposures. That is equally true of us. If God is going to use us for mighty work, His only recourse is to refine us through the furnace of suffering. There is no way we can get around it. As for David, he later recounts:

> *He trains my hands for battle, So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You have also given me the shield of Your salvation, and Your right hand upholds me; And Your gentleness makes me great. You enlarge my steps under me, And my feet have not slipped. I pursued my enemies and*

> *overtook them, And I did not turn back until they were consumed. I shattered them [because the Lord was with me], so that they were not able to rise; They fell under my feet. For you have girded me with strength for battle; You have subdued under me those who rose up against me…. He gives great deliverance to His king, And shows lovingkindness to His anointed, To David and his descendants forever (Ps. 18:34-39, 50).*

One thing about David is he never lost focus that his training, his victories and life's successes are all because of Who and What God is —a matter of His unsurpassing grace. David prayed,

> *"Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and strengthen everyone" (1 Chron. 29:11-12).*

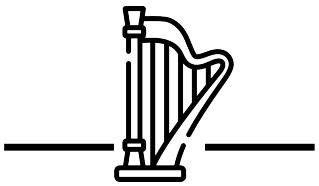
Saul continues to lose sleep over David; he would make another attempt to kill David. Hold that thought.

Chapter 7
Saul’s Resolve to Kill David

> *Blessed [Praised] be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, The God who is our salvation. God is to us a God of deliverances; And to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death (Ps. 68:19-20).*

What a relief to know God will fulfill His Word, not because of who and what we are, but because of Who and What He is. We cannot state it enough. Failure to live up to His Word would violate His essence. Failure to live up to His Word would delight Satan who, in desperation, attacks God‘s Word from every angle. He erroneously hopes one day he will be able to invalidate God‘s promise, and thus make Him a liar. Let us simplify: A failure on God’s part to fulfill one Word of Scripture would cancel the entire Word of God. This explains why our Lord was adamant concerning the Father’s faithfulness.

God is watching over His Word like a hawk to ensure no part of it will ever fail. “The LORD said to me, ‘You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled’” (Jer. 1:12 NIV). “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Num. 23:19 NIV).



God is watching over His Word like a hawk to ensure no part of it will ever fail.

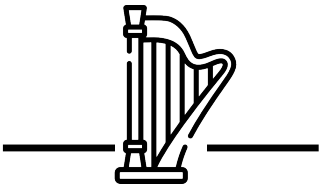
No part of His Word will ever fail. What a solace for all of us who believe. On the one side, God made an unbreakable promise to David. On the other, Satan, through Saul, worked around the clock to cancel that promise. In reflecting on God‘s faithfulness, the psalmist sang, “For the word of the LORD is upright; And all His work is done

in [perfect] faithfulness. …Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him" (Ps. 33:4, 8). Saul made yet another attempt to thwart God's plan with regard to David; but God would again frustrate Saul's effort to kill His chosen one.

Plot to Kill David Foiled

> *Now Saul told Jonathan his son and all his servants to put David to death. But Jonathan, Saul's son, greatly delighted in David (1 Sam. 19:1)*

And yet, Saul's hatred toward David was boiling over. Murder made the list as one of the seven sins most abhorrent to God (Prov. 6:16-19). People whose hearts are steeped in evil "are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet and its waters toss up refuse and mud" (Isa. 57:20). Saul wants David dead without delay. But to Saul's disadvantage, his son, Jonathan, is David's closest friend, closer than a brother. Solomon noted such friendship when he said, "A man of many friends comes to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24).



That is what grace is all about. It is never earned, never deserved.

Jonathan and David fall into this highest category of friendship. Jonathan loved David as he loved himself (1 Sam. 18:1). He, too, is a lad of integrity. Jonathan was acutely aware, by the order of primogeniture (the firstborn son receives the inheritance), he would be the next in line to be king of Israel after his father, Saul. Armed with that knowledge, he was equally aware God's grace was upon David beyond measure; and, more than likely, David would be the next king. He was not envious of David; he was not poisoned with jealousy. Rather, he was happy for his friend (20:12-16). That is maximum integrity, a trait rare among Christians today. Much more, God would use Jonathan as a messenger to safeguard David's life. "So Jonathan told David saying, 'Saul my father is seeking to put you to death. Now therefore, please be on guard in the morning, and stay in a secret place and hide yourself '" (19:2).

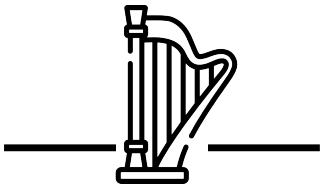
Saul is breathing hatred for David. By contrast his son, Jonathan, loves David dearly and would be an advocate for him. David did not need to look for an advocate; for God had already made the provision before

the beginning of time. That is what grace is all about. It is never earned, never deserved. Jonathan went straight to his father, to plead David's case. Hence we read,

> *Then Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, 'Do not let the king sin against his servant David, since he has not sinned against you, and since his deeds have been very beneficial to you. For he took his life in his hand [literally he risked his life] and struck the Philistine [Goliath], and the Lord brought about a great deliverance for all Israel; you saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by putting David to death without a cause?' (1 Sam. 19:4-5, emphasis added).*

Jonathan's argument won Saul's heart, but just for the moment (1 Sam. 19:6). Seeing Saul's change of heart, Jonathan requests his beloved friend, David, to continue his therapeutic music for his father (19:7). On top of this, during the time David was providing his heartfelt service to Saul, he went and defeated the Philistines who posed another threat to Saul's kingdom (19:8). We know David could only be in one place at any given time. In his absence, Saul's condition (under demonic attack) had deteriorated. David would experience another premeditated murder attempt upon his life following his return from defeating the Philistines. We pick up the story here;

> *Now there was an evil spirit from the Lord on Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand and David was playing the harp with his hand. And Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, so that he stuck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night (1 Sam. 19:9-10).*



There is no sin under the sun which the carnal believer cannot commit.

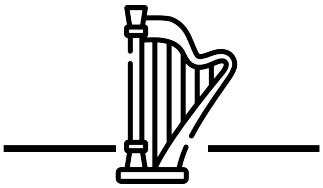
Does this surprise you? Not if you take God's Word at its face value. A believer in perpetual carnality (going from sin to sin, never confessing and returning to fellowship with God) is always at the mercy of the power of the Sin Nature. He is never stable in his ways, he cannot be rational, nor can anyone trust him. There is no sin under the sun which the

carnal believer cannot commit. That was Saul's condition. He was unstable. He was of sound mind yesterday; today he is ready to commit murder. What a miserable way to live!

But David escaped, not because of his maneuvering skill; but because escape from death belongs to God (Ps. 68:20). David was not going to be killed by *anyone* until God's plan for his life had come to perfect completion (Acts 13:36). That goes for you, too. You can sleep comfortably tonight, knowing this biblical truth! David escaped, but Saul's instability remained unchanged. He intensified his quest for David's death. He would now involve everyone in an all-out war to get David.

Killing David By Any Means

> *Then Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, in order to put him to death in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, told him, saying, 'If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be put to death' (1 Sam. 19:11).*



Accidents do not exist in God's plan.

Was David's marriage to Michal, Saul's daughter, an accident? No, because accidents do not exist in God's plan. Being in the right relationship at the right time, God would use Michal to guard the life of his servant David. She helped him escape through their window and fooled Saul's messengers (1 Sam. 19:12-16). Saul was not happy with his daughter's cleverness. The bottom line is David escaped unharmed. The important lesson for us all is we should avoid dangers when we are aware of them. The Lord did the same. David could have said, "Nay, the Lord of the armies is with me; what would man do to me?" That would have been tantamount to tempting God.

David simply did what he could; he escaped and went to Samuel. Both went and stayed at Naioth, Ramah. David had run away; supposedly that should end Saul's pursuit. Right? Not so. Saul asked his messengers to go after him in Naioth. Saul is obsessed; he is not resting because he has become an instrument in the hands of the restless one, Satan, who is working tirelessly to make God a liar. To do

this, Satan plans to use Saul to kill David before he is crowned king. God's justice awaits Saul's messengers at Ramah.

Saul's Messengers' Prophesy

> *It was told Saul, saying, 'Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah.' Then Saul sent messengers to take David, but when they saw the company of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing and presiding over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul; and they also prophesied (1 Sam. 19:19-20).*

Amazing? Yes. Our God is a God of amazement and He is not finished. Saul sent yet another group; he also lost them to the group of prophets; for they too prophesied. Even so, Saul sent a third group and they too joined the rest and prophesied (1 Sam. 19:21-22). Scripture is silent with regard to what they prophesied about. But maybe their prophesy was something like this: "God is finished with Saul; David is the next king on the horizon, Amen."

Apparently Saul called his messengers losers because they were unable to maneuver around the sovereignty of God. Thinking he could outwit God, he took matters into his own hands; Saul himself went to see what was happening at Ramah.

But does God have a surprise for Saul! He too met the power of the Omnipotent God. God's sense of humor is unequalled. Our Father God is *bigger* than we are; His plan is *superior* to ours. While ours may fail, God's plan *will not* and *cannot* fail. God's sovereignty guarantees it! Who is Saul kidding? God would meet him with the empowerment of God's Spirit and Saul too would prophesy.

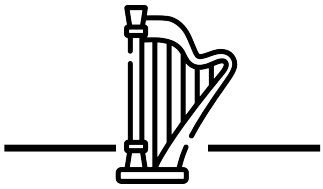
> *Then he himself went to Ramah and came as far as the large well that is in Secu; and he asked and said, 'Where are Samuel and David?' And someone said, 'Behold, they are at Naioth in Ramah.' He proceeded there to Naioth in Ramah; and the Spirit of God came upon him also, so that he went along prophesying continually until he came to Naioth in Ramah. He also stripped off his clothes, and he also prophesied before Samuel and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, 'Is Saul among the prophets?' (1 Sam. 19:22-24).*

No, he was not among the prophets; yet he was made so temporarily. This experience was enough for Saul to learn God's promise shall not be broken!

Saul would make yet another attempt to thwart God's plan with regard to David; but God would again frustrate Saul's effort to kill God's chosen vessel. Job too knew this, for he said, "I know that You can do all things; And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2).

Saul's Anger Burns Against Jonathan

> *Then Saul's anger burned against [his son] Jonathan and he said to him, 'You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!... For as long as [David] the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Therefore now, send and bring him to me, he must surely die' (1 Sam. 20:30-31, emphasis added).*



A soul without the life of God is in constant distress.

"He must surely die" were the words of a believer in perpetual carnality. Saul had allowed his soul to be saturated with the poison of self-centeredness, egocentrism, bitterness and the venom of animosity. His antagonism was directed toward David and everyone around him. He constantly thought of no one but himself.

Anyone who opposed him, even his son, was the object of his wrath. When his son, Jonathan, objected to his behavior, "Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him down" (v. 33), saying: "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!" We see clearly, a soul without the life of God is in constant distress.

The reality is when a believer loses touch with the life of God, he becomes a tool in the hands of the evil one. There is no sin too small or too great in Satan's plan. That is the condition in which Saul found himself. He had no spiritual vitality. He had no peace. He had no joy. All he had was misery and thirst for murder. He was a weapon in Satan's hands. This is a dreadful position for any believer. There can be no normal life for anyone operating without the power of God the Holy

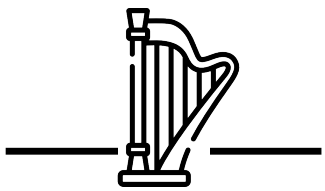
Spirit. There is no way of getting around it. The price of perpetual carnality is huge!

Saul was hoping to get rid of David so he could keep Israel's kingdom in his family. But not a chance, for God had spoken. David will and must be the next king of Israel. It's that simple. Saul should have known better. He should have known his son, Jonathan, had reverence for God as we shall see in a moment. But first, let us examine Saul's father-to-son talk, a reality check: "For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Therefore now, send and bring him to me, for he must surely die" (1 Sam. 20:31).

In other words, "Son, what I am doing is for your own good. If we team up, we can send David to an early grave and keep the kingdom for you." Saul thought this was an irresistible offer. Who wouldn't want royalty? Anybody would. But not Jonathan, who realized being king was not God's plan for his life. What an exceptional believer!

Jonathan's Integrity

Integrity is a familiar word to all of us. It echoes throughout Scripture. For example, David wrote, "I shall walk in my integrity" (Psa. 26:11). Solomon said, "The just man walketh in his integrity" (Prov. 20:7 KJV). But what is it? Integrity is synonymous with spiritual maturity; it is the same as "love for God." It is a lifestyle of enduring devotion, guarded by unsurpassed love and constant obedience to the mandates of Scripture, today, tomorrow and the next. Such a lifestyle allows God's Word to take precedence over whatever the world offers, no matter how alluring the offer. Saul offered his son, the kingdom of Israel at the expense of David's life. But Jonathan feared God. His integrity insulated him from taking part in that which God does not approve.



Integrity is synonymous with spiritual maturity; it is the same as "love for God."

Jonathan knew God was preparing David for something greater, for "he was prospering greatly" (1 Sam. 18:15). He knew God would ultimately transfer Saul's kingdom to David. So in his integrity, Jonathan was not jealous, or envious the kingdom would go to

someone else. He simply accepted God's will. Assured of the kingdom transfer, he said to his friend, David, "may the Lord be with you as he was with my father" (1 Sam. 20:13). He added, "If I am still alive, will you not show me the loving-kindness of the Lord?" (v. 14). Jonathan signed off on his assurance of the kingdom transfer with a covenant, "'You shall not cut off your loving-kindness from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.' So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David'" (vv. 15-16).

There we have it, integrity magnified! Jonathan never took part in his father's conspiracy. Rather, he revealed to David his father's plan to kill him (1 Sam. 20: 31-38). Reading such a story sends chills through my spine. I am sure it does the same thing to you. Here is a young man who was content knowing David was in position to take the kingdom away from him; yet he never showed one iota of bitterness. Instead, he prayed for David, "may the Lord be with you as he was with my father."

Before we take on another portion of work for scrutiny, it is of paramount importance we pause and re-examine our own lives. If the Bible were to be re-written, and each of us were entitled to a page, what would the content be? Could somebody read it and say, "Wow! This is God reflected in a human life?" If not, what are we doing as Christians? These questions bring this segment to a close, and open another with David's spiritual failure.

Chapter 8
David’s Spiritual Failure

We have just wrapped up a beautiful testimony of Jonathan’s spiritual integrity, only to open a chapter revealing David’s spiritual failures. The Bible has nothing to hide. It is not prejudiced. It tells it as it is: the good, the bad, and the ugly. In this section we will cover two of David’s sins. One, he lied to a priest. Two, he faked insanity to a king. This section is pivotal to our study. But before we examine David’s failures, it is important to understand the nature of spiritual failure.

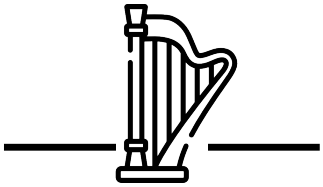
Defining Spiritual Failure

Spiritual failure is anything that falls short of God’s righteous standard. Make no mistake; no one is immune to spiritual failure, not even spiritual giants. We all fail at every level of our spiritual growth. We fail as spiritual babes, as spiritual adolescents and as spiritual adults. This is a fact of the spiritual life. It is self-deception to think a believer can gain sinless perfection in this life. “Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins” (Eccl. 7:20). “We all stumble in many ways” (James 3:2). If sin does not trap us mentally (what we think), it traps us overtly (what we do); and if it fails mentally and overtly, it wages war to trap us verbally (what we say), “no one can tame the tongue” (v. 8). It is because of God’s grace with respect to our failures that Scripture records a tough question for us: “If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” (Psalm 130:3). Nobody! “But there is forgiveness with You” (v.4). Thank God for His grace!

The problem with Christianity today is not spiritual failure, as such; the real problem is irresponsibility. Many of us are careless with our spiritual lives. We do not pay attention to what we think, to what we do or to what comes out of our mouths. As a result, we come short of

having the mental "attitude… which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5); we come short of being "imitators of God as beloved children" (Eph. 5:1); we come short of letting our "speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that… [we] will know how… [we] should respond to each person" (Col. 4:6, emphasis added). Therein is the tragedy of our day.

How we handle spiritual failure reveals our level of seriousness toward God's plan for our lives. Apathy for God's plan is a way of life for a believer in perpetual carnality (1 Cor. 3:1-3). Failure awakens a growing believer, and causes him to "be of sober spirit" (1 Peter 5:8). Because of a mature believer's "love for God," spiritual failure sends a shock wave to his spine, and causes him not only to "be of sober spirit," but more so, to be careful not to repeat the same failure. He dreads shaming the name of the One he loves dearly, realizing he is the 5th Gospel, the only Bible some can see, "for we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing"… "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men" (2 Cor. 2:15; 3:2).



Spiritual failure is something we should not take casually.

We all fail. But a growing or a mature believer takes every step to recover. God has graciously provided 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins [all known sins], He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our [known] sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [unknown sins]" (emphasis added). Sadly some think 1 Jn. 1:9 is a license to sin. Some say, "All you need to do is commit the sin of your lust and confess it afterwards." But, spiritual failure is something we should not take casually; for it comes with a price, divine discipline (Heb. 12:6; cf. 1 Cor. 11:30; Prov. 10:27).

May I say to you as God's minister: a premeditated sinful act is a deliberate insult to God's justice that carries a warning. "You shall not put the Lord your God to the Test" (Matt. 4:7). Failure is a reminder we are still trapped inside the coat of our Sin Nature. But that does not exonerate us in our spiritual failures. Remember, "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines and He scourges every son whom he

receives" (Heb. 12:6). With this in mind we can now proceed to examine some of David's failures.

David's Lie to a Priest

Fear is our worst enemy in the spiritual life. It eclipses truth in a hurry. After David fled from Saul, fear led him to a city called Nob, and there he met up with "Ahimelech, the priest" (1 Sam. 21:1). Ahimelech was surprised to see David, and he asked, "Why are you alone and no one with you?" (1 Sam. 21:1). David was faced with a dilemma: Should he lie or tell the truth? He lied.

> *David said to Ahimelech the priest, 'The king has commissioned me with a matter and has said to me, "Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you and with which I have commissioned you; and I have directed the young men to a certain place"' (1 Sam. 21:2).*

We do not condone David's failure. Whatever the reasons were, the bottom line is David lied to Ahimelech the priest. Was David's sin premeditated, or was he caught off guard? We do not know. Does it mean we can live a lifestyle of lying because David lied? God forbid! Remember, a premeditated sinful act is a deliberate insult to God's justice that carries a warning. Before you ever think of putting God to the test, consider what happened in the Garden. Eve was deceived; but Adam willfully sinned. Therefore, God held Adam responsible and made him the sole head of the human race. "In Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). Furthermore, Scripture warns,

> *Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under-foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb. 10:28-29, emphasis added).*

David Fakes Insanity

> *David arose and fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath. But the servants of Achish said to him, 'Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of this one as they danced, saying, "and Saul has slain his thousands, And*

> *David his ten thousands."' David took these words to heart and greatly feared Achish king of Gath. So he disguised his sanity before them, and acted insanely in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, 'Behold, you see the man behaving as a madman. Why do you bring him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this one to act the madman in my presence? Shall this one come into my house?' (1 Sam. 21:10-15).*

While Scripture left out David's reason for lying to the priest, as we studied earlier, here it pleased the Holy Spirit to supply us with the reason he acted insanely: fear. He *"greatly feared Achish king of Gath."* He may have reasoned, "If I don't act this way, the king could arrest me, and perhaps alert King Saul of my whereabouts." Fear is our worst enemy in the spiritual life. Fear has robbed a great number of us of our blessing. So let us take a look at the subject of fear.

Examining Fear

David could have looked to the testimony of believers in the Old Testament. There are many examples of God using ordinary people to do great things because they set their lifestyle of fear aside so God could use them.

Fear is a lack of trust in God. It is failure in a dilemma to recall and apply the pertinent aspects of God's essence: love, omnipresence, omniscience, veracity, sovereignty and omnipotence.

Love, as a component of God's essence (1 John 4:8), speaks of His care. As a loving Father, He loves you more than words can express, and "nothing can separate us from His love" (Rom. 8:39).

Omnipresence underscores the fact He is there on the spot with you. You are not facing your problem alone; He is right there with you! This is why He said, "Do not fear, for I am with you" (Isa. 41:10).

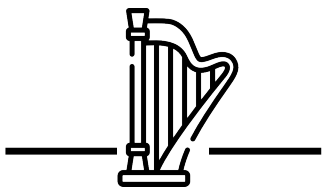
Omniscience reminds you your present circumstance was known to the all-wise God billions of years ago in eternity past. He made provision to take care of your problem long, long before you were born. This He reminded Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). In other words, "Jeremiah, if you knew I am

the God of the universe, if you knew I knew all your flaws and frailties, if you knew no one can undo My plan, if you knew My plan is bound to be executed *in full*, then you would have no cause to fret or complain about your shortfalls."

Veracity refers to His truthfulness. God cannot lie concerning His plan for your life (Num. 23:19). Abraham knew God cannot go back on His Word, he "was fully assured that what He [God] had promised, He was able to perform" (Rom. 4:21). Sovereignty reminds you He is King of kings, Lord of lords; and no plan of man can ever supersede His.

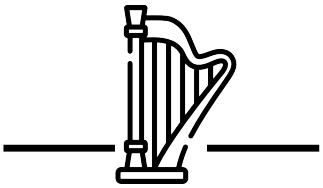
Omnipotence seals the fact God is all-powerful. He has what it takes to ensure His plan for your life cannot be thwarted (Job 42:2). That means he will remove any obstacle that threatens His plan. Understanding this Biblical truth ought to build a protective wall in your soul, to seal it off from a barrage of fear that wages war against it. You have no reason to be afraid if you know God is at both ends of your life's journey.

Mastering God's essence dispels fear on every front. "People who know their God… carry out great exploits" (Dan. 11:32 NKJV). Daniel was great because he knew his God; therefore, he was courageous and so he handled every pressure, crisis or difficulty without fear. When subjected to idolatry, "Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food" (Dan. 1:8). He was not afraid of the king, nor the consequences of his decision not to be defiled.



Mastering God's essence dispels fear.

That is not all; King Dairus passed an edict that everyone who made petitions to any other god, except his idol, would be thrown into the lion's den. Daniel defied that, too, and prayed to God alone (Dan. 6:6-11). He knew God was sovereign and omnipotent and His mandates were supreme, not the king's. What's more, Daniel knew God had a plan for his life which no man, not even the king, could thwart. He had the assurance in his soul God would safeguard His own at all costs. He knew the omnipresent God was right there with him. Consequently, he knew that nothing, not even hungry lions, could terminate his life, until God's appointed time!



The cure for fear—knowing who your God is, and what He is capable of.

The same was true of Daniel's three friends. They defied the king's law that everyone in his province must bow to his statue. They defied his edict, even though they knew the penalty: being thrown into a furnace with a temperature over 1,000 degrees. In their fearlessness, they said to the king, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire [courage under fire]; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king**.** But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Dan. 3:18).

We are years away from these men of the Old Testament, but in their stories is the cure for fear—knowing who your God is, and what He is capable of.

• Fear and Immaturity

A lifestyle of fear is a sign of spiritual immaturity. Spiritual babes fear constantly. They fear when things fall apart in their life. They fear when they are diagnosed with a terminal disease. They fear when the giants of this life confront them. They panic when the economy spirals downward. They fear, even when a mosquito charges at them. But, for mature believers, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfect in love" (1 John 4:18).

The Apostle John used love as a synonym for maturity, "There is no fear in love." In other words, there's no fear in maturity, for "perfect love [maturity] casts out fear." He went on to say *"fear involves punishment."*

What does he mean? Fear involves punishment because the believer, in essence, is saying "God is almighty; but not mighty enough for my problem." That's reducing God's power to

something of no value. Even worse, it's a blasphemous thought and those who blaspheme God in their minds will pay a heavy price.

Think of it: Over two million Jews died in the wilderness because of fear of the giants (Num. 13:1-16; 14:4). When they saw the giants, fear gripped them and flushed all recollection of God's past faithfulness out of their memory. They forgot His saving power, which ranged from breaking the yoke of Egypt against them with ten superb miracles, to drying up the Red Sea, where He delivered them and drowned the Egyptian army. They "did not remember [His] wondrous deeds which [God] had performed among them" (Neh. 9:17, emphasis added). Fear erased all the mighty works of God from their memory and left them trembling in front of the giants. They panicked and forgot God was with them (Ex. 13:21-22).

We all fail, regardless of the level of our spiritual growth. Occasionally, unexpected turbulence of this life rocks our soul and stirs up our adrenals, triggering fear. That's a normal human reaction. But we ought not to allow this normal physical reaction to trouble our souls. We should stabilize our souls quickly, using God's Word, *"*Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand*"* (Isa. 41:10). So, my beloved, remember, "God has not given us a spirit of fear" (2 Tim. 1:7). Conversely we have no reason, whatsoever, to entertain fear.

God never condoned David's failures. God is the sovereign Judge. He always has been and always will be. We do not have all the facts, God does! He knows every fact surrounding every failure, past, present and future. We do not; that's why He's God, and we are not. Because of this, God alone reserved the right to pass judgment on David.

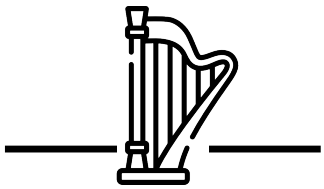
• Test Yourself

We can all learn from David's spiritual failures which highlight two things: 1) No one is immune to failure. 2). God's grace is greater than any failure.

David failed, but God's grace was not withdrawn. He never lost his title, "a man after… God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). He simply ran into a bump and stumbled. We do this all the time in our spiritual walk.

We stumble frequently as spiritual babes. We stumble less frequently in our spiritual adolescence. In spiritual adulthood, we still stumble, but more seldom. That is the difference!

You can always measure your spiritual life by taking a quick test. Ask yourself, "How often do I stumble?" Frequently? Less frequently? Or seldom? Another way we can measure our spiritual life is this: Does it grieve you when you fall short of God's mark for your life? For baby believers, there is no grievance over their spiritual failures (1 Cor. 3:1-3; cf. 5:1-5). For growing believers, there is a degree of grievance in their soul when they stumble. And for mature believers, they certainly grieve within whenever they realize they have failed the One, who has done so much for them.



We should always apply the recovery procedure of 1 John 1:9 when we fail.

The good news is God's grace is greater than our failure, no matter the magnitude. Realizing this, we should never allow our spiritual failure to weigh us down and keep us from moving forward. We should always apply the recovery procedure of 1 John 1:9 when we fail. It works every time, when properly applied. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This is grace in action!

Did David confess the sin of his lie? One would think he did. He was familiar with the Mosaic Law, and the consequences of sins, and the remedy thereof. He later wrote after his adulterous behavior, "I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, I will confess my transgressions to the LORD; And You forgave the guilt of my sin" (Ps. 32:5).

Scripture does not condone lies. On the contrary, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor" (Eph. 4:25 NIV). The grammatical construction of Ephesians 4:25 in the Greek is revealing. It is in the imperative mood, present tense. This is significant. This underscores the fact truthfulness is a virtue no one is born with. Because of this, you and I are commanded (imperative

mood) to keep on doing something (present tense) that is not natural to us, "Speak truth each one of you" (Eph. 4:25).

Man's Corrupted Nature

The problem is we have a corrupted nature; we are "of the flesh, sold into bondage to sin" (Rom. 7:14). "Nothing good dwells in… [us]" (v. 18, emphasis added). Our "new nature," by means of regeneration is in a tug of war constantly with our "old nature," "they are waging war against the law of … [our minds]" (Rom. 7:23, emphasis added). It is self-deception, or wishful thinking at best, to presume regeneration is tantamount to eradication of the Sin Nature (the source of temptation). We deceive ourselves when we think a born again believer is no longer subject to sin (1 John 1:8-10). The sooner we grasp the truth that regeneration is a declaration of spiritual war, the better armed we will be. Consequently, the sooner we understand the intense battle between our two natures (old and new), the better we will be equipped spiritually to "extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16). Our Lord reveals the origin of man's nature as we see in the following verse:

> *You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).*

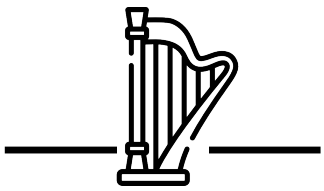
The Sin Nature is always in opposition to our new nature (Gal. 5:16). It wages war against us constantly. Its goal is to cause us to lose our spiritual balance. David was a mature or a maturing believer at the time he lied to Ahimelech, the priest. It is interesting to note, this is the same David who, years back, stood boldly, fearlessly and courageously before Goliath and challenged him. But face to face with the priest, he was caught in a web of fear. There, he swallowed truth and spit out lies. Why did he lie to God's servant? *Fear*. Fear caused him to fumble away his spiritual integrity.

The lesson here is obvious: Spiritual failure is both a reminder and a warning of what we are against. Though we have "put on the new man" according to Scripture (Col. 3:10), we still wear the coat of the "old man" (Rom. 7:15-18). The devil still wants to get us in trouble with the Supreme Court of heaven. But hold it! Before anyone can go

about blaming the Sin Nature for his failures, remember: Temptations come from our Sin Nature; spiritual failures come from personal volition (James 1:13-14). We fail because of the choices we make. Our choices will make or break us.

David at Keilah

We do not know David's state of mind when he was at the king's palace. We do not know why fear gripped him and caused him to act deceptively. You ask, "Isn't he cunning?" (1 Sam. 23:22). Why didn't God choose someone else better than David? Good question; but there is no one better God could have used to demonstrate the word "grace." God's treatment of David paints a picture of grace you and I can see vividly. We capture a glimpse of how He treats all of us in grace! You get the point? God's grace is unfathomable. It is *bigger* than all our failures! People who think they are better than someone else are often the most arrogant of people. Please note: God does things through and for us, not because of who we are, but because of Who and What He is. Let this truth sink in. David, indeed, was a picture of God's grace in every sense.



We fail because of the choices we make. Our choices will make or break us.

> *Indeed, none of those who wait for Thee will be ashamed; those who deal treacherously without cause will be ashamed (Ps. 25:3).*

There are two sides to this passage, "those who wait for" God, and "those who deal treacherously without cause." David waited while Saul dealt with treachery. Saul continued to pursue David relentlessly without reason. On the other hand, David tirelessly continued to run for his life. He knew God had a plan and God would bring His plan to fruition. One thing about David: He was not in a hurry. He knew Saul was a treacherous man; but integrity kept David from praying God would end Saul's life and turn his kingdom over to him. He simply waited on the Lord. Are you like David, waiting patiently on the Lord? If so, make David's words your own: "Indeed, none of those who wait for Thee will be ashamed" (Ps. 25:3). God is a God of perfect timing. He has never been late. He is always on time and on target! You see,

one cannot offer what he does not have. You cannot, in good conscience, give anyone advice about patience if you, yourself, are impatient. David could wait on the Lord (Psalm 37:34). He had a mastery of patience. Even while waiting on the Lord's perfect timing, he was still on the lookout for the interest of others.

> *Then they told David, saying, 'Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are plundering the threshing floors.' So David inquired of the LORD, saying, 'Shall I go and attack these Philistines?' And the LORD said to David, 'Go and attack the Philistines and deliver Keilah' (1 Sam. 23:1-2).*

David was always in tune with heaven (23:2, 7-12). David had victory after victory against the Philistines; and yet, when he had opportunity to fight them again, he did not rely on his past victories. He still inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" He went and the Lord gave him victory. No wonder he later sang, "He trains my hands for battle" (Ps. 18:34); and "girded me with strength for battle" (v. 39); "The king is not saved by a mighty army; A warrior is not delivered by great strength. A horse is false hope for victory; Nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength" (33:15-17). This expression highlighted David's mental attitude of humility.

David continued to run for his life, as "Saul sought him every day" (1 Sam. 23:14). While in the wilderness, his best friend, Jonathan, "Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God" (v. 16). Yes, he encouraged him in the Lord. What a believer! What a friend! We will next examine one of the great ministries of the saints: the ministry of encouragement.

Chapter 9
The Ministry of Encouragement

Discouragement is the most subtle and potent weapon in Satan's arsenal; it freezes the believer's spiritual life like nothing else can. A believer in Christ may fall into any sin but bounce back quickly by utilizing 1 John 1:9, but once a believer is discouraged, his will to go on stalls, his will to fight another day freezes. A discouraged believer often finds it difficult to read his Bible, let alone pray when prayer is his most powerful weapon. Even more frightening, if discouragement lingers it can lead to depression, the real poison of discouragement.

No one, great or small, is immune to the missile of discouragement. Everyone is vulnerable. It can hit anyone anywhere, anytime. Think of Job; he had everything going for him, super abundant blessing on every side, an amazing family and a lifestyle of spiritual integrity. Zaam! Just like that, everything he had was gone. Consequently, he became a victim of the missile of discouragement. He lamented, "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, Their poison my spirit drinks…! Would that God were willing to crush me, that He would loose His hand and cut me off [literally that God would let me die]!"' (Job 6:4, 8-9, emphasis added). Although Job knew Satan was the agent of his pain and suffering, he ultimately believed everything that happened to him was permitted by God, which explained why he did not mention Satan's name regarding his suffering.

Job was not alone; consider Moses of the Old Testament. Discouragement hit him so hard he pointedly asked the Lord, "Why hast Thou been so hard on Thy servant [Moses]? … Please kill me at once" (Num. 11:11-15). Think of another giant, Elijah the Prophet. He had a similar reaction when the missile of discouragement hit him hard. He cried out, "O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers" (I Kings 19:4). He, like Job and Moses, wanted to die. Can

you now begin to see the devastating effects of discouragement? Have you ever experienced a low point in your life, so low you wished you were dead? Take heart, you are not alone. Spiritual giants in the Bible have already come to the same point of desperation, long before you.

God Uses Prepared Vessels

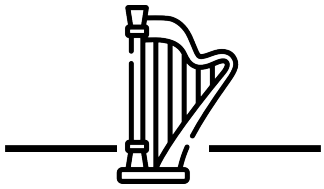
Here is amazing news for the Church Age Believer: God, in eternity past, designed a missile-defense system to knock down Satan's missiles of discouragement. He equipped Jesus Christ to destroy and neutralize the power of the weapon of discouragement. God uses prepared vessels; and so, He prepared His Son.

Jesus Christ endured affliction, where "He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). Step by step, God took Him through every experience of suffering, so He could have personal knowledge of what suffering is all about. This was God's plan for His Son. The Lord experienced every suffering that exists, "to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8). Consequently, by means of suffering, He was "made perfect [matured/prepared beyond measure]". Having been perfected, He became "the source of eternal salvation to all those who trust Him" (Heb. 5:9).

We ask, "Why did God take His Son through this awful route?" So Jesus Christ might be "a merciful and faithful high priest" (Heb. 2:17). So He can "sympathize with our weaknesses" (4:15); and "come to the aid of those who are" quickly discouraged (2:18). The author of the book of Hebrews tells us, "we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (4:15). Because of His familiarity with every suffering, He is ever ready to take down the missile of discouragement for us when we are its target. Count on Him! The Apostle Paul testified,

> *At my first defense no one supported, but all deserted me…. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened [encouraged] me…and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen (2 Tim. 4:16-18, emphasis added).*

It was not the end of God's plan. In His infinite wisdom, He prepares every believer as an agent against Satan's missiles of discouragement. To do this, He takes us on a route of affliction, just as He took His Son (Isa. 48:10), and takes us through the rugged road of suffering. There He acquaints us with His matchless grace, His love, and His providential care (2 Cor. 1:2, 4). When our preparation is complete He equips us to engage in the ministry of encouragement*: "*encourage one another, and build up one another… day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today'" (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13).



One cannot effectively engage in the ministry of encouragement unless one has experienced suffering or disaster and, through God's infinite grace, come out on top.

We have been called to encourage one another. This is a ministry for every believer. Because we have experienced God's providential care in our times of trial, we can boldly encourage others, "with the [same] comfort [encouragement] with which we ourselves are [comforted] by God" (2 Cor. 1:4, emphasis added). Remember, one cannot give what one does not have. One cannot effectively engage in the ministry of encouragement unless one has experienced suffering or disaster and, through God's infinite grace, come out on top. Because we have experienced the awesome power of God's Word in our times of trial, we can tell one another, with a clear conscience, God's Word works! Elijah could not have courageously ministered to others had God not ministered to his own needs. These are the facts of Scripture (1 Kings 17:4-6; 19:5-8; cf. 17:10-16)!

The way God builds His defense against discouragement is a bit roundabout by human standards. But it works!

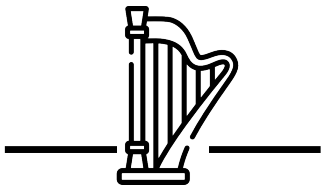
> *First, He trains us through the intense fire of affliction: "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction" (Isa. 48:10). We cannot get around it (2 Cor. 1:5).*
>
> *Second, He sees us through (2 Tim. 4:17-18; cf. Isa. 43:2-3). That is His promise (Heb. 13:5).*

> *Third, He empowers us to encourage others, "with the [same] comfort [encouragement] with which we ourselves are [comforted] by God" (2 Cor. 1:4, emphasis added).*

This is amazing that God has given us the awesome privilege to encourage one another. The ministry of encouragement is two sided: words and actions.

- **Words**

Words are powerful. Every situation varies so we are to be sensitive to the mentorship of the Holy Spirit. Often, words of encouragement may be in the form of sharing good news, as in the case of the apostles Paul and Timothy. "But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love… for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted" (1 Thess. 3:6-8). Or, it could be by way of rejuvenating one's spirit in the midst of a dilemma, as in the case of Nehemiah and the people of Israel (Neh. 2:17-18). Or, simply by pointing one to God's Word: "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and encouragement of Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

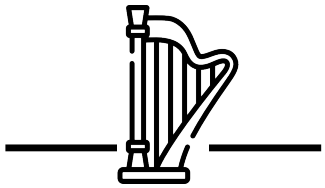


In the spirit of meekness, we are to minster to discouraged souls and guide them to the "Living Water" for refreshment.

Likewise, in the spirit of meekness, we are to minster to discouraged souls and guide them to the "Living Water" for refreshment. We are to let the dispirited soldier of the cross know there is hope, and God is at work on his behalf, "'For I know the plans I have you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope'" *(*Jer. 29:11). We are to share our own experiences when applicable.

- **Actions**

Actions are the most potent weapon against discouragement, "But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed [action] and truth" (1 John 3:17-18, emphasis added). A good gesture, no matter how small, even "a cup of cold water" (Matt. 10:42) goes a long way in restoring a believer with a fainting heart. "And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb. 13:16). Remember, we are God's defense system against Satan's missiles of discouragement. So let us encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11). Let us see how Jonathan encouraged David.



Actions are the most potent weapon against discouragement.

Jonathan Encourages David

> *And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in the Lord (1 Sam. 23:16).*

What incredible encouragement Jonathan gave David in his affliction. Think of what such words of encouragement would have done to David's fainting heart. Refreshing to say the least! Often we are guilty of reading Scripture hastily. David was advancing to take Jonathan's rightful place as Israel's next king, and Jonathan knew it. He was not jealous, not envious, and he did not even retreat to self-pity, the "why me" syndrome. He simply trusted God and acknowledged His plan for what it was—the perfect plan of God!

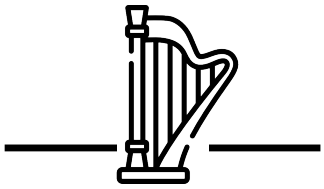
By accepting God's plan, Jonathan "said to him [David], 'Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul, my father shall not find you, and you will be king over Israel and I will be next to you; and Saul my father knows that also" (1 Sam. 23:17, emphasis added). Consider these words. "You will be king over Israel and I will be next to you." This is the epitome of spiritual maturity. Jonathan is going with the flow of God's plan, no matter the cost. This is the ministry of encouragement at its peak. Can we truly be happy for the progress of others? That's the

acid test of spiritual maturity—"rejoice with them that do rejoice" (Rom. 12:15). Saul could not pass this test and continues his frantic search for David.

Saul Continues to Pursue David

> *"And David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds, and remained in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but the Lord did not deliver him into his hand"(1 Sam. 23:14).*

Apparently Saul, at this time in his spiritual life, was approaching the point of no return. This is a scary point to reach in one's spiritual life. "A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy" (Prov. 29:1; see 1 John 5:16). While God continues to pursue Saul with longsuffering, Saul continues to ignore God's grace. More than 3,000 years later, we need to ask ourselves: Are we different or are we like Saul — ignoring God's grace?



Are we different or are we like Saul—ignoring God's grace?

Having been informed of David's whereabouts, Saul told his informant, "May you be blessed of the LORD" (1 Sam. 23:21). Do you see who is invoking God's blessing? The carnal believer. Just because one invokes God's name does not necessarily mean one is spiritual. For sure, Saul was not spiritual. Knowing where David was, "Saul and his men went to seek him" (v.25). His aim, as always, was to kill David. "But the Lord did not deliver him into his hand." God kept him shielded from Saul and his men. Saul's desperation to get rid of David brought him to Engedi.

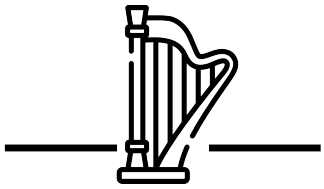
Saul in Engedi

It is heartbreaking that Saul degenerated spiritually to the point he was totally detached from reality. The idea that God is Sovereign and His plan must be fulfilled was not an issue for Saul anymore. Having been told, "David is in the wilderness of Engedi" (1 Sam. 24:1), "Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David" (v. 2). Yes, he took three thousand chosen men to hunt down David.

Remember, a believer at the lowest rung of his spiritual life is capable of committing any sin imaginable, even worse than an unbeliever. King Saul had hit the bottom of his spiritual life! No peace of mind, no joy; only frustration and fragmentation of life marked him.

Consider that Saul was so desperate to kill David he took 3,000 soldiers to go after one man. Yet David had peace of mind as exhibited in his beautiful song:

> *My soul waits in silence for God only…. He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken. How long will you assail a man, That you may murder him… They delight in falsehood; They bless with their mouth, But inwardly they curse. My soul, wait in silence for God only, For my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be shaken. On God my salvation and my glory rest; The rock of my strength, my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us (Ps. 62:1-8).*



We are rewarded in God's sight, not for the accumulation of His Word in our souls, but for the application of it.

Having come to Engedi, Saul and his men surrounded "David and his men to seize them" (1 Sam. 23:26), but God made a way of escape for David, which prompted a new song: "[Praised] be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, The God who is our salvation. God is to us a God of deliverances; And to God the Lord belong escapes from death" (Ps. 68:19-20, emphasis added). Reread these encouraging words until this truth is embedded in your soul.

David Continues to Spare Saul's Life

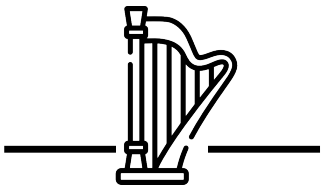
Talk is cheap; action is costly. We are rewarded in God's sight, not for the accumulation of His Word in our souls, but for the application of it. In other words, what carries the most weight with God is not how much of His Word we know, but what we do with what we know. On the mission field we have seen those in developing countries who have

had access to only a little truth apply all they know and then some! The magnified exhibition of the love of Christ from these precious souls is humbling. They completely absorb and apply the little truth they are fed.

A mature believer has a mental attitude of grace and humility. David had both! Having affirmed this, let's uncover the real David as we read (1 Sam. 13:14).

> *Now when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, saying, 'Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi.' Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. He came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave (1 Sam. 24:1-3).*

Saul simply used the cave as a restroom, where unbeknownst to him, "David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave" (1 Sam. 24:3). Saul did not see them, but they saw him. In case you miss the picture, Saul was by himself. His elite soldiers had given him privacy. What an opportunity for David and his men to capture Saul! But did they?



We are to do our part and then leave the outcome to the One who controls history.

Saul was in the lion's den, so to say, and didn't even know it. He was vulnerable for David and his men to do whatever they wished. Saul's 3,000 elite soldiers left him alone; thinking no threat could be in such an obscure cave. But they were wrong. David and his warriors were there.

True security is of the Lord, period. "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Ps. 127:1 RSV).

However, it does not negate our responsibility to be vigilant and prudent. It does not negate our duty to do what we are supposed to do, such as make short- and long-term plans, guard our city, work

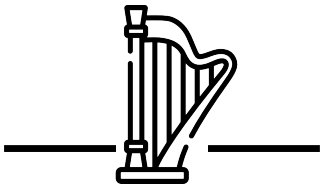
diligently and the like. We are to do our part and then leave the outcome to the One who controls history. “The mind of a man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps” (Prov. 16:9; cf. v. 33; Ps. 37:24). Imagine: Saul thought he was safe because his guards kept watch on the cave. His men thought they had covered every nook and cranny. We guard ourselves; God chuckles. On the surface, this looks like a golden opportunity for David to get even with Saul. But before we look at David’s mindset, we should examine our own spiritual lives.

Chapter 10
David’s Act of Overflowing Grace

Today, in Christianity, many believers are quick to grasp scriptural truths, some even boast of their superior knowledge of God’s Word. Sadly, when it comes to application of these biblical truths, many of us fall short. If every believer in Christ is shining as *“the light of the world,”* if every believer is allowing the reservoir of God’s Word in his soul to glow, by way of application, light would radiate in every corner of the planet earth (Matt. 5:14-16). That is the message our Lord sought to convey to His disciples and to us today. We are *“the light of the world.”* How do we apply the abundance of God’s Word we have in our souls? Consider the following passages for example:

> *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. ‘So if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”…. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Rom. 12:19-21, Matt. 5:44).*

Do we truly *love* and truly *pray* for all people, including those who hate us? If there is an opportunity to get even with our enemy, would we seize the moment and get our revenge? Or would we heed God the one and only Expert in handling unfair cases? “Never take your own revenge” (Rom. 12:19). The answers to these simple questions are spiritual benchmarks. The extent to which we fail these tests, we should quickly adjust our spiritual lives before God’s justice does that for us, “for the Lord disciplines those whom He loves, and chastises every child whom He accepts” (Heb. 12:6).



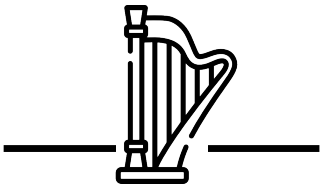
Recovery after failure is the trademark of a winner.

The elect angels cheer, "Well done," any time God's Word in our soul permeates our thoughts and actions. Though David occasionally failed, as we all do, he knew the secret of spiritual success. He bounced back and did not allow failure to conquer. Recovery after failure is the trademark of a winner. We know a winner never gives up and a quitter never wins. Having said this, it is imperative we carefully examine David's temptation.

David's Great Temptation

> *The men of David said to him, 'Behold, this is the day of which the LORD said to you, "Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you"' (1 Sam. 24:4).*

Were David's men right? These tantalizing words sound so much like what Satan told Jesus Christ during his temptation "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning you' and 'On *their* hands they will bear You up, So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'" (Matt. 4:6). Satan took words out of context just as David's men did.



God helps the helpless!

Way back in our study we touched on the issue of discernment. We need to remember just because something sounds good does not make it true. Often we hear quotations that sound good, such as, "God helps those who help themselves." It may sound good; but it is not biblical. The Bible tells us God helps the helpless! "He gives strength to the weary… to him who lacks might He increases power"; "If the Lord had not been my help, my soul would soon have dwelt in the land of silence"(Isa. 40:30; Ps. 94:17).

David had to read between the lines, and discernment was essential. He knew Scripture well and he would not be fooled. We should not be fooled either. He was familiar with the writing of Moses, "Vengeance

is Mine and retribution" (Deut. 32:35). He knew God cannot mandate us to leave vengeance to Him and at the same time instruct us to take vengeance when we can. That is not God's character. He does not give conflicting mandates. This is where accurately handling the Word of truth is critical!

David is Gracious Toward Saul

Because of David's knowledge of Scripture, he abandoned outright the temptation to kill Saul. He knew an injury to God's anointed is an injury aimed at God Himself. "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm" (Ps. 105:15). It is a timeless biblical principle; David knew it. Remember, knowing is one thing, doing is another thing altogether. Application of Scripture is all about knowing what it says and acting upon it. David was not afraid to fire back at his men with sound reasoning. "He said to his men, 'Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD'S anointed.' David persuaded his men with these words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul" (1 Sam. 24:6-7). Read David's words again, but this time view them through a new lens. Imagine. Not once, not twice, but three times he referenced the name "LORD" in a single verse (24:6). That speaks volumes about David, who was totally preoccupied with the Lord.

When a believer is truly preoccupied with the Lord, Who and What the Lord is dominates the believer's thought system. Such a believer always has a second thought before engaging in any activity that will shame the name of his Lord. Joseph and Daniel were other heroes of the Bible who exemplified this phenomenal principle.

We know Joseph's story (Gen. 39:1-10). God promoted him and with the promotion came temptation. Potiphar's wife boldly approached him with sexual sin. Joseph's reaction: "How then could I do this great evil against God?" Notice, he did not say the great evil was against Potiphar nor Potiphar's wife, but against God (Gen. 39:9).

Daniel had a similar mindset: "Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself" (Dan. 1:8). Daniel's friends held strong with him: "Be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have made" (3:18). Those were Old Testament spiritual giants!

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul declared, *"*for it will be better for me to die than have any man make my boast [in Christ] an empty one" (1 Cor. 9:15; cf. v. 12, emphasis added). We are far from being spiritual giants like these men. Nevertheless, you and I have the obligation to pause and honestly ask ourselves this question: As Christians are we imitating our Savior, Jesus Christ? (Eph. 5:1). Are the Lord's words, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15), always at the top of our mind, guiding our actions? The answer to these questions is a matter between each of us and the Lord.

Not only did David himself not kill Saul, he also persuaded his men to not do so. That is the epitome of grace. That is the picture of his soul, vividly portrayed by the Holy Spirit for us to behold. David could have easily rationalized, "Well, if I keep silent and one of my men kills him, I would not be responsible for his death." He abandoned such a thought in a hurry. Consider David had been miserable because of Saul; he'd been running from city to city, wilderness to wilderness, cave to cave, often without sleep. He knew Saul had been *"lying in wait for his life"* (1 Sam. 24:11). Despite the fact Saul had attempted to kill David several times, when David had his enemy within striking distance he refused the temptation to kill Saul. That is sobering. No doubt, two things hindered David from taking Saul's life: God's Word in his soul, and his obedient love for God.

> *Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly. It came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe (1 Sam. 24:4-5).*

David "cut off the edge of Saul's robe" to show Saul how close he had come to death. It was a disrespectful act and that's why his conscience bothered him, not because he ruined a robe, but because he ruined a robe of the Lord's anointed one. David did not need to prove anything to Saul; nor do we need to prove anything to anybody. How sweet it is to leave every matter with God.

David Appeals to Saul's Conscience

> *And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on his way. (1 Sam. 24:7).*

Obviously, Saul was unaware of the entire saga that had unfolded in the cave. Saul was unaware David had secretly cut his robe. He left the

cave as if nothing had happened. "Now afterward David rose and went out of the cave and called after Saul saying, 'My lord the king!' And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his head to the ground and prostrated himself" (v. 8).

Christianity is all about allowing the life of Christ to permeate our thoughts and actions.

See who prostrated himself? David. There is something about him we cannot completely understand. We are talking about a man whose life had been made a nightmare by Saul, and yet he never showed any animosity toward the one who caused him so much anguish. He had no ill feeling, no hatred toward Saul, his lord, not one iota. He saw his king and gave him full royal honor.

If you were David, what would you have called Saul? Or if you have an obnoxious boss, what do you call him in his absence? We are hitting at the core of our identity. Christianity is more than trusting in Christ alone for eternal life; it is more than carrying our Bibles to church every Sunday. It encompasses all these and more. Christianity is all about allowing the life of Christ to permeate our thoughts and actions. That is how the name Christian was first used in Scripture (Acts 11:26). Remember, it is a nickname coined by pagans to mock those who mimicked the actions of Christ. In that sense, are you an authentic Christian? Am I? My question is not about whether we are truly saved; rather, it is a question of Christian living.

See what David did. As an act of respect, he called Saul, "My lord the king." That is not all; he bowed before him, to demonstrate a humble heart. He went on to assure Saul he had never had any intention of harming him (1 Sam. 24:8). As proof, David showed him an edge of his robe he had cut while he was relieving himself in a cave (vv. 10-11). David rested his case, "May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD avenge me on you" (v. 12).

David left his case in God's hand, citing a biblical principle, "As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness'" (1 Sam. 24: 13); "As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same" (Job 4:8 RSV); "He who sows

iniquity will reap vanity" (Prov. 22:8). "The Lord therefore be judge and decide between you and me; and may He see and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand" (1 Sam 24:15). David closed with these sobering words of pledge: "But my hand shall not be against you" (v.13). In the New Testament this same idea is expressed as, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will [certainly] reap" (Gal. 6:7, emphasis added).

> *After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea? (1 Sam. 24:14).*

Consider who is calling himself a dead dog and a single flea. It is David, whom the entire nation of Israel regarded as a military giant (1 Sam. 18:7). We are talking about a man who so far had never lost a battle. Despite all these accolades, he still considered himself as a flea and a dead dog. Do you see the picture of humility? Words of humility covered his speech and the lyrics of his songs, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me this far" (2 Sam. 7:18); "What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man that Thou dost care for him?" (Ps. 8:4). We are far from this man. When the apostle Paul had inventoried his lifetime achievements, his humble assessment was, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

Saul's Response to David's Grace

> *Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept. And he said to David, 'You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt righteously with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you' (1 Sam. 24:16-17).*

He asked, "If a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely?" (1 Sam. 24:19). The answer is obviously no. "You are more righteous than I." But was Saul righteous? David's outpouring of grace hit Saul hard, eliciting tears of remorse for his callous behavior. It finally dawned on him that David would be king, "Behold I know that you shall surely be king and the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand" (v.20). He finally realized not only was David "more righteous than" he was, but also David had developed a superior capacity for leadership. Saul had come to terms with the reality David was the man of the hour.

What a time for celebration! Saul finally got it. It means Saul could now return to his palace and wait for regime change, and David could go about his daily life, right? Not so fast. Saul has now gone beyond remorse and repentance. He is racing toward the cliff at the speed of lightning. We cannot wait to look at his next course of action and where that led him.

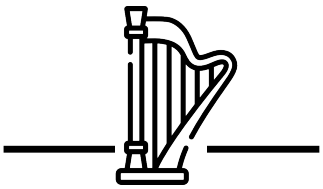
Chapter 11
Saul’s Last Installment of Grace

We should not be like Saul. Scripture reminds us, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). God is a God of love; equally He is a God of justice. Has that truth sunk in deeply? Modern-day Christianity has a problem balancing the truth that God deals with man in love and justice. Everyone enjoys being assured of God’s love, but often we tend to forget His justice.

This ought not to be. Those who turn a blind eye to God’s justice will one day be forced to face His wrath. Keep this in mind as our study winds down. Looking back, we have seen how God, in His infinite grace, has been pursuing Saul in love. Soon he will face another attribute of God: His justice. We noted God’s many graces upon Saul’s life. God crowned him king and provided everything he would ever need to have been the finest king in Israel’s history, but Saul trampled all this underfoot. He abandoned the *“fountain of life”* (Jer. 2:23) and chose a reckless lifestyle.

Saul was bitter and angry toward God for rejecting him as king because of his spiritual failure. He despised the idea of God’s installing the young David as Israel’s next king. Consequently, he vehemently tried to ruin God’s plan. He directed his anger toward David and attempted to destroy him many times. But did he succeed? Not if we believe Scripture, which tells us, “no purpose of thine can be thwarted” (Job 42:2 RSV). Not in a billion years.

Saul actually thought he could thwart God’s purpose. He abandoned his spiritual life and went against God’s plan. Eventually he would reach a point from which he could not return. David had an opportunity to kill Saul, but refused to do so, as we previously noted (1 Sam. 24:1-7). One would think David’s gracious act would have caused Saul to soften his attitude. He came close, “Then Saul lifted up



If a believer keeps on ignoring the path of the spiritual life, he will eventually arrive at the point of no return.

his voice and wept… Behold I know that you shall be king and the kingdom shall be established in your hand" (vv. 16-20). He finally got the message that no one can prevail against Almighty God.

Sadly, Saul had reached the point of no return. He had lost all bearing to truth. If a believer keeps on ignoring the path of the spiritual life, he will eventually arrive at the point of no return, just as Saul did. His response to David's kindness for sparing his life showed Saul intended to abandon pursuit of David's life (1 Sam. 24:21). But could he?

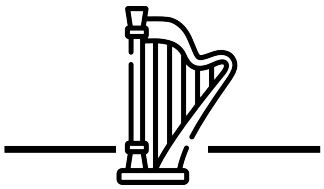
Spiritual maladjustment in his soul resulted in a heart so hardened he could no longer return to his former state, and this could happen to anyone. We each have the right to ask ourselves a serious question: "Am I lukewarm in my spiritual life?" If the answer is yes, rekindle your spiritual life now, before it is too late.

Saul's Final Attempt to Kill David

> *Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, 'Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah…?' So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, with three thousand chosen men of Israel, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph (1 Sam. 26:1-2).*

Having totally lost touch with his spiritual life and being drunk on spiritual maladjustment, Saul went again with his elite soldiers after David. See the irony? Saul earlier made a startling statement, "Behold I know that you shall be king and the kingdom shall be established in your hand." He understood God would eventually prevail and install David to the throne. So why did he still wish to harm David?

The answer is not too difficult. Saul had become a puppet in the hand of Satan, because he had subscribed to Satan's thought system. A believer can say "no" to God so many times he gets to the point where he is locked into that thinking. Saul knew right from wrong. He even

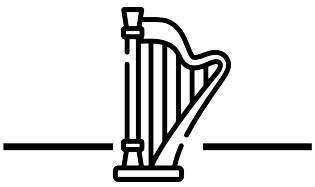


Can you see yourself in the mirror of His Word and adjust accordingly?

admitted to David, "You are more righteous than I" (1 Sam. 24:17). He knew he was on the wrong path; he just could not make the right decision. Satan's thinking had him locked up. This is a chilling state for anyone to reach in their spiritual life. The Apostle Paul described this in Eph. 4:18 as "hardness of heart." When a believer gets to this point, God's recourse is simple. He sends *"strong delusion"* to that believer (2 Thess. 2:11) or gives him up to "base mind and improper conduct" (Rom. 1:28 RSV).

Pause for a moment and honestly inventory your own spiritual life. Recall the Scripture, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction" (Rom. 12:4 RSV). This means the book of Samuel, for instance, was not written for Saul, but for us. Can we take the book apart, piece by piece, and study each segment, measuring ourselves against what we see in God's Word? That is the real question of the spiritual life. That is what is expected of any student of God's Word. Can you see yourself in the mirror of His Word and adjust accordingly?

Remember, Saul began well but along the way he messed up his spiritual life and never took the necessary steps to recover. "But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall live; he shall not die" (Ez. 18:21 RSV). What's more, God "does not have pleasure in the death of the wicked [carnal believer]" (v. 23, emphasis added). Saul failed to respond to God's grace until God had no recourse but to turn His justice toward him. In contrast to Saul's action, let us examine the reaction of his counterpart, David.



Consistency is a benchmark of spiritual maturity.

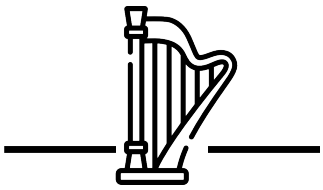
David Spares Saul's Life—Again

Time had elapsed since he refused the opportunity to take revenge against Saul. We know he never regretted his decision. Why would he? His spiritual life was on course. Consistency is a benchmark of

spiritual maturity. Doing something amazing only once is a trait of immaturity, doing it consistently and proficiently is the trademark of maturity. The author of Hebrews agrees, "The mature… because of [consistent] practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:13, emphasis added). Mature people make better decisions and, therefore, make fewer mistakes in life. David, as a mature believer had another opportunity to demonstrate that God's Word was "sweeter than honey" (Ps. 119:103) to him, sweeter than revenge.

> *So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him (1 Sam 26:7 NIV).*

Having searched all day long in vain for David, Saul and his men retired. While they slept, David secretly came to them. Reflect on what David had been through: sleepless nights in the wilderness, ceaseless anxiety for his life and the restless running from one cave to another, not knowing when and how all this would end. If you were David, when would you have said, "Enough is enough, I have had it!"? The believer is counseled by Scripture regarding this subject.



Spiritual life is not about our comfort; it is about God's glory.

> *Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God… For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously (Heb. 12:2; 1 Peter 2:21-23).*

Spiritual life is not about our comfort; it is about God's glory. Jesus Christ in His human nature exemplified this time honored principle. He did not come for His comfort. Rather, for the praise of the Father's glory: "Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7 RSV). "… Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42 RSV). "[Father-God] I

glorified thee on earth" (John 17:4 RSV, emphasis added). Having glorified the Father, He called each of us to do the same: "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." (1 Peter 2:21)

When one's comfort is in opposition to God's glory, one's comfort must be abandoned. We must never lose sight of why we are here, *"for the praise of His glory"* (Eph. 1:12). So far, David, whose psalms were full of God's praise, had not lost sight of this principle. He had another chance to put a stop to his arch enemy's constant plot to kill him. Saul had unceasingly caused him to run for his life. Consider Saul went out in search of David *"with three thousand chosen men of Israel."* That is right; three thousand in pursuit of one man or as David called himself, "a dead dog…a flea" (1 Sam. 24:14).

Put yourself in David's sandals. What would you do to Saul if given a chance? Would you put an end to his further infliction of pain on you? Think about what you might do. More directly: Do you have anyone in your life who has caused you mental anguish? If so, remember your mission, "for the praise of His glory." The pursuit of God's glory occupied David's soul.

> *Then Abishai said to David, 'Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand; now therefore, please let me strike him with the spear to the ground with one stroke, and I will not strike him the second time' (1 Sam. 26:8).*

What a tempting offer from David's warrior! It sounded as if he were speaking for God. David knew better. He "said to Abishai, 'Do not destroy him, for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be without guilt? … but now please take the spear that is at his head and the jug of water, and let us go'" (1 Sam. 26:8-9, 11).

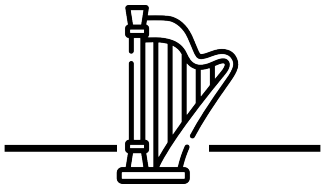
David refused to play God. What is his secret? Scripture! His soul was saturated with God's Word: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). Like Job, David treasured God's Word more than his daily food (Job 23:12). He knew what God said about anyone harming His anointed ones: "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm" (Ps. 105:15).

Another passage comes to mind, Deut. 32:35 (NIV): "It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of

disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them." It explains David's reply to his bodyguard, "'As the Lord lives, surely the Lord will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down into battle and perish.'" (1 Samuel 26:10). His attitude was refreshing: Let God deal with Saul's treachery.

Instead of allowing Saul to be killed, David played a trick; he took his spear and a jug of water and departed while they were still asleep, "because sound sleep from the Lord had fallen on them" (1 Sam. 26:12). The Lord kept them sound asleep for He alone is the source of sound sleep.

Having crossed to the other side, David awakened Saul and his army, startling them with the news of what he had just done (1 Sam. 26:13-22). He ended with a biblical application, "The Lord rewards everyone for their righteousness and faithfulness. The Lord delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord's anointed. As surely as I valued your life today, so may the Lord value my life and deliver me from all trouble" (v.23-24).



No telling how far a believer on a spiritual downturn can go, which should be a warning to any lukewarm believer.

In light of his experience can we have a greater appreciation for these psalms: "Let the Lord judge the peoples. Vindicate me, Lord, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High" (Ps. 7:8 NIV); "My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me" (31:15); "The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me" (18:20) and many more. David truly is a symphony of God's grace

We cannot appreciate our study of David without capturing the mental state of his counterpart, Saul. It will help us not only to appreciate David's spiritual life but warns us to be mindful of what can happen to a believer in perpetual carnality. It's scary!

Saul Visits a Witch

It is normal for anyone to be disgusted by Saul's behavior. No telling how far a believer on a spiritual downturn can go, which should be a warning to any lukewarm believer. There is no sin too atrocious for a believer in prolonged carnality to commit. Like many believers today, Saul was spiritually hot when he first began, and then along the way he detoured. He lost every contact with God. The Word was no longer "a lamp unto…[his] feet and a light to… [his] path" (Ps. 119:105, emphasis added). He had no peace, no joy; the only company he had was misery. He could no longer make David's song his own, "For this God is our God forever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end" (Ps. 48:14 NIV).

Saul admitted, "I am in great distress… God has departed from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams" (1 Sam. 28:15 NIV). What a frightening state! But what does Scripture say? "The Lord is with you when you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2 NIV). He will forsake you, not in the sense that you would lose your salvation, but rather in the sense of depriving you of all spiritual benefits (1 Cor. 3:14-15).

Having lost contact with God, due to choices of his own, Saul was like a dog that returns to his vomit (Prov 26:11). Unbelievably, he visited a witch! What a tragedy, considering "Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land" (1 Sam. 28:3). He had done so when his spiritual life was on course and his priority was his love for God. A believer who loves God will love what God loves and hate what God hates. Because of his love for God, Saul had purged the nation of mediums and spiritists. In his lukewarmness, he returned to that practice, which he knew was totally abhorrent to God. "Saul then said to his attendants, 'Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her'" (v. 7; see also 2 Peter 2:20-22).

Saul went to the witch his servants found (1 Sam. 28:8). He disguised himself, knowing if the woman recognized him, she would probably lie, denying she was involved in this illegal practice. "But the woman said to him, 'Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?'" (v. 9). Ironically, the woman didn't know it was Saul, the very man who had previously banished these

practices. Sadly, like Saul, many believers today are dabbling in the occult by dealing with so-called psychics, spiritists and palm readers. Make no mistake; demonic activities are real.

Meddling with demons is dangerous. Scripture forbids believers to be involved in demonic practices: "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 19:31; see also Deut. 18:10). The Apostle Paul sharply warned, "I do not want you to become sharers in demons" (1 Cor. 10:20). "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8 NIV). The potential of demonic involvement abounds. Saul had regressed so far in his spiritual life, instead of going to the all-powerful God of the universe for help, he went to a witch. This could happen to anyone and it is a great reminder why it is so important to carefully guard your spiritual life.

Saul Asks for the Dead Samuel to be Summoned

The actual calling up of the dead, in Scripture, is recorded here in our passage and nowhere else. Saul asked the witch to *"Bring up Samuel"* for him (1 Sam. 28:11, emphasis added). She did, and he appeared, but that is not the norm. God did something unusual, or as some scholars explain necromancers or mediums have no real power over the deceased, especially the righteous, but can only produce counterfeits. Samuel's appearance is explained by the intervention of the Lord, who graciously permitted Saul one last encounter with the prophet.

Having called him up, Samuel lambasted Saul, "Why have you disturbed me?" (1 Sam. 28:15). Samuel was in a place of no more sorrow, no more pain, in paradise. Keep this in mind as it will help resolve the issue of the eternal security of the believer. Samuel told Saul three things. First, God will give Saul's kingdom to David (v. 17). Second, Philistines will defeat Saul's army (v. 19). Third, Saul and his sons will join him in paradise (v. 19).

Eternal Security of the Believer

> *... tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam. 28:19).*

Samuel's assurance to Saul, "tomorrow you and your sons will be with me," is a passage many Bible teachers have overlooked when explaining eternal security. Old Testament believers went to paradise upon death. The Lord casts light on the subject: "The time came when the beggar [Lazarus, a believer] died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side [in paradise]. The rich man [an unbeliever] also died and was buried… [and went to] Hades… [a place of] torment…" (Luke 16:22-24, emphasis added).

Many of us think Saul never went to paradise because he lost the Holy Spirit's empowerment, his experience with the evil spirit (1 Sam. 16:14) and his prolonged carnality. Amazingly, that is not the case; "tomorrow you and your sons will be with me [in paradise]" (1 Sam. 28:19, emphasis added). Remember, Saul's sons include Jonathan, a matured child of God. This is the truth of Scripture. Once a believer is saved, he remains saved.

What if a believer never repents of his sins and dies? Would he still go to heaven? To answer the question, we return to Saul. First: Where was Samuel when Saul died? In paradise. Second: Where did Saul go after death? He joined Samuel, according to Scripture. Last question: Did Saul repent of his sins before he died? No. He died in sin. Despite this, he went to paradise. Because of prolonged carnality, he lost spiritual rewards. Scripture is clear. "If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:14-15). Saul finally used up his last increment of grace; God had no recourse but to call him home.

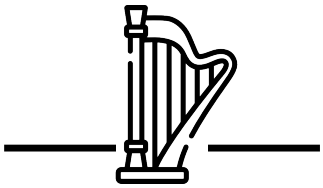
Saul Hits the Panic Button

> *Then Saul immediately fell full length upon the ground and was very afraid because of the words of Samuel [that Saul would die tomorrow…]; also there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day and all night (1 Sam. 28:20, emphasis added).*

"Saul… fell full length upon the ground… was very afraid …there was no strength in him.…" What an agonizing experience! What a painful way to begin a journey to paradise. Saul died a thousand times before his death, a reminder that anyone who tramples underfoot the holiness of God (His righteousness or justice) is guaranteed to drink His wrath.

"It is a fearful thing to [trample underfoot the holiness of God and] fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31, emphasis added).

No believer can die well unless he has lived well. A believer who fails the test of the spiritual life will hit the panic button when confronted with death. On the other hand, a believer who is spiritually on course will not be shaken by death when it comes. David said it beautifully: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4).



No believer can die well unless he has lived well.

The Reality of Death

Death is a vehicle that transports one to an eternal state, either in God's presence or away from it. For an unbeliever, death is a vehicle to an eternal nightmare. He is separated from God and enters into a place "where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48). There, he is subjected to an unbearable torment for all eternity.

For a believer, death is a vehicle of glorious hope, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of the godly ones" (Ps. 116:15). He "enters into [eternal] peace" (Isa. 57:2, emphasis added), in a place "where God will wipe away every tear… there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain, the first things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4). The death of a believer is a promotion to glory! This prompts a thought-provoking question: "Why do many believers dread death, knowing they will be in eternal bliss?" The answer is simple: *uncertainty*.

Fear Caused By Uncertainty

Fear is the bona fide experience of unpreparedness. Thoughts of death consume and frighten believers who are not ready to meet their God. They are full of dread, not knowing what lies ahead. They are fearful and do not know the implications of arriving in heaven with their assignment unfinished. The Apostle John had a similar concern for his audience: "And now little children, abide in Him [keep your spiritual life active], so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not

shrink away from Him in shame, at His coming" (1 John 2:28, emphasis added).

When the Apostle Paul thought of the future state, he wrote, "I run in such a way, as not without aim… lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified [from obtaining the prize]" (1 Cor. 9:26-27, emphasis added). Paul lived in such a manner that he would not have to fear uncertainty but could look forward with confident expectation. When the apostle knew he had totally fulfilled his assigned mission he was able to say:

> *"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come [a reference to his imminent death]. I have fought the good fight [fear of uncertainty erased], I have finished the course, I have kept the faith [I have applied God's Word to the maximum]; in the future is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will award to me on that day [confident expectation highlighted]…" (2 Tim. 4:6-8, emphasis added).*

Death is a wonderful experience for a believer on course spiritually: "We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). Given a choice, the Apostle Paul preferred to die and go to heaven, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

The Apostle Paul was not afraid of death. He was not afraid to see his Judge. With his mission accomplished, he was eager to face God. See the difference? The opposite is true for a believer in prolonged carnality. He never looks forward to dying. He dies a thousand times before he actually dies.

Consider Saul, who had the opposite reaction to that of the Apostle Paul. Unlike Paul, King Saul was not looking forward to dying because of his abject spiritual failure. He panicked when Samuel told him he would die the following day. He is contrasted with believers of the Old Testament who preceded him in death. Consider Joshua's word of encouragement to his people, Israel:

> *"Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth [anticipation of death], and you know in all your hearts and in*

> *all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed" (Jos. 23:14, emphasis added).*

Joshua was not afraid of death. He was looking forward to it. That is not all; he recounted God's faithfulness: "not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed." That is the right way to die, celebrating God's faithfulness. David, unlike Saul, had a relaxed mental attitude regarding death and, like Joshua, admonished his son, Solomon:

> *"I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man. Keep the charge of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the Law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn" (1 Kings 2:2-3).*

God has put together a superior plan designed to help us live a life free of fear and trepidation. We shoot ourselves in the foot when we turn our backs on it. Saul was a perfect example of one who turned a deaf ear to God's awesome plan. Time and again, he rebuffed God's warning, "until the wrath of the LORD arose… until there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:16).

Saul Dies the Sin Unto Death

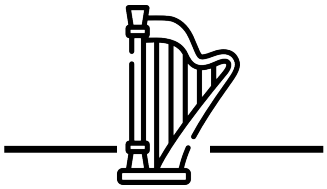
> *Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel… the Philistines killed Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua the sons of Saul. The battle went heavily against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was badly wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armor bearer, 'Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, otherwise these uncircumcised will come and pierce me through and make sport of me.' But his armor bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. So Saul took his sword and fell on it. When his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died with him (1 Sam. 31:1-5).*

Consider the details of the above passage. It is comforting to know God keeps His Word. Samuel's prophesy came true. The Philistines prevailed against Saul, his army and his three sons. Consider how

Saul's sons died: quickly. When it comes to how Saul died, Scripture was graphic: "The battle went heavily against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was badly wounded by the archers." That was by divine design. His death and the manner thereof, was a result of an accumulation of disregard for God and His mandates.

Seeing how badly wounded Saul was, he called upon his armor bearer to kill him. His armor bearer refused. "So Saul took his sword and fell on it." Saul finished off where the enemy left off; he took his own life. *He committed suicide*. The point is, God called him home. "So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the LORD, because of the word of the LORD which he did not keep; and also because he asked counsel of a medium, making inquiry of it, and did not inquire of the LORD. Therefore He killed him and turned the kingdom to David the son of Jesse".

Clearly *"Saul died for his trespass"*; he died the sin unto death. Tragically, he committed suicide. Keep in mind, he was a believer. We ask again: Where did Saul go after his death? The Bible tells us he went to Paradise where Samuel was, "… tomorrow you [Saul] and your sons will be with me" (1 Sam. 28:19, emphasis added). Samuel's assurance to Saul was similar to our Lord's assurance to the dying criminal on the cross: "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). The difference between the two was evident: The former was a dying believer in prolonged carnality and the latter an unsaved sinner who at the last minute trusted in Christ.



I urge you to abandon tradition and believe Scripture!

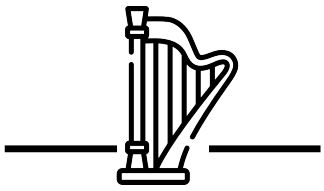
Spiritual failure *does not* cancel "our so great salvation." Rather it robs one of enormous blessing in both time and the eternal state, "though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15 RSV). That is what the Bible teaches. I urge you to abandon tradition and believe Scripture!

The question is, how would you like to die – painfully or joyfully? It will be joyful only if you choose God's amazing plan. By the way, it is not too late to return to His plan if you have abandoned it.

In contrast to the tragic end of Saul's life, we now wrap up our study by observing David's grace mental attitude.

David's Grace-Orientation

You can see why we chose the title: *David, a Symphony of God's Grace*. He understood God's grace and equally lived it out. One can brag about one's in-depth knowledge of grace; but the true test of grace is in its application. David had yet another opportunity to allow his knowledge of God's grace to permeate his action and to let his light shine before men. (Matt 5:16)



One can brag about one's in-depth knowledge of grace; but the true test of grace is in its application.

David's grace orientation was linked to his action after his conquest of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 30:1-17). Here is the story: In his absence, the Amalekites raided the city where David lodged with his family during the time he was running from Saul. They looted and took many captive even his *two wives* (v. 5).

Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, 'Please bring me the ephod.' So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. David inquired of the LORD, saying, 'Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?' And He said to him, 'Pursue, for you will surely overtake them, and you will surely rescue all' (1 Sam. 30: 7-8).

Note that David inquired of the Lord. What a contrast to Saul, who sought help from a witch. The truth is, one who is occupied with the Lord does nothing independently of Him. He always seeks God's guidance and plan in all things: "I can do nothing in My own initiative. As I hear, I judge" (John 5:30). David was certainly occupied with the Lord; so he asked Him whether he could go to war. The Lord gave him a green light to pursue his enemies. He took "the six hundred men who were with him" (1 Sam. 30:9).

When David and his men came to the brook of Besor, two hundred of his men were unable to continue the fight because of exhaustion (1 Sam. 30:9). There he left them and continued with those who were

able. David and his men defeated the Amalekites, regained everything which had been taken from them, and acquired great spoils of victory.

Grace in the Distribution of Spoils

Observe: Upon his return, David wanted to share the spoils with everyone, even those who did not complete the battle: "When David came to the two hundred men who were too exhausted to follow David, who had also been left at the brook Besor, and they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him, then David approached the people and greeted them" (1 Sam. 30:21).

David saluted the men. Are we missing something? David actually gave a salute to those who did not toil to the end. That's a mental attitude of grace. He was not angry with them; he did not look at them with disgust. He simply saluted them with great joy. He did not stop there. He proceeded to demonstrate grace. He wanted to share with them in equal proportion all they acquired from war, even though, physically, they could not fight to the end. This is grace!

Selfishness is the antithesis of grace. David's men were absorbed with self-centeredness: "Then all the wicked and worthless men among those who went with David said, 'Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away and depart'"(1 Sam. 30:22). You read it correctly. They were not ready to reflect the grace which they themselves had received from God, the Author of grace.

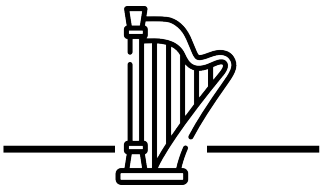
> *Then David said, 'You must not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given us, who has kept us and delivered into our hand the band that came against us. And who will listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike.' So it has been from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day. (1 Sam. 30:23-25).*

God's Grace and Fairness

Many who are not on the mission field often get anxious about what might become of them regarding the reward of the Great Commission.

Herein is good news: God will reward in equal proportion those who are on the supply line, who support those on the mission field, "For as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike." The truth glows even brighter. Those in the supply line under the shadow of the fighting soldiers are themselves in the battlefield.

Rejoice for our God "will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity" (Ps. 98:9). This ends our work on *David a Symphony of God's Grace* and prepares the way for our next work, *The Rise and Fall and Restoration of King David*.



Those in the supply line under the shadow of the fighting soldiers are themselves in the battlefield.

Until we meet again in His Word, may God richly bless you, my beloved!

"To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forever. Amen" (Jude 1:24-25).

May the Lord use the truth gained from the study of this book to prepare you for the "praise of His glory" in the most wonderful and precious name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Reflection

It is totally sensational, walking through David’s journey from beginning to end, to behold how remarkably God graced him out in all respects. David was just a lad, taking care of his father Jesse’s flock when God’s grace overruled and made him the chosen vessel. We saw how God delivered him from dangerous animals, the bear and the lion (1 Sam. 17:34-37). And here we are beholding afresh God’s rescue after rescue of his servant David from a barrage of pursuits by Saul. This underscores our title, *David, a Symphony of God’s Grace.*

With this in view, let us review eleven basic principles:

- Grace mirrors God’s character and policy both in eternity past, the present and eternity future.

- As a result of God's immutability, His grace policy is totally undiminished.

- Your failures—past, present and future—were thoroughly known by God in eternity past. That means your failures in time cannot surprise God; it can only shock you or your brethren.

- From time immemorial, God factored in and computed your failures—past, present and future—into His overall plan for your life.

- When it comes to spiritual failure, each believer, no matter what his spiritual level, can commit any sin. David learned that lesson firsthand, as we will see in the second part of our study. He couldn’t believe he could do what he did to an innocent couple. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, Uriah. My question is this: What other sins, after salvation, could you commit that could surpass David's despicable acts?

- Your failures as a believer cannot change God's grace policy or His plan for your life. They can delay, and draw maximum discipline from the Bar of Eternal Justice. Case in point: When I was 11 years old, my spiritual vocation as God’s servant was made clear; and,

like Jonah, I went in the opposite direction, to pursue medicine. After an awful and unbearable 13 years of intensified discipline, as a result of disobedience to God’s will for my life, the Lord finally pushed and dragged me to where He planned for me to be, and to do what He wanted me to do. But not without the price of many bruises. Like my brother, who pastors a Bible church in Mississippi, put it: If God asks you to jump, ask Him, “Lord, how high?” That is to say, when God speaks, all human debates and excuses are over. In other words, He will make you jump, either joyfully or painfully. He is Sovereign. Do not ever forget that!

- To that effect, no amount of failure on our part can cancel or supersede the riches of God’s unconquerable grace. David was a master of this valuable lesson.

- What we know from Scripture is each believer in the Old Testament, both great and small, had a measure of failure in their spiritual life.

- Sin is sin—no matter how little it ruptures our fellowship with God—and can only be recovered when 1 John 1:9 is applied.

- We must reject the temptation to make other believers' failures the object of our amusement. It is arrogant, it is evil, it is a sign of spiritual babyhood, and discipline often ensues.

- And finally, when you, as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, are walking in God’s light and you suddenly fail, no matter what the frequency or intensity, get back into fellowship, isolate the guilt that goes with your failure and move forward, onward to where sorrow and God's grace meet.

Appendix

The Shepherd's Love for His Flock

A shepherd was employed to tend, guard, and feed sheep. His equipment consisted of a knapsack made of goat's skin, to tote food and other articles. He usually carried a sling to protect himself and the sheep against wild animals. A rod (stick) about 30 inches long with a knob on one end was a necessary item in a shepherd's inventory. The shepherd's staff resembled a walking cane, usually with a crook on one end. He carried a flute made of reeds to entertain himself and to calm his sheep, which he knew by name, and they knew his voice. He saw that they were all safe in the fold at night.[7]

This is a description befitting David—the shepherd boy. From this, we discover the qualities of a good shepherd: namely, tending, feeding and guarding. We will attempt to analyze these three elements, since they cast light on David's mental attitude. Our Lord Jesus Christ brought these three words (tend, guard and feed) to focus when He met Peter at the Sea of Galilee, where Peter and some of our Lord's disciples were fishing. In the Apostle John's account, we read:

> *So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love [agapao] Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love [phileo] You.' He said to him, 'Tend [bosko] my lambs [baby sheep].' He said to him again, the second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love [agapao] Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love [phileo] You.' He said to him, 'Shepherd [poimaino] My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love [phileo] Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love [phileo] Me?' And he said to Him, 'You know all things [appealing to the Lord's omniscience]; You know that I love [phileo] You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend [bosko] My sheep.' (John 21:15-17, emphasis added).*

A handful of commentaries, with varying views, have been written on the above three verses. It's not my intention to dispute any

[7] Tenney Merrill: The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary: Zondervan Publishing House (1964), 599

commentary; however, by God's grace, I wish to take a closer look at these verses, as the principles in them apply to every believer, particularly to pastors.

The Lord deliberately selected His words in John 21:15-17 to teach Peter and all of us a valuable lesson. I believe the Lord had three groups of believers in mind (the baby, the adolescent, and the mature or adult believer) when He addressed the Apostle Peter, and He used each verb accordingly. He mentioned virtue or unselfish love twice, that's agapao, the strongest love. The emphasis is always on the integrity of the one loving and never on its object. Quite frankly, the object of the one who has virtue love can be obnoxious, but it would not make any difference. Finally, He used personal love, that is phileo, which has an emotional connotation—a rapport kind of love. And in such love, the integrity of the object is always in view and determines the direction of the love and controls its duration. It is based on a mutual reciprocation of respect, admiration and integrity of those loving. Let us examine those three elements of a good shepherd: tend, guard and feed.

Tend

A baby sheep, or lamb, needs all the tender care or attention it can receive. It cannot feed itself and usually is frail when it walks, or when it needs to run in case of an attack. Similarly, a human baby needs someone to hold his hand and guide him to take his first steps. He is likely to fall if allowed to stand on his own. It requires patience and virtue love to deal with their inadequacies and shortcomings. They are ever ready to be where you do not want them to be, go where you do not want them to go, and do things you don't want them to do. They are babies. With this in mind, the Lord called Peter's attention to this dynamic virtue love, which he would need if he were to be successful in caring for lambs or baby believers.

Acquiring this unique love takes time and training of the mind with biblical truth and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."(Rom 12:2 Phillips). As the believer's soul is transformed by God's Word, he will come to see himself as a wretched and most graced-out believer. The believer's recollection of God's

mercy and grace toward him while he was a baby believer should compel him to treat other baby believers with the same mercy and grace. "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Rom. 15:1). As for David, the shepherd boy, his spiritual life accelerated rather quickly as he tended his father's flock. His shepherding experience, combined with humility and grace orientation, would serve as a buffer in his future career as Israel's finest king.

Guard

"… Simon, son of John, do you [agapao] Me? … Shepherd My Sheep." The word for shepherd [poimaino] means "guard," which involves the whole office of the shepherd, guarding, folding of the flock as well as leading it to nourishment. This is a stronger word than "tend." Whom does the Lord have in mind when He employs this word? The adolescent believers. They are the most difficult to deal with—terribly stubborn in every sense of the word. Sometimes, it requires a little knock of correction with the shepherd's staff to keep them from injuring themselves. If you leave adolescent sheep for a moment, they wander off in different directions, making it harder for their shepherd to keep them in place. Often, the chore of guarding them can be ,frustrating. It requires virtue love to deal with them—in grace, of course. It gives a shepherd the opportunity to display his poise under pressure.

This is also true of life in general, especially in a local church. The adolescent believer tends to be arrogant, with the potential to draw a shepherd or a believer down to their level, if the shepherd does not possess virtue love – or has it, but is not vigilant in employing it. That is why the Lord underscored the importance of acquiring agapao love as a shepherd or a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the course of David's spiritual growth, he attained agapao love, which was a necessary ingredient in his vocation as a shepherd. It is a major and precious component that set him apart from his peers. And how did he get there? Grace! "For who regards you as superior? And what do you have [including virtue love] that you did not receive? But if you did receive it [and you did], why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7, emphasis added).

Feed

The first two times the Lord asked Peter, "Do you love Me?" He used agapao; but the the third time, He used phileo, saying, "Do you phileo Me? … Tend My sheep." Why this change from agapao to phileo? Because the Lord was referring to mature believers. You would agree with me that being in the company of mature believers is like a trip to Paradise. Their conversation is always seasoned with salt, full of grace-orientation, humility and testimonies that call for praise to the Most High God. Above all, they are teachable, eager to learn new truths—always waiting to be fed. These are sheep that recognize their shepherd's voice. Fellowship with them is nothing but friendly or an outburst of phileo love.

As David cared for his father's sheep, he began to love them, even putting his own life in danger to rescue them from the danger of prey. And thus, when King Saul asked him what credentials would qualify him to go to war with Goliath, he replied, "… Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear…." (1 Sam. 17:34-36).

He was a young lad with astonishing confidence in his God. Above all, his knowledge of God's Word through parental teaching, dreams, angelic and other means available to him was all he needed to excel in his spiritual life. Perhaps with the exception of the Apostle Paul, David had an unparalleled comprehension of God's grace, more than anyone in human history. The amazing thing about David is his spiritual failures were unequaled; yet God met his failures with unsurpassed grace.

Buy Truth, and Do Not Sell It

(Proverbs 23:23a)

Are you aware that sound Bible teaching is a precious and priceless piece of spiritual jewelry? Indeed, church history has shown how difficult sound teaching is to come by, especially in modern day Christianity! So, when God from His oasis of grace leads us to the pearls of truth in His infallible and inerrant Word, we ought to cherish them without reserve. The Bible is the treasure box that holds your capacity to enjoy abundant life, to reap maximum happiness in life, friendship, marriage, business, and to enjoy unprecedented blessings for today and tomorrow; therefore, “buy truth” [stay grounded in the Word] “for wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her” (Proverbs 8:11).

Truth: For you are not under law but under *grace.*
(Romans 6:14b)

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."
(2 Peter 3:18)

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