

Session 12. How David Overcame Fear

INTRODUCTION

This is Session 12, 1 Samuel 21:1-9, and we'll look at this in a little more detail next week, Lord willing. In 1 Samuel 21:1, what's happening is that David has now fled from Saul. He goes to the city of Nob to Ahimelech the high priest. He was "afraid when he met David" (1 Sam. 21:1). He said to David, "Why are you alone, and no one is with you?" (ibid).

David told him a lie, and we'll look at that in a little more detail next week. What he says is, "I need help from you. I was in such a hurry, I didn't have time to get weapons and I didn't have time to get food, etc." He says, "I was on the king's business" (v. 2, paraphrased), and he tells them it was urgent, so they give him some food and bring out of the trophy case the sword of Goliath. Goliath was 9 feet 9 inches tall; can you imagine? He was nearly 10 feet tall. He had this massive sword, and it was right there in the trophy case, if you will, in Nob, the city of priests. There were eighty-five priests there. Again, we'll look at this in more detail later, but I just wanted to contextualize what's going to happen next.

"DAVID AROSE AND FLED THAT DAY FROM BEFORE SAUL, AND WENT TO...GATH"

David takes Goliath's sword and then takes off. "David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath" (1 Sam. 21:10). This is a very interesting story. He goes to Achish king of Gath. Philistia was a coalition of five major cities that made up the Philistine nation. It's not very big, but as far as nations went in those days, it was an average-size nation. It was made up of five cities. Each city had its own king, and a coalition of them together established the Philistine nation. They dwelt on the west side of the nation of Israel, right there on the Mediterranean Sea down towards the south. One of the cities is Gath. Achish was the king of Gath. He was one of the five kings. It was from that very city that Goliath was the champion. David had Goliath's sword and he went to Gath with Goliath's sword. He wasn't exactly putting that together yet. I tell you, when fear gets hold of you, one plus one no longer equals two.

THE PHILISTINES ALREADY CONSIDERED DAVID THE KING OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

The servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David the king of the land?" (1 Sam. 21:11). David, again, was maybe twenty-five or twenty-six years old at the time. It's hard to say. But he was in his mid-twenties. They had been calling David the king instead of Saul, who was in his sixties. They said, "No, this is the real king." That's an interesting story already. They said, "Yes, we know Saul is the king, but really, David is the one the whole nation is following."

David might have said, "That's exactly my problem!"

Then of course, the prophet of God could have whispered in his heart, "No, David, your problem is that you have need of a deeper foundation because of your calling yet to come."

"Is he not the king of the land of Israel?" they asked. "Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying, 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'" (1 Sam. 21:11). That little tune wasn't just on the top as the number one song in Israel. It was the number one song in the Philistine nations as well. They knew of the young virgins of Israel dancing in the streets singing songs about young David that angered Saul. They knew about it. This was a number one song for a long time. It's years later now. This is some years later.

DAVID FEIGNS MADNESS IN HIS DESPERATION TO SAVE HIS OWN LIFE FROM THE SWORD

“David took these words to heart” (1 Sam. 21:12). He “was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath.” He basically said, “Oh no, they know who I am.” In 1 Samuel 21:13 what he did was something very, very undignified. He kicked into a fear mode again. He was very much afraid. Fear dominated his heart. The thing we learn from the life of David is that you can be a godly man or woman and still have some moments where the godliness is hard to see. A godly person isn’t just a person who never, ever fails. It’s a person where the rule of their life is that they’re given to God. This is a dark moment in David’s life. Fear lays hold of him. “He changed his behavior” (1 Sam. 21:13)—before the king and before the king’s court, is the implication. He pretended madness in their hands. “He scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard” (ibid).

Achish said to his servants, “Look at that. That’s the man who killed Goliath” (1 Sam. 21:14, paraphrased). The word “look” there has a lot to it. “Look, you see the man is insane” (ibid, NKJV). In other words, “The man has gone mad! He’s crazy! Why have you brought a madman to me? He’s no threat to me. A man that will stoop to that indignity, I’m not worried about him.” He says, “Have I need of a madman, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?” (1 Sam. 21:15).

GOD FAVORS DAVID EVEN IN EXILE; HE BECOMES ACHISH’S FAVORITE MAN

It’s a fascinating story because of the bigger picture. He ends up going into Achish’s house and becoming like his son later on in 1 Samuel 27. That’s the amazing part of the story. David’s rationale is this: Saul is a coward. The spirit of the Lord isn’t on him. Saul is afraid. He’s actually afraid of war; he’s a man of war but he no longer has courage. He’s fearful with this evil spirit on him, etc. David said, “Saul will chase me forever until he kills me. I’ll cross over the line and go to the Philistines. Saul will never cross that line. He will be too afraid to seek for me. His hatred is only superseded by his fear of the Philistines; the only thing greater than his hatred of me is his fear of the Philistines, so I’ll go into the hand of the Philistines to get Saul to leave me alone.” This is part of David’s despair. Remember back in 1 Samuel 20:3, how he says, “There is but a step between me and death”—in other words, “I know I will die.” David is operating in compromise. He’s operating in fear. He wasn’t supposed to do this. He’s famous over there. He has Goliath’s sword at his side. That’s just amazing. It’s really hard to know exactly what’s happening, but if you take 1 Samuel 27 into account, then David’s motive was to win Achish’s favor. Surely it’s clear by 1 Samuel 27, when he goes to Gath the second time. He wins Achish’s favor and becomes like a son to him. As a matter of fact, he becomes Achish’s favorite person in the world. The favor of the Lord is on David. Even when he’s in the wrong place, it’s still working. The favor of the Lord is on him.

WHATEVER MEASURE OF FAVOR YOU HAVE, YOU WILL ANSWER FOR ON THE LAST DAY

That’s an interesting principle. I have sometimes seen the anointed of the Lord get into sin and get completely out of their calling. I don’t mean that they get into sin because they’re out of their calling. They get into perverse sins and therefore they’re out of their calling. They have to lay it down. They go into the business arena. I literally know five or six men who have done this. They make millions of dollars instantly. You say, “How does this happen?” The favor of the Lord is upon them, but they’ll give an account for it on the last day. Whatever measure of favor God has put upon you in this life, you’ll answer for it on the last day. I don’t mean that you’ll go to hell for it. I’m saying that the judgment seat is the great equalizer. When Billy Graham stands before the Lord, as I have said before, the Lord won’t say, “Billy Graham, oh my, look at this: You led thousands to My Son.” That won’t happen. He’s going to say, “Billy Graham, you’ve led millions, but look at what I gave you. We’ll measure your life in the equation of what I gave unto you.” The idea that more is better

isn't necessarily an equation that holds up at the judgment seat. What's better is love. Love is better, not more impact. Love is better, because the impact is given by the Lord.

Anyway, I have seen people get into sin, have to lay their ministry down, and step over into another arena of business, and instantly make a tremendous amount of money with favor on everything that they touch. I said, "Lord, this is truly amazing."

Again, I imagine the Lord says something like, "They will give an account for everything that I have given unto them. Really what I measure is their growth in love, not how much they made or how easy or how hard it was. I do it by love, by voluntary love."

THE MYSTERY OF WHY ACHISH DOESN'T KILL DAVID HERE WHERE HE STANDS

So what happens is that David goes over there to hide. I think he's trying to get Achish's favor. He believes it can happen, because he does it in 1 Samuel 27. The men around him are completely alarmed. They say, "Wait a second... This is the champion of Israel, number one. He killed the champion of the Philistines. Number two: it wasn't too long ago when he crossed lines and killed 200 of our soldiers to give a dowry to King Saul." One man might have said, "Yes, I was there; I escaped. He only had to kill a hundred, but he killed 200 of us, he and his little band of men."

David is saying, "No, no. That wasn't me. No."

The man says, "Yes, it was you. I was right there by you. You're the one that did that."

David says, "Oh no..."

I don't know, because it's still a mystery to me, in 1 Samuel 21:13 when he pretends madness why Achish out of vengeance and anger doesn't kill him right there for killing the 200. David has won a lot of these little skirmishes with the Philistines. He has won a lot of them, too, in the last number of years. I don't know why, in the natural, Achish didn't kill him. I know from the favor of the Lord that he didn't. But for some reason Achish connects in his mind, "This man is no threat to me; if he's willing to stoop to this indignity, then he has lost all his abilities to impact me in a negative way. Maybe he's a bigger trophy that we've conquered him this way than he would be if we killed him." I don't know what Achish's reasoning was for not killing a man who did more harm to him than any man in their history up to now, but he doesn't. He dismisses him and says, "No, you can't live in my house. You can't be a part of my house." That was obviously an issue, and again, in 1 Samuel 27 that's the issue again and at last David succeeds.

THE THREE PROMINENT PROPHETIC VOICES IN THE LIFE OF DAVID

"David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam" (1 Sam. 22:1). Adullam is a city near which there was a famous cave called the cave of Adullam. We'll look at that later. I just wanted you to see that he escaped or he departed from there to the cave of Adullam. Then in 1 Samuel 22:5 the prophet Gad says to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go to the land of Judah." There are three prophets in David's life just for the record. We won't develop this in any great way in this course, but David has Samuel when he is young, old prophet Samuel. Gad is a contemporary. He's a contemporary with David. He's about his age. He's with him all his days, from his youth straight through. I imagine that when David is twenty-five or twenty-six that Gad is about twenty-five or twenty-six. He's maybe a little older, but he's with David even at the end. We

know that he lived to be extremely old. Nathan was a prophet when David was an older king. He was a younger prophet. David had an old prophet when he was young and then a peer-aged prophet. When he was an older king he had a younger prophet. Those are the three prophets in David's reign over Israel. They were the three prominent prophetic voices.

“I DESPAIRED EVEN OF LIFE...”

Anyway, the prophet Gad appears and tells him, “God says, ‘Go to Judah.’” That’s a very significant prophecy. “Go to where the heat is and stay there.” David undoubtedly tells Gad, “Judah? Wait, Judah isn’t that big.” He has 3,000 soldiers. “I can’t go to Judah.”

“Stay in Judah and the Lord will protect you.”

It’s the same thing with Peter: “Peter, get out of the boat.” Getting out of the boat, walking on the water, was the same thing as staying in Judah. Going to Judah was getting out of the comfort zone and needing God to display His power to deliver David. Judah was big trouble for David. The word of the Lord came by special revelation: “Stay in Judah. Go there and stay there is,” the meaning of it. David goes there for a little while.

Turn to 1 Samuel 27:1. “David said in his heart, ‘I know I will die one of these days by the hand of Saul’” (1 Sam. 27:1, paraphrased).

“No, David, don’t do this...” He’s only sixteen months out from God killing Saul. God is the one who killed Saul when he was seventy years old. David was thirty and Saul was seventy. Saul was forty years older than David. He was sixteen months out. But he didn’t know it. If you compare Scripture with Scripture, he’s about a year and a half away from being king over Judah, and then eventually, seven years after that, king over Israel. David is a year and a half out, and he says he’s wavering. He says, “This is getting so wearisome. It’s so wearisome.” He’s twenty-eight and a half years old right now. He says, “I don’t know. I’m going to die. This seventy-year old king is going to kill me. I know he’s about at the end of his reign, but he’s going to kill me before it’s over. There’s nothing better for me.”

THE DARKEST MOMENTS OF DAVID’S LIFE – A FEW SHORT MONTHS LEFT IN EXILE

“Listen to yourself, David, what are you doing?” This is the true David. He’s in a bad moment again. “There’s nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape and disobey the prophet of God and go to the land of Philistines” (1 Sam. 27:1, paraphrased). I’m adding the “disobey.” “Saul will despair of looking for me and I’ll escape out of his hands.”

Gad is with him. Gad even goes with him back over to the land of the Philistines. It’s not recorded, but I believe Gad, who really received the Word of the Lord, said to him, “David, you can’t go back to Gath. You have to stay in Judah.”

“No, I can’t; I’m going back.”

This story, again, is a fascinating story. We’ll look at that in the next couple of weeks. He goes back to Achish the second time. It’s a couple of years later. He lies to him about three or four times here. He gets caught in some of his lies. His city gets burned to the ground. David’s army has now grown to 600 men. All the wives and children have been taken away as captives by the Amalekites and David’s 600 men are thinking about killing

David. It's a fantastic story, especially because he lived. We'll look at that later. I just wanted you to know that he went back there and lied to Achish and sold his bill of goods. Achish put him in his house as his son. It looked like everything was working for a while.

THE POWER OF DAVID'S LIFE WAS HIS CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S MERCY AGAIN AND AGAIN

Turn to Psalm 34. David had some pretty big blunders, but the power of David's life was his confidence in God's mercy to come back again, time after time after time. The one thing that David never lost hold of was that God delighted in the people who would come back to Him, no matter what they did, and say, "God, I repent. I'll walk away from this." That's the hallmark, in my opinion, of David's life. We think of David as the great worshiper. I think of David as the man with unusual confidence in the mercy of the Lord, that facet of God's beauty called His mercy. He saw the Lord as more than merciful, but he saw the mercy of the Lord in an unprecedented way. That's what made David a worshiper. David was a worshiper because of what he saw and what he experienced as a weak man before a good God.

PSALM 34: DAVID FACES HIS FEARS AND FINDS THE MERCY OF THE LORD

Look at the top of Psalm 34. "A psalm of David" is the title, "when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed." *Abimelech* is the royal name, and *Achish* is the family name. This is Achish. It's when David is feigning madness. It's not a mistake, because kings sometimes have four or five names. *Abimelech* would have been his royal name; *Achish* would have been his family name. Psalm 34 was written after David faced his fears. When he went to Gath, both times he went in the fear that God wouldn't keep His word to him. He went in compromise because he didn't believe God. The second time, he deliberately defied the word of God the prophet to go to Judah. The idea was to stay in Judah, because he was going to be king over Judah in about a year and half after this. He lost heart and went over to Achish again.

This psalm could be called, "David facing his fears and finding the Lord." It's a psalm about the fear, and David writes under the anointing of the Spirit to tell you some of his journey and some of what he learned in facing his fear. He's in a time of great compromise. He yields and he recovers and tells us what he thinks about God. There are two basic fears. There may be a hundred fears, but there are two that David is constantly talking about. It's his fear of man, number one, and his fear of calamity, number two. When I think of the fear of man, I think of the social fear of man, of receiving the displeasure of someone we care about. That's what I mean by the fear of man. David references the fact that he didn't want to yield to popular opinion. He didn't want to become a man-fearing, man-pleasing person. The second fear that he talks about even more prominently was the fear of calamity that he would actually be killed or that harm would come to him. There are other fears besides those, but those are the two main fears that David talks about. I would say in our society that the fear of man, of pleasing people and disobeying God because we don't want someone to think badly about us, is a more prominent reality than a calamity destroying our lives. Most of us don't live in a present tense fear of calamity. Sometimes in a season of our lives people will think that, but typically it's fear of man that's the real Goliath before this culture.

A THEOLOGY OF FREEDOM FROM FEAR

Psalm 34:11 tells us that David is speaking this to his children. These lessons are lessons he taught in his home. He spoke them to his children and he spoke them to everyone else. In Psalm 34:11 he's saying, "This is my curriculum of what I teach people about fear." If you want to really develop a theology of liberation from fear, I believe you can find it in the twenty-two verses of Psalm 34. It's a Holy Spirit prescription of how to walk free from fear. I have never really developed it and don't know that I ever will, but someone whom God has called

to this ministry of touching people's fear in a real, focused way can feel free to do that. I want to challenge you to study everything you can study on Psalm 34. You would be fascinated as to what the implications, are line upon line. He states in Psalm 34:11, "This is what I teach my family. This is what I lay down, line upon line, these doctrines, these concepts of what I have discovered to walk free from fear" (paraphrased). Because David really did walk free from fear in the latter end of his life. When I say "free from fear," I don't mean he never had an impulse to fear, but it never dominated him at the end. David was fearless as humans go at the end. The last ten, twenty, thirty years of his life, he was fearless. He knew about overcoming fear. He had little residues of it undoubtedly, but it wasn't something that was a major issue in his life. He was going out to war all the time. Some of you saw the war in *Braveheart*, and when they hit you, then you're in trouble when you go to war. He went to war all the time; he was fearless. I looked at that and said, "Man, where is the Novocain? That's trouble."

This is what David taught the 400 that grew to 600, the men who were around him. They were with him all the time, especially after he went to Gath the second time. The first time they weren't with him, because they gathered to him after he left Gath the first time. They gathered to him, 400 strong, and it grew to 600. Then he took them all back to Gath with him the second time. This is what's going on. Again, he had been running from Saul. Now he had to face the Philistines. They figured out that he was the man who killed 200 of their men for the dowry. He was the one who killed Goliath. He stood up and said, "I have some serious fears."

A GENERAL OUTLINE OF PSALM 34

Here is a general outline of Psalm 34. The first ten verses are his testimony. He tells you what he experienced (Ps. 34:1-10). That's testimonial. Psalm 34:11-22 is his teaching. It's his actual doctrine. It's line upon line what he taught to others. Psalm 34:1-10 would be his song. It was the song he sang in his heart before God. Psalm 34:11-22 was the sermon he would have given. It was that into which he brought others, line upon line.

THE ECONOMIC TROUBLES AND HARDSHIPS OF DAVID IN GATH

In Psalm 34:6 he refers to himself as a "poor man." He was poor. He had no money. Economically, it was very, very difficult. We don't think of his economic problems, but he had them. He really had no income. He was living off the land as a fugitive. He was poor in that he disobeyed the Lord. He was poor in that he lost all his friends and his family, in essence. I believe he was poor because fear was dominating his heart. He had lost his income; he had lost his friendships; he had lost his fresh walk with God. He said, "This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him" (Ps. 34:6). In other words, "I don't have any money. I've lost my friends; I feel like I've lost my calling. I've lost my walk or at least my freshness in the Lord. Fear is dominating me. I'm disobeying Him." This reality is what he faced, regardless of whether it's the first or second time he went to Gath. These are the things he encountered.

THE LORD IS NEAR TO THE BROKENHEARTED; HE DELIVERS THE CONTRITE IN HEART

Psalm 34:18 is one of the great themes of David's life. "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit" (Ps. 34:18). David loved the doctrine of the broken and the contrite spirit. This is a very, very important theology of David that he brought to the redeemed community back then, and then of course the Body of Christ 1,000 years later. He said, "Let me tell you something: Nearness to God is a reality to anyone who wants it." Instead of the word *nearness*, we can say the idea that God will bring into intimacy anyone, anyone, no matter how messed up. David said, "I lost my family. I lost my friendships. I lost my economic base. I've lost my ministry"—being the king of Israel, or his place in the army—"and I've lost my fresh walk with God, but one thing I know through all this now that I'm restored: God will bring near, He will

bring into intimacy, the kind of person who will simply say, ‘I’m sorry,’ and, ‘I need You, God.’” He said, “I don’t care how broken you are or how far you’ve gone.” A broken and contrite spirit is not some great depth of maturity. That’s not what he’s talking about. He says, “I fell on the ground. This poor man cried, ‘God, I can’t live without You. Will You give me a way back?’” I tell you, when it’s all said and done, there’s intimacy for the heart that will say yes to God and that can believe God would actually take them.

DAVID DESCRIBES THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REBELLION AND IMMATURITY

The problem with most people is in Psalm 34:22. David is talking about the unbelievers who are the condemned of the Lord. Believers feeling they’re condemned buy lies about what God is like. David says, “I know one thing about God.” He differentiates between rebellion and immaturity. David was one of the first to put into writing and into clear thought the distinction between the rebellious and the immature. It’s one of the great doctrines in the grace of God. God looks at an immature man or woman, sincere but immature, and the yes in their spirit moves the heart of God even though their life is broken.

WE DEFINE OURSELVES BY OUR STRUGGLE; GOD DEFINES US BY THE CRY IN OUR HEART

I’m not trying to be soft on sin. I’m trying to say this: When you stumble and fall and you know who He is, you run to Him instead of from Him when you know what He looks like. God says, “I like a person with a yes in their spirit.” The yes in our spirit defines us as part of who we are before God. It’s not the entirety of who we are before God, but part of our spiritual identity and part of our definition is the yes in our spirit. Do you know what we define ourselves by? We define ourselves by our struggle, and God defines us by the cry in our heart. We define ourselves by how much victory we attain, and God defines us by what we cry for and what we long for. We’ve lost it all. We lay in our bed at night and we say, “God, I really want You. I know my friends don’t believe me. I know the leaders don’t believe me. I know no one believes me. I want You, God. I mean it. I want to get free from this. I don’t want to walk into it. I want to walk out of it. I want You.” God defines you by the longings of your heart before Him and not by your track record.

WHEN YOU SEE THE WEAKNESS OF YOUR FLESH, YOU CAN RUN INTO THE ARMS OF GOD

That’s a radical idea to many, many, many, many people. People say, “Wait a second. Wait a second...” This is something that I don’t want to overstate, but it’s something that I have thoroughly researched for fifteen-plus years in the Word of God. It is written all over the place that God responds to us according to the cry of our heart. David was one of the first to make this clear. It’s clear all the way through the Scriptures. We’re so used to the other paradigm of relating to God. We relate to God on the basis of our current victory and our current track record. When we do well, we feel confidence. When we do badly, we feel condemned. All that is pride, whether covert or overt, one way or the other. It’s the idea that we bring something to the table to motivate God to look at us. God says, “I’m motivated without your help. You come to the table by My goodness.” Yes, there’s a place where we say yes as voluntary lovers of God, and we have to say yes. I don’t stand before God and define my life by the last three months of what I have attained. I’m defined before God because of who He is, what He has said about me, and the cry that He has put in my heart for Him. That defines me. When you stumble and see the weakness of your flesh, then you can run to Him instead of from Him if you believe in Psalm 34:18. He will bring into intimacy the person with a heart broken over their sin.

THE ONLY TIME GOD EVER RAN

It was scandalous when Jesus talked to the Pharisees about a God who ran to a prodigal son, embraced him, kissed him and wept over him. Jesus talked about a God that runs; a God that embraces, a God that kisses. They

said, “No, no, He doesn’t do that. There’s no Oriental father who would stand up and be moved with longing and run across the field to embrace his son of shame. No father would do that.”

Jesus said, “My Father does that.” I’m telling you, He saw the heart cry in the prodigal. The only time God is ever depicted as in a hurry is when He’s running to the broken who say yes to Him. Every other time, God is depicted in perfect patience. He runs for one thing, and it’s to the heart that says, “I’m Yours and I’ll come back.” That’s the only time the Scriptures show God as in a hurry. It was the mouth of Jesus revealing His Father whom He dwelt with from eternity past. He said, “I’m telling you: My Father runs for one thing: sinful, broken people who resolve in their hearts that they want to be God’s. He will run to them. He will embrace them and kiss them when He runs to them. He will be near. He will kiss them and restore them to intimacy.”

AT THE CORE OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT IS THE LONGING FOR THE ASSURANCE OF DELIGHT

This is David at his best. I believe David is writing this and saying, “O Lord, this is my favorite stuff to write about.” He wants to teach his children this. He wants to teach everyone in the nation this doctrine. It’s so obscured in the body of Christ right now. People are so afraid. They say, “No, no, no. If you give people that idea, they’ll get sloppy with sin.”

I say, “No, that’s not true. You don’t understand the human makeup. There’s such a panging, such a longing for the assurance that we’re enjoyed. There’s such a desire to be accepted.” The opposite is rejection. We all know about rejection. We’ve all experienced it. We all struggle with it. We all have thought residues of it or problems with it. At the very core of the human spirit is the longing for the assurance that you’re enjoyed. God says, “When I strike that string in their heart, they’ll run to Me, not from Me. I’ll be the only One who can answer the deepest longing in their being, and they’ll run to Me, not from Me.”

I’ve talked to preachers and they say, “You get people so comfortable in sin.”

I say, “No, you’re wrong. It makes them fierce; it makes them radical; it makes them violent in their pursuit. They say, ‘If God will take me, then I’ll just be hanging on His leg everywhere He goes. If He will take me every time, He won’t be able to get rid of me.’” It awakens something. It’s volcanic. Something explodes in our human makeup when we feel enjoyed. No matter how far we go, we look back and say, “Wait a second: There’s only one place I can get free from the pain. It’s in His embrace. He likes me. He likes me! I’m successful in His embrace.” It’s too strong in us to overcome the need to be accepted. We can’t repent of that. You can try to do it in a wrong way, but David touches that. David is like a master psychologist under the Holy Spirit’s leadership. He says, “If the brokenhearted will come, mercy will absolutely overcome them.” David is the picture of that. It’s fantastic!

“SHALL WE CONTINUE IN SIN, THAT GRACE MAY ABOUND? GOD FORBID!”

Paul the apostle got accused of false doctrine with this. In Romans 5:20 he says, “Where sin abounds, grace abounds more” (Rom. 5:20, paraphrased). People said, “What? Where sin abounds, grace abounds more?”

He said, “Absolutely. Where you’ve sinned a lot, there’s more forgiveness and more power for deliverance. If you sin a lot, God’s embrace will be stronger and His deliverance will be greater to you. Come.”

In the next few verses they charged Paul, saying, “Oh, so what, are we going to sin more so we can get more grace?” (Rom. 6:1, paraphrased). Paul said, “Say what you will; accuse me as you will; you don’t understand. If

you touched it, you would never accuse me of that, because anyone who touches it never thinks about how to sin more when they touch it. Rather, they think about how to give themselves more.” Now, there are people for whom it’s merely a theory, and they use it as an excuse. But someone who touches it in reality, it never dawns on them to sin more to get more grace. That’s only intellectual curiosity with a doctrine, but to feel it makes you ravenous for God.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE MONASTIC MOVEMENTS IN HISTORY TO PSALM 34

David knew that. If you had to write one thing over David’s life, that would be what made David a worshipper. It’s Psalm 34:18. He says, “I know fear. I know compromise. I lost everything. I lost my walk with God and, at the very least, my freshness in that walk. I look like I forfeited my calling, but do you know what? I came back and I feel God again. He likes me and I want the whole earth to know this.” Psalm 34:18 is a good one; that’s a real key to getting free from fear. Psalm 34:1-3 is David’s personal vow. He wants to bless God night and day. He wants to live perpetually in praise. If you look at the monastic movements throughout history, Psalm 34:1 is a really big one. They grapple with how a person can live in continual praise. That’s Psalm 34:1 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18: “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing.” Those are synonymous ideas. That passage and Psalm 34:1 are the two verses they would put before God. They would go on a lifelong pursuit: “How can we live constantly in praise? We won’t slander. We don’t ever want to complain again, not once. We want to live in constant praise before God.” Whole orders would be built around the pursuit of living in constant communion based on gratitude from Psalm 34. I tell you, this kind of commitment David made isn’t based on discipline. This thing is based on gratitude. You can never discipline yourself into that response, but with revelation and gratitude you can move more powerfully into that reality. It’s based on gratitude. David lies before it. He says, “I want to do this continually, continually, continually. I don’t want to let go of it. I don’t want to ever slip back into the old way again.” We do know that he did because he went to Gath, came back and wrote the psalm, then went to Gath again a few years later.

We’ll look at what he wrote in a week or two after his second visit to Gath. It’s powerful. It’s wonderful. It’s Psalm 56. It’s powerful. He said, “My tears of struggle are captured in God’s bottle” (Ps. 56:8). “All my tears, all my wandering, and all my brokenness; God didn’t write me off. He stored all my tears. He picked them up and scooped them up and stored them in His bottle because He loves me.” That’s what he said after his next visit to Gath. David understood something, didn’t he? You know what, by the grace of God we’re going to understand it. We’re going to go drink somewhere differently. When we drink differently, we won’t boast about it. We’re in humility going to serve and bring other people to the well. We won’t bring them to us; we’ll bring them to a well. They can’t get it from you; they can’t get it from me; they can’t get it from a prophet. They have to go to the well.

SANCTIFICATION: THE ORCHESTRATION OF OUR EMOTIONAL RESTRUCTURING

Psalm 34:4-7 is really good. Here David lays out his struggle. He lays out the divine and human interaction in Psalm 34:4-7. He says what he did and he says what God did. He says, “God does one part and we do another part. God won’t do your part and you can’t do His part.” God won’t do your part and you can’t do His part. I love to talk about the cooperation in the grace of God: the human part and the divine part. We change our mind and He changes our emotions. That’s a really simple way to say it. God won’t change your mind; you have to change your mind. You can’t change your emotions; God can, though. He can reconstruct your emotional chemistry little by little. He does it. It’s called *sanctification*. You feel differently at the end of the day. I’m not saying it’s all about feelings, but feelings are impacted. I love the analogy, and I’ve used it for years, about the farmer who took the preacher home to his farm. They drove up to the beautifully-manicured farm. It was just

acres of this rolling beauty and everything was in its place. The preacher said, “Boy, God sure blessed you with this farm.”

The farmer said, “Well, preacher, when God had this farm it was a mess.” The preacher didn’t really appreciate how much work the farmer did. There’s a cooperation: God produces the principle of life in the seed and God produces the sun and the rain. The farmer has to plow the ground, put the seed in, water it, and weed it. God is the one who put the principle of life in. Without the principle of life, I don’t care how hard that farmer worked, nothing would grow. I don’t care how much life is in the seed. If the farmer doesn’t plow the ground and weed it, there won’t be a harvest. There’s a human side and there’s a divine side. There’s a division of labor that’s divinely designed with wisdom.

David lays it out in Psalm 34:4-7. He says, “I sought the Lord. That’s my part. I go after Him. I search for Him. I seek Him. God’s part is that He answers me when I seek Him. God waits.” It says in Isa. 30:18 that God waits. He hides Himself until He hears the cry of His people, and then He answers.

God waits up there. We’re hurting. We’re hurting. We’re hurting. He says, “I want you to lift your voice.”

“Why do You want me to lift my voice?”

“Because if you cry out to Me, then you’ll make the connection in your thinking that when you move towards Me, then I move towards you. When that connection is made in your thinking, it will really draw you closer to Me.”

THE THREE-STEP PROCESS WHEREBY WE RESPOND TO GOD AND HE RESPONDS TO US

When the invisible God does things and we say things, it’s called *prayer*. We speak, He’s invisible, and all of a sudden things are different. We say, “Wait a second... He’s real! When I do this, then He does that!”

God says, “You got it. That’s why I won’t answer you until you ask. I want you to connect the idea that when you move to Me, then I move to you.” Of course we understand that God is the One who moved first. God moved us originally, and then we respond to the leadings in the grace of God. Then God responds to our response. It’s really a three-step process. God moves on us, though we never thought of anything about Him. He moves on us and our hearts are “strangely warmed,” John Wesley said. We move to God after that response, and then God moves in response to our response.

David understood. He said, “If I don’t move to Him after He has touched me, then He doesn’t move closer to me. He doesn’t want me to understand that life works without moving into the heart of God.”

It’s about intimacy. The Creator is into intimacy. He’s a lover. He’s not just a creator. He’s not just wise. He is a lover at the core of who He is. He wants His power to be administrated in a way that brings His creation into His heart. That’s called prayer. That’s the genius of God in prayer. He says, “I have great wisdom and great power, but I will display it to you and through you in a way that moves you into love. I’m a lover first. I’m not just an artist who paints the skies; I’m not just an architect who can build the heavens. I’m a lover first. I will display My wisdom and My power in a way that makes you love.” He says, “Here is what I’ll do. I won’t do it until you reach towards Me. When you reach towards Me, then I’ll say, ‘Come on, reach more,’ and just from that reaching, I’ll answer, and then things will change in you.”

You'll say, "Wait a second, prayer makes a difference!" Really, it's the moving towards God. God waits until you move towards Him, and then He moves towards you so that you connect with it.

David understood that and he said, "I will move to God."

THE FIRST SYMPTOMS OF LOVESICKNESS; THE MARK OF GOD'S THUMBPRINTS

Some of you say, "Well, I don't feel Him."

"Yes, you do. Yes, you do feel Him."

"You say, "No, I don't." The very fact that you would have anguish in your heart is the very work of God in lovesickness in you already. The fact that some of you are sitting there thinking, "I can't stand listening to this man. This is killing me; I feel so distant. My heart is so cold; I don't love the Word; there's no movement of God in my soul. I can't bear it;" the very fact that you can't bear it is the beginning of lovesickness in you. The unbeliever thinks this stuff is just foolish and totally boring. To you who are stuck it's painful because you're in the very beginning stages of lovesickness. Before you met the Lord, this would have been folly to you and totally boring. You would say, "Man, when is this guy going to shut up?" Never mind, but some of you are sitting there in pain. I tell you, that pain is the mark of God's thumbprint on your heart already. You've never had that pain before. Where did that come from? Well, it's not from the Devil and it's certainly not from your sinful flesh. That pain is a longing that has hold of you that won't let go. That's good; that's where it begins. It begins with the pain. It's that unrelenting ache of desire.

"Oh God, I can't stand not feeling and having and flowing in this. I hate it. I hate it. I hate it."

The Lord says, "Come on. Keep coming; keep coming." You need to recognize that as grace. God is moving on you. He says, "Move to Me now." Don't let that pain just dissipate. Let it drive you into the fire of God.

David said, "I sought and got answers. I looked and God released His radiance. I looked to Him." There are four things he did: he sought; he looked; he cried; he feared the Lord. God releases radiance in the lives of the people in time; not immediately, but in time He illuminates. We look and He illuminates. We cry and He saves. We fear the Lord and God surrounds us with angelic help, supernatural help. A lot of the supernatural help that He surrounds us with, we can't see. The right hand is the things that we observe and discern, and the left hand is the activity of God that's indiscernible to the human heart but it's all there. It's upholding all the time and moving and acting. It's releasing and hindering things that keep our lives in order that we know nothing about, the left hand of God, the indiscernible but nevertheless very powerful activity. I tell you, we fear the Lord and He surrounds us with the right and the left hand.

What I want to say to you is this: that David is telling the people, "I went through fear. I lost my job. I lost my relationships. I lost my family. I lost my ministry. I lost my freshness with God. I sinned. I grieved God and I want to tell you, I had the courage to stand and seek, to cry out, to fear the Lord again and look to Him. He became radiant. My heart was illumined again. I found answers. I saw the hand of God surround me in a new way. I'm telling you, it will work if you'll do it." David is laying it out line upon line.

DAVID CHALLENGES US TO TASTE AND TEST THE GOODNESS OF THE LORD

Then in Psalm 34:8-10, he really wants to make it personal. He tells them, “Try it. Test the Lord.” That’s twice in the Scripture where we can test the Lord. We can test Him with money. If you give money to God, He says, “I will give you power encounters in finances. I will surprise you. I’ll do things you wouldn’t imagine that I would do in monetary areas.” You can test Him in money and you can test Him in seeking Him. David is saying it right there: “Taste and see” (Ps. 34:8). He says, “You can try and test the Lord in this. Go after Him and see if He won’t unfold Himself to you in time.” Here in Psalm 34:8-10 he’s telling people to experience it to the degree that they want it; “taste and see.” He’s saying, “Experiential knowledge is within your reach.” It’s experiential knowledge: “Taste and see.” God wants you to taste the pleasure of Him. He says, “Go after it for a while. I just want to throw a little of it out to you. Just get a little of understanding that God likes you when you’re immature so that you get the condemnation gone, and that confusion a little minimized and out of the way. With a paradigm of God that He’s mad at you all the time, you can’t taste Him. You have to get an idea that He likes you when you’re reaching out to Him when you’re young in the things of the Lord. That’s essential number one. Open your Bible. Turn down the recreation and entertainment a little. Throw in a bit of fasting here and there. Bear the silence for a short while and do it for a few months or a year or two. At the end of seventy years, you tell me if that season and that year or two did not change your life. The Lord says, “You taste and see. Come after it. Come after it and you will taste and see. You will touch it and you will experience it. I didn’t say you would get it in six weeks; I didn’t say your life would be radically transformed with a feeble attempt. You come after it hard, even in a feeble way, but as hard as you know.” The Lord says, “I will move you forward in this thing.”

David had the confidence to tell Him to do it. Again, he says four things in Psalm 38:4-10. He says, “Taste, trust, fear the Lord, and enjoy the Lord.” “Taste the Lord. Come and experience the pleasure of it.” He tells them to trust the Lord, fear the Lord, and enjoy the Lord. In other words, he says, “Be satisfied. You will be satisfied at the end of the day. Satisfaction guaranteed.”

“THE YOUNG LIONS LACK AND SUFFER HUNGER”

In Psalm 34:10, David says, “When the young lions who are hungry come after you...” (paraphrased). David had a bunch of young lions after him. They were Saul’s soldiers and the soldiers of the Philistines. He had lions coming after him. Lions were common in Israel. He said, “Just like the lions all around, they get hungry and they want to be fed; when the lions are coming after me in my own life, I found this to be fail-proof at the end of the day.”

“KEEP YOUR TONGUE FROM EVIL, AND YOUR LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT”

Then in Psalm 34:11-22 he kicks out of an autobiographical mode into a teaching mode. I’m going to give a brief summary. You can follow out the themes yourself. Look at verses 12-14. You can almost predict it when David is talking; it’s either going to be mercy or speech. The first thing he says is, “OK kids, let’s line up. Let’s talk about speech.” Again, not the whole approach but some of the approach to bridling our tongue is the wrong approach. It’s not just about integrity. We may have taken too idealistic of a route in teaching people to bridle their tongue. We tell them it’s integrity. They think, “Well, I probably won’t get caught if I whisper, because the guy doesn’t have a track record in telling people anyway.” The integrity doesn’t normally hold people. David is appealing to something else. He says, “Your life will work if you interface with God. You will be surprised what you’ll find. You’ll be surprised what you will walk in.” That is what I believe David’s paradigm was. When you don’t vent, you boil inside and you have to get comfort. It drives you into God, and when you drive into God, you find out new information about God and life in you. Then your need to vent is changed. David

said, “Don’t let the pressure off; don’t go vent. Interface, interact with God. You will come out with a totally different philosophy, because the pain of not venting will make you vent to God.” I tell you, when you vent to God, not only will He change the circumstances, He will change the way you view life, because the pain of it will be like power pushing you into God. We go for those little cheap band-aids. I’ve done it plenty of times, and plenty of times I’ve done it to the Lord. I know a little about this. I want to know more about it.

WE CAUSE TO BE DISSIPATED ALL THE THINGS THAT DRIVE US TO GOD’S HEART

David gives a very key principle. He says, “Who is the man who desires life? Who is the man who loves many days, that he would see good? Who is the man who wants to enter into life and see goodness?” (Ps. 34:12, paraphrased). Look at what he says. He links it with talking rightly (v. 13). He says, “Do you want to enter into life? I know something that will power-drive you into the heart of God. Don’t distort your speech. Don’t present yourself as the victim or the hero. Don’t change the circumstance. Don’t be a victim and go tell people how badly they did it. Don’t be the hero that saves the day. Don’t get your reward from people. Let the power, the drive to get your reward burn in you and drive you into God. It will drive you into God and you will see good days. You will see life flow to you like you never have before.”

One of the greatest powers we have in us is the urge to relieve the pain of our life. God says, “Use that urge to relieve your pain to drive you into God. Don’t vent it. I’m telling you, you will see good days.” In other words, the anointing and the spirit of intimacy will begin to touch you. It is one of the most powerful urges that we have. God designed it so that it would help us with Him. He says, “You just waste it. You cause to be dissipated all the things that were driving you to My heart.” Isn’t that interesting? The very first thing David touches is the issue of speech. Again, he’s not talking about integrity; he’s talking about that power and that urge in our heart to look good and get things right. He’s saying, “Use it to drive you into God.” But what we all do, and I’ve done it many times, is tell the story. We’re the victims that are being mistreated. We try to rally support, or we’re the heroes that saved the day so that people like us and find us endearing. The Lord says, “Don’t cheat. Quit doing that. Take that urge and come to Me. I will give you life, and then you won’t need to do it that way.” That’s one of the great themes in the life of David. In every psalm he talks about the tongue, every time. That was the thing I talked about last week that he was so wise about.

“I HAVE NOTHING TO BRING THAT CAN EVEN SCORE; ALL I WANT, ALL I NEED, IS YOU”

Psalm 34:15-16 describes the sovereignty of God. God is looking with His eyes, His ears, His face; He is attentive. It’s David’s revelation of the sovereignty of God. Psalm 34:17-18 is the mercy of God, his life’s message, and the great discovery after Gath. God likes immature, broken people who have a yes in their spirit. That is his great life message: “God will help you. He will be near you if you will just say yes to Him. Don’t let condemnation shut you down, run to Him.” He said the same thing after he killed Uriah. After he murdered Uriah, he wrote in Psalm 51:17 that the sacrifice God wants is a broken and contrite heart. He wants a yes in your spirit. He doesn’t want you to try to go to more prayer meetings to even the score, or to give to missions to even the score, or witness to a few people to even the score. He wants you falling down saying, “I have nothing to bring except that I just want You. Will You have me?”

God says, “That I will operate with.”

SIN’S PUNISHMENT IS RESIDENT IN THE SIN ITSELF

Psalm 34:17-18 is David’s life message. Then in Psalm 34:19-20 he talks about the power of pressure. He says, “God will use pressure to make you better.” That was one of David’s many themes. He says, “Pressure will

make you better. It drives you into God if you don't waste the energy that pressure produces in your heart. Don't look for false props. Be driven into God." David is talking about that right there. It's one of his great doctrines. He talks about the futility of sin.

I like Psalm 34:21. It's really interesting. He says, "Evil shall slay the wicked." Evil shall slay the wicked. When we play around with sins, it's not that God has to come and break us. Sin breaks us. God can take a step back. Sin's punishment is resident in the sin itself. The punishment of sin in a believer is resident in the sin itself because it causes us to lose life. There are circumstantial disciplines that God will bring. He will cause some circumstances to be harder sometimes, but sin brewing in our members, because we yield to it, is its own punishment. He says, "You have such beauty and such potential. Yet you dissipate all of your affections and all of your life in these things." The destroyers of righteousness are self-destroyed. God's administration of the universe is such that people who destroy righteousness destroy themselves by destroying righteousness. The great sin of the human race is spiritual suicide. They literally kill themselves spiritually. It is suicide on a mass level. Saying no to God is self-induced spiritual suicide. The penalty of it is that we kill ourselves by doing it.

In Psalm 34:22 David says, "Get this thing straight: If you are of the Lord, you are of the redeemed. He has paid for you. You are not of the condemned." He comes back to one of his great themes: "You are of the redeemed. You are not of the condemned." Condemnation is one of the big hindrances that hinders us all the time. One of David's real passions was to hinder condemnation.

Amen. Let's stand.

MINISTRY TIME

I think it's good not to slander for integrity reasons. But it doesn't hold most people in place. If you know that you can see more of the glory of God by not slandering, then you think, "I might do it for that reason." If I can get more pleasure by not talking in the end, that is how I approach it. I know it's better if I talk right in integrity, but I know I will find God if I use that pressure to drive me into Him. I don't do it all the time. I don't want to present that I sin in that area, but I have done it a number of times. I've discovered things that surprise me. A little more of the big picture comes into place. I say, "Yes, that's cool. That's not such a big deal anyway that the guy is ripping me off, is it?"

He says, "No, not really. It's not that big of a deal, not really."

"Wow, the scheme is really big. They seem really small now."

Lord, we love You. O God, we love You. Lord, we have a small faith that You can satisfy us. We believe it a little. Now draw us into You, God. Just a little we believe this, Lord but, that is good enough to start. There is a river of pleasure that David talked about. Lord, we want the river of pleasure.

We've prayed for this before, but some of you feel stuck. I went on that bunny trail about being lovesick. You're hurting; you're saying, "I feel tortured right now, because it seems like it's real, but it seems out of reach. I'm willing to see this as the thumbprint of God on my heart. It really is His grace that I feel so miserable right now." I would like you to come stand up here if you would like prayer. You feel like you're stuck and the Lord understands that. We have all been stuck. Say, "I am lovesick, but I want this to go on to the next level." Don't be ashamed of that. I have been stuck there a number of times. I just have confidence now after being

stuck a few times, and then I got unstuck. I really know you will get unstuck this time; stay with it, stay with it. You want to take that pain and let it lead you into the fire of God's heart. Don't waste pain. Don't waste pain. Let it lead you to the heart of God. Before the Lord I want you to acknowledge in your own words that the pain you feel of barrenness is the gift of God. Call it a gift. Don't say any more. The Lord doesn't mind this. It holds you in bondage. Don't say, "Lord, You're not good," but, "The very pain is Your gift to me. My desire for You is a gift from You, because I didn't use to feel this way before. Years ago when I never thought of You, I never had this desire." Your desire for God is God's gift to you. Your desire for God is an expression of God's desire for you. Thank Him that He desires you enough to let you feel this. It is an expression of His passion for you. That big knot in your heart is the work of God. A lot of people don't have any knot in their heart when they think of God. They feel nothing. You feel pain at least; that's the gift of God in you. Now let it drive you to Him. Thank Him for it right now. I know that's hard, but it really is a revelation. It is the gift of God in your life. Look at you; you've heard about Him. You hurt because you want Him and you can't feel Him or sense Him. That's not the Devil and it's not your sinful flesh. That's the work of God in you.

Lord, I ask that You give more, more desire. Give the breakthrough in these next weeks and months. Give the breakthrough. Sometimes the breakthrough comes in a moment. Usually it comes on a journey. It comes on a journey. Mostly the breakthrough comes in a journey. Not always; sometimes it comes in a moment. Release the breakthrough. Release the breakthrough. Kiss the heart, Lord. Show Your power and Your wisdom in a way that brings them into love. You are a lover, God. Bring them into love as You show Your power to them. Let Your power come, Lord. I want to invite some of you to come up, if you would. Let's lay hands on them. We want to ask the Lord to kiss their hearts. We may do it the same way, week after week after week, but let's pray for them. They want prayer. God gives more when believers pray for believers. He give more to them. That's just how He operates. Let's ask for the fire of the Holy Spirit to kiss their hearts. Say, "Turn up the desire. Turn up even the pain Lord, the pain of longing for You, until the breakthrough comes." While they're praying for you, be thanking God that you have the pain of barrenness, that you feel it. Thank God that He cares enough to give you that gift.

Lord, release Your fire. Release Your fire, Lord. If you don't know what to say, then just say, "Lord, kiss their heart with Your Word." Kiss their heart, Lord. Let the Spirit of God flow like a river of love to the heart. You don't have to have a profound prayer. You don't even have to feel anything when you're praying. They're doing what David said; they're coming and looking at God right now. They're gazing at the Lord. They're posturing themselves before the Lord. That is what He said to do. God said, "You will be radiant in time. If you posture yourself before Me, you will be radiant in time. Just stick with it."

