

IT'S COMPLICATED: SEASON 1

INTRODUCTION

I'm guessing not a single person reading this introduction would disagree with the concept that life is complicated. From the questions we ask concerning our identity, to the search for our calling, to questions of faith, to navigating current affairs, politics, ideologies, finances, friendships, and more; our lives can be incredibly complicated.

The challenge is, we want a black and white world, a world where our choices are one of only two options. Wouldn't that make life easier? And even then, we'd still love someone to tell us what to do. But if we're honest, life is much more grey than black and white. It is nuanced, and this is true in our spiritual lives and our understanding of God as much as anything else. The apostle Paul reflected on our own personal struggle in his famous passage in Romans 7:

"15 I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. 19 I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway." (Romans 7:15, 19 NLT)

Over the next six weeks, we are taking a team teaching approach, with different weeks written by Pastor Paddy, Pastor Dave, and Pastor Tim, as we try to recognize how complicated life can be through the life and reflections of one of the most well-known figures in the history of the Jewish people, King David. As we do, we'll look at stories from his life, while connecting those stories to some of the Psalms he would have written around the same time. We believe these connections will give us more of a 360 degree view of the complicated life that David lived, that can teach us much about our own.

Here are a few reflections on David to set the stage.

David was often described as a man after God's own heart. What does that mean? He certainly wasn't perfect. He was a warrior with blood on his hands, but he was also passionate, always coming back to God with a heart of worship. He wasn't just a warrior who killed 10's of 1,000's of their enemies (1 Samuel 18:7), he had a weakness for women that led him to put plans in place to have a man killed to get the woman he wanted in the moment (2 Samuel 11). It doesn't take much time to read his story to realize David was far from perfect, and our perception of him as a hero of the faith is, well, complicated.

And yet, David was hailed as one of the best kings of Israel who ever lived. God even commented on David after his death that David *"kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my eyes..."* (1 Kings 14:8b, ESV).

In this series, we're going to address some of the nuances of our faith that lie in the grey areas of understanding ourselves, and trying to understand God a little better. We'll recognize that though life isn't black and white, and there are always more than two sides to every story and person, God continues to meet us where we are right now with His grace. When we lean on and depend on that grace, it helps us grow more and more into the people God sees when he looks at us. But even with this growth, it's important to recognize that we still have our scars, we still have our struggles and weaknesses, our good moments and our bad ones, and we will always need Jesus as we navigate the complicated nature of this life.

We'll touch on themes of mental health, questions of faith, spiritual disciplines, friendship, risk, and more. I can tell you this, your Crosswalk Global Teaching Team is looking forward to this journey, and we believe you can too.

Pastor Paddy McCoy, Pastor Dave Ferguson, and Pastor Tim Gillespie
Crosswalk Series Guide Writing Team

IT'S COMPLICATED (S1): WEEK 1

By Pastor Paddy McCoy

WEEK 1: DAY 1 (Psalm 23:1-2, 1 Samuel 17:34-35)

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. 2 He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. Psalm 23:1-2

"34 But David persisted. "I have been taking care of my father's sheep and goats," he said. "When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock, 35 I go after it with a club and rescue the lamb from its mouth. If the animal turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death. 1 Samuel 17: 34-35

Psalm 23 is perhaps the most famous and favorite Psalms in the Scriptures. It includes tones of peace, of protection, and of God's presence with us even in the darkest of times.

Maybe its impact is so prevalent because the author, David, knew what he was talking about. Up until the age of 15, being a shepherd was what he knew. As the youngest of nine brothers, David's job, as soon as he was old enough, was to spend countless nights watching over and protecting the sheep, and countless days leading them in and out of the pen. This was his contribution to the family. Of course, we also know David was a musician (the Psalms were songs), and writing songs and prayers was an important part of his spiritual journey. Likely, he honed this skill out in the wilderness, under many a night sky.

The best songs are written from personal experience, and they touch more people because we can identify with the sentiments expressed in the song.

In David's time, a shepherd wasn't a menial job or career. Shepherding supported the livelihood of the family, and the metaphor of shepherding became so important in their culture that the term was widely used in reference to other rulers and kings. Maybe one of the reasons this particular Psalm is so widely known was that our very king-of-kings, Jesus, himself, used the reference to a shepherd to define his role, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep." (John 10:11 NLT)

The first line, *"The Lord is my shepherd, I have all that I need."* Is one I try to pray on a regular basis. It reminds me that if Jesus is the one I'm letting lead my life, then I already have everything I need. I don't need to chase after that which I don't need, long for and obsess over

things I want that may never be mine. It's a line of peace and contentment, just like the one that follows it about the Lord leading us towards rest and peacefulness.

But shepherding wasn't always a peaceful venture, as David attests to in his words to King Saul concerning his qualifications to face their enemy, Goliath. There were dangers involved from outside forces. There were marauders who would seek to steal the sheep for their own gain, and predators looking for a meal. Not to mention sheep wandering away from the fold and finding themselves in precarious places. So sometimes, protecting the sheep involved some fairly violent responses.

But how can peace and violence exist in the same person? How can David, described by God as a man after God's own heart, sing songs of contentment, while at the same time having blood on his hands. Well, it's complicated.

- 1. What are some of the things you've learned about God, or favorite passages, that bring you peace?**
- 2. What, if any, are some of the questions you have from Scripture about God and whether or not He's also violent at times, or at least seems to ask us to be violent?**
- 3. How do you reconcile these different pictures of peace and violence? Which do you think God prefers?**

WEEK 1: DAY 2 (Psalm 23:3)

3 He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name. Psalm 23:3

I can't read the first few words of Psalm 23:3, without thinking of another famous passage from the prophet Isaiah...

"31 But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31, NLT)

God, our shepherd, not only seeks to protect us, but he renews our strength as we trust in Him. In the context of today's verse, this happens in part as we trust in His leading which often brings honor back to Him.

Reminds me of something Jesus said in his sermon on the mount about how we are called to be a blessing to others, "In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father." (Matthew 5:16, NLT). Our good deeds are not to draw attention to us, but rather to God. We are more drawn to love others, care for others, protect others, because we are aware of how God, the good Shepherd, has done these things for us.

When I think about how God guides us in life, I often think about those bumpers bowling alleys use to help new bowlers (often kids, and people like me) not roll into the gutter every time they roll their ball down the alley. If you went into the gutter every time, you'd likely give up on bowling pretty quickly. However, as you learn and gain confidence, sooner or later you're able to bowl without the bumpers like learning to ride a bike without training wheels. I believe God, as the good shepherd and faithful Father, wants us to succeed and as we submit to him, he guides us along life's paths. Tomorrow, we'll see He even has tools to help. However, this

doesn't mean that if we submit to God we'll never face hardships or steer off path. You see, it's complicated. Life seems like a constant struggle between what God wants for our lives, and what we want, then, there's just the unpredictable circumstances of living in a fallen world.

Thankfully, God never gives up on us, even when we give up on ourselves. He's always ready to help steer us back to a path that leads us back to him, the one we were created by and for.

So if you feel like you've been doing all the right things, but life continues to knock you down time and time again, try not to give up. It doesn't mean God has abandoned you, or is upset with you. It means, no matter what we do, life can be hard. Learning to continually come back to God and the community he calls us to participate in, is what helps us on that right path.

- 1. In what ways do you need God to come alongside you today to renew your strength?**
- 2. Where have you felt frustrated in your walk with God, and/or in what's happening in your life right now? What questions do you have of God?**
- 3. What can you surrender to Him today, to find some peace and get some rest?**

WEEK 1: DAY 3 (Psalm 23:4, 1 Samuel 17:35-36)

4 Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. Psalm 23:4

35 I go after it with a club and rescue the lamb from its mouth. If the animal turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death. 36 I have done this to both lions and bears, and I'll do it to this pagan Philistine, too, for he has defied the armies of the living God! 1 Samuel 17:35-36

Talk about a contrast! I'll admit that I don't often think of the violent nature of shepherding when I read Psalm 23. And yet, to make the connection between these two passages, we learn that the "rod and staff" mentioned in Psalm 23:4, is exactly what a shepherd like David would have used to catch an animal and club it to death. That sure puts a different spin on the peaceful nature of Psalm 23.

I can identify. I am a soul that by and large wants to work towards harmony. I love it when people get along, and I struggle when they fight. I think in many ways I'd classify myself as a pacifist, but I also recognize that there seems to be a time and place where the only option to protect someone may result in the harm of another. There's no other way to say it but that it's complicated.

As much as I strive for peace, I know I have a mother bear inside of me. That mother bear roars whenever someone I love is threatened in any way, shape, or form. It may not be with physical violence...

So maybe we're not just pacifists. Maybe sometimes we're not just one person, but two, or three. And no, I don't mean schizophrenia, I just mean we have the people we want to be, and the people we are at the moment. The person we're growing into, and the person we're trying to leave behind. We strive for the qualities we want to have, while at the same time recognize that we are all works in progress and that God isn't finished with us yet.

6 And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. (Philippians 1:6, NLT)

1. Think back to who you were 5 years ago. Are there areas where you have grown and matured? Maybe things you used to do or struggle with that aren't as much of an issue now?
2. What about areas in your life that you struggle with now? In what ways do you hope to grow more over the next 5 years?
3. What do you think you can do in your relationship with God to help with these areas?

WEEK 1: DAY 4 (Psalm 23:5, 1 Samuel 17:37)

5 You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Psalm 23:5

37 The Lord who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear will rescue me from this Philistine!" Saul finally consented. "All right, go ahead," he said. "And may the Lord be with you!" I Samuel 17:37

Ok, we're going to take today's passages one at a time, both have much to teach us.

Psalm 23:5 always seems to be oddly placed in a passage that mostly is about peace and protection. I mean, why is the Shepherd preparing a feast in the presence of David's enemies?

There actually may be a tie between this verse and David's confidence in his comments about facing Goliath. In Psalm 23:5, David is saying that God takes care of him even when he is surrounded by his enemies, and that even in these circumstances, David always has much to be thankful for. The anointing of the head with oil was a blessing, and when the cup meant to catch the oil overflowed, it meant that your life had more blessings than you can count.

So David's perspective was that God was always bigger than anything he would face, and he tried to remember that even in difficult times, he had many blessings to be thankful for.

We see this time and time again in the Psalms where David cries out to God and wonders why life is so difficult, but then he almost always finds a way to offer God gratitude and praise. I've often wondered if this is one of the ways in which David was a man after God's own heart, because even in the most trying of circumstances he rarely forgot to keep chasing after God's heart.

So these two passages are tied, let's spend just a moment in the one from 1 Samuel 17.

I have always been taken aback by the courage of the young shepherd boy named David. He was so confident in what he believed God would do, whereas I often feel like the father who pled with Jesus, "I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief."

But I want to look forward to a story we're going to cover in the coming weeks. When David does go to fight Goliath, he actually picks up five smooth stones. Now, if he was so confident, why not just pick up one stone and trust that God will rescue him.

There are different interpretations of the five stones. One is that Goliath had four brothers and that David was preparing to kill them all. Maybe. But I'm also ok with the idea that as confident

as David seemed, he may have had a part of him that cried out, “I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief.”

Whatever the case, the life of faith is complicated. We can be confident one day, scared the next. We can see God’s work one day and celebrate, then two weeks later feel like He’s nowhere to be found. The two best tools I’ve found to navigate these times are to continue to invest in the Word of God, and to participate in community. Both of these help me navigate my faith when it gets complicated.

- 1. Whatever is going on in your life right now, what do you have to be grateful for where the blessings overflow?**
- 2. Was there a time in your life that you were confident in who God was and what He was up to at the time?**
- 3. How about a time when you have cried out, “I believe, help my unbelief?”**
- 4. What helps you get through your times of struggles and questions?**

WEEK 1: DAY 5 (Psalm 23:6)

6 Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.” Psalm 23:6

God pursues David while David pursues God, but also fights his carnal nature that pursues violence, victory, validation, and the spoils that come with being a champion.

But David is also a shepherd, and somehow he knows that if he can just continue to follow God like the sheep follow him, God will continue to have space for him to rest. In fact, as David continues to pursue God, somehow he knows that one day, he will dwell with God forever.

I actually had this verse hit me in a new way during a difficult time in my life. I was trying to discern what God’s will was for my family and I. We had a big decision to make that would impact us in many ways, but God’s leading wasn’t clear; doors of opportunity were opening in both directions and we didn’t know what to do.

As I wrestled, I came across this verse that David penned, and it reminded me that no matter what decision we made, we could pursue God from anywhere and dwell with him...anywhere. Somehow, that took the pressure off the decision and allowed me to have a bit more peace.

I’m so excited about how this sermon series will unfold. I am proud to be a part of a church that is willing to have the tough conversations, to spend time in the grey areas of life, to even address topics that we may not have all the answers for, but at least we’re not afraid to have the conversation.

Life is complicated, but thankfully, the one who created us can help us navigate even the most confusing of times. May we have the courage to continually pursue the one who pursues us, even when we struggle to know where to start.

- 1. What does it mean to you to be pursued by God?**
- 2. In what ways do you pursue Him back? What practices are most meaningful to you?**
- 3. When life gets complicated, where do you turn for help? Guidance?**

IT'S COMPLICATED (S1) - WEEK 2

By Pastor Tim Gillespie

WEEK 2: DAY 1 (1 Samuel: 16)

Now the LORD said to Samuel, "You have mourned long enough for Saul. I have rejected him as king of Israel, so fill your flask with olive oil and go to Bethlehem. Find a man named Jesse who lives there, for I have selected one of his sons to be my king."

Jesse belongs to the tribe of Judah and appears in 1 Samuel as a civic leader in the town of Bethlehem. Jesse was also the son of Obed and grandson of Boaz and Ruth. (Ruth 4:17; 1 Chronicles 2:12-15)

Here, God tells his prophet Samuel that it is time to move on from the mourning they were doing for Saul. Here is the difficult part, Saul wasn't dead, but God had at this point seen fit to move on from his authority as King. He just wouldn't tell Saul for quite a while. This put Samuel into a pretty precarious position.

I have always thought that God's relationship to the monarchy of Israel is dubious at best. He never thought they should have a king, so the first one he gave them was found in a luggage hold, and the second one they had was a shepherd and a poet. I wonder if Israel ever stopped and thought that perhaps God had been mocking them the whole time?

Regardless, we see God moving the story forward and giving him instructions to go and find this man Jesse, because one of his sons would be the future king. I wonder if Samuel was a little tired of all these politics at this point, and simply wished that Israel would follow their God, rather than a king? But nonetheless, he needed to go to find Jesse.

Do you look for a king or ruler in your life, or do you seek to follow God? I often wonder if it is possible to follow two different authorities in your life? The bible seems to say no, but here we are with Samuel about to go and look for another king. We all know who this king will be, David, of course, but I wonder if they really needed a king, or if they could have just leaned into following God.

Either way, they didn't seem to want to do this, so Samuel has to take on the task of finding the next king.

- 1. How do you go about finding the next king in your life?**
- 2. Who do you give authority to in your life?**
- 3. What do you think you can do to give more authority to Christ? What would that look like today?**

WEEK 2: DAY 2 (1 Samuel 16:2)

But Samuel asked, "How can I do that? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me."

"Take a heifer with you," the LORD replied, "and say that you have come to make a sacrifice to the LORD. 3 Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you which of his sons to anoint for me."

Interesting. Is God telling Samuel to be deceitful? Or is it just a practical reality at this point in the story? Are we supposed to lie to make things easier? Would God tell anyone to lie?

There seems to be a little deception that is happening in this story, but it seems that it has to happen in order to forward God's plan. The difference between you or I making a deceptive plan and God making one is pretty simple: God is God, and we are not.

I think that it has become pretty popular to lie and deceive to get what you want in this world. We see it in popular culture, we see it in politics, even in academics. This is, I suppose, all well and good if you don't claim to be a Christian, but if you do claim Christ, then you are going to have to hold yourself to a different and higher standard.

And that is okay. Actually, it is more than okay. The world needs those who will hold the banner of honesty and transparency high and will not compromise themselves for efficiency's sake. Proverbs 12:22 says that "lying lips are an abomination to God, but they who deal truly are His delight." This has never changed, nor will it.

How a Christian does something is as important as what they do. We are not afforded the opportunity to simply end-around morality for the greater good. We still have to be held accountable for our actions, even if the intent is correct.

In this story, it seems that God was helping Samuel manage some pretty tricky waters, not by being deceitful, but by working with expectations and making sure that someone was getting to where they needed to be in order to make his will happen. God uses us, particularly when there is something that only we can do, in order to help his will be done in the world.

- 1. Have you ever felt like God needed you for a specific thing?**
- 2. What can you do in order to be able to continue to follow God in his commands?**
- 3. Have you ever been tempted to thwart the truth in order to get something done you want to get done?**

WEEK 2: DAY 3 (Psalm 21)

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

***1 How the king rejoices in your strength, O LORD!
He shouts with joy because you give him victory.***

- 2 For you have given him his heart's desire;
you have withheld nothing he requested. Interlude*
- 3 You welcomed him back with success and prosperity.
You placed a crown of finest gold on his head.*
- 4 He asked you to preserve his life,
and you granted his request.
The days of his life stretch on forever.*
- 5 Your victory brings him great honor,
and you have clothed him with splendor and majesty.*
- 6 You have endowed him with eternal blessings
and given him the joy of your presence.*
- 7 For the king trusts in the LORD.
The unfailing love of the Most High will keep him from stumbling.*
- 8 You will capture all your enemies.
Your strong right hand will seize all who hate you.*
- 9 You will throw them in a flaming furnace
when you appear.
The LORD will consume them in his anger;
fire will devour them.*
- 10 You will wipe their children from the face of the earth;
they will never have descendants.*
- 11 Although they plot against you,
their evil schemes will never succeed.*
- 12 For they will turn and run
when they see your arrows aimed at them.*
- 13 Rise up, O LORD, in all your power.
With music and singing we celebrate your mighty acts.*

1 Samuel 16:4 *So Samuel did as the Lord instructed. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town came trembling to meet him. "What's wrong?" they asked. "Do you come in peace?"*

5 *"Yes," Samuel replied. "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Purify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." Then Samuel performed the purification rite for Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice, too.*

6 *When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, "Surely this is the Lord's anointed!"*

Lots going on here today. I know we have had a long text, but that is because we are using Psalm 21 this week as the Psalm that goes along with the scriptures we find dealing particularly with Samuel and eventually David. We chose this Psalm because it is a psalm that the king sings to the most high, thanking God for essentially making sure that the king is safe and is welcomed back.

Samuel has gone to Bethlehem in order to Sacrifice. When Samuel shows up, he is God's representative, and honestly, the people and elders of the town were not super happy. They were "trembling" when they met him. Why would they be trembling? Whenever someone who is touched by God, represents God, or has a special relationship with God is introduced in scripture, there is often a bit of anxiety that is introduced into the drama. This is simply because we are rarely comfortable around those who seem to have a better connection to God than we do. We hope that they will pretty much leave us alone, and when they don't, things usually get interesting, harder, yet interesting.

Samuel showed up and said he was there for sacrifice. He performed the right for Jesse and his sons, and when they arrived, Samuel took a look at Eliab and must have seen something pretty regal in him. He assumed that this was the one that God was choosing. Was he good looking? Was he tall? Was he broad shouldered and looked like he could carry a kingdom on his shoulders? We just don't know. But what we do know is that Samuel was mistaken.

- 1. Have you ever mistook someone for some position because of what they looked like?**
- 2. Have you ever tried to follow the will of God but didn't exactly know what God was asking of you?**
- 3. Did God ever make it so plain that you did exactly what he said? How did that work out?**

WEEK 2: DAY 4 (1 Samuel 16:7)

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

8 Then Jesse told his son Abinadab to step forward and walk in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "This is not the one the LORD has chosen." **9** Next Jesse summoned Shimea, but Samuel said, "Neither is this the one the LORD has chosen." **10** In the same way all seven of Jesse's sons were presented to Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." **11** Then Samuel asked, "Are these all the sons you have?"

What an interesting situation. All of these sons, and yet none of them are the ones that God is having Samuel look for. No matter how great and good they looked, the anointing was not for any of these young men. Rather, it was for someone Samuel had not met yet.

I can only imagine that Jesse was frustrated by this scene. He parades all his best sons, probably in order of age, height, or some other feature that he thinks Samuel wants. He must be increasingly chagrined when each of these boys is rejected for seemingly no good reason.

As a father, I think I would be not only sad, but a little angry at this exercise. Here, the prophet of God is coming and serving judgement on my family, on my sons. That is no good! I think that every father thinks that each son has such great attributes in their own right. It would be impossible for one a father to watch this prophet reject one son after another.

We love our children, each for their own attributes. Each child we have is a reflection of the best and sometimes the worst of us. We know that each child is gifted differently and will excel in different situations. But as Jesse was watching this happen, he must have felt some chagrin as he knew which son would be capable of leadership, and they were passed over.

The last phrase: “are these all the sons you have?” is a harbinger of things to come, to be sure. For those of us who know the story, we know that there is one more son that has yet to be seen. Jesse couldn’t have imagined that this was the son that Samuel was interested in.

But throughout the story of the kings of Israel, perhaps more so at the beginning, we seem to see God making fun of them for wanting a king. Rather than finding the most fitting character, he chose Saul from a luggage cart, and will choose David from herding sheep. God has a funny sense of humor.

The truth is, life is complicated, and finding good leadership is just as difficult as finding a good cook. God knew who to get Samuel to look at. The story is about to continue.

- 1. Have you ever felt led to make a choice that doesn’t seem to make sense?**
- 2. What would you do if you were Jesse and saw your sons being passed over, especially the ones who seemed to make the most sense?**
- 3. How can you be sure that you are following God when it comes to the choices that you make?**

WEEK 2: DAY 5 (1 Samuel 16:8)

Then Jesse told his son Abinadab to step forward and walk in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “This is not the one the LORD has chosen.” 9 Next Jesse summoned Shimea, but Samuel said, “Neither is this the one the LORD has chosen.” 10 In the same way all seven of Jesse’s sons were presented to Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.” 11 Then Samuel asked, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse replied. “But he’s out in the fields watching the sheep and goats.”

“Send for him at once,” Samuel said. “We will not sit down to eat until he arrives.”

12 *So Jesse sent for him. He was dark and handsome, with beautiful eyes.*

And the LORD said, “This is the one; anoint him.”

13 *So as David stood there among his brothers, Samuel took the flask of olive oil he had brought and anointed David with the oil. And the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David from that day on. Then Samuel returned to Ramah.*

“There is still the youngest.”

This phrase was all that Samuel needed. He asked that David be sent for, and that dinner would wait until he arrived. When David finally did arrive we learn two things: 1) He was dark and handsome. And 2) This is the one that God wanted Samuel to anoint.

It seems like this is simple. However, I can recall a story when one son was picked over the many others in the Old Testament. The story of Joseph (Genesis 37), his dreams, and the ensuing situations were not great. Family dynamics change when one child is chosen over the others. This could have been the case when it came to the family dynamics in Jesse's household.

What do you think the other brothers felt as they saw David being anointed? How would they have reacted? How would you and your siblings have reacted if this happened in your family? Would there be jealousy, anger, frustration, and maybe even fighting?

Family systems are complicated and are deeply entrenched in us from the beginning of our lives. While it is no fault of our own, it is certainly something that we each have to deal with. Perhaps this is something that you are struggling with or something that needs to be addressed with a counselor. It is pretty shocking to me that over the years in my Pastoral Counseling role, the amount of family systems pain that has been caused and the deep work it takes to dig out of these ruts.

We don't know too much about the ongoing family dynamics of Jesse's sons in response to David's choosing, but we can extrapolate that this changed the dynamics and the hierarchy of the family system. I wonder if it is like when one sibling gets famous or wealthy and how the rest of the family reacts? Perhaps this change turns the family upside down, or perhaps it is something that simply has to be navigated and negotiated.

What is your family like? How do you think it would handle a shift in family dynamics like this? Would you all handle it well, or would you struggle with what might seem like things being very unfair?

If your family is like most of them out there, there are things that need to be handled carefully, and the introduction of a therapist is never a bad idea. Seeking professional help with family dynamics is always a good investment, particularly when it comes to changes in the social structure or setting of the family.

- 1. Do you think David's brother appreciated being passed over and having to watch as their youngest brother was anointed?**
- 2. How do you think they handled it?**
- 3. How can our relationship with God help us when it comes to embedded family systems?**

IT'S COMPLICATED (S1) - WEEK 3

By Pastor Dave Ferguson

WEEK 3: DAY 1 (1 Samuel 17:3-11)

... the Philistines and Israelites faced each other on opposite hills, with the valley between them.

Then Goliath, a Philistine champion from Gath, came out of the Philistine ranks to face the forces of Israel. He was over nine feet tall! He wore a bronze helmet, and his bronze coat of mail weighed 125 pounds. He also wore bronze leg armor, and he carried a bronze javelin on his shoulder. The shaft of his spear was as heavy and thick as a weaver's beam, tipped with an iron spearhead that weighed 15 pounds. His armor bearer walked ahead of him carrying a shield.

Goliath stood and shouted a taunt across to the Israelites. "Why are you all coming out to fight?" he called. "I am the Philistine champion, but you are only the servants of Saul. Choose one man to come down here and fight me! If he kills me, then we will be your slaves. But if I kill him, you will be our slaves! I defy the armies of Israel today! Send me a man who will fight me!" When Saul and the Israelites heard this, they were terrified and deeply shaken.

Psalm 143:4

I am losing all hope; I am paralyzed with fear.

Are there giants roaming the creek beds of your mind? Taunting you? Blocking you? Creating paralyzing fear and discouragement?

Our study begins with the people of God caught in a face-off against their Philistine enemies. Positioned on opposite plateaus, these two armies are separated by a valley carved by swollen rainy-season rivers. Currently, a shallow creek babbles where the river once flowed. However, the most striking feature of the valley? Goliath. For the past six weeks, each day has started the same way. The nearly ten-foot-tall hulking giant steps from the morning shadows, slams his telephone pole spear into the ground, and begins chanting taunts. His booming bass voice echoes across the canyon, ascending to the tents of the Israelites quaking in fear.

Goliath's challenge is clear: Send me your best warrior, and we will fight to the death, winner take all. The Israelites feared Goliath. They were afraid of death, slavery, being called out, and failing. They worried no one would step up. As is often the case, overwhelmed by this fear, God's people were paralyzed and motionless.

Ironically, the Hebrews have their own giant... King Saul. First Samuel 9:2 and 10:23 describe him as "head and shoulders taller than anyone else in the land." Yet, in this story, Saul never leaves his tent. He, too, is petrified.

Have you ever experienced this? Where an enemy of your plans and future stands in the way? It's easy to focus on such obstacles. They consume our thoughts and cloud our vision. We become demoralized and stuck. The giant could be a lack of finances or a habit that you can't seem to overcome. It might also be a disease or illness. Ultimately, the giant leaves a heavy residue of fear that can easily thwart God's plans in our lives. We feel immobilized, and no one appears able to help.

However, from the depths of this story, hope emerges. Courage arrives. We do well to note that courage isn't the absence of fear. Instead, courage steps up in the face of fear. Sometimes, it comes from the most unpredictable places. And when it does, the results can be extraordinary.

1. **What are your top 3 fears? The dark, heights, snakes, public speaking... what?**
2. **What "giant" currently stands in the way of one of your dreams or goals?**
3. **What idea has God been speaking to you about that seems too scary to try? What conversation would you like to have with Him about that?**

WEEK 3: DAY 2 (1 Samuel 17:12-30)

Now David was the son of a man named Jesse, an Ephrathite from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. Jesse was an old man at that time, and he had eight sons. Jesse's three oldest sons—Eliab, Abinadab, and Shimeaa—had already joined Saul's army to fight the Philistines. David was the youngest son. David's three oldest brothers stayed with Saul's army, but David went back and forth so he could help his father with the sheep in Bethlehem.

For forty days, every morning and evening, the Philistine champion strutted in front of the Israelite army.

One day Jesse said to David, "Take this basket of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread, and carry them quickly to your brothers. And give these ten cuts of cheese to their captain. See how your brothers are getting along, and bring back a report on how they are doing." David's brothers were with Saul and the Israelite army at the valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines.

So David left the sheep with another shepherd and set out early the next morning with the gifts, as Jesse had directed him. He arrived at the camp just as the Israelite army was leaving for the battlefield with shouts and battle cries. Soon the Israelite and Philistine forces stood facing each other, army against army. David left his things with the keeper of supplies and hurried out to the ranks to greet his brothers. As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, came out from the Philistine ranks. Then David heard him shout his usual taunt to the army of Israel.

As soon as the Israelite army saw him, they began to run away in fright. "Have you seen the giant?" the men asked. "He comes out each day to defy Israel. The king has offered a huge reward to anyone who kills him. He will give that man one of his daughters for a wife, and the man's entire family will be exempted from paying taxes!"

David asked the soldiers standing nearby, "What will a man get for killing this Philistine and ending his defiance of Israel? Who is this pagan Philistine anyway, that he is allowed to defy the armies of the living God?"

And these men gave David the same reply. They said, "Yes, that is the reward for killing him."

But when David's oldest brother, Eliab, heard David talking to the men, he was angry. "What are you doing around here anyway?" he demanded. "What about those few sheep you're supposed to be taking care of? I know about your pride and deceit. You just want to see the battle!"

"What have I done now?" David replied. "I was only asking a question!" He walked over to some others and asked them the same thing and received the same answer.

Surely, you've noticed how often God uses the unpredictable to deliver salvation. It seems He prefers broken things, the insignificant, the "lesser than," and those who "don't measure up" for His most pivotal work. Maybe it is because this approach most clearly demonstrates His power.

David arrives on a donkey. He isn't there to fight; he's the water boy delivering lunch, glad to take a break from tending sheep. Curious about the adventure, he wants to hear all about the war. He watches the Israelite troops assemble in long rows on the valley floor, facing the enemy. Then it happens. The giant steps out of the shadows to unleash his taunts, and the Hebrew soldiers run for their lives.

At this moment, David does what I believe is inevitable: he starts asking questions. "Who is stepping up to fight the giant? Are there tryouts? Surely, many are willing to fight. Is there a reward? Why isn't anyone stepping forward?"

Questions arise whenever our communities of faith attract the young, the inexperienced, or the unchurched. Some of their questions are easy; others are difficult or even unanswerable. Some questions are respectful, while others threaten our historical culture. Some questions feel kind. Others sound hostile.

If only we could meet these questions with patience and humility. How refreshing it would be if we joined the newest members of our community in their quest for understanding, occasionally admitting, "I don't know." Instead, most of us struggle with the urge to shut down questions with the perfect answer or even with condescension and belittlement.

In most churches, for every David asking questions, at least one Eliab tries to shut them down. Rather than engaging in dialogue, Eliab attempts to humiliate David into silence. He calls him small and insignificant. He belittles his experience in a way only an older brother can. And likely, he thinks that's the end of it.

Nope. As a perfect example of how to respond to most detractors, David turns away from Eliab to the next person he can find and continues his line of questions. Passionate, persistent, perfect.

Here, courage begins to grow at the intersection of fear and faith, curiosity and confusion. Through the act of questioning, David ends up in the king's tent, offering his services, such as they are. As it turns out, they are precisely what God has been waiting for.

- 1. On a scale of 1-10, how inquisitive are you? Why do you think that is?**
- 2. What question have you always wished you could ask God and receive His answer?**
- 3. How comfortable are you to say, "I don't know," in response to someone else's question?**
- 4. Have you ever felt shut down by someone in the community of faith? What did you do about that? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**

WEEK 3: DAY 3 (1 Samuel 17:31-40)

... David's question was reported to King Saul, and the king sent for him.

"Don't worry about this Philistine," David told Saul. "I'll go fight him!"

"Don't be ridiculous!" Saul replied. "There's no way you can fight this Philistine and possibly win! You're only a boy, and he's been a man of war since his youth."

But David persisted. "I have been taking care of my father's sheep and goats," he said. "When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock, I go after it with a club and rescue the lamb from its mouth. If the animal turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death. I have done this to both lions and bears, and I'll do it to this pagan Philistine, too, for he has defied the armies of the living God! The LORD who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear will rescue me from this Philistine!"

Saul finally consented. "All right, go ahead," he said. "And may the LORD be with you!"

Then Saul gave David his own armor—a bronze helmet and a coat of mail. David put it on, strapped the sword over it, and took a step or two to see what it was like, for he had never worn such things before.

"I can't go in these," he protested to Saul. "I'm not used to them." So David took them off again. He picked up five smooth stones from a stream and put them into his shepherd's bag. Then, armed only with his shepherd's staff and sling, he started across the valley to fight the Philistine.

Psalms 143:5

I remember the days of old. I ponder all your great works and think about what you have done.

David arrives at the king's tent to witness quite a scene. Saul is surrounded by high-ranking advisors who are wringing their hands in frustration. Is he pacing restlessly? Or is he slumped in the corner, resigned to the giant's victory and a life of slavery at best, beheading at worst? What we know for sure is Saul is afraid (v11).

Before we proceed, notice why David has been invited to see the king. "David's question was reported to the king." This young visitor to the battlefield has persistently continued his questioning so thoroughly that he has been elevated up the chain of command: private to sergeant, lieutenant to captain, all the way to the king himself. Here, we learn a lesson. Instead of shrinking into the background when our questions are dismissed, we do better to stand firm, persist, and be stubborn.

As David arrives, he quickly assures Saul, "Don't worry, I will fight the giant." Can you hear the voice of this teenage boy cracking? How cute. The king responds with a laugh, "That's just ridiculous." But David has a plan.

David tells shepherding stories of a bear and lion attack, during which he faced certain failure and death until God stepped in to rescue him. His strategy is to attack the giant, and just as Goliath is about to crush the boy, God will intervene and save him from the giant's grasp. What an absurd proposal! No organizational board would vote to move forward with a tactic like that.

For some peculiar reason (perhaps out of sheer terror at the thought of Goliath), Saul quickly agrees to the plan. He then follows a familiar pattern. Often, when the young and inexperienced are finally allowed to take charge, those in power struggle to relinquish authority. Saul piles his hefty, oversized armor onto David's teenage frame. It's as though Saul is saying, "Sure, you can tackle this task as long as you do it my way. Attack in the shape of my armor." The breastplate of this fully mature man, described as head and shoulders taller than all of his countrymen, won't fit the boy. Similarly, new leaders shouldn't be confined to outdated methods. Either Saul needs to gear up and confront Goliath himself or step aside for the boy armed with a shepherd's stick and a strip of leather.

Besides, David's strategy doesn't rely on armor or five stones. Victory rests on whether God shows up.

1. **When was one of the first times you were trusted with a truly important task? How did that make you feel?**
2. **What expectations have others placed on you that don't fit who you are? How have you reacted?**
3. **What battle are you currently in that can't possibly go well unless God shows up with rescue? What do you want to say to Him about that?**

WEEK 3: DAY 4 (1 Samuel 17:41-50)

Goliath walked out toward David with his shield bearer ahead of him, sneering in contempt at this ruddy-faced boy. "Am I a dog," he roared at David, "that you come at me with a stick?" And he cursed David by the names of his gods. "Come over here, and I'll give your flesh to the birds and wild animals!" Goliath yelled.

David replied to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of Heaven's Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. Today the LORD will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! And everyone assembled here will know that the LORD rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. This is the LORD's battle, and he will give you to us!"

As Goliath moved closer to attack, David quickly ran out to meet him. Reaching into his shepherd's bag and taking out a stone, he hurled it with his sling and hit the Philistine in the forehead. The stone sank in, and Goliath stumbled and fell face down on the ground.

So David triumphed over the Philistine with only a sling and a stone, for he had no sword. Then David ran over and pulled Goliath's sword from its sheath. David used it to kill him and cut off his head.

Psalms 143:9

Rescue me from my enemies, LORD; I run to you to hide me.

The call of the giant roars, "You come at me with a stick? Keep coming. I will tear you in half and throw you back where you came from." But the boy's warbling voice responds, "No, I don't come with a stick. I come with the Creator of the Universe, the Lion of Judah, the One who gives you breath and upon whom your life depends. I'm crossing this creek with Him."

We have many questions as David approaches the giant. Does he shine with the naïve confidence sometimes observed in youth, sensing no danger? Or might we notice a slight tremor as faith and fear intertwine with each heartbeat? Why does he select **five** stones? Is it because he knows Goliath has four enormous brothers and is uncertain how many must fall before the day ends?

In any case, he stands at the edge of the creek, at the crossroads of paralysis and action, bathed in the secret sauce of Christianity: “I come in the name of the LORD of Heaven.” Whatever your giant, no matter how wide the valley between you and your future, the way forward is to walk in step with Jesus.

A deep belly laugh erupts from the massive man as his head tilts back just enough to dislodge his helmet from its proper fit. One stone zings through the air, and time slows for everyone in sight. The thud of the stone against Goliath’s forehead captures everyone’s attention. The arrogant laughter of the Philistine Army falls silent as the giant wobbles in a confusing sight before crashing heavily onto his face on the ground.

For a brief moment, no one knows what to do. Everything is still except for a single pair of sandaled feet. David crosses the creek bed, lifts Goliath’s massive sword, and decapitates the enemy. Now, there is no doubt that the problem is dead.

More than just a romantic tale, this story serves as a window into God’s plan for our lives. We live in frightening times and face countless giants. If we are honest, there’s no way to confidently find our way through—at least not one we naturally perceive. Yet, the God of David whispers through the ages, “Walk with me... go in my direction, and I will see you through.”

Your giants may include loneliness, financial loss, addiction, troubled relationships, or even death itself. Perhaps your giant lurks just around the corner, unseen for now. Still, Jesus invites you to proclaim throughout the landscape of your life, “I come in the name of the Resurrection, the Way, the Truth, the Life, the LORD of Heaven. And He holds me in the palm of His hand.”

1. **Think of a moment during an activity when you were smaller or less capable than those around you. How did that affect you?**
2. **When a problem arises during your day, how easy is it for you to talk to Jesus about it right then? Why do you think that is?**
3. **What is the most challenging thing you are facing right now? How long has this been a part of your story? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**

WEEK 3: DAY5 (1 Samuel 17:51-58)

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they turned and ran. Then the men of Israel and Judah gave a great shout of triumph and rushed after the Philistines, chasing them as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron. The bodies of the dead and wounded Philistines were strewn all along the road from Shaaraim, as far as Gath and Ekron. Then the Israelite army returned and plundered the deserted Philistine camp. (David took the Philistine’s head to Jerusalem, but he stored the man’s armor in his own tent.)

As Saul watched David go out to fight the Philistine, he asked Abner, the commander of his army, “Abner, whose son is this young man?”

"I really don't know," Abner declared.

"Well, find out who he is!" the king told him.

As soon as David returned from killing Goliath, Abner brought him to Saul with the Philistine's head still in his hand. "Tell me about your father, young man," Saul said.

And David replied, "His name is Jesse, and we live in Bethlehem."

Psalm 143:10-11

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. May your gracious Spirit lead me forward on a firm footing.

For the glory of your name, O LORD, preserve my life. Because of your faithfulness, bring me out of this distress.

David proclaims the presence of the Lord of Heaven, slings a rock, the giant falls, and then the **BIG** miracle happens.

The people of God have been parked atop a plateau for six weeks, staring at their problem in abject paralysis and fear. The underdog shepherd boy topples the giant, unlocking Israel's zeal. Their legs now move, and their hearts resume beating. The Zombies have come alive.

Scripture records that once David acts in God's name, a vicious battle commences from the valley floor, thirteen miles to the borders of Philistia. Then, the Israelites run back to loot the enemy's tents. For twenty-six miles, the church goes from stuck to marathon runners because an undersized outsider doesn't understand what can and can't be done.

Could God have a plan for His church to come unstuck? What might He do with the faith of the young, inexperienced, and naïve? Maybe God plans to use the stick and stones of my weird armor to make a difference in the Crosswalk community of faith.

But before we leave this story, consider a profoundly complicated problem God has with us. David enters this story as the long shot, the unpredictable solution to Israel's problem. However, look carefully; notice that's not how he leaves this passage.

In a confusing twist during the closing words of this chapter, Saul appears uncertain about who David is. He should know since David has already served the king as a musician and comforter. However, as the battle concludes, Saul invites David to his tent for clarification. The Bible notes that David arrives with Goliath's head "still in his hand." Wait... what?

Let's get this straight. The underdog beheads the giant and raises the trophy high. This ignites newfound faith, motivating the Israelites to charge into battle. Presumably, David fights in the skirmishes along the thirteen miles to the border of Philistia while carrying Goliath's heavy head. Is this a joke? Or does it highlight a complicated issue God continually faces when He allows us to participate in one of His victories?

Because of the actions of God, David will flip from obscurity to a national hero in seconds. According to 1 Samuel 18:6-7:

*... when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing... And the women sang to one another as they celebrated,
"Saul has struck down his thousands,
but David his ten thousands."*

Why would David fight one-handed to carry Goliath's head with him? Maybe it serves as a reminder of God's miraculous presence as the troops battle the enemy. Or is it a misplaced expression of pride? Does David want to ensure everyone knows, "I'm him; I'm the one who did it. Don't worry; your champion is here to rescue you, and it's me?"

How many times must God pause to consider the problem? He loves to use the weak to accomplish His purposes. The problem is that as soon as He does, the ego of the weak may take over, and a new Goliath is born.

1. **Have you ever won a contest or received a trophy? What was it? How did it make you feel?**
2. **How much do you struggle with pride on a scale of 1-10? What is something that keeps you humble?**
3. **What does the story of David and Goliath cause you to consider confessing to Jesus?**

IT'S COMPLICATED (S1) - WEEK 4

By Pastor Paddy McCoy

WEEK 4: DAY 1 (1 Samuel 18:1-4)

"1 After David had finished talking with Saul, he met Jonathan, the king's son. There was an immediate bond between them, for Jonathan loved David. 2 From that day on Saul kept David with him and wouldn't let him return home. 3 And Jonathan made a solemn pact with David, because he loved him as he loved himself. 4 Jonathan sealed the pact by taking off his robe and giving it to David, together with his tunic, sword, bow, and belt."

1 Samuel 18:1-4 NLT

Do you have a best friend, a kindred spirit, someone who simply gets you? I am blessed to say I've got a few, but the one I've known the longest is a childhood friend of mine that I met in 7th grade.

He was new to our school, but I had only been at the same school a year before, and had previously moved across the country with my mom and two older brothers in order to start life anew. In my previous school, I had lots of friends, people I was excited to see at school, but we didn't hang out much outside of school due to the distance between our houses and unsuccessfully trying to obtain a driver's license at 8 years old.

But in my new school, we tended to spend as much time outside of school as we did inside. We regularly went to each other's houses, found activities to keep us busy, and had a lot of fun together.

Though some friendships came and went with changes in school and age, Jon and I always stayed close. We went through college together, he met a girl and got married, then she introduced me to the woman that would be my wife. We were in each other's weddings, there for the birth of our kids, and we have remained "knit" together in close friendships for over 37 years.

It's amazing to have a friend who gets you. Someone that no matter how much time you spend apart, when you do meet up again, you pick up right where you left off.

This is how I imagine the friendship between David and Jonathan. They got each other. There was a deep bond that as we'll see, caused Jonathan to protect David, even from his own father.

Life sure is a whole lot more manageable when you have someone, or a group of someone's, to go through it with. To share in your triumphs, to draw near in your defeats, and to listen and be a presence when you need them most.

And don't miss Jonathan's act of putting his robe onto David. Jonathan was an heir to the throne, but when he takes off his robe and put it onto David, he's giving that right to David instead. Jonathan must have been quite an amazing person to do such a thing for a friend.

That said, there are things about friendships that can get complicated. We'll spend time this week reflecting on some of those challenges, asking ourselves the question, "Is this friendship worth the risk?"

- 1. Do you have someone in your life who just gets you? If so, who is it and what is it about them that makes your relationship easy?**
- 2. Have you ever gone through a challenging time with that friend, maybe even wondering if they were on your side or not?**

WEEK 4: DAY 2 (Psalm 55: 14)

14 What good fellowship we once enjoyed as we walked together to the house of God.

-Psalm 55:14

We've included Psalm 55 in this week's focus because as we'll learn more about on Friday when we look at more of this passage, scholars believe this Psalm was written by David after Jonathan died in battle.

One of the complicated things about friendship is that entering into a friendship always comes with risk. Whenever you allow someone else into your heart, it's risky. You risk being hurt by them if they were to betray you. You risk losing them if they move away or die. You risk being hurt by them in any number of ways. So one always has to ask yourself the question, "Do you know enough about the other person that you've decided that friendship with them is worth the risk?" I ask couples I'm doing premarital counseling for the same question, is entering into this marriage covenant worth the risks involved, because there are no guarantees as to what may happen in life.

My dear friend, Pastor Sam Leonor, and I used to chaplain at different universities at the same time. He was at La Sierra University, and I was at Walla Walla University. Both schools send out students to serve as missionaries around the world; anywhere from 3 months, up to a full year.

In the process of helping a student find their call as to where they will serve, the parents of the students would inevitably get involved to help their child pick somewhere “safe.” Sam and I would talk about the challenge of these conversations, because though somewhere may seem relatively “safe,” we couldn’t guarantee complete safety anywhere in the world.

At one of our campus ministries conventions, I heard Sam say that there is no such thing as risk versus no risk. Everything is a risk. The question you have to answer is, do you have enough information to determine if the risk is worth it or not.

David took that risk with Jonathan and for many years, it paid off. But then Jonathan was killed and David’s heart was broken. Gone was his friend who help him in times of trouble; gone was his consistent shoulder to lean on and an ear to listen too, and gone was the person who understood him better than most. Jonathan was gone but not forgotten.

In today’s verse, even though David is grieving the lost of his kindred friend, he is able to remember better times. For a moment, it’s this memory that gave his heart some hope amidst his pain.

We each need these kinds of relationships in our lives. I pray you have at least one.

- 1. Who would you consider one of your best friends? How long have you known them? What is it about them that draws you close?**
- 2. Have you ever lost a friendship, or love, that was near and dear to your heart? How did you handle it?**
- 3. Have you ever been betrayed by someone you thought was a friend? If so, what happened and did it influence the “risks” you took in the future?**

WEEK 4: DAY 3 (1 Samuel 19:1-3)

“1 Saul now urged his servants and his son Jonathan to assassinate David. But Jonathan, because of his strong affection for David, 2 told him what his father was planning. “Tomorrow morning,” he warned him, “you must find a hiding place out in the fields. 3 I’ll ask my father to go out there with me, and I’ll talk to him about you. Then I’ll tell you everything I can find out.”

1 Samuel 19:1-3

Friendships can be complicated, and so can families. Sure, Jonathan and David were dear friends, but Jonathan was also the son of the current king of Israel, while David had been anointed as the king to take Saul’s place all the way back when he was 15. Complicated? You could say that?

Overtime, though David was deeply loyal to Saul, overtime, Saul became more and more jealous of David. David was handsome, David was a revealed and successful warrior, and David seemed to have the favor of God that Saul wanted. So because of Saul’s jealousy, the relationship between Jonathan and David got complicated to say the least.

In today's passage, Saul wants David assassinated, and even asks his son, Jonathan, to play a part. Saul must have known of their friendship, but as we're told, Saul wasn't in his right mind in this season of his life.

But Jonathan remains loyal to his friend, offering him protection while at the same time, trying to honor his father. As we'll see tomorrow, Jonathan makes a case for why David's life should be spared.

Do you have someone in your life who you know would be willing to put their reputation on the line for you? Do you have someone you'd be willing to put your reputation on the line for as well? These kinds of relationships are so important to our overall physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

If you have had a friend stick up for you even to protect you from their family or their other friends, what did they feel like? What did it do to the dynamics of your relationship?

Sticking up for a friend in their time of need can be tricky, risky even, but it can also solidify your bond in ways that nothing else will.

Thankfully, God didn't wait for us to be perfect or have everything figured out before he came to stick up for us. As the apostle Paul wrote, "When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." (Romans 5:6-8, NLT)

Yes. There's just something incredibly bonding about someone sticking up for you, especially when you don't deserve it. Jesus did it for us; might we be willing to do the same for others?

- 1. Have you ever had a friendship where a family member or friend got in the way of that friendship? If so, what happened?**
- 2. Can you remember a time when someone stood up for you during a critical moment? What happened, how did it make you feel, and where does that relationship with that person stand today?**
- 3. What does it mean to you to know that Jesus didn't wait for you to get perfect, or uncomplicate your life, before he came down to rescue you? What might you be willing to tell others about this wonderful Savior?**

WEEK 4, DAY 4 (1 Samuel 19:4-7)

4 The next morning Jonathan spoke with his father about David, saying many good things about him. "The king must not sin against his servant David," Jonathan said. "He's never done anything to harm you. He has always helped you in any way he could. 5 Have you forgotten about the time he risked his life to kill the Philistine giant and how the Lord brought a great victory to all Israel as a result? You were certainly happy about it then. Why should you murder an innocent man like David? There is no reason for it at all!" 6 So Saul listened to Jonathan and vowed, "As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be killed." 7 Afterward Jonathan called David and told him what had happened. then he brought David to Saul, and David served in the court as before.

1 Samuel 19:4-10 NLT

One thing I'm most struck by in today's passage is how Jonathan must have spoken in defense of today with a tone of love and respect for his father, otherwise, Saul could have easily just killed Jonathan for his lack of loyalty and respect. It wouldn't have been the first time a father killed a son to maintain power. But Jonathan must have loved his father, even when his father wanted to kill someone near and dear to Jonathan's heart.

I think there is an important lesson here for us. In a world that is so ready to disagree with you, or even cancel you, simply based on what you're wearing, how you voted, or even the color of your skin or your sexual orientation, we are still called to be images of God's love. We are still called to love and respect even those we vehemently disagree with, because believe it or not, there is a way to disagree within a spirit of love and respect.

So maybe instead of being quick to block someone on your social media, kick out people from your friend group who voted differently, or shrink and insulate your "people" from ideologies you hate, maybe, we should work on learning again what it means to listen to one another. Listen to see what makes a person tick. If we disagree about something, whether an interpretation of Scripture, how to address a problem, or who to vote for, then maybe we should seek to be more curious instead of judgmental. Maybe before writing someone off, we should learn their name and a little bit about their story and what makes them, them.

See how in verse 6, "Saul listened to Jonathan..." Saul listened because Jonathan spoke to him out of love, and with much respect. And Jonathan did just plead for David, he tried to remind his father who he knew God to be.

As I am writing this, we just celebrated Martin Luther King Jr day and are about to head into Black History Month. In honor of both of these, I will end with one of my favorite quotes from Dr. King from a sermon given from an Alabama Jail entitled simply, "Love Your Enemies." I think it's a reminder to our community to lovewell, even when it's really hard, because love is the only hope we have.

"Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." - Martin Luther King, Jr

- 1. Have you ever had a disagreement with a loved one that you were able to address while maintaining the spirit of love and respect? What happened?**
- 2. Have you ever blocked, cancelled, or written someone off in your life for a difference between the two of you? What was the difference and why was it decided to walk away?**
- 3. God seems to care an awful lot about reconciliation. Is there an estranged friend or loved one in your life that has wronged you, who would be open to an attempt of reconciliation that can bring them, and you, great healing?**

WEEK 4, DAY 5 (Psalm 55:1-8, 14, 16-17)

1 Listen to my prayer, O God. Do not ignore my cry for help!

2 Please listen and answer me, for I am overwhelmed by my troubles.

3 My enemies shout at me, making loud and wicked threats. They bring trouble on me and angrily hunt me down.

4 My heart pounds in my chest. The terror of death assaults me.

5 Fear and trembling overwhelm me, and I can't stop shaking.

6 Oh, that I had wings like a dove; then I would fly away and rest!
7 I would fly far away to the quiet of the wilderness. Interlude
8 How quickly I would escape—far from this wild storm of hatred.
9 Confuse them, Lord, and frustrate their plans, for I see violence and conflict in the city.
10 Its walls are patrolled day and night against invaders, but the real danger is wickedness within the city.
11 Everything is falling apart; threats and cheating are rampant in the streets.
12 It is not an enemy who taunts me—I could bear that. It is not my foes who so arrogantly insult me—I could have hidden from them.
13 Instead, it is you—my equal, my companion and close friend.
14 What good fellowship we once enjoyed as we walked together to the house of God.
16 But I will call on God, and the Lord will rescue me.
17 Morning, noon, and night I cry out in my distress, and the Lord hears my voice.

We began this week by asking you to think about a friend in your life that just gets you; your kindred spirit, your bestie? But we'll end the week spending a little time thinking about if you have ever lost one of those kinds of friends, whether through death, a move, a betrayal, or some other type of incident.

If you have, then you know the pain and the very complicated journey of grief.

In Psalm 55, David is pouring his heart out because he has just lost his best friend, Jonathan. He cries to God, he's overwhelmed with grief, his heart pounding, his body can't stop shaking, and he's overcome with fear and trembling. This is what grief does to us.

If we've done any studying about grief, we've likely heard of the six stages of grief that every person goes through when they've experienced loss in their life. Those stages are summed up with these words; shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. And though most people want to see this as a checklist that happens in a linear format, sadly, it is not. You can go in and out of stages, you can have gone through all the stages only to be reminded of something years later and enter back into a stage. And no two people go through grief in the same way, this what makes it difficult and complicated.

We were never meant to experience grief, so when it does happen, it rips us apart.

But the good news is, grief won't last forever. One day, death and mourning and crying and pain will be no more (Revelation 21: 4b, NLT). Until then, good friends and the right kind of community, can be there for you and help hold you up when you can't walk. And as much as grief can hurt, and as many risks are involved with putting one's heart out there to make friends, in my experience, there is nothing like a good friend and community to help you get through the most difficult of times.

- 1. Have you ever gone through the stages of grief? What was it like? What happened that you didn't expect?**
- 2. If you were to describe the journey of grief to someone who had never experienced it, what would you say?**
- 3. How do you know when you know enough about a person to determine that starting a friendship with them is worth the risk of getting hurt?**

IT'S COMPLICATED (S1) - WEEK 5

By Pastor Tim Gillespie

WEEK 5: DAY 1 (Psalm 131)

*LORD, my heart is not proud;
my eyes are not haughty.
I don't concern myself with matters too great
or too awesome for me to grasp.*

*2 Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself,
like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's milk.
Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me.*

*3 O Israel, put your hope in the LORD—
now and always.*

1 Samuel 18:5 *Whatever Saul asked David to do, David did it successfully. So Saul made him a commander over the men of war, an appointment that was welcomed by the people and Saul's officers alike.*

6 *When the victorious Israelite army was returning home after David had killed the Philistine, women from all the towns of Israel came out to meet King Saul. They sang and danced for joy with tambourines and cymbals. 7 This was their song:*

*"Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands!"*

8 *This made Saul very angry. "What's this?" he said. "They credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. Next they'll be making him their king!" 9 So from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.*

I used to work at a church where I was an associate pastor. I was just getting my feet wet when it came to preaching each week, and I was still learning, needing mentoring, and was not great at it, if I am honest. But every now and again I would be given the opportunity to preach in the "big house," otherwise known as the sanctuary. I didn't really like preaching there, it wasn't really my vibe. I had to dress up too much, I had to try and be comfortable speaking after 50 minutes of preliminaries, and I never felt comfortable there.

One time, I preached a pretty good sermon. That is not totally unheard of, even a blind squirrel finds a nut now and again! But one older gentleman came up to me after the sermon and said, “our senior pastor better watch out, you are coming up on him quickly. . .”

To be clear, I would never have wanted the seniors’ job. I wasn’t gunning for it, and I didn’t have aspirations at that point in my career; I was just happy I got through the day and didn’t fall or throw up!

However, I am pretty sure that my Sr. Pastor did hear the comment, and it made him a bit uncomfortable. This was a shame, as our working relationship was pretty good at that point. I don’t know if that changed his attitude about me or if something else might have happened, but I saw our relationship change for the next few years. Perhaps this was a catalyst, who knows? Regardless, jealousy and fear is a real thing in the workplace.

And can you imagine that coming from a king? That had to begin to make the relationship between him and David ultimately more complicated. The text seems to indicate that it was more complicated because of this.

Have you ever had a relationship like this with someone you worked with? How difficult was it in the long run? Do you think things could have been better if people had just minded their own business? There are times when people exacerbate a situation and make it much worse than it needs to be.

- 1. What would you do if you were David and this was happening to you?**
- 2. Do you think people were just trying to be supportive?**
- 3. How can you avoid getting into this kind of situation while still working hard to do a good job?**

WEEK 5: DAY 2 (Psalm 131)

*LORD, my heart is not proud;
my eyes are not haughty.
I don’t concern myself with matters too great
or too awesome for me to grasp.*

*2 Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself,
like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother’s milk.
Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me.*

*3 O Israel, put your hope in the LORD—
now and always.*

1 Samuel 18:6 *When the victorious Israelite army was returning home after David had killed the Philistine, women from all the towns of Israel came out to meet King Saul. They sang and danced for joy with tambourines and cymbals.*

Today, I thought we could emphasize Psalm 131. This Psalm is a song that is speaking to God, and the author is trying to explain to God that his heart is in the right place. He is not trying to be too arrogant about what is happening around him. He wants to redirect people into understanding that God is always in charge and that there is hope for Israel if they just trust in what God is doing, now and always.

The Psalms speak to the human condition. They speak of pain, anger, and frustration but also of joy, hope, and the peace that comes from trusting in God.

What do you do when you need to let out those emotions when it comes to your relationship with God? Do you write music? Do you crochet? Do you write poetry or do art? How do you express yourself in these situations?

It is important to do something. I sometimes go for a jog, workout, or write a note in my notes application on my phone. All of these things are what we can do to help us get out what we are feeling inside. I do much of this, along with constant prayer and conversation with God. Sometimes, the physical act of exercise allows me to clear my head and speak with clarity to God about what is going on in my life. And sometimes, I even let God have it a little.

I realized a long time ago that God is not afraid of my questions, my questioning, and my anger. He has seen it all a billion times, and so he is willing to listen. I never want to be abusive of my relationship with Him, but I do need to get out my feelings at times. I don't think God is too worried about this. If you have read the Psalms, then you know that David was doing the same thing a great deal of the time. The Psalms are not all about feeling good in your relationship with God, they are even about being angry, frustrated and not understanding what God is doing from time to time. It is fair to say that David was not afraid to tell God the truth about how he was feeling, and neither should you!

- 1. Have you ever yelled at God? Do you think it upset Him?**
- 2. How can you get out your emotions in ways that are helpful to you and your relationship with God?**
- 3. Do you have a favorite Psalm that you like to quote or go to when you need some help and support?**

WEEK 5: DAY 3. (1 Samuel 18:7)

This was their song:

*"Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands!"*

Coming back to this text today. This is quite a clever turn of phrase, but it is not helpful in the relationship between Saul and David. The women were coming out of their homes and singing this song, which makes me think it was perhaps already popular in the cities and towns where David and Saul had to travel.

Can you imagine if you had a subordinate doing well, and this was being sung about him/her? How would that make you feel?

Throughout my career as a pastor, I always tried to surround myself with amazing people—people who were smarter than me and could run circles around me. This not only kept me humble but also kept me on my toes and made me a better leader. However, it also meant that I needed to rejoice in their successes as much as my own.

This can be hard, especially when someone else gets the accolades that used to come to you. You have to learn to humble yourself a bit and accept the idea that others can do things as well or better than you can. This is a great thing to learn and can make you a more generous and benevolent person. To take joy in their successes means that you have been leading well and helping them achieve their goals.

Saul did not see it this way, and the issue became one that had to be handled with suspicion and anger.

At work, it is easy to try and make yourself look good, and sometimes that means making someone else look bad. This is never a good leadership position to be in. The best thing we can do is make sure that we can support those who do well and try to enable those who are struggling to get better. This is good leadership. When you experience jealousy at work, you need to make sure you can bring that other person into the success you are experiencing if at all possible. In this way, you are showing that benevolence that God has shown you!

- 1. Has anyone ever been jealous of you at work? How did that make you feel?**
- 2. Have you ever been jealous that someone was succeeding at your job?**
- 3. Does one person doing well always mean that no one else can? Or is there a way to make a team approach work?**

WEEK 5: DAY 4 (1 Samuel 18:14)

David continued to succeed in everything he did, for the LORD was with him. 15 When Saul recognized this, he became even more afraid of him. 16 But all Israel and Judah loved David because he was so successful at leading his troops into battle.

I find it interesting that the word used for Saul's emotions are not that he was "jealous," but that he was "afraid." How closely related are fear and jealousy? Pretty close, I think.

Have you ever dated someone who was very jealous? How did that make you feel? Did it make you feel comfortable, happy, or was it hard to deal with? Why was the person jealous?

Maybe a better question is “what did that person fear?” As that is usually the reality of someone who is jealous. They fear losing something, losing to someone, or they fear the change that might come. The problem with jealousy is that it rarely makes situations better. And by rarely, I mean never!

It is never a better situation when someone becomes jealous of someone else. This is the reality that David had to deal with on a daily basis. Saul was becoming more and more suspicious and jealous of what David was achieving, and so there were some real breaks in their relationship. This was not going to get more comfortable over time. It was actually going to get much worse as time went on.

This is the situation we all have to deal with when it comes to jealousy. It will never get better by being ignored. Rather, you need to face it head on and find a way past it, through it, or around it. However, if you cannot, the relationship is not only going to suffer, but will probably end poorly. I wish there was a better way to say this, but it is true.

Was David supposed to stop being successful in order to make Saul feel good? That is not a great way to move forward in situations like these. People have to come to an agreement, or the relationship will have to end, and probably end poorly. What has your experience been in situations like these?

So how can you stay out of these kinds of relationships?

- 1. Choose your partners/friends/colleagues wisely. While we can't always choose the people we work with, we can be on the lookout for signs of fear and jealousy.**
- 2. Create space for everyone to succeed, and don't take credit for something they have done. The best thing to do is give more credit away than you take for yourself.**
- 3. Always be gracious. In your communication, in your help, and in your time. This will help people to know where you are coming from.**

WEEK 5: DAY 5

Here is a quick overview of David and Saul's relationship in 1 Samuel 18. The relationship is marked by complex and growing tension, driven by admiration and jealousy. After David defeats Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, his popularity among the people of Israel skyrockets. Saul, the reigning king, initially sees David as a promising ally and a source of pride, but as David's success continues to grow, Saul's feelings begin to shift into envy and fear.

The pivotal moment in their relationship occurs when the women of Israel sing a song celebrating David's victories, saying, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7). This comparison provokes a deep sense of jealousy in Saul. He is no longer able to view David as just a loyal servant or warrior but as a threat to his own power and legacy. The text notes that "Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly" (1 Samuel 18:8), revealing how deeply this perceived slight affected the king's sense of self-worth and security.

Saul's jealousy is exacerbated by his growing realization that God's favor may be shifting away from him. God had previously rejected Saul as king due to his disobedience (1 Samuel 15), and the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him, leaving him vulnerable to the influence of harmful spirits. In contrast, David is portrayed as a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), and this divine favor only increases Saul's fear. His jealousy morphs into open hostility, and he begins to see David not only as a rival but as an existential threat to his reign.

The intensity of Saul's jealousy is evident in his attempts to eliminate David. First, he tries to manipulate David into marrying his daughter Michal, hoping that this will entangle David in court politics and make him more vulnerable. When that fails, Saul resorts to more direct methods, including several attempts on David's life. The constant tension between them is evident in the way Saul tries to kill David with a spear while David is playing music to soothe Saul's troubled spirit (1 Samuel 18:10-11).

At the heart of this narrative is the destructive power of jealousy. Saul's growing obsession with David's success blinds him to the loyalty and goodness David demonstrates. Instead of nurturing a relationship based on trust and mutual respect, Saul's jealousy isolates him, leading to his eventual downfall. In contrast, David remains steadfast, avoiding confrontation and continuing to honor Saul, despite the king's increasing animosity. This contrast between Saul's jealousy and David's integrity highlights the moral and spiritual consequences of envy.

1. **How can you be sure this doesn't happen in your life?**
2. **What can you do when someone becomes jealous of you, or your relationship changes?**
3. **How can you continue to do what is right for you, and yet help them understand you better?**

IT'S COMPLICATED (S1) - WEEK 6

By Pastor Dave Ferguson

WEEK 6: DAY 1 (1 Samuel 24:1-4)

After Saul returned from fighting the Philistines, he was told that David had gone into the wilderness of En-gedi. So Saul chose 3,000 elite troops from all Israel and went to search for David and his men near the rocks of the wild goats.

At the place where the road passes some sheepfolds, Saul went into a cave to relieve himself. But as it happened, David and his men were hiding farther back in that very cave!

"Now's your opportunity!" David's men whispered to him. "Today the LORD is telling you, 'I will certainly put your enemy into your power, to do with as you wish.'" So David crept forward and cut off a piece of the hem of Saul's robe.

Psalms 140:1-3

O LORD, rescue me from evil people. Protect me from those who are violent, those who plot evil in their hearts and stir up trouble all day long. Their tongues sting like a snake; the venom of a viper drips from their lips.

Okay, this is the kind of story people like to tell. It has intrigue and rivalry, multiple twists amidst the suspense, and just a hint of sanctified potty humor. If this were a movie we were watching, we might feel the director is being unreasonable, asking us to suspend our disbelief given the long odds against these parties all ending up in the same cave. But here we go.

The tensions between Saul and David have built over time, ever since the miraculous beheading of Goliath. David is on the run, zigzagging across the map to evade the search parties. However, the king is closing in on the small band of warriors. And then it happens – the cave.

Have you ever prayed for something only to have the answer served up inappropriately? You need the money, and no one would know if you took it. You've prayed for companionship, but they have committed to someone else. You deserve the promotion; all it would take is sharing a little information about your rival that isn't yours to disclose.

David is hiding in the very cave Saul chooses for his private moment. None of his guards enter with him. He is alone. And God has promised David the throne. This is clearly an answer to prayer, right?

Picture the dramatic scene from the soldiers' viewpoint outside the cave. Saul ventures inside by himself. Moments later, David steps out, holding Saul's head for everyone to see, just as he had done with Goliath's—and... scene.

Encouraged by his men, David sneaks up on Saul. Just one knife plunge away from ending his exile, David is halted by a sense of guilt. While it is true that God has promised him the throne, it is also true that God established Saul's kingship. He can't shake the thought that only God should undo what He has established, no matter how convenient his current opportunity may seem.

How incredibly challenging this is! We face this same struggle, at least in subtle ways. Every day, we are tempted to step in and manufacture something God has promised to handle Himself. We take up the cause of vengeance and seize our advantage over others. We cut corners on honesty, pretend ignorance when it suits us, and use sleight of hand to obtain what we believe we deserve. But the patience required to allow God to be God is always worth the wait. So, steel yourself to take the long road rather than stepping outside God's promises to do things your way. When you find yourself inching up on an improper opportunity in the darkness of your cave, take two steps back and talk with the one who promised to deliver you.

- 1. Did you have a childhood rival or enemy? Who was it, and why?**
- 2. What shortcut have you taken that you regret? Have you asked forgiveness for it?**
- 3. What promise God has made to you requires the greatest patience? What would you like to say to God about this?**

WEEK 6: DAY 2 (1 Samuel 24:5-8)

But then David's conscience began bothering him because he had cut Saul's robe. He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this to my lord the king. I shouldn't attack the LORD's anointed one, for the LORD himself has chosen him." So David restrained his men and did not let them kill Saul.

After Saul had left the cave and gone on his way, David came out and shouted after him, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked around, David bowed low before him.

Psalms 140:6-8

I said to the LORD, "You are my God!" Listen, O LORD, to my cries for mercy!

O Sovereign LORD, the strong one who rescued me, you protected me on the day of battle.

LORD, do not let evil people have their way. Do not let their evil schemes succeed, or they will become proud.

How hard is this? Everything lines up for David to take Saul's life. The king is vulnerable, unarmed, and alone, while David is concealed in the shadows and bathed in the element of surprise. Fresh whispers of support ring in David's ears, "Do it. Do it. Do it." There is even a theological bent to the encouragement from the young warrior's followers, "*Today the LORD is telling you, 'I will certainly put your enemy into your power, to do with as you wish.'*" (v4)

We have probably all experienced the growing voice of conscience as we crawl through the caves of our lives, shortcutting God's intentions. But it is no small task to stop midstream, contemplate God's will, and reverse course once we have started. This is remarkable.

David silently detaches a swatch of the king's robe (he will soon regret even this), retreats a safe distance, and watches the opportunity vanish through the mouth of the cave. Returning to his disappointed men, David needs to explain. The problem wasn't that he had lost his nerve or failed the attempt. Instead, conscience dictated that he let the king go. David had been talking with God between the time they last spoke and this moment of explanation. And that changed everything.

There is one hope for you and me to resist the temptation of inappropriate shortcuts... a living, ongoing, vibrant conversation with God.

There are several reasons the teaching team chose to pair Psalms with our study of the life of David. They are raw, earthy, and often easy to relate to. Some Psalms contain human struggles and sentiments found nowhere else in scripture. Conveniently, we have primarily chosen Psalms, which David himself composed, giving a unique insight into the mind of our central character. Maybe the best reason is that these Psalms illustrate what an ongoing conversation with God could sound like for you and me.

In Psalm 140, David pleads with God, "*LORD, do not let evil people have their way.*" As he pulls back from harming the king, he hears the reassuring voice of God, "That's right, don't take this into your own hands. I will take care of this. I am the one who placed Saul on the throne, and I will take care of you. Be patient and trust me."

David pulls back from the brink of regret. Today, you can too. Center your mind on God. Allow His Word to flow over your challenges and victories. Talk with Him as you experience your day.

1. **When something funny or exciting happens, who do you most want to share that with?**
2. **When angry or frightened, do you find it easy to talk about it? With whom?**
3. **Did you grow up with formulaic or free-form prayers? Do you find it easy to pray?**
4. **Find something bothering you and have an open-thought conversation with God about it.**

WEEK 6: DAY 31 Samuel 24:9-11

Then he shouted to Saul, "Why do you listen to the people who say I am trying to harm you? This very day you can see with your own eyes it isn't true. For the LORD placed you at my mercy back there in the cave. Some of my men told me to kill you, but I spared you. For I said, 'I will never harm the king—he is the LORD's anointed one.' Look, my father, at what I have in my hand. It is a piece of the hem of your robe! I cut it off, but I didn't kill you. This proves that I am not trying to harm you and that I have not sinned against you, even though you have been hunting for me to kill me."

Psalm 140:9-11

Let my enemies be destroyed by the very evil they have planned for me. Let burning coals fall down on their heads. Let them be thrown into the fire or into watery pits from which they can't escape. Don't let liars prosper here in our land. Cause great disasters to fall on the violent.

Psalm 140 captivates my attention. I feel both mortified and delighted to hear David call down burning coals on his enemies. Asking God to alleviate our problems feels honest and raw. Presenting the choice of consuming fire or watery pits pushes me beyond my comfort zone. However, all of this exists within the context of David's understanding that the king is the LORD's anointed. Throughout his life, David deceives and hides from Saul, even taking sides against him. Yet, he never raises his hand to do violence to the king.

Once Saul has safely exited and rejoined his army, David and his men arrive at the mouth of the cave. As the reality of Saul's narrow escape from death sinks in on the crowd, David cannot help but ask, "Why? Why are you pursuing me so relentlessly? Why do you want me dead? What have I done to you? And why do you believe the lies about my trying to harm you?"

Have you noticed how easily people turn against each other, create rifts, and become sworn enemies? It seems to be getting worse these days. Our culture yells, rants, and even taunts anyone we disagree with over the slightest issues. We have engaged in a global pastime of drawing lines, taking sides, and creating opponents. Perhaps the new bumper sticker should say, "He who dies with the most enemies wins."

King Saul's story unfolds in scripture with dark hues and disturbing details. Ultimately, we come to realize that he grapples with various mental health issues and faces spiritual warfare complicated by the demonic. I wonder, do the inner voices that saturate his mind with negative thoughts bind him to the disorders he suffers? And do we risk facing the same fate as we engage in the cultural contest of tearing others down from the shadows?

The counsel of God's Word is straightforward: "Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry." (James 1:19). It's so simple yet so different... listen, slow down, and resist anger. When we add the encouragement of the Psalms to express our most genuine feelings with God, even when they may be somewhat dark and vengeful, we discover a soothing recipe for acting like Jesus.

Today, may you dance to the melody of God's tenderness and love.

1. **What routinely makes you frustrated or angry?**
2. **Who do you find difficult to listen to patiently?**
3. **What relationship is frayed and needs God's healing? What do you want to say to God about that?**

WEEK 6: DAY 4 (1 Samuel 24:12-15)

"May the LORD judge between us. Perhaps the LORD will punish you for what you are trying to do to me, but I will never harm you. As that old proverb says, 'From evil people come evil deeds.' So you can be sure I will never harm you. Who is the king of Israel trying to catch anyway? Should he spend his time chasing one who is as worthless as a dead dog or a single flea? May the LORD therefore judge which of us is right and punish the guilty one. He is my advocate, and he will rescue me from your power!"

Psalms 57:1-3

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I look to you for protection. I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until the danger passes by.

I cry out to God Most High, to God who will fulfill his purpose for me. He will send help from heaven to rescue me, disgracing those who hound me. My God will send forth his unfailing love and faithfulness.

Why does David commit to never harming Saul? Surely he has every excuse and every right to lash out against his tormentor? This is incredibly confusing when viewed against the backdrop of today's philosophy. We seem to have fully embraced a culture of revenge and retaliation. When someone instigates an attack, their target is expected to fight back. Rarely will anyone respond with peace, de-escalation, or choose not to respond at all. However, there are compelling reasons to consider adopting David's approach.

First, David isn't just a wimp, trembling in fear with the heart of Oz's Cowardly Lion. His refusal of violent retaliation mirrors the God he walks with, sings about, and prays to. Consider God's strategy in the plan of salvation. Instead of launching a violent attack on those who have wronged Him, God sends His son to die for us. This approach contrasts sharply with the Spirit of Darkness, which seeks retribution through murderous violence. Talk about counterculture! Both Paul and Peter urge believers to resist the everyday practices of our time: "Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing." (1 Peter 3:9).

There is a second, very practical objection to striking out against the king. Consider the outcome if David murders Saul in the cave. At first, it would seem heroic. The underdog has won. To be clear, Saul is the odds-on favorite to win this dispute. It would be stunning for David to emerge from the cave with Saul's head in hand. His rise to the throne would be inevitable. However, historically, when someone gains power through the murder of a predecessor, it triggers a chain

reaction of similar behavior. Often, entire families partake in murderous actions after witnessing an initial impatient and bloody revolt. If David chooses this path, he will never live in peace among his countrymen.

Here, we gain insight into making choices in our own lives. There are numerous opportunities for aggressive responses to the people we encounter. When someone cuts in line in traffic or at the grocery store, we become the target of a spicy social media post, or a coworker acts selfishly to our detriment; we are tempted to follow the script demonstrated around us every day. However, the example of David in the cave calls us to a different path. In these moments, we should remember the words of Jesus as he faced captors in the Garden of Gethsemane. When his disciple pulls a sword to defend against the menacing crowd, Jesus says, "Put away your sword. Those who use the sword will die by the sword." (Matthew 26:52).

Perhaps a key ingredient in our recipe for loving well in this chaotic world is to pour a generous helping of peace over the anger and vitriol we encounter.

- 1. What pet peeve(s) nearly always triggers a response from you? How do you typically respond?**
- 2. When was the last time you were in a "fight" or dispute? Who was it with? What was the result or resolution?**
- 3. Knowing how we have wronged God and His response of love and kindness, what would you like to say to Him today?**

WEEK 6: DAY 5 (1 Samuel 24:16-22)

When David had finished speaking, Saul called back, "Is that really you, my son David?" Then he began to cry. And he said to David, "You are a better man than I am, for you have repaid me good for evil. Yes, you have been amazingly kind to me today, for when the LORD put me in a place where you could have killed me, you didn't do it. Who else would let his enemy get away when he had him in his power? May the LORD reward you well for the kindness you have shown me today. And now I realize that you are surely going to be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will flourish under your rule. Now swear to me by the LORD that when that happens you will not kill my family and destroy my line of descendants!"

So David promised this to Saul with an oath. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went back to their stronghold.

Psalms 57:7-10

My heart is confident in you, O God; my heart is confident. No wonder I can sing your praises!

Wake up, my heart! Wake up, O lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn with my song.

I will thank you, Lord, among all the people. I will sing your praises among the nations. For your unfailing love is as high as the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

What a fantastic ending to our story! When faced with a violent shortcut, David makes the right choice. He appeals to Saul based on his good behavior, and Saul responds just as we would hope: with confession and commitment. The end? Not quite.

For a time, Saul adjusts his tactics toward David. He halts the pursuit and allows for relief. However, if David adopts his peaceful posture merely to achieve this outcome, he is about to face painful disappointment. Soon, Saul will slump into another depressive state. This bipolar shift will generate even more visceral hatred and a new campaign against the former shepherd boy.

If the only reason for resisting the encouragement to kill Saul in the cave is to change Saul's heart, it's a failed strategy. But what about the change in David's heart? Could the valuable takeaway be that, while we might influence others to do good, the most critical work is God's realignment of my own heart? The most important reason to do the right thing is internal. God intends to change **ME**.

At his lowest point, David sings, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and make me right with you." (Psalm 51:10). In Acts 13, as Paul preaches to the people of Antioch, he quotes God's description of David as "a man after My own heart." (v.22) While we might hope for change in others, we know for sure that God is growing us.

The love of God so fills David's heart that he will honor his promise despite Saul's fickle moods. Even though the king's hatred never wanes, the future king will protect Saul's family. David's heart is awake with God's unfailing love.

The next time you grapple with the complicated reality that doing the right thing doesn't guarantee a suitable response from others, turn to the story of David in the cave. Draw strength from this glimpse into a real-life faith struggle and ask God to give you a clean heart. On stormy days and in clear ones, may you sing praises to Almighty God for His unfailing love.

- 1. If you could change one thing about you, what would it be?**
- 2. What would you like to ask God to cleanse?**
- 3. What do you praise God for today?**