



At this time I invite you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 26 (p. 233, pew Bible). If you are a believer in Christ, you have probably uttered the prayer that “the apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’” (Luke 17:5). Who doesn’t want to overcome worry and anxiety? It’s no fun living that way. And who wants to walk through life on eggshells, always second-guessing yourself, always fearing that one misstep will ruin everything?

At the same time, we Christians know that we are to put no confidence in the flesh, in our own selves per se, because Jesus said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63). Our confidence is rooted in the gospel; it comes from knowing what Christ has done for us and that his Spirit lives in us. Our confidence is not *self*-confidence, it is *Christ*-confidence.

Even though the gospel was not fleshed out as fully in the Old Testament because the Scriptures were still being written, the concept of where our confidence should lie was quite clear. David himself affirmed in Psalm 3, “Salvation belongs to the LORD” (v. 3). David’s son Solomon wrote “a word to the wise” in Proverbs 3, saying, “you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble. ... for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught” (vv. 23, 26).

That’s how God wants his people to walk – with an *air of confidence*, Godward confidence. That’s what it means to *live in the atmosphere of faith*.

AIR OF CONFIDENCE: Living in the Atmosphere of Faith

1 Samuel 26

David displays this kind of confidence in 1 Samuel 26, as he has another encounter with King Saul – one that is quite similar to the encounter they had in the cave in chapter 24.

In between these two encounters was the episode involving Nabal and his wife Abigail in chapter 25, which we studied last week. In the heat of the moment, due to Nabal’s mistreatment of David and his men, David almost takes matters into his own hands. But Abigail intervenes and keeps David from committing mass murder. David said to Abigail,

“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you his day to meet me!
Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day
from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand!”

- 1 Samuel 25:32-33

David ends up leaving the matter in the Lord's hand. As a result, Nabal winds up dead, and David winds up with Abigail. She "became his wife" (1 Sam. 25:42b). The narrator then concludes chapter 25 by informing us in verses 43-44, "David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives. Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was of Gallim."

This was a cruel act on the part of King Saul, one of the many sufferings that he inflicted on David. But we're also told that David married two other women. The narrator states this matter-of-factly without further comment, but that that doesn't mean that what David did was okay. In fact, as we continue to follow the narrative of David's life, we will see the devastating consequences of deviating from God's plan for marriage, which has always been for marriage to be a one-man, one-woman, one-flesh, life-long covenant of companionship. "This marriage pattern established at creation ... is both commanded and commended throughout the rest of Scripture,"¹ whereas deviating from God's plan leads to disastrous consequences. We see this not only in the life of David, but also in the lives of his ancestors Abraham and Jacob and especially in the life of David's son Solomon, whose many wives led him into idolatry.

The first polygamist in Scripture, Lamech, was a descendant of Cain and is portrayed in Scripture as a wicked, murderous man whose thirst for violence was exponentially worse than Cain's. The link between polygamy and family strife is evident in the narratives of Scripture. In parts of the world today where polygamy is still practiced, such as in Papua New Guinea, "an increasing number of women have been charged with the murder of another one of their husband's wives."² This is consistent with Scripture's depiction of the relational tension, rivalries, and violence that characterize polygamous households.

In an article on the Desiring God website, Sam Emadi writes,

Scripture grounds monogamy in the created order, ordained by God himself as a picture of Christ and the church. Depictions of polygamy and concubinage in Scripture don't overturn that fact. Instead, they reveal the ugliness and heart-break that accompany sexual activity outside God's established boundaries. Far from commending polygamy, narratives of polygamous patriarchs and kings in Israel reveal the spiritual and familial devastation inextricably linked to this sin.

The biblical authors include their stories not to inspire their readers but to warn them. Whereas explicit commands in Scripture teach the people of God that polygamy is wrong, the stories show it to be ugly — a hideous perversion of one of God's greatest gifts. From the muck and mire of Abraham, Jacob, and David's broken families we are meant to see the beauty and goodness of God's original design: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).³

¹ Sam Emadi, "Why Did God Allow Polygamy? Untangling Old Testament Sexual Ethics." Desiring God, 25 May 2021 [online]. Retrieved on 10 December 2022 at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-did-god-allow-polygamy>; Internet.

² "Polygamy unsuitable for PNG today, says church group." The National, 21 December 2022 [online]. Retrieved on 10 December 2022 at <https://www.thenational.com.pg/polygamy-unsuitable-for-png-today-says-church-group/>.

³ Ibid.

This continues to be God's plan, regardless of what Congress, the President, or the Supreme Court says. Our culture's redefinition of marriage is anything but respect for marriage, and our nation will suffer the consequences thumbing its nose at God's word. Even though the Respect for Marriage Act makes no allowance for polygamy, it is only a matter of time before the U.S. government expands the boundaries. Because once you separate your definition of marriage from God's, marriage will come to mean many other things. President Biden, who has expressed his enthusiasm for signing the RFMA into law, "The United States is on the brink of reaffirming a fundamental truth: love is love. And Americans should have the right to marry the person they love." Think about the implications of that statement, or when Senator Elizabeth Warren from Massachusetts said, "I want to see the day when we have 100 votes in favor of no discrimination, not just for who we love, but also in any activity." No boundaries, no definitional standards. Love is love.

Yet truth is truth, and God's word has not changed. The question is: will we be faithful to God's word, or will we compromise our convictions and capitulate to the culture? Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "There are no ethics apart from doing God's will, and God – indeed, Jesus Christ – is the nonnegotiable given in the equation of human ethics. ... We cannot speak rightly of either God or the world without speaking of Jesus Christ."⁴

Friedrick Von Logau (LOO-go), a 17th century German poet, said, "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small." Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, a 19th century American poet, elaborated further, writing, "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small. Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness He grinds all." God far more patience than any of us – but there's a limit to it, because God's patience is governed by his holiness. God will not let sin to go unpunished. Saul's life is a powerful illustration of both the Lord's patience and his punishment of sin.

At this point in the narrative of 1 Samuel, Saul has been hounding David relentlessly without cause for a long time. In chapter 24, when David confronted Saul with this fact, Saul confessed to David, "You have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil" (1 Sam. 24:17). This was after David alluded *twice* to the judgment of God and called upon the Lord to deliver him from the hand of Saul.

God not only delivered David out of Saul's hand on that occasion, but God also did a work of conviction in David's heart and spared Saul from David.

Now in chapter 26, God once again spares Saul once again from David's hand. But this will be Saul's final sparing. Just as the Lord judged Nabal for his sin, so the Lord would deal with Saul also. Saul reneges on his promise that he would no longer pursue David, which shows Saul's loss of character. But David's character is growing. He is maturing into the man who would become Israel's greatest king. The sequence of the passage reveals David's faith in God and strength of character. This text teaches us that *believers can navigate life ever confident of God's guiding hand.*

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*. Cited by Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), p. 469.

***Believers can navigate life
ever confident of God's guiding hand.***

Let's look at how this principle plays out in this passage.

1. Trouble Resurfaces (vv. 1-4)

Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the east of Jeshimon?" ² So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. ³ And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, ⁴ David sent out spies and learned that Saul had indeed come.

- 1 Samuel 26:1-4

Geographically, David is backtracking.



A few chapters earlier, in 1 Samuel 23, David went from Adullam to Keilah to Ziph, where the inhabitants made his whereabouts known to Saul. So, in chapter 24, David and his men escaped to Engedi, where he spared Saul's life. Then in chapter 25, David returned to the Wilderness of Maon just south of Ziph, where he encountered his nasty neighbor Nabal and would have killed him if it hadn't been for Nabal's wife Abigail, who intervened. The Lord killed Nabal, after which David married Abigail.

Now at the outset of chapter 26, David is back in Ziph, and the Ziphites throw him under the bus again. We may wonder why David returned to Ziph, since the people there had already betrayed him once. But remember afterwards when David spared Saul's life in En Gedi, Saul publicly acknowledged David's integrity and that he would surely become king (24:17-20). Saul then "went home" (24:22). So, perhaps David hoped that he would get a respite from all his running and enjoy a season of calm.

But that was not to be. Saul was on the hunt again. Arthur Pink wrote,

The action of Saul here provides a solemn illustration of a well-known principle: if sin be not dethroned and mortified, it will soon recover its strength, and when a suitable temptation is presented, break out again with renewed force. . . . [L]ike Pharaoh of old, he again hardened his heart, and determined to make another effort to remove his rival. And thus it is with many a one who has been sobered and awed by the Word: after a brief season, Satan and his agents suggest such thoughts as tend to rekindle the smothered flame, and then the lusts of the flesh are again allowed free play.”⁵

What a warning this is for us. You can’t play with fire and not get burned. As John Owen famously said, “Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.” Sin tolerated is sin triumphant. But praise God there’s a flip side to that truth, and it’s exemplified in the next scene.

2. Temptation Resisted (vv. 5-12)

⁵ Then David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, with Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Saul was lying within the encampment, while the army was encamped around him.

⁶ Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Joab's brother Abishai the son of Zeruiah, “Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?” And Abishai said, “I will go down with you.” ⁷ So David and Abishai went to the army by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the army lay around him. ⁸ Then Abishai said to David, “God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice.” ⁹ But David said to Abishai, “Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?” ¹⁰ And David said, “As the Lord lives, the Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish. ¹¹ The Lord forbid that I should put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go.” ¹² So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head, and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them.

- 1 Samuel 26:5-12

Verse 5 informs us that David first went by himself to survey the situation. That’s what a leader does – he steps up and takes on the most difficult and dangerous tasks.⁶ After returning from his reconnaissance, David asks his nephew Abishai and Ahimelech the Hittite which of them wants to go back with him. Abishai volunteers, and away they go.

David’s purpose in going is to prove to Saul once again that David means him no harm. Had David not paid attention to his conscience when he cut off Saul’s robe in chapter 24, or if he had not listened to Abigail and let God deal with Nabal in chapter 25, David may not have been so likely to spare Saul this second time in chapter 26.

⁵ Arthur W. Pink, *The Life of David*, volume one, chapter twenty: “His Chastening,” pp. 2-3.

6 Pink, 4.

The Lord knows the lessons we need to learn for what lies ahead.

“David has learned that it is *always* better to wait patiently for God’s timing and methods.”⁷ Chapter 25 says, “the Lord struck Nabal, and he died” (v. 38). Here in chapter 26, David considers that the Lord may also “strike down” Saul. David has learned to leave matters in the Lord’s hands. God is more than able to deal with fools and foes. David imagines a few different methods by which the Lord may deal with Saul. God may strike him down, or Saul may die naturally, or he may die in battle. The point is that God will see to it, and David’s faith is imagining the many ways in which God might work. Dale Davis writes,

Many contemporary believers, in fact, would do well to let their imaginations run riot in regard to the adequacy and sufficiency of God. ... In fact, one might say that faith needs imagination to pull out all the stops if it is even to begin to grasp the grandeur, majesty, and ability of Yahweh.⁸

Isn’t that the kind of faith exhibited by Paul in his benediction at the end of his prayer for the church when he prays,

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

- Ephesians 3:20-21 NIV

Although David didn’t know how exactly God might work in this situation, David did know that he was not to sin against the Lord by taking matters into his own hand. It’s never right to do wrong in order to get a chance to do right. The end does not justify the means. David knew that, and so must we. Each of us will encounter situations in which we’re not sure how the Lord might work, but we are sure about what the word of God says and what God expects of us in that situation. For example, you may have problems in your marriage, and you don’t know how God will resolve them, but you do know that you are not to slander your spouse. You are not to mentally check out of your marriage. You are not to commit adultery. You are not to engage in pornography. You may not know how God will resolve your situation, but you do know what obedience requires.

Just as Abigail kept David from sinning, now David keeps Abishai from sinning. *True godliness demands that we restrain not only ourselves from sinning but also our well-meaning but worldly-minded friends, when it is within our power to stop them.* Abishai wants the kill but all he gets is Saul’s canteen and spear. That’s all David needs to prove his point.

3. Truth Revealed (vv. 13-25)

⁷ Bill T. Arnold, 1 & 2 Samuel. The NIV Application Commentary, gen. ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), p. 355).

⁸ Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*. Focus on the Bible Commentary Series (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000, reprinted 2008), p. 271.

a. Regarding Abner's irresponsibility (vv. 13-16)

¹³ Then David went over to the other side and stood far off on the top of the hill, with a great space between them. ¹⁴ And David called to the army, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, "Will you not answer, Abner?" Then Abner answered, "Who are you who calls to the king?" ¹⁵ And David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord. ¹⁶ This thing that you have done is not good. As the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the Lord's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is and the jar of water that was at his head."

- 1 Samuel 26:13-16

King Saul was caught with his pants down literally in chapter 24. Now Abner is caught with his pants down figuratively here in chapter 26. Neither Abner nor Saul nor the three thousand elite soldiers with them can keep David from obtaining the kingdom. The same is true of "the spiritual forces of evil" (Eph. 6:12) arrayed against us. The forces of hell could not keep Christ from obtaining the kingdom, and the same is true of all who belong to Christ by faith. "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29).

Next, David reveals the truth about his own integrity.

b. regarding David's integrity (vv. 17-20)

¹⁷ Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king." ¹⁸ And he said, "Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands?"

- 1 Samuel 26:17-18

A clear conscience is never afraid of asking honest questions. If David had done anything wrong against Saul, he wanted to know about it and make it right. Truth is, Saul was treating David like a criminal, even though Saul was the guilty one and David had done nothing wrong. By asking these honest questions, David prefigured our Lord Jesus when he asked his enemies, "Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?" (John 8:46). When Jesus was arrested and unjustly tried, he said to his accusers, "If I've said something wrong, prove it. But if I'm speaking the truth, why are you beating me?" (John 18:23). Truth is, Jesus didn't suffer for his sin but for ours. Scripture says,

Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.

- 1 Peter 3:18 NLT

That's the truth. Do you believe it? Have you trusted Jesus to save you from your sin?

Going back to 1 Samuel 26, David says something else quite significant in verses 18-20:

¹⁹ Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' ²⁰ Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the Lord, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains."

- 1 Samuel 26:19-20

By cutting off David from public worship, Saul was essentially telling him to serve other gods. David knew that God was everywhere. Many of David's poems, songs of worship and prayers were written in the open fields and mountain slopes of Judea as well as in the wilderness, in caves, and even in foreign regions beyond the borders of Israel. David knows he can worship God anywhere, but private worship is not enough. He is not content with his Bible, harp and prayer list in a some pasture or cave. He wants to encounter the presence of God in the public worship of God with the people of God. Remember what David prayed in Psalm 63, "when he was in the wilderness of Judah":

You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land where there is no water.

I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.

- Psalm 63:1-2

Dale Davis wrote, "To be cut off from the ordinances of public worship is David's most severe grief. Would that cause me anguish? Christians have surpassed David in privileges, but few have approached him in appetite."⁹ I find these words convicting. Do you?

Hunger is usually a sign of good health. That's true not only physically but also spiritually. You know you're spiritually hungry when you're desperate to meet with God, when you long for fellowship with the people of God, and when you lose your appetite for the things of the world. John Piper rightly states, "Our appetites dictate the direction of our lives."¹⁰ David navigated his life well because he cultivated a hunger for God. Let us do the same.

After testifying of his own integrity, David reveals the truth regarding Saul's insincerity.

c. regarding Saul's insincerity (vv. 21-26)

²¹ Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake." ²² And David answered and said, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take

⁹ Ibid., 275.

¹⁰ John Piper, "A Hunger for God: Desiring God Through Fasting and Prayer." Desiring God [online]. Retrieved on 10 December 2022 at <https://www.desiringgod.org/books/a-hunger-for-god>; Internet.

it. ²³ The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. ²⁴ Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the Lord, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation.”²⁵ Then Saul said to David, “Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them.” So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place.

- 1 Samuel 26:21-26

Hmmm. Where have we heard this before? It sounds awfully similar to Saul's words at the end of chapter 24, when he confessed his sins to David outside the cave at En Gedi. Saul said, “I have sinned,” but his *conviction* and his *confession* were not accompanied by *change*. And that proved that his repentance wasn't real.

We see a powerful example of authentic repentance among the believers in the church at Corinth. The apostle Paul commends them for this tremendous turn-around, saying,

Just see what this godly sorrow produced in you! Such earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation, such alarm, such longing to see me, such zeal, and such a readiness to punish wrong. You showed that you have done everything necessary to make things right.

- 2 Corinthians 7:11

Henry Bosch, one of the two founders of the *Our Daily Bread* devotional guide, quoted an unknown author who wrote,

There is a radical distinction between natural regret and God-given repentance. The flesh can feel remorse, acknowledge its evil deeds, and be ashamed of itself. However, this sort of disgust with past actions can be quickly shrugged off, and the individual can soon go back to his old wicked ways. None of the marks of true repentance described in 2 Corinthians 7:11 are found in his behavior. Out of a list of 10 men in the Bible who said, “I have sinned,” we believe only five actually repented. They were David (2 Sam. 12:13), Nehemiah (Neh. 1:6), Job (Job 42:5,6), Micah (Micah 7:9), and the prodigal son (Luke 15:18).”¹¹

Do you want to navigate life well? Do you want to live with an air of confidence, moving from situation to situation without worry, fear, or regret? Then live in the atmosphere of faith. Look to the Lord, as David did.

The narrator concludes chapter 24 by saying, “David went his way, and Saul returned to his place.” David and Saul never saw each other again. They were headed in two different directions. The question is: Which direction will you go? Will you go on alone, or will you go on with the Lord, confident that he will lead you and deliver you from every distress?

¹¹ *Our Daily Bread*, Monday, July 16 (year unknown).