



Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 30 (p. 235, pew Bible). Whenever we read the Bible, we must remember that it is more than a “holy how-to” manual for navigating life. The Bible’s primary purpose to reveal God’s plan to save humanity through his Son, Jesus Christ. That’s why the Reformer John Calvin wrote, “The scriptures should be read with the aim of finding Christ in them.”¹ The famous 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon asserted, “the sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savour of Christ in it.”²

This is true even when it comes to the Old Testament. After all, Jesus himself declared, “These are the very Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39 NIV). One of the ways the Old Testament Scriptures do this is by presenting characters who prefigure Christ. Despite their flaws, they give us a glimpse of what the coming Savior will be like.

David is such a character. Whenever we look at David, we catch glimpses of his greater descendant, Jesus, who is the Son of God and the ultimate Savior-King.

But even though Christ is “the grand theme of the Old Testament, he doesn’t present himself as the exclusive application of every text.”³ After all, Jesus warned people to “remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32). And when the Pharisees accused Jesus’ disciples of breaking the Sabbath because they were “breaking off some heads of grain and eating them” (Matt. 12:1), Jesus defended their behavior by pointing to the example of David and his men eating the showbread (1 Sam. 21:3-6).

The narratives of the Old Testament demonstrate that “God teaches some of his greatest truths through biography.”⁴ The characters of the Old Testament were “real men and women who lived in the same world we inhabit.”⁵ So, in addition to revealing something about the person and work of Christ and how desperately sinners need a Savior, these real-life figures also teach us vital lessons about Christian morality, how God wants his people to “be holy and blameless before him” (Eph. 1:4b).

I share all this by way of introduction because the narrative of 1 Samuel 30 illustrates both the saving work of Christ and the kind of men the gospel is intended to produce. That is not to say that this text does not apply to women. It does. But it applies most forcefully to men. For in this passage David not only prefigures Christ but also provides

¹ John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), vol. 2, p. 139.

² Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Christ Precious to Believers,” *The New Park Street Pulpit* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1860), p. 140.

³ Jim Savastio, “Is It Wrong to Draw Moral Lessons from OT Figures?” TGC U.S. Edition, 05 August 2019 [online]. Retrieved on 19 January 2023 from <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/preachers-toolkit-wrong-to-draw-moral-lessons-from-ot/>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

an example of the kind of leaders the Lord calls us to be for his glory and for the good of our families – the wives and children whom God has entrusted to our care.

Today, many families are dysfunctional, in disarray, and suffering because the men have abnegated their responsibilities as husbands and fathers. My prayer is that today's text will break your heart with conviction and also build your confidence in the Lord, inspiring you to become the man that God has called you to be.

The title of today's message is *the road to recovery*.

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

1 Samuel 30

The *transformative truth* – the principle that will produce positive change if we believe it and act on it – is this:

The Lord rescues his people and recovers what's been lost.

Let's see how this principle played out in the life of David, how it points us to Jesus, and how it applies to the context of your life today.

Speaking of context, let's keep in mind the preceding context of 1 Samuel 30. David and his band of six hundred men, had been living among the Philistines for a year and four months. Throughout this period, there is no record of David writing any psalms, praying, or consulting the Lord. He seems to be in a spiritual slump of sorts. But during this time David has gained the trust of Achish, the king of the Philistines, who is preparing to go to war with the Israelites. This puts David in quite a quandary. But God uses the contempt that the other Philistine commanders have for David and the conflict this produces between them and Achish, to get David out of this jam. Achish sends him back home to Ziklag – the town in Philistia that has been David's home away from home for well over a year.

We can imagine the relief and joy David and his men felt from getting out of this bind and back to the comforts of their own home, the loving embrace of their wives, and the ecstatic welcome of their children. Yet their joyful anticipation is shattered by the sledgehammer of reality. Beginning in 1 Samuel 30, verse one, we read:

¹ Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid against the Negeb and against Ziklag. They had overcome Ziklag and burned it with fire ² and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great. They killed no one, but carried them off and went their way. ³ And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. ⁴ Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep. ⁵ David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. ⁶ And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters.

- 1 Samuel 30:1-6a

We can only imagine the heart-wrenching grief David and his men experienced over this reversal of fortune. Their homes a heap of ashes, their wives and children gone – carried away by the enemy during their absence. This was the loss they suffered.

The Loss Suffered (vv. 1-6a)

Who was the enemy that took them away? “The Amalekites” (v. 1) – the enemy Saul failed to exterminate when the Lord told him to and gave him the wherewithal to do so. Saul’s disobedience brought devastating loss and unspeakable grief to hundreds of households later.

But even then the effects of Saul’s sin on these households could have been mitigated if David and his men had been home with their families instead of with the Philistines. This predicament arose because David had doubted God’s word and went where he never should have gone. His absence and that of his fellow men cost their wives and children dearly.

Not only that, but David’s own men turned against him and talked of stoning him, because it was his leadership that got them into this mess.

Broad Gospel Implications

The plight of David and his men, their wives and their children, illustrates the devastating consequences of sin. Just as they suffered the consequences of Saul’s sin decades earlier, so all people everywhere suffer the consequences of Adam’s sin. The apostle Paul alludes to this in Romans 5:12, saying, “When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.” We’ve compounded the effects of Adam’s sin by our own sin, just as David made matters worse by doubting God’s word and fleeing to Philistia in the first place. Because David was where he shouldn’t have been, his family wound up where they shouldn’t have been. Then David’s absence left them exposed to the attacks of the enemy. Because David wasn’t there to protect his family, he lost them, and his home was left in a heap of ashes.

Specific Moral Application

This crisis depicts not only the condition of humanity as a whole but the failure of men in particular to protect their families, just as Adam failed to protect Eve when she was under spiritual attack. In his book, *The Men We Need*, Brant Hansen highlights Adam’s failure to protect and tend the garden that God had entrusted to him.

When the garden was faced with a threat, Adam did nothing.
 When Eve was under spiritual attack, Adam did nothing.
 When Eve offered him fruit, Adam took the path of least resistance.
 When God came into the garden to speak to him, Adam hid.
 When God confronted him with what he did, Adam made up excuses and blamed Eve.
 At no point in this story is Adam doing his job. He is passive.⁶

⁶ Brant Hansen, *The Men We Need: God’s Purpose for the Manly Man, the Avid Indoorsman, or Any*

So are many men today. Though they may be physically present in the home, they are spiritually absent. “A passive man is useless to those around him.”⁷ Drs. Paul and Virginia Friesen, both of whom have Doctorates in Marriage and Family Therapy and have been involved in Family Ministries for more than forty years, have said that “passive men are a far more common problem in their practice than men who are overbearing, physically intimidating or other usual things we consider examples of “toxic masculinity.”⁸

I’ve seen this to be the case in my own experience in working with families for the last thirty years. Many husbands are physically present but spiritually absent in the home. They check out mentally and emotionally, focusing on work or a particular hobby or whatever else interests them while their families suffer from their lack of leadership and loving active involvement in their lives. Brant Hansen rightly states,

Nobody admires a passive man. People don’t buy movie tickets to watch men without a mission. ...

Passive-Man is a disappointment at best and a threat at worst. The good news is, you can make a decision right now to be different.⁹

And on this point we can glean much from David’s example throughout the remainder of 1 Samuel 30. After suffering the loss of his family, David seeks the Lord.

The Lord Sought (vv. 6b-8)

But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

⁷ And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, “Bring me the ephod.” So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. ⁸ And David inquired of the Lord, “Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?” He answered him, “Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue.”

- 1 Samuel 30:6b-8

Here we see a significant difference between David and Saul. When Saul was in “great distress” (28:15), he consulted a medium, whereas when David was “greatly distressed,” he “inquired of the Lord” (v. 8a) and “strengthened himself in the Lord his God” (v. 6b).

By using the expression, “the LORD his God,” the narrator is emphasizing David’s intimate relationship with the One who has always been “with him” (16:18). Alexander Maclaren points out that David could no longer say “my house,” “my city,” or “my possessions,” but he could say, “My God.” That is where the strengthening must begin.¹⁰

Man Willing to Show Up (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2022), p. 38.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and First Book of Samuel* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.), 385-87. Cited by 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. 313.

When David asks the Lord if he should pursue the band of raiders that took his family, “the Lord’s response is immediate, clear, and full of encouragement.”¹¹ The Lord says, “Go after them! You’ll catch them and recover everything that was taken from you!”

Nahum 1:7 says, “The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.” We take refuge in the Lord by confessing our sins, crying out to the Lord in prayer, clinging to his promises, and committing ourselves to obey his word.

Not in a *quid pro quo* sort of way – like “I’ll seek the Lord if he gives me back everything I’ve lost.” No, David sought the Lord and strengthened himself in the Lord his God *before* getting any guarantee that he’d get his family and possessions back. We must seek the Lord for the Lord’s sake, because he is worthy, not because he gives us what we want. God is not the means to an end. He *is* the end. “The great business of life is to glorify God by enjoying him forever.”¹² In his famous sermon, *The Weight of Glory*, C. S. Lewis declared, “He who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only.”¹³ When Asaph repented of his sinful outlook and sought the Lord, he prayed, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25-26). When you can say that truly from the heart, you’re on the road to recovery. Such was the case with David.

The Loved Ones Saved (vv. 9-20)

⁹ So David set out, and the six hundred men who were with him, and they came to the brook Besor, where those who were left behind stayed. ¹⁰ But David pursued, he and four hundred men. Two hundred stayed behind, who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor.

¹¹ They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. And they gave him bread and he ate. They gave him water to drink, ¹² and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. And when he had eaten, his spirit revived, for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights. ¹³ And David said to him, “To whom do you belong? And where are you from?” He said, “I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite, and my master left me behind because I fell sick three days ago. ¹⁴ We had made a raid against the Negeb of the Cherethites and against that which belongs to Judah and against the Negeb of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag with fire.” ¹⁵ And David said to him, “Will you take me down to this band?” And he said, “Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this band.”

- 1 Samuel 30:9-15

¹¹ Ronald F. Youngblood in *1, 2 Samuel*. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 3, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 792.

¹² John Piper, cited by Tim Challies, “Evangelism – The Chief End of Man?” 01 December 2005 [online]. Retrieved on 21 January 2023 from <https://www.challies.com/articles/evangelism-the-chief-end-of-man/>.

¹³ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/81966-he-who-has-god-and-everything-else-has-no-more>.

Two significant forces are at work in this sequence of events: David's *proactivity*, and God's *providence*. David "*pursued*," and God *provided* a man in the middle of nowhere who could take him and his men to Amalekites who had taken their families captive.

Scripture teaches that God is sovereign, and people are responsible. Although our finite minds cannot fully comprehend how these two realities are compatible with one another, we must embrace both to be biblical. God's sovereignty doesn't negate our responsibility. When it was time to leave for church, you didn't say, "If God wants me to go, he'll start the car for me" (although you might have prayed, "God, please make the car start for me!") God has given you the keys, along with hands to put the key into the ignition and turn it or press the ignition button so the car will start. Once again, Brant Hansen writes,

We only tend to get weird and super "spiritual" when it comes to *other* people's needs. These are the things we consider God's job. This has a bonus effect of taking us off the hook. We think it doesn't matter whether we meet the need or not, because someone else will do it if God *really* wants it done.¹⁴

That's a lopsided theology that denies a fundamental principle in Scripture, which is this:

What you do really matters.

God has uniquely placed you exactly where you are to make a real difference in the lives of others. "No one else is in your exact context."¹⁵ God expects you to provide your wife and children with the loving servant-leadership they need from you in the home. If you are not proactive in giving them the protection, the direction, the interaction, the help, the support, and the encouragement they need, then they probably won't get it. But if you devote your time and energy to serving them, then they will flourish because of your influence.

Charles Francis Adams, son of President John Quincy Adams and grandson of President John Adams, kept a diary. One day he entered: "Went fishing with my son today – a day wasted." His son, Brook Adams, also kept a diary. On the same day, Brook Adams wrote, "Went fishing with my father – the most wonderful day of my life!" The father thought he was wasting time when he was actually investing his time. The only way to differentiate between wasting and investing is to know your purpose in life and to judge accordingly.¹⁶

Often success and failure hinges on how far you're willing to go and to give of yourself – not only for the sake of your family but for the sake of other families, too. When David and his men arrived at the Brook Besor, two hundred of the men were too exhausted to continue the chase. Keep in mind that these men had already walked for three straight days, covering the sixty miles from the Philistine camp at Aphek back to the town of Ziklag. They were exhausted not only physically but also emotionally, having "wept until they had no more strength to weep" (v. 4). So, two hundred men stayed with the baggage while the other four hundred men crossed the brook and kept pursuing the captors with the help of the Egyptian slave whom the Amalekites had left behind.

¹⁴ Hansen, *The Men We Need*, 88.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁶ "Investing Time," Ministry127 [online]. Retrieved on 21 January 2023 from <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/investing-time>.

¹⁶ And when he had taken him down, behold, they were spread abroad over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. ¹⁷ And David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day, and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled. ¹⁸ David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives. ¹⁹ Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken. David brought back all. ²⁰ David also captured all the flocks and herds, and the people drove the livestock before him, and said, "This is David's spoil."

- 1 Samuel 30:16-20

David saw the party and pounced. He slaughtered them all night long and throughout the next day. No one escaped except for four hundred men who fled on camels. That's how many men fought with David, which goes to show how outnumbered they were. Humanly speaking, the odds were stacked against them. "But if God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). Remember, God was with David, and David had "strengthened himself in the LORD his God" (1 Sam. 30:6). Then David did what he had to do. What David did really mattered. The narrator clearly emphasizes David's actions and the decisive role he played in this victory:

David struck them down ... David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken ... David rescued his two wives ... David brought back all ... David also captured all the flocks and herds, and the people ... said, "This is David's spoil."

This takes nothing away from the Lord. Rather, it shows what God can do with a man who hits rock bottom and has nothing left but the Lord. God's power shows up best in weak people. His grace is enough. It was enough for David, and it's enough for you.

By the way, don't we see in David's victory a foreshadowing of Christ's ultimate victory over Satan? At one time we were held captive by Satan, separated from God, dead in our trespasses and sins, helpless and hopeless. All seemed lost until Jesus showed up and dealt Satan a decisive blow by dying on the cross. When Christ died for our sins, Satan was disarmed and defeated. We were forgiven and set free.

Jesus struck him down ... Jesus recovered all that Satan had taken ... Jesus rescued his people ... Jesus brought back all ... so we say, "This is Jesus' spoil."

Isn't this what the Lord predicted through Isaiah the prophet when he proclaimed, "I will reward him extravagantly, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12 MSG, NIV). The imagery Isaiah presents is that of a conqueror sharing his victory with his allies.¹⁷ That's what we see David doing throughout the rest of the narrative in 1 Samuel 30.

¹⁷ Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., "Isaiah." The ESV Study Bible, gen. ed. Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), p. 1339.

The Loot Shared (vv. 21-30)

²¹ Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow David, and who had been left at the brook Besor. And they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him. And when David came near to the people he greeted them. ²² Then all the wicked and worthless fellows among the men who had gone with David said, "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except that each man may lead away his wife and children, and depart." ²³ But David said, "You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the Lord has given us. He has preserved us and given into our hand the band that came against us. ²⁴ Who would listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down into the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage. They shall share alike." ²⁵ And he made it a statute and a rule for Israel from that day forward to this day. ²⁶ When David came to Ziklag, he sent part of the spoil to his friends, the elders of Judah, saying, "Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the Lord." ²⁷ It was for those in Bethel, in Ramoth of the Negeb, in Jattir, ²⁸ in Aroer, in Siphmoth, in Eshtemoa, ²⁹ in Racal, in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, in the cities of the Kenites, ³⁰ in Hormah, in Bor-ashan, in Athach, ³¹ in Hebron, for all the places where David and his men had roamed.

- 1 Samuel 30:21-30

When David and his men returned from battle, the mean-spirited ones didn't want to share the spoil. But David said, "You can't act this way with what God gave us. He's the one who kept us save and gave us the victory. The share of the one who stays with the gear is the same as the one who fights – equal shares for everyone!" This became a standing rule in Israel from that day forward.

This principle was based on David's theological perspective. If all good things come from the Lord, who are we to hoard them for ourselves? The more we understand God's grace toward us, the more generous we will be toward others.

On a practical level, I think of men who are worse off than we are. Just like two hundred of David's men were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor, so too there are men today who need their brothers in Christ to fight for them and their families too. Our role is not to criticize them but to do all we can to help them so that their families can flourish too.

And not just their families, but their friends, just as David shared his spoils with the elders of Judah. As families flourish, so does society – one heart, one home at a time – until "the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).