

## Developing a Heart for God (David -Pt.6)

### Hope for a Discouraged Heart

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[read through slides 1-6 with sound]

[**slide 7**] Take a look at the screen. Do you see that body of water at the bottom of the satellite picture? [use laser pointer]

In Arabic it's called the Al-Baḥr Al-My-it', the 'Sea of Death'.

In Hebrew it's called the Yam Ha-May'-lah the 'Sea of Salt', and it's dying.

At a rate of about 1m per year, this sea is shrinking.

[**slide 8**] You can see this more clearly in a shot taken by the Space Shuttle [use laser pointer]. The Southern half of the sea is now separated from the Northern half.

Water from the Sea of Galilee flows down through the Jordan River into the Dead Sea.

[**slide 9**] But the Dead Sea darkens and acidizes the water creating what Max Lucado calls 'a saline cemetery'.

You find little life in its waters and in the land surrounding it.

Ominous cliffs rise to the East and West, to a height of about 600m.

Erosion has scarred the land carving it into a myriad of caves and ruts and canyons; a home for hyenas, lizards, and vultures.

No one chooses to live in this desolate wilderness today.

But sometimes you'll find yourself in a desolate wilderness.  
Sometimes when adversity strikes,

when tragedy hits, when sickness assaults you, when illness attacks,  
when ridicule and slander beat you down,

you'll find yourself in a desolate place.

When you do, discouragement can afflict you like the plague.

**[slide 10]** We're going to look at what I think is one of the most discouraging seasons in David's life –

when he finds himself alone in a desolate place, running for his life while being hunted down by King Saul.

As we do, we're going to discover one verse which describes something David does that all of us can learn to do when facing discouragement.

**[slide 11, blank]** So turn to 1 Sam. 21. While you're looking that up, let me fill you in on what's going on in David's life.

We've already seen David being anointed by Samuel the prophet and employed by Saul the king.

We've seen how he defeated the giant Goliath and how all the people loved him for it.

He's going to become king. But one by one, things begin to crash down around David.

First of all, he loses his job. He had been promoted from just a shepherd boy to a court musician to a leading warrior;

he was the most successful officers in the army of Israel.

But Saul grew so insanely jealous of David he repeatedly tries to kill him and David manages to escape each time.

For example, one day Saul sent his soldiers to David's home to kill him.

[Me-call], David's wife, helps him escape, but she is taken by Saul and Saul eventually has her marry somebody else.

So David not only loses his job's, he loses his wife too.

Now you can call him mint jelly because he's on the lamb. He flees to a town called Ra-mah', where Samuel, his spiritual mentor, lives.

Saul finds out where David is and sends his soldiers to Ra-mah'. David has to make another escape.

By this time Samuel is an old man. He can't go with David. And not long after this, Samuel dies. So David's lost his job, his wife and his mentor.

Then David meets up with his best friend, Jonathan. They are BFF's, kindred spirits.

Jonathan stands up to his paranoid father, Saul, and risks his life for David. But Jonathan cannot leave the royal court.

So David, on the run for his life, has to leave his best friend. Having lost his job, his wife, his mentor, and his BFF,

we pick the story up in 1 Sam. 21.10: "That day David fled from Saul [again] and went to [Aw-keesh'] king of Gath."

Anybody remember who came from Gath? A real tall guy - Goliath.

David ends up with the Philistines - his mortal enemies – hoping they won't recognize him.

Here's what happens: v.11ff: "... the servants of [Aw-keesh'] say to him, 'Isn't this David, the king of the land?'

Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'?

Hearing these words, David is very much afraid of [Aw-keesh´] king of Gath. So he feigns insanity in his presence

giving his best Heath Ledger imitation of the Joker in the Batman movie.

He acts like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gates with his fingernails and letting saliva run down his beard.”

“[Aw-keesh´] says to his servants, ‘Look at the man! He’s insane! Why bring him to me?’

Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me?’”

Get him out of here! I don’t want to catch whatever he’s got! So they drove him out of town and into the desert.

So, 22.1, “David left Gath and escaped to the cave of [A-dool-lawm´].”

Think about this. David is waiting for the day that he will take the throne as king.

Now he has no money, no home, no friends, no wife, no job, no mentor – and he’s running for his life.

He’s expecting a palace and he ends up in a cave with no explanation as to why and no guarantee that anything will ever change.

The cave is where you end up when all your supports get stripped away.

Maybe you’re in the cave right now. Maybe it’s because you’ve lost a job and you’re under financial pressure.

Maybe you’ve lost a spouse to death, desertion, or divorce.

Maybe you’ve lost a mentor or a very close friend.

Maybe you've been deeply disappointed in a relationship.

Maybe you've lost your health or are suffering an illness.

Maybe you made a bad decision somewhere along the line, and everything is crashing down around you.

For whatever reason, you're in a cave. And if you're not in a cave right now, you will be.

Nobody plans on living there, but sooner or later everybody spends some time in a cave.

One of the hardest things about being in a cave is when you start to wonder, "Has God lost track of me? Has he forgotten his promises to me?"

Does God remember where I am? Does he even hear me? Will I ever be anywhere but in this cave?"

Another of the hardest things about being in a cave is to realize that caves are where God does some of his best work.

The cave is where God can mold and shape our lives like no place else.

That's because sometimes when all the supports in your life get stripped away, and you find that all you've got in this world is God,

that is when you discover that God is enough to see you through.

There's no clear chronology here, but as best I can figure, David spends about 10 years of his life in the wilderness, 10 years on the run as a fugitive,

where from a human perspective it looks like God's promise to him to become king is never going to come true. These are difficult years for David.

Now at some point during those 10 years he is not entirely alone.

Look at 22.2 - this is David's band of outlaw brothers.

"All those who were in distress or who were in debt or discontented gathered around [David], and he became their leader." There were about 400 of them.

How would you like to have that be the description of your church family? Wouldn't that be an enticing group to join?

Drifters, dropouts, and debtors, troublemakers and those who were troubled.

Sounds like the kind of people Jesus, who, by the way was called the Son of David, attracted in his time – 'the least of these' as Matthew puts it.

David spends many years with this band of misfits. Now turn over to 1 Sam. 30.

David is still a fugitive; still on the run from Saul.

Eventually he and his men establish a refugee village in [Seek-lag']. Many have married and are raising families there.

They go out from time to time to raid other villages, enemies of Israel.

One day they come home from one such raid and discover their village has been burned to the ground,

and all their wives and children have been taken captive.

They are devastated. V.4, "David and his men wept until they had no strength left to weep."

Sounds pretty bad doesn't it? Well, for David, it's about to get worse. Look at v.6:

"David is *greatly distressed* because the men are talking of stoning him; each one is bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters" [who have been taken captive].

Let's pause here for a moment. David is a fugitive from his own country. King Saul is trying to kill him.

He has no job, his 1<sup>st</sup> wife is gone, his mentor is dead, his best friend is gone,

his refugee village has been razed to the ground, and now his rag-tag band of outlaw brothers is ready to stone him to death.

What does David do? Look at the last phrase in v.6. It's our key verse for today [highlight it / underline it]. **"But David found strength in the Lord his God."**

[slide 12] The Hebrew verb can also be translated as, "David 'took courage' in the Lord his God."

In other words, he encourages himself. How? In the Lord.

He looks to the Lord for the *encouragement* he needs to deal with his *discouragement*.

It's wonderful to be encouraged by other people. It's great to read something that encourages you.

But when you're in a cave and there's nobody to turn to, it's even more wonderful to know that you can 'take courage' or 'encourage yourself' in the Lord.

That's what David does. How'd he do it?

This morning we're going to discover 4 steps David takes that we can take to encourage ourselves in the Lord when we find ourselves in a cave;

when we are facing adversity that leads to discouragement.

[What then, is the 1<sup>st</sup> step to encouraging yourself in the Lord when you're in the cave of discouragement?]

**Step 1: TALK openly and honestly with the Lord.**

Many of the Psalms are written by or associated with David. Psalm 142 is one of them.

Notice the superscription in Ps. 142. It reads, "A ma-schíl - a contemplative poem - of David. When he was in the cave. A prayer."

This is a Psalm for cave dwellers. David is expressing the cry of his heart when he's living in a cave. Look at v.1:

"I cry aloud to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy. I pour out my complaint before Him; before Him I tell my trouble."

A quick show of hands: How many of you have discovered that complaining is your spiritual gift?

Well if you can complain, you can do this first step; you can do as David did and "pour out your complaint before the Lord."

Tell the Lord just how you feel. David does. In vs.3b-4 we read,

"In the path where I walk people have hidden a snare for me. Look and see, there is no one at my right hand;

no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life."

If I said that to my wife she would say, "Oh stop your whining. Stop your complaining."

But this is what David does and so can we. God is big enough to be able to handle our complaints.

Now there are some people who live with such a chronic case of discouragement they just get used to it.

Take for example Bob's neighbour. Bob's neighbour is a farmer who's just never impressed by anything. He's a very discouraging guy.

Bob gets the world's greatest hunting dog and trains it to do remarkable things just to impress his discouraging neighbour.

Bob teaches his dog to sniff scents from miles away, to sit and point for an hour without moving a muscle.

Then he invites this farmer to go out hunting with him. They go, and his dog does all these remarkable things. But the farmer doesn't say a word.

Finally, they're in a duck blind, and Bob shoots a duck and it lands in the middle of a pond.

He sends his dog, and the dog goes out **walking on the water** to fetch the duck and bring it back to Bob. "Isn't that amazing," says Bob to the farmer.

The farmer looks over at Bob and says, "Huh. I guess your dog can't swim, can he?"

Do you know anyone like that? It's possible for people to slide into a chronic state of discouragement that just never seems go away.

And it sucks the life out of themselves and others.

So if you want to encourage yourself in the Lord, your first step is to talk openly and honestly with him about what's getting you down.

Do as David does and : "pour out [your] complaint before you Lord." That's step one.

[What then, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> step to encouraging yourself in the Lord when you're in the cave of discouragement?]

**[slide 14] Step 2: TAKE positive action.**

This is what David does. Look at 1 Sam. 30.7.

This is after David's village has been burned to the ground and all their wives and children taken captive by the Amalekites.

"David says to [A-bee-ath'-ar] the priest, the son of [Ah-em-me'lek], 'Bring me the [ey-fodé].

[A-bee-ath'-ar] brought it to him, and David inquired of the Lord, 'Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?

'Pursue them,' he answered. 'You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue.'"

Now you may be wondering, "What's an [ey-fodé]? Do they sell them at Walmart?"

Well, there's a lot we don't know about the [ey-fodé] but what we do know is that it is part of the priests clothing

and is used as a means of finding out what God's will is.

And the very clear message from the Lord to David is, "Pursue them." In other words, "Take action! Don't just sit there and do nothing."

Sometimes people get stuck in a chronic state of discouragement because they don't take any action to deal with it.

They just sit around waiting for God to take care of it, when they should take positive action - inquire of the Lord, then do what he says.

Maybe that's what you need to do - inquire of the Lord. Pray to him, read his word, and find out what action to take.

Then do what he tells you to do. That's what David does. That's what we can do.

[What then, is the 3<sup>rd</sup> step to encouraging yourself in the Lord when you're in the cave of discouragement?]

**[slide 15] Step 3: RESIST temptation.**

Look at 1 Sam. 24. There's a significant connection between temptation and being in the cave of discouragement.

And that connection is, when you're in the cave of discouragement you will be vulnerable; vulnerable to any temptation that promises a quick fix or instant relief.

Look at v.1ff: “After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, ‘David is in the Desert of En Gédi.’

So Saul took 3,000 chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crag of the Wild Goats.

He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself.

David and his men were far back in the cave. The men said, ‘This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you,

‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’”

David has a way out of the cave, literally and figuratively. Here’s Saul going into the cave to ‘relieve’ himself.

That’s a Hebrew euphemism for evacuating the bowels from the squatting position.

There’s a reason why the biblical writer shares this rather graphic and humorous detail with us.

It’s to show us that Saul is in an extremely vulnerable position at this moment.

There is nothing Saul can do should David do what his men say he should do. That’s a lot of do-do!

This is David’s chance to do away with the man who wants him dead. One thrust of the blade will bring Saul’s tyranny and their running to an end.

His rag-tag band of out-law brothers is urging him to seize the moment. “Go on David. God promised you deliverance. Here it is!

Don’t you think this must have been so tempting for David? Look at the last sentence in v.4 and the verses that follow.

David creeps up unnoticed toward Saul, but instead of killing him, he just cuts off a corner of Saul's robe that was on the ground as he was relieving himself.

But after doing this David's conscience begins bothering him. He says to his men, v.6,

“The Lord forbid I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord.”

With these words, v.7, David rebukes his men and does not allow them to attack Saul.”

It must have been so tempting for David to think, “I could get out of this cave now. I could take my place in the palace now.”

To kill Saul would have been a short cut to relief from his cave of discouragement.

But it would have been wrong. To kill Saul, whom David still acknowledges is the Lord's anointed, would have been rebellion against God.

Some of you may be in a cave right now. You're in a discouraging place, and there's a shortcut to relief that is tempting you.

But it's not God's will for your life. It contradicts his desire for you. And the question that your future pivots on right now is,

“Will I take the shortcut, or will I submit to God? Will I say, “All right God, I'm willing to spend more time in this cave. As hard as it is, I will not take a shortcut out of here.”

So, what might that temptation be? Maybe it's the temptation to deceive someone.

Maybe it's the temptation to just ignore a pattern of behaviour that is sinful and destructive to yourself and others.

Maybe it's a temptation to just quit something when you know God is calling you to endure, but it would just feel so good to quit.

Maybe it's a temptation to keep wrongdoing hidden.

Will you have the courage not to give in to the temptation to take the shortcut and to stay in the cave even though it would be so easy to get out?

[What then, is the 4<sup>th</sup> step to encouraging yourself in the Lord when you're in the cave of discouragement?]

**[slide 16] Step 4: FIND your ultimate refuge in the Lord.**

Sometimes you're in a cave that no human action can get you out of; it's something you cannot escape.

All you can do is to hang on to God; to find your ultimate refuge in him.

'Refuge' is a word David uses over 40 times in the Psalms. Finding ultimate refuge in the Lord means

being so convinced of his love and faithfulness, his mercy and goodness,

that you find even the cave is a safe place for you to be because God is there with you as he was with David.

Here are two verses from two of David's 'cave' Psalms: Ps. 142.5a, "I cry to you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my refuge.'"

And Ps. 57.1, "In you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings."

Sometimes you're in a cave and all you can do is to hang on to God; to find your ultimate refuge in him.

That's what Don did. **[slide 17, blank]** Don dated a lot of girls in school. But he always seemed to attract girls that were just a few bricks short of a load. It got very discouraging for him.

Once he graduated college he taught an abnormal psychology class and used his ex-girlfriends to illustrate the 4 major categories

of psychopathology [or mental disorders] – deviance, distress, dysfunction, and danger.

It was one of the best-rated classes on campus with a very high attendance rate.

But Don patiently waited on God. He wasn't going to make a foolish choice for a life partner.

He wouldn't take a shortcut regarding his future mate even though it got very discouraging at times.

When he finally did meet the girl who would become his wife, they had to wait a long time to have children.

Then they got word that she had breast cancer, and that was a cave time for them.

With treatment and a lot of prayer she recovered and eventually they had a beautiful little baby girl.

But after seven years of being cancer free, the cancer came back. This time it's in her bones and it's inoperable.

All of the fear and confusion and questions that put them in a cave before are happening again; this time at a much deeper level.

One of the things she said in the midst of this cave experience was,

“I have never felt God's presence more strongly or been more certain of God's goodness to me than I do right now.”

I think that has something to do with what it means to finding your ultimate refuge in the Lord, because ultimately, there is no other refuge.

As someone said, “You'll never know that God is all you need until God is all you have.”

Some of you may be in a cave that you don't think you'll ever get out of. And some of you aren't there yet, but you will be sooner or later.

And on that day, find refuge in the Lord and cling to the one piece of good news that matters most, which is this:

The Lord understands all about caves because he has been there.

Our Lord Jesus, the 'Son of David', also had everything stripped away from him.

His friends deserted him. The once cheering crowds turned against him. His life was threatened by his enemies.

Eventually he was nailed to a cross and he died. They put his body in a cave. They thought he was finished.

But what they didn't know is that God does some of his best work in caves.

Caves are the place where God can resurrect lives.

They put Jesus in a cave, but the cave couldn't hold him. God raised him bodily from the dead.

I don't know about your cave. But I do know that God does some of his best work in caves.

When adversity strikes and discouragement comes,  
talk openly and honestly with God, take positive action, resist temptation, and find your ultimate refuge in God alone.

And that's how you can encourage yourself in the Lord as David did.

489 / 78 P - 'Dear Lord, I Lift My Heart To Thee'

For our closing prayer let's sing, 'God Will Make A Way' as the band comes back to the platform.

