

June 2, 2019
Facing our Fears
1 Samuel 21-22, Psalm 56 & 57
(Scripture reading 1 Samuel 21)

What are you afraid of? Most of us would probably glibly say we are not afraid of anything. But yet there are things that do frighten us. It may be the loss of our health. It may be financial problems. It may be issues with our relationships. It may be personal safety. It may be the future. Maybe it really is public speaking. Maybe our personal problems are not causing us worry, but the struggle of those we love makes us fearful. We worry about a loved one's health. We are afraid for our children or grandchildren in tough circumstances.

We're even afraid to talk about our fears, but at one time or other, we all have them. And they are very real.

David, great soldier and brave leader that he was, knew all about fear. Three times Saul tried to kill David (1 Samuel 18:25, 19:9, 19:11). Each time David barely escaped with his life.

One time, David fled to the city of Nob. Note what happens: David tells a little white lie to cover himself (*"David went to the town of Nob to see Ahimelech the priest. When he saw him, Ahimelech trembled. "Why are you alone?" he asked. "Why is no one with you?" "The king has sent me on a private matter," David said. "He told me not to tell anyone why I am here. I have told my men where to meet me later"* (1 Samuel 21:1-2). That lie was going to have devastating consequences for those who believed him as Saul will wipe out Ahimelech's family and the entire town of Nob (1 Samuel 22:6-19).

That little lie mushrooms into full-scale dishonesty as David ends up pretending he is a lunatic in the Philistine city of Gath. (Curious sub-plot: David killed Goliath; at Nob he takes Goliath's sword; he then seeks refuge in Gath, Goliath's hometown – is it wise to arrive in Goliath's town, carrying Goliath's sword?) When we are fearful, we reach out for all sorts of straws to protect ourselves. Sometimes we do things that don't make sense. Sometimes we do things that are just plain wrong. Or dumb.

In Gath, King Achish knows who David is, and David *"was very much afraid."* As we might expect him to be. Being in Goliath's hometown, and fearing for his life, David pretends to be insane. David escapes and makes his way to the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1). *"O what tangled webs we weave,"* writes Sir Walter Scott, *"when first we practice to deceive."* That certainly was David's experience.

These events are not the highlights of David's life. When we look back at him as a hero of faith – as a man after God's own heart – we overlook these verses. But they're important. Because sometimes we find ourselves in situations that seem just as tangled-up as David's did. Although we may not admit it, we too may be *"very much afraid."*

It is interesting that David, himself, found these events very, very meaningful. At least three psalms (Psalms 34, 56, and 57) come directly from these experiences.

How does David untangle the tangled webs in his life?

Recognize the Problem

David knew there were problems in his life:

- *"Enemy troops press in on me, foes attack me all day long, slanderers hound me constantly, and many are boldly attacking me ... they are always twisting what I say; they spend their days plotting ways to harm me. They come together to spy on me – watching my every step, eager to kill me"* (Psalm 56:1-2, 5-6).
- *"I am surrounded by fierce lions who greedily devour human prey – whose teeth pierce like spears and arrows, and whose tongues cut like swords ... My enemies have set a trap for me, I am weary from distress"* (Psalm 57:4, 6).

Our fears may not be David's fears, but they are every bit as real. ***The first step to moving forward is to recognize we have problems.*** Then we can begin to deal with them. This may require genuine humility and ruthless honesty. Some of us do not like to admit we have any problems at all. Other people may have problems, but we don't. Unfortunately it sometimes takes a great crash before we actually see those problems in our lives that everyone else sees so well.

Pray, and ask God to help you see the problems in your life clearly. Ask someone you trust to help you see the issues in your life you need to deal with. We all have them. The first step toward getting back on track is to recognize we're actually derailed.

Some of us know we have problems, but we also know that we are not the ones to blame. Others are responsible. And in many cases that is very true. But whether a problem is of our own making or not, ***we are the ones who have to deal with it now.*** The issue is not really who's at fault for our problems, but whether or not we are prepared to recognize those issues and begin to seek solutions

And some of us have problems – boy, do we have problems. We could spend all day telling you about our problems. We could go on and on about our problems. The issue for us is: are we ready to stop talking about our misfortunes and actually do something about them?

Recognize the Presence of God

How did David deal with his problems once he became aware of them?

- He prayed earnestly and sincerely, naming his problems to God: *"O God have mercy on me ... Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy ... I cry out to God Most High"*(Psalm 56:1, 57:1a, 2a).
- He reminded himself of God's presence, even in the most difficult circumstances: *"But when I am afraid I put my trust in you. O God, I praise your word. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me? ... I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until this violent storm is past ..."*(Psalm 56:3-4, 57:1b,).
- He reminded himself that God knows, intimately, his circumstances: *"You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book"*(Psalm 56:8, c.f. Luke 12:7).
- He had confidence, knowing that God was on his side: *"On the very day I call to you for help, my enemies will retreat. This I know, God is on my side. God will fulfil his purpose for me. He will send help from heaven to save me, rescuing me from those who are out to get me. My God will send forth his unfailing love and faithfulness"*(Psalm 56:9, 57:2b-3).
- He could look back, with thanksgiving, to those times when God had sustained him: *"You have rescued me from death; you have kept my feet from slipping. So now I can walk in your presence, O God, in your life-giving light."* (Psalm 56:13). The past gives him confidence to face the present and the future.
- He realized that whatever happened here and now, God's eternal will was always wonderful, and nothing could destroy that: *"I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?"* (Psalm 56:10, c.f. Luke 12:4-5, Romans 8:38-39). That doesn't mean, in the short term, life is always going to be sweet and wonderful. It does mean that, in the long term, we can have confidence knowing our lives are always in God's care.

Recognize the "Fear of the Lord"

There is another kind of fear in David's vocabulary. It is what Old Testament writers call the "fear of the Lord." This is not about terror or shaking in one's boots.

What that means is having a deep reverence of God – a sense of God’s awesome love and power that drives us to worship him. Our God is an awesome God! It develops as we see the work of God in the world around us, and in our own lives.

One of the great mysteries of Christian living is that we often draw closer to God through the difficult times of our lives. We can talk all we want about prayer, knowing God is with us, and believing that God knows all about our circumstances. But sometimes talk is just talk. It is only through the experience of living through those things that we really understand how profound God’s presence and provision really are. It is when we stand before Goliath – or in Goliath’s hometown, carrying Goliath’s sword – that we really discover how real and powerful God’s presence and provision really are.

Read Psalm 34 (responsive reading).

Our Daily Bread devotional has the story of a young man who asked an elderly believer to pray that he would have more patience: *"The older man got down on his knees and began, 'Lord, send this young man tribulation in the morning; send this young man tribulation in the afternoon; send this young man ---' At that point the young Christian blurted out, 'No, no, I didn't ask you to pray for tribulation. I wanted you to pray for patience.' 'Ah,' responded the wise Christian, 'it's through tribulation that we learn patience.'"* David would have agreed with that.

Sometimes it is through the difficult times that we learn to truly praise God *"Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. ... God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him"* (James 1:2-12).

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Psalm 34

I will praise the Lord at all times.

I will constantly speak his praises.

I will boast only in the Lord;

let all who are helpless take heart.

Come, let us tell of the Lord's greatness;

let us exalt his name together.

I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me.

He freed me from all my fears.

Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy;

no shadow of shame will darken their faces.

In my desperation I prayed, and the Lord listened;

he saved me from all my troubles.

For the angel of the Lord is a guard;

he surrounds and defends all who fear him.

Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!

Fear the Lord, you his godly people,

for those who fear him will have all they need.

Even strong young lions sometimes go hungry,

but those who trust in the Lord will lack no good thing.

The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right;

his ears are open to their cries for help.

The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help.

He rescues them from all their troubles.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted;

he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

The righteous person faces many troubles,

but the Lord comes to the rescue each time.

For the Lord protects the bones of the righteous;

not one of them is broken!

The Lord will redeem those who serve him.

No one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.