

NO ORDINARY JOURNEY

**SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:
THE STORY OF DAVID.**



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1 Samuel 21:1–15
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1 Samuel 21:1–15

Today we begin Chapter Two of “A Life of Passion: The David Story.” When we met David in Chapter One, he was a shepherd. As we begin Chapter Two, he’s a fugitive. As a fugitive, he learns priceless lessons, which he passes on to us in the Psalms.

A character in one of C.S. Lewis’ novels observed a fly crawling up a doorpost and comments, “I remember thinking that its sluggish crawling, seemingly without aim, was like my life, or even the life of the whole world.”¹

Is that it? Are our journeys comparable to that of a fly working its way up a doorpost? Apart from an all-loving, all-powerful Creator, there may not be more to it than that. However, even many of us who believe in Christ, and the all-loving, all-powerful God that he incarnates, wonder if the circumstances of our lives make our journeys nothing more than ordinary.

Let’s see how David evaluated his journey. Our journeys have more in common with his than that of a fly sluggishly crawling up a doorpost. And, if our journeys are something other than ordinary, what will we need?

Holy bread

1 Samuel 21:1-7:

Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David trembling and said to him, “Why are you alone, and no one with you?”² And David said to Ahimelech the priest, “The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, ‘Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.’ I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place.³ Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here.”⁴ And the priest answered David, “I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread—if the young

men have kept themselves from women.”⁵ And David answered the priest, “Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?”⁶ So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.

⁷Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord. His name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul’s herdsmen.

David, on the run from Saul, hopes that Ahimelech will furnish him with provisions for his journey into the wilderness. Earlier, when running from Saul, David came to Samuel, a prophet of the Lord (1 Samuel 19:18). Now he comes to the priest of the Lord. David not only seeks provisions, he also seeks the holy: he seeks the Lord. Ahimelech, though, is suspicious, because he knows David as a military leader, and David is traveling without an army. David says he’s on a secret mission—that’s why he’s without an army. He lies.

When Saul sat down to eat with his court, David literally didn’t come to “the bread” (1 Samuel 20:27). Inasmuch as David seeks “bread” from the priest, we gather, once again, that he has an appetite for holy things. Ahimelech, however, is out of ordinary bread; all he has is the “holy bread,” twelve loaves that would be placed on the altar as an offering to the Lord and then replaced each Sabbath with fresh loaves. The priests—and only the priests—could eat the old loaves (Leviticus 24:5-9).

Why does Ahimelech ask if David’s men have refrained from sexual relations with women? We know that when the Lord entered into a covenant relationship with Israel, Moses instructed them to temporarily refrain from sexual relations (Exodus 19:15). We also know that Uriah, a warrior, abstained during battle (2 Samuel 11:11). Apparently, it was common to set aside sexual relations for certain periods of time when certain

tasks were undertaken that were considered holy.² So the priest, who was tasked with distinguishing between the common and the holy, wants to know if David's mission is holy (Exodus 22:26, Haggai 2:11-14). David's answer means yes, his mission is holy. So Ahimelech gives him the bread.

The bread that is "removed before the Lord to be replaced by hot bread" represents Saul, whom the Lord has removed as king in favor of David (1 Samuel 16:1; 15:26, 28). However, a servant of the old king, Doeg the Edomite, is present for David's interaction with Ahimelech. No wonder David is less than forthcoming with Ahimelech: one of Saul's spies is listening to every word. He can't very well say, "I'm running from Saul, who wants to kill me."

Feed your soul with the bread of life

David was hungry. Are you hungry? I mean, are you hungry like David was hungry—hungry-in-your-soul hungry?

David asked for five loaves, and he left with twelve holy loaves. When a large crowd came toward Jesus, the Son of David, a little boy gave him five loaves, along with two fish. The Son of David touched the loaves and made them holy—so holy, in fact, that he fed a crowd of five thousand with them; so holy, in fact, that when his disciples gathered up the fragments of bread, they filled twelve baskets. David asked for five loaves and left with twelve; the Son of David started with five loaves and finished with twelve.

The crowd tried to take Jesus by force and make him king, but he withdrew from them. Later, they tracked him down. Jesus told them in **John 6:26-27**:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you."

Then he told them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger . . ." (John 6:35).

Are you hungry-in-your soul hungry? Come to Jesus. Feed your soul with the bread of life. How do you do that? Here's one way:

Take one verse, Luke 22:19: "And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you.'" Now, imagine that you're sitting at table with Jesus.

Picture him doing everything that Luke says he's doing. Picture him taking bread, giving thanks, and breaking the bread. Smell the bread. Hear it tear. Now picture Jesus giving the bread . . . to you. Look at his hands and his arms—and remember what happened to those hands and arms. Are they scarred? Here him speak . . . to you: "Take; this is my body, which is given for you." Feast your soul on the images and sounds and smells of the upper room.

David is supplied with food—holy food. Now, especially in light of Doeg's presence, he needs a weapon.

The sword of Goliath

1 Samuel 21:8-9:

Then David said to Ahimelech, "Then have you not here a spear or a sword at hand? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." ⁹And the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck down in the Valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it, for there is none but that here." And David said, "There is none like that; give it to me."

David has no weapons with him because he had to flee from Saul in haste, though again, he lies to the priest and says his haste is attributable to "the king's business." The priest, having supplied David with holy bread, now offers him the only weapon on hand, and it's no ordinary weapon: it's Goliath's sword, which David used to kill the Philistine giant after he had felled him with a stone. The priest has kept it, wrapped in a cloth to protect it from damage.

David recognizes the sword as unique. He would know: he used it, and used it to great effect. When David battled Goliath, he was fighting the Lord's battle. The sword, therefore, has become a holy weapon from holy war. The priest has recognized it as such, having preserved and protected it as something like a relic. Moreover, the sword serves to remind David of his battle with Goliath, when the Lord was with him. The Lord is still with him, but now that David is alone, a fugitive on the run, Goliath's sword would serve as a tangible reminder of the Lord's presence and power. Furthermore, the sword is rightfully his: he defeated Goliath and took the sword from him. David takes the sword.

On the one hand, David lies to Ahimelech. He can be

excused for doing so, especially in light of the presence of Doeg. On the other hand, he speaks the truth—more truth than perhaps he even knows. Twice he uses the word “king” without using Saul’s name. He says the “king has charged him with a matter.” If the king is the Lord, then David speaks truly, for as it turned out, a scenario that Jonathan anticipated came to pass: “...the Lord has sent you away” (1 Samuel 20:22). Indeed, then, “the king’s business required haste.” Moreover, isn’t David the king? Saul is acting king, but David has been anointed king. His business, as the king, is the king’s business. Indeed, in David’s words, this is no “ordinary journey.”

David came to the priest hungry and defenseless; he leaves full and equipped.³

Appropriate Christ’s victory

David was defenseless. Are you, like David, defenseless? Are you defenseless against evil? In one sense, you’d have to answer yes. The world is full of evil, and there’s no way to predict and prepare for everything that could go wrong.

David wanted a weapon, and he left with a holy sword. The apostle Paul urges us in **Ephesians 6:10–13**:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.”

Ahimelech allowed David to “take” the sword of Goliath. Paul, after telling us to put on the armor of God, urges us to “take” a sword—not the sword of Goliath, but an even more powerful weapon. He urges us to take “...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:10–20). The word of God is not the Bible per se but the essential biblical message: the Gospel, the good news that Jesus Christ, in his death and resurrection, has triumphed over evil, including the “spiritual forces of evil.”

Are you defenseless against evil? No, not if you believe the gospel. Jesus has triumphed over evil and will one day vanquish evil. You can take the sword of the Spirit:

through thought, prayer, and faith, you can appropriate the truth that Christ has triumphed over evil and will vanquish evil. With the sword of the Spirit, you can “withstand the evil day,” whenever and however it comes. Grab hold of the gospel as if you were grabbing hold of a sword. Evil, and those who have aligned themselves with evil, is going down. Those who believe the gospel are going up.

What’s the worst that can happen?

Randy Scroggins is pastor of New Beginnings Church in Roseburg, Oregon. His eighteen-year-old daughter was in the room at Umpqua Community College when the gunman opened fire, killing nine people, but she survived. Last Sunday, Scroggins preached what I imagine was the most difficult sermon of his life. Here’s what he told his church: “Violence will not have the last word.” That’s taking the sword of the Spirit! That’s appropriating the victory of Christ!⁴

“The worst isn’t the last thing about the world,” writes Frederick Buechner. “It’s the next to the last thing. The last thing is the best.”⁵ And the best, as the poet says, is yet to be.

David, full and equipped, resumes his journey. But where is he to go?

Fleeing to Gath

1 Samuel 21:10-15:

And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath. ¹¹And the servants of Achish said to him, “Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances,

‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands?’”

¹²And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. ¹³So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. ¹⁴Then Achish said to his servants, “Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? ¹⁵Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?”

First, David fled to a prophet of Israel. Then he fled to the priest of Israel. Now he flees to . . . Achish, the king of Gath? Gath is a Philistine city—the hometown of Goliath, in fact. David isn't safe in Israel. Indeed, the Lord had sent David away (1 Samuel 20:22, 42). But why Achish, a Philistine? David is seeking refuge and sustenance, and Gath might be his last best option. Moses, for one, found refuge among foreigners in the wilderness. We surmise, inasmuch as he doesn't identify himself, that David is hoping that he won't be recognized.

No such luck. Achish's servants suspect him. They wonder whether he's David, "king of the land," who was hailed for striking down his ten thousands—ten thousands of Philistines, by the way. David was anointed king of Israel in secret. The Philistines still recognize Saul as king of Israel, but inasmuch as they identify David as a kind of king, "king of the land," even though he's landless, they see more than the servants of Saul—or anyone else in Israel, for that matter, save Samuel.

David, understanding that the Philistines are on to him, takes "these words to heart"—the words of Achish's servants. Not long ago, he fled to prophets, the Lord's servants who spoke the Lord's words. Aren't those the words he should take to heart, not the words of Philistines? He's "much afraid" of Achish of Gath, a Philistine king. Wait a minute: he wasn't afraid of Goliath of Gath, a Philistine giant. Saul was much afraid of Goliath, not David, and Saul was much afraid of David (1 Samuel 17:11; 18:12, 29).

Having been suspected of being the man he in actuality is, David pretends to be someone else: a madman. In other words, he acts like his predecessor, Saul, who was given to bouts of insanity in his mad pursuit of David and, when last seen, was lying naked on the ground all day and all night (1 Samuel 19:24). David is much afraid, like Saul, and he acts insane, like Saul. Is the new king becoming like the old king? In any event, Achish falls for it, and David escapes to the wilderness, to the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1).

David cannot find refuge in Gath. What now will come of him? Will the future king be conformed to the image of the old king? He isn't safe in Israel. He isn't safe in Gath. Where can he find refuge?

What do you need?

Have you ever been to Gath? Sure you have. You live in Gath! David came to Gath, hoping for bread and refuge. Are you looking for bread for your soul? Not easy to find around here, is it? You've probably already eaten some

of the bread they're serving up around here, in the guise of money, sex, power, and success, and it doesn't satisfy your soul. Are you looking for a safe place around here, a refuge from the slings and arrows of the world? David was recognized as a king and felt threatened. Have you ever been recognized as a believer in the king, King Jesus, and felt threatened or opposed or shunned? Have you, like David, felt that you had to deny who you are and pretend you're someone else? If you spend enough time pretending you're someone else, you risk being conformed to the image of that pretend person. You risk losing who you are.

What do you need in Gath? David came to Gath presumably with whatever was left of the bread that Ahimelech had given him and with the sword of Goliath. But the bread was running out, and the sword would do him no good, one against a city. Ah, but if you believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you can feed your soul with the bread of life and you can grab hold of the sword of the Spirit, the good news of Christ's victory over evil. You have bread for the journey and a sword for the fight.

David tasted none of Gath's bread, and he was "much afraid" in Gath. Having escaped by the skin of his teeth, he reflected on his sojourn in Gath and wrote Psalm 34:

- "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! (Psalm 34:8a)
- " I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears" (Psalm 34:4).

Are you hungry, hungry-in-your soul hungry? Taste and see that the Lord is good: feed your soul with the bread of life. Do you feel defenseless against everything that could go wrong? Take the sword of the Spirit: appropriate Christ's victory over evil, and the Lord will deliver you from all your fears.

You mission is holy

When Jesus' disciples were picking heads of grain on the Sabbath, the Pharisees objected. Jesus, coming to the defense of his disciples, invoked 1 Samuel 21:1-6. Jesus claimed the right to pick grain on the Sabbath, the holy day, just as David claimed the right to eat bread from the holy place. David was anointed by Samuel, a prophet, but not yet enthroned. Jesus saw himself as the presumptive king of Israel, anointed by a prophet, John the Baptist, but not yet enthroned. His disciples, who picked the heads of grain, shared his holy mission (Mark 2:23-28).

Are you a disciple of Jesus, one of his followers? If so, then your mission, whatever it is and wherever it takes you, even if you can't define it, even if you're doing something as simple as picking grain, is holy. You're a saint, a holy one.

It doesn't matter who you are, how young or old you are, what you're doing, or how insignificant you feel. It doesn't matter whether you're trying to change the world or trying to change a diaper—and who knows whether those who are changing diapers are doing more to change the world than those who think they're changing the world? It doesn't matter whether you're happily married, unhappily married, or can't get a date.

If you're a disciple of Jesus, your mission is holy: you are about the King's business. This is no ordinary journey. Ordinary bread won't satisfy. An ordinary sword won't suffice. For such a journey, you need the bread of life, Jesus Christ himself; you need the sword of the Spirit, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Feed your soul with the bread of life, and appropriate the victory of Christ.

Endnotes

¹C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co, 1984), 90.

²The apostle Paul, in urging married couples to engage in sexual relations, acknowledges that that separation may be appropriate on special occasions for the purposes of prayer (1 Corinthians 7:5).

³David left in haste from Saul's presence, just as Israel left in haste from Pharaoh's presence in the exodus. David, now equipped with a holy sword, will eat holy bread for his holy journey in the wilderness, just like Israel, which ate manna from heaven in the wilderness. In David, a new Israel will be formed. Where? In the wilderness.

⁴Gosia Wozniacka and Tim Abollah, "Pastor's Sermon: Violence will not have the Last Word" (Associated Press, Oct. 4, 2015).

⁵Frederick Buechner, *The Final Beast* (Harpercollins, 1982).