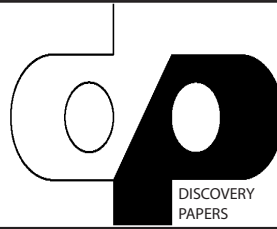


INSIDE THE CAVE

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



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1 Samuel 22:1–23

In October 2009, former Yale professor William Deresiewicz, an essayist and critic, addressed the plebe class of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The address went viral. Here's an excerpt:

It seems to me that Facebook and Twitter and YouTube—and just so you don't think this is a generational thing, TV and radio and magazines and even newspapers, too—are all ultimately just an elaborate excuse to run away from yourself. To avoid the difficult and troubling questions that being human throws in your way

Here's the other problem with Facebook and Twitter and even The New York Times. When you expose yourself to those things, especially in the constant way that people do now—older people as well as younger people—you are continuously bombarding yourself with a stream of other people's thoughts. You are marinating yourself in the conventional wisdom. In other people's reality: for others, not for yourself. You are creating a cacophony in which it is impossible to hear your own voice, whether it's yourself you're thinking about or anything else.¹

What, instead, does Deresiewicz recommend?

I find for myself that my first thought is never my best thought. My first thought is always someone else's; it's always what I've already heard about the subject, always the conventional wisdom. It's only by concentrating, sticking to the question, being patient, letting all the parts of my mind come into play, that I arrive at an original idea. By giving my brain a chance to make associations, draw connections, take me by surprise. And often even that idea doesn't turn out to be very good. I need time to think about it, too, to make mistakes and recognize them, to make false starts and correct them, to outlast my impulses, to defeat my desire to declare the job done and move on to the next thing.²

Deresiewicz recommends that we get alone with our thoughts. David got to the point where he was alone with his thoughts—but not *just* with his thoughts. He was alone with his thoughts *and* his prayers, and he

emerged not only with an original ideal but also with priceless insights. Do we need to do the same? What might happen for us if we get alone with our thoughts and prayers?

David, on the run from Saul, could find no refuge in Gath of the Philistines; he had to pretend to be a madman to escape from Gath with his life. He's not safe in Israel. He's not safe in Gath. The only safe place left for him is . . . well, let's pick up the story in 1 Samuel 22.

1 Samuel 22:1-5:

David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. ²And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them. And there were with him about four hundred men.

³And David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab. And he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother stay with you, till I know what God will do for me." ⁴And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. ⁵Then the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not remain in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.

Alone in the darkness of the cave of Adullam, as he buries himself in the LORD, David finds refuge.

At least two of David's psalms, Psalm 57 and Psalm 142, masterpieces both, emerged from the cave, according to superscripts of those compositions. What did David find in the cave? He found that the LORD was his refuge. Psalm 57:1: "For in you my soul takes refuge; / in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge. Psalm 142:5: "I cry to you, O LORD; / I say, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.'"

In effect, then, David doesn't find refuge in the cave, he finds refuge in the LORD—he finds the LORD in the cave. The LORD has become his place of safety, which is good, because the LORD, not the cave, is with him wherever he goes. The word “portion” was connected to the land the Israelites were allotted. The land was their most valuable possession. David, on the run, is landless. The LORD has become his most valuable possession. He lost the land, but he gained the LORD. What an exchange!

David's “brothers and all his father's house” find their way to the cave. Wait a minute, didn't David's father all but dismiss him because he was the youngest, and didn't his father only send him to the front lines to look after the welfare of his brothers when Goliath was taunting the Israelites? (1 Samuel 16:11,17:17-19). And didn't David's older brother rip into him for the “presumption and the evil” of his heart? (1 Samuel 17:28) Yes, but that was then. This is now—now that anyone associated with David is at risk with Saul in mad pursuit. Others, refugees from Saul's kingdom, also beat a path to the cave, and David finds himself as the leader of a small army, the nucleus of the new kingdom.

In some ways, we're seeing this scene play out in our day. Just as the Israelites were running from a madman, Saul, Syrians are running not just from one madman but many madmen, who have devastated their country. Our missionaries, Nolan and Sandra Sharp in Croatia, are on the front lines as refugees stream into Europe. “Most of the Christian ministries we know are in action, and the churches as well,” says Nolan. “As you read of the crisis Europe, know that believers, often without many resources, are working and praying to figure out how to respond as Jesus would.”

In the cave, David finds the LORD, and formerly alienated family members, not to mention hundreds of refugees, find him. Saul can't find him, but the refugees of Saul's kingdom can. The spiritual life emanating from the cave of Adullam has become a powerful magnet for the marginalized. David himself, as the eighth son, had been marginalized. In the cave, David envisioned something like this: “The righteous will surround me, / for you will deal bountifully with me” (Psalm 142:7).

Recognizing that his parents aren't safe in Saul's kingdom, and now that he has an army to command, David asks the king of Moab to shelter them, perhaps hoping for hospitality because Moab was the birthplace of his grandmother, Ruth. The king agrees. Likewise, Jesus, the Son of David, made arrangements for his mother even as he was dying on the cross (John 19:25-27).

In the cave of Adullam, David finds the LORD, but he doesn't immediately know “what God will do” for him: he doesn't know what the next step is. Enter a prophet named Gad, who tells him it's time to leave the cave, which must not become for David a permanent fortress. After all, the LORD is his refuge, not a cave.

Bury yourself into the LORD

Like David, Jesus of Nazareth, the anointed but not yet enthroned king, found no refuge in the land of Israel. He said, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). Like David, the Son of David found refuge in the LORD. He often withdrew to “desolate places” to pray, most notably when he withdrew from his disciples in Gethsemane, fell to his knees, and buried himself in the Father (Luke 5:15, 22:39-46).

Have you ever felt like David, like the Son of David? Have you felt as if someone—or something—was out to get you? Have you felt persecuted or marginalized? Have you felt in some way that you just didn't belong? Do you feel that way even now?

Larry Crabb writes: “I have come to a place in my life where I need to know God better or I won't make it. Life at times has a way of throwing me into such blinding confusion and severe pain that I lose all hope. Joy is gone. Nothing encourages me.”³

Have you ever felt that way? David felt that way. Where should you go? Hint: You shouldn't go to Facebook or Twitter or YouTube or the TV or the radio or magazines or newspapers. You should go to a cave, so to speak. You should withdraw from others and bury yourself in the LORD on a regular basis, but especially when you become aware of your need for him—without making the cave a permanent fortress, of course. What should you do in the cave? You should meet with God, starting where you are with him and being honest with him. Look at the first four verses of Psalm 142:

**With my voice I cry out to the LORD;
with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD.**

**²I pour out my complaint before him;
I tell my trouble before him.**

**³When my spirit faints within me,
you know my way!**

**In the path where I walk
they have hidden a trap for me.**

**⁴Look to the right and see:
there is none who takes notice of me;
no refuge remains to me;
no one cares for my soul.**

David first cries out “to” the LORD, as if the LORD were distant. Then he pours out his complaint “before” him, as if he’s moved closer to the LORD. He’s honest with his “complaint.” Next, instead of speaking to “the LORD” or “him,” David addresses the LORD personally: “you know my way!” He doesn’t know what’s going on, but now, he’s confident that God knows. Alone in the cave, David feels as if no one—no one!—takes notice of him or cares for him. Only when he writes that “no refuge remains” to him does he discover that the LORD is his refuge and portion. By starting where he is, by being honest; by, in William Deresiewicz’s terminology, concentrating, sticking to the question, being patient, letting all parts of his mind come into play; by giving his brain a chance to make associations, draw connections, and take him by surprise, David arrives at an original idea—and a priceless one at that: the LORD is his refuge and his portion.

Starting where you are and being honest with the LORD—getting it all out on the table, so to speak—will help you move closer to him.

As you express your concerns to him, you will know that he knows about them, and you may begin to sense that he can be trusted with them. You may not feel safe with anyone else. You may not even feel safe with yourself, for that matter. You can’t tell anyone else everything, but you can tell the LORD everything. You’re safe with the LORD. He’s your refuge.

Often times, as in David’s case, it’s only when you lose something or someone of value that you sense your need for the LORD. And when you know you need the LORD, he becomes more valuable to you. You begin not only to need him but also to want him. He becomes like the land was to Israel—your most valuable possession, your portion in the land of the living. You lose whatever, but you gain the LORD. That’s priceless. That’s eternal. What an exchange!

What will you find in the cave? You’ll find the LORD! In the darkness of the cave, you’ll see things more clearly, and perhaps you’ll begin to see the future differently, like David, who envisioned being surrounded by the righteous.

On December 2, 1995 (I remember the date), I was in a place of need. I’m always in a place of need, but this day, I knew it. A relationship had just come to an end. I had been a pastor for eighteen months and still hadn’t found my way. In the morning, I got in my car and drove to the mountains. During the day, I went for a long walk along a creek-side trail. At night, I holed up in a coffee house, pouring out my thoughts and feelings on pages of paper. I buried myself in the LORD. I went to a cave, so to speak.

What’s going on outside the cave?

Outside the cave

1 Samuel 22:6-10:

Now Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men who were with him. Saul was sitting at Gibeah under the tamarisk tree on the height with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him. ⁷And Saul said to his servants who stood about him, “Hear now, people of Benjamin; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, ⁸that all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day.” ⁹Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who stood by the servants of Saul, “I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, ¹⁰and he inquired of the LORD for him and gave him provisions and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.”

Gibeah means “height.” Saul, imperious as ever, with his servants before him, sits on the “height” of “Height,” looking down on everyone. He clings to his spear, which for him, signifies his power, but we know better. Three times Saul has hurled his spear at David, and three times he has missed. The spear isn’t a symbol of his power but of his impotence.

Saul, in his paranoia, thinks that even the people of Benjamin, the tribe he hails from, have fallen in with the son of Jesse (he can’t bring himself to say David’s name) and have conspired against him. His son (Saul can’t bring himself to say Jonathan’s name, either) has made a covenant with David, yes, but he hasn’t stirred up David against him, and David isn’t lying in wait for him. Saul throws a pity party: “None of you is sorry for me . . . ”

Doeg isn’t a Benjamite. He isn’t even an Israelite. He’s an Edomite, a foreigner. More than anything, he’s a political opportunist. If those closest to Saul supposedly won’t even tell him what’s going on, then Doeg senses an opportunity to curry favor with the king and get closer to power. Doeg, who was present when David came to Nob and left with provisions and the sword of Goliath, informs on Ahimelech, the priest who supplied David. Doeg doesn’t mention David’s lies or Ahimelech’s suspicions, thereby falsely depicting the priest as being disloyal to Saul.

Now, Saul wants to hear from Ahimelech—sort of

Massacre of the innocent

1 Samuel 22:11-19:

Then the king sent to summon Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests who were at Nob, and all of them came to the king. ¹²And Saul said, "Hear now, son of Ahitub." And he answered, "Here I am, my lord." ¹³And Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in that you have given him bread and a sword and have inquired of God for him, so that he has risen against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?" ¹⁴Then Ahimelech answered the king, "And who among all your servants is so faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, and captain over your bodyguard, and honored in your house? ¹⁵Is today the first time that I have inquired of God for him? No! Let not the king impute anything to his servant or to all the house of my father, for your servant has known nothing of all this, much or little." ¹⁶And the king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house." ¹⁷And the king said to the guard who stood about him, "Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because their hand also is with David, and they knew that he fled and did not disclose it to me." But the servants of the king would not put out their hand to strike the priests of the LORD. ¹⁸Then the king said to Doeg, "You turn and strike the priests." And Doeg the Edomite turned and struck down the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five persons who wore the linen ephod. ¹⁹And Nob, the city of the priests, he put to the sword; both man and woman, child and infant, ox, donkey and sheep, he put to the sword.

Without even hearing from Ahimelech, Saul has already determined that he's guilty of conspiring against him. Courageously, Ahimelech defends David as a faithful servant of Saul, whom Saul has endorsed in multiple ways. Doeg charged Ahimelech with inquiring of God in David's behalf, though the account of David's interaction with Ahimelech in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 includes no such inquiry. Ahimelech doesn't bother to refute the charge because the charge is irrelevant. He's inquired of God in David's behalf in the past without raising the king's ire. After all, David commanded Saul's armies. Even if Ahimelech had done so again when David visited Nob, he wouldn't have been acting in disloyalty to Saul.

Ahimelech pleads ignorance: he knows nothing of a conspiracy. There's no conspiracy to speak of, because there isn't one.

It doesn't matter what Ahimelech says, whether much or little; he's a dead man—and not only him but also all the priests, who allegedly "did not disclose" to Saul that David was fleeing from him. Of course, they didn't know that David was fleeing from Saul. No matter. Saul's servants conclude he's taken things too far and refuse to carry out his orders to kill the priests.

Doeg, though, has no qualms. The priests of the LORD aren't his priests. He carries out the massacre. In fact, he goes berserk, not only killing eighty-five priests but also every person and every living creature in Nob, the city of priests. The narrator does not disclose whether Doeg laid waste to Nob on his own or whether he was following Saul's orders. In any event, Saul commanded Doeg, and responsibility for the massacre falls at his feet.

Doeg killed "both man and woman, child and infant, ox, donkey, and sheep." Earlier, the LORD had commanded Saul to attack Amalek and kill "both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." However, Saul spared the king of Amalek, as a prize to be paraded, "and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good." Samuel, when he found out about Saul's disobedience, reprimanded him and informed him that the LORD had rejected him as king of Israel (1 Samuel 15:3, 9, 26). Saul wouldn't obey the LORD and execute holy war against an evil foreign nation, but he turns around and carries out holy war against a city of his own people—and a city of priests of the LORD at that! It's as if he's telling the LORD, "If it's holy war you want, you can have it!"

In one way or another, people get beat up in the kingdom of this world—by the imperious, who look down on everyone else; by the paranoid, who think that everyone is out to get them; by the self-pitying, who expect everyone to do their bidding; by the judgmental, who are deaf to the truth; by the opportunists, who lay waste to anyone in their path to power. Some people, disappointed with the way their lives have turned out, strike out against God, consciously or not. Some of them, like Saul and Doeg, go berserk.

The self-pitying young man in Roseburg, Oregon, who was disappointed with the way his life had turned out, was at least in part motivated by an anti-religion bias when he opened fire on October 1 and killed nine people at Umpqua Community College. Was he in some way striking out against God?

People who get beat up in the kingdom of this world need a place to go. Where are they to go?

Where refugees go

1 Samuel 22:20-23:

But one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. ²¹And Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. ²²And David said to Abiathar, “I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father’s house. ²³Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you shall be in safekeeping.”

Saul orders the deaths of all the priests, but one, Abiathar, escapes. Where does he go? Where other refugees of Saul’s kingdom have gone: to David. At the beginning of the narrative, David “escaped” to the cave of Adullam. Other refugees then streamed to the cave. Now we hear that Abiathar “escaped and fled after” David. David, the new king, now has a priest, Abiathar, who can inquire of the LORD in his behalf.

David, having started where he was with the LORD and having been honest with the LORD, sees himself as in part responsible for the massacre. He says he knew that Doeg would squeal but didn’t stop him. How different is David from Saul! David confesses; Saul doesn’t confess. David takes responsibility for the massacre even though Saul ordered it. In the cave of Adullam, David started where he was with the LORD, and he was honest with the LORD. Therefore, he is honest about his failures with Abiathar. A priest of the LORD isn’t safe with Saul. David, though, promises the priest, “With me you shall be in safekeeping.”

The righteous will surround you

If you bury yourself in the LORD, starting where you are with him and being honest with him, and if you find the LORD, then watch for him to send your way some refugees who have been beaten up in the kingdom of this world. Don’t be surprised, though, if you find yourself involved with people who aren’t exactly your first choice. Remember who gathered to David: “everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was

in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul.” David, in Psalm 142, envisioned being surrounded by “the righteous.” Might David, at some point, retreated deeper into the cave and complained to the LORD, “Is this what you call the righteous?”

Expect your life to get messy. Expect to be inconvenienced by real people with real problems: the burned-out and the stressed-out, whether they’re down-and-outers or the up-and-outers. They’ll be attracted by what emerges from your time with the LORD in the cave: your honesty, your willingness to confess your failures and take responsibility for them. Because of your transparency, they will sense that they can trust you, that they don’t need to be afraid in your presence, that with you they “shall be in safekeeping.” Indeed, the righteous will surround you.

A new vision

On December 2, 1995, when I went for a long walk on a creek-side trail, when I holed up in a coffee house, when I buried myself in the LORD, at some point, somehow, I sensed God’s presence and his love. I found the LORD. Or he found me. In any event, a new vision began to take shape that day—a vision for a new ministry. Indeed, a few weeks later, I began to ask some people if they wanted to join me in this new venture, and to my surprise, they said yes. I asked twelve people, and twelve people said yes. Thus, the Young Adults Fellowship was born. I shepherded the ministry for thirteen years before handing it off to Paul Taylor in 2009. Today we’re commissioning two new pastors, Paco Lopez and Dan Westman, and Paul is handing off the Young Adults Fellowship to Dan.

Bury yourself in the LORD, and watch for him to send a few refugees of this world your way.

Endnotes

¹William Deresiewicz, *The American Scholar* (March 1, 2010)

²Ibid.

³Larry Crabb, *Finding God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 11.