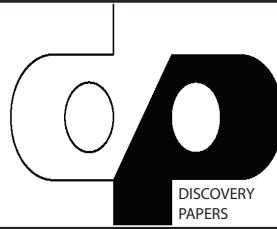


# CLASH OF COUNSELORS

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



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2 Samuel 15:1–16:14  
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Paul Taylor  
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*2 Samuel 16:15–17:29*

I had done all that was within my power to do. It was out of my hands. All I could do was to wait. I had recently applied for my very first job. Do you remember that feeling?

I was in high school and had applied to work in a sporting goods store near my home. A family friend had connected me to the hiring manager and arranged for an interview. I went in, gave it my best, and now all I could do was wait. I still remember so vividly the name of that hiring manager: Charles Prince. Not to be confused, of course, with Prince Charles.

I remember his name so well because I felt he had my future in his hands. His decision determined so much of my life. Day after day, I waited for the call from Charles Prince, who would let me know the fate of my job application.

What do we do when we've done all that we can, but our fate rests in the hands of someone else? What can we do while we're waiting? How do we survive that sense of not being able to control our own lives?

After a great weekend last week worshipping God through acts of service in our community, we're back together at PBC. We are in the home stretch of our series on the life of David that we've called *A Life Of Passion*. If you haven't been with us since last August, we've worked our way through a lot of ups and downs of David's life.

Most recently we've seen David make a series of terrible decisions. These mistakes led to several complicated and confusing family dynamics. In response, David did... nothing. He became passive. But then two weeks ago, we finally saw him take action. His son Absalom had mounted a rebellion against him. In a surprising move, David gathers his friends and flees the city. He leaves Jerusalem to his rebellious son, even going so far as to refer to Absalom as the king.

On his way out of the city, David encounters several friends, one of whom will feature prominently in our story this morning. His name is Hushai. We met him for the first time two weeks ago. The text describes him as a friend. That word probably refers to an official royal position, something of an adviser to the king.

Before meeting Hushai, David had learned that one of his previous advisers, named Ahithophel, had defected and betrayed him. In response, David sends back Hushai to spy for him. His plan is for Hushai to thwart the advice given by Ahithophel. It's a risky assignment, but his friend eagerly accepts it. This leaves Absalom with two people giving him advice, which sets up the main conflict in our story today.

Most of this story doesn't involve David. He is on the run. He has been betrayed. He has sent back a spy. And now as events unfold in Jerusalem, all David can do is to wait. David can't do anything, but this is still David's story, because these are the events that will decide his fate.

David is in that place where he's done all that he can. Now he has to wait to see how everything turns out.

This wait-and-see scenario is one that we're familiar with. Applying for jobs, completing projects, sending an invitation, planning an event, or even serving in our community. There comes a point where you say, "I've done my part. Now I wait." In a sense, it's a relief, because you've done everything that you can. But it's also infuriating. As long as there was something more to do, it was in your control. But now the outcome lies with someone else.

This is a vulnerable place. We are exposed. The future is uncertain. And there's nothing we can do about it. We've offered our best. We've done our part. The result is out of our hands.

These moments can be powerful ones in our lives. When we are vulnerable, we are open to God in a new way. As long as there's work to be done, we can distract ourselves and convince ourselves that we have control. But in these kinds of moments, we come face-to-face with our own lack of control.

It's terrifying to lack control. But these moments are opportunities for us. This is where our faith in the God of the universe becomes real and practical. If we allow ourselves, we can experience God in a powerful way during those times of vulnerability.

Let's walk with David through this vulnerable place and see what we can learn about facing similar situations in our own lives.

## A Tale of Two Counselors

David has sent Hushai back into the capital city of Jerusalem to thwart the advice of Ahithophel. Hushai's first task is to convince Absalom that he is on his side. He needs to earn Absalom's trust.

### 2 Samuel 16:15-19:

**Now Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him. 16 And when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, came to Absalom, Hushai said to Absalom, "Long live the king! Long live the king!" 17 And Absalom said to Hushai, "Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?" 18 And Hushai said to Absalom, "No, for whom the Lord and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen, his I will be, and with him I will remain. 19 And again, whom should I serve? Should it not be his son? As I have served your father, so I will serve you."**

Hushai's pitch is a great example of verbal ambiguity. He pledges allegiance to "whom the LORD and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen." Of course Absalom hears that as himself. But Hushai could be referring to David. Then he gets specific. He insists that he will serve Absalom as he has served David. Here is the critical moment. Will the spy be accepted? Or will he be found out?

We are left in suspense. The story doesn't answer that question. Instead, the narrative moves immediately to the other adviser, Ahithophel. Remember that Ahithophel used to be David's counselor, but he has switched sides. Now that Absalom has entered Jerusalem, he asks Ahithophel what he should do next.

Ahithophel's answer gives us a sharp picture of the type of character he is.

### 2 Samuel 16: 20-21:

**Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give your counsel. What shall we do?" 21 Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened."**

This is a ruthless strategy: effective, but brutal. To lie with his father's concubines is a powerful statement of disrespect and rebellion. It is a brash and vulgar way to pronounce his claim to the throne. Such an act is strictly against the Jewish Law. It was prohibited for a man to lie with any of his father's wives. And once again, we see women being used sexually to further the selfish ambitions of the men in the story.

This is the kind of king that Ahithophel would mold Absalom into. It would be a bold and barbaric beginning to his reign. Absalom follows the advice. It was brilliant, if evil advice. The chapter ends with the following pronouncement regarding Ahithophel.

### 2 Samuel 16: 23:

**Now in those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom.**

Our story has opened with the introduction of these two counselors. We're rooting for Hushai because he is on David's side. But things don't seem to be falling in his favor. Hushai has made his case to Absalom, but we don't know whether it was accepted. Ahithophel has offered great advice and it was followed, and we are told what great counsel this man gives.

The tension is building in our story. Things don't look good for David. He is in a position of great vulnerability. He's sent Hushai back. He's on the run. All David can do is wait to learn of the outcome. It's a terrifying place in which to be.

When have you found yourself feeling this way? When are you vulnerable?

A few months ago I went to the park with my son to play whiffle ball. I was pitching to him and he was swinging away. It was great. But then he hit it off center and the ball flew over the side fence into street next to the park. It rolled along the edge of the street.

Just then, a car came by. The car stopped in the middle of the street, right by where the whiffle ball was near the curb. Someone got out from the back door, walked over to the ball, and picked it up. Then they got back into the car and drove off. They stole my whiffle ball. I couldn't believe it. Who does that? Why would they do that?

Sometimes you don't realize that you're vulnerable. Sometimes it comes as a surprise. We tend to feel vulnerable when we are in need. We want someone to love us in return. We want our finances to be sufficient. We've opened up and feel this need to be accepted.

Is there a situation that you face right now where you are vulnerable? You've put yourself out there and you don't know how it will turn out?

Pick something right now to think about. Some position of vulnerability. Some area of your life where you can't control the outcome. Maybe you get what you want. Or maybe you don't. Maybe your whiffle ball gets stolen and you walk home in shock.

What do you do now? How do you handle this time of waiting?

## **The Counselors Go Head to Head**

David is in a vulnerable position. Decisions are being made about him that will completely change his life. As chapter 17 opens, Absalom has to decide his next move. Now we have a conflict between these two counselors. Hushai and Ahithophel go head-to-head.

First, we hear Ahithophel's advice.

### **2 Samuel 17:1-4:**

**Moreover, Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight. 2 I will come upon him while he is weary and discouraged and throw him into a panic, and all the people who are with him will flee. I will strike down only the king, 3 and I will bring all the people back to you as a bride comes home to her husband. You seek the life of only one man, and all the people will be at peace." 4 And the advice seemed right in the eyes of Absalom and all the elders of Israel.**

We know that David is vulnerable. Ahithophel knows that David is vulnerable. He wants to form an elite strike team to chase David and take him by surprise. It would be a decisive strike against David. Absalom would be left as the heir. It's good advice. We can see that. Absalom can see that. All the elders in Israel can see that.

But Absalom wants to make sure, so he checks with Hushai as well.

### **2 Samuel 17:5-8.**

**Then Absalom said, "Call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he has to say." 6 And when Hushai came to Absalom, Absalom said to him, "Thus has Ahithophel spoken; shall we do as he says? If not, you speak." 7 Then Hushai said to Absalom, "This time the counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good." 8 Hushai said, "You know that your father and his men are mighty men, and that they are enraged, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field. Besides, your father is expert in war; he will not spend the night with the people.**

Hushai is brave. He wants to give David some more time, so he challenges Ahithophel's good advice. He says that the surprise attack won't work. David is too smart for that. His people are too skilled to be dealt with that easily. Hushai advises waiting and assembling a larger army. He wants to trade the element of surprise for strength. Don't go quick. Go big.

What is going to happen? There are two pieces of conflicting advice. We are afraid that if Ahithophel's advice is taken, David will be destroyed. We are anxious. Could this be the end?

### **2 Samuel 17:14:**

**And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel." For the Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring harm upon Absalom.**

Amazingly, Absalom takes the advice of Hushai. We are so relieved. David will live to fight another day. The situation is still uncertain, but he has escaped certain doom.

In the rest of the chapter, Hushai sends people to warn David. These spies are almost caught, but manage to sneak through and avoid capture. Tragically, when Ahithophel realizes that his advice wasn't taken, he hangs himself. He knows that there is no room around the throne for a counselor who is ignored.

And just like that, things are looking a whole lot better for David. Absalom took the bad advice. David escaped. But why? How did we get here?

Because of God. God did this. Verse 14 makes that clear: "the LORD had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel."

Why did God do this? Why did God protect David when he was vulnerable? Because David asked. We read it two weeks ago. As soon as David found out that Ahithophel had switched sides, he turned to God. 2 Samuel 15:31 records him praying, "And David said, 'O LORD, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.'"

It was an important moment for David. This was the first interaction we had witnessed between David and God since his repentance and prayer after his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. We had no record of David's spiritual life for a 10-12 year span. No prayers. No asking for God's advice. No psalms attributed to this period.

But then David worships again. He asks God for help. And here God delivers him.

We don't actually see David while all these events are taking place in Jerusalem. In a few minutes, we'll look at a Psalm that gives us an idea of what David might have been feeling during this time.

But we can consider how we respond in these moments of vulnerability. Think again about that situation where you find yourself vulnerable. How are you tempted to respond? What does it look like for you to trust God with that situation? Can you trust God when you're vulnerable?

As is often the case, we can fall off the cliff on both sides. On the one hand, we can withdraw. Curl up in a ball hide in the corner. We can't handle the waiting, the not knowing, the sense of helplessness. It paralyzes us

until the situation is resolved. We protect ourselves and plan our defense.

The other extreme is to go into control mode. We may not actually be able to change anything, but we can make ourselves busy anyway. We get hyper-controlling. We micro-manage. We send one more email or text another time. We call again with a reminder. We repeat what everyone already knows is our opinion on the matter. We have to do something.

Here's what you need to know. You can trust God when you're vulnerable. You may believe that in your mind. It's time to practice that with your life. This is the freedom of a life lived with Jesus. You can wait with God. You can surrender to Him. You can even accept it if things don't turn out the way you had hoped.

Asking God for what we think we want doesn't mean that we'll receive it. There are times when you might get hurt. God doesn't always protect us from pain. Sometimes he walks with us through it. David has certainly seen his share of God being with him in his pain. But we can even trust God when we are hurt.

What do you do when you're vulnerable? Do you withdraw? Do you get controlling? Can you trust God when you're vulnerable?

## **The Fight Isn't Over**

God has given David a small victory. Absalom waits to attack him with a larger army. David is not out of danger yet. He will still have to go to war against his own son. David is still vulnerable. He still has to wait.

In the midst of this time, God gives David one more gift. Upon leaving Jerusalem, David arrives at a city by the name of Mahanaim. This city actually appeared in an earlier part of our story. After King Saul's death, the nation was split between two kings: David and one of Saul's sons named Ish-bosheth. Mahanaim was the capital under Ish-bosheth: the other king.

So, we would not expect this city to be friendly to David. David would be anxious about going there. It probably wasn't his first choice. That's why his reception is so surprising.

## 2 Samuel 17:27-29:

**When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim, 28 brought beds, basins, and earthen vessels, wheat, barley, flour, parched grain, beans and lentils, 29 honey and curds and sheep and cheese from the herd, for David and the people with him to eat, for they said, “The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness.”**

People from many different places show up to take care of David and his men. They feed them. They sympathize with them. They give them rest. David receives unexpected hospitality from the people of Mahanaim.

I find myself valuing more and more these kinds of gifts from God. A surprise compliment on a day when I'm tired and discouraged. An email from an old friend. An invitation from someone I've been wanting to reconnect with.

So often I'm focused on initiating, leading, trying to see something happen. I'm hoping for some result from my efforts. So when something good happens that I can't control, that I didn't create and that I wasn't expecting, it's a refreshing gift from God. It's humbling. A reminder that I'm important and accepted. Not because of what I can accomplish, but just because God cares about me.

These reminders are so important because the challenges never really stop. Each little victory often only leads to another opportunity to trust. God gave David protection from Ahitophel's advice. Then God gave David refreshment at Mahanaim. But now the scene is set for the real battle.

It's one thing to trust God once for one big, heroic push. But how do we trust God faithfully throughout many seasons, over and over again? There's always something new around the corner. Can you trust God over the long-haul? Can you wait for those surprise refreshments that you can't control? Can you continue to make yourself vulnerable in response to God's leading? Can you keep going?

Do you know that feeling? You've spent yourself on one big project and as soon as it's done, there's another one waiting to start. You faced a huge challenge, trusted God, and saw him work. But then something else

comes up. For a preacher, this is the Monday morning melancholy. No matter how your sermon went on Sunday—good or bad—that day is over and another Sunday is coming up in less than a week.

Life in Silicon Valley has a way of just wearing you down. It can feel like a constant sprint. You think to yourself, “OK, I can make it through this week.” But then the next one starts.

What if trusting God when we're vulnerable isn't something we need to do every now and then? What if this is the way we're supposed to live our entire lives? To cultivate the kind of faith where we are always deeply aware that our very lives are balanced in the hands of God.

We need to cultivate the kind of faith that persists. We need to grow into people of faithfulness and perseverance. Not just flashes of energy followed by burnout. We need to be realistic about what we can do and faithful to the things we commit to.

We're coming off a huge project weekend where we had hundreds of volunteers spread out across several projects. But now we apply ourselves to continue by living lives of service. Big weekends like Beautiful Day are a helpful re-calibration to the kind of attitude that creates a lifestyle.

When we do this, God will surprise us. He will provide. Even in places where we don't think we'll be welcome.

God is not bound by politics or history or personality or our own limited expectations. God will surprise us with little gifts of refreshment and relief. Look for them. Receive them. Enjoy them. Even when the enemy army is camped on the other side of the hill.

## The Psalms Path

The story in 2 Samuel has described the events that are happening around David. But they haven't given us a picture of what's going on for David himself. What's it like to trust God when you're vulnerable? What's it like to receive little surprises of refreshment?

Several of the Psalms are attributed to various times in David's life. Psalm 3 is said to have been written during the time that he was running from his son Absalom. When we read this Psalm with this story in mind, we get a beautiful picture of David's heart during this time of vulnerability.

Listen to how it unfolds.

**Psalm 3:1-2:**

**O LORD, how many are my foes!  
Many are rising against me;  
many are saying of my soul,  
there is no salvation for him in God. Selah**

Here is the situation that David faces. His foes are rising against him. His own son has betrayed him. Things don't look promising. Everyone is saying that he is doomed. What is he to do? How does he respond?

**Psalm 3:5-6:**

**I lay down and slept;  
I woke again, for the Lord sustained me.  
6 I will not be afraid of many thousands of  
people  
who have set themselves against me all around.**

What does David do when he's done all he can? He lies down and sleeps. Isn't that incredible? He sleeps in the midst of enemies rising against him. He sleeps when he doesn't know how things will turn out.

He doesn't try to manipulate things from afar. He doesn't go crazy with worry. He sleeps. He assures himself that he will not be afraid of all those many people who set themselves against him. The LORD sustains him.

The Psalm resolves in verse 8.

**Psalm 3:8:**

**Salvation belongs to the LORD;  
your blessing be on your people! Selah**

David receives salvation and attributes to God. This could be a reference to Hushai's advice being taken. It could be a reference to the surprise hospitality he received at Mahanaim. It could refer to both. God acted for David when he couldn't act for himself.

David was vulnerable. He trusted God and went to sleep. He received salvation and moved on to the next challenge. In the middle of all this, he slept.

For the past several weeks, we've been thinking particularly about engaging our culture. From Palm Sunday to Easter, to hearing about foster care and adoption, to our efforts around Beautiful Day, we've been looking outward.

This seems to be a movement of God in our midst. We're actually looking toward a series beginning in the fall where we will continue to think about how we can get out into the world. God seems to be leading us to believe not just in here, but out there as well. We want to grow in our ability to integrate our faith into our whole lives.

Honestly, this is a huge challenge. The odds are stacked against a revival of faith in the Silicon Valley. Culture is moving away from God. People are losing their faith. The polls and statistics and reports don't paint a good picture. When we take steps of obedience, we make ourselves vulnerable. We can't control the outcome.

But we have prayed. And we continue to pray. We want to see the healing and hope and full life that comes through faith in Christ come to people in this area. We want to see the influence of this area used for the kingdom of God. We can't make those things happen. So we pray and we trust and we wait.

And we have faith that God will move. It may not be exactly what we expect. It will certainly come from unexpected places and probably surprise us. But God is at work our area. God is on the move in the Silicon Valley. That much is clear. We will see his salvation. We will see his blessing poured out.

## **Conclusion**

Remember that picture of me waiting for the phone call in high school? Wondering when Charles Prince was going to tell me whether I would be lucky enough to work at Oshman's Sporting Goods? Well, I got the job.

It was a good job. But, it was just a summer job. Of course, life would continue to give me plenty of opportunities to trust God when I was vulnerable. They have gotten harder and more painful, but also far more meaningful. And one of the surprises along the way is to realize who is there, trusting God right by my side.

Corrie Gustafson hosted an event this week for the women's ministry on Islam. She brought in a fantastic speaker who gave a clear and respectful survey of the Islamic faith. She didn't stoop to prejudice or criticism. But she did highlight what was unique about the gospel that we believe from Islam, and probably from most other world religions.

We believe in a God who made himself vulnerable. We believe in a Messiah who saves the world by putting himself in a situation that he wasn't in control of. Even Jesus, God in the flesh, concluded his life by telling his Father, "Into your hands I commit my Spirit."

An all-powerful God, becoming vulnerable for the sake of his people. There is no other Gospel like this. This is the beauty and the power and the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

How are you vulnerable today? Can you trust God with your vulnerability? Can you keep going? You are in good company. Even the Son of God himself had to exercise faith. Don't withdraw. Don't try to control things that you can't. Face your fears. Trust God to protect you. And go to sleep.

When you do this, you'll be able to proclaim with David these words:

**Psalm 3:3-4:**

**But you, O Lord, are a shield about me,  
my glory, and the lifter of my head.**

**4 I cried aloud to the Lord,  
and he answered me from his holy hill.**

**Selah**