

#3: Cave Opportunities: 1 Samuel 23-24

Written by Bob Stone

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This series, "Cave Psalms," addresses many of the things we go through in life: times when we are in stretching moments, way beyond our ability to endure; maybe crushing moments or experiences that even take our breath away... defeat, mistreatment, divorce, abuse, break-ups, failures, betrayals, rumors, lies, disappointment, disloyalty, even death.

How about problems at school, at home, at work, with family, with relationships, with finances, with friends? Scriptures call these moments *trials*, *tests* or *persecution*, and sometimes temptation. These are the kind of circumstances when, in fact, you want to run, to find a place of safety.

Other experiences in which we find ourselves seem to have no solutions. We're tapped out, stressed out, burned out. We don't know where to go and what to do; we're spent. Think about those kind of circumstances and then try to plug them into the life of King David; here we find some examples that I think are exceedingly helpful.

Saul was King of Israel, its first king, but was rejected as king. David was then anointed as the next king, but there was a gap between the anointing and the coronation, as we talked about in [Part One](#). After that, David killed Goliath and became a hero. As a result of that and other circumstances—of course, by the Lord's bidding and direction—David was brought into Saul's household. He was a musician, a soldier, a friend.

Soon, however, as the praise for David grew louder and louder and Israel began to proclaim him as "that one who can kill more and is more victorious than Saul," Saul became jealous and wanted David killed. So David fled from Saul and, through a series of events, ended up in a cave. That's where we come to the cave psalms.

David initially was alone and then, over a period of time, 600 men joined him... men in distress, in debt and discontented. As we talked about last time, what a great group of guys to gather around you! Saul was relentlessly pursuing David, so he had to hide in the

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stronghold in the hills and the caves.

I've been in this spot. It's above the Dead Sea, and there are caves and actually some springs. It's a wonderful vantage point, and that's why David was there. Saul took 3,000 chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the crags of the wild goats.

Caves are not only stressful and stretching, but they provide what we'll call unique opportunities. Are you ready for this next verse?

1 Samuel 24:3: *He (that is Saul) 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.*

I thought I'd never come to this text and preach from it in my whole ministry career! I've had lots of suggestions from folks about what David might have said or done at this point, most of which I can't share with anyone! Here is my favorite one, though... "Okay men, on the count of three, everyone scream!" They could have done nothing, or they could have done what David's men suggested: kill Saul.

1 Samuel 24:4: *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."*

I want you to notice how spiritual this sounds, a kind of holy tone. A common temptation is to blame God for what we want to do. David's men thought it was God's will to kill Saul. (Remember, these were fighting men.) Sometimes when we want to do something we say, "Well, the Lord led me to do this". Did He? The truth is, more often than not when we say that, the Lord's getting blamed for things He has nothing to do with.

What was David's response? You can follow along if you like in your Bible or on the screen.

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Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Afterward David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that 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 David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul and Saul left the cave and went his way. Then David went out of the cave and called to Saul "My Lord the king". When Saul looked behind him David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He said to Saul "why do you listen when men say David is bent on harming you? This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave."

This is a wonderful example of poetic justice. David had been forced to run for his life, and found himself in the cave. Now God, in a way only He could engineer this, brought Saul to the very cave where David was, with 600 of his men.

"Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you. I said I will not lift my hand against my master because he is the Lord's anointed. See my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand. I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you. But you are hunting me down to take my life. May the Lord judge between you and me and may the Lord avenge [remember this statement] the wrongs you have done to me. But my hand will not touch you. As the old saying goes, from evildoers comes evil deeds, so my hand will not touch you. Against whom has the King of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it. May he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."

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So David gave his oath to Saul, then Saul returned home and David and his men went up to the stronghold. This is one of the most remarkable passages of Scripture.

Now I asked, as I began to look at David's response, what brought him to this point? What prepared him?

He entered caves and wrote Psalms and therefore was prepared spiritually. We've gotten a glimpse in our first two studies in Cave Psalms. Psalm 34 offered an outline of the responses that we should have: praise and prayer, and patient perspective. Then we saw the importance of passing on the principles of the things that we're learning (even as we're in the process); practicing his presence; and proclaiming his promises. Psalm 57 taught us to honestly state our condition to God; to seek God's glory above all things; to be steadfast and focused. We should speak to ourselves about praise and then do it, and then recall his attributes.

What we are learning as we study the life of David is that we can vicariously and actually learn from the experiences of others and take the principles, the lessons learned and apply them to our life. That's why the Old Testament has so many narratives. In a very real sense, as we identify with the characters, seeing them walk through their experiences, we deduce the principles and the lessons and apply them to our lives.

He inquired of the Lord; i.e., David asked God for help 4 times—23:2-6. This was a regular process in his life. In fact, in this passage we see him inquire of the Lord four times. What's the impact of that kind of consistent talk with the Lord? It makes our consciences more sensitive because we are used to listening to the Lord's voice and, in fact, His wisdom as it comes to us. David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.

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He was strengthened in the Lord by a friend, i.e., Jonathan—I Samuel 23:16-1

When David's best friend—Jonathan the king's son—found David at Horesh, he helped him find strength in God. *"Don't be afraid" he said. "My father, Saul, will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this."* The two of them made a covenant before the Lord and Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh. This was a wonderful encouragement that definitely made a difference in David's preparation of David.

What does David's experience say to us? Well, here's a summary of what we've already seen.

Our caves are opportunities to prepare us for what God has in mind for us to do in the future. We learn through the process of our experiences to process; frequent prayer will keep us sensitive; and we need friends to strengthen us.

We need to learn to strengthen our friends in the Lord. Not only do we need to be strengthened, but we need to take the experiences we've received in the crucible of our lives, the principles we have learned, and find another person to share it with. In other words, we pay attention. When someone finds us and encourages us, we take notes.

Looking back even at what Jonathan did with David, you note first **he took initiative** to strengthen his friend. He found him; he didn't wait for him to call for help. Saul couldn't find him, but Jonathan could.

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Second, **speak to our friends' needs**. Jonathan spoke to David's need for courage. "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you." He spoke faith into his fear.

He **gave him encouragement** as we should. He gave him some information that he didn't have, and also prayed with him. The two of them made a covenant before the Lord.

Most of us will not be well-known in any kind of circle. There may be a key moment, however, when you will be able to walk into the cave of a person who's destitute, down, distressed or in trouble, and be able to strengthen and encourage him, enabling him to move on to touch the world.

What else should we learn in our caves?

In a negative way our caves can become places of opportunity to take our problems and future successes into our own hands. If we do, however, we miss God's plan and/or his best. It's possible we may shorten God's plan for us, what He has in mind for us. I've seen this happen so many times: a person doing the right thing at the wrong time. To get to some activity, people rush it, manipulate, take the shortcut, pressure or demean others.

Avoid shortcuts—to success, ministry, advancement—in any arena of life. Observe David's heart. He resisted, even rebuked what others told him was God's way to advance, because their solutions demeaned those in authority over him, and it was not the right time. Growth in ministry and opportunity should always be accomplished in the context of honor, respect and a servant's heart.

I watched an Olympic race last night. Two sisters were running in the quarter-final or semi-final race. One was in her late 30s, the other in her mid-20s. It was pretty obvious that the older sister was not going to win; in fact, she was dead last. The younger sister came toward the beginning of the pack and won. At the end of that race they interviewed the two, and what impressed me was the way the younger sister honored the older sister and put her race in context. By the time she got done, the older sister seemed like the hero, the one that had won the race. That's the heart that we see here in David.

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Many of you have gone through stressful circumstances and sought out counselors. I think that is appropriate. I want, however, to give a word of caution. If you walk into a secular arena with a person who does not know God, value relationships, marriage or eternity as you do, you should measure that counsel against the Scripture. We have had too many experiences, even in this church, where people have taken counsel from others outside the community of Christ and have gone directions contrary to Scripture just because it came from that very personal relationship—a counseling relationship.

That's just an illustration of what happens when you are in a cave. Friends do come around you, but often they are not mature. Often they don't have life experiences. They are your buddies, and you love them, but you must weigh the advice they impart.

Caves can create wonderful opportunities to be at peace with our enemies. Again, watching the Olympics, I heard an American who was going to lose one of the races make the statement that she would spit in the lane of the person who was going to win. What an opportunity she missed—one to be a good sport and to acknowledge that the person who was going to win was in fact better than she was.

David was at peace with his enemy. When a person's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies to live at peace with them. In many cases we change our enemy by changing our ways. We make sure our way is pleasing to God, and God brings peace to relationships. Of course, there are abusive relationships, or maybe an inability to establish relationship. Maybe there will not be reconciliation. What we're talking about here, however, are the normal kinds of relationships where there can be peace. In a moment of conflict with another person, we are to ask ourselves, "Lord, I know what they are doing but what am I doing? How can my ways be altered?"

We will never regret forgiving someone who doesn't deserve it. That's the nature of

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forgiveness, the nature of grace. In the same way we forgive, Scripture says, we will be forgiven. All the more reason, then, for us to be gracious and forgiving, because we need it.

What else does David's experience say to us?

Be prepared for our friends, colleagues, and families to belittle or challenge our patience, our integrity, and righteous responses. David had to rebuke his men. **Caves teach us to stand alone if need be, for what is right.**

In a cave you are alone, and that loneliness can be translated to another experience where you stand alone because it's right.

Our caves will either compromise our values or build our character, and of course we should choose "build our character." What would have happened if David had moved forward and killed Saul? What kind of king would Israel have had? David's response to Saul was a difficult call because it continued to cost him, but ultimately God ended Saul's life on the battlefield and not in the cave. David's character was built! Key decisions in the time of crisis can have an unbelievable impact on our future.

We must turn our desire for revenge over to God. He will right the wrongs. Charles Swindoll says, "Because we are all sinful, expect to be mistreated. Since mistreatment is inevitable, expect feelings of revenge. Since feelings of revenge are inevitable, refuse to fight in the flesh. Let God do the fighting for you. Vengeance is his to carry out."

It's like one pastor said, "You know, I'm not going to take revenge. I'm not even going to take even. I'm just going to tell God on you!"

Here's the passage – Romans 12:18ff:

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to

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avenge; I will repay,"[4] says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."[5] 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I know a church that had to take an associate pastor through a Matthew 18 process. It was very stretching for this church. They lost people. Rumors were started about the church; there were lawsuits and a great deal of stress. They turned this person over to God, however, and left him in His hands. Four years later, after the former associate went through terrible, terrible times, he repented and the church had a reconciliation service. People in the congregation wrote notes. The former associate stood up and asked for forgiveness. There was communion. Someone bought him a suit. The pastor of the church gave him a ring with four diamonds on it, one for each year he had been away. God brought peace to that situation.

That church was Hillcrest Chapel. A huge amount of stress and pain came from that experience, but I'm here to report that I have been drawing on the comfort that came out of the stress and pain for the last 15 years. I have talked to over 100 churches and/or pastors *individually* and been able to take that experience and strengthen them in the Lord because of what we have gone through.

The caves that you walk through—and you will get through them—have the possibility of doing something in you so profound and far-reaching it's beyond your wildest dreams. It is crucial, even critical that we respond properly in the cave... not perfectly but properly. In the midst of that circumstance we must cry out to God, seek His wisdom, learn our lessons, and purify ourselves even if the sin is coming from outside of us. Then the search light will be upon us and will reveal our own sins, our own need to grow and to mature. Years later, God will do something wonderful in you and through you and through the next generation that will follow.

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to Saul was a difficult call because it continued to cost him, but ultimately God ended Saul's life on the battlefield and not in the cave. David's character was built! Key decisions in the time of crisis can have an unbelievable impact on our future.

We must turn our desire for revenge over to God. He will right the wrongs. Charles Swindoll says, "Because we are all sinful, expect to be mistreated. Since mistreatment is inevitable, expect feelings of revenge. Since feelings of revenge are inevitable, refuse to fight in the flesh. Let God do the fighting for you. Vengeance is his to carry out."

It's like one pastor said, "You know, I'm not going to take revenge. I'm not even going to take even. I'm just going to tell God on you!"

Here's the passage – Romans 12:18ff:

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"[4] says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."[5] 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I know a church that had to take an associate pastor through a Matthew 18 process. It was very stretching for this church. They lost people. Rumors were started about the church; there were lawsuits and a great deal of stress. They turned this person over to God, however, and left him in His hands. Four years later, after the former associate went through terrible, terrible times, he repented and the church had a reconciliation service. People in the congregation wrote notes. The former associate stood up and asked for forgiveness. There was communion. Someone bought him a suit. The pastor of the church gave him a ring with four diamonds on it, one for each year he had been away. God brought peace to that situation.

That church was Hillcrest Chapel. A huge amount of stress and pain came from that experience, but I'm here to report that I have been drawing on the comfort that came out of the stress and pain for the last 15 years. I have talked to over 100 churches and/or pastors

#3: Cave Opportunities: 1 Samuel 23-24

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individually and been able to take that experience and strengthen them in the Lord because of what we have gone through.

The caves that you walk through—and you will get through them—have the possibility of doing something in you so profound and far-reaching it's beyond your wildest dreams. It is crucial, even critical that we respond properly in the cave... not perfectly but properly. In the midst of that circumstance we must cry out to God, seek His wisdom, learn our lessons, and purify ourselves even if the sin is coming from outside of us. Then the search light will be upon us and will reveal our own sins, our own need to grow and to mature. Years later, God will do something wonderful in you and through you and through the next generation that will follow.