

# Dealing With Times of Trouble

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] If you could turn with me again to that passage we read in 1 Samuel chapter 18, that's on page 290 in the church Bible. And this morning we're just going to take a quick overview of that whole chapter.

Now the other week I went out to see the film 12 Years a Slave. The story of Solomon Northup who had been a free man in the northern states of America but was drugged and abducted and sold into slavery in the deep south.

And the film's about his years as a slave and as you watch the film life becomes much harder as the film progresses. Things seem to go from bad to worse and Solomon becomes increasingly desperate.

He is desperate to get back to his former life. He is desperate to get back to his family and friends in the north. And so after a while he begins to put his trust in men and the first man he puts his trust in lets him down badly.

He was asked to deliver a letter to his friends in the north which would, oh I should say this is a warning spoiler alert. But yeah it's always going to be a good ending.

[ 1 : 1 7 ] And so he lets him down badly and Solomon is back to square one. But thankfully over time he begins to make friends with this Canadian called Bass or Bass.

I can't remember Bass I think it is. And Bass is very sympathetic and Bass realizes that if he helps Solomon by delivering this letter to the north he is putting himself at great risk.

But he decides to risk his life to allow Solomon to have peace from his troubles to bring Solomon back into true freedom.

It's a really hard film to watch but it's a film which we see a desperate man humbly putting his life into the hands of another.

And what we see in this passage is a slight reflection of that kind of idea. We have a man David who doesn't put his trust in a man but puts his trust in God when he is in a troubling situation.

[ 2 : 3 6 ] We have a man David who puts his whole life in the hands of God and as he does that like Solomon he finds peace through that act of dependence.

In chapter 17 of this passage we've had the great story of David and Goliath, sensational story. A teenage boy has just defeated the most feared Philistine.

We have this young boy who has come from the fields, who has never worn armor before, who has slain the giant which had kept the Israelite army trembling for days and days and days.

He is this great hero for the people of Israel. And at the start of chapter 18 we have David riding high on the crest of a wave.

Nothing can go wrong for David. Everybody loves him. The crowds love him. As he rolls into Israel he is met with singing and dancing and praise like the all conquering hero.

[ 3 : 46 ] He is getting all the praise which he deserved as the giant slayer. But what we are about to see in this chapter is that things in David's life are going to go down and they're going to go down pretty low.

So after the beginning of 18 where the crowds are praising David for all that he has done we will then see David plunged into the midst of a dark and sinister battle with the king.

But as we proceed through this chapter we will notice how God helps David through those times of testing. How God will prepare, how God will guide and lead David through the storms of life.

And this morning I would like to divide this chapter into the following sections as we look at it and try to glean some principles for ourselves and our own situations.

In verses 1 to 5 we have God's provision. God's provision in verses 1 to 5. Then from verses 6 to 27 we have God's testing produces dependency.

[ 5 : 03 ] God's testing produces dependency in verses 6 to 27. And then finally God is our shade in verse 28.

Let's look together then at verses 1 to 5 God's provision. Now many of us over the last wee while will have headed across the country or beyond as we have chased the turkey and gone home to be with family or friends and try to celebrate Christmas and New Year together.

But I'm sure that most of us will have done some kind of preparation before we set out on these wonderfully frustrating journeys meeting the closed A9 or some other problems.

We've probably checked the fuel, we've probably checked oil. Well, not me, I never checked the oil. You've probably kept some warm clothes in the boot just in case some water maybe and some snacks for the way on the journey.

You've packed, you've double packed, you've checked, you've double checked and you set out knowing that you've done everything possible to ensure that you get to your destination on time and in safety.

[ 6 : 15 ] And in many ways what we have in verses 1 to 5 is God getting David ready for his journey ahead. A journey that started in Bethlehem that went via the valley of Eila and will eventually end up at the throne room in Jerusalem.

God is providing for David on his travel to the throne. God knows exactly what is ahead of David and he is not going to allow David to go ahead unprepared.

God is going to equip him for his journey to the throne and to the kingship. But how does God do this? How does God prepare David for the throne?

Well, God gives David a friend who will be like a brother to him, one who would become one with spirit with David.

In the midst of all the praise, in the midst of all the adulation, in the midst of all the fanfare, there was a man standing a little bit away who would become David's closest friend in Eila.

[ 7 : 27 ] Who would become a friend of David, not for what he could receive from David, but he would become a friend who would give everything for his friend David.

In verse 1 we notice that as David and Saul reflect on the battle in Eila, as they reflect on the fall of Goliath and the defeat of the Philistines, we have this figure waiting in the wings and he is Jonathan, Saul's son.

As he listens to David and his dad talk about how the Lord was with David, how the Lord won victory over Goliath, he becomes increasingly warm towards this David.

He becomes increasingly, he, love grows up within him, wells up within him as he sees and hears from David.

And over the next five verses we notice two key features of this friendship between Jonathan and David. Now the first thing we note is that Jonathan commits himself to David in verse 3.

[ 8 : 41 ] In verse 3 what we have there is, and Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. This is commitment at an extraordinary level. This was not two 20-something men making some silly promise to one another to be best of friends forever.

No, this was real meaningful friendship. This was real meaningful commitment. This covenant was going to be deadly serious. For Jonathan it meant risking his life to help his friend David escape from his father, Saul.

For David this meant looking after Saul's servant Mephibosheth for Jonathan's sake. Now the act of making a covenant at that time involved the cutting of an animal in two pieces.

And then both parties would walk between the two pieces of the animal. So Jonathan and David would walk between the two pieces of animal as if to declare, if I do not fulfill my covenant with you, may I end up in pieces just as this animal has done.

Jonathan and David are committed to ensuring that this friendship remains and that it will last until death. Now the second feature of their friendship, we've had commitment. The second feature of their friendship is found in verse 4.

[ 10 : 18 ] Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David along with his tunic and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

What this is, is Jonathan sacrificing his position and status for David. He does this by handing over to David his tunic, his sword, his bow and his belt.

These possessions all signified, all pointed to Jonathan's status. These possessions pointed to the fact that Jonathan was a prince and he is declaring to David, all the trappings of the kingdom is for you to inherit.

Jonathan is stating to David through this action, I will not be King Jonathan. This is Jonathan giving up his birthright. This is Jonathan giving up his crown to David.

Try to imagine all that Jonathan's doing here. He is giving up everything so that God's man could sit on the throne. His humility is astonishing.

[ 11 : 37 ] He knows that David is God's chosen leader. He knows that naturally he stands to inherit the kingdom of Saul. He knows that naturally he is about to become the king once his father has died.

But with great humility, Jonathan submits to God's will and demonstrates that he will lay aside his claim on the throne so that David will become King.

God provides for David a friend like no other to assist him on the road to the throne. One who will commit himself to David and one who will give up his royal privilege for David.

As we see the sustaining nature of their friendship, we can draw a parallel between Jonathan and David's friendship on one hand and our friendship with Christ on the other. Listen to the words of John 13 to 15.

Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business instead.

[ 12 : 51 ] I have called you friends for everything that I learned from my father I have made to you. Jesus calls his disciples friends and by extension as followers of Jesus Christ, he refers to us as his friends too.

Our friendship with Christ is much greater and much deeper than the friendship we see with Jonathan and David. Now our relationship is different because with David and Jonathan you had two flawed warriors making friends with one another.

We're not in that situation. What's happening here is we are not coming into a friendship of equality. David and Jonathan were equal in many ways but we are coming to a greater one.

We are coming to God himself and God himself declares us to be friends with him. This is a remarkable statement. We as Christians are friends of Christ.

We as Christians are friends of God. This must be a huge encouragement for us. We have a friend who has bound himself to us, who has covenanted himself to ensure that we remain friends with God forever.

[ 14 : 07 ] And that we too receive all the blessings that this will involve. We can become friends with the one who gave up all that was rightfully his and who stepped off his throne and entered into our world to die in our place so that we can become heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

Like David, we don't know the path of our life. But like David, God has provided for us a true and perfect friend.

One who will help us through life's journey no matter how difficult it becomes. Christ with us is our great assurance. No matter the time, no matter the place, no matter the situation Christ is with us.

David had an extraordinary bond with Jonathan. But as Christians, we have a bond with God which is much stronger still and which does not last a lifetime but lasts an eternity.

We have a friend who binds himself to us and who has given up his royal privilege for us. The second thing we notice in the passage is God's testing produces dependency.

[ 15 : 27 ] So we've had God's provision for times of trouble. Then we have God's testing produces dependency in verses 6 to 27. For David had been going oh so well.

It had been going great. Life was amazing. The nation adored him. The king's son was now his dearest friend. What could go wrong? Life was peachy. It was all good in the household of David however things begin to take a turn for the worse.

As the hero returned the streets are filled with praise and as David is with Saul returning as the conquering heroes they begin to hear this little song in the crowd.

The women in the crowd are now singing songs of victory. Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands.

It's hard to believe but this little ditty sends Saul over the edge. He is beside himself with jealousy. He cannot believe that the people are praising David more than they are praising him.

[ 16 : 37 ] How on earth could this shepherd boy from Bethlehem receive the adulation of having slain tens of thousands as he as king gets the adulation of only killing thousands?

How dare they despise my rule and reign over them? Then Saul declares in a fit of rage what more can he get but the kingdom.

Saul is clearly on edge. He knows his days are fast coming to an end. He must now be reflecting on what God had told him in verse 15.

The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors to one better than you. Naturally he concludes this must be talking about David.

This must refer to David. And as Saul reflects on this he burns up with anger. And he begins to concoct various plots and plans to desperately hold on to the kingship of Israel and to ensure that God's declaration on his rule and reign will not come to pass.

[ 17 : 50 ] Saul is going to go and try and oppose God's will. Now this next part we see a number of plans that Saul concocted to end David's life.

And the first one we see is in verse 10 to 11. There is nothing subtle about it. Saul wants David's spirit against the wall. No one, not one attempt but two attempts on the harpist warrior.

The second test is much more subtle. Saul's becoming a bit more reflective in his practice. And in verse 13 it looks as if he's giving David a well deserved promotion.

It seems to be the dream job. David is going to be a commander of a thousand men. This 20 something is going to take control of this unit of soldiers at such a young age, such a position would have been unheard of.

Now if you're 20 and you've got charge of a thousand men you're going to be excited about that. You're going to jump at the opportunity to rule and reign over that group of guys. And he even has the king's backing, the royal seal of approval on this appointment.

[ 19 : 00 ] However, verse 17 I think kind of displays the kind of thinking in Saul's mind as he offers this promotion to David.

And it doesn't take a genius to figure out what Saul is up to. He wants David on the battlefield. He wants David on the front line for as long as possible.

He wants to be giving David's eulogy. He wants the Philistines to kill David. He's becoming subtle. He can't just pin him to the wall anymore.

He's going to put him on the battlefield for as long as possible and increases chance of an early grave. But after David's first sure of duty Saul begins to recognize that Plan B isn't up to much.

So he begins to work on Plan C. Now Plan C is a bit more subtle again. This time let's use my daughters as bait. And so he offers David his daughter Merab.

[ 20 : 05 ] And okay David you're not so sure about Merab here. Have Michael. So over a process of time Saul offers both daughters to David and Merab.

Then David eventually relents and take Michael and Merab because Saul has asked for the dowry price to be just the death of 100 Philistines.

That's okay for David. Again you see what Saul's up to. Do that. Take on 100 men. Boom. Sure to die aren't you David? And so it's this very sad and desperate Saul that we meet in this chapter.

One who had been close to God. Who had risen through the ranks so dramatically but now resorting to such underhand and cowardly plots to oppose God's appointed king.

And what Saul finds out is this. That David doesn't kill 100 Philistines he kills 200 Philistines. Again Plan C has failed.

[ 21 : 11 ] And the question that we ask is why? Why does God allow that to happen? Why does God allow David to undergo such testing?

Why does God allow David to endure this constant assault by the king on his life? Now in this instance David is being prepared for the throne.

He is being prepared to lead God's people. But before he does this he must learn to become dependent on the God who will place him on the throne.

David must be fully aware that he is not able to get through life on his own. And he is not able to lead God's people on his own.

He must ensure that he walks in accordance with God's will. The king must rule under the authority of the king of kings.

[ 22 : 20 ] These episodes of testing in David's life would continue and they would intensify. But all the time God is refining David. He is knocking the rough edges of David, moulding David into a man after his own heart.

David would rule in a way that Saul had failed as one who sought to follow God's will for his life rather than oppose God's will. In our own lives we face tests, we face troubling times, we feel the heat of battle and we may ask ourselves why?

Why oh God are you allowing this to happen to me? But what we see in David's life we take and put it onto our own life.

We know that as we go through these testing times that we should become more and more dependent on God. And as we become more and more dependent on God for help in these times, God will use these times to mould us and to shape us into the increasing likeness of Christ.

Our assurance is that the God who guided David through his trials to prepare him for greater works of service is also using our trials to enable us to better glorify God.

[ 23 : 56 ] Our trials are not meaningless. They are not chance events, but God is using them for his glory and our good.

And that is our great confidence that when trouble comes we know that God is with us, helping us through those times.

And finally we have seen God's preparation of David, we've seen how David depends on God, and then we see God is our shade, verses 28.

One of the big stories from last week has been the intense heat of the Australian Open. Playing in 42 degrees heat is probably not anybody's idea of fun.

And so you've had pictures of players desperately going to the shade, staying in the shade for as long as possible. And these are the kind of photos that have dominated the Aussie Open so far.

[ 24 : 58 ] And so throughout this chapter we have had David feeling the intense heat of Saul's anger. Remember back in verse 8, Saul's jealousy engulfs him.

He turns all his anger and hatred towards the shepherd boy David. During these times of testing where the king of Israel is committed to David's downfall, David rests under the shade of the Lord. He stays close to the Almighty in his time of trouble.

David keeps close to God and as he dwells in the shade of God, he is guided through the storm and the test. And he can experience the comfort of the Lord even in these testing times.

Throughout the passage we see this refrain, The Lord is with David. You see it in verse 12, in verse 14 and verse 28.

And the phrase is always used after an intense trial. It occurs after Saul's spear in verse 12. It occurs in verse 14 after his military campaign and appears in verse 28 after the bait of his daughters and after he has slain the 200 Philistines.

[ 26 : 22 ] If we are Christians, we like David have the Lord with us. This is our great source of comfort during those times of testing that come our way.

The Lord protects us. We are under his shade and he is watching over us. He is ensuring that we will get through our trials.

During this testing time for David, a most striking aspect of David's character also shines through. And that's his humility.

He is absolutely adored by multitude. In verse 26, the verb to love is used with David as the object. In verse 1, verse 3, verse 16, verse 22, 28.

Everyone seems to love David. The crowds love David. Jonathan loves David. Michal loves David. The women of Israel love David. His soldiers love David.

[ 27 : 19 ] Everybody seems to be in love with David, apart from Saul. Now with all this love and adulation going around, you are thinking, wow, this is great. You can think, imagine his ego just ballooning as most people in the whole country are infatuated with this warrior king.

And you would think, okay, all this love is going to go to his head and he's going to become this arrogant warrior who struts about getting his own way, looking out for his own happiness.

But we find something completely different. David remains humble. David knows that it was God who defeated Goliath.

David knows that it was God who helped him as Saul turned his anger on him. David knows that it was God who helped him defeat the Philistines.

It was nothing to do with David. And it was because of David's humble spirit that God could lead and guide him through his time of trouble.

[ 28 : 22 ] In Psalm 25, David pens these words, he guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. It was because David was willing to follow God's plan that he was able to steer through the storms of Saul's anger.

As we go through our times of testing, do we humbly rely on God or do we use our own strength to try and figure out the next move?

Like David, in times of trouble dwell under the shade of the Lord. Don't be tempted to try and fix it yourselves, but the lesson we learn from this passage is, remain under the Lord's protective shade.

He will be able to steer you through the storm. If we do this, we like David will bring glory to God in our lives.

In conclusion then, we have seen that in this passage, God will help us through the trials of life as he helped David. God has given us Christ who was willing to lay aside the riches of heaven so that we may have a living and lasting relationship with God most high.

[ 29 : 47 ] Remember that God uses our trials for his glory and that as we go through times of testing, let us humbly remain close to God, for then he can guide us through our trials and our struggles in life.