

WHEN FACING A MUTINY
1 Samuel 30

As things stand today it appears the leading candidate for the specialty our son is leaning toward in his medical career is emergency medicine. Given who he is I am not surprised by that, because he is a bit of an adrenaline lover and he thrives on pressure situations. However my experience with emergency departments (he has informed us this is the proper term since an emergency room is not actually a room) has made me want to steer as clear of that particular location as possible. The last time we were there we were with our daughter and were waiting for her to have a test. We waited in the emergency waiting area. While we were there one man came in bleeding and I heard the admitting nurse ask, "Is your finger still attached?" Later a guy came in obviously very sick. He was having repeated episodes of explosive vomiting. I was thinking, "Please, get me out of here." It takes a certain kind of person to desire to work in that kind of environment.

I suspect that person has to have a unique combination of wanting to alleviate the suffering of others but to also not be especially bothered by it. But more to the point, such a person needs to be totally cool under pressure. They need to be able to calmly analyze situations and know how to respond. I admire people like that. This is the kind of person people look to when disaster strikes, someone who can act calmly, decisively and effectively to deal with the situation. Laurie and I have watched the TV show *The Last Ship*, which centers on a Navy destroyer that is at sea when a terrible plague strikes all over the world killing billions of people. Chaos erupts as societies break down completely. The main character is the ship's captain, Tom Chandler, a square-jawed, steely eyed, leader's leader, who responds to disaster after disaster with strength, wisdom and courage. I find myself thinking, "Yeah, I want to be that guy when disaster hits." It is not likely that we will ever be in that situation, but we will face our own personal disasters. All of us will. Disasters come in a wide variety of forms. Sometimes they are little personal crises, sometimes they can be major life earthquakes. Whether it has to do with relational problems, devastating health issues, financial disasters, career storms, or some other crisis, we will all encounter some form of disaster. How will we respond? Today we will watch David face disaster and hopefully learn what can help us when our day turns into a mini-disaster, or our life turns into a full blown catastrophe. Let's look at what happened to David in 1 Samuel 30.

DAVID AND HIS MEN EXPERIENCED A SHOCKING TRAGEDY

At the end of chapter 26 David was still fearful of a murderous and unstable King Saul even though the king had promised he would no longer try to assassinate David. After years of dodging Saul, after proving twice he had no intention of trying to kill Saul, David realized that Saul might have brief moments of lucidity when he would see that he had nothing to fear from David, but the madness would return. Saul's default state was to have an insane obsession with killing David and he would soon return to it just as surely as mosquitoes show up in Mississippi in the summer time. David was painfully aware of this so in 27:1 we see, "David thought to himself, one of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul." That is a pivotal, critical statement. David had come to the place where he was convinced that he was doomed. It was only a matter of time until Saul got what he wanted and was able to kill David.

So David made the curious decision to once again try fleeing into Philistine territory to escape Saul. He had tried that once before despite the fact that the Philistines knew that David was famous for killing Philistines in battle. That first foray did not go well, as David was quickly recognized by the Philistines and only narrowly saved his life by pretending he had lost his mind. Strangely, despite that previous misadventure he decided to try that same thing again.

That looks like a bizarre decision. Didn't David learn from that first trip into Philistine territory? Apparently David perceived that things had changed. When he went into their region the Philistines not only accepted him, they actually gave him his own town to occupy. I can only guess that by this time the Philistines had learned for certain that David and Saul were at odds and there had been open conflict between them. David had his own army which had been defending him against Saul. In other words, they saw David as an enemy of Saul, meaning an enemy of Israel, their enemy.

This flight to Philistine territory eventually led to a potentially terrible situation in chapter 29 when the leader of the Philistines tried to draft David and his troops into the Philistine army to fight against Saul. Even though the last thing David wanted was to fight against his own people, something which would have made later becoming their king very difficult, he and his men joined Philistine forces in order to maintain the image that they were, indeed, enemies of Israel. Had David refused he would have created suspicion that he was actually an Israeli spy. I am sure there were some panicky moments as he and his men tried to figure a way to avoid actually killing their own countrymen, but at the last minute God provided a solution. They were on the verge of going to war with their fellow Israelis when

the Philistine commanders objected to the whole scheme. They wanted no part of hundreds of armed Israelis in their midst when they went to fight Israel. Reluctantly, seeing that his commanders wanted no part of David and his men in their ranks, the Philistine king agreed and sent David home to Ziklag, the town they had given him.

We pick up the story in chapter 30. “David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, and had taken captive the women and everyone else in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way.” David and his men returned to find all of their possessions destroyed or stolen, but much worse, their wives and children taken by the Amalekite raiders.

This was no minor incident. Verse 4 says, “David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep.” They were crushed. I guess so. I can’t imagine coming home to learn that my entire family had been kidnapped by a marauding army. I found it interesting that their reaction was just to cry until they were so exhausted they couldn’t cry anymore. Why didn’t they do something? They were devastated because they saw no remedy for the situation. The raiders were gone, taking their families with them. They were under no illusion that they could go after the Amalekite army on their own and defeat them because, as we will see, this was such a large force of Amalekites that David’s band could not defeat them. This was a done deal in their minds.

DAVID’S MEN BLAMED HIM

Verse 6 says, “David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters.” David was facing a mutiny. Only they weren’t just going to quit following him, they were threatening to kill him! I understand them being bitter, but why blame David? When people have been devastated by a shocking loss, they at times in their grief and hurt feel a need to blame someone for what has happened to them. Since David was the leader, he was an obvious target for their collective grief and anger. But there was more to it than that. David was at least partially responsible for what happened to them.

Why were they in Ziklag where the Amalekites could raid them in the first place? Go back to 27:1 where David said, “One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul.” Was that true? No, it was not. Remember what Jonathan said to David in 23:17. “Don’t be afraid. My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel.” Jonathan knew that God would keep his promise, that

David would be safe from Saul and that he would become king. There was literally nothing for David to fear.

Recall the words of Abigail to David in 25:29, “Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my lord will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God.” She went on in verse 30 and spoke of the coming time, “when the Lord has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel.” It was widely known that God had appointed David to be the king of Israel. Abigail knew it, Jonathan knew it, Saul knew it and the people knew it. And Abigail reminded David that God would keep his promise, so there was no chance that Saul could kill him. Let me repeat that, there was exactly zero possibility of Saul killing David.

By this time God had proven that to David in multiple ways on multiple occasions. There were the interventions of Jonathan and Michal, there was the bizarre Jedi mind trick incident when Saul and his men got diverted by prophesying uncontrollably, there was the incident when Saul had David in his sights, but had to let him go in order to defend against a Philistine attack, there were the two instances where God put Saul defenseless right in front of David so he could kill him if he wanted to.

By chapter 27 David should have been totally confident that he had nothing whatsoever to fear from Saul. But David was human, and somehow, despite all the evidence to the contrary, he freaked out. He became convinced that if he stayed in Israel he was a dead man walking. He could not believe God could actually act in his life to protect him. He believed it when he faced off against Goliath, but after years of narrow escapes his fear overwhelmed his faith.

At 9:30 P.M. on August 14 authorities received a 911 call saying that shots had been fired in Terminal 8 at the JFK airport in New York. Police responded quickly, but word spread even more quickly. News got out that there was an active shooter in the terminal, and the panic was on. To worsen matters a second call some 20 minutes later reported a second shooter in Terminal 1. If you’ve read any accounts of eye witnesses you’ll know that the situation was terrifying. There was mass confusion as people ran for their lives, but had no idea where to actually run. The panic itself threatened lives as the mass rush of large crowds of people in enclosed spaces almost turned into stampedes in which one could easily be trampled. The airport was closed for more than 2 hours and travel plans were disrupted, some 25,000 people were affected. The irony of the situation was that no shots were ever fired and there never was a shooter at all. The whole mess was sparked when

someone mistook a loud noise for a gunshot and people panicked. Panic can create irrational behavior that causes a mess. And that's what happened to David. He ran when he didn't need to run. Because of his fear he led his men to Philistine territory, ending up in Ziklag, and that put him and his men in the position where they were in the Amalekites' crosshairs.

But it is even worse than that. In Philistine territory David was faced anew with the challenge of feeding his men. In Israel he created a business protecting wealthy peoples' herds and flocks from possible raiders and bandits. But the Philistines would not trust him to do that. So what should he do? He decided to flip the coin. Instead of protecting from raiders, he'd have his guys become raiders.

So in 27:8 we see "David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites." What a simple solution. He stole from other people groups. He wasn't picky. He attacked the Geshurites, the Girzites, the Amalekites, the stalactites, the acolytes, the spotlights, the mosquito bites and the termites. Just kidding. This was a violent phase of his life. Verse 9 says when he attacked an area "he did not leave a man or woman alive." There was a reason for that.

According to verse 10 when David and his men returned Achish, the local king, would see them coming back loaded with goodies and wonder where all that came from. Was David raiding the Philistine people? So he asked, "What have you been doing?" David said they had been raiding "against the Negev of Judah or against the Negev of Jerahmeel or against the Negev of the Kenites." No mention of the Geshurites, the Amalekites, the acolytes, the spotlights or the termites.

The areas David claimed to be raiding were either in Israeli territory or were allies of Israel. Achish would have been delighted to have David raiding them. Israel was his main enemy. David claimed to be helping him in his fight against Israel. Were those other groups also enemies of Achish? Not so much. There's an old story about a knight who was trying to make a name for himself and elevate his position in the royal court. He returned after being gone for some time and the king asked him, "What have you been doing?" The knight answered, "My liege, I have been valiantly fighting your enemies in the east." The king, looking a little puzzled, said, "But I don't have any enemies in the east." After a pause the knight said, "Oh. Well, uh, you do now." David could have been that knight. Those groups he was raiding were not enemies of the Philistines. That's why he had to kill them all. He thought "They might inform on us and say, 'This is what David did,'" according to verse 11.

In other words, David lied through his teeth about what he was doing, and he was killing people to cover up the lie. He knew Achish would be furious and would punish him if he knew the truth, so he lied. David was a great man, but he wasn't perfect. One of his failings was at times when cornered he would fall back on his own clever schemes and he would lie. And when he lied, people died. It happened in chapters 21 and 22 when he lied to the priest Ahimelech in order to get some help from him, with the result that Ahimelech and his entire town ended up dead. We will see that later David will implicitly lie again to try to cover up an affair with a married woman, and an innocent man would end up dead then too.

David was raiding nations that were enemies of Israel, so he was helping Israel while making it appear as though he was helping the Philistine cause. But such deception has a way of backfiring. David tried to kill all the people who knew what he was really doing to cover up his lies, but that's not always easy. Apparently at least one witness survived and identified David and the Ziklag Gang as the perpetrators of the massacres. So the Amalekites returned the favor and raided Ziklag when he and his men were gone.

David's men blamed him because it was his fear, his scheming and his lying that led to the disaster that had befallen them. They were angry at him, and were threatening to kill him.

DAVID WAS STRENGTHENED BY GOD

At that point David faced a situation that for many of us would be overwhelming. He had failed to trust God once again and his failure led to a disaster. So he was feeling guilty, but he was also feeling threatened and defeated. For a moment I think he was paralyzed by the situation.

At the end of verse 6 we are told that "David found strength in the Lord." He turned to God and found the strength he needed to respond to the situation. He needed quite a bit. He needed to overcome his own guilt and sense of failure and he needed to convince his angry men to keep following him instead of taking their bitterness and grief out on him. He had to turn the mood of an angry mob. Remember that David was not dealing with a bunch of accountants here. These were outcasts, most of them violent men, now all of them combat veterans who had been making their living by killing and stealing.

But God gave David the strength to do what was necessary. He won the men over and convinced them to follow him as he tracked down the Amalekite raiders. They were all aware that fighting the Amalekites was not going to be a walk in the park.

As you will see, this was a large armed force. David did eventually find them, and just at the right time. He caught them while they were partying and were “scattered over the countryside” according to verse 16. In other words, they were in no shape to fight. David and his men were able to rout them. We get a feel for the size of the Amalekite force when we read that David “fought them from dusk until evening of the next day” in verse 17. The battle lasted more than 24 hours. The writer tells us none of them got away except 400 who fled on camels. The point of that is that the army was so large that 400 escaping was minor compared to the number killed. So minor that it was like “none of them got away.”

David found the strength to turn around a really bad situation that would have been frightening for anyone, and go on to lead his men to a great victory, rescuing all those who had been kidnapped by the raiders. The strength to do that came from God.

IMPLICATIONS

I suspect you and I will never face situations as dire as the one David experienced, at least I hope we won't. But we all will face dire, disastrous situations that threaten to completely drown us, to totally paralyze us and defeat us. We will face situations where we are convinced that “I can't do this. I don't have the strength.” Any time you find yourself thinking, “I can't do this” you are in the place where David was. This passage claims that David found strength in the Lord, and the Bible furthers that message by saying that we, too, can and will find strength in the Lord if we will seek it from him.

Isaiah 41:10 quotes God saying, “Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” 1 Peter 5:10 says that God will “restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” The English Standard translation of Philippians 4:13 has Paul writing, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” God strengthened Paul to the point where he was able to endure with grace countless indignities, injustices and physical torments. He strengthened David to enable him to turn around a terrible situation and bring victory out of it. And he can strengthen us for any and every situation. But how does he strengthen us?

By Giving Us Grace

One of the things that can defeat us is our own failure. David could easily have wallowed in the fact that he, the man after God's own heart, the chosen future King, the one who had defeated Goliath, had once again seriously compromised because of fear. What David found out was that God didn't get fed up with him

and toss him out. God gave him grace and continued to love David, he continued to provide a future for him and continued to use him.

Did you happen to see any of the Charger game last week? In the first half the Chargers were aggressive on offense and defense and they completely dominated a very good Kansas City team. They looked every bit a possible Super Bowl contender. In the second half they looked every bit a Toilet Bowl contender. They were passive, tentative and were totally dominated, losing the game after having a huge lead early in the third quarter. They were passive because by the choices they made the coaches told them to be passive and try not to lose. Had this been an aberration I would say, "Well, I hope they learn something from this." But it isn't an aberration. It's a pattern under the current coach. I've had enough. This coach has had his chances and he doesn't learn. Time for a new one. No more grace for this guy.

What if God viewed me the way I see that coach? What if after repeated failures God said, "This guy's useless. He's an epic fail. Get rid of him"? What if we merely feared that would happen? Life would become so stressful and tense that it would sap our energy and possibly cause us to fold. But God doesn't relate to us that way. Jesus Christ died for us precisely to free us from the tyranny of that. He gives us grace and tells us that nothing can ever separate us from his love for us.

Do you remember what happened after Peter totally failed Jesus? This was a colossal disaster. At the worst possible moment Peter showed understandable but profound cowardice and disloyalty to Jesus. How did Jesus treat him after that? He told him, "Peter, feed my sheep." Be the leader I chose you to be. Nothing has changed. You still have a crucial role to play.

By His Word

Psalm 119:28 says, "My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word." The New Living Translation of that verse says, "encourage me by your word." In *The Message* Eugene Peterson paraphrased the verse, "my life is a dilapidated, falling down barn; build me up again by your word." In that same Psalm verse 81 says, "my soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word." It is through God's word and the hope that it brings that God strengthens us.

All of us who have known Jesus as Lord for even a little while have experienced this. I recall a time in years past when Laurie and I were faced with a daunting financial shortage and could see no way to overcome it. I happened to be reading

the book of Philippians and came across 4:19 where Paul wrote, “My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” I recalled that the Philippians were some of the people Paul referred to in 2 Corinthians 8:2 as living in “severe trial” and “extreme poverty.” I realized that those people knew poverty that is beyond my worst fears, yet Paul said God would meet all of their needs. And he would do it according to the riches of his glory. How rich is his glory in Christ? It is beyond measure. As I read that I thought, “what are you worrying about? God is going to meet your needs.” I was strengthened.

At one point in my ministry I was dealing with a profound sense of inadequacy and failure. I realized that I felt inadequate because I am inadequate. Several people at that time were confirming this to be true. They felt inadequate would be a charitable description of me. In times like that everything looks pretty dark and hopeless. The tendency is to just look for some way out, some avenue of escape. I couldn't see any that was realistic, and that made things worse. At that time I recall reading 1 Corinthians 15:10. Paul was facing a situation that certainly had some parallels with mine. The Corinthians had decided that he was inadequate and were not shy about letting him know that. And Paul was aware that some of the shortcomings they saw in him were real. He wasn't the dynamic, spellbinding orator that they wanted. He wasn't Mr. Charisma. He had issues that we know he even asked God to change. To make all that worse he carried with him the guilt of having severely harmed followers of Jesus before he became a believer himself. In verse 9 he said, “I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle.” That sounds like he was admitting defeat. But he wasn't. In verse 10 he wrote, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.”

Reading that provided a powerful jolt for me. By the grace of God I am what I am. What if someone else doesn't think it's enough? What if *I* don't think it's enough? None of that matters. I am what I am by God's grace. Oh, so you're blaming God for your flaws? No, I'm saying if I am ever to do anything of value it will not be because I'm so gifted or smart or powerful, it will be by the grace of God and nothing else. Who am I, and who are those people to argue with what God in his grace has done? For me, just reading God's word saved the day and gave me the ability to keep going.

By Giving Us Inner Power

In Ephesians 3:16 Paul prayed “out of his (God's) glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.” That is a prayer God will answer. He wants to give us strength in our souls with the power of his

Spirit. Psalm 29:11 says, “The Lord gives strength to his people.” David wrote in Psalm 18:32, “It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure.” In Psalm 18:1 David wrote, “I love you, Lord, my strength.” Jude 24 speaks of God as the one “who is able to keep you from stumbling.”

When we read about being strengthened with the power of the Holy Spirit we tend to think of doing mighty things, maybe even miracles, because we know the Spirit has that power and far more. But that is not how God typically strengthens us. It is not how he demonstrates his power in us. In 2 Corinthians 4:7 after mentioning God’s power in creation in verse 6 Paul said, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” God’s power, that is greater than any other force in existence, is in us, in the bunch of ordinary clay pots collected here today. That is almost impossible to wrap your head around. Such great might must be truly impressive, right? It must do spectacular things that blow everyone away, yes? Well, yes and no. Paul goes on to explain how this unlimited power works in us. In verses 8-9 he says, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” Paul said God’s power is displayed in us when we face impossible odds, when we are battered and face situations that we cannot begin to understand, and we are not defeated by it. We aren’t crushed, we don’t despair, we just keep going, staying faithful to our God. We display that inner strength by persevering.

A number of years ago *The New York Times* carried an article about David and Nancy Guthrie. Their daughter, whom they named Hope, clearly had problems. It wasn’t long before she was diagnosed with a rare metabolic disorder called Zeilweger Syndrome. It caused her body to be unable to rid itself of toxic substances. There is no treatment. Babies born with it rarely survive even 6 months. As you can imagine they were devastated. They were both Christians, but the experience shook them to their core. In so many ways they had done all the Christian things, but never really pursued God. All that changed. Over and over, as they grieved, they committed to trust God through the process. Hope died on her 199th day. Both parents must carry the recessive gene for this syndrome, so they decided not to have any more children. David had a vasectomy. It failed. Nancy became pregnant. Genetic testing revealed the next child, a boy they named Gabriel, had the disease. Nancy wrote, “Like Job, we often cannot see the hidden purposes of God. But we can determine to be faithful and keep walking toward him in the darkness.” Gabriel lived 183 days. Nancy says, “A lot of people say, ‘Oh, I could never do that.’ And David and I say, ‘You couldn’t. But if God allows this in your life, he will also give to you the grace you need to respond to it faithfully.’”

I've experienced one of the worst things that can happen and I haven't found I'm strong and I can handle it. But I have found out God's promise is true, his grace is sufficient. Now when I read, 'My grace is sufficient' I believe it not only because Jesus said it in the Bible, I believe it because I've experienced it."

By His People

David was strengthened by Jonathan at one point. 2 Samuel 23:15 tells us of another time when David was hiding out in a cave. Philistine troops had occupied his home town of Bethlehem. Weary and fearful at home point David said he wished someone could give him a drink of water from the well in Bethlehem. It was a wistful way of expressing the wish that he could just go home and be safe. Three of his buddies heard this comment and wanted to encourage him. They went to Bethlehem, broke through the Philistine lines, drew some water, and fought their way back to David to give it to him. He knew that he was not alone, that he had men with him who would do anything for him.

By Giving Us Hope

But how do we get this strength he offers? Faith is key. We must believe he will in fact do as he says and give us the strength. We have to believe that it will happen. But there is one other crucial element. **One Key Element: Full Commitment.**

In 2 Chronicles 16:9 Hanani, a prophet, addressed the Asa, the king of Judah. Asa had been threatened by some enemies, but instead of believing that God would give them the strength to defeat them, Asa did what God had said not to do, and sought an alliance with Syria. The prophet told him he had made a huge error by disobeying God. Then he said, "The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." God is not going to lose you if your heart is fully committed to him. He is continually looking for such hearts. But he is only going to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him, to those who are all in on trusting God. There is no negotiating on this.

I have noticed that our son-in-law, Michael, gets a lot of really cool perks from being in the Marines. One of the biggest is that they have spent a huge sum of money to train him to be one of the best pilots in the world. There is a relatively small number of people in the world who can do what he can. And they've let him fly some of the coolest planes on the planet. But he gets other stuff, too. On the base they have stores where they get to buy food and all kinds of stuff much cheaper than they would anywhere else and there's no sales tax. I don't get that privilege unless I'm with him. They get discounts at hotels and even at Disneyland.

When we went to Pensacola one day we got to go to a really nice beach where there were hardly any people because it is on the base. On some of his assignments his pay has been tax free. If he so chooses he can board airplanes first.

But here's the deal: to get all those privileges he had to go all in with the Marines. He had to be fully committed to them. That has been difficult at times. It was hardest when 2 days after his and Carissa's wedding day they sent him off to the desert for final training, then weeks later shipped him to Afghanistan. It was hard when, though he is a pilot, they assigned him to serve on the ground in that combat zone. It was hard when he was deployed to Japan, he and Carissa had made plans to spend a week together in Hawaii, and 3 days before they were to go on their vacation his CO canceled all permission for personnel to leave Japan because he feared we were about to go to war with North Korea. It was annoying when a CO required that all personnel come in on a holiday and clean the squadron offices. It was very difficult when he had a CO who literally wasn't fully sane. I'm serious, the guy was nuts. I could go on forever, but the point is, he has been fully committed. That's the only way he could receive those benefits.

If we want to have God's strength we have to be fully committed in our hearts. There is no negotiating. We are to salute, say, "Yes, Sir!" and get on with doing what God gives us to do. But the great news is if we are fully committed to him he will give us the strength to handle whatever disaster we may face.