



Catalog No. 1648

I Samuel 24:1–22 &amp;

Psalms 57:1–11

First Message

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May 1, 2011

# LISTENING TO YOUR HEART

## SERIES: A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

In this eight-week series we will examine one of the qualities that made David a “man after God’s own heart.” Paul Borgman, in his book *David, Saul, & God*, writes: “What has God seen in David that makes him “better” than his predecessor Saul, so much better as to help change God’s mind about the divine choice of Saul as king over Israel.”<sup>1</sup> There are many comparisons we could make between the two kings, but perhaps the most telling is their response to being confronted with their sin. Both kings commit grievous sins that unleash horrible consequences upon the nation. But when they are confronted with the evil residing in their hearts, there is a vast contrast between the two. Saul never owns up to his guilt. First he denies it, then he attempts to justify it. And when the relentless prophet backs him into a corner and he is forced to acknowledge it, he has the gall to ask to be exempted from any consequences. Saul spends the rest of his life running from God’s inescapable judgment and ultimately is driven to suicide.

Like Saul, David is capable of grievous sin, and over the course of his life he is confronted by various intermediaries (his *conscience*, a *woman*, a *prophet*, a *general*, an *enemy*, his *wife*, etc.). But in each and every case, David freely admits his guilt, takes full responsibility for his actions and submits to the consequences. His actions, and the psalms that accompany them, give evidence of an authentic desire to restore his broken relationship with the Lord, whom he has offended, and to eagerly serve him once again with his whole heart. At the end of his life, David can confidently affirm,

**I was blameless before him,  
and I kept myself from guilt. (2 Sam 22:24)  
Is not my house right with God? (2 Sam 23:5)**

We enter the story after David has been living on the run for quite some time and has survived several attacks on his life by the relentless king, Saul. Saul has been in hot pursuit of David throughout the Judean wilderness, west of the Dead Sea. In the process of fleeing, David delivered an entire city from the Philistine threat, restoring them with more wealth than they had lost at the hands of the invaders (1 Sam 23:5). But, rather than repaying David with kindness and providing him refuge, the majority of the city’s inhabitants betrayed him into the hands of Saul. David had to keep moving. With spies everywhere, he and his men could not risk staying in one locale. The narrator describes David’s fate: “They went wherever they could go.” (1 Sam 23:13).

Following several failed attempts by Saul to capture him, David fled to the limit of the territory, right to the edge of Dead Sea and into the strongholds of Engedi.

### I. David’s Men: “This is a Day for Retribution!” (1 Sam 24:1–8)

#### A. Seeking refuge in a cave (vv. 1–3)

When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, “Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi.” Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek Da-

vid and his men in front of the Wildgoats’ Rocks. And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. (1 Sam 24:1–3 ESV)

After Saul responded to the Philistine threat, his intelligence network informed him of David’s location. Saul gathered an elite force of 3000 men and made the thirty-mile journey south to Engedi. In a desolate land lined by steep canyon walls, Engedi is a lush oasis fed by underground springs. Archaeologists have found it replete with caves, some of which are massive, with many side vaults where deepest darkness reigns. David and his men took refuge deep within one of those caves.

As Saul’s troops wound their way down the steep path to the sea, they came to a series of “sheepfolds along the way,” which provided a campsite for Saul’s men and a cave nearby, where the king could take cover to relieve himself (lit. “cover his feet”). By *coincidence* this is the exact cave where David and his men are hiding. Suddenly the pursuer becomes the prey as Saul, blinded by the light of day, places himself in the midst of David’s troops in the most vulnerable position – seated and alone.

The tension mounts, the stage is set: this is day! Yes, this is the day, but what *kind* of day is it? The narrator, being a master of wordplays, uses three nouns (“day,” “hand” and “eye”) and one verb (“cut off”) by three players in the drama, each time in a different arrangement to give us three different points of view of what *day* it is.

#### B. David’s men: “This is the day for revenge!” (v. 4)

And the men of David said to him, “Behold the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘Behold, I am giving your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good in your eyes.’” Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. (v. 4)

David’s men are quick to interpret the events as arranged by the Lord’s hand to David’s advantage, “Behold the day...to *you...your* hand...*your* eyes.” They back their theology with what they previously heard as a legitimate promise by God to attack the Philistines (“I am giving the Philistines into your hand,” 1 Sam 23:4) and apply it to Saul. Finally, they lure David by personal desire “do what is good in your *own* eyes.” To a discerning ear this is the one dissonant note that throws off the entire equation, because it evokes the tragic memories of the days of Judges, when “there was no king in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes.” This was the driving element of their equation, to which God’s promise and providence are made subordinate. David’s men are guilty of taking God’s name in vain. Without God’s Holy Spirit you can correlate Scripture with circumstance and apply it with utter freedom, and yet get it all wrong!

The adrenaline rush from having his enemy in his hands, coupled with the enthusiastic and convincing support of his friends must have

made the temptation very hard for David to resist. Yet he not only refuses, he resolutely reshapes their thinking.

### C. David: "This is the LORD's anointed!" (vv. 5-7)

**And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed." So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way. (vv. 5-7)**

When David returns, his men are stunned by what they see. Instead of Saul's head, David returns with a mere edge of Saul's robe. Did their mighty leader lose his nerve? Did he cave in to cowardice? As the reader, we are privy to the answer. David had stalked his prey unnoticed, then reached out and cut off a mere corner of the king's robe. David had transgressed into the realm of the holy by touching God's property. As a result his heart began to palpitate, as if he had touched a high-voltage electric socket. If he had gone any further and killed Saul, he knew he would have incurred bloodguilt and become liable to the death penalty.

With his heart now made sensitive to all things holy, David overrules his men, preventing them from cutting Saul into pieces. This king will not be ruled by the voice of the people. To train believers to see things from God's perspective is no easy task, especially when they have suffered gross injustice or longstanding abuse. The fact that David had to "persuade his men with these words," suggests it took warrior-like strength on David's part. The verb "persuade" means "to tear, divide," and was "used of Samson's tearing apart a lion in the same manner as he would tear apart a kid goat. [Here] David tears apart his men with words, refusing them permission to attack Saul."<sup>2</sup> They confidently attach the Lord's name to their conviction that Saul was David's enemy, but David resolutely refutes it with an oath, "The Lord forbid!" For David there was only one issue. Saul was emphatically still the Lord's anointed. Though he had been disobedient, rebellious, and murderously evil, he still occupied the holy office representing God's rule. Therefore it was up to God to remove him. To pre-empt God and force his hand would be an attack on God himself. We must never seek to exalt ourselves in God's kingdom.

For David this was a day of opportunity, but not for retribution. Rather than striking Saul in the dark, David will expose him in the light.

## II. David: "This is the Day for Revelation" (1 Sam 24:8-15)

### A. Disarming with vulnerability (v. 8)

**Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. (v. 8)**

The first task in confronting a man driven by perverted passions is to disarm his irrational emotions. In Saul's case, David has to disengage Saul's jealousy at least momentarily, so he is able to receive the light of truth and logic. To do this David has to bridge the physical and psychological barriers that were forged by paranoia and hate, and so David leaves the cave as Saul entered it, alone and vulnerable. Then he speaks and acts perfectly the role of a loyal subject, bowing with his face to the earth in homage. One can imagine the effect had David vented his rage on the king. This is a lost art among believers today,

but is crucial to break down barriers between pained relationships, angry political groups, and warring nationalities.

Sami Awad is a Palestinian Christian working for reconciliation between Palestinians and Jews in Israel. Prior to 1948 his father's family lived in Jerusalem in a neighborhood where Jews, Christians and Muslims lived as neighbors for decades. When the war broke out their neighborhood was right in the middle of the warring factions. To protect their large family with seven children, his grandfather climbed to the roof of the house to hoist a white flag, but was shot and killed in the process. A few days later the Israelis took over the entire area and their whole family became homeless.

His grandmother was forced to send her children to a home for orphans. But, despite the injustice she suffered, she would gather the children each Christmas and give the message of forgiveness of the Jews. She would say, "The soldier who shot your father did not know who he was; otherwise he would not have shot him." The message stuck and was passed on to the grandchildren. After being educated in the U.S., Sami went back to Palestine to work for reconciliation. He felt the only way he could fulfill Jesus' commandment to "love your enemy" was to first know his enemy and to embrace their pain. So he went to Poland and visited Auschwitz and spent the night in a child's grave and wept. Now when an Israeli soldier looks at him with contempt, he can understand, forgive and love in return.<sup>3</sup>

It must have been a shocking moment for Saul, for he is speechless. With the stage set, David breaks the silence with his longest speech in the books of Samuel. "This statement, made face to face to the king, establishes in detail, unambiguously and exactly the relationship that David has to the king."<sup>4</sup> In the first half he convincingly establishes his innocence (vv. 9-12), while in the second he demonstrates Saul's guilt (vv. 13-15).

### B. David demonstrates his innocence (vv. 9-12)

**And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'? Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.' See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. (vv. 9-12)**

In his opening address David asks, "Why are you ruled by the words of men?" In reality Saul was ruled by the deep, deviant voices of jealousy within his subconscious, but by giving Saul an out, he continues to disarm him. David seizes the opportunity to grant Saul this one moment in his life where the light of logic can overrule the demons of jealousy and force Saul to confront the naked truth. Appealing to Saul in tender, fatherly terms (after all David was his son-in-law), he lays out the material evidence of his innocence. Pressing his advantage, three times David tells Saul to take a good look at the corner of his robe, "See, see.... see" (v.11). "This is a day for your eyes to see that the Lord did deliver you into my hand, but I took pity on you and did not kill you, though I was encouraged to do so. You are the anointed, look and see the robe, judge for yourself."

David concludes his defense appealing to the Lord as judge between them, and seals it with an oath that his hand will never touch Saul. With absolute brilliance David has cleared himself of any crimes,

rebellion or sin against the king. With such a watertight defense one would think that David would rest his case. But David is not done, and with the ploy of a proverb, he goes on the attack as chief prosecutor.

### C. David indicts Saul as the guilty party (vv. 13-15)

As the proverb of the ancients says, ‘Out of the wicked comes wickedness.’ But my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! May the Lord therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and lead my cause and deliver me from your hand.” (vv. 13-15)

David, the master of words, quotes the first half of a well known proverb to grant Saul confidence that he will continue to restrain his “hand” against the king. If there were true guilt residing in David, there would be evidence of such wickedness, for “out of the wicked comes wickedness.” By not quoting the second half of the proverb, David skillfully turns the proverb on Saul.

**“Out of the wicked comes forth (yatza’) wickedness...  
After whom has the king of Israel come out (yatza’)?”**

With powerful metaphors David turns the king’s behavior into the theatre of the absurd. The rhetoric is as brilliant as it is humorous.

**“After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom are you pursuing? After a dead dog? After [just] one flea?”**

It all looks a little ridiculous, the king and all his panzer divisions in search of a dead dog in the wilderness, or worse yet, a single flea on a dead dog! From a human standpoint it looks like extreme overkill. But then again, David is confronting Saul with deeper issues: “Why am I a threat to you?” David’s searching words will also be found on the lips of Jesus when he is apprehended (John 18:7). In a sustained appeal David leaves his case at the Lord’s feet for him to judge and vindicate him.

How will Saul respond, now that he has been backed into a corner by David’s humility and respect, and has had his paranoia dismantled by the force of David’s logic?

### III. Saul: This is a Day for Reward (1 Sam 24:16-22)

#### A. Authentic emotion (v.16)

As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, “Is this your voice, my son David?” And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. (v. 16)

Formerly Saul refused to speak of his enemy by name. Now the evil caricature that he had so carefully constructed within his psyche is utterly undone by David’s actions and words. With all the barriers broken, with no more ability to manipulate or control, Saul finally sees David in the light of day and calls him “my son.” For the very first time in the story Saul weeps.

#### B. Honest confession (vv. 17-19)

He said to David, “You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. (vv. 17-19)

After Saul has wept, he gives his longest speech in Scripture. It is more than David could have ever hoped for – a full confession,

unequivocally admitting his guilt and affirming David’s absolute innocence. Saul even matches David’s proverb with one of his own to show that David’s goodness was extraordinary. If that is not enough, there is still more. In this brief moment of truth, Saul makes a public admission of David’s future.

### C. The exchange of crowns (vv. 20-22)

**And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. Swear to me therefore by the Lord that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father’s house.” And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold. (vv. 20-22)**

After a full confession, who would have ever expected that Saul would give public testimony to God’s election of David. Not only does he give verbal assent to God’s choice, he prophetically acknowledges the permanence of his rule (reminiscent of what Hannah comprehended by faith long ago, 1 Sam 2:10). Finally, to demonstrate his complete acceptance of the Davidic crown, Saul takes the role of David’s subject and appeals to him for mercy to not “cut off” the life of his descendants after his downfall. To ensure the safety of their dynasty, a monarch would often exterminate the descendants of his predecessor. David grants Saul’s request, for the reader knows he has already made such a guarantee to his beloved Jonathan, and ratified it with an oath.

What a day! This was the day David listened to his heart, instead of his men and as a result, Saul’s barriers are broken down and he hands over the crown to David in tears. As the sage says,

**When the Lord takes pleasure in a person’s ways,  
he compels even his enemies to surrender to him.  
(Prov 16:7 Bruce Waltke translation)**

### IV. Secrets of the Heart (Psalm 57)

The one question we have not addressed is, “What made David’s heart so sensitive to God’s voice and then so resolute as to withstand the temptation?” As Saul and his 3000 troops made their way to the entrance of the cave, David and his 600 men were outmanned and outflanked, with no possibility of escape. But David, instead of plotting strategy, was spiritually fortifying his heart in prayer. Psalm 57 is an incredible prayer, a mysterious mix of lament and confidence and producing praise that is so expansive it is hard to visualize it emerging out of such a dark and confined space. It opens with the superscript – “By David. A *miktam*. When he had fled from Saul into the cave.”

#### A. Finding refuge under his “wings” (Ps 57:1-3)

**Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me,  
for in you I take refuge.**

**I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings  
until the disaster has passed.**

**I cry out to God Most High,  
to God, who vindicates me.**

**He sends from heaven and saves me,  
rebuking those who hotly pursue me—**

**God sends forth his love and his faithfulness. (vv. 1-3)**

Cornered in a pitch-black cave David miraculously travels to the heavenly throne of God through the metaphors of memory. The irony is that though David had to flee the earthly sanctuary for safety at Nob (1 Sam 21:10), he is never denied access to the heavenly sanctuary. As Weiser points out, “The grace of God is revealed only to the man who trusts in God, and the feeling of being out of danger in the house of God, where Yahweh sits enthroned upon the wings of the cheru-



bim, under the 'shadow' of which the worshiper has taken refuge, is already a gift of the divine grace which the poet invokes."<sup>5</sup> It is in that safe place David fortifies his trust in God's precious promises regarding his election, an act that grants him confidence of a miraculous outcome. Taking refuge under the wings (*kanaph*) of God made David's heart sensitive to all that was holy so that it "smote him" when he made an illicit reach for the throne by cutting off the "wing" (*kanaph*) of Saul's robe.

#### B. Assessing the situation: Two realities (Ps 57:4-6)

I am in the midst of lions;

I am forced to dwell among man-eating beasts,  
whose teeth are spears and arrows,  
whose tongues are sharp swords.

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;  
let your glory be over all the earth.

They spread a net for my feet—

I was bowed down in distress.

They dug a pit in my path—

but they have fallen into it themselves. (vv.4-6)

David sees himself as prey to wild man-eating beasts which not only "pant" after him, but for weeks have encircled him and are now ready to tear him limb from limb with their sharp teeth. He is aware that these are not insignificant, isolated acts of terror, but are acts of heavenly treason against God and his anointed (see Psalm 2). The reality of evil leads the poet into a refrain of praise. This bold refrain rings with the clarity of a loud bell. David is asking God to rise up above the heavens and cause the weight of his worth (*kavod* – "glory," the root means "to be heavy") to be felt over the entire earth. David's world-view in the recesses of that cave is so expansive it is mind blowing. He has the inspired sense that when God acts to deliver him from that dark pit it will be an earthquake of such a magnitude it will be felt around the world. And when it is over God's name will be supremely magnified.

The refrain reshapes David's lament with a new confidence of what God will do on his behalf, and with it the poem turns from death to life as the wicked fall into the very pits they have dug for themselves. With a touch of humiliating humor the metaphor becomes literally true as Saul digs his personal pit of privacy before David's watching eyes.

#### C. Let the singing begin (Ps 57:7-11)

My heart, O God, is steadfast,

my heart is steadfast;

I will sing and make music.

Awake, my soul!

Awake, harp and lyre!

I will awaken the dawn.

I will praise you, Lord, among the nations;

I will sing of you among the peoples.

For great is your love, reaching to the heavens;  
your faithfulness reaches to the skies.

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;

let your glory be over all the earth. (vv.7-11)

This newborn hope gives David a stirring confidence to sing. The wicked may have "prepared" (*kun* – "fixed," "established") nets for him for destruction, but David's heart is doubly prepared (*kun*) to sing praises. With steadfast purpose of heart he is able to look past the dark present to the glorious future. The vision so consumes him he is

able to glory in it to such a degree that he wants to start his singing already, before the victory has even come. So he calls forth all that he is and in a threefold crescendo of "awake, awake, awaken," his music resounds to the heavens and rouses the sleeping dawn.<sup>6</sup> As God's glory has so completely taken hold of David, so David's glory will not be satisfied until his music stirs the heavenly courts.

Not only does David's praise span the heights of heavens, it also spreads over the full breadth of the earth. David envisions himself recounting God's loyal-love before a congregation that includes not just Israel, but also Gentiles. Lest we think this is mere hyperbole, remember that this story has been recounted in almost every known language in the world. But more than that, the apostle Paul understood that the breadth of David's voice given here in Psalm 57 was prophetic of the inclusion of the Gentiles as the people of God as a result of Christ's resurrection (Rom 15:9). Some churches continue the tradition, using this psalm for their services on Easter morning.

Who is this God who makes even his enemies bow down at the feet of his anointed? Who is this king who will not take his own vengeance? In answer to David's prayer, God did rise above the heavens to make his glory felt over the earth and orchestrated the story so that everyone – Jonathan, Michal, the women, the people, Saul's servants, the Philistines, the priesthood, and now finally Saul himself – has recognized and paid tribute to God's new anointed. This is but a foretaste of what we can ultimately expect as the STORY is repeated and intensified in Christ, so that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-10). In the face of our enemies let us sing and awaken the dawn!

*What wondrous things happened in this cave –  
encircled by destructive darkness,  
pursued, outmanned and outflanked,  
cornered with no escape,  
but God  
sent from heaven his loyal-love  
that gives the poet's heart an anchor and wings  
to reshape the dimensions of his universe,  
one for which harps and lyres now play  
to overpower spears and arrow tongues  
and awaken the dawn.  
Amen.*

1. Paul Borgman, *David, Saul, & God, Rediscovering An Ancient Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37-38.

2. Richard Hess, "shesá," NIDOTTE 4:199-200.

3. Sami Awad's story was taken from Ted Dekker and Carl Medearis, *Tea With Hezbollah* (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2010), 189-196.

4. J. P. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates, Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* (Assen: Van Corcum, 1986), 461.

5. Artur Weiser, *The Psalms*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 426-427.

6. The phrase "awake, harp and lyre" is found in the first line of a German hymn by Joachim Neander (1650-1680). The English translation we know as "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation."