

## Nobody Ever Said It Would Be Easy

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We don't know how long David was on the run from Saul. Some guesses put it at seven to ten years. These stories don't have many time stamps in them, so it's hard to know the timing of many of the following events: David was anointed by Samuel; he eventually killed Goliath; he played music to sooth Saul's troubled spirit; he was a captain in Saul's army; he ran away when Saul wanted to kill him; while on the run, he had two opportunities to kill Saul, but he didn't out of respect for the Lord.

In the last year and a half of David's time on the run, he made acquaintance with a Philistine king, who gave him a city called Ziklag. David and his army of 600 men, along with women and children, lived there for 14 months. But one day, upon returning to Ziklag from a mission in northern Israel, David and his men find the city burned, and all their families are taken captive. David's men, beside themselves with grief, are ready to pick up stones to kill him.

The reaction of David's men is understandable. His men join him and stay by his side while on the run from Saul. And yet, if David had just killed Saul in the cave, or in the camp—one of those two times—they could have been back home in Israel years ago. So, from his men's point of view, it's David's fault that they are still on the run, and now it's David's fault that their families have all been taken.

David was loyal to the Lord, and even to Saul, and yet he still went through the hardship of being on the run for up to a decade.

Our lives can often mirror David's saga of hardship. Our efforts to live better don't necessarily translate into a better experience for us. Someone who maintains a healthy diet and refrains from smoking and excessive drinking may *or may not* live longer and disease free. Some people who take up a daily exercise routine simply end up with chronic pain. Getting yourself to church every Sunday and reading the Word doesn't guarantee that your anxiety, worry, sadness, or anger will go away, or that your troubled relationship will get fixed.

It's like David, trying to do things right for years, and coming back to his city—completely burned and loved ones taken.

But that just doesn't seem right. Shouldn't there be some reward for the effort we put into improving our lives? Shouldn't there be some return on investment? He says, "Come to Me, and I will give you rest." I showed up to church and I even pray, now where's my rest?

Well, maybe the problem isn't a lack of reward or return on investment ... maybe the problem is the type of reward we are anticipating, or even the type of rest we are expecting.

So what kind of rest do you expect? And what do you want from the Lord? Are you looking for a life free of physical hardships? Do you go to church so that the events and circumstances of this natural world will work in your favor? What is the Lord's goal for us—for you—in this natural world?

As we learned from our reading in the book *Divine Providence*, the Lord's main goal is not to make us happy in the moment, but rather to reform us and change us so that we can be happy to eternity. Sometimes (oftentimes?) that reformation can be uncomfortable on a good day, and painful on a bad day. The natural hardship doesn't result from God's intention or orchestration of it, but He does allow it so that we can get closer to Him. In fact, the Lord may allow a person to remain in poverty or live in lowly status if He foresees that wealth or power will cause a person to make spiritually poor decisions. And on the other hand, He might allow people to be in wealth and power because they will just make poor decisions anyway.

Based on this idea, we should really be grateful for whatever comes our way in life. Here's a small thing I do: I try to practice this sometimes by thanking the Lord when I hit a red light, and I imagine that He saved me from some horrible car crash that otherwise would have occurred farther down the road. Remember, no matter what external circumstances you find yourself in, the Lord always has your eternal welfare in mind.

So, let's look at the story of David again. He didn't seem to do anything wrong early on, and yet he was being hunted by Saul. He even spared Saul's life, and he was still being pursued. When Ziklag was razed, his men were ready to stone him – all because he was following the Lord. And yet he persisted. When his own men were ready to kill him, what did he do? He didn't make some rash decision. He didn't give up or give in and do what his men wanted him to do, he continued to look to the Lord—he asked Abiathar to bring the ephod so he could ask the Lord what to do. He persists in the Lord even when it's rather uncomfortable. And the result? David and his men end up recovering all that they thought they'd lost, and more!

Our recitation today from Psalm 30 describes this situation of having a hard time. I want to just read an extra verse from that psalm: "Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." Of course, the Lord doesn't get angry, that is something that we impute to Him when things don't go our way, and especially when WE get angry. But it says, "His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." His favor is for life ... keep that part in mind.

The Lord doesn't tell us that we won't have hard times ... in fact, the opposite is true. In John 16 today we heard His words: "You will weep and lament ... you now have sorrow." Straight up, the Lord tells us we will have hardship. But where does this hardship come from? Some of it comes from outside of us: social pressures to look, act, and think a certain way; wanting to look good in front of other people; having enough money to get by or survive; and also, other people around us can just be jerks sometimes. Those are just some of the external reasons for our difficulties.

But some of it also comes from inside: our own selfishness that wants to look good so that we can be adored; our lust for power and control over others, especially those closest to us; our greed that wants more than it needs; trusting our *self* and our control of our lives instead of trusting the Lord's providence.

In reality, the reasons for our difficulties are ALL internal. The only reason we have problems on the outside is because we are experiencing separation from the Lord on the inside, or as our reading from *Divine Providence* puts it, our loves are not married to, or are not matching up with the true ideas that we know. To the extent that our lives are in line with the Lord's Word, to that extent we are in heaven, and also to that extent we have rest from our difficulties.

Do understand that hardships and difficulties like losing a job, a rocky relationship, injury, loss of a loved one—these are real hardships and real difficulties that can bring worry and sadness. Even our social standing in the community is something that, if lost, can be incredibly hard to deal with. Even if we have grown up with the ideas of the Lord's providence and His love, we will still have cares, worries, and anxieties about this world.

Here I'd like to distinguish between two different emotional experiences for your consideration. You can take it or leave it, but it has helped me parse out some of my own feelings around my own hardships. I name them *pain* and *suffering* simply to differentiate between two very different things. You may choose to give them different names, or just leave them nameless.

What I refer to as *pain* is something that cannot be avoided, and even being regenerated by the Lord will not stop you from experiencing it. Having a marriage of good and truth in your life will not stop you from feeling hurt when you stub your toe on your bed, and it will also not prevent you from experiencing heartache from missing a loved one who has passed.

*Suffering*, though, is pain on top of pain. Suffering is your interpretation of the pain. Suffering is when the pain has become detrimental to your ability to live and love. If, for example, you stub your toe and it ruins your day because even your bed has turned against you—pain has turned into suffering.

It's true that there is pain and hardship and sadness in this world—we have bodies that sometimes stop working so well and eventually fail; there are imperfect people in this world and all around us who make decisions that can affect us quite negatively. David and his men came back to their burned homes and loved ones gone. "You will weep and lament ... you now have sorrow." There will be pain.

But the Lord makes us a promise: if we work with Him and cooperate with His ideals of shunning our bad habits of making the world and ourselves more important than the people we are supposed to be serving—if we put in the effort to treat someone with compassion even though they aren't our favorite person in the world at the moment ... then He can reduce and take away our suffering. When we align ourselves with the Lord's providence, stubbing our toe or even getting sick or losing our job can be seen for what they are—temporary things of this world that will pass away. After all, that's exactly what this body is.

The purpose of life in this world is to become more and more like the Lord, and less and less like our old selves. Let the Lord give you a heart of flesh and take out your heart of stone. The purpose of life in this world is not to have an easy life, but life is so much easier when we let the Lord in.

The Lord says, "Your sorrow will be turned into joy. I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you."

Amen.

## Readings

### 1 Samuel 30

Now it happened, when David and his men came to Ziklag, on the third day, that the Amalekites had attacked Ziklag and burned it with fire, and had taken captive the women and those who were there, from small to great; they did not kill anyone, but carried them away and went their way. So David and his men came to the city, and there it was, burned with fire; and their wives, their sons, and their daughters had been taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep. Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. Then David said to Abiathar the priest, "Please bring the ephod here to me." And Abiathar brought the ephod to David. So David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?" And He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all."

So David went, he and the six hundred men who were with him, and came to the Brook Besor, where those stayed who were left behind. But David pursued, he and four hundred men; for two hundred stayed behind, who were so weary that they could not cross the Brook Besor.

Then they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David; and they gave him bread and he ate, and they let him drink water. So when he had eaten, his strength came back to him. Then David said to him, "To whom do you belong, and where are you from?"

And he said, "I am a young man from Egypt, servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind, because three days ago I fell sick. We made an invasion of the southern area of the Cherethites, in the territory which belongs to Judah, and of the southern area of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire."

And David said to him, "Can you take me down to this troop?"

So he said, "Swear to me by God that you will neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this troop."

And when he had brought him down, there they were, spread out over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil which they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. Then David attacked them from twilight until the evening of the next day. Not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled. So David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away, and David rescued his two wives. And nothing of theirs was lacking, either small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything which they had taken from them; David recovered all.

### John 16

"A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father."

Then some of His disciples said among themselves, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying."

Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'? Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you."

### **Divine Providence 58.**

The reason divine providence focuses on what is infinite and eternal particularly in its intent to save the human race is that the goal of divine providence is a heaven from the human race. Since this is the goal, it follows that the main focus of divine providence is reforming and regenerating us, that is, saving us, since heaven is made up of people who have been reformed and regenerated.

Since regenerating us is a matter of uniting what is good and what is true, or love and wisdom, within us the way they are united in divinity that emanates from the Lord, divine providence focuses primarily on this in its intent to save the human race. The image of the Infinite and Eternal One can be found in us only in the marriage of what is good and what is true. We know that emanating divinity accomplishes this for the human race because of individuals described in the Word, individuals who have prophesied after being filled with that emanating divinity called the Holy Spirit, as well as because of enlightened people who see divine truths in the light of heaven. We see this particularly in angels, who have a sensory awareness of the presence, inflow, and union. Angels are also aware, though, that the true nature of this union could be called a direct contact.