

Stories in the Bible and what we can learn from them.

1 Samuel 30: Ziklag Test

- **Grief**
- **Guidance**
- **Generosity**
- **Godward Gaze**

Imagine your life as a timeline with highs and lows. What time or event is your (highest) high and what is your (lowest) low?

1 Samuel 30 tells us David's lowest low, his deepest despair, his darkest night, and how he reacted to it. [This story from David's life has encouragement for us in this time of coronavirus anxiety. This has become a low point in the lives of many people. It's a low point if you're a student because you don't know how this will affect your future – high school graduation and college. It's a 'selfish' low point for me because High Point Climbing & Fitness is closed until June 1.]

David's Grief: 30:1-6a

Read 1 Samuel 27. Saul tried to kill David several times. David fled to the Philistines. David made an alliance with a Philistine named Achish, the son of the King of Gath. David was given a country town named Ziklag for him and his 600 men. David raided southern Judah but didn't kill any Israelites and lied to Achish. David killed all the people in the villages he pillaged so there would be no witnesses.

Read 1 Samuel 29. Achish wanted David to join him in a battle against King Saul and the Israelites. The Philistine generals didn't trust David and asked him to stay behind. So David and his men returned to their hometown Ziklag.

David went from relief to grief.

Two idioms describe David's plight.

The first idiom: David was "caught between the devil and the deep blue sea." This means he faced a perilous dilemma. David could fight for the Philistines and kill Israelites or lose the support of the Philistines and become their enemy. David would never be able to be king of Judah if he fought with the Philistines and killed Israelites. Or if he refused to fight with the Philistines, then they would see his loyalty to Judah and he would be trapped between two enemies. David was caught between the devil (demonized Saul - 1 Samuel 28) and the "deep blue sea," the Philistines.

But David experienced relief when the Philistine generals told him to go home. They didn't trust David. So David and his men returned to their town in the Judean wilderness. The town was called Ziklag.

That's when David's relief turned into grief.

1 Sam. 30:1-5: *Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid against the Negeb and against Ziklag. They had overcome Ziklag and burned it with fire² and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great. They killed no one, but carried them off and went their way.³ And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive.⁴ Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep.⁵ David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel.*

The second idiom: David went "out of the frying pan and into the fire." David escaped the frying pan of the Philistines and jumped into the fire of the Amalekites. David had been running from King Saul for 8 years. A few times King Saul came very close to killing David. And now this! Ziklag, David's hometown was destroyed and all wives and children were taken captive by Amalekites. (Amalekites = Satanic attack by God's permission, like Satan afflicted Job at God's permission. Recognize Satan is behind your dark night and deep despair and grieve, but remember God is sovereign over Satan.)

Relief to grief! After 3 days of walking 25 miles a day, David and all his men expected the comfort of their families and a home-cooked meal. David and his men watched the smoke rise from their burned out village. It was silent. Only the crackling of fire burning wood. No wives greeted the men with a kiss. No children ran out shouting "Daddy!"

Relief to bitter grief! 30:6: *And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters.* Even David's loyal friends who had been with him through thick and thin spoke of stoning him. Their grief and bitterness turned into anger directed at David. They actually considered killing him. If grief doesn't find comfort in God then it can become self-destructive and harmful to others.

Did David feel sorry for himself? Did he collapse in despair and discouragement? Did he give up? No. He grieved! David's soldiers grieved and David was greatly distressed. When we experience a loss it is good to grieve. Grieving or weeping is healthy for our emotions. [The coronavirus is causing a lot of loss: lost family members and friends, lost health, lost businesses, lost jobs - 22 million, lost wages, lost freedom - state governments denying the "Bill of Rights," and worst of all, lost PEACE.]

It is appropriate to grieve over any loss, but not OK to get stuck there. The prophet Samuel grieved over the sinful disobedience of King Saul, until God told him to stop

grieving because God had another, better plan. 1 Samuel 16:1-3: *The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."* It's like God said to Samuel, "Don't get stuck in your grief. Move forward. Trust me. I have a better plan and a better person to take his place."

Let out the grief and then get up and do the next thing David did - seek God.

David's Guidance: 30:6b-15

Here's the key verse: 30:6: *And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. **But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.***

David didn't blame God. "I have so many troubles! Why did you let this happen? Why couldn't you protect our families?" David didn't move away from God; he moved toward the LORD his God. David strengthened himself in the LORD. The Hebrew word *chazak* means to strengthen, encourage, cheer up, stand firm. David encouraged himself to stand firm in his faith. He cheered himself up. David didn't wait for somebody else to strengthen his faith; there was nobody else. You must know how to strengthen your faith in God and not depend on any other person; not even your pastor. (But I do hope this message strengthens you in the LORD your God!)

I think David strengthened himself in the LORD three ways.

First, I think David remembered and rehearsed in his mind the anointing and word of the LORD he received from the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 16). I imagine David strengthening himself, "LORD God, I know you keep your promises. Samuel anointed me and said you chose me to become king. It's been several years since Samuel spoke that prophetic word in the presence of my family. You've preserved me through many dangers. I put my trust in you. You are faithful to keep your promises."

Second, David wrote and sang Psalms. (*I will show this at the end of the message.*)

Third, after David grieved he strengthened himself in the LORD his God by inquiring of the LORD. He went back to the source of guidance, the priest and the ephod which contained the urim & thummim (Exodus 28), the guidance stones.

Exodus 28 (CJB): ²⁹*Aharon will carry the names of the sons of Isra'el on the breastplate for judging, over his heart, when he enters the Holy Place, as a continual reminder before Adonai.* ³⁰*You are to put the urim and the tumim in the breastplate for judging; they will be over Aharon's heart when he goes into the presence of*

Adonai. Thus Aharon will always have the means for making decisions for the people of Isra'el over his heart when he is in the presence of Adonai.

David had the written word of God, Moses' Pentateuch, but this was the OT way of determining God's direct, situational will. The 10 Commandments are the LORD's definite will, but sometimes we want situational guidance; for example, "Lord, should I take this job?" David wanted to know the LORD's will for his situation. Should he pursue the Amalekites and would he be successful recovering the wives and children? 30:7-9: ⁷ *And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. ⁸ And David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?" He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue." ⁹ So David set out, and the six hundred men who were with him.*

Use of the guidance stones decreased during the era of the prophets and then stopped after Ezra. In the NT the "breastplate for judging" becomes the word of God and the priest someone trained to interpret it accurately, like a pastor or another mature believer.

David received his situational guidance from the LORD and pursued the Amalekites with 600 men. 200 were too tired to pursue and stayed behind. 30:10-15: ¹⁰ *But David pursued, he and four hundred men. Two hundred stayed behind, who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor. ¹¹ They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. And they gave him bread and he ate. They gave him water to drink, ¹² and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. And when he had eaten, his spirit revived, for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights. ¹³ And David said to him, "To whom do you belong? And where are you from?" He said, "I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite, and my master left me behind because I fell sick three days ago. ¹⁴ We had made a raid against the Negeb of the Cherethites and against that which belongs to Judah and against the Negeb of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag with fire." ¹⁵ And David said to him, "Will you take me down to this band?" And he said, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this band."*

The Egyptian was abandoned by the Amalekites, but it was no accident. It was God confirming the guidance that came from the priest's ephod. Sometimes God accommodates our weakness with confirming signs. We see this sometimes in the OT, like Gideon's fleece. We see this in the NT also when the Holy Spirit gave visions to guide the mission work of the 1st century church. The Holy Spirit gave Paul situational guidance with a vision of a man from Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). Paul

received confirming guidance from the prophet Agabus (Acts 21:10-11). Paul was obeying Christ's Great Commission (the word of God), but he still need the direct, situational guidance of the Holy Spirit. We do not seek confirming signs, but if God provides, then it gives us extra assurance that we are in the center of his will. The Egyptian was not an accident; he was left behind by God's design to give David more confidence he was in the center of God's will.

For Christians in the New Testament era guidance comes from the Holy Spirit within, but we also know from Acts that the Spirit can provide signs (dreams, visions, and other mature believers) to confirm guidance.

David's Gracious Generosity: 30:16-31

After David and 400 men defeated the Amalekites and recovered wives and children and great spoil, David was graciously generous. Some wicked and worthless men among the 400 who fought against the Amalekites and recovered all the spoil didn't want to share with the 200 who were too tired to fight and stayed behind to guard the baggage.

The people said "This is David's spoil." David could've kept it all for himself or a lot more of it than he lost. He earned it. He had a right to be greedy. But David used gracious generosity to maintain unity among his divided men. He graciously shared it with the 200 who were too tired to fight, the elders of Judah, and with all the people in all the towns "where David and his men had roamed" while fleeing from Saul. David paid back people who had helped him during his dark days running from Saul. He sincerely ingratiated himself with all the other people and established friendships because he would be the next king of Israel. David did this out of gratitude to God.

Significant Point: The spoil David recovered from the Amalekites was much more than he had lost from Ziklag. The Amalekites had taken people to sell as slaves, goods, flocks and herds of cattle. They had taken spoil from the land of the Philistines and Judah, not just David's little town (30:16). David went from relief to grief to gaining much more than he had before and he was graciously generous with it. [It would be like what David did: A robber steals \$100 from you. You get your gun and track him down. As you point your gun at his head he pleads, "Don't shoot. You can have all the money I stole. Here's \$10,000." Then you return some of the money to the victims of the robber.]

What at first looked like a discouraging disaster, God turned into a great blessing. [This Coronavirus attack is a discouraging disaster. But something better than what you (we) had before will come out of this Coronavirus attack when it is all over. That's the way God works.]

David's Godward Gaze

I want to conclude by returning to the main idea: ***But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.*** David looked Godward and encouraged himself in the Lord. Nobody else would do it because everyone was weeping and some wanted to stone him to death.

The Bible says Christians are supposed to encourage one another. 1 Thessalonians 5:11: *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.* But sometimes you cannot depend on others to encourage you, so you must speak to yourself. You must encourage yourself in the LORD.

How did David encourage himself?

We know David encouraged himself in the LORD a lot because he wrote many Psalms. He encouraged himself by focusing Godward. David encouraged himself in the Lord, not with positive thinking but with Psalms. I once had a tenant who posted a lot of positive thinking quotes and she seemed to be happy. But it's all just one-dimensional humanism. No mention of God. But when you are at your lowest low, deepest despair, you will need something two-dimensional. You need an open, honest, satisfying relationship with the LORD God. David expressed this in his many Psalms.

- Psalm 59 written while fleeing Saul
- Psalm 56 while imprisoned by Philistines and he had to fane insanity
- Psalm 3 while fleeing from Absalom
- Psalm 63 hiding in the wilderness of Judah. This Psalm comes close to the time of David's Ziklag experience.

Encourage yourself by trusting God's promises. Read and recite Psalm 91 and 23.

Final Truth: How you respond in your deepest, darkest valley, is a test of your faith and character. David's faith and character were tested for several years as he fled King Saul. The Amalekite attack on Ziklag was David's darkest night, but the dawn was very near. This was David's one last test before he became king. 3 days later David got the news that King Saul was killed in a battle, the battle he was supposed to fight with King Achish and the Philistines against Israel (1 Samuel 31 & 2 Samuel 1-2). After that David became the new king of Judah the prophecy of Samuel was finally fulfilled.

There will always be one final test before your breakthrough. God is faithful to his promises.