“Stabbed in the Back: David and Saul”
Theme: Insights for Living from the Life of David

Scripture: 1 Samuel 24:1-4

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon:
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Meditation Moments for Monday, April 25 – Read 1 Samuel 18:5-16 – Next week we will look at the first part of this chapter where David and Jonathan become friends. This week we turn our attention to the jealousy and anger that begins to rise up in King Saul towards David.

- Jealousy is a natural human emotion. Why do we tend to become jealous? Why does Saul become jealous of David? What do you think the “tormenting spirit” was about for Saul in verse 10? Have you ever experienced intense jealousy? Why were you jealous and if so, how did you get through that experience?
- Saul seems to be jealous of David because he is successful and appears to be a threat to his rule as King, even though Saul at this point does not know that David has been anointed by Samuel to be the eventual King of Israel. Do you think Saul could have reacted another way in the wake of David’s success and popularity? What could he have done differently? Has someone ever been jealous of you and if so how did you react to that?

Prayer: God, help me to not be envious of others and their success but instead to celebrate what you are doing through them. Keep me humble when I do have success and help me to share that success with others so it’s not all about me. Amen.

Tuesday, April 26 – Read 1 Samuel 18:17-30 – Only now is the promise of the hand of the king’s daughter for the vanquish are of Goliath implemented. But the fulfillment of that promise, as it turns out, is part of a plan to destroy David. The interior thoughts of Saul leave no doubt about his intentions. While Saul’s popularity made him proud and arrogant, David remained humble, even when the entire nation praised him. Although David succeeded in almost everything he tried and became famous throughout the land, he refused to use his popular support to his advantage against Saul.

- Do you ever allow popularity to twist your perception of your own importance? What happens when we do this? It’s comparatively easy to be humble when you’re not on center stage, but how do we usually react to praise and honor? What are some ways we can practice humility?
- We learned that Michal, the daughter of Saul, loved David. One interesting note is that she is the only woman in the entire Hebrew Bible explicitly reported to love a man. Nothing is said, by contrast, about what David feels toward Michal, and as the story of their relationship unfolds, his feelings toward her will continue to be left in question. We get an idea of how David feels towards her when he says he would rather have victory over the Philistines. In any case, David expresses that he is unworthy of praise. How do you suppose David stayed humble through this time of being popular? Do you think that his humility is one of the things that made Saul so angry with him?
Prayer: Thank you God for the image of David, who had so much success and yet at this stage in his life remained humble. Remind me daily of the joy of following you, which seemed to keep David grounded. May I stay grounded in you every day. Amen.

Wednesday, April 27 – Read Samuel 19:9-23 – We find in this passage one of the many times in which someone tried to kill David, this time it being King Saul. Once again we find the tormenting spirit coming upon King Saul. As Saul is chasing David he is overcome by the spirit in verse 23. We do not know if he was speaking messages from God or merely joining in an ecstatic expression of the spirit. The first time this happened to Saul was in chapter 10 after he was anointed king and did not want to accept the responsibility. This time Saul was consumed with jealousy over David’s growing popularity, the spirit of God immobilized him so he was unable to harm David. Although Saul was receptive to the spirit of God and was caught up in prophesying, his heart and mind were far from loving God and thinking God’s thoughts.

- Have you ever experienced a nudge or something you might attribute to God spirit when you have been doing something that you know is wrong? What was that experience like and what do you think God was trying to speak to you?

Prayer: God, sometimes I do things and I know they take me far away from you or hurt others. Speak to me in those moments and draw me back to your heart. Forgive me and help me to turn around and follow you. Amen.

Thursday, April 28 – Read 1 Samuel 21 – there are several interesting things in this chapter to note, but the first is that the priest in the story had to go against the law to give the holy bread to David because the bread was supposed to be given only to the priests. Ahimelech put David’s need in life ahead of religious ceremony and fed him the holy food. This upheld a higher law of love mentioned in Leviticus 19:18. Centuries later, Jesus would refer to this incident to show that God’s laws should be applied with compassion. To do good and to save life is God’s greater law according to Jesus.

- Have you ever had to set aside rules in order to show love to someone? When do you think that is appropriate?
- How can we choose love over laws in our daily lives as we seek to follow Jesus?
- David pretends to be crazy at the end of this story in order to survive among the Philistines. Have you ever had to act a certain way to get along with others? When do you think that is appropriate?

Prayer: O Lord, I confess that sometimes I put rules over people. Help me to see people the way you do and to show love in those moments where you lead me to your people in need. May I respect the laws and your law of love every moment. Amen.

Friday, April 22 – Read 1 Samuel 22 – Those in trouble, in debt, or discontented joined David, who himself was an outlaw at this point. These people were outcasts themselves and could only improve their lot by helping David become King. David’s control over this band of followers again shows his resourcefulness and ability to lead and motivate others. The second part of this story is painful to read, where King Saul slaughters innocent priests and their families, including children. Saul’s actions showed his mental and emotional instability and how far he had strayed from God. By destroying everything in Nob, Saul was placing the city under the ban described in Deuteronomy 13 which was supposed to be used only in cases of idolatry and rebellion against God. But it was Saul, not the priests, who had rebelled against God.

- Why would Saul have his own priests killed? While none of us have killed large groups of people like Saul did, we all have done things we have regretted when we have gotten far away from God. Can you think of a time where you did something that you later regretted because you were jealous or angry or un-centered and far away from God?
- David lived in a cave for a while in this story to keep safe and sometimes in life we need to draw back from the world to get our bearings and protect ourselves. Have you ever found yourself in a place where you have needed to, “hide in a cave?” When did you know it was safe to come out? David eventually leaves the cave to lead his people and it reminds us that while there is a time to hide there is also a time to step forward in faith.

Prayer: Gracious God, I know you’re with me in those times when I feel like I need to hide in a cave. Give me strength when it is time to move and get back out in the world like David. I pray today for those innocent people who are persecuted still in today’s world by men like King Saul in this story. Especially be with those Christians who are persecuted for their faith. Amen.
Saturday, April 23 – Read 1 Samuel 23 – When Saul heard that David was trapped in a walled city, one with gates and bars, he thought God was putting David at his mercy. Saul wanted to kill David so badly that he would have interpreted any sign of God’s approval to move ahead with his plan. Had Saul known God better, he would’ve known what God wanted and would not have misread the situation as God’s approval for murder.

- Not every opportunity is sent from God. We may want something so much that we assume any opportunity to obtain it is of divine origin. As we see from Saul’s case, however, this may not be true. An opportunity to do something against God’s will can never be from God because God does not tempt us. When opportunities come your way, double check your motives. Make sure you are following God’s desires and not just your own. Have there been times when you have wrestled with these questions, whether an opportunity is God’s will or a temptation?

Family Activity: The theme of last week’s sermon and all of the readings this week about David focus on betrayal and how King Saul desperately wanted to kill the man who had saved his army from Goliath. Try to think of some times when you have been betrayed by someone. How did it feel? How did you respond? Have you ever betrayed someone else? If so, why did you betray them? If you didn’t get any prayer rocks last week as part of the story of David and Goliath, gather five smooth stones, or get out the five smooth stones you put in a basket from last week. Have each person in the family hold a rock (get an extra rock or two if you have more than 5 in your family!) Hold those rocks will you pray the prayer below.

Prayer: Dear God, sometimes I have betrayed others. Sometimes others have betrayed me. Forgive me and allow me to forgive. Help me to be trustworthy for others, or myself and for you God. Amen.
Theme: Insights for Living from the Life of David

“Stabbed in the Back – David and Saul”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

April 23-24, 2016 at First United Methodist Church, Durango

Scripture: 1 Samuel 24: 1-4 and 7b-11

1 After Saul returned from fighting the Philistines, he was told that David had gone into the wilderness of En-gedi. 2 So Saul chose 3,000 elite troops from all Israel and went to search for David and his men near the rocks of the wild goats. 3 At the place where the road passes some sheepfolds, Saul went into a cave to relieve himself. But as it happened, David and his men were hiding farther back in that very cave! 4 “Now’s your opportunity!” David’s men whispered to him. “Today the Lord is telling you, ‘I will certainly put your enemy into your power, to do with as you wish.’” So David crept forward and cut off a piece of the hem of Saul’s robe.

...After Saul had left the cave and gone on his way, 8 David came out and shouted after him, “My lord the king!” And when Saul looked around, David bowed low before him.

9 Then he shouted to Saul, “Why do you listen to the people who say I am trying to harm you? 10 This very day you can see with your own eyes it isn’t true. For the Lord placed you at my mercy back there in the cave. Some of my men told me to kill you, but I spared you. For I said, ‘I will never harm the king—he is the Lord’s anointed one.’ 11 Look, my father, at what I have in my hand. It is a piece of the hem of your robe! I cut it off, but I didn’t kill you. This proves that I am not trying to harm you and that I have not sinned against you, even though you have been hunting for me to kill me.

VIDEO Sermon Intro

SLIDE “Stabbed in the Back – David and Saul”

We continue today in a sermon series that we began two weeks ago in which we are looking at the Old Testament figure of King David and how his story and our story meet. Even though David lived over 3000 years ago, there are insights from his life that speak directly into our lives today and over the next few weeks we will continue to look at those insights from the life of David. As we continue in this series we are looking at one of the most famous stories of David, I
invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. You will find a space to take notes and my hope and prayer is that you hear something that you feel the holy spirit is speaking to you and you would write those things down. Below that and on the backside you will find meditation moments in which you will get a chance to read this story in depth as well as other Scriptures that relate to this story. If you will take a few minutes each day to read some Scripture and reflect upon them I believe they can make a profound difference in your life.

We learned the very first week of this sermon series that Saul was anointed by Samuel the judge and prophet to be the first king of Israel, the leader over all the tribes which had been a loose confederation up until Saul became king. Over time, Saul began to fall away from God and not lead in the way that God asked him to lead and so God sent Samuel to speak with Saul. He said to him, “Saul, you have forsaken God and so God has turned his back on you. A day is coming where a new King will be chosen to lead Israel and neither you nor your children will rule over the house of Israel again. God has already chosen another who is a man after his own heart and he will supersede you as the king over Israel.”

Saul became jealous and frightened and threatened and was always looking over his shoulder for that King might be that God had chosen. Rather than understanding what had already been set in motion by God, Saul did what many of us do when we know God’s clear will and yet we decide to disobey. He said, “I don’t care what God wants. I am going to do everything I can to hold onto the kingdom and my power. I am going to do everything I can so that me and my children will rule over the nation of Israel, regardless of what God wants.”

God came to Samuel and told him that there would be a new King anointed and he would find him in the house of Jesse in Bethlehem. David was selected to be King, he was an unlikely candidate because he was small and young and he liked music and poetry and art and didn’t seem to fit the categories of what a king would look like in ancient times, however he was a young man after God’s own heart and because of that God chose him to lead the ancient Israelites and become the greatest King they would ever know. We learned about the importance of not judging a book by its cover and about how God looks at the inside, at our hearts, and he longs for us to follow him with a heart that is faithful.

Last week we read about the most famous battle described in the Old Testament that was not fought between two armies, but between two people. It was the battle in the Valley of Elah between David and Goliath and we talked
about the giants in our lives and how we can slay those giants so they don’t paralyze us and take over our psyche. David was only 16 years old at the most and not old enough to fight in the battle against the Philistines.

King Saul and all the warriors of Israel are gathered on one side of the valley of Elah with the Philistine army on the opposite ridge. In the center of the valley is one giant whose name is Goliath. The Scriptures tell us that for 40 days Goliath stepped to the middle of the valley and challenged the greatest warrior from Israel, whoever that might be, to step forward and fight him. Goliath taunts the Israelites every day, “Don’t you have a God in Israel who is strong enough to deliver me into your hands? Send forth your mightiest warrior and then we will be your slaves if he were to defeat me. But if I defeat him, then you become our slaves.”

One day, David is sent by his father Jesse to bring lunch to his brothers who are on the battlefield. He hears the taunts of Goliath and he wonders why nobody is doing anything about the big ugly giant in the middle of the Valley because the God of Israel will surely deliver him to whoever fights the Philistine. David is called before the King of Israel, King Saul, and reminds him who the God of Israel is and he will deliver Goliath into our hands. David offers to go and fight Goliath and King Saul says, “You have got to be kidding! Have you seen how large he is and how small you are? You can’t possibly fight that man.”

But David convinces the King to allow him to fight. David walked out onto the battlefield and Goliath laughs at him as David picks up five smooth stones from the riverbed and places them in his shepherd’s bag. The giant approaches David and says to him, “You fool, today I will feed your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!”

David replied, “I don’t think so. I think it is you and your men who will be birdseed and lion food, for the Lord God is on my side.” He takes his slingshot because David is a Slinger, and we learned last week that a Slinger in ancient times could hurl a rock at 100 ft./s and from 100 feet could hit a coin off of a rock. He hurled one of his stones at Goliath and with one shot hit him between the eyes, just below his helmet, bringing the giant to the ground.

I showed you this Goliath that we create for our children in our children’s ministry and if you add another foot on top of this, that is how tall Goliath would’ve been. What we didn’t show you is what the kids did after they slayed Goliath. Let’s check this out.
VIDEO Kids slaying Goliath

I love how the kids are beating on him because the story tells us that David cut off Goliath’s head as part of his victory, and clearly the kids wanted to reenact that event! After David slew Goliath, the Israelites come running down the hillside and across the valley and chased the Philistine army off of the battlefield and the Israelites claim victory that day. Today we turn to what happens after David defeats Goliath. On the one hand, King Saul is excited as David returns because the Philistines have been defeated. The giant has been slain and Israel’s pride has been restored, but that battle led to the rise in popularity of David which made the current king of Israel, King Saul, insanely jealous of this shepherd boy.

The people began to chant David’s name and hail him as a great warrior and so King Saul decided to send David out into another battle, hoping he would be defeated in the process since he was so young and naïve. Saul gave David charge over the youngest warriors in Israel and they went out against the Philistines once again to do battle. Each time David led his troops in the battle, when it seemed like they would be defeated, they would snatch victory from the jaws of defeat and he would come back more victorious than before. David legend began to grow among all the people and they were amazed that God’s presence seemed to be with him in each battle.

David finally returns to the throne room of King Saul after many victories against the Philistines. David receives loud accolades and critical acclaim as the people of Israel are shouting his name. We see this depicted in this scene from the 1985 film King David starring Richard Gere. Listen carefully to what the people say about David and look at King Saul’s eyes and his facial expression as he hears these words.

VIDEO King David Clip 1985

Did you see them chanting David’s name? Did you hear them with these words that we find in 1 Samuel 18: 7?

SLIDE 7 This was their song: “Saul has killed his thousands, and David his tens of thousands!”

The worm of jealousy and fear begins to creep up into the heart of King Saul and from this time forward we find 12 chapters devoted to Saul pursuing David because of David’s success. Even though David has done nothing wrong, we find during these chapters that Saul has determined that David is his enemy and a threat to his throne. It nearly drives Saul mad as he at one point takes his javelin
and tries to spear David to a wall. He actually does that twice and so David flees and spends 10 years in hiding, living among his enemies, the Philistines. Hundreds of Israelites gather with David and fight with him against other enemies of Israel and they live off of what they capture from those battles.

David’s legend grows because of his victories and it drives Saul even more insane, to the point where after Saul’s army defeats the Philistines or any other enemy, he takes his finest troops to go try and find David who is in hiding so he can have them killed. Saul is wrestling with natural jealousy because he knows he should of been the one in the battle against Goliath, defeating the giant. When someone else does something and gets credit for something that maybe we should’ve done, we get jealous. We think, “Well, I could’ve done that!”

Saul also is afraid about who will be the next King and it becomes pretty obvious when you he sees what David is doing and the accolades being showered upon him. In the book of Psalms we have these beautiful songs which David sings about having a heart after God. David goes into battle with great courage even though he is a Shepherd boy by training, recognizing that God is with him in those moments. He has victory after victory and it is a contrast to what Saul experiences in his own life. He naturally wonders, “Could this be the man that God is going to give my kingdom to?” Saul believes he can outsmart God simply by killing David, so he proceeds down that path.

Finally, Saul is motivated by his own poor self-image. He is struggling because he knows that he has failed God. He knows that God has already chosen another to be king, which makes David seem like the natural enemy. Remember that David did nothing wrong and whenever Saul asked, David complied because David saw Saul as the King. David’s victories in battle help to assure that Saul would remain King. David’s victories in battle ensure the safety and security of Israel. David was a loyal subject and served his king faithfully. He did everything right and yet Saul sought to kill him.

Saul wasn’t always a villain, but his character gives us several important things that we should learn about ourselves as we look at his story. Many of us might be reading through 1 Samuel for the first time and it is an interesting read. You can read many of the stories to your children, even if you have to edit certain parts to make them more PG rated. Many of us read other parts of the Bible and we are confused, but this story seems pretty straightforward and it reads pretty easily. But these stories weren’t simply written so Hollywood might make a movie out of them three centuries later. These are found in the Scriptures because they
are God’s Word to us and they are meant to speak into our hearts. Let me remind you of the words of the apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians 10 where he teaches us about the Old Testament stories, the ones we are reading right now.

**SLIDE**

6 These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did,

12 If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. 13 The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience.

The story of Saul and his dark side in the Old Testament is preserved in the Scriptures because through them God speaks to us today about our own dark side, our own character and the way that character can emerge if we are not careful. Every one of us in this room has the Saul syndrome lurking underneath the surface of our hearts. We watch people who outshine us and we act upon those jealousies. Every one of us in this room has some insecurity somewhere in our life and those insecurities can bubble to the surface and cause us to do things that we do not want to do if we are honest and they do not honor God. All of us at times are afraid that someone else will show us up or that we will lose our job to the next bright, young star in our profession. Every one of us struggles with this kind of fear in our hearts if we are honest.

There was a woman who received a great promotion at a large company. She had been a junior level executive and did a great job managing her group. She had great success in her business dealings and upper management was watching. When an Executive Vice President position opened the top management began interviewing people but several of them had their eye on this young woman. There were more than 100 people in the company who wanted the job and after all of the interviews, she was selected over many people who were several rungs up the corporate ladder from herself. That created a lot of hard feelings when people watched her take the corner office, feeling like they should have been considered for that position.

Many of her subordinates and peers were jealous of her at this point and the Saul syndrome began to develop. They would welcome her to her new office and when they saw her they would complement her and tell her what a good job she was doing and say things like, “Were so excited that you are here on our floor and that now you are the manager of this department.”

But the moment she walked out the door those same people would begin
to talk among themselves and ask questions like, “I wonder what she had to do to get this job. I bet I know what she did to get it.” They would continually tear her down and question her abilities and her methods. Whenever she did something wrong they were watching like hawks that would pounce on every mistake. Instead of going to her privately and sharing concerns or things they saw happening that were problematic, they would run up the flagpole so everybody could see her errors. They tried to destroy her.

What’s interesting about this work environment I just described is that 90% of them claim to go to church. Good Christian people who teach Sunday school and sing in the choir and praise team and hear sermons week after week about loving one another and not gossiping. A few of them even had invited her to church when she was lower on the totem pole, but the Saul syndrome got the best of them.

Does this sound familiar with anything in your life that you have experienced or seen in a work environment or at school or in some other setting? This doesn’t just happen in corporate America but sometimes it happens in school. Someone new moves into town and they start coming to your middle school and suddenly all the girls are interested in the hot new guy. They think he is really cute and hot stuff and if you been the one who has been getting all the attention and someone new shows up and steals it, it can be rather irritating, can’t it? They all stand around and talk about the new kid and he has more friends who are girls than boys and then they talk about that. They begin to make comments and find ways to make him look like a fool and write things on the bathroom walls about him. Nowadays they start webpages because we now have new and creative ways to bully and to put people down.

What’s really painful is when I hear about experiences like this that kids are having and then I discover that some of those kids who are acting that way are the ones that go to youth group at church. They call themselves Christians but they got caught up in the Saul syndrome and did things that if they were honest, would embarass them and they certainly wouldn’t want to be on the other side of.

It happens in our families and in our neighborhoods when someone has great success our siblings or parents or the people next door become jealous. While we want to rejoice in their success, there is a part of us that also wants to tear them down or look for mistakes or chinks in the armor so that we can feel better about ourselves. This is the Saul syndrome. This is the inability to rejoice
when someone else succeeds and instead we want to tear them down, either to their face or behind their back.

It’s our own insecurities feed this, but the tragedy is that in the end, it destroys us. Is like a worm eating away at our soul. God is not honored by our actions and makes us look foolish in the end. We hurt ourselves with these self-destructive tendencies. In the case of Saul, it drove him nearly mad. Over time, as he would lash out at David and try to have him killed, it will build the wall between himself and God higher and higher. Other people began to turn their backs on Saul as well. The more separated Saul felt from God and others the angrier he became at David and the more he wanted to kill him, and his people and the cycle went on and on until he was destroyed from the inside out.

This is what happens in our own lives if we are not careful and if we don’t guard against this kind of jealousy and rage that can grow in our hearts. If you don’t ever struggle with these things I would love for you to email me and tell me how you do it, because my experience is that we all have these human tendencies and struggles with jealousy and the Saul syndrome. You also could write a book and probably make lots of money because most of us wrestle with these feelings if we are honest.

The question is not whether or not you will wrestle with these feelings because they are part of our nature. The question is rather, “What will you do with these feelings?”

SLIDE What will you do with feelings of jealousy and anger towards others?

Will you act upon those feelings, or will you submit them to Christ? Will you come to God with the prayer like this? “God, please help me rejoice in the victories of others. Help me to say only encouraging words and not destructive ones.”

The Scriptures teaches us how we might respond to these moments. Jesus said:

SLIDE “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

After he said this, Jesus reminded us that our neighbor is not always the people that we like, but sometimes is the person we resent.

SLIDE “Do unto others as you would have done unto you.”

We know this is the Golden rule and it is meant to remind us to simply stop
and ask a simple question. “If I were the one who got the promotion, what would I want all my coworkers to say about me around the coffee pot? How would I want to be treated or talked about?” You see, someday that may be you.

Perhaps the most poignant and pointed words came from the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:29 – 32.

SLIDE 29 Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

30 And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Early this fall will be doing a sermon series on the power of words using this text as a jumping off point as we begin the push to the presidential election in November because my sense is that these are words that those in the political arena, as well as those who discuss political candidates and ideas, should heed wisely. As I look at the Internet and read stories about wars I found myself fascinated by how many of those began because of the Saul syndrome. How many of us, with our siblings and coworkers and neighbors and people who used to be friends, find ourselves separated from them and from God because we failed to take into account the teachings of Jesus and Paul when it comes to the Saul syndrome?

That’s not a fun lesson to learn but it’s an important one as we recognize the 12 chapters in the life story of David about how Saul let his jealousy and anger get a hold of him. While that might be the negative in this story that we are meant to learn from, the positive side is David the refugee and how he responds to the jealousy and anger and rage of King Saul. David was simply singing and playing his lyre the first time King Saul’s anger got the best of him and he threw a spear at David’s head and just missed him. David shook it off and said, “Surly this must just be a mistake. It must’ve been an accident and the javelin must’ve slipped because he would never do that. He is the King.”

He didn’t take it seriously the first time, but the second time King Saul tried
to peg David to the wall with a spear however, he got the point—pun intended—and he had to pay attention. The decision David made at that moment was profound because what he did was get out of the King’s way. He didn’t take a javelin and try to jab it right back at the King. He didn’t go to all the servants in the palace and tell them what a terrible person that Saul was because of what he did. Instead, he simply left.

Every one of us has been in the role of David. Someone has tried to hurt us for some reason or another. Someone has said something about us because their own insecurities have welled up and they have criticized us. We have had people who have said things that were not true about us. People have spread gossip about us. When we are in the role of David and someone hurts us, the message in the Scriptures is that we should just shake it off the first time.

**SLIDE**  
Shake it off, then get out of harm’s way.

But when someone consistently hurts us, there comes a time where we need to get out of the way and not put ourselves in harm’s way over and over again. Maybe we can’t get completely away from them, but there does come a point where we can say, “I am choosing not to be wounded by you anymore. I’m not going to open up my heart to that kind of abuse anymore. I’m not going to stick around for you to treat me that way anymore.” We learn from David that it’s okay to take care of ourselves and not put ourselves in harm’s way. We can still love and care for someone, as David did for King Saul, but not allow them to spear us to the wall.

Sometimes we have a friend that will betray our trust and we take them back because we are meant to offer forgiveness. But if they continue to betray us again and again, there comes a time where we need to say, “I love you but I can’t put myself in the position to be wounded by you anymore.”

The last thing that David did which we find in this story today is that David showed great mercy towards King Saul. While David is in hiding he is living among the Philistines and he has gathered 600 warriors who follow him and with whom he fights the other enemies of Israel. He doesn’t fight against King Saul and he doesn’t do anything to undermine Saul’s work as the King of Israel. Instead, he fights against Saul’s enemies and his legend continues to grow.

Saul continues to seek out David to try and kill him because he is threatened by his success and his popularity. He knows that David could be the next King which leads us to the story I want us to look at today. Listen to these
words from 1 Samuel 24.

SLIDE 1 After Saul returned from fighting the Philistines, he was told that David had gone into the wilderness of En-gedi. 2 So Saul chose 3,000 elite troops from all Israel and went to search for David and his men near the rocks of the wild goats. 3 At the place where the road passes some sheepfolds, Saul went into a cave to relieve himself. But as it happened, David and his men were hiding farther back in that very cave! 4 “Now’s your opportunity!” David’s men whispered to him. “Today the Lord is telling you, ‘I will certainly put your enemy into your power, to do with as you wish.’” So David crept forward and cut off a piece of the hem of Saul’s robe.

In this story we find David in En-gedi which is an oasis in the desert wilderness. There is a beautiful waterfall and there are caverns in which to hide. David and his 600 warriors are hiding in the caves when Saul arrives with his 3000 soldiers because they have heard that David and his men are hiding in the caves. They go from cave to cave looking and there is much noise and all the while David and his men are hunkered down in the back of the caves where Saul and his men cannot see.

In some ways the writer is telling this story tongue and cheek because Saul now has to go to the bathroom and relieve himself while they are searching the caves. He goes into one of the caves that he believes is empty and his generals stand outside of the cave. Saul opens his robe and squats down on his haunches to relieve himself. David happens to be in the back of that particular cave. The King can’t see them but they can see the king walking into the cave towards them and squatting to go to the bathroom. Can you imagine this picture?

There is so much noise and shouting outside the caves that David and his men can whisper to each other while King Saul is relieving himself inside their cave. The generals are giving orders outside the cave and maybe Saul is humming to himself or watching a YouTube video on his smart phone! Okay, I obviously added that part!

David’s men elbow him and say, “David, here’s your chance. The Lord has delivered your enemy into your hands. Here’s a dagger you can go kill him right now!” That was perfectly acceptable and ethically appropriate in the time of David where his life was in danger because of this adversary who would’ve killed David and all of his soldiers if they have been discovered. All’s fair in love and war,
even if your enemy is doing his business and has no idea you are right behind him. So the men encourage them, “Kill him David. Here’s a knife. Kill him!”

David’s response is, “I will not destroy the Lord’s anointed one. He is still the king, but this is what I will do.” He stealthily creeps up behind Saul and while Saul is hunched on his haunches, David kneels down and cuts off the edge of the tapestry robe that the king wore as a sign of his royalty. He then speaks back to his men. This is a wonderful scene and a magnificent picture of the character of David. One lunge of his dagger could take the life of the King and no one would’ve known and it would’ve served him right according to everyone else, but not to David.

Saul gets up and walks out of the cave and begins to walk down the valley towards his horse. His generals are walking with him when David appears from out of the cave, knowing that if Saul decided he would be destroyed in an instant. There is nowhere for David to hide and he and his generals would be killed in that cave if Saul chose to do that. But instead we read this is what happened...

SLIDE

...After Saul had left the cave and gone on his way, 8 David came out and shouted after him, “My lord the king!” And when Saul looked around, David bowed low before him.

9 Then he shouted to Saul, “Why do you listen to the people who say I am trying to harm you? 10 This very day you can see with your own eyes it isn’t true. For the Lord placed you at my mercy back there in the cave. Some of my men told me to kill you, but I spared you. For I said, ‘I will never harm the king—he is the Lord’s anointed one.’ 11 Look, my father, at what I have in my hand. It is a piece of the hem of your robe! I cut it off, but I didn’t kill you. This proves that I am not trying to harm you and that I have not sinned against you, even though you have been hunting for me to kill me.

This scene gives us a picture of the mercy of God displayed through David. David is not perfect and the one thing we love about his story as a hero is that he is very much like us. David makes mistake after mistake and we’ll look at his biggest one in two weeks. But at this moment, David shines and we see the heart of God coming through this man who has a heart after God’s own heart. This is a biblical principle that we can’t miss.

SLIDE

God who is rich in mercy calls us to be rich in mercy.

We saying this church that we want to be Jesus Christ to the world and this
is part of what it means, to be rich in mercy and growing in steadfast love, like David towards the one who was trying to kill him, King Saul. We are meant to offer this kind of grace toward those who hurt or wrong us. We all have been David. Every one of us have had someone say something about us that was slanderous or they question our motives. We have had people hurt our feelings and do things which undermine our credibility. We may have had our career destroyed.

The truth is that we won’t have loving feelings towards those people who have hurt us in this way. God understands our feelings of hurt in these moments and what he asks us to do is to feel them but not react out of them which takes us into vengeance and anger and rage that not only destroys others but destroys ourselves and our very souls.

In this story God invites us to show mercy rather than judgment. God encourages us to find ways to demonstrate how Christ is living inside of us and don’t do to others what they have done to us. David shows us this as he offers mercy to his enemy. Jesus also taught us about this in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s gospel, 5:7.

**SLIDE** 7 God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

James writes in his letter in 2:13 these words.

**SLIDE** 13 For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. (NRSV)

David knew that in the end God would take care of Saul and eventually Saul would die in battle and David would take over his king. David knew that God would take care of David if he tried to do the right thing and show mercy. David knew that the highest calling in his life was to follow God’s will and not simply his own feelings of wanting vengeance or justice.

Jesus teaches us this biblical principle about mercy when he hangs on the cross. Remember what Jesus said when he looked down at those who crucified him and put him on the cross.

**SLIDE** “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”

David understood that Saul was a bundle of insecurities. He knew that his kingship would eventually be taken from him. David knew that Saul was filled with fear and experience God’s displeasure with him. David understood and his heart went out to the man Saul and he trusted God to take care of him in the end.
Every one of us has the Saul syndrome inside of us. We have the capacity and the tendency to allow our insecurities to bubble up and to tear other people down when we watch them succeed. We have the ability to hurt others who are doing well because we are jealous and we have the tendency to talk behind people’s backs and try to tear them down to make ourselves feel better and bigger and more important. That is the dark side of our human nature and we have to be honest about it and not pretend it doesn’t exist. God calls us to rise above that and not allow the Saul syndrome to take over in our lives and in our hearts because it doesn’t just destroy the other person, destroys our very heart and soul.

Every one of us will be a David sometime and we will have two choices. We either get even or we show mercy. We either find ways to express our desire for vengeance or we have empathy and we try to understand that others can be just as insecure as we are. We trust that God will take care of judgment in the end because that’s his job and not ours. We are called to live out lives of mercy and grace, even when it’s hard and when it hurts. God does not expect us to put ourselves in harm’s way over and over, but he does hope that we will walk away when necessary and offer grace whenever possible. If we don’t have the power to do that, that is when we rely on God and the mercy and grace offered to all of us from Jesus Christ, who gives us the power and strength to forgive and move on.

These are the insights from the story of Saul and David for our lives today. They are gifts from God that I hope each of us will cherish. Let’s pray.

SLIDE  

Prayer  

Lord God, we give you thanks and praise for the gift of the stories of David and Saul, the stories of heroes and villains. Teach us with these stories and grow our character so that we might be like Jesus himself you. Gracious God, you know how many times we have spoken ill of others, that in this room all of us have been guilty of the Saul syndrome, myself included. Forgive us for the times are insecurities of got the best of us, and we have allowed destructive words to come out of our mouth rather than words that are good for building up and encouraging. May your Holy Spirit live in our hearts so that when others have wronged us that we don’t react in anger, knowing that vengeance and justice belong to you. Help us to trust in you and know that in the end you will bless those who have a merciful and you honor those who trust in you. Help us to be gracious and rich in mercy, just like you. Guide us and bring reconciliation where there is hardship and brokenness and pain in our relationships. We give our life to you, in
Jesus name. Amen.