

## No Shortcuts on the Path to Glorifying God

I Samuel 24

*“The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’s anointed, to put my hand against him...”*

**Introduction:** In most areas of life we are looking for *shortcuts*, ways that we become more efficient without losing quality. We have apps to help us navigate routes quicker, taking us down side roads and into scarcely populated mountainsides to save three minutes to our destination. There is a whole industry devoted to **life hacks**, helping us with the mundane, like putting pancake batter into a ketchup bottle (try it), or freezing coffee into ice cubes for your iced coffee the next day (ensuring it doesn’t get watered down). Athletes are always looking for an edge, going the way of healthy supplements or doing high intensity workouts to try to gain advantage. Businesses try to streamline, make processes more effective, cutting out steps, and simplifying communication.

Shortcuts can be helpful, but can also prove detrimental. The shortcut on the app brings you to unfamiliar roads and costs you more than time. The life hack becomes more complicated than doing the simple thing (just put ice in it!). The athlete dabbles in illegal substances, and the business streamlines but loses customer service or quality of relationship. This morning we are going to look at **Saul** and **David**, one who took matters into his own hands, trying to find shortcuts to happiness and meaning, and the other trusting the sovereign, good, and glorious God for his present and future joy and purpose. In doing this, we hope to identify areas that we’ve tried to shortcut our path to maturity and obedience, and places where we need to fully trust a perfect and sovereign God.

### Setting & Story (23:2-24:3)

*So Saul returned from pursuing after David and went against the Philistines. Therefore, that place was called the Rock of Escape.<sup>29</sup> And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of **Engedi**.*

*When Saul returned from following the **Philistines**, he was told, “Behold, David is in the wilderness of **Engedi**.”<sup>2</sup> Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the **Wildgoats’ Rocks**.<sup>3</sup> 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.***

In the ongoing saga of Saul pursuing David to rid himself of this young man who he was jealous and afraid of, and to ultimately kill him, we left with David *barely* staying ahead of the grasp of Saul, when God providentially orchestrated an attack by the Philistines against the land of Judah (23:27). Of note, David was a savior for Israel against the Philistines in the beginning of ch. 23, and God used the Philistines to save David at the end of the chapter. God’s plan and providential care can even use enemies to accomplish His will and purpose. David was able to escape into the Wilderness, and particularly to the strongholds of **Engedi**. Let’s look briefly at why David is here and how this became the setting for a pivotal event in the preparation and revelation of the character of David.

Engedi, which is also referred to as “The Spring of the Goat”, or “Wildgoats’ Rocks” (or the crags of the Ibex), is an oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea. Now the Dead Sea currently has such a high saline content that few/no biological organism can live in it and literally allows one to float on the surface. In David’s time, there may have been more life, but in **Ezekiel 47:10** there is a prophecy of a future time where the sea will have fish like the Great Sea, intimating that even during this time fish

were sparse. Engedi was one of 2 fresh water springs on the western shore, but also had the most land for farming or agriculture. It was known for its palm trees, balsam wood, vineyards, and perfume production. Solomon reference this in **Song of Solomon 1:14**, comparing his bride to *“my beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi”* (yep, beat that kind of note Hallmark!). As you can see on the picture, by the fresh water springs would have been caves where David and his men could have hidden, and where the action of our story takes place. This will also be a stop when we (Lord willing) visit Israel next year (2025), and will be able to tour Engedi and float in the Sea.

The story itself is important to understand the point of the narrative itself. Saul had brought 3000 choice men with him to hunt David, which was typical overkill to overtake David’s few hundred. As the men took a break at the oasis, Saul had to use the restroom, going by himself into the same cave where David and his men were hiding. David’s men saw this as an answer to prayer and God’s deliverance, since one swift stroke of a sword could have ended this ongoing nightmare. But a strange thing happened: David refused to kill his pursuer, instead only taking the corner of his robe, letting Saul ignorantly escape. Then, from a distance, David appeals to Saul to stop pursuing since he **could have ended things**, but did not because he trusted the Lord. In a moment of clarity, Saul responded seemingly well in regret and guilt, and the chapter ends with what seems to be an end to the hostility. But as we will see in future chapters, Saul did NOT repent or relent, and fell back into sinful habits, where this became a culture setting event in David’s leadership and life. With that context and story under our belt, let’s now look at these events from the perspective of the two characters, both of whom acted consistent with their character and convictional belief.

### Saul: Shortcuts & Misery

*4 And the men of David said to him, “Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, ‘Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.’” Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.*

People who deny the existence of God or who are *practical atheists* – meaning they *act* like there is no God – do not do it from a **lack of evidence**, but rather out of **moral rebellion** and in their own **unrighteousness**. In other words, there is an active choice of rebellion to suppress the truth that is evident around them and in them, because acknowledging God means they are responsible to Him. Here is how the New Testament describes this in **Romans 1:18-21**:

*18 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who **by their unrighteousness suppress the truth**. 19 For what can be known about **God is plain to them**, because **God has shown it to them**. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, **have been clearly perceived**, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although **they knew God**, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they **became futile** in their thinking, and **their foolish hearts were darkened**.”*

Notice a few things that this passage points out about those who walk in the rebellion of unbelief before God:

- **God has made Himself known to man, without doubt or argument** – God has shown us His attributes plainly (19), they have been clearly perceived (20), and we know God (21). People are not rebels against an unknown entity but One who they know and reject. God has made Himself

known generally in nature, by revelation in His Word, and even our own consciences have the law of God written on them, which accuse us when we break God's law (2:15-16)

- **Man is responsible for their rejection** – Mankind suppresses the truth BECAUSE of their unrighteousness – refusing to honor God or give thanks to Him – but instead have tried to establish truth or worship elsewhere.
- **God's judgment includes giving people over to their desires** – Mankind both embraces and is given over by God to every kind of perverse way of thinking and acting. Once God is rejected, any and every kind of foolish thought or action is possible, including the worship of images instead of the immortal (v. 23), exchange of the natural with the unnatural (26-27), and fully orbbed depravity, which invents evil and approves of others' sin (28-32).

This is a description of every single person today who knows there is a God (again, whether they acknowledge or articulate it or not) but in their desire to *live their own life according to their own version of the truth*. We hear it often today and observe it even more. We see it today in the extremes: *I can define my own gender, or sexual morality, marriage and family, or truth itself on my own*, to the sanitized: *life should be about accumulation of wealth, comfort, and safety*, and everything in between. There is nothing new under the sun, and the only difference is how long a culture continues down a path of unrighteousness is to the degree that the creativity of wicked heart can find expressions of their depraved heart. This is the picture we have of **King Saul** in the latter parts of 1 Samuel.

Saul obviously knew God, understood His Word, heard His commands, experienced His benefits, and reaped the consequences of disobedience, yet the end of his life was marked by his choice to blaze his **own path rather than yield to God and His will**. *"No doubt Saul thought that as Israel's king he could stave off the consequences of rebellion against God, just as postmodern man persuades himself that he can ignore God and rewrite millennia-old rules of morality and human society, trusting in his technology, wealth, and leisure to live successfully in opposition to God's Word."*<sup>1</sup> When people are in rebellion against the Lord, they will view any earthly success they have as a sign of God's favor (or their own ability to make it happen) and when life **doesn't work**, facing setbacks, sickness, pain, or other restraints, they refuse to acknowledge their need.

This is exactly what Jesus pointed out in the parable of the rich fool in **Luke 12**, in pointing out that life does not exist IN the abundance of possessions. The rich man was blessed by God's common grace, where he built larger storage for his overflowing crops, and instead of praising the LORD, he simply said, *"Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."* But God said to him, *'FOOL! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.'* (12:19-21). The rich man thought he found the **cheat code, the life hack, and had it all figured out**. But he missed the fact that God was simply gracious to him, and rejected in his own unrighteousness.

Now, come back to 1 Samuel and fast forward to the end of the story. David spared Saul, and Saul had a momentary burst of clarity and shame. But it **did not produce repentance** (see 2 Corinthians 7:9-10). His responses revealed his heart through his tears:

- *"You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid evil"* (24:17)  
– This was true, but notice the holding out of **self-justification** – David was MORE righteous, but

<sup>1</sup> Richard Phillips, "1 Samuel: Reformed Expository Commentary", p. 410.

Saul was still somewhat righteous. Repentant recognition is that of the **tax collector** in Luke 18:13, who implored of God, *“God, be merciful to me, the sinner!”*

- *“And now behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand”* (24:20) – This is an open admission that his way of life was truly futile, yet he continued to pursue it! It sheds light on the fact that unbelievers KNOW their life is pointless, miserable, and vanity, but they still grip it with their whole life – still looking for the **life hack to make it all make sense.**
- *“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”* (24:21) – **Self-preservation** was at the core of this pitiful request, seeking a legacy of a ‘good’ name in spite of his sinful behavior.

At the core of looking for shortcuts in life is rebellion, and rebellion is marked by a **low/wrong** view of God, an elevated view of self, selfishness, pride, and unrighteousness. **The solution** for Saul was the same solution for all of us: humble yourselves before a holy God, admit the fact that YOU are a sinner, believe that Jesus paid the price for all the sin you committed in life, TURN from your sin and follow Jesus as your LORD and SAVIOR in joyful obedience with your life. In this, *there are no shortcuts or life hacks.* Rebellion WILL send you down a whirlpool of growing depravity and misery until judgment, but faith and repentance will bring you to new life, joy, and peace in Christ.

### David: Sovereignty & Success

Living out our convictions of Scripture will absolutely put us out of step with the world, since so much of what the Bible calls us to is both **counter-intuitive**, *going against our natural mind and bent*, and **counter-cultural**, *going against the flow and norms of society around us.* We see this in marriage and family, where the assault on marriage the way God intended is laughable by some and suspicious by others. When we talk as a church about encouraging young people to be sexually pure until marriage, to encourage marriage early in life, and to have many children, this will be viewed more and more as out of step and radical by many outside of the church.

David demonstrated this principle mightily in this situation in terms of his trust in the **absolute sovereignty of God.** For David, God’s sovereign care and authority was not truth to argue or wrestle with but a **lens to see the world.** He had a singular trust in God which became distinctive to all those around, creating tension even with those closest to him. If given this situation, many would choose a different outcome, and most would not question it. But David knew there were no shortcuts to glorifying the LORD, so he was willing to give up in the short run what could not be taken away in the long. Gordon Keddie said this:

*Circumstances in God’s providence are not a substitute for the principle He has revealed in His Word!*

David knew that just because there was an “open door”, it did not mean that it was God’s will to go through it. He did not ask the question “can I do it”, but *“should I do it”*. Some believe that if there is a possibility to do something, even if it falls short of glorifying God, and they get away with it or nothing happens, somehow it is justified. But as those who are seeking to discern what is **best with all wisdom so that we may approve what is excellent** (Phil. 1:9-10), to the glory of God, we have a higher standard and a greater goal.

So there Saul was, exposed in a cave that David and his men had been hiding. What an opportunity! Months of running for their lives, living in caves, being treated like a criminal could all come to an end with one quick swipe of the sword. His men were **convinced**: *David, this is the day, brother! Look how God has answered and delivered. Finish him!* There certainly is some truth here, and often this is how many make decisions: it would make life easier, it seemed right, and those around are in agreement. But **Proverbs 16:25 says**, *“There is a way that **seems** right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”* David had a different lens, a different way of operation, because his view of God was large.

David instead crept down and cut a corner of Saul’s robe, with Saul being none the wiser. But then a funny thing happened: *David felt guilt and conviction. **Why?*** Because cutting the robe was symbolic of God tearing the kingdom away from Saul, as Saul had torn the robe of Samuel after he declared that fact (see 1 Samuel 15:26-28). This was intentional by David, but even this symbolic act violated what he believed. This is why he literally “tore apart” or persuaded his men not to attack Saul. So how did David’s view of God’s sovereignty shape his decisions, leadership, and life?

1. **David knew God had authority to set up whoever He wanted** – Notice that David said three different times (v. 6 twice and 10) that he would not do any harm **to the LORD’s anointed**. Even though David knew HE had been anointed, it would have been a shortcut to off Saul and take the kingdom by force. In fact, David played this principle out by executing the Amalekite for saying he killed Saul and Jonathan later on (2 Samuel 1:14-16) and the men who killed Ish-bosheth, Saul’ son (2 Sam. 4:11-12). David would not take that authority into his hands, but **trusted God’s timing. The throne was not worth this price. Faith will wait.** This is absolutely what colors and shapes our thinking when it comes to rulers, authorities and governments over us (see Titus 3:1-3; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; Rom. 13:1-7), where we are willing to submit to earthly institutions knowing that it is God who has ultimately set them up. This means that we may function differently than those who are merely moral or conservative in this world.
2. **David knew that the LORD was the judge and avenger** – Even though David had been treated downright nastily by Saul, and though David was righteous, and though God gave Saul into His hand (v. 10), David ultimately knew that God was the judge (v. 12, 15) and avenger (v. 12). David knew that he could not change Saul’s heart or mind, but also that Saul ultimately got away with NOTHING. He would be responsible for all the sin that he committed, and would have to account for it. This is true of us today. In fact, having a high view of God’s justice, holiness, and judgment allows us to be THIS KIND OF COUNTER-CULTURAL:

**Romans 12:16-21** - *16 Never be wise in your own sight. 17 **Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.***

The ONLY way we can live this way is to have a proper view of God, our own sin, and the work of Christ on the cross – which frees us from vengeance, bitterness, clamor, slander, and lack of forgiveness.

3. **David was willing to be gracious with his enemy** – David not only spared his life, but he swore to Saul not to cut off his offspring. David showed kindness years later to **Mephibosheth**, Jonathan's crippled son, by restoring to him all the land that Saul had once possessed (2 Sam. 9:7-9) and let him dine at his table. Viewing our lives through the lens of grace (David referred to himself as a dog and flea – v. 14) allows us to give grace to the undeserving.

But how do we do this? We follow in the pathway of **David's Son, who refused to take any shortcuts on the way to the cross**. When the devil tempted Him at the front end of His public ministry, Satan offered Jesus the Kingdom that was promised, **but without the pain of suffering, the crown without the cross!** (Matthew 4:8-9). The temptation was a shortcut, and that is exactly his appeal to us today. He tempts humanity, blinding them of the truth, by saying there is a way to be happy, fulfilled, and satisfied without all of that suffering, discipline, and persecution stuff. Eat, drink, be merry, for tomorrow we die and that's it!

But we know the truth. The cross is the way of true glory, and humility is the path to greatness. Jesus went to the cross in submission to the will of the Father, substituting Himself for us, so that we can have new life in Him. So when He commands us to *"deny yourself, take up our cross and follow Him"* (Luke 9:23) we view it NOT as a punishment but AS THE PATH THAT LEADS TO ETERNAL LIFE. And the commitment is not to veer off that path, not look for a shortcut or life hack, but to follow our Savior.

*What is your view of the Sovereignty of God? Is He sorta sovereign? Do you follow when it's convenient or out of all-in commitment? The answer is clear: shortcuts lead to judgment, trusting in Christ leads to life.*