

This book takes a realistic journey through some of the most puzzling events of the lives of David, Solomon and their families in order to better prepare us to handle the temptations they faced and better understand the depth of God's grace when we fail.

LOVING GOD LIVING ME

Exploring God's Grace in the life struggles of David and his son Solomon

by REV. THOMAS VENT

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REV. THOMAS VENT

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ISBN: 978-1-64718-442-1

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2020

First Edition

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Vent, Rev. Thomas
Loving God Living Me by Rev. Thomas Vent
Library of Congress Control Number: 2020906333

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CHAPTER 1

GRACE through the Challenges of Youth – *Molded but Messing Up*

*“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the children of one's youth.” (Psa 127:3-4)*

When beginning the research and note taking for this book, I had planned to begin it by just jumping into the problems of David's life and then move into Solomon's life. I couldn't get started. I thought I had sort of a “writer's block.” It hit me one evening when I was reading an unrelated book, that the reason I was struggling to get this book started was that I wasn't planning to start at the beginning. So here I am – deciding to visit the young David before He ever becomes King. Before he ever becomes engulfed by his own strengths and weaknesses. Before he ever pens one word of his Psalms. Before he ever starts his own family. Let's visit the home that David was raised in.

We Choose our Friends, NOT our Family

Like most, I have only slivers of memories of the first five or six years of my life. My earliest memory was when I was about 3 years old. I remember standing in the middle of an empty apartment with my dad and my grandmother as they talked to another man about the place. As it turned out, it was the place I would live in with them and my siblings until I was eighteen. It would not be until years later that I would understand about the circumstances of my family. As a child, I questioned why I called this man “dad,” but the woman “grandma.” I was able to understand later, as I grew older, that my parents had

divorced, and my grandmother had told the court that she would help raise us so that my dad would be given custody. You see, my mom had left my dad and abandoned three of her children, taking only the baby, my brother Daryl, with her when she left. The court had no stomach for this and awarded custody to my dad, a very flawed man who, I'm sure, gave my mother good reason to leave. He was an only child with a bad temper and a jealous nature that would often be fueled by excessive alcohol use. Never-the-less, here I was, a child of the sixties in a broken home and being raised, primarily, by a grandmother and whatever guidance and instruction I received in those early formative years came from her.

We don't get a tremendous amount of information about the child David from the Bible, but we get glimpses of his youth from the narrative book of Samuel and from his reflections in the Psalms. We first meet David in the book of Samuel during a time in Israel's history that had followed the period of the judges trying to rule and bring order to the nation. The judges were leaders appointed by God and supposed to be relying on Him and following His desires and working to establish His rule in the nation - they struggled and failed miserably. They were responsible for judicial rulings, military leadership and spiritual guidance for Israel. Samuel was the last of these judges (as well as a Prophet) to lead a people that the scriptures say, "*did what was right in their own eyes*" during that lengthy period of history.

Because of the military advances of the Philistines, who were perched on their border, the people had decided that they wanted to be more like the surrounding nations and have a *real* king rule over them instead of another Judge. God then allowed Samuel to anoint a man named Saul as the first king of Israel. It was said that he was a mighty man who was "*head and shoulders above other men.*" He became a solid leader - for a while. As the years passed, he began to change. The valiant man of war with the awareness of God's will and plan for Israel, began to weaken. He became more like a fearful, compromising politician who had his own self interests at heart. He cared more about what the rest of the world thought of him than God. It was into this

world that David, the son of Jesse from Bethlehem, was born. Into a nation that barely resembled the one that Moses had miraculously led to Canaan depending on the power of Jehovah to protect them and prosper them. This was a world that had not been hearing from God because of their sinfulness and rebellion. Samuel was the lone prophet in that day, and he also experienced struggles in his own family.

A Change of Guard

Saul had crossed a line with God once too often. God had spoken to him prior to a battle with Israel's enemy, the Amalekites, and instructed him to:

“go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” (I Sam 16:3-4)

But Saul rebelled in his heart and did not obey God:

“But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them.” (v. 9)

Deciding to move on from Saul, God sent Samuel to him to let him know that he failed as king with this disobedience and God was removing his hand from him. His time as king was coming to a close. Saul begged Samuel not to do this, even as he continued to blame *the people* for his own disobedience. He did what many Christians still do today, he tried to *divert* and *disguise* his behavior as “well intentioned.” He said that he only spared the animals so they could use them to “sacrifice for God.” Samuel wasn’t buying it and said:

*“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the Lord?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to listen than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,
he has also rejected you from being king.” (v. 22-23)*

It was during this time of Saul’s rebellion, that God had begun preparing the heart of a young boy named David. Born as the eighth son of a prominent citizen of Bethlehem named Jesse, God had begun to mold him to be the next king of Israel. But in contrast to Saul, who was chosen because of his physical stature and strength, *David is chosen because of his heart* - a boy who would be consumed with pursuing God and would later write:

*“I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall
continually be in my mouth.” (Psa 34:1)*

The chronology of this time is not exactly clear in the Bible, but as time passed, God sent Samuel to Bethlehem to Jesse’s house to anoint one of his sons to be the next king. Samuel did as he was instructed and went to Jesse’s house and one-by-one Jesse brought his sons before Samuel, at least the seven *oldest* boys. But God had spoken to Samuel as the first son, Eliab, was brought to him, and said:

*“Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his
stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees
not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance,
BUT THE LORD LOOKS ON THE HEART.”
(1 Sam 16:7)*

All seven of the oldest sons were brought to him and God had the same response for each. Samuel became puzzled and asked, *“are all your sons here?”* Jesse told him that there was one more, but he was

young and small and as was normal in those days, he was sent to watch the flocks of sheep so the older brothers could do other things, including go to war for Israel. Samuel said, “*Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.*” (v. 11). Samuel waited as they ran and brought the young boy back home. He saw this young, good looking teenage boy and instantly heard the voice of God say, “*Arise, anoint him, for this is he.*”

“Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward.” (v. 13)

The Reality of Spiritual Conflict

One of the things that makes David such an unusual study, is the fact that he is the *only* Old Testament saint in which it is said, he was “*continually*” filled with the Spirit. You see, the Spirit of God in the Old Testament had a different ministry to God’s people than in the New Testament age. We in the New Testament age, experience the *indwelling* of the Spirit the moment we, by faith, place our trust in Christ as our Savior. He then remains in us until “the day of redemption” and “seals” us. In the Old Testament, before Jesus died on the cross as the final payment for sin, the Spirit came on saints to empower them for specific tasks and for short periods and would then leave the person. *But not so with David.* His relationship with God, because of his heart, was special and God *never* withdrew the Spirit from him. In fact, in the very next verse of 1 Samuel, after David is anointed and receives the Spirit, it says that simultaneously:

“the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him.” (v. 14)

Once God withdrew His Spirit from Saul, he immediately was inflicted by an evil spirit that God allowed to work on Saul. This began

about 14 years of Saul struggling with depression and defeat and manifesting times of rage and jealousy that would eventually follow him to his death. At this point, I want to consider a matter that is crucial for the Christian, and often plays a major role in the many times *we disconnect* from the Lord. Let's not lose the impact of the words "*a harmful spirit...tormented him.*" Some translations call this, "an evil spirit." Many people get confused as to why an *evil, harmful, tormenting spirit* could come from God. This is a familiar concept with Israel since they understood that their God was completely sovereign and in control of everything, even when He *passively allows* something to happen it was referred to in an *active* sense. Just like in Exodus when it says, "God *hardened* Pharaoh's heart." God knew that the very *love and protection* He would show the Israelites, would at the same time *harden* Pharaoh's heart. So truthfully, what happened to king Saul was nothing more than God *allowing* an evil spirit to work on him. We see this happen with Job when Satan kept trying to get to him, but God had placed a "*hedge*" of protection around him and only removed it in His time. Did God send Satan to attack Job? No, He *permitted* him to and used those attacks to make Job even stronger than before.

We do not have enough information in the story of king Saul to know for sure if he was a redeemed man. Some say yes and some say no. But something is obvious, the rebellion and disobedience he was displaying to God, became worse than ever after the Spirit of God left and the "harmful" spirit took over. In the New Testament, Jesus warned Peter that,

"Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." (Lk 22:31)

If Satan could take an Apostle like Peter and *manipulate* him to ruin his testimony and *fail* the Lord, would he not do that to us too? Now, we shouldn't blame every failure on some "evil spirit," but it is possible that...

when we open certain areas of our lives to disobedience, Satan is ready to accelerate our disobedience and the aftermath leaves us bitter and depressed.

This is very important for us to understand. This is why Paul told us to use our special “armor,” unlike king Saul’s physical armor, ours is spiritual and it’s called the *armor of God* (Eph 6). When Paul had to address some sinful behaviors witnessed in members of the church at Corinth, he told the church that if one particular individual would not repent of his sin, they needed to:

“deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” (1 Cor 5:5)

Is it not plausible that this could be what happens when a believer stays in disobedience and does not come to repentance? Satan eventually destroys the life of that unrepentant person. We cannot overlook this *supernatural* involvement when we disobey God. We would be wise to heed Solomon’s words:

*“Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.” (Pro 4:23)*

What Makes a Young Person Useable by God?

As months (maybe even years) went by, king Saul had continued to battle depression and evil thoughts so much, his own servants would talk about it and attempt to find some kind of help for him so their own lives would be easier. It was during one of these sessions that one of them remembered hearing a talented young boy in a field in Bethlehem playing beautifully on a harp. He probably had heard him play as he journeyed through the countryside and would pause to listen

to him play his harp. He would probably speak with him giving the young boy a chance to talk about his adventures while guarding his father's sheep. The servant thought about how soothing and spiritual his music sounded and decided to suggest to Saul that he be brought to play for him and maybe sooth his mind.

What did he see in this young boy that would make him worthy to sit before the king and minister to him in such a way that would comfort him? The answer is in his description of this boy found in the next verses.

“And Saul's servants said to him, “Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre, and when the harmful spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well.” So, Saul said to his servants, “Provide for me a man who can play well and bring him to me.” One of the young men answered, “Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the Lord is with him.” (v. 15-18)

In the months following his anointing and the Spirit coming upon him, David matured and drew closer to God than ever before. The lesson for us here is obvious...

We cannot expect our children to develop properly if they never begin a genuine relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

If we would allow God to work in the lives and hearts of our children, what would that look like? These verses say that this young boy had already demonstrated *skill, courage, character* and *spirituality*. God chose to place him into a field, day after day, and mold his heart into a

shepherd's heart. There, away from the busy-ness of the city, away from the influence of other people, he would learn to commune with God. He would develop the traits that God wanted him to possess in order to take on a much bigger role one day.

Wouldn't it be great if we could see young David's traits in our children? This servant of Saul, just by meeting David a few times, could see God in him. He no doubt knew that God was in him and using him already in his youth. We know that God had blessed him in several important ways. Understanding these traits in David can help us raise our children, by God's grace, to remain *connected* to Christ throughout their lives and develop these same traits.

- First, was *skills*, musical skills, as David later became the one who made musical worship a large part of Jewish history. God used him to write many hymns of worship in which many were preserved in the book of Psalms. He is even referred to as the "sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam 23:1).
- Second, God gave him *courage* because he no doubt shared with this man how he had to defend the flocks from predators like lions and bears and thieves and would battle them in God's strength and win.
- Third, he revealed *character* by the way he showed respect to this man and resisted being prideful or egotistical about his victories.
- Lastly, he was able to demonstrate *spirituality* by giving God the glory for everything that he was able to do on his job as a shepherd. He left this servant of the king with a very positive impression that would come to his mind just when it mattered most.

We have a glimpse of the heart of this shepherd boy in one of his early Psalms. David, later as a young man, a young writer, reminisced back to his youth and let his heart resurrect the feeling of security and strength he had when he was serving faithfully as a shepherd boy. As he would care for the flock and protect them, he learned to sacrifice for

them, and God would reveal himself to this young shepherd while performing his duties. He shared some spiritual comparisons and characteristics he learned in one of his most familiar Psalms:

*“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.” (Psa 23)*

This young man was not hesitant to share his awareness of the *real Shepherd* of his life. It was because of his awareness of God's *presence* in his own young life that he could stand bravely against any enemy, man or beast. He knew there was no reason to fear defeat or even death when you have God's *protection*. He had been able to put life in *perspective* and enjoy the *peace* of God that “passes understanding.” Think of the spiritual perspective he gained from just being faithful to the lowly job of a shepherd, while at the same time being able to recognize how God was working on his behalf as he faithfully performed his duties. His long days alone in the fields meditating on God are reflected in his psalms. He understood that the reason God leads us, guides us, protects us and restores us is because

of “His names sake,” and “His glory.” David understood that what God was doing in Him was about Him being magnified, not David. He further reflected those early days spent outdoors under the stars and shared his heart in another of his Psalms:

*“O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (Psa 8)*

What Goes On In The Home Matters

My wife, Cindy, and I began our family while studying for the ministry in college. We were twenty years old and would have five children in eight years. Those early years of parenting brought many challenges to two young adults, both of whom came from dysfunctional homes themselves. Growing up, I did not have a good example of a father. My dad was a disconnected parent who left the

raising of us kids to his mom, our grandmother. After his divorce, he spent his time working and drinking his life away. Cindy's parents had been separated when we met in high school, as her father decided to have an affair on her mother. They later reconciled, but both of us had little foundation to build a godly home with. I was clueless about how to be a good husband and father. I began reading books, praying for wisdom and watching other godly couples that served as role models for me.

Cindy and I were married right after graduating from high school and left for college to start our own family. As we began to have children, it seemed they came in rapid succession. Our oldest was born when we were twenty years old, and our fifth, and last, was born when we were twenty-eight. During those years of raising our children, one of the things I tried to eliminate from our home was sibling rivalry. Since our children were so close in ages, it was paramount for us to allow each one to succeed or fail on their *own* merits. I did not want one to depend on the other ones for their academic or spiritual successes. Neither did I want any of them to be held up to the standard of one of their siblings. I tried to never say things like, "Why can't you get good grades like your brother!" or "Why can't you do better like your brother!" I knew that this would only serve to build resentment between them. I felt like their best chance for success in life was to set their sights on being the best person *they* could be, and whatever that was I would be satisfied. I never expected them all to be "A" students just for the sake of a grade. I was willing to accept lower grades in school if I saw that they were working hard and that was the best they could do. In fact, I was more satisfied with them bringing a "C" that they worked for and earned honestly, than if they got an "A" but didn't do the work for themselves. That being said, there were times that the tactics I used with raising my children failed them. I think that my passive-aggressive style was, at times, more for the establishing of my position of authority than the critical development and growth of my children's faith. Yes, I often played as much a role in *disconnecting* my children's faith than the world ever did. There was not enough time *listening* without being *judgmental and critical* of their thoughts

and their opinions. I had too little tolerance for their *failures* and not enough understanding about how to help them *connect* their behaviors with their faith. Whether we want to admit it or not;

Most parents have to bear at least part of the blame for their children growing up and not having as a priority for their life, staying connected to Christ.

I'm not exactly sure of the dynamic in Jesse's household, but it stands to reason that with eight sons, there was some sibling rivalry. We know when Samuel went to Jesse's house and requested to see his sons, that Jesse did not even include young David in the mix. Why? I think there are a couple of possible reasons for this. First, Jesse may have had an idea that Samuel was sent by God there to anoint the next king of Israel and in his mind, only his older adult sons could possibly be candidates for this royal position. Sometimes when there are multiple children in the family, it's gets difficult to treat each one with an unbiased, unique approach. Many parents tend to show bias and favoritism towards one or two and be either harder or neglectful of the others. Some parents try to make up for deficiencies in their lives by pushing their children to be or do what they couldn't. The lesson for us here?

Parents should never impose THEIR plans for their kids over God's plan.

It's very important to allow God to work His plan out in each child's life and to train them to seek that plan, whatever it may be. Samuel had this kind of a start in life. His mother Hannah had sought God for a child and promised that if He would give her one, she would give him back to God. She did that very thing:

"For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore, I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord." (1 Sam 1:27)

As Christian parents, we would do well to have this kind of a heart with our children. God knows what's best for them. Let Him work within them as He seems fit. I have met many parents who attempt to live their lives through their kids. This is not a healthy practice. It hampers children from being able to find their own strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes in life. Sports was very important to my dad when I was growing up. In fact, we rarely found anything to talk about other than sports. As I raised my own sons, I determined to expose them to different sports but to not emphasize it or push them into playing unless they demonstrated a desire themselves. They all found their specific athletic likes and dislikes. When my youngest son, Matthew, was young and discovered a guitar that his cousin had left at our house, he began messing around with it and trying to learn how to play. I watched and listened for weeks while he strummed away in the basement. I went down to talk to him once and saw that he had taken paper and drew out the chords so he could learn and practice them. I got the idea that he was serious at that point, so I purchased him his own guitar and offered to get him lessons. As they say, the rest is history as he went on to get a degree in music and is a worship leader at his church.

Don't Hold Them Too Tight

The second possibility for why Jesse didn't have David there with his other sons for Samuel is that he could have simply been, like many parents...

*Too possessive and protective of his children, especially
his last and youngest son.*

There's a term that's used today for these kinds of parents, *helicopter parents*, because they always hover over their kids and never let them out of their sight and are extremely overprotective. We have a generation of kids and young adults today who have difficulty

handling *failure of any kind*, because their parents have sheltered them from experiencing it in anything. In an attempt to shelter this generation of young people from hardships, failure, trials or disappointment in any form, we have harmed them. This generation of few rules, vague definitions of success, participation trophies and safe zones is not being taught how to handle challenges and trials in life. We are raising a generation of *conviction-less* and *direction-less* young people that have been so sheltered they cannot even tolerate those who simply have differing opinions and therefore need *safe zones* to hide. Maybe Jesse wanted his youngest son to stay in the fields with the sheep because it was safer. After all, it was wartime in Israel and most of his other sons were accustomed to having to go out to battle. He may not have wanted his youngest to be put in danger like the older ones were doing. But, fortunately, God worked on his behalf and despite Jesse's shortsightedness, David was anointed by Samuel and started on his path to doing God's will with his life.

When I served as a youth pastor in the late 80's, I had a teen in our youth department that always wanted to participate in rallies and trips with the other teens, but his mother wouldn't allow him to attend these events. I approached her one time, at the request of the boy, and tried to discuss the benefits of her son joining the other youth on these trips, only to face stiff, unbending opposition to the idea. After several minutes of discussion, she abruptly shut it down saying, "You may as well just forget about it, my son's not going anywhere that I can't go with." She was very over-protective. I have known other families who will actually do their child's homework and projects for them if necessary, so that he/she would continue to get good grades. After all, it doesn't make a good Facebook post to say, "Yahoo! My child failed math again this semester!" If children are not allowed to experience small failures in life while growing up, they may never learn how to make corrections with their behaviors later on.

*Instead of teaching our children that times of failure and struggles serve as reminders for the believer to **reconnect** with God, we intervene ourselves and they miss this important area of spiritual*

growth. Like David and Solomon, experiencing failure in my life served as learning experiences for me to understand what my limitations are and what I must do to stretch my potential and guard against future failures in specific areas of my life. We are losing this battle in this generation.

Not Too Loose Either

Later in life, David would experience much heartache of his own by failing to raise his own children consistently before God. In fact, the greatest distractions that David had from doing God's bidding in Israel, came from his *failings as a father and a husband*. Yes, this "sweet psalmist of Israel" and the "man after God's own heart" was nothing more than a man *constantly struggling* with his own family issues. His failure as a dad came about because of several reasons. One was this:

He more than likely stayed too busy with his personal responsibilities as king, to pay attention to his family.

His kids needed the personal touch of a dad not just the home of a king. While raising my kids in a pastor's home, I tried to remain a dad and interact as a dad, not just as their pastor. Separating these roles in my mind turned out to be extremely difficult. Trying to raise my children and deal with their problems but at the same time maintain the image of a pastor with his home under control. I confess there were times that I was harder on my children than I should have been because I was afraid of what others might think about *me* if they misbehaved too much. I found myself being very demanding and, at times, unrealistic. David didn't make this mistake, he went the other way. We don't have any record of his children's behavior when they were young, but after they grew older we do. His oldest son, Amnon, raped his half-sister, Tamar and to complicate the situation more, *David did nothing about it*. So, his third son, Absalom, decided he was

going to have Amnon killed for this act. Two years later it happened. Then, after several more years passed, he would form a rebellion and try to steal the throne away from his own dad.

When David first heard the news of what Amnon had done to his daughter, the Bible says, *“he was very angry”* (2 Sam 13:21). But I repeat, he did nothing to his son for this wicked behavior. In fact, the Greek version (the Septuagint) of the Old Testament adds this phrase from an ancient manuscript of this book, *“But he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, since he was his firstborn.”* This leads us to another failure of David as a parent:

He was a parent who failed to administer discipline properly to his children.

He became *angry* but offered nothing in the way of discipline for this heinous behavior. When my children were young, I lost my temper in anger way too many times. I wish I could say it was always anger in which I “sinned not,” but that wasn’t the case. I developed some bad habits that when I look back, wish I had caught them and changed them sooner. I found myself apologizing to my wife and kids on many occasions. It was David’s son who later wrote these proverbs:

“Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.” (13:24)

“Chasten thy son while there is hope and let not thy soul spare for his crying.” (19:18)

“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.” (22:15)

“Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod.” (23:13-14)

“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.” (29:15)

“Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.” (29:17)

From the time my children could understand my words, I began to teach them to obey the sound of my voice. I’m sure they can all remember the consequences of ignoring me when I spoke to them. They will also remember times of being sent to my bedroom to wait for me to come and administer some form of punishment for misbehavior. I held to this belief - if my children were allowed to disrespect my authority, it would probably reinforce the impulse to ignore *other* authorities such as the law, employers and God. The problem is that we have forgotten the real purpose of discipline. It is a teaching and molding opportunity designed to help a child *understand* the danger of continuing in behavior that is disobedient or rebellious. Children need to be taught that sinful behaviors will always *disconnect* us from God and need to be confessed and our relationship restored. This is what God does for us when we practice sinful behaviors. David understood the process well, so he wrote...

*“Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD,
and whom you teach out of your law, to give him rest
from days of trouble” (Psa 94:11)*

What are the Lessons from These Failures?

Remember, God is never caught by surprise. He is and always has been sovereign and in control. His grace permits us to make decisions independently of Him if we so choose. After all, like an old preacher once said, “*grace wouldn’t be grace if it couldn’t be abused.*” God uses failure as opportunities to teach us about ourselves. He wants us to learn about our weaknesses and our strengths. He wants us to learn

in the times apart from His will in order for us to *realize, repent and return* to Him. God knew absolutely everything that was going to happen in David and Solomon's families. He knew every area in which they would disobey and bring failure into their lives, yet, *He still called them and used them to accomplish His will*. What were the lessons that these men learned from their failures as parents? I can see David sitting at the bedside of his son during the late hours and sharing from his heart about life and lessons he gleaned from God. I can almost see a starry-eyed young boy looking admirably at his warrior father as he sensed a sincerity and tenderness for him. He then retired to his own room in the castle and while the thoughts were still there, penned these words from his heart to his son:

“Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table.

Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. The LORD bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life!

*May you see your children's children! Peace be upon
Israel!" (Psa 127-128)*

David came to the realization later in years as he reflected back on his life, that the real strength of the Christian home is *keeping God central*. He writes this Psalm to cause everyone to think about how they proportion their time. Notice he uses the word *vain* two times in this passage. A warning that would come back to haunt Solomon later in his life. David wants people to meditate on the fact that there are way too many things that steal our time from our family. Precious time that we can never get back. Many years later when the Apostle Paul would write to the believers in the church, he instructed them to:

*"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but
as wise, making the best use of the time, because the
days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but
understand what the will of the Lord is." (Eph 5:16-17)*

David had reflected on the early days of being a King and having children and came to realize that a lot of what he spent his time on was just *vanity* and it cost him the relationship with his children. There are not many parents that cannot look back without some regrets involving their parenting. When I think back to the years I spent as a dad and a pastor, one of the things I regret, is being involved in a church movement entrenched in legalism. I spent years holding my children to standards that were intended to produce holiness in them, but instead *stimulated* the attraction to the things I tried to isolate them from. It wasn't until later in my parenting years that I learned "*not being conformed to this world*" (Ro 12:2) was really *insulating our children with love and truth from the Scriptures and not isolating them from the world*. It's our job to prepare our children to be *released* from our control into the world around them. That's what David implies with his visual of the archer and the arrows when he wrote:

*“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children
of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver
with them!”*

Think about how important arrows are to the archer. He must always keep them *sharp* and *straight* and keep them *close* in order to be ready for battle. When it comes time to use them, he must be ready to *aim* them in a specific *direction* and then *release* them towards the target. This is how we are to be raising our children - preparing to release them into their own lives and trusting they'll hold onto God.

Solomon also learned a lesson that he shared in his Proverbs to help parents. Beside the verses above about disciplining children, he made this very important statement.

*“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when
he is old, he will not depart from it” (Pro 22:6)*

This advice from Solomon has been misused by many well-intentioned, Christian parents through the years to mean that they must *indoctrinate* their children sufficiently, so they won't depart from the faith. Although I certainly believe that we're to spend time teaching our children about the Gospel of Christ and the truths of the Bible, that's not what this verse means. The word *train up* means to “create a thirst.” Therefore, we must be raising our children and spending enough time with them as they develop to see what God is doing in them. Figure out their strengths and weaknesses, their likes and dislikes, their loves and hates in order to help them understand what God has equipped them to do, then *stimulate* that area within them. Help them pursue their specific calling like a *thirsty* person would pursue a drink of water. *They must be exposed to the truth of God's grace always available to them.*

I'm convinced that David reflected on his own parenting days and realized that he was simply too *short-sighted*. He realized how very easy it was to get caught up in the day-to-day routines and activities

and lose sight of the direction his children were heading. Missing out on hearing those conversations in the home that reveal their fears, their challenges and their temptations. Having made many mistakes while parenting,

I imagine David must have felt like it was a breath of fresh air to be able to look across his table as an aged man and see some of his grandbabies sitting there across from him. Listening to them giggle and fuss and be able to reach over and pat a head or rub a cheek. He realized at some point, as a father, the joy of sharing his home and his substance with his children, his in-laws and his grandchildren. It makes sense that God would use David to write from his heart and say to all of us:

*“Your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. The LORD bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life!
May you see your children's children!”*

Let's Reconnect right now

“Father, thank you for your wonderful grace. Thank you for undeserved mercy. Thank you that you have entrusted us with family life. I ask that you give wisdom to those of us raising children right now and who may have a young David in their home. Give strength to parents who have failed or are failing to raise their children for Christ. Forgive us for guiding our families selfishly thinking we know better than you. God give us hearts of understanding and pour your grace on us, that we may bring you glory with our lives and by how we are living as a family. Too often, Lord, we are overwhelmed by the task of raising our children and trying to be godly examples and we give up or we give in too often.

Lord, I don't know how to be a godly example for my family, I need your help and mercy in my life. For those I have already failed, please forgive me and give me grace to restore relationships and to be an example of patient godliness. Lord, move in my family to accomplish your goals, but begin in me. Pour your grace on us so we also can see God in our children and in our grandchildren. Let us never forget to give you the praise for everything in our lives and help us to never be silent in speaking your name to all who will listen. For Jesus' sake, Amen"

CHAPTER 2

GRACE through the Disappointments of *Life – From Hero to Zero*

Born in Jamaica, in 1961, Ben moved to Toronto, Canada with his mother when he was 15 years old. He was a gifted athlete and had found a trainer that would work with him to help him maximize his natural abilities. He amazed everyone with his speed, and it appeared that there was no ceiling to his potential. Faster and faster he became as he won more and more competitions. He eventually became nationally known throughout Canada and was enlisted to represent the nation around the world in track events. The more he pushed himself, the closer he came to world record speeds. By 1987, Ben Johnson had established himself as the fastest Canadian ever and had broken all Canadian, Commonwealth and World Cup 100-meter records. He had earned the right to represent Canada in the 1988 Seoul Olympic games. He proceeded to smash the world record with a 9.79 in the 100-meter and won the gold medal, easily beating his biggest rival, American Carl Lewis. He put on what CNN has described as “a display of power and awe never before seen in track and field, against the greatest field of sprinters ever collected.” He reportedly told the media that he believed his record would stand for 50 or 100 years. Within days, he was stripped of his medal after drug tests showed he had banned steroids in his urine. Canadians were horrified that they had been represented by a cheat, and that they had been celebrating a hero who was a fraud.

The years following, found him travelling around the world trying to find employment. He went to Libya to work for the family of Muammar Gaddafi, coaching the dictator’s son, in his effort to play professional football. He had to witness firsthand the horrors of the Gaddafi regime for the three years he was there. He went to Japan where he earned money participating in stunts like racing against turtles and having weights fitted to him and racing a swimmer by

running at the bottom of a pool. He once raced against a racehorse and a stock car in a charity race. He probably sank to his lowest when he appeared in a TV commercial for an energy drink called Cheetah Power. The ad featured someone calling to him and asking, “Ben, when you run, do you Cheetah?” and he responded, “Absolutely, I Cheetah all the time.” Probably his lowest point was allowing a faith healer, Bryan Farnum, to convince him that he was a reincarnated pharaoh and that Carl Lewis was a reincarnated enemy from thousands of years ago. Farnum then co-authored a book titled *From Seoul to Soul*. Now this story is not one we should gloat about. We shouldn’t be too quick to feel smugly about Ben’s misfortune and collapse. We shouldn’t even be the ones to say, “He did it to himself!” We shouldn’t be that way because, we are the same way. Just on different levels. And so was David.

A Star is Born!

After a period of service to king Saul serving as his armor-bearer and personal musical therapist, David returned to his home in Bethlehem to resume his duties as the family shepherd. Unfortunately, the political situation in Israel continued to worsen. The Philistines and their king Achish, continually challenged Saul and his armies and Israel was slowly losing heart in this war. The death toll was mounting, and Israel was barely holding their own. The Philistines were brutal, fierce warriors while Israel was a worshipping nation who fought only as Yahweh commanded and for His purposes. The Old Testament names many different battles that occurred between these two people groups, and 1 Samuel 17 describes the most famous of them all. There, straddling the valley of Elah, were mountains on either side in which encamped these two battling armies. During this particular time of battle, the Philistines tried a different tactic. Thinking they had a “we can’t lose” hand, they sent their greatest warrior, a giant man, a physical anomaly in any age, named Goliath, to challenge the Israelites to a “one-on-one battle.” These kinds of

“gladiator” type battles were not uncommon in those days. But the stakes in this challenge was. The Philistines greatest warrior against Israel’s and the loser would be the servants to the winner. For forty consecutive days this challenge was presented, and no one in Israel’s army would take the challenge, even their best warrior, King Saul himself, who you remember was also, “head and shoulders above everyone else.” Now this is where the story takes an unusual turn.

As this challenge was being issued daily, David, who had been back shepherding his father’s flocks, was sent by Jesse to bring food to his brothers who were on this mountain with the others. David obeyed his father and started the journey to the battle site. *What happens next sets off a chain reaction of events that will change David’s life forever.* What is about to happen was written down in the pages of this book by Samuel, inspired by God and read for thousands of years. Christians and non-Christians alike know this story, it’s characters and many details of this event. It has been used to challenge people to attempt great tasks in their lives - tasks that seem insurmountable. It has provided a challenge to many others who have been challenged by adverse circumstances to stand up and fight. It has provided endless numbers of sermons and books and has been analyzed spiritually, physically and psychologically in every way imaginable. Unfortunately, many sermons miss the whole point of the story. You see, what was about to happen next was not even about David - *it was about God.* What I want you to see is that this event, as heroic as it was, was simply the first step in the sovereign plan of God to further mold David’s heart into a King for His people.

David had already been *anointed king*, but he was far from ready to be *coronated king*. There is quite a difference between the two events. Remember this.

*We can be saved and possess the Spirit of God, but still
be far from God’s intended place for us in His plan.*

This event is crucial to our understanding as to how God prepares us for growth, service and surrender to His will. Every day in the life of Christians we come face to face with situations that will require quick decisions and even reflex behaviors. When we find ourselves in a tough situation, whether it's an opportunity to make a stand for Christ with our verbal testimony or simply by resisting temptation, it's important to remember God allows these situations *to mold us into His image*. These situations are never to be taken for granted because they serve as opportunities to strengthen our connection with God or if mishandled, they could *disconnect us from God*.

David finally arrives at the battle site just in time to hear the warrior, Goliath, stand on the slope of the canyon and challenge the men of Israel to a one-on-one battle, for the forty-first day in a row. David is shocked! Maybe it was the naïve nature of his youth, but he looked at the cowering men around him, including his brothers, and said, "*Why doesn't someone fight this man? He disrespects our God!*" The bold attitude that he now reveals, should be an example for everyone to follow in their daily lives. The rest of the story is well known as David defeats the warrior Goliath, breaking the confidence of the Philistines and propelling the Israelites to defeat their enemy as they retreat. He cuts off his head and takes his giant sword back the camp of Israel as a reminder of God's power to deliver His people.

What Makes Someone Want to Fight a Giant?

How was this young boy David able to win such a lopsided match amid this drawn out battle of these Jewish people? Let me share a few observations about this young David that enabled him to win this battle. If we can identify the characteristics that made him ready for this huge challenge, we will be better able to understand why he fails later. We tend to inject our impressions into the story and make it more than what it actually was. This story was about God ruling a nation and raising up a man who would trust Him enough to put Him first. The

first thing that stands out with David is that he wanted to fight this battle with Goliath because:

His relationship with God gave him a uniquely spiritual perspective on life.

He looked at the challenge of Goliath *differently* than the others. He saw it not just as an attack on Israel, but as a defiance to God, as he cried out “*who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?*” David’s heart was still brimming with faith in God and His purpose for the nation of Israel. If you’re a believer, can you remember back to a time after you first met Christ and was saved from the pending doom of your sin, how precious He was and how full of faith you were after the Spirit of God came into your life? David no doubt has had months and possibly years since his anointing by Samuel, to think and dream about what his future kingship will look like and how God was going to use him. This challenge would merely serve to be a preparatory event for him. How many times do we get into trouble and fail when the tests or temptations come into our lives because *our spiritual perspective* on life has faded? We tend to drift along with the crowds and choose neutrality over conviction, then we find ourselves adapting the philosophies of those without God or a concern for His will. We become content to do nothing as God’s will is trampled and ignored by the world around us. I believe David had reflected on this exact danger when he penned these words.

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord knows the

*way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will
perish.” (Psa. 1)*

In his heart he understood the connection between our *perspective on God and our actions*. He knew that the quickest path *away from God* is one that finds us joining hands with the *ungodly* and trying to blend with their philosophies and activities that are counter to God’s will. As David entered the scene on the mountain that day, he was *offended* that his God was being *defied* and no one there would stand up for Him. The second trait I see in this story that helped David win this battle was that:

*David used sensible planning to defeat this
enemy of God.*

He was not oblivious to understand how God had been preparing him. Some people picture David as a bumbling youth who had more *faith than sense*, and he simply charged this giant intending to throw rocks at him to beat him. That’s not how it happened at all. God had been preparing him for a long time and David knew it. He had become a master “slinger” as well as a “singer.” A common mode of defense in those days, according to historians, was to use a sling that was twirled in super-fast circles and then would release a projectile towards a target at speeds of over 80 mph! Soldiers who mastered this type of weapon could even hit birds in flight. When David was reprimanded for volunteering to fight this giant warrior, he sensibly rehearsed his battle resume to show how he had battled in the past. It’s not to be overlooked that it was no small feat to fight a lion with bare hands as he had also done! So, when king Saul reluctantly allowed David to be the nation’s representative to fight Goliath, he offered David his personal armor for protection. David *sensibly declined it* because it was not something he had used before and would simply weigh him down and get in his way. Besides, the armor was more for those who were going to go into close hand-to-hand combat. This was not David’s plan. Which brings me to a third principal:

David was relying on the supernatural presence and power of God to defeat the giant.

As he headed down the side of the mountain to meet the giant, the text tells us...

“Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.” (17:40)

David was going to battle him in a way *he* was accustomed, with the sling and stones. There has been much speculation and supposition as to why he chose five stones. As a skilled “slinger” it was most likely because he figured he wouldn’t have time to hit him with more than five stones before the giant would be able to get close enough to smash him. David knew in his heart, that this battle was God’s and he was going to need God to put some power behind his human efforts or he was going to be killed anyway. David had entered into this battle with a deep, personal reliance on God and His power to help him win this battle. Listen to him again:

*“The **Lord**...will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” (v. 37); “I come to you in the **name** of the **Lord** of hosts.” (v. 45); “This day the **Lord** will deliver you into my hand...that all this assembly may know that the **Lord** saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the **Lord's**, and he will give you into our hand.” (v. 46-47)*

You know the rest of the story, as it turned out, it only took one stone. Now, there is a possibility that God had so purposed to honor David’s courage and bring glory to His own name in this physically mismatched battle that even if David had closed his eyes and stumbled when he slung the rock, God was going to direct it to the exact spot to drop this giant warrior so David could then slay him while on the

ground. There are always going to be those times in our lives when we must simply choose to follow God when we're tempted, otherwise, simply because it's what we're called to do and allow Him to work as He desires. In the difficult testing of our faith, we must trust the sovereign power of God to work on our behalf.

When Friends Turn to Foe

Several months before I resigned as pastor from my last church, I had started seeking God's will for the church and direction for my own life. We had purchased a large church building that had been used by the county park district for years and restored it to a church again and sold the small building we were meeting in. It was a large, beautiful church building with a wonderful large auditorium and a lot of space to accommodate much growth. We were all happy and proud of our new opportunity in the community. After about a year in this building, I noticed a subtle change in the perspective of many of the members. The spirit of the church was changing, and I felt it was becoming displaced. I spoke openly and candidly to the church about an upcoming revival that was approaching and just a few weeks away and sought the church to seek God with me for Him to show us his will and give us direction for this ministry. I set aside special prayer times to meet and pray for His leading and the week before the revival I was in the church auditorium every evening expecting others to join hearts with me in prayer. To say the least, I was discouraged. Most of those meetings consisted of myself, my son Nathan and maybe one or two others would come intermittently. I continued to pray and encourage people to come out and seek God with us, but to no avail.

The revival began and after a week of services, the attendance and spirit continued the same way the prayer meetings had. As the pastor, I was disappointed and discouraged. I couldn't shake the feeling that I had hit a wall as their pastor. The events following the revival over the next few months were not just a challenge to me, I had survived many

of those, but rather a confirmation to me of God's will. The spirit of many of the members continued to decay and was replaced by a spirit of *discontentment* and *criticism*. Unfortunately, much of it was turned on me. I received emails challenging my leadership and even questioning statements I was making in my sermons.

Now let me clarify something, I'm very aware of the fact that I was not a great pastor or even a good administrator of the business of the church. I left most of that to others and tried to keep focused on expositional teaching and preaching. But I was baffled by this rather quick turn of events. Since I served the ministry as a bi-vocational minister, working another job to provide for my family, I took no salary for my services. Yet, I was criticized by people who had been serving faithfully and appeared loyal to me in the past, for not giving enough of my time or caring enough about *the church building*. For some of these members, it was a mystifying 180-degree turn, from loyal service to painful attacks on me personally. I had critical letters left on my desk before services, the deacons were questioned about my leadership tactics and I eventually was told by a concerned member that some of the families were going to either leave or call a meeting to have me removed. Now, I know that this happens to pastors and this type of activity occurs in churches quite often. Again, I had survived discontented members in other seasons of my pastoring over twenty-five years, and just kept going, but these issues came after I had been specifically seeking God for His leading in my life. Preaching to people who formerly stood by me and expressed support, to seeing them sitting there resistive and unimpressed by my sermons was very hard for me. This was a very difficult time for me personally. Right or wrong, I felt confirmation in my heart that I had His answer. I had reached my end in leading this church and the personal attacks just confirmed it and I resigned and still spent months hearing remarks from my new critics.

In the days and weeks following his victory over Goliath, life took an unexpected turn for young David as a different kind of battle began. Yes, he could beat even the toughest pagan warriors for God, but what

if he gets attacked by people close to him? Specifically, someone he trusted, respected and admired. This is where David's life takes its first unexpected turn to confuse and challenge him. *This is when his God connection is tested by real life challenges and temptations.* David was tested in the days following this great victory in some rather strange ways, but none-the-less challenges that would require life changing decisions on his part. After defeating the giant, king Saul brought David into his circle and he became very close to Saul's son Jonathon. He served the king well leading his men into battles against the Philistines with great success. In fact, God had so prospered David in his tasks, that the Bible says:

"As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. And the women sang to one another as they celebrated,

***"Saul has struck down his thousands,
and David his ten-thousands."***

And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, "They have ascribed to David ten-thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?" And Saul eyed David from that day on." (18:6-9)

King Saul started becoming very jealous of David because his fame and popularity was growing more and more in the nation, he therefore decided to reward him with the opportunity to marry into his family by offering one of his daughters to him, Michal. But sadly, he just wanted David close to him so he could eventually kill him. A word to the wise, the presence of *envy* and *jealousy* among family or close friends, will do nothing but create pain and division in relationships. When David came to realize what Saul was up to, it set in motion a chain of events that would challenge his own decision making and his relationship to God. Now, I must admit, my faith has been challenged

by circumstances in my life, but I have never felt my life threatened. That's a serious challenge that isn't experienced very often in America. What was he going to do?

A Different Test and a Different Response

Let's remember that a believer can find themselves sinning spontaneously and impulsively when they fail to respond correctly to temptation. I wish it weren't so, but this happens to me much too often. I took time to review the narrative of David's life and his rise to fame, because we need to look at the decision-making process that he used which reveals the *anatomy of spiritual failure*. It involved a gradual process of moving away from God that will be seen in David's life repeatedly and can be seen in our responses to life today.

After wrestling with the thought of how king Saul could be so angry with him that he would want him dead, David enlists his best friend, Jonathon, to try to find out if his dad was really plotting to kill him. After Jonathon himself was almost killed by his own dad's anger for not being able to find David, he warns him, and David then shifts the transmission of his spiritual life into reverse. The events that occur over the next few months in David's life, reveal a pattern of *disconnecting from God* that is directly linked to his spiritual failure. In a spiritual reversal of the principles that gave him victory, his first step *backwards* during his disconnection was this:

David lost his spiritual perspective during his trials.

It seemed like it was easier to maintain perspective when the enemy was from far away, but when the battle came from within his circle and during his day-to-day activities, his perspective faded quickly. His relationship with God faded into the background. The young man who once *fearlessly walked right toward a giant*, is now ready to run away out of *fear* of Saul, his own king. With Goliath he was able to see this

enemy as a *defiance to God*, but he now sees Saul as an *unbeatable foe*. The courage and faith that took him down the mountain to confront Goliath has dissipated as he *flees to avoid facing Saul's wrath*. Why was this situation so much more difficult for young David? Why was he so afraid? It was because of this important principle:

The emotional pain that accompanies attacks from close relationships or companionships can temporarily blind us to God's perspective and disconnect our communion with Him.

During a period of living *disconnected* from the Lord, bad things can happen. Many a Christian man or woman, who would never think of renting pornographic movies, have instead fallen into sexual sin with someone *familiar* to them in their work place or social sphere. Or, how about the Christian who is living faithfully for God until their spouse leaves them or they lose their job or some other major derailment in life, and in the aftermath, they turn and *disconnect from their faith* and fall away from the Lord.

In response to his alarming news, David runs toward the place where Samuel lived, Naioth, to get advice and counsel from him. The exact nature of the counsel he sought is not given, only that he stayed there with Samuel at his “school of the prophets” camp for some time. Maybe he needed his anointing confirmed. Maybe he spent time praying with Samuel and seeking God’s leading. We’re not given any details regarding their activities, but this move by David reveals that, at this point, he is still fighting to stay connected to God and strong in faith.

Unfortunately, during my twenty-five years as a pastor, I assisted several families who were trying to live faithfully for Christ and have a godly home, when one of the spouses broke their marriage vows and the home, instead, crumbled into *faithlessness*. I worked closely with several individuals experiencing this very deep *emotional pain* and

tried to help them maintain their spiritual perspective and *faithfulness to God* despite the tragic event, to no avail. Some would struggle for a short period of time and eventually *reconnect* with God to repair their lives, but there were others who ran away from God during their struggles, *disconnected from Him*, and to my knowledge, have yet to return to Him. What was the difference between these people? Keep reading and I'll show you later in the chapter.

David's plight doesn't stop here. After Saul got the news as to David's location, he sent men to Naioth to bring him to him. But, to protect him, as the men would approach the city, God would reach down and *change their hearts* so that they would *praise and prophesy* and leave David alone. Three different groups were sent, with the same result. Saul himself finally decided to go get him, and God did the same to him, only for an even longer period of time. Even with this miraculous evidence of God's willingness to protect him, David's faith began to weaken as did his *spiritual perspective*. Then David takes a second step backwards as we see...

*David's newly devised plans now make **no sense** with this battle.*

David briefly and secretly returns home to speak with Jonathon. He confides in him to find out if his dad is still intending to kill him – he was. So, David takes off again and this time goes to a place called Nob where Ahimelech the priest and eighty-five other priests and their families lived. But what was special about this particular town was that it was the place David had brought the sword of Goliath after he killed him. Here's where it is evidenced that David is no longer using the *good sense* that God gave him. He requests a sword from the priest and when Ahimelech tells him he has none except the sword of Goliath that David had brought as a memento of God's miraculous power, he requested to take this giant sword. A sword much too heavy for him to use skillfully for his protection. He is in a panic and trusting the physical instead of the spiritual.

Yes, the young man who refused to wear his own king's armor because he hadn't worked with it before, made a 180-degree turn! He has forgotten already how God equipped him and used him in his past battles. Not even the mention of Goliath's sword could jog his memory into *thinking sensibly* about his abilities. Another evidence of his altered thought processes surfaces here. *David is now willing to lie to get what he thinks he needs.* This evident loss of judgment by David, once Saul found out, got all those priests and their families murdered. How often do we, in the midst of a difficult time, turn to lies, deception and manipulations in an attempt to turn the odds in our favor? For the Christian, this will always worsen our situation.

With David's *spiritual perspective blurred*, and his *good sense blemished*, he now takes one more step backwards from his faith. Once David accepted the fact that he had no future being around King Saul, he continued his flight away from him. What he did next was dangerous and reckless. He fled from Nob in another direction altogether, he ran right into the *enemy's territory*. Wait David! Stop! Think, pray and consider what you're doing! This is not going to turn out well for you. David, while *disconnected from his faith*, has his good sense *blurred* and his decisions are reflecting it. He has forgotten that his God is protecting him. He has forgotten that God anointed him to be the next king and God is not weak and unable to get him there. In fact, in his current state of fear he has completely forgotten about God delivering him from lions, bears and giants. His memory has been clouded by his fears.

“And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath.” (22:10)

So David made the erratic decision to go about twenty-five miles southwest of Nob into the *enemy's backyard*, to Gath a Philistine city, in order to flee the “presence of Saul.” His next step backward was this:

Filled with fear, David loses his awareness of the presence and power of God in his life.

With his eyes no longer on God, and his thinking no longer making sense, David became so consumed by the *fear of Saul*, that he sought to hide from him in the last place Saul would think to look for him, among the enemies of Israel. Alas, another fleshly solution by David that over the course of months left him disconnected, empty and deeper in trouble than before. He was so consumed with not being in *Saul's presence* that he failed to seek *God's presence*! But like most decisions that Christians make when they start living in their flesh and not seeking God, this decision too turned into a terrible mess. Many Christians wind up in failed circumstances in their lives, primarily because of eroding faith that *distracts* them from God and affects their sensible decision making.

David entered Gath, the key city of the Philistines, thinking he could hide out from Saul until things cooled down in Israel, but instead he is recognized immediately by the Philistine people. Because of his spreading reputation in battle, they say:

“Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands’?”
(22:10)

He immediately began thinking that now King Achish is going to kill him because he was the warrior from Israel that killed his greatest warrior, Goliath, and hundreds of other soldiers in battles. Here's what it says in Samuel:

“And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. So, he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. Then Achish said

to his servants, “Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?” (22:12-15)

So, David flees from Saul’s presence out of fear for his life, enters Gath and is recognized by the people and again panics, this time out of fear of Achish. What does he do now? He’s a man caught between two worlds and cannot find peace in either one! Sound familiar? When a believer loses the desire to be in *God’s presence* and turns to the world for security, it brings emptiness to their heart and life pursuits. What to do, what to do? He came up with a scheme to play as if he lost his mind and in turn, King Achish would hopefully have pity on him. It worked and Achish had him removed from *his presence* thinking this hero had gone crazy. How can a Christian prevent coming to a situation like this in their life? We may not pretend to be crazy, but learn this: *During a spiritual disconnection, a Christian will often pretend to be someone they’re not.*

Like the Apostle Peter hanging out around a burning fire and *pretending to be someone he wasn’t*, and even swearing to add credibility to his disguise, we find ourselves doing and saying things that contradict who we really are. *When we lose our spiritual perspective on life, start rationalizing fleshly behaviors and neglecting our spiritual life, we are on the move away from God just like David was doing.* As we walk through many of the difficult times in David and Solomon’s life, we will see this pattern repeated often.

Remember, the reason I am writing this book is not to simply review the biographical information of David and Solomon, nor to just point out their failures, but to *seek solutions for those times we find ourselves disconnected from our the Lord.* One of the important things that must be established after reviewing their failures and their victories, their weaknesses as well as their strengths, their high points and their low points, is the *scriptural evidence of their genuine faith in*

God. David, you will recall, is referred to as “*A man after God’s Heart*” (Acts 13:22). But after reading about how *he ran away from God*, how can it be said that he was pursuing “after” God’s heart? David serves as a type of New Testament believer. We find ourselves in the same dilemma almost daily. Having a heart that wants to pursue after God and feet that want to run away from Him at times. We find the answer to this dilemma in the Psalms he wrote in the aftermath of those tough times. Every Psalm David wrote can be placed somewhere on the timeline of his life and connected to his experiences, good and bad. Let’s look at some specific Psalms and how they *reflected and revealed* his heart for God during the period we just read about.

Written Evidence of a Heart Pursuing God

First, during the challenging months *after* his victory over Goliath, we find him searching his heart and pouring it out to God in his song writing. The lyrics to his Psalms serve as a type of diary in which he would put into words his most intimate thoughts about his life and his relationship with God. I imagine that he spent many evenings weeping and grieving over his predicaments as well as his own failing faith and disappointing behaviors. I don’t think there exists a genuine believer who hasn’t done this at some point in their walk with Christ. Listen to David as he pours out his heart to God in some of the Psalms he wrote specifically during those challenging days. Please, don’t just read them, *really listen* to the words of his heart after he fled to Gath and the Philistines seized him and held him in order to take him to king Achish.

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me? All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil. They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life.” (Psa 56)

Have you ever faced a challenging circumstance or temptation and responded in a sinful or foolish way and later regretted it? How did you respond later? Did you go to God with honest conversation about your poor decision? David came to regret his decision to flee into Philistine territory. He realized the huge mistake he made and turns his heart back to God and *recommits his trust in Him*. He remembers that this is the only time he is truly fearless of his enemies. If you kept a journal of your most intimate times with God, how would they read? He emphasized his real needs to God in this Psalm by crying out...

“Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly... This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.” (v. 9-11)

At some point after his poor decision, he had cried out for *God’s grace* to help him as his decision put him in the very hands of his enemies. He knew he needed God’s grace now. Before he was even done writing the Psalm, he was given a wonderful *confidence* that God was “for him” and he was praising Him for His grace. *He was reconnected!*

A second Psalm was written during these events, after he was recognized, captured and waiting to be brought to King Achish acting like a drooling, crazy man who lost his mind. We again find him praying to God until a great peace comes over him and he takes out a quill and parchment and begins to express his heart’s gratitude with another song. Here’s what he wrote after a time alone with God:

“I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him and

*delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!”
(Psa 34:4-8)*

I can almost see him, after being sadly dismissed by the king as a waste of time and then being put out of that city, and again sitting alone with his thoughts and reflecting on how close he came to death because of his stupid decision to go there. Reflecting on the “fear of man” that caused him such a panic and he no doubt reflected on the foolishness of that feeling when he serves such a powerful God who sends His angels to guard his children. He continues with his writing and adds these inspired, melodious words:

“When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.” (Psa 34:17-19)

This is the heart of a man desperate and *totally aware* of his need for God and His help because he kept messing things up. Again, read the thoughts of his heart after he found out that Saul had all the priests at Nob murdered after he left there.

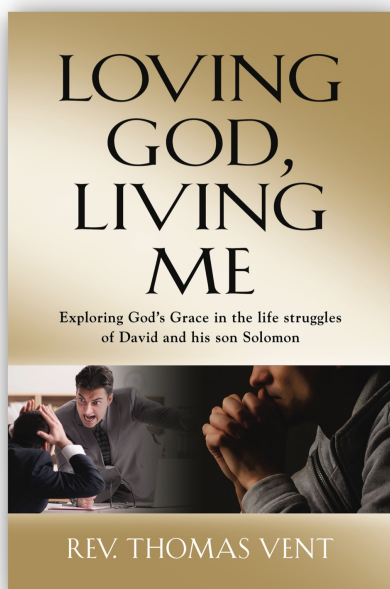
“Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God endures all the day. Your tongue plots destruction, like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit. You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking what is right. Selah You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue. But God will break you down forever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah The righteous shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him, saying, “See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in his own destruction!” (Psa 52)

He felt great shame and pain because of the destruction caused by the “mighty man,” who was King Saul. David warned that, “God will break you” and as a result “the righteous shall see and fear.” He recognizes now that he must always make “God his refuge.” What lessons have you learned from your failures, poor decisions and sinful actions? Do you feel the brokenness of sin? When you fall into sin or fail in living for God as you should, does it break your heart and draw you back to *reconnect* your faith in Him?

Let's Reconnect right now

“Lord, I thank you for your grace. I praise you for being present with me when I have turned my thoughts to other things. Thank you that your mercy endures forever. Father forgive me for the many times I wander from you. For the many times I hide my faith as if I was not your child. I have failed you with my weak testimony and sought security from this world. At times the world and people around me have too much control over my decisions and my emotions. I need your grace to help me stay faithful to you and faithful to living every day with my heart fixed on you.

Lord, often my eyes are pulled from you and your will, because I am cowardly and fear pain and failure. I become filled with fear and my faith withers. I compromise my values, my testimony and my God. Lord, forgive me and restore me with your grace and help me focus my heart on you and return to seeking relationship with you. Help me faithfully seek you in your Word. Lord, I also fail to pray and seek your face when challenges come my way, please give me a steadfast spirit and to keep my eyes focused on you. I will give you all the praise and will not fail to share my faith with all who will listen, for your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen”



This book takes a realistic journey through some of the most puzzling events of the lives of David, Solomon and their families in order to better prepare us to handle the temptations they faced and better understand the depth of God's grace when we fail.

LOVING GOD LIVING ME

Exploring God's Grace in the life struggles of David and his son Solomon

by REV. THOMAS VENT

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