



17: Seeking God in Prayer

(1 Sam 22:3-23:18)

*When life feels out of control, do you seek God first—or only when there's nowhere else to turn?
Today we watch David depend on God in desperate times
and discover how prayer can move us from panic to peace.*

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* All Scripture is from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) unless otherwise noted.

The story of **Saul** opens with a humble young man seeking Yahweh, but regresses to a power hungry, prideful man who cared more about *his glory* than *God's glory*. **David**, on the other hand, has been seeking God's glory as a young shepherd boy & now as a mighty warrior. His humility is intact. His prayer life is thriving and he models how we might be people seeking God in prayer.

CATCH THE CONTEXT

1 Samuel 22:1-4

So David left Gath and took refuge in the cave of Adullam. When David's brothers and his father's whole family heard, they went down and joined him there. In addition, every man who was desperate, in debt, or discontented rallied around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him. From there David went to Mizpeh of Moab where he said to the king of Moab, "**Please let my father and mother stay with you** until I know what God will do for me." So he left them in the care of the king of Moab, and they stayed with him the whole time David was in the stronghold.

Then David took his family & men and traveled to **Mizpeh** in the territory of Moab - a 60-70 mile hike following rugged travel routes. Given the harsh Judean wilderness and the steep climb into Moab, David's group (including his elderly parents) would have taken 4-5 days minimum, possibly up to a week if they moved cautiously or avoided Saul's patrols. David's great grandmother was Ruth, the Moabite.

Moab is listed as an enemy of King Saul (1 Sam 14:47), but David's father's family came from this place and David believed his folks would be safe from Saul here.



1 Samuel 22:5-8

Then the prophet Gad said to David, "Don't stay in the stronghold. Leave and return to the land of Judah."

So David left and went to the forest of Hereth. Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. At that time Saul was in Gibeath, sitting under the tamarisk tree at the high place. His spear was in his hand, and all his servants were standing around him. Saul said to his servants, "Listen, men of Benjamin: Is Jesse's son going to give all of you fields and vineyards? Do you think he'll make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? That's why all of you have conspired against me! Nobody tells me when my own son makes a covenant with Jesse's son. None of you cares about me or tells me that my son has stirred up my own servant to wait in ambush for me, as is the case today."

You can hear the fear in Saul's voice - the belief that *EVERYONE*, including his own son Jonathan, is against him. They must have all been trembling knowing that Saul could demand their immediate death. But a familiar name pops up with some important information for Saul, information that will send him sniffing the trail that will lead him to the same place David have previously gone, to the priest at Nob.

1 Samuel 22:9-19

Then **Doeg the Edomite**, who was in charge of Saul's servants, answered, "**I saw Jesse's son come to Ahimelech** son of Ahitub at Nob. Ahimelech inquired of the LORD for him and gave him provisions. He also gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

The king sent messengers to summon the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub, and his father's whole family, who were priests in Nob. All of them came to the king. Then Saul said, "Listen, son of Ahitub!" "I'm at your service, my lord," he said. Saul asked him, "**Why did you and Jesse's son conspire against me?** You gave him bread and a sword and inquired of God for him, so he could rise up against me and wait in ambush, as is the case today."

Ahimelech replied to the king, **"Who among all your servants is as faithful as David?** He is the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard, and honored in your house. Was today the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Please don't let the king make an accusation against your servant or any of my father's family, for your servant didn't have any idea about all this." But the king said, **"You will die, Ahimelech—you and your father's whole family!"** Then the king ordered the guards standing by him, **"Turn and kill the priests of the LORD because they sided with David.** For they knew he was fleeing, but they didn't tell me." But the king's servants would not lift a hand to execute the priests of the LORD. So **the king said to Doeg, "Go and execute the priests!"** So Doeg the Edomite went and executed the priests himself. On that day, he killed eighty-five men who wore linen ephods. He also struck down Nob, the city of the priests, with the sword—both men and women, infants and nursing babies, oxen, donkeys, and sheep.

In this way, the prophecy was fulfilled - that Eli's family would be no more. Way back in chapter 2, as Eli failed to stop his sons - Hophni & Phineas - from mistreating God's people and blaspheming His Name. An unnamed prophet showed up with this message:

1 Samuel 2:30-34

Therefore, **this is the declaration of the LORD**, the God of Israel: 'I did say that your family and your forefather's family would walk before Me forever. But now,' this is the LORD's declaration, 'no longer!

For those who honor Me I will honor, but **those who despise Me will be disgraced.** Look, the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your forefather's family, so that **none in your family will reach old age.** You will see distress in the place of worship, in spite of all that is good in Israel, and **no one in your family will ever again reach old age.** Any man from your family I do not cut off from my altar will bring grief and sadness to you. **All your descendants will die violently.** This will be the sign that will come to you concerning your two sons Hophni and Phinehas: both of them will die on the same day.

1 Samuel 22:20-23

However, **one of the sons of Ahimelech** son of Ahitub **escaped. His name was Abiathar**, and he fled to David. Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. Then David said to Abiathar, **"I knew that Doeg the Edomite was there that day and that he was sure to report to Saul.** I myself am responsible for the lives of everyone in your father's family. Stay with me. **Don't be afraid**, for the one who wants to take my life wants to take your life. **You will be safe with me."**

Abiathar's entire family is dead, because his father's providing for David & his men had cost him and his family their lives. In reality, this isn't David's fault. It's SAUL'S FAULT! But that doesn't keep David from feeling the weight of this wickedness. David assures Abiathar that he is now safe & welcomed. The author of Samuel jumps back a few days, just before Abiathar joins the team - we'll see him show up again in a moment.

1 Samuel 23:1-2

It was reported to David, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and raiding the threshing floors."

So **David inquired of the LORD:** "Should I launch an attack against these Philistines?"

The LORD answered David, "Launch an attack against the Philistines and rescue Keilah."

Keilah was a walled city that was a rich agricultural area in Saul's territory of Judah, fairly isolated from other cities in Judah and thus more prone to being attacked without immediate backup on the way. This happens during the wheat harvest, so the raiding of the threshing floors has to deal with the Philistines stealing their wheat product.¹

When this **was reported to David**, it led him to prayer - asking Yahweh what he should do about it.

1 Samuel 23:3-4

But David's men said to him, "Look, we're afraid here in Judah; how much more if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!" Once again, **David inquired of the LORD**, and **the LORD answered him**, "Go at once to Keilah, for I will hand the Philistines over to you."

David's troops are concerned as they were already trespassers in **Judah**, the land of Saul. And now David wanted to attack a superior Philistine fighting force with his rag-tag army of outcasts? But Yahweh once again **answered** David's prayer and gives them the go-ahead to rescue **Keilah**, because He will **hand the Philistines over** to them.

1 Samuel 23:5-6

Then David and his men went to Keilah, fought against the Philistines, drove their livestock away, and inflicted heavy losses on them. So David rescued the inhabitants of Keilah. **Abiathar son of Ahimelech fled to David** at Keilah, and he **brought an ephod with him.**

Now David has a small army of about 600 (1 Sam 23:13), & a prophet (Gad) & a priest (Abiathar). The priest - Abiathar - son of the slain high priest - would use the **ephod** with the breastplate that held the Urim & Thummim - 2 stones or sticks - that when tossed they likely revealed a "yes" or "no" kind of answer from Yahweh. (Num 27:21, 1 Sam 28:6).

¹ Robert D. Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel, vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 231-232.

1 Samuel 23:7-8

When it was reported to **Saul** that David had gone to Keilah, **he said, "God has handed him over to me**, for he has trapped himself by entering a town with barred gates." Then Saul summoned all the troops to go to war at Keilah and besiege David and his men.

Note the difference between David & Saul. *Saul CLAIMS God is on his side but doesn't seek God's wisdom in prayer.* But David does...over and over again.

Notice too, how Saul is not grateful that people in his kingdom have been protected from the Philistines. Here we see the difference between David - a savior of the people, and Saul - a slaughterer of the people (priests at Nob). Saul is fixated on killing David.

1 Samuel 23:9-12 When David learned that Saul was plotting evil against him, he said to the priest Abiathar, **"Bring the ephod."** Then **David said, "LORD God of Israel**, your servant has reliable information that Saul intends to come to Keilah and destroy the town because of me. Will the citizens of Keilah hand me over to him? Will Saul come down as your servant has heard? LORD God of Israel, please tell your servant." **The LORD answered, "He will come down."**

Then David asked, **"Will the citizens of Keilah hand me and my men over to Saul?"** *"They will,"* the LORD responded.

Once again, **David asks. Yahweh answers.** Again, note that while David is the unquestioned leader, David recognizes that he is not the ULTIMATE LEADER- Yahweh - to seek His wisdom regarding the group's next steps.

Will the citizens of Keilah hand me and my men over to Saul? How could these people do such a thing - handing over the men who had protected them? Simple. They knew that harboring a fugitive could end in *THEIR DEATH*. They rather hand David over than face Saul's wrath.

1 Samuel 23:13-15a So **David and his men**, numbering about six hundred, **left Keilah at once and moved from place to place.** When it was reported to Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, he called off the expedition. David then stayed in the wilderness strongholds and in the hill country of the Wilderness of Ziph. **Saul searched for him every day, but God did not hand David over to him.** David was in the Wilderness of Ziph in Horesh when he saw that Saul had come out to take his life.

While Yahweh had answered the prayers mentioned in the text, there were no doubt prayers that David lifted that had NOT yet been answered - or certainly not the way he wanted them answered. Don't you think David asked God to remove all his enemies, give him peace, and let him go home? But God didn't answer with a "yes". That's when it's tough to trust God, isn't it? It's easy to trust when He answers "Yes!" but not as easy when the answer is "No" or the answer is in a holding pattern. Once again, there is a Psalm attributed to David during these difficult days, as David contrasts where his hope is compared to Saul/Doeg the Edomite.

Psalm 52:7-9 Here is **the man who would not make God his refuge**, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, taking refuge in his destructive behavior. But I am like a flourishing olive tree in the house of God; **I trust in God's faithful love forever and ever. I will praise You forever for what You have done.** In the presence of Your faithful people, **I will put my hope in Your Name, for It is good.**

God is with David through it all. God's faithful people are with him too. And despite running from Saul & his army, Saul's son, Jonathan, makes his way to encourage his dear brother David.

1 Samuel 23:15b-18 Then Saul's son **Jonathan came to David in Horesh and encouraged him in his faith in God**, saying, "Don't be afraid, for my father Saul will never lay a hand on you. **You yourself will be king over Israel**, and I'll be your second-in-command. Even my father Saul knows it is true." Then **the two of them made a covenant in the LORD's presence.** Afterward, David remained in Horesh, while Jonathan went home.

What kind of humility is this? Jonathan could be fighting to secure his spot as the next king, but instead, he recognizes God's hand on David and takes 2nd place, celebrating God's call on his dearest friend, David. This WILL be the last time David & Jonathan will ever see each other on this side of eternity. And the very last time they are together, Jonathan encouraged David to trust God and once again affirm their **covenant** to protect one another, with Yahweh as the witness.

Through the difficult days you can know that God is near and God hears. Further, you can know that God's faithful people are with you too! 1,000 years later Jesus is teaching near the Sea of Galilee and He encourages His audience to be those who are SEEKING GOD IN PRAYER as well as being brothers and sisters who might help answer that prayer.

Matthew 7:7-11 Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Who among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him.



► Write down the needs you are asking God to answer.

► Write down the date God answers your prayer.

Matthew 7:12

Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

As our Heavenly Father wants to provide for the needs of His people, so God wants YOU & ME to provide for each other. In fact, we are to consider how WE might be an answer to prayer as we help meet a need.



► Share a Prayer Need

► Pray for God's answer & consider how you can help.

heretoserveyou

Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

- * Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Christy** (850-673-9764), **Caleb** (864-315-8015), **Gary** (850-673-2507), **Betty** (850-973-3266), or another follower of Jesus soon!
- * Or call our **deacons & wives: Alan & Christy Androski** (850-464-1428), **Steve & Debbie Bass** (850-673-7952), **Noel & Patricia Barnes** (813-767-2881), **Derek & Emily Beaty** (813-763-4421), or **Tim & Joni Hughey** (850-464-1156).

Discussion questions

These discussion questions are designed to help you LIVE what you LEARN with your Family, Friends, or Small Group.

CATCH THE CONTEXT

1. When have you been tempted to take matters into your own hands instead of seeking God's direction?
2. Why do you think Gad told David to "return to Judah" even though it seemed more dangerous (22:5)? What does that reveal about trusting God's plan over personal safety?
3. Compare David's humility with Saul's pride. How does prayer (or lack of it) expose what's really ruling our hearts?

SEEKING GOD'S GUIDANCE (1 Samuel 23:1-6)

1. What stands out to you about how David prays in 23:2 and again in 23:4? What can we learn about persistence in prayer from that?
2. When David's men doubted, he didn't argue—he prayed again. How could that shape the way you lead your family, team, or ministry?

LISTENING AND OBEYING (1 Samuel 23:7-13)

1. How does Saul's version of "God talk" (v.7) differ from David's prayerful dependence?
2. Why do you think the people of Keilah would turn on David even after he rescued them? What can that teach us about expecting gratitude—or not—from people we serve?
3. How do you stay faithful when obedience doesn't lead to comfort or applause?

PRAYER IN THE WILDERNESS (1 Samuel 23:14-18)

1. What does it say about God's care that He sent Jonathan to encourage David right when Saul was closing in?
2. Jonathan tells David, "Don't be afraid... you will be king." Who has spoken courage into your faith when you were weary? How can you do that for someone else this week?
3. Their covenant friendship ends with a shared trust in Yahweh. What spiritual friendships or accountability relationships help keep your prayer life alive?

FEET2FAITH (Application & Reflection)

1. When has God last answered one of your prayers clearly?
2. What prayer have you been praying that hasn't yet been answered—and how can you keep trusting God in the waiting?
3. This week, what's one specific prayer request you'll write down and one tangible way you'll help meet someone else's need as an answer to prayer?