

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

January 25, 2026

A Heart After God – The Story of David

“Merciful Heart”

1 Samuel 24:1-15

Rev. Mike Fordham

A mother ran into the bedroom when she heard her 7-year-old son scream. She found his 2-year-old sister pulling his hair. She gently released the little girl's grip and said comfortingly to the boy, "There, there. She didn't mean it. She doesn't know that hurts." He nodded his acknowledgement, and she left the room. As she started down the hall now it was the little 2-year-old sister's turn to scream. Rushing back into the room to see why she was screaming the mom asked, "What happened?" The little boy replied with a mischievous grin, "She knows now." We live in a world caught in a cycle of unending conflict. Our natural tendency is that when someone hurts us, we automatically hurt them back which leads to ever escalating conflict where everyone loses and is hurt. For those who have a heart after God, instead of retaliating, we treat even our worst enemies with hearts of mercy. David showed that he had a heart after God through the miraculous mercy he showed to King Saul's multiple attempts to have him killed.

For those of you who are on Facebook, you know that there is a part of your profile where you can indicate your relationship status. Some of the options from which you can choose are: single, in a relationship, engaged, married, separated, divorced, widowed, or one that I find interesting, it's complicated. Definitely the relationship between King Saul and David could best be described as, it's complicated. It wasn't always like that, though. Saul was king over Israel for about 40 years. Due to King's Saul ever-increasing corruption and rebellion against God, about 20 years into Saul's reign, David was secretly anointed to be the next king of Israel. Sometime after David miraculously defeats Goliath, he becomes a national hero. David then gets a job to work for King Saul as a musician, armor-bearer, and successful military leader. David even became King Saul's son-in-law when he married Saul's daughter, Michal, and David was also the best friend of King Saul's son, Jonathan. In time though, Saul became jealous of David, knowing that David was the new king in waiting, Saul's jealousy intensified to the point that for about 13 years David was forced to go on the run from King Saul as Saul tried numerous times to have David killed. Their relationship was definitely complicated! Please read carefully about what transpired on one of those occasions where Saul almost caught the fugitive David.

1 Samuel 24:1-15

After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the Desert of En Gedi.”² So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats.

³ He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. ⁴ The men said, “This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’” Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. ⁵ Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. ⁶ He said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord.” ⁷ With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

⁸ Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, “My lord the king!” When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. ⁹ He said to Saul, “Why do you listen when men say, ‘David is bent on harming you?’ ¹⁰ This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, ‘I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the Lord’s anointed.’ ¹¹ See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. ¹² May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. ¹³ As the old saying goes, ‘From evildoers come evil deeds,’ so my hand will not touch you.

¹⁴ “Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Who are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? ¹⁵ May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand.”

DAVID’S HEART OF MERCY

Saul was so intent on finding and killing David that he and 3,000 of his elite soldiers were searching for David. All this manpower to find one man. Saul was out of his mind with murderous rage. Saul got a tip that David and 600 of his men were hiding in the area known as En Gedi.

Incidentally, if you would like to see En Gedi for yourself, next year we are joining other churches from the Global Methodist Church in Florida and going to Israel, the Holy Land. Missy and I will be hosts for our group and would love for as many of you who would like to join us. Among many of the Biblical sites that we will visit from both Old and New Testaments, we will actually visit En Gedi and also see the region where David killed Goliath. It will be a once in a lifetime trip. We are having an informational meeting next Tuesday evening, February the 3rd. Join us in person or if you cannot make it in person then join us online.

En Gedi is fed by a spring that still flows today. In the arid wilderness, this spring made it a life-sustaining oasis. The area is known for its wildlife, especially wild goats (ibex), which may be why the oasis is called En Gedi, which literally is translated as “Spring of the Kid (Goat)”. It sits within the region known as the Wilderness of Judah, a desert region full of canyons and cliffs. Despite being in a desert, En Gedi flourished with vineyards and lush vegetation. It was a desert oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea. The many caves in En Gedi were the perfect place to hid out as a fugitive on the run as David and his men did.

As King Saul and his men were looking for David, King Saul pulled over to the rest stop of En Gedi and went into one of the caves to relieve himself. It was their version of a stop at Buc-ee's or Busy Bee. Little did Saul know that David and his 600 men were hiding in that same massive cave. Seeing Saul in the cave, David's men told David that God has set up this opportunity for David to end their running and hiding in fear by killing Saul. David, didn't see it that way. David quietly went up to the King and somehow was able to cut off a piece of Saul's royal robe and quietly backed away without the king noticing. David's men had to have been in shock that David let Saul live. For years they had been on the run from the terror of being captured and killed by Saul for having done absolutely nothing wrong. Saul deserved to be killed and yet David chose to treat Saul with radical, undeserved mercy. David was so close to God, had such a heart after God, that he treated Saul with the heart of God, which is with a heart of mercy.

There are countless examples in the Old Testament of God patiently treating His people with unbelievable grace and mercy. Over and over again, the Israelites deserved God's wrath but over and over again, God did not give them what they deserved but instead offered them His grace and mercy. One example is the time when the Israelites worshipped a golden calf while God was giving them the 10 commandments. Moses shattered the 10 commandments and God invited Moses back onto Mount Sinai again, a second time, for God to once again give him them a second, fresh, new, set of 10 commandments. When God spoke to Moses, God described Himself in this way in Exodus 34:6-7, “⁶ The Lord passed in front of Moses, calling out, ‘Yahweh! The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.⁷ I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children and grandchildren; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations.’” God's first reaction when we have rejected Him, rebelled against Him is not to quit on us, reject us, or to lash out at us with His

holy, righteous wrath. Instead, God patiently offers us His compassion and mercy by holding off His anger and giving us His unfailing, forgiving love. That is how David treated King Saul by patiently offering Saul God's compassion, mercy, and forgiving love. He gave Saul what Saul did not deserve.

Jesus has taught us to do the exact same thing even with the worst of our enemies as he taught in *Luke 6:27-28*, “²⁷ ‘But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you.²⁸ Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.’” Jesus also said in *Matthew 5:45*, “⁴⁵ ‘In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven.’” David acted with a heart of mercy because he had a heart after God, which gave him a heart like God. We have the heart of God when we treat people with a heart of mercy. To add to this *James 2:13* tells us, “*There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you.*” Also, *Ephesians 4:31-32* says, “³¹ *Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.³² Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*” Is that how we react to others when we are treated harshly?

Please listen carefully to this excellent quote from Alexander C. DeJong who wrote, “To forgive someone involves three things. First, it means to forego the right of striking back. One rejects the urge to repay gossip with gossip and a bad turn with a worse turn. Second, it means replacing the feeling of resentment and anger with goodwill, a love which seeks the other's welfare, not harm. Third, it means the forgiving person takes concrete steps to restore good relations.” When someone says something harsh to us, gossips about us, lashes out at us with anger, having a heart after God, a heart of mercy, will lead us to forgive them by forgoing the right to strike back at them. Instead, we will give them what they do not deserve, God's patient, unfailing love of compassion, grace, and mercy. Finally, we will do what we can to treat them in such a way as to bring reconciliation with them. David didn't just treat Saul with mercy; David even went so far as to try to repair his relationship even with the murderous King Saul.

TRUSTED GOD

We also learn from David's heart after God, that he was able to treat Saul with undeserved mercy because he **Trusted God**. After David cut off a piece of King Saul's royal robe, his men still wanted to kill Saul, but he would not allow them to do so. After King Saul left the cave, David risked it all and came out of the cave and called out to the king and humbly bowed low to the king. David then tried to talk some sense into the king by showing him the piece of the robe proving that he could have killed him but instead showed him mercy even though the king had been unjustly trying to kill him. Then David concluded by saying to King Saul in verse 15, “*May the Lord therefore judge which of us is right and punish the guilty one. He is my advocate, and he will rescue me from your power!*” David understood that there was only one true, righteous, perfect judge of humanity and that is the one true God. David was not to be the judge of King Saul and take his life. His role was to show God's mercy and leave the judgment

up to God who will now or later bring about justice and punish the guilty if they do not repent. Thinking about it, David could have easily justified taking King Saul's life. He could have said that it was an act of self-defense to kill the man who was unjustly trying to kill him. He could have justified taking revenge on Saul for all the torment Saul put David, his family, and all David's faithful warriors through. David could have even gone so far as to say God had promised that he was going to be the king and maybe this is the way God would make it happen. That was the line of reasoning David's men gave him for exacting revenge upon King Saul. Instead, David trusted God to bring judgment upon Saul. David trusted God to make him the king in God's timing. David knew his role was to simply trust God and follow God's lead. This empowered David to treat Saul better than he deserved, with God's merciful love.

From 1965 to 1997, President Mobutu reigned as the dictator and President of the Democratic Republic of Congo. But after global political changes, Mobutu was forced out of power and the country collapsed and descended into conflict and chaos. British pastor Mark Meynell tells the story of his good friend Emma, a man from the Congo who witnessed many atrocities committed against his friends and family members. It got so bad that Emma, his wife, and three daughters fled east on foot. Weeks later they arrived in Uganda as refugees, with nothing. After a few months of a miserable existence, Emma walked past a local seminary and sensed that the Lord was calling him to ministry. The family had been living in one room, without water or electricity, and had just enough to pay for one meal every two days. Meynell said that one evening they met in the seminary's tiny library and started talking. As Emma opened his heart and shared the story of the violence and injustice he had witnessed, he started to openly weep, despite the fact that African men never cry in public. Then Emma said these sobering words, "You know Mark, I could never believe the gospel if it were not for the judgment of God. Because I will never get justice in this world. But I couldn't cope if I was NEVER going to see justice done." Meynell commented, "We in the West often recoil from God's justice for a very simple reason: We've hardly had to suffer injustice. But most people around the globe recognize that God's justice is praiseworthy and great. Of course his mercy and redemption are even greater, but we need his perfect justice as well." Praise be to God that He is both the one true God of justice and mercy.

If we truly know God as the God of justice and mercy, we are then empowered to treat everyone with God's mercy, even those who we might call our enemies, or even those who are constantly testing our patience. The next time we are in conflict with our spouse, siblings, friends, coworkers, fellow church members, with others in our community, let us be people after God's own heart by trusting God and treating everyone according to what God teaches us to do in *Romans 12:17-21*, ¹⁷ *Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.* ¹⁸ *Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.* ¹⁹ *Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, 'I will take revenge; I will pay them back,' says the Lord.* ²⁰ *Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads."* ²¹ *Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.*"

As you have listened to this sermon God may have brought someone to your mind with whom you are in conflict, or maybe you realize that you tend to react to others harsh treatment by giving them back harsh treatment, or you may even be convicted that you have been the one who is treating others harshly, God is speaking to you to draw near to Him. Invite God to change your heart to be a heart after God that can treat everyone with a heart of mercy. Only God can change our hearts to be hearts of mercy.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES: (Books marked with * are available to be checked-out in the Asbury Discipleship Resource Center)

- *The Holy Bible* (Several FREE copies are available in the DRC)
- *A Godward Heart*, John Piper
- *Renovation of the Heart*, Dallas Willard
- *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard
- *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, W. Phillip Keller
- *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*, Lysa TerKeurst

Icebreaker Questions

1. “It’s Complicated” Moments

Think of a relationship in your life that could honestly be labeled “it’s complicated.” Without sharing names, what usually makes relationships complicated—misunderstanding, hurt, fear, pride, or something else?

2. Gut Reactions to Hurt

When someone hurts you—especially repeatedly—what is your *natural* first response: avoidance, retaliation, defensiveness, or something else? What usually drives that reaction?

Sermon Discussion Questions

1. David’s men interpreted Saul’s vulnerability in the cave as a God-given opportunity for revenge. How do we sometimes confuse *opportunity* with *God’s will*? How can we tell the difference?
2. Showing mercy to Saul cost David safety, comfort, and continued uncertainty. What do you think mercy has cost you in the past—or what might it cost you now?
3. David chose not to take revenge because he trusted God to be the judge. Why is it so difficult for us to leave justice in God’s hands? What fears surface when we do?
4. How do we distinguish between showing mercy and enabling harmful behavior? How does David’s example help us hold mercy and wisdom together?
5. Alexander C. DeJong describes forgiveness as giving up retaliation, replacing resentment with goodwill, and taking steps toward reconciliation. Which of these is hardest for you—and why?
6. Romans 12:21 says, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” What might that look like in a real, current conflict in your life—at home, work, church, or community?
7. What impacted you most from the sermon? How might you apply this week’s sermon to your life?
8. How might this group pray for you this week?