

The response of Faith

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[0 : 00] Let us now turn to the passage of Scripture that we read. The first book of Samuel, chapter 30. And we may read again at verse 6.

And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him. Because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters.

But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. And I'd like just to place two thoughts before you from our text.

First of all, a dark providence. And secondly, the response of faith. The prophet Amos paints a graphic word picture for us.

Of a man fleeing from a lion. Only to meet a bear. From which Amos implies that he also flees.

[1 : 07] And when he reaches what he assumes to be a place of safety. His own house. Leaning against the wall. Amos doesn't say, but probably panting from the exertion of flight.

Hugely relieved to have reached a place of safety. Only for a serpent. Or a snake to bite him. Amos says as if a man fled from a lion and a bear.

He went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall. And a serpent bitten. He had successfully escaped from these animals.

But he did not see the snake slithering along the wall until it was too late. Now you might use that as an illustration. Of how unexpectedly your providence can change in life.

You can apply it in this way. You may have come through several critical operations. You are on the mend. Only to be struck down by another form of illness.

[2 : 24] Not only in an unexpected way. But when least expected. Or it could be that you have come through difficult and trying providence.

And you think I have survived that. Only to be confronted with a providential event. That shakes you to the very core of your foundations.

An event as you and I have all experienced in these past weeks. Amos' description in many ways. Fits the kind of situation that is set before us in this passage. In the first book of Samuel. David has been a fugitive for quite some time.

He is unable to remain in his own native country. Because of the hatred and pursuit of King Saul. Hounded out of Israel.

[3 : 31] In desperation he and his followers seek refuge among the very peoples. Who are the enemies of the Israelite peoples. The Philistines.

There is to be more fighting. And David and his men expected. Were expected to fight alongside the Philistines. Against his own people.

And you might say that is an indication of the place where David was. Before this providence came into his experience. Perhaps an indication of the spiritual standing of David before God.

In the sense that he was prepared to fight alongside the Philistines. Against his own peoples. And so we are told of the esteem in which the Philistine King Achish held David.

He defends David's reputation amongst those who are suspicious of David and his motives. Is this not David the servant of Saul's King Achish.

[4 : 42] King of Israel who has been with me now for days and years. And since he deserted to me. I have found no fault in him to this day.

He speaks personally to David himself. About the valuation that he places on his service. And as to the reason why David and his men are not permitted to accompany the Philistine army.

As the Lord lives says Achish. You have been honest. And to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign. For I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day.

Nevertheless the Lords do not approve of you. That is those other Philistine chiefs were deeply suspicious of the motive of David.

Now the writer does not tell us whether these suspicions had foundation. Or whether they were totally without foundation. I think it would be understandable if you were a Philistine.

[5 : 58] To be suspicious about what might happen in the heat of battle. And whether David and his men would become a force against them on the inside.

However it is very remarkable that this view is not at all shared by King Achish. Because you have this further affirmation of his esteem for David.

I know he says that you are blameless in my sight. As an angel of God. It is quite striking. The view that Achish had of David.

Nevertheless the commanders of the Philistines have said. He shall not go up with us to the battle. So here is the king regarding David as an angel of God.

Messenger from God. He has this high esteem and valuation of David. But because of the suspicion of the Philistine chiefs.

[7 : 00] He is not permitted to take him with to battle. And so to go back to the illustration that I quoted from the book of Amos.

David and his men are freed from the constraints and the constant surveillance of being among the Philistine army. They were dismissed.

They were dismissed. And allowed to return to the place that had been allocated to them. They set out for Ziglag. It would be a journey of approximately 60 miles.

I do not think that they were faced in any way at the prospect of this journey. Because their wives and families beckoned at the end of the journey.

That is how they looked on it. It was to be a homecoming of joy. They were not to have to suffer in a battle engagement.

[7 : 59] But when they came to Ziglag, the snake had bitten. The writer informs us in the opening verse of the chapter that we read what had taken place.

David and his men are oblivious to this. But we, the readers, are told what had taken place. Ziglag was raided by a group of plundering Amalekites.

They took defenseless women and children. They plundered the place and then they torched it. Ziglag was no more as a community of homes.

There were no homes when David and his men arrived there. There was no happy, welcoming party of wives waiting for them.

There was no sound of children at play. Or the noise of domestic animals. There was only the blackened, smoking ruins of what had once been a vibrant community.

[9 : 06] They were met by the silence of a sudden and overpowering destruction. So that when David and his men looked out over the blackened, bleak landscape that once held their nearest and dearest, they sank down into the bleakness of a dark coal that held no light.

We know, the readers, at that point, that none were put to the sword. That none of those who were captured were put to death. But David and his men at that point were not aware of that.

As far as they knew, they were lost to them. And so we read of how they gave way to the turmoil of grief that flooded their hearts.

David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep. They exhausted themselves with their depth of grief.

Now remember these men were soldiers. They were war veterans. Hopes were abruptly dashed. Their providence that appeared so bright had become gloomy with despair.

[10 : 33] Everything that was so totally contrary to what they expected. The picture that had sustained them on the journey to Siglaug was the very opposite of what they expected.

And the Bible tells us this with great clarity. Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.

Their situation stark, bleak, hopeless. And that of David even more so.

We are told that he was greatly distressed. Everyone deeply grieved. And in the bitterness of grief, they began to look for someone to blame.

That is often what happens. When there is the sheer depth of frustration and sorrow and grief, the blame game starts.

[11 : 45] And these men focused their blame on the leader because he was the obvious target. Here was a group of men. Here was a group of men.

Hundreds strong. They had not been subjected to forced conscription. They had voluntarily joined David in the cave of Adela.

But now in their heart and frustration and bitterness and deep distress. They began to talk of stoning David.

They want a scapegoat. They want a scapegoat. And that is often the way fallen human nature deals with the shattering of dreams, of aspirations.

When our world comes crashing down. When our world comes crashing down. We are looking for someone or something to lay the blame on. For our frustration.

[12 : 45] For our grief. For our sorrow. For our sorrow. For our sorrow. For our sorrow. For our sorrow. These men were no different. They looked on David as the natural scapegoat.

So the situation for David was one that plummeted even further. One might be forgiven for thinking that the situation could not have been.

Could not have got bleaker. This man had been under enormous intense pressure. Hounded from place to place.

He was a wanted man. The king Saul wanted him dead. And you know there may be circumstances in life. Where you are thinking things can't get worse than this.

And then comes Ziklag. The last straw. After the last straw. The psalmist wrote.

[13 : 45] Weeping may for a night endure. And mourn doth joy arise. And in a situation like Ziklag. However it comes about.

You are almost tempted to add another line to that verse of Sam. Disaster strikes. The next afternoon. Reminds me of something I read once.

Of a Christian woman. She was writing to a New Testament translator. Who suffered a great deal from depression. And mental distress.

And in her letter to this man. The woman spoke of her own peculiar trials. She had suffered from polio. That left her disabled in a measure.

Requiring a caliper on her foot. She was dependent on elbow crutches. In order to walk. Systemic gangrene set in.

[14 : 47] That also affected her way of living. Her husband was a political refugee. He developed psychotic tendencies.

So that his whole personality was altered. Between the effects of polio on his wife. And his own altered personality. He decided to leave his wife.

Went to another country. Leaving her with three small children. And no income. Although the Lord provided for her.

When this family grew up. A daughter. Was engaged to be married. And the person to whom she was engaged to be married.

Was killed in a car accident. And you might say. Surely. That was enough of a different. A difficult providence. But then.

[15 : 44] There was Zigglaq. Two years after the boyfriend was killed. The daughter herself. Was involved in a car accident. And she was so badly concussed.

That she had to be put in a place. For the mentally ill. And this woman wrote. In all of this she says. I never knew God to fail. I never knew God to fail. And that's what I found striking.

And that is where you and I have to go. In every adverse situation of life. However dark. However mysterious.

However problematic. However few answers we have. To our providences in life.

[16 : 44] To come. To the God. Who never fails. Times. In all of our lives. When trials appear.

To be overwhelming. Just like the psalmist speaks of. In the first psalm. That we sang together this evening. Where he feels himself to be.

At the very ends. Of the world. Crying out to God. Overwhelmed. Baffled. Perplexed. By whatever. Is his own peculiar situation.

And he's asking for God. And he's asking for God. To lead him. To the rock that is higher than he.

Are there not times in your own life. When that is true of you.

And you know ministers. Are not exempt. Or insulated. From that kind of situation either. When you feel that everything. Is coming to nothing.

[17 : 42] And so I believe. There is a very. Valuable lesson. To be learned in this passage. Many would probably conclude. When they viewed.

A destroyed. Sick luck. A blackened. Bleak. Dismal. Picture. A picture. That destroyed. Every aspiration.

And every dream. That these men had. And then. Would David not. Have been hearing the voice. You're not meant. To be king. Over Israel. You're deluded. You're deceived. It is not possible. That God really intended.

For you. To be king over Israel. And if people wouldn't say it publicly. The devil would whisper it in his ear. If God meant for you. To be king.

[18 : 40] Over. Over the nation of Israel. This would never. Have happened to you. Should you not give up the struggle. Forget about the whole thing.

Well if David had these. Bleak. Discouraging thoughts. The writer doesn't tell us. Nor does he appear to blame. The other men. For their attitude. Towards him.

What the writer does tell us. Is exceptionally valuable. For it seems to me. That the writer is directing out attention. To the very marked contrast.

Between the attitude of the distraught. Embittered men. And that of David. But. David strengthened himself.

In the Lord as God. The significance. Of that little word. But. Cannot be over. Emphasized. Because.

[19 : 40] Here are people who are experiencing. Depths of tribulation. And you know. That is what Christ promised. That you. The Christian would have in the world.

In the world. You will have tribulation. Tribulation. He doesn't say. You might have tribulation. There is no if about it. There is no dubiety about it.

In the world. You will have tribulation. He doesn't spell out. In what way. You will experience it. He doesn't say. What direction. It will come from.

Or what form. Your tribulation might take. He merely draws attention. To the. To the certainty. Of tribulation. And when you are. Confronted by it.

How often. We are surprised. By tribulation. That was true. Of the. Early church. Peter writes. In his. First letter.

[20 : 34] Beloved. Do not be surprised. At the fiery trial. When it comes upon you. To test you. As though. Something strange. Were happening to you. And yet. The truth is.

That we are often. Surprised. When we are. Confronted by trial. Often. We are. We are caught off guard. When trial comes. And so.

Here we have then. Ah. A dark providence. And that takes me. To the second point. The response of faith. Where do we find. The response of faith. Well I have touched on it already.

David doesn't try. To protect himself. From the intentions. Of the men. But what David does. Do is highly significant. He strengthens himself.

In the Lord. His God. Here he is. Surrounded. By men. In a deep. And bitter rage. And their talk of stoning. You might ask the question.

[21 : 32] Did David not suffer like them? Of course he did. The writer is at pains. To tell us. That. That. That. David's two wives. Also.

Had been taken captives. On whatever you might think. Of marriage. In that day. The writer. States. That David's. David's loss. Was just as acute. As the loss of others.

Ahanoam of Jezreel. And Abigail. The widow of Nabal. Their. Deep grief. Their bitter rage. Appears to have blinded them. To the loss.

That he himself. Had experienced. But this man. Had learned. Something that the men. Had not. When I am afraid. I put my trust.

In you. And so we read. He strengthened himself. In the Lord. His God. At that very moment. David had nothing. That he could call his own.

[22 : 26] In a material sense. Apart from the clothes. On his back. The Amalekites. Had gone off. With all. His belongings. His home was destroyed. His wives.

Were posted missing. But whatever was taken from him. There was one. That they could not take. From this man. The covenant.

Keeping God. Still monitoring. The life of David. And although he could not say. My house. My possessions. My wives. He could say.

My God. God. And even although you may. Suffer deprivation. From everything in life. God. Alone. Is sufficient. Even although. Everything is taken from you. God. Is sufficient. That's where your riches are. David.

[23 : 20] At last. You might say. All. At this moment. He was in danger. Of even. Losing his very life. Had these men. Pursued. Their intention.

Totally isolated. Broken by grief. But he hung on to this. My God. Here. Is someone. Who had experience. Of the power. And the sustaining. Grace. Of almighty God. Someone. Who could write.

The Lord. Is on my side. I will not fear. What man. Can do to me. Even though. I walk through. The valley. Of the shadow. I will fear. No evil.

For you are with me. And so. He encourages. Or he strengthens. Himself. In the Lord. His God. The word.

[24 : 15] That is used here. For strengthening. Is the word. That is also used. Of Jonathan. When he met. With. David. In the desert.

Of Zith. And you remember. He went down. And he. He. He. He. Strengthened. The hand. Of David. He didn't just.

Strengthen him. By. Empathizing. With his situation. Or by just. Being with him. You know. Sometimes. When you are in a difficult situation.

To have somebody with you. Who is close to you. It is of help. That is not what the Bible. Sets before us there. It is that he. Strengthened his hand.

In God. In other words. He was. Reminding David. Of the precious. Promises. That had been given to David.

[25 : 08] By the Lord. Promises. That reminded David. Had he forgotten them. That he would one day. Certainly. Be king. Over Israel.

And so you have. The same terminology. Used here. Yes. We strengthen. Each other's hands. And God. By reminding each other.

About. The promises of God. That are especially suited. For one another's needs. And so. When. We read of this here. He strengthened himself.

Remembering. The promises. That were given. And I don't think. It would be. Wrong of me to say. That there was. Many times.

In his life. Before now. Where he had experienced. Experienced. Of. Of the. Of the. The providential dealings. Of the Lord.

[26 : 05] In his life. He could. Look back. To the Lord. His God. You know. Every trial.

Causes. Opposing voices. To ring. In the ears. Of the child of God. One of the voices. Is our circumstances. Telling us.

That our situation. Is hopeless. The other. Is the voice. Of faith. Telling us. That our God. Is sufficient. For our trial. And that's the voice.

That conquered. The fears. Experienced. By David. In this stark. Dire. Situation. He strengthened. Himself.

In the Lord. He's God. It's. Significant. To note. The relationship. That he has.

[27 : 05] In whom. Was he strengthening. Himself. In the one. Who has revealed. Himself. As the ever existent. I am. That I am.

As the one. Who is. From all. Eternity. God. The Lord. Yahweh. The triune. God.

And when. He comes. To strengthen. Himself. He is drawing. On the vast. Resources. Of an omnipotent. God. Whose power.

Exceeds. The powers. Of frail. Men. And women. And so. Here. You see. How. There is this. Vital. Vibrant. Union. Between. David. And God. It is not saying. That he. Strengthened himself. In the Lord.

[28 : 02] God. But in the Lord. He's God. And that is highly. Significant. In the passage. Because it tells you. That faith. Is reasserting.

Itself. In the life. Of this man. And when he is. Thinking of this. Vibrant. Personal. Faith. In the God. Of Israel. Could David not say. This is the God.

Of Abraham. Isaac. And Jacob. The God. Of covenant. Faithfulness. The God. Who has promised. To be with his people. In every situation. And in every circumstance.

Throughout life. Irrespective. Of how bleak. Our providence. Might be. David. Had experience. Of the power.

Of God. Of God. You remember. How he had gone out. Against the giant Goliath. Looking. The. The challenge. Look to be one.

[28 : 58] That. Could never be. One. An unarmed. Virtually. Stripling. Going against. A gigantic. Experienced. Soldier. Fully armed. God. And yet. David. Went out. In the strength. Of the Lord. As God. And you know. Whatever giants.

Encroach. Upon your life. Whatever giants. Confront you. From day to day. In your daily living. The only way. That you can confront.

Your giants. Is in the strength. Of the Lord. Your God. There is no other way. Of overcoming. Your giants. Doesn't matter. Doesn't matter.

How you might. Think. That your own resources. Are adequate. They are totally. Inadequate. You are ill matched. For the giants.

[29 : 54] That confront you. In life. Because you are not. Fighting. With natural powers. You remember. How the apostle Paul. How he.

How he speaks of it. When he. When he. When he counsels. The church at Ephesus. To put on the whole armor. Of God. Until. He.

He counsels them. On this very. For this very purpose. Put on the whole armor. Of God. That you may be able. To stand. Against the schemes. Of the devil. For we do not wrestle.

Against flesh and blood. But against the rulers. The authorities. The cosmic powers. Over this present darkness. Against the spiritual forces. Of evil. In the heavenly places.

How can you hope. To overcome. These forces. In your own strength. You can't. It's a. A virtual impossibility. You cannot do it. You are.

[30 : 48] Early equipped. To take on. These forces. As you are. In and of yourself. Unless you go out. In the strength. And the power. Of the Lord. Your God.

And so. Here. We see. That David. Strengthens himself. In the Lord. In the Lord. His God. It's not enough. For David. To know.

That the Lord. Is God. He has to know. That he is. He is God. It's not enough. For you and me. To know. That there is a God. In Israel. Not enough.

For you and me. To know. That the Lord. Reigns. In heaven. If he is not. Your God. And my God. It wasn't enough. For the apostle Paul. To know. He had to know.

This. This individual. Relationship. With God. Who loved me. And who gave himself. For me. You see. There is that. Individualization.

[31 : 43] Of the relationship. That exists. Between God. Between the apostle. And his Lord. And no believer. Ought to be. Ought to be satiated. That there is a God.

In Israel. That he is the God. Of thousands. Or millions. Or the God. Of our forbearers. Or the God. Of Abraham. But that he is. Your God. That alone.

That alone. Will enable you. To confront. The powers. That confront you. In life. And so. David. David. David. David.

Strengthens himself. In the Lord. His God. Because he knows. He has learned. That the Lord. Is a stronghold. Or a strong fortress.

In the day of trouble. You know. The day of trouble. Is not just one day. It's not a one off. Not even two days. The day of trouble.

[32 : 39] Can be a constant factor. In the lives. Of believers. As they go through life. And the fact. That the Lord. Is a stronghold. Speaks that he is. Like a.

Like a. Like a. Ah. Ah. Ah. Strongly built. Castle. If you like. Where there is protection. Where. The believer.

Can rest. Where the believer. Can feel safe. Where the believer. Can feel protected. As he rests. In God. For the Lord. Knows those.

Who take refuge. In him. And that doesn't speak. Of God's. Omniscient knowledge. It speaks. Of his covenantal knowledge.

Of his knowledge. Of love. The knowledge. With which he. Uniquely knows. The hearts. And the lives. Of those. Who are his. The name.

[33 : 34] Of the Lord. Is a strong. Tower. The righteous. Run to it. And is safe. And that is. What I believe. David was doing. In. On.

On this occasion. And you see. How that is. Born out. Because he sought. The guidance. Of God. You see. That is part of the. Strengthening process. You seek. Enlightenment. And guidance. From God. Here is a man. Who had been following.

His own guidance. And his own wisdom. For a certain. Period of life. But you see. Here. The Bible. Reminds us. He inquired.

Of the Lord. Shall I pursue. After this ban. Shall I overtake them. He came. To the. To Abiathar. He used. The ephod.

[34 : 28] And whatever you think. Of the ephod. And the way. In which they consulted. In those times. It was. The manner. In which they discovered.

The mind of God. It may seem. Privative to us. It may seem. Obscure. To us. Where do you and I. Find the mind of God. Through. The teaching.

Of his truth. Through his own word. Not by some mystical voice. That you expect to hear. Shouting from the heavens. But through. The word of God.

Through constant. Reading. And studying. The word of God. That's how you are going to find. Guidance. Out of the truth. And this man. Is guided. By the revealed.

Will of God. And so you note. The difference. In a man. Who had practiced. Deceit. Secretly. Secretly. Waging war. On the enemies.

[35 : 21] Of Israel. But now. He's obedient. To the revealed. Will of God. And obedience. To the revealed. Will of God.

Is important. In the life. Of the believer. So that the pursuit. Is successful. David recovered. All that the Amalekites. Had taken. David rescued.

His two wives. Nothing was missing. Whether small. Or great. Sons. Or doctors. Spoiler. Anything. They've been taken. He brought them all back. And you know. Remember.

In the reading. Two hundred of the men. Were fatigued. They were unable. To continue. To the recovery. Of their possessions. And the four hundred.

Who did. They hadn't learned. A lot. Had they. They wanted. Just to give them. Their wives. And their children. But the possessions.

[36 : 13] They would keep. For themselves. Does that not tell you. Something of the state. Of the heart of man. Myself. First.

And second. Does it not tell. Something of the greed. That exists. In the heart of man. Will give them. Their wives. And their children. But we'll keep.

The possessions. Because we were the ones. Who were on the battle front. Do you remember. How David spoke.

Here is a man. Who God is preparing. To take on the onerous. Duty of king. Might seem a strange way.

To the. To many. To see how God. Was preparing. And equipping him. For the strains. And the stresses. And the duties. That would devolve.

[37 : 09] Upon him. As king of Israel. And you notice. How grace. And the wisdom. Of grace. Prevails. In the life of David. You shall not.

Do so. My brothers. You shall not. Deal. Like that. With those. Who didn't go. To the fight. And you notice.

How he puts it. With what the Lord. Has given us. He has preserved us. He has given into a hand. The band that came against us.

In other words. It is. This is the doing. Of the Lord. It is all the doing. Of the Lord. He. He. He gave. He preserved.

He delivered. Those who were against us. We didn't do it. But God did. Is that not a solitary lesson there?

[38 : 04] That's just. How the people of Israel. Of old. As they reflected back. On their past. In the dilemma.

Of the present. And as they reflected. On the past. They. They reflected. On what they had heard. What their fathers told them.

What deeds were performed. In these days of old. How. The Lord. Planted them. In the land of promise. And they go on to say.

Not by their own sword. Did they win. Nor did their own arms say. But your right hand. And the arm. And the light of your face. For you delighted in them.

And yet. They are in a perplexing. Providence. At the time. That they speak like this. And they look. They look.

[38 : 58] To the redemption. Of the Lord. At the end of that sound. Redeemers for the sake. Of your covenant love. Or your steadfast love. And that's who it is.

With David here. Irrespective. Of the circumstances. Of those men. Who greedily wish. To retain the possessions.

David. Speaks wisely. Graciously. Lovingly. And with grace. And you know. We too.

Have a priest. A priest. That is. Greater than a beather. One who is spoken of. In the Bible. As a great high priest.

Who has passed through the heavens. Jesus. The son of God. Let us hold. Fast. Restore confession. For we do not have a high priest. Who is unable to sympathize. With our weaknesses.

[39 : 56] But one who in every respect. Has been tempted. As we are. Yet without sin. Let us then. With confidence. Draw near. To the throne of grace. That we may receive mercy. And find grace.

To help. In time of need. I am not going to tell you. That you will find answers. To all your questions. Whatever they might be.

I am not going to say. That God. Will furnish you. With a list of answers. But what I can say is this. That he promises.

Grace to help. He promises grace to help. And faithful. Is the one who has promised. Oh how.

We require that grace. Rather than an answer. For this. Or for that. Or the next thing in life. Grace to remain on our feet.

[41 : 00] To travel through the rigors. Of this life. In this world. Through a world. That is too demanding.

For our feeble frame. Grace to persevere. Grace to have endurance. To persevere to the end.

And this surely is part. Of the strengthening process. Of the Christians. In this life. Only he.

Only God. Only God. Only God. Can give. Bring light. Out of darkness. Only God. Can bring peace. Out of tribulation.

Only God. Can bring good. Out of evil. Is this God. Is it your God. And my God. This evening.

[41 : 58] Is this the one. At whom. We are strengthening yourselves. Or are we sinking. In the morass. Of self-pity.

And despair. And blackness. Are we being uplifted. To look to the one. The unchangeable God. The one who alone.

Can equip. And lead. And guide. Through. Life. Let us pray.