



Unit .11

Session .02

A Fugitive Spares His Rival

Scripture



**1 Sam. 24:1-4,8,
11-17,20-22**

1 When Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the wilderness near En-gedi.” **2** So Saul took three thousand of Israel’s fit young men and went to look for David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. **3** When Saul came to the sheep pens along the road, a cave was there, and he went in to relieve himself. David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave, **4** so they said to him, “Look, this is the day the LORD told you about: ‘I will hand your enemy over to you so you can do to him whatever you desire.’” Then David got up and secretly cut off the corner of Saul’s robe. ... **8** After that, David got up, went out of the cave, and called to Saul, “My lord the king!” When Saul looked behind him, David knelt low with his face to the ground and paid homage. ... **11** “Look, my father! Look at the corner of your robe in my hand, for I cut it off, but I didn’t kill you. Recognize that I’ve committed no crime or rebellion. I haven’t sinned against you even though you are hunting me down to take my life. **12** “May

the LORD judge between me and you, and may the LORD take vengeance on you for me, but my hand will never be against you. **13** As the old proverb says, ‘Wickedness comes from wicked people.’ My hand will never be against you. **14** Who has the king of Israel come after? What are you chasing after? A dead dog? A single flea? **15** May the LORD be judge and decide between you and me. May he take notice and plead my case and deliver me from you.” **16** When David finished saying these things to him, Saul replied, “Is that your voice, David my son?” Then Saul wept aloud **17** and said to David, “You are more righteous than I, for you have done what is good to me though I have done what is evil to you. ... **20** “Now I know for certain you will be king, and the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. **21** Therefore swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father’s family.” **22** So David swore to Saul. Then Saul went back home, and David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Intro Options



Main Point:
God's people are to trust
in Him for justice and
show grace to all.

Option 1

Have your students come up with a list of bitter enemies. They can come from history, from movies, from books, from sports rivalries, from wherever (e.g., Sith-Jedi; Alabama-Auburn; Batman-Joker).

Break your students up in pairs or trios. Assign each group one of the rivalries. Tell them to enact a skit wherein one of the enemies ends up, in a surprise move, at the mercy of the other enemy. What would happen next? Then have them do a second skit with the same scenario, but where the enemy with the upper hand in the last skit is now the one at the mercy of the other.

Afterward, debrief: did each enemy respond the same way? Why? If one responded differently, why? Who showed mercy and who did not? Why? Which actions were most admirable? Why?

Segue into how in today's lesson features Saul being given into the hand of David, his sworn enemy. We'll see how David handles this situation.

Option 2

Have your students come up with a list of bitter enemies. They can come from history, from movies, from books, from sports rivalries, from wherever (e.g., Sith-Jedi; Alabama-Auburn; Batman-Joker).

Break your students into pairs, trios, or individuals. Instruct the students that their job is to try to get one of the rivals to make peace with the other one. Moreover, they are to try to achieve a peace that will last indefinitely, not simply a temporary truce. They can either share their plan verbally or act it out in a skit (or a storyboard if they are artistically inclined). If they are in trios, one person could role-play mediating, and the other two could role-play being the rivals.

Debrief their plans. Which of the two rivals did they try to make the peacemaker? What was their strategy? Did they try to get one of the pair to be more humble and to take initiative? How did they seek to make for lasting peace?

Use their answers to segue into how David sought peace with Saul even though Saul was actively hunting him.

TEACHING PLAN

The seeds of jealousy in Saul's heart bloomed into an outright quest to find and destroy David. Saul would stop at nothing until the hero-turned-fugitive was dead. Ever since the battle with Goliath, Saul's jealousy and suspicion had only grown stronger. He wanted to rid Israel of David, thereby protecting his place as king over the nation. Despite the prophecy from Samuel that God would hand over the kingdom to someone else (1 Sam. 15:26-29), Saul persisted in delaying this outcome for as long as he could. He still had the threat of the Philistines breathing down his neck, but even that would not detract him from pursuing David.

Read 1 Samuel 24:1-4.



This scene is telling because it shows a clear picture of how Saul—even with three thousand armed men—was still powerless against David. Just as his spear always seemed to miss, his plot against David fell short as well. The very cave he entered to relieve himself is the place David and his men were hiding. The text is clear that Saul was at the mercy of David. He was alone, he was vulnerable, and none of his men knew that David was in the cave. David could easily have taken Saul's life. In fact, his own men encouraged him to do so. But David did not take Saul's life. Instead, without Saul even knowing it, he cut off a portion of his garment. However, as soon as David did this, his conscience struck him (v. 5). He refused to lift his hand against the Lord's anointed (vv. 5-7). For David, this would be sinning against the God he loved. Although the pieces and circumstances seemed to be in the right place, David saw through it all and discerned that taking action here would be wrong. It was not an opportunity for God to show His faithfulness to David but rather for David to show his faithfulness to God.



- **What dangers do we experience if we rely solely or too heavily on circumstances as we make decisions? What can we do to safeguard ourselves?**
- **How can we involve others in the decision-making process to take advantage of their wisdom? Who in your life can you turn to for wisdom?**

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 40, DDG)

God is Just

God establishes standards for His moral creatures that are in accordance with His righteousness, and His moral creatures will be judged according to those righteous standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be an injustice if God were not to uphold His righteousness, for such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. Since humanity has sinned by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God took it upon Himself to make provision by being both just and the Justifier of those who place their faith in Christ (Rom. 3:25-26).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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1 Samuel 24

1-4. Not only did David desire to be king, but in this moment he had the ideal opportunity to finally remove Saul, the obstacle between him and his future. To make matters more tempting, David's men encouraged him to take Saul's life. These faithful companions of David interpreted this situation as most of us would: not fortuitous, but rather a divine appointment. Everything was in place. It made so much sense. They were on the run with David, and for them, this was the opportunity that God had placed before him to end this ruthless manhunt and replace Saul as king. In fact, they interpreted this as a fulfillment of the prophecy made about David (v .4). This seemed like a gift from God from one perspective. But was it? Eventually, David came to see that it was not God's plan at this time.

8,11-15. In David's conversation with Saul, we find three things worth emulating when it comes to responding to conflicts and rivalries.

1) He took the initiative. Did you notice that David made the first move toward Saul? David was the victim; Saul had betrayed him. Worse still, Saul was the one initiating this conflict. In an ideal world, Saul would have come to his senses first, confessed his sin to David, and begged for forgiveness. Instead, we see David make the first move. At a significant risk to his life (and the lives of his men) he confronted Saul and sought to put an end to the conflict that had been thrust upon him. (*Cont'd on pg. 45*)

In Defense (p. 42, DDG)



If David took an oath not to cut off Saul's descendants, why did he later allow the Gibeonites to kill seven of them? David's agreement was that he would not wipe out Saul's descendants as a way of "cleaning house" when he took over the kingship of Israel. That was the normal practice in the ancient Near East when a ruler established a new dynasty (that is, a ruler of a different family line from the previous king); it was done to eliminate other potential claimants to the throne. David not only kept his agreement, he invited a member of Saul's family line to eat at the royal table and restored a generous inheritance to him (2 Sam. 9:1-13).

Saul, in attempting to exterminate the Gibeonites, had brought great guilt on himself by violating the centuries-old agreement in which the Israelites had allowed them to live in the land (Josh. 9:3-15; 2 Sam 21:2). Because Saul, as leader, represented all Israel, his guilt led to the spread of famine (2 Sam. 21:1). To bring an end to God's judgment, David agreed to let the Gibeonites take limited revenge on the house of Saul. As a remedy for Saul's homicidal actions, this "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" principle (Deut. 19:21; cp. Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20) was effective; God lifted His punishment from Israel (2 Sam. 21:14).

TEACHING PLAN

Read 1 Samuel 24:8,11-15.




After Saul left the cave, David decided it was time to confront him and hopefully put an end to the king's useless pursuit. The Lord was clearly on David's side and would not let anything happen to him by the hand of Saul. David's response to King Saul reveals something important. David seemed less concerned about his own welfare than God's glory. Yes, David pleaded his case before Saul, but he rested in God's tender care for him.

- **What are some ways that we tend to handle conflict?**
- **Are there any differences between how Christians generally handle conflict and how the world does? Why?**

Read 1 Samuel 24:16-17,20-22.




Not only had David humbled himself by sparing Saul's life, but now we see that he promised to preserve the lives of Saul's family as well. This went above and beyond anything that David was required to do. We can understand David's restraint against Saul, God's chosen one, but even then we could argue that David acted with surprising kindness. But God had not chosen Saul's family. Surely David was under no obligation to them; besides, they would be a potential threat to David's monarchy. An ousted family might attempt a future claim to the throne or take matters into their own hands and assassinate a rival king one day.

But David lived by a higher standard. He was more righteous than Saul—something that even Saul admitted. And so, at his own peril, David promised to preserve Saul's family. In making such a promise, David painted a beautiful picture of both mercy and grace. David first had mercy on Saul by not taking his life. Now, David extended grace to Saul and swore to bless him by not cutting off his name from the face of the earth. We see this most vividly in the story of Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9:1-13), which we will study in a few weeks. 

- **What are some ways we can shower mercy and grace on others with whom we might find ourselves in conflict?**

David provides us with a good example of extending mercy and grace to an adversary. But as good as his example is, it is not the perfect example. David's example is designed to point us to the greater David—Jesus. In all the ways that David exemplifies how to handle our rivals, Jesus shows us an even better way.

We have seen over and over how David, as great as he was, wasn't the best and final king. He pointed to a more excellent King. He pointed to a greater David who would do what he could not. And only when we see Jesus—sparing our lives, humbling Himself, taking on the death and punishment that we deserve—can we genuinely posture ourselves toward our rivals in a way that honors God and shows that we trust Him. 

- **How should Jesus change our perspective on conflict with others?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God's people are to trust
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2) He humbled himself. When David confronted Saul, he didn't start with rebuke. He didn't say, "How dare you come after me! Don't you know that I am the future king of Israel?" Where we might be quick to attack a rival, David humbled himself instead. He bowed low to the ground and even referred to himself as a dead dog and a flea (v. 14). David showed that he was no threat to Saul. This is fascinating. Here, we see the future king of Israel who defeated Goliath, won countless victories for his people, and had some of the deadliest soldiers at his side humble himself. But even more importantly, he was God's chosen king. David had all the power he needed over Saul to bring to bear in this moment, but he refused to use it.

3) He refused to fight back. David left Saul in God's hands (v. 15). He trusted that God would do what was right. And so, he wouldn't take matters into his own hands and thus stand in God's place. At times we want to take control of our rivals and ensure that the outcome bends to our favor. But not David. He did not trust in himself for justice—he trusted in the Lord instead. He believed that God would deliver him from the hand of Saul, which is why he refused to fight back. God would work for his good. God would defend his cause.

Activity

Pass out index cards to each of your students. Each of them should write on the card a summary of a rivalry in their world: it can be either something they individually or experiencing, or something of which they are aware (examples: fight between mother-son, between friends, political party feud, team rivalry, etc.).

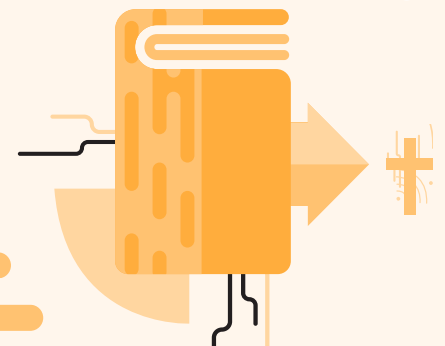
Collect the cards, sort them into a random order, and re-distribute them. Each student should now try to propose a plan for how one of the people in this rivalry can model David, and Jesus, by seeking peace with his or her rival. Specifically, they should lay out several parts to their suggested approach based off the lesson:

- How to take the initiative
- How to humble oneself
- How to refuse to fight back if the other person becomes hostile
- How to show greater concern for the glory of God and the person than for oneself
- How this act of attempted peace mirrors Jesus' far-greater act of peace for us

Debrief afterward: what commonalities did you see? What are some excellent ideas? Who will try, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to act out the ideas put forward? Take some time to pray for the Holy Spirit's help moving forward; acts like this grace cannot be done with the tremendous grace of the Spirit and faith in Jesus' sovereignty and goodness.

(p. 41, DDG) Christ Connection

David refused to take the life of his rival, Saul, even when his own life was in peril because he trusted in God for justice. Jesus trusted His Father's plan and laid down His life for His enemies so that they would be spared from death and become part of God's family.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



Have you ever taken the initiative to reconcile with someone who hurt you? What was that like?

How can being passive allow opportunity for negative feelings to grow within you for that person who hurt you?

Heart



How does this account show us that we always need to check our desires and circumstances against the truth of Scripture?

When have we been guilty of saying something was God's will just because something felt right or the circumstances were lining up?

Hands



What does this account teach us about the ability to offer forgiveness to others?

How does the gospel equip you to extend forgiveness to others this week?

Main Point: God's people are to trust in Him for justice and show grace to all.



Head

If we are honest, most of us would have to admit that when someone wrongs us or hurts us, we are prone to passivity. We harbor our wounds and refuse to move toward the person who caused our suffering. We plan to forgive them or reconcile only if they make the first move to apologize or confess their wrongdoing. But moving toward the offender and seeking reconciliation when we are the ones who have been wronged requires a level of godliness that few of us possess on our own. Yet this is the pattern of behavior David exhibits and the one that Jesus commands (Matt. 5:23-24).



Heart

This is important for us to see because our hearts often seek so strongly to find what we want. The pull toward self and sin is so strong that we can easily interpret our surroundings for our own gain. And we might even receive support from those around us. We believe that if the right desires, circumstances, and people are in place, we must be in the will of God. We look at the factors in place and find that we want this (desire), there is an opportunity to do it (circumstance), and people (community) around us telling us to move forward. Then shouldn't it be the right thing to do? Maybe, but we ought to dig deeper. This account teaches us that perception is not always right. We must search the Scriptures and listen to God's Word. And when something clearly violates Scripture, we must refuse to take matters into our own hands. David knew that the Word of God trumps all other factors. We should follow his example.



Hands

Few of us don't like to be forgiven. We want others to be generous and quick in forgiving us of our wrongdoings. But when it comes to forgiving others, we don't hold ourselves to the same standard. We might like the idea of forgiving others—of appearing to be merciful and gracious—but the practice of forgiving is much more difficult. Perhaps it even seems impossible.

But it doesn't have to be this way. As we have seen in the account of David sparing Saul and going beyond to preserve the welfare of his family, when we turn to God and place our situations in His loving care and rely on His transformative power to work in us and through us, we too can extend forgiveness to others. We love because we have first been loved (1 John 4:19); we forgive likewise. God's Son became God's enemy to make us, God's enemies, into His beloved sons and daughters. This is why we love our enemies, extend grace to all, and seek to bring many into God's family!