

# "WHEN LIFE IS TOUGH"

## 1 Samuel 21:1-15

Life is tough. Sure, there are fun moments and happy moments, but there are also hard moments and sad moments. These can include . . .

- **A strained relationship with a parent**
- **Deep concern for a prodigal child**
- **The boredom of a dead-end job**
- **Dealing with a chronic illness**
- **Anxiety over a financial nightmare**
- **Pain associated with a broken marriage**
- **The surprising death of a spouse**

This line can be found in the lyrics of a secular song—*"When the Going Gets Tough, The Tough Get Going."* That's a line that football coaches often use with their players. I want you to consider the tough stuff David was facing. He was around 20 years old, and his life had bottomed out.

- **He was no longer a hero to the masses.**
- **He was detached from his wife.**
- **His military career seemed to be a wash-out.**
- **He was separated from his best friend.**
- **He was all alone.**

Spurred on by envy, jealousy, and sheer hatred, King Saul put David on Israel's *"most wanted list."* The prophet Samuel had anointed him to be the next king of Israel, when he was a young teenager. Now, he was in essence a fugitive. Life was tough. Let's pick up the narrative as David flees from King Saul and makes his way to Nob.

**1 Samuel 21:1–9...** Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest; and Ahimelech came trembling to meet David and said to him, "Why are you alone and no one with you?" **2** \*David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has commissioned me with a matter and has said to me, 'Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you and with which I have commissioned you; and I have directed the young men to a certain place.' **3** "Now therefore, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found." **4** The priest answered David and said, "There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women." **5** \*David answered the priest and said to him, "Surely women have been kept from us as previously when I set out and the vessels of the young men were holy, though it was an ordinary journey; how much more then today will their vessels *be holy*?" **6** So the priest gave him consecrated *bread*; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence which was removed from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread *in its place* when it was taken away. **7** Now one of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD; and his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds. **8** David said to Ahimelech, "Now is there not a spear or a sword on hand? \*For I brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's matter was urgent." **9** Then the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, behold, it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you would take it for yourself, take *it*. For there is no other except it here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

David was running out of options, so he went to Nob where the Tabernacle was located. With Saul breathing down his neck, surely, the *king-to-be* could count on the help of the high priest. He and his companions were hungry. Ahimelech didn't have any freshly baked bread available. So, he gave him 5 loaves of the holy bread called the "**bread of the Presence**" from the table in the tabernacle.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. D. Greear and Heath A. Thomas, [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 143.

**Leviticus 24:6–9...** “You shall set them *in* two rows, six *to* a row, on the pure *gold* table before the LORD. **7** “You shall put pure frankincense on each row that it may be a memorial portion for the bread, *even* an offering by fire to the LORD. **8** “Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before the LORD continually; it is an everlasting covenant for the sons of Israel. **9** “It shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the LORD’s offerings by fire, *his* portion forever.”

So how is holy bread that has been reserved only for priests an appropriate meal for David and his companions? Technically it is not. Jesus mentioned this very incident. **[READ LUKE 6:1-5]**

**As David could eat holy bread because God had anointed him for a purpose, God anointed Jesus for a purpose as well, and He could eat grain in the field. Leon Morris captures the thought of Jesus’ words: “It is the Son of David who is Lord. If David could override the law without blame, how much more could the much greater Son of David do so?” David’s encounter with the holy bread at Nob prepares us to see the true Messiah, the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus. In Him we meet God face-to-face. Jesus is the bread of the Presence. He meets our deepest needs (especially when life is tough). When you think of God’s presence and provision in your life, what comes to mind? <sup>2</sup>**

David was living in fear, not faith. Desperation drove him to deception. He told Ahimelech that King Saul had sent him on a secret mission. What was he thinking? David did what he considered to be his only alternative. Listen, he knew the Word. He knew that lying was wrong. Needless to say, David never meant for anybody to get hurt! Don’t overlook the mention of Doeg the Edomite in verse 7. He saw Ahimelech give David the bread and Goliath’s sword. What happens next is bizarre.

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<sup>2</sup> J. D. Greear and Heath A. Thomas, Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 145.

**1 Samuel 21:10–15... Then David arose and fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath. 11 But the servants of Achish said to him, “Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of this one as they danced, saying, ‘Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands?’” 12 David took these words to heart and greatly feared Achish king of Gath. 13 So he disguised his sanity before them, and acted insanelly in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard. 14 Then Achish said to his servants, “Behold, you see the man behaving as a madman. Why do you bring him to me? 15 “Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this one to act the madman in my presence? Shall this one come into my house?”**

The fugitive is on the road again. He’s gone from Gibeah to Nob and now to Gath. This is Philistine territory. This is Goliath’s hometown. Why would David do such a strange and dangerous thing? Maybe he thought, “Nobody will recognize me. Besides this is the last place King Saul would ever look for me.” For whatever reason, here’s the man after God’s own heart in enemy territory seeking to live among pagan idolators.

Somebody recognized him and even remembered the song the Jewish women sang about him—*“Saul has slain his thousands; David has slain his ten-thousands.”* Suddenly, David realized that his life was in jeopardy. The shepherd, musician, warrior, and leader suddenly became an accomplished actor. He pretended to be insane. Achish had him kicked out of Gath. No doubt that saved David’s hide!

**Here’s a lesson for us to learn. When a Christian compromises their commitment to the Lord Jesus by going into enemy territory, their behavior changes. They say and do things that are totally out of the ordinary for them. Listen, in enemy territory the believer must be a thermostat, not a thermometer.**

David wrote **Psalms 34** and **Psalms 56** in relation to this time in his life. In these psalms we see what David learned through this tough time. Let’s read these two psalms . . .

**Fear is the enemy of faith.**

Faith is strengthened by studying the Word and believing the promises of God. Never lose your confidence in God!

**Knowing God is essential.**

We've got to learn to trust God. He is good (34:8-10). He is faithful. He is for us (34:15-18). He delivers us from all our fears (34:4-7, 56:3-4).

**God knows what He's doing.**

He was getting David ready to be King of Israel. He uses tough times to accomplish His purposes.

**Trust the Lord consistently.**

You can trust Him in the good times and in the tough times!

Read 1 Samuel 21:10-15. David asked to take Goliath's sword because he thought he could depend on it and his reputation for his defeat of Goliath to keep him safe. God stripped David of his reputation and humbled him. David fled to Philistia, thinking Saul's assassins would not follow him into enemy territory. David went to Gath, the hometown of Goliath, seeking asylum. The people immediately recognized David as the one who slew the giant. They even remembered the song the women sang about David's exploits. It didn't help that David came to town carrying Goliath's sword. Terrified, David played crazy. He scribbled on the wall and drooled all over himself. Achish, King of Gath (whose dynastic name was "Abimelech")

rebuked his men for wasting his time with this madman. David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam.

1. Read 1 Samuel 22:1-5. David is learning many lessons as he continues to seek safety and refuge. He leaves Gath, hides in Adullam and then moves on to seek help from the king in Moab. Marshall reminded us today that the people of God don't need to depend on past successes, careers, titles, status or relationships for comfort or security. We may even live in our past spiritual experiences we've had as some type of comfort. We can't live in the past! The question is, "What is God doing in your life currently?!" Are you actively pursuing a relationship with Him and following what/where He is leading you?
2. Read 1 Samuel 22:6-10. We see Saul having a pity party and an angry fit. Saul is always angry and ready to strike anyone who he sees as a threat. Do you struggle with anger? Do you desire people to fear you and walk on eggshells around you? Does intimidation give you feelings of power? Intimidation is not strength, it's a misguided attempt to control. Parents, be careful that you are not alienating your children by making them fear you. Husbands and wives, be mindful of how you treat your spouse. Bosses at work, watch how you treat your employees. If this is something you struggle with, repent and ask the Lord to help you change your attitude!
3. Read 1 Samuel 22:11-23. Saul sentences the priesthood to death for helping David and Doeg is all too willing to carry it out. Ahimelech's son, Abiathar escapes and reports to David. The Lord teaches David through this that if you give room for the enemy, he will exploit you every time. The massacre wasn't David's fault, but the enemy exploited a moment of weakness and people were hurt because of it. Marshall reminded us that we must put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:10-17), and we must not store up and depend on provisions for the flesh (Rom. 13:14). We must address every sinful practice, or it will

destroy us! Our leadership model comes from the Lord – not the world! Read Mark 10:42-45 to see the contrast between how the world uses power to lord over others, and the Lord comforts, protects and serves. In what ways is God asking you to change your daily habits and leadership style to be in right relationship with God and others?

4. Read Psalm 52. Let us trust in the Lord, His provision and instruction. Then we will be like the green olive tree, fruitful, pruned, cared for and secure. We are not alone or forgotten. We are not worthless! Christ has made us worthy! Let's cling to Him and live out His will for us!