

The Life of David

Week 7: Running on Empty

1 Samuel 27

Dr. Kevin Maurice ---- October 1, 2023

This fall a photographer was assigned to take pictures at a local elementary school. And it was time for the second-grade class to take their photos. And the photographer would ask them these little questions to try to put them at ease and coax a smile out of these little boys and girls. *What's your favorite candy? Who's your favorite superhero?*—that kind of thing.

One little girl came through and she took her seat, and the photographer asked her, “What are you going to be when you grow up?” And the little girl frowned and she kind of scratched her head and she searched for a response to this question. So, he tries to help her come up with an answer. So, the photographer adds, “Think about your mom and your dad. What are they?” And the little girl lights up because she's got her answer, and she says, “Tired! When I grow up I'm going to be tired!”

Anybody else resonate with that? Are you worn out? Are you just plain tired? Maybe you're in this season of life where work is just at this all-time high and RPMs are just ramped up, and in this post-COVID world where you can work from home, it just means that home is not just an extension of work.

Or maybe you're looking for work, and there's this churn of searching job sites and then sending résumés and scheduling interviews, and the continual waiting. And it's starting to take its toll.

Or parents, do you ever feel like you are an unpaid chauffeur? Soccer and baseball and gymnastics and cheerleading all sounded like a ton of fun for your kid, but you didn't know how much time was involved and in how many different places those things were. And now you and your spouse are like ships in the night just kind of passing each other on your way; one person is getting home and getting dinner ready and the other one leaves to pick up or drop off. And at night you just collapse on the couch because you're done.

Or maybe you're emotionally empty. Maybe you're spiritually spent, because you're in a season now that's marked with grief and loss and hurt, and so life itself is just straining. Do you ever feel like you've got nothing left in the tank? Like you're running on empty?

If that's you, you're not alone. And today in our time in the Bible we're going to explore what to do with these feelings. What do we do when we're just weary of life? Where do you run when you're running on empty?

David Runs to the Philistines

This fall we've been studying the life of David, and we're going to pick up the story in 1 Samuel 27. So, if you would, please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 27. We're at a time in David's life when he's literally, physically, on the run. He's been running for a few years. And David is starting to feel the full weight of this difficult season of his life. He's been attacked, he's been hunted by King Saul. And he's made these thrilling escapes. He extends forgiveness and mercy to his enemy. He spares his life when he could've killed him. One commentator says, "It's the kind of stuff that makes great movies, but it takes its toll on real people."

When we catch up with David in 1 Samuel 27, he's tired and he's spent and he's weary. "Then David said in his heart, 'Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand.'"

From the jump, the Bible reminds us of the great struggle that's going on in David's life. Twice David has spared Saul, and twice Saul promises him, *I'm going to stop hunting you*. David shows love and forgiveness to his enemy, but he's not foolish about it, and he knows his enemy.

And so, he believes, deep down, that he's still a marked man. Saul's not done. Saul's not going to keep his word. And because of this belief, because of this fear, David despairs. And in his heart, he thinks to himself, he convinces himself, *Saul is going to kill me. There is nothing better for me here ...* And David does something drastic.

He chooses to run. And he escapes to the land of the Philistines. Now the Philistines are still the sworn enemies of God's people. Nothing has changed since David killed their greatest warrior Goliath. This is the last place any person of God should ever consider running to.

Why would David do this? This man after God's own heart, the future king of Israel—why does David doubt God's protection, God's provision? Why does David doubt God's promises?

Yes, his life is difficult right now—absolutely. But being on the run from Saul is just part of the story. It's not the whole story. So, David's in a season of suffering right now, but throughout his life he's received promise after promise and reminder after reminder that God is good, God is gracious, God is sovereign and consistent, and He has a plan for David's life. David was anointed. God says, *You will be the king. I will not let harm come to you.*

David's best friend Jonathan reminds David of this in 1 Samuel 23. "He said to him, 'Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this.'"

David's wife Abigail reminds him of the same truth. She says, "The Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house . . . if men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God."

David has received promises from God that God will be with him. He gets good counsel from his wife and from his best friend. And still there's this uncertainty—there's this doubt.

Jonathan and Abigail say, "God shall protect you." And David says, "I shall . . ."—not "I might . . ."—"I shall perish." He's tired. He's tired of running, he's tired of waiting for things to get better, he's tired of hoping for something to change. His faith is starting to waver.

And in this depressive mood David is basically saying, *I don't think God can handle all of the things that He's promised. It seems like it's too much for God, so it's definitely too much for me. And I've waited long enough. So, I need to do something. I need to do anything, just as long as I'm doing something.*

Have you ever felt that way? When you're running on empty, do you ever feel like you just need to run to something? Some of us run to the fridge. We're feeling empty inside, and so we say, *Well, I'll fill myself with food or snacks.* Some of us run to the liquor cabinet. And we're hoping to just satisfy or numb that feeling for a little bit longer. We run to social media or entertainment as a distraction or an escape from this world, because this one's really difficult, *so I'll escape to that one, if only briefly.* We run to pornography for comfort, for control, to placate a desire. We run to work for identity and purpose, because at least at work things kind of make sense.

Some of us even run to running or exercise. During a difficult time in my life I was emotionally tired, I was just spent. Y'all remember the year 2020? Yeah? We were all at home. My wife and I had just had our second child. Stress is at this all-time high, we have a baby running around, the world is kind of going crazy. And whenever I just felt exhausted, whenever I felt hurt, when I received text or e-mails that upset me, when I interacted with someone and I wanted it to go better, when I felt emotionally done, I would go for a run. I would just go running.

Which sounds like a really healthy thing, right? And it can be. But for me, I began to recognize that in my life it was becoming something more than physical exertion; it was becoming something more than it should be. I was running to running, rather than going to God, the Creator of the universe, with the things that I was struggling with.

When we're running on empty, we're tempted to run to something. And there are times when I believe that the best solution to that difficult problem or that difficult person or this difficult season is to run to something for comfort or rest, even things and places and people that we know deep down are not good, or right, or what's best for us.

David knows that the land of the Philistines is not where he should be. David knows better. *What is a guy like you doing in a place like this?* But David convinces himself, *There's nothing better for me.* And he believes it. He believes it in his heart.

The first lesson from David this morning is that when you are running on empty, be wary of your emotions. Be very cautious about your feelings. Be watchful of your heart.

And guard yourself against believing that there's nothing better for you out there than that temptation. We see this years later. Jesus is going to be tired and weary, and in the desert, and that is when Satan chooses to tempt Him. Jesus has been fasting for forty days, so he's hungry and He's tired. And Satan tempts Jesus with food and power and a kingdom. And Satan is trying to cultivate in Jesus the same heart that David has in this chapter. He's trying to convince Jesus that: *There's nothing better for you. So, take this route instead. Just run this way.*

When we are exhausted we need to be aware of the lies that we're going to buy into. So, when you're depleted, when you're tired or hurt or depressed, when you're just struggling, that's when the enemy's lies become way more tantalizing and believable. *Hey, just do this. Try this. Run to this. Because it's easier, it will make you feel better, it'll fill you up.*

Be on the lookout for your feelings. When you're running on empty, you're very likely tempted to run to something.

And the great danger in running to something is that ultimately you end up running from God. When you run to something, you're running from God. That's exactly what David does.

“David arose and he went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish, the son of Maoch, king of Gath. And David lived with Achish at Gath ... And when it was told to Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him ... Then David said to Achish, ‘If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be given to me in one of the country towns, that I can dwell there. For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?’”

David believes his heart, his feelings, his emotions. He gives into this fear and this temptation. And he runs to the land of the Philistines, and he runs to the king of the Philistines. And he bows down to that king and says, *I'm your servant*.

And notice where David is—notice where he's run to. He's in a place called Gath. Years prior when the Philistines stole the Ark of the Covenant from God's people, they stored it in Gath in a temple to their idols, their gods. And they put it in there to taunt Israel and to mock the Lord. Gath is also the city where Goliath came from. This is the Philistine city.

And in this city, David bends the knee to a foreign ruler. He has run to the land of false gods and false kings. He's running on empty. And now he's running from God.

And so, let's recognize the pattern of David's running, because it's likely that if we're running to something, if we're running from God, this is a pattern that we're going to see in our lives too. What's the pattern of running from God?

Bad Thinking

The first thing we see in David's life is there's a lot of bad thinking going on. Bad thinking. David's thoughts are false, because even if David believes in his heart, deep down, that Saul is going to continue to hunt him, God has never deserted David. In every perilous position up to this point God has always provided David a way out, a way to salvation, a way forward. David's fear is unfounded.

It's contrary to the evidence of his life. It's contrary to the promises of God. It's contrary to what David himself has written and sung before in his life.

Look at Psalm 33. He writes this before this moment. David says, “Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and our shield. For our heart is glad in Him, because we trust in His holy name. Let Your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in You.”

How about Psalm 34? “I sought the Lord, and He answered me and delivered me from all of my fears ... Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him ... The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned.”

Bad Choices

David wrote these things. He sang them. He knows them. But right now, he doesn't believe them. And this bad thinking leads him to make a series of bad choices. So, he runs from God, from the land of God, and he runs to a foreign king in the land of enemies.

And part of David's bad choice includes what he doesn't do. Notice throughout this chapter that David never prays. Not once. David never prays about his decision. He doesn't seek the Lord. He doesn't find wise counsel. He just relies on himself. This chapter is all about him. The Bible says it's in his heart, that he arises, he and his men. David depends on himself and he decides he's going to find help on his own terms.

That's what happens when we run from God. We have to rely on someone, so we rely on ourselves. And when we're not thinking correctly, we're prone to making really bad decisions.

We should be wary of making any big decision when we're worn out—when we're physically, emotionally, or spiritually tired. Don't make any big decisions.

Because when you're running on empty, the choices you make tend to be made out of reflex rather than reflection. It's the same reason you don't go to HEB when you're really hungry. Otherwise you come home with bags full of stuff that looked really good in the moment. And then you get home, and think, *Why did I buy this many Twinkies?* It might not be good for you.

There's bad thinking: David doesn't believe God is going to do what He promised.

There are bad choices: He doesn't pray, he doesn't ask for advice, he runs to a place that he no business being.

Bad Company

One more part of the pattern: Bad company. David's new king is a Philistine. He's an outright enemy of God. And he doesn't just spend a weekend or a few weeks with this guy. The Bible says that David spend sixteen months in his company—sixteen months.

And by the end of that time, look what this king thinks of David. 1 Samuel 27:12: **“Achish trusted David, thinking, ‘He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant.’”** *He's mine. I've got my claws in him and I've twisted them and molded him into something that's odorous and obnoxious to his own people. I'm making him more and more and more like me.*

When you're running on empty, be careful of who you're running with. Because who are the voices that you're listening to? Who are you following? Who's in your inner circle? If it's bad company, it's going to lead to bad things.

Bad Thinking, Bad Choices, Bad Company in Our Own Lives

Let me just show you how this pattern of running from God might play out in your life. Maybe you find yourself thinking, *I'm not getting the credit at work that I should. I'm not getting the respect at home that I deserve. This season of life is just too much. And it's never going to change. I'm just trapped here. And so, I have to go find change.* And we're steeping in this bad thinking that we need something else or something more to satisfy us.

And then we make a bad choice. Maybe it's a series of bad choices. And we neglect prayer and we stop reading our Bible. We skip church for a week and it turns into a couple of weeks and it turns into a month. We tell our wives or our husbands or our friends, “You know, I just want one more drink.” Or, “I'm just going to take care of me right now. I just need a little space. I need to do my own thing.” Sometimes the bad choice is the decision to withdraw into yourself or withdrawing onto your phone or your computer, and you just leave the door open, wide open, to temptation.

And then, even though you're worn down, you still hoist yourself up into this hamster wheel of running to something. And you're running to something trying to fill yourself or find yourself or just satisfy.

And then, if there's no one in your life who's willing to pull you out of that and say, "You are making a really bad decision," you're in trouble. If the only people in your life, the only people you listen to, if they're not interested in the condition of your soul, you're in a dangerous spot. If the only company that you keep could not care less about your character, you might be in a place like Gath. And that's how you wake up one day, and you find yourself far from God.

Bad thinking, bad choices, bad company. There's a pattern. And David has all three. He's tired, he's weary, he's dried up. And he slips into this self-destructive spiral.

He says, "There's nothing better for me ..." He makes one bad choice that leads to another, and sixteen months later—sixteen months go by like that—he's no longer a servant of the Lord God, King of the universe. He's become the servant of King Achish, the king of Gath.

This is one of the lowest points in David's life. The future king of Israel, a man after God's own heart, and here he is, far from home, far away from God.

Aren't you so glad you came to church this morning, by the way? What a happy story ...

But I'm so glad it's here in Scripture. Because isn't it comforting that the Bible never flatters its heroes ever? The Bible tells the truth about people, no matter how unpleasant that truth might be. And God gives us His Word to encourage us and to guide us and to teach us, because so often we are in the same place. We're going through the same circumstances. We feel the same way.

David felt alone and empty. That's why he ran. And this is where he ran to. When you feel alone and empty, where do you run? To whom do you run?

Listen, David was absolutely wrong when he said, "There's nothing better for me"—one hundred percent wrong. Because there was something better, much better. There was someone better, much better.

There is not one single mention of God in this chapter of the Bible. There's not one. But it does not mean that He's not there. Just like when Elijah believes that God has left him all alone, or in the Book of Esther where there's not a mention of God, God is still all over this story. He has been with David and He has promised David that He will be with him. David needs to choose to believe it. He's got to choose to believe it.

Application

When we're running on empty, we have to choose to believe God and to run to Him, to trust in His promises. Not just when we feel Him; we have to trust in His Word, that God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, that He's always been and will always be. But the promises He gives us are true. When you are running on empty, run to God, not away from Him.

Find Good Company

And the way that we do that is to fight against this pattern that we see in David's life. Instead of bad thinking and bad choices and bad company, we do the exact opposite. Instead of finding bad company to spend our time with, find good company. Find people in your life who will those spiritual bumpers at the bowling alley, who will help keep you out of the gutter. They're going to help you avoid living in a place like Gath.

And listen, if you're looking for good company, if you're wanting people in your life who will be intentional to speak truth into your life, you're in a great place to find them.

Find someone, find multiple people here at Grace who could be some good company for you. Get into that men's group on a Thursday morning or a Thursday evening. Join that women's Bible study. Find a Sunday morning community (they meet on Sundays) that's filled with peers and with mentors who want to be good company in your life.

Even if you're doing great right now—you're doing really well—but you don't have this in your life—you don't have people like this--now is still the time to find them. Don't wait until you're running on fumes to find good spiritual friends, to find good company.

Pray

And then when you go through seasons or experiences of just being burned out, make a good choice. Make a good choice to pray. Pray. Seek the Lord. Even if you don't feel like praying, when the words aren't there, take a small step and talk to God about it. And just say, "God, I'm kind of done. I don't think I can do this anymore. I don't want to do this anymore. Help me." And if you really cannot find the words to say, ask that good company, those good people in your life, "Hey, could you pray for me?"

Remember God's Promises

And then when you're weary, when you're tired, when you're just burned out, resist bad thinking by remembering God's promises. Instead of just being introspective and spiraling into this world where you only listen to and trust your own heart, trust in God's Word. And rather than running to something or someone else, run to Him and find Him in His Word. Which is why it's so important to know His Word, to memorize it.

And so, today you could change the background on your phone to a Bible verse that's going to remind you of what's true. You could pick that passage that speaks to you and write it down over and over again. Or write it down and keep it on your mirror or somewhere you're going to see it as a reminder.

Choose specific passages, so that when you're tired or exhausted or empty, you remind yourself of who God is and what He says it true about you. Just look at what Jesus says.

Jesus says, "Look at the birds of the air: they don't sow or reap or gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they are?"

He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your weakness."

You can take comfort in the Psalms. And when you're running on empty, read Psalm 139. "I run in the path of Your commands, for You [God] have set my heart free ..." That's a promise.

In the book *The Silver Chair*, which is part of the Narnia series, there's a moment where this little girl meets with the great lion Aslan. He's the king, the ruler, of this fantasy world. And they're on the top of this mountain and this little girl is about to be given a quest. And Aslan tells her, "This is the most important thing you will ever need to know. This is the most significant thing for your journey." And he says, "Remember, remember, remember the signs. Say them to yourself when you wake in the morning and when you lie down at night and when you wake in the middle of the night. And whatever strange things may happen to you, let nothing turn your mind from following the signs. It is so important to know them by heart and pay no attention to your circumstances. Remember the signs and believe the signs. Nothing else matters."

Remember, remember, remember the signs. Remember, remember, remember the promises of God in His Word. Nothing else matters.

Find good company. Pray. Remember His promises.

God Is Running Towards Us

Now before that begins to sound like too much like a to-do list, let's remember that when we run to God, we never have to run very far. Because God has been running toward us all along.

In the parable of the two lost sons, Jesus tells us that the heart of God the Father is always on the lookout for His children. And when he sees his child, the father runs to him to meet him and embrace him. The father runs. The Father runs to you. That's who He is.

My daughter is in second grade this year, and she just started riding the bus to school. And recently she has decided that she doesn't want me to wait at the bus stop for her. She wants all this independence that comes with being seven. She wants me to stay at home and be surprised when she gets home—not on the porch, but inside, kind of like *Cheers*. “Hey, it's Norm!”

I tell you, this week I've had my face just pressed against the glass waiting to see her walking down the street. And when I see that little girl walking down the street and she looks tired and worn out and that backpack is heavy because it's bigger than her, and she's been at school for this long day, every part of me wants to run to her and meet her in the street. Because I want to hug her and I want to hold her and I just want to welcome her home.

And Jesus says that if that's true of a sinful and broken earthly father, how much more so is that true with a perfect loving heavenly Father?

So, if you're tired today, if you're emotionally empty or spiritually spent, if you're worn down and worn out, beware of this temptation to believe that there's nothing better for you. Don't run to something else.

Because there's someone better—much better. And He's running, and He's running after you because He loves you. So, when you're running on empty, run to God. Run to the Father. Run to Him. He's waiting.

Would you please pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we thank You for who You are. God, we're humbled that You love us, that You care for us; God, that You created us and You have a plan for our lives. God, help us to

remember that. Help us to remember Your promises to us; that You'll never leave us or forsake us, there's no height nor depth that can separate us from Your love.

God, when we're in seasons of temptation or in seasons of weariness, help us to turn and to run to You. Help us to remember that You're always there, that You're actually running to us. So God, I just ask that You would be present with us; that You would encourage us. Give us the strength and the guidance to turn and see You.

We pray these things in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.