

“Escaping the Cave”

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)
Continuing a series *A King for God's People*

1st Samuel 24

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You can see the Scripture reading by clicking [here](#).

Dave had every reason to kill Saul.

After all, King Saul was obsessed with destroying Dave.

It didn't have to be this way. Dave had been the king's general, his champion, the hero who gained victory upon victory over the king's enemies. Dave had been the king's comforter, his favourite musician and poet, his advisor and servant. To his King Saul, Dave had given his everything.

But Saul hated Dave.

Whatever Dave did for his king, King Saul's mind twisted into an attack.

- Dave, while still a youth, defeated the enemy champion Goliath. But Saul thought, *“He is showing me up, because I would not face the giant myself.”*
- Dave became best friends with the king's son and heir, Jonathan. But Saul worried, *“He's turning my closest and dearest against me.”*
- Dave married the king's daughter. But Saul imagined, *“He's after my throne.”*
- The king's people celebrated Dave's victories. But Saul obsessed, *“They love him more than me.”*
- Dave played music for the king. But Saul complained, *“The sound of his voice, the sight of his face, is a poisonous hatred to me.”*

(You know. A seed of suspicion plants in you. It grows until everything they do, everything they whisper, feels like it is about you, against you. They smile, and you're suspicious. They don't smile, and you steam. Insecurity and fear mix into a fuel that blazes on its own fumes.)

Saul burned with hatred for Dave, and bent to destroy him.

Saul hunted Dave. Saul forced Dave's family to flee. Those who Dave helped, Saul then turned against him. Those who helped Dave, Saul slaughtered. Saul's spies shadowed Dave. Saul's informants exposed him. Saul's army stalked him.

Dave had every reason to kill Saul.

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I hope you don't have reason to kill anyone . . . though maybe?

But might there be someone? . . . You steam when you see them. Shudder when you hear them. Wince at their name.

Maybe you did them wrong, but what they've done to you . . . much worse!

Or maybe you are innocent, as innocent toward them as David was with Saul. And they've returned to you wrongdoing, brutality, cruelty.

Maybe they caught you in the crossfire of their own demons. You got tangled up in their insecurities, drafted into their drama. Maybe you can understand, even have sympathy. But the scars they've left on you are still real.

Maybe you were devoted to them. Faithful. But now, they haunt you. If not literally, then certainly in your thoughts, they hunt after any sense of peace.

Great pains grow from love betrayed.

They might be nowhere close, but they still have you. They may be long gone, but they still are the bars of your prison. You feel like you are hiding from them in a cave.

III

Saul finds Dave's cave. But he doesn't know Dave is there. So, unprotected and alone, vulnerable and exposed, the king goes about his "private" business.¹

It's perfect!

Can it be just a coincidence that, of all the caves in the Ein Gedi wilderness, Saul would choose this one for a bathroom? This one where Dave is hiding! Everyone in the story is clear. It's God! Dave's soldiers, and Dave, and even (in a few moments) Saul — all see a divine design happening in this chance encounter in that cave.

What might God be doing in your cave?

Dave and his band picked that cave to hide in. Saul picked that same cave to go in. They made their choices. Each day, we make choices. Others do too. Events unfold. History happens. And in it all, mysteriously and mostly unseen, God is weaving, gathering, mending, shaping, prodding, moving things forward, keeping our stories going toward God's goal for us, God's good purpose, our completion. While Dave has been on the run, it has been God who has kept Dave from falling into Saul's hands. And now, God has placed Saul into Dave's hiding place, his cave.

¹ The Hebrew phrase is "cover his feet," and it was translated this way in the KJV and ASV. Contemporary translations render this euphemism as "use the restroom" or "relieve himself."

Why? So Dave could kill Saul? So justice could be done?

The tables have turned. The hunter is now the prey. The hunted now has his pursuer in his sights. A quick stab in the dark, and it will be all done. *“Kill him,”* his companions urge. *“Kill him, you’ve earned it. Kill him, he deserves it. Kill him, and be free. Kill him, or will kill us all!”*

Dave has every reason to kill Saul.

He refuses. He lets his enemy escape the cave.

IV

So why, then, did God put Saul into Dave’s cave?

Was it so Dave could let Saul go?

After Saul leaves, Dave follows after, showing the piece of robe he cut as proof he had been in striking distance of his enemy, but had not struck. He makes his plea to Saul. And Saul breaks. He’s soul is opened in a way no stab nor slash could have. He collapses in tears. Every mess he had made in his life, everything torn up inside him, Saul has been putting onto Dave. *“Dave’s out to get me. Dave’s coming after me. Dave is against me.”*

But now, he sees the proof that none of that is true. He sees past Dave, to see himself. Saul sees the truth of himself, and what he has done, and the destruction he has wrecked around him.

Saul leaves the cave behind, and goes home. His story is not finished. None of our stories are finished, because our stories are part of God’s story. But Saul finally admits publicly that his time is passing and Dave will become king.²

If Dave had not let Saul escape the cave, none of that could have happened.

V

Here’s another thought. Why did God put Saul in Dave’s cave?

Maybe so Dave could let himself go.

When he could easily have cut Saul’s throat, he instead cut the king’s cloak. In that moment of decision, Dave was set free. Dave was released from his need to gain his own justice against Saul. Dave was released from his need to make his own victory. Dave was released from his need to get what was due to him, and give Saul what he surely deserved.

² Walter Brueggemann, First and Second Samuel (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), 171f.

Dave was released to see that Saul was in God's hands.

"May the Lord judge between me and you!" he said. *"May the Lord take vengeance on you for me. . . . May the Lord see what has happened, argue my case, and vindicate me against you!"*

Saul was always in God's hands. Everyone — ourselves, our adversaries — is always in God's hands. Dave now realized it. Because God is Saul's judge and because God is Dave's vindicator, then Dave does not have to be. He is freed from being the judge. He is freed from vindicating himself.

We are freed too. We can put down our sword against our adversary, knowing that they are in God's hands. We can trust them to God.

Just as we can trust ourselves to God. God is our judge, and in Jesus, God has put down the sword against us. In Jesus, God has judged us — guilty! And in Jesus, God has vindicated us — forgiven! Jesus has escaped us from the cave. Amen.