

Prayer

Throughout this day, Lord God, we ask for strength to face every difficult decision, every troublesome situation and every awkward moment, with the wisdom, courage and perseverance that You alone can give. More than this, Lord God, we ask that we might rise above our trials by the power of Your Spirit, and be victorious through mercy and love. Through Jesus Christ we pray; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: World Politics

Pray for your own country and its political leaders. Pray also for those responsible for supporting the government and enabling it to function; civil servants and other staff.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for security in your home
- Pray for people everywhere who are searching to find faith
- Pray for those whose lives are threatened by bad weather

Meditation

What do you gain by reading?
Some insight, some stimulation?
and a chance to draw aside from other things?

You can read magazines or daily papers,
And have the cultural gossip of your day, spoon-fed,
In the guise of news about what's happening in the world.

You can read a novel, or perhaps biography,
To challenge and extend your mind, and be manipulated
In your emotions by the skills of those who happen to write.

You can read God's Word, the scriptures,
To open up your mind, heart and spirit to deeper things,
The inspiration, revelation, and power of God for life.

Read widely, but make a careful choice.
All can feed the mind or inspire feelings, but with what?
Only one can feed the spirit with truth and give you value for life.

Bible Study - 1 Samuel 21:10-15

¹⁰ David rose and fled from Saul immediately, and went to Achish the king of Gath. ¹¹ The servants of Achish said to him, 'Is not this David, the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands"?''

¹² David took these words to heart, and was very fearful of Achish the king of Gath. ¹³ So he altered his behaviour when with them, and feigned being mad in their presence; he made marks on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle run down his beard. ¹⁴ Then said Achish to his servants, 'Look, you can see the man is mad; so why then have you brought him to me?' ¹⁵ Do I lack fools, that you

have brought this person to play the fool in my presence? Why should I have this person in my court?'

Review

Today's story shows David at his most vulnerable, in the early days of his exile from the Israelite court. He was on the run from King Saul, and there were few places he could go within Judah and Israel whilst Saul was alive to avoid the spies who would give him away. It is not surprising therefore that he travelled out of the land of Judah, and found himself in the territory of Israel's nearest neighbours and fiercest enemies. He went to Gath, one of the five city states that made up the tribal group we know as the Philistines. Yes, David, the man who once delivered Israel and Judah from the hand of the Philistines by defeating Goliath, their great champion, now sought refuge in a Philistine city state! He is not the first person in history to 'change sides' because he had fallen foul of his friends and contacts.

However, his position was perilous because his fame had gone before him. They had heard of David in Gath, and the reports they had heard did not give them confidence. In those days, every city state or tribal grouping was hostile to those on its borders, for fear of enemies who might destroy their life and culture. The last thing the Philistines wanted was a spy in their midst, least of all a well known warrior from a neighbouring state who, despite a story of being thrown out of court, was nevertheless responsible for what they regarded as some of their greatest military defeats!

David tried to change the situation to his advantage by feigning madness (21:12). It is not said in the text, but David's likely intention was to gain sympathy in order to persuade the King of Gath that he was not a threat to the city so that he would be allowed to stay. It would be a tough act to sustain, but David needed a cover under which to hide for a few years, and this was the first thing which came to mind in the heat of the moment.

His plan did not work. King Achish of Gath was already cautious of David, and would have nothing to do with him. He berated the servants who presented David to him as a harmless madman, and David did not remain long. In the passage which follows (22:1f.) David leaves Gath to find somewhere else to live. It is possible that King Achish saw through the whole ploy, and he had many good reasons to keep David well away from his city at that time. Saul could have come looking for David, and this would place him and his people in a difficult situation.

David, the great man of God had lost his way. Even his enemies would not take pity on him in his plight, and he was forced to remain on the run. This is a sad story of a low point in David's life, and although we are not told what David's thoughts and feelings were, it takes little imagination to see that in doing what he did, he must have felt there were few options left to him. Perhaps he was close to despair; we do not know, but it seems likely. He undoubtedly misread the situation when he tried to feign madness; and elation at his escape from death at the hands of Saul was replaced by the anguish of deciding what to do next.

This is the first time that we see David in a position of real personal weakness. An important feature of David's story is that the Bible tells us of his weaknesses as well as his strengths, making it a profoundly human story. With the obvious exception of Jesus, and possibly Moses, there are more chapters of the Bible which describe the story of David than any other character, taking up half of 1 Samuel and the whole of 2 Samuel (as well as twelve chapters in 1 Chronicles). It is important that we have long stories such as this in the Old Testament which are there for our instruction and guidance (2 Tim 3:16). We often want God's will to be immediately obvious to us and immediately applicable, yet a story

such as that of David tells us that God's purposes for an individual span an entire human life, and within the time frame of a human life, things happen in a divinely ordained order, and not all at once. The important thing for us all is to find God's order of things rather than to force them ourselves (as David did on this occasion). This requires patience, and sometimes the ability to accept that we have misread a situation.

David had to pull himself together and move on. Tomorrow we will discover that God had his hand on the whole situation, but David was not to see how it would work out.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Does it surprise you that David made a mistake? Why do we find it hard to learn from our mistakes?
2. Discuss whether you think that Achish was taken in by David's 'madman' act and dismissed him as a madman, or saw through the whole thing?
3. Share with each other those times in your life when you have been uncertain about God's plans for you.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It is always hard to admit mistakes, and it can take a long time for us to fully understand what has happened and why. Nevertheless, I have found that it is important to find peace with myself before God about such failures and it is no good 'sweeping them under the carpet'. Feelings about the past will rise up when we don't want them to if we do not settle them down within God's good governance of our lives. He will lead us to do what is right.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- Write down one or two of the serious mistakes you have made in your life. What do you feel about them, and are you able to be at peace about them now?
- If possible, look for opportunities to be a comforter and a helper of others who are having difficulties or who have failed at something. Seek to be a blessing to those you meet and follow the Spirit's guidance.

Final Prayer

In Your wisdom, Lord God, give me what I need to live my life; and reveal a little of what is to come so that I may be encouraged to move on in Your strength. Lead me into Your future, and show me the path by which I may fulfil my true vocation as Your disciple. Through Jesus Christ, I pray; AMEN