

Illustration: Howard Hughes, an American business magnate, aviator, and filmmaker, rose to fame in the early 20th century for his achievements in aviation and his success in the film industry. However, as the years went by, Hughes became increasingly reclusive, and his isolation led to growing paranoia. In the 1940s, Hughes retreated from public life, obsessing over privacy and security. His eccentricities included renting entire hotel floors for solitude and storing his urine in bottles due to an obsessive fear of germs.

As Hughes's seclusion intensified, he communicated primarily through intermediaries. Rumors about his mental state and the stability of his business empire multiplied. Near the end of his life, his employees hadn't seen him for quite some time and they became alarmed. When his staff and associates discovered Hughes's body in his penthouse at the Acapulco Fairmont Princess Hotel, they found him to be extremely emaciated; his hair and beard and fingernails wildly overgrown. By the time of his death in 1976, one of the richest, most famous men in the world had transformed from a bold pioneer into a cautionary tale of the destructive effect of extreme isolation.

Transition: In our story today, we encounter a similar downward spiral occurring in King Saul. Saul's paranoia grows, leading to baseless accusations against his own people. Three scenes are left in our story from 1 Samuel Chapter 22. If you recall, last week we covered the first two scenes. David takes refuge in Adullam, and his family joins him there—but so do 400 desperate, in-debt, and disgruntled men who become the nucleus of his mighty resistance movement. But David is told by the prophet Gad to go back to Judah—in the direction of his tormentor and antagonist. David, doesn't hesitate to obey God's Word, because as we said last week, David is a man of the Word.

1. Saul's Paranoia and Accusations (1 Samuel 22:6-8). Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. At that time Saul was in Gibeah, **sitting under the tamarisk tree at the high place**. His spear was in his hand, and all his servants were standing around him. ⁷ Saul said to his servants, "Listen, men of Benjamin: Is

Jesse's son going to give all of you fields and vineyards? Do you think he'll make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? ⁸ ***That's why all of you have conspired against me!*** Nobody tells me when my own son makes a covenant with Jesse's son. ***None of you cares about*** me or tells me that my son has stirred up my own servant to wait in ambush for me, as is the case today."

Observation: In a place where God's glory should be evident to all, Israel's palace has become a haunted mansion, Saul spends his days pacing and ruminating, mumbling murderous plots, dreaming of nothing else but killing David. Saul's mental life is deteriorating, his thoughts now choking on the fumes of suspicion. Every whisper, every glance, and every conversation is perceived as betrayal. Paranoia has now consumed the has-been king.

Principles:

- Isolation and idolatry breed Paranoia: Notice where he is. Saul is alone "sitting under the tamarisk tree at the high place" which in the Bible means a shrine of idol-worship. The author wants us to see that Saul has left the faith of his fathers. The Spirit had departed him, and he has now left God.
- The paranoid mind is plagued by made-up stories about others. We see this as Saul lashes out at those closest to him—In a tirade, Saul accuses his closest servants—his Benjaminite homies—are also accused of colluding.
- Paranoid suspicion has led to the loss of vital relationships. Gone is David, the palace worship pastor, whose music once filled the hallways, quieting Saul's beleaguered mind. A man with such initial promise is now obsessed with pursuing his political rivals at the expense of all else. The cost of becoming blinded by rage and suspicion is his inability to make good decisions for the commonwealth.
- Saul's erratic paranoia leads to a rejection of needed guidance and perspective. Now estranged from friends, adrift from his Jewish faith, and spurning wise counsel, he is capable of anything except empathy. A Malignant Narcissist, he becomes sadistic and cruel. As we'll see in the next scene.

Application: We must seek healthy fellowship in Christ's body in order to avoid fostering an environment of mistrust. God designed the Christian life to be interdependent. Face-to-face fellowship is the cure for mistrust and

speculation about what's in the minds of those around us. It's very easy for us to imagine the worst if we haven't had a conversation with them. We desperately need each other. This is what Solomon is trying to tell us in Ecclesiastes 4:7–12 Again, I saw futility under the sun: ⁸There is a person without a companion, without even a son or brother, and though there is no end to all his struggles, his eyes are still not content with riches. "Who am I struggling for," he asks, "and depriving myself of good things?" This too is futile and a miserable task. ⁹Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. ¹⁰For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up. ¹¹Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm; but how can one person alone keep warm? ¹²And if someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken. Solomon articulates the futility of going it alone: we share our struggles and offer mutual support and strength as we develop a resilience that can only be found in the Christian community.

It is no accident that the scene right before Saul goes on his retribution tour is one of delusional paranoia fueled by his isolation from wise, godly people and from God. This is what a life of idolatry and isolation leads to.

2. Doeg's Betrayal and its Consequences (1 Samuel 22:9-19). Then Doeg the Edomite, who was in charge of Saul's servants, answered, "I saw Jesse's son come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob. ¹⁰Ahimelech inquired of the Lord for him and gave him provisions. He also gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine. ¹¹The king sent messengers to summon the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub, and his father's whole family, who were priests in Nob. All of them came to the king. ¹²Then Saul said, "Listen, son of Ahitub!"

"I'm at your service, my lord," he said.

¹³Saul asked him, "***Why did you and Jesse's son conspire against me?*** You gave him bread and a sword and inquired of God for him, so he could rise up against me and wait in ambush, as is the case today."

¹⁴Ahimelech replied to the king, "Who among all your servants is as faithful as David? He is the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard, and honored in your house. ¹⁵Was today the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Please don't let the king make an accusation against your servant or any of my father's family, for your servant didn't have any idea about all this."

¹⁶ But the king said, “You will die, Ahimelech—you and your father’s whole family!”

¹⁷ Then the king ordered the guards standing by him, “Turn and kill the priests of the Lord because **they sided with David**. For they knew he was fleeing, but they didn’t tell me.” But the king’s servants would not lift a hand to execute the priests of the Lord.

¹⁸ So the king said to Doeg, “Go and execute the priests!” So Doeg the Edomite went and executed the priests himself. On that day, he killed eighty-five men who wore linen ephods. ¹⁹ He also struck down Nob, the city of the priests, with the sword—both men and women, infants and nursing babies, oxen, donkeys, and sheep.

Observation: Saul vents his rage and unleashes a tempest on the priests at Nob. Men overtaken by paranoia see conspiracies against them everywhere. Every whisper, every conversation, every glance in their direction. Thin accusations mask a desperate king clinging to a crown already taken from him. Like a serpent in the grass, Doeg relays what he’s seen—aid and comfort given to David.

Saul’s eyes glaze with vengeance as he orders Doeg to slaughter them all. Yet, beneath this bloody scene is God’s unchanging word—many chapters earlier God had promised to end Eli’s priestly lineage, to purge Israel’s priesthood of the incurable corruption and ineptitude of Eli’s house. Chapter 22 is the moment when God is making good on that promise. That judgment is coming to pass.

Whether Doeg thinks he’s doing this for the Kingdom, or for his own self-preservation, or whatever the reason, he makes a choice that puts him squarely in the plan of a Sovereign God who is somehow orchestrating this entire plot—and he also damns himself because he is opposing God’s ultimate purpose to make David King.

Don’t miss the theology of the passage: This entire scene is happening according to God’s foreknowledge and plan. But the people who are the instruments of Ahimelech’s destruction are liable for their choices. Doeg is responsible for betraying God’s elect anointed King, David and for this massacre. And Saul is answerable for his role as a delusional, unhinged tyrant.

Principles:

- Betrayal leads to inevitable consequences. Whether through gossip, breaking faith, abandoning vows, divulging secrets and breaking confidentiality—anyone who’s experienced the sting of betrayal knows how deep the wound goes. The sin can be forgiven, but the consequences cannot be avoided. Doeg is Saul’s enabler—not only willing to betray David but to carry out an unimaginable horror on the priests and their families.
- Most of the instruments God used to discipline Israel, or its leaders were then destroyed. Remember what David said to Doeg in Psalm 52:5 “This is why God will bring you down forever. He will take you, ripping you out of your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living.” If I could retitile Psalm 52 and give it a more modern title, it would be “Doeg’s Lesson: Snitches Get Stitches.” David is saying, “You thought your lies were truth-speaking; you may have even thought you were doing God a service by opposing God’s anointed—but you will be held accountable for your betrayal.” Think of every person who chose to be an instrument of God’s judgment or discipline upon the Lord’s elect nation or his leaders: Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome—those kingdoms were once great world empires—if you lived at that time you couldn’t imagine the world not being ruled by these kingdoms and their strongmen. But today—we are digging up the remains of these cultures putting their artifacts on display in museums. Every instrument that God used to judge or discipline Israel he then discarded. Because the people involved in that judgment were all too willing to take their stand against God’s elect.

Doeg doesn’t know it, but what he is doing, what Saul has demanded of him, is part of God’s sovereign plan to rid the priesthood of Eli’s descendants—but Doeg and Saul are both still responsible for their choices—their actions.

Application: (1) If we are the object of someone’s betrayal, we extend forgiveness, expect repentance, and leave vengeance in the hands of the LORD. In the case of someone like Saul’s henchman, that seems a little easier. He will answer to God for his sins, his betrayal and his murder. But that is God’s judgment to execute. Not mine.

But what about someone close to us? Another song by David recalls a time when he had been betrayed. Listen to the ache in his heart over someone close to him; it could have been Absalom or Joab, but I think this is directed at Saul. Psalm 55:12–14; 20–22 Now it is not an enemy who insults me— otherwise I could bear it; it is not a foe who rises up against me— otherwise I could hide from him. ¹³ But it is you, a man who is my peer, my companion and good friend! ¹⁴ We used to have close fellowship; we walked with the crowd into the house of God...My friend acts violently against those at peace with him; he violates his covenant. ²¹ His buttery words are smooth, but war is in his heart. His words are softer than oil, but they are drawn swords. ²² Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never allow the righteous to be shaken. What is David's response to one so close who has betrayed him? He laments and leaves it in God's hands. He casts this unbearable burden on the LORD, because it is God who sustains and upholds him. It is God who stabilizes and establishes the righteous.

But what if you're the betrayer? Later in David's life, he will be guilty of betraying Uriah—killing him off and marrying his wife, who becomes pregnant with David's child. When confronted, David is the one who repents and confesses his sins.

(2) When we have betrayed someone's trust, we ask for forgiveness and seek reconciliation through repentance.

Illustration: I have a friend right now who is currently estranged from all his friends in ministry. Now, I tell you this, not to "tell" on him, but to tell you how I'm trying to work through it. He betrayed his wife after 45 years of marriage and ran off with a woman 15 years younger. He regularly posts these shallow, empty blogs on Facebook, essentially demanding that we all forgive him and allow him back into fellowship. Quoting Jesus and Paul, who command us, in fact, to forgive one another. "Grace" he writes, "means that God loves me in spite of my faults, my failings, and yes, even my betrayal." Yes, but God does not love you in your faults, in your failings, and in your betrayal. God hates sin, and he hates what sin has made us. Fair enough. Jesus commanded us to forgive and seek reconciliation and leave judgment up to God alone. Amen.

But I often get the sense from my friend's rants that what he wants is not really grace—it's what German Lutheran pastor and prisoner of the Third

Reich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, referred to as “cheap grace.” In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer famously said that the Lutheran church had embraced this cheap, cut-rate grace, which is grace without repentance and grace without the cross. It is the demand that I be forgiven, though I have no intention to change, to repent, to turn from my sin. Forgetting that Paul did not only teach salvation by grace, but also that this same grace that saves you now trains you to say no to ungodly passions, to walk according to the pattern of biblical teaching.

Listen, All is forgiven.

But betrayal has consequences.

And a refusal to repent of sin leaves us disfellowshipped, cut off from the vine, and often isolation becomes our chosen judgment. Which we’ve discovered is incredibly destructive to the Christian life.

3. David’s Guilt and Taking Responsibility (1 Samuel 22:20-23). However, one of the sons of Ahimelech son of Ahitub escaped. His name was Abiathar, and he fled to David. ²¹ Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the Lord. ²² Then David said to Abiathar, “I knew that Doeg the Edomite was there that day and that he was sure to report to Saul. I myself am responsible for the lives of everyone in your father’s family. ²³ Stay with me. Don’t be afraid, for the one who wants to take my life wants to take your life. You will be safe with me.”

In this final scene of the chapter of David and Abiathar, we see a poignant moment of tension between guilt and responsibility. Though blameless for Doeg’s murderous actions and Saul’s paranoia, David’s empathy compels him to take ownership of the tragedy. He shoulders the burden of “unintended outcomes,” not with self-flagellation, but with a mature understanding of how our choices ripple outward in their effects. Rather

than wallowing in self-pity or guilt, he stands up and deals with it like a man.

David isn't guilty of ponderous self-introspection. He embraces Abiathar, the lone survivor of the massacre, offering not just refuge, but unwavering support.

This gracious spirit of taking responsibility and trying to make it right is literally the opposite of his previous mentor who now occupies a throne that belongs to David.

Application: A mark of Christian maturity is taking responsibility for our actions and the unintended consequences. Of course recognizing that we are not omniscient, we are not all-powerful—but we do our best to try and make it right. Oh, that Saul and his armed forces had that same mentality. What a different story this would have been.

Conclusion: We must seek healthy fellowship in Christ's body in order to avoid fostering an environment of mistrust.

- Do you find yourself embroiled in an environment of mistrust and suspicion? Might I suggest that you choose the path of fellowship, keeping short accounts, confession and dialogue. The cure for the devastating effects of isolation is found in the fellowship.
- Are you on the receiving end this morning of a bitter betrayal. Or perhaps you find yourself in the position of being God's instrument of judgment on others. Don't be too quick to embrace that role.
- Can you leave judgment to God for the sins committed against you?
- And if you are the one who has betrayed a trust, can you come humbly asking for forgiveness, confessing your wrongdoing—evidenced by a genuine repentance and turning away from sin?