

A Road Map through Troubled Times
(Lessons from David's Time on the Run from Saul)

David's life was on a strong, positive course toward the throne when suddenly, all he was doing was running from a mad king intent on his death. God never abandoned David, however, and the experience would remind David forever that God would be with him whether he encountered caves or crowns. His time on the run sorted David out, deepened his character, and fortified his relationship with God. Our lives, too, can spin on a sudden toss of a spear but God will never abandon us either. In 1 Samuel 17-31, we find a road map for thriving through our own troubled times.

1. **Learn to Trust God in Peace Time** – 1 Samuel 17:31-37 As a youth, David spent hours alone with God shepherding. He learned to talk with God and to rely on Him for protection. This served him well when Goliath threatened the Israelites. David responded with confidence, not in his own abilities, but in God. Likewise, we do well to press into God by praying, studying the Bible, and putting into practice what it says *before* trouble strikes.
2. **Establish Boundaries around Evil** – 1 Samuel 19:18 When Saul attempted to kill David, he didn't stick around. Though he continued to honor the King, he put distance between the two so that he would be safe. We set boundaries around evil when we, daily, put on the armor of God, set healthy limits on toxic relationships, and guard our minds by spending more time in God's Word than with the media.
3. **Receive Counsel from Trusted Friends** – 1 Samuel 20 David informed Jonathan, his friend and Saul's son, of Saul's attempts on his life. Jonathan was able to confirm Saul's intent and warn David to flee. When trouble comes, we don't always think straight, especially at the initial onslaught. Let godly friends come along beside you with wise counsel.
4. **Request Help** – 1 Samuel 21 David asked help from Ahimelech the priest and previous to this, he'd asked help from Samuel and from Jonathan. There are times when we all need support, supplies, or shelter from others. It's no shame to ask for assistance and allows others to partner with God in blessing us.
5. **Act a Little "Mad" if it Helps**– 1 Samuel 21:10-15 David realized that the King of Gath posed a threat to his life so he acted insane to show he wasn't a risk. I imagine he was feeling stressed enough for it not to be a challenge. It can be healthy to do a little yelling in the car, put the music up loud and dance, change up your routine, or retreat for a day.
6. **Accept New Travel Companions** – 1 Samuel 22:1-2 David hid from Saul in the caves and the Bible records that "everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them." During times of trial, we often encounter new associates who grow to be new friends as God uses times of trial to push us out of our comfort zones. Pay attention to the opportunities in these new relationships.
7. **Own Our Mistakes** – 1 Samuel 22: 20-23 David didn't become perfect because he was Saul's victim. He sinned, made missteps and mistakes but he took responsibility for the consequences of his actions. It can be harder when we're undergoing trial to acknowledge sin but confessing quickly is our best course to moving on.
8. **Rely on God's Leading** – 1 Samuel 23:1-14 On the run, David learned to seek God's leading for every decision. He was a warrior and knew how to battle but he consulted God before

committing to action. It can be a gift to be thrown off kilter, we remember the benefits of complete reliance on Jesus.

9. **Maintain Integrity and Honor** – 1 Samuel 24 David had opportunity to kill Saul but David acted with integrity and honor in sparing Saul's life. Undergoing trial is not an excuse for vacating our call to live godly lives. When we are wronged, we can be tempted to wrong others but we can rely on Jesus to provide strength to resist.
10. **Rejoice, Love, Celebrate the Good** – 1 Samuel 25 Even in the time of trial, David recognized good in others, found love in Abigail, and celebrated his marriage to her. Joy is God's gift to us and isn't tied to circumstances but is a fruit of the spirit. We're free, even during times of intense suffering, to find moments to laugh, love, and celebrate the good. This practice can sustain us in our worst moments.
11. **Be an Example to Others** – 1 Samuel 26 Again, David spares Saul's life, this time before the eyes of a foreigner. He is an example of godliness to the Hittites and a reminder to Saul of the godliness to which he once aspired. Others are always watching the lives of Christians – more so, frequently, when we're undergoing testing and trial. God may use the way we conduct ourselves during suffering to draw others to Himself so there is reason to press in to Him and be unwavering in our walk with Christ.
12. **Remember We Still Have Something to Offer** – 1 Samuel 27 – In the midst of trial and misery, David remembered he had skills and training to offer to serve others and he sought opportunity to do so. Even in our lowest times or most intense trials, we are free to serve others and to offer whatever we have to the work of furthering God's kingdom. It can be a powerful reminder to us that our trial will pass and that we will remain.
13. **Remember Others are Always Watching** – 1 Samuel 29 – David's conduct continued to be an example to those outside the Israelites and to the people following David, even as he endured the trial of separation from his king and his throne. God may use our trial and our conduct within it to encourage, exhort, or instruct not only other believers but those outside the family of God as well.
14. **We can Experience Victory even in Trial** – 1 Samuel 30 – David had victories along the way even as the greater trial continued. He didn't succumb to the false notion that nothing would be right until the greater trial ended. Look for small victories and celebrate them. Sometimes it helps to write a Psalm, like David did, of all the things God has brought us through and the small victories along the way to read in moments when we are low.
15. **Exercise Honor even in the Downfall of Your Enemy** – 1 Samuel 31 – When King Saul was finally defeated in battle and died, David continued to conduct himself with honor toward God's anointed. From the beginning of the trial to the end, David proved himself a man devoted to God, focused on God, and entirely motivated by a desire to please God.

No one wants to endure trial or undergo suffering but most of us do at one time or another. Take courage from 1 Peter 4:12-19 and both encouragement and instruction from David's time on the run. Know that God is with you. Be kind and gentle to yourself as you endure through the strength of Christ.

I've made this handout available for any Christian to use individually, in small groups, distribution at church, or in any Christian organization with the simple request that it be attributed to Lori Stanley Roeleveld. You can find other free materials like this at www.loriroeleveld.com.