Cultivating a Heart for God, Part 1

INTRODUCTION
1 Samuel 13:14 is very powerful passage of Scripture. What’s happening is that the prophet, Samuel, is coming to the King Saul, the rebellious king of Israel. Samuel is announcing that rebellious King Saul’s reign is over. It’s interesting that the prophet said, “Your reign is over, and God is going to give your kingdom to another” (1 Sam. 13:14, paraphrased), but that didn’t even happen for another thirteen, fourteen, or fifteen years. That’s interesting. It’s interesting to study the life of David, and to see the space of time between when the Lord says something, and when He actually does what He prophetically declared.

“THE LORD HAS SOUGHT FOR HIMSELF A MAN AFTER HIS OWN HEART”
Samuel says to the rebellious Saul, “Your kingdom shall not continue” (1 Sam. 13:14, NKJV). Here’s one of the most heartwarming lines in the Old Testament: “The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart” (ibid). The Lord has commanded or appointed or chosen this man whom we know as David. He’s just a young man; maybe he’s only twelve or fifteen at this time. He has appointed or commanded this young man to be commander over His people.

The Lord has sought for a man after His own heart. Of course, David was merely a boy, just a lad at this time. There are several points I want to make in this verse. Number one: God was seeking a certain type of heart response. God is seeking. The fact that God is seeking a human response is staggering to me. Jesus mentioned the same principal in John 4:24. He said, “My Father seeks those who worships Me in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:24, paraphrased). God is seeking after the response of the human heart because He longs for it so much.

HUMAN LOVE IS BUT A FORETASTE OF THE PASSIONS OF HIS HEART
I don’t know if you’ve ever been really in love before. I’m sure most of you have. When you’re really in love you so seek and long for a response in the heart of the person to know what’s in your heart. God’s heart is filled with love. He wants a response that’s according to the knowledge of what’s in His heart. He wants a response, number one. He’s seeking for it. The turbulent rivers in the heart of God’s personality are flowing strongly. He desires a response for the human race. He wants one desperately. Those of you who have felt the fire of love in your heart, whether romantically, or for a friend, or for a parent or a child, know how intense the longing is. Let me tell you, that longing is but a dim shadow of one facet of the love that dwells in God’s heart. God’s longing is much more intense than any of the five or ten types of human love we can experience. Whenever you feel the pang and the longing of love in your heart, it’s a dim, brief, glimpse into that violent love that’s in the heart of God for human beings.

There are many different types of human love. They’re all glimpses into that many-faceted diamond of the passion and personality of God’s heart. David referred to the personality of God in Psalm 36:8. I think he’s referring to the personality of God. He called it the “river of God’s pleasure” (Ps. 36:8, paraphrased). There’s a river flowing in the heart of God. It’s called the “river of His delight,” the “river of His pleasure.” It’s how He feels; it’s the emotion of His heart. We want to get into that river, don’t we? We want to live in the river of pleasure. God’s desire for human beings is dimly reflected in the five or ten types of love you can experience in various relationships on the earth.
LOVE ALWAYS SEeks A RESPONSE FROM THE ONE WHO IS LOVED

The paradox of love: it has pain and pleasure. Either way it goes, though, it ends with God longing for, seeking after, searching for a response from the heart of human beings. Whatever love you’ve experienced, take it to an infinite degree, and then you begin to understand the passion and the pleasure of God’s own river, of His own emotional makeup for His people. The emotional makeup of God is a fascinating reality. It’s the effortlessly-flowing life of God, the river of God, that flows within His own heart and His own emotional makeup. God is looking for a response. The lover always wants a response from the one who is loved. The parent craves a response from the child that he or she loves. The child craves a response from the heart of the mother or father. In the romantic sense, even in the deep friendship sense, there’s a longing, a craving, when love is fully ablaze and comes to boil.

This is what’s behind the sentence, “God has sought for. . .” Whenever God seeks for a human response, a human heart, you know that there’s a tremendous, fierce power behind the thing that’s in the heart of God. I so little understand this aspect of God’s personality, but I love it. It’s the violent love in the heart of God. Earlier I quoted John 4:24. Jesus says, “I seek for worshipers.” Oh, I love that. He seeks for lovers who understand His love. He seeks for people to understand the love. He seeks for people to reciprocate His love. God loves it when we understand His love. God has such delight in planning your pleasure. Did you know that? The heart of love is so intense.

GOD DELIGHTS IN PLANNING WHAT WILL BRING YOU PLEASURE

Of course, God is looking at a perspective of billions of years. He’s not looking at a mere seventy-year time on the earth, nor is He looking at a five-year period in those seventy years. He’s not looking at these three or four weeks. Often we interrupt God through the grid of the last three or four weeks. We say, “He doesn’t look like He’s planning my good.”

God says, “Let’s get a slightly bigger picture—first five years, then seventy years, then five billion years. You’ll understand it.”

Let me tell you this: God so delights in planning what will bring pleasure to you, the ultimate heart of love. Not only does He delight in planning it; He delights in communicating it to you. Something triggers in the heart of God when He talks about His love to us—just like the heart of any lover, when they talk and express their heart. The heart of the one talking, the heart of the one in love, is alive in communication. It’s called the spirit of revelation, the spirit of prophecy. It’s in the Scriptures. God communicates the plan He so delights in—a plan to bring us pleasure. It’s fantastic. God delights in our discovery of this great plan. When we discover it and we’re awed, we say, “Oh, my goodness!”

Just in the last few years, I was stunned by the revelation of the Bride of Christ. I said, “Unbelievable!” I only understand it a little. But even in the awe of my heart, I imagine God who so delights in planning my pleasure. He delights in telling me about it, and He delights when I discover it. I say, “This is incredible!”

He says, “Oh, I love it when you say that.”

That’s called worship. That’s called, “God desires worshipers.”

“Oh, God this doctrine is incredible.”
“Oh, Mike, I love it when you say that to Me.”

He really likes it when we fully express it back to Him. Not only when we discover it, but also when we express it.

This word is just hanging on my heart: “God has sought for Himself . . .” I love that phrase. He’s the ultimate Lover of all of life. I’m talking about God the Father right now. Beyond the human experience, the ultimate Lover is seeking for and searching for Himself that which that completes the very cycle of love that’s in His soul. It’s called the “river of pleasure.” He seeks for worshipers. Jesus said, “My Father wants them.” You don’t have a clue how much He wants worshipers. God delights in planning our pleasure. God delights in communicating it to us. God delights in the awe we have when we discover that plan of pleasure. God delights when we communicate it back to Him. God searches for those four different things. He searches for a human response.

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PERSON AFTER GOD’S OWN HEART?**

He called David a man after His own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). I love that phrase: “a man after God’s own heart.” What does it mean to be a person, a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, a person after God’s own heart? Most often when I’ve heard this taught over the years, the one who’s doing the teaching focuses on the second point. It’s a very important point, but it’s second: being an obedient follower of God, desiring to obey His ordinance and edicts and what’s on His heart. Whenever I’ve heard teaching on this verse, most people focus on David’s commit to obey the commands of God. I love that part about David. Let me tell you, on a list of 100 things, this is important. Number two is high up on the list. It’s second. It’s not secondary, but it’s second to being a person after God’s own heart. Being a person after God’s own heart means first and foremost a person who understands the emotional makeup of the heart of God; a person that has revelation into that river of pleasure called “the emotional makeup of God.”

Above everything else in David’s life, the number one characteristic is confidence, kindness, desire, and mercy. Call it what you want, because it’s all the same thing: his confidence in God’s heart for him. David knew the heart of God. When God called David a man after His own heart, what He meant first was, “This young man has an unique grasp of My desire for him. He knows My heart. He knows what I think about him and human beings.”

Secondly, David made a commitment to obey God’s commandment. Not secondarily; it’s not of secondary importance. It’s number two on the list. Again, on most of the occasions when I’ve heard this verse taught, they go right to the second point. Without the first point, the second point is just a grasp at the wind. You’ll never be an ardent, obedient follower of the commands of God’s heart unless you’re a person with insight into the desires, the passion, the longing, the turbulent river of pleasure that’s in the heart of God for you.

**THE CENTRALITY OF DAVID’S HEART IN THE STORY OF SCRIPTURE**

Only a year or three ago I did a series on the life of David. I went through it verse by verse at the training center, and I was re-gripped. The first time I taught the life of David verse by verse was twenty years ago. My point is, I’ve been a student of the life of David for twenty years. I taught it verse by verse all the way through with a dozen commentaries. I didn’t understand it very well, but I was working on trying to understand it twenty years ago. I’ve been a student of the life of David for one major reason: there’s more on David’s life than any single person in the entire Bible besides Jesus Christ. There’s a reason for that. There’s more about David’s
heart and life than there is about Paul, or even Moses. There’s more insight into the heart of David than there is about any single human being in redemptive history besides the Man Christ Jesus, who is fully God and fully Man.

When God puts that much emphasis on one heart, to expose it and reveal it, guess what? He wants us to know it’s an important heart to understand. The first time I ever studied the life of David, I took it as a course somewhere, and that’s what the teacher said. I said, “Man, I never knew that. I knew about David and Bathsheba, and the David and Goliath story.” Those are the only two stories I knew. I said, “I didn’t know he was that big of a deal.” And because that man said that one sentence, I said, “I will dive into that thing if it’s that important. I may as well jump in and see what I might find.”

What I found was shocking to me. I said, “God, what kind of man would You choose to be the prototype of a believer in the kingdom of God on planet earth? Surely it’s Paul.”

“No, it’s not Paul.” I didn’t hear this conversation; I’m making it up. It’s just the argument of Scripture, given the sheer volume on the life of David. I remember giving a sermon some years ago, in the spring or summer of 1985, to this congregation. I took the eight worst recorded sins in David’s life and put them all into a sermon. I spent five minutes looking at each one. I saved the juiciest one for the end: when he murders Uriah. Everyone talks about Bathsheba. Poor Uriah got killed. Bathsheba became the queen. What about poor Uriah? We need to re-title this, “Uriah, David, and Bathsheba.”

When I get to heaven, I’m going right to Uriah. Maybe; probably I won’t. I’ll go to heaven and say, “Hey, man, I was for you. I understand a little. You got really majorly ripped off. Even in the telling of the story later, you got ripped off.” Anyway, I saved the juiciest story for last. I gave the number of lies David told, the compromise he was in. I gave blow by blow the eight worst sins. Not all the sins of David; I only had time for eight main ones.

I remember when I finished that message, I was going to talk about how great the mercy of God was. The church back then said, “You know what? We need to vote David out of the Bible.”

When you hear all eight of them in a row, it’s really disillusioning. You say, “My goodness.”

They said, “At least let’s kick him out of the church for a while. Let’s do something. No one with that much mess in their life should be recorded in the Bible as a good man. No one should.”

**GOD’S FIRST AND LAST DESCRIPTION OF DAVID IN THE BIBLE**
The first description of David in the Bible is here, when he’s called “the man after God’s own heart.” His last description—not his last mention, but his last description in the Bible—comes a thousand years later, in Acts 13:22. God ends with the same statement: “A man after My own heart” (Acts 13:22, paraphrased). God introduces him in redemptive history that way. God leaves the scriptural account of him with the same exact statement a thousand years later, even after taking into account all of David’s weaknesses. God says, “I still call him a man after My own heart.”
Paul adds one more thing in Acts 13:22. He says, “Not only was David a man after God’s own heart. That’s how God still sees him, even though Bickle slammed him in that one sermon.” You know what Paul added? “David fulfilled all of God’s will” (Acts 13:22b, paraphrased).

I say, “Wait a second. I’ve studied the life of David now for twenty years. David didn’t do all of God’s will, Paul.” I might say, “Did you ever read 1 Samuel, Paul?”

He would say, “Yes, I read 1 Samuel, but I also have a revelation of the cross that you don’t fully understand.”

Through the cross of Jesus and the very loveliness of God’s own heart and the passion He feels for His redeemed people, he says, “Through God’s editing process God saw all the eight scandalous sins and all the other implied sins and failures. At the end of David’s life, he was still a man after God’s own heart, and he still fulfilled the will of God.”

I remember when I first read that. David didn’t fulfill all the will of God. The man made some major blunders. How many of you like God’s editing process? It gives hope to the human race. I know I can make it if this man made it. If some of you would study the life of David more, you would have some serious hope about your own difficulties. You would know a little about David. Typically you only have the good stories about David. He wrote the Psalms and he loved God. That’s really true. This man was a serious stinker. He really was. He did some really, really bizarre things.

THE ULTIMATE ISSUE IN THE GENERATION OF THE LORD’S RETURN

But he was a man after God’s own heart. First, “a man after God’s own heart” talks about David’s insight into the heart of God. Let’s turn to the Psalms now. We’ll start with Psalm 103. I’m just going to look at a few Psalms. Why am I sharing this with you today? Because I’m in need of hearing, number one. I can preach this stuff, but I need this stuff. I need to drink from this well. I need my soul to grow in it. Like I say when I go to conferences, “This thing preaches a whole lot better than it lives.” It’s easy to say it, but hard to grasp it. I’m on this divine treasure hunt of understanding the personality of God. I’m so convinced that this is the ultimate issue in the Body of Christ in the generation in which the Lord returns. There’s no question, it’s the ultimate issue in your life. How do you perceive the personality of God? When David talks about the river of pleasure in God, it’s talking about God’s heart for His people.

It’s not just that we get pleasure, though of course we do. We tap into the river. The river is filled with pleasure because of God’s feelings for His people. It’s God’s desires. One of the most profound books I ever read was by a good friend of Sam Storms, John Piper, called The Pleasures of God. We have it in our bookstore. It’s fantastic; it’s a whole statement on the pleasure and personality of God. I read that book and I ached. It was so good, it hurt me to read it. That’s how good it was. It blessed me. I said, “This is awesome.” It’s The Pleasures of God, by John Piper. I highly recommend it.

SATAN ACCUSES OUR HEARTS BEFORE GOD DAY AND NIGHT

I want you to know something about Satan that you already know. In Revelation 12:10 he’s called the accuser. Satan is called the accuser for one reason: that’s what he does most. Yes, he lies, but he lies primarily to accuse. Satan, number one, accuses the heart of God to you. He whispers in your heart day and night, night and day, day and night, night and day. Satan accuses the heart of God to you.
Then he comes and accuses your heart to you. He tells you that you’re on the end of the string, at the limit of His patients. “He’s about finished. He’s about to crush you.” He lies about the heart of God to you. The he lies about your heart to you. When you stumble in your immaturity, he calls you a rebel; he calls you a hypocrite. The truth is that you’re a lover of God, but you’re immature. Satan calls you a rebel and a hopeless hypocrite. He lies to you about your heart.

**THE GLORY OF GOD IS THE HEART BEHIND THE CROSS**

First he lies to you about God’s heart. Satan has been so effective in lying to the Church about God’s heart that the world has all these lies about God’s heart. It’s horrible. Satan blinds the minds of the people from the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:4). The glory of God isn’t just the cross. It’s a pretty big statement; the cross is pretty awesome. It’s the most awesome event of history. The glory of God is the heart that pounds within God’s emotional makeup that made the cross happen. The glory of God isn’t just what He did. It’s why He did it. There’s a river of pleasure in the heart of God. He has delight in planning your pleasure. He delights in communicating it and expressing it. He has delight in watching you discover it. He has delight in watching you communicate your heart back to Him.

“O God, I love this! This is awesome!”

“Oh, I love it when my son does that. I love it when he says that.”

That’s called worship. That’s what we did this morning. When worship comes out of a fresh discovery of the delight that God has in planning our pleasure, it moves the heart of God. I don’t want to go back to that point. David is called a man after God’s own heart in all of his weakness.

**CRANKY HOLINESS WILL NEVER SATISFY THE HEART OF GOD**

I believe that in our church right now we’re in a transition point. Those of you who understand this terminology, good, and those of you who don’t, don’t worry about it. We’re at the Hebron state. Some of you know what I mean. I gave a message on that some months ago. If you don’t remember, that’s fine. We’ve come out of the Adullam years, the years in the wilderness, and now we’re at the Hebron state. Do you understand the kind of person God wants to give influence over the people of His kingdom? He wants people with heart like David. He wants a people with happy holiness. Many of the holiness people are cranky. Many of the happy people aren’t holy. God wants happy holiness. Jesus hated iniquity (Heb. 1:9). Jesus loved righteousness, but the same verse tells us He had more joy than any other person in human history. He had more gladness than any of His companions. That means more than any fellow human being. Jesus had more gladness in His hatred of sin. His heart was filled with eternal, infinite happiness. He has happy holiness. He has exuberance with gladness in the mist of His hatred against sin and His love of righteousness.

I tell you, the cranky holiness is never going to win the unbelievers. It’s never going to satisfy the heart of God. Carnal happiness isn’t, either. Happy holiness, the two together, brings more joy, but a greater hatred of sin than you had before. That’s where God is bringing this church: to a place where we hate sin, and we love righteousness, and we have lots of gladness. Our spirit percolates. Our spirit is buoyant with joy on the inside. That’s where God is taking His end-time church.

Lord, we’re in for the ride. We’re into this thing. We’re going all the way with You. We’re in a transition time. I’m absolutely sure of this. In this transition time—in my mind, I’m still in Psalm 103. I want to challenge us...
above everything to be people after God’s own heart. In order to be people after God’s own heart, we have to understand God’s heart, number one. Then, number two: we commit ourselves to obey the commands of His heart. Number one, we understand His heart. These two things don’t have to be in enmity; they work together. It’s the right and the left hand. It’s not either/or; it’s both/and.

As a matter of fact, until you understand the first dimension of God’s heart, how He feels, you’ll never really be equipped to follow in obedience the heart of God, because the accuser is so effective. The accuser will come and take all of the energy out of your spirit. The accuser will tell you that God is about to wipe you out, and you’re just a hypocrite anyway. “Just curse God and die!” is what the accuser will tell you (Job 2:9, paraphrased). He accuses God’s heart night and day. He accuses your heart night and day, day and night, night and day. I don’t care if you’re a mature believer or the newest believer. One proven tactic in Satan’S kingdom is accusation: to accuse and tell lies about God’s heart and your own heart. “Quit!” But we were made to know that God loves us, and we were made to be lovers of God. We can’t succeed any other way. That’s why he accuses those two points, over and over and over and over.

THE NUMBER ONE CHARACTERISTIC OF DAVID’S HEART
I told the eight sins of David’s life and we almost kicked him out of the Bible, or least out of the church, at least for a year or two. “Don’t preach any more sermons on David for at least a year,” because he did so badly when he was on the earth. Here’s what we ended up with. I did another sermon on the ten characteristics on the heart of David. There are about fifty of them, but there are ten main ones. I tell you, I’m not trying to pull rank on you, but having studied the life of David for twenty years, unmistakably the number one characteristic of David’s heart was his confidence in God’s mercy when he sinned. Let’s say it differently: his confidence that God liked him when he stumbled. It’s profound. It’s all through his life. It’s all throughout the Psalms. When you combine the psalms that he wrote with the events that he was in when he wrote the psalms—which we’ll do; today is just an overview—when you put the psalm in the place of his life, you see what he was doing when he wrote that psalm.

It really is magnified. David had this glorious but almost obnoxious confidence in God. David would do this terrible thing. He would then get up and say, “I repent. I’ve shed tears of repentance, but you know what? God likes me so much.”

I say, “David, how dare you?” I wasn’t used to that at first. I wasn’t used to people not whipping themselves for at least a month or two after they did something bad. I began to connect with this a little, some time ago. I need to connect with it more; that’s what the Lord is doing in my life right now. He wants me to connect with the river of His pleasure in a deeper way than I ever had. That’s what the kingdom of God is about. It’s a great, eternal, divine romance. It’s the Lover of all the ages, wooing the hearts of men and women created to be lovers. Wooing them in the river of God; wooing them into being loved and becoming lovers. That’s what this whole thing called salvation is about. It’s a giant love story. This is what it really is about in the heart of God the Father.

So of the top ten characteristics, I’m just going to mention this one: his confidence in God’s mercy. His resilient confidence in God’s mercy was incredible. It’s unbelievable; it’s off the charts. In fact, I would rank David’s obedience as third or fourth on the list. David was an obedient man of God; but he had enough glitches that I would say, “David, I wouldn’t exactly rank that as number one. It might be way up there, but come on, David; bring it down one or two. You had some pretty serious scandals in your life.”
You might think of Joseph and Daniel, or Elijah or Enoch, men like that, if you’re looking for major obedience. Moses had a few bad ones in there, and so did Elijah, now that I think about it. Joseph and Daniel—let’s leave it at that. Maybe you can put them as the sterling characters. You see no glitches in their character at all. Maybe this is too revealing, but I relate to David.

HE CROWNS YOU WITH LOVING-KINDNESS AND TENDER MERCIES
Look at the middle of Psalm 103:4. “He crowns you with kindness and tender mercies” (Ps. 103:4, paraphrased). Oh, I love that!

David says, “You know what? I’ve been crowned king.” He says, “In my world, when people meet me they think about how big my kingdom is.” David expanded the kingdom of Israel more than any man except Solomon. If you don’t include Solomon, the kingdom was largest under the reign of David. Certainly, it was the largest in Israel’s history up to David’s time. At his point in history, he had the largest extension of the kingdom of Israel ever. He conquered all the nations. People would come and see the crown on his head. When you talked about David, they thought of incredible military power, incredible political might, and influence over all the nations.

David says, “You know what I think about my life? I don’t think about my military and political crown. That’s not what really defines me. I’ve been crowned with kindness. I’ve been crowned with tender mercy.” He says, “That’s the crown that I wear.” That’s why David carried his authority so lightly. It strikes you in the life of David how lightly he carried his authority. He wouldn’t us his authority in any way to his own personal advantage, but only for God. That’s one of the most striking issues of David’s life: the lightness with which he carried his authority. He wouldn’t even put the sword through his enemies. He said, “So what? It’s just my kingdom. I don’t care if I don’t have this job. I’m a lover of God. That’s what I’m really about.”

When you talk to David, you say, “David, what’s your favorite crown?”

He says, “Oh, the crown of kindness and the crown of mercy. God put His tender mercy on me. He crowned me with it. I’ve been crowned with a crown that’s so much more important than a political crown.” I believe that’s how David defines his life: through the crown of mercy; through the crown of tender mercy. It’s absolutely fantastic.

Turn to Psalm 18. This is truly one of the most remarkable psalms in the life of David. It’s remarkable, and we can’t actually look at the Bible verses because of time, but I’ll give you a three- or four-minute description of what was happening in David’s life when he wrote Psalm 18. This was the transition time in David’s life. He wrote Psalm 18 exactly where I believe we are in the Spirit. For those of you who understand the symbolism, we’re going from the Adullum years to the Hebron years. I shared that in the summer. It’s the transition time. David wrote this precisely during the seven-day period when he was going from the Adullum years to the Hebron years. For those of you who have notes, you can look at the top of Psalm 18. It says, “A psalm of David the servant of the Lord, who spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul” (Ps. 18:1).

This was written on the day that Saul died. Saul died in the same seven-day period that David received an awesome deliverance from Ziklag, from the Amalekites, from the Philistines, and from the treachery of his own team of 600 who had made a commitment to kill David. David had one of the wildest weeks of his life prior to
his thirtieth birthday. When he was twenty-nine and a half, or twenty-nine and three quarters, right before his thirtieth birthday, David had one of the wildest seven-day periods that you can imagine. I want to describe it to you.

David had been in Ziklag for sixteen months. Ziklag was a city that belonged to the Philistines. This was really bad. Why? Because David was supposed to be in the land of Israel. The problem was that Saul had 3,000 full-time assassins in Israel committed to murdering David.

But after six or seven years, David said, “You know, God, I’m really tired of running from these 3,000 soldiers. They’re going to get me one of these days.”

God says, “No, they’re not. I will protect you. I’ve you protected for five years. I’ll protect you until this season is over, until you go to Hebron.”

David says, “I’m tired of believing You to protect me. Here’s what I will do. I know Saul is such a chicken at heart. He’s such a coward. I’ll sneak over to the Philistines’ camp.” They were the archenemies of Israel. “I’ll hide behind the Philistines. Saul will never chase me there. He’s afraid of them.”

Here’s what David had to do. It’s really bad. He had to go to one of the kings of the Philistines, Achish, king of Gath. You know what he had to do with Achish? He had to sell himself with a total lie. Basically he said, “Achish, I’ve been running from Saul for five years. I’m disillusioned with Israel. I’ve renounced all the prophecies. I want to be your servant. I just want to be your bodyguard, because you’re so awesome.”

Achish said, “Aren’t you the one all the little Hebrew girls are singing about?” David’s song had been on the top ten charts for years: “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (1 Sam. 18:7). All the little girls were singing it. That’s heady wine for a young, twenty-year-old man. Everyone was singing it. It was known even in the land of the Philistines. They said, “We heard that song about you.”

David said, “You know what, Achish? I’m tired of Israel. I’m tired of Saul. I don’t trust him anymore. I’m disillusioned. God won’t protect me. I’m with you, if I could just be a bodyguard in your court. That’s all I want.”

This was a total lie. David was schmoozing him. That’s not a bad word, is it? I didn’t know if it was a Hebrew curse word. David was lying to Achish. It was a bold-faced lie. “Achish, I just want to be with you.” That’s how he got over there: by deceiving Achish. And David was a great warrior. He was Joe Montana, MVP, winner of the Super Bowl, and the whole bit. David was the main warrior of Israel’s history.

Achish said, “You’ll work for me, for free?”

“Yes, just to be with you, Achish.” What a liar!

Anyway, he’s over there. He’s done this thing to Achish. He’s comfortable. “Saul can’t get me!”

God sends the prophet Gad. I’m skipping parts of the story and summing it up, so it’s not exactly in this sequence. The prophet Gad says, “Get back over there. Get back over to Israel.” David disobeys the prophet.
Cultivating a Heart After God

Gad. He’s in compromise with God. He’s afraid. He has a spirit of depression on him. He says, “There’s only one step between me and death. I’m going to die anyway” (1 Sam. 27:1, paraphrased).

Someone says, “You are? You killed Goliath. You’ve killed all these mighty armies. Why are you going to die at the hand of Saul?”

“I just know I will.” He’s going in a spirit of despair, disobeying the prophets, disobeying God’s command.

He goes over there and lies to Achish. Achish gives him a city called Ziklag and says, “You can live in Ziklag for a while.” He then tells several more lies, which I won’t go into, to Achish and the other people. He’s lying through his teeth. It really drives you crazy, what he’s doing here. This goes on for sixteen months. You might think, “One month isn’t that big a deal; boys will be boys,” but sixteen months! “David, you’re a man after God’s own heart. I don’t buy it, you little hypocrite.”

But that’s not what God sees. We won’t look at Psalm 56; I’ll just quote it. At the top of the psalm, David explains that he wrote it while in Gath, in the midst of this sixteen-month period. He says, “God has stored every one of my tears of repentance in His bottle. He hasn’t mocked a single one. He has stored them. He has written every tear of repentance in His book” (Ps. 56:8, paraphrased).

He says, “When I stand before God in the last day, when He looks at this sixteen months, He won’t look at it as a waste of time.”

God says, “I saw every tear you shed. I saw the despair that was on you. I saw the fear that gripped you. I saw the compromise that overcame you. I saw your cry for deliverance in Gath. You know what, David? Those tears mean something to Me. Your men may write you off as a hypocrite, but those tears are stored in My bottle. They’re written in My book.”

David writes this while in Gath, which is next to Ziklag. Ziklag and Gath are together. It’s all the same regime, and it’s under the Philistines. It’s compromise. He writes this in Psalm 56:9: “For this one thing I know, that God is for me” (Ps. 56:9, paraphrased).

When I read that and connected with it, I said, “God is for you? You’re in Ziklag, you old backslider. How can you tell me that God is for you? You’ve spent sixteen months in compromise. The thing you believe is that God is storing every one of your little tears in His bottle because they’re so precious to God.”

David says, “You may not think they’re precious. He doesn’t let one of them fall to the ground unrecorded, because my cry to be fully who I am is recorded in the heart of God.” Is that not awesome? Psalms 18 and 56 were written in Ziklag. Psalm 18 was written on the day he was delivered.

“SAVE ME, O GOD, FOR THE WATERS ARE COME UNTO MY SOUL!”

Here were the five terrible enemies that had come against David. Number one: assassins, 3,000 assassins paid by Saul and the government—your tax dollars at work! Three thousand men, paid full-time to kill David while the other men were trying to keep the nation from attack by the Philistines.
Secondly, the Amalekites had enslaved David’s family. I’ll skip that story. David’s family and the families of his 600 soldiers had been enslaved by the Amalekites, taken away in chains and ropes.

Thirdly, the Philistines. The generals, the high command of the Philistines were totally against David.

Fourth, the 600 men in David’s small, mobile army had just made a decision. They had just made a decision to stone David and kill him (1 Sam. 30:1-6).

Fifth, and greatest of all: David’s own fear, compromise, and unbelief were like a flood of waters drowning him. He wrote, “The rivers flooded over me. My feet are stuck in mud. I can’t deliver myself from my own inward fears. I can’t deliver myself. The floods have overwhelmed me. I’m sinking in mud, my God” (Ps. 69:1-2, paraphrased).

Let’s go through it again. There were 3,000 men trying to assassinate him. The Amalekites had enslaved his family. The Philistine high command was against him. His own 600 men had turned against him and decided to kill him. Because of his own sins and his own soul, he had five major enemies pounding at his mind and heart. All five of those things happened in one turbulent, seven-day week in David’s life! Did you ever have a seven-day period like that? Did you ever have a week or two, or a month or two, when every single issue imaginable was coming down the pipe at one time? Your poor, little heart was stretched beyond anything you could take or imagine. Suddenly, it was the hour of truth. The truth wasn’t how cool David was, or how committed he was. The truth was what David knew about God under the crisis of everything going wrong.

“HE DELIVERED ME, BECAUSE HE DELIGHTED IN ME”

David says, “He drew me out of many waters” (Ps. 18:16). Oh, that’s an understatement. Many waters? He’s talking about Saul’s 3,000 men, the Amalekites, the Philistines, his own men, and his own sin. “He drew me out of many waters.” I would say that’s putting it mildly.

Look at verse 19. We’re skipping so much. “He brought me to a broad place” (Ps. 18:19, paraphrased). David is certainly understating this. A broad place? All of your enemies are subdued and you’re the king of Judah in one seven-day period. I would say that’s a broad place. That works for you, doesn’t it? Everything is turned around in one seven-day period.

Here’s the question of the hour. They get him in front of CNN and interview him. They say, “David, it’s been quite a political turn of events for your career. You’re back as military king of Judah. All of your enemies are dead. They’re singing new songs. New songs are coming hot right off the list, the new psalms. Tell us why all this happened.”

David says, “Yes, He delivered me for sure. God is the One who delivered me.”

“Why did God deliver you?”

Look at verse 19. He says, “For one reason: He likes me so much” (Ps. 18:19b, paraphrased). That’s the answer he gives.
They say, “Because He likes you? No, no. David, surely the right answer is because God is so great and merciful.”

“Well, yes, that too. The bottom line is, God really, really likes me. He really delights in me.”

“Well, David, I don’t want to embarrass you. You’re on national TV. You’ve been in Ziklag for sixteen months. There are a lot or rumors flying around. You’re disobeying the prophets. They’ve been telling us. They’re not supposed to, but they always do. The prophets are speaking some stuff over here on this. All your men were going to kill you. They told their wives; they wrote home. The word is out that there’s been a military coup in your own little camp. I don’t think you’re that lovely right now, David. Why the military and the political turn of events in your career? Why this new thing?”

He says, “God likes me. That’s really the reason.”

It’s incredible that he can say this after that sixteen-month period. He lied through his teeth. He’s full of despair. He’s sinning and in compromise, but his tears have been shed day by day. David cries tears of deliverance, and all of them, every single one, God stores in His bottle. David said, “I knew God was for me when I shed those tears.”

Look at the end of verse 35. Oh, how I love verse 35. It’s so good. He says, “Father.” I’m adding that. He says, “Your gentleness has made me great” (Ps. 18:35). “Your gentleness with my sin is the reason I’ll be a great man of God, Father.”

Here’s what he’s saying. He’s saying, “There’s a reason why, at the end of my life, I’ll be great. There’s a reason I’ll be mature, and a reason I’ll slay and defeat the Lord’s enemies: You were gentle with me when I was stumbling. Your gentleness with me is what will make me a great man.” What a sentence.

“THERE IS FORGIVENESS WITH YOU, THAT YOU MAY BE FEARED”

David builds on that in Psalm 130. You can read it later. David said, “If God marked our iniquities, what man could stand” (Ps. 130:3, paraphrased)? If God were counting who did it badly, what human being in the history of planet earth would stand? David says, “No, He doesn’t count iniquities. He doesn’t mark or record them. He washes them away.”

Why? So that the weak people will fear the Lord in the days that are yet to come in their life. You’ll never fear the Lord today if God wasn’t kind to your sins five years ago. Every God-fearing man and woman of God in the earth today is someone whose sins were not marked by God five years ago. Rather, God forgave them. Later, in His gentleness, He made them a great fearer of God.

David puts the two together. He says, “With the Lord there is forgiveness, so that the immature will fear the Lord one day” (Ps. 103:4, paraphrased). It’s fantastic.

We’ll end with this verse. Psalm 18:1. Here’s David. These last seven days have been crazy and bizarre. The Philistines are gone. Saul is dead. They’ve recovered their families from the Amalekites. The army is now going to stand with David rather than kill him. David has gotten the compromise out of his life. Here he is. It’s a new day. He’s clean-shaven and he has new robes on. He says, “I will love You, O Lord, my strength” (Ps. 18:1).
Here’s the problem. When David first signed this new worship song, “I will love You,” the 600 men said, “That’s pretty convenient, David, now that everything is OK. Oh, David loves God.

David said, “I loved Him every step of the way.”

“Oh, it’s really nice to call God your strength now that all of your enemies are defeated.”

David said, “In my soul, I knew He was my strength. I was just stumbling in my weakness.”

If you said, “I love You, God,” after sixteen months in Ziklag, the devil would come and call you a liar to your face. He would call you a hypocrite. He would accuse you night and day.

David said, “Forget it. I love God. I’m a lover of God. God loves me. He has delighted in me. Even though I shed the tears in Ziklag, He loves me every step of the way. He desired me. His gentleness has made me great. I’ll be a great king one day. I’m not crowned with the crown of Israel and the crown of Judah. Yes, I wear that, but that’s not the crown I live by. I’ve been crowned with kindness. I’ve been crowned with tender mercy.”

Beloved, this is the psalm David wrote in the transition state, the week before he went to Hebron, the day that Saul died. When you put the story together, it’s before Hebron. As a people, we’re right at Hebron. I know that God wants Psalm 18 in the life and the foundation of this church. It’s your life right now before we begin to rise up and wash our face, put the place behind us, and prepare to seek the Lord diligently as the new year comes. We’ll go into a season in January and February and March and April—we don’t have the exact dates; it’s not settled yet. We’ll go into a season of seeking the Lord as a people. We know that a time of blessing is upon us right now; but first, we have to get through Psalm 18. We have to stand before the Lord and say, “You have delighted in me. Your gentleness will make us a people who are great lovers of God. Not famous, but great in love.”

We begin by saying, “I love You, O God.”

Your friends say, “Hey, bud, you’re in Ziklag.”

You say, “I love You, God. I don’t care what anyone says; I’m a lover of God.”

Amen and amen. Let’s stand.

MINISTRY TIME
Oh, we love You, God. Lord, we want to be a people after God’s own heart. Lord, I just don’t want to obey Your heart, and I do. I want to know Your heart. I want to feel the river of pleasure, the delight You feel when You plan my pleasure, O God; the delight You feel when You tell me of that which brings me pleasure. The delight You feel when I discover it; the delight You feel when I speak it to You in worship. Oh, the river of Your delights. Let the river flow into our own souls, O God. Thank You, Lord. O Lord, we thank You.