



## Editor's Note

Long ago, the Lord made a promise through the prophet Malachi, which many living in the time of his writing would find hard to believe. He said "my name shall be great among the nations," and He repeated it again in the same verse (Mal 1:11).

This promise is being fulfilled particularly today, not only by the extension of the Gospel to people groups who are hearing the message of God's love for the first time, but also on entire continents where the gospel has been

known for many years, but where distances or other geographical situations have made it difficult to develop.

It is a special joy to see subscribers being added to our readership from many countries in Latin America, and I would like to extend a special word of welcome to all of them! We trust the Lord to bless them abundantly as they join in making "His Name great among the nations." 

## Biblical Teaching

### Leadership that Rescues (1 Samuel 23) by Warren Henderson

We learn from 1 Samuel 23 that David was not idle during his wilderness years of evading Saul. Besides writing a number of lovely psalms, David also defended the oppressed and protected those near his hideouts. For example, after learning that the Philistines were robbing the threshing floors of Keilah, David was moved with compassion to do something, but wisely sought the Lord's counsel on the matter first. "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" (v. 2). The Lord's answer was, "Go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah" (v. 3).

#### Keilah

It is unclear how the Lord answered David's questions, but regardless, the man of faith wanted to discern the mind of the Lord before acting (v. 6). While speaking to the Lord, David humbly refers to himself three times as "Your servant." Before acting on the Lord's behalf, it is wise to seek His mind with a spirit of meekness and submission. We should want only what the Lord wants. Knowing His mind first will prevent us from opposing what He has determined to accomplish. For instance, we may respond in pity to the perceived need of another only to find out later that we enabled that person to continue in sin.

David's men, already on the run from Saul, were not as eager to confront an enemy that was not seeking them, especially a much larger one like the Philistines. David showed good leadership by not ignoring the reservations of his men. Rather, he sought the Lord's counsel a second time to be sure of His direction (v. 4). Again the Lord confirmed what

David was to do, but gave the added promise that He would ensure a complete victory: "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will deliver the Philistines into your hand."

Seeing that this was the Lord's battle, David obeyed and led his men against the Philistines, who were soundly defeated and despoiled of their livestock (v. 5). David, with the Lord's help, saved Keilah and exemplifies true faith working for God's honor. It did not take long for news of David's rescue of Keilah to reach the ears of Saul (v. 7). The deranged king actually believed that God, who had soundly rejected him, was showing kindness

to him by entrapping God's "beloved" in a walled town so that he could be captured. It is the epitome of an evil spirit to think God is somehow for you when He is not with you at all. The king quickly assembled a sizeable complement of men to besiege Keilah and capture David and his men (v. 8).

Yet David understood the evil heart of Saul and

knew that the king would not rest until he was dead. Through Abiathar's use of the ephod, David inquires of the Lord (vv. 10-11). Although he is the anointed king of Israel, David does not exalt himself in God's presence, but rather claims to be merely a lowly servant who desired to do God's bidding.

Jehovah's answer to David's inquiry was concise, "He [Saul] will come down." David then asked the Lord if the men of Keilah would deliver him and his men into the king's hands. The Lord affirmed, "They will deliver you" (v. 12). Having discerned the mind of the

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## Problem Solving

### Keep Your Balance in the Quest for Fellowship, Part 3 *by Jack Spender*

The first two articles in this short series were devoted to choosing and supporting good leaders for groups. The old saying, “As leadership goes, so goes the church” is true at other levels, too, including small groups that constitute part of the assembly’s work. Another area in which balance is important for healthy groups is in the content or subject of group meetings. This is very important. Shepherds must feed the flock, but they are never told to convince the sheep that their choice of food is nourishing. Sheep know good food, and they will seek it out.

The content of small group meetings is a broad subject, and much depends on the goals for which they come together. When groups of people with specialized needs or interests gather to learn together, and support one another, the church can reap great dividends. People enjoy meeting others with similar interests, such as insights for raising small children, or recovering from substance abuse, or supporting missions or meeting to study Scripture or for prayer, etc. Unlike group meetings in the world, groups in the church are not simply social get-togethers. There is life-changing work to be done as part of discipleship. The Lord loves fellowship!

#### A Gentle Warning

Before we list a few guidelines, a word of warning is in order. Because some (especially older) churches have only known “Bible studies,” there can be resistance to groups meeting for the needs of practical fellowship, that is, for relationship building. Elders must understand that the content of group meetings should never be a choice between Bible study and practical subjects; they complement one another. God’s Word is the foundation of all learning, of course, and we cannot neglect or minimize it. However, it is a mistake to think that simply learning doctrines is the whole work of “feeding the flock.” Many Christians are educated far beyond their obedience!

It is of vital importance for elders to face such questions as: Where are the opportunities in this assembly to ask questions, to extend compassion, to hear

what’s in the heart, to share testimonies of God’s workings? Is there a forum to offer practical insights, to stop and pray for a need that surfaces, and to heal relationships? Certainly, groups that meet to discuss practical matters of the Christian life ought to ground their fellowship on Biblical principles. But then they also have the freedom to explore this equally important question: “How can we live out these truths and encourage one another to build them into the daily Christian walk?” This is where balance comes in.

#### Things that Edify

Regardless of specific subject matter, all groups within the church will have one thing in common; they are meeting to grow together in the Lord. The content may not necessarily focus on any particular need or interest: only that the believers have an intimate setting for learning, sharing insights, caring for one another, etc. Let’s think about this in greater detail.

Groups should observe a few simple guidelines such as 1) being clear about the goals of the group (more about that in the next article), 2) respecting those who lead and are accountable to the elders, 3) being committed to the work of relationship building, and 4) being committed to Scripture as the foundation of all wisdom and knowledge.

We have already spoken about the importance of equipping and supporting group leaders. This means helping them maintain a good balance between serious study and personal sharing, between steadfastness in doctrine, and willingness to hear personal points of view, between time for comforting and caring as well as theoretical subjects of truth and holiness. Striving for balance in these things can foster groups that meet needs and are valued rather than simply tolerated.

To state it another way, groups that edify preserve a healthy balance between the two words “faithful” and “relevant”: that is, faithful to Scripture and relevant to “people needs.” Here are a few areas to be considered in this regard.

#### Check the Practical Side

##### *Meeting design*

The format should be communicated clearly. I mentioned previously the LLDD option—Love, Learn, Decide, Do—that helps disciple the whole person, not just the mind. But whatever the chosen format, it needs to be understood by the people and kept on track by those who lead.

##### *Physical structure*

Warm and inviting space enhances fellowship. Seating layout, simple provisions such as a pitcher of water with glasses, appropriate lighting, reasonable

heating or cooling of the room, and provision for small children can all contribute to success or failure of the group’s purpose.

##### *Loving environment*

Nothing is more toxic to fellowship than a critical spirit, either in those who lead or those who attend a group. New people and

young people especially can bring some baggage into a group, and they quickly discern whether they are accepted for who they are (not what they believe), or whether they are subtly being urged to go elsewhere. An atmosphere of acceptance where people feel free to be open, confess faults, ask for help, learn how to listen and how to pray, will pay rich spiritual dividends.

##### *Developing a sense of mission*

Is the primary goal of the group to edify the saints or to reach out to the community? The answer is often, “Both!” In that connection, a study of the Lord’s work with the Samaritan woman in John 4 is invaluable. He did not suggest that they go to town to meet and evangelize her friends. He showed such love and acceptance of her, that she could not wait to introduce her friends to Him! Groups that cultivate this spirit may exist to serve the saints, but they will inevitably reach out to friends and neighbors in the process.

#### Conclusion

Faithful elders take seriously the

*(Continued on next page)*

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## **Fellowship** (continued from page 2)

command to “feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28). Enlisting the help of “under-shepherds” is commendable, and a precious training tool for future elders, but it does not relieve them of the ultimate responsibility to monitor the content and the progress of the groups, and take

action when necessary. Maintaining a close working relationship with group leaders is crucial, and under normal circumstances, freedom can be granted to adjust the content of meetings as the Lord brings needs to light.

Designing groups that hold interest

can be challenging and enjoyable. But we must never lose sight of the real reason for getting together: fellowship, the strengthening of relationships within the body of Christ. So always, the content of group meetings must be a servant, not a master. 

## **Prophets** (continued from page 1)

Lord, David immediately left Keilah with his six hundred men (v. 13). Saul halted his advance on Keilah after learning that David had escaped into the wilderness.

David’s response to his difficult circumstance was quite different than Saul’s reaction to *his* challenging situation in 1 Samuel 13 where the king chose to compromise the truth (i.e., to do what the Law prohibited). David, on the other hand, waits on the Lord to ensure he knows the truth before acting. David is victorious over the Philistines and rewarded for honoring the Lord. In contrast, Saul was told he would lose the kingdom for transgressing the priesthood.

This comparison reminds us that we should never compromise the truth to alleviate whatever circumstances are pressing down on us. The consequence of not having God with us in our trials will always be more costly than if we had continued in faith to do what He appreciates. As David shows us, it is best not to concede what we know is right but to let the Lord fight our battles for us! Despite life’s difficulties, living is so much more enjoyable when we walk with the Lord.

### **Ziph**

David hid in various mountain strongholds in the Wilderness of Ziph and Saul unsuccessfully hunted for David every day (v. 14). David was aware that Saul was seeking his life, but he was equally aware that God was preserving him despite his aggressor’s efforts (v. 15). Although Saul could not locate David, Jonathan had no difficulty finding him in the forest of Ziph (v. 16). He says to David, “Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that” (vv. 17–18).

Knowing David’s skill in eluding

him and not wanting to go on another wild goose chase, Saul tasked the Ziphites with pinpointing David’s exact location and then spying on his activities. Saul would continue his search for David throughout Judah, but would quickly move to apprehend David after they provided more precise information (vv. 21–23). David, apparently sensing the danger, moved his men about five or six miles further south of Jeshimon into the wilderness of Maon (v. 24).

Saul was subsequently informed that David was hiding in a rock stronghold near Maon (v. 25). Saul quickly took his troops to this location, but arrived on the side of the mountain opposite to what David was on (v. 26). While his prey was quickly circling away from him, Saul received an urgent message that the Philistines were invading the land, which prompted the king to abandon his quest for David (v. 27). Saul left to battle the Philistines, and David took the opportunity to relocate to the rugged, rocky region of En Gedi to the east (vv. 28–29).

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God’s providential care of David in this situation is somewhat ironic. The very people David just defeated at Keilah invaded Judah at just the right time to preserve him from Saul’s hand. The wisdom and ways of God are never at a loss to care for His people and to accomplish His purposes in the process. In honor of God’s protection, David afterwards referred to this locale as the Rock of

Escape. God has already demonstrated in the life of David that He has many ways of delivering His own from trouble.

### **David’s Responses**

No wonder David joyfully named the place “the rock of escape.” David penned Psalm 54 shortly after the treachery of the Ziphites. In it, David urgently pleads with the Lord to deliver him from his vicious oppressors because they had no respect for God’s name, which represents His person and character (Ps. 54:1–3). The latter portion of the psalm is an expression of David’s trust in God, his Helper, to render justice and retribution on his enemies (Ps. 54:4–5). Because God is good, His name is also good—David knew that God would judge all those who dishonor His name by their ill-treating those who treasure it.

May we too endeavor to honor the Lord’s name in whatever we do (1 Cor. 10:31), and likewise to honor those that He honors for doing so.

The psalms that David wrote during this season of his life show us that his heart was becoming more intimately bound to God’s through each trial. For example, while avoiding Saul in the wilderness of Judah he expressed his deepening desire for God: “My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me” (Ps. 63:8). James teaches us that God uses progressive trials to add patience to our existing faith (Jas. 1:2–3), and David tells us that the wilderness experiences of life are worth having to obtain a higher experience with God.

Through his godly, humble conduct in 1 Samuel 23, David teaches us the virtues of leadership that is effective in protecting and blessing God’s people. If we desire to rescue God’s sheep from danger we would do well to heed David’s example. 

## Wives' Corner

### The Journey of Faith: Naomi: Hope Beyond Sorrow by Marti Miller

Grief is a powerful emotion that hovers over one's life, dipping down to overwhelm the soul in its loss. It's not easy. Having cared for my widowed mother for four years, I watched her in every phase of grief and sorrow. Now she is in her heavenly home, and grieves no more.

Mother lived a life of faith, loved the Lord and looked for His soon return. She knew hardship from early days of poverty: sorrow over children going astray and severe, debilitating chronic pain till the day she passed into glory. She went through many stages of grief. Shock, denial, and anger were her early responses. Sound reasoning slipped as the dark clouds of depression overwhelmed her at times. When I said, "Look to the Lord, He will help," she said, "You don't understand. I do trust Him but I am so lonely." It was true. I did not fully understand, nor could I replace the one she hungered for. Yet the Lord understood. He is the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3), and Mother knew He understood.

The grief of Mother's loss appeared more painful than all the sorrows I knew she had ever experienced. Yet, she kept her hope of heaven before her. She read the Word, went to meetings, and prayed with me each night for all the family, both saved and lost. Best of all, her smile

would broaden as she boldly approached a stranger to tell them that she was a widow but Jesus Christ was her Savior and someday, maybe soon, she would be with the Lord and her husband. And then she would say, "Do you know where you are going when you die?"

In watching my mother, I have pondered Naomi's grief. Her sorrows were multiplied, her losses deeply felt. Her two daughters-in-law with their own dreams dashed—what would they do now?

Naomi's name means "my delight." I may be reaching, but I believe that her faith in God wavered only a little although her delight dimmed. Ruth learned from Naomi that grief can encompass a soul but God gives hope. Naomi must have sowed glorious truths about her God during those ten years, even as she grieved deeply.

When Naomi heard that God had visited His people in giving them bread (Ruth 1:7), a longing grew in her heart to return. Ruth, with a hunger of her own, chose to follow Naomi. With a determined commitment she left all behind for Naomi and her faithful God.

This same hope is ours to cling to and ours to offer to others who struggle. As Psalm 116:7–8 says, "Return to your

rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." Trust the Savior at all times for He is always faithful.

Naomi's friends and family rejoiced

over her return to Bethlehem, yet she told them to "call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty" (Ruth 1:20–21). Sometimes the Lord has to show us our emptiness in order to fill us to overflowing! He gave both Naomi and Ruth a redeemer and a son through Boaz. Redemption was

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always God's plan, not only for the one who grieves, but for the lost as well.

Let us enjoy the fresh Bread of Heaven, today! "Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, That we may rejoice and be glad all our days"! (Psalm 90:14). 

#### THE SMALL PRINT

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