
Be Still.

THOUGHTS AND READINGS FOR MEDITATION 49

“Saul is in your bloodstream, in the marrow of your bones. He makes up the very flesh and muscle of your heart. He is mixed into your soul. He inhabits the nuclei of your atoms.”

“They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I know it not...” Hos. 8:4



Dedicated to the brokenhearted Christians coming out of authoritarian groups, seeking solace, healing and hope. May you somehow recover and go on with Him who is liberty.

And to Christians who have been, or presently are, involved in the heart-rending experience of a division within your fellowship. May this story give you light, clarity and comfort. And may you, too, somehow recover and go on with Him who is peace.

And may you both be so utterly healed that you can still answer the call of Him who asks for all because He is all.

A TALE OF *Three Kings*

David ran. He stopped long enough to get his breath. Then, sweat pouring down his sunburned cheeks, he walked into his father's house, his eyes recording everything in sight. The youngest son of Jesse stood there, tall and strong, but more in the eyes of the curious old gentleman than anyone else in the room. Kin cannot always tell when a man is grown, even when looking straight at him. The elderly man saw. And then, something else, too. Some way the old man knew what God knew.

God had taken a house-to-house survey of the whole kingdom, as a result of which the Almighty had found that this leather-lunged troubadour loved his Lord with a purer heart than anyone else on all the sacred soil of Israel.

“Kneel”, said the bearded one with the long, grey hair, and David felt oil pouring down upon his head. “Behold the Lord's anointed.” The Hebrew words were quite unmistakable. Even children knew them.

Quite a day for this young man, wouldn't you say? Then do you find it strange that this most remarkable event led the young man, not to the throne, but to a decade of hellish agony and suffering? On that day, David was enrolled, not into the lineage of royalty, but into the school of brokenness. Eventually he found himself in the castle of a mad king. And in circumstances that were as insane as the king, the young man was to learn many indispensable things.

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David sang to the mad king. Often. The music helped the old man a great deal, it seems. Nonetheless, the king was mad and, therefore he was jealous. Or was it the other way around? Either way, the king felt threatened by David, as kings often do when there is a popular, promising young man beneath them. The king also knew, as did David, that this boy might just have his job some day. David was caught in a very uncomfortable position; however, within his circumstance he seemed to grasp a deep understanding of the unfolding drama in which he had been caught. He seemed

to understand something that few of even the wisest men of his day understood. Something which even in our day, when men are wiser still, fewer understand. And what was that?

God did not have, but wanted very much to have, men who would live in pain.

God wanted a broken vessel.



The mad king saw David as a threat to the *king's* kingdom. He did not understand, it seems, that God should be left to decide what kingdoms survive which threats. So Saul threw spears at David. He could. Kings can do things like that. They almost always do. Kings claim the right to throw spears. Everyone knows very, very well that such men have that right because the king has told them so—many, many times.

Is it possible that this mad king was the *true* king, even the Lord's anointed? What about your king? Is he the Lord's anointed? Maybe he is. Maybe he isn't. No one can ever really know for sure. Men say they are sure. Even *certain*. But they are not. They do *not* know. God knows, but *He* will not tell.

If your king is truly the Lord's anointed, and if he *also* throws spears, then there are some things you *can* know, and know for sure: 1) Your king is quite mad, and 2) he is a king after the order of King Saul.



God has a university. It's a small school. Few enroll, even fewer graduate. Very, very few indeed. He has this school because He does not have broken men. Instead He has several other types of men. He has men who claim to be God's authority... and aren't. And men who *are* God's authority, but who are mad *and* unbroken. And He has, regretfully, a spectroscopic mixture of everything in between.

Why are there so few students? Because they all must suffer much pain. And as you might guess, it is often the unbroken ruler (whom God sovereignly picks) who metes out the pain.

As David's king grew in madness, David grew in understanding. He knew that God had placed him in the king's palace, under true authority—*God's chosen authority for David*. Unbroken authority, but divine in ordination, nonetheless.

David drew in his breath, placed himself under his mad king, and moved farther down the path of his earthly hell.



David had a question: What do you do when someone throws a spear at you? Does it seem odd to you that David did not know the answer? After all, everyone else in the world knows what to do... you wrench the spear out of the wall and throw it right back! And in doing this small feat of returning spears, you will prove many things: You are courageous. You stand for the right. You boldly stand against the wrong. You are tough and can't be pushed

around. You will not stand for injustice and unfair treatment. You are the defender of the faith, keeper of the flame, detector of all heresy. You will not be wronged. All of these attributes then combine to prove that you are also, obviously, a candidate for kingship. Yes, perhaps *you* are the Lord's anointed... after the order of King Saul.

There is also a possibility that some twenty years after your coronation, *you* will be the most incredibly skilled spear thrower in the realm.

And, most assuredly, by then... quite mad.



Unlike anyone else in spear-throwing history, David did *not* throw Saul's spears back at him. Nor did he make any spears of his own and throw them. Something was different about him. All he did was dodge. What must a young man do when the king decides to use him as target practice? First, he must pretend he cannot see spears, even when they are coming straight at him. Second, he must learn to duck very quickly. Lastly, he must pretend nothing at all happened.

You can easily tell when someone has been hit by a spear. He turns a deep shade of bitter. David never got hit. Gradually, he learned some very well-kept secrets: 1) never learn anything about the fashionable, easily-mastered art of spear throwing; 2) Stay out of the company of all spear throwers; and 3) keep your mouth tightly closed. In this way, spears will never touch you, even when they pierce your heart.



"My king is mad. At least, I perceive him so. What can I do?" All any of us can do is ask ourselves the question: "Is this man the Lord's anointed, and if so, is he after the order of Saul?" Asking this question may not seem difficult, but it is. Especially when you are crying very hard... and dodging spears... and being tempted to throw one back... and being encouraged by others to do just that. And all your rationality and sanity and logic and intelligence and common sense agree. But remember in your tears: You know only the question, not the answer. No one knows the answer except God... and He *never* tells.



"What do I do when the kingdom I'm in is ruled by a spear-wielding king? Should I leave? If so, how? Just what does a man *do* in the middle of a knife-throwing contest?" The answer is, "You get stabbed to death." You have your eyes on the wrong King Saul. As long as you look at your king, you will blame him, and him alone, for your suffering. Be careful, for God has *His* eyes fastened sharply on another King Saul, one just as bad—or worse. God is looking at the King Saul in *you*. He breathes in the lungs and beats in the breast of all of us. You may not particularly find this to be a compliment, but at least now you know why God put you under someone who just

might be King Saul.

David the shepherd would have grown up to become King Saul II, except that God cut away the Saul inside David's heart. The operation, by the way, took years and was a brutalising experience that almost killed the patient. The scalpel God used to remove this inner Saul was the outer Saul. And David accepted this fate. He lifted no hand, nor offered resistance. Nor did he grandstand his piety. Silently, privately, he bore the crucibles. Because of this he was deeply wounded, his whole inner being mutilated. His personality was altered. When the gore was over, David was barely recognisable.



How does a man know when it is finally time to leave the Lord's anointed—especially the Lord's anointed after the order of King Saul?

David never made that decision. Saul made it for him by his own decree: "Hunt him down, kill him like a dog!" Only then did David leave. No, he fled. Even then, he never spoke a word or lifted a hand against Saul. Please note also this: David did not split the kingdom when he made his departure. He did not take part of the population with him. He left *alone*. *All* alone. King Saul II never does that. He always takes those who "insist on coming along", those who are willing to help you found the kingdom of King Saul II. Such men *never* dare leave alone.

But David left alone. You see, the Lord's true anointed can leave alone. There's only one way to leave a kingdom: *Alone*.



Caves are not the ideal place for morale building. They are all the same. Dark, wet, cold and stale. And a cave is worse when you are its sole inhabitant... and in the distance you can hear the dogs baying.

But sometimes, when the dogs and hunters were not near, the prey sang. He started low, then lifted up his voice and the cavern walls echoed each note just as the mountains had once done. He had less now than he had when he was a shepherd. No staff, not even the company of sheep. *Everything* was being crushed out of him. He sang a great deal, and matched each note with a tear.

How strange, is it not, what suffering begets? There in those caves, drowned in the sorrow of his song, David very simply became the greatest hymn writer, and the greatest comforter of broken hearts this world shall ever know.



Sometimes the dogs came close; sometimes they even *found* him. But swift feet, rivers, and watery pits hid him. Caves were castles now. Pits were home.

In Jerusalem, when men taught of being submissive to kings and honouring to the Lord's anointed, David was the parable. "See, this is what God does to rebellious

men.” The young listeners shuddered at the thought and sombrely resolved never to have anything to do with rebellion.

These were David’s darkest hours. You know them as his pre-king days, but he didn’t. He assumed this was his lot forever. Suffering was giving birth. Humility was being born. By earthly measures he was a shattered man; by heaven’s measure, a broken one.

Others had to flee as the king’s madness grew. After long searching, some of these fugitives made contact with David. But he had changed. He talked less. He loved God more. He sang differently. They had never heard these songs before. Some were lovely beyond words, but some could freeze the blood in your veins.

These fugitives were a sorry, worthless lot of thieves, liars, fault-finders: rebellious men with rebellious hearts. They were blind with hate for the king and, therefore, all authority figures.

David did not lead them or share their attitudes. Yet, unsolicited, they began to follow him. He never spoke of submission to authority; but, to a man, they submitted. Legalism is not a word found in the vocabulary of fugitives. Nonetheless, they cleaned up their outward lives as David modelled for them submission, instead of authority. And so, for the first of two times, true kingship had its nativity.

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“Why, David, why?” The place was another nameless cave. The men stirred about restlessly. All were as confused as Joab, who had finally voiced their questions. “Many times he almost speared you to death in his castle. I’ve seen that in your own eyes. Finally, you ran away. Now for years you have been nothing but a rabbit for him to chase. Furthermore, the whole world believes the lies he tells about you. The King himself has even come hunting every cave, pit and hole on earth to find you and kill you like a dog. But tonight, you had *him* at the end of his own spear and you did nothing! Look at us, we’re animals *again*. Less than an hour ago you could have freed us! And Israel too! Why?” There was a long silence. Men shifted again, uneasily. They were not accustomed to seeing David rebuked.

“Because... once, long ago, he was not mad. He was young. He was great. Great in the eyes of God and men. And it was God who made him king—not men.”

Joab blazed back, “But now he *is mad!*” And God is no longer with him. And David, he will yet kill you!”

This time it was David’s answer that blazed with fire. “Better he kill me than I learn his ways, the ways that cause kings to go mad. I will not throw spears, nor will I allow hatred to grow in my heart. I will not avenge. Not now. Not ever!”

Joab could not handle such a senseless answer. He stormed out into the dark.

That night men went to bed on cold, wet stone and muttered about their leader’s distorted, masochistic views of relationships to kings, especially mad ones.

Angels went to bed that night, too, and dreamed, in the afterglow of that rare, rare day, that God might yet be able to give His authority to a trustworthy vessel.

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What kind of man was Saul? Forget the bad press. Look at the facts. He was one of the greatest figures of human history. He was a country kid, tall, good-looking and well-liked. He was baptized into the Spirit of God. He had some of the greatest historical figures of all mankind in his lineage. And it was Saul who welded Israel into a united kingdom. He created an army out of thin air and won battles in the power of God. Furthermore, he was a prophet. He was everything men today are seeking to be... empowered with the Holy Spirit... able to do the impossible... for God. A leader, chosen by God, with power from God. He was also eaten with jealousy, capable of murder and willing to live in spiritual darkness. Is there a moral in these contradictions? Yes, and it will splinter your concepts of power, great men of God and about God himself.

Hidden under prayers for power are ambition, a craving for fame, the desire to be considered a spiritual giant. The man who prays such prayers may not even know it, but the same dark motives and desires are in his heart... in *your* heart. Prayer for power is the shortcut that circumnavigates internal growth. There is a vast difference between the outward clothing of the Spirit’s power and the inward filling of the Spirit’s life. In the first, despite the power, the hidden man of the heart may remain unchanged. In the latter, that monster is dealt with.

Why does God give unworthy men power, even though they are a pile of dead men’s bones inside? The answer is both simple and shocking. He sometimes gives unworthy vessels a greater portion of power so that it might eventually be revealed for all to see the *true* state of nakedness within that man. Highly gifted and very powerful men, reputed to be leaders in the kingdom of God, can do some very dark and ugly deeds. What does this world need: gifted men, outwardly empowered? Or broken men, inwardly transformed? Keep in mind that some of the men who have been given the very power of God have raised armies, defeated the enemy, preached and prophesied with unparalleled power and eloquence...

And thrown spears. And hated other men. And attacked other men. And plotted to kill. And prophesied naked. And even consulted witches.

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“The man I sit under... I think he is a King Saul. How can I know with certainty?”

Your leader may be a David. It is not given to us to know. And remember, even Sauls are often the Lord’s anointed. Men who go after the Sauls among us often crucify the Davids among us. However, the passing of time will reveal a great deal about your leader. And the way you react to that leader—be he David or Saul—will reveal a great deal about *you*.

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What’s that? You are now certain that the man of God you are under is not truly from God, or at best he is only a Saul! My, how certain we mortals can be... of things even angels do not know. What do you plan to do with this newly acquired knowledge, you yourself being neither a Saul nor a David... but only a peasant of the realm. Share your discoveries with a few friends? Perhaps I should warn you that with this heady new knowledge of yours there is an inherent danger. A strange mutation can take place within your own heart. You see, it is possible, but wait! What is it I see over there, in that distant mist behind you. Who is that figure making his way through the fog? He is now putting on a cape, and a coat of arms from some ancient, long forgotten order. Who is this man! That bearing. The stance. The carriage. I’ve seen it before, I’m sure. Why, it’s YOU! You, who can so wisely discern the presence of an unworthy Saul! Look, too, at the name upon that coat of arms. Behold: ABSALOM II!

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It warmed your heart to know a man who saw things so clearly. He could penetrate to the heart of any problem. Men felt secure just being with him. Talking with him, they realised that they themselves were wiser than they’d realised. They began to long for the day when this one would become their leader. But this imposing, insightful man would never hasten the day of his own rule, of this they were certain. He was far too humble, too respectful of the present leader. The more they sat and talked with him, the more they realised there were things presently amiss in the kingdom which they had never thought of before. But the wise young man sat quietly and added not a word to these murmurings. He always closed the evening conversations with an humble word of deference toward those with responsibility.

But such a compassionate man could not forever turn his face from these sufferings. Finally, his followers, which he vowed he did not have, wanted to do something about these endless injustices. At last, it seemed, the magnificent young man might concede. At the outset it was only a word. Later, a sentence. Men’s hearts leaped. Nobility at last was arousing itself for action. But no! He cautioned them not to misunderstand. He was grieved, yes, but he could not speak against those in seats of responsibility. No, absolutely not. No matter how great the grievances.

Yet he grieved more and more. Finally, his righteous anger broke out in cool, controlled words of strength. "These things ought not to be." He stood, eyes blazing. "If I were in power, this is what I would do..." And with these words, the rebellion was ignited. Ignited in all but one, that is. In the noblest and purest man in the room this was not the case. Rebellion had been in *his* heart for *years*.

Says History,

"Absalom is both sincere and ambitious, a contradiction perhaps, but true. He probably means some of what he says, but his ambition will continue long after he discovers his inability to do the things he promises. Righting wrongs always comes secondary to ascent to power. And he has stated two irreconcilable propositions: more changes, more freedom.

All kingdoms follow a bumpy course. To accomplish all he speaks of will take time. Not all will be willing to go along. Will he still be determined to put all his dreams into being? If so, then Absalom has but one recourse: dictatorship. Either that, or he will see few, if any, of his grand dreams accomplished. If he *does* become a dictator, I can assure you that in the not too distant future there will be discontent with *him*, just as there is now with the present king. But rebels who ascend the throne by rebellion have no patience with other rebels and their rebellions. Then Absalom will become a tyrant. He will be ten times the evil he now sees in his king. He will crush rebellion and rule with an iron hand... and by fear. This is always the final stage of high-sounding rebellions. Such will be Absalom's way if he takes the throne from David.

Some rebellions have been of benefit, throwing out brutes and despots, but this particular kingdom is different from all others. It is composed of God's people. It is a spiritual kingdom. No rebellion in the kingdom of God is proper, nor can it ever be fully blessed. A man who will lead a rebellion has already proven, no matter how grandiose his words or angelic his ways, that he has a critical nature, an unprincipled character, and hidden motives in his heart. Frankly, he is a thief. He creates dissatisfaction and tension within the realm, and then either seizes power or siphons off followers. The followers he gets, he uses to found his own dominion. Such a sorry beginning, built on the foundation of insurrection... No, God never honours division in His realm.

Is it not curious that men who feel qualified to split God's kingdom do not

feel capable of going somewhere else, to another land, to raise up a completely new kingdom? Beginning empty-handed and alone frightens the best of men. It also speaks volumes of just how sure they are that God is with them. Men who lead rebellions in the spiritual world are unworthy men."



David stood looking over the balcony of the garden terrace of his palace. The lights from the houses in the Holy City twinkled below him. From behind, a man approached. David sighed, and without turning, spoke. "Yes, Joab, what is it?"

"Do you know?"

"I know," he replied quietly. "I have known for months, years. Perhaps I have known for thirty years."

Joab was not sure, after this answer, if they were speaking of the same subject. Absalom, after all, was not much past thirty.

"If you have known for so long, why did you not stop him? Shall I stop him for you?"

David whirled round, "You shall not! Nor shall you speak one word to him!"

"But will he not then take the kingdom?"

David sighed again, softly, slowly. For a moment he balanced between tears and a smile. "Yes, perhaps he will. I have fought many battles and faced many sieges. I have usually known what to do. But for this occasion, I have only the experience of my youth to draw on. The course I followed then seems to me to be the best I can follow now."

"And what course was that?"

"To do absolutely nothing. Absalom will do the unthinkable. He will divide the very kingdom of God. All else was talk. The kingdom hangs in the balance and it seems I have two choices: to lose everything, or to be a Saul. I can stop Absalom. I need only to be a Saul. I feel the Lord Himself awaits my decision. Shall I now be a Saul?"

Another voice answered from behind, "Good king, he has been no David to you." It was Abishai, who had approached unannounced. "You fled and left the kingdom rather than divide it and overthrow Saul. You risked your own life for unity and sealed your lips and eyes to all his injustices. You had more cause to rebel than any man in history. Has Absalom behaved as you did? No! He is only pure and noble! Why don't you stop his rebellion? Absalom speaks against you night and day!"

"You are asking me, Abishai, to become a Saul," David replied, heavily.

"No, I'm saying he is no David; stop him!"

"And if I stop him, will I still be a David?"

Abishai said nothing for a while. Then slowly, he spoke, making sure he grasped the significance of David's decision. "My good king, if you are not willing to put Absalom down, then I suggest we prepare to evacuate the kingdom, for Absalom will surely rule."

"Only as surely as King Saul killed the shepherd boy," replied the wise old king. "Think on it, Abishai. God once delivered a defenceless boy from the powerful, mad king. He can yet deliver an old ruler from an ambitious young rebel."

"You underestimate your adversary," retorted Abishai.

"You underestimate my God," replied David, serenely. "It is better to be defeated, even killed, than to learn the ways of a Saul, or the ways of an Absalom. The kingdom is not *that* valuable. Let him have it, if that be the Lord's will. Shall I throw spears, and plot, and divide... and kill men's spirits if not their bodies... to protect *my* empire? I did not lift a finger to be made king. It may be *His* will for these things to take place. After all, it is *His* kingdom. It may be that in God's eyes I am no longer worthy to rule.

Any young rebel who raises a hand against one whom he believes to be a Saul; any old king who raises a hand against one whom he believes to be an Absalom, may—in truth—be raising his hand against the will of God. I seek God's will, not His power. The Sauls of this world can never see a David, only an Absalom. And the Absalom's of this world can never see a David, only a Saul.

We Hebrews are consistent, aren't we? Remember Korah approaching Moses and Aaron with his troop? At 40, Moses had been an arrogant, self-willed man, not unlike Korah. What he might have done at 40, I cannot say. At 80, he was a broken man, the meekest man who ever lived. The man who carries the rod of God's authority should be meek, or God's people will live in terror. Yes, a broken man faced Korah. And I believe you already know what Moses did. He did... nothing. He fell on his face before God. That is all he did. Moses knew God alone had put him in charge of Israel. There was nothing that needed to be done. Those 253 men would seize the kingdom—or God would vindicate Moses. Moses knew that.

In my old age I shall not be a Saul, even if it costs me a throne, a kingdom, and perhaps my head. God shall be God!"

Adapted from the book by Gene Edwards

"These two principles, their own reputation and that of their sect, constituted the life and soul of Pharisaism of old."

"It is not the glorious battlements, the painted windows, the crouching gargoyles that support a building, but the stones that lie unseen in or upon the earth. It is often those who are despised and trampled on that bear up the weight of a whole nation."

—JOHN OWEN