Good morning, Moon Valley!

Today, I am going to talk about something we all engage in at one time or another: ▶ awfulizing. Awfulizing is the tendency to fixate on and exaggerate the negative aspects of a situation. Awfulizing imagines a situation to be as bad as it could possibly be. Things can be 95% good, but awfulizing locks onto the other 5% that's not so good and blows it all out of proportion.

And this thinking can lead us to dark places and damaging decisions.

Today we continue our sermon series titled, ▶ "Making a Difference in a Nation Adrift." It is a study through the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel.

The text we are studying today is ▶ 1 Samuel 27:1-28:2. In this text, we are going to see David struggle with awfulizing. We are going to consider its source, its development, its consequences, and its cure—all from the life of David.

You may be surprised that a godly man like David could awfulize. But the reality is, we are all susceptible, some more than others. Even the most positive people who seem never to awfulize can fall prey to it in a perfect storm of circumstances.

Let's see what we can learn from the awfulizing of David. Our text begins in ▶ 1 Samuel 27:1, where it says,

> ESV 1 Samuel 27:1 Then David said in his heart, "Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. . . ."

The awful thought that David is thinking is that he will not survive his current ordeal—that Saul will eventually murder him.

You may recall that Saul is the current king of Israel who has been chasing David to kill him, not because David has done anything wrong, but because Saul wants to retain his power as king, and he knows that God has rejected him in favor of David.

Awfulizing is a form of self-talk. Notice that David is talking to himself ▶ "in his heart."

While the awful thought David is thinking is to a certain degree understandable—Saul is a threat—it is not consistent with the truth that God has revealed to him. Indeed, for the believer, awfulizing is typically out of alignment with God's word. Noted pastor and author, Charles Swindoll goes so far as to say, "You and I have never had the Lord lead us to a pessimistic thought. Never once. They come strictly from within our carnal minds."[1]

We have plenty of evidence that David's awfulizing was out of sync with both God's word and David's previous convictions.

You may recall that the prophet Samuel had anointed young David to be the next king of Israel. And since the anointing, God also spoke through Jonathan, and through Abigail, and even through Saul, who all affirmed to David that he would one day be king.

In the immediately preceding chapter, David also seemed convinced that God would deal with Saul, clearing the way for him to become king. Remember, in 1 Samuel 26:10, David said the Lord might kill Saul miraculously, or by natural causes, or in battle. David seemed confident that, one way or another, the Lord would see to it that Saul would be the one to die first, not him.

[1] Charles R. Swindoll, David: A Man of Passion and Destiny (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 110.

And this confidence was supported by experience. The Lord had repeatedly protected David. It was clear that God was actively, personally, and lovingly involved in the details of David's life, working out his plans and promises.

What's more, in the most recently recorded episode in David's life—the one we studied last week in chapter 26—there seemed to be some reason for optimism. David had boldly gone into the camp where Saul was sleeping. He took Saul's spear and used it not to kill him but to try to convince him to give up the chase. And it seemed to work. Saul confessed his sin and vowed not to harm David.

So, what happened between chapters 26 and 27 to cause David to start awfulizing?

At least two things.

First, an unspecified amount of time passed. Extended periods of hardship with no relief can wear you down.

Second, during that time, it seems that Saul must have started chasing again for David to say, "Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. . . ."

Let's put ourselves in David's sandals.

He was a fugitive in his own country, exiled from his family, betrayed by his countrymen, running for his life, hiding in the desert, looking for odd jobs, constantly on the move, having to feed hundreds of men. All for no good reason that he could see.

Saul's most recent return to his murderous chase meant that David's life-threatening hardship would likely continue.

And this didn't go on for just days, or weeks, or months. It went on for years with no end in sight. This is fertile soil for awfulizing to take root.

On commentator explains, "[David] had turned the other cheek. He had gone the extra mile. He had just spared his archenemy, the king of Israel. Had he not been loyal and faithful both to his king on earth and to his King in heaven? Why weren't things going better? Who could blame David for asking these questions?"[2]

At some point, in the midst of his weariness, David began to awfulize: "Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul."

In our text, there is no mention of prayer.

In fact, there is no mention of God.

I suspect this is indicative of David's perspective and self-talk during this time. "God has forgotten me. God has hidden his face from me. My life is miserable. I thought I could be king. But that is never going to happen. And I'm going to die if I keep this up. Saul is eventually going to prevail. I need to take things into my own hands. I need to escape."

Beware when you do a lot of talking to yourself but no talking to God.

David's plan of escape starts to unfold in next part of ▶ verse 1, where he says,

> ESV 1 Samuel 27:1 ". . . There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. . . .

[2] Gene A. Getz, *David: Seeking God Faithfully* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 1995), 135-136.

Really? Is there *nothing* better? Is there really no better option than to escape to the Philistines, the enemy of God's people, to buddy up with them?

How about trusting God right where you are in the middle of the hardship?

Throughout the history of Israel, God had warned his people not to align themselves with or be influenced by godless people, such as the Philistines.

But awfulizing makes escape look better than trust. In fact, that is the ▶ big idea of my sermon: Awfulizing makes escape look better than trust. "Following God is too hard. I think God has deserted me. He can't be trusted. I need an escape."

In such circumstances, escape is a bad choice.

Our circumstances may be different, but we, too, have our own forms of escape prompted by awfulizing.

When things get tough enough for long enough, awfulizing can tempt us to escape God's boundaries through . . .

- unfaithfulness,
- pornography,
- workaholism,
- substance abuse,
- gambling,
- apathy,
- materialism,
- church hopping,
- being emotionally unavailable,

- trying to control everything,
- abandoning your marriage for no good reason,
- or staring at a screen instead of facing our challenges.

Escape can be easily rationalized. In the last part of ▶ verse 1, David reasons,

> ESV 1 Samuel 27:1 ". . . Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand."

So, David escapes, as explained in ▶ verses 2 through 4.

> ESV 1 Samuel 27:2 So David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maoch, king of Gath.
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> ▶ ESV 1 Samuel 27:3 And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, ▶ and David with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow.
>
> ▶ ESV 1 Samuel 27:4 And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him.

When I make a sinful choice to escape, I often rationalize that it's nobody's business but mine—I'm the only one who will have to deal with the consequences. But my poor choices affect those who trust me and depend on me and look up to me.

David brings his family and his men into his bad decision.

As is often the case, escape seems to work at first. It brings fast relief. Saul stops chasing.

And David's decision to escape seems to get even better, as described in ▶ verses 5 through 7.

> ESV 1 Samuel 27:5 Then David said to Achish, "If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be given me in one of the country towns, that I may dwell there. ▶ For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?"

David seems to use false humility as a pretense for getting his own place to live at a distance from Achish. It works. Verse 6 continues.

> ▶ ESV 1 Samuel 27:6 So that day Achish gave him Ziklag. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day.

> ▶ ESV 1 Samuel 27:7 And the number of the days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months.

In escaping to the other side, David finds acceptance from Achish that he didn't have with Saul.

And David and his entourage enjoy some security for 16 months in Ziklag.

David's decision to escape is typical in that it brings initial relief—enough to make him think he's made the right choice. "See, everything's going great! I got this."

But David has crossed over. Everybody serves somebody. David once served the Lord; he has now defected to serve the enemy of God's people. David describes himself to Achish as "your servant." The man of God has become a man of the world, where Satan, the father of lies holds sway.

A modern version of David would be a carnal Christian—somebody who has believed in Jesus for eternal life and is saved, but is not obediently walking with the Lord, but walks instead according to the flesh, the way of the world.

And when you turn your back on God, taking things into your own hands, trouble comes eventually.

Cracks in David's character appear. David begins to further compromise his integrity.

David has to feed his decision. In order to get provisions for his people in Ziklag, David and his men raid and plunder people groups who are enemies of Israel, but not enemies of the Philistines. The raids are unprovoked.

David deliberately deceives in two ways.

First, he leads Achish to believe that he has been attacking his fellow Israelites the whole time. It's a lie.

Second, he covers his tracks by killing every person in each people group so that no one is left to tell Achish the truth about what David is really doing.

All this is explained in ▶ verses 8 through 12.

> ESV 1 Samuel 27:8 Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, ▶ for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as Shur, to the land of Egypt.
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> ▶ ESV 1 Samuel 27:9 And David would strike the land and would leave neither man nor woman alive, ▶ but would take away the sheep, the

oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the garments, and come back to Achish.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 27:10 When Achish asked, “Where have you made a raid today?” David would say, “Against the Negeb of Judah,” ▶ or, “Against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites,” or “Against the Negeb of the Kenites.”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 27:11 And David would leave neither man nor woman alive to bring news to Gath, thinking, “lest they should tell about us and say, ‘So David has done.’” ▶ Such was his custom all the while he lived in the country of the Philistines.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 27:12 And Achish trusted David, thinking, “He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant.”

Once you start down the road of deception, things get complicated. You can keep up the lies for a while, finding ways to escape, but eventually you turn into a dead end. In ▶ 1 Samuel 28:1, David encounters one.

ESV 1 Samuel 28:1 In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war, to fight against Israel. ▶ And Achish said to David, “Understand that you and your men are to go out with me in the army.”

David’s lies had led Achish to believe that David and his men had been fighting against their own people all along and should have no problem joining him in war against Israel. The truth is, David had not been fighting against his people and has no intention of doing so.

Imagine the look on David's face when Achish summons him into battle. It's a "what-have-I-got-myself-into" moment.

Yet David manages to keep up the ruse, answering vaguely in ▶ verse 2.

> ESV 1 Samuel 28:2 David said to Achish, "Very well, you shall know what your servant can do." ▶ And Achish said to David, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life."

Oh boy.

That is the end of the episode in our text. The scene then shifts to Saul, providing no immediate resolution. It leaves us hanging. This story doesn't pick up again until chapter 29.

We can see the truth of the big idea: ▶ Awfulizing makes escape look better than trust. We can see that choosing escape over trust is a bad idea. But we are left wondering: How do we deal with awfulizing so it doesn't get us into trouble?

If you have been following this sermon series, you may be thinking, "This is where Bob jumps over to a psalm written by David during that period of time that gives us some answers."

Good thought. Only one problem. Not one of David's psalms is attributed to his days of defection recorded in our text. Which is not surprising. When you choose escape over trust, you're usually thinking about yourself, not God.

You may be unsettled by David's behavior in our text. As I read various commentators in preparation for this sermon, I got the impression that some didn't quite know how to take David's bad behavior. It was as if it didn't square with a certain theology that says godly people can't do

really dumb stuff. In fact, one commentator rationalizes David's actions as laudable—the deception, the lying, the extermination of people groups to cover his tracks—as if the behavior of a man after God's own heart could not be otherwise.[3]

In reality, every biblical hero is deeply flawed. Except Jesus. Keep in mind that David is only in his twenties when all this happened. Ever do some really dumb stuff when you were young?

But David is not beyond the grace of God, and neither are we. God is at work, preparing David for a forty-year reign as Israel's king, even in the current ugliness.

We have some evidence that David learned from his mistakes. While David may not have written any psalms during his defection to Philistia, at some point, he did write some psalms that reflect a helpful pattern that may have been informed by his experience in our text.

For example, here is some ▶ awfulizing that sounds a lot like David in our text.

- God has forgotten me.
- God has hidden his face from me.
- My life is miserable.
- My enemy is better off.
- This is going to kill me.
- My enemy is going to prevail.

This awfulizing is presupposed in Psalm 13, written by David. Psalms are not presented in chronological order in the Bible, so Psalm 13 was not necessarily written before Psalm 14. The introduction to Psalm 13 says David wrote it but provides no clues as to when he did. That said, I think

[3] Bill T. Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 359.

David probably wrote it with the defection behind him, having learned some lessons.

In Psalm 13, there is a two-part approach to dealing with the awfulizing.

The first part is to ▶ redirect to God. Let me show you.

It begins with the awfulizing thought that David thinks to himself, ▶ "God has forgotten me." In Psalm 13:1, David redirects that thought to God, saying to God,

> ESV Psalm 13:1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? . . .

Then, there's the awfulizing thought, ▶ "God has hidden his face from me." In the last part of verse 1, David redirects, saying to God,

> ESV Psalm 13:1 . . . How long will you hide your face from me?

And so it goes. ▶ "My life is miserable" is redirected in verse 2:

> ESV Psalm 13:2 How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? . . .

▶ "My enemy is better off" is redirected in the last part of verse 2:

> ESV Psalm 13:2 . . . How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

▶ "This is going to kill me" is redirected in verse 3:

> ESV Psalm 13:3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,

▶ "My enemy is going to prevail" is redirected in verse 4:

> ESV Psalm 13:4 lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

This is simply of matter of taking negative self-talk and redirecting it to God in the form of sanctified complaining and questioning. It's pouring out our hearts to God instead of ruminating to ourselves.

At first blush, this may seem trivial. But it is an important way to get the focus off ourselves and onto God. It is a needful Godward shift. It sets us up for the next part of the process.

The next part is to ▶ reflect on the truth as revealed by God. David begins this in ▶ verse 5, saying,

> ESV Psalm 13:5 But I have trusted in your steadfast love; . . .

The syntax of the Hebrew verb translated, "I have trusted" does not limit the action to the past, but also conveys a present state of mind.[4] Some translations simply render it, "I trust."

And the object of David's trust is the truth of God's steadfast love, which is a translation of the Hebrew word *hesed*. It is a love that is faithful—faithful to what has been promised or revealed. It is a proven love.

Essentially, this is David saying to God, "I choose trust in you over escape. I choose to trust in you, despite my circumstances. I choose to trust in you, regardless of how I feel. Because your steadfast love is trustworthy."

In the last part of ▶ verse 5, David also says to God,

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[4] Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 30. I take the tense or aspect to be a perfect of experience.

> ESV Psalm 13:5 . . . my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

The original Hebrew verb translated “shall rejoice” can be understood as a strong directive[5], in which case David is commanding his heart to rejoice. It is a decision or commitment, not just a feeling. He chooses rejoicing instead of awfulizing.

The reason for rejoicing is the truth of God’s salvation. The salvation in view here is broad. When we trust God and follow him, he saves us from everything detrimental to our ultimate well-being. Including guys like Saul.

We believers today can always choose to rejoice in our salvation, regardless of our circumstances. Through faith in Jesus, we have been saved from the penalty of our sin. Through faithfully following Jesus in this life, we are saved from a lot of needless trouble. And because we have believed, we will one day be saved from the very presence of sin in heaven forever.

That is indeed cause for rejoicing!

Finally, David says in ▶ verse 6,

> ESV Psalm 13:6 I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

“I will sing to the Lord” is a vow to sing God’s praises.[6] It is a choice to sing instead of awfulize.

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[5] Ibid., 32. I take the tense or aspect to be an imperfect injunctive.
[6] Ross, Allen P., *A Commentary on the Psalms 1–89: Commentary*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2011–2013), 370.

The reason for singing is the abundantly generous way the Lord has dealt with David. And hasn't the Lord dealt bountifully with us all?

When we reflect on the truth, we can take our cues from David in asking ourselves three questions drawn directly from verses 5 and 6:

1. Hasn't God shown his steadfast love to me enough to trust him?
2. Hasn't God saved me enough to rejoice?
3. Hasn't God dealt with me bountifully enough to sing?

We can now go back to our ▶ big idea and attach an important addendum.

Yes, awfulizing makes escape look better than trust. But we can overcome awfulizing when we redirect and reflect.

It's about mind management—taking our thoughts captive. This is not a pollyannish pep talk that denies how hard life can be. It is a decision based on faith to redirect our awfulizing self-talk to God and to reflect on the truth he has revealed to us as a ground for trust and rejoicing.

Let's pray. Lord, when we awfulize and are tempted to escape rather than trust in you, help us to redirect our negative self-talk to you and reflect on the truth. Amen.