

David: A Man After God's Own Heart, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: Vengeance Belongs to the Lord: Sparing Saul

1 Samuel 24

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This chapter presents one of the defining tests of David's character. Historically, David is still a fugitive, hunted by Saul through the wilderness of En-gedi, when Saul unwittingly enters the very cave where David is hiding. David has the opportunity, the justification in his men's eyes, and the apparent providential opening to kill the king who has hunted him for years. Instead he spares Saul, refuses to harm the LORD's anointed, and openly entrusts his cause to God as judge. The doctrinal and ethical stakes are the fear of God, the conviction that vengeance belongs to the Lord, the value of a tender conscience, the guarding of the heart against bitterness, and, at the height of the lesson, the way David's restraint foreshadows Christ, who entrusted Himself to the Father who judges justly.

The teacher should help the class feel how genuinely hard David's choice was. This was not a small slight but years of unjust persecution, and the opportunity for revenge looked providential and felt fully justified. The lesson is not that David was indifferent to justice but that he refused to seize it with his own hand, trusting God to be the judge and to give the kingdom in His own time. This is the crux: leaving justice to God is an act of faith, not weakness, and it is one of the costliest acts of faith we are called to.

Aim at formation, because nearly everyone carries a Saul. The lesson invites students to identify the wrong they are still privately rehearsing, to release their grip on revenge, to recover a tender conscience, and to guard their hearts against the slow hardening that mistreatment produces. Then lift their eyes to Christ, whose response to far greater injustice both models and empowers our own. Press these home concretely so the class leaves ready to hand a real grievance back to God.

Question 1

Student Question:

When David's men urged him to kill the vulnerable Saul, David refused, saying, "The LORD forbid that I should... put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed" (24:6). What does David's restraint teach us about the fear of God, about respecting what God has set in place, and about why he would not take a life that God had not given him to take?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

David's stated reason for sparing Saul is striking: not that revenge is impractical or that Saul might reform, but that Saul is "the LORD's anointed" (24:6). David sees Saul not merely as a

personal enemy but as a man God had set in place, and he will not lay his hand on what God has appointed. The controlling reality for David is God, not Saul.

This is the fear of God in action. David is governed by a higher allegiance than his own grievance or even his own survival. The teacher should help the class see that the fear of God is precisely what holds David back. He is more afraid of acting against God than he is of remaining in danger from Saul. That ordering of fears is the heart of the matter.

There is also a lesson here about respecting what God has established. Without endorsing every act of Saul or every authority, the text shows David refusing to take into his own hands a removal that belonged to God alone. David would not seize by violence what God had promised to give him by other means. He trusted God's methods and timing rather than forcing the outcome.

Apply it carefully. The point is not passivity toward all wrong but a deep reluctance to act against God by grasping what is not ours to take. David would not take a life God had not given him to take, nor a throne God had not yet handed him. The fear of God restrained him, and that same fear is meant to restrain us when we are tempted to seize justice or advancement by wrong means.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fear of God as the restraint on revenge
- A higher allegiance to God above personal grievance or survival
- Respecting what God has set in place rather than seizing it
- Refusing to force by violence what God promised to give
- Trusting God's methods and timing over our own

Discussion Prompts

- Why did David refuse to harm Saul even when it seemed providentially handed to him?
- What does it mean that the fear of God restrained David?
- Where might the fear of God need to restrain you from seizing something wrongly?

Question 2

Student Question:

David held back his hand even when striking would have felt completely justified. Where in your life right now do you have the power to repay a wrong, get even, or settle a score, and feel justified in doing so? What would it look like to deliberately hold back your hand and leave that to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question moves David's restraint into the student's life. The aim is to identify a present situation where they have the power to repay a wrong and feel justified in doing so. Specificity matters; the cave moment is always concrete.

Help the class see how reasonable revenge feels in the moment. David's men gave him a theology for it: God has handed your enemy over. Our own opportunities to get even almost always come dressed in justification. The teacher should expose how readily we baptize retaliation as fairness or as standing up for ourselves.

Then call for the deliberate holding back of the hand. This is not passivity but an active choice to leave the wrong with God. Invite each student to name one situation where they could repay a wrong and one specific way they will instead hold back and entrust it to the Lord this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying a present power to repay a wrong
- How revenge dresses itself in justification
- Holding back the hand as an active choice, not passivity
- Entrusting a specific wrong to God
- Resisting the self-justifying logic of retaliation

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you currently have the power to get even and feel justified in it?
- How does the temptation to repay dress itself up as fairness?
- What would it look like to hold back your hand and leave it to God this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Coming out of the cave, David appealed to God as judge: "May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you" (24:12). What does it mean that vengeance belongs to God and not to us, and why is leaving justice in God's hands an act of faith rather than weakness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

David's words outside the cave state the principle directly: "May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me" (24:12). David does not abandon the hope of justice; he relocates it. Justice will be done, but by God, not by David's own hand. This is the doctrine the New Testament makes explicit in Romans 12:19: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

The teacher should clarify what this does and does not mean. It does not mean that wrong does not matter or that justice is unimportant. It means that the right to repay belongs to God, the only judge who sees fully and judges perfectly. When we take vengeance, we usurp a role that is God's alone, and we do it with partial knowledge and a wounded heart, which is why our revenge so often overshoots.

Stress that leaving justice to God is faith, not weakness. It takes far more strength to hold back a justified blow than to strike it. David's restraint was not cowardice; it was confidence that God is a righteous judge who can be trusted with the case. To release vengeance is to declare that we believe God sees, God cares, and God will act rightly in His time.

Apply it to the believer's grievances. Entrusting a wrong to God frees us from the exhausting work of being prosecutor, judge, and executioner. It does not always mean the absence of consequences or the avoidance of lawful processes, but it does mean surrendering the personal hunger to repay. The teacher should help the class see this surrender as a profound act of trust in the character of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Vengeance as belonging to God, the only perfect judge (Romans 12:19)
- Relocating justice to God rather than abandoning it
- The danger of usurping God's role with partial knowledge and a wounded heart
- Leaving justice to God as strength and faith, not weakness
- Surrendering the personal hunger to repay
- Trusting God's character: He sees, He cares, He will act rightly

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that vengeance belongs to God and not to us?
- Why is leaving justice to God an act of faith rather than weakness?
- What case are you still trying to prosecute that you could hand to the righteous judge?

Question 4

Student Question:

It is one thing to say we leave justice to God and another to actually release our grip on a wrong done to us. Is there a wrong you are still privately rehearsing, still wanting to repay or see punished? What would it look like this week to genuinely hand that case over to God as the righteous judge?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the student to move from agreement to release. Many will affirm that vengeance belongs to God while still privately rehearsing a wrong, replaying it, nursing the

grievance, wishing for the offender's comeuppance. The teacher should name this gap with compassion.

Help the class recognize the signs of an ungiven grievance: the imagined confrontations, the satisfaction in the other person's troubles, the inability to wish them well. These reveal that the case has not actually been handed over, however much we have said it has.

Then call for a genuine act of release. Handing a wrong to God is often not a one-time event but a repeated, deliberate surrender, sometimes daily. Invite each student to name a specific wrong they are still rehearsing and one concrete way they will entrust it to God this week, perhaps by praying for the offender rather than against them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between affirming and actually releasing a grievance
- Signs that a wrong has not truly been handed over
- Release as a repeated, deliberate surrender
- Praying for an offender rather than against them
- Freedom from the exhausting work of nursing a grievance

Discussion Prompts

- What wrong are you still privately rehearsing or wanting repaid?
- What signs show whether you have truly handed it over to God?
- What is one concrete way you could release it to God this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Even after only cutting Saul's robe, "David's heart struck him" (24:5); his conscience was tender about even a small act against the king. What does this sensitive conscience reveal about David's heart toward God, and what does it teach us about the value of a conscience that is grieved by even small wrongs?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question draws attention to a small but revealing detail: after merely cutting a corner of Saul's robe, "David's heart struck him" (24:5). His conscience was troubled by something most of us would consider trivial. This tenderness of conscience tells us a great deal about his heart toward God.

The teacher should help the class see what a sensitive conscience indicates. David was so attuned to God that even a small act of dishonor toward the LORD's anointed grieved him. A

conscience that registers small wrongs is a healthy, living conscience, kept soft by closeness to God. This is the opposite of the seared conscience Scripture warns about (1 Timothy 4:2).

Explore the value of such tenderness. A conscience grieved by small sins catches them while they are small, before they grow (as Saul's envy grew). A dull conscience, by contrast, lets sin accumulate unnoticed until it does great damage. The health of the inner life depends in large part on keeping the conscience tender and responsive.

Apply it as both diagnosis and encouragement. The teacher can invite the class to notice where their own conscience is sharp and where it has gone quiet, and to value the gift of a tender conscience as a mark of nearness to God. Where conscience has dulled, the remedy is to return to the light of God's Word and presence, which resensitizes the heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A tender conscience as a mark of a heart near to God
- The health of a conscience that registers even small wrongs
- Catching sin while it is small, before it grows
- The danger of a dull or seared conscience (1 Timothy 4:2)
- Keeping the conscience tender through God's Word and presence

Discussion Prompts

- What does David's troubled conscience reveal about his heart toward God?
- Why is a conscience that feels even small wrongs a valuable thing?
- What resensitizes a conscience that has grown dull?

Question 6

Student Question:

David felt the sting of conscience over something most of us would consider trivial. Has your own conscience grown dull in any area, so that sins you once felt keenly now barely register? Where might God be calling you to recover a tender conscience that takes even "small" sins seriously?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question applies the tender conscience to the student. Over time, and through repetition, sins we once felt keenly can stop registering at all. The teacher should help the class examine where their own conscience may have grown quiet.

Encourage honest inventory. Are there habits, attitudes, or compromises that once troubled them and now feel normal? A dulled conscience is dangerous precisely because it does not feel dangerous; the absence of conviction can be mistaken for innocence.

Then point toward recovery. The conscience is resensitized not by self-flagellation but by returning to God, His Word, and honest prayer that asks Him to show us what we have stopped seeing. Invite each student to name one area where their conscience has dulled and one step toward recovering its tenderness this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- How a conscience dulls through repetition and time
- The danger of mistaking lost conviction for innocence
- Honest inventory of compromises that now feel normal
- Resensitizing the conscience through God's Word and prayer
- Asking God to show us what we have stopped seeing

Discussion Prompts

- Where has your conscience grown dull to sins you once felt keenly?
- Why is a quiet conscience in such areas actually dangerous?
- What step could help you recover a tender conscience this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

David not only spared Saul but spoke to him with honor, calling him “my lord the king” and “my father,” and appealing to him with humility rather than hatred (24:8–11). What does it teach us that David refused to let years of mistreatment turn him into a bitter or hateful man, and how is this different from merely suppressing anger?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question highlights the manner of David's response, not only its substance. He does not merely refrain from killing Saul; he addresses him with genuine honor, calling him “my lord the king” and even “my father,” bowing before him, and appealing to him without hatred (24:8–11). Years of cruelty did not turn David into a hateful man.

The teacher should distinguish this from mere suppression of anger. David is not gritting his teeth and pretending. His restraint flows from a heart that has kept its softness toward God and even toward his persecutor. This is the deeper work: not just controlling outward behavior but guarding the inner self from being deformed by the wrong done to it.

Explore why this is so important. Long mistreatment exerts a steady pressure toward bitterness, cynicism, and hatred. The wounded person is tempted to become hard, to let the offense define them, to repay in kind. David resisted that pressure, and in doing so he protected not only Saul but himself, refusing to let Saul's sin turn him into someone like Saul.

Apply it directly. The teacher should help the class see that one of the gravest dangers of being wronged is not the wrong itself but what it can make of us. The aim is to be the kind of person who can suffer injustice without becoming unjust, who can be hated without learning to hate. This requires keeping the heart tender before God in the very midst of mistreatment.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honoring an enemy rather than hating him
- Restraint that flows from a soft heart, not mere suppression
- The slow pressure of mistreatment toward bitterness and hatred
- Refusing to let an offender deform who we are
- Suffering injustice without becoming unjust
- Guarding the inner self, not only outward behavior

Discussion Prompts

- What does it teach us that David honored the man who hunted him?
- How is this different from merely suppressing anger?
- How can we suffer wrong without letting it harden us into bitter people?

Question 8

Student Question:

Long mistreatment can slowly harden us into bitter, suspicious, or hateful people, often without our noticing. Has being wronged or mistreated begun to change who you are, making you harder or more cynical? How might God want to guard your heart so that what others have done to you does not turn you into someone you do not want to be?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question asks the student to examine what being wronged has been making of them. The aim is awareness, because the deforming work of mistreatment is usually gradual and unnoticed.

Help the class look honestly at the symptoms: a new hardness, a reflexive cynicism, a readiness to assume the worst, a loss of warmth or trust. These can be the slow residue of real wounds, and naming them is the first step to resisting them.

Then point toward the guarding of the heart. Bitterness is resisted not by denying the wound but by repeatedly bringing it to God, releasing the offender, and asking God to keep our hearts soft. Invite each student to name one way they sense mistreatment changing them and one way they will guard their heart this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Examining what being wronged is making of us
- The gradual, unnoticed work of bitterness
- Symptoms of a hardening heart (cynicism, suspicion, lost warmth)
- Guarding the heart by bringing the wound to God
- Asking God to keep the heart soft amid mistreatment

Discussion Prompts

- Has being wronged begun to make you harder or more cynical?
- What symptoms of a hardening heart can you detect in yourself?
- How might God guard your heart so the wrong does not deform you?

Question 9

Student Question:

David spared the LORD's anointed and refused to seize the throne by his own hand, waiting for God to give the kingdom in God's own time and way. This restraint points beyond David to Jesus, the true Anointed One, who "when he was reviled... did not revile in return" but "continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23) and refused to grasp at deliverance from the cross. How does David's refusal to take vengeance foreshadow Christ, and how does Christ's example, entrusting Himself to the Father who judges justly, empower us to do the same?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it lifts David's restraint to its fullest meaning by pointing to Christ. David refused to lay hands on the LORD's anointed and refused to seize the kingdom by violence, waiting for God to give it in His own way and time. In this he prefigures the true Anointed One, who endured far greater injustice without retaliation.

The teacher should draw the connection through 1 Peter 2:21–23, which is almost a commentary on this kind of restraint. Christ, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten; but He kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. On the cross, Jesus had the power to call down deliverance and the most complete justification imaginable, yet He refused to grasp at it, committing His cause to the Father. David spared one persecutor in a cave; Christ forgave His executioners from the cross.

Be precise about how this empowers us. Peter holds up Christ's example specifically as the pattern for believers suffering unjustly: this is the path we are called to walk, and we walk it the same way Christ did, by entrusting ourselves to the God who judges justly. The strength to refrain from vengeance is not mustered from within; it comes from confidence in the righteous Judge and from union with the Christ who has already walked this road and now lives in us.

Then close the circle to application. Because we have a Judge who sees all and will set all things right, we are freed from the need to repay. Because we follow a Savior who entrusted Himself to that Judge, we have both the pattern and the power to do the same. The teacher should help the class see that leaving vengeance to God is not resignation but a deeply Christlike act of faith, grounded in the cross and aimed at overcoming evil with good (Romans 12:21).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- David's restraint foreshadowing Christ, the true Anointed One
- Christ not reviling in return but entrusting Himself to the just Judge (1 Peter 2:21–23)
- The cross as the supreme refusal to grasp at self-vindication
- Christ's example as the believer's pattern in unjust suffering
- Strength to forgo vengeance drawn from union with Christ, not willpower
- Overcoming evil with good as the aim (Romans 12:21)

Discussion Prompts

- How does David's refusal to take vengeance point us forward to Christ?
- What does it mean that Christ kept entrusting Himself to the One who judges justly?
- How does Christ's example give us both the pattern and the power to leave vengeance to God?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter, the open cave, the held hand, the appeal to God as judge. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through David's refusal to take vengeance. What is the single truth about leaving justice to God that you most need to carry into your own "Saul" situation this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the lesson and turns it toward response. The class has stood with David in the cave, watched the held hand, heard the appeal to God as judge, and traced the line forward to Christ. Now the aim is one specific, personal step.

Encourage concreteness over general resolve. One student may need to release a specific grievance; another to recover a tender conscience; another to guard a hardening heart; another to pray for an enemy rather than against them. The value is in naming one real situation and one real step.

Close by lifting the class's eyes to Christ, who both shows us the way and gives us the strength to walk it. We do not leave vengeance to God by sheer effort; we do it as people united to the

One who entrusted Himself to the Father. Send the class out ready to hand a real Saul back to the righteous Judge.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from the cave to a specific personal step
- Naming one concrete way to leave justice to God
- Christ as both pattern and power for refusing vengeance
- Letting one truth take hold this week
- Trust in the righteous Judge as the ground of release

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this lesson is God pressing on you most directly?
- What is one specific way you will leave justice to God this week?
- How does Christ's example strengthen you to do it?