

# **Study on the Life of David**

**by**

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## Introduction: A Heart After God

*“Your love is better than life” (Psalm 63:3).*

David is no doubt the most well known and well loved of all the biblical characters. We are drawn to David, not because he lived a perfect life, but because with imperfections he never lost his love for God. What makes David so loved is not his popularity as a shepherd, giant slayer, warrior, and king. He was all these, but they are not the qualities that attract us. We are drawn to David because God loved David, and He loved him deeply. God’s affirmation is best expressed in the well known statement, *“The Lord has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him leader of his people”* (1 Sam.13; 14 NIV).

As I write this, America is one week from voting for the president. Both candidates are working hard to earn people’s votes. It is essentially a popularity contest, and each candidate is aggressively vying for people’s hearts. Can you imagine what the consequence would be if somehow God made his preference known for one candidate over the other? We would probably flock to that candidate. You see, what God thinks of someone is important, and his expression of acceptance and approval seems to quickly dissolve whatever concerns we might have. We love David, not because he did great things more admirably than someone else. We love David because God loved him and David, throughout his whole life, remained lovable to God. He did wrong! He murdered! He committed adultery! He stole! Cheated! Covered up sin! Struggled with pride! But when exposed, his tender heart responded to God. It could have happened to Saul, or Solomon, or any other great figure we admire, but it was most notable in the life of David.

David summed up his love for God with these words in Psalm 63. *“Oh, God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary, and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you, I will praise you as long as I live”* (vs.1-4).

The life of David is a love story. Study his life and you will find plenty of faults and many failures. Yet, like a marriage held by a singular strand of love and commitment, this one between God and his child remained strong. David was fiercely loyal to God, and God was deeply loyal to David. This was a covenant friendship.

My desire in this study is first personal and secondly pastoral. Personally, I need to be reminded over and over again of God’s love for me. I tend to measure this love against my performance, which always falls short. As Philip Yancy observes in his book What is so Amazing About Grace, *“There is nothing I can do to make God love me more; there is nothing I can do to make God love me less.”* God loves me. That is an undeniable fact. *“In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons ... in accordance to his pleasure and will”* (Eph.1:5). I am not on a pursuit for God’s love. Neither am I out to persuade God to love me more. My desire is to understand that love like it was for David. I want to be embraced by it, especially in my moments of loss, pain, and failure. C.H. Macintosh, in his classic 1861 devotional on Leviticus describes the enjoyment rather than the pursuit of God’s love this way. He says, *“There is no such thing as*

*progress in justification... (We) may if (we) walk in the Spirit, make progress in the sense of enjoyment of this glorious reality.”*

I study the life of David also with a pastor’s heart. As a pastor I tend to study the Bible motivated by how what I am studying can also benefit others. If you happen to pick up this study, and decide to read it, my hope is that you will not be drawn to David, but to God. One Sunday I was visiting a church and as the music leader was preparing the congregation for the singing he encouraged all of us to “Love on God.” While I felt uneasy with his choice of words, what he said was an invitation to enjoy God through the worship. Well, this study is just that, an invitation to enjoy God’s love. After all, *“Nothing else in all creation will be able to separate us from the Love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom.8:39).

### **A Study on Calling - 1 Samuel Chapter Sixteen** *“How long will you mourn for Saul”* (vs.1)

God called David because Saul had abandoned his call. We find Samuel the prophet, at the beginning of this chapter, broken over Saul’s rejection of God. Furthermore, God told Samuel that Saul would no longer serve as part of God’s team. *“How long will you mourn for Saul”* (v.1). Apparently, Samuel took Saul’s rebellion quite hard and very personally. Pastors will often do this when a member of their flock cease to be a team player. It breaks a pastor’s heart, and the pastor will often take it personally, when one of these sheep choose to run from God. Samuel’s heart was heavy, and God saw that this heaviness threatened to loom for a very long time. So God intervened, and literally commands Samuel to give Saul up. It was time to move on. God had someone else in mind.

When Samuel did approach the anointing of David, again he did so with that sense of heaviness. I can’t help but think it was something like the atmosphere surrounding to resignation of President Ford, following the shameful impeachment of President Nixon. The nation had rejected Nixon, and Ford was his legal replacement. Similarly, Samuel did not go into this inauguration of a new king with the enthusiasm that must have existed when Saul was first installed.

It is not my desire to linger long over the mood of this story. I have entitled this lesson a Study On Calling because the passage contains some rich principles for understanding: **Why God Calls; Who God Calls;** and finally, **How God Calls.** Having said that I do not want to linger with the mood, it is important nevertheless, to observe that God often calls his servants when they are in the midst of turmoil. It is not uncommon for God to meet us in a time of deep crisis and for us to later realize that it was right there He was extended a call to us. This is consistent with how God works in his servant’s lives. He called Moses in the desert after forty years of brokenness. Samuel himself had been called when Israel was living in a spiritual vacuum. Psalm 42:7 tells us that *“deep calls to deep,”* meaning that it is often in our deepest crisis that God is able to do his deepest work. That was certainly the case with Jonah who finally turns back to God while inside the belly of a fish and at the bottom of the ocean. (See Jonah chapter 2).

I have to confess that in every case in my life where God extended a call to me, I was going through a time of personal crisis. God has had to unsettle me first before ministering to me. My

calling into ministry for example came about in 1982 when I felt my life was falling apart. I broke down before God, and there in that brokenness God poured out his Spirit upon me and invited me to give all up to him.

Samuel's mourning over Saul, the subsequent fear of moving on to Bethlehem (*Saul will hear of this and kill me*) and the elders' reaction to seeing Samuel (*the elders trembled when they met him*) all serve to form the context for David's calling. This was not a festive mood. When this in place I want now to spend some time understanding better the call of God.

## **1. First we need to ask the question; Who Does God Call?**

God's call to us is simply an invitation to participate in what He is doing. That is why He calls. He wants us to join Him in what He is doing. I remember in high school being a member of the choir for one year. I couldn't really sing that well, so my contribution was not all that valued by the other members who each had more right being there. But I was a part of the choir. I belonged. When I moved on the college I joined the basketball team. My assessment of my own skills varied drastically from how the coach assessed me, so I spent a lot of time sitting on the bench. I did not play often, but I was a member of the team. Later when we moved to England I was consciously aware that I really had little to offer in terms of ministry abilities that would truly meet the needs in this spiritual vacant land. Yet, I felt valued because I was a part of something big, and thankfully I was aware of it. God was doing something and He invited me to be part of it.

I have been recently mentoring a young man who is serving as youth pastor at the church I attend. (Toccoa, GA 2001). We have been working through Henry Blackaby's study, Experiencing God. Describing God's call to Moses, Blackaby says this; "*God's purpose was to deliver the children of Israel. Moses was the one through whom God wanted to accomplish that*". Moses was invited to participate in what God was already doing. Likewise Abraham's involvement with God went far beyond a unique friendship between one man and his God. God called Abraham because God had something big in mind and Abraham was invited to participate with God in it. Had Abraham chosen to rebel against this call, as King Saul did, God would have found someone else to fulfill it.

To make sense of David's call you have to view it from the context of God's covenant with Israel, which of course began with Abraham. God wasn't just looking for a king. He sought out a man who would gladly participate with God in carrying out and unfolding His divine purposes for man. David's role in that participation would be as King. Years later, having had time to reflect on all God had done for him; David became overwhelmed by God's desire to include David in his purposes. He expresses this in 2 Sam. 7:18-19. "*Who I am O Sovereign LORD and what is my family that you have brought me this far. O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD?* David was overwhelmed that he, an ordinary shepherd had been invited by the creator Himself, to participate with Him. "*He also chose David his servant, and took him from the sheepfold*" (Psalm 78:10). "*I have found David my servant; with holy oil have I anointed him*" (Psalm 89:20).

Saul in contrast to David chose to no longer participate with God, and this choice cost him dearly. We find in Saul, that those who refuse to participate with God are rejected and overlooked by God. *“For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever”* (1 Sam. 13:13). Saul was told that he had missed out. His name could have been forever identified with the covenant of God. Instead it is David we now associate most with Israel. God explained further to Saul; *“But your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you”* (1 Sam. 13:14). Saul lost out, not God.

When God first called me into the ministry I thought my part was indispensable to God. I really believe that without me God’s hands were tied. The years of suffering in ministry have taught me a humble lesson. He hasn’t called me because He needs me. He called me because it delights Him to see me participate in what He is doing. As I write this I am standing at the fourth major cross road in the past two years. My wife’s illness, my son’s death, the end of our ministry in England, was all enough to have challenged the very core of my faith. But then, this last week we received a phone call from our national office informing us that the door to overseas ministry has closed. My career as a missionary seems over. Keep in mind, I am one who for years announced I would never consider ministry in the states; but now it seems to be the direction God is leading. Interestingly, I see all this as a continuing invitation to participate with God. He is up to something in my life and I have no idea what it is. But I am asked to trust Him. David did. In fact, after his call, he would wait many years before he would serve as King.

## **2. This leads me to consider the second question regarding God’s call. Who does God call?**

In short God calls anyone who will listen. I don’t mean listen in the sense of just hearing with our physical ears. I mean listening with our hearts. God called David because David was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:13-14). Saul stopped listening to God, so God no longer spoke to Saul. David was just an ordinary man, but one whose heart sought after God. Throughout his entire life David maintained the discipline of hearing God. Later when Solomon is admonished to live fully for God, the Lord refers Solomon to the example of his father David. *“As for you, if you walk before me, in integrity of heart, and uprightness as your father did...”* (1 Kings 9:4).

The prophet Samuel, perhaps influenced by the years of Saul’s reign, assumed the man of God’s choosing from Jesse’s household would be an impressive alternative to Saul. He was to learn a shocking lesson. Impressed first by Eliab, the oldest of Jesse, Samuel thinks; *“surely the Lord’s anointing stands here before the Lord”* (vs.6). The Lord rebukes Samuel for assuming that quality and ability were God’s measure. *“Do not consider his appearance or his height for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks for. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”* (vs.7). Samuel had been conditioned because of Saul to look for human qualities to determine God’s man, not godly quality. You could say the world had influenced Samuel’s thinking. I like the way God took the time to graciously instruct Samuel on the sort of person He looks for. It is a gentle rebuke we could receive today. Our Christian culture has been conditioned by the world to look for men and women with worldly qualities, but God rejects this. *The Lord looks at the heart!* and there is only one man in Jesse’s family who apparently had the right heart, and he had not even been invited to the interview.

I wonder how often we overlook people who have the heart but lack the physical abilities and outward requirements. Furthermore, how often do we neglect our own heart condition for the furthering and nurturing of those things, which are external? Later in David's life, his body would weaken, (see Psalm 6) but his heart and mind remained strong and tender before God.

So whom does God call? Simply; people who love God, and who just want to be where God wants them. I have a friend in England who would often say to me, "*Mitch, I just want to be where God is.*" This statement was my friend's purpose statement. My friend remains today a man after God's own heart. If the Church is ever going to make a splash for God, God's servants need to stop marketing the Church like it is a business. We might be impressed with the new styles and paradigms – but I don't think God is. Remember in Revelation chapter three; how the church in Sardis had everything going for her outwardly? They were an active church; "*I know your deeds*" Jesus commented. They were a model church; "*you have a reputation of being alive*". That is what the world saw, but it is not what God saw. God saw the heart! "*but you are dead*". "*Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of God*" (vs.2).

What is your life like in the sight of God right now? I am aware right now of how my life might appear to others. Broken. No job. I have faced loss. I am uncertain and lacking in some confidence. Serious. Unable to go overseas. All these pressure me. But are these what God sees? I hope and believe God sees a heart that yearns after Him, that is tender to His will. "*As a deer pants for the waters, so my soul pants after you, O God*" (Ps.42:1). *O Lord, help me to not seek what others want, but what you want. I know that begins in my heart and continues in my heart. I might never do anything that impresses those around me, but I have done all I need if I simply love you and seek you.*"

3. We have looked at why God calls; that we might participate in what He is doing. In asking who God calls, we concluded that he calls those who are listening to God. **Now we need to ask; How Does God Call.**

God calls by empowering us with His Holy Spirit. When we make ourselves available to Him, (or from God's point: He sets us apart for Himself), often in brokenness, He responds by filling us with Himself. Remember, he cannot do that when we are self sufficient and full of our own confidence. God cannot fill us if we are like Saul. God looks for David's, who are empty of themselves and ready to serve. God is the only one who seems to recognize and value this quality of humility in David. And so God told Samuel, "*rise and anoint him, he is the one*" (vs.12). Samuel anointed David and something great but unseen happens. David is filled with God's Spirit. "*and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power*" (vs.13).

Some months ago I spoke at a youth rally and the call to surrender that came at the end brought a good number of teenagers forward. I stood aside and with my physical eyes observed 40 teens on their knees crying out to God. Many wrapped arms around each other, and they wept together. What I saw take place physically was the anointing of oil. Something more profound was occurring and I was keenly aware of it in my spirit. God's Spirit was filling broken emptying lives. That moment would become spiritually significant for many of these young people,

because right then the Almighty God met them. They were empowered by God. That is how God calls. God takes our broken empty lives and fills us with Himself.

What else does God do when He calls us? We noted that he empowers us. Secondly He sends us out to serve. David went back to his sheep. Nothing changed in his routine. As Charles Swindoll puts it, "David did not immediately go shopping for a crown." David went back to do what he had been doing, with one difference. He now belonged to and was empowered by the Living and Almighty God. Apparently David had been instructed by Samuel to do this. You see, when God calls us He will often not tell us everything He has in mind. Sometimes young people who go forward during meetings want to know everything God wants for them. What God asks of them is to go back and do what they were doing, with one difference. Do it for Him! Now that they belong to Him, He will show them the way. For most young people, the mark that distinguishes them as belonging to God is their obedience and submission to their parents. Perhaps David stayed to shepherd to demonstrate that sort of continuing obedience to his father Jesse.

Finally, God's call involves waiting. Waiting is not easy especially when you are eager and ready. Those who have been empowered by God are often eager to move. To work. But if you are truly, and fully God's, you will be willing to wait. What did waiting do for David? It gave him time to mature. It helped him become familiar with the context of royalty. The time spent serving in Saul's court prepared David to later lead. This time gave God the opportunity to prepare the people for a change.

Catch this. David is anointed by God to be King, but is first asked by God to enter Saul's service (vs.21). David had to wait from 13-17 years to become King, but when he arrived, he was a patient King. Yesterday I received a phone call informing me that we have been called to serve in a large Church in Wisconsin. I will have been on the side line for three years when I commence this ministry. Many days without work have tested my patience. I have felt useless and at times guilty. But I have chosen to wait on God, and this is the reward. It is a joy to serve Him, but a greater joy to be His.

### **A Study in Strength. (Ch.17)**

*"I come against you in the name of the Lord" (vs.45).*

We determined already in the previous chapter that God has a different way of looking at things than we do. He looks at the heart, while we have the tendency of looking at the outward appearance. Because God's outlook is so different than ours, we see him doing things differently than we would do them. That is certainly the case in the scriptures.

Had we no prior knowledge of the story of David and Goliath, we would likely have a different sense of how the story would turn out. We would probably assume that God would find a match for Goliath out of the vast ranks of Israel's army. But He didn't do that, because He does things differently than we do. Instead God chooses a young shepherd, too small to even wear the usual soldiers armor, and too insignificant to even be in Israel's army.

David's strength lay in the fact that he viewed this crisis through God's eyes. Borrowing the lesson from his own anointing, David, like God, did not look at the outward appearance but at the heart. David was given the ability to see this situation as God sees it. His ability to see the giant as truly a weak fool, gave David the courage to fight for God and in God's strength. David was a man after God's own heart, thus he was able to view the situation through God's eyes.

The key to any victory we will experience lies in our ability to view life's difficulties as God views them. To develop this we need to note that this story is one of contrasts. The story of David and Goliath reveals what happens when we don't view things as God views them, and what happens when we do. Two principles emerge from this that I will develop. One; we will face defeat when our view is dominated by the problem itself – the result; we will be paralyzed by fear. Two; We will face certain victory when our view is dominated by God – the result; we are empowered by faith. In any battle we face then, we will either be **paralyzed by fear** or **empowered by faith**.

**What it is like to be paralyzed by fear.** Let us consider what happens when our view is completely dominated by the problem. Goliath, by the way, was only symptomatic of the problem. Israel had been fighting the Philistines for centuries. Like Goliath, the whole nation had been impossible to dislodge. Having tolerated a nation God had instructed to destroy had now grown to huge insurmountable proportions. Like any sin, if you ignore it, it will come to haunt you in Goliath size proportions and you will be paralyzed by it.

Ever since Israel had entered Canaan this enemy remained an obstacle. *“The Israelites did not drive out the people of Geshu, and Maacah (the Philistines), so they lived among the Israelites to this day”* (Joshua 13:13). The fact that Israel could not physically remove this enemy cost them spiritually. As migrants, the Philistines carried with them a pagan belief system that eventually influenced and eroded Israel's position with God. Their belief, particularly in the goddess Ashtoreth, the female counterpart to Baal, had an especially strong impact on Israel especially under Solomon's reign. Able to control and contain this sin for centuries, Israel now found herself in a position of helplessness. The dwarf had become a giant. What David saw as he stood facing Goliath was the embodiment of sin's devastating effect when left uncontested. The Apostle James speaks to this danger. *“Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown (sin never remains the same size by the way) gives birth to death”* (James 1:15).

When David entered the scene, sin is full grown. The presence of Goliath, the physical embodiment of sin, rendered this nation paralyzed by fear. Sin had entangled them (Heb. 12; 1) keeping them from running the race God had marked out for them. What happened when we are paralyzed by fear? Let's consider a few of the consequences of sin left unattended in our lives.

**First, we become obsessed by every detail of our enemy** – the obstacle to our victory. The writer Samuel gives us a description of Goliath as seen through the eyes of Israel. As the people looked to Goliath they became consumed with every detail. He was a *“champion from Gath”* (vs.4). They seemed to know everything about him; where he was from, and his reputation as a champion of his people. They also noted every detail of his physical makeup. *“He was over nine feet tall... He wore a bronze helmet, a scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels*

(125lbs).” When they looked at him they were transfixed by the “*bronze grieves on his legs*” (vs.6). And that bronze javelin stretched to intimidate the bravest soldier in Israel’s ranks. So was his “*speak shaft*” and “*its iron point*” which alone weighted 15 pounds.

I have observed about myself that when I worry I become obsessed with almost every details of what it is I am worrying about. That is our nature when we take our eyes off God. When we take our eyes off God, and all we see standing before us is the giant, every details of that giant will consume us. That is sin. God tells us to be consumed by every detail about Him, of His character and His attributes. This cannot happen if all we see is the giant. John, imprisoned on the island on Patmos for loving Jesus and preaching about him, could have easily been consumed with every detail of his experience. His dungeon, however, did not seem bigger than God. God was bigger than the dungeon. Notice the details John observes about Jesus. “*among the lamp stands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet, and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance*” (Rev. 1:12-16). John was consumed not by the problem, but by the presence of Jesus. This made the problem smaller and less significance. If you have a tendency to worry, you will probably notice when you do worry that you are consumed by every little detail of your problem. Try the exercise John applied. Look to Jesus and study the details of his character, and I am sure the problem will become smaller. Study His character, reflect on his attributes, and you have found the anecdote to worry.

Something else will happen when we are paralyzed by fear. **We become intimidated by the voice of the enemy.** Often times fear will shut out the voice of the Lord. At times like this all we will hear will be the taunts of the enemy. “*Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel*” (vs.8) and this was the only sound the Israelite army could hear. “*On hearing this ... Saul and all Israel were dismayed and terrified*” (vs.11). This kept on for forty days and with each day Israel begins to believe what they heard. They were no good. They were weak. They had no one to fight. Their God had abandoned them. There was no hope.

If we shut God out long enough we will begin to hear what the devil says to us. Interestingly, David entered the scene, and because he could hear God, what he heard from the giant was hallow, empty words. Later, in verses 42-42, Goliath would hurl all his abuse on David expecting David to cower in fear like the rest of the army had. But David didn’t. He listened to God, and what he heard from God was vastly different from what he was hearing from this giant. More on this in a moment.

Finally, when we are paralyzed by fear, **we will act in the flesh.** When God does not dominate our mind, when He is not the main focus of our lives, we tend to act without God. That is what it means to act in the flesh. At times like this, when the enemy dominates our view, we don’t ask what God can do for us; we do it our selves. Fear will do that.

When David arrived to the scene and began to inquire from the people what they planned on doing about this giant, he was shocked to find God completely absent in the planning. So David

asked, “*What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?*” (vs.26). Those who heard David must have thought, “*hmm. We never thought of this as a spiritual problem. Defying God? Never thought of that!*” What David discovers is a strongly human response to a deeply spiritual problem. “*The king will give great wealth ... He will also give him his daughter, (perhaps why no one takes the challenge), and will exempt his father’s family from taxes in Israel*” (vs.25). Israel was asking the wrong question. They wanted to know what Saul could do for them. David was concerned with; *what will God do for us?*

It is easy when we take our eyes off God to see no solution but our own. Many fail because of this, and many miss out on what God has as a reward for those who follow His plan. This is what happens when we are paralyzed by fear. We become obsessed by every detail of our problem. We become intimidated by the taunts of our enemy, even believing what the enemy says about us. And finally, we act without God and act in the flesh.

Israel was paralyzed by fear, but David was empowered by faith. He saw the same giant Israel saw, but next to God, the giant wasn’t all that big. In fact, next to God the giant wasn’t really a giant at all, but a dwarf. In London there is a tombstone for a certain Lord Lawrence that has this simple inscription. His name, date of birth and date of death followed by these words which apparently sums up his life. *He feared man so little because he feared God so much.* That could just as easily been the inscription on David’s tomb. David feared Goliath so little because he feared God so much. When Israel looked up, all they saw was the giant. When David looked up, he saw Goliath, but he also saw God, and God was bigger, far bigger than the giant.

Due to his faith, David was able to do four things. We saw what happens when we are paralyzed by fear. Here is what happens when we are empowered by faith.

First, **David had the right perspective and this gave him confidence.** In verse 45 David claimed to come against Goliath, not to represent Israel; not out of anger or need for revenge; nor to settle a long standing feud with the Philistines. He come against Goliath “*in the name of the LORD Almighty*” (El Shaddai). David was doing this for El Shaddai, the Almighty LORD Himself. To Israel, Goliath at that moment was the Almighty One, but not to David. And for us, there are always two ways to handle a crisis. We are either intimidated by it (paralyzed by fear) or we will trust God with it (empowered by faith).

When my wife and later my son were diagnosed with their brain tumors I had to make a choice. I would either accept this, or buckle under it. By accepting it, a curtain was moved back to reveal God overshadowing the crisis. That was the perspective I needed. Knowing God was with me, gave me the confidence to face this giant. There was no way I would allow this giant to appear bigger than God.

Secondly, because David was empowered by faith, **he had the right position; this gave him conviction.** If you look again at verse 45-47 it is obvious where David had positioned himself. “*You come against me with a sword and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the*

*carcass of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORDS saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into out hands*". The conviction David expressed here determined everything. He staked his life; literally, on the conviction that God was who He said He was, and that God would intervene on Israel's behalf. It is as though David pulls out his ID saying to Goliath, *Look you big oaf. Look who I belong to, and you will know why I am not afraid of you.* Goliath was not impressed. He looked down at David and "*he despised him*" (vs.42). Yet David stood his ground. He belonged to God, and nothing would change that.

Taking your stand, by the way, is the only way to fight giants. In your battles be sure you know who you belong to. That knowledge gave David both confidence and conviction. Listen again to his expression of confidence. . *This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcass of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORDS saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into out hands*" (vs.41).

Note also that such expression of confidence and conviction only made the giant move closer. He would challenge David's conviction as the devil will challenge ours. David however does not retreat. Rather "*David came quickly to the battle line to meet him*" (vs.48). Do you get that last line? He ran quickly to the battle line to meet Goliath. Why? Because, he already knew the outcome. That was part of the conviction that gave him confidence. "*The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine*" (vs.37) Imagine possessing such confidence in your battles. It can only come by first possessing these convictions. I belong to God therefore nothing can really harm me. The battle is His, therefore how can I lose.

I praise God that these convictions truly work. I can write with absolute confidence that you don't need too much to face your battles when God is on your side. Others will try to burden you with the heavy armor of how too books, seminars on how to cope, and support groups. But really all you need is the little you have in your hand. "*So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone*" (vs.50). Well, not really. That's hyperbole. He really triumphed because he really believed that God was on his side, and that God was bigger than the giant. He is on your side too. Don't forget that. So when you enemy taunts you, and moves toward you, take your stand. "*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devils schemes*" (Eph. 6:10).

### **A Study in Endurance** chapter 18-19

David had been told he would be King. He knew it. Samuel knew it. And God knew it. That seems to be as far as the message got. No one else seemed to have known about it. It would take a long time before what God declared about David was realized. Meanwhile David needed endurance. And lots of it.

This is quite a contrast to the prophet Elisha, whom I have been studying recently. There is a very small gap between the departure of his master Elijah and the commencement of his own ministry. In 2 Kings 2 Elisha steps right into Elijah's shoes left vacant in his vanishing, and literally begins his ministry where his master left off. No waiting. No long process of being broken. Oh yes Elisha is jeered by some youth for his baldness, but he turned around and used his power to do away with them. (2 Kings 2:23-24).

Apparently God had a much different approach to developing David than he did Elisha. Why? I have no idea. Because He just did. He is God and He does what He wants the way He wants to do it. There are many things He does that I do not understand. I visited my brother-in-law this past week, whose church seems to be facing a very difficult time. There is no real explanation why. It just is. God has humbled my brother-in-law though, so you would think that product of this trial would cause the church to explode in growth. I know my brother-in-law is fasting frequently and crying out to God for renewal. He is doing the very same things others do who see great fruit as a product of their humble stand. But my brother-in-law's church doesn't seem to have been affected by this. Meanwhile I can read in a Christian magazine of a church in Missouri that in just a few years has grown to over 6000 people. When asked why, we are told it is because of prayer and fasting. Well, my brother-in-law is doing exactly the same thing. I guess some churches are Elisha's, who sprint immediately to great success, while other churches are David's, who are meant to struggle for a long period. Perhaps the lessons from this section in David's life will help us better appreciate the pace at which God works with some of us. Perhaps what you will conclude afterwards is maybe the one who is struggling is actually more blessed than the one who has seen great results in their lives.

After killing the giant, David's life begins to unravel. Proclaimed king by God David begins this new phase of his life virtually a prisoner in Saul's court. *"From that day Saul kept David with him, and he did not let him return to his father's house."* (18:2). We do see some value from this time of waiting and disappointment. A deep friendship between David and Saul's son Jonathan formed during this time. But that is about the only good thing you can pull out of this story that has any redemptive value. Well, OK, there is one other good thing that comes out of this. David becomes Saul's leading fighter, but even that makes life harsher for David. His popularity rises and Saul becomes jealous of people's response (vs.7). *"Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands"*. *"Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him"* (vs.8). *"And from that time Saul kept a jealous eye on David"*. *"Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with David but had left Saul"* (vs.12). So Saul tried to have David killed. He attempted this himself by hurling a spear at David. This happened more than once (vs.10). He sent David on the front lines, hopefully so David would be killed (vs.13). He offered David his daughter Michal, hoping she would be a snare to him (vs.21).

Three times it says in the text that Saul was afraid of David. God does not seem to interfere with this, and for some reason lets David go through this. By chapter 19 things get even worse. Saul plotted to kill David and Jonathan tried to prevent any harm from coming to David. Things seemed good for a while *"but an evil spirit from the LORD came upon Saul ... Saul tried to pin David to the wall but David eluded him. That night David made good his escape"* (vs.10). You would think for David this was a point of relief. But it wasn't. In fact this would mark the beginning of a long period of running. As long as Saul was alive, David was in trouble.

Similarly, as long as you or I are living for God the devil will keep up his attack against us. Until the Lord returns, and imprisons the devil, we are going to be on the run, as it were. David ended up where it all began, in Samuel's presence. *"He went to Samuel in Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him"* (vs.18). I wonder what they spoke about. I wonder if Samuel was as confused by this as David. After all, he had experienced the joy of anointing David, but now lived with the disappointment of little coming from it. I wonder how long they just sat there. No words. Tired. Just reflection. They didn't sit there too long, because Saul found where they were and the order is given to capture David (19:20).

So here was David. Anointed King over Israel, but so far nothing good had come from it. It would have been better to remain a shepherd. Life would have remained simple. Uncomplicated. But before God allows David's disappointment to turn into despair, He shows David that He is still in control. The sovereignty of God is displayed here in a strange way. The men who were sent to capture David to harm David walked into a trap set by God. Listen to what happens. *"When they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came upon Saul's men and they also prophesied"* (19:20). This term, "prophesying" apparently describes an enthusiastic behavior of praise for God. Literally, these men who intended to harm David during the worship service end up joining in on the singing. When Saul heard this, he sent more men (vs.21) and the same thing happens. It happens a third time. *"Finally, he himself left for Ramah...the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying"* (vs.22-23). In fact, Saul got quite undignified about it. *"He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all day and night"* (vs.24). So unusual and uncharacteristic was this for Saul, a saying came from this experience. *"Is Saul also among the prophets"* (vs.25).

What was all this about? God is saying something here to David, to Samuel and even to Saul. David saw everything in his life crumble. His position. His family. His friendships. His hopes and dreams. But when it was all taken away from him, guess what? He still had God. There in Ramah, in David's desolation, God's presence was so rich, so thick, so real, anyone who walked into it, whether they lived for God or not, became affected by it. This demonstration of God's presence had a deep impact on David, he would later write about it. This is what he said. *"Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, you are there. If I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast"* (Ps.139:7-10).

It is impossible to get away from God. The Apostle Paul confessed this when he said, *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither heights nor depths, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom.8:37-39). If even the worst sinner cannot get away from God, what can we say of God's presence with us? Some months ago, a good friend of mine informed me that her husband had left her. He had grown up a Christian, but some years ago abandoned everything having to do with God and proclaiming that he was an atheist. He shared with his wife how at that point he never felt so free. What a contrast to how I see my faith in God. Take the thought of God with me at all times away from me, and I would collapse. I cannot imagine ever walking away from

His presence. He has sustained me, supported me, nourished me, encouraged me and been my refuge. I am afraid for my friend's husband. He does not know that he can never escape from God. Like Saul, a day will come when he, along with every sinner will have to confess that He is Lord.

Meanwhile, the Christian who is just enduring, seeing little fruit, doing all they can (like my brother-in-law) to see God move; may rest assured that there is no better place to wrestle with life than in the presence of God. Many of us struggle for more, forgetting that where we are is the best place we could ever be – with God. Isn't that enough?

Charles Spurgeon in his classic devotional, Morning and Evening offers this wonderful thought. *"Dear reader, there is no need to try other forms of life to see if they are better. If you could have all the comforts of life but lost your Savior, you would be wretched. If you have Christ and if you were to waste in a prison you find it a paradise. Should you live in obscurity or die in famine, with Christ you will be fully satisfied with favor and goodness"* (Dec.2, Evening).

### **A Study on Friendship (Chapter 20)**

*"Jonathan became one in spirit with David"* (18:1)

I have valued friendships these past years. I shared this with someone recently even relating several examples. When she heard what I had to say about friendships, she bemoaned the fact that her husband had no real friends. I could not imagine life without my friends. Several men have in fact been my soul companions in these past several years of difficulties. I prayed with one weekly. Another friend, who lives overseas, is in constant contact with me, reassuring me of his love and prayers. He encouraged me to press on when the way becomes unclear and unbearable. Others, perhaps more on the periphery are only a phone call away, always available to talk, pray and encourage. Just yesterday a friend stopped by and when I shared a particular burden with him, his immediate reaction (without warning, I must add) was to break out in prayer. Yes, God has blessed me with many friends. I see friendships as one of the great provisions of God.

If anyone were to mention friendships in reference to the bible, the two that would likely come up would be that of David and Jonathan. Jonathan was a provision of God, given to David to sustain him, challenge and encourage David, and protect David. Without this friendship David would have been very alone. The depth of this friendship is best seen in David's lament for Jonathan after he and his father have died. *"I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were a very dear one to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of a woman"* (2 Sam.1:26).

This friendship began early in David's life. After David is presented to Saul, following his victory over Goliath, he meets Jonathan. Like it is with many friendships, this one ignited instantly. *"After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David and he loved him as himself"* (18:1). *"And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took the robe he was wearing and gave it to David along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow, and his belt"* (vs.3-4). This friendship was sealed with a

covenant. This covenant would not be broken. Although the relationship in the years that followed would be severely tested. Solomon wisely observed that *“a friend loves at all times”* (Prov. 17:17), and such was the case with David and Jonathan.

A little background on Jonathan’s life will help us appreciate more the depth of this friendship. What you will see from this is that it is Jonathan who is the real star that shines in the story. He was the one who gave up the most and went the furthest to make the relationship work. The humility of Christ seems to dominate Jonathan’s life.

We first meet Jonathan as a man of deep courage. He was a fighting man, who possessed a real faith and a single minded determination for God. One day (1 Sam. 14) Jonathan grabbed his armor bearer and set off to fight a detachment of Philistines. Tired of waiting for his father to muster up the courage to attack, Jonathan sneaks off suspicious that God will lead him to victory. Saul was too busy waiting on God to move (See 14:3, 19). It is here that we witness Jonathan’s real depth of faith. He says to his armor bearer, *“Perhaps the LORD will act on our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few”* (14:6). The result of such faith? *“So the Lord rescued Israel that day”* (14:23).

What Jonathan did here certainly put him in high regard among the fighting men of Saul’s army. They saw in Jonathan what they had not seen in Saul. This act of single-handedly attacking the Philistine detachment drew people to him, strengthening his position even more as the heir to the throne. That is important to keep in mind when you remember what Jonathan relinquishes to David. He not only had the right to the throne, he also had earned the right to the hearts of the people. Jonathan was a popular man in Israel.

Furthermore, the people showed higher regard for Jonathan than to the king himself. This is evident in the story of Jonathan eating honey in chapter fourteen when Saul had made all the soldiers vow they would not eat anything. This rash vow led to defeat. Hungry men cannot fight. Saul spiritualizes this loss and is led to blame Jonathan for it. To Saul’s disillusioned mind defeat came about because one person had broken the vow. To maintain his own dignity, Saul vows that Jonathan would die for his action. Saul’s men, however, would hear none of it. *“Should Jonathan die – he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the LORD lives, not a hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he did this with God’s help”* (vs.45).

The Lord rejected Saul as King, and Jonathan it seems accepted it. And so when David comes into the picture Jonathan was a broken warrior. An heir without a throne. He accepted David, and recognized God’s anointing upon David. Here is the key to Jonathan’s acceptance. He chose to become David’s friend. The context of this friendship was turmoil. He chose otherwise would have caused great strife and turmoil. Imagine if Jonathan had refused to accept David’s anointing? This was an act of the will on Jonathan’s part, to accept David in this way. It was a decision that set the stage for a deeper friendship, unlike any other in the scripture.

With this background in place, I observe five foundations to godly friendships as reflected in the relationship between David and Jonathan. Hopefully, they will prompt you to value the friendships you have, and even to pursue friendships that might be lacking in your life. My true

aim, though, is to point you to Jesus, for he is ultimately the best friend you can ever ask for. All that we say of Jonathan and David is merely a small taste of what Jesus desires with you.

1. A true friendship is for life. “*I friend loves at all times*” (Prov. 17:17). “*There is a friend who is closer than a brother*” (Prov. 18:24).

The pastor of the Church I attend, who was also a missionary with us in England, noted once the difference in the level of friendship in American compared to England or Australia. What Americans consider a friendship, he commented, Australians and the British would see only as an acquaintance. Having lived in England where I nurtured some deep friendship, I have to agree with him. People in American are satisfied with less in a friendship. I go back to the covenant Jonathan made with David, and the underlying expression of loyalty in that covenant. Look at the description of the friendship and you will note an unbreakable bond. “*Jonathan became one in spirit with David. He loved him ... Jonathan made a covenant with David. Jonathan took off his robe he was wearing and gave it to David...*” (18:1-3).

Notice also that Jonathan seemed to have taken most of the initiative in the expression of friendship. Why? I think it has something to do with that fact that he had more to lose by aligning himself with David. To be involved with David for the rest of his life would cost him his position and ultimately his life. Jonathan again serves as a Christ figure for us in this expression of love. I think it is worth adding here how important it is for men to express their love for one another. I am moved when men will say to me, *Mitch I love you*. While this expression seems a weak thing in American, there is really strength to such expressions.

The friendship between David and Jonathan would be severely tested in the years that followed. Later when Jonathan realized the threats by Saul to kill David were real, he did not back away from the friendship. Instead he reaffirmed his love for David. “*And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David to reaffirm his out of love for him because he loved him as he loved himself*” (1 Sam. 20:16-17). It would have been easy for David to also assume that Jonathan would no longer support him, but Jonathan did not allow David time to consider such a thing. He took steps to express again that this love was for life. Solomon, learning from his father about love, observed this about friendships; “*Wounds from a friend can be trusted*” (Prov.27:6). And so, this friendship was strengthened during a time of pain.

I have discovered in my life, sadly, that suffering seems to screen the true friendships in our lives. I received a letter from a high school friend right after Travis died. In the letter from friend tearfully apologized for not being there, or taking any steps to show support during the trial. That note was the only time I heard from the person. Apparently it assuaged their guilt and they no longer felt the need to reach out. My reaction to this was to say *well, you could start now*. But that would have been too costly. Another friend, placing his arm around me when I wept before God at the altar at church, promised to be there for me (a covenant), but as my sons situation grew worse I had to chase him down to receive the support he promised. When we did get together I found the response at best, lukewarm. After a year since my sons death and now nearly three years since our family trial began, I have discovered that I probably only have 2 or 3 really close friends. These are the ones who will still be there for us 4 years from now. They will call

periodically just to see how you are. These oaths of friendships, or simply expressions of love, do not cost much but they are priceless to me. True friendships are not hindered by crisis, but deepened.

Now the finger could be pointed at me here. I am sure I have failed others in my claim to be their friend. God is speaking to me about this right now. Have I been a true friend to others. I want to be.

2. A friendship is a showcase for exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit. It is in this unique relationship between Jonathan and David that you observe the Holy Spirit at work. There he perhaps no better case study of the fruit of the Holy Spirit personified in a person than here; with the exception of course of our Lord Jesus. The purity of the relationship between Jonathan and David, provided the Holy Spirit fallow ground to display love in its purist form. I won't go through it in detail, but spend a few moments and consider each of the fruit of the Spirit as given in Galatians 5:22,23, then reflect how you see it worked out in the relationship between Jonathan and David. "...*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.*" All these are certainly evident in this relationship. Love served the basis for the relationship. "*Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and loved him as his own*" (1 Sam.18:10. Joy was the expression of this relationship. Peace sustained the relationship. On the surface there was turmoil, but underlying the relationship there was a sense of security and confidence that whatever happened God would care for them. Patience seemed to give fuel to the relationship. David was particular patient for God's timing, and this had impact on the relationship. You can see if we were to continue with the list, how each of the fruit was clearly evident in this relationship. *Kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.* Its all there. In fact, Jonathan and David's union was a show case of the Holy Spirit at work in two lives completely surrendered to God.

Look at your own relationships for a moment. Begin with the one closest to you; your marriage. Now spend a few moments reflecting on each of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. What do you see? How healthy is this relationship? Do you know where you need to put some effort to strengthen that relationship? My weakness with my wife is in the area of being gentle and patient. I must begin, not seeking each fruit thought, but to submit the relationship to God. The fruit will be a product to enjoy following this submission to God. May the Lord display his life through your relationships today, as He did with David and Jonathan.

3. Friendship is more valuable than position. Many people have been willing to lose a friend to keep or even obtain a relationship. Just last week, one of the more secure African nations faced certain turmoil after the president of the country was murdered by his close friend. A true friend, however, rejoices when his friend receives higher honor. Interestingly, Jonathan did not just respond positively to David's promotion, he encouraged it. He even took steps to assure that David would move ahead of him in the race for the throne. It is safe to say that without Jonathan's help, David could not have become King. By giving to David his robe, tunic, sword, bow and belt (1 Sam.18;4) Jonathan was giving up his right to reign. Like John the Baptist, Jonathan was eager to decrease so that his friend might increase.

Before his father, Jonathan “*spoke well of David*” (19:4). So insistent was Jonathan before Saul, Saul vowed not to kill David. “*As surely as the Lord lives David will not be put to death*” (19:6). A true friend always speaks well of his friends. Did you know Jesus is such a friend? Think about this for a moment. Jesus has nothing but good to say to his father about you. He speaks well of you. In 1 John 2:1 “*he speaks to the father in our defense...*” This means even when we have blown it, and failed God, if we confess our sins to him, he will forgive us (1 John 1:9).

When the sufferer, Job, could no longer take the hypocrisy of his friends, he appealed to God as his friend. He had this to say to God. “*Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high*” (Job 16:19). There will be times when God is the only friend we will have and the only one we will need to turn to.

Ultimately, Jonathan was willing to die for David. He loved David as he loved himself (1 Sam.18:1, 20:17). He protected his friend. He risked his life for David at numerous, and why? All in the hope that David would shine as his own life dimmed into the obscurity of histories pages. What was at the heart of such friendship? Perhaps the question ought to be, who was at the heart of such a friendship? The answer to that lies somewhere in the friendship Jonathan had with God.

4. True friendship is a reflection of a friendship with God Himself. I often wonder how much influence Jonathan had on David writing the Psalms. Many of the Psalms are really love letters to God, but was David possibly influenced in writing them by what he observed in Jonathan. I was overwhelmed again in reading Psalm 139 last night. This great Psalm speaks of David’s awe of God, who knew David so intrinsically well, and yet loved David so much. “*O Lord you search me ..you know...you discern... you are family with all my ways...you have laid your hand on me...such knowledge is too wonderful for me, to lofty for me to attain*” (vs.1-6). God’s total involvement in David’s life caused David to cry for more of God, to know God personally. *Search me, O God, and know my heart* (vs.23). This cry to be known by God, and to know God is a consistent theme in the Psalms.

Jonathan was, I believe, a friend that drew David to God. His acceptance of David as based on God’s acceptance of David. He was willing to see David as God saw David. This is why Jonathan did not fight David, because to do so he would have been fighting God. Jonathan saw David as the future King of Israel because that is what God saw. A true friend seeks to view others as God views them. Jonathan expressed this to David on a number of occasions. “*But show me kindness like that of the Lord, as long as I live*” (20:14). As far as Jonathan could foresee he would grow old only to watch David surpass him in greatness. Later when it became apparent that they would not see each other Jonathan expressed this beautiful words to his friend, David. “*Go in peace, for we have a sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, the Lord is witness between you and me*” (20:42). It was the love of God that formed this deep bond. What existed between Jonathan and David flowed from God. I am beginning to see that Jonathan is one of the strongest Christ types in the Old Testament.

Reflecting on God’s love, Charles Spurgeon had this to say. “Jesus Christ has no quarrel with his spouse. Though she may wonder from him and grieve his Holy Spirit, he does not allow her faults to lesson his love. He sometimes chastens her, but always in a tender manner and with a

kind intent...Our precious husband knows our sully hearts too well to any offense to our ill manner.” The hymn writer was so write when he wrote, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*.

5. The bonds we share here are only a token of what we will share there. So much stood in the way of David and Jonathan from being able to fully share and enjoy their union. When the tension became so great they parted the scene in brokenness. Those closing moments are emotionally gripping. *“David.. bowed down before Jonathan three times with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together – but David wept the most”* (20:4).

So much here on earth stood in the way of their friendship. Aren’t you sometimes angry at what stands in the way of your friendships? Tensions, family interference, war, arguing, differences in personality and opinions, ill health, distance, death. Isn’t it all frustrating. For two years a speech disability had driven a wedge between my wife and I being able to enjoy the depth of friendship we once shared, not in our love but in our ability to communicate that love to each other. It is frustrating. But a day is coming when God will *“wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain for the old order of things has passed away”* (Rev.21:4).

David and Jonathan wept over the conclusion of their friendship here on earth. But they have eternity to enjoy what they only tasted in the bitterness of this life. O what glory that will be.

#### **A Study on Security (Ch.22-23)** *“David was in the stronghold”* (vs.4)

David had lost all that was secure to him. His wife, his job, his friends, his home, self respect, position. Saul would have killed David, had David stayed in town. He had to run, and one day, exasperated, and out of energy, aimless and utterly dejected he found himself in a cave. *“David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam”* (22:1) Caves are places of safety but they are not always pretty. You can’t run far in a cave. There is usually only one way in and out, and if there is another way it is not easy to find. If you enemy find you in a cave, you’ve had it. Caves are also dark places, dank and cold. Caves are full of the unknown, places of mystery. David ended up in a cave because he had no where else to go. In the previous chapter (21) we saw how David thought he would be safe in the temple, but the priest Ahimelech trembled when he saw David (21:1). David could not hide here. It would be the first place Saul would think of looking.

So David, now equipped with Goliaths sword and fed by some of the bread of the temple, headed for Gath, Goliaths old country. It was maybe when the people in Gath saw the sword that once belonged to their hero that they expressed mistrust of David. *“David took these words to heart and was very much afraid. so he feigned insanity in their presence, and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard”* (21:13). And that is when David realized he could be safe no where, and he ran to a cave. He had no where else he could go. He had no other plans. This was all he could do.

It was there in this desperate moment of solitude that David, for the first time, truly understood God’s presence. Here, God became the refuge of David’s soul. That cave provided David a holy

sanctuary that even the temple could not offer. You see, often it is when we can go nowhere else that we discover how God is really all we have anyway. When David could go no further, he found himself at the center of God's will. His safety however, was not in that cave, it was in God. Armed with this wonderful truth, David grabbed a pen and began to write. What he wrote there in that cave, when all else had failed, when he had nowhere else to go, we know as Psalm 57. The title of that Psalm explains the setting. "*When David had fled from Saul into the cave.*" The Psalm was David's testimony of how God was his cave, or his refuge. "*Have mercy O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until this disaster has past. I cry out to God who fulfills his purpose for me. He sends from heaven and saves me*" (vs.13).

God became David's hiding place. When David left the cave, God remained David's refuge. It was there in that physical confine that David's conviction of God as the true hiding place became a permanent reality. He reentered the dangerous open air, vulnerable again to Saul, but knowing in God's protection, he was safe. David would move around a lot from that cave. His life would remain unsettled. "*From then David went to Mizpah ... but the prophet Gad said to David, 'do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah. So David left and went to the forest of Hereth'*" (22:3-5).

From cave, to stronghold to the open forest of in Judah, David moved closer to the enemy but he was safe as he ever had been because God was his refuge. Later, David would reflect on this when he wrote; "*My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake my soul. Awake harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn*" (Ps.57:7-8). With a song of assurance in his heart and on his lips, David moved from safety to vulnerability, knowing that with God no harm could come to him unless God meant it.

O how I need this today. When my soul is restless and vulnerable to the enemy, I need to know my hiding place. There in the cleft of the master's hand, the enemy can not touch me. I can move on from my cave, to the open vulnerable forest knowing that no harm can come to me. (WORDS FROM HYMN, THE CLEFT OF THE ROCK... HE COVERS ME THERE WITH HIS HAND.....)

This position of safety would mean several things for David.

**First, in such a position God would direct every step.** When we are settled in his hands, he is the one who carries us. Hidden in God, David understood that to remain in God would require careful obedience from him. So will it be with us. *Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above not on earthly things. For you have died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God*" (Col. 3:1-3). The only safe place to be is in Christ, completely hidden in him. God directs every step best when we have obediently set our hearts (that is desires) and our minds (that is our plans) on that position with him.

David left that cave motivated by a desire to protect and provide for his family. He looked for that safety from the King of Moab home of his grandmother Ruth. "*Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you*" (22:3). Here David would seek God's will. "*Until I learn what*

*God will do for me*” (vs.3). This statement strikes a deep cord for me and has served to challenge me in the past months. In fact, next to this verse I have written these comments; *awaiting God’s purpose in regard to Elaine, Travis and England – Dec. 5th, 1998*. When I wrote this my wife was recovering from a brain tumor operation and my son was dying of a brain tumor. Adding to these burdens, the prospects of returning to the mission field were dimming. There I stood, like David, unable to move until God showed the way. You see, that is what it means to be *“hidden in Christ”*. It is to be so much in fellowship with God that we do not move until his will is perfectly clear. You do nothing until *you learn what God will do for you*. *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight”* (Prov. 3:6).

That is what David did. He positioned himself in God, and he waited. When God moved, David moved. He refused to do anything until he *learned what God will do for him*. God, in response to this did as he promised David if only David would trust him with all his heart and not lean on his own understanding. The prophet, Gad, (vs.5) was sent to David with this message from God. *“Do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah. So David left and went to the forest of Hereth”* (vs.5). To the outside observer David moved from safety to more vulnerability. But because he belonged to God he was safe wherever he went even if it had been the front door of Saul’s house. God was simply better positioning David to unsettle Saul. Later Saul’s pursuit of David would become intensely hot, but David did not panic. Saul had all of the priests of Nob killed because they had given David support and refuge. There were fewer places David could hide. If this were not ad enough, the Philistines were attacking and looting threshing floors in Keilah, perhaps the home town of some of David’s men. But again, David relies on God. *Shall I go and attack the Philistines*, David asked God (23:2). God said, *go*, and David gained victory against this enemy.

When the dust settled from that victory, David was again pursued by Saul. *“Saul called up all his forces for battle to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men”* (vs.8). What followed is one of the most beautiful examples of complete reliance on God in all the scriptures. David’s first reaction upon hearing that Saul is attacking, was to go to God. *“Bring the Ephod”* David commands the priest. David entered a period of intense prayer. He asked God if Saul would continue to attack. *“He will”*, God replied. Pressing further David asked God if the citizens of Keilah will surrender David to Saul. *They will* the LORD said. So guided by God, David and his men *“kept moving from place to place”* (vs.13)

This situation is perhaps the clearest evidence of man’s free will we see in the scriptures. Had David not inquired of God, and subsequently obeyed God, the results would have been different. There were two options available to David. God his own way, or follow God’s way. God made it clear to David that choosing one way over the other would cost him. You see, you and I, like David, are moral agents guided by the hand of the sovereign God. That is not a contradiction. As sovereign God here, God brought to David’s attention the cost of one choice over another. He allows David the choice, but interacts with David in his situation. That is the wonder of living as free moral beings under a sovereign God. Unlike what some suggest, we are not puppets. God does what he will with us only when we have placed our lives in his hands. Otherwise, we are on our own. This is why David refused to move until he knew with unequivocal certainty what God wanted. Gerald Sittser addresses this tension between our will and God’s beautifully in his book

Grace Disguised. ~~IIIIIIIIIIFFFFASFASFAS~~. Donald English in his commentary on Mark's Gospel adds this insight. *"God's sovereignty is neither proactive or reactive. It is interactive, and it is a privilege of our humanity that we can be part of that process of interactivity."*

Later David would reflect on this. In the Psalm dedicated to this crisis he wrote, *"I cry to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me. He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me"* (Ps.57:2). And also in Psalm 142:3-4 David wrote; *"When my Spirit grow faint within me, it is you who knows my way. In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me..."*

Because David had made God his refuge, God would direct his every step. God will only tell you which way to go, and when, if you are looking to his instruction and guidance and living wholeheartedly for him. Otherwise, my friend, you are on your own. God's hands are not bound when we rebel. He only chooses to leave us until we become so alone and desperate we have no choice but return to him for refuge and help.

Secondly, it was in such a position of safety that God would surround David with the right people. With God, David was not alone. God would reassure David of that by bringing the right sort of people into David's life when he needed it most. This was a direct response to David's prayer in Psalm 142:4. This Psalm was written while David was in the cave running from Saul. Here David laments; *"Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life."* Well, God answers that prayer. David happened to not be the only one running from Saul. There were other men, and they would end up in that cave with David to become his companions. Many of these became like David; rebels on the run. Saul, like Saddam Hussien, was systematically and ruthlessly removing anyone who served a threat to his reign. So God sent to David four hundred men. Later in 23:13 this number would grow to six hundred. *"All those who were in distress, or in debt or discontented gathered round him and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him"* (22:2). David was no longer alone. Charles Swindol explains; *"this smelly, dank cave became a place of training for these who were the beginning of the army that would be called 'David's mighty men of valor.'" That's right. This motley crew would become David's mighty men of battle, and some would later become his cabinet members. He turned their lives around and built in them order and discipline and character and direction."*

Here is the principles for living in God' security. When in despair and we look to God, he brings to us the people we need. These people became in a very real sense the presence of God to David. When my wife lay dying in the hospital, I referred to my church as God's arms. God sent an army of men and women to remind me that I was not alone, and they held me up and provided for me and strengthened me through this trial. Some do not receive this from God, because to do so takes humility and vulnerability.

Last year, just at the same time that my son was dying, I heard of another family who had just undergone loss. A wife and mother of three children had just died of cancer. When my son died, it rocked the community where we lived. Nearly 500 people came to his viewing and an equal number to the funeral. Few knew of this woman's death however because when she was diagnosed and received treatments she insisted that few be informed. It was only when she lay

dying that word began to trickle out of the family need. I met the husband recently, and he has suffered alone. My son, Travis' soccer coach shared with me during Travis's illness how he had also suffered from cancer and how he drove to Atlanta alone to receive chemo treatment. While there he would visit he parents who lived only miles from the treatment center, but they never knew the real reason why he was there. To this day, I believe, they remain ignorant of what their son had gone through.

David was not like this. He made himself vulnerable and word trickled out of his need, and hundred came out to lend him their support. David would alter reflect on the significance of this in Psalm 57. At first David did not see this as a group of supporters. Listen to his initial reaction to being surrounded by a group of men in distress, in debt and discontent. *"I am in the midst of lions; I live among ravenous beasts – men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords"* (vs.4). Imagine the talk and the attitude in that cave as four hundred men each grumbled and complained of the injustices in their lives. But God turned these men into friends and David would later thank God for them. *"I will praise you among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples"* (vs.9). What changed the climate in that cave was David's contagious longing to exalt God. This too became the song on the lips of these men as they recognized that God would never reject them as others had. *"Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be all over the earth"* (vs.5,11). *"For Great is your love, reaching to the heavens, your faithfulness reaches to the skies"* (vs.10). And that love filled that cave, turning each bitter heart into the breeding ground for praise. In another Psalm David reflects on this change of heart. *"Set my heart free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me"* (Ps.142:9). That cave became a sanctuary of worship.

Isn't that then a wonderful picture of the church; filled with people in distress, discontented by life's trials, and in debt? Enter a true place of worship and you will not hear the complaints of broken, hurting people. Rather you will hear the praise of men and women who look to God.

Armed with this theme of praise, and accompanied now by 600 men (23:13), *"David stayed in the desert strongholds and the hills of the desert"* (vs.14). David's discovery of God, and his renewed passion to praise God did not outwardly improve his life. Instead it worsened. *"Day after day, Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands"* (vs.14). Let us be careful in thinking that worship will improve our lot. What it does is what ultimately matters and that is it keeps us in God's hands. Yet, David was still prone to discouragement and apparently there were none in his band of 600 men who became close enough to lift this burden off David. So God sends Jonathan to David. *"Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him to find strength in God. ... Don't be afraid; he said, 'my father will not lay a hand on you. You shall be kind over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this. The two of them made a covenant before the LORD'"* (vs.15-18).

### **A Study On Mercy (Ch.24,26)**

*"Afterwards David was conscience stricken"* (24:5)

I have learned some harsh lesson on mercy recently from behind the wheel of my car. With an impatient temperament, and with the knowledge that a little pressure exerted by my foot can get me where I want to quicker, I have on several occasions been forced to the side of the road by a

police officer. I am earning a reputation in my family of having the record for the most stops but never yet being ticketed. My kids are also learning from me that the best way to tap the usually hardened heart of an officer is to admit guilt. Here is how the scene usually unfolds. The officer pulls me over. He approaches my car, and as he does I lower my window bracing my self. Before he can say a word, I say this to him. "Officer, I am so sorry. I know I was going 65 and the speed limit is 40. I just don't know what came over me." This plea for mercy relaxes the officer. He moves his hand from his holster and says something like this to me. "OK, I will give you a warning this time. But if you do it again, you will be ticketed."

I have to confess that when this happens I am exploiting mercy. And the most recent incident made me realize I am teaching my kids a lesson on seeking mercy that does not come from a pure and truly repentant heart.

David's expression of mercy in these two chapters came from a pure heart. There was nothing exploitive about it. In the two events given to us involving Saul, David could have ripped Saul apart. There was no plea for mercy from his rival, and no admission of wrong. Yet when given the opportunity to strike back, something deep in David's tender heart caused him to respond instead in mercy.

I want in this study to take a journey to that deep cavern of mercy in David's soul. I suspect what I will find there will be larger than David. I believe as I pursue this study on David and mercy I will run into God's mercy. Let's find out.

Saul's efforts to destroy David reached dynamic proportions. Following a victory over the Philistines, Saul takes 3000 battle ready soldiers and seeks out David. He had narrowed down David's location near the "crag of the wild goats" (24:2). Along the way, Saul needed to relieve himself and so he entered a cave, which happened to be the cave where David was hiding. David's men, logically, saw this as a divine opportunity for David to once for all get rid of Saul. "*This is the day the Lord spoke about when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish'*" (vs.4). Giving the impression that is exactly what he will do, David crawls close to where Saul is sitting. But instead of returning with blood on his hands, he held in those hands a piece of Saul's robe.

Surprisingly, David was filled with a sudden rush of guilt for what he had done. That tender side of David surfaced again and David confesses this as a sin to his men and rebukes them for even urging him to take Saul's life (vs.7). We will return to this scene in a moment, because David's interaction with Saul outside of the cave reveals the secret of what lay deep in his heart of mercy. Chapter 26 describes another scene where again David had the opportunity to kill Saul, but chose not to. We need to look at that also in order to complete this image of mercy given to us in this section.

In Chapter 26 David is again in hiding. Whatever true conviction Saul possessed in the previous scene was short lived and there were no traces remaining. In fact, Saul becomes even more determined and obsessed in his pursuit of David. "*Saul went with his 3000 chosen men of Israel to search for David*" (vs.2). Ruling the country at that moment seemed peripheral now to Saul while seeking out David became all that mattered.

David was given another opportunity to strike at Saul, but again, guided by a tender heart, he doesn't. While Saul was camped near where David was hiding, David and Abishai crawl into the campground. To Abishai this was an even more obvious divine opportunity for David. *"Today God has given your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice"* (vs.8). But to David such an act would place them under guilt. *"Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?"* (vs.9). This is for God to deal with. So David and Abishai leave, but not after having taken Saul's spear and water jug (vs.12). The next morning when Saul discovered what had happened, and that his life was again mercifully spared, he experienced a bout of temporary remorse for his pursuit of David. *"I have sinned. Come back. David my son. Because you considered my life precious today I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly"* (vs.21).

David was cautious of Saul's display of contrition, and send for one of Saul's men to retrieve the spear and water jug rather than approach Saul personally. David knew Saul would not change despite this act of sorrow.

This story, remember, is about mercy and it is David, not Saul, who remains true to his commitment to show mercy. It is in David's explanation to Saul, as to why he spared Saul's life, where we are given a beautiful look at the heart of one who possesses true mercy. What David was able to say to Saul is nothing short of astounding. No one can respond in love toward someone who is out to kill you unless they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Let me list some of the expressions of mercy by David in both of the accounts that lay before us.

*"Some urged I kill you, but I spared you"* (24:10).

*"I will not lift my hand against my master because he is the Lord's anointed"* (24:10).

*"May the Lord judge between me and you"* (24:12).

*"May the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you"* (24:12).

*"May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand"*

*"The LORD rewards everyman for his righteousness and faithfulness"* (26:23).

*"The Lord gave you into my hand today, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord's anointed"* (26:23).

*"As surely as I value your life today, so may the Lord value my life and deliver me from all my troubles"* (26:24).

These are abnormal statements made by David. I say, abnormal, because it is not the way a person normally responds when being attacked, but it is the way one will respond when empowered by mercy. This was God responding through David. When David spoke to Saul the way he did, he was making several declarations of mercy. You and I have opportunities daily to make these declarations, but we will unlikely make them unless we are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

1. First, David is saying in all this, "My goal is righteousness". *"As the old saying goes, from evil comes evil deeds, so my hand will not touch you"* (24:13). *"What you have done is not good"* (26:16). *"The LORD rewards everyman for his righteousness and faithfulness"* (26:13).

David looked to do what was good and right. It became the measure for every reaction of his. He weighed carefully every situation against this standard; what is good for God? How will God react to what I do? Imagine responding always in such a manner. Right now I am dealing privately in my heart with what I feel has been a slight injustice against me. I am on missionary tour, and one of the churches I am assigned to has not taken my ministry with them very seriously. I am to speak there tonight, and the fact that they have yet to contact me tells me that missions is not their high priority. My impulse is to just not show up, but as I study this I don't believe that is God's impulse. That must be my measure in weighing carefully my response to this. If God's goal is always what is good and righteous, this must also become my goal. David "sought righteousness" and "all these things were added unto him" (Matt. 6:33). Later David would relay this principle to his son, Solomon, who wrote "*a throne is established through righteousness*" (Prov. 16:12). Most would try to obtain what they want through force. David understood that this was a matter best left in the hands of his God.

Consider what your response would be if righteousness was always your goal? Since commenting on the "injustice" by the particular church I mentioned, I have completed my ministry at that Church. Several other unfortunate things happened that added to my frustration. Most noticeably being the pastor's decision to go on vacation on the second night of the conference. He did not do this subtly either. As I arrived for the meeting that night he and his family were there in the front with all their suitcases waiting for their ride to the airport. Responding in righteousness to this, I knew, had to be an initiative in my heart of the Holy Spirit. On my own, I could not act righteously to this situation. I could hear the whisper of "Abishai" saying to me, *Mitch. Go on. This is your opportunity to tear him to pieces. Take him out with the swift lance of a sharp word. He deserves it. He has done wrong to you.* The Holy Spirit would not allow me to respond that way.. My responding in righteousness, God blessed the meeting, and I also know, he blessed me.

2. David's second response was to say to Saul; I value your life and I want you to value mine. God kept David from harming Saul because he accepted Saul as a creation of God, and an anointed sovereign ruler placed over Israel. "*Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the Lord's anointed'*" (24:10) "*As surely as I value your life today, so may the Lord value my life and deliver me from all trouble*" (26:11).

Had David ignored who Saul was to God, he would have struck Saul down in one blow. The story of Nadab, sandwiched between the two encounters with Saul, reveals what happened when David lost sight of the value of man before God. It is a hard lesson to really swallow, isn't it? We do not naturally view corrupt people as valuable members of God's creation. Yet the most vile and evil person is still precious in the sight of God. When David spoke of life's value in Psalm 139, there was no one he could exclude. "*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well*" (vs.14). Every living soul ever placed upon this earth is *fearfully and wonderfully made*. "*God does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*" (2 Peter. 3:9). This must include the vilest of men. Hitler, Stalin, Sadaam Hussein, Nero; they were all precious in the sight of God. And so, with that godly view of Saul, David refused to bring harm upon his life.

This principle has profound implications in our relationships with people we like, but more importantly with people we don't like very much. This is why Jesus urged us to "love our enemies" and "pray for them" (Matt. 5:44), and "do good to them" (Lk.6:35). Solomon urged that we "do not gloat when your enemy falls" (Prov.24:17), and "if your enemy is hungry, give him food" (Prov. 25:21). Our response to those who don't like us is based upon our understanding that despite their faults, and even their wretchedness, they were created by God and with purpose. Our response of love can even serve to restore them to God, an opportunity Saul had on several occasions. In fact, look at how Saul reacts to David's love. "When David finished saying these things, Saul asked, 'Is that your voice David my son?' and he wept a loud. 'You are more righteous than I', he said, 'you have treated me well, but I have treated you badly'" (24:16,17). "Then Saul said, 'I have sinned. Come back David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly" (26:21). By loving Saul and treating with value, David brought conviction on Saul's heart. "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head" (Ro. 12:20).

*Lord, the impulse of my heart is to lash out.  
Help me to love.  
When my heart desires to be critical  
Help me instead to build up.  
Give to me the grace and ability to love others  
As you love them  
So that by doing so they might be brought to you.*

### **A Study on Restraint (Ch. 25)**

*"Now Samuel died" (vs.1).*

We have just looked closely at David's tender heart and have found him to be a man of deep sensitivity from the way he treated Saul. Now, sandwiched between the two encounters with Saul is a story with a much different expression from the heart.

Here we discover a side to David unseen to this point, and perhaps even unknown to David. While stricken with grief when he simply cut off a piece of Saul's robe, in this story David erupts in fury at a man who was perhaps foolish, but certainly not matching Saul's capacity for evil. Have you ever noticed inconsistencies like this in your life? I sure have. One day I might seem to have it all together spiritually, behaving in a godly matter and doing all that God wants of me. I feel close to God and react tenderly to situations. But the next day, or even an hour later, I can get impatient with my wife or my children, or even slip into a weak moment of entertaining immoral thoughts.

The chapter begins on a sad note, but one, which also helps us understand better why David reacts the way he does. "Now Samuel died" (vs.1). Consider the impact of that on David for a moment. It must have torn him apart. Samuel had been like a father to David, certainly his mentor. Samuel had played a tremendous role in David life. David would not have been where

he was had it not been for Samuel. And now Samuel was dead. David was probably in hiding when he heard this news. Worse yet, it was doubtful David was able to attend the funeral. To attend would have made him more vulnerable to Saul. *“All Israel assembled to mourn for him”* (vs.1).

The death of Samuel then, appropriately sets the mood for the story we are looking at. David is on the run. Saul wants to kill David. David’s best friend, Jonathan, can no longer see him. And now his spiritual mentor is dead. To say this least, David was in no mood to mess around with, but one man tries. On his journey, this time *“into the dessert of Maon”* (vs.1), David has an two encounters, each a real contrast to the other. He meets a fool named Nabal, and he meets a beautiful woman called Abigail.

1. The encounter with Nabal – Nabal is a fool, but he is a rich fool. Even his wife thought so. She explained to David later; *“pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name – his name is fool, and folly goes with him”*. So Nabal was a fool, he was rich, and even his wife had to acknowledge that he was wicked.

David’s encounter with Nabal involved the began with a request. Hearing that Nabal was *“sheering his sheep”* (vs.4) David sent his men to Nabal to ask for provisions form his profit. David’s approached this in a traditional way. He had watched over Nabal’ sheep at one point and so to return the favor Nabal is asked to provide for David and his men. It was only fair to ask this. *“When your shepherds were with us, we did not ill treat them...nothing of theirs was missing . . . therefore be favorable toward my young men...Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them”* (vs.7-8).

When Nabal hears this is reacted like a fool will react. *“Who is this David? Why should I take my bread and water and meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where* (vs.11)? When David heard this he turned hot. *“David said to his men, ‘put on your sword”* (vs.12). David was in no mood for such games. He had lost Samuel. He was tired of running from Saul. There was no tender heart to react sensitively to this situation. David was angry and he was prepared to shed blood.

No will turn our blood redder than a fool. Some people are so self centered, so consumed with themselves and with their own profit they are unable to recognize the mark of God on others. In fact they are such fools it might as well be their name. Nabal was beyond foolish, he was a fool. It didn’t describe his dealings, it described him. Yet, sometimes we had to admit it, such a person is still a creation of God and loved by God. David was not consistent in how he treated Nabal with his treatment of Saul.

Nabal was a fool and he was wicked but not near the degree that Saul was. David would not touch Saul because Saul was God’s anointed. Yet he forgot that Nabal, a fool, was nevertheless a man created in the image of God. Rather than respecting Nabal, David despises him.

It is hard, isn’t it, to see beyond the fool to acknowledge the stamp of God’s creation in certain people. Yet the worst sinner, the worst fool, is still God’s property. I am not suggesting here that we ought to ignore certain people’s foolishness. Even Abigail acknowledged these black marks

on her husband's life. What God does ask of us though is that we respect and honor him as creator and giver of life by the way we even treat the worst sinner. It was Abigail, who God used to teach David this lesson.

One more comment about the fool before we note how the story unfolds. Nabal represents in this story the fool who rejects God. Just as Nabal scoffed at David, many scoff this way at God. David's men came to Nabal as though to say, "David, the future King of Israel, wants you to be a part of his life". God offers the same to mankind. Having provided for man, as David had for Nabal, God now extends his hand to man in order that there might be relationship. We cannot imagine that anyone would turn down what God has to give him. But man does. And he is a fool for it. *"The fool says in his heart, there is no God; they are corrupt, their deeds are vile – there is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one"* (Ps. 14:1-3). I wonder if David had Nabal in mind when he wrote this Psalm.

2. The encounter with Abigail – Abigail, is a picture in this story of the righteous person, even a Christ figure, who lives in a world of fools. In the same Psalm about fools, David acknowledges that *"God is present in the company of the righteous"* (vs.5).

When David meets Abigail he is kept from destroying Nabal's entire family because of Abigail's righteousness. It is likewise the presence of the righteous that keeps God from fully destroying the world. *"For the sake of ten I will not destroy it* (speaking of Sodom when Abraham pleaded with God to hold back his wrath) (Gen.18:32).

When Abigail hears what Nabal has done, her only recourse is to go directly to David. Had she gone to Nabal, he would have scoffed at her. So she musters together an unbelievable supply of food, drinks, and supplies as an offering for David and his men. Like Abraham she takes her case straight to God as it were, to plead that David would not destroy her family.

*"When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, 'my Lord, let the blame be on me alone'"* (vs.23-24). Like Abraham begging that God would spare Sodom, Abigail pleads with David to spare her wicked husband. Abigail of course was most concerned about the many innocent in her family, and she was willing to lay the brunt of David's wrath on her shoulders. Nabal was the fool, yet she was willing for the blame to rest with her. We again have a picture here of Christ whom Isaiah foretold would do a similar thing for all of us. *"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken but God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ... The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all"* (Is. 53:4-6).

At this risk of projecting too much that is figurative in this story, I see in the example of Abigail also a model on how we are to approach God. A picture of Christ, Abigail is also a picture of the believer who seeks God out for his righteousness to be carried out.

First, we note the manner in which Abigail humbled herself before David. *“When Abigail saw David she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground...”* (vs.23-24). Had Abigail said what she said while still sitting on her donkey, her words would not have had the impact it had on David. Our posture before others, and more importantly before God, reveals something of the seriousness of our words. Bowing before God, and even lying prostrate before him reveals something to him of the intent of our hearts. But I believe it also enables us to speak humbly to God. What I mean is this. Physical posture can and will affect what happens to us spiritually. I do not often get on my knees when I pray, and rarely do I lie face down before him. But when I do the effect is tremendous. When we bow, or lie face down, there is little else we can do. Our attention is more on him and less on our surrounding. *“Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will lift you up”* (James 4:10). *“The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down”* (Ps. 145:14).

Secondly, Abigail appeals to her own righteousness deflecting David’s attention away from Nabal’s wickedness. Interestingly, Abigail makes no excuses for Nabal. *“May the Lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name – his name is fool”* (vs.25). Instead, Abigail says to David, *“My Lord, let the blame be on me alone”* (vs.24). Isn’t that how Jesus presents himself to his father regarding us. *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who believe in me through their message”* (John 17:20). *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34). *“But if any one does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the righteousness”* (1 John 2:2).

We do not get from God what we deserve because Jesus humbled himself before God to defend us. God responds to our sin according to the righteousness of Jesus. So it was with David. Abigail’s righteousness diffused the anger David had toward Nabal.

Third, as a sign of her loyalty to David, she presented him with gifts. *“Let this gift be given to the men who follow you”* (vs.27). Her offering was her statement with which she acknowledged David’s position. *“Your servant ... my master”* she declared to David indicating his willingness to serve him. The gift was not meant to appease David, but rather to demonstrate her loyalty to him.

God desires such expressions from us. Our human relationships are to never come before our relationship with God. When is the last time you have expressed that to God? I love my wife dearly, but she is not God to me. I heard a pastor say about his wife once; *“She is a great wife, but she makes a lousy god”*. Abigail was expressing a higher commitment here. Not to David, but really to God. She was married to a fool, but served and honored a good and righteous God.

God looks for certain expressions of love from us. The pastor of the Church where I am currently attending, will often call people to come forward during the pastoral prayer time in order to *“body language to our prayers”*. Likewise, we need body language to our commitment to God.

Fourth, Abigail asked for David’s forgiveness. *“Please forgive your servants offense, for the Lord will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the Lord’s battles”* (vs.28). It is interesting how Abigail sought David’s prosperity in the same breath as asking for forgiveness. I don’t think it is inconsistent to ask God to cleanse us while acknowledging his

greatness and blessing through the world. We want to be part of what God is doing, but obviously cannot if we are not on his side. This was Abigail's way of saying, *David, I want what you want. I love to see you glorified. I want to be right in your eyes so that I might participate in what you do. "And when the Lord has brought my master success, remember your servant"* (vs.31).

David's reaction (vs.32-35). Had Abigail not intervened in the way she did, David would have certainly followed through on his plan to kill all the males in Nabal's family (vs.34). But God used Abigail to cause David to act righteously. His own anger, and the mood brought about by Samuel's death had clouded David's judgment. He would have regretted it later as Abigail herself pointed out to David. *"My master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed"* (vs.31).

David's reaction is first to praise God and second to honor Abigail. *"Praise be to the Lord .. May you be blessed"* (vs.32-33). And because Abigail acted, and David listened the story turns out right. It always does for us whenever we leave conflict with God. I failed in this past week. While visiting a church I stayed with a family who throughout the meal showed great enthusiasm for missions – but then they never came to the meeting after the meal. I thought this was wrong, so in my "thank-you" letter to them I subtly made reference to my disappointment, but not subtle enough for them to miss my reaction. It is probably something that would have been better left with God. Had my wife been privy to my little devious plan, like Abigail she would have stopped me and encouraged me to leave the matter to God. I realize I wasn't out to kill every male in the family, but nevertheless, the intent of my heart was not righteous.

The matter left to God, meant that God had his way in this story. Nabal has a stroke and Abigail becomes David's wife. No doubt all of Nabal's riches also became David's. David learned here the value of restraint. When we bite our tongue, hold back a plan for revenge, we are leaving the situation with God. David would learn a vital lesson here that would become useful later as king in bigger matters of conflict.

May God help us to learn the value of restraint. There are many things better left with God. Can you think of any today?

**A Study On Sin Ch.28-31**  
*"He no longer answers me" (28:15).*

Last week while preaching at a church I noticed a homeless man sitting at the back of the sanctuary. He was listening attentively and at moments even gave indication of agreeing with what I said. In the middle of expounding a point he raised his hand and asked me a question related to something I was saying. Wanting to keep my focus (and knowing I was near the end of my message anyway) I suggested to him that we meet afterward to talk about it. We did have a lengthy talk. I discovered the man had been on the streets for over twenty-seven years and only once during those years did he have a brief period of being settled. I asked him how long he had been drunk.

*"I am not drunk"* he told me, *"I am a drunk"*.

What amazed me was that my homeless friend knew the scriptures better than many who sit in church week after week. It turned out that because he had been in so many shelters where the gospel was preached, he had acquired a good grasp of its message. Unfortunately the truth never reached his heart.

Somewhere in this man's past he made a series of seemingly innocent choices that led him down this path to loneliness and isolation from both people and God. In this existence he is safe from relationships, but faces little hope. People who work with the homeless refer to my friend as a "chronic homeless" person. I am told that statistically he has a 2% chance of being rescued from this lifestyle. I tried to picture this man clean shaven, with a family and good job. Instead, he has teeth missing, scraggly hair and old, torn, clothes. It could have been so different for him. A few different choices early in his life would have led him down a far different path. The apostle, James warned of the power of those small choices and its devastating effect on the human soul; *"each man is tempted, when by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death"* (Ja.1:14-15).

Things could have been so different for Saul. A few choices, a couple unresolved failures, a stream of rebellious acts, and gradually Saul found himself on a one-way path to destruction. It did not have to be this way for Saul. *"You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you"*, Samuel warned. *"If you had he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all times. But now your kingdom will not endure"* (1 Sam. 13:13-14). The longer Saul stayed on this path the more difficult it was for him to turn back. He was no longer just drunk with sin, he had become a drunk of sin. His last act was a pitiful one, desperate and dreadful. But, again, it never had to be like this for Saul. It could have been so good.

What happened to Saul? Where did he go wrong? Why do some people, even when faced with death, still refuse to turn back to God? I want to try to understand this because I am burdened for many who, like Saul, seem to have drifted so far from God there seems to be no turning back. I want to understand why some people seem to become "chronic spiritually homeless" people. A study on these last days of Saul's life gives insight in understand why some never turn back.

It is important first to understand that the conditions surrounding Saul contributed to his down fall. The devil will often cause circumstances to affect us, knowing that we might become distracted from God. Many cling to God when faced with difficult circumstances, but Satan knows there are enough people who don't, and so it is worth his effort to cause things to go bad for us. Peter warns us of this when he says in 2 Peter. 5:8. *"The devil is like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour."*

We can easily identify several factors that led to Saul's collapse.

1. The wearing affect of sin. The advance of the Philistine army against Israel served to weaken his trust and dependence on God (v.1). In fact, this had been a battle ever since Saul was made king. The presence of the Philistines gradually wore on Saul. Sin never tires. It persists and eats away at us until we fall victim to it. Unless we strike a death blow to sin it will always lurk and

seek a way to defeat us. On this day, the Philistines “gathered their forces to fight against Israel” (v.1). We note from this that sin gains in intensity, its forces become increasingly more powerful as we fall susceptible to it.

Saul knew of this pending danger and from a distance could possibly see the advancing army poised for battle. “*The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem while Saul gathered all the Israelites and set up camp at Gilboa*” (v.4). Gilboa was a mountain range east of the plains of Shunem and there Saul could see the vast army of the Philistines. And what he saw struck him with fear. “*When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart*” (v.5).

The soldier who had once conquered thousands and was once filled with unlimited confidence was now stricken with terror. Outside of the will of God, now it was fear that gripped him. Anyone who lives for a prolonged period outside the will of God will eventually become filled with fear. The complete opposite is true of the believer who in the worst of possible situations can be faced with complete peace. Saul was alone because he had abandoned God.

2. The lack of a support structure. The absence of Samuel left Saul without a crutch to lean on leaving him alone, and susceptible. The writer of Samuel reminds us again of Samuel’s death. “*Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel mourned for him and buried him...*” (v.3). Saul could no longer rely on Samuel as he had before. So he sought out God personally but without changing his heart. He sought out God to allay his fears not to be reconciled to Him. “*He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer by dreams, or Urim or prophets*” (v.6). Saul never owned his own faith in God. Sadly, he depended on Samuel for his spiritual strength, and when Samuel was gone Saul found himself lacking.

God did not answer Saul because Saul was tuned to the wrong frequency. He tried to hear from God without adjusting the dial of his own heart. Remember this. God will never refuse us if we have honestly made the steps to know him and receive from him. Saul believed he could receive from God without living for God fully himself. He was not repentant when he sought out God on this occasion but desperate. He was obsessed with what the outcome would be not concerned with the condition of his own relationship with God.

What an important lesson there is here for us. What is our motive for coming to God? Is it for a good outcome to a certain situation, or is it to be in right communion with Him? The condition for coming to God, and for God to respond to us is clearly given in the scriptures and it must always have as the motivation a right relationship with God. 2 Chronicles 7:14 lays out this condition in very clear terms. “*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land.*”

Without Samuel, Saul was desperately on his own. And with out Samuel Saul was forced to acknowledge the tragedy and consequence of rejecting God. The greatest consequence of sin is having to live with God’s silence. I cannot imagine anything worse. However, the greatest motivation for living right is to be in a position to hear from God. But to live with God’s silence? That is hell! When God no longer speaks to us that is the final and ultimate price to sin. What

Saul did next shows how much he longed to hear from God, but again only so it would benefit him. There was no pursuit of righteousness in what Saul did. Saul did the unthinkable. He requested a medium. He, himself, had banned mediums and spiritists from Israel, but now in the lowest act of ungodliness he attempts to drown out the silence of God by asking for one. I understand in England there are more registered spiritists than there are ministers of the gospel. *“Find me a medium, so that I am go inquire of her”* (v.7). *“There is one in Endor’ they said”*. Saul had surrounded himself with ungodly advisors. There was no one to guide him, no one to guard and guide him spiritually. He had nurtured spiritual relationships and now it was costing him.

3. Saul opened a spiritual door and could no longer turn back. Saul foolishly attempted to disguise himself but instead opened himself to all the demons of hell. *“So Saul disguised himself putting on other clothes”* (v.8). These clothes could never cover the blackness of his heart. Like Judas, who stood up and left the room at the Passover, Saul took a similar step toward inviting Satan into his heart.

Saul asks the medium for Samuel, and in an unusual way Saul gets what he asks for. I personally cannot accept any interpretation that God manifested Samuel through this medium. To do so would condone the practice of necromancy. This is a demon that manifested himself as Samuel. I think there is no other way to explain this phenomena. The kingdom would be torn from Saul as God said it would, and the time had now come for it to happen. It is wrong to assume that the evil one will always lie to us. My understanding of spiritism today usually involves telling the person what they want to hear. You see this particularly with fortune tellers. We should not forget though that the devil delights in the downfall of people. He told the truth to Saul because he enjoyed torturing on of his own.

Saul was spent both emotionally and physically and spiritually. When this horrid experience with the demon is over Saul despaired of life even more. There was nothing left for him to live for. *“Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel’s words. His strength was gone...”* (v.20).

There is a lesson in all this that both warns us and encourages us in regard to righteous living. My heart pities Saul but I am also forced to look at my own life right now. What led Saul to destruction can serve as a warning sign on our own path to righteousness. I want to identify three of those warning signs.

First, we note that self will always rule until replaced completely by the rule of God. God does not impose Himself on his people. It is up to us to make that final decision as to who will reign. While Saul started off on the right foot, he never settled the issue of “death to self” with God. It finally cost him his life. Even just prior to his last act of falling on his own sword, (ch. 31) Saul could have submitted to God, and his soul would have been saved.

I know of a pastor who when caught living an immoral life abandoned both his call and walk with God. The last I heard, he was living the life of an alcoholic , far from what he was as a preacher of the gospel. Hebrews 6:4 warns us of this. *“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit ... if the*

*fall away, to be brought back to repentance...*” Yet the same scripture tells us that “*all things are possible for God*” (Matt. 19:26) and no one is too far from God where he will not be received back. David acknowledged God’s intervention in what is impossible for us when sin has got a hold of our lives. “*He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand*” (Ps.40:2). Even Saul only had to reach out his hand and God would have been there. Oh that none of us would ever give up praying for the soul that seems to far from God. Let us never give up on the one who seems to have rejected God. My own heart aches for a friend who seems to have traded eternity for a haughty belief in atheism. I fear for my friend’s soul, but I also know that he is only one prayer away from restoration to God.

The second lesson I glean from Saul’s tragic story, has to do with the power of pride. Pride can do some strange things to people. In Saul’s case it kept him from ever fully submitting to God. Many mornings I begin my prayer time with the words from Psalm 131 which seeks to keep pride away. “*MY heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty. I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul...*”

Saul never learned this lesson of humility and was never moved to give of himself in this way to the Lord. Pride kept Saul from ever knowing what God did have in store for him. And so it is for many. Chuck Swindoll comments; “*Saul’s epitaph was a sad one, summing up the tragic lie of this man who played such an important role in David’s life. He was a king who could have been David’s role model and mentor...*” (p.119 David). Pride kept Saul from ever becoming what God had purposed for Saul. “*You have not kept the commands the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all times*” (13:13).

Finally, we see in Saul, again tragically, how even at death he was more concerned with his image than he was with being restored to God. Swindoll sums it up this way; “*Isn’t it interesting, he’s more concerned about this image with the enemy but shows little concern for his relationship with God whom he is about to meet*” (p.122). Saul was obsessed with his image; God is passionately concerned for his soul. Death is not the end. It is the end for that which is physical, but not for the soul. Death can be the triumphant beginning for the soul. Sadly, it would not be for Saul who was blinded to his eternal condition out of his concern for the fleeting moment of death.

I was stunned to read about the Oklahoma City bomber, Timothy McVeigh requesting that after his execution no autopsy be made on his body. This has become his last obsession in life, a cause even his lawyers have taken up. His soul faces the prospect of eternal separation from God, and all he cares about is that no autopsy is done on his body.

It is of course more tragic how many possess this type of vanity in their daily lives. The news splashes images daily of glamorous movies starts parading at the Oscars, and I want to cry out, “So What!” These, like Saul, will die more concerned about what they are wearing than the lost condition of their soul. What contrast to David’s life who longed for the deliverance of this temporal abode. His cry is best heard in the Psalm he wrote, Psalm 6:6-9: “*I am worn out from groaning, all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes*

*grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes...The Lord has heard my cry for mercy; the Lord accepts my prayer...*”

### **A Study On Grief (2 Sam.1)**

*“David took up this lament concerning Saul” (v.17)*

My family is visiting Dalat School in Penang Malaysia right now as I am writing this. We are facing another family crisis. My father commented yesterday that we are becoming experienced at grieving. The crisis this time involves my sisters’ husband who, diagnosed only last week with Melanoma cancer, faces the prospect of living only a brief life. The prospect for my friend and brother-in-law is not good.

While perhaps we are becoming experienced at grieving, we are not accustomed to it. No one ever does. Because we never plan for death we are never really prepared for it.

This study on David’s lament over Saul’s death has given me a quiet place to grieve in these early mornings. I have woken up early and meditated on this passage finding myself side by side with David. This will be a deeply personal study. As I pursue this I am aware that I am not yet through grieving the loss of my son. My brother-in-law’s cross will become a place where I will have to continue to hang portions of my pain.

Saul’s death was a blow to David. It hit him deeply, not because Saul was a good friend, but because God grieved for Saul. This lament was also for his good friend Jonathan whose friendship he could never fully enjoy because of Saul’s hatred for David.

In the first section, prior to the lament, we find David was in no mood to be toyed with. One man tried and it cost him his life. Three days after Saul’s death *“a man arrived from Saul’s camp with his clothes torn and with dust on his head”* (v.2). David inquires where the man has come from and so the man proceeds to fabricate a tale he hoped would earn him a place close to David’s heart. *“So I stood over him and killed him... And I took his crown that was on his head and the band on his arm and have brought here to my Lord”* (v.10). The man was not prepared for David’s reaction. *“Then David and all his men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. They mourned and wept and fasted until evening”* (v.12). David then turned to the man, his grief now gave way to anger. *“Why were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy to Lord’s anointed?”* (v.14). With that, David commanded one of his men to strike the man, and the man died.

People, like David, who grieve loss are not very tolerant of other’s hypocrisy. We put up with a lot of nonsense as Christians. But the Christian who suffers or who is grieving does not take well things that are said which are hallow and not meaningful.

I want to pay most of the my attention now to the lament David writes on behalf of Saul and Jonathan. As a lament, this was a song from David’s heart. But David insisted also that others sing it (v.17). In fact, this lament became part of Israel’ tradition of songs finding its place in the *“book of Jashar”* (v.18). No matter how much it was by others, this was always David’s lament

therefore most meaningful to him. Recently, a friend of mine wrote a beautiful song for Travis as a tribute to his life. The song, entitled *Man of God at the Crossroads*, truly touches every aspect of Travis' faith and commitment. The song, although written by another, is in many ways my lament. Song by another, and heard by even more, the song is most meaningful to me. Like David, I have silently insisted that others enjoy the song as I do. But no one can because it is not their song. I sent the song to a friend of mine in England. With typical British bluntness he suggested that Travis' life is too precious and sacred to be reduced to several words on paper. My friend confessed he felt uncomfortable with the song. I responded to him explaining how when we grieve loss it is natural to become poetic. Songs often meaningless to us suddenly become meaningful. It is not uncommon when someone dies that a tribute is written about them usually in the form of a song. The wide appeal to Elton John's song, *Candle in the Wind* written for both Marilyn Monroe, and Princess Dianna, is an example of that. Those of us who have mourned find comfort in songs.

David's lament exposes his pain. Similar to how God created the world out of the void with a single word, David's music created order for his inner chaos. There was a need for David to build a structure for his thoughts, and his lament became the material to build that structure.

Meditating on the contents of this lament will guide the mourner to the building sight and the material needed to rebuild what has perhaps become rubble. I have found David's lament to be one of the most significant places where I have found meaning and comfort. It is my hope, as we study it, that it might do the same for others. The content of this song covers all the essential aspects of restoring that which is broken. This lament is like a torch that shines light into a dark cavern filling it with hope and renewed strength. Here is what the lament offers us.

1. We have to begin by accepting that the death of any person is a great tragedy and it strikes insult to the value of God's creation. When we mourn the loss of someone we mourn the death of a creation of God. "*You're glory O Israel, lies slain... how the mighty have fallen...*" (v.19). The very fact that David refers to Saul, of all people, as the glory of Israel, stresses how valuable any life is. If Saul is valuable to God, everyone must be.

One in England we heard of the tragic death of a fourteen-year-old high school student. I did not know the boy but I knew he had a reputation of a being a rascal. His death came about by his own stupidity and arrogance. Kicked out of a bus for being unruly the boys last words before being hit by an upcoming car were a string of obscenities hurled at the bus driver. His own rage caused him to be unaware that he was walking into the path of the car. Later I spoke to one of his teachers who sadly viewed the boy's death as a benefit to the whole school. "Well, I guess we don't have to worry about him anymore" I was told.

David could have said that of Saul. Saul's death should have been viewed as a benefit to Israel. He was a trouble maker, determined to reek havoc for God. But to David, "*God's glory*" lay slain that day. David mourned Saul's death because Saul had been chosen and anointed by God. A rebel, he had still been God's child. A father still mourns the death of a rebellious son with the same pain, probably more, than the death of a righteous child. That is what the prodigal's father says to the older brother. "*My son. You are living with me, and everything I have is yours. But*

*we have to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:31-32).*

To David, this was a mighty man who had fallen (v.19). David was mourning the death of God’s will and purpose for Saul. Saul could have left a legacy for God, but never did. His fall as a mighty man came long before his death.

2. Our reaction to death ought not to give the enemy reason to gloat. (v.20). *“Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice.”*

The funeral of the boy I mentioned was one of the most desperate funerals I have ever been to. The mood was dark, and there was very little that was said that was good. There hovered over that room a blanket of hopelessness. Even the minister (an unbeliever himself) failed to bring out any word of encouragement or hope. The was one funeral where it seemed to enemy was gloating.

By his reaction to Saul’s death, David did not want to give the enemy more reason to gloat. *“Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, (a span covering the entire Philistine region) lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice.”* There was obviously no way the news of Saul’s death had not already reached the Philistines. They knew it. It would have been impossible to keep the daughters of the Philistines from cheering this one. How then did David expect his people from depriving the Philistines from celebrating? David is addressing his own people in this song, urging them by their reaction not to give the Philistines further cause for celebration. Saul and Jonathan’s death was one thing, wallowing in self pity would have been another. It was bad enough to see death, it would have been worse to live in defeat because of these deaths. That was what the Philistines really wanted from this war. It was not just Saul and Jonathan they wanted deposed, but also Israel’s confidence and pride. David urges the people not to give in to that.

With our family having had our share of suffering in the past years, my wife will often tell people that “Satan is having a good laugh over it all.” Well, he might have a reason to gloat over our trials, but we are determined to spoil his fun by turning this series of trials into triumphs for Jesus Christ. We might lose some of the skirmishes as Christians, but the battle is the Lord’s (I Sam. 17:47) and we re guaranteed a final victory. This was David’s attitude in his victory against Goliath and one he was determined to carry in this trial. *“All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD’s and he will give all of you into my hands.”*

3. The death of any person leaves a great void on earth (vs. 21-22). The life of an soul fills a special place on earth. No person is without purpose. God places us here because we are precious to Him, and because we have a reason for existing. *“For from him, and through him and to him are all things...”* (Rom.11:36). Some discover that purpose and in turn give their lives to God, others fail to. Either way, the death of any human being leaves a vacuum. There is a sense of course, where when a believer dies they have fulfilled their purpose.

In his lament, David projects that vacuum on the setting where Saul and Jonathan lost their battle for life. David did not want this field to prosper because of their death. *“O mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither rain, nor fields that yield offerings of grain. For there the shield of the mighty was defiled”* (v.21). There is something about the death of one close to us that causes us to not want anyone else to be happy. I hear many say this following the death of a loved one. It can sometimes be an irrational expectation, involving an inner wish that even strangers stop acting so happy and share the grief. In some sense this part of David’s lament is irrational. Why should nature keep producing when David is so miserable? What does nature care that David is so broken? The point of all this really has nothing to do with whether or not Gilboa produces grain. David’s comments are simply meant to highlight the barrenness of his own soul. This protest over others happiness when we are hurting is really our way of drawing attention to the depth of our pain.

4. The importance of memories in the grief. (vs.23-24).

The believers strength lies in the our hope of the resurrection from the dead. Twice Paul exhorts his reader to not lose in light the provision of this resurrection. Speaking of our resurrection in 1 Cor. 15 ends the section with this; *“Therefore my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know your labor in the Lord is not in vain”* (v.58). In 1 Thess. Paul draws the mourner’s heavy heart to meditate on the return of Jesus. Paul concludes this exhortation with this challenge. *“Therefore encourage one another with these words”* (v.18). Believers are those who grieve with hope. *“Brothers we do not want you to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope”* (1 Thess. 4:13). We are promised by Jesus that our *“grief will turn to joy”* (John 16:20).

It is the hope of the resurrection that enables believes to endure suffering and even be victorious in loss. I have noticed though that even unbelievers seem to “manage” grief quite well but for a different reason. (Landorff p.200). They manage grief because the feed off the memory of a lost loved one. I have even observed that in the life of a believer. When they speak of their dead loved one you can see a twinkle in their eye, that memory offering to them a small dose of encouragement. Memories of loved ones do feed the barren soul; but it is limited compared to the hope of the resurrection.

It was natural for David to focus on the good that lay in Saul. This is consistent of David’s treatment of Saul. David held the same gracious attitude and respect for Saul in death as he did in life. *“Saul and Jonathan in life they were loved and gracious...”* (v.23). That of course was not entirely true. In life, Saul was hated and far from gracious, but not by David. David always viewed Saul through the eyes of God and that was not to change now that Saul was dead. In fact as David reflects on Saul’s life there is a lot of good about Saul that came to his mind. For example, Saul was a good provider to his people. *“O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold”* (v.24). David could also reflect on Saul’s accomplishments as a warrior. *“They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions”* (v.23b). *“How the mighty have fallen in battle”* (v.25).

There is much good that can be said of anyone who dies, even though they might not have known the Lord Jesus. But reflecting on their memory is the best we can do for some because we will not see them in the resurrection. Memories offer solace, not hope. How sad it is to never be

able to say of someone, “we will see them on the other side.” David could not say that of Saul. Rather he saved his best words for his friend Jonathan. *“I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of a woman”* (v.26).

Love has varying depths. David’s love for Jonathan was far different than the love he had for his wife, Abigail. This was a unique love shared by two men that went beyond human love. This was not a sexual bond as proponents for homosexuality are eager to suggest. It was simply a deep friendship. The depth of David’s love for Jonathan makes more sense when you consider what normally would happen in this type of relationship. Jonathan was the heir to the throne, but it was David who was promised the throne by God. Normally two men in such a position would challenge the right to reign with blood. The chapter that follow reveal the sort of violence and hatred that often came with a challenge to power. Jonathan however, chose to promote David, not tear him down. He did this because he honored God, and he loved David. It was this self sacrificial love between David and Jonathan that David celebrated in his lament.

There is a love that runs deeper than human love, and we should seek that love. As I lament the death of my son I find myself filled with an unusual affection for him. I cannot explain that love, but I know it finds its origin from God. That love for my son is deepened in knowing I will see him again some day.

### **A Study On Purging (Ch.2-5)**

*“David grew stronger ... while the house of Saul grew weaker..”* (3:1)

It is a good place to be in your Christian life when the battles and skirmishes between your flesh and your spirit become fewer and the experience of rest become more frequent. Such peace and harmony with God does not come about over night, and neither does it come without a great deal of pain and bloodshed. I have observed in my life how the battles have become fewer, but those that continue can sometimes be intense.

It would take David seven years before his reign was settled and before he would enjoy peace. Getting there did not come without a battle. Slowly though *“David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker”* (3:1). Saul's house, our picture of the flesh, clung to power until it had no resistance left. Like the flesh, Saul's house sought to rule until it was fully slaughtered. Only when God Himself occupies us fully can we enjoy the fullness of His reign. He must possess and reign over every tribe in us before we will enjoy the lengthy days of peace and prosperity.

The strengthening of David's reign offers us is a picture of the strengthening rule of God. How David moved through the battle and how he obtained victory, tells us something, in principle at least, how God will lead us to victory. David's story of obtaining peace offers us several lessons on how God reigns in our lives.

1. Know what God wants for you and let Him lead you there. By this time in his life David had acquired the habit of looking to God for everything. He assumed that God would do what he said

although he wasn't sure how God would do it. We see evidence of this sort of faith in how David responded to this crisis. As the pressure from Saul's house threatened the advance of David's rule, David did not panic. Instead he looked to God who had promised David the throne. So "*David inquired of the LORD, 'shall I go up to on the towns of Judah' (3:1)*". David was fully convinced God had appointed him. He understood where the path would take him, but the details were not so clear. So he looked to God. He knew what God wanted for him and he would trust God to get him there.

I am in a new position as I write this serving as associate pastor in a large Church in Cedarburg, Wisconsin. In the past year I have been convinced that God wanted me to continue serving him as a pastor. Most recently I knew this service was to be carried out here in Wisconsin. The details were not always clear, and some even now are evasive to me. But I owned the call. I knew I had to serve. I understood what God wanted for me, and that was to give my life in service to him as a pastor. The details of this, however, are up to God, not me. I want to remain a regular inquirer of the details. To ask God daily, *OK, is this what you want me to do? What do you want me to do now? Is this how you want me to handle this situation? How do you want me to approach this particular challenge?* It is not easy living with this sort of regular reliance on God. But it is so necessary.

2. Expect the battle to intensify. (2:8-3:5). David's claim of Hebron, and Hebron's claim of David as King, brought about greater resistance from what remained of Saul's house. Saul's loyal commander and captain, Abner, refused to accept David as King, and instead placed Saul's son, Ishbosheth, as King. Two kings can never reign over the same people, so the country was quickly divided. David had been declared King, but Abner refused to give in.

When we give our allegiance to Jesus, the old reign will refuse to give in. The flesh does not volunteer to step down when God takes possession of our lives. Rather, the flesh declares war. Our heart becomes divided. It is a battle that can easily weaken us if we do not take the right measures to assure complete victory. If certain areas remain loyal to the flesh our commitment to God will erode. We will weaken and eventually give in fully to the reign of the flesh.

What ensues in the story with the conflict between David's house and Saul's, is a lesson on how senseless sin is. A horrible proposal was made and one carried out without the knowledge of David. Abner challenged Joab (David's commander) to a contest of life and death. "Let's have some of the young men get up and fight hand to hand in front of us" (2:14). What followed was nothing short of bloody. "Each man grabbed his opponent by the head and thrust his dagger into his opponent's side and they fell together" (vs.16). This was only the beginning. "The battle that day was fierce, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated by David's men" (v.17).

War is always senseless. But none is more senseless than the battle that rages between the spirit and the flesh. As I look back over my life I cannot believe I permitted certain battles to continue in my life. They were futile. Only when I realized that the battle was already won at the cross did I begin to understand and enjoy what it meant to live in victory. This battle between David's men and Abner's was totally unnecessary because David had already been declared the winner. Any further fighting was simply because the flesh, Saul's house, refused to die. Likewise, giving ourselves fully to Jesus, and accepting completely his reign over us will enable us to avoid

unnecessary battles in our lives. *"He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that war against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."* (Col.2:13-15).

3. For God to reign, expect your loyalty to be continuously tested. Perhaps another, more constructive way to say this is; for God to reign, your life must be marked by godliness.

It is one thing to mourn the death of your friend, but completely another to mourn the loss of an enemy. Tomorrow many in America will gloat over the death of the Oklahoma City bomber, Timothy McVeigh. He is to be executed at 8 in the morning by lethal injection. It would be unreasonable of course, to ask anyone to love McVeigh. He possesses a ruthless mind and lives with a calloused heart. How can you love someone who referred to the death of children as "casualties of war".

I have not heard anyone express love or forgiveness to McVeigh. Yet I am sure among the families who lost a loved one in that blast, there must be a Christian. They certainly must be struggling with the instruction by Jesus to love our enemies and pray for them (Matt. 5:44). I have struggled over McVeigh's execution. He deserves death. I have no doubt about that. But I am not happy he is dying. His soul will be forever lost in an eternity of darkness and I don't want that for anyone. If it had been my family member killed in that blast I would have had an opportunity, and a Christian obligation, to extend forgiveness to McVeigh. David also had two opportunities to gloat over the death of his enemy, but he chose instead to mourn. Abner was a wicked man who for all practical purposes deserved death. Joab thought so, and choosing to act on his own, killed Abner. That fact that David handled these deaths the way he did revealed a depth of godliness. Over and over David was to be tested, and came out as pure gold. His adultery with Bathsheba of course revealed some flaws in David's life, but the way he responded when exposed was godly.

God does not ask us to be perfect as much as he wants us to be honest about our imperfections. Of course this brings us to perfection. Having passed the test of loyalty, not gloating over the death of his enemies, David was able to win the hearts of all Israel. *"All the people took note and were pleased. Indeed everything the king did pleased them"* (3:36). It had been a long struggle for David. The years of running from Saul, and more years reigning over a fragmented kingdom, produced made David a righteous, honest King. He was ready to reign.

In ministry, it is the pastor who has become honest and vulnerable, that is ready to lead. again, I write this at the launch of a new and demanding ministry. I don't believe people are looking for a perfect pastor out of me, nor a skilled leader. They simply want someone who will love them and be real with them. Someone whose loyalty has proven to be genuine. My years of pain have by no means made me perfect or more capable. In reality, suffering has simply highlighted the flaws and revealed how imperfect I really am. I hope my three years of brokenness have produced in me a genuineness and deep loyalty to Jesus.

Furthermore, David was not about to play political games, something easily done in ministry. The two in chapter who brought the head of Ish-Boseth to David expected David to reward them

for tipping the political balance his way. Instead David was broken by this. *"Should I not now demand his blood from your hand rid the earth of you"* (4:11).

May God lead us to serve out of honesty and integrity. Ministry, like the leadership of a King, carries with it the high demand for it.

### **A Study on Worship I (chapter 5-7)**

*"They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place..."* (6:17)

Worship, that is directing all that we are Godward, is the loftiest activity for the believer. Many of us live our lives for God, but never learn the joy of worship. Part of our problem has been that we equate worship with the hour or two that is set aside on Sunday mornings, rather than a life activity. Until we understand how central God is to all that we are, do and think, we will not enter into a life of true worship. *"For everything comes from him; everything exists by his power and is intended for his glory. To him be glory ever-more. Amen"* (Romans 11:36 New Living Translation).

We discover in the following chapters of 2 Samuel what it was like for David before God's presence became central in his life, but then what happened when God did become central, and finally the implication of this to a life of worship.

#### 1. What was it like for David before worship encompassed all of life. (Ch.5).

All began to look good for David after what had been years of turmoil and waiting. What lingered from Saul's house was finally snuffed out, and David began to see a rainbow peering through the dark clouds of conflict. All the waiting, all the danger, the storms and the violence, and all the opposition had now become a thing of the past. What God had promised years ago had now become a reality. David was King. *"All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, 'we are your flesh and blood... the King made a compact with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David King over Israel'"* (5:2-3).

Having been given all this by God, it could have been easy for David to begin ruling without God. Saul had. We even have that tendency in our Christian lives. God is the one who brought us salvation and He provides everything we need for this journey, but we easily forget all this and march on in our own strength. I'll get back to that in a moment.

One last thing remained for David. Conquering Jerusalem. This must have been a driving passion for David, his men and for all Israel. There was a place everyone knew needed to become the seat of government and it was Jerusalem. However, enemy who occupied Jerusalem mocked David even so far as to post as guards the *"blind and lame"* (5:6).

But David did conquer and made Jerusalem his own. He took up residence there and called it *"the City of David"* (5:9). *"He built up the area around it, from the supporting terraces inward. And he became more and more powerful, because the Lord God Almighty was with him"* (v.10). And now God really blessed David. In fact the blessings were poured out. A friend of David's, a king (Hiram) offered to David all the material he needed to build a palace. *"Cedar logs and carpenters and stonemasons, and they built a palace for David"* (v.11). All this material blessing

did not deter David. David kept his perspective. *"And David knew the Lord had established him as King over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel"* (vs.12).

And then the blessings flowed for David. They also became personal. Whatever we might say about the multiple wives David took, they were indicative of some sort of blessing from God. God particularly blessed David with many children (vs.13-14). However, blessing and success are often followed by opposition. No exception for David. *"When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed King over Israel, they went up in full force to search for him ..."* (5:17). But again, David hides in God (going to the stronghold) and he depends on God for wisdom and God gives him victory.

So, David had it all. Security, strength, the love and honor of his people, material and personal blessing. For many believers today this would be enough. David, however, having everything, was restless. Augustine touches on this when he said, *"we are forever restless until we find our rest in thee."* As long as the ark of God was not in Israel, central to the life and community of Israel, it was as though God were not there. God intended for the ark to be a manifestation of his presence, and with the ark absent Israel had no place to direct their worship. It was as though the foundation for worship was in place, but not the object of worship. Like it is for many believers; we have the blessing, we live in peace and security, and we are enjoying the company of others. That is not the life of worship though. Until God is placed where he is supposed to be, at the seat of our being, we cannot worship. We live with all the right stuff, but fall short because God is not with us. Many Christians, sadly, are satisfied with the blessing, but don't seek the blesser Himself. AB Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance summed this up well in his hymn Himself. He writes;

Like the other psalmist, Asaph, David was essentially saying "I can have everything but until I have God, I have nothing. *"My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever ... But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the sovereign LORD my refuge..."* (Ps.73:26,28).

The story of how the ark was brought to Israel reveals some interesting and extremely relevant lessons on worship. We discover here that God is particular about worship. We speak in church about "freedom to worship", and "allowing the Spirit to have his way and do what he wants", which both speak of our desire to maintain a lot of flexibility in how worship is done. While I do not prescribe that any form of worship is right over another, God does expect that certain attitudes about worship exist, and when appropriated, these attitude will, I believe, bring about some common features to worship. It is the attitude then that must determine the form. This right attitude is a product of our honor and our reverence being directed Godward. Too often worship leaders determine worship by what they sense the people wants. We can spend a lot of time creating a profile of our worshipers, and then give these what they want. I argue that we spend our time profiling God and then giving him what he wants. **The worship committee that spends time studying the character of God, his traits, his personality and his desires will produce true worship.** The story of the ark is a poignant reminder that there is some worship that God despises.

I want to review three fundamental characteristics of worship that flow from a right understanding of God. I want to look at the importance of the form of worship, the foundation to pure worship, and finally the fruit of such worship.

1. The importance of form in worship. Anyone who says that the way we worship really doesn't matter has not read the Old Testament. God is very particular about how we worship, simply because how we worship says a lot about what lies in our hearts. Form generally reflects meaning. Freedom in worship does not necessarily mean we abandon ritual or form. Often we are most free to worship when we are helped by certain rituals and symbols. David was right in wanting to return the ark to Israel, just as the average worshipper is right in wanting God to be present in the worship service. But just as David was wrong in how he brought God to Israel, we can sometimes be wrong in how we seek to bring God into our worship. The key issue regarding worship involves either the presence of fear and reverence, or the absence of it.

We already get a sense of the sacredness of David's mission in how the ark is described. *"The ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty who is enthroned between the Cherubim that are on the ark"* (6:2). Worship begins here, in holding a sense of awe regarding God. When we come to worship does God come to our minds as the *LORD Almighty, the one who is enthroned between the Cherubim*, or is He just our good buddy who loves a pat on the back, and a way-to-go God cheer from those who have gathered to worship Him? Our correct understanding of God will dictate the way we worship. We are drawn to worship only when we are drawn to God. But doesn't it seem that this sense of awe existed? After all look at how God is described. Keep in mind that this account is written later, after the fact, and that the proper sense of reverence was re-attributed to God after the full story of his glory has unfolded. When the ark was being carried to Israel the people seemed more interested in having God back in Jerusalem than they were in knowing who this God was.

In his eagerness to return the ark, David employs a method that was convenient, but worldly. *"They set the ark of God on a new cart ..."* (v.3). In 1 Sam. 6:7 this was the method the Philistines used when they sent the ark away from their land. Everything went well for David, and the ark, until it reached the threshing floor of Nacon (v.6). There, Uzzah *"reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died beside the ark of God"* (vs.6,7).

The question is raised as to why this was such a big deal for God? As long as God was being worshiped, why did it matter how it was done? Well, it was such a big deal because God prescribed otherwise. Exodus 25 makes it quite clear how the ark was to be carried. It was to be done in such a way that heightened the sense of awe and respect that God deserved. When David and his men *"were celebrating with all their might before the LORD"* (v.5), they had lost sight of the sacredness of God. Let me be so bold as to suggest here that there are certain forms of worship that diminish a sense of awe in God. We can easily celebrate with all our might, but not with all of our heart. Paul instructed in 1 Cor. 14:40 that *"everything should be done in a fitting and orderly manner"*.

I firmly hold that even in contemporary services, (which by the way I prefer to traditional ones), should have certain forms to them so as to not abandon our sense of awe in God. We are good in celebrating with all our might in contemporary services, but often guilty of losing site of who we are worshipping. Prayer, silence, scripture reading ought to be done in such a way that invokes reverence in God.

There are consequences to wrong worship, or cheap worship as it might be called. Uzzah's family would have told you that. Here is a guy just trying to help, and he gets zapped. He paid the price for the neglect of others. And so it is often the case today. When God is no longer held in high honor, and no longer worshiped in fear the cost is great. The greatest cost to cheap worship is a diminished sense of God's holiness. He is a consuming fire, Hebrews 12:29 tells us; *You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm ...You have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God" (v.22).* We worship the same holy God today as the One represented in that ark. God has not become tolerant of our cheap worship and neither has the high expectation for holy worship changed. God is holy and He is awesome. He only needs to make His point once, and we are accountable.

2. So what was it like when God's holiness became the standard for worship? For David it meant fear. For Obed-Edom it meant blessing. And it all came down to what side of God's holiness a person chose to stand. David's reaction revealed his need to adjust his theology on God and worship. *"David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah" (v.8). "David was afraid of the LORD that day and said; 'how can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?' He was not willing to take the ark of the LORD to be with him in the city of David. Instead he took it aside to the house of Obed-Edom....The ark remained in the house of Obed-Edom...and the LORD blessed him and his entire family" (vs.9-11).*

Imagine for a moment if during a worship service several ushers suddenly drop dead because the service was not honoring to the Lord? Imagine worship where we are more focused on what God can do for us, and suddenly an elder in the congregation falls. The God we worship day after day and Sunday after Sunday is no different than God who struck Uzzah and blessed Obed-Edom. Thank God that his wrath has been fully absorbed in the person of Jesus, because we often stand guilty of flippancy in worship.

David's reaction of anger and fear were good because they cleared the ground for David to rebuild a right attitude about worship. It was good now that David feared God and it was necessary that for a time he distanced himself from God's presence. Until David's heart was right, he needed to back up and rethink his position. We too need to be more afraid of God. But like it was for David, it will take time. For a time he was reluctant to be near God. He had to take a few steps back and consider the nature of his relationship with God. *"He was not willing to take the ark of the LORD to be with him..." (v.10).* This was a lesson I learned when my son was diagnosed with cancer. My wife's illness just prior to this had shaken some of my preconception of God. Now this, the prospect of my son dying, shattered everything I thought I knew of God. Since then, my view of God has been renewed. Like David I had to back away for sometime, and reconsider who God was. What I see now frightens me, but draws me. Like Moses I recoil at the holiness of God in that ordinary bush, but as I approach the bush, God stops me and reminds me

that I stand on holy ground. God is a mystery to me no longer the convenient buddy he was to me before. Now I confess I don't understand God. He is holy! And I love Him. Why is he asking my sister to now watch her husband die, mystifies me about God. I am in awe of such of God. The fact that I cannot understand Him now draws me to him. I will never try to explain him. Like David, I have discovered you cannot put God into a box and carry him around at your convenience.

3. The Fruit of true worship. For three months David lived in disillusionment of God. That is, until he heard about what was happening at the home of Obed-Edom. *"The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom for three months and the LORD blessed him and his entire household"* (v.12). David was to learn that it is possible to live in fear of God and still enjoy his blessing. In fact the only way to know the blessings of God's presence is to fear Him. . *"Fear the LORD your God and serve him only...(Dt. 6:13). "He did this so that the people of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so you might always fear the LORD your God"* (Josh. 4:24). *"Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways..."* (Ps.128:10).

Obed-Edom was such a blessed man, and David wanted a portion of it. So the ark was taken from Obed-Edom's and you can be sure the blessing and presence of God were not.

This time the ark was carried as it was meant to be carried, by the priests. *"When those who had carried the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and fattened calf"* (v.13). David was so filled with awe and with joy he abandoned himself in dance before the LORD (v.14). This embarrassed his wife, Michael, who mocked him for it (v.20). People who live in worship are often not going to be understood by those who live in the flesh. Often a life of worship will reveal the flaws in human relationships. It is sad to see how David and Michael could not share the joy of God's presence and blessing. While God blessed the entire household of Obed-Edom, he was not able to do so for David's household. It was a divided house. So many today do not share a life of worship, because some in the family do not fear and serve God. We have a lesson here on how sanctuary worship must find its application in the home. I hope in my family that what we experience at worship on Sunday morning does spill over into my home. I want it to. May God's holy presence fill your home in this way to. May he fill your life with blessing that can only come from fearing and honoring him.

### **A Study on Worship II (Ch.7)**

*"David went in and sat before the Lord"* (vs.18)

I remember some years ago while pastoring in England, feeling that life had never been so good for me. I was overseas, settled, and for the first time in my life belonged somewhere. I felt valued and I was at peace. I made reference about this to a friend, commenting how good God had been to my family. In all this there was something deep inside me that wanted to do something to recognize God's goodness.

I can understand then, David's position of being so settled he wanted to do something for God. *"After the king had settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest..."* (v.1). In this time of peace David reflected on the goodness of God. In this time of peace David reflected on the goodness of God knowing that it was the Lord that *"had given him rest from all his enemies"*

(v.1). Looking at his surroundings, David began to sense some uneasiness though that so much had been built to acknowledge his greatness, but so little had been done for God. After all, David knew, it had been God, not him, who has achieved all that surrounded him.

David, then, began a quest, commonly pursued by many of us today, of wanting something more for God, as though there were portions of the universe that do not yet belong to Him. Today that pursuit can often be expressed in our desire to see revival. We build a structure, become a people of prayer, with a passion to see God do something great among us. There are the common expressions that seem to come with this desire; *We want to see God do something great here. God is going to pour out his blessing here. We want God to bring revival.* It is almost as though we are saying, *God, we have done all this for you, now we want you to do more for us.*

Such a pursuit of God, of course, is not wrong. Like David though, we often find that we cannot contain God. Neither can we expect God to respond in a predictable manner. What often happens, and is certainly the case in this text, is that instead of us being able to do anything for God, we become overwhelmed by what he does for us. Who was David that he could even begin considering anything for God. It is not that God puts David in his place when he denies David permission to build a temple. Rather God overwhelms David with his love and goodness. That is also what we will find when we begin to pursue more of God. He pursues us!

There are really two sections to this passage. God's response to David's request, and secondly, David's overwhelming reaction to this response.

1. God's response to David's request reveals both the mystery and the awesomeness of God. Most gods (if they were real, which they are not) would revel in all that is done for them. Most religions have monuments, or shrines or idols to represent their gods. Much is done for these gods to please and to appease them. Yet, if you were to ask even the most serious worshiper what their god had ever done for them, they would be hard pressed to find an answer. Our God does not demand or need shrines and memorials. In fact, he rejects such representations, and hands out serious punishment to those who try. Through the Old Testament God commands against idolatry because he simply cannot be reduced in this way. He cannot be contained in an object. Yet, the record of God's goodness is rich and this is what God's points to in his response to David. It is as though he says to David, *You can never do anything for me, David; but lets talk about all I have done for you.* And in the end of this conversation, as we will see, instead of discussing God's house, God chose to talk about a house he had for David. Here is a summary of God's response.

1. Tell David I have never lived in a house since the day Israel left Egypt. (v.6)
2. I have never asked any ruler to do such a thing for me. (v.7)
3. Let's talk about the house I have planned for you. (v.8ff).

Let me comment first before looking at these statements, that we can never truly understand what God has for us until we begin with a pursuit of knowing God. But that is just it. It is a pursuit of God not a discovery of God. David would become overwhelmed by God only when he begin to understand that God cannot be understood. Only at this point does God, from a vantage point of mystery, begin to unveil his purpose for us.

I believe we are living in a time when existentialism is slowly running out of breath. Having dominated the Christian experience for decades, this self indulging religion is being slowly replaced by an honest hunger to really know God. I just had a discussion with a woman in whose house I am visiting and we discussed a book she is reading entitled "When God is Too Small". I am also reading a book entitled, "When God is too safe". Having tried to cater to God and shape Him to our liking we are beginning to see that God is too big for this.

I am waiting for the day when the stroking touchy feely sermons will be replaced by messages on God's holiness and even his awesome wrath. We are beginning to see that God is far more awesome and holy than we ever imagined. I thought more of this last night as I lay in bed. I had just tucked my son into bed who had a slight fever. I prayed for God to intervene as I always do in situations like this. I found myself also thanking God for the amazing way the body is made and the marvel of how the body is built to sustain so much. Then as I lay in bed it thundered, and the lightening cracked with a fierce brilliance. I begin to think about how the God we talk about so easily, and pray to so carelessly, is unbelievable and mysterious. Thunder and lightning always do that to me. And it did for David. *"Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea - the LORD on high is Mighty"* (Ps.93:4).

Perhaps it was after such an experience that David said, *I need to build a house for such an awesome God. He deserves it. I would be doing him such a big favor.* God's response? *David I am too big for that. No one ever asked that of me before and I have never asked that of anyone either. Instead if you want to dwell even more on my greatness, let's talk about what I have in mind for you.*

2. And so we find, once that pursuit leads David to God's mystery, that God had all along been pursuing him. David is reminded that God can not be contained in a house. He is too big for that. Imagine now, that David with that sense of God's greatness consuming him, is told by God that it is God who is pursuing David. Nathan was the bearer of that message. *"Now then, tell my servant David, the is what the LORD Almighty says..."* (v.8). Nathan must felt as though he were carrying fire. The message did not carry blueprint for a house, but plans for promoting David and Israel. WOW! *"Now I will make your name great like the name of the greatest men on earth"* (v.9). David wanted to take this inaccessible God and by building him a house give people access to him. Instead, God wants to talk about how he took insignificant David and made a household name of him. Furthermore, God speaks to David about a house he has in mind for Israel, where they will *"no longer be disturbed"* (v.10), and *"wicked people shall not oppose them anymore"* (v.11).

3. Ultimately, David's prayer and desire for God to have a house is answered but not in the way he had thought. The house God had in mind for David and for Israel and for us is in fact the dwelling place of God. God simply stretches David's prayer to involve something far bigger and far greater than merely a physical building. (2 Cor. 5:1, Eph.2:21, Acts 17:24, Eph.4:12, 1 Peter 2:5).

When God said to David, *"the LORD himself will establish a house for you"* (v.11), he had two things in mind. The temple which would be built by Solomon, and also the church which would continue to be built by Jesus. *"When your days are over I will raise up your offspring ... I will*

*establish your kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name sake" (v.13). "You also, like living stones are being built up into a spiritual house to be a royal priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5)*

Solomon's temple was a magnificent structure. But it was really only meant to be a shadow and replica of the real thing. *"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and does not live in temples built by hands" (Acts 17:24)* It was Jesus who came to fulfill all that the temple represented. *"The one greater than the temple is here..." (Matt. 12:6)*. The church, following the resurrection would become that temple as the body of Christ, the holy dwelling of God. (See 1 Cor. 6:19 and 2 Cor. 6:16). We will truly not know the full significance of this until after we die. *"Now we know that if this earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (2 Cor. 5:1)*. But the reality is a present one. *"And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling place in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph. 2:21)*. (See again 1 Pe. 2:5).

No wonder David was so overwhelmed. This God spoke of would become a secure and sacred place where God would dwell permanently. (2 Sam. 7:15). It is a house that would *"endure forever"* (v.16). David's response? He *"went and sat before the LORD..."* (v.18). He then expressed his awe in God. How he have ever thought that he could contain God in a house? And now God speaks to David about a house for him. But ultimately it would really be a house for God. How David responded should be our response when we consider all that God had done for us and ultimately for Him through us.

The first reaction is humility. (vs. 18-21). David's first move was to take a prolonged period of time to just sit in God's presence. We are told that he went in and sat before the LORD (v.18). What a beautiful picture of communion with God. We enter in and sit in his presence. To sit before someone implies several things. Deep relationship. Love. Listening. Speaking. It also suggests patience, a lack of hurrying, and a desire to remain for a long time. How often do I just sit before God without needing to rush elsewhere? How beautiful those moments where all I want is just to sit before God.

Then David expressed worship. And what he said to God contained awe that God had done so much for David. *"Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family that you have brought me this far"* (v.18). So often we challenge God over something He has done when instead we ought to be in awe over all He has blessed us with. I should express more often my deep joy that God has chosen my family to serve Him in the way He has. He has brought us this far, and provided for us especially in the moments of pain. WOW! He could have, and should have, given up on me a long time ago.

The past humbles David. But so does the future. *"And if this were not enough in your sight O sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of your servant"* (v.19). David has heard God say some amazing things about the future. And it is so for us. We ought to be more in awe, more humbled, by what God has told us lies ahead for us. David asked, *"in this your usual way of dealing with man?"*, and I can hear God reply, *"Yes, David, it is!"*

It is this sort of personal interest God has in us that characterizes God. He demonstrated that in Jesus who gave great attention to the beggar, the lame, the lonely woman in Samaria, to Peter in his failure, and to Nicodemus. Yes, this is the way God deal with man. This ought to humble us and bring us to worship. *"How great you are, O Sovereign LORD,. There is no one like you and there is no God but you ..."* (v.22). And the fact that such an awesome God has chosen Israel overwhelmed David further. *"The one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself and to perform great and awesome wonders..."* (v.23). God chose Israel to make himself look good. He chose them so that the world would know him, and know what he is like. Through Israel, and ultimately through us, he has told the world he is here, he loves people and he desires that they come to him.

Finally, David expresses in a final prayer his deep longing that God never take away his blessing and withdraws his promises. *"And now LORD God, keep forever the promises you have made ... (v.25)...Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant... With your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever"* (vs.27,29). David's motive for this prayer was pure. His interest is solely God, not himself. *"So that your name will be great forever"* (v.26). *"And the house of your servant David will be established before you"* (v.26). *"Bless the house of your servant that it may continue for ever in your sight"* (v.29). David expressed here in the close of his prayer the unbelievable conviction that God always keep his promises and never takes away his blessing to those who live for him.

*"O Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant... You O Sovereign LORD have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever" (vs.28-29). - Amen*

### **Study on Kindness (Ch.9)**

*"Is there anyone left .. to whom I can show kindness?"* (v.1)

Several years ago I was speaking to our director for missionary candidates, a man who had battled cancer and won. I asked him how he was and made some comment about his exemplary devotion to God in this trial. His reply continues to amaze me even today when I reflect on it. He said, *"Mitch, God has been so kind to me it is embarrassing!"* This reply from a man who suffered much, stands unique against the many reaction of anger and bitterness I have heard expressed against God by those who have suffered. My friend helped me to spend more time dwelling on the kindness of God which I have done much of in the past several years of my suffering.

The story of David looking to show kindness to Saul's house is really the story of God looking to show kindness to us. This narrative merely helps us to better understand the source of kindness which lies with God. Even David acknowledged this. *"Is there no one .. to whom I can show God's kindness?"* (v.1). Somehow David had become so overwhelmed by God's kindness (well, we saw the reason for that in the previous chapters) that he longed to show that kindness to others. That is really the theme of this story. It is about being so overwhelmed by God that we simply long to spill that over to others. Spend sometime dwelling on all that God has done for

you and you will find yourself looking for ways to show kindness to people around you who need it. Like Isaiah said, *“I will tell of the kindness of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to praised, according to all the LORD has done for us”* (Is.63:7).

David’s expression of kindness then is a spill over of God’s kindness. Study this story and you get a good idea of how God works. From it you will learn several things about the kindness of God. David’s act of kindness mirrors God’s.

1. It is undeserved. The basis for David’s desire to show kindness was a covenant he had made with his friend Jonathan. (1 Sam. 20). This covenant took place at the critical point of Saul’s pursuit of David. Jonathan took the initiative in establishing the covenant. *“But show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD ... and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family ... So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David.... And Jonathan reaffirmed the oath of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself”* (1 Sam. 20:14-16).

What David did then in showing kindness to Mepheboeth was for the sake of Jonathan and based on a covenant made with Jonathan. Mepheboeth himself had not earned this. Standing alone, without the support of this covenant, Mepheboeth, to use a modern vernacular, would have been dead meat. He did not deserve what David extended out to him. It was for Jonathan’s sake that he showed kindness. David also took multiple risks in taking Mepheboeth into his home. First, this had political implications. Many, no doubt, did not approve of what David did and did not understand why David went the “grace” route after all Saul had done to him. The sensible, even traditional thing reaction would have been to do completely away with anything and anyone that was associated with Saul. David showed kindness though, rather than settle an old score.

There would also have been personal risks to this move. Mepheboeth was crippled. Swindol in his commentary on David role plays a conversation the servant Ziba might have had with David. *“David, you really better think twice before you do this, because the guy is not going to look good in your court. He doesn’t fit the surroundings, this throne room, this beautiful home in the city of Jerusalem. You know David, he has a serious disability.”*

I visited a man this past week that has an interest in coming to our church. He is disabled and will need weekly transportation. As I sat with him discussing the details I realized as a church we are taking a risk. But it is a risk enveloped in grace. It is a risk God asks of us daily. Every time we demonstrate such grace we are rehearsing a greater story. The ultimate act of grace, God’s kindness to us through Jesus (Ro.5:8). You talk about risk; there it is. What God has done for us is undeserved. *“We were yet sinners when Christ died for us”* and *“it is by grace that we have been saved through faith...”* (Eph. 2:8). Undeserved grace. That is God’s kindness. We were living in darkness, when *“he rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the son he loves”* (Col.1:13). Like Mepheboeth, but worse, we lived as crippled in our Lo-debar (2 Sam. 9:4). The name Lo-debar means no pastureland. God took us out of such a place and placed us, of all places, in his courts. But not as servants. We are invited to eat with him. We are spiritual cripples at both feel, but like Mepheboeth it can be said of us that we *“always ate at the Kings table”* (9:13).

2. It is Unexpected - Because grace is completely God's initiative it does often catch us off guard. A convicted criminal who is told he can go free because someone else stepped in to take his place, will of course say, "*I never expected this*". (Tell Gary H's story - in all the years I never heard him say I deserve this...)

In a sense Mephiboseth is that convicted criminal. From the line of Saul, he vicariously deserved death. David however, had promised to Jonathan to show kindness to his family and this provided the way for David to show grace when it was least expected. And what amazes me about what David did is that he did not have to do it. He was under no obligation to do what he did for Mephiboseth. In fact, as I stated earlier, in that culture and considering the circumstances, he should have done the opposite.

We will cherish God's grace more when we become overwhelmed by what he should have given us. The phrase "*the wages of sin is death*" is far more than a Vacation Bible School verse. It says, we deserved death! Yet God did not give us what we deserved. "*What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God -through Jesus Christ our Lord*" (Rom.8:24-25). Mephiboseth's life in the palace offers us a beautiful picture of what it is like for Christians to live as redeemed people in God's courts. It offers us several profound implications.

First, living in grace means we have no way to pay God back for what he has done for us. We have been bought with the price of Jesus' blood. God asks for nothing more and nothing more can be given so sufficient was that blood. (Acts 20:28). "*And with your blood you purchased men for God*" (Rom. 5:9).

When Mephiboseth came before David he fell down to the ground and said nothing. What could he say? It is David who speaks and he simply speaks out Mephiboseth's name. Mephiboseth gives an interesting reply. He can only say back to David, "*Your servant*" (v.6). This simple interchange shows us the embrace of grace given by King David. Expecting a sword to strike at him, instead a hand lifts Mephiboseth. How could he repay such love? There is no way he could but simply to give of himself to David. When Mephiboseth said *your servant*, he was giving King David his response. Here is my life! I am yours! It is the least I can do. And that is what God asks of us. How can we repay God for what he has done for us. Really we can't. But we can give him ourselves. After all, we are his.

Secondly, living with grace means we have complete access and fellowship with our Father. Like Mephiboseth, we are invited to fellowship with God and enjoy communion with him as though we are his very own son. That fellowship is reassured in the words David offers Mephiboseth where he promises to lavish every blessing on him. "*Don't be afraid, David said to him, for I will surely show you kindness...I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table*" (v.7). David made it easy for Mephiboseth to live in grace. He did not, as some do, hang over Mephiboseth's head all the sins of his family. God is not like that. He has made it infinitely clear that we are welcome. "*Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ*" (1 John 1:5).

Mephiboseth's reaction to all this was true humility. *"What is your servant that you should notice a dead dog like me"* (v.8). When Peter was overwhelmed by the catch of fish reacted in a similar way. *"Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinful man"* (Luke 5:8). Again, the apostle Paul, came face to face with his own wretchedness before God. *"What a wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"* (Rom. 7:24).

Like Paul and Peter, Mephiboseth realized he was received only on the basis of the righteousness of another. *"I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan"* (v.7). How moving those words must have sounded to Mephiboseth. *I love you. I accept you fully. You are completely welcome here, but understand this; It is because of another that this is possible.* Jonathan stands as the Christ-figure in this story, the one whose righteousness made Mephiboseth's acceptance possible. It is only by the righteousness of Jesus that God accepts me, and through Christ I am fully accepted. God accepts me only because of a promise he made to his Son. *"God alone made it possible for you to be in Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made Christ to be wisdom itself. He is the one who made us acceptable to God. He made us pure and holy, and he gave himself to purchase our freedom. As the scriptures say, 'The person who wishes to boast should boast only of what the Lord has done'"* (1 Cor. 1:30,31 NLT).

Third, a life of living with grace, means our limp is an ever reminder that it is by grace only. *"And Mephiboseth lived in Jerusalem because he always ate at the kings table, and he was crippled in both feet"* (v.13). But we know that. Why is that mentioned again? Two reasons. First, because we need to be reminded that even in fellowship with God our problems do not always go away. Too often evangelical Christians promise freedom from crutches if one will only enter fellowship with God. Yet, Jesus himself, with whom we have fellowship, promised that *"in this world you will have troubles"* (John 16:33). A day will come when we will be able to throw those crutches away, but not yet. Today we can enjoy full fellowship with God and communion with him, while still struggling financially, while still living in a tense family situation, or while having to suffer with sickness. But that only gives communion with God depth, doesn't it.

There is another reason the reference to being crippled is made. Those crutches were an ever reminder that it is *only by grace that we are saved through faith, not of works lest any man should boast* (Eph. 2:8). Those crutches are Jacob's limp, Moses' stutter, and Paul's thorn. These crutches proclaim that we had nothing to do with being in the fellowship hall of God. We are there only by invitation. It is all his doing. *That is why for Christ sake, I delight in my weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecution, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong"* (1 Cor. 112:10).

### **A Study in Restoration. (ch.11-12)**

David's adultery, and the events that followed it, provide for us some lasting evidence that no man is exempt from falling. When I study David's life, I can not help but react by saying, *"if it can happen to him, it can happen to anybody"*. This dark interlude in David's glowing and exemplary life forces me to conclude that even the best can fall, and those who are in higher positions who fall, fall hard. The higher you are the deeper the impact of failure. Because of his

position, the consequences of a pastor's failure are much greater than an employee of a local factory who fails.

It would be easy to put the torch on David in order to expose and analyze his vulnerability to sin in this study. I have been tempted to keep that torch on him and say, *look! See what happens when you keep your heart unguarded and allow sin to entice you?* But I can't help but observe that this is a story that is more about God's mercy and grace than it is about David and his sin. We need to discuss the man and the sin, but only to draw our attention to God, his forgiveness and his move toward restoration of that man. By the end of this lesson I want to promote God's mercy, not expose David's sin. I want to guide us to God's reservoir of forgiveness, not tantalize you with what David did.

1. We need to begin by finding where it all began. Where did the sin fester? Where was the breeding ground that led to this great wrong? I'll call this the compromise for that is essentially where David went wrong. In a series of deliberate acts, David compromised everything he ever believed. How can that happen? And does it happen now, and how can it be avoided.

First, it began as a secret in David's heart! Long before this story, David began to scheme for this day. He did not necessarily plan that one day he would commit adultery and murder. What he did though was to allow the possibilities to increase. The very fact that David took multiple wives increased his chances of becoming unfaithful. It also says to us something of the dissatisfaction in David's life for one woman. There is only one route to sexual and emotional intimacy and it is through a relationship of one partner. The general law "more opportunities gives more satisfaction" might work in mountain climbing or parachuting, but not in marriage.

It is important to stress also that God did not permit polygamy. In Deuteronomy 17 God warned against it. "*He must not take many wives or his heart will be led astray*" (v.17). David apparently was a man with a strong sexual drive who never learned to satisfy that drive through one relationship. I have learned in my life that there is only one way to control a sexual drive and that is to direct it toward my wife. I have had to strangle all the feeders to my heart and mind in order to enjoy the purity of a relationship with one woman. It seems that David was not satisfied with his first wife, causing him to seek it elsewhere. That is why, on that quite night, he found himself compromising all that he believed.

I am sure David tried to contain and control this urge, but it cannot be contained or controlled. And that night it caught up with him. James chapter one warns us that sin never becomes dormant. This is most pronounced with sexual sins. There seems to be no point where sexual sin becomes dormant. Like cancer it grows until it kills. "*Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires. These evil desires lead to evil actions, and evil actions lead to death*" (James 1:14,15 NLT). Our only hope against such sin is to do what Colossians 3:5 tells us to do. "*So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking with you. Have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust, and shameful desires.*"

Secondly then, sin that is not dealt with will act out its evil intention. That brings us to that fateful night. Keep in mind the problem did not begin that night. David entered that night ripe for a fall because he had an unstructured heart. The real problem was not in the bed chamber. The real problem was played out in the chamber of his mind.

Several precipitating factors weakened David's conviction and caused him to eventually give in to this temptation.

First, he was not where he was supposed to be that night. The setting gives us an accusing detail. It was "*spring, at the time when kings go off to war...*" (v.1). Like a detective looking for the causes of a crime, the writer of Samuel quickly takes note of this fact. David sent Joab and his men to the front lines to face death, while he "*remained in Jerusalem*" to face a more subtle enemy. Charles Swindol interestingly points out that "our greatest battles don't usually come when we are working hard; they come when we have some leisure, when we've got time on our hands, when we're bored". Many of us fall to temptation because we allow ourselves in places where the possibility for falling is heightened.

Secondly, David looked for this. As he lay in bed his mind wondered and I am sure he began to fantasize about a woman other than his wife. Perhaps at another time he had seen a woman bath from the roof top but because his convictions were sharpened, and because of the presence of the soldiers, he kept his disciplines. But on this night David was alone with his thoughts. He strolled to his balcony and saw what he hoped he would see. He "*walked around the roof* (again, his heart stalking for prey). *From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was beautiful*" (v.2).

Men need to know that we do not need to look long for our wild minds to find prey to feed our sexual thoughts. It is harder to control and contain than it is to seek and find. I spoke to a man recently who confessed to being unfaithful to his wife. He explained how on many nights he strolled through the city looking for a woman to unleash the fury of his sexual appetite. But it happened one night, when his wife was away, with a simple phone call to a woman friend. He invited her over and he sold out! Compromised! He put a sledge hammer hard over his covenant vows, smashing them to pieces. Repairing those vows can take years.

Third, David did nothing to stop the growing urges of his wild heart. My dad shared with me one of his disciplines to maintaining a pure heart. When he sees a beautiful woman he only looks once. I jokingly ask him how long he looks. The point is clear. You cannot help what you see the first time. But the choice is yours as to whether you will look again. That second look can be fatal.

From the rooftop David looked. Then he looked again. *I shouldn't do this*, he probably thought. Then he looked once more. The look lingered, turning into a stare. The stare gave way to wild gawking. The sexual impulses ran wild and uncontrolled through every vein of his body. All scruples began to vanish and David was trapped. A wild river swept him off his feet and he was *dragged away and enticed* (James 1:14). Desire was conceived and *gave birth to sin*, and sin when it was full grown, *gave way to death* (James 1:15).

What was happening to David at that moment? Deitrich Bonhoeffer wrestled with this in his book Temptation. "*At this moment God is quiet unreal to us. He loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real. The only reality is the devil. Satan does not here fill us with hatred, but with forgetfulness of God... The lust thus aroused envelopes the mind and will of man*

*in deepest darkness. The power of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us”*  
(David; by Chuck Swindoll p.186).

As well as not allowing the earliest desires to fester, what else could David have done when he got to this point? The bible offers only one solution that is completely effective. FLEE! Get out! Run hard! Run fast! Yet, so often by the time we get to the point where we need this wisdom, our ability to reason has diminished. The voice of our conscience can barely be heard due to the rushing torrent of the temptation. The urge has to be stopped earlier. The longer you let it go, the harder it will be to flee.

Job made a covenant with his eyes “*not to look lustfully at a woman*” (31:1). He knew the best way to overcome temptation was at the front end. Front end resolve, I want to call it, simply means we make tough decisions before we ever face the temptation. You can not wait till the temptation to decide what you are going to do. For David it would have meant never sleeping alone on warm night when the troops are away. For me it has meant a vow to God never to watch TV after nine o’clock without my wife, or if I am alone in a hotel; no TV at all. This front end resolve has done marvels in keeping my mind pure. Front end resolve means discussing with my wife the struggles out there for men. And promising to talk to her when the struggles become intense. Front end resolve means never surfing the Internet unless someone is in the room with you, particularly if you are prone to temptation in this area. It means masturbation is out of the question as it simply revives the mind to lustful thoughts. Others might consider this a gray area not addressed in scripture, but you choose to raise the bar for your own life and you will be amazed at the effect it will have on your purity. You call it a sin even though no one else does, and you will be helped by it. Thus, all your sexual urges are directed and fulfilled in the purity of an intimate relationship with your wife.

And so David acted on the urges. He lost touch with his conscience, the voice of reason was drowned out by the maddening pleas of the flesh. The problem was not the act. The real problem could be traced earlier when David compromised. By calling for Bathsheba the sin was not committed but completed. This was merely the expression of what lay in his heart.

## 2. Having compromised all he believed, David committed the sin and followed by covering up the sin.

The effects of sin never dissolves. Like nuclear waste wherever it is hidden it poses a continuous and dangerous threat. It is difficult to know what David expected once the act was committed. Perhaps his conscience had been so dulled he managed to go on with life as usual. He was king, and so even this rather private matter could be contained. Or so he thought. The words sent to David that Bathsheba was pregnant must have felt like a dagger plunging deep into his stomach. Those three words, “*I am pregnant*” (v.5), must have left David’s head spinning and his mind racing for options. And so he schemed.

When David received word that Bathsheba was pregnant he had a choice to make. And right there he could have admitted his sin, sought forgiveness and made restitution. Believe, he did consider this. Apparently this option did not appeal to David. His reputation was at stake and so possibly was his kingdom. As is true today was just as true then. The higher the position the

greater the fall. David considered thoroughly his options and he chose the way of covering up. And what followed validates what James wrote in his letter. *“After sin has conceived (the desire for adultery) and gives birth to sin, (adultery); and sin when it is full grown, gives birth to death (David’s plan to murder Uriah) (James 1:15).*

It is vital to note here that sin never remains dormant. Once committed it becomes like a cancer that grows until it kills. When my son was diagnosed with cancer we knew what cancer was capable of doing. Yet often, particularly in his good days we hoped the cancer had reached its limit of growth. But cancer never does. It is born for destruction. Likewise, as David attempted to cover up his sin, it continued a destruction course. Several things about David’s cover-up I believe are common with any sin that remains uncontested.

First, the cover-up made David devious. His plan to have Uriah sleep with his wife (11:8) was cunning and underhanded. This way her pregnancy would appear as though it was the result of Uriah’s relationship with her. This does not at all sound like the sensitive conscience stricken David we knew before. Sin will do that to us. Uncontested, and covered-up, sin causes us to become callous rather than tender. Many who live with secret sins act differently than they were before. Those who saw David day after day must have wondered, *“What is wrong with David. He doesn’t seem himself lately?”*

Uriah’s righteousness made matters worse. This must have driven David mad. What a contrast between the two lives. On one hand you have a king whose robe has been soiled by adultery, and on the other hand a faithful servant and soldier who has put God and country above everything. *“Uriah said to David, ‘The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my Lord’s men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live (that didn’t help) I will not do such a thing’ (v.11).* David could not rest with this response and so he became even more devious. He plotted Uriah’s death.

Secondly, David’s cover-up made him irrational. Having chosen to contain the sin rather than confess it, caused David to panic. Uncontested sin never allows us to be at peace. Rather than think rationally, we tend to react. David’s plan to kill Uriah really made no sense. What did he think to gain from this? David was no longer able to rationalize and was unable to see that this further sin would simply make matters far worse. David had become a survivor looking for a way to save his skin and nothing more. He became a pitiful king who could not even see that this pattern of sin had completely severed him from fellowship with God. David did not write any songs during this long period of torment. I am sure of it. He lived in a horizontal world consumed with his reputation and unconcerned even to consider what this had done to his relationship with God. David lived a one-dimensional life void of anything spiritual.

Third, David’s cover-up caused him to live in agony. God would not let David go during this long period of personal torment. I am thankful for this about God. One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to *“convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8).* One of the best things that can happen to us is to feel the hand of God pressured heavily on us when we have sinned. This is particularly so for believers. For the year that David lived with this sin covered -up, he was being crushed under the hand of God. He would later reflect on

this in Psalm 32:3-4 and 51:3-4. *“When I kept silent my bones were wasting away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of the summer.”*

God would not leave David alone. Until we abandon God, he will nag us until we scream out in repentance. Some choose never to repent. They suppress the truth and *“exchange the truth of God for a lie”* (Rom. 1:25). And so God releases them to live as they want and for some there is a point of no return. I have seen it and it is a tragedy. In fact I pray regularly for some who have abandoned God, yet I wonder if they will ever repent. It is not that God will not receive them He longs to. It is simply that they have become so slave to sin and no longer can hear the convicting voice of God. That is the point of true danger. One person I know who today lives an abandoned life once lived as a committed Christian. Today he claims to live as an atheist.

Thank God for his convicting hand. We would never repent without it.

David compromised all he believed. He sought to cover-up his sin but instead found himself under the heavy hand of God.

We see third, that it took a confrontation for David to repent. David did not relent under conviction, even though it made him sick. God had to expose David and he did it by bringing the matter to the public. So, as God often does, he took the initiative in exposing David. While David tried to hide the sin from others, he was never able to hide it from God. The one most offended by the sin had to act, and he did through his prophet Nathan. David would later acknowledge what God did. *“For I knew my transgression, and sin is always before me. Against you, and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight”* (Ps.51:3-4).

Having spent so much energy keeping the sin covered, the one who really mattered already knew about it. Isn't that interesting. Much of what we do in containing the sins in our lives we do to keep others from knowing about it, but we do little to keep it from God. This is likely because we do not take seriously how much our sin offends him. It was only later that David would become overwhelmed by this. He was later to discover that he had done displeased the Lord (2 Sam. 11:27). We would be quick to repent of sin if we understood each time the depth of the offense against the living God.

God's confrontation involved two things. The right timing and the right person.

The right timing. It is interesting that God waited a whole year to expose David. Why? Swindol explains that *“God let the grinding wheels of sin to do their full work”* before he intervened. That was not a pleasant year for David. Remember what Ps. 34:3? David groaned all day long, we are told. God's hand was heavy upon David. His bones were crushed under the heavy hand of God. He could not sleep. His inner man was tortured by guilt. And God waited so David could reap what he sowed (Gal. 5:7). And so by the time God did intervene, David was ready to receive what God had to offer.

God also sent the right person. Nathan the prophet would be God's lance to strike that horrible boil. (12:1). This man would be God's sword to strike at David's sin sick and infected

conscience. Skillfully Nathan took that sword and when the time was right he thrust the sword forward piercing that conscience. Nathan said to David, *You are that man*" (v.7)

Confronting sin is not an task for any believer, and it is a ministry. Proverbs 27:6 reminds us that the "*wounds from a friend can be trusted.*" Often the best thing we can do for a friend who has sinned is to confront that sin. Several considerations with this:

1. The severity of the sin has to be felt by the sinner. Recently a man came to my office and confessed to me a moral failure that had serious impact on his family. Yet when we met I did not sense that he had been struck by the severity of his sin. He felt guilt and was miserable but that seemed to be the extent of it. The fact that what he had done was a serious offense to God, and that the sin could have lasting marks on his family, did not seem to weigh as heavily as the guilt and the need for affirmation.

Had Nathan simply charged into the palace and pointed his finger at David, accusing him of adultery, the impact would not have had the required affect. By using a word picture, or a parable, David was made to understand the seriousness of what he had done. David had to objectively visualize the damage his crime had caused, and the parable served to do that. By reacting so strongly to the fictional account, David unknowingly judged himself. "*As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die. He must pay...! Then Nathan said to David, 'you are the man'*" (12:6-7).

2. The truth has to be told. I lost a friend once because I told him the truth about his sin. His wife was having an affair and I had to break the news to him. His desire to maintain peace and avoid conflict became more important than striking at the root of a serious marital problem. By telling the truth I knew I risked the friendship. But truth was more important to me than convenience. Nathan took a big risk by telling David the truth. He knew the situation with David could become messy. He must have come to the palace braced for several possibilities. What if David blew up and lashed out at him? Was it worth it? Yes, it was because it was the truth.

The recent tragedy of September 11th has overshadowed what was for several months' front page news, the mystery surrounding the disappearance of an intern who had been having an affair with senator Gary Condit. Even today, three months later, the mystery has not been solved. Just before September 11th Gary Condit was being interviewed by Connie Chung. Grilling Condit, Chung insisted that he tell the American people the truth about his relationship with intern. He would not, it seems. Had he, it would have been messy. Confession while ultimately good for the soul can first cause pain. It is often messy, but the Lord Jesus promises to clean that mess (1 John 1:9), if we simply confess to him.

Confrontation allows the truth to be told and opens the door to confession. In our courts telling the truth does not mean a guilty man will go free. But he can be spared some of the consequences. In God's court telling the truth and receiving his truth opens the cover to receive God's mercy. In God's court truth does set the guilty person free. David, thankfully, immediately accepted the truth, and he was immediately declared clean. We will see in a moment how he still had to pay the price for his sin, but in God's eyes he was no longer guilty.

3. Confession must be expressed. What David heard left him with no defense. He is pinned to the wall by his own words. Nathan looked David in the eyes and with stern conviction called David a sinner. You are the man! What could David had said? He could deny it. He could rationalize. He could shift blame. He could use his power to silence Nathan. No one would have known. Yet the sin is so blatantly before him, and he has suffered so much. Nathan did not soft peddle the sin. The whole mess was now on the table. *“Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes. You struck down Uriah .. and took his wife”* (12:9). You murdered, David. You committed adultery, David. Do you understand what you did? And further more, David, this has a price to it. *“The sword will not depart from your house ... Out of your home I am going to bring calamity on you.. You did it in secret, I but I will do it in broad daylight...”* (12:11-12).

David had no defense to make. No arguments. *“Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned’”* (v.13). Keep in mind David confessed and repented because the sin was clear. Nothing had been held back. Confession and repentance requires completely honesty and ownership on our part. Hold back sin and you hold back God’s mercy from being poured out on you. They say that often a struggling alcoholic will only confess only enough to relieve the pressure of his guilt. He will say, *yes I had one drink this month*, when in reality he has had twenty drinks. Until he confesses the full scope of his drinking activities he will not be helped. By saying *I have sinned*, David admitted to everything. And now God could move.

4. Forgiveness must be offered and received. David confessed and immediately God forgave him. *“Nathan replied, ‘The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die’”* (v.13). This would later overwhelm David as we have already seen in Psalm 51.

It is important to note that David’s confession provided God the opportunity for forgiveness. *“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12). God has already forgiveness us but we must claim this through repentance. Confession and repentance are our arms stretched out to receive God’s provision already available at the cross. God has so much for us, if only we will turn from our sins and look to him. In fact what he has for us will overwhelm us and like David we will say, *“Let me hear joy and gladness, let the bones you have crushed rejoice”* (Ps.51:8).

5. The consequence of sin must be expected. Visiting a cancer patient yesterday I was interested in a comment she made about her past. Before she met Christ she had made some seriously wrong choices that led down a path of personal brokenness and family turmoil. As she reflected on her life she said, *I am really paying for my life, aren’t I?* I had no right to argue with her. The cancer of course is not her doing, but the fact that she is lonely and has little support structure is a consequence of some poor choices made even before she met Jesus. She is redeemed, forgiven, and fully God’s child. But she is the holder of scars. She carries on her body the marks of past sin.

Recently, someone said to me, *Mitch someday you are going to have to tell me the story of that scar on your elbow.* I replied by explaining that I have two versions to this story. One is true, the other is utter fiction. In fact one is believable and the other too unbelievable to even accept. My first story has me swimming for life from an attacking crocodile in the swampy rivers of Irian

Jaya where I grew up. The crocodile grabbed me just as I reached the bank of the river. My life was saved, but I will always have the scar to remind me of the incident. Now that story, of course is outlandish. I wish it were true but it isn't. The true version is far less dramatic. The scar on my elbow is a lasting reminder of my foolishness as a six year old. I broke my arm by trying to jump an impossible distance between two couches. The wound from the surgery, and the crushed bone from the fall would of course heal. But the scar remains to remind me forever of my foolishness.

The scar also serves to remind me of God's marvelous provision of healing. I look at that scar and I marvel at how fearfully and wonderfully God has made the body. Because of the break my arm is weakened. So the scar, and the injury reminds me of my weakness. When I try to lift something and find it difficult, I look at the scar and I remember why I am weak. The scar also explains the awkward bend when I stretch my arm straight out.

David would be scarred for life. The wounds would heal, the crushed bones would mend, but the scar would be a lasting reminder of his sin but also of God's mercy. The moment David confessed his sin he was forgiven. But the brief moment of relief was sobered by Nathan's announcement that David would nevertheless suffer for his sin. "*The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die*". David is forgiven, but punished.

It is important we understand that God's grace does not come free. It comes to us at a price, that price of course being the death of our Lord Jesus. While the death of David's son was not a substitutionary sacrifice for David's sin, it did highlight the need for payment in order to receive God's grace. But the death of his son also illustrates how sin will leave it's mark. The moment we confess our sin we are forgiven. However, the effects of sin remain. The scars of Jesus hand are a reminder to us that sin has left a mark. But praise be to God, we are forgiven, and he has chosen to bear the marks of our sin. We are no longer under condemnation. And just as the death of David's son would remind him of his sin, it would also remind him of God's grace. Each lonely walk to the grave not doubt caused David to painfully and soberly rehearse the mess he got into. But with each step the words of Nathan echoed words of mercy. *You will not die.*

I'll take the scars. They speak more of God's mercy than my sin. "*Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead*" (1 Peter 1:3).

A Study on Family Trials Ch.13-20  
"*The sword will never depart from your home*"

David might have been a great King and he was a good man, admired and loved, by God. But his family suffered and suffered greatly.

David's trouble at home was partly due to the consequence of his own sin, and partly due to what seemed to be the lack of some basic parental skills. He cannot, however, be singled out as the only cause for all his family problems. A study of David's family is a study on the nature of the individual. David's children chose to behave the way they did. They had just enough reason

to be good as they did to do bad. David's godliness was as a good an example to follow as were his failures. Keep in mind Solomon, when you study the wild man, Absalom.

I remember years ago sitting on the deck of a pastor's house listening to him talk of his pain over his son's rebellion. I could not ever imagine what it would be like to pastor a church while my son sat in jail for robbery. Here was a father who loved and served God, but was discredited for being a failure as a father.

I hope this study puts parenting into perspective. While I hope to encourage stronger parental involvement I also want to tap my finger on a desk to bring the readers attention to the word, *GRACE*. There are many parents who feel like failures who shouldn't. When a child chooses his own will and runs wild with it, the parent needs encouragement and support, not condemnation. I would like, through this lesson, not only to strengthen parenting, but to also offer parents in crisis a safe place to cry and receive grace.

Perhaps the first thing that stands out with David, has to do with his neglect as a parent. We cannot fully know what David was like as a father other than what we can infer from the incidences we read about. His reaction to his baby son's death, and later his deep pain over Absalom's murder reveals the heart of a father who deeply loved his children. It is unfair to accuse David of being negligent, other than to conclude that at certain moments he did not intervene when he should have. I want to be careful not to make sweeping statements about David. We can however draw some application from several crucial events. One of those was the rape of Tamar, the half brother of Ammon.

Ammon was in love with Tamar and wanted her. Pretending to be sick (13:6) he asked David if Tamar could care for him. David did not see through the pretence. "*So David agreed and sent Tamar to Ammons house to prepare some food for him*" (13:7). An involved father would know the tendencies of his kids. Ammon was a rascal and David should have known it, but he was blind to it. Even when David did hear of the rape all we are told was that "*he was very angry*" (13:21). You do not have to be a child psychologist to know that just being angry at a child's behavior will never correct that behavior. Had David punished Ammon for this, his household would have been spared a great deal of tragedy. As it stood, Ammon's sin brought about deep division in David's household.

As a result, Absalom hated Ammon (v.22) and for two years he did not speak to him. Again, it seems David did not pick up on this tension, or at least he chose to ignore it. Perhaps, like many parents, he hoped the problem would just dissolve on its own. Instead it got worse. Absalom murders Ammon and David's reaction? That's right! He got angry again. This time, really angry. "*The king jumped up, tore his robes and fell prostrate on the ground. His advisors also tore their clothes and fell to the ground*" (v.31). Besides finding a seamstress to mend all the torn clothes, there is little else David did. Oh, he mourned many days for Ammon (v.37) and once over this, "*he longed to be reunited with his son Absalom*" (v.39). Perhaps now David was waking up and smelling the roses, realizing his palace was in serious trouble. UN-involved, led David to become unable. The situation, through his neglect, had gotten out of control. David could only ride the storm.

Many parents I talk to can only watch helplessly the outcome of their own negligence in the lives of their children. Once this happens parents are unable to influence any longer. The dye has been set, and the pattern can not change, at least by the parent. UN-involved parents eventually become unable parents. It is only when the child changes his or her heart and willingly repents of the rebellion can harmony be restored. Unfortunately this rarely happens and it sadly did not happen with David's family. Once David did respond, it seems to have been too late.

2. David's family crisis drew him close to God. There is no other resource for hurting parents than to place themselves with their pain in the loving arms of Jehovah. David chose to place himself under the protection of God. He might have been vulnerable to Absalom, but he sensed himself safe in God's arms.

We noted that David had made some mistakes as a distant father. Absalom gained more leverage over David by killing Amnon (13:37). David mourned Amnon's death, and longed also to be reconciled to Absalom (v.39). David, however lived with the tension between losing his throne and losing his son. When Joab tried to bring Absalom back David allowed it, but only as long as Absalom did not come into David's presence. "*Absalom may go to his house, but he must never come into my presence*" (14:24). Absalom took extreme measures to see his father though by burning Joab's fields. Joab responds by arranging for a reunion between the father and his estranged son. "*Absalom came and bowed low before the king and David kissed him*" (14:33). But it was too late. Absalom had settled in his heart that he would be king. He did so by wooing the crowds to himself. Many joined him and the conspiracy gained great momentum. David had no choice but to flee Jerusalem.

For David to hear that all Jerusalem had joined in the conspiracy against him must have been like a dagger in his heart. I think of my reaction when one person is displeased with me, yet David has been completely rejected not only by his son by the country. A few linger with David some expressing deep loyalty to him. The description of David leaving the city is a pitiful one. "*There was deep sadness throughout the land as the king and his followers passed by. They crossed the Kidron Valley and then went out toward the wilderness*" (15:23). They walked into the unknown without any assurance that they would ever return.

It is here that David chooses trust over despair. What follows is one of the most moving expressions of unconditional devotion to God. Having lost all hope, David places himself completely under the care and security of God. David makes a conscious choice to trust God. He instructs the Levites to take the ark of covenant and place it at an appropriate place on the side of the road (v.24). Everyone passes as a sacrifice is made on that altar. That ark would become a lasting reminder that as long as God was with them, no situation was hopeless.

It was not easy to assume God's involvement in this matter. Acceptance that God was with him was an act of faith on David's part. Circumstances did not verify it. So David, by this act of offering a sacrifice, needed to drive a stake deep into the ground so that his faith would not waver. I did the same when my son was diagnosed with cancer. Against all emotions I expressed my commitment and allegiance to God. And what David did, did not relieve the pain, but it did reaffirm his commitment to God. In fact, David left this scene a broken man. "*David walked up the road that led to the mount of Olives, weeping as he went. His head covered and his feet bare*"

*as a sign of mourning*” (v.30). Many wept with David. Yet in this brokenness David kept a keen mind and led well. He instructed his priests to return the ark to Jerusalem as an expression of confidence that they would worship there again. Then he commands his advisor Hushai to return and spy on Absalom and frustrate his plans.

David models for us how to handle grief. It is OK to grieve loss but never at the expense of devotion to God. He also teaches us to value of remaining alert and involved. A person who grieves loss should keep working, keep leading and maintain his or her routines.

Things would get worse for David. It is true that suffering will often reveal who your friends are. David’s vulnerable situation also brought to the surface his closet enemies, in the grass root people who did not like David but before never had the courage to express it. It seems at first that Mephiboseth, Saul’s grandson who David had previously taken in, turned against David. This was at least the servant, Ziba’s, interpretation of why Mephiboseth was absent. *“He stayed in Jerusalem ... Today I will get back the kingdom of my grandfather Saul”* (v.16:3). That version conflicts with what Mephiboseth would later tell David once David returned. Then, in chapter 19:24 he accused Ziba of leaving him behind. Whatever the truth might have been, David was surrounded by a great deal of deceit, and utter selfishness. When it came to a crisis many seemed more concerned about saving their skin.

The most blatant expression of hate came from the villager, Shemei who curses David and threw stones at him. Shemei we are told was a *“member of Saul’s family”* (16:8). David did not seek vengeance. Rather he left the issue with God and remained close to God. Such intimacy with God helped David to accept that anything could be from God, but if not, at least in God, he was safe. *“Let him curse for this the Lord has told him to do it. And perhaps the LORD will see that I am being wronged and well bless me because of these curses”* (v.16). David accepted rejection because he assumed God was in control. If it was part of God’s will that this bring David down, so be it.

The Muslims see everything fitting into the “will of Allah” as they refer to it. David’s submission to God’s will, however, assumed God’s personal concern. Muslims on the other hand see God as aloof and unknowable. Our God is active and personal and can take anything, even if it is meant in hard, and use it for our God and his glory. His will often involves us. David leaned heavily on the assumption of the unseen activity of God. This would help him accept his pain, absorb rejection and wait patiently for God’s deliverance.

3. Dealing with loss. The death of Absalom, and David’s reaction to it, is one of the most touching and moving narratives in the scripture. It also offers one of the most intimate glimpses of the heart torn by grief. David leads the war against his son, but lived in conflict because the enemy he was fighting was his own son. For some parents it might seem that the enemy the fight is their own flesh and blood. David never wanted it to be this way. The tension of leading a nation and raising a son had come to a climatic breaking point in Absalom. No one could really know the inner turmoil within David. When Absalom died, a messenger was eager to inform David. Joab knew better than to let the messenger through. *“No”, Joab told him, “it wouldn’t be good news to the king that his son is dead”* (18:20).

In reading this section there are several lessons emerging on parenting and grief. Those two often merge together, don't they.

First, parents need to know when it comes to raising children there are no guarantees that they will turn out godly. David, I am sure assumed Absalom would grow to love God and cherish his position as the son of the one whom God loved. Yet, he discarded this heritage, trading it in for the life of a rebel.

I am confident as a father that my children will follow the Lord, but I cannot be assured of it. I can, with God's help, do all I can to nurture them in the ways of God. In fact, I pray everyday that they will be obedient to God. I even have a scripture I claim for both my children and I refer my daily prayers to those scriptures. I live with pride that the first of my children to reach glory, possessed a deep love for God and never rebelled. But there is no guarantee. One day they will have to chose their own way. That is when I no longer have control. What they chose will really not come down to who has invested the most in their lives; me or the world. They will chose on the basis of their own will. I have primed that will, given it a framework to understand God, but even with that some chose to rebel. I am have seen many children throw away the riches of grace instilled there by their parents for the poverty of rebellion. As parents we can only lay out the choice food. It is up to them to eat it.

Secondly, David's story is a sober reminder that some family battles do turn sour. On the surface such a statement clashes with such scriptures that promise a good ending. Romans 9:28 for example, has guided many parents to believe that their family situation will have a happy ending. Yet all things, it seems, does not work out for good, certainly from a human point of view. Neither does it seem true that if you "*train up a child in the way he should go, and he will not depart from it*" Just as it seems that all things do not always turn out for the good for Absalom it is equally true, it seems, that he did depart from the training of his father. The fact is, Absalom is the prodigal who never did come home.

Absalom fits perfectly the profile of a son who longed to be like his father but in seeking it turned out to hate is father. What hints there were to a story of reconciliation diminished under the cloud of revenge, pride and greed. The story of this family struggle ended tragically. Perhaps what redemptive lesson can be learned from this story is that parents must invest in the lives of their children early on. Neglect them, and deprive them of your love and attention or you will regret the manner in which your child will seek that later in life. Through his rebellion Absalom was simply seeking what was not given to him when he was younger; his father's love.

Third, we find in David's reaction a profound study on grief. David's reaction over hearing of Absalom's death was an unleashing of grief. David was a pitiful figure waiting for the news of Absalom (18:24). The result of the war was not as important to David as that. David even managed his anxiety in a somewhat superstitious manner as the messengers approach. "*The watchman saw another man running toward them .. He also will have good news*" (v.25). "*The first man runs like Ahimaaz... He is a good man and comes with good news*" (v.27). Ahimaaz called out to David announcing that the enemy has been crushed. David seems to ignore this. Only one thing mattered to him. "*What about young Absalom?*" the king demanded. "*Is he alive*" (v.29). Another messenger came with similar news of victory. Again David asked only

about his son. The response crushed David. *“May all your enemies be as that young man is”* (v.32). *“The king was overcome with emotion. He went up to his room over the gateway and burst into tears... O my son! My son Absalom. If only I could have died instead of you, my son”* (v.33).

My son, Brett, recently asked me why movies and books always have to have happy endings. Brett, who has watched his mother suffer a lengthy illness and his brother die of cancer knows first hand that not all stories do have happy endings. The bible does not describe for us a fantasy world. It paints portraits of real people, many of them messed up, and who often faced tragic ends. God did virtually no editing in history. The Bible is full of stories of people we can relate to. They are not removed from our world. While it would have been wonderful to read that Absalom was restored to his father, the reality is, he did not and many of us can relate to that. Sadly, some parents will not see their children turn around and be restored to God. Family estrangement is of the great tragedies of sin.

Third, David’s way of grieving helps us understand the need to grieve. David would not have made a good American or Brit. Had he been one of us, he would have been expected to keep a stiff upper lip, and not “lose control” of himself. However, *“the king was overwhelmed with emotion. He went to his room over the gateway and burst into tears”* (18:33). It was necessary for David to do this and it was healthy. I often tell my children that God has made us to cry when we are hurting. Tear ducts are made by our creator to help us release our pain. Even Jesus poured out his heart in the garden when he was overcome by the prospect of dying. David grieved more than the death of his son though. He grieved the tragic end of a relationship. My son died knowing God and having expressed his love to me first. I cherish his words to me just months before he died. We were walking together, hand in hand, and he said to me *Daddy, you are the best dad in the world*. I find comfort in those words when I miss Travis. There was little in David and Absalom’s relationship where David could draw encouragement.

Fourth, David helps us appreciate the need to keep serving out of pain. David’s grief had an impact on those around him. His grief, in fact, took the wind out of his troop’s sails. A great victory had been won, but when the troops heard of David’s reaction they lost their festive mood. *“As the troops heard of the king’s grief for his son, the joy of their day’s victory turned into deep sadness. They crept back into the city as though they were ashamed and had been beaten down”* (19:2-3).

The troop’s reaction and sharing of David’s grief was touching but it had the potential of bringing about a loss of moral. Joab understood this and he reprimands David for it. *“Now go out there and congratulate the troops, for I swear by the LORD that if you don’t not a single one of them will remain here tonight”* (19:7). This is all needed. *“So the king went out and sat at the city gate, and as the news spread through the city that he was there, everyone went out to him”* (v.8).

Following the death of my son the temptation to sit and wallow in grief was great. Then came a moment where I had to force myself to keep going. To become controlled by grief would have had a deep impact on my troops - my wife and the my two children. Similarly, it took every ounce of energy for David to move from retreat to service. But it is in that forcing of ourselves

that the blood begins to drain back into our drained veins. The first few steps are the hardest and the most important. Once in motion, healing begins to take place and we find ourselves surprisingly still able and still needed by others.

The most decisive thing David did, and a sure sign that he was back, was to replace Joab as his commander. David could not have the man who killed his son lead his people. David returned to Jerusalem (19:15). He forgave the cursing Shimei (19:19-23) and restores Mephiboseth. Yes, David was back.. Broken and tired, but strong and ready to serve God and his people. He had lived in trust, proved faithful and God blessed him for it. David is a worth example for us. He was a man who made mistakes, who failed God and his family and friends. Yet, through it all he loved God. More importantly God loved him. May God bless all who seek his heart as David did.