

# 2 Samuel Devotionals 2

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## 2 Samuel DEVOTIONALS Today in the Word

### 2 Samuel 1

#### 2 Samuel 1:1-16

There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. - Luke 12:2

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

According to developmental psychology, children in the “egocentrism” stage believe that everyone in the world sees only what they see. As a result, children in this stage will routinely hide by covering their eyes and declaring, “You can’t see me!” Because they can’t see anyone else, they reason that no one else can see them.

As we begin this month’s study of the book of 2 Samuel, we see something like this egocentrism in the way the Amalekite reported the death of Saul. At first glance, things seem straightforward: a messenger from battle travelled a great distance to offer the news that Saul and his son were dead. The Amalekite declared that he himself happened upon a dying Saul and then heroically killed the king to save his honor in the face of the Philistine enemies. The Amalekite was now bringing the royal crown and armband as evidence.

A deeper look reveals some problems with his story. Today’s reading follows on the heels of 1 Samuel 31, and there the biblical narrator tells us that Saul killed himself, followed by the suicide of his armor-bearer (1 Sam. 31:4-6). No mention is made of a prolonged death, a wandering Amalekite, or the need for someone else to finish off the king. In short, it appears the Amalekite lied, thinking he could deceive David and earn a reward as the one who brought news that David could now ascend to the throne.

The text doesn’t tell us what really happened with the Amalekite or how he obtained the king’s memorabilia. But he hadn’t realized one important fact when crafting his false tale of heroism: that the king’s blood was precious to David and God alike. On numerous occasions, David himself had the chance to kill Saul, but instead spared his life (see 1 Sam. 26:10-11). Now David turned to the Amalekite and used his artful story against him: “Why weren’t you afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD’s anointed?” (v. 14). In the end, the Amalekite’s lying words not only exposed his deceit to the careful reader, but also brought David’s judgment upon his head.

#### APPLY THE WORD

Do we operate with spiritual “egocentrism,” thinking that if we deceive ourselves or others, then God will be fooled as well? We’ve all been tempted, as the Amalekite was, to twist a story to make ourselves look better. Jesus reminds us, “There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known” (Luke 12:2). May this month’s study of 2 Samuel turn our hearts toward truth, so that we can pursue an honest relationship with God and others.

#### 2 Samuel 1:17-27

There is a time for everything ... a time to weep ... a time to mourn. - Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4

## TODAY IN THE WORD

By definition, a lament is more than a spontaneous outburst of sorrow. It denotes a more thoughtful expression of grief, one that might be recorded, circulated among others, and memorized. The Bible contains numerous laments, including certain psalms or the entire book of Lamentations. In today's reading, we encounter a lament within the narrative of David's discovery of Saul and Jonathan's death, and from this lament we learn a number of things about godly sorrow.

First, we see the appropriateness of thoughtful expressions of grief. There is a time for spontaneous mourning over loss (v. 11), but here David took the time to craft a poetic expression of grief, and even "ordered that the people of Judah be taught this lament of the bow" (v. 17). The lament, Scripture teaches us, invites us into the prolonged ache of the loss of loved ones. Thoughtful expressions of grief do not betray our theology of hope, but are part of the human process of mourning.

Second, David's lament does not shy away from speaking of the tragedy. Verses 19 through 22 explicitly recount the death of warriors and the bloodshed, tumult, and destruction of war. The defeat and loss were real, and David's words recognized that reality, reminded others of it, and encouraged a healthy sorrow over it. Ignoring tragedy around us does not help the healing process.

Third, notice that David mourned over both his friend and his enemy. Given the repeated abuse David suffered under Saul in 1 Samuel, we would not be surprised if David's lament mentioned only Jonathan, but it does not. Saul, along with Jonathan, is both mourned and praised in David's poem. Death, no matter whose, is a tragic thing, and lamenting the insatiable jaws of death is an appropriate response from God's people.

Finally, David's lament moved him to expressions of love. The poem proclaims David's love for Jonathan, "my brother," who was "very dear to me," and whose love was "more wonderful than that of women" (v. 26). Indeed, thoughtful expressions of grief demonstrate the depth of our love for the one we've lost.

## APPLY THE WORD

Are you dealing with grief, or know someone who is? What kind of thoughtful expression of grief might you offer? If facing your own loss, consider penning a personal lament to express your loss and love. If you know someone grieving over the loss of a loved one, consider writing a thoughtful letter that not only expresses sympathy, but enters into their grief with them, reminding them that sorrow over death is appropriate, even as we await its final destruction in Christ.

## 2 Samuel 2

### 2 Samuel 2:1-11

Then the men of Judah came to Hebron, and there they anointed David king over the tribe of Judah. - 2 Samuel 2:4

## TODAY IN THE WORD

A couple enjoying a hiking vacation in the Rocky Mountains encountered a surprise: there in a rocky outcrop on a mountaintop grew a fragile, yet vibrantly-colored flower. In all the wrong conditions, hidden from the view of most people, this tiny sign of life grew. Their photograph of that hidden growth now brings beauty and an invitation to hope to countless guests in their home.

Another picture of such fragile, hidden hope lies in today's reading: David's kingship. Having first sought God's direction, David moved his entire family, along with his loyal followers, out of Philistia and into Hebron. The people of Judah came to David and anointed him as their king. Even though David had already been anointed secretly in 1 Samuel 16:13, here in Hebron he was declared king publicly for the first time.

Notice the formidable obstacles that stand against God's chosen king. His kingship, although public, was over Judah, just one tribe among twelve. In fact, it would be over seven years before David would reign over all Israel. In the meantime, David would face tribes with divided loyalties and encounter outright rivals.

David first attempted to bring unity in his kingdom with the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead, long-time loyal supporters of Saul and his kingship (see 1 Samuel 11). In a winsome appeal, David mixed praise, blessing, and invitation. He praised them for their conscientiousness in burying Saul; he twice called for God's blessing upon them; and he extended a genuine invitation to join the people of Judah in acknowledging him as God's anointed king. This narrative gives us a model of charitable dealings with potential enemies.

Finally, we are shown a rival to David's kingship. Abner, powerful and shrewd commander of Saul's army, took Saul's remaining son, Ish-bosheth, and made him king over all Israel. David may finally have been anointed publicly, but the odds seemed against him: few supporters, many potential enemies, and a powerful rival seeking his downfall and destruction. Yet God's fragile sign of hope

had emerged.

#### APPLY THE WORD

Today's picture of that fragile, emerging hope evokes a similar picture in God's plan of redemption: the coming of our Savior-King as a vulnerable child, born to poor peasants, surrounded by those who wanted Him dead. Is this not the way of God's kingdom? Today's reading teaches us that despite the seeming odds, God's kingdom will advance, His gospel will go forth, and His King will prevail. Give thanks to God today for the picture and promise of His kingdom.

## 2 Samuel 2:12-3:5

The war ... lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker. - 2 Samuel 3:1

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

Representative combat was a common battle strategy in the ancient world. Rather than having entire armies fight, the outcome of the battle could be determined by a smaller battle between the best soldiers from each side. The nation whose champions won the battle would be the victors over the other side. (See 1 Samuel 17 for a biblical example.)

We see in today's reading a failed attempt at such representative combat. Having been told previously of the clash between the house of David and Saul, we now arrive at that inevitable conflict. Abner and his pro-Saul forces crossed the Jordan and moved to Gibeon, a town just a few miles from the Davidic territory of Jerusalem. Ultimately, Abner's men were defeated by Joab and his men. The summary statement at the end of chapter 2 details the definitive results.

Yet note that the narrator chooses not merely to summarize the end results; instead we are shown particular details of the battle. First, Abner suggested representative combat—each side would choose twelve men to fight. That did nothing but leave twenty-four dead soldiers on the field. Next, an all-out battle commenced. Asahel, brother of Joab, pursued Abner until eventually Abner killed Asahel with a backward thrust of the spear. Finally, at Abner's request, Joab called his men back from battle. The final tally revealed that Joab lost twenty men; Abner lost 360.

Why all these details? In part, Scripture is showing us the foolishness and cost of sin. Abner knew that David was God's chosen anointed king (look at 2 Sam. 3:9-10), yet he initiated aggression against David's forces, cost the lives of over 380 men, and perpetuated a civil war that "lasted a long time" (3:1). Moreover, we are told that as this conflict continued, "David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker." Is this not the way of God's kingdom? It grows stronger while its opponents grow weaker. And yet the irrationality of sin compels us to fight against God's action and will in the world. Let the story of Abner be a lesson to us today.

#### APPLY THE WORD

How often do we acknowledge something of God's truth and yet fail to live in accordance with it, even fighting against it, causing great pain in our lives? Spend some time today meditating on the Lord's prayer, giving particular focus to the clause "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." If there are ways your life does not display Christ's kingdom here on earth, acknowledge God as King and seek the Spirit's help to align your life with His will.

## 2 Samuel 3

### 2 Samuel 3:6-21

May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the LORD promised him on oath. - 2 Samuel 3:9

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

According to the prosperity gospel, true Christian faith always results in material abundance. But in the words of one biblical scholar critical of such teaching, the prosperity gospel makes God, "The Vending Machine God: put in faith and out pops blessings—money, homes, cars, beautiful spouses, clever kids, good neighbors, big churches, and plush vacations." Put another way, the prosperity gospel offers a material answer to the egocentric question: "What's in it for me?"

In many ways, Abner was a man driven by the question, "What's in it for me." The narrative begins with a seemingly innocuous reference to Abner's relationship with one of Saul's previous concubines, Rizpah. Ish-bosheth stingingly accused Abner of relations with her. In the ancient world, the one who took over the dead king's harem asserted claims of succession over the dead king's throne. Apparently Abner was plotting to take control, and Ish-bosheth tried to put a stop to it.

Then came Abner's "theological" tirade against Ish-bosheth. Whatever Abner's initial intentions, he now vowed to "do for David what the LORD promised him on oath" (v. 9). Apparently Abner knew of God's promise to David, and he now committed himself to help fulfill it. He met with David, arranged for the return of David's first wife Michal (a political move more than a romantic one), met with the Benjamites and elders of Israel to convince them to side with David, and then celebrated a partnership meal with David.

All seemed well. Abner was referencing God's word, committing himself to it, and using it to convince others of their duty to God and king. But don't miss the underlying motives. Abner was largely interested in what was in it for himself. Sure, Abner would trust in God's word to David, and even work to bring it to fulfillment. But why? Verse 12 reveals the motive when Abner says to David, "Make an agreement with me, and I will help you bring all Israel over to you." Only when Abner saw the possibility of personal gain did he start theologizing about God's promises and quoting God's word.

#### APPLY THE WORD

How many of us do the same thing as Abner? We cite God's Word when it agrees with us or promises something we want, but ignore it when it proves inconvenient. Has God become for you a "Vending Machine God?" Do you use your relationship with God as a means to further your own security, possessions, reputation, or desires? Consider memorizing one of the following verses: Psalm 37:4; Proverbs 3:5-6; Philippians 4:19; or 1 Timothy 6:6.

## 2 Samuel 3:22-39

All the people took note and were pleased; indeed, everything the king did pleased them. - 2 Samuel 3:36

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

In Charles Dickens's novel, *Little Dorrit*, William Dorrit was a gentleman who found himself in debtor's prison. Through a remarkable turn of events, Mr. Dorrit later discovered that he was an inheritor of a large fortune. He and his children were released from prison and reentered society as a wealthy family. All seemed to be going well for the Dorrit family when they discovered their new money had been lost in a fraudulent investment scheme. Just when things seemed to be moving in the right direction, a new turn of events threatened disaster.

A new turn of events threatened David's kingdom as well. Abner had come to David promising him the northern tribes in return for a place in David's kingdom. David had agreed and sent Abner away "in peace" (vv. 22, 23). Just when things seemed to be coming together for David, Joab stepped in and threatened disaster for the hope of a united kingdom. Acting from personal vengeance over his brother's death, and using David's peaceful promise as a cloak, Joab summoned Abner and ruthlessly murdered him in private.

Would all be lost? Would Joab's blood vengeance thwart the promises God made to David about his kingdom? Surely the northern tribes would cry foul at the murder of their top general! And yet, even in the face of such circumstances, God's plan slowly continued to move forward. David responded with genuine grief over Abner's death. He made public declarations of his innocence; he called curses upon Joab and his family (also involved in Abner's death—see v. 30); he called for a public funeral to mourn Abner's loss; he wrote a lament in Abner's honor; and even in private he refused to eat out of respect for Abner's death.

This led to the surprising result: "All the people took note and were pleased; indeed, everything the king did pleased them" (v. 36). Despite Joab's selfish action and his growing power, Scripture subtly reminds us that God's promises cannot be thwarted. The northern tribes were coming around; a united kingdom was beginning to develop.

#### APPLY THE WORD

It's a lesson we've seen already, but one Scripture wants repeated for our benefit: God's kingdom will ultimately prevail, despite the seeming resistance of others (or ourselves!). When you look at the injustice and suffering in the world, do you begin to doubt God's promise of healing and restoration? Pray that God may give you eyes of faith to see the small, subtle ways in which His will is surely advancing in our world.

## 2 Samuel 4

## 2 Samuel 4

Wicked men have killed an innocent man in his own house and on his own bed—should I not now demand his blood! - 2 Samuel 4:11

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

When kids bully others, the goal is usually to control someone else. Some bullies seem strong and demanding, but according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry many bullies are themselves victims of bullying or abuse at home. What appears to be an exercise of strength turns out to be cowardly opportunism: find someone smaller or younger, and victimize them for your own selfish ends.

Baanah and Rekab from today's reading exemplify such self-promoting cowardice hidden behind the appearance of strength and courage. The storyline is summarized quickly: These two brothers took the life of Ish-Bosheth and presented his severed head to King David in hopes of a reward. Much like the messenger of 2 Samuel 1, Ish-Bosheth's murderers use the guise of advancing the Lord's promise in order to secure a premier place in David's kingdom.

But notice several important details Scripture offers concerning Baanah and Rekab. First, their act of killing Ish-Bosheth was hardly courageous. We are told in verse 1 that Ish-Bosheth had "lost courage." A few verses later we see that the only other royal heir of Jonathan was a cripple (v. 4). In the face of a weakened house of Saul, Baanah and Rekab kill Ish-Bosheth while he was defenseless, sleeping in his bed. They may have exerted force, but they were cowards at heart.

Next, notice their ultimate intentions. If they had wanted to assist David in building his kingdom, they could have done this simply by offering their support. Instead, they ride through the night to present David with the head of Ish-Bosheth in hopes of some reward. They were not only cowards but selfish opportunists.

Finally, we see David's response. While the death of Ish-Bosheth may have aided his political rise, David condemned it as injustice. He ordered Baanah and Rekab put to death and to act as a public lesson that no amount of kingdom advancement can justify such injustice. David is the contrast to these men. Innocent blood can never be justified by the ends, even if those ends were promised by God Himself.

#### APPLY THE WORD

Do we seek to advance God's kingdom in the world because it is right, serving God when opportunities arise? Or are we selfish opportunists who seek honor from others as we "work" for God's kingdom? Do we justify using or abusing others by saying it's for the good of the church? Pray especially today for the ministers and leaders in your church that they would be strong against the temptation to promote themselves instead of the glory of God.

## 2 Samuel 5

### 2 Samuel 5:1-7

To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill. - Psalm 3:4

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

A few years ago, news wires reported that a chain of discount stores planned to build a new store at Ferry Farm, the boyhood home of George Washington, which lies across the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg, Virginia. But a preservationist group in Fredericksburg came to the defense of Ferry Farm, taking possession of the historic site where our first president lived from the age of about seven until he left home as a young man.

When it comes to God's promises, no one can take away anything He has intended for us--whether it's a home, a nation, a kingdom, or even our very lives. David desperately needed this security during the years between his anointing by Samuel until the death of Saul--and he had the best Defender of all in the Lord God.

Today's reading brings us past the years when David lived as a fugitive, sometimes only one step ahead of Saul's jealous rage. The psalms David wrote during that time show how completely the uncrowned king of Israel trusted in God to deliver him from his enemies and vindicate him.

Saul's death in battle (1 Sam. 31:1-13) removed the threat to David, and under God's blessing he moved to consolidate his kingdom. He was anointed as king of Judah (2 Sam. 2:4), and reigned in that capacity for seven-and-a-half years (5:5). Then all the tribes of Israel came to David and acknowledged him as their king. David was then anointed for a third time (including his original anointing by Samuel) and was finally recognized as the undisputed ruler of Israel.

David's first act as king was to establish his capital, for which he chose the Jebusite stronghold of Jerusalem. The city that Israelites today call their eternal city was brought under Israelite control by King David. The Jebusites mocked David's attack, but the outcome of the battle was never in doubt.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY

People under attack need a strong defender--especially when they can't see the enemy.

### **2 Samuel 5:1-12 Joshua 15:20-63;**

This is the inheritance of the tribe of Judah. - Joshua 15:20

## TODAY IN THE WORD

Rosa Parks didn't set out to change a nation or start a revolution. When she courageously refused to move to the back of the bus fifty years ago, her reasoning was simple. As she put it, "All I was doing was trying to get home from work." It was an eventful trip home that helped bring rest, not just to Rosa Parks, but to entire generations of Americans as well.

The trek home for the tribe of Judah was not without incident either, although today's reading simply describes the landscape to which they arrived. We have to peel back the layers of history in order to appreciate today's text more fully.

Among the tribes of Israel and the land that they inherited, Judah is especially significant, because it was out of this tribe that Israel would find her king. Interestingly enough, it was King David who would finally finish the job of claiming the land exclusively for Israel.

The tribe of Judah was not able to drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem (Josh. 15:63). But this was to be the permanent home of the line of kings and the temple. Occupation by worshipers of other gods was unacceptable.

After David was anointed king in Hebron, the next action we see him take is the attack on the Jebusites in Jerusalem. After their perseverance through many years of Israel's residence in the land, the Jebusites seemed to have developed a rather arrogant attitude. Whatever courage they had was misplaced, however, for David won and claimed the fortress as his own.

For Israel, the courage to fully claim the land that God promised came a few generations later, but God didn't waver in His faithfulness. It's another example that Joshua's campaign is an example of God's grace and mercy. Even though Israel failed in completing some of the tasks God had commanded them, God remained true to His covenant with them.

Seeing David capture the palace and validate his reign on the throne of Israel foreshadows an even mightier King who would walk the streets of Jerusalem and emerge from the line of David, a Savior who could permanently wipe out sin from any fortress and any heart.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As David showed us, strength and courage are indispensable in battle—but they're also a necessity in the fight against sin.

Don't believe the lie that you simply can't overcome sin in your life. The Lord is with us! Ask the Holy Spirit to help you drive out sinful attitudes and protect you from unrighteous behavior and reactions. Don't be discouraged and don't wait for the next generation to fight the battle for you. We have victory through Christ.

## 2 Samuel 6

## 2 Samuel 6

I will celebrate before the LORD. - 2 Samuel 6:21

## TODAY IN THE WORD

In C. S. Lewis's classic novel, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Susan learned that the one whom they were about to meet, Aslan, was a lion. Somewhat uncomfortable with this notion, she wondered if he was safe. Mr. Beaver responded: "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king I tell you."

Today's reading exemplifies the uncomfortable theme about the dangerous holiness of God's presence. David had gathered a moving party to transport the ark of God back to Jerusalem. Considerable attention is given in verse 2 to remind us that the ark is the very sign of God's presence (see also Num. 10:35-36). This was a momentous and celebratory occasion to be bringing the presence of God to the capital. Then tragedy struck: the oxen pulling the ark stumbled, Uzzah reached out to stabilize it, and God struck him dead.

Why would God do such a thing? Wasn't Uzzah trying to help? Shouldn't God give him a break? David's own anger and fear (vv. 8-9) may echo our own. But we should remember that God had already given clear instructions about how to transport the ark,

including dire warnings against those who did not follow his instructions (Num. 4:15-20). Any son of a priest would know that, yet Uzzah foolishly disregarded those divine instructions and paid the price. Ours is no tame, domesticated God.

The remaining part of our reading balances the awe-inspiring holiness of God with His goodness and blessing. Terrified to bring the ark to Jerusalem, David sent it to the house of Obed-Edom, where God showered blessing for three months. In response, David decided to resume the ark's transport to Jerusalem. On the way, David danced before God "with all his might" (v. 14), now understanding the joy of God's presence when coupled with obedience.

David's understanding of godly joy is clear in his conversation with Michal. While she mocked David's lack of professional decorum and dignity, David defended his choice of joyous worship before God even if it meant embarrassing himself before the people.

#### APPLY THE WORD

Today's reading gives us two images of God necessary for a full picture of His character—the danger of His holiness if it is not heeded, and the joy of His presence when He is obeyed. Which of these images do you need today? Does your life flout God's will without any sense of conviction? Be reminded of Uzzah. Do you struggle to express the joy of the Christian life? Ponder the words and actions of joyous David.

## 2 Samuel 7

### 2 Samuel 7:1-17

I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. - 2 Samuel 7:13-14

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

Relationships between kings and deities in the Ancient Near East often displayed a similar pattern. First, the deity would grant some favor to the king such as success over enemies. In return, the king would then construct a temple-house for the deity out of gratitude for the deity's assistance. Finally, the deity would make promises of future blessing for the king's work.

Understanding the typical ancient context of king-deity relationships is important for our reading today—precisely because of the difference we see. David had been given "rest from all his enemies" (v. 1). In response, he wanted to build God a temple. But instead of David constructing a temple and God responding with promises of future blessing, we are given a picture of a God who blesses first, even before His house is built. We learn a number of important lessons about the kind of God we serve.

First, God recounted what He had done for David: "I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone" (vv. 8-9). At no initiative on David's part, God blessed him with His very presence and leadership over Israel.

Second, God promised what He would do for David and for Israel. The grace God had already shown would be extended. Verses 9 through 11 promise stability, security, freedom, and renown, highlighting God's tender care for His people.

Finally, God proclaimed what He would do for generations to come, and here in verses 12 through 16 we see the crux of God's word to David. While he would not be permitted to build God a house, God would build a "house" for David. God would establish a future offspring who would one day build a temple. God promised that David's house would "endure forever before Me" (v. 16). Moreover, this offspring would be God's son who would never lose God's love (vv. 14-15). Today's passage is saturated with God's grace—past, present, and future. He blesses not because of anything David or Israel had done, but simply because He is good.

#### APPLY THE WORD

While the promise of 2 Samuel 7 is fulfilled in David's son Solomon (see 1 Kings 6), it has its deeper fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the offspring of David who builds the true temple of God (Mark 14:58) and bore the rod of punishment on our behalf (1 Peter 2:24). As you ponder today's picture of God's grace to David, to Israel, and to us in Christ, offer a prayer of gratitude to the God who freely blesses.

## 2 Samuel 7:1-17

For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. - Hebrews 3:4

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

Stafford House, the London dwelling of the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland, was London's social center and was renowned for its

splendor. During one visit Queen Victoria told the duchess, “I have come from my house to visit your palace.”

Perhaps David feared that the Lord would have a similar reaction when it came to his own home. There is a note of guilt in his words to Nathan in verse 2: “Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.” Nathan’s enthusiastic reply anticipated David’s ambitious plan and reflected confidence in Israel’s king but did not take the Lord’s will into account.

That night the Lord adjusted the plan. God would do the building. After reminding David that He had no need for an earthly dwelling, the Lord promised to build David a dynasty. He also promised to “plant” Israel so that they would have home of their own and no longer be afflicted by their oppressors. It was not David but his descendant who would build a house for Israel’s God.

There is a play on words in God’s promises that He would build David a house and that David’s descendant would build God a house. In his commentary on 2 Samuel, Old Testament scholar Robert Alter explains, “God will grant David a house—that is, a continuing dynasty, and then will have David’s son build Him a house—that is a temple.”

The New Testament reveals that the double meaning implied in the image goes even deeper. Stephen’s citation of this passage in Acts 7:48-50 suggests that this promise was not completely fulfilled by Solomon but pointed to Jesus Christ, “the Righteous One.” The Lord enabled Solomon to build a house, but only Jesus Christ could build a family. All those who are in Christ are members of God’s household (Eph. 2:19).

God does not need temples or church buildings. They exist for our sake. They provide us with an opportunity to express our devotion to God and facilitate our worship. But God is always more interested in the household of faith than in the house or building in which we meet.

#### APPLY THE WORD

David was expecting great things from God and attempting great things for God. His only problem was that he was not in step with God’s timing. Have you been acting on plans without asking first whether they are God’s plans? You may accomplish your project but not your purpose, especially if your goal is to glorify God. Set your plans aside for a time and ask God to direct you. He may give you the green light. Or He may show you a better plan.

## 2 Samuel 7:8-16; Matthew 1:1-16

Jesus Christ, the son of David. - Matthew 1:1

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

The film “Anna and the King” presents the real-life story of Anna Leonowens, who came from India to Siam (modern Thailand) to be the governess for King Mongkut’s children. In one stirring scene, Anna’s courage and creativity save the King’s children from certain death at the hand of a would-be usurper to the throne. The importance of these children is quite clear—they represent the future of the country.

History has other accounts of royal children being protected. In fact, the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38) represents many amazing ways that God faithfully preserved the line of the true King, including the story of King David’s grandparents, Ruth and Boaz. Knowing that Jesus is the “Son of David” is essential because God’s Promised Messiah had to be a descendant of David.

That’s why King Herod was so threatened by the birth of Jesus; Herod was not from the line of David and he knew that he had no legitimate basis for his rule. Herod foolishly thought he could “outwit” God by killing all baby boys approximately the age of Jesus (Matt. 2:13–18). But God preserved His chosen Messiah, whom He had promised from the beginning.

One of these promises is found in our passage from 2 Samuel. King David was one of the greatest kings who ever lived. He extended the boundaries of Israel to unprecedented limits. Yet even with all his greatness, God promised that one of his descendants would be even greater (vv. 12–13). The throne of the kingdom of this promised Offspring would endure forever (v. 13). By the time of Jesus, the rabbis called this Promised One “great David’s greater son.”

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Thrilling accounts of rescue are not limited to movie scenes and royalty

## 2 Samuel 7:16

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



After Caesar Augustus, also called Octavian, finally defeated Mark Antony at Actium, one of his priorities was to track down a particular Egyptian teenager. The boy's mother went to great lengths to protect her son, but more than maternal instincts were involved—she was Queen Cleopatra and the boy was the only male heir of Julius Caesar. As long as young Caesarion lived, Octavian's rule was threatened. Despite his status as heir, Caesarion was killed.

## 2 Samuel 7:18-29

How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you. - 2 Samuel 7:22

### TODAY IN THE WORD

Any parent knows the challenge of teaching children good manners. Through repetition and example, they remind children to answer someone when spoken to, to look at someone when talking, and to say "Please" when asking for something. Perhaps most common of all, parents can be heard encouraging their children to say "Thank you" when someone gives them something. If cultivating good social manners in ourselves and others is important, how much more important is it to cultivate the spiritual discipline of gratitude before God? Today's reading provides a lesson.

After hearing God's word through the prophet Nathan, David "went in and sat before the LORD" (v. 18). In a posture of humility, David recognized his own unworthiness for all God had done for him, and all God had promised in the future. In other words, David began his prayer with a humble heart of gratitude.

David then moved into expressions of admiration for God's grace, His blessing, and His very nature, proclaiming: "How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you" (v. 22). Even while recounting all the blessings experienced by Israel, the focus remained on God and His character. Isn't this a genuine expression of gratitude? The focus is not on us or our experiences, but on the God who brings that blessing to us.

Having acknowledged his unworthiness and having marveled at God's character, David petitioned God to keep His word just spoken. "And now, LORD God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised" (v. 25). Even this is not a self-centered request, for David explains why he wants God's word to hold true: "so that your name will be great forever" (v. 26). When God keeps His promises, others will praise His name.

Finally, notice the basis for the prayer: David's entire motivation is God's present and future grace (v. 27). David's prayer shows us what our response to God's grace should be—a humble expression of gratitude and praise.

### APPLY THE WORD

How might you respond to God's blessing in your life? Spend some time today meditating on God's grace: past, present, and future. Using David's prayer or other expressions of gratitude found in the Psalms, try to write your own hymn of praise and thanks to our God of grace who blesses us far beyond what we deserve. Then post that prayer in a place where you will see it and be reminded this week of God's hand in your life.

## 2 Samuel 8

## 2 Samuel 8

The LORD gave David victory wherever he went. - 2 Samuel 8:14

### TODAY IN THE WORD

A frequent device in movies is the montage. When a director wishes to summarize significant episodes in the storyline, the film will condense a series of scenes (often set to music) in order to give brief glimpses of significant moments strung together. Rather than utilize dialogue and gradual plot development, the montage gives a quick overview and summary of the most important events in the storyline.

Second Samuel 8 is a kind of literary montage that summarizes and compresses into a brief span the various conflicts and outcomes between David and his enemies. In less than twenty verses we are told of David's conflict with and victory over the Philistines, the Moabites, Hadadezer king of Zobah, the Arameans, the Edomites, the Ammonites, and the Amalekites.

Rather than focus on smaller details, Scripture emphasizes the type of victory David enjoyed. First, we see that this was a divine victory. Twice Scripture says, "The LORD gave David victory wherever he went" (vv. 6, 14). More than simply reporting David's success, we are told the source of that victory: God. If David's kingdom was to be established as God had promised, then it would

be God Himself who would establish it.

Second, we are shown that this was no temporary victory—God was establishing a stable kingdom that would last. Not only did David defeat his enemies, but he did so resoundingly (think of the numbers of defeated forces reported), over a wide range (the geography of this chapter extends from the far north to the far south), and with an established longevity—David set up garrisons in foreign lands and extracted tribute from them.

Finally, the text indicates that David recognized God's hand and responded appropriately. David dedicated all the silver, gold, and bronze to God. Near the end, Scripture summarizes David's reign this way: "David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people" (v. 15). All his accomplishments did not create a big head for David—he continued to rule with justice and godliness, recognizing from whose hand it all came.

#### APPLY THE WORD

As God's kingship establishes itself in your life, and as we await the day when God's reign will be revealed fully, today's reading offers some lessons on how we should live. Make a list of the blessings and the responsibilities you have been given in your life. Is your stance, like David's, one of honoring God for His blessings and "doing what is right and just" with all you've been given? Let us commit to live in a way that reflects the reality of God's kingdom.

## 2 Samuel 9

## 2 Samuel 9

Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. - 2 Samuel 9:11

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

In any transfer of power in the ancient world, a new monarch was often concerned about two things. First, he wanted to stabilize the kingdom by subduing all surrounding enemies. Second, he was anxious about securing the throne from potential rebellion from within. In particular, a monarch from a new line would often protect his throne by killing all relatives of the previous ruler.

King David had stabilized his kingdom in 2 Samuel 8 by subduing his enemies. Next, one might think he would protect his throne by hunting down every last survivor in Saul's line. So when we read the first part of verse 1 in today's passage, this seems like David's plan: "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul?" But that course of action is quickly clarified when we finish the sentence: "to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Unlike other kings who would destroy all potential rebels, David sought to show kindness to Saul's remaining descendants.

We learn that one of Jonathan's sons remained: Mephibosheth, "lame in both feet" (see 2 Sam. 4:4), and wisely hiding in Lo Debar. Mephibosheth was summoned before King David, perhaps wondering what his fate might be. And then he heard the surprising and wonderful news: "Don't be afraid ... for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan" (v. 7). David promised to restore Mephibosheth's land and commissioned workers to tend the land in order to provide for Jonathan's son.

David's most important action, however, was the promise that Mephibosheth would always eat at the king's table. In fact, we hear of this important treatment of Mephibosheth four separate times. Twice David himself spoke this promise, and twice the narrator reminds us of it, reporting that "Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons" (v. 11; also v. 13). A crippled son of David's enemy, who can offer nothing in return, was granted the honor of family fellowship with the king. What a demonstration of grace!

#### APPLY THE WORD

Today's image of a weak, potential enemy of the king sitting in fellowship at his table truly is a remarkable picture of God's gracious relationship with us in our celebration of the Lord's Supper. This Sunday, or the next time you celebrate Communion, use the occasion as an opportunity to experience the grace of today's reading. Our Lord the King has allowed us to sit at His table, celebrating union and life with Him. Praise and thank Him for that kindness.

## 2 Samuel 10

## 2 Samuel 10

Be strong, and let us fight bravely... The LORD will do what is good in his sight. - 2 Samuel 10:12

## TODAY IN THE WORD

A Texas newspaper recently reported a story about an act of kindness returned with insult. A man saw a homeless person, Philip, with a sign that read “Traveling and hungry, anything helps. God bless.” Moved by compassion, the man allowed Philip to sleep on his apartment couch for two nights. Unfortunately he awoke one morning to find the apartment empty and his wallet, car keys, and car gone.

Today’s reading records a similar situation. When the Ammonite king died, David showed kindness to the Ammonites by sending emissaries to express his sympathy. The Ammonites, however, returned David’s kindness with insult and war. They sent the emissaries home humiliated, with their beards half-shorn and buttocks exposed. Then when the Ammonites “realized that they had become obnoxious to David” (v. 6), they turned aggressive, hiring Aramean soldiers to fight the Israelites.

The rest of the chapter records the wars between the Israelites and the Ammonite-Aramean alliance. The battles are summarized briefly but poignantly by the narrator—three times Israel’s enemies “fled before them” (vv. 13, 14, 18). Is there not a lesson here about responding to God’s offer of kindness? We can receive it for what it is—God’s offer of goodness and blessing. Or we can reject that offer and find ourselves “obnoxious” to God and at war with Him—a war we will ultimately lose (consider Psalm 2 for a poetic illustration)!

We see another lesson here about the kinds of challenges we might face as God’s people. Even after following the Christian admonition to kindness towards all (1 Thess. 5:15), we might well be met with mockery, ridicule, or even physical danger. The predicament in which Joab found himself in today’s reading was similar—on foreign ground, surrounded by massive armies, fighting soldiers who were experienced in battle. Joab’s words before the battle begins are important: “The LORD will do what is good in His sight” (v. 12). Joab had no guarantee that God would win this particular battle for him, but Joab placed his trust in God’s ultimate promise to “do what is good.”

## APPLY THE WORD

Has your kindness to others ever been met with rejection? A smile unreturned, the sacrifice of your time unnoticed, or even your witness for Christ met with ridicule? Perhaps you become discouraged in your stance against spiritual forces at work against God’s kingdom (Eph. 6:12). Rather than letting bitterness take root, create a list of the ways you have been discouraged lately, then make Joab’s words your meditative prayer: “The LORD will do what is good in his sight.”

## 2 Samuel 11

But the thing David had done displeased the LORD. - 2 Samuel 11:27

## TODAY IN THE WORD

Throughout history, numerous maxims have been stated warning against idleness. An early Christian theologian once wrote: “Do some good deed, that the devil may always find you occupied.” A Scottish proverb reads: “If the Devil finds a man idle, he’ll set him at work.” And an old Turkish saw cautions: “The devil tempts all other men, but idle men tempt the devil.”

It’s a long-standing and universally understood principle that idleness can often get us into trouble, and that is exactly what we see in today’s reading. The previous two chapters had recorded the various activity of David, but now in 2 Samuel 11:1 we see David’s idleness. It was “the time when kings go off to war,” but while David sent his armies into battle, David himself “remained in Jerusalem.” Strolling along his palace rooftop one evening, he spied beautiful Bathsheba bathing. Idleness turned to action; sin planted its root in the king’s heart and bore fruit.

Note that the previous chapters have repeatedly emphasized David’s heartfelt expressions of kindness. But this story includes no description of emotion at all. There is only action: David saw, inquired, sent, took, and laid with the woman (vv. 1-5). How quickly David fell! The previously positive portrayal of the king was no defense against the temptation that used David’s idleness as a springboard for lust, adultery, deception, and even murder. What an important reminder that none of us are beyond the need to guard against even the subtlest of temptations.

The sequence of events after David’s encounter with Bathsheba also provides us with an important picture of the destructive and escalating nature of sin. What started as lust in the heart soon became physical adultery. David then moved to deception in order to cover up his sin. He called Bathsheba’s husband back to Jerusalem in hopes that Uriah would sleep with his wife, but Uriah refused. Finally, David sent secret orders to Joab to make sure Uriah was killed in battle. His plan succeeded—Uriah was dead and Bathsheba became David’s wife. And so we see the nature and reality of sin left unchecked.

## APPLY THE WORD

It seems David's sinful schemes succeeded, until the last verse: "But the thing David had done displeased the LORD" (v. 27). God's perceived silence over sin does not imply either His absence or His approval. We cannot hide our sin from God. Rely on the Spirit's guidance to be more conscious of the subtle temptations around you. Memorize 1 Corinthians 10:13, and resist temptations before they take deeper root in your heart and lead to greater, spiraling disobedience against God.

## 2 Samuel 11:1-5.

### TODAY IN THE WORD

Author Jerry Jenkins, in his book *Loving Your Marriage Enough to Protect It*, warns couples: "The strongest marriage you know of is in danger today if hedges are not in place."

Jenkins tells how early in his marriage he and his wife set up protective "hedges"--guidelines to guard them from temptations. Jenkins asks: "How close have you come to being burned? Have you found yourself impressed with someone and then attracted to them? Maybe it seemed innocent and safe, but then you said or did things you never thought you would say or do...Maybe looking back, you can see that you were living dangerously. When friends fall to the right and left, you see that perhaps you were lucky you weren't snared. If so many of your friends and acquaintances have fallen--people you never would have suspected--how will you avoid being a casualty?"

Throughout his book, Jenkins speaks of guarding one's heart long before temptation strikes. As one Bible teacher observed, when you see a man who commits adultery and destroys his family, you know you are seeing the end of a process that no doubt began earlier in that man's mind and heart.

In the case of David and Bathsheba, the narrative of lust is told in compact detail. The writer did not dwell on Bathsheba's beauty, David's thoughts, or the sin itself--and neither should we. Instead, we need to consider the steps that David took in the downward spiral of lust. Here is a tragic real-life illustration of the truth of James 1:14-15.

Verse 2 says David saw Bathsheba bathing. The verb is a very common one, used hundreds of times in the Old Testament. The only indication that David did more than glance was that he noted the woman's beauty.

But David took the next step and sent someone to find out who--and perhaps, whose--she was. Instead of fleeing his growing lust when he learned she was the wife of a trusted officer in his army, David decided to consummate his desire. He sent for her and committed adultery with her.

### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Are you somewhere in that deadly cycle of lust today? Read Psalm 32:1-4 and you'll see the tremendous physical, emotional and spiritual toll David's sin exacted.

## 2 Samuel 11:1-27

At the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab. - 2 Samuel 11:1

### TODAY IN THE WORD

The hypocenter is a point under the earth's surface where the energy of an earthquake is released. The vibrations of large quakes can be felt over a thousand miles away and about 50 feet above the hypocenter; all the crumbling buildings, tidal waves, fractured pavement, and other destruction can be traced to a single geological point.

Like a seismic quake with aftershocks that devastated the face of the nation, many of the significant disturbances in David's reign as king of Israel can be traced back to David's tragic sin of multiplying wives, most notably his adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband. It is without question the low point of David's reign. In fact, 1 Kings 15:5 lists that transgression as the lone blemish on David's record. From that moment on, he would never again enjoy peace as king.

What a change had transpired in David since he was the young man who didn't feel worthy to be the king's son-in-law! Here, he felt arrogant enough to sleep with the wife of one of his mighty men (23:39), and then manipulate him with a series of ploys designed to fool Uriah and conceal David's sin. As David engaged in selfish conduct, Uriah was the one who acted honorably and selflessly.

What David felt for Bathsheba can hardly be described as love. Their so-called love story began as lust, moved to adultery, twisted into deceit, and boiled over into murder. Most telling is David's reaction to the husband's death. She mourned, the king reacted with cold indifference. His concern was for Joab, the man who executed David's plans to have Uriah killed in battle (vv. 15-16, 25). He showed disdain for both Uriah and the feelings of his widow! How greatly and disturbingly sin transformed David during this account!

The departure from God's plans and God's ways completely altered David's character. His life was marked by consistent dependence on God, but this chapter in David's life was a devastating aberration. It shows us that even a godly man is only as strong as His allegiance to the Lord.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Outside of God's will, no one can prosper. Many Bible commentators believe that David's downfall began when he stayed home from battle. Now, there's nothing wrong with anyone taking a vacation from a job, but we must never take a break from our responsibilities to God and our pursuit of His will. Following Christ is not a part-time position. When we step out of a mindset of active obedience, we step into trouble. Pray for the Lord's strength to help you stay the course around the clock and throughout the week.

## 2 Samuel 12

Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin." - 2 Samuel 12:13

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

John Donne, the seventeenth-century English poet-theologian, knew of our need for the sometimes severe grace of God. His Holy Sonnet 14 opens: "Batter my heart, three-person'd God; for you / As yet but knock; breathe, shine, and seek to mend; / That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend / Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new."

Today's passage contains something of the divine battering, o'erthrowing, and breaking in God's treatment of David. In chapter 11 David seemed to have gotten away with lust, adultery, deceit, and murder. Yet now in chapter 12 we see a God who has not abandoned David to sin, but instead pursued him with a severe grace. He sent Nathan the prophet, and through a powerful story revealed the sins David had committed. In the face of David's zealous indignation over the injustice in the parable, God's judgment on David is clear: "You are the man!" (v. 7).

Verses 7 through 12 don't mince words about David's sins or the consequences. God didn't sugarcoat what David had done, but recounted it simply and straightforwardly: after all I have done for you, "Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes?" (v. 9). David had a man killed and then taken his wife. The consequences for his actions were excruciating—David's house would know no relief from the sword, he would experience the shame and insult of another man taking his own wife, and perhaps most grievous of all the child born to Bathsheba would die.

These words may strike us as harsh, but there is a restorative purpose here. As one commentator put it: "Sometimes we receive more grace in God's strokes than in his favors." Look at David's response and God's reply: David confessed, "I have sinned against the LORD," and Nathan responded, "The LORD has taken away your sin" (v. 13). Even David's fasting and pleading with God over his son's life demonstrated a contrite man who understood what a God of grace might do. But only when David saw the reality of his sin could he repent and know God's forgiveness.

#### APPLY THE WORD

Today's reading gives us a terrifying, yet hope-filled picture of God's pursuing grace. Terrifying because we must look deep into our hearts and face our sin. Hope-filled because true repentance embraces God's offer of grace and forgiveness. He shows us our depravity that we might know His love. Go online today to find John Donne's full poem and spend time reading it over slowly. Are you ready for God to batter your heart that you might be made new?

## 2 Samuel 12:1-14

I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things. - Psalm 78:2

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

The Dutch painter Rembrandt achieved fame for painting biblical narratives such as the blinding of Samson, Jacob blessing Joseph's sons, and Paul in prison, expertly capturing dramatic moments and characters' inner feelings. One museum official said, "Rembrandt has been admired from his day to ours for making Scripture come to life. He portrayed not just a scene, but also the human drama of what occurred in the text. He made that drama convincing and supremely moving in human terms."

Rembrandt accomplished this not only for viewers, but also for himself. In a painting of the Crucifixion, for example, he painted himself into the scene as a bystander. In another masterpiece, The Return of the Prodigal Son, he painted his own features into the character of the Prodigal.

Godly creativity can reveal truth. This doesn't mean, though, that Christian artworks need to "preach," as we see in today's reading.

Through his story, Nathan led David down a road of moral discernment and discovery so that the king judged himself.

At least nine months had passed since David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, yet the king's heart remained hard. Nathan's parable revealed David's sins of mercilessness, adultery, murder, abuse of power, despising the Lord, and dishonoring His name (vv. 10, 14). The story led him step-by-step, first to judge the main character, then to personal confession and repentance (v. 13; cf. Ps. 51).

Because creativity reveals truth indirectly, it can conceal truth from people without spiritual vision (see Matt. 13:13–14). But other biblical examples reinforce the fact that creative treatments can make spiritual truths more vivid and memorable for those willing to see. Thirsting for God, for example, is made more powerfully concrete in the picture of a deer panting for water (Ps. 42:1). And Paul's extended metaphor of the armor of God helps us imagine more clearly the idea of spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10–18). When our imaginations are engaged, we more easily and effectively understand, remember, and apply God's truth.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Why not enjoy the gift of art today? Whether through looking, listening, or reading, you can train your imagination to see truth. You could choose from the following ideas: (1) Read a novel or other work of literature, perhaps from a list of "great books" at the library. (2) Listen to some classical music, for example, by Bach or Beethoven. And really listen—don't just use it as background music. (3) Visit a museum and view the paintings, sculptures, and other works of art. Tastes differ, so seek out what you enjoy.

## 2 Samuel 13

Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house. - 2 Samuel 12:10

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1974, the song "Cats in the Cradle" was a #1 Billboard hit. It spoke of a young boy who grew up vowing to be like his father. Unfortunately, the father never had time for his young son, and eventually the roles are reversed. The grown son now has no time for his father and the song ends with the haunting words: "And as I hung up the phone it occurred to me / He'd grown up just like me / My boy was just like me."

This theme of the son becoming like the father is portrayed vividly in today's reading, as David's sins of lust, adultery, deceit, and murder are now played out in even darker ways by his own sons. The first part of the story begins with Amnon's supposed "love" for his half-sister Tamar and ends with a horrible encounter when he raped her.

Unlike Bathsheba, who remained largely silent in chapter 11, we get more details about Tamar. In the clutches of Amnon, Tamar's words underscore the depravity of the incident as she pleaded with Amnon: "Don't do this wicked thing" (v. 12). Despite her wise appeals to spare her from disgrace and himself from foolishness, Amnon "refused to listen" (v. 14). His "love" turned out to be only selfish and hateful lust. Tamar found herself cast out of the house, unable to be consoled by her brother Absalom or her father David, and left "a desolate woman" (v. 20). Scripture intends us to see the severity of sin in David's house.

That theme is underscored with further depictions of spiraling wickedness. Jonadab, the cunning schemer, helped Amnon succeed in his wickedness. David himself is portrayed as a weak and ineffective father who saw sin but did nothing about it, despite his apparent fury. And then Absalom plotted his half-brother Amnon's death for two years before serving revenge. Yet despite the troubling picture of chapter 13, and the seeming absence of God (He is never once mentioned), a broader perspective reveals that this is the outworking of God's promised judgment on David and his house.

#### APPLY THE WORD

David's sin and the events of chapter 13 are terribly parallel—Amnon and Absalom have taken on the same sins as their father. If you are a parent or grandparent, seek the Lord's guidance for how to leave a legacy of godliness to your family. While each person is responsible before God for his or her choices, we don't want to instill expectations that excuse our sins. If patterns of generational sin have plagued your family, ask the Lord for His grace and deliverance.

## 2 Samuel 14

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. - 1 Corinthians 3:19

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

A small plane carrying a computer expert, a pastor, and a boy scout was going down. The pilot announced that there were only two other parachutes left after he took one for himself. The computer expert, claiming to be the smartest man alive, quickly grabbed a

pack and jumped. The pastor began explaining to the boy scout that he would sacrifice his own life for the young kid, when the boy scout interrupted: "Relax pastor, the computer whiz took my backpack and jumped out!"

Sometimes cunning and smarts are not the same thing as true wisdom, and today's reading hints at that reality. David's advisor, Joab, saw the king's anguish over Absalom and sent for a "wise woman" from Tekoa. Much like the so-called "wise" Jonadab from chapter 13, this woman appeared to have practical cunning and intelligence. With Joab's help, she told a heart-wrenching story to parallel David's own situation. She had two sons; one killed the other; now the murdering son had been banished and his life was threatened by the people. She sought his return and secured David's oath that her son would be protected from harm.

As Nathan had done, she then turned the story back on David and revealed his double standard—why would David promise protection for her murderous son but do nothing for his own murderous son? David conceded and agreed to allow Absalom's return. Yet is this true wisdom? While Nathan used a story to arouse David's confession over sin, the Tekoan woman used a story to secure Joab's aims.

In the second half of the chapter, both David and Absalom appeared wise in their actions, and yet failed to demonstrate true wisdom in their relationship with one another. David demonstrated a bit of wisdom when he saw through Joab and the woman's pretense, and yet he was unable to handle wisely the return of his son. Absalom demonstrated shrewdness when dealing with Joab, but then only pleaded his innocence rather than seek forgiveness and restoration with his father. The world's so-called wisdom only proved to be more foolishness in David's declining kingdom.

#### APPLY THE WORD

The apostle Paul also knew something about God's wisdom versus the world's wisdom when speaking of the cross (1 Cor. 3:19). Where is the world calling you to cunning manipulation in order to gain control—at work, among family members, even in church politics? Take these concerns before God today and seek instead after the godly wisdom of the cross—selflessness and sacrifice—as you strive to honor God in your various relationships (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

## 2 Samuel 15

If I find favor in the LORD's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see ... his dwelling place again. - 2 Samuel 15:25

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

When a young child wants to take something that doesn't belong to him, often he will simply grab it and run. The wiser, older child will use a different method. Instead of simply snatching the coveted toy when the other is not looking, she might instead begin a small campaign of flattery, veiled kindness, and bargaining. When the moment is right, the child gets what she wants because her cleverness has paved the way.

We see a similar ruse from Absalom. Rather than immediately claim his father's throne, risking rejection by the people, Absalom patiently worked to pave the way. He displayed his kingly persona by obtaining chariots and footmen. He sowed seeds of discontent with the current king by promising better justice. And he worked the crowds, convincing Israel that he was a man of the people, not elitist royalty. After four years of persistent, cunning work, Absalom "stole the hearts of the people of Israel" (v. 6), traveled to Hebron, and had himself declared king. He was so successful that even David's counselor, Ahithophel, joined Absalom's conspiracy.

David's kingdom was in decline. His throne was in jeopardy, and his own son was leading the rebellion, all in fulfillment of God's promised judgment for his sin with Bathsheba. Despite the dark tone of the chapter, don't miss the glimmers of wisdom and faith in David. When David heard about Absalom, he fled the city, both protecting the inhabitants from potential battle and establishing who his loyal followers were.

It turns out his followers were many, including the priests and Levites who brought along the ark of the covenant. Notice, however, David's decision to return the ark to Jerusalem. Rather than attempt to manipulate God through possession of the ark, David submitted to God's will: "I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him" (v. 26). Likewise, when David heard that Ahithophel had betrayed him, David immediately turned to prayer: "LORD, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness" (v. 31). These were dark times for David, but we must also see them as occasions for faith.

#### APPLY THE WORD

In times of adversity, David trusted in God. Do we do the same? Do you know someone who faces adversity in their life right now, and who needs encouragement to continue trusting in God? Determine this week to make a phone call or write a note to that friend or family member, encouraging them to make this time of difficulty a time of growth in prayer and faith. You might even share a lesson from the life of King David.

## 2 Samuel 16

It may be that the LORD will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today. - 2 Samuel 16:12

### TODAY IN THE WORD

Athanasius, a fourth-century archbishop of Alexandria, was a pillar of orthodoxy during his day. He pastored the Alexandrian church for seventeen years but also suffered exile five different times under four Roman emperors. Because of Athanasius's staunch defense of the divinity of Christ, he had numerous conflicts with heretical church leaders and emperors, earning the title "Athanasius contra mundum" (Athanasius against the world).

Given the series of opposition David faced in today's reading, 2 Samuel 16 could likely be entitled "David contra mundum!" The chapter begins with what seems like a positive stroke for David: Ziba, servant of Mephibosheth, was waiting with an array of supplies and refreshment. Yet if we peek ahead to 2 Samuel 19:24-30 we'll see that Ziba's story was utter fabrication. He was no Davidic loyalist; instead he was a conniving liar using David's dire circumstances for his own gain.

Then there was Shimei, a member of the clan from Saul's family. Apparently convinced of David's hand in the deaths of Abner and Ish-bosheth, as well as David's usurpation of Saul's throne, Shimei traveled miles hurling insults and rocks upon David and company. And finally, near the end of the chapter, the advice of Ahithophel led Absalom to pitch a tent on the palace roof and sleep with David's concubines "in the sight of all Israel" (v. 22). The comment in verse 14 could well apply to David's feelings about all the events of his exile: "The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted."

In the face of these exhausting insults, David's response is important: "Let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. It may be that the LORD will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today" (vv. 11-12). In these brief words he both accepted God's judgment for sin and relied on God's grace despite his sin. Even though sin will inevitably create misery in our lives, David's words remind us that we can still turn to the God of grace who may yet bless.

### APPLY THE WORD

Like David, none of us are perfect saints, and sometimes the misery in our lives is the result of our own sinful choices. If you are struggling with the consequences of your sin, let David's words encourage you. Even as you face the reality of sin in your life, turn to God (even today!) and seek His blessing. He is indeed a God of grace and forgiveness. He delights to forgive and to restore.

## 2 Samuel 17

The LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel ... to bring disaster on Absalom. - 2 Samuel 17:14

### TODAY IN THE WORD

In the early 1990s, autostereograms, also known as "Magic Eyes," became all the rage. In this visual phenomenon, a three-dimensional object reveals itself hidden in a two-dimensional picture by focusing the eyes in just the right way. What appears to be nothing more than meaningless rows of colors and shapes, when perceived correctly, suddenly emerges as a floating, three-dimensional image.

The story of David's exile and flight from Absalom works in a similar way. It seemed like the world stood united against David; in today's reading another image appears, hidden behind the exterior scene. Scripture presents a picture of the few significant individuals who remained loyal to David, and God had not forgotten His anointed one. God would strategically use all the characters He had put in place to bring David through this crisis.

First, there was Hushai. Despite Ahithophel's seemingly sound advice (the plan did appear good "to Absalom and all the elders of Israel" [v. 4]), Hushai was called upon to offer his own counsel on how to deal with David. Given the words of 2 Samuel 16:23, this is all the more incredible. Nevertheless, Hushai offered a very different strategy, convincing the king to hold his attack until he had gathered more men. Not only was Ahithophel's advice neutralized, Ahithophel himself was removed from the picture (v. 23). But there was more than human cleverness involved; verse 14 tells us: "For the LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom." God was at work behind the scenes.

The rest of the chapter further demonstrates this point. Word was sent to David through Jonathan and Ahimaaz who had to hide to escape detection from Absalom's men. But notice that a man and wife were willing to do the hiding (and lying) to deter the pursuers. David then safely crossed the Jordan (thanks to Hushai's secret message), and he was met with generous provisions of bedding and food supplies. What began as a dark picture of adversity for David now emerges as something else: God is still in control.



## APPLY THE WORD

Where are God's hidden graces in your life? Do you have the eyes of faith to see them? We often focus on the adversity and pain in our lives, forgetting that God sometimes works in small but important ways to bring us blessing. Focus your thoughts today on the ways God has blessed you. Then keep a list as a tangible reminder that despite how circumstances may feel, we worship a God who cares, who is present, and who does not forget.

## 2 Samuel 18

### 2 Samuel 18:1-19:8

My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you— O Absalom, my son, my son! - 2 Samuel 18:33

## TODAY IN THE WORD

On May 1, 2011 the world heard the news that Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks, had been killed. Information released after his death revealed an interesting irony. Bin Laden was one of the most violent, feared, and arrogant men in the world—he had multiple wives, commanded thousands, and found pleasure in watching himself on TV. But this same man met his end hidden away in a residence of squalor and disarray, some reports indicating that he had spent the last six years of his life in these conditions.

Today's passage is equally thick with irony. Nothing seems to go quite as we might expect, particularly with Absalom. Here was a strong, handsome man, victorious in previous battle, and commander of thousands. He went out to deliver the final blow against his father David. And yet Absalom met his end in humiliation—hanging from a tree by his hair, speared repeatedly by his enemies, and then buried in the ground like an accursed man. The persona Absalom had created for himself (18:18) faded as he met his death.

Other ironies exist in today's passage as well. Consider King David. He issued only one command (18:5) which was brashly ignored by Joab and his men. Instead of congratulating his men and proving himself a leader of his people, David had to be prodded by his second-in-command to step up to his duties. And of course there was the response to the news from the Gileadites. Although the report was about victory in battle, it ironically produced mourning and shame among all Israel.

A key point in this chapter is David's response to Absalom's death. As his cry, "My son, son Absalom!" (18:33) echoed across the city, we have a sobering picture of how sin distorts and twists our lives. Certainly David mourned the loss of a son, but more than that, his overwhelming grief emphasized the reality that his own previous sin produced this pain. Nothing is as it should be in 2 Samuel 18, as is so often the result of our sin.

## APPLY THE WORD

Isn't this the way of our world? Instead of joy and peace, we experience loss and fractured relationships. David's anguish points to our need for the One who can set things right. While sin has wreaked havoc upon our world, we can take hope in the comfort that one day Christ "will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Rev. 21:4). Rest in the promise that He hears your cries and will one day make all things right.

## 2 Samuel 19

### 2 Samuel 19:9-43

Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. - Psalm 24:7

## TODAY IN THE WORD

In J. R. R. Tolkien's beloved novel, *The Return of the King*, Aragorn the true king had spent years wandering Middle Earth, awaiting the day when he would rightfully claim the throne. Finally, after defeating his enemies, Aragorn was welcomed into the great city of Minas Tirith, hailed as the long-awaited ruler of the land. The king had returned, and when he did he bestowed favor on some while forgiving others their offenses against the crown.

Today's passage depicts the return of King David after the rebellion against him, yet this account is hardly so glorious. Among the responses to the return of their king, there was first Shimei. In contrast to his previous abusive treatment of David, we now see a very different man. He rushed to the Jordan (first in line), admitted he was wrong, and repeatedly pleaded for David's mercy. Yet, there is no real indication that Shimei had changed his feelings about David. We get the impression that Shimei would rather play

politics by suffering humiliation and offering support from his kinsman, if it meant sparing his life. While David offered mercy, Shimei's allegiance was political necessity more than heart-felt affection.

If Shimei pleaded his allegiance to David in words, Mephibosheth did so with actions. Contrary to the lie Ziba told earlier (2 Samuel 16), we now learn that Mephibosheth had remained loyal to David, refusing even to care for his body and clothes as a sign of mourning. In response to this new information, David returned half of Mephibosheth's land to him. Yet even at this, Mephibosheth's real joy was over the return of his king (v. 30). He knew that all he had was a result of the king's kindness.

Finally, there was Barzillai, the elderly supporter of the king. He had provided generously when the king was in need (recall 2 Sam. 17:27-29). Now, David rewarded Barzillai's faithfulness with an invitation to live at the royal court. Instead, Barzillai delicately refused the offer, choosing to remain content with his current situation and the king's safe return.

#### APPLY THE WORD

Today's reading is a dim reflection of the day when the true King will return in glory. Consider the reactions of Shimei, Mephibosheth, and Barzillai. How will you respond to the return of King Jesus? Will you find yourself, like Shimei, bowing not out of love but out of necessity? Or will you receive the King, like Mephibosheth and Barzillai, with humility and joy? Use today's reading as an opportunity to reflect on your own preparedness for the return of the King.

## 2 Samuel 20

So all the men of Israel deserted David to follow Sheba son of Bikri. - 2 Samuel 20:2

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

A desolate neighborhood was once infamous for drug deals and drive-by shootings, but because of the generous work of volunteers, new life was breathed into the area. Houses received fresh paint, graffiti was removed from walls, and local playgrounds were repaired and cleaned. While it looked wonderful and inviting, the drug dealers and violent criminals remained. In a short time the neighborhood returned to its former state of danger and destruction.

David's kingdom was something like this. His return promised stability and security, it was only a façade over the same old problems. Especially given the hints from the previous chapter (19:41-43), the events of chapter 20 come as no surprise. In different ways, the actions of both Sheba and Joab are to be expected in a kingdom still facing rebellion.

Sheba is introduced in verse 1 as a "troublemaker." He lived up to this description by his outright refusal to submit to the Judean king. Proclaiming, "we have no share in David" (v. 1), Sheba convinced all of Israel to desert David. Even the king realized how problematic this was. It had happened with Absalom. Now it was happening again, and David summoned both his commanders to pursue the rebel. Sheba's actions were not just a rejection of David the man, they were the very rejection of God's chosen king. Sheba epitomized the outright rebel in God's kingdom, and he had to be dealt with immediately.

Then there was Joab. Although David first appointed Amasa, and then Abishai, to pursue Sheba, it is Joab who takes center stage in our reading. On the one hand, Joab was a loyal commander in David's army. He successfully pursued Sheba and through diplomatic conversation with the woman from Abel, secured both the death of Sheba and the stability of David's kingdom. By the end of the chapter, all seems in order again.

Yet despite Joab's loyalty to David, he was a man concerned only with himself and his exalted place in the kingdom. Just as he did with Abner and Absalom, Joab violently killed his rival Amasa. Nothing would stand in the way of his aspirations.

#### APPLY THE WORD

The church today continues to face Shebas and Joabs. It's not hard to find church members who are either in outright rebellion against God's revealed will, or who offer apparent loyalty to Christ that is ultimately self-serving. Pray today for your local church, and for Christ's church in the world, that God's King would be honored with loyalty and selfless obedience. Pray for your church leaders that they may wisely handle those who challenge the true King.

## 2 Samuel 20:1-22

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. - Proverbs 15:1

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

The Christmas Truce of World War I is a famous peaceful moment. On the Western Front, on Christmas Eve of 1914, German and British soldiers unofficially ceased fighting and celebrated together. According to one letter by an unknown British soldier, Germans

lit candles along the trenches and wished their enemies “a Happy Christmas, etc,” prompting the cease-fire. Perhaps the good news of Christmas Day compelled such an armistice. In our passage today, a woman with a wise word secured a similar truce for her entire city.

The conflict between King David and his subversive son, Absalom, was heightening. Absalom “stole the hearts of the men of Israel” (2 Sam. 15:6) and consequently, David fled Jerusalem (15:13-16). Absalom was later killed following a treacherous encounter with an oak tree (18:9). After mourning, David began to return to Jerusalem (19:8b-15). The faction of Israel rejoined the men of Judah to bring back David, but after crossing the Jordan, conflict arose between the two groups (19:39-43). This sets the stage for chapter 20.

The text is full of war, treason, turbulence, and drama. The death of Absalom was not the final threat to David's throne; the king was flanked by enemies at every side. Amasa, once the commander of Absalom's army (17:25), was restored as commander of David's army (19:13), but quickly proved to be a traitor and died by Joab's dagger.

With Amasa removed, Joab and his men pursued the “troublemaker,” Sheba (v. 1), who holed up in the city of Abel. Sheba was trapped like a gopher. As they proceeded to destroy Abel along with those inside, a wise woman judiciously interceded (vv. 15-16). The unnamed woman pleaded for peace based on the city's historic faithfulness (v. 19); she agreed to a solution which secured a truce (v. 21b), and persuaded the entire city to comply (v. 22). Twice the narrator commended her wisdom to propose an alternative to the existing circumstances (vv. 16, 22).

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The Psalms are prayerful songs that reflect the experiences and emotions of our ancestors in the faith. For example, feeling overwhelmed by surrounding enemies is a common theme, and so is God's sure deliverance. Perhaps you can identify people or circumstances threatening to destroy your life and faith. Or maybe you relate to other facets of the psalmists' words. Consider praying through the Psalms as you seek refuge and worship God. Learning to Pray through the Psalms by James W. Sire is a helpful resource.

## 2 Samuel 21

### 2 Samuel 21:1-14

Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made ... except by the blood of the one who shed it. - Number 35:33

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

According to a study by the National Center for Education Statistics, one often-overlooked factor in the process of learning is a student's background knowledge. While good teaching and student motivation are important factors, the study confirmed that the higher the level of background knowledge, the greater degree of new learning took place among students.

So it is with today's reading, a challenging episode in David's reign, and one better understood with some background information. Israel was experiencing a three-year famine. For an agricultural nation, famine was devastating, but Deuteronomy 28:15, 23-24 also tells us that an extended famine for Israel meant divine cursing. David knew this, consulted God, and learned that the famine was the result of Saul's previous treatment of the Gibeonites.

Again, a little background knowledge reminds us that long ago the Israelites had made a covenant with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9)—a promise apparently broken by Saul in his misguided zeal. Covenant breaking was no small matter in God's eyes, and David's kingdom was feeling the effects. According to Numbers 35:33-34 such bloodshed polluted the land and had to be atoned for.

With that background information, the remaining events make more sense. In light of the divinely sent famine, David sought to reverse God's curses by fulfilling the atonement laws about bloodshed. He went to the Gibeonites, who asked for seven of Saul's descendants to be killed (a far less violent request than war on the whole nation). David agreed, and Saul's descendants were killed. After a moving scene involving the mother of two of the killed, David took their bones, along with Saul's and Jonathan's, and provided a proper burial. After that, “God answered prayer in behalf of the land” (v. 14).

The famine was over. This narrative tells us something about sin. It has real consequences of pain and suffering, and must ultimately be dealt with. If we are tempted to trivialize covenant disobedience, today we see just how serious it is.

#### APPLY THE WORD

The horror of today's passage shocks us, but it should also point us to another equally horrific act of love and judgment, the one on

the cross at Golgotha. But only when we see the seriousness of sin do we see the beauty of our salvation. Consider spending some extra time this weekend reading the narratives of the Jesus' suffering and death in the Gospels. As you read, thank God for His love in providing atonement through Christ's blood.

## 2 Samuel 21:1-14

How shall I make amends so that you will bless the Lord's inheritance? - 2 Samuel 21:3

### TODAY IN THE WORD

In many court cases, restitution is quite important. It's not uncommon for a criminal sentence to include prison time and compensation for the victim, which tries to make up for losses in property, time, or physical well-being. In the Old Testament, this is sometimes called *lex talionis*, or more commonly, "an eye for an eye." This principle lies behind the incident that we read about in 2 Samuel 21.

After a three-year famine, David prays to the Lord and finds out that this calamity is the result of Saul's betrayal of the Gibeonites. We have to look back to Joshua 9:3-27 to learn that the Gibeonites tricked Joshua into a peace treaty so that they might be spared. Years later, Saul violated that treaty when he killed the Gibeonites (v. 2).

Clearly God takes oaths and promises seriously, so there were consequences to Saul's actions. David's compliance with the Gibeonite request for seven of Saul's descendants might shock us, but keep in mind that his action was consistent with "an eye for an eye" concept of justice. We also see how seriously David took his own oaths. Before Jonathan died, David had promised to protect Mephibosheth (see 1 Sam 20; 2 Sam 9), which is indeed what he did.

The end of David's life was filled with a series of heart-wrenching events, including the rebellion and death of his beloved son, Absalom. But the last four chapters of 2 Samuel are most likely intended to give us a final portrait of David as Israel's ideal king. In these chapters we find events that show how David acted righteously, including the incident we find in today's passage. Here we see that Saul's failure impacted the next generation, but that David's willingness to repent and to do justice led to the reversal of the famine.

David represents further fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Israel at this time was a great nation, and they enjoyed a great reputation. Today's passage shows us that David's concern for justice blessed the nations—in this case, the Gibeonites.

### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God takes justice very seriously and is concerned about violations of promises and the oppression of others. Have you ever excused an unjust action toward someone by thinking that that individual probably would have done the same thing? Or perhaps you deceived someone, thinking that he or she wouldn't know the difference anyway?

As we see from this account, we can never anticipate the full consequences of unjust actions. When we live honorably, we bring glory to God and blessing to others.

## 2 Samuel 21:15-22

These four were descendants of Rapha in Gath, and they fell at the hands of David and his men. - 2 Samuel 21:22

### TODAY IN THE WORD

It didn't look like much. A sketchy drawing with an odd mix of colors, most of which did not stay in the lines, hung prominently on the office wall above the man's desk. But what appeared to others as rather insignificant was in fact precious and meaningful art to the father of the child who drew the picture.

We don't get much detail from today's passage. There were battles with Philistines, and each time the Philistines were defeated. We don't get much theological commentary from the narrator either. It reads like the annals of some monarch's archive. So at first, we might be tempted to dismiss these eight verses in 2 Samuel 21 as unimportant. In fact, these seemingly dull verses do provide us with precious and meaningful truths from our Father.

First, we learn the important lesson that David's enemies were defeated: "These four were descendants of Rapha in Gath, and they fell at the hands of David and his men" (v. 22). One of the main antagonists against Israel were the Philistines. We see this as early as 1 Samuel 17 when young David encountered and killed Goliath the Philistine. Now we see God giving peace to David's kingdom by subduing those enemies, just as promised in 2 Samuel 3:18: "By my servant David I will rescue my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines." What God had promised, God delivered. The peace and security David and his people experienced was no

insignificant matter.

Second, notice the way God delivered this peace and security. It is not just through David and his own heroics, but through others as well. In fact, in the first battle David is depicted as weak; he was saved only by the effort of Abishai. Likewise, in each of the next three battles, we learn of new Israelite heroes: Sibbekai the Hushathite, Elhanan, and Jonathan son of Shimeah. Even the men's words of verse 17 reveal that there was great loyalty to David among his people. In today's passage, credit is given to those heroes in the shadows.

#### APPLY THE WORD

In God's kingdom work, how often do you notice the efforts of others who serve our God faithfully? Naturally we thank our church leaders, as we should. But what about the ones who work behind the scenes, teaching our children, coordinating events, cleaning floors, and answering phones? God uses the entire body of Christ to bring about His will in the world. Take time to make an intentional effort to thank those who serve God faithfully, even when most of us are not watching.

## 2 Samuel 22

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. - Psalm 96:1

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

Singing is a natural means of expressing our feelings. Whether a soaring hymn in a cathedral, a soft lullaby to a child, a plaintive lament at a memorial service, or solitary singing in the shower, singing is a creative gift from God. It uses both our souls and our bodies to express emotion, and every culture around the globe employs some form of singing as a part of their emotive expression.

In today's passage we have a beautiful example of David's poetic song of praise to God. In response to God's deliverance from Saul, David offered this song (see Psalm 18 for a parallel). First, David opened with general praise. God is exulted as "rock," "fortress," and "deliverer" (v. 2). Because of who He is and what He has done, the Lord "is worthy of praise" (v. 4).

Next David moved into specifics. In the face of death itself (recall that Saul repeatedly tried to kill David), David cried out to the Lord and the Lord delivered. In a moving description of God's awe-inspiring presence, David depicted a scene reminiscent of God's earth-trembling appearance at Mount Sinai. Verses 7 through 20 could have been summarized simply by saying that "God delivered me," but Scripture wants us to see, feel, and experience the grandeur of our God.

Third, David moved into the reason for God's deliverance, broken into two parts. First, David claimed he was "righteous" and "blameless" before God (vv. 21-25). While this may puzzle us given David's grave sins in chapter 11, we must remember the setting of verse 1. Specifically regarding his treatment of Saul, twice sparing the king's life, David did not sin. But the more important reason for God's deliverance is God's own character: "You, LORD, are my lamp; the LORD turns my darkness into light" (v. 29). It is because of who God is that we can turn to Him for deliverance.

Finally, David ended his song with further adoration and praise of God's character and action (vv. 32-51). We end where we began. God is perfect and beyond compare. He is our provider and enabler. He alone gives victory. He alone is to be praised and exalted.

#### APPLY THE WORD

Thoughtful, poetic praise of God was an important part of David's life. We can offer God our own creative expressions of thanksgiving. As you look back over the past month, how has God been your rock, defender, and deliverer? Try creating your own song, poem, or picture of praise to God by following David's example, exalting Him both for who He is and for what He has done for you.

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## 2 Samuel 22:1-51

He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me. - 2 Samuel 22:19-20

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

Poet, warrior, father, king ... adulterer, murderer—David was all of these things. And yet he is also called a man after God's own heart. Perhaps more than any other biblical character, David embodies the tension of fallen man in a relationship with a holy God. As we examine his song of praise, we see the interaction between God's faithfulness and David's faithful finish.

God chose David, a lowly shepherd boy, to be king over His people, and David represented the Lord well in the beginning (1 Samuel 16-2 Samuel 6). God also initiated an unconditional, everlasting covenant with David (2 Sam. 7:4-17). This didn't, however, mean that David was exempt from temptation and sin. The consequences of his sin with Bathsheba reverberated for years. Despite monumental failure, David repented and the Lord remained loyal to His promises (2 Samuel 12; cf. Psalm 51).

Our reading today is a song of praise that David offered at the end of his life. The sections of the song reflect the relationship between this fallen-yet-faithful man and an always-faithful God. The first portion boasts of God's deliverance (vv. 2-20). David depicted his enemies as powerful waters overtaking him and the vise grip of death strangling him. The Lord, however, is sovereign over the forces of creation, and He is mighty to save.

The second section, verses 21-30, reminds us that our faithfulness matters to God. He responds to our obedience and righteousness. This is not some sort of innate goodness or a salvation by works. It does mean that our response to God's work of salvation is important. Those who seek to serve the Lord will experience His faithfulness (v. 26).

In the third part of the song, David praises the character and provision of God (vv. 31-51). There is a cause-and-effect portrayed here: because there is no God besides the Lord, therefore David is able to defeat his enemies (vv. 32-33). We can have victory because God is with us—"and who is the Rock except our God?" (v. 32).

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Many find in David's words our own desperation for God's help as we encounter torrents of destruction in our lives. His song heartens us that victory is possible because of God's faithfulness, not our greatness, and through Christ, we experience the steadfast promises of Romans 8:35-39. Verse 34 of today's text compares God's gift of strength to that of a deer standing in the heights. To further contemplate the victories over trials available through Christ, consider reading Hannah Hurnard's *Hinds' Feet on High Places*.

## 2 Samuel 23

### 2 Samuel 23:1-7

When one rules over people in righteousness... he is like the light of morning at sunrise. - 2 Samuel 23:3-4

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

A familiar scene in books and movies depicts a family gathered around a dying father. In those moments, the father might express his love toward his family. But he might also take that opportunity to impart some final wisdom, reminding them of his life lessons, and urging them toward certain actions in the future.

Although David was not technically on his death bed, today's reading constitutes his "last words" (v. 1). What words of wisdom did David wish to impart? First, David was careful to explain what kind of words these were. He repeatedly emphasized the divine character of his speech. This was the "inspired utterance" (v. 1) of David, through whom "the Spirit of the LORD spoke" (v. 2). Scripture takes care to point out that this speech of David is delivered by the inspiration of the Spirit, and we must take special note.

Notably, the first part of David's speech was not about David, but God. And what God spoke about were the qualities of ideal leadership: ruling "people in righteousness" and "in the fear of God" (v. 3). Only then will such leadership be like the bright morning sun and the renewing rains that bring forth life. While this was true in part with David's reign, we realize that David did not always rule this way. God's picture of the ideal ruler, then, points us to the day when that picture will be fulfilled completely—in the eternal reign of Christ in His kingdom. David's words contain hints at what is yet to come.

Next, David's speech moved to his own response to God's picture of the ideal ruler. While we see that in part David met these qualifications, this also points us to something bigger, beyond himself. It was not just David in focus here, but his "house"; not just David's present kingdom, but God's promised "everlasting covenant" (v. 5). Again, we look forward for some future Ruler in the house of David that will reign with a righteousness that renews and restores. Finally, those who resist such a Ruler will be discarded and excluded like useless thorns (vv. 6-7).

#### APPLY THE WORD

Today's reading points us to the future Ruler from David's house, who will reign in righteousness and bring forth life. It also highlights just how few leaders in today's world exhibit such biblical leadership. As you long for the day when Jesus' rule is fully revealed, also pray fervently for our earthly leaders around the world today, that like David they might reflect something of the righteousness and godly fear of that coming kingdom.

## 2 Samuel 23:2

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

Peter Marshall, former U.S. Senate Chaplain, once prayed: "Give to us clear vision that we may know where to stand and what to stand for—because unless we stand for something, we shall fall for anything." As a pastor and chaplain, his impact was tremendous. Following his death in 1949, the Washington Evening Star wrote the following: "Living and working in Washington only eleven years, the Reverend Dr. Peter Marshall nevertheless has left his mark upon the whole city. He was a man of contagious spirit, eager and alert, quick to see opportunities of service and to meet their challenge ... he was a builder of the kingdom of God on this earth." Above all, people remember him as a man completely led by the Spirit of God.

## 2 Samuel 23:8-39

But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the LORD. - 2 Samuel 23:16

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

Every year in August, a new group of players are enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. Over 250 athletes have been chosen as "individuals who have made outstanding contributions to professional football." Once selected, the enshrined player is honored with a sculpture that goes on permanent display in the Hall of Fame for future generations of football fans to see.

Today's reading is a hall of fame of another sort: a list of David's mighty warriors. The passage starts with "the Three," and their deeds are impressive. Josheb-Basshebeth killed 800 enemies in one stand; Eleazar stood his ground when the rest of Israel fled; and Shammah single-handedly defended a lentil field against the Philistines. Despite their worthiness as mighty men, don't miss another important message about their strength: "The LORD brought about a great victory" (vv. 10, 12). God was behind their success.

Then there was the incident of water from Bethlehem. The Three risked their lives to obtain water from a well surrounded by the enemy. David was amazed, but refused to drink. The deeds were incredible, but again the focus was on God. Scripture tells us that David "poured it out before the LORD" (v. 16). The blood of these men belonged to God, and David could do nothing but offer to God

such a gift. The real honor belonged to Him.

The list of mighty men continues, from Abishai, the commander of the Three, to Benaiah son of Jehoiada, lion fighter and Egyptian slayer, to the list of the Thirty. There is again a subtle lesson in an otherwise dry list of names. Near the top of the list, the men came largely from the region of Judah (David's own tribe). But as the list progresses, the mighty men came from non-Judean regions in Israel, and then eventually from outside Israel altogether (such as Igal from Zobah and Uriah the Hittite). So while the apparent focus is on their valiant work for David, the list also underscores God's faithfulness to His promise with David in establishing him king over all Israel and beyond.

#### APPLY THE WORD

Numerous men and women in our own lives serve God well. As we remind ourselves of their worthy work, we must remember the One to whom our honor truly belongs. Make a list today of all those you know who have offered their lives in service to God and neighbor and then thank the Lord for all that He has done through these individuals. Pray that God will continue to raise up mighty men and women who are willing to risk all to serve Him.

## 2 Samuel 24

I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great. - 2 Samuel 24:14

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

Thomas Chisolm had a difficult life. Despite chronic illness and long hours of work, he nevertheless understood the unending faithfulness and mercy of God. From that experience, Chisolm penned the now-famous hymn whose refrain proclaims: "Great is Thy faithfulness / Great is Thy faithfulness / Morning by morning new mercies I see / All I have needed Thy hand hath provided / Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me."

We may wonder if this theme of faithfulness and mercy is relevant in today's reading. We may be caught up in the numerous questions that arise about why David's military census was so wrong, and especially why it seems God would incite David to do something that later turned out to be unwise. While these are important questions, too much focus on them obscures the central message of the passage: the mercy and faithfulness of God.

After the census had been taken, we are told that David was "conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men" (v. 10). Here in David's response and in God's actions we see the central theme of mercy. First, David's response tells us something about God. Knowing God's character, David turned to Him in confession and asked for the removal of his guilt. Then, when God provided David three options for punishment, David again relied on the character of God: "I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great" (v. 14). Even in the face of sin and punishment, David viewed God primarily as merciful. Is this the way you view God?

Second, God's actions demonstrated His mercy. As a consequence of David's sin, God punished all Israel. But notice what ended the plague: "The LORD relented concerning the disaster" (v. 16). Likewise, after David followed God's command to build an altar and offer sacrifice, "Then the LORD answered his prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped" (v. 25). Sin has consequences, but God is gracious and will intervene out of His love, forgiveness, and mercy.

#### APPLY THE WORD

As you reflect on this month's study, notice that the theme of sin and consequences has been prominent. But Scripture encourages us to dwell on the mercy and faithfulness of God. Consider ending your study today by singing Chisolm's fourth stanza: "Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth / Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide; / Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, / Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!"

### DEVOTIONALS BY THEODORE EPP 2 Samuel

#### GOD DOESN'T NEED HELP

2 Samuel 1:1-16



Second Samuel opens with the account of a messenger coming to David and telling him that Saul and Jonathan and many others were dead.

Thinking to gain David's approval and possibly receive a reward from him, this messenger, who was an Amalekite, told David that it was at his hands Saul had died.

He said he had come upon Saul, who was still alive even after falling on his own sword. Saul had pleaded with him to kill him before the Philistines came upon him and mutilated his body while he was still alive.

The young man claimed he did as Saul requested. Some Bible students believe the young man told the truth; others believe he lied, but whatever the correct version is, he took his story to the wrong man.

David had always had a strong aversion to raising his hand against God's anointed. Neither would he permit any of his own men to do it. So when this young Amalekite claimed to have killed Saul, David had him put to death.

David did not want what the Lord did not give to him. He would not take by force what God had promised.

So many of us make the mistake of feeling we have to help God fulfill His promises.

"Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all" (1 Chron. 29:11).

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## **WAITING FOR GOD'S TIME**

2 Samuel 2:1-11

Second Samuel 2 opens with these words: "And it came to pass after this, that David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron" (v. 1).

David found, as we will too, that we never lose anything by believing God and then patiently waiting on Him. But we will surely suffer if we take things into our own hands and rush blindly ahead.

The word "Hebron" means "alliance" or "communion" in contrast to Ziklag, which refers to self-will. Being allied with God and being in communion with Him, David was in a place to be led in the will of God.

David's reign began by reigning first over Judah. It was not necessary for David to take the throne; God saw that he received it. God moved him back to Hebron, and his own tribe anointed him king.

Seven and a half years went by, however, before the whole kingdom was put under his hand. David still had to wait, but it was God's time he was waiting for, not people's.

"There is a time there for every purpose and for every work" (Eccles. 3:17).

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## **NOW THEN DO IT**

2 Samuel 3:1,7-18

David's waiting on the Lord indeed paid off. At the end of seven and a half years, God began to arrange events so that David was finally crowned king of all Israel.

Abner, who was general of the armies of Israel, had put Ish-bosheth on the throne of Saul to reign over 11 tribes. However, when Ish-bosheth quarreled with him concerning one of Saul's concubines, Abner retaliated by scheming to turn the kingdom over to David.

A very practical admonition comes from a statement made by Abner that we can apply to our own hearts. Abner went to the people of Israel and said that they had sought for David in the past to be their king, and he added, "Now then do it" (2 Sam. 3:18).

Make Christ king in your life. He is God's appointed King as David was appointed and then anointed for the kingship of Israel.

Remember, the name "Christ" means the "anointed of God," and as such He has been appointed and anointed to be king in our lives. So make Him king today.

The work of redemption that Christ did for us is a finished work. The work of the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, which is forming

Christ in us, is progressive. Have we ever progressed beyond Calvary?

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection" (Heb. 6:1).

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## **THE KING GIVES VICTORY**

2 Samuel 5:1-10

So impregnable did the Jebusites think their fortress to be that they jeered at David and his men, saying that the blind and the lame could hold it against David's army.

"Nevertheless," we are told, "David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David" (2 Sam. 5:7).

David then moved into the city and made it the headquarters for his government, and later on it became the central place of worship for God's people. Eventually Solomon's great temple was erected in Jerusalem.

From this city the Lord Jesus Christ will rule in the Millennium and establish His New Jerusalem of which the Prophet Ezekiel spoke.

There is a rich spiritual lesson for us here. Some habits of sin are so deeply entrenched in our minds and bodies that we have struggled in vain against them from the day of our new birth.

We may have felt it was no use to try to overcome these habits and that we might as well give up. What we need, of course, is to let the King, the Lord Jesus Christ, lead us in the battle against this entrenched sin.

We can never defeat the Enemy by ourselves. It must always be done through the strength of Christ.

"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

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## **WHEN GOD SAYS NO**

2 Samuel 7:1-13

Nathan commended David for his desire to build a temple and then went to his own house. That night God spoke to the prophet, and as an obedient servant, Nathan brought the word to David. The message was no.

God was not going to allow David to build a house of worship for Him. The Lord, however, was pleased with the intentions and the attitude of David's heart in this matter.

Years later, after David's death, Solomon built a magnificent temple and in his dedication message said, "It was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. And the Lord said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart" (I Kings 8:17,18).

Though God said no to David's building a temple, He was so pleased with David's attitude that He made a covenant with him in which He promised to establish the house of David forever.

Can you take a no from God? He knows what is best for all of us. Remember, His promise to David was "I will be with thee for ever" (see 2 Sam. 7:16). This promise is ours also, for He has said He will never leave us nor forsake us (see Heb. 13:5).

"As for God, his way is perfect" (2 Sam. 22:31).

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## **FACING SIN**

2 Samuel 11:1-5

We have seen before that God does not gloss over the sins of His children. David, though a man after God's own heart, was not sinlessly perfect. We come now to the darkest hour in this great man's life.

It seems that the higher the peak of victory, the deeper the fall a believer can sustain. Though David was one of God's choicest men, he gave way to selfish desires that have left a blot on his name that time has not erased.

David's sin of adultery was not the end of his fall. It led him to commit murder also. David sank into spiritual deadness with no apparent thought of repentance until God shook him to the very depths of his soul, and then he returned to his senses and sought God's forgiveness.

David's sin was recorded for our learning. The Bible does not hesitate to reveal and denounce sin. God's Word conceals nothing. When necessary, it pulls aside the curtain and discloses the human heart.

We are stunned as we think of a man like David, wondering how he could have fallen so low. Will God be able to consider him the man after His own heart following this terrible incident?

But can we point the finger at David and excuse ourselves? Are we able to face sin in our own lives, not just in David's life?

"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion" (Prov. 28:13, NASB).

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## **The Unchanging Flesh Nature**

2 Samuel 11:6-15

David's scheme was to bring Uriah home on a military furlough, hoping that he would be considered the father of Bathsheba's child. Uriah was much more righteous than David in this. He would not permit himself to relax until the war was over.

David then resorted to extreme measures. To the sin of adultery he added the sin of murder. He wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. It contained instructions that Uriah must meet death in battle.

Uriah--honest, upright and fully dedicated to his nation and to his king--was given a letter with his own death warrant in it to be handed to Joab, the leader of Israel's army.

If David could not cover up his sin by his plots, then he would seal Uriah's lips so that he could not accuse David of being the father of Bathsheba's child.

Some of us think that when a person such as David falls into such terrible sin, the reason must be that he was not a true believer. We must never forget that the evil nature inherited from Adam, or the flesh, in the believer is no different than in the unbeliever.

Until we see this, we will never understand the sovereign grace of God and God's sovereignty in the methods He uses in our lives.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9).

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## **SOWING AND REAPING**

2 Samuel 12:1-10

David's harshness and lack of pity were due to his being out of touch with God. No wonder he failed to remember the judgment prescribed by the Law. At this point the Holy Spirit gave Nathan boldness to say to David, "Thou art the man" (2 Sam. 12:7).

Through Nathan, the Lord reminded David of His sovereign choice of David, of His protection of him through the years of Saul's bitter enmity, of his elevation to the throne and of the abundance of God's provision for him.

In spite of God's mercies, David had despised God's commandment. God hid nothing from His servant. David was forced to face his sin.

Nathan's message to David not only reminded him of God's tender mercy, love, abundant gifts and honor but also warned David that, because he had sinned, he would reap a harvest of sorrow.

"Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife" (v. 10).

The Lord made it very plain in the New Testament that believers cannot escape reaping the kind of harvest they sow. We cannot hide our sin; we will not get away with it. The secrets of the night are not hidden from God.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

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## **GETTING RIGHT WITH GOD**

Psalms 51:1-17

David asked God to create in him a clean heart (see Ps. 51:10). With regard to the unbeliever, this would be a matter of regeneration, but for the Christian it involves renewal and restoration.

David said, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me" (v. 11).

This is Old Testament doctrine and has to do with the fact that when a person had the Spirit of God and was disobedient, the Holy Spirit might leave him as He left Saul. David did not want this to happen to him.

In this Church Age the Spirit of God comes into the believer's life to stay. Nevertheless, many Christians, some of them Christian workers, have been put on the shelf and are useless to God because of some sin that they have allowed to control, or dominate, their lives.

Our position before God in Christ is assured, but our condition, or experience, if it is to be victorious, must be one of living in fellowship with the Lord.

Then the grace of God comes into full view as we see David saying, "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee" (v. 13).

Once the individual has been restored to fellowship, then, by the grace of God, he can effectively share the Gospel with others.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

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## **GOD'S PURPOSE IN CHASTISING**

Hebrews 12:1-13

God's purpose in chastening us is so that we might learn not to sin. We cannot expect forgiveness and then be turned loose to go on living in the sin that brought God's displeasure.

God fixed a gulf between sin and righteousness. This must be maintained. Absolutely no compromise is possible. No attempt should ever be made by us to reduce or detract from the absolute holiness and purity of God.

Sin is always sin, and righteousness is always righteousness. There can be no blending of them in any way, shape or form. God cannot forgive us at the expense of lowering His standard of righteousness.

In order to teach us to hate sin, God chastens us. If He did not, we would be crawling to Him every five minutes for more pardon because of our continuing to live in sin.

God's people are taught by Him to hate sin by its bitter consequences and are also taught to love righteousness, or holiness. God chastens us as He pleases "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12:10).

God does not want us to come to heaven with nothing to show for our spiritual lives and service. He wants to see abundant spiritual fruit.

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

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## **RESTORATION FOLLOWS FORGIVENESS**

2 Samuel 12:11-23

When God forgives, He at once restores. He never carries a grudge. Nevertheless, we must expect to face consequences because of our sin.

The Lord uses the rod of discipline on His children, and one aspect of that discipline is to let us reap what we sow. While He restores us to fellowship, the bitter cup we have brewed for ourselves has to be drunk.

David lived for 20 more years, but the seeds of murder and lust that he had planted bore fruit in his own family.

Another son was born to David and Bathsheba, and David "called his name Solomon: and the Lord loved him. And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah [beloved of the Lord], because of the LORD" (2 Sam. 12:24,25).

David and Bathsheba's first son was taken from them because of their sin. But in the grace of God, their second son was chosen of God to succeed David on the throne.

Surely this was an indication of God's complete forgiveness of David and a fresh evidence of God's mercy. On one hand we see the severity of God. On the other, we see His grace, since the lesson He taught His child had been learned.

"I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. 32:5).

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## **A MISPLACED CONFIDENCE**

2 Samuel 24:1-14; 1 Chronicles 21:1

This last attack of Satan upon David took place about 38 years after David had ascended the throne and about two years before his death.

Satan was successful for a brief time in enticing David into sin, which should remind us all that we are never free from being tested. At the same time we can have God's victory.

If we fall, we can find forgiveness and restoration if we are genuine in our repentance.

Ordinarily nothing would be wrong with numbering people. Census taking is done periodically by any alert government.

But numbering the children of Israel was a matter of pride. David wanted to know how strong his nation was militarily. His strength really was in God, but David was putting his trust in his armies when he numbered the people.

God's advice was, "You do not need to number the people. I have taken care of this situation." The strength of Israel's army meant nothing if God was not with them.

The same is true in our spiritual life. Until we can say with true conviction, "I am nothing," God cannot do much for us. He has chosen that which is nothing to confound the wisdom of the wise (see 1 Cor. 1:26-29). Our sufficiency is of God, not of ourselves (see 2 Cor. 3:5).

"It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man" (Ps. 118:8).

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## **WHEN IS IT A SACRIFICE?**

2 Samuel 24:18-25

The Lord not only stayed the plague, but through Gad He also instructed David to build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Ornan, the Jebusite (1 Chron. 21:18).

The Lord was very specific about this and left no alternative in the matter.

Why this particular spot was chosen does not appear in the narrative, but later on in 2 Chronicles 3:1 we have this statement: "Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite."

If David had been a grasping, selfish man, he might have looked on this as an opportunity to fulfill the will of God without any cost to himself.

He had been passed over when the plague struck men in Israel, and now a rich man had offered him a threshing floor for an altar and animals and grain for the offerings.

But David refused to bring before the Lord that which cost him nothing. "And the king said unto Araunah [Ornan], Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing" (2 Sam. 24:24).

What a tremendous lesson for us. It is one thing to serve on boards and committees that handle the affairs of others; it is quite another to make decisions that affect us personally.

It is not a sacrifice to the Lord if we give of that which costs us nothing.

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17).

## A MAN AFTER THE HEART OF GOD

1 Samuel 16:1-13

When Samuel was sent to the house of Jesse to anoint one of his sons to be king, the old prophet apparently assumed that since Saul (the present king) was a man of striking physical appearance, God would choose another like him.

As Eliab, Jesse's oldest son, stood before him, Samuel said in his heart, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him" (1 Sam. 16:6).

Then God showed Samuel that the divine standard was not according to a man's physical appearance but according to his heart attitude toward God.

"Look not on his countenance," the Lord said, "or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (v. 7).

Paul referred to this fact when he said in Acts 13:22,23, "And when he [God] had removed him [Saul], he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus."

So God's choice was a heart choice. It is clear from this that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and our ways are not God's ways (see Isa. 55:8,9). God looked for a man whose heart was right toward Him and found him in David.

"But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself" (Ps. 4:3).

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## A LIFE THAT BLESSES OTHERS

1 Samuel 16:14-23

Having been anointed king of Israel, David's life could never be the simple life of a shepherd boy again. He was able to return to his flocks for brief periods, but those times soon ceased.

As Psalm 23 indicates, David never forgot that the Lord was his Shepherd. The reminders of the Lord's majesty and care and the benefits of the quiet pastures and still waters steadied David in many a crisis. And they helped bring about the restoration of his soul when he sinned.

The quality of David's life was such that when he first appeared at the royal residence, Saul "loved him greatly" (1 Sam. 16:21).

David came to dispel with his sweet music the evil spirit that often troubled Saul. He, of course, did not know that David was to be his successor.

On the other hand, David behaved so well and was so humble that Saul had no reason to dislike him; rather, he admired and loved him. He made David his armor-bearer and sent word to Jesse that his son was now attached to the inner circle of the king's bodyguard.

Do our lives give off a sweet fragrance that is a blessing to others? Others should see Christ's life reflected in our lives as believers in Christ.

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

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## THE WAY OF VICTORY

1 Samuel 17:17-37

Saul stated that David was not able to go against the Philistine. Saul said, "Thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth" (1 Sam. 17:33). Here was a man of gigantic stature and who had been trained for war from his adolescent years.

In this way, Saul sought to discourage David just as Eliab had tried to discourage him with criticism and slander. But David knew his God and would not be put off.

Many centuries later Paul put into words the truth that God does not choose the great things of this world to do His work, but He calls on those things that the world considers as nothing to confound the world's wisdom (see 1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Herein lies a basic difference between human reasoning and God's reasoning. David knew his God and had already seen the hand of God upon his own life in a remarkable way.

David said to Saul, "Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him" (1 Sam. 17:34,35).

All of us face lions and bears and Goliaths who defy the living God and scorn His people. But where is the Lord God of David? He is still the same today, and those of us who put our trust in Him will be victorious.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1).

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## **STANDING STRONG FOR GOD**

1 Samuel 17:38-51

God's own program for the ages calls for the complete subjugation of all enemies.

"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:24-27).

When Goliath died, the Philistine army began to run in terror, and the people of Israel followed them to take the spoils.

This is always true. Wherever the faithful servant or servants of God carry through some project to victory, the unbelieving and faithless crowd will always come in, seeking what it considers its share.

That same crowd may have held back the victory for a time through envy and jealousy, but as soon as the victory is won, they want to climb on the bandwagon.

May God give us grace to believe Him and, through faith, not to be defeated Christians but victorious children of the living God. May God stir our hearts so that we will not be ashamed of Jesus Christ our Lord.

"What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee" (Ps. 56:3).

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## **THE PRICE OF POPULARITY**

1 Samuel 18:1-16

Popularity has its attractive side, but it carries with it spiritual dangers. There is always a price to pay for it, and sometimes it is too high. Some can handle popularity and not be hurt by it; others cannot.

Pride arising in the human heart for any reason is not good. Then there are always those who become jealous of anyone who seems to be well liked by others.

Perhaps these dangers, internal and external, help keep a person on the alert. The Lord knows how much any of us can take of these things and always provides a way of escape (see 1 Cor. 10:13).

David knew the source of his strength so that praise only caused him to give God the glory. It did not change his humble attitude toward life. On the other hand, Saul's reaction to the praise given David changed Saul for the worse.

Let us not become discouraged if, after we surrender our lives to God, He permits testings and trials to come. They will always come.

Young people write to me or speak to me in services about this. One of their most common questions is why things are so adverse after they have given themselves completely to the Lord.

We know first from the Scriptures and then from experience that testings are essential for our spiritual training. They are needed before God can trust us with the responsibilities of spiritual leadership.

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

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## **THE EFFECTS OF SIN**

1 Samuel 21:1-10

When he fled to Ahimelech, the priest, David resorted to an untruth.

Ahimelech was afraid that David's presence before him was the beginning of trouble, but David sought to quiet the priest's fears by saying, "The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place" (1 Sam. 21:2).

This was a sad chapter in David's life, but he was not forsaken. God permitted these tests in order to teach David some very valuable lessons. The Lord was preparing him for the throne where he would have to meet much greater tests.

David did not know that his lies would bring trouble to Ahimelech. David was hungry and asked for food.

While conversing with the priest, he saw Doeg, chief herdsman for King Saul, near the sanctuary. This man was an Edomite, not an Israelite, who wore a cloak of religion to cover up the true condition of his heart.

He was a tool of Saul's, cruel and unscrupulous, and it is likely that David's heart skipped a beat when he saw this wicked man.

Had David stayed with Samuel no harm would have come to Ahimelech and his fellow priests; but David's presence among them, of which they were entirely innocent, proved to be their death warrant (1 Sam. 22:9-18).

One person's sin can sometimes have far-reaching effects on others.

"For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8).

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### **Rejected but Strong**

1 Samuel 22:1-5; Psalm 34:8-22

We find in 1 Samuel 22 that David has stopped hiding among his enemies and has returned to his own land. It was during this period in his experience that he wrote psalms 34, 57 and 142.

David was God's anointed king in exile. These men gathered around him, recognizing him as God's chosen one. They were willing to wait for God's time with him and were willing to suffer with him if necessary.

They did for David what we are admonished to do for Christ in Hebrews 13:13: "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."

Paul reminded us in Romans 8:17 that we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him."

Our Lord is now rejected but is gathering together a group to reign with Him. This is only a small army. They are equipped to fight, not with carnal weapons but with the spiritual weapons that are mighty through God. With Christ as Captain this army will conquer.

We can only do great things in the future as we learn to do the right things now. We learn from Ephesians 2:6 that God has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

This is something that is true of us now. We are being trained by our Lord now and can learn to say as Paul did, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

"Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand" (Ps. 37:24).

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### **BEWARE OF CIRCUMSTANCES!**

1 Samuel 23:6-14

We learn from this chapter that people who intend evil can also speak of the Lord and His work in a very pious way.

Saul was told that David had delivered Keilah, and he said, "God hath delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that hath gates and bars" (1 Sam. 23:7).

This was Saul speaking, a man who had been so disobedient to God that the Spirit of God had departed from him. He was a man who, no matter how he prayed, received no answer from God because his heart was not right toward God.

Yet here he was saying that God had delivered David into his hands. We must always be careful of our interpretation of



circumstances.

On a number of occasions I have counseled with different persons who were very obviously following a selfish path. Their one strong argument was that the circumstances favored the course they wanted to take; but it was obvious to me, at least, that they were viewing circumstances in a false light.

I was able to check the subsequent history of some of these people and found them miserable in heart with no joy in the Lord. If our wills are not wholly submitted to the Lord, we are bound to misinterpret the circumstances around us.

"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 16:25).

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## **FAITH WAITS ON GOD**

1 Samuel 24:1-15

No sooner had Saul dealt with the Philistines than he turned and followed David into the wilderness of En-gedi. With an army of 3000 chosen men, Saul went into the area of "the rocks of the wild goats" (1 Sam. 24:2).

When Saul decided to enter the cave, he did not know that David and his men were hiding in its recesses.

David's men jumped to the conclusion that these circumstances were designed by God so that David could take the life of Saul. It does not take a strong imagination to picture how they must have argued and pleaded with him to get rid of his enemy once and for all.

Had David reasoned about this--and he possibly did--he would have recognized that this was a golden opportunity to get rid of his enemy. But David had been learning that reason alone was not sufficient.

He decided to wait on God. What his men urged could be true, but it would be at the sacrifice of faith and of a humble will that was submissive to God if David took matters into his own hands.

"My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him" (Ps. 62:5).

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## **CAN OTHERS TRUST YOU?**

1 Samuel 24:16-22

When Saul realized how close he had come to death and how David's integrity had kept him from taking his life, the king said, "Thou art more righteous than I" (1 Sam. 24:17).

Irritating Saul all the time was this thought: "Behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand" (v. 20).

Though Saul was momentarily stopped in his evil intentions, he had not bowed his heart to the will of God with regard to David's succeeding him on the throne.

Would our enemies be able to rest on our promises as Saul did on David's? Unbelievers have often had good reason to point an accusing finger at Christians for their lack of consistent living.

Some Christians have even observed that it is easier to work with unbelievers than it is to work with some professing Christians. If others should ever have reason to distrust us, the fault will lie in our failure to keep a proper relationship with God.

David, of course, first gained the victory over himself before he triumphed over Saul. This cannot be done at a church altar, though we can make very momentous decisions there.

But the decisions only open the door to a life of walking in victory with God. The life of victory is accomplished through a moment-by-moment fellowship with God.

"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2).

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## **YESTERDAY'S VICTORY INSUFFICIENT**

1 Samuel 25:2-13, 23-27, 32-35

While David and his men had been hiding from Saul in the southern part of the land of Canaan, they were not idle.

They contributed in a great measure to the peace and security of the people in that area. David, with his 600 men, was very active in protecting these Israelites.

Nabal acted as though he did not know who David was, though he undoubtedly knew a good deal about him but was using this method of showing his contempt.

David did not meet this testing as he had met the testing concerning Saul. Then he was gracious and noble and kindhearted, but now he was ready to destroy a whole family.

Abigail was of different stuff than her husband. She decided to do what her husband failed to do and had donkeys loaded with all kinds of food and then went out to meet David.

She recognized that David was fighting the Lord's battles and that he had a right to be incensed against Nabal for his churlishness, selfishness and greed.

God did not permit David to fulfill his basic intention of killing all the males of Nabal's household. God used Abigail to perform this special service to David and to bring him back into fellowship with God.

This should remind us that yesterday's victory is not sufficient for today. We must have a moment-by-moment walk with the Lord so that when each testing comes, we will be victorious for Christ.

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Pet. 3:17, NASB).

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1 Samuel 26:5-14, 17-21 Sin Must Be Judged - **not available**

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## **ACTING IN PANIC**

1 Samuel 27

David was in very difficult circumstances because Saul was constantly hounding him. David had 600 men with him, and undoubtedly there were many families also that had to be provided for.

How do you hide 600 men and their families? It is no wonder, from the human standpoint, that David said, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1 Sam. 27:1).

For the second time David fled to Israel's enemies, thinking he would find a safe place among them. Apparently his reasoning was that if he went to the land of the Philistines, he would be safe from Saul because Saul was afraid of them.

That sounds like good reasoning, but it was only human reasoning. It led David into difficulties that could have been avoided had his trust remained strong in the Lord.

David had acted in panic when he had said in his heart that there was no hope for his safety while he stayed in Judah. This is something all of us need to be aware of. We should never act in panic.

When troubles strike, let us carry them to God and let Him bring peace and quietness of heart to us. We cannot quiet ourselves, but we can be quieted in God's presence. His mercy is there for us at any time.

"The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him" (Nahum 1:7).

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## **The Dilemma of the Disobedient**

1 Samuel 28:1-19

David and his men became bodyguards to Achish, king of Gath, and this soon put David in a dilemma. The Philistines decided to go against the Israelites, and David apparently could see no way out of going along and fighting against his own people. He had a weakness for telling lies when doubts came into his heart. This was one of his besetting sins. He had lied to Jonathan and, through Jonathan, to Saul. He had lied to Ahimelech, and that had brought death to 85 priests.

When Saul saw the Philistines, he desperately wanted help to know what to do. The story of his visit to the witch of En-dor is well known. Samuel had been dead for some time, and Saul had no one he could turn to who would reveal to him God's will. It was in keeping with Saul's character to have issued orders to destroy everyone who sought contact with the dead, such as the witch of En-

dor, and then, when he found himself facing a real difficulty, to seek the help of just such an evil person.

The witch of En-dor was terrified when she discovered that it was not the evil spirit for whom she was a medium who appeared to Saul. It was Samuel himself. Once again we see that Saul's great sin was the sin of rebellion against the will of God. May we always seek to know God's will in order that we may do it.

"But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa. 57:20,21).

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### **A Believer Out of Place**

1 Samuel 29

Now we can see how God delivered David from the dilemma sin had gotten him into in Gath. He must have been a troubled man when Achish told him that he and other Philistine princes were going against Israel.

But when those princes came, they were alarmed and indignant to find Hebrews in the army of Achish. They said, "What do these Hebrews here?" (1 Sam. 29:3).

That was a good question and is a question the world has a right to ask when Christians are out of place. Worldly people seem to know better than some of us who claim the name of Christ that we ought to have standards different from theirs.

We often think that we must mix with the world in order to win the people of the world. We think that by compromising we will win them to the Lord.

This is often an argument given by Christian young people who marry unbelievers. They feel that after they are married they will be able to win their mate to Christ. But it rarely works out that way. Disaster often follows.

God in His mercy has His way of keeping a person from going completely to ruin. David was dismissed from the army by Achish, and this dismissal was his way out. Achish was satisfied with him, but the other princes of the Philistines were not.

This was how God made it possible for David to escape from this great dilemma. God kept David from falling into the greater tragedy of actually fighting against his own people.

"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" (1 Cor. 15:33, NASB).

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### **Seeking God's Will**

1 Samuel 30:1-8, 18-26

When David and his men found Ziklag burned with fire and their wives and their children gone, they wept. This was a bitter blow to all of them. David in particular, however, tasted the bitterness of being without God's protection. He had been miraculously taken care of on many other occasions, but now that protection had been removed for the time being. David had exchanged the king of Gath and a walled city for the Spirit of the Lord and found no protection in man. It is the Spirit of the Lord who protects God's people. How often we forget this.

Some of us might be inclined to think that the normal thing would have been for David to start out after the Amalekites without even asking the Lord about it. We might think this was the obvious thing to do. But remember, David had had enough of his own reasoning. He had followed his own reasoning in going to Gath and by it had escaped from the hand of Saul, but he got himself into more difficulties than he ever expected. The seemingly natural thing to do may not always be the right thing as far as God is concerned. When David's fellowship with the Lord was restored, he let the Lord guide his steps.

God's Word admonishes us: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). David sought God's will, and God eventually gave victory.

"But who so hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil" (Prov. 1:33)