

2 Samuel 19:1-10

Harsh, But Heart-Felt Words

It was told Joab, "Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom." So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people, for the people heard that day, "The king is grieving for his son." And the people stole into the city that day as people steal in who are ashamed when they flee in battle. The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Then Joab came into the house to the king and said, "You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters and the lives of your wives and your concubines, because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you, for today I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the Lord, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night, and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now." Then the king arose and took his seat in the gate. And the people were all told, "Behold, the king is sitting in the gate." And all the people came before the king.

Now Israel had fled every man to his own home. And all the people were arguing throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies and saved us from the hand of the Philistines, and now he has fled out of the land from Absalom. But Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?" – 2 Samuel 19:1-10 ESV

David needed a kick in the pants. He may have been king, but he wasn't acting like one. His faithful followers had just handed him a decisive victory over Absalom and his forces, returning him to the throne of Israel. Yet, all he could do was weep and mourn over the loss of his son. We are not given the reason behind David's deep depression and what appears to be excessive grief over the death of his rebellious son. It is impossible to know if David was grieving over the loss of Absalom or his own sins that had set in motion the whole sordid affair. Perhaps David was mourning and regretting his less-than-stellar parenting skills, which had led to his son's loss of respect for him and, ultimately, his rebellion against him. Whatever the reason behind David's ongoing grief, it had become a problem. Since the victory, there had been no celebration and no words of gratitude from David to his troops. David's dour mood had affected the entire city. We're told the people "crept back into the town that day as though they were ashamed and had deserted in battle" (2 Samuel 19:3 NLT). And "the joy of that day's victory was turned into deep sadness" (2 Samuel 19:2 NLT).

How long would this have gone on? We can't say. But we do know that one man decided to do something about it. Joab, David's long-time friend and the commander of his army, could not sit back and watch David squander this great victory and continue to treat his people with contempt. So, he stepped in and spoke up, and, in doing so, he took a great risk. After all, David

was the king, and Joab was the one who disobeyed a direct order from David to spare Absalom's life. He had personally thrust three spears into the body of Absalom as he hung defenseless from the branches of a tree. Now, he was going to confront the man who could have him put to death for his insubordination. But for Joab, it was worth it because something had to be done.

The Bible has much to say about the power of a well-intended and well-timed rebuke. It is never something we *like* to do. But there is no doubt that there are times when it is exactly what we *need* to do. A rebuke, when done in love, has a curative and restorative quality to it. The apostle James reminds us, "you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins" (James 5:20 NLT). David's excessive mourning over the loss of Absalom was a sin. He was not only offending the sensibilities of his people by overlooking all that they had done for him, but he was treating God with contempt by refusing to acknowledge His hand of deliverance in all that had happened. God had done what David had refused to do, punish Absalom for his murder of Amnon. God had returned the kingdom of Israel to David, and all David could do was spend his days crying.

The Proverbs of Solomon have much to say about the topic of rebuke.

Whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue. – Proverbs 28:23 ESV

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy. – Proverbs 27:5-6 ESV

Solomon would later discuss the same topic in Ecclesiastes.

Better to be criticized by a wise person than to be praised by a fool. – Ecclesiastes 7:5 NLT

Perhaps Solomon, the son of David and the God-appointed heir to David's throne, learned these lessons from David himself. David would later write in one of his psalms:

Let the godly strike me! It will be a kindness! If they correct me, it is soothing medicine. Don't let me refuse it. – Psalm 141:5 NLT

What Joab had to say was difficult for David to hear. His words must have stung. But they were necessary. They were exactly what David needed at this point in his life, because he was blind to the impact his actions were having on all those around him. So, Joab was blunt, even harsh, telling David, "You seem to love those who hate you and hate those who love you" (2 Samuel 19:6 NLT). Ouch! That must have hurt. Those words would have been like a slap in the face to David. But Joab was not done. He bluntly states, "It seems that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died, you would be pleased" (2 Samuel 19:6 NLT).

This was not how David felt, but the exaggerated nature of Joab's words was intended as a wake-up call. His language was meant to shock and shame David. The king had become oblivious to the impact his actions were having on those around him. Can you imagine how the rest of David's children felt about his over-the-top display of sorrow over Absalom? What about his ten concubines who had been sexually humiliated by Absalom on the palace rooftop? David had said nothing to them and done nothing for them. His behavior had become dangerously destructive. His fractured kingdom and damaged reputation needed repair, but instead, he was tearing down the confidence of his people and destroying their trust in him. Until Joab did what needed to be done. And his risky efforts paid off.

So the king went out and took his seat at the town gate, and as the news spread throughout the town that he was there, everyone went to him. – 2 Samuel 19:8 NLT

Joab put his neck on the line. Why? Because he cared for David, and he knew that if he did nothing, the ramifications would be devastating. He had even warned David, "Now go out there and congratulate your troops, for I swear by the Lord that if you don't go out, not a single one of them will remain here tonight. Then you will be worse off than ever before" (2 Samuel 19:7 NLT). Doing nothing was not an option for Joab. He could not afford to sit back and watch David destroy the kingdom. There was far too much at stake.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Sometimes our words hurt, even when spoken in love. However, if our intent is their restoration and reconciliation, it will be worthwhile. If we are motivated by love and focused on restoring the one to whom we are speaking, then our words, while initially hurtful, will prove helpful in the long run. David was in deep sorrow, but it was a misdirected and unhealthy sorrow. It was destroying those around him. He wasn't expressing sorrow over the deaths of the 20,000 Israelites who were killed in the battle. He wasn't expressing regret or displaying repentance for his role in the whole affair. Not once do we see David confessing to God and admitting his culpability for what had taken place. And the apostle Paul provides us with a powerful reminder of what godly sorrow looks like:

For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death. – 2 Corinthians 7:10 NLT

Had Joab not spoken up, David might not have ever woken up, and seen the devastating nature of his actions. Joab's love for David was evident in his willingness to tell David what he needed to hear. To say nothing would have been easier, but it would have been nothing less than an expression of hatred.

2 Samuel 19:11-23

A House Divided

And King David sent this message to Zadok and Abiathar the priests: "Say to the elders of Judah, 'Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his house, when the word of all Israel has come to the king? You are my brothers; you are my bone and my flesh. Why then should you be the last to bring back the king?' And say to Amasa, 'Are you not my bone and my flesh? God do so to me and more also, if you are not commander of my army from now on in place of Joab.'" And he swayed the heart of all the men of Judah as one man, so that they sent word to the king, "Return, both you and all your servants." So the king came back to the Jordan, and Judah came to Gilgal to meet the king and to bring the king over the Jordan.

And Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, from Bahurim, hurried to come down with the men of Judah to meet King David. And with him were a thousand men from Benjamin. And Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, with his fifteen sons and his twenty servants, rushed down to the Jordan before the king, and they crossed the ford to bring over the king's household and to do his pleasure. And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was about to cross the Jordan, and said to the king, "Let not my lord hold me guilty or remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. Do not let the king take it to heart. For your servant knows that I have sinned. Therefore, behold, I have come this day, the first of all the house of Joseph to come down to meet my lord the king." Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the Lord's anointed?" But David said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be as an adversary to me? Shall anyone be put to death in Israel this day? For do I not know that I am this day king over Israel?" And the king said to Shimei, "You shall not die." And the king gave him his oath. — 2 Samuel 19:11-23 ESV

Joab had forced David out his lingering state of mourning over Absalom and demanded that he take back the reins of his fractured kingdom. And the very first thing David did was attempt to win back the support of own tribe of Judah. They had backed Absalom during his attempted coup and, now, David would have to win back their trust and favor. So, he sent the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, with an offer of pardon and restoration if they would only recommit themselves to him as their king. He even offered to replace Joab with Amasa as the commander of his army. Amasa was the man whom Absalom made his leading general. We know little about him other than what we are told in 2 Samuel 17:

Absalom had appointed Amasa as commander of his army, replacing Joab, who had been commander under David. (Amasa was Joab's cousin. His father was Jether, an Ishmaelite. His mother, Abigail daughter of Nahash, was the sister of Joab's mother, Zeruiah). — 2 Samuel 17:25 NLT

Whether or not this was a wise move on David's part is yet to be seen. But it was an obvious slap in the face to Joab and intended as punishment for his role in Absalom's death. Joab had

disobeyed the explicit orders of David to spare his son's life. Once again, we see David making judgments that appear to be motivated by emotion rather than logic or reason. It had been Joab who led David's army against the forces of Absalom and delivered a resounding victory. It was Joab who spoke words of truth to David and commanded him to stop mourning over Absalom and start acting like a king again. But David would reward Joab by giving his position to Amasa, Joab's cousin and the man who had led the army that tried to destroy David. Some might say that this was just a case of political posturing on David's part, an attempt to win back the opposing side. David was just "reaching across the aisle" in a gesture of good will. But was this a wise move? Better yet, was it a godly move? In his effort to unify his fractured nation, was David going too far and sending the wrong message? It is interesting to note that David did little to punish those who rebelled against him, yet he demoted Joab, his long-time friend and the commander of his army. Just as he never punished Amnon for raping Tamar or Absalom for murdering Amnon, David seemed reluctant to mete out justice for the many acts of treason committed against him. And it is important to remember that every person who participated in the coup against David was actually sinning against God, refusing to accept His appointed king and determining to replace him with one of their own.

David even pardoned Shimei, the man who cursed and threw stones at him as he was fleeing Jerusalem. This disgruntled member of the clan of Saul had publicly berated and chastised David.

"Get out of here, you murderer, you scoundrel!" he shouted at David. "The Lord is paying you back for all the bloodshed in Saul's clan. You stole his throne, and now the Lord has given it to your son Absalom. At last you will taste some of your own medicine, for you are a murderer!" – 2 Samuel 16:7-8 NLT

Not surprisingly, it was Shimei who was one of the first to show up on David's doorstep begging for forgiveness.

As the king was about to cross the river, Shimei fell down before him. "My lord the king, please forgive me," he pleaded. "Forget the terrible thing your servant did when you left Jerusalem. May the king put it out of his mind. I know how much I sinned. That is why I have come here today, the very first person in all Israel to greet my lord the king." – 2 Samuel 19:18-20 NLT

And just as on the day when Shimei had hurled rocks at David, Abishai spoke up and offered to take his life, saying, "Shimei should die, for he cursed the Lord's anointed king!" (2 Samuel 19:21 NLT). But, once again, David rebuked Abishai, and told him, "Why have you become my adversary today? This is not a day for execution, for today I am once again the king of Israel!" (2 Samuel 19:22 NLT). Rather than retribution, Shimei was given a full pardon. David was understandably reticent to mar his return to office with additional bloodshed or acts of vengeance. He wanted to be viewed as a peacemaker, not a vindictive, revenge-seeking dictator who would exact retribution against anyone who had wronged him.

But there is an interesting side note concerning David and Shimei that sheds some light on David's attitude toward this man. Years later, when David was nearing death and preparing to hand over the kingdom to his son Solomon, he gave him a series of directives to be carried out after his death. One of them concerned Shimei.

"And remember Shimei son of Gera, the man from Bahurim in Benjamin. He cursed me with a terrible curse as I was fleeing to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan River, I swore by the Lord that I would not kill him. But that oath does not make him innocent. You are a wise man, and you will know how to arrange a bloody death for him." – 1 Kings 2:8-9 NLT

It seems that David's pardon of Shimei was temporary. David would keep his word and not seek revenge against Shimei, but that did not mean his son would not. David was basically commanding Solomon to kill Shimei for him. But Solomon came up with a different plan.

The king then sent for Shimei and told him, "Build a house here in Jerusalem and live there. But don't step outside the city to go anywhere else. On the day you so much as cross the Kidron Valley, you will surely die; and your blood will be on your own head." – 1 Kings 2:36-37 NLT

This arrangement would work well for Shimei until he made the mistake of leaving Jerusalem in search of a couple of runaway slaves. When Solomon found out, he had Shimei executed. So, David's revenge against Shimei was ultimately carried out. He paid for his sins. But it seems that David was constantly letting someone else do his dirty business. He let Absalom carry out justice against Amnon. Then it took Joab to pay back Absalom for his act of treason against his own father. And he assigned Solomon the task of dealing with the rebellion of Shimei.

There is no doubt that David was in a difficult spot. He had a divided kingdom and his reputation was in shambles. Absalom had spent years disseminating vicious rumors concerning David's poor leadership and lack of justice. He had raised questions about David's integrity and undermined the people's trust in him. So, David had his work cut out for him. But what he really needed to do was act like a king. He needed to lead decisively and justly. He could not afford to be complacent or appear to lack conviction. David's desire to be politically correct and treat everybody with kid gloves was going to backfire. David should have spent more time worrying about what God would have him do, rather than obsessing over what was politically expedient. The people wanted and needed a king. Part of the reason they had backed Absalom was that he came across as the kind of leader they had been looking for. He had exposed flaws in David's leadership, and David continued to allow those very same weaknesses to plague his reign.

God had provided a means for the kings of Israel to rule. He had given them His law and statutes. They were to operate based on His will, not what was politically correct or personally convenient. In fact, God had clearly said:

“When he sits on the throne as king, he must copy for himself this body of instruction on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. He must always keep that copy with him and read it daily as long as he lives. That way he will learn to fear the Lord his God by obeying all the terms of these instructions and decrees. This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. It will also prevent him from turning away from these commands in the smallest way. And it will ensure that he and his descendants will reign for many generations in Israel.” – Deuteronomy 17:18-20 NLT

David’s divided kingdom needed a king who was devoted to God and guided by the Word of God. They needed a monarch who was obsessed with doing the godly thing, not the expedient thing. They needed a man after God’s own heart, not a king who spent all his time trying to win their hearts.

2 Samuel 19:24-30

Living Wisely and Well

And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king. He had neither taken care of his feet nor trimmed his beard nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came back in safety. And when he came to Jerusalem to meet the king, the king said to him, "Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?" He answered, "My lord, O king, my servant deceived me, for your servant said to him, 'I will saddle a donkey for myself, that I may ride on it and go with the king.' For your servant is lame. He has slandered your servant to my lord the king. But my lord the king is like the angel of God; do therefore what seems good to you. For all my father's house were but men doomed to death before my lord the king, but you set your servant among those who eat at your table. What further right have I, then, to cry to the king?" And the king said to him, "Why speak any more of your affairs? I have decided: you and Ziba shall divide the land." And Mephibosheth said to the king, "Oh, let him take it all, since my lord the king has come safely home." – 2 Samuel 19:24-30 ESV

This short little vignette offers another example of David's seeming inability to deal wisely and decisively with difficult situations. Here, he is confronted with a situation where he must discern the truth between what Ziba and Mephibosheth have told him. If you recall, when David was fleeing from Jerusalem, Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth showed up bearing provisions. When David asked him where his master was, Ziba told him, "He stayed in Jerusalem" (2 Samuel 16:3 NLT). Then he added a bit of news that would condemn Mephibosheth in David's eyes. He informed David that when Mephibosheth had heard that Absalom was taking over the kingdom, replied, "Today I will get back the kingdom of my grandfather Saul" (2 Samuel 16:3 NLT). In other words, Ziba had inferred that Mephibosheth was siding with Absalom in the hopes of regaining his inheritance. But none of that should have made sense to David. Absalom was not going to hand the kingdom over to Mephibosheth, just because he was the grandson of Saul. And Mephibosheth had nothing to gain by Absalom becoming king. David had already given him all the land that had once belonged to Saul. David had ordered Ziba and his 15 sons to care for the land on Mephibosheth's behalf, while he ate all his meals with David in the palace. You can easily see why Ziba might want to paint Mephibosheth in a negative light and why he had shown up that day bearing gifts to David. David had taken Ziba's word concerning Mephibosheth as truth and rewarded him by giving him all of Mephibosheth's property and possessions.

Then David returned to Jerusalem and found Mephibosheth in a disheveled state. When he questioned Mephibosheth about why he had not fled Jerusalem alongside him, Mephibosheth revealed that he had intended to, but had been betrayed by Ziba.

"My lord the king, my servant Ziba deceived me. I told him, 'Saddle my donkey so I can go with the king.' For as you know I am crippled. Ziba has slandered me by saying that I refused to come. But I know that my lord the king is like an angel of God, so do what you think is best. All my relatives and I could expect only death from you, my lord, but instead

you have honored me by allowing me to eat at your own table! What more can I ask?" –
2 Samuel 19:26-28 NLT

David was faced with a dilemma. He had already awarded all the property and possessions of Mephibosheth to Ziba, which may explain why Mephibosheth “had not cared for his feet, trimmed his beard, or washed his clothes since the day the king left Jerusalem” (2 Samuel 19:24 NLT). Now, David heard the other side of the story and found himself needing to decide as to what would be the just and wise thing to do. And David’s decision?

“I’ve decided that you and Ziba will divide your land equally between you.” – 2 Samuel 19:29 NLT

Mephibosheth’s response speaks volumes and should have opened David’s eyes as to what was really going on. Mephibosheth didn’t argue or appear shocked. He simply replied, “Give him all of it. I am content just to have you safely back again, my lord the king!” (2 Samuel 19:30 NLT).

This whole exchange should bring to mind a similar story that took place during the reign of Solomon, David’s son. Renowned for his wisdom, one day he was confronted with a case involving two women who came to him for justice. It would require Solomon to determine the truth regarding which woman was the real mother of an infant boy. Here are the details provided by the women themselves, just as Solomon heard it:

“Please, my lord,” one of them began, “this woman and I live in the same house. I gave birth to a baby while she was with me in the house. Three days later this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there were only two of us in the house.

“But her baby died during the night when she rolled over on it. Then she got up in the night and took my son from beside me while I was asleep. She laid her dead child in my arms and took mine to sleep beside her. And in the morning when I tried to nurse my son, he was dead! But when I looked more closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn’t my son at all.”

Then the other woman interrupted, “It certainly was your son, and the living child is mine.”

“No,” the first woman said, “the living child is mine, and the dead one is yours.” And so they argued back and forth before the king. – 1 Kings 3:17-22 NLT

What would Solomon do? How would he decide which one was telling the truth? Interestingly enough, his initial decision was similar to that of David. He determined to divide the disputed “property” between the two of them.

Then the king said, "Let's get the facts straight. Both of you claim the living child is yours, and each says that the dead one belongs to the other. All right, bring me a sword." So a sword was brought to the king.

Then he said, "Cut the living child in two, and give half to one woman and half to the other!" – 1 Kings 3:23-25 NLT

Solomon's decision had its intended effect. The real mother, shocked at the thought of her son being put to death, pleaded with Solomon to let him live and to give him to the other woman. The other woman, driven by jealousy and not by love for the baby, callously replied, "All right, he will be neither yours nor mine; divide him between us!" (1 Kings 3:26 NLT). Solomon had heard all he needed to hear. He wisely ruled, "Do not kill the child, but give him to the woman who wants him to live, for she is his mother!" (1 Kings 3:27 NLT).

So, what does this have to do with David, Ziba, and Mephibosheth? The responses of the real mother and that of Mephibosheth were evidence of the veracity of their story. Solomon was wise enough to see through the lies of the other woman. But David, having already given all of the land of Mephibosheth to Ziba without giving him the benefit of a doubt or having heard his side of the story, decided to split the difference and give each of them half. But one of them was lying and deserved nothing. When Mephibosheth told David, "Give him all of it", he should have recognized who was telling the truth and reinstated all the lands of Saul back to Mephibosheth. But instead, he rewarded Ziba for his deception.

David was in a conciliatory mood and didn't want to offend anybody. He was making peace with everybody. At this point in his life, just getting along was more important than justice. Winning friends and influencing enemies was first and foremost on his mind. But he was the king and it was his duty to dispense justice. It was his God-given responsibility to rule righteously and justly, not based on expedience or convenience. It would be David's son, Solomon, who would later write these powerful words, that stand in stark contrast to the actions of David.

*Give your love of justice to the king, O God,
and righteousness to the king's son.
Help him judge your people in the right way;
let the poor always be treated fairly.
May the mountains yield prosperity for all,
and may the hills be fruitful.
Help him to defend the poor,
to rescue the children of the needy,
and to crush their oppressors.
May they fear you as long as the sun shines,
as long as the moon remains in the sky.
Yes, forever! – Psalm 72:1-5 NLT*

The prophet Isaiah speaks of a future day when a righteous king will reign. He tells of a king who will rule justly and righteously.

*Look, a righteous king is coming!
And honest princes will rule under him.
Each one will be like a shelter from the wind
and a refuge from the storm,
like streams of water in the desert
and the shadow of a great rock in a parched land.*

*Then everyone who has eyes will be able to see the truth,
and everyone who has ears will be able to hear it.
Even the hotheads will be full of sense and understanding.
Those who stammer will speak out plainly.
In that day ungodly fools will not be heroes.
Scoundrels will not be respected. – Isaiah 32:1-5 NLT*

That king will be Jesus. He will rule on this earth from the throne of David in Jerusalem. He will not be swayed by the lies of ungodly fools or motivated by the deceptive actions of scoundrels. He will be anything but politically correct. He will not rule selfishly or shortsightedly. He will always be concerned with the glory of God and the good of the people. David would ultimately prove to be a good king, some might even say, a great king. But he was nothing compared to the King to come. He was a man, marred by sin and easily influenced by the falsehood within his own heart and the deceptive motives of those around him. But what we can learn from the life of David is the desperate need we all have for God's help in leading well. Without His assistance, we are easily deceived by our own hearts and by the schemes of others. We are easy prey to the enemy. Only God can provide us with the wisdom we need to lead our families, employees, churches, and lives well.

2 Samuel 19:31-43

How Things Turn Out When God Gets Left Out

Now Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim, and he went on with the king to the Jordan, to escort him over the Jordan. Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. He had provided the king with food while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. And the king said to Barzillai, "Come over with me, and I will provide for you with me in Jerusalem." But Barzillai said to the king, "How many years have I still to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am this day eighty years old. Can I discern what is pleasant and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats or what he drinks? Can I still listen to the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king? Your servant will go a little way over the Jordan with the king. Why should the king repay me with such a reward? Please let your servant return, that I may die in my own city near the grave of my father and my mother. But here is your servant Chimham. Let him go over with my lord the king, and do for him whatever seems good to you." And the king answered, "Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do for him whatever seems good to you, and all that you desire of me I will do for you." Then all the people went over the Jordan, and the king went over. And the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his own home. The king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him. All the people of Judah, and also half the people of Israel, brought the king on his way.

Then all the men of Israel came to the king and said to the king, "Why have our brothers the men of Judah stolen you away and brought the king and his household over the Jordan, and all David's men with him?" All the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, "Because the king is our close relative. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we eaten at all at the king's expense? Or has he given us any gift?" And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, "We have ten shares in the king, and in David also we have more than you. Why then did you despise us? Were we not the first to speak of bringing back our king?" But the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel. – 2 Samuel 19:31-43 ESV

These closing verses of Chapter 19 set up what is going to happen next. As David attempted to reestablish his claim to the throne of Israel, he faced the task of rewarding those who had stood by his side during Absalom's short-lived coup, but also of winning back the allegiance of those who had sided with his son in the rebellion. There were some, like Barzillai, who had aided David in his escape from Jerusalem. This wealthy octogenarian had provided food for David and his followers while they were in Mahanaim. Barzillai was from Gilead, a region east of the Jordan River that was divided between the tribes of Gad and Manasseh. We are not told which tribe Barzillai belonged to, but only that he proved to be an ally to David during those difficult days after the loss of his throne. Barzillai gratefully rejected David's desire to reward him because of his advanced age. Rather than accept David's gracious offer to return to Jerusalem and live out his days in David's palace, he preferred to return home and die in his own land. But he offered Chimham, most likely his son, to stand as his proxy. Chimham would return to Jerusalem with David and receive the benefit of the king's gratitude.

But there was a storm brewing. David's return to the throne was not going to be easy, and simply handing out rewards to those who had stood by his side was not going to make the transfer of power any easier. One of the first things David did when he received his abrupt wake-up call from Joab and stopped his excessive mourning over Absalom was to call for the tribe of Judah to come to his aid. He sent a message to the leaders of Judah.

"Why are you the last ones to welcome back the king into his palace? For I have heard that all Israel is ready. You are my relatives, my own tribe, my own flesh and blood! So why are you the last ones to welcome back the king?" – 2 Samuel 19:11-12 NLT

This wasn't exactly the case. David was a bit optimistic in his assessment of the situation, because the text actually paints a slightly different picture.

Meanwhile, the Israelites who had supported Absalom fled to their homes. And throughout all the tribes of Israel there was much discussion and argument going on. The people were saying, "The king rescued us from our enemies and saved us from the Philistines, but Absalom chased him out of the country. Now Absalom, whom we anointed to rule over us, is dead. Why not ask David to come back and be our king again?" – 2 Samuel 19:9-10 NLT

Not everybody was lining up to welcome David home. The Israelites, representing ten of the other tribes besides Judah and the Benjamites, were divided in their opinions about David. Many were scared that he would seek retribution against them for siding with Absalom. Others argued that David had been successful against the enemies of Israel, but had fled at the sight of Absalom. The only real vote of confidence in David was that, since Absalom was dead, he was the most obvious choice as a replacement. Yet, David was under the somewhat deluded impression that all of Israel was ready to welcome him back, and so he used this thought to goad the tribe of Judah into action. But in doing this, David made his problem worse.

We're told, "All the troops of Judah and half the troops of Israel escorted the king on his way" (2 Samuel 19:40 NLT). Not everyone was on board with David's return. Many were in hiding, fearing what David was going to do when he returned to power. The leaders of the ten tribes expressed to David their concern over what they saw as a case of cronyism.

But all the men of Israel complained to the king, "The men of Judah stole the king and didn't give us the honor of helping take you, your household, and all your men across the Jordan." – 2 Samuel 19:41 NLT

It was important to these men that they have the favor of the king, because they were the ones who had sided against him. So, when they saw the men of David's tribe of Judah getting the honor of escorting him across the Jordan, they became jealous and fearful. They knew their actions against David were going to make it difficult to win back his favor, and they were concerned that David's close ties to his own tribe would make reconciliation that much more difficult. So, an argument broke out.

It is important to remember that these people had just fought a major battle against one another in which 20,000 men had died. There were still emotional and physical wounds to be healed. The civil war that had just taken place, while short-lived, had left deep-seated animosities between the tribes. Every step David took, both literally and figuratively, was going to be overanalyzed, and his leadership skills would be tested like never before. His ability to navigate the stormy and dangerous waters of reunification was going to require a wisdom greater than he possessed. If David ever needed God, it was now. But there is a marked absence of any reference to God in any of this narrative. On so many other occasions in David's life, he sought input from God. He would refrain from making any decisions until he had heard from God. But here, in the heat of the moment, David seems to be acting out of impulse. Perhaps he was in a hurry to put this nasty episode behind him and restore normalcy to his kingdom. But it appears that every decision he made blew up in his face. He was learning the difficult lessons that come with leadership. Simply wearing the crown did not make him a king. Getting his kingdom back wasn't going to win his people back. Handing out rewards was not going to heal the wounds that plagued his nation. David needed the wisdom of God. Without His help, David was like any other man, susceptible to outside influences, filled with inner conflicts, motivated by fear and self-preservation, capable of anger, and always subject to sin.

Far too often, we read the stories of David's life and attempt to make him an icon of virtue, a model for spirituality and godly leadership. But David was a man. Yes, he was a man after God's own heart, but that does not mean he always did what God would have him do. The real lessons to be learned from the life of David have to do with the faithfulness of God, not the righteousness of David. His life is a stark reminder of our desperate need for God. David was God's anointed king and had been hand-picked for his role. But without constant reliance upon God, David was an accident waiting to happen. Apart from God, his life tended to end up a train wreck with bodies strewn across the landscape.

The good news of the gospel is not just that we have been chosen by God to receive His mercy and grace made available through His Son's death on the cross. It is that we have access to His wisdom and power every day of our lives. We have forgiveness for the sins we will inevitably commit. We have His unfailing love, even when we fail to love Him wholly or consistently. David wasn't a perfect king, but he was God's king, and his life provides us with a powerful reminder that our best days will be those in which we recognize our weakness and our need for God's power. Trying to be king without God never worked out well for David. Trying to be a Christian without God will never turn out well for us either. It is not the title that sets us apart; it is our relationship with and dependence upon God.

2 Samuel 20:1-13

When God's People Live Ungodly

Now there happened to be there a worthless man, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite. And he blew the trumpet and said, "We have no portion in David, and we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel!"

So all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah followed their king steadfastly from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

And David came to his house at Jerusalem. And the king took the ten concubines whom he had left to care for the house and put them in a house under guard and provided for them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as if in widowhood.

Then the king said to Amasa, "Call the men of Judah together to me within three days, and be here yourself." So Amasa went to summon Judah, but he delayed beyond the set time that had been appointed him. And David said to Abishai, "Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom. Take your lord's servants and pursue him, lest he get himself to fortified cities and escape from us." And there went out after him Joab's men and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men. They went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri. When they were at the great stone that is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was wearing a soldier's garment, and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath fastened on his thigh, and as he went forward it fell out. And Joab said to Amasa, "Is it well with you, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not observe the sword that was in Joab's hand. So Joab struck him with it in the stomach and spilled his entrails to the ground without striking a second blow, and he died.

*Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri. And one of Joab's young men took his stand by Amasa and said, "Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab." And Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the highway. And anyone who came by, seeing him, stopped. And when the man saw that all the people stopped, he carried Amasa out of the highway into the field and threw a garment over him. When he was taken out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri. – 2 Samuel 20:1-13
ESV*

David had not yet made it back inside the walls of Jerusalem when another disaster struck. He had just eliminated one rebellion when another one raised its ugly head. The ten disgruntled tribes of Israel, unhappy with what they viewed as David's favoritism for his own tribe, decided to throw in their lot with Sheba, a Benjamite. This "worthless fellow" took advantage of the unstable conditions in Israel and called for another rebellion against David. It is impossible to read this account and not recall the curse God had placed on David as a result of his affair with Bathsheba.

“Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.” – 2 Samuel 12:10 ESV

There was going to be more bloodshed. And more people were going to die unnecessarily, all as a direct result of David’s sin. The conditions in his kingdom remained unstable and insecure. Even when he finally made it back to Jerusalem, David had to deal with the ten concubines whom Absalom had sexually violated and publicly humiliated. It must be remembered that what happened to them was also tied to David’s adulterous affair with Bathsheba. God had told David:

“Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.” – 2 Samuel 12:11-12 ESV

These women were shamed and forced to remain in a state of widowhood, not because of anything they had done, but because of David’s sins. The wake of human misery and destroyed lives that David left behind him is unprecedented. He had lost three sons to death. His daughter had been violated by her stepbrother. Tens of thousands of his people had been killed in an unnecessary civil war, and the death toll would continue to rise. When David called for his troops to put down the uprising led by Sheba, he placed Amasa in command. It’s important to remember that David had replaced Joab with Amasa as the commander of his army, all because Joab had disobeyed a direct order and killed Absalom. Now, Joab was going to take the life of Amasa, in an attempt to eliminate the competition and get his old job back. And the day would come when Joab would get what he deserved. But it would not be under David’s watch. Just as he had done with Shimei, David put off meting out justice, leaving it to his son Solomon to do when he took the throne. It would be Solomon who eventually dealt with Joab for his murders of Abner and Amasa.

“Do as he has said, strike him down and bury him, and thus take away from me and from my father’s house the guilt for the blood that Joab shed without cause. The Lord will bring back his bloody deeds on his own head, because, without the knowledge of my father David, he attacked and killed with the sword two men more righteous and better than himself, Abner the son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah. So shall their blood come back on the head of Joab and on the head of his descendants forever. But for David and for his descendants and for his house and for his throne there shall be peace from the Lord forevermore.” – 1 Kings 2:31-33 ESV

But there was no peace in Israel, at least not in David’s day. The body count was mounting. The violence was escalating. The instability of David’s kingdom seemed to be getting worse, not better. David was still a man after God’s own heart, but his kingdom was in disarray. He was

learning the painful lesson that his relationship with God did not protect him from failure or inoculate him from the ramifications of sin.

The people of God are just as prone to bad decision-making as anybody else. Believers can undervalue the wisdom of God and overlook the sins taking place around them. We can surround ourselves with bad counselors, put off making difficult decisions, give in to impulsive desires, and leave God out of our daily lives. When we do, we will find ourselves facing the same kind of unnecessary outcomes. David loved God and had a deep-seated desire to serve Him. But his desires needed to show up in his behavior. His love for God must be accompanied by a commitment to obey God. Any hope he had of serving the people of God as the faithful shepherd of God depended on his complete reliance upon God.

As believers, we are God's people living in a godless environment, surrounded by ungodly people who don't share our views of or love for God. It is difficult to live as a child of God on this earth, but we make it more difficult by refusing to rely upon Him. There will always be a temptation to do things our way and assume that our relationship with God will provide us with some kind of invisible force field, protecting us from the dangers of sin. But our salvation, while it has delivered us from the judgment of sin, does not inoculate us from the temptation to sin. That is why Paul so strongly urged his readers to rely upon the Holy Spirit.

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. – Galatians 5:16-17 NLT

A man after God's own heart who refuses to let God have his heart will find himself surrounded by discord and difficulty. Our ability to survive and thrive on this planet is dependent upon our commitment to remain reliant upon God. David would continue to learn that invaluable lesson by discovering the reality that being God's hand-picked king meant nothing if he did not live as a God-dependent man.

2 Samuel 20:14-26

Wisdom Works

And Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Beth-maacah, and all the Bichrites assembled and followed him in. And all the men who were with Joab came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-maacah. They cast up a mound against the city, and it stood against the rampart, and they were battering the wall to throw it down. Then a wise woman called from the city, "Listen! Listen! Tell Joab, 'Come here, that I may speak to you.'" And he came near her, and the woman said, "Are you Joab?" He answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Listen to the words of your servant." And he answered, "I am listening." Then she said, "They used to say in former times, 'Let them but ask counsel at Abel,' and so they settled a matter. I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel. Why will you swallow up the heritage of the Lord?" Joab answered, "Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy! That is not true. But a man of the hill country of Ephraim, called Sheba the son of Bichri, has lifted up his hand against King David. Give up him alone, and I will withdraw from the city." And the woman said to Joab, "Behold, his head shall be thrown to you over the wall." Then the woman went to all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw it out to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and they dispersed from the city, every man to his home. And Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king.

Now Joab was in command of all the army of Israel; and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was in command of the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and Adoram was in charge of the forced labor; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was the recorder; and Sheva was secretary; and Zadok and Abiathar were priests; and Ira the Jairite was also David's priest. – 2 Samuel 20:14-26 ESV

Finally, like a cool breeze on a hot summer day, we get a refreshing glimpse of true wisdom, despite all the folly that has filled the preceding chapters. Time after time, we have seen impulsiveness, anger, fear, and recrimination rule the day. Decisions have been made based on nothing more than raw emotion. Highly intelligent people have made some very foolish choices. Godly individuals have made ungodly decisions, and the results have been death and destruction. Joab has brutally murdered Amasa, leaving his body lying in the middle of the road for all to see. Now he is besieging the city of Abel, in an attempt to capture Sheba, the leader of yet another rebellion against David. They have surrounded the city and erected siege walls against it. They are in the process of attempting to knock down the city's walls, and the prospects of yet more bloodshed loom large. Then wisdom shows up.

This short little vignette, located where it is in the narrative of David's life, provides a stark counterpoint to all that we have seen so far. In it, we are introduced to an unnamed woman who is recognized for her wisdom. She is referred to as a "wise woman," and, other than that, we know nothing else about her. She resides in the city of Abel, and like everyone else residing in the city, she is forced to watch as David's troops batter the walls in an attempt to wreak destruction. But no one knows why. There is no indication that anyone inside the city even knew that Sheba was there or what he had done. Outside the walls, Joab made no attempt to

parlay with the city officials to negotiate the handover of Sheba. Driven by the same emotions that led him to kill Absalom and Amasa, Joab is foolishly and stubbornly focused on one thing: The capture and death of Sheba. Even the destruction of a city filled with fellow Israelites would not stand in his way.

Then wisdom showed up in the form of a nameless woman who saw a serious problem and had the foresight to do something about it. As all her fellow residents stood by helplessly and hopelessly, she decided to act. She called out to Joab, asking for an opportunity to talk with him. Amid all the chaos and confusion surrounding the siege, she calmly called for a conversation to discuss what was going on and how they might avert a tragedy. Once she had Joab's attention, she said to him:

"There used to be a saying, 'If you want to settle an argument, ask advice at the town of Abel.' I am one who is peace loving and faithful in Israel. But you are destroying an important town in Israel. Why do you want to devour what belongs to the Lord?" – 2 Samuel 20:18-19 NLT

She reminds Joab that the city had a reputation for wisdom. It was also an important town in Israel. He was not attacking a foreign city filled with pagans; he was threatening the lives of his fellow Israelites. The woman describes herself as peace-loving and faithful, intentionally contrasting herself with Joab and his troops. She wanted peace while Joab wanted to devour what belonged to God, and she wanted to know why. That's when Joab informed her of Sheba's presence in their midst and of the crime for which he was guilty. This was news to the woman and the rest of the people inside the city walls. They had no idea they were harboring a fugitive from justice. When the woman discovered that the cause of all their problems was a single individual who was guilty of leading a rebellion against the king, she didn't hesitate. She met Joab's demands and delivered Sheba to him, but she chose to do so in an interesting way. She convinced the leaders of the city to cut off Sheba's head and throw it over the wall. We are not told why she chose this method, but it would seem to indicate her distrust of Joab. She wasn't about to open the city walls to let Sheba leave, because she feared that Joab and his troops might storm the city anyway. She also knew that if Sheba was guilty of treason against the king, the penalty was death, so she decided to go ahead and speed up the process, giving Sheba the fate he deserved, and providing his head as proof that the guilty one had been dealt with effectively.

By keeping the city gates closed and throwing Sheba's head over the wall, she protected the citizens inside and tested the reliability of Joab's words. If Joab had achieved what he wanted and failed to call off the siege, he would have exposed his deceit, at minimal risk to the city's inhabitants. So, her decision to cut off Sheba's head was a wise move on her part, and it accomplished what she had set out to do: Deliver her city from further harm. Joab and his troops dispersed, leaving the residents of Abel unharmed. Her wise counsel spared the city and prevented Joab from committing yet another crime of passion.

This section of the story is immediately followed by a seemingly out-of-place listing of David's key administrative heads. You see the names of Joab, Benaiah, Adoniram, Johoshaphat, Sheva, Zakok, Abiathar, and Ira. Among them are David's military commander, the captain of his bodyguard, his royal historian, court secretary, and priests. These prominent men served as David's inner circle, providing him with counsel and acting as his royal cabinet. They were well-known, revered, powerful, and influential. Their names and titles are mentioned, but nothing is said about their character. They stand in contrast to the woman in the story who, though unknown and unnamed, was recognized for her wisdom. It wasn't *who* she was that mattered; it was *what* she was – a wise woman. She was known for having the character quality of wisdom, and she proved it by her behavior. The men whose names are listed in the closing verses of this chapter had the titles and prestige of serving on the king's royal cabinet. But their positions would prove meaningless unless they possessed wisdom. Solomon, David's son and successor to his throne, was known for the wisdom given to him by God. He would later write these important words concerning wisdom.

*For the Lord grants wisdom!
 From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.
 He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest.
 He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.
 He guards the paths of the just
 and protects those who are faithful to him.*

*Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair,
 and you will find the right way to go.
 For wisdom will enter your heart,
 and knowledge will fill you with joy.
 Wise choices will watch over you.
 Understanding will keep you safe. – Proverbs 2:6-11 NLT*

It was this woman's wisdom that diverted a tragedy. She had knowledge and understanding. She possessed common sense. She knew what was right, just, and fair. She saw the right way to go and she went there. And her efforts kept her city safe and resulted in much joy. We can only imagine the celebration that took place inside the city walls of Abel that night after the siege was lifted and the troops had dispersed. Wisdom brought joy. Which is why Solomon goes on to say, "So follow the steps of the good, and stay on the paths of the righteous" (Proverbs 2:20 NLT).

David would have done well to surround himself with individuals like the wise woman from Abel. He seemed to have a tendency to choose men who were untrustworthy and prone to foolishness. When it comes to leadership, character should always trump external characteristics. In fact, if we go back to the day when God sent Samuel to the house of Jesse to anoint the next king of Israel, He told the prophet:

“Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” – 1 Samuel 16:7 NLT

Wisdom is God-given and resides in the heart, not the brain. It is far more than intellect. Some of the brightest people can be the greatest fools. The essence of foolishness is a rejection of God. It is living as if God does not exist or does not matter. Paul describes the plight of those who, in their intelligence, determine they don’t believe in God or end up creating a god of their own choosing.

Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. – Romans 1:21-22 NLT

Wisdom really does work. But it’s only available to those who know God and fear Him.

2 Samuel 21:1-14

Seeking the Face of God

Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the Lord. And the Lord said, "There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death." So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites. Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah. And David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the Lord?" The Gibeonites said to him, "It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel." And he said, "What do you say that I shall do for you?" They said to the king, "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the Lord at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the Lord." And the king said, "I will give them."

But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the Lord that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. The king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; and he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the Lord, and the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest.

Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell upon them from the heavens. And she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day, or the beasts of the field by night. When David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa. And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan; and they gathered the bones of those who were hanged. And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father. And they did all that the king commanded. And after that God responded to the plea for the land. – 2 Samuel 21:1-14 ESV

These closing chapters of the book of Second Samuel function as a kind of appendix, presenting six unrelated stories in no chronological order, but are intended to provide us with a historical overview of David's life. The first involves a famine, which probably took place early in David's reign. It had lasted three years and brought much devastation to the people of Israel. But it was not until David sought the face of God that he became aware of the cause of the famine. It is significant to note that, early in David's reign, he seemed to have been more prone to seek the

face of God when faced with a difficulty. But he still waited three years to ask God what was going on. And God told him, “The famine has come because Saul and his family are guilty of murdering the Gibeonites” (2 Samuel 21:1 NLT). Now, before we move on in the story, we must look back at how all of this happened. Back in Joshua 9, we are told of an incident concerning the people of Israel as they were attempting to take possession of the land of Canaan, promised to them by God. Joshua was approached by some Gibeonites, disguised as weary travelers and presenting themselves as representatives of a distant nation. They were seeking to make a treaty with the Israelites. The Gibeonites, who were actually local occupants of the land, had heard what Israel had done to the cities of Jericho and Ai, and they feared they might be next. So, they came up with a plan to deceive the Israelites into making a treaty with them. And it worked.

But it worked because Joshua “did not ask counsel from the Lord” (Joshua 9:14 NLT). Instead, he signed a treaty with the Gibeonites, vowing not to attack them. Even when the Israelites discovered they had been deceived, they could not do anything about it, because they had “sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel” (Joshua 9:18 NLT). Why is this important? It reveals a powerful lesson regarding the danger of God’s people failing to seek His wisdom and direction. We have seen over and over again what happened to David when he refused to seek God’s input. It never ended well. This incident with the Gibeonites is yet another reminder that failure to seek God may not have immediate consequences, but it will inevitably come back to haunt you.

Years later, when Saul had become king of Israel, he broke the very same covenant with the Gibeonites by killing some of them. The details of this incident are not recorded in the book of First Samuel, but David does not attempt to dispute that it happened. First, it was God who had said that it had happened. Secondly, the Gibeonites confirmed it. There is little doubt that Saul had not sought the will of God when he had committed this violation of the covenant. And his sin was now having its inevitable consequences. As a result, David was forced to put seven of Saul’s sons to death as a form of retribution to satisfy the demands of the Gibeonites. The famine would not end until this situation was made right and justice was served.

One of the lessons we must take away from this story is the residual nature of our sins. Joshua had failed to seek God and had made a covenant that went directly against the will of God. God had commanded the complete destruction and elimination of the occupants of the land. No treaties were to be made. Joshua’s failure to listen to God would leave the Gibeonites in the land. Then Saul would end up putting some of them to death, breaking the covenant Joshua had made with them. As a result, the people of Israel would suffer through a three-year-long famine, all because Saul had violated a treaty with the Gibeonites, sworn before God Himself. One sin had led to another, and then David was left with the unpleasant task of having to remedy the whole situation by having seven men put to death.

Sin always has consequences. What can easily be overlooked in this story are the thousands of innocent people who suffered from the famine. Many had lost loved ones due to starvation. Innocent children suffered. Animals died. The entire community was forced to go

through three years of God-ordained punishment because of the sins of two men. And we see the sorrow of Rizpah, one of the mothers of the slain men, as she stays beside the bodies, mourning their deaths and protecting them from scavengers. Her grief was the direct result of someone else's sin.

The story concludes with David gathering the bodies of the seven slain sons, along with the bones of Saul and Jonathan, and burying them all in the land of the Benjamites. Saul and Jonathan had also died as a result of sin against God. Saul deserved what happened to him, but Jonathan was yet another innocent casualty of sin's devastating impact. Time and time again, the Scriptures reveal the latent and lingering influence of sin. It has a long shelf life. Our sins can be forgiven, but their consequences can last for generations. That is why it is essential that we seek the Lord. It is when we fail to seek Him and leave ourselves vulnerable to our sin natures and the influence of the enemy, that we risk doing things that come back to haunt us. We tend to wrongly assume that our sins are personal and harm no one but ourselves. But the Scriptures are full of sobering stories like this one that prove that conclusion painfully wrong – dead wrong.

2 Samuel 21:15-22

The Greatness of God

There was war again between the Philistines and Israel, and David went down together with his servants, and they fought against the Philistines. And David grew weary. And Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze, and who was armed with a new sword, thought to kill David. But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid and attacked the Philistine and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, "You shall no longer go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel."

After this there was again war with the Philistines at Gob. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who was one of the descendants of the giants. And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, struck down Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. And there was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number, and he also was descended from the giants. And when he taunted Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's brother, struck him down. These four were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants. – 2 Samuel 21:15-22 ESV

It is impossible to tell from the text at what point these events occurred in David's reign. It is assumed that they took place in the early days of his kingship, but there is no way of knowing definitively. As part of the "appendix" to the book, they are designed to provide the reader with an overview of David's rule. In these closing verses of Chapter 21, we are given insight into the ongoing war that David waged against the Philistines. Ever since his days as the young shepherd boy and his defeat of the Philistine champion Goliath, David had been in a constant war with the Philistines. It seems that Goliath had relatives who held a grudge against David for his victory over their kinsman. We are introduced to four of them in these verses: Ishbi-benob, Saph, Goliath, and an unnamed man with 26 toes and 26 fingers.

Each of these men was larger than life, both literally and figuratively, and posed a real threat to David and the nation of Israel. But they fell at the hands of David's men. Despite their massive size and formidable weapons, they were no match for David's mighty men. But why? It would be tempting to make this all about the four men who accomplished these mighty deeds on behalf of David and the nation of Israel: Abishai, Sibbecai, Elhanan, and Jonathan. Chapter 23 will even introduce us to the "mighty men of David," a select group of individuals who displayed almost supernatural military prowess. However, rather than focusing on these men, we should immediately recognize the hand of God. The victories of Israel over the Philistines and their seemingly endless line of champions were due to God, not these men. Yes, they had to fight, and were required to go into battle against superior adversaries and risk life and limb, but their victory was due to God, not themselves.

Verse 22 states, “These four were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.” But once again, their victories were made possible by God. The author’s emphasis on each Philistine’s larger-than-life dimensions and bigger-than-usual weapons is intended to portray impossible odds. Yet, David’s men came out victorious. These were not your run-of-the-mill adversaries. One of them even had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. But they fell at the hands of David’s men because God was with them.

David’s reign would be marked by war, and his battles against the enemies of Israel would never end. Once again, we must recall the fact that this characteristic of David’s reign was due to the failure of Joshua and the people of Israel to obey God and rid the land of all its inhabitants. They had been partially obedient and, therefore, only partially successful. As a result, David was left with the task of finishing what Joshua began, and his battles would last the entirety of his reign. It would be his son, Solomon, who would reign over a kingdom marked by peace. However, David’s tenure as king would be marked by constant war and bloodshed, and God would be with him. That is the message found within these verses.

What should really jump out is God’s faithfulness even amid all the unfaithfulness surrounding David and the people of Israel. David’s victories were not the result of his own faithfulness, but that of God. God was sparing him despite him. Time and time again, we have seen David fail God in sometimes epic fashion. But God remained faithful to His promises to David. It would have been easy for the men of David to take credit for their successes. They could have, and probably did, brag about their victories over superior enemies. But the message for us is one of dependence upon God. We are only as great as our God. To be victorious, we must understand that our God is glorious.

2 Samuel 22:1-16

The Knowledge of God

And David spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said,

*“The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation,
my stronghold and my refuge,
my savior; you save me from violence.
I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,
and I am saved from my enemies.*

*For the waves of death encompassed me,
the torrents of destruction assailed me;
the cords of Sheol entangled me;
the snares of death confronted me.*

*In my distress I called upon the Lord;
to my God I called.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry came to his ears.*

*Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the foundations of the heavens trembled
and quaked, because he was angry.
Smoke went up from his nostrils,
and devouring fire from his mouth;
glowing coals flamed forth from him.
He bowed the heavens and came down;
thick darkness was under his feet.
He rode on a cherub and flew;
he was seen on the wings of the wind.
He made darkness around him his canopy,
thick clouds, a gathering of water.
Out of the brightness before him
coals of fire flamed forth.
The Lord thundered from heaven,
and the Most High uttered his voice.
And he sent out arrows and scattered them;
lightning, and routed them.
Then the channels of the sea were seen;*

*the foundations of the world were laid bare,
at the rebuke of the Lord,
at the blast of the breath of his nostrils. – 2 Samuel 22:1-16 ESV*

It was A. W. Tozer who wrote, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God.”

When studying the life of any individual, we can easily become obsessed with their accomplishments, failures, actions, and apparent attitudes about everything from life to leadership, family to financial success. And David is no exception. When examining his life, we are presented with so many painfully transparent details that we assume we know him well. However, one thing we can never know about any person is their heart. God had to remind the prophet Samue, of this very fact when he was searching for the man to replace Saul as the next king of Israel. Seeing that the prophet was using external criteria to determine the right man for the position, God told him: “The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7 NLT).

We can’t see into a man’s heart. But in the case of David, we are given a glimpse into what he thought and how he felt at different points in his tumultuous life. The closing chapters of 2 Samuel offer a revealing glimpse into a piece of literature written by David, which is almost like reading his personal, private journal. The verses above are nearly a word-for-word copy of what David wrote in Psalm 18, a psalm that bears the description: “A Psalm of David, the servant of the Lord, who addressed the words of this song to the Lord on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.”

It is important to keep in mind that the closing chapters of 2 Samuel serve as a kind of appendix to the entire book. They are not in chronological order, but function as a summation of David’s life, providing a more holistic image of who he was as a man, leader, father, husband, and servant of God.

Based on the description that accompanies Psalm 18, it can be assumed that this particular psalm was written early on in David’s life. It clearly states that it was written after David had been delivered from the hand of Saul. So, it is not a late-in-life exposé written as David lay on his deathbed, looking back in regret or a fit of nostalgia. These are the words of a young man who found himself in the early days of his calling by God to be the next king of Israel, but having faced a litany of challenging circumstances that seemed to contradict both God’s call and the promises He had made. Yet, these words, which prefaced his life, were not negative or filled with complaints or a fist-shaking diatribe against God. Yes, they are blunt and highly transparent because David was not one to mince words or to attempt to hide his true feelings from God. He is open and transparent, but he is also respectful and reverent in how he talks with God. He was willing to express his feelings to God, but he didn’t let his emotions influence his thoughts about God. Notice how he starts out:

*The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my savior;
 my God is my rock, in whom I find protection.
 He is my shield, the power that saves me,
 and my place of safety.
 He is my refuge, my savior,
 the one who saves me from violence. – 2 Samuel 22:2-3 NLT*

Throughout this psalm, David speaks to and about God with reverential awe and honor. He saw God for who He really was: His rock, fortress, deliverer, savior, shield, refuge, and the all-powerful, praise-worthy, transcendent God of the universe. David knew from experience that his God was almighty and yet all-loving. He was an ever-present God who was fully aware of David's plights and heard his cries for help. His God was not distant or disinterested in the cares David faced. David's God was not unresponsive or unapproachable, even though His dwelling place was in heaven. David knew he could call out to God and not only be heard, but receive help. His God rescued and redeemed, and not in some passive way that left you wondering if it had really been Him at all.

David describes God's actions in terms that appeal to the senses and leave little doubt as to His power and majesty:

...the earth quaked and trembled. The foundations of the heavens shook; they quaked because of his anger... – vs 8

Smoke poured from his nostrils; fierce flames leaped from his mouth. Glowing coals blazed forth from him. – vs 9

The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. – vs 14

It is evident that David had a profound respect for God, and it was this unique, personal relationship with God Almighty that distinguished David from many of his contemporaries. In reading this passage and so many of the psalms that bear David's name, we are left with the inarguable conclusion that he really was a man after God's own heart. As we work our way through the remainder of Chapter 22 of 2 Samuel, we will see that David not only knew and understood who God was, but he was also comfortable with his relationship to Him. David had no delusions about his own sinfulness and God's holiness, but could say, "he rescued me because he delights in me" (2 Samuel 22:20 NLT). He was a man who was at peace with his God and delighted in the relationship he shared with Him. He was confident, guiltless, content, joyful, grateful, without fear, and happy to praise his God for who He was and all that He had done.

2 Samuel 22:32-43 ESV

This God

*“For who is God, but the Lord?
 And who is a rock, except our God?
 This God is my strong refuge
 and has made my way blameless.
 He made my feet like the feet of a deer
 and set me secure on the heights.
 He trains my hands for war,
 so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
 You have given me the shield of your salvation,
 and your gentleness made me great.
 You gave a wide place for my steps under me,
 and my feet did not slip;
 I pursued my enemies and destroyed them,
 and did not turn back until they were consumed.
 I consumed them; I thrust them through, so that they did not rise;
 they fell under my feet.
 For you equipped me with strength for the battle;
 you made those who rise against me sink under me.
 You made my enemies turn their backs to me,^[a]
 those who hated me, and I destroyed them.
 They looked, but there was none to save;
 they cried to the Lord, but he did not answer them.
 I beat them fine as the dust of the earth;
 I crushed them and stamped them down like the mire of the streets.” – 2 Samuel 22:32-43*
 ESV

Whether we want to admit it or not, we worship other gods, and it has always been that way. While some of our national currency still carries the phrase, “One Nation Under God,” it has never said, “One God Over the Nation.” Like every culture and generation before us, we Americans have, and have always had, a predisposition toward idolatry. The people of Israel were no different; that’s why God gave them the Ten Commandments, the first four of which have to do with man’s relationship with God. God prefaced His list of commands with the statement, “I am the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:2 NLT). He was telling Moses and the people of Israel that He was to be their God, their one and only God. Then He clarified what He meant. “You must not have any other god but me” (Exodus 20:3 NLT). Unlike all the other cultures around them, they were to have only one god, not many. They were to worship one deity, not a multitude of gods, as the Egyptians did. They were to give their allegiance to the one true God. God was not admitting that He had competition and He wasn’t simply demanding their undivided attention. God didn’t have to worry about competitors, but He did have to be

concerned about man's natural tendency to create false gods, man-made substitutes or stand-ins for Him. That is why the psalmist wrote:

*Their idols are merely things of silver and gold,
shaped by human hands.
They have mouths but cannot speak,
and eyes but cannot see.
They have ears but cannot hear,
and noses but cannot smell.
They have hands but cannot feel,
and feet but cannot walk,
and throats but cannot make a sound.
And those who make idols are just like them,
as are all who trust in them. – Psalm 115:4-8 NLT*

But the fact that these gods are false has never stopped men from placing their hope in them. While the psalmist is obviously referring to actual 3-dimensional idols made to represent a false deity, we 21st-century human beings have moved to a much more sophisticated, yet sinister, form of idolatry. Our gods come in a variety of forms; they don't sit on a shelf where we offer literal sacrifices to them. But they demand our worship nonetheless. We have made gods out of everything from work to entertainment, and the television in our home to the money in our bank. There are many things in our lives that demand our undivided attention, or, to put it another way, our devotion. We revere these things and sacrifice our time, attention, and even our money to them. We turn to them in times of trouble, hoping they will rescue us. We lean on them for a sense of contentment and happiness during the dark days of our lives. We seek satisfaction from them and put our hope in them. But God would remind us:

*"To whom will you compare me?
Who is my equal?
Some people pour out their silver and gold
and hire a craftsman to make a god from it.
Then they bow down and worship it!
They carry it around on their shoulders,
and when they set it down, it stays there.
It can't even move!
And when someone prays to it, there is no answer.
It can't rescue anyone from trouble." – Isaiah 46:5-7 NLT*

David knew there was no reliable source of help and hope in his life except for God. Which is why he rhetorically asks, "Who is God except the Lord?" The answer is obvious: No one. There is no god but God. He has no competition or equals. We may attempt to find help elsewhere, but those solutions will always fall short. They can't deliver. That is why David said, "*This* God is my strong refuge" (2 Samuel 22:33 ESV). It was Yahweh, the God of Israel to whom he turned for help, hope, safety, security, rescue, rest, strength and victory. *THIS* God, and no other.

In this passage, David weaves together an interesting mixture of pronouns, repeatedly referring to both himself and God. He was not putting himself on the same level as God, but was simply trying to show that his life was totally dependent upon God.

He makes me as surefooted as a deer... – vs 34

He trains my hands for battle... – vs 35

You have given me your shield of victory... – vs 36

...your help has made me great... – vs 36

You have made a wide path for my feet... – vs 37

It was God who had done these things for David and, as a result, David was able to say:

I chased my enemies and destroyed them... – vs 38

I did not stop until they were conquered... – vs 38

I consumed them... – vs 39

I struck them down... – vs 39

I ground them as fine as the dust of the earth... – vs 43

David had done his part, but only because God had made it possible. David knew he was not a self-made man, and he could take no credit for his victories. He was in no place to brag about his exploits, apart from God's help. Anything he had done of value in his life was attributable to God, and He alone was to receive the glory. God deserved the credit, which is why David was able to say to God, "Your help has made me great" (2 Samuel 22:36 NLT). He had no problem acknowledging God as the source of all his victories and the explanation behind any value he had as a person. Without God, David was nothing. Apart from God, David would have accomplished nothing; at least, nothing of lasting note or significance. It was as if David was saying, "THIS God has made THIS man who he is."

How easy it is for us to take credit for what God has done. How tempting it is to give credit to someone or something else for what is clearly the work of God in our lives. We are sometimes prone to give more credit to luck than we do to the Lord. We explain our good fortune as fortuitous when we should be giving God the praise He deserves. In Exodus 20, we read the words of God. "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods" (Exodus 20:5 NLT). God will not share His glory with anyone or anything. He will not tolerate faithlessness and infidelity among His people. Which is why He repeatedly referred to the people of Israel as adulterous. They cheated on Him, on a regular basis. They shared their

attention and affections with others. They refused to give Him the credit He deserved and the honor His status as the one true God demanded. But we are so often guilty of the same thing. David provides us with a sobering reminder that THIS God of ours is worthy of our praise, glory, honor, gratitude, worship, and undivided attention. For who is God except the Lord?