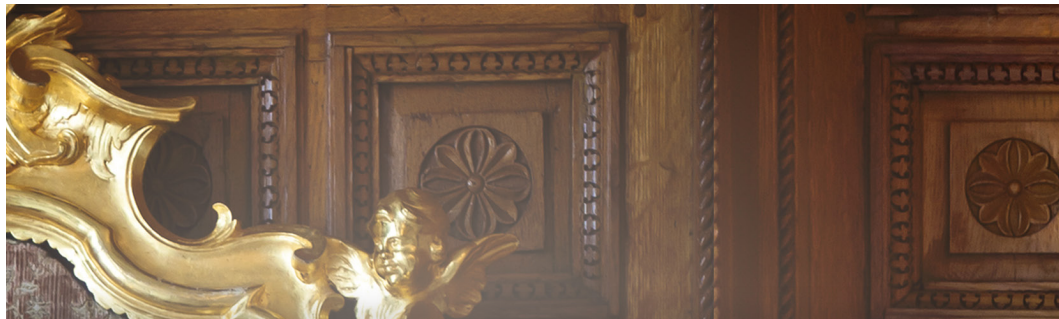




SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOK OF 2 SAMUEL

17 Day Devotional



foundations
daily devotional

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2 SAMUEL

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SOUTHLAND
CHURCH

DAY 1**READ: 2 Samuel 1**

In the book of 1 Samuel we saw a shift happening as the rule in Israel moved from a position of judgeship to kingship. In rebellion against God's leadership, Israel demanded a king that they might be like the other nations. The book took us through the plummeting reign of Israel's first king, Saul. Though he started out relatively well, Saul's sins of jealousy and anger overtook him causing him to commit horrible sins against God and the nation. Meanwhile, God led the prophet Samuel to anoint the next king whom He said would be a man after His own heart. God led the prophet to David, a shepherd boy and the youngest of eight sons. The remainder of the book illustrated Saul's decline as he sought to kill this godly young man who would be his successor. But David trusted in the mighty and sovereign hand of His great God, Yahweh. The book ended with the death of Saul, leaving the reader in eager expectation of David's coronation as King!

At the end of 1 Samuel we learned how Saul died: injured, he called to his armour-bearer commanding the servant to kill him. But the man knew that to kill the Lord's anointed was wrong – Yahweh was a big God, and the armour-bearer would not stand in the way of what God would or would not do on this day. And so Saul fell on his own sword and died. We can believe this account as written by the author of 1 Samuel. Therefore, the story told by the Amalekite at the beginning of 2 Samuel is false. The young man is claiming to have mercifully killed Saul in hopes of gaining favour with the one who will now be king. But the response he receives is anything but praise. As a sojourner in Israel, this man was held to Israel's laws; to kill the Lord's anointed showed rebellion and irreverence – to the king and ultimately to God. And so David demands the death of the Amalekite. He is receiving just punishment for the murder of the Lord's anointed.

The chapter ends with David's heartfelt lament over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. The depth of his integrity and trust is so evident here. Where most in David's position would rejoice at the news of Saul's death, David is truly sad over Israel's loss. David has learnt forgiveness on a powerful level. We see such a surrendered heart in this lament; God has truly prepared David for kingship and has developed in him a godly heart. Though Saul had wronged him much, David does not stand in judgement; we do not hear him declare: "Aha! Saul has received his reward! He has gotten what he deserved!" There is no underlying message of: "*Finally* Israel will have a good and noble king – me!" David is humble and honours the king he served.

The loss of his best friend is particularly painful to him. Jonathan was given to David in a time of need. David needed an ally, a friend who would stand beside him and who could vouch for his character, a friend who knew the truth about what was going on between Saul and David. But the Lord gives and takes away. Jonathan filled a need for David, but ultimately it is God who fills every need. And David knows this; it is why, in his sorrow, he turns quickly to the Lord.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Ask God to reveal a relationship where you are holding onto unforgiveness. If you don't clearly know where these feelings came from ask God to show you why you feel this way.
 - a. Confess your unforgiveness to the Lord.
 - b. If you have been hurt by this individual, ask God to speak into your hurt. What truth does He want to speak to you?
 - c. In prayer, give your hurt to God. Tell Him you want to accept His truth. With His strength, spend some time praying a blessing for this person.
 - d. When you feel feelings of unforgiveness creeping in, continue to bring it before the Lord and to pray for this person.
2. Think about the friends God has brought into your life. Maybe there were some relationships that were hard to let go of.
 - a. Thank God for the friendships he has given you, especially for those who have spurred you on in your faith.
 - b. If you have experienced hurt because a friendship ended before you were ready, ask God to show you how His timing was perfect in this.
3. David lived a life of extreme integrity while he was on the run from Saul, so much so that he truly mourned the king's death. Ask God to grow this kind of integrity within the church. Ask Him for hearts that are submissive to His leadership even when they don't agree with everything going on around them.

DAY 2**READ:** 2 Samuel 2-4

In these chapters we see the start of David's kingship, which begins in Judah and eventually spreads into the rest of Israel. Though Israel was not yet officially divided into two separate kingdoms, the southern tribe of Judah acted somewhat independently from the other tribes, having already had their own army during Saul's reign (see 1 Samuel 11:8). The events of these first chapters are not what one would have expected at the end of 1 Samuel. The book left us eagerly anticipating the triumphant fulfillment of God's promise to David, yet that fulfillment is slower and more disjointed than expected. But the Bible is not made up, "happily ever after" fairy tales; it is the true history of a chosen nation and the story of God at work within that nation and the world. We see God reaching down into a world that is broken and messy.

Though Saul is dead, his supporters are not, and his faithful commander, Abner, seeks to put one of the royal sons on the throne. And so for two years, we see David ruling in the south while Ish-bosheth rules in the north. Fighting and rivalry goes on between the kings' commanders, Abner and Joab. There is a lot of blood in these three chapters – one murder per chapter! First Abner kills Ashael, who is in hot pursuit of him. When Abner comes over to David's side, Joab, out of distrust and revenge for his brother's death, kills Abner. And in chapter 4, we see King Ish-bosheth murdered by two of his captains.

David, true to his integrity and reliance on God's sovereignty, mourns both the deaths of Abner and of Ish-bosheth. His heartfelt fasting and weeping bring the people to admiration; they are pleased to see the integrity and compassion of a king who mourns

even his enemies. David was chosen by God to succeed Saul as king, but that didn't automatically make him fit for the job. David's choices to submit to God and to respond according to God's ways are what have prepared him to serve Israel as the nation's greatest king. God called him to a place of great influence and David responded with full commitment and submission and this is what made him great. When God's power is combined with our obedience, great things happen for the kingdom!

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. David truly knew how to love his enemies. Though Abner was once against him, David is willing to trust him.
 - a. Why do you think David was able to show love for his enemies time after time?
 - b. Who is an enemy in your life? What can you learn from David
 - c. Ask God how He wants you to respond or show love to this enemy.
2. The twelve tribes of Israel found their beginnings in the twelve sons of Jacob, so all Israel was related down the line. Thus it is sad to read about the battle of Gibeon in chapter 2 where Abner and Joab set their men against one another – the descendants of brothers now killing each other for sport! Spend some time in prayer for your family today:
 - a. Ask God to show you ways that you have brought division to your family. Confess these things as sin.
 - b. Ask God how you can bring peace to your family. Be specific.

DAY 3**READ:** 2 Samuel 5 & 6

In chapter 5 we see David ushered into his full reign as king over all Israel. After the deaths of Abner and Ish-bosheth, the elders of Israel invite David to take his place as king over them. For seven and a half years David reigns from Hebron – until he sets off to take the "stronghold of Zion", a well-fortified city belonging to the Jebusites. Despite taunting that even the blind and lame of the city could easily keep David out, he and his armies take the stronghold and from there he builds his own city – Jerusalem, the city of David. Under David's rule, Israel will increase substantially in territory. He is a strategic and decisive leader, boldly leading the people whom God has prepared him to shepherd.

The latter part of chapter 5 describes a battle with the Philistines. Earlier, while on the run from King Saul, David had formed somewhat of an alliance with the Philistines and had taken refuge within their borders. When they discover that David has been anointed the succeeding king over Israel – their enemies – the Philistines go in search of him. David hides out in a stronghold while the Philistines spread out in the Valley of Rephaim. Twice the Lord gives the Philistines over to the armies of Israel! David is seeking direction from *his* King, Yahweh.

In the early chapters of 1 Samuel the Philistines defeated Israel and captured the Ark of the Covenant. However, God brought curses upon them and they returned the ark to Israel where it was eventually brought to the house of Abinadab in Kiriath-jearim (also called Baale-judah). There it remained until 2 Samuel 6 when David decided to have it moved to Jerusalem. The Ark of the Covenant was a specially crafted trunk overlaid in gold where God's presence would be manifested. The ark was not just a *symbol* of God's

power and presence; God Himself was present above the ark. Therefore, it was not to be taken lightly. 2 Samuel 6 can be a difficult story to stomach if we do not read it through the lens of God's holiness. God had commanded that the Ark of the Covenant not be touched (Numbers 4:15). Of course, Uzzah had good motives and was only trying to steady the ark and keep it from falling, but the punishment was rooted in an earlier act of disobedience. God had given specific instructions about how the ark should be transported: The ark had rings along the sides, allowing it to be carried using specially made poles, and it was only to be transported by Levites. Uzzah and Ahio were Levites, but they neglected the clear commands regarding the transportation of the ark. They used a cart rather than the poles.

One might read this story and think: *Pole or cart? What's the difference?!* At the core, this story is about God's holiness. Though God is loving and merciful, He is also holy and just. This story shows us a glimpse of just how holy God is. God had clearly spoken about the means by which the ark of His presence should be moved. This act of putting it on a cart was direct violation of God's law. And God is holy – to violate His holy law is no small thing. Throughout scripture, when individuals experienced the pure presence of God, they *expected* to be struck down. They knew that anything “good” about them vanished in the sight of God's pure perfection. It was God's *mercy* that allowed men like Isaiah (Is. 6:5) and Jacob (Gen. 32:30) and Moses (Ex 33) to see him and live. Uzzah received what was expected. Further, the ark had not fallen off the cart, the oxen merely stumbled. Uzzah was stepping in to intervene and help God who needs no help or intervention. Uzzah's act was one of disobedience. It is also possible that Uzzah was a son of Abinadab who had grown up with the ark in his house. Perhaps such familiarity had brought irreverence into his heart – the ark was just a “thing” and not the precious seat of God Almighty.

Whatever the case, we must remember that God is good – all the time. Uzzah's punishment was not a deviation from His goodness. And we must learn from this story to seek God in reverence and awe. He is a personal and intimate Friend and Father, but *at the same time* He is the Lord Almighty. He is eternal and uncreated. He created the universe by the power of His word. He gives life with one breath. His voice is like the sound of mighty waters. His radiance is like that of the sun. His purity is beyond the purest gold. He has power to give and take away because He is the Owner of all things. This is the God we worship and this is the God we must hold in highest esteem.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend some time in heartfelt worship. Declare truths about who God is. Use your Bible to find passages that declare truth about God and proclaim those things back to Him.
2. Choose one or two of the attributes of God that you declared and take some time to meditate on them. Ask God to bring you deeper revelation about Himself through this specific attribute/truth.
3. Pray for specific people in your life. Ask God to reveal to them this same truth about Himself.
4. Ask God to show you any ways that you are being irreverent (showing disrespect) towards Him (including irreverence towards His Word and His Church). Spend time in repentance as things come up.

DAY 4



READ: 2 Samuel 7

We all have landmarks in our lives – specific incidents, events and people that have played major roles in shaping who we have become. 2 Samuel 7 is one of those landmarks in the life of David and, more importantly, in the salvation message of the Bible.

In this chapter, we learn of David's desire to build a house for the Lord. He sees the splendour that he lives in and wants to honour the Lord with a beautiful dwelling place as well. David loves and fears the Lord. He has learned to seek the Lord in times of peace and chaos, want and prosperity, and has developed a deep and personal relationship with God. In chapter 6, we saw his passion as he danced wildly when the Ark of the Covenant entered Jerusalem. In chapter 7, God makes a powerful promise to David. David desires to build a house for God; instead, God says *He* will build a house for David – an *everlasting* house! David is the godly king that Israel needs. He is the “man after God's own heart” that God was seeking to govern His people. Scripture is sure to highlight David's weaknesses, but it is his *heart* that singles him out as one of the great men of the Bible. He trusts in God; he responds quickly to correction with a repentant heart; he loves to be in God's presence; he is a worshiper; he is a strong leader. 2 Samuel 7 is a powerful chapter. In it, God makes an everlasting promise to David. David's kingship will never end! It is an incredible promise because it is *unconditional*. Though God says He will punish David's descendants when they sin, He gives a great promise: “*But My love will never be taken away from him*” and an eternal blessing: “*your throne will be established forever*”! (v 15 & 16)

But this chapter describes something even greater and deeper than this! While the promise is an amazing *personal blessing* to David, it is also the next step in the fulfillment of God's covenant to Abraham; in fact it reveals the *goal* that God has for the whole earth. God chose Abraham, and through him, the Israelites, as the tool through which He would reveal Himself to mankind. Through this covenant to David, God zeros in on one tribe, one family line. Depth and perspective is given to the vague promise God made to Abraham: “*and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*” (Gen. 12:3) God is interested in more than this one group of people. He is a God of salvation and redemption (made clear through the Exodus and the entrance into the Promised Land) and He has a plan of salvation and redemption for the *whole earth*. (A plan that he first spoke of after the Fall in Genesis 3:15!) Through this promise to David, God's plan is made a little bit clearer: David's throne will *never end*; that means that someONE will always reign from it. So we get a greater glimpse into just HOW all the people of the earth will be blessed through Abraham: it involves a promise of a *real, eternal kingship* and an *actual ruler on an actual throne*. From this time on, Israel looks forward to a *King* – a *real person* – who will bring eternal rest to Zion (Jerusalem). And so we see that this chapter points towards our great King and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who came to make His life a sacrifice and is coming again to set up this eternal kingdom!

Later the prophet Isaiah would add to this mystery when prophesying about the Messiah who would stand as a banner of salvation to the whole world. Isaiah calls him the “Root of Jesse.” (Isaiah 11:10) Jesse was David's father. In the gospels, Jesus would be called the “Son of David” because he came from the tribe of Judah and the family line of King David, as God had promised. But through Isaiah, God showed the *eternal nature* of the Messiah; Jesus is both the Root of Jesse and the Son of David; the one who created David, and the one who was born after David; the one who always was and the one who was yet to come.

In Revelation 1:8 Jesus says of Himself, *“I am the Alpha and Omega – the beginning and the end... I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come – the Almighty One.”* What a wonderful God we serve, whose wisdom is beyond all comprehension! A God who speaks with power and fulfills all His promises! A God who is faithful and true and who never fails! A God who planned redemption from the very beginning! A God who is coming to reign forever!

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask God how He wants to speak to you about Himself through this chapter and today's reading. Journal in response to what He tells you.
2. Are you a worshipper? Do you desire to serve God wholeheartedly? Ask God to search your heart on this question. Ask Him to show you where He is pleased with your love for Him. Ask Him to show you any area of selfishness that is keeping you from serving Him with a glad heart.
3. God's plan of salvation is the most wonderful gift. Yet we degrade it when we try to save ourselves – when we feel we need to make ourselves “good enough” before we can come before God or receive love from Him.
 - a. Ask God to show you how you have been working out of your own self-effort in hopes of making yourself presentable before Him. Tell Him that you need Him and ask HIM to work in your heart and transform your life in this area.
 - b. Ask God to show you the love that He has for you. Ask Him to show you how He sees you.

DAY 5

 **READ:** 2 Samuel 8 & Psalm 60

Under the leadership of King David, Israel expanded well beyond its previous borders. It became one of the world superpowers, right up there with Egypt and Assyria. Egypt and Assyria were both in somewhat weak condition at this time, giving Israel an opportunity to grow in power and peace. Over the course of his kingship, David defeated armies of Philistia, Syria, Moab, Edom and Ammon. Though these nations rose up against Israel, they were never much of a threat during David's reign. Chapter 8 gives a summary of a number of David's victories over these specific nations. This chapter is not necessarily chronological as some later events (such as chapters 10-12) could have happened somewhere within the battles of chapter 8. Whatever the case, God gave David and the armies of Israel much victory. He also supplied David with faithful officials who aided his kingship in ability and loyalty.

As a reader and an outsider, it's easy to blow through the list of victories without taking the time to think about the realities of the events. Each battle was an act of faith. Women would say teary goodbyes to their husbands, sons, and fathers, knowing full well that it might be their last farewell. The men marched nervously into battle; God held all the power to give victory, but *would* He? Each skirmish left behind a bloody battlefield flowing with blood from both sides; total victory did not mean zero casualties.

The reality behind the list is brought out in Psalm 60, which is considered to have been written in correlation to a few of the battles mentioned in 2 Samuel 8. In this Psalm we see

the heart of a nation going into battle. The introduction tells us that the psalm is written “for instruction”, possibly instructing the people on how to pray when entering into battle. Though the people feel somewhat abandoned in times of war, they know that they are God's chosen and so cry out to Him for salvation. They declare His holiness and a word of deliverance that He has previously spoken over them. They know the promise that all nations of the earth will be blessed through them. God calls the tribes of Israel His own, and He also calls out purpose for the opposing nations of Moab, Edom and Philistia. Israel's purpose was not to expand territory for the mere sake of national pride; her purpose was to be a blessing to other nations. In the time of David, that was best accomplished through making other nations subject to her. And so in this psalm, the people pray according to God's great will, that Israel would fulfill her calling of blessing, and also receive victory over hostile enemies.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. God raised Israel to be a blessing for all nations. How have *you* been blessed by this promise? What does this show you about God? Thank Him for the things He reveals to you.
2. The principle that God blessed Israel to be a blessing to all nations is true for our personal lives as well. We have been blessed that we might bless others.
 - a. Ask God how He wants you to walk out this calling today.
 - b. How can you make this a life principle for yourself? To bless people, not just today, but *every day* out of the blessings God has given you?
3. Using Psalm 60 as a template, spend some time in prayer for the nations of the world. Pray God's sovereignty and purpose over the nations. He is the Owner of all things and He is coming back to reign as supreme Ruler and King. Pray that He would bring nations into alignment with His heart. Pray that God would rescue the church from her enemies.

DAY 6

 **READ:** 2 Samuel 9-10

In 1 Samuel 20 a heartfelt exchange took place between David and Jonathan. Jonathan was David's best friend and Saul's son. The two had a deep, brotherly friendship and swore their allegiance to one another, even to their descendants. Jonathan asked of his friend, *“If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the LORD, that I may not die; and do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.”* Jonathan knew that his father's reign would end and that he would not be the one to inherit the throne. He also knew that his father was being wicked to David and that the Lord's judgement would quite likely allow David to cut off Saul's entire family one day. And so Jonathan asks for mercy for his children, which David gladly offers. In 2 Samuel 9, we see David make good on his promise. He shows steadfast love and honour to Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, and his family.

David is an honourable man. In chapter nine, he easily honours the son of his best friend. In chapter 10 he seeks to honour one who is not a friend, the new king of Ammon who just lost a father. David sends messengers to give his condolences over the death of King Nahash. But instead of honour, war ensues. The new king, Hanun, does not accept David's sympathies, and instead disgraces the messengers, sending them back to Jerusalem bald and naked! Knowing this act wouldn't put them in David's good books, the Ammonites call

the Syrians to join them in battle against Israel. Joab, the commander of David's armies, and his brother Abishai split the armies of Israel, quickly and easily conquering the armies of Ammon and Syria. The Syrians then call upon Syrian armies further north and another battle ensues. The victory is again given to David and the armies of Israel. What was meant for Israel's harm turned out to be for her benefit as the Syrians became subject to Israel.

As king, David had the authority to take vengeance on any and all enemies, past or present. It was his right and sometimes, even his duty. But when one is walking with the Lord, personal and positional rights are not always *right*. People desire power. This is not cultural, it is human nature. We see it here as the Ammonites and Syrians seek to defeat Israel, and we will see it many times over before this book is done. But when one who follows God is given power, that power is really a test. What really is *power*, when the God who made man out of dust is in control? In the grand scheme of things, that power is no more powerful than the lowest peasant, or the tiniest creature. God divvies up the power of the earth according to His own will and purpose. And each person of power will be held accountable to what they received – in fact, we will *all* be held accountable to the words and actions of our lives. When God gives a person power – perhaps it is owning a business, or acting as the spiritual leader of many people, or whatever – it is a test to see if that person will give the power back to God. Will the businessperson allow God to run their business? Will the pastor allow God to lead their church? Will the politician allow God to govern the people? Just because power gives one the right to lord it over another doesn't mean that the right is *right*. David's life – at least for now – is a declaration of God as King, of God as the One who reigns in Israel and on David's throne.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

- What levels of power and position do you possess (and we all have one kind or another)? What are your rights within your position? Is it *right* to exercise all of your rights?
 - Spend some time in prayer, asking God to show you areas where you are righteously using your power.
 - Ask Him to show you if there are any rights He wants you to lay down. Ask Him to show you if you are wielding your power in any ways that displease Him. If He reveals something, confess it to Him and make it right.
- Take time to dedicate yourself and your role to God. Ask Him to reign as King in all areas of your life.
- David honours people – friends and enemies. Ask God to give you a name of someone He wants you to honour. How can you do this?

DAY 7



READ: 2 Samuel 11

Many people know this story: the story of David and Bathsheba, the story of David's big sin. However, this sin was not something that David just stumbled into. When we study the story, we can see that through arrogance and rebellious choices he veered off of God's path and walked way off the map. Integrity has much to do with how one responds when one has messed up, and what one does when given the opportunity to either hide or confess a sin. It is with great sadness that we see King David turn his back on integrity.

The backdrop to this event is the Israeli/Ammonite war which began in chapter 10 and continues throughout chapters 11 and 12. While the nation's armies are on the battlefields, the reader receives news about what is happening on the home front. Chapter 11 verse 1 shows us that something is wrong: *"In... the time when kings go out to battle... David remained in Jerusalem."* It was a key role of the king to lead the nation into battle. During Saul's reign, it was David who stepped up on multiple occasions to lead the people in battle, and in doing so he was exalted by the people. They saw David's leadership abilities and many longed to see him reign as king in Israel. Yet here he is as ruler of Israel shirking his kingly duties, twiddling his thumbs on his throne while his armies are off fighting a vital battle. This isn't just any skirmish; the armies of Israel are going to besiege the Ammonite capital of Rabbah, an endeavour that will take much time and calculated strategy. In arrogance and laziness David stays home. This is his first transgression, and it will open the door to greater sin.

This is a very different David than the man we grew to admire in 1 Samuel. This man seems more like jealous Saul than the sweet Psalmist of Israel. The steadfastness that was developed in the wilderness looks to be crumbling, the devotion to God lost, the zeal for righteousness discarded. David appears pompous; power, prestige and prosperity have fattened his ego. That is why he is at home while his armies are fighting the nation's battles. He has forgotten that God is Lord of Israel and is supposed to be King over his own life. No longer is he acting as God's anointed servant, raised to lead Israel for the sake of the nation; instead he has placed himself on a pedestal and is relishing in the service of others while he does what he wants. While his armies are camped out on the battlefields, David is lounging in bed till late afternoon. Laziness is a dangerous additive to life. When we are lazy, we cease to guard ourselves against sin. Proverbs 13:4 says *"The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied."* While on the run from Saul and later as a new king, diligently seeking God, David's soul was filled in abundance. But as he has lost diligence and gained worldly riches, he has become a sluggard. In laziness, his eyes lust after what is not his and his heart craves that which God has not given him. And though he attempts to satisfy the craving, his soul is starved.

From atop his palace roof he finds that he has the perfect view of a beautiful woman. He inquires about her; if she is unmarried, he would have had the right to take her as one of his wives. But the news that she is Bathsheba, *wife* of Uriah, should have quelled his urges. Instead, temptation gives way to lust; David covets this beautiful wife of Uriah. He sends for her and sleeps with her. There is nothing to tell us that Bathsheba should share in the guilt of David's actions. She was not placing herself in David's sightline, nor should she be blamed for her own beauty. She was not seducing David in any way, and we should not assume that she was consensual in the encounter. As king, David had the power (though not the blessing) to take any woman he pleased, and it pleased him to take Bathsheba. His actions were driven by lust and laziness. It seems that he had no intentions beside one night of pleasure, for she goes right back home afterwards. David made the mistake of many – that "just one time" could be a completely no-strings-attached incident. He had not planned on a pregnancy. David moves into panic mode. First covetousness and lust, then adultery and now lying, David seeks to deceive Uriah and tries to get him to sleep with Bathsheba so that her pregnancy will appear legitimate. But Uriah is too honourable for that. In the face of David's brazen immorality, Uriah shines with integrity and humility. He will not allow himself the luxury of his bed and his wife while his comrades are sleeping in tents on the battlefield! And so, in desperate measure, David orders the murder of Uriah. Uriah carries his suicide note back to the frontlines and falls in battle.

Uriah was not an unknown name to David. He was listed among David's "Mighty Men" in 1 Chronicles 11 – the men who *"were the chiefs of David's mighty warriors—they, together with all Israel, gave his kingship strong support to extend it over the whole land, as the Lord had promised"*. (v 10) Uriah was a friend and advocate who had valiantly put his life on the line to serve his king. And his king killed him.

They say "all's fair in love and war." Covetousness, lust, adultery, deception, laziness, arrogance and murder are not right or fair. Yet the whole event appears to be swept under the rug. Only David and Bathsheba know of the pregnancy. Only David and Joab know of the murder. Bathsheba mourns the death of her husband and David quickly takes her as his wife. Perhaps all is fair and well and fine in David's harem and on his battlefields. What no one knows will not hurt the nation... right? But there is One who is always watching, One who saw it all, and He was not pleased. *"But the thing David had done displeased the LORD."*



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. This is a heavy and sad story, showing us that even the most devoted follower can move very far from God through compromise. Spend some time in quiet examination. Ask God to open your heart. In humility, ask him to show you areas of compromise – things that you are doing, saying or thinking that, if you continue, could lead you far away from God's path for your life.
2. Take some time to focus specifically on laziness. Read and meditate on Proverbs 13:4. Ask God to show you if and how laziness is an issue in your life. Ask Him to open your eyes to the damage that it is causing to your life.
3. Spend some time in confession. Repent of any sin that has been revealed and ask God to cleanse your heart. Ask Him to change you.
4. Is there something that you have swept under the rug that God wants you to bring to light and confess to another individual? Is there something you need to make right? If so, plan to do that as soon as possible.

DAY 8



READ: 2 Samuel 12 & Psalm 51

Chapter 12 continues the story of David and Bathsheba. David has taken care of business. He has covered his tracks. Perhaps he had squelched his conscience with the idea that his actions weren't actually that bad: he had gotten himself a new wife and a baby was on the way! What could be better than a new little prince or princess running around? But the All-Seeing knows all things. Nothing is hidden from Him and He has the power to cast our sins as far as the east is from the west... or to shout them out from every rooftop. In David's case, He chose the way of a prophet. Nathan comes to David with a story, and David's response reveals the duplicity of his life: he rages out against the injustice of the rich man, all the while shoving his own injustice further under the rug. But Nathan's word is not his own; He has been sent by God and has been given a word of knowledge – a direct picture into David's past. In the name of the Lord, Nathan rebukes David's sin, declaring out loud what David has worked so hard to hide. David is charged with *despising* the word of the Lord and doing what is *evil* in God's sight. Interesting... David, who has *received* the word of the Lord through songs of prophecy and worship, has now shown loathing towards that

precious word. The shepherd boy who wrote line after line about loving and meditating on God's law now stands in opposition to that law. His actions are unholy and evil; he has acted like one of the many enemies he has penned about in his psalms.

Like a child caught deliberately disobeying his parent, David needs no warning or second chances. He opposed his Father's heart and violated half of God's ten primary moral commands. His actions require punishment and the punishment fits the crime: because of David's sin and unrepentant heart, strife and bloodshed will characterize his household. A family member will rise up against David. Someone will capture his wives and sleep with them in broad daylight. And these punishments will be observed by the entire nation. Before Nathan even finishes describing the consequences, David's heart melts and softens. His eyes are opened to his wicked rebellion and he humbles himself before God: *"I have sinned against the LORD"* he says. Nathan declares God's forgiveness, but he must tell David the final consequence: Bathsheba's child will die.

The events and consequences of this story are horrible, but the outcome – on a heart level – is truly wonderful. Chapter 11 left us wondering about David's future. Would he become like King Saul, his wicked and jealous predecessor? Saul and Pharaoh are two biblical characters famous for hardening their hearts towards God. After multiple personal decisions to become hardened, God gave them up to their rebellion. Would David end up the same way? In 2 Samuel 12:1-14, David's life is at a crossroads. Will he deny Nathan's accusation and use his kingly power to have the prophet removed from his presence, maybe even killed? He does not. Instead, he confesses his sin. But then he hears the most heart wrenching punishment of all – his new baby will die. Will he resent God and harden his heart for good? In the rest of the chapter and in Psalm 51 we see the pivotal choice that David made to humble himself and repent of his sin.

Psalm 51 is David's deep and heartfelt prayer in response to Nathan's rebuke. It is a stunning and emotional prayer when read along with 2 Samuel 11 and 12. Through it, and the remainder of chapter 12, we see that David had a solid view of God. He had not *stumbled* in impurity or anger; David had fallen flat on his face and committed some of the worst sins a person can commit. When he saw his pride and wickedness he *truly* humbled himself. And we see this by the way he turned to God. When we know we have sinned, humility is admitting it to God and throwing ourselves at His feet. It is pride and shame that keeps us from going to him after we sin. As Max Lucado writes: "Pride and shame. You'd never know they are sisters... Pride says, 'You're too good for him.' Shame says, 'You're too bad for him.' Pride drives you away. Shame keeps you away. If pride is what goes before a fall, then shame is what keeps you from getting up after one." (Max Lucado, *"He Did This Just For You."*) David has recognized his pride, and instead of falling to her sister, he chooses humility and presents himself before God. He stands a sinner before the Holy One because he *knows* that God is abundant in mercy and steadfast in love. He knows that no matter what he has done, if he repents, God will forgive him. It is within God's very nature to forgive the repentant heart. This story is a remarkable revelation of God's mercy. Many people read the laws found in the Old Testament and feel God is a mean, distant, confusing "guy in the sky". But God's laws were for the protection and preservation of His people, and for the glory of His name. Punishment for sin was severe in the law, but there was so much room for His grace. In David's case, the law demanded his death (Lev. 20:10). But in response to David's repentance, God shows great mercy. And so David pours out his heart beautifully before his God, asking boldly that God would forget his sins, cleanse his heart and renew his spirit which has fallen away. It is with this heart that he prays, also, that his

child would not die. He knows God has the power to retract the consequence and save the child, but he will accept what God decides. And meanwhile, he will continue to praise the Lord and sing of God's righteousness. He even ends his psalm with a prayer for his people. As a leader, he knows that his actions affect the nation and that as their king, God holds him to a high standard. And so he prays for his people, that God would do good to them and delight in their sacrifices. Essentially he is praying that his people would learn his lesson: that God delights in the sacrifice of humility, repentance and submission.

It is with great gladness that we can read this story. If this is the response of a liar, adulterer and murderer made aware of his sin, should we not respond the same way when our eyes are opened to our own sin? The God who showed mercy and love to David is our God. Yes, David would reap very hard consequences for these sins, but God would not leave him. Neither did God remove the promise and blessing of 2 Samuel 7. God's faithfulness and love remain despite our wickedness. But we must turn to Him in our sin and weakness. We must say "No!" to pride which would have us try and save ourselves. And we must say "No!" to shame which would have us wallow in self-pity and condemnation. Let us turn our eyes to our great God who is mighty to save even the worst of sinners!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Take some time to be quiet before the Lord and ask Him to speak to you based on what you have read. Is there something specific or personal He wants to say to you. Invite Him to move in your heart however He pleases.
2. Based on Psalm 51, what are some things about God that David knew to be true? Write these things down. Thank God for these qualities. Thank Him that these things are *still* true about Him.
3. Ask God how either pride or shame has kept you away from Him. Tell him that you are sorry. Take time to spend in His presence and just talk to Him about what is on your heart today.

DAY 9



READ: 2 Samuel 13 & 14

In 2 Samuel 12, the prophet Nathan laid out the consequences for David's sins: *"Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house... 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 neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of the sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun."* (v 10-12) The execution of this prophecy begins in these next few chapters, and the "evil" mentioned are David's own sons.

David's son Amnon rapes David's daughter, Tamar. Amnon and Tamar are half-siblings, having different mothers. Sexual relations between siblings of any degree were forbidden in God's law. But Amnon's urges are strong, and he does little to fight them. It seems irrelevant to him that such an idea was an abomination to God. Amnon seems to care little about God, his father, or anyone but himself in this matter. And so, despite her pleas and objections, Amnon rapes his sister. Immediately his feelings change: Amnon's love is replaced with deep loathing. After having his way with her, he commits an even

greater injustice – he sends her from his presence. God's law demanded that if a man raped a woman, he was obligated to pay the dowry and take her as his wife and he could never divorce her, but Amnon refuses. King David hears about the situation, and though he is angry, he does nothing about it. Absalom hates Amnon for what has been done to his sister, and so he takes Tamar into his home and tells her to leave the matter alone; Absalom is taking matters into his own hands. He spends two years seething over what happened between Tamar and Amnon and finally takes an opportunity to kill his brother. David has seen his daughter robbed of a future, and now, like Adam and Eve, has seen one son murdered and another become a murderer.

Absalom runs off, and while David does not seek vengeance, he does not welcome Absalom back, either. It is sad to see David stand idly by while his children ruin each other's lives. It is sad that after his own experience with Bathsheba he would not speak out against the injustice of his son, Amnon, and urge him to repentance. It seems that David's own sins have crippled him as a father. While he received the forgiveness of God, we see him a rather warned out figure in these chapters, weathered by sin and weakened in judgement. He does not want to punish Absalom, but neither does he want to accept him into the palace. He forgives him in terms of dismissing charges, but will not speak to him or see him. And so Absalom, left in limbo, finally resorts to burning Joab's fields in order to get David's attention. Some extent of reconciliation occurs, but more trouble is coming.

Just because we follow God and just because we have developed a personal relationship with him does not mean that our lives will be without hardship or injustice. David is the man after God's own heart. But we look at his life and we see that he makes mistakes – big ones – and that his family is a mess. He has lived with injustice for years and now he has been the cause of injustice through both his sin with Bathsheba and his silence with his children. Yet he is *still* called "the man after God's own heart." So we must stop and think: *What does it mean to be a person who is "after God's heart"?* Clearly it is not someone who is without sin and weakness; we cannot be God. The key word is *after* – one who *chases* and *pursues* the heart of God. Running a lifelong race will inevitably bring some stumbles – we will trip over rocks or over our own feet in clumsiness! Sometimes we might fall flat on our faces. We will get tired, and slow down. We will need refreshing. Portions will be uphill and others will be flat and easy. One who is *after* God's heart will continue. He will spend his whole life calling himself a runner. When he stumbles because of sluggish movement, he will be attentive to pick up his feet. When he starts to get distracted by his surroundings, he will set his eyes on the goal. When he wipes out and skids on the road, he will get up again and let the bruises heal. And throughout the race, he will have frequent refreshment. In our lives, we must continually seek the refreshment that comes from the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. We must stay in the Word if we want to continue to the race. We must stay in communication with God through prayer. Our race will include seeking to know more about who God is and how He feels. It will include learning about our purpose in life and what it means to have Christ living in us. We will seek to know what pleases God and how we can grow in our love for Him. We will choose to worship Him with everything we do. We must determine that we are runners – followers of Christ – and we will keep running until we cross the finish line, no matter how many times we fall in the process. This is the life of one who is after God's heart.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. What kind of man is Amnon? Study his character and note different places where he went wrong. What should he have done differently at each point? How could he have realigned himself with God's ways at each point? How do you see David's struggles reflected in Amnon's life?
2. Spend some prayer time in intercession for family members today. If you have children or grandchildren, pray for them specifically. Ask God to set them free from any bondages of sin that are in their lives (lust, eating disorders, anger, etc.), particularly from areas of sin that you have struggled in. Ask God to work through them with His mighty power.
3. Are you a man, or woman, "after God's own heart"? Ask God if you are? Ask Him to show you specific things you have done on the race that have pleased Him. Ask Him to show you if there is an aspect of the race where He wants to see improvement.

DAY 10**READ:** 2 Samuel 15:1 – 16:14 & Psalm 3

Though reconciliation was made between Absalom and David to some extent, Absalom's intentions are for the throne. With charisma and a façade of compassion he steals the hearts of the people of Israel. With a smile, a pat on the back, a word here and a word there, he sows discontent into the minds and hearts of his fellow countrymen. David was a beloved king, and so Absalom must have had incredible charm to woo the people of Israel away from his father.

Absalom knows how to take his time. He waited two years for the right opportunity to kill his brother, and he spends four years worming his way into the hearts of Israel before making his first traitorous move. He may have appeared somewhat chivalrous in the previous chapters in his attempt to protect and avenge his sister, but we see that the heart of Absalom is really no different than that of Amnon: while Amnon lusted for pleasure, Absalom lusts for power. God had promised that a descendant of David would always reign on the throne of Israel. Absalom wanted to ensure that *he* would be that descendent, and so after four years of strategy, he begins to gain a following in Hebron. Even Ahithophel the Gilonite – David's own counselor and a man lauded for accurately speaking the word of God – switches over to Absalom's side.

Why would the nation that cheered David's name and eagerly crowned him king allow such subversion? David is not the man he used to be. He seems debilitated as a father. Absalom won the hearts of Israel in broad daylight. As king, David must have known of his son's behaviour, yet he did nothing to stop it. He has become a somewhat passive ruler. The dejection and defeat is easily sensed as he gathers the royal family and servants and leaves Jerusalem. Even while David is joined by a faithful band of foreigners who refuse to leave his side, his spirits are low. However, while he seems extremely passive as a leader, even idly enduring an enemy's curses, Psalm 3 shows him leaning heavily on the Lord. *"Many are my foes! Many are those who are rising against me! Many are saying that You have abandoned me! But you, O LORD, are my shield."* David had walked with God long enough to know the peace of the "BUT GOD" principle. Circumstances may seem insurmountable... BUT GOD is the Almighty One. The stain of sin seems unpardonable... BUT GOD can cleanse

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

man of any sin. Weakness and strife seem to prevail... BUT GOD is the everlasting God who does not grow weary or faint. David knew that, though his circumstances were changing yet again, God was constant. His faithfulness and mighty salvation were as near as they had always been. And so, though David may appear weak to the reader, we see Him relying on the only One whom he can securely trust.

So perhaps David's passivity is better described as weary resolution. He is at the end of his strength and is relying on God, declaring truth about the Lord, even though he may not *feel* those things to be true. While he is not defending himself against his enemies, we do see him taking some action: he prays that God would turn the council of Ahithophel to foolishness and sends one of his men, Hushai, undercover to Absalom – a decision that God will use vitally in protection of the throne.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. God does not change. What is true about Him when we are on a spiritual high is as true when we feel very far from Him. What are some things you *know* are true about God even though you don't *feel* that they are. Take time to specifically thank Him for these things.
2. We see David's people standing in judgement of him as he leaves Jerusalem. It is easy to judge people when we see extreme changes in them, but it is not our place to judge. Ask God to show you how you have cast judgement on others. Confess this as sin and pride and ask God to give you a heart of love and grace for others.
3. Where do you need to focus on the "BUT GOD" principle? What is something going on in your life that seems insurmountable or unfixable or impossible? Ask God what He wants you to know about Himself. Thank Him for this.

DAY 11**READ:** 2 Samuel 16:15 – 17:29

The story of Absalom's treason continues, and in these chapters we see the results of David's prayer that God would make foolish the council of Ahithophel. Hushai, whom David sent undercover to thwart Ahithophel's ideas, is surprisingly accepted by Absalom. In these first verses, we see the specific words of Nathan, the prophet, come to life. Through Nathan, God said that what David did in private would be done for all to see: an enemy from within his own household would assault his wives in public. (2 Sam 12:11-12) And at the council of Ahithophel, this is exactly what Absalom does. He takes over the palace at Jerusalem and lies with the concubines his father left behind to watch over the house. Ironically, this happens on the roof of the palace – possibly the exact same place where David allowed his lustful eyes to rest upon Bathsheba. It seems like an odd thing for Absalom to do, but as Ahithophel said, it showed the people that Absalom was doing his own thing and was claiming his father's throne – and everything else – as his own.

After this, they start discussing military strategy. Absalom is cold-hearted. He views his father as nothing more than an enemy to be conquered. He is presented with two pieces of advice, one from Ahithophel and the other from Hushai. Ahithophel's advice: attack immediately while the king and his people are still weary, kill only the king and bring the rest back to Jerusalem. Hushai's advice: wait, then lead the people into battle and wipe out

David and all of his followers. Hushai plays to Absalom's ego. He tells Absalom to gather and lead the army himself and not to sit back while others attack. Absalom likes this. Of course, Hushai is on undercover assignment from King David. With his advice, he hopes to buy David time to prepare for an attack. Hushai is sent out of the room and, not knowing which strategy Absalom will choose, sends two servants to tell David the two possible outcomes so that he can at least be prepared for something. Meanwhile, God does something amazing: Absalom goes with Hushai's advice. This is to be lauded as an act of God. The author made a specific note to tell us in 2 Samuel 16:23 that Ahithophel's council was believed to be like the word of God itself, so for Absalom to choose Hushai's advice is entirely miraculous. In his defeat and discouragement of the previous chapter, David cried out for God to make foolish the council of Ahithophel. And that is exactly what God did.

There are two important things we can take from this portion of the Absalom story. First is this: just because someone uses the name of the Lord does not mean that they are working in alignment with Him. Ahithophel was known to be a counsellor of godly wisdom. However, the way that he abandons David shows foolishness and tarnished character. Frequently throughout the reign of the kings in Israel and Judah, we meet kings who claimed to follow Yahweh, yet whose actions were pagan. These kings "worshiped" Yahweh while at the same time sold themselves to idols, sacrificed their children to foreign gods and engaged in every sort of sexual perversion. Their worship of Yahweh was drowned out by their idolatry. And so we learn that we must walk through life with wisdom and discernment. We must remain steadfastly in God's Word and keep our hearts tied to one Master. Then we will know whether someone who comes "in the name of the Lord" is truly acting in alignment with God.

And a second point we can take from this story is one about the miraculous. God works in His own way. He often tends to act on the very borderline of practical and mystical, reasonable and inexplicable. We see that here. There is no parting of waters, no miraculous healing, no resurrection – yet that Absalom would take Hushai's advice over Ahithophel's is an equally miraculous event! God is working behind the scenes, using man to put His good plans into effect. We see this in the book of Esther. God is not even mentioned in the book and yet it is HE who saves the Jews THROUGH Esther's obedience. This is no less of a miracle than the parting of the Red Sea! We see this today when people are healed from sickness and disease. Sure, it could be explained as a doctor's remedy or skill, but God is as much behind the healing as He was behind the resurrection of Christ! Or when we have lost something and pray that God would help us find it and then we remember where we put it – this is God at work! A skeptic will attempt to explain away even the most supernatural event. As Christians, we must look for the hand of God around us. We must ask God to open our eyes to what He is doing. He will use people and nature to accomplish His plans. Why wouldn't He, since He *created* these things?! Sometimes we get too hung up on "experiencing" God in a "supernatural" way. While such experiences are wonderful and faith-building and should be sought, God does not want us to worship experiences. God wants us to worship Him. And we will grow in worship when we look for Him in the moments of our day. *Where is God right now? How has God shown His love and presence to me today? What is something practical God has helped me with?* As we think of these things, we will be drawn to new levels of thanksgiving and worship.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. What Bible stories can you think of where God thwarted the plans of man in order to accomplish His own plans? How have you personally seen God do this?
2. Take some time to ponder those questions that were at the end of the reading: *Where is God right now? How has God shown His love and presence to me today? What is something practical God has helped me with?* Thank God for these things. Ask Him to open your eyes to His *practical* workings in your life.
3. Read Psalm 11 and thank God that He is victorious! Though evil will appear to flourish and triumph in the last days, we know with certainty that God is in His holy temple and on His throne, and that He is coming to reign over us in righteousness and justice!

DAY 12



READ: 2 Samuel 18:1 – 19:8

Having received news of an impending battle, David rallies his men to prepare for combat, dividing his army into three groups under the commands of Joab, Abishai and Ittai. Despite the pushback and disgrace David has endured from enemies, he has a strong support of true friends. David has gained allegiance – men who have rallied around him, not because they owe it to him or are afraid of his power, but because they truly love him and desire to have him as their king. What evidence of God's faithfulness! How wonderful that God's plan to sustain His servant, David, included friendship! And his friends will not allow David to fight in battle; he is their king and they will protect him. David agrees, asking his men to deal gently with Absalom. In other words – bring David's son back alive.

The battle rages and David's armies conquer the army of Israel, leaving a bloody field in their wake. David's armies used the surrounding forest to their advantage – apparently it was hard for the enemy to navigate through the thick woods. And it is in these woods where David's men find Absalom, suspended in the air, his head (likely his hair) caught in an oak tree. Absalom was extremely handsome and his hair was a source of pride for him. In fact, the author tells us that he would cut and weigh his hair once every year (2 Sam 14:25-26) – a random little tidbit until we get to part of the story where Absalom is killed. He had lived his life to serve his pride, and now his pride and joy was his ruin.

Though David had asked his men to bring Absalom back safely, Joab will not stand for such mercy. He likely assumed Absalom would continue in his treachery and so he and his armour-bearers finish Absalom off. When David hears of Absalom's death, he falls apart. His supporters are left in an awkward position. They have just shown their incredible allegiance to their king and have just received great victory in battle, but the one they fought to defend is not celebrating. Instead of feasting and rejoicing, the people snuck back into the city as though they were ashamed! Joab is disgusted and has a brave conversation with the king, calling him to rise up and show his people some respect: *"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."* Bold words to say to your king – but necessary. Joab reminds David of all those who have been

saved on this day. In fact, God answered David's prayer from Psalm 3: *"Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God! For You strike all my enemies on the cheek; You break the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the LORD; Your blessing be on Your people."* There is a time for mourning, but David was focusing only on the death of his son and neglecting his duty as king. Leadership comes with tough responsibilities. David was placed by God as king of Israel, and this was a hat David would wear till death. Even personal tragedy could not remove him from his calling.

In Ecclesiastes 3, we find the famous passage, "A Time for Everything." Not only did God create the universe and mankind, but He created *time* itself. What a mind-blowing thought! And because of time, we have moments; we have hours and days, seasons and years. Time allows us to create rhythms – to speak, read and make music. And over the course of our lives, we will experience so much – death and birth, sorrow and joy, plenty and want. But life is unpredictable, and sometimes these "times" intersect. This is where we find David in this story – a time of rejoicing and victory intersects with a time of mourning and loss. Such is the messiness of life. What a comfort, then, to know that our God is *faithful* and unaffected by our circumstances. Of course he *cares* for us in our worry and uncertainty, but there is nothing that causes Him to tremble. He is completely sovereign – the Most High and Almighty One! Hallelujah!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Are you in a particular season of life right now? Do you feel the messiness that David felt when multiple "times" bombarded him at once? Ask God for His wisdom and direction in this season. How does He want you to handle this time? Meditate on the truth that He is the Most High, that He is completely sovereign during this time.
2. Ask God how you can give support of someone who is going through a difficult time right now. Spend some time praying for that person.
3. Ask God to show you an area of selfishness in your life – a way that you are being self-absorbed. Confess your selfishness and ask God to give you a step of obedience that will help you to be more outward in this area.

DAY 13



READ: 2 Samuel 19:9 – 20:26

Absalom may be dead, but David's trials are not over. The whole nation wants to reinstate David as king, but what should be a unifying act becomes a point of greater division. The tribe of Judah rises up to bring David across the Jordan and back to his palace in Jerusalem. On the way, those who had shamed and tricked David come crawling back, begging for mercy. While it was in David's power to have these traitors killed, he shows compassion. We also see an intimate bond of friendship between David and Barzillai, an old man who aided him while he sought refuge from Absalom in Mahanaim. The two say goodbye, knowing this is likely the last time they will ever see each other. David wants so much to bless the man who blessed him. David's own experiences and adventures have given him a great understanding of mercy, friendship and the sovereignty of God.

Along with these, David also understands consequences as he continues to feel the weight of his sin through the fulfillment of the prophecy that the sword would never depart

from his house. What a terrible consequence – one that gravely altered the nation's future. David's heart of worship brought about the prophecy of salvation – the promise of an everlasting dynasty; his heart of *self*-worship brought about the prophecy of sin – the constant sword. Yet, in God's mercy, the first and greater promise remained! If only David could have received the first promise without the burden of the second. But this is the nature of sin – it brings brokenness, pain to us and others, and spiritual death. Christ has bridged the gap of separation and conquered eternal death; He can even bring reconciliation and redemption to relationships; but the sting of sin remains very felt on this earth. And, as Adam and Eve were given a blessed hope after they fell but were still cast from the Garden and cursed with toil and pain, David was blessed with a promise of *prospective* peace but of *proximate* pain.

"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." David's daughter has been raped, and two sons murdered. And now the hostility spreads out and civil unrest begins again. The men of the northern tribes are extremely offended that David and the men of Judah did not wait for them to join the procession in bringing David back to Jerusalem. They feel that the tribe of Judah has been given special treatment. Just when peace seemed inevitable, an uprising breaks out under the leadership of a worthless man named Sheba. Initially, much of Israel follows him, though the group seems to simmer down to comprise only his own clan. David's response is much different than his earlier response to Absalom. When his son rose up against him, David didn't put up a fight; instead, he slunk out of Jerusalem and hid out until battle was necessary for self-defense. Here we see a much more kingly response as David sends Amasa to rally the troops. Amasa had replaced Joab as commander of David's army (19:3), likely because Joab had ignored David's request to deal gently with Absalom. However, Joab would not give up his position so easily. He kills Amasa and regains command. Sheba's rebellion soon loses most of its support and is easily put to rest at the intervention of a wise woman from the city of Abel.

David's life is certainly not going as expected. As a young shepherd boy, when Samuel anointed him as the next king of Israel, David must have been both afraid and excited. We see something similar in the Christmas story. An angel appears to Mary telling her that she will give birth to the Messiah – a wonderful and terrifying prophecy! Wonderful because she gets to be an integral part of God's salvation plan; terrifying because the Messiah will overthrow kingdoms, which is essentially an act of treason. As Jesus grew, a perfect child, did Mary suspect the agonizing death that was to come? And as David grew in skill and popularity throughout Israel, did he expect the bloodshed, sorrow and mess that would come? Even within the wonders of God's promises and under the protection of His blood, we will experience disappointment in our lives. Every day, news headlines and personal struggles remind us that we are not living in the Kingdom of God. BUT GOD! Because He reached His hands into the dirty mess of the world, we know with calm assurance that His kingdom *is coming*. He is coming, our Lord is coming back. And so, we cry out along with the apostle John and the millions of Christians who have gone before us: *"Come, Lord Jesus!"* (Revelation 22:20). This is not a cry of *hope*, but of *faith*; we are SURE of what we *hope* for, and CERTAIN of what we do not yet see *because* He has already testified: *"Surely, I am coming soon."*

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

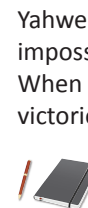
1. In what ways were your expectations dashed, or unmet, this past year? Give your disappointment over to God. Thank Him that He is your King, and that His promises of joy and blessing for your life *still remain*. Ask Him to speak specifically into your disappointments; what does He want to say?
2. Ask God what it means to have a “kingdom perspective.” Ask Him to give you a kingdom perspective. Ask Him to show you where you are too focused on things that are *not* of His kingdom. Are you willing to lay those things to rest?
3. Ask God to prepare you for His coming. Ask God to prepare your family for His coming. Ask Him to prepare His church for His coming. Spend a good amount of time in prayer for these things. And pray the prayer of Revelation 22:20: “*Come, Lord Jesus!*”

DAY 14**READ:** 2 Samuel 21

At some point during David’s reign, we are told there were three years of famine. Upon seeking the Lord, David learns that the famine is a result of some unfinished business. Saul had apparently shown injustice to the Gibeonites – a misdeed that had never been reconciled; and so David goes forth to right Saul’s wrong. For recompense, the men of Gibeon ask that seven of Saul’s sons be given to them that they might be put to death. This seems like a harsh agreement, and whether or not it was condoned by God is uncertain. Whatever the case, the famine did end after the sons had been killed and after David honoured the bodies of Saul and Jonathan.

Stories like this often stir up questions. Conclusions are drawn and alternate answers offered, but there are some things we will not know for certain. One thing we do learn from this story is that God will use His creation to get man’s attention. He sends a famine in order to shed light on Saul’s unjust actions. And He still does such things today. We do not like to say it when a natural disaster befalls a nation – it wouldn’t be politically correct – or when sickness invades a home, but it is nonetheless true. Of course, disaster – be it in the oceans, land, skies, or human body – is not always in response to *sin*; but God is in control of all things and so He has *allowed* such disasters with a *purpose* in mind. Nothing happens without God’s allowance. That is a tough pill to swallow if we have not erected a foundation on the truths of his nature – that He is *good* and *loving* and *almighty*. And so, when disaster strikes in our lives, we should seek God immediately. We should ask if He is trying to get our attention in some way. Perhaps He will reveal an area of sin He wants us to deal with. Perhaps He will tell us that He is giving us *rest* through sickness. Perhaps he will reveal a great picture of what He wants to accomplish through our trial. Perhaps He will show us how He wants to use this trial to draw us nearer to Himself. Perhaps He will say nothing but, “Trust Me.” We should not assume what He will *or will not* say; we should only trust that whatever His word, it is the best word.

The chapter goes on to summarize four battles between Israel and the Philistines. The Philistines were Israel’s primary enemies during the reign of David. David’s fame in Israel began when he killed the Philistine champion, Goliath of Gath, when David was only a shepherd boy. Here we are told of the demise of a handful of other Philistine giants. Once again, God is proved to be the Almighty Champion of Israel. Even a giant is no match for

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Take a moment to identify an area of struggle or disaster in your life that you have not brought before the Lord. Spend some time in prayer about this issue. Ask God what He wants to say about this. Ask Him if He might show you the purpose He has in mind. Don’t be afraid of His Word! He desires to draw nearer to you.
2. What is a need or desire you have that seems impossible. Ask God to make it possible, if it is in His will for your life. Thank God for His power which is evident through the stories you just read. Ask Him to give you a revelation of His power and might.
3. Spend some time in prayer for the Canadian Church. Pray that the truths of Gods character as defined through Scripture would become foundational truths for Canadian believers. Pray that God would remove the lies that His people have believed about Him. Pray that those lies would be replaced with His truth. Pray that Canadian Christians would become committed to God’s Word and prayer and that they would stand firm against the devil and his schemes. Pray that those who have weak faith and struggle with unanswered questions will find rest in the truth of God’s character.

DAY 15**READ:** 2 Samuel 22

2 Samuel 22 is a song that David composed in response to the Lord’s deliverance in his life. David is nearing the end of his life and is reflecting on the many ways that God has shown faithfulness to him. The psalm paints a handful of pictures and declares a few major themes: 1) *I called out the Lord and He heard me*; 2) *The Lord came down in power and might and delivered me*; 3) *The Lord saves me because of my righteousness*; 4) *The Lord has helped me to be victorious over my enemies*; 5) *Praise the Lord for saving me, the king*.

One of the most striking portions of this psalm is verses 21-25 where David makes such claims as: “*The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness*” and “*For I have kept the ways of the LORD*” and “*I was blameless before Him*”. How can David say such things?! Has he forgotten the adultery, deception and murder he committed? Has he forgotten the death of his baby? Has he forgotten the raping of Tamar, and the deaths of Amnon and Absalom? No. He has not forgotten his sin. *But God has*. As David penned in Psalm 103: “*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*” (v 11-12) Oh what a glorious thought – that God would take the transgressions of the repentant sinner and throw them to the very ends of the earth! What a treasure that, though our sins are like scarlet, as red as crimson, *He has washed them as white as snow, as white as wool!* (Isaiah 1:18) This was the wonderful truth David knew, the wonderful truth that had captured his heart and wooed him back to the Lord. He was not a perfect man – he knew this so well – and yet he could confidently claim that he was righteous and blameless! This is the truth for the repentant sinner. True, we cannot live a double life. We cannot claim God’s righteousness when we are knowingly living in sin and rebellion. But

when we are truly repentant – as David was when he confessed his sin to God – we are covered with the righteousness of Christ. His blood, which was crimson, washes over us so that we shine as clean and pure and white as snow before God. This is the message of the cross.

This psalm shows God to be an intimate, all-powerful Saviour. The description of God coming down from His temple in verses 8-20 is captivating. He is a mighty warrior, sovereign over all creation, coming down to rescue His son from the hand of the enemy. God is a faithful Father *and* a mighty warrior. He is one we can *cling* to and one who evokes a measure of fear. How wonderful to follow this mighty God!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Read the song again and take note of the different themes and the specific words David uses. (In verses 2-3 alone he uses seven words to describe the protection offered by God!) Meditate on these things – really think about what they mean and what they declare about God.
 - a. Write down all of the truths declared about God in this chapter.
 - b. Think back on David's life. As you read, jot down specific instances in David's life when God delivered him.
2. Take some time to reflect back on your own life. How has God delivered you from the hand of your enemies? How has he shown you the cleansing power of His blood? Why can you praise Him? Write your own prayer, or poem, of thanksgiving and praise to God.
3. Thank Jesus for the power of His blood. Thank Him that you can stand blameless before Him because He has forgiven you for your sins when you have repented. Pray for someone in your life who has not experienced the cleansing of sin through the blood of Jesus. Titus 3:5-7 says: *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.* Use the wonderful truths of this verse to pray for this person.

DAY 16



READ: 2 Samuel 23

King David is nearing the end of his life. 2 Samuel 23:1-7 contains David's final psalm. In it, the just ruler is compared to the worthless man. One who rules justly with a fear of the Lord is like light and life to his people. But worthless men will be cast away and consumed with fire. He doesn't know all the details of the afterlife, but David knows that his hope is in the Lord after death just as it has been on earth. And the promise of an eternal throne brings much joy to his heart. He knows that God will cause his desires to prosper. David's desires were to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, and God's promise will allow this to be so.

The rest of the chapter lists David's mighty men – the men who stood faithfully by his side all of his days as king. Of the men, there are three that stand out: Josheb-basshebeth, Eleazar and Shammah. These three showed exceptional strength and dedication. Abishai

and Benaiah are also noted for their skill and leadership, though they did not attain to the distinction of the three. David was beloved by his people. Men were eager to fight for him and defend his throne. Verses 13-17 even tell of the lengths three men went to in order to get David a drink of water. David was easy to serve. Level-headed, he sought the council of his commanders and ultimately of the Lord. Throughout 2 Samuel we overhear conversations between David and Joab showing a very open and candid relationship between the two. While David was honoured, his men were also able to speak their minds without fear. Unlike Saul, he was not given to fits of rage or outbursts of jealousy.

This list is given to encourage and inspire us. We must recognize the necessity of friendship and teamwork. Even the most skilled person cannot accomplish his task alone. David was a talented leader and a mighty warrior – long before kingship, he had shown his strong abilities while defending his flocks from predators. But the lions and bears were nothing compared to the Philistine armies! He needed warriors who had both skill and devotion. The Bible never ceases to show us reality, and deception is a prime component to the kingships of the Old Testament. And while David experienced much of this at the hand of his children, we are encouraged to read this list of men who stood faithfully by his side. The name of Uriah in verse 39 brings a pang with it: deceived by the king whom he fought for. Again, we are subtly reminded of David's weaknesses.

As leaders we must acknowledge, praise and encourage those who stand beside us. Encouragement and affirmation bring out the best in those we lead, whether in business, ministry or the home. If those who follow us feel that nothing they do is ever good enough for us, we will lose them. Employees and volunteers will quit or shirk their duties and our children will emotionally detach. But if they feel that their efforts will bring encouragement, recognition and pleasure, they will be inspired.

And for those of us who follow... we are encouraged to love the ones we follow, to love our employers and leaders and parents. Perhaps these men listed didn't always agree with David's actions. Certainly some did not feel too fond of David's reaction on the day they defeated Absalom only to find their king weeping and refusing to acknowledge their victory. And yet they served him. We are not told how many of them died in battle, but they all put their life on the line for their king. Our roles are somewhat different. Most of us are not literally putting our lives on the line for our bosses, but we are called to honour and serve them with all our strength, to work with joy and fervour. If your boss or leader were King David, would your name be listed among his mighty men?



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. David is nearing the end of his life with a sound mind and devoted heart. Spend some time meditating on the theme of *finishing well*. Are you set on a path to end your life well? If you found out today that you had only a short time left, would you feel prepared?
 - a. Ask God to show you any changes you need to make towards a good ending.
 - b. Spend some time praying for someone whose lifetime you know will end soon. Pray that they could end life well. Ask God how to pray for them specifically.
2. Ask God to show you how you can specifically start to encourage people more. Plan to do this today.
3. Ask God how you can joyfully and fervently serve those who lead you. Plan to do this today.

DAY 17 **READ:** 2 Samuel 24

The book of 2 Samuel ends on a somewhat disappointing note. David's pride draws him into another act of sin. David commands Joab to take a census of the people. This is an act of pride, showing both that David does not trust the Lord to defend and protect his kingdom, and also that David boasts in the number of those under his command. Verse 1 tells us that the Lord incited David to take the census. 1 Chronicles 21 recounts the same story and says that it was Satan who incited David to this act. And so we conclude that the Lord allowed Satan the authority to tempt David in this way, and David succumbed. Joab knows this is a bad idea and tells David so, but David has his mind made up and sends Joab out to number the people.

It doesn't take long for David to recognize his sin. Pride is an ugly thing. We have just read the list of David's wonderful mighty men, and now we see David giving himself the glory for such commitment in his kingdom. God hates when we steal His glory. David is nothing without the Lord. It is Yahweh who called him out of the pastures and into the palace. It is Yahweh who brought him out of the desert and into his domain. It is Yahweh who showered him with His presence, with friendship and with sustenance. When we take glory for God's gifts, God gets angry. David should have known better, and so consequence ensues. He is given three options: 1) three years of famine in Israel, 2) three months on the run from his enemies, or 3) three days of pestilence in Israel. David's response is so true to form: *"I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man."* Even in the midst of punishment, David trusts in God's mercy. And so we learn – mercy does not always mean being let off the hook. In fact, sometimes punishment is merciful because what we learn from it far outweighs being let off the hook. Whatever would come, David trusted in God's mercy and the love God had for His people. And so Israel falls into three days of pestilence and 70,000 men die before David calls out for deliverance and God stays His hand. The mercy of the Lord spares the nation and retains the promise of an everlasting dynasty.

In worship and obedience, David buys the field where the angel of the Lord ceased his destruction and built there an altar to the Lord. Again, a poignant principle is shown to us by David. He offers to buy the field from Araunah, but Araunah kindly offers it for free. David will not take it and says: *"No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD that cost me nothing."* There is nothing we can do to repay the Lord for the kindness and salvation He has shown us. But a sacrifice without sacrifice is nothing. When we give tithes and offerings faithfully, even though it means we cannot afford something else that we would like to buy, God is pleased. When we take some of our spare time to spend with someone who needs a friend, even though we would like to rest, God is pleased. When we abstain from something we enjoy for a time in order to grow our intimacy with God (fasting), God is pleased. Our sacrificial actions show that we value Him above all else. David models this for us.

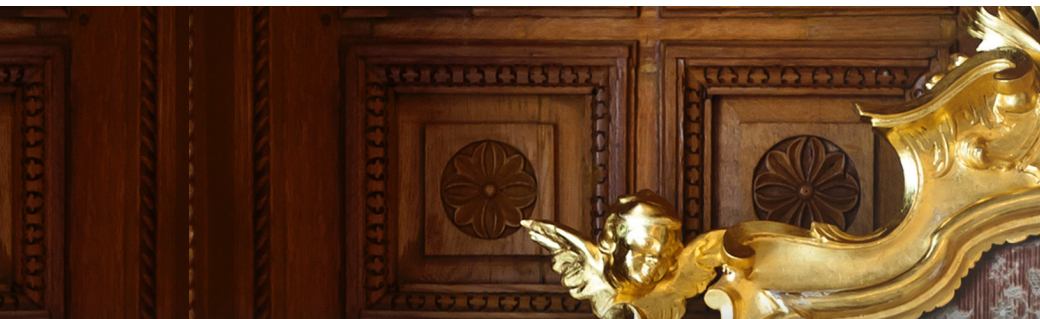
And so we end 2 Samuel on the cusp of a change. David is old in age, having written his final psalm. His kingdom is promised to remain forever, but the time is nearing for the kingship to pass to another. Who it will be and what will happen to the nation of Israel is further developed in the books of Kings and Chronicles and through the prophecies of the Major and Minor Prophets. God has chosen a people and a nation. Now He has chosen a kingdom and a family line. One is coming who will reign forever on David's throne. He has

come once and He will come again. We look with joyful expectation to that glorious and terrible day when *"the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory."* (Matthew 24:29-30) And we will cry: *"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready"* (Revelation 19:6-8). And He will defeat Satan and all who oppose His throne, and then, finally, *"the dwelling place of God [will be with] man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."* (Revelation 21:3-4) Amen.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Ask God to show you if and how you have taken personal glory in the gifts He has given to you. Ask Him to reveal pride to you and to give you a repentant heart, like David. Confess this pride to God. Ask Him to show you any consequences that have been in your life because of your pride.
2. Do you sacrifice for the Lord? Have you accepted His sacrifice only to go on doing whatever you want, or do you seek to lay down your life for Him out of love and worship for what He has done for you? Ask God to grow a sacrificial heart in you. Listen for a way that you might need to sacrifice your time, money or something else for His kingdom.
3. Think back over the book of 2 Samuel and how God has been working out his plan of salvation throughout the book. Thank God for this plan that He laid out in scripture. Thank Him for the salvation you have received. Ask God to grow in you a joyful expectation of His second coming.
 - a. How can you proclaim the message of salvation to others today?

NOTES



The Book of 2 Samuel

In the book of 2 Samuel, Israel is ushered into the long-awaited kingship of King David. However, things do not go as smoothly as one might have expected. Though the kingdom expands greatly under his leadership, David's reign is fraught with trouble as his own sins bring grave consequences to his personal life and to the nation. However, a message of hope shines through this book as Yahweh's plan of salvation which was promised to Abraham becomes slightly clearer. God's incredible covenant to David will light the way for our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, to reign forever on David's throne!

2 Samuel 7:17 (ESV)

"And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before Me. Your throne shall be established forever."



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