

Undeserved Love: A Highpoint in Kingly Rule – Part 1

2 Samuel 9

*“Do not fear, for I will show you **kindness** for the sake of your father Jonathan”*

Introduction: There are some words in the English language that are hard to define: *nonplussed, ineffable, disparate, abjure, and blandishment* to name a few. But a much simpler word that is challenging to get our arms around is the word **love**. Sure, we all know what it **generally** means in terms of having affection for another, but because love has so many facets, like a well cut diamond, simple definitions fall short. *Is love a feeling? A commitment? A choice? A verb (thank you D.C. Talk)? An action? Something you fall into and out of? Does everyone have the capacity to love? Is loving someone based on their worthiness or something else? Is it romantic or platonic?* A full-orbed definition may be a bit more challenging than first considered.

Love IS a central theme of the entirety of the Bible, thus an ultimate thread by which the universe exists and redemptive history hangs. One of the ways the words that the Old Testament uses for the word “love” is the word “**hesed**”, a word we’ve seen before in 1 Samuel but which dominates God’s interaction with Israel. This word means “love”, but also carries the connotation of *kindness, faithfulness, mercy, goodness, loyalty, and steadfast love*. One commentator said that he closest equivalent in the NT is the word **grace, since this kind of love is undeserved and surprising**. It’s the kind of love by which God described Himself:

Exodus 34:6-7 *“The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God **merciful and gracious**, slow to anger, and abounding in **steadfast love** and faithfulness, 7 keeping **steadfast love** for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin”*

His *steadfast love* meant that He not only chose Israel for His own glory, but remained committed to them despite their struggles, sins, and faithlessness. He was faithful when they were not. He gave them grace when they offered nothing in return. He withheld judgment that was deserved. He did all of this because *hesed* is His nature. Because He extended this to Israel, it is what He required of them:

Micah 6:8 *“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but **to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?**”*

Notice that *hesed* is required of His people in terms of kindness, which goes above and beyond merely being **nice**, and is wrapped up in both *action* (justice) and a proper view of oneself (humility). *Hesed* love goes above and beyond what is expected, doing good for others for their best when there is NOTHING in it for ourselves. It is serving others who we like AND those who annoy us, those who have something to offer and those who have nothing to give. *Hesed* is the marrow of selfless, humble, sacrificial, kind, gentle, and loyal love that only a believer can truly live out, since it takes a supernatural source to accomplish it. This is the kind of love that **Israel’s king** was supposed to embody and that **Israel** was supposed to display. What David showed in 2 Samuel 9 is truly a **highpoint** in world history, an act of undeserved kindness that reflects the heart and character of God, but was something he could not maintain, which begs the need for **another king, a better king, to fulfill hesed completely**.

The Object of Hesed Love: A Desperate Plight (9:1-4)

*And David said, “**Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?**” 2 Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and they called*

him to David. And the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?” And he said, “I am your servant.” 3 And the king said, “Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?” Ziba said to the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; **he is crippled in his feet.**” 4 The king said to him, “Where is he?” And Ziba said to the king, “He is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at **Lo-debar.**”

After expanding Israel’s borders, running out enemies from the land, and securing his defensive positions (2 Samuel 8), David had **time** to contemplate next steps, the kind of time that is brought on by true rest. The text begins with the statement, “*Is there anyone left in the house of Saul*”, a questions posed most likely to his Cabinet or leaders. Now, the next statement of the question could have **easily and logically been**: *that I may wipe the slate clean, leaving no remnant of Sauline line to be a thorn in my flesh*. In fact, in the Ancient Near East, warring dynasties would engage this way, including **Jehu** in **Kings 10** as he killed the 70 sons of Ahab and **Athaliah** in **2 Kings 11:1-3** as she destroyed all the royal family, putting down any competition. But David was going to show a counter-cultural way forward, instead operating in a way **unknown by those in power during his day...and days since**.

Instead of exacting revenge or systematically eradicating competition, David made **two clear statements**: He wanted to show **hesed** to Saul’s house, and this was on account of his dear friend and covenant relationship with **Jonathan**. We will come back to that relationship in a few minutes, but for now, this request set off a chain of actions. **Ziba**, a former servant in the house of Saul, was found who had knowledge of a **living relative of Saul and son of Jonathan**. His name was **Mephibosheth**. To understand how **hesed** works, we must have a full understanding of who this man was and the plight he found himself. Here is what we know:

- When he was **five years old**, his grandpa and dad both died in battle (2 Samuel 4:4). This meant in one fell swoop he was left without father figures in his life.
- In the haste of fleeing upon news of Saul’s death, Mephibosheth’s well-meaning nurse and caregiver moved so quickly that he fell, leaving him permanently **crippled in his feet** (2 Samuel 4:4), a fact that would become his **identity** (almost every time he is mentioned, his being crippled is mentioned). We live in a day where we do not believe a handicap defines you, and there are opportunities to participate in every area of life despite impairments. But in this day, this kind of injury would have left him on the outside, in constant need and dependency, without hope of a better future.
- He was living in **Lo-debar**, a land to the northeast of Jerusalem on the other side of the Jordan River in a mountainous, desert, and desolate place. The name “Lo-debar” means “**no pasture**”. Why was he living in a place so off the grid? This was his Tatooine (ask a Star Wars nerdy friend), a place where he tried to hide out, make no waves, and have no one know who he was. He was living a paltry life.
- He was old enough to be married since he had a son named Mica (2 Sam. 9:12), so he had been living this way for the last 15-20 years.
- He considered himself a “**dead dog**”, a phrase that meant the lowly of the lowly (David referred to himself this way when Saul pursued him – 1 Sam. 24:14). Mephibosheth considered himself part of the dregs of society, and had accepted his position in life.

- He had lost all hope of a future inheritance or ability to care for himself or his family.

Mephibosheth did not choose to be born into royalty, nor did he choose to become crippled. He did not have a say in the death of his father or the fact that he became an exile. But the REALITY was, all of these things were true for him. His present plight was desperate, and there was no hope for a better or bright future. The best he could hope for would be to stay hidden and unknown in Lo-debar and watch his son grow up.

The Expression of Hesed Love: A Gracious Pursuit (9:5-8)

*Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. 6 And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and paid homage. And David said, “**Mephibosheth!**” And he answered, “**Behold, I am your servant.**” 7 And David said to him, “**Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always.**” 8 And he paid homage and said, “**What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?**”*

Now, we are not sure what David would have been expected when he saw Mephibosheth, but we do know how deeply David loved his friend Jonathan. Remember, Jonathan was a stud! He was a **warrior, skilled in combat, able to scale rock walls and courageous enough to take on Philistine strongholds by himself** (1 Sam. 14). He was a faithful man, a committed friend, and once who did what was right even if it cost him conflict with his own family. We said Jonathan was the man you hope your son becomes and your daughter can marry someday. When David was still on the run from Saul, Jonathan caught up with his friend David and made this promise with him:

*If I am still alive, show me the **steadfast love of the Lord**, that I may not die; 15 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.” 16 And Jonathan **made a covenant** with the house of David, saying, “May the Lord take vengeance on David’s enemies.” 17 And Jonathan made David swear again **by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.***

20+ years had passed since this took place, but David’s commitment to Jonathan through covenant and *hesed* remained. His commitment to Jonathan went above and beyond personal gain or cultural value placement, but instead expressed the kind of supernatural kindness that can only be found in the love of God. These are the **marks of hesed expressed in relationship**:

- **Hesed pursues others, not waiting to be pursued** – Notice that it was David who took the initiative with Mephibosheth, not the other way around. This is a distinctive mark and why **grace** is closely associated with it.
- **Hesed** is LOYAL, meaning it is committed to others based standards that are not based on reciprocity, in the same ways we are loyal to our kids and other family members. I’m committed to my daughters no matter what, and they cannot do anything that would cause me to be disloyal to them.
- **Hesed** is based on covenant realities, NOT the value of the person or what they can offer in return. When David saw Mephibosheth, he in many saw the *opposite* of who Jonathan was. If his love and sacrifice was based on the value of the object, he would have taken one look at the pitiable state of Jonathans son and left him to fend for himself. But hesed is place on the

individual, seeking their good without thought of what is returned. This speaks largely into how we are to love one another...but we'll get to that in a minute.

- **Hesed** is for the **undeserving** – There is nothing Mephibosheth did to put him into his situation, but there was nothing about him that stood out that would make him worthy of this kind of mercy and grace...except one thing (again, we'll get to that). The text goes out of its way to simply show his situation and not the virtue of his character, meaning he was dependent on the grace of others completely
- **Hesed is by nature KIND** – Even the author of Samuel translated this not as “love” but as “kindness”. This is important because kindness is MORE THAN being nice or cordial, and one can show commitment and loyalty without being kind. No, kindness is in a category of its own, going above and beyond to not only help a person in their need, but also being considerate of the whole of a person, including their feelings and personhood.

This pursuit and loyal love showed itself in specific ways, which Mephibosheth enjoyed for the rest of his life.

The Results of Hesed Love: A Restored Prospect (9:9-13)

*Then the king called Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, “**All that belonged to Saul** and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson. 10 And you and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him and shall bring in the produce, **that your master's grandson may have bread to eat**. But Mephibosheth your master's grandson shall always eat at my table.” Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. 11 Then Ziba said to the king, “According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so will your servant do.” So Mephibosheth ate at David's table, **like one of the king's sons**. 12 And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba's house became Mephibosheth's servants. 13 So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king's table. **Now he was lame in both his feet.***

When Mephibosheth first saw David, he was not sure of the purpose of the occasion. Was David there to exact revenge? Was he going to finish the job and kill him? Put him in prison? Take away any dignity he had left. His response was to simply fall on his face in humility and pay homage, claiming to be David's servant, recognizing that he had nothing to offer, nothing to bargain with, nothing to present as a reason to keep him out of wrath. But it is here in this very moment that **hesed** is displayed.

- **RESTORATION** – Notice that David sought to restore certain things to Mephibosheth. **First**, he called him by name at their initial meeting (v. 6), restoring dignity to his personhood and not treating him as a cripple but as a man. **Second**, he restored and replaced his **fear** with comfort (v. 7), compelling him not to be afraid, but to receive the kindness in the way it was intended. **Third**, David restored ALL the land that had belonged to Saul, meaning the hometown of Gibeah, which would have been of the tribe of Benjamin, in close proximity to Jerusalem. In other words, he could come home! Mephibosheth was born a prince, became a pauper, and was given back his royal inheritance once more.
- **ADOPTION** – Adoption is a powerful thing. If anyone here has been adopted or has adopted another, you know the amazing gift of loving someone who once was NOT yours and then becomes one of your very own, not differentiating in intensity the love between children from your own womb. David assured Mephibosheth that he was moving from slave/servant to a son, as he invited him to **eat at his table for the rest of his life, “LIKE ONE OF THE KINGS SONS”** (v.

11). A friend in my house has certain privileges and access, but a child has full access! Sonship was offered, which moved him from guest to part of the family, bringing a ***new and full identity***.

- **ASSURANCE** – With his lands restored, he obviously had no ability to work the land himself, so David conscripted Ziba, along with his sons and servants, to work that land FOR Mephibosheth, securing both he and his families future. In one fell swoop, Mephibosheth went from an outcast to a son, from having no future to security, from no dignity to the high status of eating at the kings table, all with the knowledge that his future and that of his son would be protected.

Concluding Takeaways from HeseD

FIRST – When we RECEIVE this kind of love, it is the kind of love we should give to others. David was the recipient of *hesed* when he received not only the kingship of Israel but when God gave him an eternal covenant. In **Psalm 89:1-3**, David recounts the covenant he received from God that built on the foundation of “*the steadfast love (hesed) of the LORD*”. In gaining something he did not deserve, he simply said, “***Who am I, Oh Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?***” (2 Sam. 7:18). In other words, David knew what it was like to be given grace by God in lavish ways, which created a conduit by which he could give this kind of grace to another.

David kept a covenant with Jonathan’s family, but we too have covenant relationships by which we can show steadfast love and kindness. The **first and clearest** is the marriage covenant we share with our spouse. Often it is hard to show selfless love in all kindness and grace, since we will look for something in return (thanks, acknowledgement, physical affection, etc). But exercising *hesed* in our marriage means that we look do good to our spouse out of kindness and grace, to build them up, and to go above and beyond without expectation of return. The **second is the familial relationships we have with the church**, meaning we seek to sacrificially serve those that we like and don’t like, those that have upside and those that are sponges. This sacrifice does not express itself in frustration or guilt laden service, but in kindness that seeks the best of the object of our love, especially when it costs us. The problem with selfish love is that it fails to distinguish itself from the world, thus is devoid of the Spirit and truth **Third**, we have an opportunity with our larger family, especially around these holiday gatherings, to show ***hesed*** those members of our family that bug us, boil our blood, and are quite frankly annoying. What an opportunity to show the love that God has for us by listening to a hard-to-love relative, taking an interest in them, asking questions, and giving of our time.

SECOND – David showed love to Mephibosheth, but in two more chapters, his magnanimous nature would come to a screeching halt as he took another man’s wife in adultery, killing him and plunging the kingdom into heavy consequences. This was David’s highpoint, but it fell short. Israel, along with us, yearned for a **better king, one who would not fail. That is what Jesus Christ fulfilled in terms of *hesed***, in lavishing grace, in covenant love, in eternal kindness, and in overflowing mercy. The overlay of David’s interaction with Mephibosheth fits snugly on top of God’s kindness toward us.

We, like Mephibosheth, begin spiritually in the dregs, possessing nothing in ourselves that we would be acceptable to God, since all our works are like filthy rags to Him (Isa. 64:9). We are children of wrath (Eph. 2:3), darkened in our understanding, and alienated from God (Eph. 4:17-18). Our best hope is to try to hide from God, which is what Adam and Eve did, but that is a fool’s errand. If nothing else changed, we would die in our own desolation. We were created to be princes with Adam to rule over the world and bring glory to God, but sin changed all of that.

This is where God's covenant, abounding love comes in. It was **IN LOVE** that God predestined to **adopt, forgive, redeem, and restore an inheritance for us in Christ** (Eph. 1:3-11). It was in the fact that God gave us to Jesus (John 17:6) and Jesus faithfully saved and gave back to His Father (John 10:28-30). They kept a covenant with each other which Jesus fulfilled once and for all on the cross. We have been moved from slaves to sons (Gal. 4:7) and heirs through God. We have been given an inheritance that is secure and set forever (1 Pet. 1:3-5). We will one day dine at His table (Rev. 19:9-10), and will be able to see Jesus because we are now God's children (1 John 3:2). In other words, it is God's love that is defined by grace, mercy, kindness, and steadfastness that **restores** us back to Him through Jesus. God moves from a wrathful terror to a loving Father who knows our name, who **WANTS** us with Him, and has provided security for us forever. God is the one who **pursues us while we were sinful, rebellious, and running our headlong race to hell**. He pursued us when we hated the light, loved the darkness, possessing hard hearts and nothing but selfish motivations. God went above and beyond in His love, as He would have been right and just to punish us, or simply leave us alone, but He instead sacrificed Himself to bring us back.

Now, if you told anyone about the story of Mephibosheth and ended this way: *and Mephibosheth heard the offer of David, saw the fact that he moved toward him in love, and promised to secure him forever, and he refused to go along with that plan. Instead, Mephibosheth went back to his paltry life that he could control and decided to live in the sand and drink up the mud instead of experience the banquet table of the king as one of his sons*" If you told anyone this ending, there would be a chorus of the same melody saying, ***"what a stubborn, prideful FOOL"***.

And so is anyone hearing today who would refuse to bow their knee to Jesus Christ, who offers Himself in love to forgive our sin and welcome into His family. But the requirement is that we see ourselves as Mephibosheth – we must see ourselves as **dead dogs**, those who are lost, blind, and worthy of wrath because of our offense of a holy God. It is then that we can truly see Christ, His work on the cross, and His love for us shining through. We don't save ourselves, but we **believe by faith, repent of our sin, ask for forgiveness, and follow Him**. That is the hope and joy of God's **hesed** on our behalf.