

Read 2 Samuel 1

I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women. 2 Sam 1:26 I had a couple of guy friends in my last church that I was very close to. In fact, it was a bit strange to hear them say “I love you” when we were talking in person or over the phone. I come from a family that was very “huggy” and affectionate, but to hear this from friends that I had known less than a year, felt odd. However, those guys meant so much to me. We shared our problems and our prayers and had a great time in our weekly bible study. The love and relationship I had with those guys was great, because they knew the things I go through as a man, husband, and father.

When some people read this passage of David, they attribute a homosexual relationship between David and Jonathan. However, the true nature of their relationship is in the beginning of the verse: brother. I don't think I could have a relationship with guys that weren't Christians in the way I did with those men from my church. The reason is because of the blood of Jesus. It's not just because they're men that we're close, but because they are men who love Jesus. They live their life for him. In the same way, David loved and appreciated Jonathan because he was living for the Lord as David was. **Do you have a close friendship with fellow men or women? Relationships across genders (other than marriage), can never provide you with the understanding and help that a relationship with other men or women who go through your exact same situations. Thank your friends for the understanding and listening they have given you over the years, and let them know you love them; it will deepen your friendships.**

Read 2 Samuel 2

Then the men of Judah came and there anointed David king over the house of Judah 2 Sam 2:4 In my last church I was able to lead the church in the Lord's Supper by myself for the first time. As I was getting the details together and asking how the church normally did it, they told me they end with a song “Blest Be the Tie that Binds”. I had never heard of the song, and had no idea how to lead it. The man who told me that was their song couldn't remember how it went either. I asked several other people, and no one knew the song. So when the time came I sang, “He is Lord”, which I knew everyone would know. Later someone came up and remarked, “We always sing Blest Be the Tie that Binds.” I said I understood that, but no one knew the song, and since I had to lead it, I picked one that I knew. It was a bit more contentious than it should have been.

There are many reasons why churches do the things they do, but the biggest are: history and God's leading. History means, “that's the way we've always done it”, and God's leading indicates that the church is moving in a prayerful and Spirit-led direction. You can see the contrast in these two kings that are chosen for the people of God. In Judah, they anointed David king. Anointed means to set apart, which they were simply recognizing that David had been set apart by God. In Israel, they simply chose the next son of the previous king. Clearly as we read the next few chapters, we see God moving in

Judah and with David because David was the Spirit-led direction for Israel. **Do you see things in your church operating out of history or God's leading? Do you speak up to see the church be what it could and should? What about in your own life? Do you simply chalk up your sin and failures to your history, or do you choose a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led life that leads you away from temptation and into a life that can be completely used by God?**

Read 2 Samuel 3

Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; and David grew steadily stronger, but the house of Saul grew weaker continually. 2 Sam 3:1 I'll never forget the first night of basic training. You could hear guys moaning all over the barracks. Our first day was brutal with constant physical torture, and now we were finally in bed, and our bodies were giving us the what for. Over a few weeks we noticed the moaning stop and that we were now running 5 miles without a problem. Our class was unique, that we had Christmas break for two weeks before our training was officially over. I ran a little bit while I was off, and some guys did more and some less. But, it was clear after the first day that we'd grown weak over the break, and the drill sergeants enjoyed a few days of kicking us back into shape.

In this passage we see the division between David and Saul's house beginning to crumble. David's house grew steadily stronger, and Saul's weaker. This indicates there were not ups and downs, but ups or downs. David's house was marked by honoring God and seeking to unite the people, while Saul's house was one of distrust, rebellion, and hoarding of power. It says in verse 36 that everything David did pleased the people. That's because He sought to please God. **What is your life and family marked by? Continually growing stronger in the Lord Jesus Christ, or are you growing steadily weaker? You can be regular church attendees and grow weaker, so that doesn't rescue you. Do you spend time with the Lord when you're away from church? Do you talk to your spouse and children about Him, and what He's been doing in their lives? Many Christians are happy with a marginal strengthening, but that will never change your life. A steady strengthening indicates you are growing more with Him everyday, but still have some areas you can rise up in. Are you closer to Him now, than you were last month?**

Read 2 Samuel 4

Then they brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron and said to the king, "Behold, the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; thus the LORD has given my lord the king vengeance this day on Saul and his descendants ." 2 Sam 4:8 Have you ever been well intentioned, and yet still totally wrong? Certainly if David were going to talk to these guys today, the term he would use is "two wrongs don't make a right." Clearly Ish-bosheth was not God's chosen man to lead Israel, but David had a problem with these guys going in and murdering someone for David's sake. As servants of Ish-bosheth, they didn't show the kind of loyalty that David would have been excited for.

Sometimes we attempt to do things for people, and then we're shocked when they rebuff our efforts. **You need to evaluate why you're doing what you're doing? Are you doing it truly for the benefit of the other person, or is there gain for yourself? Often people attempt to do things that benefit both people, instead of just being a person who freely gives without anything in return. Why do you go to church, tithe, or pray? Are you doing it for God out of love, or out of a sense of duty? Until you get your mind right regarding your relationship with Jesus, much of the Christian life will feel like monotony and rules. There is much talk in Christian life today about legalism. I have more respect for those who hold to legalism out of a sense of concern for the Lord, than those who try to flaunt their freedom and do things that many would consider questionable conduct. Be sure you aren't claiming to serve Jesus, while you really just serve yourself.**

Read 2 Samuel 5

So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them before the LORD at Hebron; then they anointed David king over Israel. 2 Sam 5:3The New York Philharmonic recently traveled to North Korea to perform in that country's capital city. The orchestra played selections from both countries, including the national anthem of both countries. After the anthem, the orchestra was given a six-minute standing ovation by the sold-out crowd of North Koreans. While they couldn't speak each other's language, many of the North Koreans waved at the orchestra members. Many of those performers put their instruments down to wave back, with tears in their eyes. It was a really historic moment, as we received a reminder that the regime of a country doesn't necessarily represent the people. As touching as the story is, a White House official pointed out that a standing ovation doesn't soften the hardliner stance of their regime that has been hinting at war with the United States since 1994. The point of the official is pretty clear; he has expectations that would have to be met before he believed the country of North Korea was really changing.

David was going through something similar, but had come out the other side. With the death of Ish-bosheth, everyone was now ready to recognize David as king. Many of these elders had followed after another, so they do two things to verify to David that they have changed. They made a covenant with Him before the Lord, meaning that they understood there was a spiritual aspect to the promise. Secondly, they anointed David, as a symbol of their repentance. It wasn't David's old servants that did it, but everyone was now involved. **Promises are proven by actions more than words. Do you make promises without proof? It's easy to say you're sorry for something, or willing to change, but you have to willingly show that change. It's not just about waving at God, but seeking to live your life in accordance with His will. Are you living out God's promises in your life, and are you living out your promises to Him? What is the evidence?**

Read 2 Samuel 6

Then it happened as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David that Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart. 2 Sam 6:16 I never realized all that goes on behind the scenes of a church, until I served in the ministry. Only then did I see the ugliness and ungodliness that comes out in people as they deal with those whom they “employ” with their tithes. I had a man who claimed to be a Christian, was a member of the church, and absolutely hated me as I ministered in that church. An intermediary went and asked the man what his problem was with me. The man replied, “I just don’t like him.” There wasn’t much I could do about that.

In this passage we see David’s wife despise him. She had watched her dad act as king with a certain air of dignity. Here David has stripped off his royal robes and dancing in the under tunic of a common peasant. Her despise for David didn’t remove his joy. He continued dancing and rejoicing that they were in the will of God. Uzzah died because the people were out of the will of God in transporting the ark. A new cart is nice, but there were rings to be used as it was carried on the shoulders of the Levites. Now that David is doing this in the will of God, he is despised. **Do you understand that living in the will of God can cause you to be despised by others? Usually it’s a result of their own disobedience to the Lord, and your life is a reminder of what they are supposed to be. But, do you despise someone? As a Christian, that should never be. 1 John 3:10 says anyone that doesn’t love his brother (a fellow Christian), is not of God. Don’t choose bitterness towards people, but forgiveness. Seek to fix relationships with all people.**

Read 2 Samuel 7

Then David the king went in and sat before the LORD, and he said, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far? 2 Sam 7:18 My wife and I like to sing together, and sang a song by Casting Crowns called “Who am I?” It takes many biblical statements about the shortness of our life and puts them to music. “I am a flower quickly fading, here today and gone tomorrow, a wave tossed on the ocean, a vapor in the wind.” And despite the smallness of one human life next to the eternal God, He still loves us. There is not a person on the earth who is not valuable and precious to God and loved by Him.

David was certainly a man after God’s own heart, and even He recognizes that there is nothing about him that should cause God to pick Him. **Do you recognize this? I have an ability to preach and teach God’s Word. However, to revel in these abilities would be wrong because He gave them to me. If it weren’t for salvation, I wouldn’t have received these spiritual gifts from Him. Don’t assume you deserve greater standing than a younger Christian, or that your service for the Kingdom impresses God. Obedience is something that pleases God, not impresses Him. Obedience is simply doing what you’re supposed to, and shouldn’t require fanfare. Thank God today that He chooses to use you, and ask Him how He desires to use you next. As my old**

missions professor used to say, “Put your yes on the table now”, as you wait on Him to give you the next assignment.

Read 2 Samuel 8

King David also dedicated these to the LORD, with the silver and gold that he had dedicated from all the nations which he had subdued: 2 Sam 8:11 When my wife and I were going through marriage counseling, our pastor took us through many aspects of our lives together. I had written down that I was tithing, but not off my National Guard income. My guard check every weekend was enough to pay for my insurance, unless I tithed from it. I had justified in my mind how that was my money and it didn't belong to the Lord. But sitting in my pastor's office, as I started to justify that line of thinking, I quickly stopped. I realized I was attempting to make a foolish argument, because everything I have comes by the Lord.

As David has victory after victory, we don't see him giving some to the Lord and some for himself. He dedicates everything to the Lord. Does that mean that God wouldn't allow him to use them for other purposes? No, but it means that David was completely open and giving God all the credit and praise for his victories. David hid nothing from the Lord. **Do you try to keep some areas of your life as off limits to God? You make your TV watching your business. Or the way you spend your money. Or the way you interact with those who cause you difficulty. In reality, the Christian dedicates every aspect of his or her life to the Lord. Then, when God chooses to step in and correct you, the openness for correction is there. So what areas is God attempting to make changes, and you're barring the door? Don't resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit. His desire is to make you better than you are.**

Read 2 Samuel 9

Again he prostrated himself and said, "What is your servant, that you should regard a dead dog like me?" 2 Sam 9:8 A woman named Mary had been checking a box to contribute \$1 from her earnings every year to the Republican party. After doing this for many years, she received a form letter to all Republican contributors inviting them to a dinner at the White House. She was very excited and purchased a special dress and bought a train ticket to take her to Washington, D.C. When she arrived at the White House, she soon realized that this was a dinner for only the biggest contributors. She arrived at the door and her name was not found on the guest list. One of then President Reagan's staffers saw the situation and casually made mention of it to the president, thinking it was funny. Reagan asked for her name and then rushed off. As she was leaving the White House, Reagan found her and said “Mary, it's so good to see you here!” He kept her with him the entire night, and had the table redone to allow Mary to sit next to him at his table. She later said it was the most incredible night of her life, to have dinner next to the President. I'm sure when Reagan called after Mary, she had no idea why he would know her name, let alone come running after her.

Mephibosheth felt much the same way when David came looking for him. I'm sure that Mephibosheth had some concern, since he was a descendant to the line of King Saul. But, David had made a promise long ago to Jonathan. When Jonathan realized that David would be king and not him, David promised that he would show kindness to Jonathan and his descendants. David was so serious about it that he sought out to find a relative of his best friend that he could keep his promise to. **Sometimes I forget that there is nothing that should draw God to me. And yet, He constantly keeps the promise of salvation to us, and comes when we call Him in repentance and sincerity. How great to know that our God loves us, and keeps His promises to us, even though we don't deserve it. Is there someone you could show the kindness of the Lord to that would not be expecting it?**

Read 2 Samuel 10

"Be strong, and let us show ourselves courageous for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God; and may the LORD do what is good in His sight." 2 Sam 10:12 I heard about pastor Adrian Rogers' conversation with another pastor. The other minister had worked diligently in his church, but found out the church was going to fire him. In order to spare the church from that difficulty, he resigned. That man told Adrian Rogers that he had done everything by the Word of God and truly attempted to honor God. Then the man said, "I can't believe what those people did to me, after all I did for them!" Dr. Rogers later said, he wished the man would have and could have said "...after all that I did for the Lord!"

In this chapter, the people of Israel decided to honor God and leave the results up to Him. Whether they won or lost, they recognized that the result was from God. So they went boldly to the task, seeking to honor God in it and as a result, God gave them victory. **God's greatest concern is that He be glorified. Some think that sounds egotistical on God's part. But, when He is glorified, people turn to Him and rely on Him. That leads people to relationship through Jesus. Truly God has the only name worth honoring and mentioning. Do you seek for your name or His to be glorified? Why do you do the service at church that you do? Is it for Him or yourself? If you never received any credit for what you do, would that be ok for you?**

Read 2 Samuel 11

Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem. 2 Sam 11:1 The worst thing I ever learned in college was that some professors don't take attendance. In learning that, I suddenly found myself avoiding the boring classes, including Psychology 101. Everything about that class was liberal and I didn't find myself agreeing with anything. I just read the book and skipped class usually. I decided on a particular Friday to go to class. When I got there, the professor was handing out a test! I knew there was one on Monday and I decided to go so I could get the review. Apparently she had moved the test up, and I was unaware. The test was about homosexuality and the psychological affects

of a homosexual relationship. I just answered all the questions as the opposite of what I truly believed, and needless to say, I passed the test. However, I could have done a whole lot better overall if I had just taken the time to go to class.

Just as there is an appropriate place for a college student to be when class is in session, there was an appropriate place for a king to be when battles were in session. Because of the difficulty of winter, often times armies reached an unofficial ceasefire. When David's army's went back to fight, David didn't go. We don't see the reason he held back, but it wasn't the right choice. As a result of David being somewhere that he shouldn't have been, he falls into sin with Bathsheba. **We have a responsibility to carry out those duties that God has for us. We cannot be lazy at our jobs, in our families, or in service to the Kingdom. Remember that when you're at work (or skipping work), that you are a representative of Christ there. Are you being responsible for your relationship with your spouse? Are you investing time into your children? That's the responsible place for a parent to be. Ask God to show you the places He wants you to be, and the ones He wants you to avoid.**

Read 2 Samuel 12

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. 2 Sam 12:13 I took the Lord's Supper many times before coming to my church in college. Under that pastor I realized for the first time how serious it is. I'm thankful that the Lord was gracious to me during all the times I took it in an unworthy manner. Our pastor, Bro. Ralph, would talk about 1 Corinthians 11, and verse 31 always stood out to me; "But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged." Bro. Ralph said we could avoid judgment for our sin if we acknowledged it and then dealt with it ourselves. He would read a list of sins that we might be struggling with, and we listened with heads bowed. I remember how many times I apologized to the Lord the first time I heard that list. I didn't try to explain to God why I made those choices. I was so ashamed that I had taken the Lord's Supper wrong for so many years, I was willing and glad to lay out my sin before Him and repent to turn from them.

This is a pivotal moment in David's life. Many kings of Israel will be confronted with sin, and many will ignore it. David willingly accepts the verdict that he already knew, but needed Nathan to share. But, Nathan is not absolving David of his sins. I believe the Lord revealed to Nathan that David would not be judged if he confessed and turned from his sins (though he lost his son). I've had maybe three people in my life who came and shared what they perceived to be sin in my life. In each case, they were correct, and I made the choice to repent. I also thanked the person for doing something that was difficult, but necessary. **How would you react if someone came and pointed out what they thought was sin in your life? Would you honestly evaluate the charge, or write it off? Sure some people are jerks, and you know those whom you shouldn't listen to, but if a godly person comes to tell you of sin issues in your life, listen. I'm thankful for John, my Dad, and my wife for bravely telling me the truth when I was wrong. If you know your sin already, repent and turn from it. Set yourself to never**

go there again. And if a man or woman of God comes to tell you about issues they perceive in your life, listen to them. People on the outside can often see things that we cannot.

Read 2 Samuel 13

Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred; for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Get up, go away!" 2 Sam 13:15 When I was in the first weeks of basic training, they would sometimes march us up to the PX where we could buy shoe shine supplies, extra clothes, or other items. We couldn't buy magazines, food, candy, soda, or anything that would be fun. They let us shop on our own, and then checked our bags hoping to find violations. I was a big mountain dew fan, and despite longingly looking at the display case, I followed the rules. In week 5 we were given a two-hour pass to go to the PX and buy and do whatever we wanted. I already knew what I wanted. I had been thinking about a mountain dew for 5 weeks. So I bought one and a king sized snickers bar. I sat down at a table, and took a drink of the soda. I almost spit it across the room. It tasted awful to me. I hadn't had much of anything with sugar for 5 weeks. I got maybe a ¼ of the mountain dew down, mostly out of principle, and ate little of the snickers. It wasn't the great moment I imagined.

The same could be said for Amnon. He had been focused on sin for a very long time, concerning his sister. Then when he got what he wanted, it didn't give the satisfaction he was hoping for. He wanted to get rid of her and avoid the terrible feelings he was now experiencing. **That's how sin is. It seems good until it's over, and then you deal with the guilt of what you've done. Maybe it was a lie you told to your spouse or parents. Maybe it was a sexual sin. Perhaps you stole something. It seemed like a good idea, and you justified it before the act, but afterwards you realized it was nothing but wrong. Are you contemplating sin now? Are you putting yourself in a position to be riddled with guilt and anger? Put your mind and planning towards God-honoring pursuits. Your life will be blessed, and you will have joy instead of guilt.**

Read 2 Samuel 14

Then the king said to Joab, "Behold now, I will surely do this thing; go therefore, bring back the young man Absalom." 2 Sam 14:21 In dealing with teenagers and I find in serious situations (sex, drugs, etc), I give them three options: you tell your parents, I tell your parents, or we tell your parents. One particular occasion, I was hoping the young man would select the third option, which he did. This young man was truly upset about what he had done. I knew his parents loved him, but might be harsh. We went to his house, and he totally laid the whole situation before them. They were upset, but they were thankful he had come and told them. They thanked me and let me pray for them. After I left, he later told me that the situation turned out much better than he ever expected. He was facing punishments, but had no doubt his parents loved him.

Some situations really need a mediator. In this case, the woman from Tekoa uses the same approach as Nathan. She doesn't tell a true story, but one to get the king thinking. At the end, this time David realizes what he should do. He calls back Absalom, something he may never have done if no one had talked to him about it. **Is there a situation in your life that could use a mediator? Or do you have friends that could use someone to work impartially to help them out. Stop avoiding their conflicts, but help them resolve them. Remember that Christ is our mediator between us and God. God cannot accept sinners, and we are all sinners. So Christ removes the guilt of our sin by His sacrifice so that we can talk to God in our good times and our bad.**

Read 2 Samuel 15

But Ittai answered the king and said, "As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be." 2 Sam 15:21 I was walking through the student commons at Mizzou one day and saw a guy from my National Guard unit. We had been back from basic for a few months, and he was reading in the newspaper that guard troops were being activated to Kosovo. I told him I had heard that, and that was part of why we signed up. He said he only signed up for college money, and was going to get his lawyer dad to get him out of the unit. We were never called up, and so he stayed. I was struck at how ready he was to get out when there was a possibility of war. What did he think the Army does?

We find David in a bad situation here, as his son is leading a revolt against him. David is clearing people out that are loyal to him, and comes across Ittai, a foreigner. The man had just arrived the day before the revolt, and now was finding himself being asked to take sides. However, he had taken sides before that day. He cites not only "the LORD", but also the lordship of David. He had accepted God as his God and David as his earthly ruler. Even though the choice was only a day old, it was his choice. **How long must we walk with Jesus before we have to be serious about it? Too often Christian teens are given a pass for their sin, just for being young? Whether you made the choice for Jesus 20 years ago, 20 days ago, or 20 minutes ago, He is the Lord of your life. You said you would submit to His rule and do whatever He asked of you. If your life is in turmoil, you can count on Jesus. We don't measure His love by our circumstances. The Christian life isn't always easy, but it's always interesting. Are you living for the Lord, remembering the choice you made to do so? Or are you ready to leave at a moments notice?**

Read 2 Samuel 16

But the king said, "What have I to do with you, O sons of Zeruiah? If he curses, and if the LORD has told him, 'Curse David,' then who shall say, 'Why have you done so?' " 2 Sam 16:10 There is nothing worse than people who weigh in on something they know nothing about. I've heard many colorful ways to convey to someone that they don't belong in the discussion. My dad used to say "This is a conversation between A and B, so C your way out." My sister used the more modern "Don't be jumpin' in my Kool-aid

without knowing what flavor it is first.” Abraham Lincoln got it right when he said, “It’s better to be silent and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.”

As David and his people are fleeing Jerusalem, a man comes out and starts yelling at the deposed king. The man is a descendant of the former King Saul, and sees a chance to get his potshots in. The man proceeds to tell David why all this has come upon him. David doesn’t react much, telling his own men, “Hey if he’s right, then I’ll be cursed, if not I won’t.” David knew the reason. God had made it clear after his affair with Bathsheeba that things David tried to do in secret would be done to him in the open. Absalom lying with David’s concubines was a proof of that word from God. **Who are you listening to? Do you allow yourself to be torn down by the words of naysayers? Those people are everywhere, so insecure in themselves that they look for someone who is down so they can kick him. And who is listening to you? Are you speaking to help or to be heard? Are you giving wise and godly counsel, or just whatever escapes from your mouth, hoping to gain some sort of footing from it? Words are powerful tools, so be careful what you listen to and say.**

Read 2 Samuel 17

Now when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed , he saddled his donkey and arose and went to his home, to his city, and set his house in order, and strangled himself; thus he died and was buried in the grave of his father. 2 Sam 17:23 I was talking to a young couple who were weeks away from getting married. They were getting over a rather serious issue that the groom had with his future wife and that we had worked through. I gave them one other piece of marital wisdom I had been given before my wedding day: “Don’t begin a conversation with your spouse by saying ‘You never’ or ‘You always’”. It is sound counsel that I try to apply everyday. Once you start with a declaration like that, it’s going to go good or very bad. It’s the kind of statement you don’t come back from.

Ahithophel essentially made a statement that he couldn’t come back from either. He gave counsel to give him an army to scatter David’s followers, and then he would kill David himself. Another counselor gives different guidance, and his is followed over Ahithophel. But, this other man was a supporter of David, and helps David to escape. Once David escapes, Ahithophel seems to believe that his statement will come back to haunt him. He had one shot to get David, and that shot is lost. So he went home and killed himself, thinking it would be less painful than what a restored King David might do to him. **Just like Ahithophel, do you sometimes make statements that are hard to come back from? Are you willing to burn bridges between people that might never be repaired? Do you attempt to justify your position without listening to others? Measure your response to situations, and seek wisdom from the Lord daily. Ask Him to give you wisdom to respond to the situations you don’t even know are coming for that day.**

Read 2 Samuel 18

The king charged Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king charged all the commanders concerning Absalom. 2 Sam 18:5 Mercy is not some enormous task that we never have to undertake. It's anytime we put our pride aside and seek to benefit another person. My wife and I attempt to teach this to our children. If one of their siblings does something mean to them, they cannot withhold their forgiveness. We require our children to show mercy by forgiving each other, and then continuing in their play.

Despite all Absalom had done to his father, David still wanted to show mercy. The last chapter showed Absalom ready to accept the counsel of a man who wanted to hunt David down and kill him. But, despite the fact that most kings would assassinate a traitor, David would not. Absalom did a terrible thing, but still David felt that he deserved mercy. **How are you in handling mercy? Do you give it to others that have wronged you, or do you attempt to use their guilt as leverage? Mercy is not just forgiving, but forgetting. It's what God does with the sin of a believer. You cannot claim to forgive someone if you bring the incident back up. Remember the mercy of Jesus that gives you forgiveness from sin and Hell, and seek to show that mercy to people around you. A merciful Christian is an excellent witness, because there aren't enough of them out there for lost people to see.**

Read 2 Samuel 19

"For your servant knows that I have sinned; therefore behold, I have come today, the first of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king." 2 Sam 19:20 Have you ever had someone come up to you and tell you they were wrong about something? Me neither (kidding!). People rarely apologize, but are often seeking an apology. If we know we've done something wrong, the best thing to do is just to admit it. It's clear to me that when people learn of wrongdoing from someone other than the guilty party, it always makes the situation worse. You can take the first step in keeping the situation from blowing up.

We now see David stepping back into his role of king, and a familiar name shows up, Shimei. He was the guy who was yelling at David claiming to know the "why" behind David's downfall. Now when the dust has settled, and David is still king, Shimei knows that he was wrong. He didn't speak out of a leading from the Lord, but out of the hatred of his heart. Instead of fleeing the country or hiding, he goes straight to the king to admit his sin. He doesn't start by saying "You know, I had a bad day that day. My kids were yelling and I couldn't get them to calm down. My wife made brussell sprouts for dinner, and you were walking by and I just took it out on you." He lays out that he sinned and he doesn't wait in some long line to settle the matter. David shows him mercy, and lets the man go. **Yesterday we read about forgiving others that come to us. Is there someone you need to go to and ask forgiveness from? Don't wait for them to find out your wrongdoing against them, but simply admit what you've done and work to repair the relationship and damage on your end.**

Read 2 Samuel 20

But Amasa was not on guard against the sword which was in Joab's hand so he struck him in the belly with it and poured out his inward parts on the ground, and did not strike him again, and he died. 2 Sam 20:10 Often when you hear a name, you think of a word or words that describe the person. If you hear “Michael Jordan”, you think “basketball.” If you hear “George Washington” you think “president”. But, some people’s names can change over time. When you say “Mark McGuire”, I used to say “baseball”, but now I say “cheater”. Our lives can often be easily summed up.

When I think of Joab I think “murderer”. This guy was obviously a warrior, but he was very willing to take a life outside of the battlefield context. He murdered Abner, who was simply switching allegiances to David from Saul’s descendants. He murdered Absalom, despite orders by David to keep him alive. And now he murders Amasa, who’s delay could indicate he was working both sides, or just mean he was late. If I were a Jew of that day, and I saw Joab walking towards me to “talk”, I’d go running the other way. Joab may have felt he was committing these murders for some noble task, but they were still murders. **When God thinks of your life, how does He describe it? If you’re lost, then you’re described by those sins that easily beset you: liar, thief, idolater. If you’re saved, He knows you by one word: His. Because of the forgiveness of Christ, God does not know us by our sins, but by His Son. Now He will discipline us for our sin, and lead us to live more completely for Him. But, He will not call us sinners, for our sins have been covered by the blood and sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Next time you feel like a worthless Christian due to sinful failures, remember how God sees you, and use that as motivation to flee from sin when it presents itself.**

Read 2 Samuel 21

They buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zela, in the grave of Kish his father; thus they did all that the king commanded, and after that God was moved by prayer for the land. 2 Sam 21:14 When I talk to people about Jesus, the most common response I get is that the person prays. Sometimes daily, sometimes weekly, but they claim to be in a prayer relationship with God. I always let them know that God will not answer the prayers of a person that does not belong to Him through Jesus. My children come to me, not a stranger, when they want to give their birthday or Christmas wish list. They do so because they belong to me and it is my role and responsibility to provide for them. The Bible makes it clear that our sins keep our prayers from escaping the ceiling (Isaiah 59:2). Only through a relationship with Jesus can our prayers be heard.

In this passage we see Israel giving up relatives of Saul who are paying for the sins of their ancestor. Apparently the malice shown against the Gibeonites was fierce, and God wanted Israel to atone for what they had done wrong. David gives all these bodies a proper burial, including moving the bones of Jonathan and Saul from an obscure grave to a well placed one. After all these things were done, it says God was moved by prayer for

the land. It seems there were some prayers that God wasn't fully obliged to answer until the nation chose to deal with old sin. It might have been Saul's, but the people chose him, thus they chose his punishments as well. **Is there some sin in your life that is causing a disconnect between you and God? Remember, it's not God that moves away, but us. That's why David says in the Psalms that whether he is in the highest or lowest parts of the earth, that God is there. Stop running from God, and stop refusing repentance. If you are a Christian, then live like one; submit to the Lordship of Jesus and do all that He has for you.**

Read 2 Samuel 22

The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness; According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me. 2 Sam 22:21 I remember when I first started working for SEARS while in college. It was the first job that I had where you had to clock in. As I came in I would always see people that were standing there and waiting for their shift to be over before clocking out. Other times, people would get a friendly co-worker to clock them in if they were going to be late. If I was late, I was late. And I didn't go back to the clock until my time was over on the floor. I decided that standing back there for three minutes was not a good use of the time I was being paid for. A few times, I made big sales during the last minute of my shift, that never would have happened if I had chose laziness and stood by the clock for the last five minutes.

Just as in a job, the Lord also looks to reward and repay us for the things we do. This is one of the most misunderstood aspects of our relationship with the Lord Jesus. He doesn't save us because of good works, because our good works are unimpressive to God. But once we belong to Him through Jesus, then our actions are done because of what He has done for us. I don't do good works to stay saved, but I do them because they are the actions that Jesus wants from me. God does reward us for those actions that are motivated by righteousness. Some of those rewards happen here on earth, and some are strictly eternal rewards that we will experience on the day of the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20. **Are you working on behalf of your Savior? Do you focus more on serving yourself or Jesus? It's a choice either for selfishness or selflessness. When we choose to do things that benefit the Kingdom, we will be rewarded for our selflessness. That is the testimony of David to us through this great chapter.**

Read 2 Samuel 23

Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me, Ordered in all things, and secured; For all my salvation and all my desire, Will He not indeed make it grow? 2 Sam 23:5 The biggest reason I lack order sometimes, is that my to-do list is never complete. I'll write down things to do, and then I'll remember something that I previously forgot. Often I'll jump straight to that task before I forget it, and then my current assignment goes undone or delayed. I've worked hard to make my to-do list definitive whether in ministry or at the grocery store. When I am disordered in my tasks, something goes undone.

How great it is to know that God leaves nothing undone that needs to be done. David said that God made an everlasting promise to him and it has two important aspects: it's ordered with nothing left out, and it's secured despite any failures that David might have had. God doesn't just seek to save us but to use us in accordance with our hopes and dreams. As I go through a personal time of waiting, it's a great comfort for me to know that God's willingness to use my talents and passions is as secure as my salvation. **Do you have concerns about how God might use you? Are you afraid that He might call you to something you cannot or will not do? God often shows us new heart desires and passions as we grow in Jesus. I certainly never had a passion for evangelism before my salvation, and not even soon after. But, as I walk with Jesus, what I once called weakness is now one of my desires. I will trust in the Lord to make it grow.**

Read 2 Samuel 24

However, the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing." 2 Sam 24:24 We try to keep our kids involved in the worship service as much as possible, though they are 6 and 5 (and 1 in the nursery). We have them stand and sit as we do, and get them to sing ones they know since they can't read the screen yet. One area they have always wanted to participate in is in the area of offerings. When the plates are passed they always want something to put in there. I've given them money ahead of time before, and was somewhat surprised to see them willingly put in this money that they had been holding for a while. But, ultimately, it's not a big sacrifice for them. They're just throwing in a couple bucks of dad's money, and not their own. Too many people go through their pockets or wallets looking for something they can throw God's way. Would you do that on your spouse's birthday or an anniversary? If so, I prophesy counseling in your future!

David made a mistake of taking a census, but the mistake was in how he did it. Exodus 30:12-13 is where God gives command on taking a census. Every person counted must give a small offering, which was not done. David just wanted to number the men. Perhaps for war, perhaps for his own ego, we just don't know. But, as David seeks to correct his mistakes through offering and repentance he buys something that a subject was willing just to give. David wanted no easy outs in his offering of repentance. **How do you offer repentance? Do you ask God to forgive you of your sins in a general way, or are you specific with your offenses? Do you give your tithes and offerings realizing it's obedience and part of the repentance process? When you give a meaningful offering that costs you something, you are saying to God that despite your spiritual failures, this relationship with Him is still a high priority. How great of a priority is your relationship with your God?**