

# VEAD OF THE DDDF

Joshua/2Samuel Challenge | MARCH

Joshua thru Samuel

# VIEW OF THE BABIE

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#### **YEAR OF THE BIBLE**

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This issue contains 26 devos—that means reading a devo a day, with a few days off every month. It leaves room for about one day off per week—one Sabbath rest. And if you stick with us from January to December, we're going to read the Bible coverto-cover together and learn a whole lot about who God is and His great love for us.

#### **READING SCHEDULE**

Day 59 Joshua 1-5

Day 60 Joshua 6-8

Day 61 Joshua 9-12

**Day 62** Joshua 13-19

Days 63/64 Joshua 20-24

Day 65 Judges 1-5

Day 66 Judges 6-8

Day 67 Judges 9-12

**Day 68** Judges 13-16 Day 69 Judges 17-21

Days 70/71 Ruth 1-4

**Day 72** 1 Samuel 1-3

**Day 73** 1 Samuel 4-8

**Day 74** 1 Samuel 9-12

**Day 75** 1 Samuel 13-15

**Day 76** 1 Samuel 16-19

**Day 77/78** 1 Samuel 20-23

**Day 79** 1 Samuel 24-26 **Day 80** 1 Samuel 27-31

**Day 81** 2 Samuel 1-4

**Day 82** 2 Samuel 5-7

**Day 83** 2 Samuel 8-10

**Days 84/85** 2 Samuel 11-14

**Day 86** 2 Samuel 15-18

**Day 87** 2 Samuel 19-21

**Day 88** 2 Samuel 22-24

### What Moves God's Heart

**[GOD'S STORY]** Joshua's leadership trainer, Moses, is gone. Joshua now heads the massive nation that has spent the last 40 years in the wilderness. God speaks reassuring words to Joshua—He will be with him just like He was with Moses.

Joshua secretly sends two spies to the city of Jericho. Rahab, a prostitute, protects them from the city's king, and the spies vow to protect her family when the Israelites attack the city. Rahab and her family will be kept safe, provided they're inside her home that's marked with a scarlet rope.

On the other side of the Jordan River, Joshua prepares the people—God is about to act. At God's direction, Joshua sends the priests and the ark of the covenant out ahead of the people. The moment the priests' feet touch the water, the river parts. The priests stand on the dry riverbed holding the ark as the nation crosses.

Once the people are on the other side, Joshua instructs 12 men, one from each tribe, to pick up a stone from the middle of the riverbed and bring them into the promised land. The rocks stand as a memorial to God, the Water-Parter.

Just before the battle of Jericho, Joshua encounters a man with a drawn sword. The commander of the Lord's army has arrived.

**[GOD'S HEART]** Rahab was a citizen of an idol-worshiping city that God was going to destroy. God's people had been commanded to kill all of Jericho's citizens. Rahab wasn't righteous, and she had a destiny with death.

But God saw her. Even though she was outside of His family, He recognized the mustard seed of faith sprouting in her heart, and it was precious to Him. He orchestrated events so that the spies went to her home, where she protected them. She professed, "*I know that the Lord has given you this land*" (Joshua 2:9). A generation of Israelites had died because they hadn't had that much faith.

God honored Rahab's trust in Him and rescued her from the coming destruction—she and her family were safe inside the scarlet-labeled home. Not only that, God drew Rahab into the lineage of His very own Son (see Matthew 1:5).

The King is moved by people who trust in Him.

**[INSIGHT]** Interestingly, when asked which side he was on, the commander of God's army answered *"Neither" (Joshua 5:14)*. Angelic armies were up to something, but not for either human side. There's a bigger story line playing out around us—a story line we don't have eyes to see.

#### Day\_**60** Joshua\_**06–08**

# God, the Infinitely Powerful Goodness

**[GOD'S STORY]** Following God's commands, the Israelite army marches around the city of Jericho once a day for six days. In the center of the procession is God's ark-presence, preceded by seven priests blowing ram's horns. On the seventh day, the formation marches around the city seven times blowing trumpets. On the seventh lap, at Joshua's order the trumpets blow and the men shout—and the walls of Jericho crumble.

God's warriors are directed to kill everyone in the city but to leave the loot alone. Only Rahab and her family survive, protected by the mark of a scarlet cord.

One Israelite man hoards gold and silver from Jericho. So when the Israelites attack the city of Ai, they're defeated. After the culprit is discovered and put to death, the Israelites attack Ai and win. This time God allows His people to keep the plunder.

Honoring Moses' last words, Joshua writes God's laws on stones at Mount Ebal. The people stand in front of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, pronouncing the blessings of obedience and curses of disobedience. And Joshua reads the law to the people. God's good ways are to be the law of the land.

**[GOD'S HEART]** It must have been incredible—the shouts, the shuddering walls, the thundering of stones crumbling in a heap. When the dust settled, the men of Jericho found themselves eye-to-eye with their Israelite enemies. It was clear to both sides: Mere humans had done nothing to collapse the walls. It was an act of God.

God could have let Israel conquer Jericho in old-fashioned, scale-the-wall combat. But He didn't. He chose to demonstrate His authority and power instead. In minutes, both sides knew that molecules and matter answer to the supreme King.

We live and move and breathe, we build and work and bustle, because the Sovereign One allows it. God lets us found our families and structure our lifestyles. And within the worlds we craft we are free to shape our lives—to honor or dishonor Him—because He allows it. But we live within His sustaining power. And He could make His sovereignty known in a second.

Life is a permissive mercy.

Just because we often live oblivious to God's work doesn't mean that He isn't in control. It's good for our hearts to tremble. The God of infinite goodness is also the God of infinite power.

**[INSIGHT]** In a symbolic way, Rahab and her family experience their own Passover—they're surrounded by death, but they're spared because they're in a home marked with red.

### God's Daily Faithfulness

**[GOD'S STORY]** The people groups living in the promised land are terrified of Israel and Israel's God. So to escape annihilation, the Gibeonites disguise themselves as travel-weary foreigners and trick Israel's leaders into vowing before God not to kill them. When Joshua discovers their lie, the Gibeonites own up to it, but Joshua won't kill them because of the vow. Instead, he forces them to be Israel's water carriers and woodcutters.

When five Amorite kings and their armies band together and attack Gibeon, Joshua and the Israelites fight on behalf of the Gibeonites, and God gives them victory. He drops large hailstones from the sky and even stops the sun at Joshua's request.

Israel then goes on a military conquest—cleaning out the dark-idol worshipers of the land. Every town and kingdom God's people face, He delivers to them.

**[GOD'S HEART]** Because God is so faithful, it's easy for us to become oblivious to Him. Because of His provision and the natural laws He set in motion, the sun rises every day, the seasons come and go, food arrives in our pantries and on our tables—it's all so predictable, routine, and normal.

But what looks like predictability is actually God being faithful. He's so faithful that we don't even question that the sun will rise and set. We rest in His faithfulness without even knowing we're doing it.

And God's daily dependability is actually a great act of wonder.

This morning, our zillion-ton planet—hovering in space over nothing—continued its nearly 600-million-mile orbit around the sun. This morning, it continued to rotate at around 1,000 miles per hour so that our particular patch of the earth spun toward the sun and experienced the sunrise. For us, the thousand-mile-perhour hurtle toward the sun was gentle and beautiful, and it happens every day.

At Joshua's request, God stopped the earth's rotation. The sun paused in the sky—because He caused it to. And this morning's sunrise happened like it does every day—because He caused it to. See God's faithfulness in each new day. Sunrise is a declaration: God is being good—again.

**[INSIGHT]** The Gibeonites knew of God's great power (see Joshua 9:9–10). Even though they lied to spare their lives, they did it to spare themselves from a God they—at least to some degree—believed in. And for the rest of their lives, they served at God's tabernacle—in a position close to the God whose power they acknowledged. Perhaps they came to know Him more.

### God, the Good Provider

**[GOD'S STORY]** Although much of the promised land has yet to be conquered, God tells Joshua to portion out the land west of the Jordan to the 9 ½ tribes that haven't yet received their inheritance. Joshua is to allot the unconquered land in faith that it will one day be Israel's. Fittingly, Joshua starts the land allotment with Caleb and ends it with himself—the only two of the 12 spies who had believed God.

Judah, the son of Jacob who becomes the family leader because of his older brothers' failures, gets a disproportionately large portion. Both of Joseph's sons— Ephraim and Manasseh—also get large land inheritances. Joseph, Jacob's faithful son, gets a double birthright.

Joshua brings the ark of the covenant to Shiloh and orders a survey of the rest of the land for the remaining seven tribes—Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan. Three men from each tribe map out the land, and Joshua casts lots to see which tribe will get which portion.

Since God's people haven't conquered all of the land, some of the tribes aren't able to settle in right away. And some of the tribes don't drive out the Canaanites still living in their sections of the promised land. The people have some more work to do to fully take hold of the promise.

**[GOD'S HEART]** Land is important to God. Each tribe had its own portion of land; each family its very own plot. Each member of God's family would have a permanent home that couldn't be taken away. To ensure this, God had instituted practices like the 7th-year debt forgiveness and the family redeemer. All the Israelites would forever know where they belonged.

And every year (except for the land-resting years), God's people would plant. They'd watch as God grew their food from tiny seeds with nothing but dirt, water, and light. They'd do their part and work the land, but they'd rely on Him to faithfully deliver life-giving sunlight and rain. In the tilling, sprouting, weeding, and waiting, an Israelite could say, "This is where my good God provides for me every day."

**[INSIGHT]** The people groups that Israel didn't drive out of the promised land would end up causing them tremendous problems in the future, leading them into worship of dark idols and continued war (see Judges 1:21-2:3). God was right when He told them to completely purge the land.

#### Day\_**63/64** Joshua\_**20–24**

### The God Who Began a Great Work

**[GOD'S STORY]** Though God's people aren't yet completely occupying the promised land, they are finally established there. God gives them rest. When the 9 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> tribes are safely settled west of the Jordan, Joshua blesses the tribes who chose to live east of the Jordan. They've faithfully fulfilled their obligation to their brothers; it's time for them to go home.

Once there, the eastern tribes build a large altar as a testimony to their dedication to the Lord. But the western tribes think that it's intended to replace the altar at God's tabernacle. Ready to rid the land of sacrilege, the western tribes prepare for war. But the misunderstanding is quickly resolved.

Joshua, now an old man, gathers the nation and charges them to walk with God. Reminding the people of their great God-history, he leads them in renewing their covenant with the Lord. After his long and loyal life, Joshua, God's warrior-servant, dies.

**[GOD'S HEART]** "I took your father Abraham . . . and gave him many descendants . . . I sent Moses and Aaron . . . I afflicted the Egyptians . . . and I brought you out . . . I brought you to the land . . . I destroyed them . . . I delivered you" (Joshua 24:3,5,8,10).

"I took . . . I gave . . . I sent . . . I . . . I . . . ." It had been God—it had always been God.

God is the Great Initiator and the Great Fulfiller. He initiated the promise, and He followed through with its fulfillment. He started His people on the journey to freedom, and He carried them all the way home.

We, like the wandering Israelites, live in the middle of a certain promise too.

God the Initiator and Fulfiller promised us: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). We don't have to stress, strain, or struggle because God is working out the kinks in our souls. Like the Israelites, our only job is to obey because the Great Fulfiller will see us through.

**[INSIGHT]** Part of a Levite's role was to teach the words of God. The cities of the Levites, listed in Joshua 21, were scattered throughout Israel so they could live among the people and better teach God's truth.

### God's Severe Mercy

**[GOD'S STORY]** The generation of Israelites who saw God part the Jordan and crumble Jericho's walls follow Him. But they fail to completely drive out the idol-worshiping enemy nations living in the promised land. Sadly, God's holy people mingle with people who pledge their allegiance to dark gods.

That influence rubs off on the next generation. They have had no direct experience of God's mighty acts, and they don't know Him in their hearts. They marry foreigners and worship their demon-gods. God allows them to face the death-consequences of disobedience. They're bullied, brutalized, and oppressed by other nations.

A cycle is established. God responds to His people's cries, sending a military leader, or "judge," to set them free. First Othniel, then Ehud, Shamgar, and Deborah. While the judge lives, God's people are true to Him. When the judge dies, they turn their backs on Him.

Captive. Crying out. Rescued. Sinful, sinful, sinful. Captive again. Miserable.

**[GOD'S HEART]** The common Canaanite gods were Baal, a fertility and storm god, and Asherah, the wife of the chief Canaanite god. God's people thought they were worshiping storm gods and fertility gods—hoping that they would bring the rain, and grow their crops and their families.

But God is the Determiner of water cycles and weather patterns. He is the One who causes life to spark in a womb. He does those things, not idols. Not only were His people giving their worship to gods who were getting credit for His work, but also the forces behind these idols were His enemies. They were seducing and enslaving the people He loved. All the while, He could see what His people couldn't. He saw every demonic scheme and watched every act as His people willingly gave their hearts to forces that were out to destroy them.

No wonder God shouted His warnings so repetitively: "Do not worship idols!" No wonder He allowed His people to be defeated and suffer hardship—anything to get their attention so that they'd stop. The cycle of the judges is God's severe mercy. He is trying to protect His people from evil they can't even see.

**[INSIGHT]** Even though the people of Judah attack Jerusalem and defeat it (see Judges 1:8), they don't officially move into the city. Jerusalem wasn't officially occupied until the godly king David captured it as one of his first royal acts (see 2 Samuel 5:6-10). He made it Israel's capital city.



### THE RAGING RIVER

When the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying twhe ark of the covenant went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. **Joshua 3:14-15** 

**IN WORD** Have you ever wondered why God chose a harvest time for the Israelites to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land? The Jordan is a less-than-formidable barrier for much of the year, and forty years of wandering would have provided ample opportunity for them to cross at a more convenient time. But no, Moses' death and the Israelites' arrival on the eastern bank of the river took them to their boundary at exactly its highest moment. Why?

God wants us to follow His wisdom—His guidance, His timing, His purposes. But we often let our circumstances dictate the path we take. The circumstances are formidable? Then we go another direction. The situation is an easy one? Then we follow the path of least resistance. Those whose lives are guided by this dynamic are following the ways of the world. The ways of God will lead us to the Jordan at its highest level. He will promise us deliverance in our darkest moments. He will provide for our needs most abundantly in a barren land. He will be for us a God of the impossible. **IN DEED** Do not let the currents of your circumstances dictate the direction you'll take. That's God's domain. His voice is to speak more loudly to us than the boundaries that box us in. We must learn to see Him as the unconstrained God, the God who is not limited by the gaping need of our situation or the restrictiveness of our circumstances.

Why does God work this way? Maybe simply because it brings Him greater glory. When we take only humanly possible steps, we give our humanity the credit. God alone can be praised for overcoming an impossibility. Miracles point to Him. Expect them. Ask for them. Never let the raging river drown out His voice.

*Faith sees the invisible, believes the unbelievable, and receives the impossible.* —*Corrie ten Boom* 

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#### Day\_**66** Judges\_**06–08**

### God's Ludicrous Love

#### **[GOD'S STORY]** God's people have been ravaged to ruins.

Gideon is cowering, trying to produce food out of sight of the Midianites— Israel's oppressors who are stealing their crops and slaughtering their livestock. The Lord, through His angel, appears to Gideon and tells him He is going to save his people. Gideon balks. But he obeys—in the secrecy of night he tears down his father's idol altar and builds an altar to God in its place.

When the Midianite and Amalekite armies—135,000 men—come to fight Israel, Gideon forms an army. But God informs him that his army of 32,000 is too big and that he should pare it down based on how the men drink water. Gideon's army is soon reduced to a mere 300 men. The next day, Gideon leads his tiny army to victory—God turns the enemies' swords on each other.

Gideon hotly pursues the Midianite kings and kills them. Taking the gold of their earrings, he fashions an ephod. Sadly, the ephod eventually becomes a snare to Gideon and all Israel. They worship it.

**[GOD'S HEART]** Gideon needed reassurance that God was with him, and God answered. Twice. On Gideon's terms. The first night, the Sovereign Creator made a fleece on dry ground soaking wet. The next night, he made the fleece dry and the ground wet.

Gideon needed to know that God was calling him to battle. God answered in a way in which there would be no doubt that it was Him.

And God wanted the entire nation to have no doubt that it was Him. God's people were giving their hearts to dark idols. They weren't denying what He was doing, but they were attributing His acts to false gods. So God whittled down Gideon's army so that 300 Israelites would take on 135,000 enemies. The odds were preposterous and intentional. God wanted to show that when the Israelites won, He was behind the victory. Even Gideon would clearly know it was God, because God had spoken through the fleece miracles.

"I am the God of heaven and earth!" God was telling His idolatrous people through the miraculous victory. He was the one true God. The rescuing God. The only God worthy of their hearts.

**[INSIGHT]** It's unclear what Gideon's intentions were when he made the ephod out of gold. His statement in Judges 8:23 seems to imply that he wasn't pridefully going after a position of leadership. But God's people were only to have one ephod—it was worn by the high priest and housed the Urim and Thummim, mysterious objects which helped determine God's will. Apparently, Gideon's ephod became a snare to him and to God's people.

#### Day\_67 Judges\_09-12

### God's Pain

**[GOD'S STORY]** Gideon's idol-worshiping son, Abimelek, seeks power, hires a riff-raff army, and murders all but one of his brothers. Jotham, the sole surviving son, pronounces a powerful curse on his brother and the citizens of Shechem. Shechem's leaders set up Abimelek as king, but it is indeed a cursed reign. Three years later, Abimelek is killed in battle by a woman who drops a mill-stone on his head.

Tola leads as judge for 23 years; Jair leads next for 22. After the time of these two leaders, God's people return to worshiping dark gods. When Ammonite armies come to war against them, they cry out to God, but He tells them to ask their idols for help—He is not coming to their aid. They get rid of the idols, and then the Lord listens.

God raises up Jephthah, an illegitimate son who has been thrown out of his childhood home by his half-brothers. But Jephthah is a valiant warrior, so the elders of Gilead ask him to lead the fight against the Ammonites. Jephthah vows that if God gives him victory, he'll sacrifice as a burnt offering whatever comes out of the door of his house to meet him. Jephthah wins, and his daughter greets him at his return. Apparently she is killed to fulfill his foolish vow.

**[GOD'S HEART]** Because of His people's betrayal, God had removed His hand of protection. Enemies invaded and took their shots—and God's people were bloodied, bullied, and used. During a brief reprieve, God's people shook off their dark idol worship and cried out to Him.

"He could bear Israel's misery no longer" (Judges 10:16).

While His people had been taking the blows, the Heart of Heaven felt the pain. He had been bearing Israel's misery—every attack, abuse, assault.

The God of love, joy, peace, and goodness longed for His people to live in the goodness that He was offering. Only He knew how well they could be living, and how far they had fallen. His love for His people, His desire for their good, hurt Him deeply.

Love is costly. And often the cost falls on the One who loves the most.

**[INSIGHT]** Tragically, Jephthah could have redeemed his daughter and spared her life from his foolish vow. Apparently he wasn't aware that God had provided a way for people to redeem their vows monetarily (See Leviticus 27:1-8). It would have been a much better solution since God hates human sacrifice (see Leviticus 18:21; 20:1–5; Jeremiah 32:35).

### God's Merciful Deliverance

**[GOD'S STORY]** God's people are still betraying Him, so for 40 years the Philistines oppress them. In the midst of their distress, God sends His angel to deliver special news. A childless Israelite woman is going to have a son who is to be set apart to God from birth. This son will help rescue God's people from the Philistines.

Samson is born and grows up blessed by the Lord. He breaks God's law, however, by seeking a Philistine wife. But God works Samson's sin for good: After his bride begs him to reveal the answer to his riddle, Samson kills 30 Philistines in retaliation. The Philistines give his wife to one of Samson's groomsmen. In response, Samson uses foxes with torches in their tails to burn the Philistines' crops. When they retaliate, Samson calls on his God-given strength and kills a thousand Philistines with a donkey's jawbone.

Samson falls in love with yet another Philistine—Delilah. The rulers of the Philistines bribe her into discovering the source of Samson's strength. She finally pesters the answer out of him, and the Philistines cut his hair, sapping him of his God-strength. Cruelly, they poke out his eyes as they take him prisoner. But while he is on humiliating display at a party, Samson asks God to make him strong for one final act of revenge. God answers, and Samson pushes over the idol temple's supportive pillars. He dies in the process, but so do thousands of Philistines.

### **[GOD'S HEART]** "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD" (Judges 13:1).

God's people were pledging their hearts to dark idols and living in the dregs of disobedience. They hadn't even cried out for His help. But God sent a deliverer anyway. Samson—flawed, sinful Samson—was a gift of mercy and grace.

God had a choice to make: "Am I going to hold My people's feet to the fire until they live the way I've asked them to live? Or am I going to deliver them?" God chose deliverance. Their rescue was more important to Him than their willingness to obey.

God hates our sin, yes, and punishment for it will be meted out. But God's desire to deliver us is greater than His desire to judge us. It's this same heart that led God's Son to take our sin upon Himself and set us free.

**[INSIGHT]** Samson seemingly broke every part of his Nazirite vow—he touched a dead body (see Numbers 6:6–7; Judges 14:8–9), his hair was cut (see Judges 16:19), and most likely he drank wine at his wedding. He was an unworthy deliverer. But God used him anyway.

### God's Pure Faithfulness

**[GOD'S STORY]** God's people have fallen low. An Israelite named Micah has an idol cast out of silver and then hires a Levite who is passing by to be his priest. While scouting for land to conquer, some men from the tribe of Dan steal Micah's fake god and fake priest, making the Levite the spiritual leader of their tribe. While God's tabernacle is in Shiloh, the tribe of Dan pledges its loyalty to a worthless trinket.

During that time, a Levite takes a concubine. While traveling through a town in Benjamin, a group of thugs rape her to death. The Levite dismembers her body and sends the 12 pieces to the 12 tribes of Israel. It's a morbidly shocking message: we need to do something; Israel is in a vile state.

The message works. All of Israel gathers at Mizpah, inside Benjamin's territory, and forms an army to find and kill the men who committed this atrocity. But the tribe of Benjamin refuses to release the criminals. Civil war ensues. The battle nearly obliterates the tribe of Benjamin. Because of their vow made at Mizpah not to give their daughters in marriage to a Benjaminite, the Israelites find creative ways to save the decimated tribe from extinction.

**[GOD'S HEART]** An Israelite hires a silversmith to make a god and employs a Levite to serve as his priest. An entire tribe pours out its love to that same silver knickknack—which they stole to obtain. Men seeking homosexual rape settle for violent gang rape. Slain bodies cover the ground as Jacob's descendants fight and kill each other. Plunder, rape, and murder—God's nation has fallen so far down that it's the standard social order.

This is the nation that God chose. The nation that is supposed to be set apart and different ends up just like everyone else. God had destroyed the Canaanites because of their depravity, but His people become just like them—even worse.

God could have ended Scripture and the story of humanity right here, closing history with a simple verse: "And God's people abandoned Him, so He abandoned them."

But God had promised a Rescuer (see Genesis 3:15). And the rancid lows that His people sink to show God's unwavering dedication to His promise. Humanity's redemption was never dependent on humanity. We exist, every moment of every day, because of the pure faithfulness of God.

**[INSIGHT]** God had already promised land to the tribe of Dan, yet they failed to obey Him and conquer it (see Joshua 19:40–48; Judges 1:34). The Danites had to go on a hunt for land because they had failed to trust and obey God.

### God's Love Story

**[GOD'S STORY]** During the immoral era of the judges, God allows a famine in Israel. A family from Bethlehem—a father, mother, and their two sons—leave their home, their piece of the promised land, and move to Moab to find food. In Moab, the father dies. The two sons marry Moabite women, but then both sons die too.

Naomi, the grieving mother and widow living in a foreign land, hears that God has lifted the famine in Israel. She decides to go back home. Ruth, one of her daughters-in-law, refuses to leave her. Ruth is unbending: She will follow Naomi and her God.

As the women settle in Israel, the faithful Ruth goes to harvest leftover grain from local fields—God's law commands that field owners leave grain for the poor. While Ruth is picking up behind the harvesters, the compassionate field owner, Boaz, notices Ruth and treats her kindly. Naomi tells Ruth that Boaz is her relative and one of their guardian-redeemers. And after Ruth shows that she is interested in marriage, Boaz goes through the legal process to redeem the family's land, which includes marrying Ruth.

Ruth and Boaz marry, and they have a son. That son becomes the grandfather of King David—and part of the lineage of God's own Son.

**[GOD'S HEART]** Naomi is a brokenhearted, needy widow. Ruth is a needy widow herself, plus she has left all she knows to follow Naomi and Naomi's God.

Boaz admits that he is older—maybe he's not a stranger to heartache either, maybe he has lost a wife. He certainly was alone.

God has a desire as well—He wants to be close to His people again.

Brokenhearted Naomi. Widowed Ruth. Single Boaz. Rescuing God.

In the story of Ruth, God shows His romantic heart. By His sovereign direction, the honorable yet companionless Boaz meets the faithful yet needy Ruth. And in their coming together, everyone's heart longings are met. Boaz finds a wife. Ruth finds a strong covering in a husband. Naomi's family is redeemed. And the God who longs to bring His people back to Himself writes Boaz and Ruth's son into the family line of King David and His very own Son, Jesus. God's desires are met in this love story too.

Heart longings are satisfied, families are redeemed, God's rescue plan continues—all in the name of love.

**[INSIGHT]** Proverbs 31:10 describes a woman of noble character. Boaz uses the same Hebrew word to describe Ruth (see Ruth 3:11). Ruth is the only woman in the Bible for whom that title is used.

#### Day\_**72** 1 Samuel\_**01–03**

### The Prayer After God's Heart

**[GOD'S STORY]** Hannah is childless. On a family trip to the tabernacle for an annual festival, Hannah seeks God in His sanctuary, and with desperate abandon pours out her heart to Him. She pleads for a son, promising that she will dedicate the child to Him. God hears her—and answers. Soon, Hannah gives birth to Samuel. His name means "God hears."

Once Samuel is weaned, Hannah brings him to the tabernacle, joyfully giving him back to God. Young Samuel stays with the high priest Eli at the tabernacle and grows up serving the Lord.

Eli's two sons are immoral priests, stealing sacrificial meats and using God's tabernacle as a site for sexual trysts. God informs Eli through a prophet that his sons are going to die. Then the Lord tells Samuel that He is going to do something that will shock all of Israel. God will not tolerate evil in His holy home.

**[GOD'S HEART]** It is painfully difficult to watch the ones you love scorn you. For generations. That must have made Hannah's prayer that much sweeter to the Lord. If He would give her a son, she would make sure that he would serve God and God alone. And God knew she meant every word she prayed. From the heart of one of God's daughters came a prayer directly after His own heart.

He must have been elated the day Hannah dedicated Samuel to Him. Lesser women would have attempted to use him simply to get their prayers answered, to get a son, but not Hannah. The joy that spills out in her prayer of praise—as she is leaving her miracle son behind for good—reveals her sweet motives. God heard her prayers and answered her. And she is overjoyed to give Samuel back to Him.

The Lord didn't just give Hannah the gift of Samuel. He gave her three more sons and two daughters. And God didn't just make Samuel any old servant of His. He made him a prophet and Israel's last judge—a great man who changed the course of the nation.

**[INSIGHT]** Hannah's prayer of praise is very similar to Mary's prayer of praise after Gabriel told her she was going to give birth to Jesus (see Luke 1:46–55). The gracious God had been lavishly good to both Hannah and Mary, and they couldn't help but praise Him.



## Love Comes First

"Be very careful to love the LORD your God." Joshua 23:11

**IN WORD** As the aging Joshua gave his farewell address, he reminded the Israelites of everything God had done for them. The appropriate response to God's faithfulness, Joshua said, was to "be very careful" to love Him. It's an act of the will, an intentional response to who He is. But have you ever thought about what it really means to love God?

Many who set out to love God focus on theology. But theology, while important and necessary, makes God an academic subject of study or a philosophical argument to prove. It may be a product of our love for

God, but it does not define love. Discussions abound in which God is a premise—a subject viewed through a theologian's microscope or a philosopher's telescope—but in which there is no affection. Doctrine is critical for us to grasp, but it is not love. Ask any Sadducee.

Many who set out to love God focus on works. But works, while an essential outgrowth of love for God, can easily become an attempt to gain His approval. In truth, they are not acts of devotion but acts of self-interest. We want a higher esteem in His eyes, something that makes us one of His "insiders." We end up with a self-righteousness that fills us with brief satisfaction but leaves us empty of love. Ask any Pharisee.

Many who set out to love God focus purely on emotions. But emotions, while a satisfying outgrowth of love, cannot define our love. They are far too fleeting. We end up riding waves of feeling or missing out on them altogether. Love remains constant. Feelings don't. Ask any zealot.

**IN DEED** So how do we love God? We lie at His feet and tell Him we are His. We seek to honor Him in all we do. We want to be like Him. We crave His fellowship. We pray His desires. We are consumed with, obsessed with, and filled with His ways, His works, and His will. The theology, the works, and the feelings will come. They are good—but only after the devotion. Love always comes first.

"I would hate my own soul if I did not find it loving God."

*—Augustine* 

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#### Day\_**73** 1 Samuel\_**04–08**

### The God Who Fights for His People

**[GOD'S STORY]** Because the Israelites are losing the battle against the Philistines, they bring God's ark to the field of combat. The massacre intensifies—the Israelites are defeated and the Philistines capture the ark. Eli's sons are killed, just as God had said. When Eli hears the news of their death and the ark's capture, he falls, breaks his neck, and dies. In one sweeping blow, the nation and the priest-hood have been shaken. God's presence is with the Philistines.

But the ark is a curse to the Philistines, who put it in their temple next to an image of Dagon—their favorite god. The next morning the idol is found facedown. The second morning the statue is in pieces. God makes His presence known—skin tumors and disease-infested rats plague every Philistine city where the ark is kept. Panicking, the Philistine leaders decide to return it to Israel and hurriedly craft gold replicas of the rats and tumors as an offering. The ark and golden offering are set on an unmanned cart. The cart—pulled by cows—heads straight to Israel.

When the ark is back in Israel, the people turn back to God. Samuel commands that the nation purge itself of its dark idol worship. God's people obey. When the Philistines attack, God defeats them.

Years later, when Samuel is old, God's people beg for a king. They have rejected God as their king. With complete foreknowledge of the consequences, God directs Samuel to give them what they're asking for.

**[GOD'S HEART]** It was a great offense. God's nation was filled with altars to dark idols, yet His people had the audacity to march His presence with the ark to a battle they were losing, as if He would guarantee their victory even though they weren't walking with Him. But God is silent. Thirty thousand Israelites die, and His ark falls into enemy hands.

When the Philistines return the ark—ironically, because God shows His great power—God's people repent and return to Him. They destroy the dark altars in the land. The next time the Philistines attack, God defends His people.

God's people turn their hearts to Him, and for a moment in Israel's history, the Almighty One has what He has been longing for.

**[INSIGHT]** The Philistines' ark-return policy was interesting, yet effective. When the two mother cows overruled their motherly instincts and walked away from their calves to take the ark back to Israel, the Philistines knew the plagues were an act of God.

#### Day\_**74** 1 Samuel\_**09–12**

### Our Father's Merciful Love

**[GOD'S STORY]** "Samuel, it's time to give the people what they want," God says to His servant. "It's time to anoint a king." When Saul comes to Samuel's hometown looking for lost donkeys, God points out Saul to Samuel—Saul is the one He has chosen. Samuel pours oil over Saul's head, explains it is God's anointing, and gives him three signs to validate that the anointing is from God. All of the signs transpire that very day.

With much suspense, Samuel assembles the people of Israel at Mizpah to confirm the nation's first king. When Saul is selected, he is nowhere to be found. God reveals that he's cowering in baggage.

When the Ammonites attack an Israelite town—insisting on gouging out the men's right eyes as a condition of surrender—Saul is enraged. He leads the nation to battle, catching the Ammonites by surprise and defeating them handily. Saul credits God with the victory and is formally crowned king.

Since the structure of society has changed with a new king, Samuel addresses the people. He reviews their God-history and plainly tells them that asking God for a king hasn't been wise, but urges them to stay faithful to God.

**[GOD'S HEART]** "A king isn't My best for you," God told His people. "But it is what you asked for, so I'm going to give it to you."

These words echo the heart of a father in a story God's Son would later tell (see Luke 15). A son wanted his inheritance while his father was still alive. It wasn't the father's best for his son. But the father gave him his share of the estate anyway—it was what his son had asked for. And the father patiently and lovingly waited for when the son—broke, broken, and bedraggled—came crawling back home to him.

"A king isn't My best for you," God was telling His people. "But when you have fallen and you're hurting and regretful, I will be right here for you."

This astonishingly merciful God fully recognizes His children are headed for destruction, warns them of it, and vows to love them through it anyway.

**[INSIGHT]** In Hebrew the name Saul means "asked for" or "prayed for." God wanted His people to remember that this was the king they had asked for—every time they spoke his name.

#### Day\_**75** 1 Samuel\_**13–15**

# The Always Loving and Always Able God

**[GOD'S STORY]** Saul's next test as king comes when the Israelites and Philistines square off for battle, and it's obvious that Israel is outnumbered. Saul's soldiers start disappearing.

Anxious because of his dwindling forces, King Saul breaks God's law and offers the burnt offering before battle—instead of following Samuel's instructions and waiting for him, a priest, to do it. The king has sinned. Gravely. When Samuel arrives, he's appalled. Because of Saul's act of disrespect for God, God will remove him as king.

Trusting that God can defeat an entire army with one man, Jonathan and his armor-bearer approach the Philistine camp in broad daylight and kill 20 Philistines. God sends the Philistine army into panic. Israel's enemies fall apart, and Saul leads Israel to victory.

God then gives Saul his next battle plan: Completely destroy the Amalekites the tribe who attacked His vulnerable people as they were leaving Egypt, fresh out of slavery. Saul leads the army to victory, but doesn't kill the Amalekites' king or all of the livestock. In his disobedience, Saul has rejected God's authority. God rejects him as king.

**[GOD'S HEART]** The well-armed Philistine army wasn't a threat to God. The Creator and Sustainer could stop their heartbeats at any moment with just a thought. Victory over enemies wasn't what God was after. He wanted a king who knew and trusted His heart.

Saul was scrambling for a leg up on his enemies—even disobeying God to get it. "*Rebellion is like the sin of divination*," Samuel told Saul *(1 Samuel 15:23)*. It's turning toward a power other than God to accomplish something. "*Arrogance [is] like the evil of idolatry*," God's prophet continued. It's valuing our own strength more than we value God's. Rebellion and arrogance say, "God, I don't think You're loving and that You want to help me," or "I don't believe You're able to help me." Yet God is both loving and able.

"Do you know Me? Will you trust Me?" God was asking Saul.

"No," Saul's rebellious, arrogant actions resounded.

"I regret that I have made Saul king," God grieved (1 Samuel 15:11).

**[INSIGHT]** That Saul killed all the people (1 Samuel 15:8) must have meant that the Israelites killed all the Amalekites they encountered. But some Amalekites survived (see 1 Samuel 27:8; 30:1). Even though Samuel killed Agag, the vile Haman is an Agagite (see Esther 3:1). Centuries later Haman is still looking for revenge—he attempts to destroy the Jews.

#### Day\_**76** 1 Samuel\_**16–19**

### The God Who Looks at Hearts

**[GOD'S STORY]** Saul's disrespect for God will soon cost him the crown it's time to anoint Israel's next king. God tells Samuel that Israel's next leader is a son of Jesse from Bethlehem. Samuel asks Jesse to show him his sons. God rejects seven of Jesse's strapping oldest sons, and chooses the youngest, David, a shepherd. Samuel secretly anoints him as king.

David ends up in the king's court—he plays the harp to soothe Saul's troubled soul when dark spiritual moods suddenly start to plague him.

In a battle with the Philistines, Goliath, a giant who is almost ten feet tall, is taunting God's army. While bringing food for his brothers at the front, David hears Goliath bellowing insults against God. Outraged at his audacity, David confronts Goliath in the name of the God of Israel and kills him with a slingshot and a stone.

Seeing David's power, Saul soon makes David an army commander. God causes David to be victorious in every battle. Jealous, Saul seeks to kill David, but two of Saul's children—his son Jonathan and daughter Michal—protect God's future king.

### **[GOD'S HEART]** "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

God knit us together in our mother's wombs. He chose every feature of our faces and our stature: freckles, no freckles; tall, not tall. As our Creator, God knows firsthand that what we look like isn't a measure of who we are. Our appearance is lovingly assigned by Him. We have nothing to do with it.

In God's eyes, it's person's heart—their character, integrity—that's a true soul measure. A person's heart shows what they're after, what they value and consider important. A heart of integrity shows that a person agrees with God's high view of truth. A heart that leaks kindness and love agrees with God's high value of people.

God looks at the heart because He is looking for kindred spirits, heart-friends: people who out of all of the choices in this world have chosen to love the good, true, and beautiful—which are actually attributes of Him.

**[INSIGHT]** David was a tender warrior—an accomplished harpist and a decorated fighter. He also wrote many psalms. As he played for Saul, perhaps he sang early forms of some of the psalms we now find in the Bible—declaring God's goodness and love. Whatever David played was powerful: It chased the dark spirit away.

#### Day\_**77/78** 1 Samuel\_**20 –23**

### The Heart Behind the Laws

**[GOD'S STORY]** Jonathan, the king's son, and David, the king-elect, are soul brothers. After Saul's latest attempt to kill him, David is afraid to come into the king's presence for the New Moon feast. Jonathan devises a plan to let David know if it's safe to come to Saul's court, and when he discovers his father's intention to kill David, it nearly costs him his life. Jonathan warns David, saves David's life, and reminds David of their covenant of friendship.

David runs for his life. As he does, he and his hungry men stop to visit a priest who feeds them the bread of the Presence and arms David with Goliath's sword. David hides in caves, and the down-and-out of society join him. When Saul finds out that the priest helped David, he has him murdered, along with his family and his entire city.

Saul relentlessly hunts for David. But God protects His chosen one from the crazed king.

**[GOD'S HEART]** God's law was clear: Only priests were allowed to eat the bread that had been placed before the Lord inside the Holy Place (see Leviticus 24:5–9). But David and his men—who weren't priests—ate it. They broke the law, and so did the priest who gave it to them.

Jesus talked about what David had done (see Matthew 12:1–8). The Pharisees were criticizing the disciples for picking heads of grain to eat on the Sabbath. The Pharisees considered it work, which was a violation of the Sabbath and God's law.

Jesus explained that the foundation of God's law is the highest law: love. When God's laws are applied without mercy and love, the letter of the law might be kept, but the spirit—the heart behind them—isn't. David was hungry, the holy bread was the only food, and God in His goodness did not want David to starve. The higher law of love trumped the law of holy bread.

God's great love is behind every one of His laws. He gave His commandments to guide us to experience and live in His highest law—love.

**[INSIGHT]** God wanted His people to celebrate the New Moon feast every month as a way of dedicating the coming month to Him. Other cultures celebrated the moon too, but worshiped the moon itself. God set up the New Moon feasts to take place during the phase of the moon where it wasn't visible so that His people wouldn't be tempted to misdirect their worship.

#### Day\_**79** 1 Samuel\_**24–26**

### The Good King

**[GOD'S STORY]** Even though David has been unwaveringly loyal to Saul, he still wants David dead. While chasing David in the wilderness, Saul enters the cave where David is hiding. It seems that God has given David an opportunity to kill the king—and David's men urge him to do it. While Saul is relieving himself, David slices off a corner of the king's robe.

After Saul exits the cave, David shouts after him, showing the evidence that he could have killed the king. David's loyalty is visible. Saul, filled with remorse, acknowledges that David will be Israel's next king.

Samuel dies, and the nation grieves. With Saul's spiritual failure and Samuel's death, the nation is in dire need of a leader who knows and loves God.

Soon afterward, David and his vagabond men request food from a rich man whose sheep they've protected during their wanderings. But Nabal refuses. Furious, David directs his men to armor up—they're going to kill Nabal and all the males in his household. But Nabal's insightful wife, Abigail, realizes her husband's foolishness. She packs a large feast for David's men and apologizes on behalf of her mean-spirited husband. The peace is kept.

Saul's remorse doesn't last long. When he learns of David's whereabouts, he pursues him. Once again, David has the opportunity to kill the king but stays his hand. Once again, David's loyalty is visible. Saul admits he has acted like a fool and vows not to try to hurt David again.

**[GOD'S HEART]** Saul hunted David down to kill him, but David never sought revenge because David knew and trusted the heart of his true King.

"'As surely as the Lord lives,' he said, 'the Lord himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed'" (1 Samuel 26:10– 11).

Finally, here was a man who knew who God was and trusted Him. Here was a man who knew that God was good, that His plans were good, and he submitted himself to Him. David was who God had been looking for.

"I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22).

**[INSIGHT]** Abigail's quick thinking saved David from taking revenge and killing lots of innocent people. She helped him honor God and His ways. No wonder David asked Abigail to become his wife soon after she was free to marry.



### **God-Centered Victory**

"All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves."

1 Samuel 17:47

**IN WORD** It was an appalling situation. A nine-foot giant would stand out in the open every day and taunt the armies of Israel. The people chosen by the almighty God were in the land promised by the almighty God, fighting a battle ordained by the almighty God, and they were intimidated by an offensive loudmouth—albeit a very big one. But their God was bigger. They should have known that.

David did. He didn't come upon the situation and challenge his elders' courage or their battle skills. He didn't offer a better strategy or suggest an opportune moment to strike. No, he was simply outraged by the absurdity of the scene. The soldiers of the living God cowering in fear? While the name of the merciful, mighty God of the universe was slandered? Why?!

David didn't go to the front lines to make a name for himself. He went to serve his brothers lunch. But while he was there, he could not tolerate the situation. God's reputation was at stake. The army's fear did not honor Him; the enemy-occupied promised land did not honor Him; and the gorilla of Gath did not honor Him. Something had to be done.

**IN DEED** Do you take that attitude into your world every day? No, you need not carry a slingshot and stones. And you need not be offensive about it. But your God—the merciful, mighty God of the universe who has chosen us and equipped us for every good work, even guaranteeing us ultimate victory—is being slandered by an unseen enemy. That enemy's propaganda has been swallowed by a gullible, hard-hearted world. And we're the only army God has redeemed for service.

Goliath is an appropriate image for Satan—big, noisy, intimidating, . . . and doomed. David is first an image of Christ, but also an appropriate image for the Christian— concerned mainly with serving bread and defending the name of his God. Can you follow his footsteps of faith into battle? Will you?

"We're in spiritual combat—cosmic combat for the heart and soul of humankind."

-Charles Colson

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#### Day\_**80** 1 Samuel\_**27–31**

### The Day God Let His Anointed Fall

**[GOD'S STORY]** To escape Saul, David and his 600 men go to Philistine territory and gain the trust of King Achish. Achish gives the men and their families the town of Ziklag. From there, David and his men secretly raid Israel's non-Philistine enemies, leaving no survivors.

Meanwhile, Saul is terrified of the impending Philistine attack. But God is silent to his pleas. In a desperate, wicked move, Saul seeks out a medium to use dark arts to conjure up Samuel. If God won't tell him what to do, maybe Samuel's spirit will. But Saul doesn't receive good news: The Philistines are going to pummel Israel, and Saul and his sons will be joining Samuel in death the next day.

When the Philistines go to battle against Israel, they refuse to let David join them. David and his men return to Ziklag, but raiders have burned their town and taken their families and livestock. After seeking God's guidance, David and his men track down the raiders and rescue their families who, thanks to God's protection, are unharmed.

The Philistines defeat God's people. Many die, including Saul's sons and David's soul brother Jonathan. In a final faithless move, the wounded Saul falls on his sword, killing himself.

**[GOD'S HEART]** God abandoned the king who long ago abandoned Him. Saul didn't faithfully love God. He sinfully carried out the responsibilities of a priest, he didn't kill God's enemies, he tried to kill God's king-elect, he murdered God's priests. Saul's heart shone clear when God didn't respond to him; instead of repenting and seeking God, who would have forgiven him, Saul sought a medium to perform divination.

David had also violated the priesthood by eating the holy bread, but he didn't do it out of rebellion. David also sought God's guidance, but he didn't make a military move until he heard from God—even when raiders had taken his family and every moment counted. And while Saul hunted David relentlessly, David didn't retaliate. He trusted that God knew, saw, and would work things out in His timing.

Saul prayed. God didn't answer. David prayed. God answered. All because of where their hearts were toward Him. Precious to God are those who love Him.

**[INSIGHT]** Dark forces have real power. The medium of Endor was able to call up Samuel's spirit—Scripture does not deny that it was actually Samuel (see 1 Samuel 28:4-24). God is very clear about engaging with these dark forces because they exist, they're powerful, and they're dangerous. They aren't of Him.

### The Grieving King

**[GOD'S STORY]** Three days after Saul and his sons die in battle, a "soldier" comes to report the news to David. His story is questionable. He shares that he killed Saul after the wounded king begged him to. Enraged and overcome with grief, David has the messenger executed.

David writes a lament for the nation to sing. The king has fallen, and David has lost his dear friend Jonathan.

After asking for God's approval, David comes out of exile in Philistine territory and moves to Hebron in Israel. The people there crown David king of his own tribe of Judah.

Meanwhile, Abner, the head of Saul's army, crowns Saul's son Ish-Bosheth king. For a time, there's a power struggle. Eventually, Abner switches his allegiance to David. But as he is leaving David's court, David's army commander Joab kills him. David curses Joab and grieves bitterly for Abner. One of God's great warriors has been needlessly killed.

Shortly after Abner's murder, Saul's son Ish-Bosheth is murdered by two of his own men. When they report what they've done to David, he has them executed. David has promised to protect Saul's family.

**[GOD'S HEART]** David's exile is over. His enemy, King Saul, is dead. Yet instead of rejoicing, David grieves. Why? Because he has the heart of his King. As God later shared, *"I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live" (Ezekiel 33:11).* 

Saul's life was one of unreached potential. His reign began with promise giving God credit for the rescue of Israel from the Ammonites. But for the rest of his life, he didn't genuinely seek God. And God watched His king strain and struggle as Saul sidelined him. If only Saul had sought after the God who was with him all along.

Only God knew the opportunities Saul missed, the way things could have been. While David and the nation grieved, God grieved most of all.

**[INSIGHT]** The Amalekite who reported Saul's death to David most likely wasn't even a soldier. He was probably a scavenger who came to pick up scraps after the battle. He had Saul's crown and armband, which the Philistines wouldn't have left behind. So, most likely, he got to the battlefield to scavenge before they did. Finding the king dead, he made up the story about what had happened to curry favor with David.

### The Worship That God Loves

**[GOD'S STORY]** Since a truce has been made with Saul's forces, the people of Hebron have another king-crowning ceremony. This time David is crowned king over all of Israel.

The people in Joshua's time had failed to drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem, so as one of David's first acts as king, he drives them out once and for all. David makes Jerusalem his home, and the people call it the City of David.

Soon David gathers the armies of Israel to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. They place the ark on an oxcart. And with music, celebration, and fanfare they parade the ark to Jerusalem. But while they're traveling, the oxen stumble. Uzzah reaches out his hand to steady the ark. God gets angry. Uzzah dies instantly. The celebration stops. The parade halts. For three months the ark stays in the home of Obed-Edom, and God blesses his entire household.

David tries again. This time there is no oxcart—the Levites carry the ark with its poles on their shoulders, like the Lord had commanded Moses. Every six steps the ark travels, David sacrifices a bull and a calf. The extravagant celebration parade continues as David dances without inhibition before the ark. God's presence is coming to His city.

**[GOD'S HEART]** The most honored man in the land is head-back, armsraised, feet-stomping, all-out dancing. God has chosen him, of all people, to lead His nation. David just can't help himself. God's goodness has overwhelmed him, and he dances before God with all his might.

Michal, Saul's daughter, is disgusted by her husband's worship. She remains childless for the rest of her life.

David bears fruit. Michal doesn't. God's preference is clear.

David's unhindered heart for God is the very reason God chose him to lead. Samuel told Saul, "Your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people" (1 Samuel 13:14). As the king, David's heart for God would kindle the hearts of the nation. His "undignified" worship (2 Samuel 6:22) was just what God is after.

**[INSIGHT]** God instructed Moses that the ark was to be carried by its poles by Levites. There is no evidence that Uzzah was a Levite. And He warned that touching the holy ark would result in death (see Numbers 4:4–6, 15). Uzzah's death was a reminder of God's holiness. When David moved the ark the second time, he followed God's commands (see 1 Chronicles 15:1–15), and all went well.

#### Day\_**83** 2 Samuel\_**08–10**

### The King of Life

**[GOD'S STORY]** As David settles comfortably in his new home, he has an uncomfortable thought: He lives luxuriously in a house while the Most Holy God dwells in a tent. David decides that he'd like to build God a house more in line with His glory, and shares his idea with Nathan the prophet. That night, God speaks to Nathan. David won't build God's house, his son will. But God appreciates David's heart, and promises that He will build *David's* house—his kingdom and throne will be established forever.

David focuses his energy on strengthening Israel's borders and subduing their enemies. God gives him the victory in every battle, and he gives God the honor. The nations that David conquers bring him tribute. Israel's king is leading his kingdom well.

David remembers Jonathan. He asks if Saul has any living relatives that he can bless in honor of Jonathan. It turns out that one of Jonathan's sons, Mephibosheth—who has two crippled feet—is living on the other side of the Jordan. David summons him to his court, decreeing that all of Saul's land be given to Mephibosheth along with the servants to maintain it. The king makes an edict: Mephibosheth is always to have a place at David's table.

**[GOD'S HEART]** David wants to build God a house. David's dream pleases God, but God says no. God didn't want David to build His house because he had shed too much blood (see 1 Chronicles 28:3). God values life and David has been a part of too much death.

In God's kingdom, death doesn't exist, and wholeness is the only way of life. The world is fallen and captive, yes, but God's plan is that one future day swords will be beaten into plowshares and nations will live in peace (see Isaiah 2:2–4). Even though David was honorably leading his nation, shoring up Israel's borders, and defending the country from attack, he was still causing death. And death in God's eyes is still—and always will be—a tragedy. It is still a misfit. God wanted His earthly home to be built in a time of peace, because His heavenly home is a kingdom of wholeness and peace.

**[INSIGHT]** David's kindness toward Mephibosheth is a glimpse of the gospel. Mephibosheth was part of the wrong family, crippled and weak. But the king brought him to his table to eat there indefinitely. King Jesus extends the same offer to us too.

#### Day\_**84/85** 2 Samuel\_**11–14**

### When God's Friend Broke His Heart

**[GOD'S STORY]** It's springtime. David should be leading Israel's army against the Ammonites, but instead he's on his roof, lusting after a beautiful bathing woman. He finds out she is Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his mightiest soldiers. But David doesn't care. He takes her into his palace and sleeps with her. She becomes pregnant.

In an attempt to cover up his sin, David retrieves Uriah from the battlefield. Surely the warrior will sleep with his wife while he's home. But Uriah loyally refuses the comforts of his wife while God's men, accompanied by God's ark, are out fighting. David's scheme is frustrated, so he orders Uriah back to the front and arranges for him to be killed in battle.

God's anointed king has fallen. He has committed adultery and set up the murder of a valiant man.

After Uriah's death, David marries Bathsheba. She delivers their baby.

God is deeply offended. He sends Nathan to confront David by means of a parable. Convicted, David confesses his sin, and Nathan reveals God's punishment. The sword of strife will come to David's family: His wives will be ravaged like he ravaged Uriah's. The newborn baby will die for David's sins.

Some time later, David's son Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar. Two years later, Tamar's brother Absalom kills his half-brother in revenge. David's sins are crumbling his family—and the kingdom.

### **[GOD'S HEART]** God takes David's sin personally. "The sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriab the Hittite to be your own" (2 Samuel 12:10).

The hurt and disappointment in God's words are thick: "I have given you everything, David. I made you king. I spared you from Saul. I gave you wives to hold—even your enemy's daughter! And I would have heaped more blessings on you! Why have you done this to Me? Did you think I was withholding something good from you? Do you not know Me at all?"

David sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, yes. But David's sin also violated God's holiness—it showed a blatant disrespect for the kindnesses God had shown David. And since God chose David because he was after His heart, perhaps that was the most hurtful of all.

**[INSIGHT]** Bathsheba was the granddaughter of one of David's advisors, Ahithophel. Later, when David's son Absalom rebels against him in an attempt to take the crown, Ahithophel abandons David and advises his rebel son. Ahithophel even instructs Absalom to sleep with his father's concubines in plain view (see 2 Samuel 16:20–23). Perhaps he is bitter about David's sin with his granddaughter.

### The Day the King Wept

**[GOD'S STORY]** The prophet Nathan's words are being fulfilled: the sword has come to the house of David. Absalom, David's son who murdered his half-brother, is plotting to steal the throne. Standing at the city gates of Jerusalem, Absalom weasels the people's support by sympathizing with the wrongs they feel have been committed against them. He is building himself up while tearing David down. Soon much of the nation loves him.

Absalom deceives David into thinking he's going to Hebron to worship God, but he's really going to stage a coup. He recruits some of David's advisors, including Ahithophel. Soon the popular Absalom is leading an army to lay siege to Jerusalem. David and his family flee, leaving behind ten of his concubines and a few strategically placed moles who will act as if they support Absalom but report all they learn to David.

Following Ahithophel's advice, Absalom publicly sleeps with his father's concubines. It is a brazen statement. Then Absalom leads the army to fight against his father. His orders? "Kill my father, the king."

But King David gives his men different orders: "Don't kill the enemy, my son." David's men defeat Absalom's army, but when Absalom is caught in a tree during the battle, David's army commander Joab kills him. When the news gets back to David, he sobs. His son is dead.

**[GOD'S HEART]** David's heart is a reflection of God's. "My son is wrong, yes. He is guilty, yes. He deserves to die, yes. But do not kill him."

Like Absalom, God's sons and daughters are guilty. We have often spurned the love of our Father, seeking to overthrow His good rule in our lives. We have thought we could reign better. We have misinterpreted His loving actions as cruelty, and we have shaken our fists at Him in anger. We have sought after cheap beauties, not trusting that He yearns to give us our deepest desires. We have disrespected the King.

David's grief refrain for his son is a prophetic picture of our loving Father. "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you" (2 Samuel 18:33).

Hear God's heart. "My children are wrong, yes. They are guilty, yes. They deserve to die, yes. But do not kill them. Kill Me instead."

**[INSIGHT]** As he leaves Jerusalem and ascends the Mount of Olives, David weeps for the sins of his son (see 2 Samuel 15:30). Centuries later, as Jesus descended the Mount of Olives for His triumphal entry, He weeps for the sins of His children too (see Luke 19:37–44).



### Undignified

"I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this."

2 Samuel 6:21-22

**IN WORD** When the ark finally made it to Jerusalem after David's lengthy attempts to bring it there, the happy king danced before the Lord. Apparently, it was a wild celebration. There was nothing immoral to it, of course, but it certainly defied the social expectations for a monarch. It was, according to Michal, David's wife, too undignified.

David wasn't very concerned with social expectations. Bringing the ark to Jerusalem wasn't for show, it was an act of devotion to the God of Israel. His heart overflowed with joy. His exuberance could not be contained.

That's characteristic of a heart in a true attitude of worship. When a deep passion takes center stage within us, nothing else seems to matter. Young lovers rarely care how nauseating their excessive affection is to those around them. The affection assumes a life of its own. And David didn't care how nauseating his excessive affection for God was to Michal or to anyone else. He was in love with his God. The affection had assumed a life of its own.

**IN DEED** Is that too undignified for the modern worshiper? It shouldn't be. God is looking for those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth, according to Jesus (John 4:23), and if the spirit knows the truth, it will jump up and down in wild celebration. It won't care what other eyes observe; it will only care about the internal festival of joy.

That's a foreign thought for many Christians. What's the solution? God doesn't expect us to go out and make fools of ourselves simply to demonstrate our love for Him. He does, however, expect that we will demonstrate our love for Him however His Spirit leads. When the Spirit says to dance—literally or figura-tively—and the world says dancing is not appropriate, we have to follow the Spirit. The world has no claim on us. God does. He's the One who fills our heart. When He does, our hearts can dance.

"I believe unselfconsciousness is characteristic of the fruit of the Holy Spirit." —Billy Graham

### The God Who Keeps His Word

**[GOD'S STORY]** David is deeply affected by the death of his son. Joab points out the irony—men in David's army bled and died to successfully squelch the rebellion, yet David's sadness insinuates that the mission was a failure. It's as if his defiant son's life is more important than the loyal men who fought. The army is demoralized. To reverse the melancholy cloud he has ushered in, King David sits at the gate to honor the warriors as they march back into the city. It is a royal thank-you.

The majority of the people of Israel want David back as king. Thousands of people escort him home to Jerusalem.

Soon though, Sheba, a rebel Benjamite, sparks a mutiny against David. Many of the Israelites defect. But the men of Judah, David's own tribe, crush the resistance.

At some point, when a famine comes over the land, David asks God what has caused it. Saul's attempt to wipe out the Gibeonites—the foreign tribe Israel had vowed to protect in Joshua's time—is behind the famine. David satisfies justice, and the famine lifts.

**[GOD'S HEART]** "You said you were going to protect the Gibeonites," God was saying in the famine. "And you haven't."

It was a great offense. The people who were supposed to represent Him were proving themselves to be liars.

Dishonesty has no place in God's people because it has no place in God. It's foreign to His nature. God's faithful honesty creates a beautiful canopy of truth that we dwell safely in and under. What God says is stable and true and we can build our lives on it.

God wanted His people to have a reputation of honesty and trustworthiness. He wanted the people of other nations to see that something in this broken world was dependable and true. And perhaps if they saw the goodness in Israel, they'd make the connection with the goodness of Israel's God.

**[INSIGHT]** The squabble between the men of Israel and the men of Judah is a foreboding one (see 2 Samuel 19:40–43). Tensions exist between the tribes. After Solomon's death, the kingdom would split. And when it did, the northern tribes would echo Sheba's rebellious cry: *"We have no share in David, no part in Jesse's son! Every man to his tent, Israel!" (See 1 Kings 12:16 and 2 Samuel 20:1.)* 

#### Day\_**88** 2 Samuel\_**22–24**

### God's Great Mercy

**[GOD'S STORY]** The author of 2 Samuel takes a detour from chronological history to share some more events from David's life.

When God rescued David from his enemies and from Saul, the king knew it was God who had done it. David's thankfulness spills out in a song of praise to the God who is strong and good. For years, Israel's king found protection from the onslaught of his enemies within the strong arms of the universe's King.

David leaves a psalm-like poem as his "last words." The king places his hope in what he has clung to throughout his life—God's good faithfulness.

And the mighty king has been surrounded by mighty men. Two groups of three elite warriors each accomplished hugely heroic feats. Enemies rightfully quaked in fear. A military hall-of-fame roster of 37 of David's mightiest testifies to the truth that God has given His nation great warriors.

David takes a census of the army, which makes God angry. David confesses: He was trusting in his military strength, and not in God's. The nation will suffer for David's faithlessness, and God lets him choose the punishment. David throws himself on God's mercy, and God doesn't unleash the full penalty.

**[GOD'S HEART]** First Chronicles 21:1 records the story of David taking a census and clears up some confusion about what motivated it. It seems that Satan tempted David to take stock of his army—to trust in his own strength instead of trusting in the strength of God.

Apparently Satan used his age-old tactic, the same one he used in the garden. "God isn't really going to take care of you. He really isn't good," he most likely whispered in David's heart. And the man who knows God's heart chose to trust in what the enemy was saying—he chose not to trust God. And David chose not to trust God for a long time. The census-takers canvassed the nation for nearly ten months. That's a long time to forego sending a messenger to stop the counting. That's a long time not to repent of his decision. Joab even tried to talk David out of it. David intentionally mistrusted God for days and weeks and months.

David's lack of belief angered God. God unleashed the punishment of David's choice, but soon mercifully relented. David had mistrusted God for months; God relented in mere days. He would not destroy Jerusalem.

**[INSIGHT]** Honorably and rightfully included in the list of David's greatest warriors is the man whose wife and life he stole: Uriah the Hittite.



## Costly Gifts

"I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." 2 Samuel 24:24

**IN WORD** David could have simply taken Araunah's threshing floor. After all, the offering was for royal purposes, a sacrifice to end a plague on the kingdom. And Araunah offered his property willingly. There was no reason for David to pay for the site other than one, overriding fact: This was an act of sacrifice!

David understood the central significance of sacrifice. It has to cost something. Worship that is easy to give is not very deep and meaningful. It may contain the right words and the right actions, but it doesn't indicate anything about the heart of the worshiper.

We have no trouble understanding this principle in our social lives. When we receive a gift that cost the giver a lot, we are deeply grateful. When we receive a gift that was cheaply obtained, we are more casual about our gratitude. Costly gifts mean something to us because they tell us something about the feelings and generosity of the giver. They give us a glimpse into the depth of the giver's love. They reflect the true meaning of giving.

Sacrificial worship reflects the true meaning of giving too. God receives gifts like we do: with an understanding that the sacrifice involved usually correlates directly with the love behind it. An act of worship that costs us nothing isn't much of an act of worship. No love is required to give cheap gifts. The God who sees into our hearts knows that better than anyone.

**IN DEED** Does your worship cost you anything? Or, more pointedly, does it cost you anything other than a couple of hours on Sunday morning and a small percentage of your paycheck? Those are important gifts to give, but God is looking deeper. He is looking for worship that flows from the heart every day of the week. He is looking for the love behind the gift. Learn to say with David, "I won't make cheap sacrifices for God." After all, He didn't make cheap sacrifices for us.

"The sign of our professed love for the gospel is the measure of sacrifice we are prepared to make in order to help its progress."

-Ralph Martin

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