



Faith Connections

Bible Study Guide

Winter
22

The Supremacy of Christ

Meaningful Bible Study

The Life of David



Bible Study Guide

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Winter 2022-23

Volume 46, Number 2

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Perspectives

God's Word: Living and Active

Psalm 119:160 says, “The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever” (NKJV). The Bible is God’s Word in written form. It is “God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). We, as believers, first and foremost accept God’s Word as true by faith. As we read His Word and allow its message to penetrate our hearts and lives, we experience the truth of God’s Word in our lives. In turn, as we experience this truth personally, God calls us to live out its message in our world. Through the things we say and do, the truth of God’s Word is lived out before the world.

When I was growing up I remember watching the documentary, *In Search of Noah's Ark*. The premise of the documentary was to present convincing scientific evidence for Noah’s Ark. The show claimed that the ark rested in Turkey on Mount Ararat, but due to logistics and political difficulties, it had not been uncovered. As a young teen, I remember thinking that if it was unearthed and verified, it would prove to the world (unbelievers) God exists and the Bible is true. But, if Noah’s ark was discovered, would everyone believe the Bible’s true?

While there is a time and place for the importance of this type of discovery, the Bible does not need us to defend or prove its validity as much as it needs us to read, study, obey, teach, and live out its truth. How do I know God’s Word is true? Not only does God’s Word proclaim its true (John 17:17), but it is “living and active” (Hebrews 4:12) in and through my life by the power of the Holy Spirit. How will the world know God’s Word is true? A good place to start is by seeing its truth lived out in the lives of those who have surrendered their hearts and lives to the One whose Word is true.

Throughout this quarter, allow God’s Word to be a lamp to your feet and light to your path (Psalm 119:105). Invite God’s Spirit to open your heart and life to the message of His Word. Think about the ways you can live out God’s truth in the world each day.

May God bless you as you study His Word this quarter!

MIKE WONCH

Editor

December

4

THE SUPREME GOOD NEWS

*The gospel is God's redemptive work in Christ Jesus
to make us God's holy people.*

THE WORD

**COLOSSIANS
1:1-14**

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

²To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

³We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— ⁵the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel ⁶that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. ⁷You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

⁹For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹²and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³**For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and**

KEY VERSES

brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

ENGAGE THE WORD

A NOTEWORTHY GREETING

Colossians 1:1-2

Following the standards of ancient letters, Paul introduces himself along with Timothy, who served with him. But he identifies himself as “an apostle” (v. 1) and not a “servant” (see Philippians 1:1) since he did not know this group (Colossians 1:9) and would later address some problems they faced (2:4-8, 18-23).

Paul’s description of the believers reveals how he understood God’s “grace and peace” (v. 2) at work among them. On the one hand, Paul depicts them as “holy” and “faithful”: God set them apart as God’s people, and by God’s grace they stayed the course despite teachings that challenged them to see themselves differently. On the other hand, Paul identifies them as both “in Colossae” and “in Christ” (v. 2). The phrase “in Colossae” reminds the Colossians (and us) that believers always find themselves in a specific location, which shapes them in specific ways and is the context where they live out the lordship of Christ. The latter phrase “in Christ” describes who has shaped their identity through the realm and relationship of believers’ incorporation into Christ. So the two phrases help us understand two competing issues: what has shaped us and how our relationship with Christ reshapes us.

A GRACIOUS THANKSGIVING

Colossians 1:3-8

This letter’s thanksgiving section expresses Paul’s gratitude for the Colossian believers and outlines a summary of the letter’s main themes. Verses 3-8 together comprise one long sentence in the original text; everything else that Paul states in the sentence relates to Paul’s thanks to God (v. 3). A report about the Colossians prompted this thanksgiving. Here we find Paul mentioning the often-repeated triad of faith, hope, and love . . . but not in that order.

Did You Know?

It is unusual for Paul to write to a church not founded by him. Other than Romans, Colossians is the only Pauline letter addressed to a congregation that he did not start. Once a city of prominence, Colossae was overshadowed by other neighboring cities in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), like Laodicea and Hieropolis in the first century. The church was likely started by Epaphras, who ministered with Paul (see Colossians 1:7-8; 4:12-13; Philemon 23). The city was significantly damaged by an earthquake around AD 60.

A SINCERE PRAYER

First, Paul refers to the Colossians' faith "in Christ Jesus" (v. 4). That is, they trusted in what God accomplished through Jesus as God's chosen and anointed One (the literal meaning of "Christ"). They relied on God's work of redemption.

Second, Paul refers to the Colossians' love "for all God's people" (v. 4), the same designation used earlier to describe the Colossian believers (v. 2). Their love for one another was apparent in their care for one another, and Paul's friend Epaphras reported about that love (v. 8).

Third, these two—faith and love—did not arise independently. The source of that faith and love is their hope. Although by definition hope has a future dimension, the description of hope as "stored up for you in heaven" (v. 5) suggests it to be an assured reality for the present, not merely a vague wish for the future. The hope of salvation is already secured in heaven, and nothing can change that because the exalted Christ is present above (3:1). That is why this is such good news—the "gospel" (v. 5)—for them.

Paul underscores that this gospel, grounded in hope, does not wait for its future fulfillment. The present aspect of the gospel "bearing fruit" among the Colossians was seen in their "love in the Spirit" (v. 8). In other words, Paul suggests that the transformation of their lives can be seen in the ways they love others, presumably within the context of the believers (cf. John 13:35).

Colossians 1:9-14

Given the reports about the Colossians, Paul prayed that God would reveal God's will to them. The desire to know and do God's will (v. 9) reflected Paul's Jewish background (cf. with Jesus; see Matthew 6:10; 7:21; Mark 3:35; 14:36; Luke 12:47). Related to this knowledge is the concern to "live a life worthy of the Lord" (v. 10). Similar instructions appear in other Pauline letters: "live a life worthy of the calling you have re-

Think About It

The word translated “gospel,” or “good news,” would have been familiar to people of the Greco-Roman era. The term was often used to refer to victory or liberation from enemies and even deliverance from demonic powers. Ironically, it was often used to speak of salvation made possible by a Roman emperor. Christian authors used the term to tell a different story: the good news that salvation comes only from God through Christ.

ceived” (Ephesians 4:1), “conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippian 1:27), and “live lives worthy of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:12). This letter focuses on the significance of Christ himself and emphasizes how one’s life should reflect Jesus’ own life (see Colossians 2:6).

Just as the thanksgiving section connects together all aspects of salvation’s story (i.e., faith, love, and hope), Paul’s prayer connects requests for knowledge of God’s will and the “life worthy of the Lord” (v. 10) with what God has already provided for them (vv. 12-14). The language is reminiscent of God’s provision in the promised land: God’s people received a “share” in the “inheritance” (v. 12), and the “light” served as a call to live as God directs them. Here Paul redefines that light so that it contrasts with the world and false teachings associated with the “dominion of darkness” (v. 13) and identifies with “the Son of God’s love” † (v. 14). This reiterates the importance of a life of love as evidence of the gospel’s transforming work. What truly makes this good news is that God’s grace redeems and transforms lives. When God makes a people holy, they (we) love others.

REFLECT | In what ways is the gospel good news to you?

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December

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THE SUPREME SAVIOR

Jesus Christ is the agent both of creation and of God's reconciling work.

THE WORD

COLOSSIANS
1:15-23

KEY VERSE

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶**For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.** ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

²¹Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²²But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

ENGAGE THE WORD

It is only natural for us in the church to think about the coming of Jesus during the Advent season. But as we think about His coming, we must admit that there are different descriptions of Jesus in the New Testament. In addition to the different portrayals of Jesus in

the four Gospels, other authors in the New Testament focus on different aspects about Jesus as the Christ to underscore significant elements of the salvation story.

THE SUPREME SON Colossians 1:15-20

Paul complimented the Colossian believers and their response to the Christian gospel, as we read in the thanksgiving portion of the letter (Colossians 1:3-14). Their love “for all God’s people” (1:4) was evidence of the gospel “bearing fruit” (1:6) in their community. However, this letter was written in part to oppose some teachers who apparently insisted that these believers were not forgiven of their sins and did not have a relationship with God unless they also had specific religious (visionary) experiences (2:18). These so-called teachers also encouraged the adoption of religious practices that would supposedly help nurture these experiences.

This is likely why Paul inserts into the letter what seems to be an early hymn or creed (Colossians 1:15-20) about the exalted Christ. The reason why it is believed to be a borrowed piece of material is that differences in vocabulary, poetic structure, and conciseness all point to a different author. Yet Paul uses what appears to be material from the faith tradition of the early Christian movement to focus on the supremacy of Christ. The hymn’s portrayal of Christ is remarkable! The first half depicts Christ in cosmic terms and depicts Christ alone as the One who reveals God (v. 15). It presents Christ as the One through whom God created and now sustains the universe (v. 16). It also describes Christ as preexistent with God before anything in creation (v. 17).

Whereas the first half of the hymn depicts Christ in cosmic ways, the second half of the hymn (Colossians 1:18b-20) parallels the elements of the first half (1:15-18a), but describes Christ in more salvific terms. Not surprisingly, this portion of the hymn begins by noting the significance of the resurrected Christ (v. 18). The

Did You Know?

The first four verses of the book of John offer a similar portrayal of Jesus (John 1:1-4). But John's version seems to have been written to make connections with the Genesis 1 account of creation and to set up the story when "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (1:14).

RECONCILED BY CHRIST

mention of all God's "fullness" (v. 19) dwelling in Christ is likely an allusion to Old Testament references to God being pleased to dwell in the temple (Psalm 68:16). The presence of God—His fullness—dwells in Christ. The culmination of this piece in terms of the reconciliation of all things and "making peace through his blood" emphasizes the role of this cosmic Christ in God's plan of salvation (v. 20).

Paul uses this hymn and its portrayal of Christ as evidence that believers in Him need nothing else. Certainly, they did not need additional religious experiences advocated by others to legitimize their salvation. They (and we) have been saved through Christ, and they (and we) identify with Him through their baptism.

Colossians 1:21-23

Paul's description of the reconciled life stands out in contrast to the life of the believers before that. He refers to persons who were estranged from God and hostile toward God. The term that Paul uses to describe the extent of that hostility was not merely their "minds" (Colossians 1:21), but the orientation of their life. This would have been the source of their "evil behavior" (v. 21). But Paul does not dwell in the Colossians' past; he turns to the "now" (v. 22) of their Christian life. The sacrificial language that is used here describes them as those who would meet the criteria of sacrifice before God (see Exodus 29:37-38; Numbers 6:14; 19:2). Such imagery conveys the sufficiency and effectiveness of Christ's reconciliation, which transforms them to be worthy in God's sight.

This emphasis on the sufficiency of the reconciling work of Christ does not leave the believers without responsibility. The beginning of verse 23, "if you continue in your faith," is not an expression of Paul's doubts. It means more like, "as long as you continue in your faith." This is not automatic, but something that must be lived and worked out. There is a definite

Think About It

In verse 22, the adjective translated “free from accusation” does not come from the context of Jewish sacrificial rituals, like “holy” and “without blemish.” It comes from a legal setting, where a defendant might be found without an accuser. Other New Testament uses of the term suggest a general community context, where no word (even among gossipers) can be found against the person in question.

OUR SAVIOR

article before “faith” in the Greek text, which suggests this to be more than personal faith. Rather, this is the faith or the apostolic teaching and tradition that the fledgling early church had been passing down. And it is what the church today continues to teach and embody.

Based on the idea and practice of continuing in the faith (v. 23), Paul offers three additional descriptors of the believers. The first description of being established has connotations of a firm foundation. The second description, which uses an adjective translated “firm,” suggests something that holds you steady or stable. The third description refers to not moving from something or changing one’s plans. The image is of something being unwavering regarding the Christian faith or the gospel, regardless of the circumstance.

From the earliest days of the Christian tradition, creedal statements have provided concise declarations about Christ, not merely as the means of deciding who is “in” the church and who is not, but also as guides that accompany Christian living. That holds true today as well. Our understanding of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is more than just something we believe or think about in our minds. That understanding should shape our lives in distinct ways. That is why we often speak in the church about being Christlike disciples, as that is consistent with Paul’s call to the Colossians. For that is what Christ as Savior has provided for us. Thanks be to God!

REFLECT Read Colossians 1:15-20 several times. Take time to consider the message of these verses.

RICHARD THOMPSON

December

18

THE SUPREME TEACHER

*Because Christ transforms our perspective as believers,
we are called to live out values and attitudes
that reflect Him.*

THE WORD

COLOSSIANS 2:6-23 **KEY VERSES** **So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.**

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

⁹For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

¹³When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

¹⁶Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. ¹⁸Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such

a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. ¹⁹They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

²⁰Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: ²¹“Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”?

²²These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. ²³Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

ENGAGE THE WORD

Colossians 2:6-8

WALKING IN CHRIST

Paul’s initial call to the Colossians reiterates what he already told them in chapter 1. His command “continue to live” (2:6), or walk, assumes what they were already doing. Biblical instructions often call believers to be what they are; here Paul encourages them to remain as they are, a complement to their faithfulness.

The term “received” is typically associated with tradition materials that were passed down (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 3:6). The believers’ lives were transformed by the gospel—that Jesus is God’s anointed One and Lord of all. They were taught these early traditions. Their lives were also shaped by the reality of those teachings: that Jesus as Christ is Lord and the source of their new way of life. All these things happened “in Him.” Such learning about Christ took place in the church, the body of Christ of which He is also the head (Colossians 1:18), making Him both subject and teacher of those walking together with Him.

Paul expands these thoughts about remaining in Christ further (v. 7). First, being “rooted” in Christ seems contrary to the encouragement about walking

Did You Know?

The “elemental spiritual forces of this world” is an expression found also in Colossians 2:20 and Galatians 4:3. The context here suggests that the false teachers in Colossae associated this with supernatural beings or angels associated with the stars or planets, which Paul regarded as threatening their salvation through Christ because it took the focus away from Christ.

BURIED AND RAISED WITH CHRIST

(v. 6): roots can go deep, but it highlights the foundational nature of the tradition's teachings. Second, being “built up in him” conveys development linked with faith's maturation. Third, being “strengthened in the faith” underscores the confirmation that comes in the faith (the gospel). Fourth, the excess in thanksgiving seems fitting, due to the blessings and change of life that come from walking with Christ.

However, Paul also warns them about teachings that downplay Christ and God's work in Christ. Paul's comments about “hollow and deceptive philosophy” (Colossians 2:8) do not argue against philosophy in general; Paul himself draws from various philosophical traditions. Nor should we interpret Paul's remarks as demeaning any form of tradition (v. 8), since this section affirms apostolic or church traditions. Paul's contention is with problematic teachings that minimized the importance of Christ, rather than centering on Him.

Colossians 2:9-15

Paul focuses again on God's presence and work of salvation in Christ. The statement about all the fullness of God living in Christ's body (Colossians 2:9) highlights the unique status and sufficiency of the earthly Jesus as the Christ and leads to his affirmation of the believers' union—relationship—with Christ. Because they are now incorporated “in Christ,” the fullness of God in Christ underscores that their relationship with God lacks nothing and need not be enhanced by additional practices or special experiences that others insisted were necessary.

To make his point, Paul refers to two religious acts. On the one hand, whereas teachers in Colossae insisted on ascetic practices to keep the human body in check and achieve visionary spiritual experiences, Paul describes Christ's death as a circumcision that stripped away such efforts (Colossians 2:11). Similar ideas of spiritual circumcision were familiar to Juda-

Think About It

Paul's explains baptism rite (through the mode of immersion) as a physical reenactment of the death and resurrection of Jesus and God's work of salvation in Christ. By immersing the believer into the baptismal waters, that person is buried with Christ and has died with Him. As the believer is raised out of those waters, this person is also raised alive (Colossians 2:13) or in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

WISDOM THROUGH CHRIST

ism (see Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 9:25-26). This relates, on the other hand, to Paul's use of baptism to depict God's work in Christ. In baptism, we see one's death to sin by being buried with Christ, yet Paul affirms how the believer is also raised and "made alive with Christ" (v. 13).

God's saving work in Christ makes the forgiveness of all our sins possible (vv. 13-14). Our debt has been paid by the death of Christ. Forgiveness came because all of the accusations and regulations listed have been canceled (v. 14a). God rids those things—"merely human commands and teachings" (2:22) that have "an appearance of wisdom" (2:23)—often added by other persons to be holy before God. All these things—our indebtedness to God and even our failings in trying to be holy for others (2:22-23)—have been taken away by nailing them to the cross.

Colossians 2:16-23

Paul offers basic reasons for resisting what the Colossian teachers were spreading. Paul's main criticism is that they "lost connection" with Christ (Colossians 2:19). There is no mention whether they recognized their error. However, it is only by staying connected with Christ that someone can remain spiritually alive. Paul insists that the entire church must remain connected with Christ and follow His wisdom. The drastic difference between two ways of life—one advocated by Paul and another by those teachers—illustrates how the term "conversion" described acceptance of the Christian faith, for Paul insists that believers will not follow what God put to death in baptism with Christ. Rather, they will be shaped by the wisdom that comes through Christ.

REFLECT

In what ways are you rooted and built up in Christ, "strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness"?

December

25

THE SUPREME WAY OF LIVING

*Christ came into the world to transform
the way humans live.*

THE WORD

**COLOSSIANS
3:1-17**

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷**And whatever**

KEY VERSE

you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

ENGAGE THE WORD

A HIGHER CALLING

Colossians 3:1-4

The passage begins by Paul returning to the image of baptism (Colossians 3:1; see 2:12, 20). Paul seems to say, “Remember your baptism!” But it is logical. As a person arises from the baptismal waters, eyes will soon look upward. This follows the command, “Set your hearts on things above.” In contrast to the false teachers, who insisted that Christ was not sufficient, Paul notes that Christ himself is seated there (at God’s right hand; v. 1). The call to focus “on things above” rather than “on earthly things” does not mean that someone becomes preoccupied when it comes to practical issues. It means that this heavenly focus provides the proper perspective for life. Remember that earlier Paul offered a hymn depicting Christ with exalted imagery (Colossians 1:15-20), a reminder to “keep our eyes on Jesus” when dealing with life issues.

THE LIFE YOU ONCE LIVED

Colossians 3:5-11

In contrast to a heavenly-focused life, Paul describes the Colossians’ former life and offers guidance about avoiding it by interspersing vice lists with brief instructions. The first vice list (Colossians 3:5) is dominated by sexual sins, but ends with greed (or covetousness), which Paul identifies with idolatry. The arrangement of the list—from more specific to general issues—exposes an underlying problem, so the focus is on symptomatic matters. At the heart of such vices is the assumption that things or people exist for one’s own gratification. The thought was that all idolatry involves some form of covetousness. All these vices reflect a failure to acknowledge aspects of life that come from God as Creator, instead elevating other things to the center of life itself. As Romans 1:25 states, this results in worshiping “created things rather than the Creator,”

Did You Know?

Paul's description of love as binding together the Christian virtues listed in Colossians 3:12 in "perfect unity" or "perfect harmony" (NRSV) does not convey a notation of perfection as flawlessness. Rather, the wording connotes a love that moves us toward God's intended goal. Although our unity in Christ may not be perfect, love moves us toward the goal of unity . . . as we walk with Christ.

LIVING AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE

which is opposite the call to give thanks (Colossians 3:17).

The second vice list (Colossians 3:8) focuses on attitudes and speech. The inclusion of anger does not incriminate it in every situation. The list holistically offers a picture of attitudes and actions that are harmful to healthy relationships and absent of love. They typically abuse or harm others rather than seek their benefit. The language of "taking off" such behavior offers a different way to understand Christian baptism: the removal of the garment of one's "prior life" and its practices (Colossians 3:9), followed by putting on a new garment. Such vices are understood as part of the past, replaced by a "new self" fashioned "in the image of its Creator" (3:10). Such a difference is evident to all!

Colossians 3:12-14

Paul was far more concerned about what that new life looks like. The former life dealt with attitudes and actions associated with the worship of self and the ways that humanity tends to categorize others, often to manipulate or oppress (cf. Colossians 3:11). In contrast, Paul now uses three terms (elect, holy, beloved) to describe the Colossian believers that the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses for Israel (v. 12). This language provides a powerful image of God's work in Christ: God chose them as God's new people.

To offer a glimpse into the life of this new people, Paul includes a list of virtues that focuses on what the community needed to get along, with an emphasis on a concern for others' interests and needs, as well as a willingness to waive one's rights on behalf of others. The instructions that follow also reflect a realistic perspective about relationships and how to deal with conflict and problems. Bearing with others (Colossians 3:13) involves accepting others for who they are and giving them space and value. The instruction here

Think About It

Our new life in Christ calls for the definitive and final removal of those aspects of our old life of sin. We are not to continue in sinful ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling because such things incur God's wrath. Jesus has given us new life—now we must live it.

HONORING GOD IN ALL THINGS

about forgiveness should be understood as mutual in nature within the context of the church. The concern is reconciliation with another and restoration within the faith community. This, for Paul, is what love looks like within the body of believers: it is self-giving and mutual.

Colossians 3:15-17

The reconciling peace that Christ brought into the world should be what rules the lives of believers (Colossians 3:15). The verb “rule” is not the same term that describes what kings and governors did. This verb connotes control or discernment. In the ancient world, it describes the activity of umpires, who directed and officiated a contest and kept order. So Paul's advice calls for the peace of Christ to provide order in life. This was not limited to interactions within the church, but extended to interpersonal interactions on all levels, even those who caused confusion by their false teaching.

The final verse (Colossians 3:17) extends from the church to all of life. With the instructions of the chapter, we might conclude that Paul “covered all the bases.” But by adding this part about doing everything “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” these instructions do not appear as burdensome requirements but what a new life looks like with Christ as Lord. A person would not follow these reluctantly, but with songs of praise and gratitude for what God has done and is doing (vv. 16-17), a walking testimony of God's goodness and grace.

Paul encourages us to see that, by God's grace through Christ, God calls us to be God's holy people, who embrace who we are and live faithfully in ways that honor God.

REFLECT

On this Christmas Day, think about the ways in which Jesus came to transform the way we live.

RICHARD THOMPSON

January

1

YOU CAN TRUST THE BIBLE

The Bible is the authoritative rule for faith and practice in the church.

THE WORD

**2 PETER
1:12-21**

So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. ¹³I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, ¹⁴because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

¹⁶For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” ¹⁸We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

¹⁹We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. ²¹**For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

KEY VERSE

ENGAGE THE WORD

These first followers of Jesus had what we now refer to as the Old Testament as their Scriptures. Having inherited this Hebrew Bible, they also were recipients of a gospel message that proclaimed a new testament (or covenant). Although the New Testament as we know it was not yet fully formed or formally recognized—that would come in the fourth century AD—the preaching and teaching of the apostles about Jesus as the fulfillment of the Scriptures provided early Christian believers with a new and compelling authority. They, like us, were invited to trust in the message and put it into practice. Let's consider what Peter tried to convince these early believers of. Perhaps his perspectives can help us as we grapple with what the authority of Scripture might mean for us in our time and place in history.

REMEMBERING OUR STORY **2 Peter 1:12-15**

The Bible clearly teaches the supreme authority is God himself. In the Bible, we are confronted with the good news of God's love and the offer of salvation. In His Word, we hear the testimony that God has been working redemptively throughout human history.

—Roger Hahn

Notice how often Peter uses the language of remembering: “remind you of these things” (v. 12), “refresh your memory” (v. 13), “remember these things” (v. 15). Are we really that forgetful? I was recently reading through a personal journal I kept about a decade ago and was amazed at how much detail I had forgotten about significant events and relationships in my life. Research on human memory functioning confirms what Peter knew and I experienced—our brains are selective in what we hear, what we store, and what we recall. Because of this, learning requires repetition—hearing, speaking, practicing over and over again.

Peter knew he would die soon (v. 14) and wanted to put the core message of the gospel in writing so the churches would not forget it. His writings, along with others, were eventually recognized and affirmed as Scripture because they faithfully remind us of Jesus' story and teachings. Our Bible—Old and New Testaments together—remind us of the story of God and

Did You Know?

In the Greco-Roman world a son did not have full status and benefits as heir until acknowledged by his father. Peter's reference to God the Father's public acknowledgment of Jesus (vv. 17-18), which echoes Psalm 2:7, would have been understood by his readers to signal that ultimate authority and reliability lies with Jesus, the Word of God.

God's people across time and across cultures. In this way they function as Scripture with authority, a frame within which we can best understand and live into our particular salvation story.

2 Peter 1:16-18

The priority of Jesus as the Word of God is clearly demonstrated in the record of the disciples' experience on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36), an event that Peter refers to in verses 17-18. Peter in this epistle is clear that the focus of the gospel message is Jesus who, as God's Son, is loved by and the recipient of honor and glory from the Father (v. 17), and who will come again in power (v. 16). It became central because believers then and now know from an experiential encounter with Jesus that He is the Christ. It's not a made-up story for self-serving purposes; rather, it is that which we have seen (v. 16) and heard (v. 18)—it comes to us from God in such a way that we find it compelling and therefore invites an honest response.

TRUSTING IN GOD

Keep in mind that the Scripture record is a means to an end; that end being a transforming encounter with the living God. The Bible is authoritative for believers because it is the Word of God; however, we must always center our belief in the God to whom the Bible gives witness and put our trust in the God about whom the Bible testifies.

LEARNING IN COMMUNITY

2 Peter 1:19-21

Peter asserts that the Old Testament record upon which he drew and the new message about Jesus, together are reliable (v. 19) as Scripture. If something is reliable, it is so not simply because someone says it is, but because it proves to be so in practice. If your exposure to the story, the message, and the invitation of the Christian Scriptures has helped you to encounter the living God, know Jesus better, and live in such a way that you love the world as God does, then you

Think About It

Peter's overall concern in writing this epistle is the building up of the community of faith in virtues (ways of living) that reflect the very nature of God for the sake of the world (2 Peter 1:5-7). What specific Scripture practices would help your community of faith produce such fruit (cf. Galatians 5:22-23)?

can say, with authority, that the Scriptures are reliable. Notice, however, that Peter does not stop there. He goes on to identify that which is most crucial for believers who have found both God and the Scriptures that testify about God to be reliable and authoritative: continuing engagement with and response to both. The image of light shining in a dark place (v. 19) is instructive: Scripture's effect on us over time is like the rising light of dawn or a rising star at night—Christ emerging and growing in us (cf. Galatians 4:19; Revelation 22:16).

How can we demonstrate the reliability of Scripture in our time and place in history? By continuing to pay attention to it (v. 19) with a humble and open spirit to receive its "prophetic message" (that is, its challenge to my established ways of desiring, thinking, and behaving) as the living and active work of the Holy Spirit. We do that together, as a community of faith. Peter states this positively by using the plural "you" ("you all") and "hearts" in verse 19. He makes the same point in the negative in verse 20 by warning that some will use the Bible individualistically to advance only their own personal ego agenda.

The concluding verse of this passage (v. 21) beautifully captures the highly relational nature of Scripture—it was formed in community (humans and God's Spirit together) and does its continuing work in community (humans and God's Spirit together).

REFLECT Consider the ways God speaks to you through His Word.

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January

8

INSPIRED TRUTH FOR THE REAL WORLD

*The Bible is essential to the health and growth
of the body of Christ.*

THE WORD

2 TIMOTHY 3:10-17

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹²In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

KEY VERSES

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-8

¹In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ²Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

⁶For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

ENGAGE THE WORD

The good news of the gospel is that it is the power of the resurrected Christ for living in the real world and facing real world challenges. Jesus' prayer to His Heavenly Father on behalf of His followers was "not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one . . . Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:15, 17).

RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Paul reminds Timothy of three key resources for his ongoing journey of faith and ministry. The first is Paul's personal example as an inspiration. Like Timothy, we can benefit greatly from exemplars who mentor us, not just with words and information, but with their "way of life . . . purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings" (vv. 10-11). The last three words in that list are a sober reminder that we often learn and grow because of navigating difficult circumstances. Our best mentors are not those who lead a charmed life or seem to always have it "together," but rather those who know suffering and loss and through it discover grace for endurance.

A second resource is memories from one's upbringing. Timothy was blessed with a grandmother (Lois) and mother (Eunice) who modeled "sincere faith" (1:5). Not all of us have that benefit. Sometimes childhood memories are quite painful. Nonetheless, even these can become a resource for discipleship if we face them honestly and open up to the Holy Spirit's healing and empowering through our suffering and loss.

A third resource is "Holy Scripture" (v. 15). What

Did You Know?

The language Paul uses in 3:16 are Greek words associated with “schooling.” Jewish boys like Timothy would have been schooled in the “Tanakh,” consisting of the Torah (Pentateuch), the Prophets, and the Writings (wisdom and poetry), as well as in the law and prayer books of Israel.

THE PREACHING AND TEACHING MINISTRY

THE LONG-HAUL PERSPECTIVE

makes the Scripture holy? What makes us holy? The answer is the same: it and we are “God-breathed” (v. 16). The source of all life is able to make the words in the Bible and the impact of those words in us come alive. Which brings us to the two-fold purpose of Scripture, according to Paul: first, it helps us to be wise about salvation (v. 15) and second, it forms us in holiness so that we can do good works (vv. 16-17). It is a tool for discipleship, cultivating virtue in believers and activating service to the world.

2 Timothy 4:1-5

It is no wonder, then, that Paul charges Timothy to faithfully carry out a ministry of preaching and teaching (v. 2). Because Scripture is a record of God’s presence and activity in the world and the call of Christ-followers is to be God’s presence and activity in the world, the pastoral ministry of connecting Scripture to lived practice is paramount. Paul appeals to “the presence of God and of Christ Jesus” (v. 1) to make this point. Ministry is all about presence, showing up (“appearing” v. 1) to patiently instruct, rebuke, correct, and encourage (v. 2).

Perhaps the most important virtue to cultivate in the handling of Scripture for the purposes of wise discipleship is patience (v. 2). Why? Because both the Bible and us as hearers are being inspired by the Spirit. Preaching, teaching, and counseling ministries in the church are live and dynamic processes, not formulaic, mechanical systems. We need patience to “keep [our] head[s]” (v. 5) in the face of human sin, failure, and struggle. People need time to work through the meaning and significance of doctrine, the inconsistency of their desires, and the temptations to an easy, but false path (vv. 3-4). Discipleship ministry is not for the faint of heart!

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Endurance (v. 5) is a fruit of patience evident in

Think About It

The contrasting examples in Scripture of godly versus ungodly ways of life suggest that the traditions of the church—its history of saints and heretics, and its liturgies of worship and confession—have value for Christian discipleship. Who are the saints of your church's history that can serve as exemplars? What in your church's history might serve as a warning?

Paul's life and ministry. Like his fellow apostle, Peter, he knew the time of his death was approaching (v. 6). His final testimony is triumphant: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (v. 7). It would be easy to focus on Paul's efforts—"I have fought . . . finished . . . kept . . ." He is an inspiring model, but the most important words in this testimony are the three objects of his efforts—the good fight, the race, and the faith. These are what Paul ultimately cares about because they are what Timothy and all of us who are disciples of Jesus are invited to embrace.

Following Jesus is a long-haul journey that requires long-haul resources (named in the previous section) and long-haul perspectives, which can be found in verses 7-8. The immediate, but temporary, satisfaction I might feel from shallow or evil living is of no comparison to the "crown of righteousness" that graces a life well lived. Keeping my eye on "that day" of Jesus' ultimate redemption of all creation helps me to make it through the "todays" that feel discouraging and hopeless. Even when I go through seasons of not feeling much (or any) of God's presence, I can join the cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1) who, with Paul, "have longed for his appearing" (v. 8).

REFLECT **T**hink about Bible stories or specific passages that have been especially meaningful to your life.

DOUG HARDY

January

15

A GUIDE TO READING AND STUDYING SCRIPTURE

We are to be students of God's Word.

THE WORD

**PSALM
119:97-112**

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.
⁹⁸Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies.

⁹⁹I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.

¹⁰⁰I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

¹⁰¹I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word.

¹⁰²I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me.

¹⁰³How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

¹⁰⁴I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.

KEY VERSE

¹⁰⁵**Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.**

¹⁰⁶I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws.

¹⁰⁷I have suffered much; preserve my life, LORD, according to your word.

¹⁰⁸Accept, LORD, the willing praise of my mouth, and teach me your laws.

¹⁰⁹Though I constantly take my life in my hands, I will not forget your law.

¹¹⁰The wicked have set a snare for me, but I have not strayed from your precepts.

¹¹¹Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.

¹¹²My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.

ENGAGE THE WORD

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm—176 verses in all! Because of its length and the constant repetition of words and phrases within it, Christians rarely read it in its entirety. Its central theme—the revelation of God through the Torah, or Law.

The purpose of Psalm 119 is to foster piety, that is, prayerful devotion to God. What better way to do that than to take the reader (pray-er) through a lengthy, repetitive sequence of affirmations about and insights into the effects of God's revealing Godself to humankind. This is no speedy, surface-level devotional. Rather, it is an extended and demanding exercise with the goal of cultivating a heart for God infused with the virtues of holy living. No wonder Christians have gravitated toward this psalm (along with Psalm 1 and Psalm 19) as Scripture to support disciplined practices of engaging the Bible.

In this session we focus on one stanza only (vv. 97-112), but its language and themes are central to the thrust of the entire psalm. In this stanza we find three exemplary features of being a student of God's Word: (1) spending time in the Word and staying with it, (2) cultivating practical fruit in our lives, and (3) discovering the love, joy, and peace of God through it.

MEDITATING ON GOD'S WORD

Psalm 119:97b,98a,99b,100b,101b,102b,108,109

The word "meditation" has been conspicuously absent in much of contemporary church life, perhaps in part because the practice seems foreign or scary. We often associate the practice of meditation with other religions (e.g., Buddhism). It is true that one does not have to be Christian to meditate, but the practice has a centuries-long tradition in Jewish and Christian faith. The word "meditate" occurs at least 19 times in Psalms.

Did You Know?

The word “heritage” (v. 111) refers to the allotment of land that all male Israelites (except the priests and Levites) were to receive as an inheritance. Like for many today, land in the ancient Near East was precious. The psalmist, therefore, affirms just how precious God’s Word is, guaranteeing a future.

To meditate with Scripture means to concentrate on God with an openness to receive God’s revelation. For the psalmist, God’s revelation was summed up in one word, Torah. It referred to three sources of God’s speaking: (1) the received tradition and teaching of the faith, including sacred books, (2) natural law in the operations of the cosmos, and (3) direct, personal communication from God. To meditate is to give focused time for experiencing the divine Word through Scripture, God’s creation, and the whispers of the Holy Spirit in our inner being. The diversity of sources for hearing and learning from God are reflected in the eight different words used in this psalm for God’s revelation: law, decree, precept, statute, command(-ment), ordinance (or judgment), word, and promise.

Faithful, regular meditation is one way—a primary way for Christians—to mature through the long, slow, ever-deepening sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, transforming us into the image of Christ, the divine Word. The discipline required to stay with a practice such as this is an expression of Christian asceticism—saying “No” to taking an easier path so that I can say “Yes” to the long-term work of God in my life for the sake of the world (v. 106).

THE FRUIT OF GOD’S WORD

Psalms 119:98b,99a,100a,101a,102a,104,105,107,110

Why bother with the discipline, effort, time, and persistence it takes to meditate on God and God’s creation (including our own complex being)? Because it produces good, practical fruit for living. The fruit named in this psalm section include wisdom, understanding, avoidance of evil and falseness, and a path forward marked by life. These are in sharp contrast to the ways of living that result in violence, hatred, and death (cf. Psalm 1) and that are affirmed in the New Testament as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

This psalm, like many others, was written to help Israel deal with their current circumstances. Through persistent prayer, praise, study, obedience, and wait-

Think About It

Many cultures and communities value individual autonomy; that is, elevate the person who is independent and self-sufficient. This psalm challenges such detachment by acknowledging the limits of human understanding and ability. Wisdom comes from passionate involvement with and dependency on God.

LOVE OF THE WORD

ing (like a suffering servant), one learns to trust in God even when the circumstances do not encourage it (vv. 109-110). The psalmist's testimony is that when you gain these fruit—when the virtues show up more consistently in your life—you can see the value of hearing and heeding God's instructions.

Psalm 119:97a,103,106,111,112

The psalmist has a strong emotional attachment to God's Word. Some of the language is passionate (vv. 97, 103), words one might reserve for a love relationship. But that is exactly the point. The psalmist loves God's revelation because the psalmist loves God. In and through the various ways we encounter God's Word—Scripture, creation, and our personal prayer dialog—God becomes known as Love which, in turn, stirs within us a love which we desire to return to God.

The happiness expressed by the psalmist is not superficial. Rather, it is a joy (v. 111) from knowing the God who gives life even when things are not going well, when I "suffer much" (v. 107), when others "set a snare for me" (v. 110). Hardships he faced are mixed in with expressions of trust—an honesty that reminds us to resist the temptation to hide or suppress our raw feelings and emotions.

Like the psalmist, we too can know the peace that comes from God's "light" (v. 105) for the journey of life. As pilgrims together in community, often unable to see very far ahead, it is comforting to know that God's Word to us will be like a lamp. We can follow (v. 106), even if it's just taking the next step forward.

REFLECT

In what ways is God's Word a lamp for your feet and a light on your path?

DOUG HARDY

January

22

A HEART FOR LEADERSHIP

Service in the kingdom of God is based on the heart, not appearance or other human qualities.

THE WORD

1 SAMUEL 16:1-13

The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

²But Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.”

The LORD said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’ ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.”

⁴Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, “Do you come in peace?”

⁵Samuel replied, “Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the LORD.”

KEY VERSE

⁷But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.” ⁹Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, “Nor has the LORD chosen this one.” ¹⁰Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, “The LORD has not chosen these.” ¹¹So he asked

Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.”

Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.”

¹²So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.”

¹³So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

ENGAGE THE WORD

THE LORD GUIDES SAMUEL TO ANOINT A NEW LEADER

1 Samuel 16:1-5

The time had come in Israel for a change in leadership. Saul had disobeyed the Lord’s command with regard to the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:10-31) and God rejected him as king over Israel. God then directed the prophet Samuel to go to Jesse’s house in Bethlehem, a city in Judah about six miles south of Jerusalem, to select Saul’s replacement. Samuel displayed a reluctance to go initially as Saul would have viewed Samuel’s mission as an act of treason—“he will kill me.” To allay Samuel’s fears, God told Samuel to take a heifer and travel to Bethlehem under the guise of presenting a sacrifice. Little did Saul know that Samuel’s sacrifice would set the stage for the anointing ceremony of Israel’s next king. When Samuel reached the city, the elders came to him “trembling” for they did not know Samuel’s intentions, and they did not want any trouble with the king. Samuel reassured them that he came in “peace” and invited them, along with Jesse’s family, to participate in the sacrifice.

THE LORD STEERS SAMUEL AWAY FROM THE WRONG CHOICE

1 Samuel 16:6-10

Samuel travelled to the house of Jesse as the Lord instructed. Jesse had eight sons and God’s chosen one resided among them. Samuel did not know which son God had selected, but when he “saw” Eliab, the

Did You Know?

The “heart” in Hebrew thought and tradition represented much more than just the physical organ in the chest cavity. The heart encompassed the whole person as it served as the seat of one’s emotion, intellect, and will.

first and oldest son, he automatically assumed God’s anointed stood before him. Samuel naturally thought that the oldest, and probably tallest, son made the best candidate for leadership. The story of Saul proved, though, that outward appearances alone can be deceiving. Saul was tall and nice looking (1 Samuel 9:2), yet he lacked faith at critical points in his story and failed to obey God throughout his kingship. In the end, his kingship turned out to be a complete failure. God reminded Samuel of this important principle. While people tend to equate strong leadership with outward appearances, such as looks or family status, the Lord looks upon the heart. In truth, the greatest leaders are characterized by their faith in and obedience to the Lord. With this important principle in mind, God rejected Eliab and the six other sons of Jesse.

THE LORD DIRECTS SAMUEL TO ANOINT DAVID TO LEAD ISRAEL

1 Samuel 16:11-13

Jesse was running out of sons for Samuel to anoint and he wondered aloud, “Are these all the sons you have?” Jesse responded that only his youngest son remained, but he was out tending the sheep.

Although Jesse’s last son may have seemed unremarkable to most (even his father did not mention him by name), there are actually a couple of noteworthy things to consider about him as he first appears in the text. First, as the youngest child, most people would have disqualified him as a candidate for an important position such as king. God, however, often chooses individuals for His purposes that most people overlook or underestimate. Second, David was shepherding the flock at the time of Samuel’s visitation. In the ancient world, the metaphor of a shepherd typified those who took on leadership roles. God’s greatest leaders learned how to tend the flock before they shepherded the people. Often times, the lessons learned while caring for the sheep proved invaluable when an individual took on leadership

Think About It

The story of Saul represented a bitter irony. When the people asked for a king they “rejected” God’s rule over them (1 Samuel 8:7). In the end, God ultimately “rejected” the king the people demanded (1 Samuel 15:23).

responsibilities. This is why Jesus referred to himself as the “good shepherd” because of the loving care He demonstrated toward the sheep (John 10:1-6). When leaders did not look out for the best interest of the people and the community suffered as a result, they were referred to as “false shepherds” (Ezekiel 34:1-10). The shepherd imagery found in our text, therefore, intimated that David would be a leader over God’s people, even before he officially became king.

Samuel waited for the youngest to be brought before him. When David came into Samuel’s presence, the Lord immediately confirmed his selection—“rise and anoint him; this is the one.” As Samuel anointed David in the presence of his family, the Spirit of God came upon David from that day forward. The word for “anoint” in Hebrew is *meshiach*, from which we get the word “messiah.” In the Old Testament, figures such as kings, priests, and prophets served as messiah figures as they carried out their appointed missions. The arrival of the Spirit not only confirmed David as God’s choice for kingship, but it empowered him to carry out the task God had for him. The text notes that the moment the Spirit fell upon David, the Spirit departed from Saul (1 Samuel 16:14). The presence of God remained with David and blessed him on his path toward the monarchy, while Saul grew further away from the Lord, even tragically taking his own life at the end of his story (1 Samuel 31:1-4).

REFLECT **T**hink about what it means that God looks not at our outward appearance, but looks at our hearts.

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January

29

IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

*Trust in the Lord is infinitely better
than trust in human beings.*

THE WORD

1 SAMUEL 17:4-9

A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. His height was six cubits and a span. ⁵He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; ⁶on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. ⁷His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him.

⁸Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. ⁹If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us."

32-37

³²David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him."

³³Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth."

³⁴But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, ³⁵I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. ³⁶Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. ³⁷The LORD who rescued me from the paw of

the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul said to David, “Go, and the LORD be with you.”

40-49

⁴⁰Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

⁴¹Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. ⁴²He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him. ⁴³He said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴“Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!”

KEY VERSE

⁴⁵**David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. ⁴⁷All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.”**

⁴⁸As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. ⁴⁹Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground.

ENGAGE THE WORD

Why is it some people can rise to the challenge and others crumble in the face of adversity? In our focus text this week, we learn Saul failed to lead the Israelite armies against the Philistines and their champion Goliath. David, however, did not run from this danger but chose to confront the Philistine warrior. Why was a young man able to face this daunting threat when others were afraid to engage?

Did You Know?

How tall was Goliath? According to the Hebrew Bible, Goliath stood over nine feet tall (six cubits and a span). The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), lists him as six feet, nine inches tall (four cubits and a span). Goliath was a formidable foe who was much taller than David and very strong (17:5).

GOLIATH CHALLENGES THE ISRAELITES

1 Samuel 17:4-9

Israel's opponent, the Philistines, did not originate in the land of Canaan, but they came from the territories of Greece and Anatolia along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. About the 13th century BC, they landed on the southwest plain of Canaan and gradually moved inland. Eventually, Philistine expansion brought them into conflict with the Israelites as our focus text indicates (see also 1 Samuel 13:5-7; 14:1-23).

The battle report notes that one of their champions, named Goliath, challenged the Israelites to send out one of their soldiers to confront him personally. The text also portrays Goliath in graphic and frightening detail. He was a large man, covered head to toe in impressive armor. To the Israelite army, he represented an impenetrable force. His helmet was made of bronze, he wore a heavy coat of mail, he donned greaves to protect his legs, and he possessed an imposing sword and spear. In addition, he had a shield-bearer go before him to act as a buffer. The terrifying presence of Goliath struck fear in the hearts of Saul's men, and Goliath taunted them, daring one of the Israelite soldiers to meet him on the battle field.

The scene painted for us in this text is reminiscent of battles in ancient times. Armies would often go to war against one another by sending out a representative to engage in a personal battle. The outcome of the battle would be determined by the warriors who faced each other. The man who vanquished his foe symbolized the winning side as the other side subsequently surrendered to the enemy. This was Goliath's battle plan and he laid out the terms before Saul and the troops—"If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us."

DAVID TRUSTS THE LORD

1 Samuel 17:32-37

David had come to visit his brothers and to see

Think About It

The name of a person had tremendous significance in the Old Testament world. It represented the nature and character of the one who bore it. Thus, David confronted Goliath in the powerful “name of the LORD Almighty,” the God of Israel.

how they and the troops were fairing. David heard the words of Goliath as he defied the Israelite army and he could see the effect his intimidating words had on the men. Since no one was willing to confront the Philistine champion, David went to the king and offered to confront him. Saul doubted that David could defeat a professional warrior like Goliath—“you are only a young man”—but David interpreted the situation through his faith in God. David’s experience as a shepherd had prepared him for this moment. His ability to protect and rescue the sheep from wild animals would allow him to overcome the threat Israel faced. David knew that the God who protected him from the lion and bear would also save him from the “hand of this Philistine.”

THE LORD ENABLES DAVID TO DEFEAT GOLIATH

1 Samuel 17:40-49

David entered the arena with the tools of his trade, a sling and some stones. Goliath was insulted that the Israelites would send out a young man to engage him—“Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” Goliath arrogantly assumed that defeating David would be an easy chore, but David reminded him that he confronted him in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. David boldly proclaimed that God would deliver him into his hands. David ran quickly to meet Goliath bolstered by his unshakable faith in the Lord and deftly slung the stone into the forehead of Goliath. Ironically, the one part of his body not protected by armor left him vulnerable to attack, and Goliath fell face down on the ground after the stone hit its mark.

REFLECT

In what ways do you need God to help you face the “Goliath-type” situations in your life?

KEVIN MELLISH

February

5

DEALING WITH ENEMIES

God's people seek reconciliation rather than revenge.

THE WORD

**1 SAMUEL
24:1-22**

After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the Desert of En Gedi.” ²So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats.

³He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. ⁴The men said, “This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’” Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.

⁵Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. ⁶He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD.” ⁷With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

⁸Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, “My lord the king!” When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. ⁹He said to Saul, “Why do you listen when men say, ‘David is bent on harming you’?” ¹⁰This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, ‘I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the LORD’s anointed.’ ¹¹See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or re-

bellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. ¹²May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. ¹³As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you.

¹⁴"Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Who are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? ¹⁵May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."

¹⁶When David finished saying this, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And he wept aloud. ¹⁷"You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. ¹⁸You have just now told me about the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. ¹⁹**When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today.** ²⁰I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. ²¹Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not kill off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family."

²²So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

KEY VERSE

ENGAGE THE WORD

Have you ever been wronged by someone from your past? How did you treat them when you had the opportunity to "get revenge" on them? In our focus text we learn how David responded to Saul when given the chance to settle the score. David's response to Saul teaches us a lot about David's character and how to deal with those people in our lives who mistreat us. By following David's example, we demonstrate what it means for the people of God to live with grace and character.

DAVID PASSES ON A CHANCE TO GAIN REVENGE

1 Samuel 24:1-7

The relationship between Saul and David had taken a sad and tragic turn (1 Samuel 18:10-11; 19:10). Saul had become jealous of David's success and suspicious of his motives. Consequently, David had to flee Saul's

Did You Know?

Saul could call David his son (v. 16). David became his son-in-law through his marriage to Michal (1 Samuel 18:20-28). When David succeeded Saul, he came to the throne as a member of Saul's family and not as an outsider.

presence in order to save his life (1 Samuel 19:11-12; 20:1-3). Saul's wariness drove him to pursue David vigorously in order to annihilate him. David had become an "outlaw" in the eyes of Saul, and he was driven to take shelter in the rugged wilderness of En-gedi in southern Judah near the Dead Sea.

One day when David and his men hid deep in a particular cave, Saul entered to relieve himself. With Saul's back turned toward David, the opportunity to kill Saul surprisingly presented itself. The men who were with David even encouraged him to take advantage of Saul's vulnerability and get revenge on the king. Could anyone really blame David for wanting to kill the man bent on snuffing out his life? David, however, strongly rebuffed his companions' invitation as he proclaimed he would not harm the "Lord's anointed" or even lay a hand on him. Moreover, David would not allow any of his men to touch Saul either. David's refusal to kill Saul demonstrated his righteousness in that he would not repay evil for evil. David did cut off a corner of Saul's cloak as proof he could have destroyed Saul but did not carry out such a plan.

DAVID SEEKS RECONCILIATION

1 Samuel 24:8-15

David called out to Saul after the episode in the cave. David presented the corner of Saul's cloak to demonstrate he had the opportunity to kill Saul but refused to raise his hand against the Lord's anointed. David wondered why Saul would give ear to the rumors that David wanted to harm the king. Surely this "evidence" proved beyond a doubt that David only harbored the noblest intentions toward Saul. David had a clear conscience in the matter with Saul and was willing to appeal to a higher authority by suggesting that "the Lord judge between you and me." If David was guilty of treason, he would face God's judgment; if not, he would be vindicated. Realistically, what harm could David cause Saul? Saul was the king who enjoyed the support of a substantial armed guard. David, on

Think About It

David's response to Saul teaches us a lot about David's character and how to deal with those people in our lives who mistreat us. By following David's example, we demonstrate what it means for the people of God to live with grace and character.

SAUL RESPONDS POSITIVELY TO DAVID

the other hand, lacked any power or leverage in this situation and referred to himself as a "dead dog" and a "single flea" to indicate that he was not in a position to damage Saul. Ultimately, the Lord knew David's motives and he left the matter in the Lord's hands. He believed that the Lord would exonerate him and deliver him from Saul's dastardly plot to run him down.

1 Samuel 24:16-22

Saul responded favorably to David's plea of innocence and affirmed his integrity. He acknowledged that David had treated him better than he deserved and that David proved to be the better man in this situation. Saul noted this when he admitted, "You are more righteous than I . . . you have treated me well, but I have treated you badly" (v. 17). Saul understood that David, even though he had the chance, did not seize the opportunity to kill him. He realized that if David was truly his enemy, he would not have let Saul get away. Saul in response offered a type of blessing on David in light of the grace he demonstrated toward the king. Saul wished that God would reward him with goodness, and he predicted that David would be king one day. Saul requested that David would not seek revenge on Saul's family once the kingdom had been passed to him, and David reassured him that he would not seek retribution on Saul's descendants. David lived up to the oath that he made with Saul when he took in his disabled grandson, Mephibosheth, and provided for his daily needs (2 Samuel 9:1-13).

REFLECT

Think about those who you consider an "enemy." In what way do you need God's guidance and strength in dealing with these people?

KEVIN MELLISH

February

12

MAKING GOOD ON A PROMISE

God's people carry through on their promises.

THE WORD

**2 SAMUEL
9:1-13**

David asked, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”

²Now there was a servant of Saul’s household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?”

“At your service,” he replied.

³The king asked, “Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God’s kindness?”

Ziba answered the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet.”

⁴“Where is he?” the king asked.

Ziba answered, “He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.”

⁵So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.

⁶When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.

David said, “Mephibosheth!”

“At your service,” he replied.

⁷“Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.”

⁸Mephibosheth bowed down and said, “What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?”

⁹Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul’s steward, and said to him,

KEY VERSE

“I have given your master’s grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. ¹⁰You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master’s grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table.” (Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.)

¹¹Then Ziba said to the king, “Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do.” So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table like one of the king’s sons.

¹²Mephibosheth had a young son named Mika, and all the members of Ziba’s household were servants of Mephibosheth. ¹³And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king’s table; he was lame in both feet.

ENGAGE THE WORD

Do you consider yourself a trustworthy person? Are you the type of person who keeps their word, or do you tend to offer empty promises. This week we learn how David kept his oath to Saul’s family by taking care of Jonathan’s son, Mephibosheth.

DAVID MAKES GOOD ON HIS PROMISES TO JONATHAN AND SAUL 2 Samuel 9:1-5

David had become king over all the tribes of Israel and established Jerusalem as the capital city of the newly formed United Kingdom (2 Samuel 5:6-12). Even though David had succeeded Saul as the new king, David wondered if there was anyone left from the house of Saul to whom he could display kindness. David’s devotion to Saul’s family extended back to his deep friendship with Saul’s son and heir, Jonathan. When Saul had taken David to be his servant, David became close to Saul’s children and became like a son to the king. David and Jonathan, in particular, formed a deep bond of respect and admiration. As evidence of Jonathan’s loyalty to David, he symbolically bequeathed the symbols of royalty to David so that his path to kinship could materialize (1 Samuel 18:3-4). In addition, Jonathan acted as an advocate for David when Saul had become suspicious of him and tried to kill

Did You Know?

Mephibosheth did not travel with David at the time of Absalom's rebellion. David could have taken this as a sign of disloyalty, but he showed Mephibosheth grace when he returned to the city (2 Samuel 19:24-30).

him. Jonathan even put his life on the line in order to protect David from Saul's advances. David's love and respect for Jonathan are especially exhibited in his lament after the death of Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:26).

Due to this friendship, David inquired from Ziba as to the status of Saul's descendants. Ziba served Saul when he was king, and he would be aware of any living family members. Ziba would also become a valuable supporter of David when he faced political threats later in his career (2 Samuel 16:1-4; 19:24-30). No doubt, Ziba's loyalty to David during Absalom's rebellion stemmed from the king's kindness to Saul's family. Ziba knew of one heir that remained in Saul's family, Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth (who is also called Merib-baal according to 1 Chronicles 8:34 and 9:40). The text reports that Mephibosheth became "lame in both feet" as a result of an accident when he was a young boy (2 Samuel 4:4). The language of the text may indicate that Mephibosheth was either a person with a disability or had to limp to get around, which hindered his movement. Mephibosheth lived in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, and David sent to have him brought to his house. Machir, like Ziba, was loyal to Saul and eventually became an ally of David and provided assistance to him during Absalom's revolt (2 Samuel 17:27-29).

DAVID TELLS MEPHIBOSHETH OF HIS PLANS

2 Samuel 9:6-8

Showing kindness to Mephibosheth demonstrated a tangible way for David to honor his covenant with Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:14-16) and pay respects to his memory. The reader does not know how well Mephibosheth knew about the history of the relationship between his father and the king. The text indicates Mephibosheth may have been fearful at David's summons, especially since he stood to inherit Saul's kingship and kingdom if the opportunity arose. Knowing this, he may have wondered if the king sought to end his life and eliminate any possibility of a restored Saulide dynasty. Thus, David's initial word to him—"do not be afraid"—possessed

Think About It

David had the opportunity to do away with the people who served Saul or were loyal to him. Because of David's kindness to Saul's family, David gained new friends who helped him in a time of personal crisis.

**DAVID ARRANGES
CARE FOR
MEPHIBOSHETH**

a quieting effect on the young man. David meant him no harm, but only goodness. David generously restored to Mephibosheth the property of his grandfather and he promised to provide for his daily needs—"you will always eat at my table." To eat at the king's table was considered a special privilege and it showed that David welcomed Mephibosheth as an honored guest in his home. The same privilege would hold true for David's descendant, Jehoiachin, when the Babylonian king let him dine at his table (2 Kings 25:29-30). Mephibosheth was taken aback by David's kindness and responded with the self-abasing statement—"What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?"

2 Samuel 9:9-13

As part of David's arrangement with Mephibosheth, David instructed Ziba to serve as an estate manager of Mephibosheth's land holdings. David directed Ziba and his sons to farm the land and use the produce to provide for Mephibosheth's family. Ziba readily agreed to David's proposition as he had 15 sons and 20 servants to help him carry out this task. In essence, those associated with Ziba's household became Mephibosheth's personal servants. With regard to Mephibosheth, David showed him special consideration in that he continued to eat at the king's table as though he was like a son to David. Mephibosheth and his son, Mica, continued to reside in Jerusalem under the care and observance of David.

The text closes once again with the notice that Mephibosheth was "lame in both feet." This is not by accident; it indicated he would not be a threat to David's rule and thus David's benevolence to Mephibosheth was genuine.

REFLECT **T**hink about what it means for you to be a promise keeper.

February

19

HOW THE MIGHTY FALL

Sin carries catastrophic consequences for all involved.

THE WORD

2 SAMUEL 11:1-9

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

²One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, ³and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." ⁴Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. ⁵The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

⁶So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. ⁷When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. ⁸Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. ⁹But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.

14-17

¹⁴In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. ¹⁵In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."

¹⁶So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. ¹⁷When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.

2 SAMUEL 12:7-13a

⁷Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. ⁹Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.’

¹¹“This is what the LORD says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. ¹²You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.’”

KEY VERSE

¹³**Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.”**

Nathan replied, “The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.

ENGAGE THE WORD

Although David displayed many wonderful qualities he was not perfect. David made bad choices when he became complacent and abused his authority. Even though David confessed his sin before God, God did not spare David the consequences of his actions.

DAVID COMMITS ADULTERY

2 Samuel 11:1-5

The opening statements of the chapter indicate that David had become lax in his role as king. It was springtime, the part of the year when kings would normally lead the troops in battle. David, however, did not spearhead the military excursion, but sent his commander Joab, instead, to besiege Rabbah, the capital city of the Ammonites, over 165 miles away. David’s dereliction of duty allowed him to be able to stay at home and enjoy the comforts and conveniences of his own palace while his men put their lives on

Did You Know?

The child born to David and Bathsheba died in infancy. David mourned and fasted on behalf of the baby, but his intercession did not prevent the tragic death from occurring (2 Samuel 12:15-23).

the line for the king. The text amplifies the “cushy” life David experienced as the army engaged in battle. It was “evening” before David arose from his couch, long passed the customary mid-day siesta people took during the hottest part of the day. As the reader can see David was in no rush to interrupt his time of relaxation.

David also took a leisurely stroll on the roof of his palace after his extended slumber. Since the king’s palace was built on the highest part of Jerusalem, it towered over the houses that surrounded his palace. As a result, he was able to look down on those living in the city and see into their courtyards. David noticed a woman “bathing,” which likely amounted to “rinsing” and/or washing off with some water and cloth. David also observed that she was “very beautiful” and inquired about her identity. The response of his servant indicated that she was the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Although she was the wife of Uriah, David disregarded her marital status and sent for her anyway. The text quickly points out that David slept with her and Bathsheba returned home. Bathsheba became pregnant with David’s child.

DAVID TRIES TO COVER UP HIS SIN

2 Samuel 11:6-9, 14-17

David quickly went into action in order to “cover up” his sin. When word came to him that Bathsheba was pregnant, David arranged for Uriah to return from battle. As king, he could arrange it so that it could look like the child belonged to Uriah. David attempted to deal with the problem of Uriah; however, Uriah did not comply with David’s scheme. David intended for Uriah to go home, enjoy the comforts of his house and the love of his wife, but Uriah would not allow himself to take advantage of these luxuries while his comrades were in the field. As a result, he stayed at the entrance of the palace with the other servants instead. Ironically, the nobility and righteousness of Uriah prevented David’s evil scheme from developing.

Think About It

No person is an island to himself or herself. What we do and how we live make a difference. We influence others in ways we do not know. David's sin had a destructive effect on his own family. His disregard for righteousness influenced people he did not know.

**CONDEMNATION
AND REPENTANCE**

When David realized Uriah would not cooperate with his plan, David had to get rid of Uriah altogether. To accomplish this, David had Uriah deliver personal instructions to Joab, the king's general, to have Uriah murdered in battle. David ordered Joab to position Uriah near the city wall where the fighting was fiercest and Uriah would be struck down. Joab complied with David's orders and abandoned Uriah during the siege of the city. Uriah died in the heat of battle, and David seemingly cleaned up the untidy details associated with his sordid actions.

2 Samuel 12:7-13a

As king, David thought that he had solved his problems. What David did in secret, however, did not escape God's attention. David's behavior had to be addressed, and God sent the prophet Nathan to confront the king. To do this, Nathan conveyed the parable of a rich man who stole and killed the ewe lamb of a poor man (vv. 1-6). David became incensed when he heard of the injustice the rich man committed against the poor man. Little did David realize that he was the rich man in the story—"You are the man." Just like the rich man, David had stolen Bathsheba from Uriah and murdered him in the process. David's greed was especially heinous in that God had made him king over Israel, yet David was not satisfied with what God had given him.

The prophet conveyed to David that he would suffer the consequences of his sin. Even though David repented of his actions and God removed David's sin, God would allow trouble to rise up within his household.

REFLECT Take time to reflect on the lessons we can learn from today's story.

KEVIN MELLISH

February

26

LOYALTY MATTERS

*God's people are to remain loyal to one another
and to God.*

THE WORD

2 SAMUEL 15:10-16

Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, “As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, ‘Absalom is king in Hebron.’” ¹¹Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter. ¹²While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he also sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom’s following kept on increasing.

¹³A messenger came and told David, “The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom.”

¹⁴Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, “Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin on us and put the city to the sword.”

¹⁵The king’s officials answered him, “Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king chooses.”

¹⁶The king set out, with his entire household following him; but he left ten concubines to take care of the palace.

23-26

²³The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the wilderness.

²⁴Zadok was there, too, and all the Levites who were with him were carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the city.

KEY VERSES

²⁵Then the king said to Zadok, “Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the LORD’s eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. ²⁶But if he says, ‘I am not pleased with you,’ then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him.”

**2 SAMUEL
18:31-33**

³¹Then the Cushite arrived and said, “My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you.”

³²The king asked the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

The Cushite replied, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man.”

³³The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!”

ENGAGE THE WORD**ABSALOM IS DIS-
LOYAL TO HIS
FATHER AND TO
GOD****2 Samuel 15:10-12**

David’s son Absalom fomented a revolt against his father after he had murdered his half-brother, Amnon, and fled to his mother’s home territory in Geshur (2 Samuel 13:23-38). Even though Absalom had been allowed to return to Jerusalem, David did not meet with Absalom for two years after Joab brokered a meeting between father and son. The tension between David and Absalom contributed, no doubt, to the political uprising incited by Absalom against David.

The revolt started by Absalom gained strength as he was able to garner the support of a large group of people. As part of his plan, Absalom also instructed the people to shout “Absalom is king in Hebron” when the horn sounded. It was not by accident that Absalom singled out the city of Hebron when he declared himself king. When David was king over Judah, Hebron served as his capital for seven and a half years before he became ruler over all the tribes of Israel (2 Samuel 2:1-3). Hebron was also Absalom’s birthplace, and there existed a faction of people in Hebron who were

Did You Know?

Absalom was known for his nice looks and his long hair (2 Samuel 14:25-26). Ironically, his long hair contributed to his downfall when it became tangled in some branches of an oak tree and left him vulnerable to attack (2 Samuel 18:9-15).

not happy about David making Jerusalem the capital of his new kingdom. The people in Hebron, fueled by a sense of betrayal, threw their support behind Absalom.

As part of his plan, Absalom made sure to send for David's trusted adviser, Ahithophel the Gilonite. Ahithophel was from the territory of Judah and Gilo; his hometown was located in the Judean hill country. Dissatisfaction with David may have played a part on Ahithophel joining Absalom's political movement. Ahithophel would later provide sound advice to Absalom to help him solidify his hold on the throne after David had been driven from Jerusalem (2 Samuel 16:20-23). On another occasion, Absalom foolishly disregarded Ahithophel's instruction in favor of the guidance of Hushai who secretly plotted against Absalom in favor of David (2 Samuel 17:5-14). Not only did Absalom lose control of the kingdom by listening to Hushai, it also set in motion a series of events that ultimately cost Absalom his life.

DAVID LEAVES JERUSALEM

2 Samuel 15:13-16, 23-26

The gaining popularity and strength of Absalom's revolt forced David to leave Jerusalem. In order to protect himself and those in his household, David sought refuge in Mahanaim across the Jordan River. The text notes that David left 10 concubines behind in the city. These women functioned as royal wives whom David married for political purposes. Since they enjoyed "secondary" status, they did not constitute the rank of a primary wife and therefore were not considered immediate family. When Absalom displaced David as king in Jerusalem, he had sexual relations with these women in broad daylight to symbolize the transfer of power was complete (2 Samuel 16:22-23). Absalom gained the confidence of the people as this act would have made him an enemy of David. Absalom's actions also harkened back to the words of Nathan when he confronted David over his adultery and murder (2 Samuel

Think About It

Absalom “stole the hearts of the men of Israel” (15:6). The “heart” in the Old Testament is the seat of one’s intellect. Therefore, the writer was not saying Absalom stole their affections; he meant that Absalom had stolen their minds, meaning he had duped them.

12:10-11). The ominous prediction that a sword would rise up in David’s household had come to pass.

When David’s entourage fled the city and passed by the Kidron Valley on the east side of Jerusalem, the people in the vicinity wept over David’s humiliating defeat. David’s priests, Zadok and Abiathar, accompanied him and the Levites transported the ark of the covenant with them. Unlike the triumphant procession that accompanied the ark when David established Jerusalem as the new capital city (2 Samuel 6:1-19), the march of those associated with David as they left Jerusalem was much more somber. David instructed Zadok to return to the city and to take the ark with him. The ark needed to reside in Jerusalem where the tent housing the ark had been set up. David believed that if God had found favor with him he would see the sacred object again; but if God was not pleased with him, he resigned himself to the fact that he would not return to the city. At this tumultuous and perilous point in David’s life, he commended his life and his fate into God’s hands.

**GOD REMAINS
LOYAL TO DAVID;
GOD’S PLAN
PREVAILS**

2 Samuel 18:31-33

God ultimately vindicated David and gave him victory over Absalom. The victory came at the cost of Absalom’s life, however, who died in horrific fashion at the hands of David’s general, Joab. David inquired about Absalom and was grief stricken when he heard the news about his fate. Even though his son rebelled against him, he still felt the anguish of losing a child. In the end, David’s triumph became bittersweet. With the death of Absalom, David was able to return to Jerusalem where his kingship was restored and his dynasty remained intact.

REFLECT | In light of today’s story, consider what it means to be loyal.

Key Verse Memory

Committing God's Word to memory is an important goal for Christians of every age. To assist you in this worthy objective, we have suggested three key verses for memorization. Select one verse to memorize each month or memorize one verse of your choosing for the quarter.

Key verses for Winter 2022-23:

Colossians 1:13-14

Psalms 119:105

1 Samuel 16:7

COMING NEXT QUARTER

Spring 2023

Unit 1: Four World-Changing Days

In four world-changing days recorded in the Gospel of Mark, we'll follow Jesus to the Last Supper, the Garden of Gethsemane, before the Sanhedrin, to the palace of Pilate, to Golgotha, and to the empty tomb.

Unit 2: The Message of James

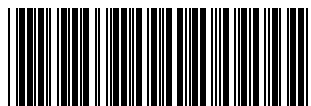
We will study the book of James and discover how its message points to the practical ways we can live out our faith in the world today.

Unit 3: The Holy Spirit

This two-week study will give you a better understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit.



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