

MONDAY, 7/1

Read 2 Samuel 19:9-43.

David is a broken man. He is still reeling from the loss of another son. As David grieves, the people begin to wonder if David will ever return to Jerusalem. It took Joab, his commanding officer, to put some fire in David's belly. With that, David sends word that he will indeed go back to the capital city.

This chapter is about mending fences, to use an old phrase. David extends an olive branch to Absalom's commanding officer, even inviting him to lead David's army. Shimei, who threw curses and stones at David as he fled Jerusalem, comes to apologize and seek David's favor. David offers it to Shimei, in spite of offers from others to end his life.

Mephibosheth goes to meet David as well. If you remember, there was some controversy with Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson whom David welcomed into his household. Ziba, his servant, claimed that Mephibosheth was considering his own coup against the king. Mephibosheth claims that Ziba was exploiting him and that he had never considered betraying David. David refuses to name a guilty party and chooses to divide Saul's estate between the two men.

There are many instances in these verses about healing relationships that have been fractured. David's relationships have been put to the test with Absalom's revolt. David is painfully aware of what he has lost. He shows no interest in losing any more, so he is quick to build bridges rather than barriers.

We could learn something from David here. Sometimes we live without an awareness of what truly matters until it's too late. Sometimes our pride brings us to the point that we are more interested in winning the argument than we are in the person. Relationships are too important, and time is too precious. Don't let your pride steal them from you; instead, seek to win the person and the relationship rather than the argument.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, this chapter was a powerful example of the call to reconcile with others. Teach us Your ways. Help us to be seekers of reconciliation. You taught us to build bridges and seek restoration of that which is broken. Empower us for such work. Amen."

TUESDAY, 7/2

Read 2 Samuel 20:1-22.

Drama, drama, drama. David's story continues with more interesting developments. With the smell of rebellion still in the air, Sheba turns on David. He garners support for his cause with the people of Israel in the north, while the people of Judah, the south, support David. This division will only grow over time.

David orders that Amasa, Absalom's former commanding officer, take some men to pursue and kill the trouble-maker Sheba. When Amasa takes too long, David orders Joab, his longtime commanding officer, to hunt down Sheba.

Amasa and Joab meet along the way. The first time they met was on the battlefield as commanding officers of the opposing armies. It's clear that Joab still harbors bitter feelings toward Amasa. When Amasa goes to embrace him, Joab literally spills his guts.

This is not the first time we have seen Joab act independently of the king's wishes. As David assumed a more passive role as king, Joab became bolder in his actions. He took Absalom's life, and here he kills Amasa. Joab has been a faithful leader for David for years, but he begins to break from David. David will grow angry with him, but he never directly challenges Joab.

The chapter closes with a grim scene of Sheba's head being tossed over a city wall. Joab carried out his orders and then some before finally returning to David.

I want to revisit David and Joab. There are many times in David's life when he appears to avoid conflict. Perhaps he was conflict averse. I get it. Some of us don't like conflict, and others like it too much. We need to understand that if we are going to be in relationship with other human beings, there will be conflict. It is a natural part of one flawed person being in relationship with another flawed person. We need to be willing, then, to have hard conversations so that we resolve matters rather than allow them to fester. David is often unwilling to do this, and it will lead to bitterness and frustration at the end of his life.

I wonder whom in your life you might need to reach out to in order to have a hard but much needed conversation to move closer to reconciliation.

Praying Together:

"Lord, give us courage as we navigate our relationships. It is easy to be passive like David at times in our lives. It is easier than having tough conversations or doing the hard work of repentance. In the end, it is more difficult to lose a relationship of great value than it is to have a hard conversation. Inspire us to be reconcilers as You are. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 7/3

Read 2 Samuel 21:1-27.

Chapter 21 opens with news of a famine. For the first time in a long time, we find David seeking the face of the Lord, which essentially means that he prayed to the Lord. This was a regular practice of David when he was first installed as king, but it became an infrequent practice as he got older.

The source of the famine pertains to Saul's house and his bloodshed against the Gibeonites. This is somewhat confusing given we don't have any accounts of Saul's killing any of the Gibeonites. This missing detail makes it difficult to put some of the pieces together.

David wants to make things right. This is a matter of justice; therefore, a wrong needs to be made right. The Gibeonites demand some of Saul's descendants to be killed over the matter. David hands them over, and they are hanged.

While a head-scratching passage in some ways, we have a picture here of a mother's love. Rizpah, a mother to two of the men who were killed, stays near the bodies in order to protect them from further disgrace. David learns of her dedication that brings the dead from Saul's line home.

There are more conflicts with the Philistines. When David is threatened, his men pledge that he will never again accompany them to the battlefield. This signals a shift in the king of Israel's responsibilities. The people originally wanted a king who would go before them and fight their battles alongside them. This was a warrior-king. Now, they want a king who will represent and

rule over them. This king will organize and influence the affairs of the kingdom. This is the kind of king they will receive in Solomon, who follows David.

This reminds me of the words from Ecclesiastes that tell us there is a season for everything under the sun. David's time as Israel's primary warrior is over. His role as king will shift in his later days.

We too go through these shifts in life. We go through seasons where our lives change dramatically. Sometimes these changes are welcome, while at other times, they bring fear and distress.

The Apostle Paul reflected on the impact of such seasons in his life in the book of Philippians. Writing from a cold, cramped jail cell, he declared, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Him who gives me strength." Please hear what Paul is saying here. He is not saying he can leap over tall buildings like Superman. He says the source of his contentment is found in God's ever-present strength. Paul knows he can thrive in any season or circumstance because of God's generosity. God will supply him the strength to face whatever comes his way. That, for Paul, provides a deep sense of peace.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, You are our hope through all of life's twists and turns. You provide us with sustaining grace and strength. Help us to be content whether we are the warrior in the fight or taking a backseat. Amen."

THURSDAY, 7/4

Read 2 Samuel 22:1-51.

David was many things, and among those, he was a poet. David wrote many Psalms. Chapter 22 is a song of thanksgiving he wrote to the Lord, giving Him glory for the various victories that God had provided him.

This song is repeated in Psalm 18. It is placed within David's story because David was a worshiper. While his heart drifted at times, he always came back to the Lord. That resonates for many of us. It's like these words in my favorite hymn "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing": "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." This is a good summary of the human condition.

You might have noticed in the song that David, even though this is a hymn about great military victories, doesn't make much mention of an army. His emphasis is on God as the One who fought their battles. It was God who readied and steadied David's warriors. It was God who delivered them and provided for their needs.

One notable verse is 31, where David says, "As for God, His way is perfect: the Lord's Word is flawless; He shields those who take refuge in Him." This is a good summary of David's core beliefs about God.

While God's ways are, at times, mysterious to us, they are perfect. We often see this only as we look back on our lives. David knew and trusted in the Lord's words to him. Even when God called him to the carpet, David listened and was quick to yield to the Lord. Finally, one of David's favorite images for God in his numerous songs is that of God as a refuge. God was the One to whom he could run for help.

Those are some wonderful truths for us to consider about God. Perhaps you are in a season of life when God's ways are not apparent. David would encourage you to trust that they are perfect and to put your confidence in Him. He would tell you to draw wisdom and strength from God's Word and to turn to the Lord as a refuge in your distress.

Praying Together:

"God, You are our refuge in times of struggle. You are the One to whom we can run at all times and in every season. Fill me once again with confidence in Your plans for my life. Help me trust Your ways. Even though they are not my ways, I believe Your ways are higher. As I come before Your Word, speak into my life. Your words are life-giving to me. Amen."

FRIDAY, 7/5

Read 2 Samuel 23:1-39.

This section of scripture is often titled "David's Last Words". We know these aren't the final words of David. It is likely a final declaration, or prophetic utterance, but not his last words. Perhaps it was a message to his royal court.

David's testimony in verses 2-7 is a reflection on God's faithfulness and the role of the king. David declares that the king was to be a blessing to the people. God would bless the king in order that the people might be blessed. We get the understanding of the king as the vessel the Lord uses to guide His people. This means the role of the king was an awesome responsibility. The king was to rule as a reflection of God's care. This is why God's standards and expectations for the king were so high. We saw in our study of Joshua how diligent and faithful God was in caring for His people. He would expect no less from the king, who represented His presence to the people.

Beginning in verse 8 and carrying through to the end of the chapter, we see stories from David's warriors. Their exploits would make a decent movie. David is no longer the young man who stood toe-to-toe with Goliath. He is an older man and needs others to be bold on the battlefield. The reason these stories are included is that they show David more as a leader than a warrior. Even when David passes away, Israel will still have great warriors to fight on behalf of the people.

The theme that runs throughout this chapter is God's faithfulness. Whether the people know it or not, the kingdom is in transition. David will pass away soon. This will bring up questions of stability for the nation. David assures the people that God's covenant is secure. God will make every provision for their needs by working through the king and protecting the nation through mighty warriors.

Whatever you are going through in your life right now, know that God is faithful and will make provision for your needs. There is much joy to be found when we are able to put complete confidence in God's care.

Praying Together:

"Father, I have tasted and seen Your faithfulness throughout my life. Thank You for loving me and caring for me in every season of life. I trust that You will continue to give me what I need for each given day. Help me to be content with what comes my way. Amen."

SATURDAY, 7/6

Read 2 Samuel 24:1-19.

We've all heard the statement, "When mamma ain't happy, ain't no one happy." The same is true for the Lord.

Chapter 24 starts off with God's anger toward His people. We aren't told why, which makes it a challenge to resolve all of our questions from this chapter.

One of the questions that arises out of this is that it seems that God provokes David to take a census, which is ultimately deemed as a sinful act. That doesn't make much sense to us. The interesting thing about verse 1 is that the Hebrew is unclear in who provokes David to take the census. The verse reads, "*it* incited David". God is almost always referred to using a masculine pronoun. We assume it's God because only He is named here, but the Hebrew is unclear.

1 Chronicles 21:1, which tells the same story, identifies the "it" as Satan, the Accuser. Now, that makes sense to us. Of course, the enemy would seek to disrupt God's plans. That helps resolve at least this question.

Another question we might ask is this: why is it sinful to take a census? There are a few reasons why this might be the case. There was only one reason why kings took count of their fighting force—a war. It was because they wanted to assess the strength of their forces. The nation was moving into a time of peace. It was no longer appropriate to fight against the other nations.

The other reason is that Solomon, who follows David once he died, will use the census for recruiting slaves and for taxation. The census helps Solomon centralize Israel's government, which is a double-edged sword. The nation will have resources to do more than before, but it comes at a cost. Perhaps God didn't want Solomon to enslave and tax His people.

God punishes David's sin and allows him to choose his fate. We have to remember that as king, David is held to a high standard in providing the appropriate care for God's people. When he—or any king—falls short, God is quick to discipline them for the ultimate good of the people.

David purchases a threshing floor in order to make a sacrifice to God on behalf of the people. This is the site on which the Temple will be built when Solomon takes on the great project. While this chapter may seem strange to us, it is the origin story of the Temple as a place of sacrifice and mercy.

While God's discipline in our lives looks much different than it does for the kings with their immense expectations, we know we can trust God's discipline. Hebrews 12 makes the argument that God discipline is based on His love for us. Like good parents, God has a vision for the kind of people we are to become. Discipline is the means He uses to help us realize what we can become. Verse 11 says it so well: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." So let us take heart whenever we feel we are being disciplined by God. It means we are loved and that He is doing a great work in us.

Praying Together:

"Lord, we receive Your discipline as a sign of Your love. You love us far too much to allow us to become less than what You created us to be. While discipline may not be pleasant, it is ultimately good. It is for our good and for Your good purposes. Amen."

SUNDAY, 7/7

Read 1 Kings 1:1-2:12.

The book of 1 Kings opens with Solomon's path to the throne as Israel's next king. David's strength and power as king have faded. Adonijah, one of his sons, seizes the opportunity to assert his bid for the throne. He garners support from Joab and a few others, but not from his father.

Bathsheba enters the scene to intervene on behalf of her son, Solomon, to become king. She plots with Nathan, the prophet. Nathan confronts David, and David agrees to have Solomon declared king. Adonijah, who is disappointed with the news, relents and yields to his brother Solomon. In a refreshing move, Solomon chooses not to spill his brother's blood.

Chapter 2 records David's final words to Solomon. These are words transferring power and authority to the successor. David's message is interesting. It is both encouraging and ominous. Much like David's rule, we see good and bad, light and darkness. David extends wisdom to his son to be strong as a leader. He tells Solomon to be obedient to the Lord above all things so that he and the people will prosper. That is sounds advice for us as well. Jesus will go on to say that obedience is the sure sign of discipleship.

David also extends the task of taking two lives to his son. Clearly, David has grown bitter in his old age. The startling reality is that David has had ample opportunities to make amends--or at least deal with--these men while he was still alive. He chose to avoid the conflict and allow another to deal with it. For those who are conflict averse, this makes sense. It isn't, however, a great way to live, because David is filled with regrets on his deathbed, and that is no way to go out.

It is fitting for us to heed David's wisdom and avoid his foolishness here. No one wants to live with regrets. It's worth asking yourself this: if you were to die today, what would be your regret? What relationship would you kick yourself for not seeking reconciliation?

We can also take David's advice regarding obedience to God. David was at his best when he was seeking God's counsel and following it. David stood out for his faithfulness in the first half of his life. He lost a handle on that toward the end, and we have witnessed the fall-out. David now looks at his life and imparts to his son the wisdom to listen and trust the Lord.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, we love You and long to obey You as the sign of our love. We don't want to merely love You with words, but with our actions. Help us to learn from David. It is good to trust You and do what You ask. There is life in Your instruction. Give us direction and courage to resolve what will otherwise be regrets. Amen."