



THRONES

THE COURT HISTORY OF KING DAVID

A DEVOTIONAL JOURNEY THROUGH
1 SAMUEL AND 2 SAMUEL

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INTRODUCTION:

The books of Samuel and Kings recount a story of humanity at its most dramatic. The story is filled with both triumph and tragedy. It includes intrigue and counter intrigue, assassinations and romance, loyalty and betrayal, passion and violence, shining success and wretched failure. It has been called “the finest piece of history writing in antiquity.” It is a true-to-life account where characters are presented unadorned and raw with remarkable honesty. No attempt is made to clean up the moral lapses of the heroes or hide the dark side of life. ***In these stories we can discover something about the potential in each of us for great good or great evil, and our struggle to answer the important question: who occupies the throne of our hearts?***

This study was written with the hope that you would experience it with a Bible and a journal open, pen in hand. The 10 “chapters” that appear here accompanied a 10 week teaching series broken into 10 “episodes.” You can find those messages at:
www.terraforma.church/going-deeper/message-archive

We hope this content ignites your imagination, awakens your heart, and fuels your spirit. The **summary** portions should help you zoom out and glimpse the big picture of the narrative. The **study** portions are there to prompt reflective thoughts and to draw attention to important details of the text. The **questions** were written to help catalyze your journaling and reflection. Answer all the questions, or just pick one to reflect on at length. Invite God’s Spirit to meet you in the text and illuminate your thoughts.

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

- Abigail** – Beautiful and wise woman that wins the affection of David as a young man and later becomes one of David’s wives.
- Abishai** – David’s left hand, Joab’s brother, mighty warrior.
- Abner** – General for Saul, then Ish-bosheth after Saul’s death. He is a capable warrior and wise. He almost formed an alliance with King David that would have ended the War of Contention. He reluctantly kills Asahel, and is later killed by Joab in retaliation.
- Absalom** – David’s son: gifted, cunning, and handsome. He is known for his larger-than-life pageantry and accompanying ego. Kills his brother, steals the hearts of the people, usurps the throne of his father. He is killed by Joab in the single battle of the War of Rebellion.

- Adonijah** – David’s third son, he attempts to take the throne while his father is still living. His move for the throne fails quickly, despite gaining the support of Joab and other prominent people.
- Ahithophel** – Counsellor to Absalom during his rebellion. He kills himself after his advice is thwarted by Hushai, who is a secret agent of David.
- Amasa** – General for Absalom’s armies in the War of Rebellion, later named as Joab’s replacement as commander of the armies of David for a short time. Joab kills him treacherously.
- Amnon** – David’s son. His twisted lust leads him to rape his half-sister Tamar. He is killed by Absalom in revenge.
- Asahel** – Joab’s youngest brother, known to be brave and fast of foot. He tries to kill Abner in the War of Contention between the house of David and the house of Saul, but is defeated.
- Bathsheba** – Beautiful wife of Uriah the Hittite. She becomes the forced mistress of King David and later his wife after Uriah is murdered by the king. She is the mother of Solomon.
- David** – Shepherd, poet, warrior, slayer of Goliath, murderer of Uriah, 40-year king of Israel.
- Hushai** – David’s secret agent planted in the court of Absalom during the rebellion. He spies and reports on Absalom’s plans to David, and confounds the advice of Ahithophel.
- Ish-Bosheth** – Son of Saul, has a short reign over half of a divided kingdom after winning the support of the tribe of Benjamin and several of Saul’s key leaders. Engages in a civil war with the house of David to contest the rightful control of Israel (War of Contention). He is assassinated by his own men after Abner defects to David.
- Joab** – David’s right hand: general, assassin, advisor, and friend. He does what he wants sometimes - not always what he is told. He carries out most of David’s killing and is known to take matters into his own hands. He is not afraid to speak his mind to the king, even rebuke. Joab is a capable leader and a proficient warrior, but his complex relationship with David makes him unpredictable.
- Jonathan** – Saul’s son and the favorite to succeed Saul’s throne. He is an accomplished warrior that is beloved by the people. He abdicates his throne to David in a covenant of friendship defined by the Hebrew word *hesed*. He pleads David’s innocence before his father Saul and protects David from the mad king.
- Mephibosheth** – Jonathan’s son, Saul’s grandson. He was crippled as a young child and made to live in secret for fear of David’s wrath. Mephibosheth received mercy (*hesed*) from David in fulfillment of his promise to Jonathan.

- Michal** – Saul’s daughter, David’s wife. She is taken from David when he flees the kingdom as a fugitive and given to another of Saul’s men. She is later given back to David during the War of Contention. She mocks David’s worship as the ark is returned to Jerusalem.
- Nathan** – A prophet that acts as the corrective voice of God to David during his reign. Nathan confronts David after his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah. Later he is present at the anointing of David’s heir.
- Samuel** – Prophet, sage, kingmaker. He is the voice of God to the people. He anoints Saul as king, and later he presides over Saul’s rejection as king. Samuel anoints David as a boy in anticipation of his ascension to the throne.
- Saul** – Israel’s first king - a hero turned villain. He is tall, handsome, and impressive, yet known to be paranoid, fearful, and anxious. The latter years of Saul’s reign are marked by instability as he unsuccessfully strives to retain his power.
- Shimei** – Supporter of King Saul that taunts, shames, and abuses David while David flees from Absalom. When David returned to the throne, Shimei begs for mercy.
- Solomon** – Another of David’s younger sons; his mother is Bathsheba. Solomon is the only one of David’s sons that doesn’t make a play for the throne while his father is still living. David names him his heir and gives him command of his private army. Solomon is known for his legendary wisdom, and his reign is the high-water mark for Israel.
- Tamar** – Beautiful daughter of David, sister to Absalom. She was shamed and abused by her half-brother Amnon and used to advance the political goals of her brother Absalom. Her story is tragic.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Scripture Reference</u>	<u>Event</u>
1079 BC	1 Samuel 15	Saul's REJECTION - The Lord rejects Saul as King <i>"The kingdom will be torn from your hands and given to someone better..."</i>
1063 BC	1 Samuel 16	David's RISE David anointed by Samuel while tending his father's flocks.
	1 Samuel 17	David defeats the giant Goliath in single combat.
	1 Samuel 18	David in Saul's service, Saul begins to be jealous of David.
	1 Samuel 20	David's covenant friendship with Jonathan begins.
1062 BC?	1 Samuel 18-26	RIVALRY of Kings: David flees the kingdom as a fugitive, Saul in pursuit desperately grasping to retain power. Saul tries to kill David twice.
	1 Samuel 22	David trains a private army of mercenaries at the Cave of Adullam.
	1 Samuel 24 & 26	David spares Saul's life twice and refuses to take the kingdom by force: he will not <i>"touch the Lord's anointed."</i>
1056 BC	1 Samuel 31	RESISTANCE before David's Reign: Saul kills himself after losing a battle against the Philistines at Mt. Gilboa. David receives Saul's physical crown as proof of his death. David mourns the loss of Saul and Jonathan.
	2 Samuel 1	David writes a moving lament for the fallen king and his friend Jonathan. David is anointed king over Judah (south) Ish-Bosheth king over Israel (north)
	2 Samuel 3	The War of Contention: Years of war between the House of David and the House of Saul; Joab leads David's armies and Abner leads the armies of Ish-Bosheth. David increases in favor, while Ish-Bosheth decreases. War ends when Ish-Bosheth is assassinated by some of his own battle leaders in an attempt to win David's favor.
1048 BC	2 Samuel 5	David king over all Israel David defeats the Philistines to secure his borders. David takes Jerusalem and makes it his capital city.
1042 BC	2 Samuel 6	Ark of the Covenant brought to Jerusalem.

	2 Samuel 7	David desires to build a temple for God's glory. Even though he is told "No," he receives a remarkable covenant promise from God: <i>"I will establish the throne of your kingdom forever."</i>
1040 BC	2 Samuel 9	RESTORATION of Relationship for Covenant Friend: David seeks out Mephibosheth to fulfill <i>hesed</i> promised to Jonathan.
1035 BC	2 Samuel 11	David's REPROACH: David rapes Bathsheba and murders her husband, Uriah, to cover up his sin after getting her pregnant.
1032 BC 1030 BC	2 Samuel 13	RUPTURE of David's Household/Trouble at Court: Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar. Absalom kills Amnon to avenge his sister's shame and to eliminate one rival to the throne. As a result, he is banished from the kingdom.
1027 BC	2 Samuel 14	Absalom returns from exile thanks to the intervention of Joab on his behalf.
1024 BC	2 Samuel 15	Absalom's REBELLION: Absalom conspires to usurp the throne of his father David. David flees Jerusalem barefoot and hooded as people taunt and humiliate him.
1023 BC	2 Samuel 18	Absalom is killed by Joab in battle between those that sided with Absalom and David's private mercenary army and faithful men.
	2 Samuel 19	David returns to Jerusalem to REBUILD his fractured kingdom.
	2 Samuel 20	David puts down another rebellion from the tribe of Benjamin named by Sheba which stabilizes the kingdom.
1015 BC	2 Samuel 23	REWARD: David dies as King of all Israel after a 40-year reign, a <i>"man after God's heart."</i> David's son Solomon succeeds him as king.

CHAPTER 1: REJECTION

THE BIG PICTURE

The books of Samuel and Kings tell one sweeping story of transition. Up until this point, Israel has been a loose confederation of 12 tribes - sometimes united and at times divided. As the narrative unfolds, Israel becomes a single nation led by one king. This story is told masterfully by a brilliant narrator and includes irony, suspense, surprise, and drama. Our story starts with the passing of the torch of leadership from Samuel to Saul; from an aging prophet to Israel's first monarch. God has warned the people of Israel about the liabilities of trusting a human king, and their first king will prove to be a disappointment. The entire Biblical books of **1 and 2 Samuel** make for dramatic and fruitful reading, but this guide will highlight some important passages and give you some important background information.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. Read the circumstances surrounding Israel's demand for a human king in **1 Samuel 8**. Why does Israel want a human king? Essentially, they want a human king because the other nations around them have a human king. They are struggling to trust God and have chosen to trust the voice of popular opinion instead.
 - Think about other examples of people making ill-advised choices trying to follow the crowd. Why is this so tempting?
 - How often do you make this mistake? What are the consequences?

- II. One of the key themes in the books of Samuel is the idea of **covenant loyalty**. The big question for the story is not whether or not Israel will have a king, but what kind of king Israel will have. Will he be a king that honors the covenant with God? Will he lead the people to be faithful to God? In the early years, Saul was stable, level headed, and he paid attention to God. In **1 Samuel 9:21**, he almost seems humble. As his recognition grew, he began to overly concern himself with the approval of others. It is easy to imagine how Saul constantly heard the praise of men and women alike. He heard he was handsome, impressive, and noble. This becomes problematic when Saul lives primarily to please people. In the story recorded in **1 Samuel 13:5-15**, Saul seems to be more concerned with the approval of the people than he is with the command of God. He lost his ability to derive his worth from God alone and began to establish his worth based on the opinions of people.
 - Whose approval do you crave? Understand that every name that is on this list is someone you have given significant influence on your life.
 - In what way is seeking the approval of others like rejecting the approval of God?

- How can craving the approval of others lead to imbalances like fear and paranoia? Where else do you see evidence of imbalance in Saul's life?

III. Another great study that reveals something about the character of Saul is to look at his relationship with his weapon of choice: **the spear**. Saul's spear is a symbol of his insecurity. It is the perfect melee weapon to keep people at a distance. It is used as a tool of wrath on several occasions: **1 Samuel 18:10-11**, **1 Samuel 19:9-10**, and **1 Samuel 20:32-33**.

- How does your insecurity affect your relationships with others?
- When you "throw spears" at others, does it look more like an overt attack, cold silence, pent up anger, sarcastic jibes, intimidation, or something else?
- Have you ever "thrown a spear" at someone that was important to you? How have you tried to mend the relationship?

Read **1 Samuel 22:6**. Look at the way Saul hangs around camp with his "spear in hand." Imagine Saul giving speeches or addressing his people with this weapon in hand. Is he trying to be intimidating? The author of this story is painting a very dramatic picture, and it is easy to see the pattern. Saul and this spear are an unhealthy combination. In **1 Samuel 26:7**, Saul even sleeps with the spear, paranoid that everyone is out to get him.

- Do you know anyone that lives "spear in hand," like they are always ready to go off on the people around them?
- Saul used a spear to intimidate and keep people away. What barriers do you put in between you and others?

IV. Saul's final rejection comes after he directly disobeys the command of God to destroy the Amalekites - a story recounted in **1 Samuel 15**. Saul tries just about everything to avoid admitting to the sin of disobedience. He blames others, justifies his actions, and minimizes his mistake; however, Samuel holds him accountable. Saul has disobeyed God's command in such a way that he personally profits from God's judgment on the Amalekites. Saul was sent to avenge an ancient injustice, and as God's agent, he should not have personally profited from it. The Amalekites story goes back to the Exodus (**Exodus 17:8-16**) when they fell on the pilgrim Israelite people in the wilderness, almost blocking God's redemptive plans. This war is God's war, not Saul's. **Saul is only carrying out God's sentence**. It wouldn't be right if Saul became wealthy or profited in fame or otherwise by serving God in this way. God is not happy about this - the same way a parent is not happy about punishing his or her children. The principle of *herem* was invoked to ensure that one child does not profit from the discipline of another. This Hebrew word describes a special act of consecration after such a battle. All the spoils of

war are irrevocably devoted to God; therefore, they are holy (set apart). This is the same principle that was followed for the battles of Jericho and Ai. It was a serious crime to take plunder in this situation. In this case, it implies that Saul does not view himself as God's servant, but instead he uses the favor of God to serve his own selfish purposes. He thinks he knows better. It is simple arrogance and presumption. Note how Saul's struggle with pleasing others surfaces in this passage, and how it disqualifies him from leadership in Israel. Look closely at the last verse in this chapter: **1 Samuel 15:35**. His rejection is final, but his reign is far from over. The old prophet Samuel, the one that discovered and mentored this boy with so much promise, grieves over the reality of Saul's failure. His heart is broken, and he never sees Saul again.

- Saul is desperately trying to keep on the right side of public opinion. How worried do you think a leader should be about the opinions of crowd? How is a monarchy different from a democracy in this regard?
- Can you imagine God feeling regret or sadness because of what Saul has become? Do you think God has ever felt regret or grief because of your choices? How can you better honor the gifts and opportunities God has given you?
- This passage includes this rebuke from Samuel: "You were once small in your own eyes." Do you struggle with pride or a puffed up sense of importance? How can you avoid Saul's mistake?

CHAPTER 2: RISE

THE BIG PICTURE

Saul failed as Israel's first king because he would not submit to God as the ultimate source of authority. Up to this point in the story, the prophet Samuel and Saul have been the central characters. As God selects someone to replace Saul as king, we are introduced to David. He will become the central figure in the unfolding drama. David is anointed as The Lord's choice for king, but he will not actually rule until the early chapters of 2 Samuel. Now begins the process that carries David toward the eventual promise of sitting on the throne of all Israel as a man after God's own heart. David's story starts in obscurity, but ends in notoriety as his accomplishments and God's favor advance his position. For this section, read and be familiar with **1 Samuel 16-18**. In these chapters, the author is going to give us a series of stories that illustrate the character of David and emphasize what makes him God's choice for king of Israel.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. Read the story of David's anointing in **1 Samuel 16:1-13**. We are introduced to David in a way that emphasizes his humble beginnings. He was a shepherd boy - the youngest son of Jesse. David was so insignificant to his own family that he wasn't even invited to the banquet when the prophet came to town. Contrast this with the way Saul is described in **1 Samuel 9:1-2**. God's caution to Samuel is this: *"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."*
 - Why do you think Samuel needed a caution from God about judging the heart instead of appearance? Who would our culture value more as a leader, the impressive Saul or the humble David? Who would you rather follow? Why?
 - Are leaders born or made? Why? What evidence do you see in the stories of 1 Samuel of David being shaped into the right sort of person for the job?
 - What kind of person do you think God wants you to become? What process is God taking you through right now to form these qualities in your heart?
 - It is a crazy thought to be anointed king and return to tending sheep just like normal. Nothing immediately changes after David is anointed. If you were in his situation, how would you remain patient?

- II. One of the most remarkable (and famous) stories in the entire Bible is that of David and Goliath in **1 Samuel 17**. Two armies are at a stalemate in the valley of Elah. The armies are arranged on opposite hillsides with the valley in between them. If either army was to attack, the attacking army would have the tactical disadvantage because they would

have to fight uphill. As the stalemate drags on, some taunting begins. There was an ancient practice to appoint one champion from each army as the representative who would settle the conflict through single combat. The Philistines have a reason to prefer this kind of settlement - they have someone in their army who is undefeated. He also happens to be six cubits and a span tall (which is roughly ten feet). This giant would taunt and humiliate the Israelites each day when they refused to send someone to face him. A common understanding in antiquity was that when two nations did battle, it was as if their gods were doing battle as well. A victory for one would have been the defeat of the other. Into this situation, enters David.

- Note the reason why David came to the scene of the battle. He wasn't there as a soldier, nor did he wake up that morning expecting to fight a giant. He was there on a normal, every-day errand: to bring cheese to the soldiers. He might as well have been running to the grocery store, heading to practice, picking up his kids, reconciling his company's sales accounts, or balancing his checkbook. David is not there to do battle, but when opportunity knocks, he is ready to be used by God. This is an example of God meeting David with something extraordinary right in the middle of something ordinary. Mediate on this question for few minutes: **Is there room in your life for God to interrupt the ordinary with something extraordinary?**
- Notice how David refused to accept Saul's armor and weapons to aid in this fight. He chose to meet Goliath in his own skin: with staff, sling, and stone. This places him at a dramatic disadvantage to the well-armored Goliath. Why do you think David insisted on being himself? How does the long description of Goliath's armor and weaponry add to the dramatic tension of the story? Do you think David felt like the underdog in this fight?

III. Weapons were a sign of status in the ancient world. At one point, the account of Samuel notes that in all Israel there were only two actual swords: that of Saul and his son, Jonathan. Everyone else is using farm tools that have been converted into weapons. The Israelites were at a constant disadvantage against the Philistines because the Philistines had a more advanced grasp of metallurgy and with that the ability to make iron weapons. With this in mind, notice how David collects Goliath's armor and weapons after he defeats the giant. After David uses Goliath's sword to cut off Goliath's head, he is quick to stash the sword in his tent. Eventually, maybe as an offering of worship, the sword ends up with the priests at Nob. This famous sword becomes an important source of inspiration to David later in his life. When David is running for his life in **1 Samuel 21:8-9**, this sword is returned to David. Ahimelek the priest gives David a token of his greatest victory and reminds David that God is at his side despite the

challenges around him. When David goes into his years as a fugitive, it is with the sword of Goliath on his hip.

- Can you imagine what David was remembering and feeling every time he draws Goliath's sword to protect himself or fight the Lord's battles?
- Do you have tokens or items that serve to remind you of past victories? Why do you think it is important to remind ourselves of times when God delivered us from trouble?

IV. There is no more beautiful expression of friendship than between Jonathan and David. Jonathan was the son of Saul, the king of Israel, so he was the crown prince. David was the son of a Jesse, a poor shepherd, but God had chosen him to become King through the prophet Samuel. ***Their expected rivalry provides a dramatic backdrop for their unexpected friendship.*** Jonathan has every reason to see David as a rival and feel threatened by David's success; however, he isn't jealous of David's success - he is inspired by it. Jonathan makes a covenant with David by trading clothes and weapons with him. This is not a small detail; this act had profound meaning. The exchange of clothing was a common practice in making a covenant. The clothes are tokens of the covenant, comparable to rings as symbols of a marriage covenant. The exchanging of clothing can indicate the transfer of authority (like in the case of Elijah's cloak). This act is saying that Jonathan is willing to give his life for David. It means something like: my possessions are yours, my sword is yours, and your enemies are mine. Before you write this off as Jonathan seeking the spotlight (like a groupie of David's success), you have to understand that their friendship will only come at Jonathan's expense. Think of how strange it would be for Jonathan (the crown prince) to be seen walking around in David's clothes, and for David (a poor shepherd) to be seen walking around in the clothes of the prince. **Jonathan's friendship will become a key part of David's rise to the throne and is a very important element in the narrative.**

- Have you ever felt a sense of rivalry with a friend? Have you ever been jealous of a friend's success or status? How can you surrender these feelings to God and replace them with selfless love?
- Read **Philippians 2:3**. How did Jonathan embody the selfless love commanded in this verse? How can you better embody selfless love?
- Read the other accounts of the interactions between David and Jonathan in **1 Samuel 19:1-10**, and **1 Samuel 20:1-42**. Meditate about what it means to be a friend to others like Jonathan was a friend to David.

CHAPTER 3: RIVALRY

THE BIG PICTURE

Saul is on a downward spiral, David is on the rise, but the issue of who will rule in Israel is far from settled. Saul has no intentions of giving up the throne without a fight, regardless of what The Lord has revealed. Chapters 18-31 contain a dramatic collection of narratives that show us the character of David as we witness Saul unravel. Saul's story is one of thrown spears, irrational fears, and frustrated tears as he strives against the loss of his influence and power. Despite attempts on his life, being chased through the desert and into caves, and losing everything overnight, David makes the most of whatever situation he finds himself in. This theme will permeate the rest of the story in 1 Samuel: **Saul's struggle against the will of God is contrasted with David's surrender to the will of God.** Story after story will reveal examples of the way Saul takes matters into his own hands - motivated by fear, paranoia, and pride. David refuses to do the same; he demonstrates submission to the will of God and maintains an attitude of simple trust. When David has the chance to grasp or seize power - to assert his own position and secure his own advancement - he resists the temptation and instead chooses to wait for God's timing. Pay attention as you work through this section to the artful way the story is told. The narrator allows the reader to learn a great deal about David through the eyes of others, without ever telling us what David is thinking or feeling.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. **1 Samuel 18:5-16** paints a dramatic picture: Saul obviously has some deep psychological problems. He has fits of jealousy that turn into murderous rage multiple times. Some scholars have speculated about the nature of Saul's psychological imbalance, listing paranoid schizophrenia or extreme bipolar disorder as possibilities. The author, however, is more interested in the theological cause than such details. He wants the reader to recognize that Saul's mental collapse is directly related to the departure of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Don't fret about the difficult phrase some English Bible's translate "an evil spirit from the Lord." This could also be translated as "deep depression" or a "disturbing mental state." Saul has rejected God's ways, and he is suffering because of his choice. In a twist of irony, David is both a comfort and a curse to Saul. His success makes Saul paranoid and fearful, while his musical gifts soothe Saul's psychological pain. This is just one example of the complex relationships between characters in this narrative. The reader knows what Saul cannot see: his fears are irrational because David does not wish to harm Saul.
 - Have you ever struggled with fear, paranoia, or other thoughts that you knew were irrational? How did you overcome them?

- Have you ever found music to be therapeutic like it was with Saul? How can music impact our emotional state, positively or negatively?
 - Saul's story can teach us vital lessons about relationships that are poisoned by fear. Do you have any relationships that are influenced by fear? Why do you think fear is such a destructive force in relationships?
- II. The people of Israel, along with two key members of Saul's household, admire David, while Saul looks at David fearfully. Saul is losing influence, and the allegiance of his own children is transferred to David. David's dramatic escape from Saul's murderous intentions recounted in **1 Samuel 19** is an exciting read. Take note of the irony: Saul's own children act to defend and protect David from the king's wrath. It is easy to imagine Michal using a statue to fool Saul's men into thinking David was sick in bed.
- In this chapter Jonathan is able to achieve reconciliation between Saul and David for a brief time. Have you ever tried to reconcile two people involved in a conflict? Spiritually speaking, Jesus is often depicted as one who reconciles humanity to God. How is Jonathan's role in this story different from that of Jesus?
 - The choice of Saul's children to side with David was probably a difficult one. Have you ever had to choose sides in a conflict? What would have to happen for you to side against a member of your own family?
- III. Saul comes to the conclusion that to protect his dynasty, David must die. Saul's outburst of anger in **1 Samuel 21:1-9** is an accurate assessment of the situation. David's rise comes at great cost to Jonathan. ***Jonathan is perfectly positioned to betray David, and he has every reason to do so.*** If Jonathan sides with David, he is choosing to give up the throne. With this in mind, David's deep trust in Jonathan is surprising. David is willing to put his life in the hands of his friend. The modern world rarely witnesses such a relationship. This is a dog-eat-dog world, where if it is to someone's advantage, the only thing you can count on that person doing is putting down others as they scramble to the top. David trusts that Jonathan's own interests will be outweighed by Jonathan's loyalty to him. The strength of their relationship is described by the Hebrew word *hesed*. The best translation might be "covenant fidelity," but is often translated unfailing love, loyalty, faithfulness, or kindness. The foundation of their fierce loyalty is a covenant friendship that involves the promise of mutual protection. It is a social contract that obligates the one in the position of power to give help the one in need. Jonathan has every reason to see David as a rival and as a threat, and if David does in fact acquire the throne, he in turn has every reason to eliminate Jonathan's descendants to secure his position. Both parties appeal to their covenant to motivate the other to remain loyal despite the pressures to do otherwise. This relationship of

interdependence between David and Jonathan foreshadows the covenant community of the New Testament, where the early followers of Jesus had all things in common and were one in heart and mind. Notice again the contrast: Saul tries to control Jonathan as he struggles against God, while David trusts Jonathan as he surrenders to God's plan.

- Think about the natural desire for a son to want to please his father. Do you think whether or not to betray David was a difficult decision for Jonathan? Do you think he was ever tempted to play both sides? Have you ever been torn between two friends or two relationships like that?
- Jesus once said: "Greater love has no man than this: that he lay down his life for his friends." How does Jonathan embody the kind of love Jesus described? Do you have any friends that would give up their crown for you? Are you that kind of friend to anyone?
- Jonathan's friendship defies cultural understanding and is one of the most beautiful demonstrations of selfless love in scripture. How can you better protect, promote, and serve those around you with this kind of love?
- Compare the nature of Saul's relationships with the nature of the relationship between David and Jonathan. Are your relationships defined by control and manipulation, or by trust and selfless service?

IV. Notice how many times the text notes David fleeing or escaping. David is on the run, and Saul is in pursuit. David flees from Saul to Samuel, then to Naioth at Ramah, then back to Jonathan at Gibeah, then to Nob and the priest Ahimelech. These details illustrate the desperate circumstances of David's story. Read the account of the brief time of shelter David enjoys in the cave of Adullam in **1 Samuel 22:1-5**. One crisis after another drove David into a cave, and remarkably, he does not complain or give in to despair. Instead, he inspires and empowers the rejects and misfits that gather around him to become mighty men. Keep in mind that David has a promise from God that someday he will be king. Here, David is little more than the king of fools, but he makes the best of it.

- When you are faced with big problems and discouraging circumstances, do you complain about it, or rise up and make the best of the situation?
- David's display of resilience is profound – nothing seems to keep him down. Why do you think he was able to bounce back from adversity so consistently? How can we grow in this same strength ourselves?
- What does it say about David's character and ability that he was able to inspire and empower these outcasts and misfits to become mighty warriors?

V. Twice the author of 1 Samuel gives us surprising stories of David sparing Saul's life. In both **1 Samuel 24** and **1 Samuel 26**, David has the opportunity to end the rivalry by removing the source of the problem. These stories are masterfully told and easy to imagine. It would be easy for David to justify killing Saul. David certainly had reason to strike Saul down in self-defense or even as an act of retaliation for the wrong done to him. Saul certainly would have killed David if the tables were turned. When Abishai stood over Saul, spear in hand, imagine how David must have remembered all the times Saul hurled that spear in his direction! David makes a very difficult and God-honoring choice twice, and in doing so, teaches us something amazing about surrendering to the will of God. David refuses to take his destiny in his own hands. He refuses to grasp for the throne by force.

- Do you think that David's choice to flee from Saul was cowardly? How about his choice to let Saul live? Why or why not?
- Revenge is the act of dispensing justice *as we see fit* after we have been wronged. We want to settle the score or to get even or to payback what is due the people that wrong us. How well do David's actions reflect the teaching of Jesus on revenge that is recorded in **Luke 6:27-36**?
- How would the story be different if David killed Saul or allowed him to be killed? Would your respect for David grow or diminish?
- Ambition is normally looked at as a virtue in our culture. Ambitious people rise to the top and get things done. The Bible generally warns people against selfish ambition and treats it as a vice. How does David's posture of surrender and submission differ from our culture's attitude? Do you think ambition has a place in the Kingdom of God? Why or why not?
- It is clear that David's refusal to harm Saul is ultimately because David believes that Saul's authority comes from God. To act against Saul, in David's way of thinking, would be to act against God because Saul is "the Lord's anointed." Does God still expect us to submit to those in authority today? Is it possible for someone to be a legitimate authority, even if you do not agree with their decisions or their leadership? What lessons can we learn about submitting to authority from David's attitude?
- Some argue that the strength of David's leadership rests on his ability to submit to God's authority and to follow God's lead. True or false: "In God's Kingdom, you can't be an effective leader until you learn to be a careful follower." Explain your answer.

CHAPTER 4: REIGN

THE BIG PICTURE

The book of 1 Samuel closes with the tragic death of Saul: he takes his own life after a devastating military defeat by the Philistines. Saul's ultimate surrender happened at the point of a sword, even though David refused to be the one wielding it. Yet even after the death of Saul, the ascent of David to the throne of Israel was not smooth or easy. The aftermath of Saul's death leaves David on a journey wrought with trial and resistance - realities that David endured and allowed to shape his character. Only the southern tribes initially recognize David's rule, causing civil war to break out against the tribes in the north. The specific circumstances of the way David finally gains the throne are such an important part of the story, as are the immediate actions of David once he has power. When all Israel recognizes David as their king, the people remember the promise given to David so many years before: ***"You will shepherd my people Israel and you will become their ruler."*** David embodies the image of the "shepherd king" as he follows the lead of the Lord, the shepherd of all. David's first actions as king serve to secure safe pasture for his people and ensure their connection to God. For this chapter, read and be familiar with **2 Samuel 1-6**.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. **2 Samuel 1:1-27** highlights the strength of David's character. David receives the news of Saul's death with tears instead of triumph. Shockingly, there is no hint of offense, anger, or bitterness in David's heart despite the abuse that David has received from Saul. David does not gloat over the death of his rival, instead, he mourns. Pay close attention to the honor that David shows Saul and Jonathan in the song he composes to commemorate their lives. There is something special about a person that could write such a song after enduring such hatred and persecution. David sets the tone for his reign by honoring the legacy of his predecessor. David's display of honor invites others to show him the same level of honor.
 - Do you think you could have such affection for someone that mistreated you? Write a few thoughts about how David embodies the teaching of Jesus to love our enemy.
 - Do you agree that people that show respect deserve respect? Why? In our trash-talking and fist-pumping culture, how can we reclaim this level of respect even for those who have wronged us?
 - What do you think about David's choice to execute the man who claimed to kill Saul? What does it say about David's character and how David understands authority?

- II. In **2 Samuel 2-4**, notice how the emphasis is on David's *non-role* in the civil war and the other chaotic events that happen in the wake of Saul's death. The narrator tells the stories in such a way as to exonerate David of taking the throne by force or of any wrong doing in the deaths of Abner and Ish-Bosheth. The story might be different if David had tried to rush God's plan: a more forceful or self-seeking course of action would leave a stain on David's character and undermine his reputation for surrendering to the will of God.
- In our dog-eat-dog culture, what is surprising about David's attitude?
 - How do you discern when it is time to act and when it is time to wait?
- III. **2 Samuel 3:1** records this summary statement: *"The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker."* It is clear David's men have the edge in the civil war because of the superior training they received from David. David invested himself in these men. They came to him misfits, and he helped them become mighty. They are fierce, they are loyal, and they are disciplined. They have a strong commitment to David and would give their lives for their leader. This sacred bond is the result of watching him do the right thing when it was easy to do the wrong thing. It is the result of being chased over mountains, into caves, and across the wilderness of Judah with this man. ***Contrast the unity in David's camp with the fear, division, and paranoia that characterize the camp of Ish-Bosheth.*** Abner and his king disagree, and Abner decides to defect to David's side. Soon after Abner's betrayal, Ish-Bosheth is assassinated by his own men as they attempt to win David's favor. Ish-Bosheth might have wished for a decade in the desert in which to build some true loyalty!
- Read the legendary exploits of "David's Mighty Men" recorded in **2 Samuel 23:8-23**. With the strength of these men in mind, who has your back and watches out for you? Do you need to recruit some mighty men or women to stand beside you?
 - How can adversity prepare you for success?
 - David's men display a profound level of loyalty. Why do you think David's men followed him so loyally? What do you think makes David a better leader than Saul?
 - Do you have any relationships that have grown through adversity or trial?
- IV. The narrative of 1-2 Samuel is remarkable for a number of reasons - one of which is how well the characters are developed. This section further develops several of the men around David that will continue to be significant characters going forward. Pay attention to the three brothers: Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. The sons of Zeruiah, as they are known, emerge as David's mightiest champions and most skilled commanders. Their reputations, their choices, and their personalities are significant elements of the plot.

They are talented and loyal to David, but their wild and impulsive nature can be a liability. Joab, for instance, seems to be the kind of person that does what he thinks needs to be done regardless of David would wish him to do. Despite his sometimes “maverick” actions, David continues to trust him and rely on him. Negatively, Joab does impulsive things like the murder of Abner. Positively, he wins many battles for David and is instrumental in the capture of Jerusalem. Joab’s role in the kingdom and his relationship to the king will become very important later.

- Sometimes the bold can also be brash. Is there a difference between bravery and foolishness?
- Do you have any friends like Joab who are somewhat unpredictable? How does it impact your relationship?
- Joab and his brothers likely came as outlaws to David during his years in the Cave of Adullam. Why do you think David continues to trust Joab?

V. The story of David’s pursuit of the Ark of the Covenant illustrates David’s perspective: He knew The Lord had established him as king over Israel. David understands the throne was given to him by God, the victories over his enemies were because of God, and that his future success depends on God. David seeks the Ark of the Covenant for God’s glory, not his own. The Ark of the Covenant is a physical representation of the glory of God - a symbol of God’s desire to dwell among his people. It was a holy object that housed the manifest presence of God, and so it demanded reverence and respect. David is zealous to bring the presence of God into his new capital Jerusalem, and he makes some mistakes in his eager haste. Read the dramatic story in **2 Samuel 6**.

- This story reveals that David is concerned about God’s glory and not his own. In a culture that highly values fame, how can we keep our hearts in check?
- David is a rare example of someone who is successful and famous yet still surrendered to God and concerned with God’s glory. *Are fame and worship mutually exclusive? How can someone embody both?*
- Michal’s story is a hard one. She loved David, but she was used as a political pawn in her father’s game of thrones. She was first married to David, then given to one of Saul’s men when David fled from Saul, only to be taken from him and returned to David by Abner. She has endured upheaval and heartbreak. Can you identify with Michal’s feelings at all? Why might she be upset about David’s behavior? How could she potentially misunderstand David’s dramatic worship?
- Write a few thoughts about how David’s willingness to be “undignified” before others qualifies him to be a true worshipper. Do you ever value your dignity over God’s glory?

CHAPTER 5: RESTORATION

THE BIG PICTURE

The next movement in the narrative carries significance not just for the context of 1 & 2 Samuel and the story of David, but also for the overarching story of God's relationship to humanity. God promise to David is dramatic: ***"your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me."*** God's covenant promise to David takes its place alongside the previous covenants God made with Abraham and with the Israelites under Moses. In this light, 2 Samuel 7 is one of the most important chapters in the entire Bible. It becomes a central feature in the unfolding story of scripture, and an essential feature in Israel's understanding of the Kingdom of God. All future kings of Israel will be evaluated in terms of their loyalty to the covenant of God. As the books of Samuel lead into the books of Kings, we will see example after example of kings that were appointed by God but fail to remain faithful to the covenant. David's essential loyalty to God, as we will see in the majority of narratives that follow, becomes a point of contrast for every idolatrous and unfaithful king for generations. In giving this promise to David, God has linked the future of His Kingdom on earth with the house of David, a promise that finds ultimate fulfillment in the person of Jesus 1,000 years later. The fast paced and action packed narrative of 1 & 2 Samuel is temporarily interrupted to include a lengthy oracle from the prophet Nathan and David's prayer of response. The change in pace underlines the magnitude of the new developments presented in these chapters. The theme of covenant faithfulness (*hesed*) is illustrated as David pours out the same unexpected grace he receives from God to the cripple Mephibosheth. Carefully read **2 Samuel 7-9**, paying close attention to the theme of covenant love.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. One of the obvious themes of this section of the narrative emerges when you notice the repetition of the word "house." It is used fifteen times in **2 Samuel 7** alone. David and God each use the word differently, the contrast subtly communicating spiritual truth. David uses the word house to refer to physical structures. He has a palace, and he desires to build God a physical temple suitable to contain God's glory. God uses the word to refer to David's household, including his distant descendants in terms of a lasting dynasty. David wants to build God a house, a permanent physical structure, while God speaks of establishing the "house of David" so that his kingdom will endure forever. David's desire to build God a proper "house" is good, but God's response implies He thinks differently than David on this issue. God didn't ask any of the leaders in the past to build a permanent temple. The portable tabernacle symbolized God's choice to have His presence dwell among His people. Later, Jesus will teach his

followers that the true temple of God is the body of believers and worshippers. God is much more concerned with sanctified people than he is with sacred places. What David wants to do is good, but he is still told “no” by God.

- Have you ever wanted to do something good, but felt like God told you “no?” Why might God say “no” to something good?
- Why do you think people often associate certain places, buildings, or other physical things with worship? Are there some places that are sacred or special to you? Why? Do you think God is concerned about such things?
- Jesus was once asked about the appropriate physical place to worship God. His answer was true worshippers worship in “spirit and in truth.” What do you think that means?

II. Take a moment to carefully read God’s promise to David recorded in **2 Samuel 7:5-16**. This is a significant link in the chain of God’s evolving covenant with humankind, so it holds a very important place in the Biblical story. The promise that David’s offspring would rule “forever” would change the way that the Israelites thought about themselves from this moment on. This promise will change the way God relates to humanity – it links the kingdom of David with the Kingdom of God forever. This passage shares specific language with the previous covenant statements found in scripture, first with Abraham and then with the Israelites under Moses. David’s humble prayer of response reveals that he understands God’s favor to him in the context of God’s dealing with Israel throughout history. There is a sense of continuity between this moment and what God did for His people in the past. David does something remarkable when he receives from God such a glorious promise without allowing it to inflate his sense of self-importance. Ten times in this prayer, David calls himself “God’s servant.” God might be exalting David, but David is doing his best to remain humble.

- Read **Genesis 12:1-3** and **Exodus 19:3-6**. What do Abraham’s covenant and the covenant God made with Israel through Moses have in common with the David’s covenant in 2 Samuel? How do these covenants inform us today about what it means to be the people of God?
- Have you ever thought of your life story as part of God’s big story? How could this understanding impact the way you live?
- True humility is a rare and beautiful virtue, and David has it. He doesn’t ever seek glory, instead, he seeks humility. The Bible says three different times: “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.” How well are you keeping your heart properly ordered? How can you grow in humility?

- III. For those familiar with the New Testament and the story of Jesus, it is easy to see Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of David's covenant promise. It is no accident that the genealogy of Jesus includes David. Jesus is the greatest Son of David and he establishes the only true eternal throne as Lord of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the one who ultimately builds God's temple when he establishes the church as the new people of God. David couldn't have imagined Jesus or the Kingdom he would bring to earth. When the Jewish people hoped for a Messiah (a word that came to mean God's anointed deliverer) in the time of Jesus, they were hoping for someone like David. They had endured a long history of oppression at the hands of foreign armies, and they hoped for a warrior like David that would set them free. They thought their problem was political and geographical, but Jesus knew the real problem was spiritual. Jesus brought spiritual freedom and a release from the curse of sin. Jesus did establish a Kingdom, but not the one they expected.
- From what you know about Jesus, what do David and Jesus have in common? What differences do you see between Jesus and David?
 - When the Jewish people in the time of Jesus imagined the restoration the Messiah would bring, they looked back to their golden era under David. How was the Kingdom that Jesus brought unexpected? How is the Kingdom Jesus established better than the kingdom David established?
- IV. The normal fashion of history writing in antiquity would spend considerably more time exploring the exploits and accomplishments of David listed in **2 Samuel 8**. Here, the author goes over David's victories very quickly. The credit is given to God, not David's battle prowess or might. There is no room in God's Kingdom for hero worship, only true worship of the One True God. David remains faithful to this ideal when he dedicates the plunder and wealth of these victories to the Lord. The events of **2 Samuel 8:11-12** are a stark contrast to Saul, who once claimed the spoils of war reserved for God for himself. David knows his fame and his success come from God's favor, and so his heart remains humble.
- Our culture tends to over-celebrate our accomplishments. We now have celebrations when children graduation from kindergarten and elementary school, and we give trophies for participation. How could learning from David's heart toward God correct this imbalance in our culture?
- V. The unexpected and undeserved favor that David receives from God is the motivation for the amazing display of love that David shows Mephibosheth in **2 Samuel 9**. This story showcases David's character and highlights his faithfulness to God's covenant. David has seen his enemies defeated, his throne secured, and his empire established.

As a result, he is in a position to fulfill the covenant obligation to his friend Jonathan. We studied the pact between Jonathan and David in **1 Samuel 21** previously. Now, David returns the *hesed* (a Hebrew word that means “covenant love,” though most English translations of the Bible use the word “kindness” in this passage) he was shown by Jonathan. Jonathan had given help to David when he was driven from the king’s table. Now David can return that help by inviting Jonathan’s son to his own table along with the gift of security, honor, and wealth. **David’s display of *hesed* to Mephibosheth completes one of the most beautiful stories of friendship ever written.** This story should prepare our hearts for our own story of grace. ***Just as David related to Mephibosheth on the basis of his covenant with another, out of covenant love for His Son Jesus God has lavished his grace on us.***

- We were first introduced to Mephibosheth in **2 Samuel 4:4**. Like this boy, all humanity has been spiritually broken because of a fall. Do you relate to Mephibosheth’s story of brokenness in any way? How?
- Mephibosheth likely lived in hiding, convinced that David would want him killed as a potential rival for the throne. David knows his kingdom is established by God, so he is free to show surprising kindness to Saul’s descendants without fear. How can truly trusting God to establish your position and your worth change the way you relate to others? Should there be rivalry between members of God’s family?
- Have you ever been guilty of hiding from God? The good news called “The Gospel” is that we don’t need to hide from God because of our relationship with Jesus. What does it mean to relate to God through Jesus?
- We can live out the beautiful story of God’s covenant loyalty and undeserved love for us every time we show undeserved kindness and mercy to others. Who are you challenged to love in this way?
- Where Mephibosheth expected execution, he received grace. More than simply being allowed to live, he was given wealth and prominence. It has been said that **mercy** is withholding the harm you know you deserve, while **grace** is receiving what you know you do not deserve. How is your relationship with God characterized by getting much better than you deserve? What specific examples can you identify of God’s grace and mercy?
- Mephibosheth spent the rest of his life eating at the king’s table. Can you imagine if he rejected the king’s offer out of resentment, fear, or pride? Have you ever let such things prevent you from being in God’s presence?

CHAPTER 6: REPROACH

THE BIG PICTURE

The story of David's rise and rule takes a painful turn in this episode. Even good men sometimes struggle and fail, and David is no different. David's sin in this story is a severe transgression against his calling and the covenant he was blessed to receive. David has been anointed to be a shepherd for God's people Israel, but in the narratives recorded in **2 Samuel 11 and 12** David plays the part of a wolf. In a shocking departure from the integrity and character David has previously displayed, David's actions are ruthless and shameful. This episode serves to illustrate the warning Samuel gave to Israel back in **1 Samuel 8:11-18** – kings are takers. Samuel warned the people when they demanded a human king: a person given such power will take what is yours and make it his own. David now lives up to the worst of Samuel's predictions about kingship. He takes the wife of one of his own men in selfish lust and then murders her husband to cover up his crime. David's actions are inexcusable; he dishonors the covenant of God by abusing his power. The major theme of 1 & 2 Samuel is the question: who sits enthroned on your heart? This story shows us that the throne can corrupt even the strongest of hearts and that even people of heroic faith can fall in failure. Over the next several episodes, we will see the consequences of David's failure as his family unravels in sin and the struggle for power. Hold on to hope, because even in failure, David's strength of character will emerge as he chooses confession and repentance when his sin is confronted.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. Notice the circumstances of **2 Samuel 11:1-5**. David has enjoyed security and prosperity, and this comfort leaves him susceptible to temptation and frustration. Boredom is a dangerous feeling for a person accustomed to adventure. David has done battle with giants, roamed the wild, trained warriors, and fought God's battles. Here, he is unguarded and under-challenged, and so his appetites go unrestrained. His armies are fighting the Ammonites, but David stays home. Imagine what David might be thinking as he roams the rooftop of his palace in Jerusalem. From this high vantage point, he can survey the vast city and see the lands of his kingdom for miles around. Is he starting to feel like other kings: as if he is above the law and above the people? Is the king puffed up with pride? If so, David is playing a dangerous game with his thoughts. He has been a model king thus far because he has managed to keep perspective on the truth: God is truly the only one who belongs on the throne. When David forgets that fact, his family and his kingdom will be put at risk.
 - David seems to illustrate in this story that "absolute power corrupts absolutely." Why do you think unrestrained power is so damaging to the human heart?

- If you were placed on the throne and given amazing covenant promises by God like David, would you be able to remain humble? Why or why not? How would you prevent pride from growing in your heart?
 - Why do you think we are more easily enticed by sin when we are bored?
- II. The author of this story does not provide Bathsheba's name at first. To David, she is simply "that woman." This is an effective technique to underline for the reader the way David has objectified Bathsheba. David's servant cleverly attempts to reverse this distorted perspective when he asks: "Isn't she someone's daughter and someone's wife?" This is an attempt to humanize her, to remind the king that she is a person with relationships and a story, not an object of lust. Her husband is actually one of David's own warriors, serving in the army right now, fighting David's war! This objectification is one of the great injustices of lust. Lust is a way of seeing others selfishly as objects of gratification, not as people that are precious to God and others. Tragically, David sends men to "take" her, completing her objectification in abuse. This woman is exploited and her husband is robbed as David uses his power for cruel purposes.
- Lust is so damaging because lust defines the value of another human being based on selfishness. Modern culture has taken this objectification of others to an extreme with the prevalence of pornography. Think for a few minutes about how pornography objectifies and exploits others for selfish purposes.
 - What should David have done differently when he was tempted by lust when he saw the beautiful Bathsheba bathing?
 - Some have compared David's abuse of power to the crime of rape. David, fully able to use his power to get what he wants – does just that. He wants, so he takes. How does David's crime alter your opinion of him? Does this sin tarnish his legacy?
 - One of David's servants tried to remind him of the truth and prevent him from doing wrong when he told the king: "*she is the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.*" What accountability do you have in your life to help you with your struggle against lust?
 - The narrator never hints at what Bathsheba is thinking or feeling throughout this painful story. Can you imagine what she must be going through?
- III. When David's private indiscretion threatens to become a public scandal, his first thought is to cover-up his crime. **2 Samuel 11:6-17** records David's frustrated attempts to conceal his offense, culminating in David's decision to murder Uriah. The ugly truth about sin is that once it is committed, if sin is suppressed and concealed it will lead to more sinning. If left uncontested, it leads to the hardening of the heart. Such people stop caring about their sin or its consequences and become numb to the reality of their

own guilt. This escalation is common and among the most universal of human experiences. Sin is a spiritual cancer that spreads and brings death with it. David has grossly betrayed the sacred trust given to him by God and by his people. The last verse of 2 Samuel 11 ensures the reader that David will not get away with murder: ***“The thing David had done displeased the Lord.”***

- When David chooses to cover up his crime, he is placing himself above the law. David thinks that for some reason, the rules don't apply to kings. Why do you think people in power often use a different standard for themselves than for others?
- David's attempt to cover up the crime is another abuse of his power. He is trying to control the situation and everyone around him. His plans are frustrated when Uriah's integrity makes him difficult to manipulate. Have you ever tried to control other people with selfish motives?
- David is trying desperately to stay in control as he plots his cover-up. The funny thing is, David's sin is controlling his every move. Do you think David ever felt trapped by his sin? Have you ever felt trapped by sin?
- Have you ever lied to cover up a lie, or sinned to cover up a previous sin? How do you stop the cycle?
- Can you think of an example in your life or maybe with a friend of becoming numb to guilt and experiencing a “hardened heart” due to habitually ignoring sin? Why is this dangerous, spiritually speaking?
- Unresolved sin always has detrimental implications down the road. If you committed the sin and it stays unresolved, it leads to guilt, shame, and bondage. If the sin was committed against you and it stays unresolved, it leads to hurt, forgiveness, and bitterness. Can you see how David's unresolved sin continues to hurt himself and others? Read **1 John 1:9**. What remedy does God give to resolve our sin?

IV. There is a play on words throughout this episode more evident in the original language in which it was written. There is an obvious repetition of the word “send.” David has been “sending” to abuse, exploit, conceal, and murder. He “sent” someone to inquire about Bathsheba, he “sent” men to take her, he “sent” for Uriah, he “sent” Joab orders to kill Uriah, and so on. David is portrayed as someone sitting in his seat of power commanding reality around him. He is acting like someone with absolute power and authority, bossing others around to suit his selfish whim. In 1 Samuel 12:1, it is God that does the “sending.” This time, God sends Nathan the prophet to get the out of control king under control! David has abused the very people he was anointed to protect, so God needs to rein him in.

- Nathan’s parable in **2 Samuel 12:1-4** is masterfully composed to trap David and disarm his objections and defenses. Why do you think this story convicted David so sharply?
 - Have you ever been caught in the act of sin or had your sin exposed? How did it make you feel? How did you respond: defensiveness, humiliation, or repentance? Did the people that caught or exposed you show grace or judgment?
 - Why do you think God exposed David’s sin: for the sake of justice, for the sake of the kingdom, for David’s own sake, for a different reason, or for a combination of several reasons?
 - Contrast David’s reaction to the prophet’s rebuke in **2 Samuel 12:13** with Saul’s reaction to the prophet’s rebuke in **1 Samuel 15:20-31**. David owns his sin and confesses to it clearly. Saul tries to deny it, then tries to save face, then tries to squirm away from responsibility. What do these two reactions reveal about the character of these men? Why do you think genuine contrition and confession important to God?
- V. David’s response to Nathan’s rebuke is confession and repentance. Finally, we see some evidence of the character David has. He is finally acting like the person he can be and the king God hopes he will be. Two Psalms give us windows into David’s heart during this time: **Psalm 51** and **Psalm 32**. Tradition holds that these songs were written by David in the aftermath of his crimes against Bathsheba, Uriah, and God. These psalms reveal David’s anguish over his sin and his humble reliance on God’s mercy. The prophet tells David that *“The Lord has taken away your sin,”* yet the consequences of David’s sin cannot be avoided. David has tarnished his legacy and his lapse of character will lead to much more chaos and pain.
- Read **Psalm 51**. Psalm 51 is thought to be a prayer of David as he processes through his guilt and need for forgiveness. Have you ever felt like David did when he wrote this song? What parts of this prayer reveal David’s genuine repentance? What parts of this prayer do you find moving or significant? What do you think David meant when he prayed: “my sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit?”
 - If you need to be forgiven, what help can you find in David’s prayers? Compose your own prayer of repentance.
 - Read **Psalm 32**. Psalm 32 is thought to be David’s prayer of thanksgiving and celebration after being forgiven. Do you identify with any of the poetic expressions in this song? Take a moment to compose your own prayer of thanks for God’s mercy.

- Even though David was forgiven by God, the consequences of his sin were not all cancelled. Why do you think this is? Can you think of an example of this from your own life?

CHAPTER 7: RUPTURE

THE BIG PICTURE

2 Samuel 13 is one of the most heartbreaking chapters of scripture, and is the moral nadir of the story of David. The events of this episode are tightly woven together with the preceding sin of David with Bathsheba and the following account of Absalom's rebellion. David's failure to live up to God's covenant in the Bathsheba episode was the start of a downward slide into darkness for David's reign. His sin planted seeds destruction, and as those seeds take root and grow David will reap chaos from within his household. David has played the part of a selfish godless king, exploiting the people he was anointed to protect and taking what did not belong to him. The question throughout the books of Samuel is: "who reigns?" Ultimately, God reigns supreme and should sit enthroned on the heart of every human king. As the readers are introduced to David's adult children for the first time, the question of succession is raised. Which of his children will inherit the throne and the covenant promise of God? Will they follow in the footsteps of their father's success, or will they model their lives after his failures? David has been successful as a statesman and unmatched as a warrior, but as a father he has failed to prepare his children to inherit the throne. Instead of surrender to the will of God, they struggle and strive for power and prominence. In addition to this political uncertainty, David's children struggle to establish a moral compass as they embody the worst of their father's behaviors. David is crippled by the guilty memory of his own immorality, and so the immoral and exploitive behavior of his adult children goes unchallenged. Such unrestrained immorality will have tragic results in one of the most disturbing and saddening stories in the entire Bible.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. The story introduces some of David's adult children. Amnon and Absalom are David's oldest sons, each from different mothers. Amnon is the oldest, and therefore the heir apparent. Absalom is next in the line of succession. Pay close attention to the behavior and characterization of Absalom, because he will take a major role in the story of David's reign going forward. In this episode, there are two essential things to note. First, note the natural rivalry between these two half brothers. It is easy to imagine they are rivals for their father's attention, for power, and for prominence. Secondly, note that Absalom and his sister are known for their physical beauty. These are attractive people, and their appearance will prove to be a blessing and a curse.
 - Have you ever experienced rivalry with another person? How does such competition help or hinder your progress in life? Do you think rivalry is avoidable?
 - How could David as a father prevented the rivalry between his sons?

- Absalom and Tamar were known for their attractive appearance. How is beauty both a blessing and a curse? Why?

II. **2 Samuel 13:1-15** paint a narrative picture that is easy to imagine. Amnon's lust for Tamar is so intense it affects his physical health. After he takes what he wants from Tamar, his hatred for her is equally intense. His story is a study in the power of temptation and the cycle of sin and shame. The cycle starts when he allows himself to lust and fantasize inappropriately. These thoughts grow and work on his heart, corrupting his desires and eventually his motives and intentions. When his lust has taken root, he becomes willing to act on his thoughts despite the great risk. So many people make the mistake of thinking there is no harm in such fantasies as long as they stay in your mind. This just isn't true. Such thoughts are corrosive to your values and your will. They degrade your ability to recognize and affirm the worth of others. Broken desires lead to sin, which leads to death. These fantasies are built upon lies and falsehood, so they are never capable of delivering the satisfaction they promise. This is why Amnon (and many others) go so quickly from intense, irrational, insatiable desire to shame and even anger. He wants nothing but Tamar one second and nothing to do with her the next second. The same voice that tempts and entraps toward sin becomes the accuser slinging guilt, shame, and revulsion. This is why lust is such a dangerous thought to entertain. It gives empty promises it cannot fulfill, and leaves you more frustrated than before.

- Can you identify with Amnon craving and longing for something he should not have? What temptations do you struggle with right now?
- Lust desires to possess, use, and exploit. How is it different from love?
- Read **James 1:14-15**. How does Amnon's story illustrate the spiritual truth James is trying to convey?
- There is a dramatic shift in Amnon's emotions from v. 2 to v. 15. First, he is sick with desire and then he is sick with shame. The hatred Amnon displays for Tamar is rooted in his disgust for himself. Have you ever been ashamed of your actions? How did you deal with your guilt and shame?

III. The author of this narrative has framed the story in terms of the rivalry between Amnon and his half-brother Absalom, but modern readers will undoubtedly be concerned for Tamar. She is a true victim in the power struggle between her brothers, a woman with no power of her own. One brother uses her for forced sexual pleasure; the other brother uses her misery for political advancement. She is known for her beauty, and the speech she gives trying to prevent her brother's sin shows an impressive intellect. What happens to her is heartrending. Once Amnon objectifies and abuses her, he sends her

away forcefully. Verse 16 presents another difficulty for modern readers: it seems odd to us that after being so abused by Amnon she wouldn't want to escape. She argues that two wrongs don't make right. The issue here is that a raped woman in the ancient world was ruined. Her prospect for marriage has been eliminated and her life has been forever altered. The Mosaic Law included stipulations that required the rapist to provide for his victim. Don't think of this as marriage in the modern sense, it is more about providing for her needs. It was an imperfect system of social welfare aiming at helping victims avoid total destitution (you can easily imagine a better system where the perpetrator has to pay fines and provide for living expenses that doesn't involve victims marrying their rapist). This is what Tamar is appealing to. She is saying: "Where will you send me? You have treated me horribly; I will not allow you to abuse me further. You have made me desolate and I have no where to go!" Amnon commits another great crime when he throws her out, turns his back on her need, and locks the door behind her.

- The plight of women in the ancient world was often difficult. God's word moved people in a better direction, but the movement was at a pace that the ancient people could accept. It is almost like God was working to improve human society one step at a time. How do you feel about Tamar's plight in this story? What bothers you the most about the injustice she endured?
- Tamar was taken into the home of her brother Absalom to live as a desolate woman. This beautiful princess had her life and dreams destroyed by sin. Normally, princess stories work the other way around! How can you protect your future from the damaging effects of sin?

IV. There is no question that Amnon has behaved deplorably. He has treated a beautiful daughter of a king like an object. After he used her and abused her, he put her aside like a toy he was finished playing with. His actions are without excuse. It is easy to wonder: where is this girl's father to defend and protect her? Where is the king's justice? The text notes that David was furious, but his anger doesn't move him to action. This story causes the reader to look back on David's own sexual sin and recognize how far the consequences of his failure will reach. David no doubt recognizes the injustice, but who is he to hold Amnon accountable? Wouldn't David be a hypocrite if he judged Amnon for the same crime he himself committed? David's mistakes are returning to haunt him. He exploited someone else's daughter in selfish lust, now his own daughter will be exploited...by his own son! The entire kingdom will suffer as long as the king is without moral authority, allowing his own sinful record to disqualify him from confronting and correcting others. This story illustrates the way that the sins of one

generation can imprint on the next generation. ***Tragically, sin and shame are now writing the story of David's reign!***

- What are some mistakes of the previous generation that you need to avoid making yourself? How do you think the generational cycle of sin is broken?
- Do you think David's bad example gave Amnon a valid excuse for doing what he did? Why or why not?
- Do you agree that it would be hypocritical of David to hold Amnon accountable for the rape of Tamar after David was guilty of the same crime with Bathsheba? Why or why not? What should the king do instead of ignoring it?
- David has complex values competing for prominence. He loves his daughter, but he also loves his son. He wants to be a just ruler, but he also knows about God's great mercy. What would you do if one of your children did something horrible? What advice would you give David?

V. The story of Absalom's plot to murder Amnon starts with verse 25. For two years, Absalom has nursed anger and resentment. Yet he has also been busy! He is plotting and scheming, trying to devise a way to avenge his sister's abuse. The violent treatment of Tamar leads to more violence. David's rape of Bathsheba has been followed by Amnon's rape of Tamar. Now, David's murder of Uriah will be followed by Absalom's murder of Amnon. Like father, like son! Absalom's actions are not entirely about justice for Tamar. He is also moving to eliminate his rival for the throne. This section of Samuel has so many examples of violence being used to grasp for power or selfish gain. It is easy to imagine Absalom's self-justification of this murder: he is doing what needs to be done, what the king should have done himself! Absalom challenges the authority of David when he moves against Amnon, but again David does nothing. Like Nathan the prophet foretold, David is reaping the disaster sown in sin. **This narrative invites the reader to consider the full weight of sin.** We see its consequences are private and public, personal, and social.

- Some scholars argue that the text suggests a conspiracy between Absalom and Jonadab to set up Amnon and remove him from the line of succession. If this is true, Absalom sacrificed his sister to advance his political career. How would this change the way you read the story? How would this change your opinion of Absalom?
- What do you think about Absalom's actions? What message was he trying to send to his other siblings by killing Amnon in their presence? How much of this is about avenging Tamar, and how much of this is about securing his own advancement?
- Tragically, sin and shame are now writing the story of King David's royal court. How do you think the cycle of sin needs to be ended? How can we break the cycle of sin in our own lives?

- Although this is a true story, it has been told to teach us something about spirituality, morality, and humanity. What lessons does this tragic narrative teach?

CHAPTER 8: REBELLION

THE BIG PICTURE

Sin and shame have been writing the story of David's royal court, and David hasn't done anything about it. Crippled by the shame due to the sin of his past, the king has not been himself. His family has fallen apart because of rivalry and discord. The kingdom is suffering because of the chaos. Sin leads to more sin, violence leads to more violence. The cycle needs to be interrupted. Absalom, next in line to succeed his father as king, is in exile because he murdered his brother Amnon in retaliation for Amnon's rape of Tamar. With all this drama, people are beginning to question if David has what it takes to run the kingdom if he cannot lead his own family. Someone has to stop the cycle of sin. As readers, we are waiting expectantly for David to step up to the challenge and get back into proper alignment with the authority of God. ***It will not be easy, because the king is about the face the greatest challenge of his life.*** For this episode, familiarize yourself with **2 Samuel chapters 14-18**. The events of the last few episodes converge to form an epic conflict that emerges from within David's own family. Absalom's return from exile exposes deep fissures remaining in the social fabric of David's court. These cracks began to spread and the fracture only grew deeper with time. Eventually, the rift between father and son divided the kingdom with dire consequences.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. This section begins with David's family in disarray. Any parent can easily imagine how the king's heart is torn in two. On the one hand, Absalom his son is estranged and the king's heart longs to have him home. On the other hand, Absalom has murdered his brother and should be held accountable. The king is torn between mercy and justice. To complicate the matter further, David has received God's mercy himself for a similar crime. When Joab moves to break the stalemate, he does so by trapping the king with a well told story just like Nathan the prophet did in chapter 12. The wise woman of Tekoa begged that mercy be shown to her son for killing his brother, so her last remaining heir would not be taken from her. When David agreed with her logic, she exposed his hypocrisy in keeping Absalom in exile. After all, God is one who "devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him."
 - What would you do if one of your own children committed a crime against another one of your children? Imagine the conflicting emotions you would feel.
 - How do you think the king could best fulfill his obligations with regard to justice in this matter? How do you think they king could best fulfill his obligations to mercy?

- Think about the way God must feel when we sin against each other. One of God’s dearly loved sons or daughters is harming another of his children! Write some thoughts about how God might process this.
 - In **2 Samuel 14:14**, the woman from Tekoa is talking about Absalom but she is talking to David. David has been acting like a person “banished” since his sin with Bathsheba. Sin has been writing the story, and David hasn’t done anything about it! She is hinting at a double meaning: David, too, needs to return to God’s grace. He needs to leave his self-imposed exile. God doesn’t want his children estranged from him. How is David’s act of mercy toward Absalom a step toward God’s grace?
- II. There are two factors under the surface that create tension between David and Absalom, creating the conditions for sedition to grow in Absalom’s heart. The first is the unresolved conflict that acts like a wedge between father and son. David struggles to forgive Absalom for the death of Amnon. Even after Absalom is welcomed home, he is not allowed in the king’s presence. Absalom resents his father, feeling justified in what he did. For two years, the chasm between them grows in silent bitterness. The second factor is Absalom’s deficient character. Read **2 Samuel 14:25-27**. The author paints a picture of Absalom as vain and shallow. As the narrative progresses, Absalom proves to be a person whose gifts exceed his integrity. He is someone with charisma but not conviction. He is attractive, intelligent, and ambitious; but he is not a moral person. This is a dangerous mix in the heart of someone placed in a position of prominence.
- Offense has a tendency to grow when not addressed, yet people often choose to ignore it and hope it goes away. Read **Matthew 18:15-17** and **Ephesians 4:26**. With the story of David and Absalom in mind, what should they have done to heal the rift between them? Why do you think the bible warns against ignoring anger and offense?
 - Do you know anyone whose talents and gifts are not matched with the requisite amount of character? What makes this such a volatile combination?
 - David could certainly recognize the character deficiencies in his son. What do you think the king should have done about it, if anything? How can a parent influence his or her adult children?
- III. **2 Samuel 15:1-6** details Absalom’s conspiracy to undermine his father and elevate himself. He plays the part of the king in the eyes of the people. He has fallen to the temptation all gifted people face when they are under authority: he thinks he could do better than the one currently in leadership. In our culture of ambition and ruthless competition, it is easy to understand Absalom’s feeling and behavior. We are accustomed to stories of hostile take overs and upstarts grabbing for control. He is

undoubtedly comparing his strengths to his father's weaknesses. Absalom's self-assertion as a judge is a direct attack on the ability of his father. He is manipulating the people so popular opinion will tip in his favor. It is easy to tip the scales when he starts with people that are already unhappy or have some grievance or offense. Mutiny like this often starts in the gutter. Complaint becomes insubordination, which grows into rebellion. Absalom plots and schemes and maneuvers politically for four years.

- How is Absalom's behavior rightly called "stealing?" What did he steal? Do you think he recognized what he was doing was wrong?
- How is Absalom's story a warning against ambition? How are you dealing with the selfish ambition in your own heart? Are you guilty of rebellion against legitimate authority or undermining those over you?
- Why do you think Absalom lusted for power? Why wasn't he content with his position as a son of the king?
- Is there a right or appropriate way to "get ahead" in the world? In other words, is there such a thing as *healthy* ambition? What does it look like?
- How should you rightly handle complaints and grievances with those in leadership? Is there a way to disagree with or challenge leaders that honors God's kingdom?

IV. Absalom's conspiracy is so well planned; David has no choice but to flee. Fearing for their lives, David leads a group of faithful subjects, loyal servants, and true friends out of Jerusalem. Read **2 Samuel 15:30**. David's journey up the Mount of Olives, barefoot and weeping, is one of the most poignant pictures in the books of Samuel. Jerusalem, the City of David, is at his back and an uncertain future is ahead. David leads a parade of refugees as he flees from his own son. As he approaches the summit, which provides a panoramic view of the city, David learns that one of his chief advisors has defected to Absalom's side. This is a crushing blow to David, who is reminded that Ahithophel is the grandfather of Bathsheba. This is the moment when David reaps the harvest of pain that was sown in sin. Yet David emerges from this moment with clarity. This is a centering moment where David reflects on what God has done and remembers the long journey they have walked together. David makes several choices that illustrate his surrender to the will of God. First, he sends the Ark of the Covenant and the priests back to Jerusalem. David resists the temptation to use God's priests or God's presence for his political gain (something Absalom had done in **2 Samuel 15:8**). Second, refuses to retaliate with violence to the taunts and abuses of Shimei. This man threw rocks and dirt on the king's procession as they walked their sorrowful road. David accepted these insults without repaying them with evil. These gestures say loudly: "My fate is God's to decide, I choose to trust Him."

- Read **2 Samuel 15:16-18**. Many of the men and women who march past David have been aligned with David from the beginning. What do you think is going through David's mind when these faithful few march past him?
 - **2 Samuel 16:1-14** details the taunts and abuses of Shimei, who kicks the king while he is down. Do you think you could endure such insults at a time of great stress? What do you find inspiring about David's actions?
 - This story illustrates the spiritual truth that people reap what they sow. David's sin with Bathsheba has long reaching consequences, including the crisis of this narrative. How have you seen the domino effect of sin in your own life, where unresolved sin leads to more sin?
- V. When David learns of Ahithophel's defection, he prays that God would intervene. His prayers are answered in the form of Hushai, a friend of David sent back to Jerusalem as a double agent. In addition to Hushai, David's covert intelligence network includes the tabernacle priests and their families. **2 Samuel 16 and 17** tell the story of the clash of counselors. Ahithophel is legendary for his wisdom, so Hushai's talk is a difficult one. The advice of the two counselors is a contrast between action and caution. Ahithophel advises immediate action: strike while David is vulnerable and off guard. Hushai brilliantly reminds Absalom of the battle prowess of David and his elite guard, arguing that only a well-planned and perfectly executed assault can hope to defeat such seasoned warriors. The reader knows just how exposed David is, and that Ahithophel's advice is the better course for Absalom, but Absalom doesn't know that! Mustering all the troops will take time, a gift that Hushai hopes to give the true king! Hushai's rhetoric wins. This is a major accomplishment and a huge turn of events. The author points out that God is behind this development: "For the Lord had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel." Note the thrilling espionage story as the messengers make their way to David and dodge their pursuers.
- This battle of the minds precedes the physical battle, but has a dramatic impact on the outcome. What do you note about the way God accomplishes his purpose in this story?
 - Note the way that Hushai subtly plays on Absalom's pride to control the usurpers reactions. He manages to manipulate Absalom into leading the attack on David himself. Why do you think pride leaves such "blind spots" in a person's judgment? Have you ever made a foolish decision because of pride or bravado?
 - Once Ahithophel was defeated, he recognized there was no future for him if David regained the throne. He hanged himself. Can you think of another person that hanged himself after betraying a "son of David?" What do the characters of Ahithophel and Judas Iscariot have in common?

VI. The battle is recorded succinctly in **2 Samuel 18**. One of the themes of this story is the conflict between youth and experience. Absalom is convinced he can rule better than his aging father and that it is time for the younger generation to enjoy power. David and his men might be legendary, but they are aging. This theme plays out in the battle between the forces of Absalom and the forces of David. David's special guard was a standing army of professional soldiers. This group traces its existence all the way back to the Cave of Adullam where David trained them personally. They are very different from the armies of Israel, now led by Absalom, which is made up of the men of fighting age conscripted into service. Many of them are likely young and ambitious upstarts like Absalom himself. One group is comprised of professional, full-time soldiers with many years of combat experience. The other group is made up of farmers, craftsmen, and tradesmen that have been drafted into service. The latter is more numerous, but the former are better trained. In this battle, experience wins. David's men pick a battleground that favors their experience and nullifies Absalom's numbers advantage. The manner of Absalom's death underscores his misplaced pride. In such terrain, riding a mule would be impractical. The young king is more concerned about pomp and pageantry than practicality. His pride and foolishness leaves him hanging from a tree, completely at the mercy of Joab and his men. Not the way Joab again takes matters into his own hands contrary to the command of David, killing Absalom and ending the rebellion. Absalom legacy is the monument he built to himself, a fitting sentiment to enshrine his empty pride.

- Think about the way the author highlights the folly of Absalom's pride throughout the story. He was seeking glory and prominence, but he only received disaster. Why is pride such a dangerous sin? What mistakes have you made because of selfish pride?
- Joab took matters into his own hands and killed Absalom. Do you think Absalom needed to die? Why or why not? Is Joab guilty of rebellion because he disobeyed the king's orders?
- Absalom repaid the mercy of David with rebellion, and yet David was still seeking a way out of this conflict without harming Absalom. Read **Romans 5:8**. Think about how David's intentions reflect the heart of God toward sinful humanity. Spend a few minutes thinking about your own tendency toward spiritual rebellion.

CHAPTER 9: REBUILDING

THE BIG PICTURE

David and his men have won back the rule of Israel with the death of Absalom, but the kingdom is far from united. Deep cracks in national morale and unity have spread in the aftermath of Absalom's rebellion and the civil war. There is developing tension between the Northern and Southern tribes. David needs to deal with the personal wounds of the past, and set the kingdom back on the proper course for his heir. As the narrative unfolds, David will rise from the ashes of the recent calamity level-set and ready to move forward. He now understands just how poorly he has prepared his children for the throne. When David sees the state of the kingdom he sees some big issues that need to be sorted out before he dies. First, there is growing tension between the northern and southern tribes, a reality threatening to tear the kingdom in two. Second, David has allowed Joab to circumvent his authority multiple times in the past because Joab has proven to be effective. David needs to bring Joab under control or Joab will be a leadership challenge for David's heir. And finally, there is lingering uncertainty about who David will name as his heir. As long as David does not officially endorse any one of his children, they will continue to fight for position as rivals. This section covers 2 Samuel chapters 19 and 20.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. 2 Samuel 19 begins with David in mourning. He has now lost three children as the result (indirectly) of his own sin. The weight of his loss is heavy on his heart and the king becomes paralyzed with sadness. In his despair, he neglects his men and his leadership starts to decline. The truth of Joab's rebuke in vv. 5-7 must have been hard for David to accept. Joab reminds David that as the king, he cannot afford such a selfish display of grief. David has lost much, but he has a responsibility to lead his faithful men, and if this responsibility is ignored he will lose even more. This conversation is even more poignant considering that Joab is the one who just killed Absalom. David has been knocked low, but he needs to get back up and get to work rebuilding his kingdom. Otherwise, when he finally gets around to leading, he might discover that there is no one left to lead.
 - Joab's charge is that David's display of grief is selfish. Do you agree? What would be a more appropriate way to feel?
 - David has been knocked low, but he cannot afford to wallow in self-pity and sorrow because of the demands of the kingdom. What other sacrifices do those in leadership make?

- Proverbs 27:6 says “wounds from a friend can be trusted.” Do you think Joab is acting like a friend in this chapter? Have you ever had to rebuke a friend? Have you ever needed to be rebuked by a friend? How did it go? How could Joab have better communicated his rebuke to David?
- This chapter tells of David recovering from a long series of calamities. Take a moment and journal about the possibility that you need to “reboot” your life right now.

- II. The rest of 2 Samuel 19 tells the story of David’s return to Jerusalem. David endured many offenses as he was fleeing from the usurper, and now that the rebellion is over, there are some scores to settle. As David left Jerusalem, he heard rumors of Mephibosheth’s betrayal from his servant Ziba, a heartbreaking development if true. David was berated and humiliated by Shimei, who made the king’s mournful march worse with insults and abuse. Now the political situation has changed, and the rightful king is returning to his throne. In each case, David has a choice: revenge or forgiveness. David Joab’s rebuke seems to have level-set the king and David quickly goes about the business of rebuilding the confidence between the king and his subjects.
- Shimei brought an escort of a thousand Benjamites, revealing his justified fear of the king. He hopes to find safety in numbers as he begs for mercy. Shimei sings a completely different song now that David is in power. He admits his wrong and asks for a pardon. For the second time, Abishai asks to kill Shimei, but David will not have it. He chooses something noble and beautiful, to forgive. He knows the only way forward is to break the cycle of evil repaid for evil. David is setting the tone for how he hopes to restore his kingdom. He is acting like the kind of king God desires, one who embodies the covenant! Don’t miss how kingly David is in this moment. He overlooks a grave offense and chooses to forgive. Why do you think David was able to forgive like this? What does it say about his heart? Take a moment to journal about the people you need to forgive.
 - David next has to decide the truth about Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son, whom David had adopted as a covenant friend. Ziba the steward accused Mephibosheth of betraying the king, but now Mephibosheth has appeared to defend the accusations. He has the appearance of someone that has been in mourning, and he claims he has been distraught over the plight of the king and eagerly awaiting his return. According to Mephibosheth, Ziba is the traitor. Who do you believe? How do you feel about the justice of David’s ruling that the two should divide the land between them (if Mephibosheth is telling the truth, he gets the short end of the stick because his servant just acquired half his wealth by treachery)? Read carefully

Mephibosheth's response to the king's decree. What does this say about his guilt or innocence?

- III. The northern tribes are stung because the tribe of Judah gets preferential treatment from David on his return journey to Jerusalem. David's mismanagement of the kingdom and its affairs and the adverse effects of Absalom's rebellion have left deep cracks in national morale and unity. There is growing tension between north and south; they jockey and politic for position and prominence, trying to stake their claim on David or influence the policy of the nation. There is a tug of war for power, and David is the rope. This rivalry burns to a flashpoint in the leadership vacuum right after Absalom's rebellion. David's hold on the tribes is uncertain...and an ambitious person named Sheba makes his move. He rallies some of the northern tribes, mostly people from the tribe of Benjamin (Saul's tribe), and they try to secede from the kingdom. David now has another rebellion to put down, so he calls his tells his new commander Amasa to put them down quickly.
- Note how David fires Joab and replaces him with Amasa in 2 Samuel 19:13. Joab has just killed the king's son against his orders, and the king is hoping to prevent further defiance. Amasa led the armies of Absalom in the rebellion, who were just defeated by Joab. Joab is not likely to respect the commander he so recently defeated. Nevertheless, appointing Amasa seems like a political choice for David. David is hoping to offer something of an olive branch to those subjects that supported Absalom. Has something similar ever happened to you? Maybe you lost your spot on a team to another player that you could outperform? How do you think Joab felt about the arrangement?
 - Students of the Bible should recognize the foreshadowing here of the eventual split between north and south into separate kingdoms in the time of David's grandson. What could David have done differently in these narratives to heal this growing rift?
- IV. Restoring order in the kingdom also involves dealing with Joab. David has allowed Joab to circumvent his authority multiple times because Joab has proven to be effective and a good friend to the king. He can get the job done, but he is unpredictable. David needs to bring Joab under control or Joab will continue to be a leadership challenge for David's heir. Joab is a character. He is clearly a capable warrior. The body count you could place at his feet is staggering. He is also a gifted leader and shows substantial political influence. He is someone that does what he thinks needs doing, whether the king commanded it or not. He does seem to have the king's back, as he shows many times. He took Jerusalem, he defeated Abner, he backed the king with the issue of Uriah. He defeated the armies of Absalom. Other times he seems to be out for himself. Joab is

close enough to David to see his faults and weaknesses. The reader gets the sense that many times Joab is convinced he knows better than the king does. **2 Samuel 20:4-13** showcases the Joab's impulsive character in a dramatic way. *Don't miss this story, because it is as intense as they come!*

- It is hard to know how to feel about Joab. David certainly had conflicted feelings. How do you feel about Joab? Is he a friend or foe of the king, truly? Is Joab misunderstood and the king's most loyal servant, or is Joab an out of control rogue?
- The relationship between David and Joab is complex and multidimensional. Do you think the friendship between David and Joab made their enhanced their working relationship or made it more difficult? Why?
- Posing as a friend, Joab treacherously killed his rival Amasa with one blow and takes control of his troops. The ease with which the men accept Joab's command reveals their confidence in their long-time commander. It appeared that Amasa was botching his first assignment, but he was the person that David appointed. Joab again saves the kingdom, but this capable and confident person has also habitually killed those the king put in authority. What should David do with Joab after this? What would you do?
- The bottom line for Joab is the issue of authority. His gifts, talents, and effectiveness cannot outweigh his disregard for the king's orders. Joab cannot expect to be placed in authority unless he can learn to function under authority. For this reason, David cannot leave him in a position of power, despite his accomplishments. Read **Romans 13:1-5**. What authority are you under? Are there limits to the submission that God asks of us in this passage? Have you ever struggled with submitting to authority with which you did not agree? Why does God channel his blessing through those in authority?

CHAPTER 10: REWARD

THE BIG PICTURE

We have followed the life of David from childhood until its close; from total obscurity to complete notoriety. He began as a humble shepherd and has risen to claim the throne of Israel, leading the kingdom into an era of prosperity and security. He has endured so many challenges and taken part in so many adventures. All future kings of Israel will be evaluated against David. For a thousand years, people will look back on his life for hope as they struggle through difficulty and long for something better. David has received a covenant promise from God like few others, and the “messianic hope” of Israel is directly tied to the lineage of David. There are more pages in scripture devoted to the story of David than anyone else in the Bible with the exception of Jesus. David’s story is truly remarkable. In this chapter we will explore the choices David made in the twilight of his reign. **As David approached the end of his life, he began to consider the legacy he would leave behind.** David has walked an epic journey but as his story comes to a close he is concerned about finishing well. ***For David, this issue is tied to the choice of an heir.*** He has accomplished so many things, yet he has neglected the important task he was given as a father. God has hinted to David that his reward is a dynasty that will change history, and David knows he needs to protect it. **Who will reign in David’s place?** For this episode, read through the end of **2 Samuel** and the first two chapters of **1 Kings**.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. The bible provides two stories that help the reader put David’s advanced age in perspective. The first is in 2 Samuel 21:15-17. Here, the once mighty warrior almost falls in battle due to exhaustion. The result is that David’s career as a battle field commander is over. His men will not risk “the lamp of Israel” being extinguished. The second story opens the book of 1 Kings and includes the first four verses. In this story, David is of an age that he is struggling to stay warm at night. These two stories paint the picture that a once strong man has diminished physical capacity.
 - Think about how David’s age impacts his perspective. Is the king frustrated by his feeble physical condition? What are the advantages that come with age and experience?
 - Homebound and aging, David has ample time to reflect on his life and legacy. Knowing his story, what do you think are his biggest regrets? What do you think are his most cherished memories? What goals did David leave unaccomplished?
 - Think for a moment about how you want to face growing older. Have you ever considered life from this perspective? Think about some people that have “aged

well,” and some others that have not. What is the difference? Have you ever considered what you want to be remembered for when you are gone?

- II. 2 Samuel 22 records a psalm written by David. The author of 2 Samuel includes the song in this place because it embodies poetically many of the themes of David’s life and story. This song is also recorded in Psalm 18 in a slightly variant form. By the standards of Hebrew poetry, this is a long song. It might be a collection of several different psalms that have been compiled together as a ballad. The psalm is written from several perspectives, including that of a warrior, a worshipper and a king. As a collection, it has the effect of expressing the themes of David’s life: warfare and morality, human and divine agency, the responsibilities of the king and the people.
- The author of this psalm has clearly endured many challenges, yet his trust in God is strong. Think about David’s story as you explore the metaphors in the psalm. What does David mean when he claims God is his rock, fortress, shield, and lamp? How has God been present for you in times of trouble? What metaphor would you suggest to describe the protection, help, and strength you have received from God?
 - The stanza in 2 Samuel 22:21-25 is a declaration of the psalmist’s integrity. Do these claims match with David’s story? Knowing that he was a great sinner, what David mean when he said: “The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness?” In Acts 13:22, Paul calls David a “man after God’s heart.” What does this mean? How is David’s legacy one of righteousness instead of iniquity? How do David’s claims match up to the Gospel of the New Testament, where God deals with us according to the righteousness of Christ instead of our own righteousness?
 - The concluding verses of the psalm, 44-51, are a fitting tribute to God’s role in the story of David. With this psalm in mind, reflect on whether it is a person’s integrity and skills or the activity of God that impact their success in life. Is it one or the other, or is it a combination of both?
- III. David’s legacy as a father is again put into question when another of his sons tries to claim his throne. Adonijah’s uprising is similar to Absalom’s, yet less dramatic. Adonijah is the next oldest son, and his presumption on the throne is evidence that some in Israel were expecting their newly founded monarchy to follow the succession traditions of the surrounding cultures: the oldest son will inherit the throne. In God’s kingdom, God often chooses the younger over the older: Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over his 10 brothers, and even David over his brothers. In truth, Israel does not yet have any tradition for succession. The only precedent is when David was chosen for the throne after Saul’s rejection, breaking the assumption about dynastic leadership and favoring a model of charismatic leadership. Leadership in God’s kingdom is conferred by

God's anointing, not necessarily family lineage. Still, God has promised to David an enduring dynasty. It is possible that David delays naming an heir because he is waiting for God to choose the appropriate successor from among his children. There are many forces at work politically as David's wives, children, and other members of his court jockey for position. In this climate of uncertainty, Adonijah gathers supporters and presses his claim for the throne. You can read the unfolding drama in 1 Kings 1.

- David is old and showing signs of frailty. It is easy to imagine the concern of others about whether or not David still has what it takes to rule. What kind of justification is going through Adonijah's mind when he makes his move for the throne? Are you guilty of grasping for power or position selfishly or of justifying actions you know to be wrong?
- Think about how David received the throne. If one of the qualifications for kingship in Israel is being chosen by God, what does it say about Adonijah's claim?
- The guest list for Adonijah's coronation party reveals the nature of the political climate in David's court. Why do you think Joab backed Adonijah's claim? Who is notably left off the guest list? What do you think it means to be excluded from this small event?
- How is Adonijah's behavior similar to Absalom's? How does this reflect on David's role as a father to these two men?

IV. God has asked something unique of the king of Israel. Kingship in Israel needs to be different than kingship in the surrounding nations. In Israel, the king is never elevated to divine status, something common in other ancient cultures. Instead, Israel views the human king as God's chosen representative charged with enforcing and embodying the covenant. This is not a traditional monarchy because God needs to sit enthroned on the heart of the human king. The king is not the supreme authority; he must be surrendered to God. David's story has asked the question again and again: who truly reigns in the heart of the king? Answering this question will determine the right choice for an heir. When David hears about Adonijah's selfish grasping for power, he moves quickly to counter it. He crowns Solomon king, ratifies it with Nathan the prophet and has him anointed by Zadok the priest. To make sure his choice is secure, David hands over the command of his private guard to Solomon.

- On the surface, it appears like David chose Solomon because he favored Solomon's mother Bathsheba over his other wives. Still, this is not necessarily the true reason for David's choice. Solomon is the only one of David's named sons that hasn't grasped for the throne. David has been watching his sons, waiting for one of them to show the depth of character required to be king. From what you know about David's story, what qualities is he looking for in Israel's next king?

- David's charge to Solomon in 1 Kings 2:1-12 reveals David's priorities for his heir. What does David ask of Solomon? David knows that Solomon's (and Israel's) future success is dependent on how well he embraces and embodies God's covenant. In what ways did David model faithfulness for his son? In what ways did David model unfaithfulness for his son?
 - Decades after the reign of Solomon, another historian told the story of David's charge to his son in greater specificity. The situation of the author of this passage (when the nation was rebuilding after ruin and decades in exile) makes it clear that this is one part history and another part evaluation from hindsight. Look at what the Chronicler reports in 1 Chronicles 28:9-10. How is this charge also an evaluation of David's own reign (or maybe even other kings of Israel throughout their history)? How does this charge to Solomon speak to us still today?
 - Solomon's name means "peace." He receives from his father a kingdom at peace and primed for prosperity. All the preparations have been made to start building the temple. Solomon has been set up for success. Have you ever received a great inheritance, or found yourself in one way or another standing on the shoulders of the people that went before you? Is there pressure on Solomon to rule well? How is Solomon's position similar to ours, as those who inherit the Kingdom of God that Jesus established?
- V. The story of David comes to a close in 1 Kings 2:10: "Then David rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David. He had reigned forty years over Israel – seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem." David was a man of triumph and tragedy, shining success and glaring failure. David's ultimate reward, the fullness of his legacy, was realized a thousand years after his death. The greatest son of David was born in a little town called Bethlehem, David's own hometown. Jesus is the one of David's sons to finally and perfectly establish "the throne of his Kingdom forever."
- Which episode in David's life encourages you most right now? Why?
 - What about the character of David is deserving of the honor to be called "a man after God's own heart?"
 - What do you think was David's greatest accomplishment?
 - Throughout these 10 chapters, this question has been raised often: who truly reigns on the throne of your heart? Spend a few minutes journaling about this question and evaluating the condition of your heart in relation to God the King of All.