

THE DAILY QUIET TIME REFLECTIONS SERIES

ANOINTED AND ESTABLISHED

Reflections on the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel

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with Contributing Author Eunmi Kim

Anointed and Established: Reflections on the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel

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The Introduction draws on the introductory notes of Dr. Thomas L. Constable, used with gratitude for his lay-accessible scholarship on the text of Scripture.

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Reading, Reflecting, Together

This book was not written to be read in a single sitting. It was written to be read one day at a time, the way it was first written—a chapter at a time, over the course of several weeks, alongside an open Bible rather than in place of one. The believers in Berea were commended not simply for their eagerness to hear the Word but for their habit of examining the Scriptures every day to see whether what they had been taught was true (Acts 17:11). That daily habit, sustained over years rather than compressed into a season, is the entire aim of this book and of the Quiet Time practice that produced it.

To help establish that rhythm, we have included, as an appendix at the back of this book, the same daily Bible reading plan we have used at dailyqt.org for well over a decade. It walks through the whole of Scripture in a year, a few chapters at a time, and it does not need to be started in January; you are free to begin on whatever date suits you and simply follow the sequence from there. Each of the sixteen chapters in this book lines up with exactly one day on that plan, from 1 Samuel 1–3 on the first day to 2 Samuel 22–24 on the sixteenth, so that this book and your own Bible can move through 1 and 2 Samuel together, side by side, one day at a time.

Whether you are reading on your own or working through this book with a group like one of our own Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church in Dallas, we would suggest the following simple rhythm for each day, or for each session if you are meeting weekly as a group:

- 1. Begin and end in prayer.** Ask God, before you open either Bible or book, to teach you something true about Himself that day, and thank Him, when you close both, for whatever He has shown you—even if it is smaller or slower than you expected.
- 2. Read the assigned Scripture.** Using the reading plan in the appendix, read the day's passage directly from your own Bible before turning to our reflections on it. There is no substitute for reading the text itself first, in whatever translation you trust, and letting it raise its own questions before we offer our own.
- 3. Read the corresponding chapter in this book.** Each chapter walks through that day's passage in the order Scripture presents it, drawing out its major movements and, where it seemed useful, the historical

background behind them. Treat it as a conversation about the text you just read, not a replacement for it.

- 4. Answer the discussion questions.** Every chapter closes with three or four questions sized to fill a forty-five- to sixty-minute group discussion, though they work just as well as slower journaling prompts for a reader working through the book alone. Some ask you to notice something in the text; most ask you to notice something in yourself.

If you are part of a group, we would encourage you to read both the day's Scripture and the corresponding chapter individually during the week, and then use your time together for the fourth step: praying together and working through the discussion questions as a group. This was, after all, how the material in this book first took shape—not in a study or a library, but in a room full of ordinary readers asking each other what a passage meant and why it mattered, week after week, for years. We hope it will do the same for you.

INTRODUCTION

First and Second Samuel were originally a single book in the Hebrew manuscripts — one continuous account of roughly a hundred and fifty years, from Samuel’s conception to the close of David’s reign, later divided by the Greek translators of the Septuagint into two scrolls simply because the whole would not fit comfortably on one. We have kept them divided here for the same practical reason, but we have kept them together in a single volume because they were written, and were always meant to be read, as one story.

That story turns on a single pivotal transition: Israel’s move from being led by judges to being ruled by kings. The first half of the story — 1 Samuel — shows us God’s reign continuing undiminished even when His own people reject Him as King and demand one “like the nations” instead. God does not abandon His throne; He simply adapts how He governs, raising up prophets alongside kings, and moving His purposes forward through the loyal and the rebellious alike, Samuel and Saul and David together. The second half — 2 Samuel — shows us what it looks like when a man who is genuinely devoted to God, whatever his failures, is finally given the throne he was anointed for decades earlier. Where 1 Samuel teaches that God’s ultimate purposes do not depend on anyone’s response to Him, 2 Samuel teaches the other half of that same truth: that our own attitude toward God shapes, in very real and personal ways, what our lives become. Saul’s story is what happens when a man treats God as someone else’s God — invoked in public, obeyed only when convenient, blamed rather than trusted when circumstances turn hard. David’s story, failures and all, is what happens when a man keeps returning to God as unmistakably his own — “my God,” not merely “the LORD your God” — even through adultery, deception, exile, and a household torn apart by his own sin’s consequences.

Together, these two books ask every reader the same question in two different registers. 1 Samuel asks it by showing us a king who never really answers it. 2 Samuel asks it by showing us a king who does, however imperfectly: whose God is He to you? We have organized this volume in two parts, one for each book, each with its own introduction drawing on our own years of daily meditation on this text — but we offer them here as a single continuous reflection on a single continuous story, the making and the reign of the man after God’s own heart.

PART ONE

Anointed

Introduction

Both Judges and Ruth set the stage for the two books of Samuel, which were originally one book in the Hebrew manuscripts. Judges presented the history of Israel in the Promised Land, where the nation spiraled downward through an endless cycle of sin, punishment, and deliverance. Two expressions recur throughout that book: “everyone did what was right in their own eyes” and “there was no king in Israel.” Together they capture the same diagnosis — Israel was a people following no moral authority but its own. Ruth, by contrast, offered a glimmer of hope in that darkness: the quiet faithfulness of Ruth and Boaz, through whom the line of David would come.

1 Samuel picks up that thread. Samuel, Saul, and David are its three central figures, and two sets of contrasts run through the narrative. The faithful, discerning Samuel stands as a foil against the disobedient, foolish sons of Eli. The godly, humble David, whom God chooses to be king, stands as a foil against the disobedient, proud Saul, whom God rejects. In this sense, 1 Samuel chronicles Israel’s growth as a nation — or rather its impatience to grow up too fast. As children naively clamor for things before the proper time, Israel clamors for a king before the proper time. God gives them what they ask for in Saul, and Israel discovers that simply having a leader does not make a strong or righteous nation. Saul’s disobedience soon mirrors the same incomplete obedience that characterized Israel throughout Judges — most vividly when he fails to fully destroy the Amalekites, just as an earlier generation had failed to fully drive out the peoples of Canaan. Israel, and its king with it, begins spiraling toward the same fate depicted in Judges.

But as Ruth was the glimmer of hope in Judges, David — “a man after God’s own heart” — is the glimmer of hope in 1 Samuel. His story, which fills the second half of the book, reads like an extended argument against conventional wisdom. He is and does nothing that is expected. He does not look like a king; he is young, small, and ruddy in appearance, so unremarkable that even Samuel does not initially recognize him as the one God has chosen. He does not fight like a king; he cites his experience as a shepherd rather than a soldier, then fights the giant of Gath with nothing but a sling. He does not eagerly seize the privileges of a king; when King Saul dangles marriage into the royal family in front of him, David only reluctantly accepts, after a task meant to discourage him rather than reward him. And he does not take the fast track to the throne: twice given the perfect opportunity to kill the man hunting him, he refuses. But the deepest lesson of 1 Samuel is not simply that David does the unexpected. It is that David is consumed with honoring and obeying the LORD, and that the LORD is the one constantly watching over him through the long, hard years leading up to his coronation. David’s greatness, in the end, is measured not by the greatness of his power but by the depth of his devotion to the LORD.

This story sits within the larger sweep of Israel’s history. First and Second Samuel were originally a single book, covering roughly a hundred and fifty years — from Samuel’s conception to the end of David’s reign — during which Israel made the pivotal transition from rule by judges to rule by kings. The turning point comes early, in the people’s demand in chapter 8: “appoint us a king to judge us like all the nations.” God had brought Israel into being to be unlike the nations, a people demonstrating to the watching world what it looks like to live under the gracious sovereignty of God Himself as King. Samuel warns them of what an earthly king will cost them, but the deeper problem is not the request itself — it is what lies beneath it. As God tells Samuel, “they have rejected Me from being King over them.” The people’s desire for a king like the other nations was, at its root, a rejection of the LORD’s own reign.

What is remarkable is how God responds to that rejection — not by abandoning His people, but by adapting the shape of His rule to their circumstances. He does not relinquish His throne; He simply governs differently, raising up the office of prophet alongside the newly established office of king. From Samuel onward, God’s messages to His people would not come primarily through the king but through the prophet standing over the king, holding him accountable to God’s word. Samuel becomes the first of that long prophetic line — the one who anoints both the king Israel wanted and the king God intended. In this way, even Israel’s sin becomes the occasion for a fuller unfolding of how God governs His people. The people rejected Yahweh, but they could not dethrone Him.

Saul's story is one of the most quietly tragic in all of Scripture, in part because so many readers recognize something of themselves in him. He begins with real gifts — striking in appearance, courageous in battle, and, at least at first, genuinely humble; when the moment arrives for the people to celebrate his coronation by putting his critics to death, Saul refuses, insisting that credit for the day's victory belongs to the LORD, not to himself. But that humility does not last. Having refused to fully submit his authority to God, Saul grows to fear the opinions of people more than he fears God. He offers sacrifices he has no right to offer, disobeys a direct command regarding the Amalekites, and ultimately seeks guidance from a medium after God has stopped answering him by every legitimate means. Instead of subduing Israel's enemies, he is undone by his own suspicion, jealousy, and pride — a king given every advantage who nonetheless ends his life in near ruin, and Israel with him.

David's story unfolds in glorious contrast. God prepares him for the throne through three very different seasons: as a shepherd in the fields, as a courtier in Saul's palace, and as a fugitive in the wilderness. Each season forms something in him he will need later — the shepherd's protective instinct, the courtier's understanding of how nations and rulers operate, and the fugitive's hard-won dependence on God alone. Through it all, David is not sinless. He lies to a priest with tragic consequences. He deceives a foreign king to save his own life. He nearly slaughters an entire household in anger before a wise woman intervenes. But running beneath even his failures is a heart consistently oriented toward the LORD — a heart that refuses to lift a hand against “the LORD's anointed” even when that same anointed king is trying to kill him, a heart that waits fifteen long years for God to act rather than seizing the throne by force.

Taken together, these two lives teach the same lesson from opposite directions. Samuel was obedient, was God's instrument, and left behind a legacy of integrity. Saul was disobedient, was still God's instrument in the unfolding of His plan, and experienced ruin. David was obedient, was God's instrument, and experienced deliverance. None of the three determined whether God's purposes would ultimately succeed — God's reign moves forward regardless, using the loyal and the rebellious alike to accomplish what He has planned. But each man's own attitude toward God determined the shape of his own life and legacy. That is the double message of 1 Samuel: God will accomplish His purposes regardless of how people respond to Him. But how people respond to Him determines their own blessing or ruin.

As you read through these reflections, drawn from years of daily meditation on this book, we invite you to ask the same question this book keeps asking its readers: whose God is He to you? Is He, like He was for Saul, someone else's God — a matter of religious form, invoked when convenient

and forgotten when inconvenient? Or is He, like He was for David, truly *my* God — the one whose honor matters more than our own, whose voice we return to again and again, whose delay we are willing to wait out because we trust His timing more than our own? That is the question 1 Samuel puts before every reader, and it is the question we hope these chapters will help you sit with.

Chapter One

1 Samuel 1–3

The book opens not with a king or a battle but with a barren woman's tears. Hannah, one of two wives of a man named Elkanah, is provoked year after year by her rival, who has children and never lets Hannah forget that she does not. Hannah's answer to that provocation is neither bitterness nor resignation but prayer — the kind so raw and wordless that the priest Eli mistakes her for drunk. She vows that if God gives her a son, she will give him back: he will belong to the LORD all the days of his life. God answers, and Samuel is born.

What Hannah does next is easy to read past too quickly. She does not go up to the tabernacle with the rest of the family until the child is weaned — until, by the custom of the time, he is around two years old. For two years, Samuel is hers, and hers alone; she nurses him, teaches him to walk, watches him become a person. And then she keeps her vow. She hands her only child over to Eli and to a lifetime of service in the tabernacle, and by every indication, she does not go back on it. We have no record of Hannah changing her mind at the tabernacle door.

How hard that must have been. Yet Hannah's song in chapter two makes clear this was no grim, gritted-teeth sacrifice. It is a song of exultation — “my heart rejoices in the LORD” — a song about God's power to reverse fortunes, to bring low and to lift up, sung by a woman doing exactly that in her own household by giving up the son she had prayed for. And Scripture rewards her sacrifice, though not in the way we might expect: God goes on to give her more children, and Samuel himself “grew before the LORD,” “growing in stature and in favor both with the LORD and with men.” By the end of chapter three, God has established him as a true prophet, so that “the LORD was with Samuel and let none of his words fail.” A mother's greatest joy, this story suggests, is not a child's worldly success but a child known for faithfulness to God — and it began with a woman willing to let her son go so that he could belong, fully, to the LORD.

That question of priority becomes even sharper once the narrative turns to Eli's own household. Eli is a good and, in his own way, sincere man. He blesses Hannah. He raises Samuel with evident care. But when it comes to his own sons, Hophni and Phinehas, something has gone badly wrong. These two men, serving as priests, are extorting the very sacrifices the people bring to worship God and sleeping with the women who serve at the entrance of the tent of meeting. Eli is aware of it. He even confronts them — “Why do you keep sinning? You must stop, my sons!” But the confrontation goes

nowhere, because a verbal rebuke, offered late, is not the same thing as discipline. His sons do not listen, “for the LORD was already planning to put them to death.” And God’s own verdict on the matter is devastating: “you and your sons ... have become fat from the best offerings of my people Israel.” Eli, the text says, gave his sons greater honor than he gave the LORD.

That diagnosis deserves to sit with us longer than it usually does. It is not that Eli loved his sons too much — Scripture nowhere condemns parental love. It is that his love for them had, without his apparently realizing it, begun to compete with his devotion to God, and when the two came into conflict, love for his sons won. This is not a uniquely Old Testament danger. Jesus said much the same thing to His disciples: “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” Paul, writing about undivided devotion to the Lord, observed that marriage and children each bring a real, and legitimate, division of interest and attention — which means that those of us with spouses and children have to work all the harder to keep the Lord as our first love, not our love once other loves are satisfied.

It is worth asking ourselves the same question Eli’s story puts to us. Do we, without meaning to, honor our children — their achievements, their comfort, their approval of us — more than we honor God? When academic success, athletic performance, or a busy schedule of enrichment activities crowds out worship and the steady study of God’s Word, whom are we actually prioritizing? None of this is a case against loving our children well. It is a case for making sure that love stays in its proper place, subordinate to our love for the One who gave them to us in the first place — the same one, ultimately, to whom Hannah gave her son back.

Against this backdrop of Eli’s failure, the boy Samuel’s growth becomes all the more striking, and it climaxes in the strange, quiet scene of chapter three: a nighttime voice calling his name, three times mistaken for Eli’s, until Eli finally understands what is happening and tells the boy how to respond. The text is careful to tell us that “the word of the LORD was rare” in those days, “there were not many visions” — a phrase that could describe entire seasons of our own spiritual lives, when God feels distant and unresponsive. And more strikingly still, we are told that Samuel “did not yet know the LORD,” even though he had spent nearly his whole life so far in the tabernacle. Familiarity with sacred space is not the same thing as knowing God; you can spend your life inside the walls of religious practice and still be waiting for God’s word to become personally, directly yours. That is what happens to Samuel this night. God speaks, and what He says is a hard word of judgment against the very household that has raised him — a fitting first assignment for the boy who will spend the rest of his life speaking hard truths to power.

Samuel becomes, in a real sense, the first of Israel's prophets in the fullest sense of that office — not the first person through whom God ever spoke (Moses and Abraham held that role before him), but the first in what will become an unbroken line of prophetic mediators standing alongside, and often against, Israel's kings. From this point forward in Israel's story, when God has something to say to His people, He will not ordinarily say it through the king. He will say it through the prophet. That distinction matters more than it might seem: the king's job will be to govern; the prophet's job will be to speak for God. And it is Samuel, the son given back to the LORD by a praying mother, who opens that new chapter in how God leads His people.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Hannah gave up the son she had prayed years for as soon as he was weaned, and Scripture gives no indication she ever wavered on that vow. What is something God has asked you to release fully into His hands rather than hold onto “just in case”?
2. Eli loved his sons but gave them greater honor than he gave God, and a late, weak rebuke could not undo years of unaddressed sin. Where in your own life might love for someone or something be quietly competing with — and beginning to outweigh — your devotion to God?
3. Samuel had grown up inside the tabernacle his whole life yet “did not yet know the LORD” until God spoke to him directly. What is the difference between familiarity with religious practice and actually knowing God, and how do you keep pursuing the latter rather than settling for the former?
4. God's word was “rare” in Eli's day, yet He was still quietly at work preparing Samuel to speak into that silence. When you feel that God has been distant or silent in a season of your life, how does Samuel's story shape how you wait?

Chapter Two

1 Samuel 4–8

Chapters four through eight tell one continuous, ironic story about the difference between a sacred object and a sanctified heart — and Israel learns the lesson the hard way, twice, before it finally sticks.

It begins with a battle Israel loses to the Philistines. The elders' solution is to send for the ark of the covenant, reasoning that if God's own throne is present on the battlefield, victory must follow. It is treated less like the meeting place of a holy God and more like a talisman — bring the box, and God is obligated to show up on our side. The plan fails catastrophically. Israel loses thirty thousand men, Eli's two sons die exactly as Samuel had prophesied, the ark itself is captured, and when the news reaches Eli, the shock kills him too. The ark spends the next several chapters as a kind of unwelcome guest among the Philistines, toppling their idol Dagon and afflicting their cities with plague, until they finally send it back to Israel just to be rid of it — accompanied, notably, by pagan priests advising them not to harden their hearts “as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did,” because they, at least, remembered what happened the last time someone resisted this God. There is something almost embarrassing in that detail: the Philistines seem to recall Israel's own history of deliverance better than Israel does.

Then comes the turn. Chapter seven finds the ark back in Israelite territory, but sitting quietly in someone's house for twenty years — and in that same chapter, when Israel finally repents, puts away its foreign gods, and gathers to seek the LORD at Mizpah, God gives them a resounding victory over the very same Philistines who had crushed them earlier. The difference was not the ark's location. The Israelites had it with them in battle and lost; they had it sitting in someone's house, out of sight, and won. What changed in between was not geography but the heart of the nation — genuine repentance, confession, and a return to exclusive worship of the LORD. An object, however sacred, does not draw a person closer to God. A repentant heart does.

That distinction matters for us because we are prone to the same confusion the Israelites fell into at Aphek. We can revere the trappings of faith — a Bible on the shelf, a cross on the wall, attendance at church, the rituals of religious observance — while quietly neglecting the God those things are meant to point us toward. This is worth examining honestly in our own devotional practices, including something as ordinary as fasting. Isaiah's later rebuke of Israel's fasting captures the same problem in a different form: people bowing their heads like reeds, going through the motions of self-

denial, and calling it worship, while ignoring the kind of fasting God actually delights in — one joined to justice, generosity, and a genuinely humbled heart. Whatever spiritual discipline we take up, whether fasting, prayer, or any other practice, the question worth asking is the same one Israel eventually had to face at Mizpah: are we simply performing the form, or is our heart actually turning back to God?

The final movement of this section brings us to the request that will define the rest of the book. Samuel has grown old. His own sons, like Eli's before them, prove unworthy — they take bribes and pervert justice — and the elders of Israel come to Samuel with a request: “appoint us a king to judge us like all the nations.” Samuel takes the request personally, and is understandably hurt. But God tells him something remarkable: “it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.” The people's dissatisfaction with Samuel's sons is real, but it is not actually the point. The deeper issue is a desire to be like every other nation instead of the one nation on earth uniquely governed by God Himself.

Samuel does not simply grant the request. He warns them, at length and in painstaking detail, exactly what a king “like the nations” will cost them — their sons taken for war, their daughters taken for service, their fields and flocks and harvests taxed away, until, Samuel says, “you yourselves will become his slaves.” It is one of the most sobering pieces of political prophecy in Scripture, and the people hear every word of it and ask for a king anyway.

What stands out, reading Samuel's own farewell address later in chapter twelve, is the contrast he draws between himself and the king the people are demanding. “Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed?” Samuel had led Israel faithfully for decades, without extracting from the people what he warns a king will extract from them, and yet the people preferred an earthly king over a faithful judge under God's direct rule. There is a lesson here about the strange logic of unbelief: it is not that people always reject something worse for something better, or even something better for something worse in some obvious sense — sometimes they reject a good and quiet faithfulness for the appearance of power and glamour, not realizing what that trade will actually cost them.

And yet — this is the turn that makes 1 Samuel's opening chapters so theologically remarkable — God does not simply abandon His people to the consequences of their request out of anger. He grants it. He adapts the shape of His rule rather than withdrawing it altogether. The reign of God over Israel does not end with the establishment of the monarchy; it continues, now expressed through kings who are meant to govern under God rather than in His place, and through prophets who will hold those kings accountable to God's word. Even Israel's sin becomes, in God's hands, the occasion for a

fuller unfolding of how He intends to lead His people. That is not a reason to sin more freely — Samuel’s warning of consequences is real and will be fulfilled almost immediately in Saul’s story — but it is a reminder that no request of ours, however wrongly motivated, can push God off His throne. He may grant what we ask for, even to our cost, without ever surrendering His reign over us.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Israel treated the ark as though its mere presence guaranteed victory, then discovered that what actually changed their fortunes was repentance, not proximity to a sacred object. What sacred routines or symbols in your own life might you be relying on in place of an actual, repentant heart before God?
2. God told Samuel that Israel’s rejection was ultimately aimed at Him, not at Samuel. Have you ever taken personally a rejection that was, underneath, really a rejection of God? How did — or how might — that reframe your response?
3. Samuel warned Israel in detail what a king “like the nations” would cost them, and they asked for one anyway. What is something you have wanted badly enough to ignore a clear warning about its cost?
4. Even after Israel’s request was rooted in rejecting Him, God did not abandon His reign over them — He adapted how He would lead them. Where have you seen God remain sovereign and present even in the middle of consequences you brought on yourself?

Chapter Three

1 Samuel 9–12

If we only remember Saul for how his story ends, it is worth slowing down here, at the beginning, to see him as Israel first saw him — because God did not give His rejected, grumbling people a mediocre king out of spite. He gave them, in every visible respect, a genuinely great one.

Saul comes from Israel's smallest tribe and, by his own description, its most insignificant clan. And yet his father is described as “a mighty man of valor,” and Saul himself stands out physically, “taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward.” Samuel anoints him privately, then confirms the choice publicly through a series of signs, all of which come true exactly as predicted, climaxing in the Spirit of God coming powerfully upon Saul. This is not incidental detail. The real point of the account is not Saul's unlikely tribal origin or his impressive stature — it is that God had chosen him, and confirmed that choice with unmistakable signs, culminating in His own presence going with Saul to lead and empower him.

Saul's early character matches the promise. When Israel faces a real military crisis — the Ammonite king Nahash threatening to gouge out the right eye of every man in a besieged city — Saul responds with decisive, Spirit-empowered leadership and delivers a resounding victory. In the aftermath, the people want to put to death everyone who had earlier despised Saul's kingship. Saul refuses: “Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has accomplished salvation in Israel.” He could have used that moment for personal vindication and sweet revenge. Instead, he declines to take credit at all — the glory belongs entirely to God, not to the new king. It is hard to overstate how promising this beginning is. If we had been standing among the people that day, watching this humble, God-honoring, physically imposing king refuse to settle old scores in the flush of his first great victory, our hearts would likely have swelled with the same hope theirs did.

It is worth pausing on that, because it complicates a temptation we sometimes fall into with biblical villains — imagining that people like Saul were obviously, visibly doomed from the outset, so that their fall feels almost inevitable in hindsight. Saul's story resists that reading. Whatever pride and disobedience would characterize his later reign were his own doing, chosen freely, not written into him from the start. Scripture elsewhere teaches that what ultimately matters is not how someone begins but how they end (Ezekiel makes this point explicitly, warning that neither present righteousness nor present wickedness guarantees a person's future). Saul

begins as a genuinely promising king. What happens to him afterward is a warning precisely because it did not have to happen.

One detail from this section deserves particular attention, both for what it says about Saul and for what it says to us. As Saul sets out on the road that will lead to his anointing, Samuel tells him: “do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.” It is a remarkably simple instruction — not a formula for discerning some hidden, specific plan, but an assurance that God’s presence will be with Saul as he does the ordinary next thing in front of him. This is worth sitting with, because many of us spend a great deal of anxious energy trying to discover God’s secret, specific will for our lives, as though He were hiding it from us and we needed to unlock it through the right combination of prayer, fasting, and searching. But Scripture nowhere instructs believers to go searching for a hidden will. It calls us, again and again, to be faithful with what we already know — the revealed will of God in His Word, which exists precisely so that we might be “thoroughly equipped for every good work.” God is not only with us the way He was with Saul at the start of his story; through His Spirit, He is now in us. The anxious search for a secret plan is often, ironically, a way of trying to get ahead of God rather than simply obeying Him in what He has already made plain. Saul, tragically, would eventually do exactly that — trade faithfulness for expediency, and ultimately be rejected from the service he had been so signally called to.

The final scene of this section belongs to Samuel, not Saul, and it is one of the most moving moments in the entire book. As his official role as judge comes to its formal end, Samuel calls the nation to account, offering himself as a witness to his own integrity: “Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe?” No one can answer him with an accusation. And then, rather than stepping away from a people who have just rejected the very form of leadership he represented, Samuel makes a quiet, extraordinary vow: “far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you.” He commits himself to keep interceding for Israel — and, though it is not yet obvious to him, for King Saul as well — for as long as it remains right to do so. He will, in fact, keep praying for Saul even after the LORD rejects him, until God Himself eventually tells Samuel to stop (a boundary worth noticing: Samuel’s faithfulness to pray for someone did not mean pretending forever that nothing was wrong).

There is a model here worth imitating, and it cuts against one of our most natural impulses. When people leave a community we belong to — a church, a fellowship, an organization we once served alongside — the easy response is to write them off, to speak of them only as people who wronged us or the group, and to feel no further obligation toward them. Samuel’s

example suggests something harder and better: to acknowledge real wrong where it exists, without pretending otherwise, but to keep praying — not simply that God would let them off the hook, but that He would help them think and act rightly again, since there is no true forgiveness apart from repentance. And this cuts both ways. If we ourselves ever come to believe we must leave a group over some real and serious concern, the same principle should govern how we treat those we leave behind — continuing to pray for their good rather than simply moving on and thinking of them no further.

Samuel closes his farewell address the same way he opened his ministry: pointing people back to the LORD rather than to himself. “Only fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.” Whatever king now stands before them, Samuel’s final word is that the true King has not changed.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Saul begins his reign with real humility, refusing to take credit for Israel’s victory or exact revenge on his detractors. What has helped you stay humble in a season when things were going well for you — and what tends to erode that humility over time?
2. Samuel told Saul simply to “do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you,” rather than pointing him toward some hidden, specific plan to uncover. Where might you be anxiously searching for a secret will of God rather than faithfully obeying what He has already made plain in His Word?
3. Samuel vowed to keep praying for Israel — and eventually for Saul — even after being personally rejected by the very people he had faithfully served. Is there someone you’ve stopped praying for because of how they treated you or a group you were part of? What would it look like to pray for them the way Samuel prayed for Saul?

Chapter Four

1 Samuel 13–14

The unraveling of Saul begins with waiting — or rather, with his refusal to wait. Facing a Philistine army so vast it is compared to “the sand on the seashore,” and watching his own frightened troops scatter and hide, Saul waits the seven days Samuel had instructed him to wait before the prophet’s arrival. But Samuel does not come on schedule, the men keep deserting, and Saul, panicking, offers the burnt offering himself — a sacrifice that was not his to make. Samuel arrives moments later and delivers the verdict: because of this, Saul’s kingdom will not endure.

It is worth asking, with some sympathy, why Saul did what he did. His army was disintegrating in front of him. He had already seen, back in chapter seven, what happens when Israel offers sacrifice and cries out to God before a battle — the LORD had thundered against the Philistines and routed them. Perhaps Saul reasoned that the ritual itself was what had moved God’s hand that day, and that performing it again, regardless of who performed it or why, would produce the same result. But that earlier victory had not come from the mechanics of sacrifice; it had come from a repentant, dependent heart crying out to God, embodied that day in confession and fasting at Mizpah. Saul appears to have mistaken the outward form of worship for its substance — imagining that God delights in the ritual itself rather than in the heart offered through it. David would later put this exact truth into words in one of his own psalms: “You do not delight in sacrifice . . . My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, you, God, will not despise.” Saul had the mechanics right and the heart wrong, and it cost him everything.

What follows compounds the problem. In the heat of another battle, this one led largely by his son Jonathan’s remarkable faith and courage, Saul lays a reckless curse on his own troops: “Cursed be the man who eats food before evening, until I have avenged myself on my enemies.” Notice the possessive: not “our” enemies, not even God’s enemies, but “my” enemies. What had begun, in Saul’s earlier and better days, as a battle fought for the LORD’s honor has quietly become, in his own mind, a matter of personal vendetta. Jonathan, unaware of the oath, eats a bit of honey found along the way — and when the truth comes out, Saul is prepared to kill his own son for a technical violation of an oath Jonathan never knowingly broke, an oath God Himself seems to have had no part in honoring. Only the outcry of the people, who recognize that God had clearly worked salvation for Israel through Jonathan that very day, saves Jonathan’s life.

The contrast between father and son here is not incidental; it anticipates the contrast that will define much of the rest of the book, between Saul and David. Saul is quick to sacrifice those closest to him — his own son, and later his most loyal servant — the moment his own authority or reputation feels threatened. David, we will see, is remarkably slow to harm those who wrong him, even those who have tried repeatedly to kill him. Something has already begun to shift in Saul by this point: he is becoming a man more concerned with his own standing than with the LORD's, more troubled by an unanswered oath than by his own unconfessed disobedience regarding the earlier sacrifice. When God does not answer him about the battle, Saul does not consider that his own sin might be the reason. He looks instead for someone else to blame.

There is a pattern worth naming plainly here, because it is not confined to ancient kings. It is possible to invoke God's name, to frame our actions in spiritual language, and still be serving ourselves rather than Him. We can punish someone who has wronged us while telling ourselves and others that we are simply "seeing justice done." We can defend an institution's reputation while calling it a defense of "unity." The words we use to justify ourselves are not the same thing as the motives that actually drive us, and only sustained, honest attention to God's Word — not our own instincts, however sincerely felt — can keep us calibrated to the difference. Scripture describes believers as "the salt of the earth," and warns that salt can lose its saltiness — its capacity to discern right from wrong — and become useless. That loss of discernment does not usually happen all at once. It happens gradually, the way it happened to Saul: one small compromise, excused by a plausible-sounding reason, followed by another, until the pattern becomes the man's whole character.

Saul's own prayer near the end of this section is telling. When God does not answer him, Saul asks whether the fault lies with Jonathan's broken oath — never once entertaining the more obvious explanation, that his own earlier disobedience at Gilgal might be the reason heaven has gone silent. It is a small, human thing, and an uncomfortably familiar one: we are often far quicker to search for someone else's hidden sin than to examine our own plain disobedience. Samuel had already told Saul and the people exactly what faithfulness would look like and what its absence would cost: "If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him ... good! ... Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will perish." Saul had heard those words. He simply did not, in the moment of pressure, let them govern him.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Saul seems to have mistaken the outward form of sacrifice for the repentant heart that had made an earlier sacrifice effective. Where might you be relying on the right religious “form” — attending church, saying the right words in prayer — without the substance of an actually humbled heart behind it?
2. Saul’s oath revealed that a battle he once fought for God’s honor had quietly become, in his mind, a matter of personal vendetta (“my enemies”). Can you think of a cause or conflict in your own life that started as something you cared about for God’s sake but has since become more about your own pride or vindication?
3. When God did not answer him, Saul looked for someone else’s hidden fault rather than examining his own plain disobedience. When you sense distance from God, is your first instinct to search your own heart, or to look elsewhere for an explanation?

Chapter Five

1 Samuel 15–17

These three chapters give us a study in contrast almost too neat to be anything but deliberate: Saul, who gives the appearance of devotion to the LORD, and David, who is truly devoted to Him from the heart.

The contrast begins with a direct command. God instructs Saul, through Samuel, to destroy the Amalekites completely — “put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” — as judgment for how that nation had ambushed Israel generations earlier during the exodus from Egypt. Saul attacks the Amalekites, as ordered. But he spares their king, Agag, and keeps the best of the plundered animals alive, and even sets up a monument to himself at Carmel to commemorate the victory. When Samuel confronts him, Saul insists, astonishingly, that he **did** obey — the people, he explains, only kept the best animals in order to sacrifice them to the LORD. It is only when Samuel presses further that Saul finally admits, “I have sinned” — and even then, his very next words betray where his heart still is: “But please, at least honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel by coming back with me.” Confronted with his own sin, Saul’s chief concern is not God’s honor but his own public standing.

Samuel’s response to all of this has become one of Scripture’s most quoted lines, and it deserves to be heard in full: “Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.” Saul’s excuses — I destroyed most of them; what we kept back, we meant to give to God anyway — are the kind of partial compliance we are all tempted to offer God, dressed up as something more devout than it actually is. But Samuel makes clear that partial obedience is not partial credit. It is simply disobedience, and good intentions do not change that verdict. “Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king.”

Set against this is the account of David’s anointing, and the reason for it, in one of the most theologically important verses in the entire book. Samuel comes to Jesse’s house expecting God’s choice to be obvious. He looks at Eliab, the eldest, an impressive figure, and assumes this must be the one. God corrects him immediately: “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” Seven of Jesse’s sons pass before Samuel; none is the one. It is David

— the youngest, not even thought worth summoning from the fields for the occasion — whom God has chosen.

This is not an isolated theme. It is the interpretive key to nearly everything that follows in David's story, and it comes to its fullest expression in the account of Goliath. David, sent by his father on an errand to deliver food to his brothers at the battle line, hears the Philistine giant taunting the armies of the living God and is stunned that no one has answered him. His brothers dismiss him; Saul, when David volunteers, points out — reasonably enough, by any human calculation — that David is only a boy and Goliath a trained warrior. David's answer is not bravado about his own ability. It is entirely about whose battle this is: "You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of Heaven's Armies ... This is the LORD's battle, and He will give you to us." David does not defeat Goliath to prove himself. He defeats Goliath so "that the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel." The victory is God's; David is simply the instrument God chooses to use, and the fact that he is a boy with a sling rather than a seasoned warrior with armor only makes that point more visible, not less.

Perhaps the most striking window into the difference between these two men, though, comes not from their actions but from their language — specifically, from how each one refers to God. Watch Saul's own words when he tries to explain himself to Samuel: "sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD *your* God." Even in confession: "that I may worship the LORD *your* God." Not once in this entire exchange does Saul call the LORD "my God." Now set that against how David consistently speaks of God throughout the psalms attributed to him from this same period of his life: "Arise, LORD! Deliver me, *my* God." "Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God." "LORD my God, I take refuge in you." The pattern is not incidental. It suggests something about the actual state of each man's relationship with the LORD — one relating to God through Samuel, almost at a remove, as though faith were someone else's possession rather than his own; the other relating to God directly, personally, as a covenant partner rather than an intermediary's deity.

The same gap shows up again in how each man confesses. Saul's confession — "I have sinned ... but please honor me now before the elders" — is preoccupied, even in the moment of admitting wrong, with recovering his public reputation. Compare that with David's confession after his own great sin with Bathsheba, recorded in Psalm 51: "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight ... My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit." David's sin, by any external measure, is far worse than Saul's — adultery and, indirectly, murder, against Saul's incomplete obedience regarding livestock and a foreign king. And yet David's response to being

confronted goes immediately and entirely to God, without a single word about rescuing his own reputation before the elders of Israel. That is the difference between religious performance and a genuinely broken and contrite heart, and it is worth each of us asking honestly which posture more often describes our own confessions: are we sorry mainly because we got caught, or because we have genuinely grieved the LORD? Is God, to us, “the LORD” in some general, communal sense — the God that Christians worship, the God we pray to as part of religious observance — or is He truly **my** God, the one whose approval matters to us more than anyone else’s?

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Saul offered God partial obedience dressed up as devotion — sparing the best animals “to sacrifice to the LORD.” Where might you be tempted to call partial compliance with God’s Word obedience, simply because part of your motive sounds spiritual?
2. God told Samuel not to judge by outward appearance because “the LORD looks at the heart.” Where in your own life are you tempted to judge people — or to worry about how you yourself are judged — by outward measures God does not use?
3. Saul consistently referred to “the LORD your God,” while David’s prayers are full of “my God.” Would the way you typically speak and pray suggest a personal, direct relationship with God, or a more distant, secondhand one?
4. David faced Goliath convinced the battle belonged to the LORD, not to his own skill. What “giant” in your life right now might God be calling you to face less by your own strength and more by trusting that the outcome is His to determine?

Chapter Six

1 Samuel 18–20

Two relationships anchor this section of the book, and they could hardly be more different from each other: Saul's slow descent into jealousy of David, and Jonathan's costly, covenant friendship with the very man who stands to take his own inheritance.

The jealousy begins, almost comically, with a song. As the army returns from David's victory over Goliath, the women of Israel come out singing and dancing: "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands." It is a piece of celebratory hyperbole, not a political statement — but Saul does not hear it that way. "What's this? They credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. Next they'll be making him their king!" From that day, we are told, "Saul kept a jealous eye on David." What makes this especially striking is what had been true only a little earlier in the same chapter: "Saul loved David very much." Saul had loved David when David served him — soothing his torment with music, fighting his battles, bringing him honor. The moment David became, in Saul's mind, a potential rival rather than a useful servant, that love curdled into suspicion.

This is worth sitting with, because wrongful jealousy rarely announces itself as jealousy. It disguises itself as concern, as vigilance, as simply "keeping an eye" on a situation. But it is corrosive precisely because it pays no attention to the actual facts in front of it. David, by every measure in the text, is Saul's most loyal servant — faithfully carrying out every mission Saul gives him, refusing every opportunity to harm Saul even when Saul is actively hunting him. None of that loyalty registers with Saul once jealousy has taken hold. He sees only a threat. And that jealousy, once it takes root, does not stay contained; it spreads indiscriminately, eventually leading Saul to attempt the life of his own son Jonathan for defending David, and — in events that follow later in the book — to the massacre of an entire town of priests suspected of helping David. Wrongful jealousy, once it starts, rarely stops where we expect it to stop.

There is a deeper diagnosis available here than simply "Saul was an insecure man." Saul's whole error traces back to a failure to remember where his kingship came from in the first place. He did nothing to secure the throne for himself; God gave it to him, entirely apart from anything Saul had done to deserve it. Because he forgot that, he felt he had to personally guard and defend an authority that was never his to protect in the first place — as though it were his own achievement rather than a gift. Contrast this with David's own posture decades later, recorded in 2 Samuel, when his son

Absalom has usurped his throne and a man named Shimei curses him and hurls stones at him as he flees. David's officials want to kill Shimei on the spot for the insult. David's response: "Leave him alone; let him curse, for the LORD has told him to." Whatever authority David has, he treats as something God gave and God can take away — which means he has nothing to jealously defend. That posture, humbling as it is, is also freeing. If our position, our reputation, our sense of significance are all gifts rather than achievements, we do not need to fight to protect them the way Saul fought to protect his.

Set against Saul's jealousy is one of the most remarkable friendships in Scripture. Jonathan is Saul's own son and, by every ordinary expectation, heir to his throne. David, by contrast, is his most obvious rival for exactly that inheritance. And yet, we read, "Jonathan became one in spirit with David," and Jonathan takes off his own royal robe and gives it to David — a striking, symbolic act of relinquishing his own claim to the kingdom in favor of the man God has actually chosen. This is not a small gesture made lightly. It costs Jonathan something real: his future, his standing, arguably his own life, since Saul later throws a spear at his own son for defending his friend.

What makes this kind of friendship possible? The text gives us a clue in the phrase itself — "one in spirit." Not long before, we are told that "the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David" at his anointing. It seems that this same Spirit had, in some measure, taken hold of Jonathan as well, enabling him to love, in Jesus' later words, his neighbor as himself — even when that neighbor was, by every worldly calculation, his direct competitor. That kind of love is genuinely rare among us, and it is worth noticing why: it requires a level of personal sacrifice most of us are not naturally inclined to offer, even to the people closest to us. Jonathan's friendship with David did not cost him nothing. It cost him the throne. And he gave it gladly, because his security was rooted somewhere other than in being king.

There is something worth learning here for our own friendships and rivalries alike — the coworker whose success might have been ours, the sibling favored in ways we were not, the peer whose gifts outshine our own in some visible way. Saul's example shows what happens when we let unexamined jealousy calcify into suspicion and eventually hostility. Jonathan's example shows the alternative: a security rooted in something other than our own position, generous enough to celebrate — even actively enable — someone else's God-given calling, even at real personal cost.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Saul's love for David curdled into jealousy the moment David seemed to threaten his own position, even though nothing about David's loyalty

had actually changed. Has your affection for someone ever shifted once you began to see them as a rival rather than a friend or ally?

2. Saul forgot that his kingship was a gift from God, not something he had earned, and so he felt compelled to jealously guard it. What “position” in your own life — a role, a reputation, a relationship — do you find yourself anxiously protecting rather than holding open-handedly as a gift from God?
3. Jonathan gave up his own claim to the throne to support David, at real personal cost. What would it look like, practically, for you to actively support someone whose success might come at some cost to your own position or recognition?

Chapter Seven

1 Samuel 21–24

David is now a fugitive, and these chapters trace both the moral complexity of that season and one of the most sobering supporting characters in the entire book: a man named Doeg the Edomite.

Fleeing from Saul, David comes to the priest Ahimelech at Nob and lies about his circumstances, claiming to be on a secret royal mission, in order to obtain food and a weapon — Goliath's own sword, which had been kept there. Later, cornered again, he feigns madness before a Philistine king to escape with his life. Neither of these episodes shows David at his most admirable; the first, especially, sets in motion consequences far worse than David could have anticipated. Doeg, one of Saul's servants, happens to witness David's visit to Ahimelech and later reports it to Saul. When Saul orders his own guards to kill the priests of Nob for aiding David, his men — to their credit — refuse. Doeg does not refuse. He personally kills eighty-five priests that day, then puts the entire town of Nob to the sword: men, women, children, infants, and livestock. David, hearing what has happened, recognizes his own part in it: "I am responsible for the death of your whole family." It is one of the darker moments in his story, and Scripture does not soften it or explain it away.

What should we make of the fact that David — whose lie set this tragedy in motion — is preserved through the entire episode, while Ahimelech and an entire town of priests, whose only offense was innocently helping a man they believed was on the king's business, are slaughtered? There is no tidy answer offered in the text, and it would be dishonest to manufacture one. What the narrative does offer is a psalm, attributed to David and explicitly tied to this event, in which David does not excuse Doeg but names him plainly: a man who "loves evil rather than good," whose "tongue plots destruction." The psalm ends not with an explanation of why the innocent suffered and the guilty prospered, but with trust: "I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love." Biblical history is full of moments where the innocent suffer and the flawed are preserved, and Scripture does not always resolve the moral vertigo that produces. What it consistently offers instead is Paul's own later doxology on exactly this kind of mystery: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!" We are meant to trust God's sovereign purposes even, and especially, when we cannot fully account for the way they unfold.

Doeg's willingness to slaughter the innocent — and to do so, apparently, with Saul's tacit if not explicit endorsement — belongs to a larger and disturbing pattern that runs through this whole section: sincerity is not the same thing as being right. Saul, even after being twice rejected by God and knowing the Spirit has departed from him, still speaks as though God is on his side, invoking the LORD's name when he believes he has David cornered: "God has delivered him into my hands." He appears to genuinely believe this. He is genuinely, sincerely wrong. This is not the first time in Israel's story that sincerity and error have traveled together; the same disturbing confidence had appeared just before, in the closing, chaotic chapters of the book of Judges, where people did what was right in their own eyes and apparently believed themselves to be worshiping God even in the act of idolatry.

This ought to unsettle anyone who assumes that sincere religious feeling is a reliable guide to truth. There have been sincere religious leaders and movements throughout history who have confidently proclaimed things about God's specific will or timing — including, within living memory, a well-known figure who publicly set — and then, when it did not happen, reset — a specific date for Christ's return, and certain movements built around the claim of ongoing, direct prophetic revelation extending beyond what Scripture has already given. What makes such errors dangerous is not always dishonesty; it is often genuine sincerity, unmoored from a careful commitment to staying within what Scripture actually says. Jesus warned about exactly this kind of confident, sincere error in the Sermon on the Mount: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven ... Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, did we not prophesy in your name...?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you.'" The safeguard against this is not cynicism about sincerity but a settled commitment to test every claim, however confidently made, against Scripture itself — "not to go beyond what is written" — and to be diligently, personally in God's Word ourselves rather than simply trusting whatever a leader, however sincere, happens to tell us.

Against this backdrop of sincere error, David's own restraint in chapter twenty-four stands out with particular clarity. Hiding in a cave with his men, David finds Saul — the very man hunting him — alone and utterly vulnerable, having entered the same cave to relieve himself. David's men urge him to see this as providence handing him his enemy. Instead, David creeps forward and cuts off only a corner of Saul's robe — and even that small act troubles his conscience. "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lay my hand on him." This is genuinely remarkable restraint from a man who, by this point, has killed thousands in battle without evident hesitation. What makes Saul different, in David's eyes,

is not that Saul is a better or safer man — Saul has tried repeatedly to kill him and has just finished massacring an entire town of priests. What makes Saul different is that God, not David, anointed him, and God, not David, has the right to remove him. “May the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you.” David is willing to leave vengeance entirely in God’s hands rather than take the shortcut sitting right in front of him.

It would be a mistake, though, to read David’s restraint here as evidence that he is simply a purer man than everyone around him. The same chapters that show us his remarkable patience with Saul also show us his willingness to lie to a priest with tragic consequences and to feign madness to save his own skin. David is not being held up in this book as a moral ideal so much as a man whose heart, for all its real flaws, keeps returning to genuine trust in God rather than in his own cleverness or strength — which is, in the end, exactly the distinction this whole book keeps drawing between him and Saul.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. David’s small deception at Nob set off consequences he never intended, and Scripture does not resolve why the innocent priests died while David was preserved. How do you personally make peace with situations where you cannot see why the innocent suffer and the flawed are spared?
2. Saul invoked God’s name sincerely even while acting in direct disobedience to Him — a reminder that sincerity is not the same as being right. What is one belief or conviction you hold that you have actually tested against Scripture, rather than simply trusting because it feels sincerely true?
3. David refused to harm Saul because Saul was “the LORD’s anointed,” even though Saul had shown him nothing but hostility. Is there someone in your life you’re tempted to “settle the score” with yourself rather than trusting God to handle in His own time?

Chapter Eight

1 Samuel 25–27

At the center of this section stands one of Scripture’s more memorable minor characters: a wealthy man named Nabal, whose very name means “fool,” and who lives up to it in spectacular fashion.

David and his men have been protecting Nabal’s shepherds and flocks in the wilderness, at real cost to themselves, without asking anything in return. When David’s men request some provisions during a time of feasting, Nabal refuses with open contempt: “Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master.” Nabal is not entirely ignorant here — he clearly knows who David is and that David has broken with Saul. What he lacks is not information but discernment. He calculates that, with no formal contract obligating him to David, he can simply withhold what basic decency and gratitude would otherwise require, and treats the matter as a shrewd cost-saving decision. What he fails to reckon with is David’s anger, and the very real danger that anger now poses to his entire household.

David, for his part, does not respond well. He sets out with several hundred armed men, fully intending to kill every male in Nabal’s household by morning — a plan that, had it succeeded, would have made an ugly stain on David’s own record right alongside the massacre at Nob. What stops him is not his own restraint this time, but the wisdom of Nabal’s wife, Abigail, who — without her husband’s knowledge — intercepts David with provisions and a carefully worded appeal. She takes responsibility for calming David’s rage, urges him not to burden his conscience with needless bloodshed once he becomes king, and reminds him that vengeance belongs to the LORD, not to his own hand. David’s response makes clear how close he had come to a grave sin: “Praise be to the LORD ... who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands.”

It is worth noticing what Abigail actually discerned, because it went beyond simple political calculation. She recognized, correctly, that God was with David and not with Saul, and that David — despite currently being a fugitive with no formal claim to the throne — was nonetheless the LORD’s chosen king. That is spiritual discernment, not merely social shrewdness, and it is what allowed her to act decisively where her husband, and even Saul himself, failed to see clearly. This raises a question worth sitting with honestly: how do we handle the temptation to simply avoid taking a side, to

stay in some safe, uncommitted middle ground rather than discerning where God's hand is actually at work and acting on it? Nabal chose to ignore David's request altogether, treating detachment as safety. Saul chose to actively oppose what he knew, at some level, God had already decided. Both choices were foolish in their own way — one through willful blindness, the other through willful defiance. Abigail alone discerned rightly and acted, at real personal risk, on what she discerned.

There is also something instructive in how Abigail handles her own household afterward. She does not confront her drunk husband in the heat of the moment when she returns home; she waits until morning, until he is sober, to tell him everything that happened. It is a small detail, but a wise one — a reminder that timing matters as much as truth-telling does, and that difficult conversations rarely go well when the other party is not in a state to actually hear them. Nabal, told the full truth the next morning, has what appears to be a physical collapse — “his heart failed him and he became like a stone” — and dies ten days later when the LORD strikes him. Even here, David refrains from taking credit or vengeance into his own hands; the judgment, when it comes, comes from God, not from David's sword.

This section closes with a second cave, a second sleeping Saul, and a second chance for David to end his pursuer's life. This time David and his companion Abishai slip into Saul's camp at night while everyone sleeps, and Abishai — echoing the logic David's own men had used earlier — urges David to let him finish Saul off with a single spear thrust: “God has delivered your enemy into your hand.” David again refuses, for the same reason as before: “Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?” Instead, David takes Saul's spear and water jug as proof of how close he had come and how thoroughly he had chosen not to act, then calls out to Saul from a safe distance the next morning, prompting from Saul — however temporarily — an admission of his own folly: “I have played the fool and have committed a serious error.”

Two fools populate this section, in other words — Nabal, whose folly was refusing to choose a side at all, and Saul, whose folly was choosing the wrong side and pursuing it with everything he had. And standing between them, in sharp relief, is David: not sinless — his murderous intentions toward Nabal's household make that plain — but consistently, repeatedly, willing to let God settle what he could have settled himself by force. That posture, more than any particular virtue, is what marks him throughout this entire stretch of the book as a man whose heart, however imperfect, keeps returning to trust in the LORD rather than in his own hand.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Nabal treated David's request as a simple cost-benefit calculation rather than recognizing the real danger — and the real obligation — in front of him. Where might you be treating a relationship or situation as merely transactional when something deeper is actually being asked of you?
2. Abigail waited until her husband was sober before confronting him with the truth, rather than raising it in the heat of the moment. Is there a difficult conversation you've been putting off — or one you've handled poorly by raising it at the wrong time?
3. David came within moments, twice, of taking justice into his own hands rather than trusting God's timing — and both times, someone or something intervened before he acted. What has helped you resist taking matters into your own hands when you felt you had every right to?

Chapter Nine

1 Samuel 28–31

The book that began with a barren woman’s prayer ends with a desperate king’s séance — and the distance between those two scenes measures, as well as anything could, the distance Saul has traveled from where his story began.

Facing another Philistine army and unable to get any answer from God — “the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets” — Saul does something the text takes pains to note he knew better than to do. Israel’s own law was unambiguous: mediums and spiritists were to be put away from the land, on pain of death, and Saul himself, we are told, had once enforced exactly that command. He is not acting in ignorance. Desperate for any word at all, he disguises himself and goes to a medium at Endor, asking her to summon the now-dead Samuel. What follows is enigmatic — the text does not fully explain the mechanics of what happens — but the message that comes is unambiguous: Samuel’s word to Saul is the same rejection he delivered years earlier, now sharpened into a final sentence. Saul and his sons will die the next day.

What is most striking about this scene is not the occult means Saul resorts to, troubling as that is, but his response to the message once it comes. There is fear — Saul falls to the ground, overcome — but there is no repentance. Even at the very last hour, confronted directly with the certainty of his own death as judgment for a lifetime of accumulated disobedience, Saul does not turn back to God. He simply goes forward, the next day, into the battle that will kill him. It is worth comparing this to another king, generations later, who also turned to forbidden occult practices in his own desperation — King Manasseh, who consulted mediums and even sacrificed his own son, and who is remembered as one of the most wicked kings in Judah’s history. Yet when Manasseh was later humbled by conquest and imprisonment, he genuinely repented, and God restored him. The difference between Manasseh and Saul was not the severity of their sin — Manasseh’s, if anything, was worse. The difference was that Manasseh, in his affliction, finally turned back to God, while Saul, even facing certain death, never did. However far we may have wandered, however many warnings we may have ignored, this pairing suggests that the door back to God remains open right up until the end — but Saul’s story is also a sober reminder that a hardened heart can walk straight past that open door even when death is standing right in front of it.

David's chapters in this same section could not offer a starker contrast, and they begin at what looks, on the surface, like his lowest point yet. Returning to his camp at Ziklag, David and his men discover the settlement burned and their wives and children taken captive by Amalekite raiders. His own men, grief-stricken and enraged, speak of stoning him. This is David without any of his usual advantages — no army at his back that isn't turning on him, no ally like Abigail to intervene, nothing but total loss on every side. And it is here, at exactly this point, that we get one of the most quietly powerful lines in the whole book: "David found strength in the LORD his God." Not in his own resourcefulness. Not in a fortunate turn of events. In the LORD his God — that possessive again, the one Saul was never able to use — even, and especially, when every circumstance around him had collapsed.

That strength translates almost immediately into action: David inquires of the LORD, receives assurance of success, pursues the raiders, and recovers everything — his own family, his men's families, and considerable plunder besides. What follows is a small but telling episode about how David uses that victory. Some of his men, still bitter, want to deny a share of the recovered spoil to two hundred others who had been too exhausted to continue the pursuit and had stayed behind guarding the baggage. David overrules them decisively, establishing it as a lasting principle for Israel: "as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike." The men who wanted to withhold the spoil are called, in the text, "wicked and worthless" — a sharp judgment, because their real error was forgetting that the victory itself had come from God's hand, not their own effort, which meant no one among them actually had grounds to claim a superior share.

Meanwhile, in a separate and morally uncomfortable thread running through this same section, David has been living among the Philistines, serving under a king named Achish while systematically deceiving him — raiding actual enemy peoples but reporting to Achish that he had been attacking Israel's own territory, and leaving no survivors from his raids specifically so that no one could contradict his account. Achish, remarkably, comes to trust David completely, even naming him his personal bodyguard, entirely unaware of the deception underneath. There is a real irony worth sitting with here: Saul, who should have trusted David — whose loyalty toward him, despite everything, was genuine — could not bring himself to do so. Achish, who should not have trusted David at all, given what David was actually doing, trusted him completely. Trust, it turns out, does not always attach itself to the people who actually deserve it.

It would be easy, and would be a mistake, to read David's cleverness in this section as simple heroism. His pattern here — securing his own safety

and advancement through a string of calculated deceptions — bears an unmistakable resemblance to another flawed patriarch generations earlier: Jacob, whose entire rise also unfolded through a series of tricks, half-truths, and strategic deceptions, and who nonetheless became the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. In both cases, God’s providence was clearly, sovereignly at work carrying each man toward what He had planned for them — not because their methods were commendable, but because God’s purposes do not depend on the purity of the instruments He uses to accomplish them. We are often quick to extend grace to our biblical heroes that we would not extend to someone else behaving identically, simply because we already know how their stories end. The honest lesson is not that David’s deceptions were secretly fine because he was chosen. It is that David’s greatness, like Jacob’s before him, was never really a matter of his own righteousness. It was a matter of God’s grace working through a genuinely flawed man — which means our own confidence, and our own boasting, belongs in exactly the same place David’s ultimately did: not in ourselves, but in the LORD alone.

The book closes with Saul’s death on Mount Gilboa, exactly as Samuel had prophesied at Endor — Saul and his sons killed by the Philistines, the very disaster his own disobedience had set in motion years earlier finally arriving. It is a grim, unglorified death for a man who began his story so full of promise. And it leaves the reader, at the close of 1 Samuel, with David still not yet king — still, in fact, technically a Philistine vassal, his own hands still stained with real and serious moral compromise — and yet unmistakably a man whose heart, again and again, when everything else had been stripped away, found its strength in the LORD his God. That is not a tidy ending. It is, however, exactly the ending this book has been building toward from its opening chapter: not the triumph of a flawless man, but the quiet, persistent faithfulness of the LORD toward one who kept turning back to Him — even through failure, even through fear, even, at Ziklag, through total loss.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Saul felt genuine fear at Samuel’s final message but showed no repentance, while Manasseh, whose sin was arguably worse, repented and was restored. What do you think makes the difference between fear that leads to repentance and fear that simply leads to despair or resignation?
2. At his lowest point — having lost everything at Ziklag — David “found strength in the LORD his God” rather than in his own resourcefulness. What has helped you find strength in God specifically during a season when your own resources had run out?

3. David insisted that those who guarded the baggage share equally in the spoils with those who fought, because the victory had come from God rather than from anyone's personal effort. Where might you be tempted to claim greater credit — or a greater share of recognition — than is actually yours to claim?
4. David's rise, like Jacob's before him, unfolded through real moral compromise even as God's providence carried him toward what He had planned. How do you hold together the reality of God's sovereign purposes with the reality of our own flawed, sometimes dishonest, means of pursuing them?

Part One Conclusion

We began this part with a barren woman handing her only son back to God, and we end it with a rejected king face down before a medium's fire, having heard his own death sentence and having nothing left to say to God in response. Between those two scenes lies the whole argument of 1 Samuel, worked out across three lives: Samuel's, Saul's, and David's.

Each of these three men was given real opportunity to glorify God. Samuel, through his birth to a praying mother, his early calling, and his lifelong appointment as God's prophet, responded with obedience and loyalty from beginning to end — and God's messages were delivered, and God's work moved forward through him, and he left behind an unblemished legacy: "Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken?" No one could answer him. Saul, through his calling, his anointing, his friendship with Samuel, his popularity with the people, and his own considerable gifts, had every opportunity Samuel had, and more besides. He responded with disobedience and divided loyalty — outwardly religious, inwardly self-protective — and he failed as a king, and he died under the judgment of God he had spent years refusing to take seriously. David, through his calling, his anointing, and the long, hard preparation of his years as a fugitive, responded with obedience and loyalty despite real and serious moral failures along the way, and he became, imperfectly but genuinely, God's instrument of blessing to Israel.

The book's own theology will not let us reduce this to a simple morality tale, though, and that is worth sitting with directly. This is not ultimately a book about three men choosing their own destinies through sheer force of will. It is a book about a King who was rejected by His own people and who responded, not by abandoning His throne, but by adapting how He would govern — raising up prophets to speak His word when kings would not, using both the loyal and the rebellious alike to move His purposes forward.

Samuel's obedience, Saul's disobedience, and David's flawed but genuine devotion were all, in their different ways, woven into the same unstoppable pattern of God's reign moving toward its intended end. None of the three of them determined whether God's plan would succeed. All three of them determined, by their own responses to Him, what their own lives would ultimately mean.

That is the double truth this book leaves us with, and it is worth carrying forward into whatever season of life we are currently in. God will accomplish His purposes regardless of how we personally respond to Him — our obedience does not save His plans, and our failure does not derail them. But how we respond to His revealed will determines something that matters enormously to us, even if it does not determine God's ultimate victory: whether our own lives become, like Samuel's and David's, instruments of blessing, or whether they become, like Saul's, a slow, self-inflicted ruin dressed up in religious language the whole way down. Our attitudes and actions do not determine God's ultimate victory. They determine our own destiny within it — not, for those of us trusting in Christ, our eternal salvation, which rests entirely on His finished work rather than our performance, but the shape and fruitfulness of the one life each of us has been given to live for Him.

Perhaps the single question this book keeps returning to, in one form or another, is the one we raised at the very start: whose God is He to you? Saul spoke of “the LORD your God” even in his own confessions, as though faith belonged to someone else — to Samuel, to the nation, to religious observance in general — rather than to himself, personally, directly. David, for all his real and serious failures, kept coming back to “my God,” “my righteous God,” “my King and my God” — not because he was more naturally righteous than Saul, but because his relationship with the LORD was not, in the end, a matter of religious performance at all. It was a relationship, sustained through genuine highs and genuine lows, with a God he actually knew.

David's story is not finished at the close of 1 Samuel. He is not yet king; his hands are not yet clean; his own household troubles, his own greater sins, and his own long-promised throne all still lie ahead of him. What we have seen in this book is only the making of the man — the shepherd, the courtier, the fugitive — being formed, through every circumstance God allowed, into someone whose heart, when everything else was stripped away, instinctively turned toward the LORD rather than away from Him. That formation continues in the story still to come, as does the larger promise this book has been quietly building toward all along: that the LORD who adapted His reign once, from judges to king, was even then setting in motion something greater

still — a King and a kingdom that would, in the fullness of time, never be rejected, never fail, and never end.

PART TWO

Established

Introduction

1 Samuel ended with the death of Israel's first king — rejected by the LORD for his disobedience regarding the Amalekites, dead by his own hand rather than fall to the Philistines pursuing him. 2 Samuel begins, fittingly, with David finishing the task Saul left undone: destroying the very Amalekites who had just raided his own camp, before he is crowned king over Judah. The contrast the first book spent thirty-one chapters establishing is confirmed in the very first verses of the second.

But Saul's death does not end David's conflict with Saul's house. Abner, Saul's general, sets up Saul's surviving son Ish-bosheth as a rival king over the rest of Israel, and a long, grinding war follows between the two houses — one that David wins not primarily through military conquest but through patient waiting, as David steadily grows stronger and Ish-bosheth steadily weaker, until a falling-out between Ish-bosheth and his own general hands David the rest of the kingdom without a final battle at all. Then come two of the most memorable, and most theologically loaded, chapters in the whole book. In chapter six, David moves the ark of God to Jerusalem, but does so carelessly, without following the specific instructions Moses had given for how the ark was to be carried — and a man named Uzzah dies reaching out to steady it. David, we are told, “was afraid of the LORD” that day, in a way he apparently had not been before. Then, in chapter seven, in an almost startling reversal of what we might expect, David proposes to build God a permanent house — and God responds by promising, instead, to build David a house: a dynasty, an eternal throne, a line that will culminate, though David

could not have known the specifics, in the Messiah Himself. Theologians call this the Davidic Covenant, and it stands alongside God's covenant with Abraham and the New Covenant promised through Jeremiah as one of the three great unconditional, eternal promises of the Old Testament — the very covenant into which we, as Gentile believers grafted into God's family, have been welcomed as co-heirs.

For a long stretch after that, David's reign is a story of trust rewarded: honor given to Saul's crippled grandson Mephibosheth for Jonathan's sake, decisive military victories on every front, a king who continues to honor the LORD in everything. And then, in chapter eleven, David stumbles badly — adultery with Bathsheba, a pregnancy, and a cover-up that escalates into the murder of her husband Uriah. Nathan the prophet exposes it; God forgives it; but the consequences ripple outward with terrible force through the rest of the book. David's infant son by Bathsheba dies. One son, Amnon, rapes his half-sister Tamar and is killed for it by another son, Absalom. Absalom then rises up against his own father, drives him from Jerusalem, and is ultimately killed himself. David's household, once the picture of God's blessing, becomes the site of God's most painful discipline.

And yet — this is the thread that holds the whole book together — David's own devotion to the LORD never finally breaks under any of it. Even his desire to build God a house that was never asked of him, even his insistence, near the very end of the book, that he “will not offer to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing,” reflects the same heart God identified in him at the very start: a man after God's own heart. Every king who follows David in Israel's history will be measured against his example — and if the best king Israel ever had was still, in the end, a flawed man whose own household nearly destroyed him, then the throne of David would need, eventually, an occupant greater than David himself to sit on it forever. That, too, is part of what 2 Samuel is quietly preparing us to understand.

The theological argument of 2 Samuel is the necessary complement to 1 Samuel's argument, and the pairing is worth holding in mind as we read: a person's attitude toward God creates an opportunity for God, and God's attitude toward that person creates an opportunity for that person. We see this worked out concretely in David's own convictions, especially as he expresses them in his song of praise in chapter twenty-two — a song essentially identical to Psalm 18. David believed, first, that God was Israel's supreme ruler, and never presumed to take that place for himself. He believed, second, that God was consistently righteous in His dealings with people, which is why David confessed his sin rather than excusing it, the moment Nathan confronted him. He believed, third, that God was always merciful, and was willing to let God determine the shape of his punishment rather than trying to manage or minimize it himself. And he believed, fourth,

that God's will was always best — his own deepest desire was for God's will to be accomplished in his life and in Israel, whatever that cost him personally. Contrast every one of these with Saul, who elevated himself, made excuses rather than confessing, tried to control his own circumstances rather than trust God's mercy, and believed his own will was best. Because David held these convictions, even through devastating personal failure, God had something to work with — not because David earned it, but because his deepest orientation, whatever his worst moments, remained turned toward the LORD. That, more than any specific accomplishment, is what these coming chapters trace: a king being established, disciplined, humbled, and restored, by a God who does not measure people the way we measure each other. We look at external actions. He looks at the heart.

Chapter One

2 Samuel 1–3

News of Saul's death reaches David by way of a young Amalekite who assumes it will be welcome news, and even claims, falsely, that he was the one who finished Saul off — likely hoping for a reward from Israel's incoming king. He could not have misjudged David more badly. David's response is not celebration but grief, formal mourning, and a swift execution of the messenger, on the grounds that the man had, by his own boastful account, “destroyed the LORD's anointed.” It is worth pausing on this, because it is the same principle we watched David live out twice already in the wilderness, when he had Saul's own life in his hands and refused to take it. Even after Saul is dead, even receiving news that could only ever benefit him, David will not treat the killing of God's anointed king as anything worth celebrating — not even secondhand, not even from an enemy's hand rather than his own.

This is a pattern worth sitting with on its own terms, because it cuts against something in most of us. David had every earthly right, by that point, to be relieved and even glad at this news — Saul had hunted him for years, tried repeatedly to kill him, and stood as the only remaining obstacle between David and the throne God had promised him. David sacrifices the easy, natural response — quiet satisfaction, perhaps public celebration — for the sake of God's honor. He would rather grieve what should be grieved than seize an advantage that came to him through violence against God's anointed, regardless of how that violence served his own interests. Where do we, by contrast, quietly celebrate outcomes that benefit us even when we recognize, if we're honest, that the means by which they came about were not honorable? David's example suggests that our right to something, or our benefit from it, is not the same question as whether it honors God.

That same instinct governs how David handles the long, grinding conflict that follows. Saul's general Abner sets up Saul's surviving son Ish-bosheth as a rival king, and Scripture tells us plainly there is “a long war between the house of David and the house of Saul.” But notice how David wins it: not primarily by force, but by patient strength that simply outlasts a weakening rival, until Ish-bosheth's own foolish confrontation with Abner over a matter of personal pride costs him his general's loyalty — and, not long after, his kingdom and his life. Where Ish-bosheth's own insecurity and mismanagement accelerate his downfall, David's steady, humble strategy — mourning Abner's death rather than exploiting it, publicly disavowing any hand in it — wins him the trust of a nation still not fully certain it wants him as king. “Everything the king did pleased them,” the text tells us, and it is

worth noticing what that phrase implies: not flawless success, but a consistent, visible pattern of integrity that a watching nation could actually trust.

And yet this section closes with a sobering admission from David himself, one that complicates any picture of him as simply triumphant. When Joab murders Abner in an act of private vengeance for his own brother's death — a killing David publicly and vehemently condemns — David does not punish Joab for it. His explanation is remarkably candid: "I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too difficult for me." Being God's anointed, it turns out, did not make David immune to the real, tangled politics of holding power — powerful generals he could not simply discipline without risking his own fragile position, public opinion he had to carefully cultivate rather than command. This tension will not resolve here; it resurfaces again and again throughout David's reign, and it is not until his final words to Solomon, decades later, that David is finally able to ask that Joab's crimes be reckoned with at all.

There is an honest lesson in this for anyone who has ever occupied a position of real but limited authority — a manager who cannot simply fire the difficult, talented colleague everyone depends on; a parent negotiating with a strong-willed child; a leader in any organization who has learned that having a title does not automatically mean having the power to act on every conviction. David's response to this limitation is instructive: rather than forcing a confrontation he could not win, or quietly pretending the wrong did not matter, he named it publicly — mourned Abner, condemned the act, called Joab's family into account before God — while accepting that full justice would have to wait. That is not the same thing as compromise with evil. It is the difference between naming a wrong honestly and having the actual power, in a given moment, to fully redress it — and knowing which battles to fight now and which to entrust to God's timing instead.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. David refused to celebrate Saul's death even though it removed the last obstacle between him and the throne, because it had come through violence against God's anointed. Is there an outcome in your own life that benefited you, but that you recognize, on reflection, came about in a way you shouldn't actually celebrate?
2. David won the long war with Saul's house largely through patient, consistent integrity rather than through force — "everything the king did pleased them." What would it look like for you to build trust with people

around you the same patient way, rather than through a single decisive action?

3. David openly admitted he felt too weak, even as king, to bring Joab to justice for Abner's murder. Is there a wrong in your own life or workplace that you have had to name honestly without yet having the power or standing to fully address it? How did you handle that gap?

Chapter Two

2 Samuel 4–7

With Ish-bosheth's death, the last obstacle to a united kingdom falls away, and all Israel comes to David at Hebron to make him king over the whole nation. What follows is a rapid sequence of victories and milestones — the conquest of Jerusalem, decisive triumphs over the Philistines, and, in chapter six, the long-delayed return of the ark of God to its proper home in the new capital.

That homecoming, though, does not go as planned. David and his men transport the ark on a new cart, an arrangement that seems reasonable enough by ordinary standards, but directly disregards the specific instructions God had given through Moses for how the ark was to be carried. When the cart stumbles and a man named Uzzah reaches out to steady it, he is struck dead on the spot. The text tells us plainly that after this, “David was afraid of the LORD” — not merely troubled, but afraid, in a way the narrative suggests he had not quite reckoned with before. It is a jarring, uncomfortable episode, and Scripture does not soften it. God's holiness is not a matter of good intentions or sincere enthusiasm; it comes with actual, specific requirements, and disregarding those requirements — however well-meaning the disregard — carries real consequences. David eventually gets it right, on a second attempt, by following the prescribed method exactly, and the ark comes to Jerusalem amid extravagant, uninhibited celebration, David himself dancing before the LORD with such abandon that his own wife despises him for it. There is something worth noticing in that contrast: the same king who was struck with fear before God's holiness in chapter six is, only verses later, given over entirely to unrestrained joy in God's presence. Both reactions belong to genuine worship. Neither should be traded away for the sake of looking respectable.

Then comes chapter seven, and one of the most theologically significant reversals in all of Scripture. David, settled now in a palace of cedar, notices the discomfort of the ark still residing in a tent, and proposes, out of evident devotion, to build God a proper house. It is a generous impulse, and it says something good about David that it even occurred to him — he was not content merely to obey what had been commanded of him; he wanted to do more than that, out of love rather than obligation. But God's answer, through the prophet Nathan, inverts David's proposal entirely: instead of David building a house for God, God will build a house for David — not a building, but a dynasty, an eternal throne, a line of descendants that will culminate, though David could not have grasped the full scope of it, in the Messiah Himself. “Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever;

your throne shall be established forever.” This promise, unconditional and eternal, stands alongside God’s covenant with Abraham and the New Covenant later announced through Jeremiah as one of the three great pillars of Old Testament promise — the very covenant angels would later invoke to Mary, announcing that her son would sit “on the throne of his father David” and reign “forever.”

There is something worth sitting with in the shape of this exchange. David wanted to give God something. God’s response was to give David immeasurably more. That pattern — our modest offerings to God met with promises far exceeding anything we brought to the table — runs through the whole of Scripture, and it is worth remembering whenever we are tempted to think of our devotion to God primarily as a transaction, something we are owed a return on in proportion to what we’ve given. David offered a building. God gave him an everlasting kingdom.

It is worth pausing here, too, on a related question this section raises quietly but persistently: how do we discern whether we have actually heard from God, the way David so evidently did through Nathan? Scripture records real, unmistakable instances of God speaking directly and specifically to His people — no hedging, no ambiguity, the kind of clarity David enjoyed when he asked the LORD directly whether to go into battle and received a direct answer. That kind of experience can feel, by comparison, rare in our own lives, and it is worth being honest about why. Throughout history, individuals and movements have claimed the same kind of direct, ongoing revelation David received, often with considerable confidence and even considerable followings — and the safest posture toward any such claim, however sincerely made, is neither blanket dismissal nor uncritical acceptance, but careful testing against what Scripture has already, sufficiently revealed. We have both Testaments in full, given to equip us for every good work; nothing in Scripture suggests we should expect, or go searching for, some further “new thing” beyond what God has already accomplished and revealed in Christ and in His completed Word. Whatever we think we have heard from God is worth testing, patiently and humbly, against that standard before we act on it as though it carried the same authority David’s direct encounters with the LORD carried.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. David’s careless handling of the ark, however well-intentioned, still had real consequences — and his eventual correction (doing it exactly as God prescribed) restored both obedience and unrestrained joy. Where might good intentions be substituting, in your own devotional life, for actually doing things the way God has specified?

2. David wanted to build God a house; God responded by promising to build David one instead, far beyond anything David had offered. Where have you seen God meet a modest offering of devotion with a far greater gift than you expected in return?
3. How do you personally test a claim that someone — including yourself — has “heard from God,” against the fuller and sufficient revelation of Scripture?

Chapter Three

2 Samuel 8–12

David's kingdom, in the opening chapters of this section, is at the height of its strength — victory after victory over surrounding nations, a summary of triumphs in chapter eight, and then, in chapter nine, a gesture that reveals something important about the kind of king David actually is. He seeks out Mephibosheth, Jonathan's crippled son and Saul's grandson — the last remaining heir of the very house David had every political incentive to eliminate — not to destroy him but to restore him, giving him a permanent place at the king's own table for the rest of his life, purely “for Jonathan's sake.” In a world where a new dynasty's first order of business was often the quiet elimination of a previous dynasty's heirs, David's kindness to Mephibosheth is a small, deliberate embodiment of covenant loyalty — the same loyalty Jonathan had shown David decades earlier, now returned in full even to Jonathan's own vulnerable son.

Then comes chapter eleven, and the hinge on which the entire rest of the book turns: “at the time when kings go out to battle... David stayed at Jerusalem.” Instead of leading his army, as he ordinarily would, David remains home, and it is in that idle, unoccupied moment — rising late, wandering the palace roof — that he sees Bathsheba bathing and does not turn away. What follows compounds with each step: adultery, an unwanted pregnancy, a botched attempt to disguise it, and finally the calculated murder of her husband Uriah, accomplished by using Uriah's own commanding general as an unknowing accomplice. It is worth naming plainly what enabled this cascade: not a single overwhelming temptation but idle time — the absence of the ordinary discipline and occupation that would otherwise have kept David's attention fixed where it belonged. Unstructured time is not inherently sinful, but it does leave room for whatever is already latent in us to surface, and David's story is a sober reminder that even a man with David's record of devotion is not immune to what an empty hour, left unguarded, can become.

Nathan's confrontation in chapter twelve is a masterclass in how truth can reach a heart that might otherwise defend itself against a direct accusation. He tells David a story — a rich man who steals a poor man's only lamb — and lets David's own outrage at the injustice condemn David before Nathan ever says the words “you are the man.” David's response, once the accusation lands, is immediate and without excuse: “I have sinned against the LORD.” Compare this to how Saul, generations earlier, had responded to a similar confrontation — deflecting, minimizing, asking to be honored before the elders even in the act of confessing. David's confession has none of that

self-protection in it. And the psalm attributed to this exact moment, Psalm 51, shows us what was actually happening beneath those five words: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight... My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, you, God, will not despise.” David does not appeal to the law, which could only condemn him — by any reasonable reading, both adultery and murder carried the death penalty. He appeals entirely to God’s own gracious nature, to mercy he had done nothing to earn and everything to forfeit.

What is genuinely remarkable is that this appeal works — not because David’s confession itself purchased forgiveness, but because it was met by a God whose mercy exceeded the law’s demand. Nathan’s reply comes immediately: “the LORD has forgiven you; you won’t die for this sin.” But forgiveness, this book insists on showing us in unflinching detail, is not the same thing as the absence of consequence. The infant born of that union dies. And that grief becomes its own small, quiet window into how David held together God’s sovereignty and God’s compassion: while the child was alive, David fasted and pleaded, believing there was still reason to hope; once the child had died, David got up, ate, and worshiped, trusting that death was not the final word — that he would one day go to his child, even though his child could not return to him. Whatever we make of the details, David’s confidence that this small, unnamed life was safely and eternally with God, rather than lost, offers real comfort to anyone who has grieved a child too young to have made any conscious choice of faith for themselves.

This section, and this entire stretch of David’s life, leaves us with a question worth carrying forward rather than resolving too neatly: how does a man capable of such devotion also become capable of such devastating sin, in the same lifetime, sometimes seemingly in the same season? Scripture does not pretend these are two different Davids. It insists they are the same man — genuinely devoted to God and genuinely capable of catastrophic failure, and genuinely, undeservedly forgiven when he finally, fully owned what he had done. That combination should trouble any of us who imagine our own spiritual maturity has made us safe from a similarly sudden collapse, and it should also comfort any of us who have already collapsed and wonder whether we are still within reach of the same mercy David found.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. David’s affair began in a season of idle, unoccupied time rather than a single dramatic temptation. Where in your own life does unstructured time tend to become the soil for temptation, and what has helped you guard against it?

2. Nathan's story let David's own sense of justice condemn him before the direct accusation ever landed. Has truth ever reached you more effectively through an indirect approach like this than through a blunt confrontation? What made the difference?
3. David's confession in Psalm 51 appealed entirely to God's mercy rather than to any excuse or self-defense, and yet he still experienced real, painful consequences even after being forgiven. How do you hold together God's genuine forgiveness with the reality that consequences often remain?

Chapter Four

2 Samuel 13–15

Nathan had told David that the sword would never depart from his house, and this section shows that judgment beginning to unfold with terrible precision. Amnon, David's firstborn, becomes obsessed with his half-sister Tamar — not, the text makes clear on close reading, torn by any moral hesitation, but frustrated by a purely strategic problem: how to get what he wants. A “friend” supplies the scheme, and Amnon rapes her, then discards her in a final act of cruelty crueler, in some ways, than the assault itself. David is furious, but does nothing — no punishment, no consequence, an absence that hangs over everything that follows. Two years later, Absalom, Tamar's full brother, has Amnon killed at a sheepshearing feast, in patient, calculated revenge. Four years after that, having spent that time carefully building a base of loyal support, Absalom moves against his own father's throne.

What stands out about Absalom, reading through this whole arc, is how genuinely capable he is. He is strikingly good-looking, patient enough to wait years for the right moment, skilled enough at public relations to win the hearts of the very people his father has led for decades. He is also, underneath that capability, deeply and dangerously flawed — willing to burn a general's field to force a meeting, willing to publicly violate his own father's concubines to cement his claim to the throne, evidently vain enough to erect a monument to himself even while he still lived. This combination — real capability paired with a hollow, self-serving character — is among the most dangerous patterns a person can embody, precisely because capability so often earns trust and admiration that character alone would never have justified. History offers no shortage of examples of gifted, persuasive people whose talents were placed in service of appalling ends, and whose early promise made their eventual damage all the more devastating because so many people had trusted them.

Set against Absalom's ambition is David's own response once the rebellion actually arrives and forces him to flee Jerusalem. It would have been entirely understandable for David to fight to hold onto what was rightfully his — his own throne, taken from him by his own son in an act of open treason. Instead, weeping, his head covered as a sign of mourning, David walks up the Mount of Olives and essentially surrenders the outcome to God: “If the LORD sees fit, He will bring me back to see the ark and the tabernacle again. But if He is through with me, then let Him do what seems best to Him.” This is not passivity or resignation; David is actively taking wise, practical steps throughout these same chapters to protect himself and undermine Absalom's position. But underneath every practical step is a

settled trust that his ultimate outcome rests with God, not with his own cleverness or military strength — the same posture Job held to when he said “the LORD gives and the LORD takes away,” refusing to curse God even while losing everything that mattered to him.

It is worth asking what allowed David to hold that posture in a moment that would have broken most of us — losing, in short order, his throne, his capital, his dignity, and very possibly his life, all at the hands of his own child. The clearest answer this book gives us is that David’s confidence had never actually been rooted in the throne, the city, or even his own family in the first place. It had been rooted, as one of his own psalms from this exact season puts it, in the LORD as “a shield around me... the one who holds my head high.” When everything else was stripped away, that foundation remained, because it had never depended on any of the things that were now being taken from him.

There is a hard word here, too, about how consequence and grace can coexist without canceling each other out. David had already been told his sin was forgiven; he was also, at the very same time, living through the specific temporal judgment Nathan had prophesied as a direct result of that sin. Forgiveness had not erased consequence, and consequence had not erased forgiveness. Both were simultaneously, fully true — a pattern that echoes through the whole of Scripture and through much of our own experience: God’s mercy does not always mean God removes what our own choices, or the choices of others close to us, have set in motion. What it does mean, David’s example suggests, is that we are never left to walk through those consequences without Him.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. David’s unaddressed silence after Amnon’s crime against Tamar appears to have set the stage for years of escalating tragedy in his family. Is there an unaddressed wrong in your own family or close relationships that you sense is quietly compounding rather than resolving?
2. Absalom’s real capability made his character flaws more dangerous, not less, because people trusted him more than his character warranted. How do you evaluate someone’s character independently of how talented, charming, or capable they appear?
3. David actively took practical steps to protect himself while fleeing Absalom, yet his deepest posture was surrender to whatever God saw fit to do. What would it look like for you to hold both of these at once — practical wisdom and settled trust — in a hard circumstance you’re currently facing?

Chapter Five

2 Samuel 16–18

David's flight from Jerusalem introduces a small cast of characters whose choices, taken together, quietly determine the outcome of Absalom's entire rebellion — and none of them are David himself.

The first is Ahithophel, Absalom's chief counselor, whose wisdom is described in language that could hardly be higher: advice regarded by both David and Absalom alike "as if one inquired of the word of God." When Absalom, against all his own established pattern of trusting Ahithophel completely, instead follows the counsel of David's secretly loyal agent Hushai, the text gives us the reason directly: "the LORD had ordained to thwart the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring calamity on Absalom." Ahithophel's wisdom, however genuinely impressive by any human standard, was simply no match for the purposes of God — a reminder that intelligence, however considerable, is not the same thing as being on the right side of what God intends to do. Ahithophel, recognizing what has happened and apparently anticipating the consequences of having backed the losing side, takes his own life rather than face what is coming.

The second is Ziba, servant of the crippled Mephibosheth, who meets the fleeing David with generous provisions and a convenient story: that Mephibosheth has stayed behind in Jerusalem, hoping Absalom's rebellion might somehow restore his grandfather Saul's throne to him. David, in the chaos and urgency of the moment, believes him and grants him Mephibosheth's entire estate on the spot. Only later, after Absalom's defeat, do we get Mephibosheth's own account — that he had been betrayed and slandered by his own servant, and had spent the whole of David's absence in visible, undisguised mourning, neither trimming his beard nor washing his clothes the entire time David was gone. It is a detail that cannot easily be faked for show, and it should give us pause about how readily David — usually so discerning — accepted one persuasive account without waiting to hear the other side. There are, this small episode reminds us, almost always two sides to a story, and the version that reaches us first, delivered with the most confident urgency, is not automatically the true one.

What is most striking about Mephibosheth's response, once the full picture emerges and David can no longer be certain who was lying, is what Mephibosheth does with the ambiguity. Rather than pressing his own claim or insisting David take his side against Ziba, he simply says, "Let him take everything, now that my lord the king has returned home safely." His own material inheritance, weighed against the return of the king he genuinely

loved, was not worth fighting for. That is a striking picture of where a person's real treasure lies — not in what could still be recovered or defended, but in the relationship itself, valued more than any of the things that relationship might otherwise entitle him to.

The rebellion's climax comes with Absalom's death — caught by his own hair in the branches of a tree, killed by Joab against David's explicit, repeated instruction to deal gently with him. David's grief when the news reaches him is unrestrained and, on its surface, disproportionate to what Absalom actually was: a son who had raped, deceived, and tried to murder his own father. "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you!" But that grief becomes more understandable, and more moving, when we remember what David himself already knew — that this entire catastrophe, son after son lost, had been prophesied by Nathan as the direct consequence of David's own sin against Uriah. David is not simply grieving a rebellious son. He is confronting, in the rawest way imaginable, the actual cost of what his own choices set in motion years earlier — a cost paid, in real and irreversible measure, by people he loved rather than by himself alone.

There is something here worth sitting with honestly, and it is not a comfortable thought: our sin rarely stays contained to ourselves. David was forgiven, genuinely and completely, the moment he confessed. But forgiveness did not un-happen the consequences already set in motion by his choices, consequences that fell, again and again throughout this section, on people around him rather than on David directly. That is sobering in a way worth carrying with us — not as a reason for paralyzing guilt over sins already confessed and forgiven, but as a genuine incentive toward taking our own choices seriously before we make them, knowing that the people we love are often the ones who inherit what those choices set in motion.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Ahithophel's wisdom was genuinely exceptional, yet it could not succeed against what God had determined to do. Where might you be over-trusting your own or someone else's intelligence or strategic thinking, rather than asking whether it actually aligns with God's purposes?
2. David believed Ziba's version of events without waiting to hear Mephibosheth's side, and only later learned the fuller picture. When has acting on the first, most confidently delivered account of a situation led you astray?
3. David's grief over Absalom was inseparable from his awareness that this tragedy traced back to his own earlier sin. How do you personally carry

the knowledge that a past choice of yours may still be affecting people you love, even after you've been forgiven for it?

Chapter Six

2 Samuel 19–21

David's return to Jerusalem is not the simple restoration it might have been. Israel is fractured, resentful factions on every side need to be won back, and David's political instincts throughout this section reveal both real wisdom and real limitation.

The most striking decision he makes is appointing Amasa — the very general who had led Absalom's rebel army against him — as commander of his own forces, replacing the loyal but increasingly uncontrollable Joab. It is, on its face, a remarkably gracious and strategically shrewd move: Amasa was influential enough among the tribes that had supported Absalom to help persuade them back to David's side, and the gesture of trust itself likely helped speed the nation's reunification. But the trust is not fully returned. When David gives Amasa an urgent assignment to mobilize troops against a fresh rebellion led by a man named Sheba, Amasa is slower than the moment demands — whether from divided loyalty or simple incompetence, the text does not say. David, unwilling to let the delay cost him his advantage, sends Abishai after Sheba instead, and Joab, still smarting from his own demotion, uses the resulting encounter to murder Amasa exactly as he had once murdered Abner — under the guise of a friendly greeting.

There is a pattern worth naming in David's handling of Joab throughout this entire stretch of his reign, one we already began to see back in chapter three. David cannot seem to bring Joab to account, even for repeated, flagrant murder. "Though I am the anointed king," David admits elsewhere in this section, "I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me." Being God's chosen and anointed king, it turns out, did not translate automatically into unchallenged authority in every corner of his own government. Joab was too popular with the army, too capable a general, too deeply entrenched — David's cousin, in fact, along with Joab's brothers — for David to simply remove him without risking real instability. It is a humbling picture of leadership: even a king anointed directly by God still had to navigate genuine, unresolved political limitations, and had to choose, again and again, which battles were worth fighting now and which would have to wait for a successor with a freer hand.

That admission of weakness opens onto a broader, more searching question this section raises about the cost of faithful service under pressure. Scattered through Scripture are examples of people who served God with something close to fearlessness, regardless of the personal cost — willing to defy a king's decree rather than compromise, willing to be thrown into danger

rather than bow to an idol, willing to preach an unwelcome truth to religious and political power alike. Almost without exception, that kind of fearless obedience carried real danger with it — sometimes deliverance, sometimes death, but always real risk undertaken for the sake of faithfulness rather than safety. It is worth asking ourselves honestly, in a season and a culture that often insulates us from that kind of direct cost, whether we would recognize the same call to costly faithfulness if it came to us — and whether the relative safety many of us enjoy has made us more faithful, or simply less tested.

This section closes with a grim, largely unexplained episode: a three-year famine, traced back to a broken covenant Saul had made with the Gibeonites generations earlier and then violated, and resolved only when seven of Saul's descendants are handed over for execution at the Gibeonites' request. It is one of the more difficult passages in the entire David narrative, not because its logic is obscure — broken covenants, even generations old, carried real and lasting consequence in Israel's understanding of justice — but because the human cost of that logic is so plainly, painfully visible. Scripture does not shy away from showing us the full weight of consequence, even generations removed from the original wrong, even when that weight falls on people who did not personally commit the offense being paid for. It is a sobering companion to everything we have already seen in David's own household: covenants matter to God in ways that outlast the lifetime of the person who made or broke them, and the effects of unfaithfulness rarely stay confined to the person responsible for it.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. David extended real trust to Amasa despite his recent betrayal, and it was only partially rewarded. Have you ever extended trust to someone who had wronged you, hoping for reconciliation, only to find the trust only partially returned? How did you navigate that?
2. David admitted that even as God's anointed king, he felt too weak to bring Joab to justice, and had to leave some wrongs for a later time. What wrong in your own life or workplace have you had to consciously set aside for now, trusting it will be addressed later rather than by you in this moment?
3. The famine traced back to a covenant broken generations earlier is a hard passage to sit with. How do you understand the relationship between consequences that outlast the person who caused them and the character of a God who is also described as merciful and just?

Chapter Seven

2 Samuel 22–24

The book closes not with a battle but with a series of retrospectives — David looking back over the whole of his life and reign, and giving us, in the process, some of the clearest windows into his own heart found anywhere in Scripture.

Chapter twenty-two is a song of praise, essentially identical to Psalm 18, sung after God had finally secured David’s throne against every remaining rival. What stands out immediately is not simply its gratitude but its sheer imaginative intensity — God is pictured descending from heaven wreathed in smoke and fire, riding the wind itself to rescue His anointed king. This is not restrained, formal liturgy. It is the uninhibited worship of a man who has genuinely experienced deliverance and refuses to describe it in flat, ordinary language. It is worth asking what our own worship would look like if we approached it the same way — not as a ritual to be performed correctly, but as an attempt to do justice, however inadequately, to what God has actually done for us. David, we are told elsewhere, danced before the LORD with such abandon that his own wife despised him for it. Whatever we make of appropriate decorum in worship, David’s example suggests that undignified, wholehearted worship is a better problem to have than restrained, careful worship that never risks looking foolish.

David’s last words, in chapter twenty-three, revisit the same convictions from a different angle — not gratitude for what God has done, but confidence in what God has promised, framed now as an old man near the end of his reign rather than a young king freshly delivered from his enemies. And then, in a jarring final movement, the book turns to one of its most theologically difficult episodes: David’s census. The text tells us plainly that God’s anger burned against Israel, and that God “incited David” to number the people — while the parallel account in Chronicles attributes the same incitement to Satan. Rather than treating these as contradictory, it is worth noticing what they together suggest: that God can use even a hostile agent as an instrument of His own purposes, sovereignly permitting what He does not directly cause, in order to bring about the discipline a nation actually needed. David himself, notably, does not seem to understand any of this at the time; when the judgment falls, he pleads that it should land on him rather than on the people, apparently unaware that the anger driving the whole episode had been directed at Israel from the start, not at David personally.

This ought to leave us with a settled humility about how much of God’s actual working we can discern in any given moment. David, a man who

elsewhere in this book received direct, unmistakable answers when he inquired of the LORD, still found himself confused and in the dark about God's specific purposes in this particular crisis. If David — anointed, favored, in close relationship with God — could not always trace the hidden logic behind what was happening to him, we should be considerably more cautious than we often are about confidently pronouncing what God is doing in our own circumstances, or in someone else's. We can, and should, evaluate visible actions against the clear standards of God's Word. What remains hidden — motives, hidden purposes, the precise reasons behind a given trial — belongs to God alone to judge and to reveal, in His own timing, not ours.

The book's final scene, though, offers one of its most quietly instructive moments. Commanded to build an altar at the threshing floor of a man named Araunah, David is offered the site, the animals, and the wood entirely free of charge. He refuses: "I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." It is a small transaction, but it crystallizes something that has run beneath David's entire life, for all its real and serious failures — worship, for David, was never meant to be costless. Whatever we bring to God that requires nothing of us — leftover time, leftover attention, leftover resources after everything else has already claimed the better portion — is not, by David's own standard, an offering that means very much. And it is worth noting where this particular offering was made: this exact threshing floor would become, within a generation, the site of Solomon's temple — the very "house for God's name" David himself had wanted to build back in chapter seven, finally realized on the ground David purchased at real cost to himself, because he refused to give God something free.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. David's worship in chapter twenty-two is unrestrained and undignified rather than careful and controlled. What would it look like for your own worship to risk looking a little less composed and a little more genuinely overwhelmed by what God has done?
2. David could not fully discern God's purposes even in the census crisis, despite his close relationship with God elsewhere in this book. Where might you be overconfident in your own read of "what God is doing" in a difficult circumstance, when the truth is you simply cannot fully know?
3. David refused to offer God something that cost him nothing, insisting on paying full price for the altar and offerings. Where in your own life is your worship or generosity currently costing you something real, and where might it be, honestly, leftovers?

CONCLUSION

We opened this volume with a barren woman handing her only son back to God, and we close it with an old king refusing to hand God anything that cost him nothing. Between those two scenes lies the whole shape of these two books, and of the man they are ultimately about.

1 Samuel taught us one half of a single truth: that God's purposes move forward regardless of how any individual responds to Him. Samuel's obedience, Saul's disobedience, and David's imperfect devotion were all, in their different ways, woven into the same unstoppable reign of a God who adapted how He led His people rather than abandoning them when they rejected Him. Nothing any of the three men did or failed to do could derail what God had determined to accomplish. 2 Samuel teaches us the other half of that same truth, and it is the half that touches our own lives most directly: that our own attitude toward God determines what our own lives become within His unshakable plan. David's convictions — that God alone was Israel's true Ruler, that God was always righteous, that God's mercy could be trusted, that God's will was better than his own — created, again and again, an opportunity for God to work through him, to bless him, to forgive him, and ultimately to establish him. Saul's opposite convictions produced the opposite result. Neither man's response changed what God would ultimately accomplish in the world. Both men's responses changed, permanently and personally, what their own lives would mean.

This is not a small distinction, and it is worth sitting with directly rather than letting it pass as a tidy summary. David was not spared the consequences of his own worst failures. His household was torn apart, son after son, in ways that trace with painful clarity back to his own sin against Uriah. And yet none of that undoes the deeper truth this book keeps insisting on: David remained, through every failure and every restoration, a man after God's own heart — not because his behavior was consistently good, which it plainly was not, but because his deepest, most settled orientation kept turning back toward God rather than away from Him. God did not build His dealings with David primarily on David's worst moments. He built them on David's deepest convictions, sustained across decades, through real triumph and real catastrophe alike. That should be a genuine comfort to anyone reading this who is honestly aware of their own considerable failures: what God is ultimately building with in us is not the absence of failure but the direction of our hearts, sustained over the long course of a life, however many times that life has been genuinely, painfully broken along the way.

The final question this whole two-book story leaves us with is the one it has been asking from its opening pages, in one register or another: whose

God is He to you? Saul spoke of Him at a distance — “the LORD your God” — a matter of religious observance rather than personal devotion, invoked when convenient and resented when it was not. David, whatever his failures, never stopped speaking of Him as directly, personally his own — “my God,” “my rock,” “my glory” — sustained through exile, through sin, through the loss of children, through the collapse and eventual restoration of his own household and throne. That relationship, more than any of David’s undeniable gifts or accomplishments, is what these two books have actually been about all along.

And this David, remarkable as he is, was never meant to be the final word. Every king who followed him in Israel’s history would be measured against his example, which meant that Israel would spend centuries waiting for a king who could actually live up to it — a longing this book leaves unresolved because it was never meant to be resolved within these pages. The throne God promised to build for David forever would need, in the fullness of time, an occupant who did not merely resemble David at his best but who was, unlike David, entirely without the failures that shadowed even his best moments — Jesus, the true and better Son of David, the King of Kings, in whom the promise made in that quiet room to a startled shepherd-king finally, fully, and forever comes to pass.

APPENDIX

Daily Bible Reading Plan

This is the same daily Bible reading plan we use at dailyqt.org, covering the entire Bible—Old and New Testaments alike—in three hundred sixty-five daily readings. It does not begin on January 1st, and neither must you; begin on whatever date suits you and simply follow the sequence from there. The sixteen readings that correspond to the chapters of this book—1 Samuel 1–3 through 2 Samuel 22–24—fall a little under three months into the full sequence, but the complete year-long plan is reprinted here, as it is in every volume of this series, so that wherever you are in your reading you always have the whole plan close at hand. Check off each day’s passage as you complete it, and feel no need to catch up if you fall behind by a day or a week. The goal was never a perfect record. It was a daily habit of opening God’s Word, kept up faithfully enough, and long enough, that it becomes less a task to complete than simply the shape of an ordinary day.

Date	Passage	Date	Passage
1/10	Gen 1-3	1/11	Gen 4-7
1/12	Gen 8-11	1/13	Gen 12-15
1/14	Gen 16-18	1/15	Gen 19-21
1/16	Gen 22-24	1/17	Gen 25-26
1/18	Gen 27-29	1/19	Gen 30-31
1/20	Gen 32-34	1/21	Gen 35-37
1/22	Gen 38-40	1/23	Gen 41-42
1/24	Gen 43-45	1/25	Gen 46-47
1/26	Gen 48-50	1/27	Ex 1-3
1/28	Ex 4-6	1/29	Ex 7-9
1/30	Ex 10-12	1/31	Ex 13-15
2/1	Ex 16-18	2/2	Ex 19-21
2/3	Ex 22-24	2/4	Ex 25-27
2/5	Ex 28-29	2/6	Ex 30-32
2/7	Ex 33-35	2/8	Ex 36-38
2/9	Ex 39-40	2/10	Lev 1-4
2/11	Lev 5-7	2/12	Lev 8-10
2/13	Lev 11-13	2/14	Lev 14-15
2/15	Lev 16-18	2/16	Lev 19-21

Date	Passage	Date	Passage
2/17	Lev 22-23	2/18	Lev 24-25
2/19	Lev 26-27	2/20	Nu 1-2
2/21	Nu 3-4	2/22	Nu 5-6
2/23	Nu 7	2/24	Nu 8-10
2/25	Nu 11-13	2/26	Nu 14-15
2/27	Nu 16-17	2/28	Nu 18-20
3/1	Nu 21-22	3/2	Nu 23-25
3/3	Nu 26-27	3/4	Nu 28-30
3/5	Nu 31-32	3/6	Nu 33-34
3/7	Nu 35-36	3/8	Dt 1-2
3/9	Dt 3-4	3/10	Dt 5-7
3/11	Dt 8-10	3/12	Dt 11-13
3/13	Dt 14-16	3/14	Dt 17-20
3/15	Dt 21-23	3/16	Dt 24-27
3/17	Dt 28-29	3/18	Dt 30-31
3/19	Dt 32-34	3/20	Jos 1-4
3/21	Jos 5-8	3/22	Jos 9-11
3/23	Jos 12-15	3/24	Jos 16-18
3/25	Jos 19-21	3/26	Jos 22-24
3/27	Jdg 1-2	3/28	Jdg 3-5
3/29	Jdg 6-7	3/30	Jdg 8-9
3/31	Jdg 10-12	4/1	Jdg 13-15
4/2	Jdg 16-18	4/3	Jdg 19-21
4/4	Ruth	4/5	1 Sa 1-3
4/6	1 Sa 4-8	4/7	1 Sa 9-12
4/8	1 Sa 13-14	4/9	1 Sa 15-17
4/10	1 Sa 18-20	4/11	1 Sa 21-24
4/12	1 Sa 25-27	4/13	1 Sa 28-31
4/14	2 Sa 1-3	4/15	2 Sa 4-7
4/16	2 Sa 8-12	4/17	2 Sa 13-15
4/18	2 Sa 16-18	4/19	2 Sa 19-21
4/20	2 Sa 22-24	4/21	1 Ki 1-2
4/22	1 Ki 3-5	4/23	1 Ki 6-7
4/24	1 Ki 8-9	4/25	1 Ki 10-11
4/26	1 Ki 12-14	4/27	1 Ki 15-17

Date	Passage	Date	Passage
4/28	1 Ki 18-20	4/29	1 Ki 21-22
4/30	2 Ki 1-3	5/1	2 Ki 4-5
5/2	2 Ki 6-8	5/3	2 Ki 9-11
5/4	2 Ki 12-14	5/5	2 Ki 15-17
5/6	2 Ki 18-19	5/7	2 Ki 20-22
5/8	2 Ki 23-25	5/9	1 Ch 1-2
5/10	1 Ch 3-5	5/11	1 Ch 6
5/12	1 Ch 7-8	5/13	1 Ch 9-11
5/14	1 Ch 12-14	5/15	1 Ch 15-17
5/16	1 Ch 18-21	5/17	1 Ch 22-24
5/18	1 Ch 25-27	5/19	1 Ch 28-2 Ch 1
5/20	2 Ch 2-5	5/21	2 Ch 6-8
5/22	2 Ch 9-12	5/23	2 Ch 13-17
5/24	2 Ch 18-20	5/25	2 Ch 21-24
5/26	2 Ch 25-27	5/27	2 Ch 28-31
5/28	2 Ch 32-34	5/29	2 Ch 35-36
5/30	Ezr 1-3	5/31	Ezr 4-7
6/1	Ezr 8-10	6/2	Neh 1-3
6/3	Neh 4-6	6/4	Neh 7
6/5	Neh 8-9	6/6	Neh 10-11
6/7	Neh 12-13	6/8	Esth 1-5
6/9	Esth 6-10	6/10	Job 1-4
6/11	Job 5-7	6/12	Job 8-10
6/13	Job 11-13	6/14	Job 14-16
6/15	Job 17-20	6/16	Job 21-23
6/17	Job 24-28	6/18	Job 29-31
6/19	Job 32-34	6/20	Job 35-37
6/21	Job 38-39	6/22	Job 40-42
6/23	Ps 1-8	6/24	Ps 9-16
6/25	Ps 17-20	6/26	Ps 21-25
6/27	Ps 26-31	6/28	Ps 32-35
6/29	Ps 36-39	6/30	Ps 40-45
7/1	Ps 46-50	7/2	Ps 51-57
7/3	Ps 58-65	7/4	Ps 66-69
7/5	Ps 70-73	7/6	Ps 74-77

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7/7	Ps 78-79	7/8	Ps 80-85
7/9	Ps 86-89	7/10	Ps 90-95
7/11	Ps 96-102	7/12	Ps 103-105
7/13	Ps 106-107	7/14	Ps 108-114
7/15	Ps 115-118	7/16	Ps 119:1-88
7/17	Ps 119:89-176	7/18	Ps 120-132
7/19	Ps 133-139	7/20	Ps 140-145
7/21	Ps 146-150	7/22	Prov 1-3
7/23	Prov 4-6	7/24	Prov 7-9
7/25	Prov 10-12	7/26	Prov 13-15
7/27	Prov 16-18	7/28	Prov 19-21
7/29	Prov 22-23	7/30	Prov 24-26
7/31	Prov 27-29	8/1	Prov 30-31
8/2	Ecc 1-4	8/3	Ecc 5-8
8/4	Ecc 9-12	8/5	Ss 1-8
8/6	Isa 1-4	8/7	Isa 5-8
8/8	Isa 9-12	8/9	Isa 13-17
8/10	Isa 18-22	8/11	Isa 23-27
8/12	Isa 28-30	8/13	Isa 31-35
8/14	Isa 36-41	8/15	Isa 42-44
8/16	Isa 45-48	8/17	Isa 49-53
8/18	Isa 54-58	8/19	Isa 59-63
8/20	Isa 64-66	8/21	Jer 1-3
8/22	Jer 4-6	8/23	Jer 7-9
8/24	Jer 10-13	8/25	Jer 14-17
8/26	Jer 18-22	8/27	Jer 23-25
8/28	Jer 26-29	8/29	Jer 30-31
8/30	Jer 32-34	8/31	Jer 35-37
9/1	Jer 38-41	9/2	Jer 42-45
9/3	Jer 46-48	9/4	Jer 49-50
9/5	Jer 51-52	9/6	Lam 1:1-3:36
9/7	Lam 3:37-5:22	9/8	Eze 1-4
9/9	Eze 5-8	9/10	Eze 9-12
9/11	Eze 13-15	9/12	Eze 16-17
9/13	Eze 18-20	9/14	Eze 21-22

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9/15	Eze 23-24	9/16	Eze 25-27
9/17	Eze 28-30	9/18	Eze 31-33
9/19	Eze 34-36	9/20	Eze 37-39
9/21	Eze 40-42	9/22	Eze 43-45
9/23	Eze 46-48	9/24	Dan 1-3
9/25	Dan 4-6	9/26	Dan 7-9
9/27	Dan 10-12	9/28	Hos 1-7
9/29	Hos 8-14	9/30	Joel
10/1	Amos 1-5	10/2	Amos 6-9
10/3	Ob-Jonah	10/4	Micah
10/5	Nahum	10/6	Hab-Zeph
10/7	Haggai 1-2	10/8	Zech 1-7
10/9	Zech 8-14	10/10	Mal 1-4
10/11	Mat 1-4	10/12	Mat 5-6
10/13	Mat 7-8	10/14	Mat 9-10
10/15	Mat 11-12	10/16	Mat 13-14
10/17	Mat 15-17	10/18	Mat 18-19
10/19	Mat 20-21	10/20	Mat 22-23
10/21	Mat 24-25	10/22	Mat 26
10/23	Mat 27-28	10/24	Mark 1-3
10/25	Mark 4-5	10/26	Mark 6-7
10/27	Mark 8-9	10/28	Mark 10-11
10/29	Mark 12-13	10/30	Mark 14
10/31	Mark 15-16	11/1	Luke 1
11/2	Luke 2-3	11/3	Luke 4-5
11/4	Luke 6-7	11/5	Luke 8-9
11/6	Luke 10-11	11/7	Luke 12-13
11/8	Luke 14-16	11/9	Luke 17-18
11/10	Luke 19-20	11/11	Luke 21-22
11/12	Luke 23-24	11/13	John 1-2
11/14	John 3-4	11/15	John 5-6
11/16	John 7-8	11/17	John 9-10
11/18	John 11-12	11/19	John 13-15
11/20	John 16-18	11/21	John 19-21
11/22	Acts 1-3	11/23	Acts 4-6

Date	Passage	Date	Passage
11/24	Acts 7-8	11/25	Acts 9-10
11/26	Acts 11-13	11/27	Acts 14-15
11/28	Acts 16-17	11/29	Acts 18-20
11/30	Acts 21-23	12/1	Acts 24-26
12/2	Acts 27-28	12/3	Rom 1-3
12/4	Rom 4-7	12/5	Rom 8-10
12/6	Rom 11-13	12/7	Rom 14-16
12/8	1 Cor 1-4	12/9	1 Cor 5-8
12/10	1 Cor 9-11	12/11	1 Cor 12-14
12/12	1 Cor 15-16	12/13	2 Cor 1-4
12/14	2 Cor 5-9	12/15	2 Cor 10-13
12/16	Gal 1-3	12/17	Gal 4-6
12/18	Eph 1-3	12/19	Eph 4-6
12/20	Phi 1-4	12/21	Col 1-4
12/22	1 Thess 1-5	12/23	2 Thess 1-3
12/24	1 Tim 1-6	12/25	2 Tim 1-4
12/26	Titus-Phm	12/27	Heb 1-6
12/28	Heb 7-10	12/29	Heb 11-13
12/30	James	12/31	1 Pe
1/1	2 Pe	1/2	1 John
1/3	2 John-Jude	1/4	Rev 1-3
1/5	Rev 4-8	1/6	Rev 9-12
1/7	Rev 13-16	1/8	Rev 17-19
1/9	Rev 20-22		