

Week 22: David and Mephibosheth

Hook



Main Point: A godly person loves people the way God loves him or her.

Henry VIII famously had six marriages, four of which ended because Henry decided to end them:

- Katharine of Aragon – Henry severed England from the Catholic Church in order to divorce Katharine.
- Anne Boleyn – Henry had Anne beheaded and married someone new 11 days later.
- Anne of Cleves – Henry had the marriage annulled because he did not find her attractive enough.
- Katherine Howard – Henry also had Katherine beheaded

A lot of craziness surrounds Henry's reign, but one event that stands out is how he met Anne of Cleves. As the story goes, the king saw a portrait of Anne and fell in love with her. He sent a marriage request, and she accepted, but when she arrived in England Henry was upset, he claimed she did not look as beautiful as her portrait. They were divorced soon after their ceremony. Henry VIII was vain and fickle, consumed with looks and personal benefit over loving someone truly.¹

Q: Have you ever judged someone based on his or her appearance?

Q: How is the way Jesus taught us to love different from how those in the world do it?

Transition: The love the Bible teaches goes beyond romantic affection; this week we will see that David demonstrated genuine care for someone others might have cast aside.

RECAP: This is a new period of David's life (lessons 18–22), when David is finally made king over all of Israel, after 20 to 30 years of waiting. So far, we have seen:

- David inquiring of the Lord at every step along the way
- David's heart for worship as the primary, foundational thing in his kingdom
- God's covenant promises to David
- David's success in battle by the power of the Lord

This week, we'll see David honor the covenant he made with his dear friend Jonathan by showing the lovingkindness of the Lord to Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth.

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Book (Note: There is no parallel to this passage in Chronicles.)

Main Point: A godly person loves people the way God loves them.

1 Samuel 18:1–5; 20:12–17, 41–42 and 2 Samuel 9:1–3 [Read]

Talking Point 1: A godly person honors his or her commitments and loves as Jesus loves.

Q: Why did David want to show lovingkindness to someone from Jonathan’s house?

Q: How do David’s psalms say that Israel would be able to win their battles?

We saw way back in lesson 7 how much David and Jonathan loved each other and that they made two friendship covenants. David had been living in Saul’s palace as the general of his army and as his son-in-law, married to Saul’s daughter Michal. He and Jonathan were best friends and had made a covenant of friendship that bonded them even closer than brothers when David killed Goliath and first came into Saul’s service (18:1–5). But their second covenant was even deeper and stronger, because they made it as David was fleeing the palace because Saul wanted to kill him (20:12–17). They weren’t sure they would ever see each other again or if things could ever be the same between them, yet they promised to show “the steadfast love of the Lord” to each other and their children forever, no matter what happened between David and Saul.²

The word they used in their covenant, “steadfast love” (ESV) or “lovingkindness” (NASB) “of the Lord” or in the NIV “unfailing kindness like the Lord’s kindness,” is a unique word in Hebrew. It’s so hard to translate into English that all these translations made up a word or phrase to describe it, but even these attempts are unable to capture the full meaning. It is a selfless love, mercy, grace, and kindness for someone who doesn’t deserve it or someone who could never pay you back. It’s not just a feeling of love; it’s an action. It’s not just a random act of kindness; it’s intentional and continuous. It’s also connected to covenant loyalty, as in a marriage; it’s a covenant promise made to show love and kindness to the other person, even when it’s really hard.

The word is most often used of God’s love for His people, that He continued to show lovingkindness to Israel even though they kept turning away to other gods. Psalms uses it to describe God’s love for us over 100 times. Just one example is “Your steadfast love is better than life” (Psalm 63:4). David and Jonathan called it the steadfast love “of the Lord” (20:14) because this kind of selfless love is not like the regular human love for people you like or who are nice to you. It’s a covenant promise to love and forgive and show grace, mercy and kindness no matter what, the way God loves us.³

This is what David and Jonathan promised each other. No matter what Saul did, they would show kindness, mercy and love to each other and their families. Here, even after Jonathan’s death, David sought to honor his covenant with Jonathan’s family. The

interplay in the text of David's asking about someone from Saul's house, but for the sake of Jonathan only emphasizes this incredible kind of godly selfless love he wanted to show. Saul was his greatest enemy, yet David asked if there was anyone left of Saul's house to whom he could show lovingkindness to fulfill his covenant with Jonathan (2 Samuel 9:1). He didn't ask only for a child of Jonathan, but for anyone of *Saul's* house. David was willing to show this covenant love even to an enemy, just as God showed His incredible selfless lovingkindness for us in that while we were still His enemies, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8–10). Yet amazingly, the only one left alive was a son of Jonathan, so David was able to show this lovingkindness to the son of his dear friend.

Godly people honor their commitments and the promises they make. They keep their word, a basic tenet of integrity. Godly people also love others with the self-sacrificial lovingkindness of the Lord. They love others, even their enemies, as Jesus loves them (Matthew 5:43–48). Loving others with the self-sacrificial love of God is a defining part of what it means to be a Christian (John 15:13). Those who know God and have His Spirit dwelling inside them will love others the way God loves them, even when it's hard (1 John 4:7–21).

Q: Describe a time when you honored a commitment you had made, even when it was hard. How did you have the strength to do it? What happened as a result?

Q: Why is it sometimes hard to love people the way Jesus loves us? How can we find the strength to do so?

2 Samuel 9:3–8 and 4:1–4 and 1 Peter 3:9 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Godly people don't repay evil for evil but repay evil with good.

Q: How did Mephibosheth become lame? In which other story does the text give us this backstory information about Mephibosheth?

Q: Why would David tell Mephibosheth not to fear? Why might he be afraid of David?

We learned in chapter 4 that Jonathan's son Mephibosheth was only 5 years old when Saul and Jonathan died. When news of their deaths came to the palace, his nurse picked him up and fled, but in her haste, she dropped him, and he became lame. But we don't hear about this when it happened chronologically in the story, when Saul and Jonathan died. We hear it as a little tidbit of backstory in the middle of the story about Saul's son, Ish-bosheth (Mephibosheth's uncle), whom Abner (Saul's general) put on the throne after Saul and Jonathan died. It seems a contrast is being made between these two because of the similarity of their names – Ish-bosheth means “man of shame” and Mephibosheth means “dispeller of shame.”

To review: Ish-bosheth had taken the throne, and there had been a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David (2 Samuel 3:1). But then he accused Abner of treachery. Abner denied it, using the same phrase as David and Jonathan's covenant,

that he had done nothing but show “steadfast love” to the house of Saul (3:8). Abner switched allegiance to David, but then Joab (David’s general) killed him. Then two of Ish-bosheth’s captains killed him, thinking this would please David, but David had them killed, just as he had done with the man who claimed to have killed Saul because he thought his killing Saul would please David. Nothing is unintentional in the Bible, even the order of the stories. The text tells us about Mephibosheth in the middle of this story, to let us know that though Ish-bosheth brought shame on the house of Saul, there was hope that a son of Jonathan would dispel that shame – even though this “dispeller of shame” was physically disabled, a source of shame in their culture.

Mephibosheth had been living in Lo-Debar which means “no pastures,” a place where flocks could not graze, the exact opposite of the kind of place God promises to lead His flock in Psalm 23. As God does with us, David, as a good shepherd, brought him out of the place of “no pastures” to feast at the king’s table in the kingdom of God. David told Mephibosheth not to fear. It would be natural for him to fear David. In the ancient world, most new kings sought the former king’s family to slaughter them. For David to do this would have been seen as righteous in the eyes of the culture at the time, repaying Saul’s house for the evil Saul had done to him. But David did the exact opposite. He showered Mephibosheth with blessings and even invited him into his home.

Mephibosheth was shocked, asking how David could show such honor to a “dead dog” such as himself, the same phrase David had used to ask Saul why he was hunting for him (1 Samuel 24:14). Though he was a threat to David’s throne as a grandson of Saul, he was worthless in the eyes of their culture because of his lameness. What David did with Mephibosheth is a picture of what God does with us, and it explains the “lovingkindness” of God better than any definition. This man was an enemy of David and a threat to his throne. He was considered worthless by the world and brought nothing of value to the table for David. Yet David brought Mephibosheth into his kingdom and showered him with blessing simply because of his covenant promise to love. This is what God does for us in Christ. It is why God commands us not to repay evil with evil, but to repay evil with good (Romans 12:17–21; 1 Peter 3:9). When we show lovingkindness to others, we are showing them the love of God. We are preaching the Gospel with our actions.⁴

Q: Why is it tempting to repay evil for evil? What happens when we do that?

Q: Describe a time when you chose to repay evil with good. What happened with your relationship with that person as a result? How did it impact your community?

2 Samuel 9:9–13 and Psalm 23 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Godly people love “the least of these” as much as they love the strong.

Q: How did David welcome Mephibosheth into his family?

David not only blessed Mephibosheth by restoring to him all that had belonged to Saul, but he also commanded that he should always eat at his table “like one of the king’s sons” (9:11). This is how Saul had originally treated David when he first came to the palace. David ate at the king’s table. Saul welcomed David into his family. Then he legally became family when he married Saul’s daughter. Saul did this because David was a strong warrior, and he had a lot of success in battle for Saul. Saul loved what David had to offer and what David did for him until David’s strength became a threat. Then his love turned to hate. He kicked David out of his house and even tried to kill him.

But David welcomed Mephibosheth into his house and gave him a seat of honor at his table even though he had nothing to offer. David wasn’t trying to make a political alliance or get a strong, successful warrior on his side. The text repeats that he was lame in both feet to remind us that Mephibosheth had no value in their culture. Yet David saw his inherent dignity and worth as a child of God. In their culture, inviting someone to your table wasn’t just good hospitality, it was a time for showing honor. People of honor only ate with others of high honor; they even ordered the seating by honor. For a king to invite a lame man to eat at his table would have been scandalous in an honor/shame culture.

This is why it was so scandalous to the Pharisees when Jesus ate with sinners. But Jesus made it clear in His actions and His teaching that His table is open to everyone who will come. In the parable of the dinner guests, the host (God) throws open the gates of his home to compel *all* to come in. But he lists the least of these – the poor, crippled, blind and lame (Luke 14:12–24). In Psalm 23, David said God prepared a table with his enemies. At the banqueting table in the future kingdom, kings will sit next to outcasts, and we will sit next to those we considered enemies. David’s inviting his disabled and outcast enemy, Mephibosheth, to his table was a picture of the banqueting table of the Lord – kings and the “least of these” as one in God’s family.

In the parable of the dinner feast, when there was still room at the table, the master (God) told his servant to go out to the highways and hedges and *compel* people to come in, that his house might be filled. Jesus commanded His disciples to do the same. Not just to fill their tables, but specifically to open their tables to those who would not bring them honor. “When you give a dinner or a banquet ... invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, *because they cannot repay you*” (Luke 14:12–14). Jesus was calling off this “honor game” and telling us to reach out to the “least of these.”

In another parable, He said it is the way we treat the “least of these” that shows whether we are one of His sheep or a “goat” who is not really one of His followers (Matthew 25:31–46). This is at the heart of showing “the lovingkindness of God” – love in action toward the “least of these” and the enemy, those who cannot repay it or don’t deserve it. This is how we show the love of God to the world and create a picture of the Gospel with our actions, how God loved us and saved us when we didn’t deserve it and can never repay it, just because of His covenant lovingkindness, grace and mercy.

Q: What are some ways we can reach out to the “least of these” in our community and show them the lovingkindness of God in action?

Q: How might God be calling you to show lovingkindness to your enemies?

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Took

Main Point: A godly person loves people the way God loves them.

Mephibosheth was an enemy of David and a threat to his throne. He was considered worthless by the world and brought nothing of value to the table for David. Yet David brought Mephibosheth into his kingdom and showered him with blessing simply because of his covenant promise to love. This is what God does for us in Christ. It is why God commands us not to repay evil with evil, but to repay evil with good (Romans 12:17–21; 1 Peter 3:9). When we have lovingkindness toward others, we are showing them the love of God. We are showing them the Gospel with our actions.⁵

CHALLENGES

THINK: How have you been tempted to repay evil for evil? In what ways have you done that? What was the result? How did it make things better or worse? How would things have gone differently if you had repaid evil with good? Why is it so hard to repay evil with good? How can we find the strength to do it?

PRAY about how God wants you to show lovingkindness to the “least of these” in your community. What specific action can you take to show the self-sacrificing love of the Lord to someone who cannot repay you? Ask God to soften your heart toward those the world sees as worthless. Ask Him to open your eyes to opportunities to show lovingkindness to others every day.

ACT: Show Lovingkindness. Remember that lovingkindness isn’t just a feeling; it’s an action of kindness, mercy and grace. It’s not a *random* act of kindness; it’s intentional. Choose a specific act of kindness you can do this week toward either someone who doesn’t deserve it (enemy) or someone who can’t repay it (“least of these”).

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: Next week, we’ll enter a new phase of David’s life. Until now, we have seen his rise to the throne and all his success, ruling as a king of Israel should. Next, we will see what happens when David acts like one of the kings of the world, taking whatever he wants instead of honoring God and other people. We’ll watch as he sins greatly, then tries to cover it up, and how his sin affects his children and their relationships with one another and with him.

¹ Marilee Hanson. "The Six Wives of Henry VIII – Facts, Images & Biographies"
<https://englishhistory.net/tudor/monarchs/henry-viii-wives/>, January 31, 2015

² J. Vernon McGee, *1 and 2 Samuel, Through the Bible Commentary Series* (Thomas Nelson, 1996).

³ Eugene H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999).

⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999).

⁵ Eugene H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999).