

Creative Living Bible Study



Choices *that Matter*

Studies from the Life of David

This book belongs to:



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Before you begin . . .

David is among the Bible's most loved characters, ranking with Abraham, Moses, and Paul as a champion of faith in the living God.

David's experiences were varied. He was a shepherd on the hills of Judah, a servant in King Saul's palace, a very successful warrior and finally a king. He experienced poverty and wealth, hatred and love, persecution and honor, obscurity and prominence, the depths of sin and the heights of worship. But in every position and condition of life, David knew what it was to trust in the Lord. He poured out his heart to God in praises, thanksgiving, confessions and requests, and many of his prayers were preserved in the Psalms.

As we follow the life of David, we will see his great faith, victories and successes as well as his unfaithfulness, defeats and failures. As we are inspired by his writings, cautioned by his mistakes and instructed by his leadership and service, we will learn how to make the choices that matter as we face issues of life today.

Most importantly, our study will build our knowledge of God, who bids us to trust Him to lead our lives in the best possible way. May the pages of this study encourage you as you discover or rediscover that a loving and faithful heavenly Father does not abandon us when we fail, but rather stands by to use even our failures to bring about our blessing.

Diana Schick
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Creative Living Bible Studies

Choices That Matter

Studies from the Life of David

Part I: Samuel, Saul and David

1	Hannah's Story	Turning Sorrow to Joy	1
2	Samuel & Eli's Sons	Making Wise Choices	12
3	The Ark & The Philistines	Superstition vs. Faith I	19
4	Israel Demands a King	Winning the Battles	27
5	Saul Anointed, Samuel's Farewell	God, the Model Parent	34
6	Saul's Unfaithfulness	Decision-making Under Stress	42
7	David's Secret Anointing	Self-Worth That Matters	52
8	David and Goliath	Weapons Against Fear	59
9	Saul Attacks David	Victory Over Jealousy	65
10	Jonathan and David	The Gift of Friendship	73
11	Events at Nob	Overcoming Selfishness	80
12	David Pursued by Saul	Benefits of Forgiveness	87
13	Nabal and Abigail	Dealing With Hostility	96
14	David Spares Saul's Life	Letting God be God	106

Part II: David the King

15	David Retrieves the Ark	Superstition vs. Faith II	114
16	God's Covenant With David	Following God's Best Plan	125
17	Mephibosheth's Story	Keeping Promises	132
18	David and Bathsheba	Overcoming Temptation	141
19	Amnon, Tamar & Absalom	Dealing With Family Heartache I: Disappointment & Discouragement	150
20	Absalom's Conspiracy & Death	Dealing With Family Heartache II: Rejection	158
21	David Grieves a Son's Death	Dealing With Family Heartache III: Losses	166
22	Temple Plans	Security for Life	174
23	David's Final Words	Philosophy for Life	183
	Major Footnote Directory		190
	Bibliography		191
	About the Author		

PART I

SAMUEL, SAUL AND DAVID

Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION

The main text for our study of David's life will be the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. David comes on the scene in 1 Samuel 16, but in order to put his life in perspective, we need to start at the beginning of 1 Samuel.

Joshua had led the Israelites into the land of Canaan, a land which God had promised them through their forefather Abraham hundreds of years earlier (Genesis 12:6-7; 17:8). After Israel's conquest of Canaan, God appointed judges¹ to rule over the nation for the next 300 years. These were years of spiritual decline as the Israelites increasingly rejected God and His leadership. They quickly forgot God's miracles that had brought them into the land of Canaan, and they began to view the enemies around their nation as threats too great for God's providence and protection to handle. In spite of God's warning that a monarchy would bring calamity, they demanded to be governed by a king as were the neighboring nations. Their request was both a disregard of God's counsel and a clear rejection of His rule over them (1 Samuel 8:7).

1 Samuel records how God raised up Samuel to be the last judge in Israel. Samuel was also a priest² and prophet³ who warned the people of the consequences of rejecting God's leadership and choosing to have a potentially selfish human to rule over them. The people of Israel

insisted, however, and the disastrous 500 years of monarchy that followed finally resulted in 160 years of captivity in Babylon and Assyria.

The book of 1 Samuel, written by an anonymous author, is the fourth historical volume of the Old Testament. It serves as a transition book, narrating the biographies of the last judge, Samuel, and the first king, Saul. It also relates the early years of David, who is the main character of 2 Samuel. Beginning with Samuel's birth and ending with the death of Saul and establishment of David's reign, 1 Samuel covers about 95 years (approximately 1105-1010 B.C.).

Although the setting is in a barbaric land three thousand years ago, we will see that the people and problems were very similar to those of today.

HANNAH'S STORY

1 Samuel 1:1-2:11

The book of 1 Samuel begins with the story of Hannah, an Israelite woman who was barren. She pleaded with God for a son, promising to give him back to God for the Nazirite priesthood.⁴ God answered her

prayer in the birth of Samuel. As she had vowed, Hannah took Samuel at age three to live at the sanctuary of the Lord at Shiloh. She visited her son regularly, but Eli, the priest at Shiloh, raised Samuel.

Unselfishly, Hannah rejoiced to see her son serve the Lord and Israel, and God rewarded her with three other sons and two daughters (1 Samuel 2:20-21). Through her experience, Hannah had grown to know and love the Lord more deeply, as evidenced by her prayer of praise (1 Samuel 2:1-10).

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BUILDING BASICS

Turning Sorrow to Joy

Behind almost every outstanding person is an outstanding parent. Hannah made some wise choices before and after becoming a parent that allowed her son to become a godly leader in Israel. Her choices not only turned her own sorrow into joy, but bridged the gap of need for her entire nation.

Sorrow is a part of life, but often presents the possibility for the greatest joys of life if handled wisely. Let's make some observations about how we can turn our sorrow into joy for ourselves and others.

Lesson 2

SAMUEL & ELI'S SON

1 Samuel 2:11-4:1a

Convinced by his unusual birth that God had a special purpose for Samuel, Hannah and Elkanah left their son at Shiloh to be raised by Eli the priest. The sanctuary at Shiloh was the most important in Israel as it was the place where Israelites brought sacrifices¹ to make atonement for their sins. Eli and his two sons, Phinehas and Hophni, were the priests by family inheritance.

As the narrative continues, the author draws a clear contrast between the humble, devout and simple family of Samuel and the prestigious, but out-of-control family of the chief priest Eli. While Samuel grew as an obedient servant in the house of the Lord, Eli's two sons disobeyed their father and mocked God.

The greed and sexual perversion that brought Eli's sons into disrepute were clear. Hophni and Phinehas arrogantly ordered the sacrificial worship in a sacrilegious way by demanding the best portions of the sacrificial meat for their own consumption even before it was used in sacrifice for sin. They also slept with the women who served in the temple. Eli joined them in the feasting, rebuked them strongly for their immorality, but did not demand their obedience to the Lord on either issue. Consequently, God determined to end their days in leadership. Because these men were in positions of national religious and political leadership, their downfall would mean national crisis for Israel.

In the midst of the heresy, however, God was carefully preparing Samuel to take leadership in Israel. As he grew up in Shiloh, Samuel

was well-liked by everyone who came there (2:26). The young man of peasant origin was an obedient and available servant to Eli and those around him.

To warn Eli of the eminent downfall of his household, God sent an unnamed prophet to predict both the death of Hophni and Phinehas and the demolition of the noble ancestry of Eli in the priesthood. The same predictions came to Samuel as the first words of prophecy the young man received from the Lord. Eli accepted God's fair judgment without question, and proceeded to establish Samuel as a called prophet² of God. So it was that Samuel began to emerge as a leader who would relate God's word to Israel in their time of national turmoil.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Making Wise Choices

Most of us make hundreds of choices in any given day, most of which seem so insignificant that we don't even realize we are making them. The fact of the matter is that our smallest choices set the framework for our bigger choices, and all our choices fashion our total effect on the world around us.

It is clear from the story of Eli and his sons that our most important choices, however insignificant they may seem to us, are in our relationship with God. How responsive are we to His love and wisdom for our lives? Do we come to God on our terms or His? The choices we make every day in answer to these questions will determine the rest of our decisions and can profoundly affect the lives of those around us.

Like Samuel, we can not only develop a healthy, constructive lifestyle if we choose to put God first, but also become a person through whom God can bring blessing to others for generations to come. Let's take a closer look at what the Bible has to say about the foundation for making wise choices.

Lesson 3

THE ARK AND THE PHILISTINES

1 Samuel 4:1b-7:2

The author now takes us from the sanctuary at Shiloh to the battlefield at Aphek where Israel once again faced the Philistines. In the first battle, Israel was defeated and lost 4,000 men. As a result, the elders of the land met to discuss the reason behind the great loss. They decided it was because they lacked God's presence on the battlefield; Israel knew God had been responsible for their countless victories in years past.

To achieve God's power and presence in battle, they decided to send for the ark of the Lord.¹ This chest that contained the sacred tablets of Mosaic law symbolized God's presence in Israel. It resided in the sanctuary at Shiloh and was brought up to the battlefield by the priests Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's heretic sons.

When the Philistines heard of the ark being brought into the enemy camp, they were reminded of the Israelite God's powerful deliverance of His people from the Egyptians. Consequently, they were afraid and rallied to fight harder. Israel suffered a devastating loss of 30,000 more men in the subsequent battle.

Israel's grief was fourfold that day:

- (1) In two battles, 34,000 men had been massacred, meaning Philistine domination in much of their land.
- (2) Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, had been killed (high priests that Israel looked to for both religious and political leadership).

(3) The ark, which symbolized God's presence, had been captured by the Philistines.

(4) Eli, who had been judge over Israel some 40 years, dropped dead upon hearing the news of the day.

When Phinehas' wife learned of all these terrible events, she went into premature labor and died during childbirth. As she gave birth to a son, she named him Ichabod, meaning "no glory," because she felt the glory of God had left Israel that day. Her statement summarized the events that ended an era in Israel's history. God had shown clearly that confidence in the ark, the symbol of God's presence, was insufficient. Their faith in God had eroded into pagan worship of a symbol rather than of the Lord Himself.

The story then moves to Philistine territory. Even though the powerful warriors of the land had defeated the Israeli peasants and farmers, they were not so well equipped to deal with the presence of Israel's God. As the ark was placed in three of their five major cities, a deadly plague broke out in each city where it rested. After seven months of grief, the Philistine experts in religious matters were consulted for direction. These men proposed to send the ark back to Israel on a cow-drawn cart. Solid gold mice and tumors, representing the plague God had inflicted upon the cities where the ark had lodged, were placed in the ark as guilt offerings to the God of Israel. They released the cows with the cart, believing that if the animals headed for Israel they would know for sure that the plagues had come from the God of Israel. Even when their calves were taken from them,² the cows went directly toward the Israelite town of Beth-Shemesh when they were released.

Israel received the ark gladly, although it seemed that seventy were killed³ upon its delivery. The Hebrew writer of 1 Samuel attributed their deaths to God's dealing with the sacrilegious handling of the sacred ark.

Nevertheless, the ark was carefully moved to the home of Abinadab in Kiriath Jearim, where it remained some forty years. In this dark time in the Israel's history, the return of the ark brought the hope that God was still with them and would not remain inactive forever. As a result, many people humbly turned back to God during the next twenty years.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Superstition vs. Faith 1

The people of Israel had become indifferent and rebellious toward the God who had revealed Himself to them. As a result, their personal faith in the one true God had eroded into mere superstition. When a crisis occurred, they sought to attain His supernatural salvation from their situation by carrying the ark, the symbol of God's holy presence among them, to the battlefield like a good luck charm. In their blindness, they proudly had the ark transported by two men who had blatantly mocked God and scorned His temple rituals.

There is a definite difference between superstition and faith. Superstition, when it relates to God, is a vague and often fearful man-made definition of who He is. Faith, on the other hand, is born of personal knowledge and trust in God as He has revealed Himself throughout the historical documents of the Bible and especially through the life of Jesus Christ. Security and freedom come from a personal relationship with the Lord, who freely bestows His love and grace on every individual who commits his life to God.

Israel learned a difficult lesson: the Lord's power and grace are there for those who have personal faith in Him *before* the crisis occurs. For such people, God's love and saving power are there not only for the crisis, but for every detail of life.

Choosing faith and guarding against superstitious thinking in our relationship with God are choices that really matter. Let's take a closer look at what the Bible has to say about faith versus superstition.

Lesson 4

ISRAEL DEMANDS A KING

1 Samuel 7:2-8:22

The ark rested at Kiriath Jearim while the dreaded Philistines held power over Israel. After its devastating losses, Israel finally realized that only God could bring relief to the situation. As the people mourned, Samuel instructed the people to return to worshipping God and rid themselves of Ashtoreths and all pagan forms of worship they had adopted.¹

The people responded with prayers, fasting and confession. As a result, God empowered Israel to retrieve their land from the control of the Philistines. Thus, peace reigned during Samuel's rule as judge² over Israel.

Samuel traveled a yearly circuit to Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah, to provide leadership for the people. He made his home in Ramah where he built an altar and performed priestly³ duties for the people. Samuel loved and faithfully served his people. One author describes him as follows:

Samuel was a giant among the men of God in biblical times. He lived to serve God, not to save himself. He knew without any reservation that following the Lord with all the heart was the highest calling of any man or woman, boy or girl. He was holy and humble and kind. He sought not his own good but always the good of others.⁴

When Samuel grew older, he appointed his sons as judges. However, their dishonesty and avarice disgusted the people and gave the elders an

excuse to request a king to replace Samuel's leadership in Israel. Disturbed by their request, Samuel sought the Lord in prayer.

God responded by telling Samuel, "...it is not you they have rejected as their king, but me." God knew their hearts. While the people appreciated His past deliverance, they no longer wanted His control in their nation.⁵

To respond to the people, God gave Samuel a message of solemn warning regarding their preference for an earthly king. In contrast to God's benevolent protection, provision and guidance of Israel, a king would be selfish and oppressive, robbing them of many freedoms they now enjoyed.

The people, nevertheless, continued to demand a monarchy with conventional military organization like the nations around them. The chapter ends with the Lord granting their choice. He Himself would help Samuel select a king for the new era in Israel's history.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Winning the Battles

The Philistines posed a constant threat to the people of Israel. As they were, all of us are threatened by the battles of life. Difficult emotional, physical, spiritual and social issues force us to fight for survival.

What we see from the story in this lesson is that we can choose to fight the battles of life in one of two ways: we can follow God or we can follow our own inclinations and those of people around us apart from God's leadership. When we choose to look to God as our personal commander-in-chief, He promises victory in the battles. Let's examine more closely the choices that matter in winning the battles.

Lesson 5

SAUL ANOINTED, SAMUEL'S FAREWELL

1 Samuel 9, 10, 12

Israel persisted in its demand for a king in spite of the Lord's warnings about such a decision. Finally, He granted their request charging Samuel, the godly prophet and judge of the day, to guide the people in establishing a monarchy.

The first king of Israel would be a young man named Saul. On a trip to retrieve his father's livestock, Saul found himself with the prophet Samuel, whom God had instructed to privately anoint Saul as king. God supernaturally confirmed his decision to Saul through a series of fulfilled prophecies.

When the time came for Samuel to present the new king publicly to Israel, he gathered the people at Mizpah. There he reminded them of God's goodness and power, and of their mistake in preferring a human leader like those of the enemy nations around them. Then, through what appears to have been a casting of lots, God directed the people to Saul, who was found hiding in some baggage. Although modest, Saul seemed to be a choice young man in the prime of life. He was very handsome, and most of the people were delighted with their new king. After giving the people a draft of written regulations for the kingship,¹ Samuel dismissed the people to their homes. Saul returned to his home and fields as well, until the opportunity arose for him to take his place

as king.

That opportunity presented itself when the Israelites of Jabesh Gilead sought peace with an Ammonite king who had attacked them. The king replied that he would make peace if he could first thrust out all of the Jabesh Gilead's right eyes and lay them before Israel as a reproach. When messengers reached Saul with the news of the threat, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily.² Saul proceeded to rally three hundred thirty thousand Israelite men for the battle and succeeded in completely destroying the Ammonite forces.

The people were wild with enthusiasm over the great victory under Saul's leadership. They assembled at Gilgal to inaugurate Saul's reign in a ceremony convened by Samuel. With this event, Samuel officially stepped down from his position of leadership over Israel.

In his final statements, Samuel reminded the people of God's past goodness to Israel as well as of His discipline. He reiterated that their desire for a king to lead them instead of God was sin and explained that God was graciously blessing them *in spite* of their wrong choice, not because of it. To prove his words were from God, Samuel called upon God to produce a thunderstorm. As the storm came, the people were filled with fear and confessed that they had sinned in many ways other than asking for a king. They pleaded with Samuel to pray for God's mercy on their sins.

Samuel responded by assuring the people that, in spite of all their sins, if they and their king would honor God, God would continue to graciously honor Israel. Samuel concluded with a promise to continue to pray for his people and teach them in God's ways.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

God, the Model Parent

No one who has ever been a parent has found it to be an easy task. The choices parents make are crucial to the emotional well-being of everyone in the family and to future generations.

God fully understands the difficulties of parenting. He has faced rebellion and rejection from His children since the world began.

In this lesson, we can see the choices God as a heavenly Father made in the face of Israel's disobedience and rejection. From His perfect responses we can learn -- whether parents or not -- something about the choices that matter in parenting as well as in our relationship to God as His children.

Lesson 6

SAUL'S UNFAITHFULNESS

1 Samuel 13:1-15:35

Saul's first major battle after his coronation was against the Philistines. His standing army numbered 3,000 men; 2,000 with Saul and 1,000 under his son, Jonathan. Jonathan had attacked the Philistines and provoked them to assemble a huge army to attack Israel. Because Israel was terribly outnumbered and at that time had no weapons, most of the men scattered and hid. Samuel had given instructions to Saul to wait for him seven days, at which time Samuel would come to offer sacrifice and call on the Lord to fight the battle for the Israelites.

When Samuel was a little late in arriving, and Saul's remaining men began to desert him, Saul decided to sacrifice the burnt offering himself.¹ As he finished, Samuel arrived and was appalled at Saul's actions, which demonstrated his lack of faith in God in the hour of crisis. The power of God and faithful men of valor, not numerical superiority, had won Israel's previous battles. Because of Saul's disobedience and lack of trust in God, Samuel predicted the downfall of Saul's dynasty and left.

In stark contrast to the king's lack of faith, Saul's son Jonathan and his young armor-bearer decided to single-handedly attack the Philistines. Jonathan's reasoning was, "Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving," he said, "whether by many or by few" (14:6). As these two men charged the Philistines, twenty men were killed. Then God brought panic, confusion and a small earthquake in the enemy camp, and Philistine troops started fighting each other.

Saul heard the rumbling and saw the scattering of the enemy camp. As Israelite warriors that had been in hiding began joining the pursuit, Saul once again took leadership of the army. He made a foolish decision, however, when to “avenge himself on his enemies,” he bound his men under an oath not to eat all day. At the end of the day of fighting, they were so physically exhausted that they broke Jewish law by slaughtering animals and eating the meat with its blood.²

Unaware of his father's edict, Jonathan had unwittingly eaten honey in the forest that day, and Saul almost sentenced his son to death for breaking the sacred oath. The men reasoned with Saul that Jonathan did not deserve to die since he was responsible for their great victory over the Philistines. However, because of Saul's foolish oath, his men were too weak to defeat the Philistines, who escaped to their homes with minimal loss.

Even though Saul's leadership was misguided, selfishly ambitious and impulsive, God used him greatly as a military leader over the next twenty years. During that time, the Israelites successfully battled for their small nation against surrounding countries.

Then, twenty years later, another opportunity came for Saul to demonstrate his allegiance to the Lord by obedience to an assigned task. God gave specific instructions through Samuel to completely destroy the Amalekites.³ These nomadic people had attacked Israel at Sinai and killed stragglers on the exodus from Egypt. Now they raided isolated farms on the southern borders of Israel. Conquering them would support Judah against the Philistines as well as carry out a promise of God in Exodus 17:14.

Rather than obey God's command through Samuel, Saul decided to spare the Amalekite king, Agag, and the choicest livestock from the battle spoils. When Samuel heard of this, he was so angry that he cried out to God all night before confronting Saul the next day. Samuel's fierce denunciation put the king's arrogant disobedience on the level of idolatry and witchcraft (15:23). Samuel informed Saul that the Lord had rejected him as king over Israel.

In response to Samuel's confrontation, Saul lied, made excuses and then made a show of repentance in a desperate effort to save his

reputation with the people (15:30). Samuel finally agreed to worship with Saul, and, after putting the brutal king Agag to death, Samuel left for Ramah. There he mourned for Saul.

The Lord also grieved over Saul's choices of unfaithfulness and disobedience as the king He had appointed over Israel. For the rest of his life, Saul would go deeper and deeper into evil practices, finally destroying himself (1 Samuel 31:5).

In the context of these events in Israel's history, the stage is now set for David, God's choice to replace Saul as king.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Decision-making under Stress

Saul was not fit to be king over Israel because he was not a man of faith. He seemed to have only a vague knowledge about God and little, if any, personal relationship with Him. Consequently, Saul was neither sensitive nor obedient to God. When the crisis came that is recorded in 1 Samuel 13, he chose not to trust God to protect Israel. Instead, he desperately attempted to take control of the situation himself. When he sacrilegiously offered the sacrifice, Saul was impatiently doing what he saw as religiously "necessary" to get on with handling the battle.

Many people in biblical times made this mistake, and we can easily make such a misjudgment today. When the situation seems critical, it's easy to stop trusting God and start taking matters into our own hands. The results, as for Saul, are confusion and a "less than the best" outcome.

How should Saul have responded in the moment of crisis? Let's take a look at what the Bible has to say about the choices that matter in decision-making under stress.

Lesson 7

DAVID, SAMUEL AND SAUL

1 Samuel 16

God had made an irrevocable decision to take His hand of blessing from Saul as king, and to choose “a man after His own heart” (13:14). Samuel grieved for Saul until God urged him to move forward and anoint a man of God’s choosing for the throne.

To anoint another man as king could cost Samuel his life, because such an act could be seen as treason by King Saul. To protect the prophet, the Lord instructed Samuel to move in a cloak of secrecy. He was to go to Bethlehem in Judah with the stated purpose of making a sacrifice to the Lord. The family of Jesse, from whom the new king would come, was to be invited inconspicuously to the ritual.

Jesse had eight sons, and each of the older seven were brought before Samuel one by one. In Samuel’s eyes, the attractive eldest son named Eliab was the obvious choice, but God’s choice was Jesse’s youngest son, David, who had to be brought in from his shepherding responsibilities in the fields. David was outwardly handsome, but since he was the youngest in the family and only a shepherd boy, he was not the predictable choice of a king from a human standpoint. The writer makes clear, however, that God knew that young David’s inner qualities suited him to become a godly king for Israel.

After Samuel anointed David, “the Spirit of the Lord was on David from that day forward” (16:13).¹ God’s Spirit would empower David, not to achieve personal greatness but to be a gift from God *to the nation* of Israel. David would be anointed by God to *shepherd* Israel as carefully

and humbly as he had shepherded his father's flocks on the Judean hillsides. Unlike Saul, David was devoted to God and could be led by God to guide, protect and care for Israel.

The last half of 1 Samuel 16 records how God arranged for David to be brought into Saul's court. At the same time God gave His Spirit's power to David, He withdrew His Spirit from the unfaithful Saul. As a result, Saul suffered depression. One of Saul's attendants suggested that a musician who played the lyre might soothe Saul and drive away the evil spirit² that caused Saul's emotional pain. Another servant knew of David, son of Jesse, who had such talent, and the young man soon found himself in the king's court.

Saul loved the winsome personality and soothing gifts of his new courtier (16:21) and made him his armor-bearer as well. While David faithfully carried out his responsibilities for Saul, the Lord sovereignly worked to prepare the young shepherd boy for the throne.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Self-Worth That Matters

As we study his life, we will see that David was not a perfect man. The Bible does not hide his failures. However, the Bible does reveal the outstanding characteristic of David's life: he had a heart of extraordinary tenderness toward and responsiveness to the Lord.

It was such a heart, 1 Samuel 16:7 says, that made David a person of great worth before God. Despite the fact that people would not have chosen David as king, the Lord anointed the young man because of his heart of love and reverence for his Creator. In spite of the glaring imperfections we will discover later in David's life, the Lord honored him because of his humility and faith before God.

What makes us valuable in our own eyes? How does the God who created us define worth? What values and mindsets make us of great worth as human beings? Are the biblical answers too difficult to achieve, or are God's answers simpler than our own and those of the world around us? Saul valued personal achievements as king, and God gave his position to one better. Let's see what the Bible has to say about the choices that produce self-worth that matters.

Lesson 8

DAVID AND GOLIATH

1 Samuel 17

Once again, the Philistine army had invaded Judah's territory northwest of Keilah (see map, p. 2). Saul and his army camped across a valley from the enemy. Because of his disobedience, Saul no longer had the power of God's Spirit upon him for battle. Even so, Saul might have felt prepared for this battle had it not been for a new and frightening development. The Philistines had a warrior of giant dimensions named Goliath who challenged Israel to representative combat. The code of convention for warfare at that time made it utterly humiliating for Israel to ignore or decline Goliath's challenge. However, neither Saul nor anyone in his army had the courage to go against the giant Goliath.

At this point in the story, David is introduced as if never mentioned before. Commentators assume that the biblical author used a different writer's account for the story of David and Goliath for dramatic effect,¹ inserting 1 Samuel 17:15 to draw it together a bit with his own writings. At any rate, the story begins as David was tending sheep. His father interrupted David's work to send him, with supplies, to his three oldest brothers at the battlefield. David arrived at the front to learn of the giant Goliath's challenge to Israel. David was appalled that anyone would so "defy the armies of the living God." David's oldest brother tried to silence David by angrily accusing him of wickedness and conceit. Declaring innocence to Eliab's accusations, David continued to inquire about the situation with Goliath.

When Saul heard of this, he sent for David, who immediately volunteered to fight the giant. He argued that even though he was just a

boy, he had fought and killed both lion and bear to protect his father's sheep. David was sure that the Lord, who delivered him from the paw of the lion and bear, would give him victory over the heathen Philistine.

Rejecting any kind of battle armor, David went out to fight Goliath with only his staff, a sling and five smooth stones from the stream. A verbal battle of great significance between David and Goliath followed. Goliath declared his self-confidence and the curse of his gods on David, and David declared his confidence in "the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel." David assured Goliath and the Philistines that the battle would be fought and won by the Lord (17:47).

David proceeded to kill the giant with one small stone slung deep into his forehead. After Goliath's defeat, the Israelites immediately pursued the enemy to the gates of their major cities of Gath and Ekron in Philistia.

Overnight, David was the national hero of Israel. Curious to know more about David, Saul sent Abner, commander of his army, to bring the young man. Michal, Saul's daughter, had been promised as a reward to the one who would defeat Goliath.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Weapons Against Fear

1. What types of things do we fear?
2. What might David have feared as he went out to fight Goliath?
3. What perspectives kept David from fearing Goliath?

What was the focus of David's concerns?

4. Even if David had lost the battle with Goliath, he would have been a hero because of his courage and faith. How can this principle apply to a situation we might face today?

5. David found confidence in knowing he was in the will of God. Why is it important to know that we are in God's will in order not to be afraid?

6. How can we know we are in God's will? How did David stay in God's will?

Lesson 9

SAUL ATTACKS DAVID

1 Samuel 18:1-19:24

After defeating Goliath, David had risen to the status of a national hero. In addition, David seemed to possess a lovable personality, and everyone from Saul's children and servants to the masses of Israel became loyal to him.

Saul, however, was watching for the one Samuel the prophet had predicted would take his throne, and David became the prime suspect. Consequently, demonic¹ jealousy began to overcome Saul which led him into the lifelong pursuit of removing the threat of David to his dynasty.

Initially, Saul tried twice to kill David while the young courtier was serving in the palace. Evidently, these unsuccessful attempts were not obvious to David. Saul then decided to send David to the Philistine battlefield with a frequency that he felt sure would lead to David's death. David only became more popular as a phenomenal warrior. Then, when Saul's daughter Michal fell in love with David, Saul bribed David to kill one hundred Philistines in exchange for her hand in marriage. David killed *two* hundred Philistines and entered the royal family as the king's son-in-law.

In desperation, Saul issued blatant orders to his servants and to his son Jonathan to kill David. Jonathan reasoned Saul out of this edict, but only temporarily. Jealousy over David's additional victories on the battlefield led to Saul's insistence on David's death. Saul's daughter Michal, David's wife, saved David this time, as she lowered him from a

window during the night. David fled to Samuel at Ramah, and Saul pursued him there. God intervened to save David this time by causing Saul and all his men to go into a state of prophesying.²

It was becoming more and more clear to Saul that God had indeed chosen David as his replacement as king. Nevertheless, Saul chose to remain David's enemy in a hopeless attempt to frustrate God's plan.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Victory over Jealousy

Jealousy is an emotion that periodically creeps into all of our lives. Someone around us achieves or possesses something that we wish could be ours, and an overt or covert wish for that person's demise is born in our hearts. When Saul allowed jealousy to overtake him, he became paranoid and devious, resistant toward God and unreasonable in his actions. Jealousy finally led to his complete ruin.

Like Saul, our decisions about jealous thoughts can make or break us. The choices we make regarding tendencies toward jealousy are ones that matter greatly. Let's take a careful look at the biblical principles that help us experience victory over jealousy.

Lesson 10

JONATHAN AND DAVID

1 Samuel 20

Out of fear and insane jealousy, Saul resurrected his commitment to destroy David, who by all indications was the one God had anointed to replace Saul as king of Israel. Saul's son Jonathan thought he had put an end to his father's enmity against David and was taken by surprise when David came to him to inquire about Saul's deadly pursuit.

Together Jonathan and David devised a plan to determine if Saul had resurrected his intent to murder David.

Sure enough, when David's name came up in a dinner discussion between Saul and Jonathan, Saul became hostile toward Jonathan for befriending David. Saul declared David a threat to his dynasty and once again decreed that David must die. When Jonathan pleaded David's innocence, Saul hurled a spear at his own son, and Jonathan left the table in fierce anger.

As planned, Jonathan met David to tell him the results of their test of Saul's intentions. The two men submitted to their conclusion that the Lord would have David leave the king's court. They wept together and reaffirmed their covenant of friendship in the Lord before parting.

In the story of Jonathan and David, we have one of the most beautiful friendships ever recorded. David, the shepherd boy warrior who became a national hero, and Jonathan, a man some twenty years David's elder and heir to the throne of Israel, were both men of deep faith in God (14:6; 17:45-47). That love for God knit their hearts together in a supernaturally-strengthened brotherhood covenant (18:3,

4; 20:8, 42). Even though Jonathan realized that David, not he, would inherit the throne of Israel, he loved, supported and protected David.

Their covenant to each other also included considering each other's family members as their own (20:15). Years later, after the simultaneous deaths of Saul and Jonathan, David actually sought out and took Jonathan's crippled son into his palace as his own in fulfillment of his covenant with Jonathan.

Up to this point in the story, we have seen many of David's qualifications as a leader...his unhesitating trust in God and keen awareness of God's love and purposes for Israel; his skill and leadership in battle and humble reception of the nation's praises; and his genuine personality that won the hearts of everyone from the king's own children to the whole nation of Israel.

Yet, Saul alone was filled with anger and jealousy toward David. His disturbed mind and resistance to God's will would motivate Saul to pursue David for the next ten to fifteen years. Even so, God would turn this devastating situation into David's final training ground for his reign as king of Israel.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

The Gift of Friendship

One of the greatest gifts God can give us are deep friendships born out of mutual commitment to the Lord. Whether with a spouse, a family member or someone outside our family, the bond of love which God's Spirit produces in Christ-centered friendship is strong, unselfish and fulfilling.

Such was Jonathan and David's friendship. For better or for worse, these men were committed to supporting each other. Together they rejoiced over victories and wept over losses, all the while, growing in faith and in understanding of the Lord's faithfulness.

All of us yearn for intimate friendship. The friendship of Jonathan and David is a picture of the deep friendship God wants to give each person. The Bible has a great deal to say about choices that matter in developing deep friendships. As we continue our study of the life of David, let's make some observations about the gift of friendship.

Lesson 11

EVENTS AT NOB

1 Samuel 21-22

Knowing that Saul was after his life, David ran in fear. Although he had never instigated rebellion against the king, David found himself branded as a fugitive and outlaw by Saul.

Even the priest Ahimelech at the sanctuary of Nob was frightened to give David aid. Desperate for help, David lied to allay the priest's suspicions. Saul's servant Doeg was there, and, though David knew Saul would find out if Ahimelech helped him, he still persuaded Ahimelech to give him food and a weapon.

Driven to extremes by the danger in which he found himself, David's life continued to hang by a thread. He sought refuge in the Philistine city of Gath, where he pretended to be insane in order to keep the Philistines from killing him.¹

Finally, David went to his native tribe of Judah where his family² and about four hundred fugitives joined him in hiding in the cave of Adullam near Bethlehem. David became the captain over this defensive force, but was careful to put his aged parents under the keeping of the Moabite king.

With every report of David's actions and whereabouts, Saul built his fantasy that David was conspiring against him. Because of these imaginings, Saul became guilty of gross brutality and wanton bloodshed against his own people. He summoned the priest Ahimelech and his sons, accused Ahimelech of treason and proceeded to have Doeg the

Edomite³ slay eighty-five priests and every man, woman, child and animal in the city of Nob.

Only one son of Ahimelech named Abiathar escaped the massacre and fled to David's stronghold at Adullam. Upon hearing the news about Nob, David blamed himself and confessed his sin before Abiathar (who by seeking refuge with David showed his knowledge that David intended no harm to the priesthood). David made a solemn promise to personally undertake Abiathar's protection.

David now had both a prophet (22:5) and a priest at his side, a luxury only a king of Israel normally experienced. At the same time, Saul no longer had either. He had shown supreme folly in massacring the priesthood and blatantly resisting the hand of God.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Overcoming Selfishness

As human beings, we are prone to want our best before that of others. From the time we are born, we have a natural bent towards selfishness. While self-preservation and care for our needs is the first step to enable us to sustain a giving lifestyle, self-centeredness can ruin our lives, rendering us useless and even cruel as human beings. We can see this clearly from the life of Saul, whose selfish clutching at kingly power led him to commit appalling acts of brutality.

The Bible states clearly that a lifestyle of unselfish and sacrificial giving leads to the greatest joy and happiness. Biblical principles repeatedly establish that you cannot give more than you will receive in return for giving. There is an old adage that says: "Giving is receiving; Receiving is giving; That is the art that lies behind living." Such a statement would certainly pass the test of biblical truth which encourages us to develop and enjoy a lifestyle of giving. Let's examine some of these principles as we look more closely at a choice that matters: overcoming selfishness.

Lesson 12

DAVID PURSUED BY SAUL

1 Samuel 23-24

Saul had convinced himself and many people in Israel that David was a conspirator and a treasonous outlaw. After brutally slaying eighty-five priests and the people of the town of Nob for assisting David, Saul heard that David and his men were in the Judean town of Keilah. In his demented thinking, Saul somehow imagined that God was allowing him to capture David within Keilah's walls and gathered his men to go after him.

David *was* in Keilah, a town God had directed him to rescue from Philistine raiders. When David heard that Saul was coming, he sought God's direction through the high priest's ephod¹ which Abiathar had brought from Nob. The Lord directed David to leave Keilah, because it would be destroyed like Nob had been if its people protected David.

David was obviously shaken by Saul's pursuit, and Jonathan came to comfort him at Horesh in the wilderness of Ziph. While God's protection had made it impossible for Saul to get to David, Jonathan found easy access to his friend. He assured David with the words: "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this" (23:17). This would be Jonathan and David's last meeting before Jonathan's death (31:2), as their undiminished devotion to one another surfaced again.

However, the encouraging visit was followed by a very close call on David's life. Saul was assisted in his search for David by the people of Ziph, who had been led to believe David and his men were treasonous

outlaws. Just as Saul and his men were closing in on David, a messenger came with word that the Philistines were raiding the land. Saul had to leave immediately and abandon his pursuit of David until later.²

David fled to Engedi, but as soon as Saul had dealt with the Philistines, he pursued David again, this time with 3,000 of Israel's best soldiers. During the pursuit, Saul went to relieve himself in the very cave where David and his 600 men were hiding. David had the perfect chance to kill Saul, but chose instead to simply cut off the edge of the king's robe. Even for this act, however, David began to feel guilty.³ After explaining to his men who wanted to kill Saul that it was wrong to harm the anointed king of Israel, he went forth from the cave to confront Saul from a distance. David pleaded his innocence to the charge of conspiracy against the throne, presenting the piece of Saul's robe as proof of his words.

Saul wept, amazed at the graciousness of David. The king's response was appreciative, humble and repentant. He spoke of his fear that God would establish David as king of Israel and wipe out Saul and his family in the process. He asked David to take an oath that he would spare Saul's family. David did so, and the two men parted. Saul went to his palace, and David went with his men back to their stronghold. Saul still could not be trusted.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Benefits of Forgiveness

In his book, *The Freedom of Forgiveness*, David Augsburger tells the story of a Quaker woman who opened the door of her room one night and was shocked to find a robber going through her bureau with a rifle. As she quietly closed the door, the man turned to point his gun at her.

"Put that down," she said, "I'm going to help you because you must need whatever I have much more than I do, if you have to steal for it."

The burglar, dumbfounded, watched as she opened a secret drawer and pressed her jewelry on him, telling him she was sorry that his need was so urgent. Suddenly the man dropped his gun and fled, taking nothing.

The following day, she found an anonymous note in her mailbox that read:

Madam, I have known only hate and fear. I can deal with them. But I was powerless before your kindness.

Few people discover the power of love and forgiveness because these are unnatural responses to hurts from others. We can learn from David, however, that forgiveness has greater benefits than revenge. Saul had slandered David throughout Israel and left innocent blood in his path as he tracked David like a criminal. But when given the chance to kill Saul, David chose to forgive him instead; and it was a good choice.

In this lesson, we will observe some biblical truths about God's forgiveness, our forgiveness of others, and the benefits of choosing both.

Lesson 13

NABAL AND ABIGAIL

1 Samuel 25-26

Chapter 25 opens with the death of Samuel, the beloved judge, prophet and priest in Israel. His death marked the end of the era in which God directly led Israel through prophets and judges. The entire nation mourned Samuel's death, and a great assembly of Israelites gathered to perform a memorial service and burial in Ramah.

The account then turns to David and his six hundred men who had moved to the wilderness near Maon and Carmel in southern Judah. David had a difficult task providing food for his six hundred men. They had guarded the enormous herds of a rich man named Nabal in hopes of receiving food in return. When shearing time came, David sent ten of his men to humbly ask for provisions from Nabal in repayment for their services.

Any of Nabal's herdsmen would have testified that David and his men had acted as shields against Amalekites, Philistines and wild animals that threatened Nabal's herds. Even so, Nabal responded to the claims of David's men with disinterest and doubt, and he refused to grant their request for food.

In light of the culture of the time, Nabal's response was unconventional as well as unacceptable. Hospitality was seen as an obligation in the Near East, especially at harvest time, which was the yearly time of generosity and giving.

When David's men returned with Nabal's answer, David's reaction was also ill-advised. In anger, he impetuously gathered four hundred of his

men and set out to kill Nabal and his entire household. David's overreaction could have cost him the throne in years to come¹ had not Nabal's beautiful and intelligent wife Abigail taken steps to stop David. When she heard of the situation, she quickly assembled generous provisions for David and his men and made haste to meet them en route.

Upon meeting David, Abigail bowed humbly before him, then demonstrated brilliant tact as she led David to see God's perspective on the situation. She encouraged David to pay no attention to a foolish man like Nabal. She reminded David that he was destined to be king of Israel,² and that as long as David fought God's battles,³ God would avenge David's enemies. She pleaded with David to accept the provisions she brought for his men and turn from the actions that would only lead to remorse for him later.

David immediately recognized the wisdom in Abigail's appeal. He praised her and thanked God for sending her to avert his foolish course of action. As a result, David and his men turned back, and Abigail went home in peace. Only days later, the Lord brought about Nabal's death of heart failure, and David sent for Abigail to be his wife.⁴

After this, the Ziphites helped Saul and 3,000 of his choice soldiers to go after David once again.⁵ In the dead of night, while God caused a deep sleep to fall over Saul's men, David and Abishai stole into Saul's camp and removed Saul's spear and water jar from beside his head. When David and Abishai reached the outskirts of the camp, David called out to Saul, awakening the entire camp of soldiers. He proceeded to clearly state his innocence of alleged conspiracy against the king, showing the king's spear and water jar as evidence that he had again passed up the opportunity to kill Saul. The king apologized to David, promising never to hunt him down again, and the two men separated for the last time. David had become convinced that only by leaving Israel could he bring an end to Saul's pursuits (27:4).

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Dealing With Hostility

Nabal's hostility toward David was passive. He mocked David and left him to starve while he feasted on the profits of David's services. Saul's hostility, on the other hand, was aggressive. Time and again he gathered as many as 3,000 of his best soldiers and unjustifiably pursued the massacre of David and his men.

An abusive and hostile environment is not one in which the human spirit was created to function, whether the abuse is passive or aggressive in nature. The natural responses to the unnerving assaults of another are frustration, confusion, panic and hatred. Unless we are prepared for hostility when it comes, we can easily find ourselves practicing in retaliation the very evil we hate.

The Bible gives us healthy and constructive principles for responding to the evils of hostility. David learned these in his difficult encounters with Saul and Nabal, and we can benefit from them as well. Let's look at some biblical guidelines for dealing with hostility.

Lesson 14

THE END OF SAUL'S REIGN

1 Samuel 27-31

David had become convinced that Saul's periodic pursuits could last indefinitely, and he and his men were weary of their fugitive existence in Israel. For these reasons, David decided to flee to Philistia again (as in

1 Samuel 21:10-15). There David negotiated with Achish, the Philistine king of Gath, to lease the city of Ziklag in exchange for specific military services against the foes of the Philistines.¹ Because of Saul's renowned hatred of David, Achish believed that David would in fact fight against his own people in Israel. However, while David reported to be carrying out raids on Israelite towns, he was in fact massacring whole towns of Amalekites and other nomadic south of Judah. Because David left no prisoners of war to tell Achish his secret, David succeeded in deceiving Achish and helping Israel at the same time.² This practice allowed David to avoid harming his own people in Israel while he found asylum in Philistia.

When the time came for the Philistine kings to combine forces to fight against Israel at Aphek in the north, King Achish insisted that David and his men join the forces. David appeared to wholeheartedly agree with the plan, but as they traveled north to join the other Philistine forces, the other commanders refused to trust David and demanded that he be sent home.

When David and his men arrived back at Ziklag, they found their city burned and their women and children taken captive by the Amalekites. The men wept bitterly, and David sought the Lord's direction and help.

Finding the Amalekites who had taken their families captive was an almost impossible task, but God intervened and led them to a young Egyptian slave who had been abandoned by the Amalekites because of illness. The young man was able to direct them to the exact location of their enemy.

When David and his men arrived, the Amalekites were celebrating their success in the wilderness and were caught totally off guard. Not only were David and his men able to retrieve family and possessions, but they also gained all the plunder from the Amalekite raids on Judah and Philistia. David gave glory to God for the victory and insisted that the spoils from the battle be divided among all 600 of his men and Judeans in various cities who had helped them during their fugitive years.

In the meantime, Saul had panicked as he watched the Philistine armies gathering against Israel. He decided to seek God for direction on how to avert the disaster, but God did not respond. In desperation, Saul sought direction from the deceased prophet Samuel through the help of a medium.³ God somehow allowed the medium to reveal to Saul that he and his sons would die in the next day's battle, Israel would fall to the Philistines, and David would become king in his place. Saul was terrified and too weak to go on. Finally, the medium and Saul's servants convinced him to eat, and he was revived enough to go into battle against the Philistines during the final hours of his life.

The next day, as predicted, all three of Saul's sons and Saul died during the Mt. Gilboa battle against the Philistines. As a result, the terrible foes of God's people once again invaded and occupied the northern towns of Israel. When the Philistines discovered the bodies of Saul and his sons on the battlefield, they inflicted terrible indignities on the corpses. Their gloating lasted only a short time, however, as courageous men from the Israelite town of Jabesh-Gilead retrieved the bodies for burial.

After the defeat at Mt. Gilboa, Israel was once again as it had been at the beginning of Saul's reign. It was obvious that a king who was not faithful to God could not lead Israel in their battles against surrounding enemies. Saul had failed as king, not because of a lack of military or political ability, but because he refused to acknowledge the Lord's leadership of Israel. Even though he determined to seek God in the end, he had already gone his own way for too long, refusing Samuel's

instructions and pursuing David against God's will. In the end, Saul and all of Israel had to face the tragic results of his choices.

However, God's plan to redeem Israel through David, a godly king, would not be thwarted. David's tested and faithful generosity, gratitude and good will toward his people set him apart as a man with a heart for God...and God's heart for Israel.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Letting God Be God

Saul's downfall depicts the tragic results of rejecting God's guidance. Saul went from impatience to disobedience to open defiance of God's revealed will. As a result, jealous pursuit of an innocent man led Saul to slay eighty-five priests and an entire town of innocent Israelites. Knowing full well God had chosen David to be king (1 Samuel 23:17), Saul persisted in his attempts to kill David in hopes of thwarting God's plan.

Because God could not honor a leader who despised His authority, the small nation of Israel was rendered helpless in the final battle of Saul's reign as king. God's promise to "honor those who honor Him" and "disdain those who despise Him" (1 Samuel 2:30) became a reality: Saul and his sons fell in battle, and Israel lost all the land they had gained over the years of Saul's rule. Saul's entire family and all of Israel paid for Saul's choices to "be god" rather than let "God be God" in his life.

Although we may not rise to the position and fall to the depths that Saul did as a result of his wrong choices, it is easy for anyone to actively or passively dishonor God and His leadership. We can easily choose to "be god" in our own lives rather than let "God be God." Letting God be God means acknowledging Him as the loving and all-powerful Creator and sustainer of the universe and continually choosing to make Him Lord of our everyday existence. As we close Part I of this study, let's look at this most important choice of all.

PART II

DAVID THE KING

Lesson 15

INTRODUCTION

Part 1 of our study, *Choices That Matter: Studies from the Life of David*, was based on the Book of 1 Samuel. We saw that Israel was a nation with a theocratic government in which the people were led directly by God through anointed prophets and judges. But the people grew weary of trusting God to protect them from surrounding enemies and demanded a king as the neighboring nations had to lead them in battle. In spite of God's warnings about the tyrannies of monarchy, the people persisted in their demands and finally were granted their wish. As a result, Israel suffered greatly from the weaknesses of various kings for almost 500 years until the nation's complete downfall in 586 B.C.

The first of these kings was Saul, who proved faithless in his leadership of Israel. When God determined to replace him with David, a "man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14), Saul resisted to the point of convincing much of Israel that David was an evil conspirator. Saul pursued David's life for ten to fifteen years, forcing the young man to live as a fugitive. Although David had two clear opportunities to kill Saul, he refused to harm the king.

Saul had been king of Israel for forty years when he was killed in battle. David was immediately anointed king of his native Judah, the large southern tribe in Israel. Ish-Bosheth, Saul's son, remained king over the northern tribes of Israel. After a series of battles, David's forces grew stronger while Ish-Bosheth's diminished. Even though attempts were made to unite Judah and northern Israel peacefully, treachery and murder interrupted the delicate negotiations. Finally, Ish-Bosheth was killed in his bed by two of his own soldiers.

With Ish-Bosheth dead, all of Israel joined David's side. David was thirty-seven years of age and had been king of Judah for seven years when he was anointed king over all of Israel. His reign over all Israel would last thirty-three years.

David's first act as king of Israel was to capture the fortress city of Jerusalem from a Canaanite tribe and establish a national capital there. The city also became known as the *City of David* or *Zion*.¹ Hiram, king of the Phoenician seaport of Tyre, voluntarily built David's palace in Jerusalem to show his desire for good relationships with Israel.²

David was a fifteen year-old shepherd boy when Samuel anointed him to be the king of Israel. From that time until age thirty-seven when he was finally appointed king by the people of Israel, David had been well-trained for the throne by the many difficulties he had faced. As a shepherd, a young warrior and as a fugitive running from Saul, David had learned to trust the Lord for protection. As the leader of hundreds of distressed outcasts of society (1 Samuel 22:2), David had learned discernment and political savvy. Through mistakes, disappointments and fear, he had learned to trust in the perfect faithfulness and timing of God. With this time of preparation finally behind him, David began his reign as king over Israel.

DAVID RETRIEVES THE ARK

2 Samuel 6

After establishing a national capital at Jerusalem, David moved to fully unify the nation under God by bringing the ark,³ which symbolized God's presence, to the capital city. For sixty years, including the entire reign of Saul, the ark had been resting at Kiriath Jearim near the Philistine border in the home of Abinadab. Now David and 30,000 chosen men of Israel gathered to celebrate as the ark was being transported to Jerusalem.

Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the cart on which the ark was being carried when something happened that halted the celebration. God had commanded that the holy ark only be handled and carried with shoulder poles by Levitical priests (Numbers 4:15; 1 Chronicles 15:11-15). David, however, decided to adopt the convenient Philistine method of transport (1 Samuel 6:7-8) and commissioned the sons of Abinadab, rather than priests, to move the ark. When the ox stumbled, Uzzah reached out and touched the ark in case it should fall. Because of his irreverence for the holy ordinances that did not permit handling of the ark, Uzzah fell dead. Everyone was shocked at Uzzah's death, and David sent the ark to the nearby home of Obed-edom.

Many explanations have been made for this happening,⁴ but the lesson taken from this unexpected event was that David and the Israelites came to a fresh recognition of the holiness and awesome power of the Lord. Israel, under the reign of faithless Saul, had long abandoned the Scriptures and careful adherence to godly principles. They supposed that God would go along with *their* rules, but Uzzah's death proved that supposition wrong.

In the three months that followed, God brought blessing to the home where David sent the ark. After reminding the people of His authority, the Lord once again confirmed His good will toward Israel. Because of this, David regained courage and brought the ark to Jerusalem, this time in the proper way. There was a great celebration as David and all danced and rejoiced before the Lord.

David's wife Michal, however, rebuked David's actions, though it is uncertain why.⁵ However, her sharp rebuke of the king led to her childlessness (6:23).⁶ David would push away those who did not support the Lord's enthronement in the midst of Israel.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Superstition vs. Faith 2

For many years, Israel had been drifting away from God. With Samuel's death and under the ungodly leadership of King Saul, the nation fell to new lows in its spiritual life. For the first years after Saul's death, political factions caused civil war which reflected the pride and selfishness that pervaded the land. Even David went about setting up his new government apart from the Lord's direction. Although Uzzah's death was shocking, it was a righteous judgment by which the Lord graciously brought David and Israel back to God and His blessings.

As we saw in an earlier study, superstition, when it relates to God, is a vague man-made definition of who God is. Transporting the ark with disregard to God's directive clearly reflected the fact that David and his people had fallen away from following God's word and from a knowledge of His divine character. The ark, a religious symbol, and their own rituals, not God's, had become the focus of their worship. Their man-made definition of God made this worship superstition, not true faith.

The choices that are essential to authentic faith involve an accurate picture of who God is and a working knowledge of His principles for our lives. It is easy for us to replace the personal relationship God desires for us with religious activities or man-made rituals. Let's look at the importance of maintaining authentic faith as we seek to know God and His Word.

Lesson 16

GOD'S COVENANT WITH DAVID

2 Samuel 7

Things had finally settled down for David. He lived in a palace, the Lord had given him rest from his enemies, and the ark was in Jerusalem. It bothered David, however, that he lived in a palace while the ark of God was housed in a tent. Consequently, David called on Nathan the prophet to discuss the possibility of building a temple for the ark.

Nathan's first response was one of encouragement to David, but that night the Lord communicated differently to Nathan. He told the prophet that He had always been pleased for the ark, the symbol of His presence in Israel, to dwell in a tent. He would allow the building of a temple, but one of David's sons, not David, would be responsible for its construction.¹ David would not be disappointed, however, because the Lord proceeded to make an even greater promise to David and to the nation of Israel. He promised to establish the house, or throne, of David forever.² For David, the covenant meant that David's family would indefinitely provide the kings for Israel. For Israel, it meant that God would sustain the nation forever.³

After Nathan shared the prophecy with David, the king responded by spending time alone with the Lord in joyful and sober meditation. David humbly thanked God for the success He had given him and praised God for His goodness and greatness. David also recounted the Lord's past blessings on Israel and acknowledged the blessings He now promised for the future.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Following God's Best Plan

Sometimes our plans do not match God's. We may even plan to build a monument for God that He has never asked for. Indeed, our lives can be full of misguided projects. After his experience with the ark, David knew that it was best to put his plans before God *before* moving forward.

Often we set our hearts on a direction that seems best to us, but is not as good as God's best. Seeking God's best plan in every endeavor we undertake is a choice that matters. This choice is called "wisdom" in the Bible and promises successful living. Let's take a closer look at how to seek God's will and the benefits of doing so.

Lesson 17

MEPHIBOSHETH'S STORY

2 Samuel 8-10

Chapters 8 and 10 of 2 Samuel recount how David established Israel as a strong and predominant nation. All of the wars in David's reign are catalogued in chapter 8 as evidence that "the Lord gave David victory everywhere he went" (8:14b). We have no information about how most of these wars began, but it seems David's intentions were the defense and unification of Israel, not the building of an empire. In the case of war with the Philistines, David was not an aggressor in that he was clearing them out of the land of Israel. With regard to the Ammonite king (10:1-17), David was provoked into action. Wars with Aram, Moab and Edom were most likely wars over trade routes that passed through Israel. David's harsh action toward the Moabites, with whom he had previously had good relations (cf. 1 Samuel 22:3-4), must have also been provoked by their hostile action toward Israel.

Chapter 10 recounts the particularly significant and perilous war with Ammon referred to in chapter 8. King Nahash of Ammon had been loyal and kind to David, and when Nahash died, David sent men to convey his sympathy to Nahash's son, Hanun. Hanun's officers convinced Hanun, however, that David was really spying out their land before attacking them. Consequently, Hanun took David's men and shaved off half their beards and cut their robes off at the buttocks, sending them home half naked. Such action was a declaration of war.¹

The Ammonites proceeded to hire 20,000 Syrian (Aramean) warriors to help them fight Israel. David's commander Joab fought the Syrians, and his brother, Abishai, attacked the Ammonites. David personally led the

final battle with Syrian troops at Helam where the Israelites defeated additional Syrian troops. As a result, the Syrians were afraid to help the Ammonites anymore, and David's superiority in the area was firmly established.

David also worked to establish Israel from within, "doing what was just and right for all the people" (8:15). In 2 Samuel 8:15-18, the biblical writer describes the development of David's administration as it took full control of the nation's affairs.² Justice was important to David, and he personally administered the law. Zadok, a longtime friend of David, was the chief priest alongside of Abiathar. Together, these men led the nation in worship and religious practice. David appointed his sons as his royal advisers.³

While chapters 8 and 10 recount David's international importance and military prowess, chapter 9 records his tender dealings with the son of his deceased friend, Jonathan. As part of his friendship covenant with Jonathan, David had promised to always be kind to Jonathan's offspring (1 Samuel 20:15-17). In keeping with this promise, David sought out Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet, and brought him to Jerusalem. David presented Mephibosheth with the property of his grandfather, King Saul, and made arrangements for the property's management. David also had Mephibosheth move to Jerusalem where he ate at the king's table for the rest of his life.⁴

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Keeping Promises

To fully appreciate David's actions with Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, it is helpful to review the relationship David shared with the former crown prince, Jonathan. Because of their mutual faith, David and Saul's oldest son, Jonathan, bonded in a covenant friendship.⁵ Even though David posed a threat to Jonathan's inheriting the throne of his father, Saul, Jonathan felt no jealousy toward David. 1 Samuel 18:3 captured the extent of *Jonathan's* love for David: "And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself." When they both realized David must run from Saul and that they could no longer be in contact with each other, 1 Samuel 20:41 depicted the extent of *David's* love for Jonathan: "Then they kissed each other and wept together--but

David wept the most." In the midst of their deep commitment to each other, war had essentially broken out between Jonathan's family and David. Knowing God's intent to place David on the throne of Israel, Jonathan asked David to make one promise to him: "But show me

unfailing kindness like that of the Lord as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family--not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth" (1 Samuel 20:15).

Years after Jonathan's death, David remembered his promise to his covenant friend and kept it. In searching out and bringing the son of Jonathan to his palace, David kept his promise, in spite of the fact that Saul's entire family outside of Jonathan had become David's enemies. For this reason, Mephibosheth was no doubt afraid when David brought him to Jerusalem. However, David calmed Mephibosheth's fears, generously gave him his grandfather Saul's property, and saw to it that Mephibosheth ate at the king's table along with David's own sons. All of Israel saw David pay honor to his beloved friend as he kept his promise to Jonathan years after Jonathan's death.

It is easy to keep promises that bring pleasure. Oftentimes, however, keeping promises can be inconvenient and even painful. Habits such as not being on time, not showing up for meetings, overspending on credit cards or putting aside a promise to a child, spouse or friend are all choices related to keeping promises. These actions can subtly and profoundly color people's perception of our integrity. However, many wonderful qualities are revealed in our character when we make the often hard choices to keep promises. Let's make some observations about the biblical truths related to a choice that matters: keeping promises.

Lesson 18

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA

2 Samuel 11:1-12:25

While the armies of Israel continued warfare with Ammon, David remained in Jerusalem at the palace. One evening as he walked about on the roof, he saw a beautiful woman bathing. The woman was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of David's choicest soldiers (cf.

2 Samuel 23:8,39). David had her brought to his palace to lay with her, and she became pregnant.

Trying to conceal his error, David brought Uriah home from the battlefield under the pretense of getting information about the status of the war. David wanted Uriah to sleep with his wife so that all would think Bathsheba's baby was conceived with her husband. However, the plan did not work because Uriah refused to enjoy his wife while his comrades were still in battle.

David finally resorted to sending Uriah back to the battlefield with a note for Joab, the commander of the army. David's note instructed Joab to put Uriah at the fiercest front-line position and withdraw the troops so that he would be killed. David assumed that after Uriah's death, all would believe Bathsheba's baby had been conceived when Uriah was home. When Joab obeyed David's orders, Uriah and several other Israelite soldiers were killed. After Bathsheba's time of mourning, David took her as his wife.

Although pagan kings of the day could practice adultery and murder for selfish ends without confrontation, God's anointed king of Israel could not. God would not bend His laws for anyone, and *especially* not for the

king He had placed in power.¹ So it was that about one year later, God commissioned Nathan the prophet to go to David. Nathan told the king a parable about a rich man who had stolen the prized possession from a poor man. Not knowing it was a parable, David became furious at the injustice of the story. In the heat of the moment, Nathan used the parable to expose David's own wicked actions toward Uriah, a loyal and innocent man.

Nathan went on to tell David about the havoc that would result from his choices.² There would be bloodshed in David's family from that point on, one of his sons would lie with David's wives in broad daylight (cf. 2 Samuel 16:22), and the child Bathsheba had borne David would die.³

David's response was genuine remorse over his sin. But even though God forgave David, the child died. The story reveals the incredible redemption of the Lord, however, as Bathsheba went on to bare David another son named Solomon, a child that God's favor rested on from birth.⁴

God had warned Israel of the results of having an earthly king to replace His personal theocratic leadership of Israel. In 1 Samuel 8, we can read His words through the prophet Samuel. A king would be self-centered and prone to satisfy his own appetites at the expense of ordinary people.

Although David had been very considerate of the people up to this point, even this "man after God's own heart" fell when he trifled with God's laws. At the height of success and prosperity in his reign, David committed both adultery and murder to satisfy his own appetites. The result was the beginnings of rebellion and turmoil throughout the nation.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Overcoming Temptations

Temptation has been defined as *enticing one to sin against God*. The Bible clearly identifies the sources of temptation as Satan (Genesis 3:1-5)⁵ and our own selfish nature (James 1:13). While God allows our faith to be tested, He does not tempt us to go against His laws for our lives.

Many of us can relate to David. In an idle moment, he decided to satisfy his physical appetite "just this once." The result was deceit, murder and a lifetime of heartache.

Most of our failures to say *no* to temptations will not lead to infamy, as it did for David. Even so, everyone eventually learns that yielding to temptation produces wounds, scars and pain. God's desire is that we successfully deal with temptation. Let's see what the Bible has to say about the choices that lead to overcoming temptation.

Lesson 19

AMNON, TAMAR AND ABSALOM

2 Samuel 13-14

David's actions with Bathsheba may have taught his sons to yield to lust and the use of violence for personal satisfaction. 2 Samuel 13 imparts one of the most sordid stories recorded in the Bible. David's eldest son, Amnon, was overtaken with lust for his half-sister Tamar. Consequently, he schemed to rape her, then cast her off. David was furious about Amnon's actions, but apparently did nothing about the situation. In angry retaliation, Tamar's brother, Absalom, had his half-brother Amnon assassinated, then fled from Jerusalem to his grandfather's court in Geshur (3:3b).

David grieved over Absalom's absence every day for three years, while the nation wondered who would succeed David since the crown prince, Absalom, was in exile indefinitely. Finally, David's top military commander, Joab, used a wise woman and a parable¹ to persuade David to pardon Absalom's crime. David allowed Joab to bring the crown prince² back to Jerusalem.

After Absalom's return, David was still torn between the justice due Absalom for murder and his own personal desire to be close to his son again. Consequently, David would not see Absalom after Joab brought him back to Jerusalem. Two years passed, and Absalom tried to get an audience with David through the king's commander, Joab. When Joab refused to cooperate, Absalom burned Joab's field in insistence that the commander do as he wished. He demanded to see his father, David, even if he must die for the murder of his brother as a result (14:32). With this, Joab persuaded David to see Absalom.

So it was that after five years, David and his son Absalom were reunited. Absalom bowed low before his father, and the king greeted his son with a kiss.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Dealing With Family Heartache 1: Disappointment & Discouragement

Although David made serious mistakes morally, he repented completely and had restored his relationship to the Lord. The majority of David's life was centered around glorifying God and serving his people fairly. While not much is said about David's feelings about his sons' choices to act apart from the ethics that David espoused, we can assume he experienced deep emotional pain.

The same pain is seen today in the parent whose child chooses different ethical standards. Fear, confusion, anger, disappointment and discouragement can flood one's life when faced with this or other family conflicts. Splits in family relationships can be the most painful.

It is encouraging, however, to know that the Bible offers positive emotional choices in the face of family heartache. Rather than yielding to the debilitating forces of disappointment and discouragement, we can gain new courage. Let's take a look at constructive choices that can lift us up rather than pull us down as we deal with family heartaches.

Lesson 20

ABSALOM'S CONSPIRACY & DEATH

2 Samuel 15-17

After being reinstated into David's court, Absalom proceeded to conspire to take the throne of his father, David, prematurely. Over a four-year period, he secretly undermined his father before the people and campaigned for their allegiance. Then, under the pretense of going to Hebron to worship the Lord, Absalom took 200 naive citizens of Jerusalem with him to Hebron and sent word throughout Israel that at the sound of the trumpet, all should declare "Absalom is king at Hebron!"

When word reached David about Absalom's revolt, he quickly assembled his household and fled from Jerusalem. He left ten concubines behind to keep the palace, the priests Zadok and Abiathar to stay with the ark of God, and his friend, Hushai, to pose as a traitor to David in order to spy out Absalom's plan of attack. David gave Ittai, a new Philistine commander of David's body guard,¹ opportunity to stay in Jerusalem, but Ittai insisted on going with David.

With his group of about 1,000 travelers, David journeyed north through the tribe of Benjamin. As they traveled, they were harassed as a man named Shimei and some other Benjamites hurled insults, rocks and dirt on David and his people. David chose to ignore the assailants who were obviously motivated by fanatical tribalism.² David's tolerance paid off later as Benjamin and Judah were forever bound as allies because of his humble response.

Ahithophel, a wise man who had been David's counselor, had betrayed David to advise Absalom. He counseled Absalom to quickly pursue David and take the king's life while he and his men were exhausted from their flight from Jerusalem. Absalom received conflicting counsel from Hushai (David's friend who posed as a traitor to David) who argued that David was too great a warrior for Absalom's men. He suggested Absalom gather men from all over Israel to pursue and crush David and his men. Absalom took Hushai's rather than Ahithophel's advice, unknowingly giving David and his men time to rest and prepare for battle.

In the meantime, not knowing whose counsel Absalom would take, Hushai sent the sons of Zadok and Abiathar to tell David to flee across the Jordan. Although by narrow escape, the spies reached David, and the king moved his company across the river. There, a wealthy man named Barzillai along with two other men of Mahanaim³ cared for the needs of David and his people.

Lesson 21

DAVID GRIEVES A SON'S DEATH

2 Samuel 18-20

When Absalom pursued his father David, 20,000 men died in the forest of Ephraim in a bloody civil war. Even though David had asked that his son Absalom be captured rather than killed, Joab seized the opportunity to kill Absalom, and the battle was over. Runners took the news to David in Mahanaim where he had been instructed to remain for protection.

Upon receiving the news of his son's death, David was overcome with grief. Rather than welcome his men back to the city, he wept and cried out for Absalom. The good news for the nation and for David as king was overshadowed by David's grief as a father. Harsh words from Joab brought David to his senses, and he went out to show appreciation to the loyal soldiers who had risked their lives in battle that day.

Although Absalom's revolt died along with its leader, the country would only slowly be restored to David's control. David did not go to Jerusalem right away, but waited until he had been invited to return to the throne. Although most of Israel was ready to hail David king, the tribe of Judah lagged behind, possibly out of fear, since they had been chief supporters of Absalom. David sent friendly word to the people of Judah to ask why they had not joined others in wishing his return to the throne. He reminded them of the close relationship he had previously shared with them, and David even went so far as to invite Absalom's former commander Amasa to replace Joab as his highest military commander.¹

When Judah gave their consent to David's kingship, however, the rest of Israel was jealous because they had not received equal treatment by David. It was then that a man named Sheba seized the moment to start another revolt against David (2 Samuel 19:41-20:26). This was short-lived, however, and David was again established in Jerusalem as the king of Israel.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Dealing With Family Heartache 3: Losses

It is difficult to imagine the pain David must have felt when he heard about the death of his son. Absalom died fighting to kill his own father, and the civil war he spurned had divided the nation of Israel. David's grieving process was curtailed by his need to show appreciation to his troops and pull the country back together.

Time heals some of the losses of our lives, but other losses leave deep wounds. There are no shortcuts or easy answers, but the Lord promises to be near, to redeem the pain and to heal the brokenhearted who turn to Him.

In her booklet, *Facing the Death of Someone You Love*, Elisabeth Elliot shares principles that helped her through the deaths of two husbands. She states that six things, "if done in faith, can be the way to resurrection: be still and know, give thanks, refuse self-pity, accept the

loneliness, offer it to God, turn your energies toward the satisfaction not of your own needs but of others."

As we look at biblical principles that can support us during a time of loss, we will refer to verses that support Elisabeth's statement.

Lesson 22

TEMPLE PLANS

1 Chronicles 22,28

To finish our study of the life of David, we will move to the book of 1 Chronicles. Some years before the end of David's reign over Israel, he took a census of the people. Although it is unclear why, this act was considered evil by everyone, including Joab, David's military commander.

The census amounted to a counting or drafting of fighting men. Most believe David's action signified that he had become proud of his achievements as king and dependent upon numbers instead of God for strength.¹

At any rate, as a result of David's pride and the people's mounting offenses against God,² a plague struck the land (1 Chronicles 21). David humbly repented before the Lord and bought the threshing floor of Araunah, north of Jerusalem, to build an altar of sacrifice for his sin. David determined that this place would become the site of the temple of the Lord.³

After the incident of the census, David's heart turned completely toward worshipping God through the building of the temple. Although it was David's desire to build the temple himself, the Lord denied him the privilege because he had been a man of war and bloodshed since his youth. God had informed David that his son Solomon (2 Samuel 12:24), a man of peace, would build the temple.

Because Solomon was very young,⁴ David prepared everything in advance for the building project. This would allow the construction to get underway immediately when Solomon became king. David gave massive amounts of gold, silver, bronze, wood and stone from his own wealth and from the wealth of the kingdom toward the project. He provided detailed and exact plans and provisions for the structure. Then he charged Solomon to faithfully carry out the task God had appointed him to do.

David rallied all of Israel to give free-will offerings toward the temple and to wholeheartedly support Solomon in his undertaking. Everyone responded with great zeal, and David rejoiced in their willingness to give.

As the time drew nearer to his death, David assembled the leaders of Israel and addressed them with respect and tenderness. He announced the God-ordained succession of his son Solomon to the throne and to the task of building the temple in Jerusalem. David charged them as leaders to seek and serve the Lord and to be careful to follow His laws in the Scriptures.

David instructed his son Solomon to be a man of integrity before God, who sees the hearts and motives of kings. Solomon would need to maintain a pure heart in order to complete the sacred tasks of building the temple and leading Israel. With this said, David encouraged Solomon to move forward with the good men who were ready and organized to help with the task.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Security for Life

We all have a natural longing for security. In the midst of life's storms, we yearn for protection, safety, sanctuary and freedom from danger. Where can we find solid security amidst the uncertainties and changes we endure?

As David approached the end of his days, his actions and words represented the convictions learned over a lifetime. This man, who had experienced being shepherd and king, fugitive and nobleman, sinner and saint, had learned the only true source of security. As we near

completion of our study on David, we will look at the choices that matter in experiencing this security that withstands the storms of life.

Lesson 23

DAVID'S FINAL WORDS

1 Chronicles 29

David and the leaders of Israel contributed massive amounts of gold, silver, bronze, precious stones and other materials for the building of the temple in Jerusalem. Everyone rejoiced in the wholehearted giving of Israel's leaders as they provided for the structure that would forever proclaim the God of Israel to the world.

David praised God before the people, declaring His greatness, power, glory, victory, majesty and sovereignty. Acknowledging the fact that God had enabled them to give so generously toward the work of the temple, David prayed that the people would continue in faithfulness and that Solomon would be a righteous king over Israel. The entire assembly praised God together, and with feasting and rejoicing, they anointed Solomon as king. Because of God's grace, Solomon's reign would be the most spectacular that Israel had ever known.

David's death came sometime after Solomon took the throne. David had reigned forty years in Israel, seven at Hebron over the tribe of Judah and thirty-three in Jerusalem over all Israel. Even though he had been a warrior from his youth, God had preserved his life, giving him a long life, riches and honor.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Philosophy for Life

Inherent in human nature is a need to seek purpose and meaning in life. Eventually, we are all compelled to establish a philosophy of life -- a view of ourselves, God and the world -- that gives life purpose and meaning.

The Christian believes that purpose and meaning are found only as one establishes a *personal* relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. This relationship between creature and Creator allows one to both grow in a knowledge of his Maker as well as become the person God created him to be.

David's life was riddled with struggles, mistakes and heartaches. Yet throughout his experience, David's clear philosophy of life allowed him

to continually find fulfillment in serving the Lord, God's people and God's purposes. As a result, David left the people of Israel praising God at the end of his reign. In addition, millions of believers through the ages have praised God and found comfort through the many Psalms David penned as a "man after God's own heart."

What is your philosophy of life? How do you view yourself, God and the world? In spite of mistakes and hardships, what philosophy of life can allow you to find purpose and meaning throughout your days as well as leave a godly heritage behind? As we close our study of his life, we will look at the choices that matter in answering these most important questions.

About the Author

Diana Schick has a degree in Education from Texas State University and a Masters degree in Religion from the International School of Theology. For fourteen years, she served as a staff member of Campus Crusade for Christ, International. In 1985, Diana founded Creative Living International, a non-profit organization through which the Bible studies she has written are distributed worldwide. In addition to writing, Diana has done extensive speaking, seeking to help individuals discover biblical principles for everyday challenges. Diana and her husband Michael live in Reston, Virginia, and have two daughters.



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