

The Life of David		
What made David so special? What can we realistically learn from his life?		
Date	Focus	Chapters & Themes
April 16 th	The choosing of David	1 Sam 16 God looks on the inside
May 7 th	David, Goliath, Saul & Jonathan	1 Sam 17-20 Champions, enemies and friends
May 21 st	David on the run	1 Sam 21-2 Sam 1 The testing of faith To kill or not to kill?
June 4 th	David made king	2 Sam 2-5 & 8-10 What kind of king is this?
June 18 th	David and Bathsheba	2 Sam 11-12 How could he do that Why did God stick with him?
July 2 nd	David's family troubles	2 Sam 13-21 How could it all go so wrong?
July 16 th	David and the psalms	2 Sam 6-7, 22-24 & Psalms A man after God's own heart

Session 1 Why is David such an important person in Jewish & Christian faiths?

David is referenced more than any other person in the Bible apart from Jesus.

Person in the Bible	Times referred to in OT	In this many verses	In this many books	Times referred to in NT	In this many verses	In this many books
David	3814	1380	17	181	87	10
Moses	2659	1315	20	180	105	12
Abraham	985	364	16	230	111	11
Elijah	373	117	4	46	34	6

Revered as Israel's greatest king, though not their first, nor longest reign (~38 years, 1008-970 BC).

David's kingdom never as large or influential as Egypt, Assyria or Babylon in period 1000-500 BC.

What he is most remembered for is hardly enough to justify the high regard in which he is held.

So, what is it about David that makes him so revered and so important?

And how are we meant to respond to what we read about him?

Are we meant to try and be like him? And if so, in what ways?

Five things about David we should pay attention to:

- his understanding of God
- his heart and character that were rooted in that understanding
- his patience in waiting for God to fulfil His promises, even under severe testing
- what God chose to do in and through him
- the specific promise God made to him

Some background

When do we first hear of David in the Bible?	Ruth 4:17 & 22
What do we know about David's ancestors?	Matt 1:1-6
Other relevant passages	Gen 38, 1 Chr 2:4; Gen 46:12; Num 26:21; 1 Chr 2; 1 Chr 21:11, Lk 3:33, Josh 2; Ruth

Our first proper look at David comes in 1 Sam 16 when Samuel (the effective spiritual leader and judge over the 12 tribes of Israel) was commanded by God to go and anoint a new person of God's choosing as their king after God had rejected Saul the current king.

The calling and anointing of David - 1 Sam 16

Saul had forfeited the privilege of kingship because of the attitude behind two of his actions:

- i) exceeding his calling and authority in offering up a sacrifice to God before going into battle against the Philistines (1 Sam 13:1-14). Note: Samuel declared that '**God has sought for himself a man according to his own heart** and has appointed him as leader over his people, because you have not kept what God commanded you.'
- ii) for arrogantly rebelling against God by failing to destroy the Amalekites and all the plunder taken from them as God had commanded (15:1-31)

Three things noteworthy from David's anointing:

1. v1 Despite Saul's failure, God already had a plan to fulfil His purposes for His people.

God was not surprised by Saul's failure. He knew what He planned to do about it.

Relevance for us: Firstly, God is not put off by, or afraid of our failures. His plans are not scuppered by them. Rather, he knows about them and works in and through them. Secondly, when significant things go wrong, God will have a ready response. Are we attentive enough to God to learn what He'd have us do next? Don't dwell on mistakes and failures, look to God for how to move on from them.

2. V6-7 God chooses people to fulfil His purposes based on what they are like on the inside not what can be seen on the outside.

Samuel assumed the honour of kingship would be bestowed on Jesse's eldest son, who his culture saw as the most important child. But Samuel had to learn that God is not swayed by such traditions. Note God's choice of Isaac, the younger of Abraham's first two sons; Jacob the younger of Isaac's sons; and Joseph the eleventh son of Jacob. God reserves the right to choose whomever he pleases to fulfil his purposes. He is not bound by our cultural expectations.

Relevance for us: We may question why God apparently works powerfully through some people and not others. We may feel jealous of other people's experience of God and wonder why God has not shown us the same favour. But we should recognise God's right to choose whoever He pleases and beware of the desire to make a name for ourselves. Remember the Tower of Babel.

Samuel looked at Jesse's sons and assumed the strongest, most able, most impressive looking would get the job. But God is more concerned with what people are like on the inside.

Relevance for us: *We often jump to conclusions about who would be the most suitable leader on the basis of things that God considers of lesser importance. Some of us are very good at finding reasons why we would not be a good choice. Cf Moses (Ex 3).*

This whole chapter is predominantly about 'seeing' – more obvious in the Hebrew than in English translations. The Hebrew word *ra'ah* (meaning see, but also *provide*), occurs 9 times in this chapter (vv 1, 6-7, 12, 17-18).

The writer of 1 Samuel wants us to ponder the difference between what we see and what God sees and consequently, how God makes choices that are different from what we might choose.

God told Samuel that, when he looks at people, he looks at the heart. He is much more concerned with character than with abilities or self-confidence. Note Jesus said it is what comes out of someone's heart that defiles them (Mark 7:14-23), and just because people honour him with their lips doesn't mean they are truly following him (Mark 7:6-13). See also John 3:23-24.

Note the contrast in chapter 17:17-31 between David and Eliab, his eldest brother. Eliab humiliated David in front of the other soldiers. Yet we know that God had already chosen David as king, rather than Eliab. And they both knew that too. We're left to make up our own minds about who had the better character and who was the more conceited and wicked in heart.

Relevance for us: *How is your heart today? Are you still focused on becoming more Christ-like in your character? Never mind your age, what you can or cannot do these days, whether you have a role in church or not, or whether you are noticed by those you consider more important than yourself. Are you still looking to God to enable you to overcome in those areas in which you could be more loving, patient, joyful, generous, or self-controlled?*

Back in 1 Samuel 8, when God told Samuel to anoint Saul as Israel's first ever king, He instructed Samuel to 'appoint *for them* a king' (8:22). Here in 16:1 God declared 'I have seen *for myself* a king'. The difference between those two becomes very clear in the following chapters.

3. v13 - The moment David was anointed, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him from that day onwards

If we're to understand all that happens in David's life, we should see this moment as foundational.

The giving of the Spirit is confirmation of David's appointment as God's king. It was God's empowering from this moment onwards that enabled David to be the significant individual that he was. It was God's doing far more than it was David's.

Relevance for us: *We often think what we do for God is all about us, what we can do, what we're capable of, when actually it's all about God and what He is capable of. When we look for people to take on a role, we tend to focus on what they've already achieved, the qualities they already have. Perhaps we should pay greater attention to the person God wants to choose.*

The Spirit coming on David has an interesting parallel with the moment of Jesus' baptism. For Jesus, the coming of the Spirit confirmed not his kingship but his relationship with the Father, and it empowered him for the ministry the Father had appointed him to do.

Final thoughts on the significance of David

Jesus chose to refer to himself as the Good Shepherd. He was also seen by others who knew him from Nazareth as 'just the local carpenter's son' who surely couldn't be the long-expected Messiah.

Is it just coincidence that, when David was anointed, he was working as a shepherd and considered insignificant? Both were chosen as God's King on earth despite coming from very humble beginnings. Neither of them sought to assert themselves, but allowed God to elevate them in His timing.

When the Spirit came upon David, it also departed from Saul. The angry moods that came then upon Saul led his attendants to seek out someone to calm him down. He was offered David and invited him to enter royal service. It is ironic that, not only did God choose David, so did Saul. The rejected king chose the newly anointed king as the one to keep him from falling apart. And so, the newly anointed king kept the rejected king on the throne for much longer than might otherwise have happened.

Dale Ralph Davis draws a parallel between this and our own experience as disciples of Jesus. Jesus called his disciples the salt of the earth - salt that helps to protect the earth from decay - and yet Jesus said we would be hated by the world. Like David, we act as a restraint on the impact of evil in our world, and yet we suffer condemnation and hatred in doing so.

The Bible is unclear on the time between David being anointed by Samuel and finally becoming king. It was most likely many years. How would David deal with that wait and the tension it created?

Relevance for us: *how long are we prepared to wait between sensing that God has got something for us and us actually receiving what God has promised?*

Perhaps the more important issue is how are we to live while we wait? How proactive should we be in bringing about what we've been promised?

In David's case, the answers to those two questions were not what you might expect.

Session 2 – David, Goliath, Saul and Jonathan (Champions, enemies and friends)

It's not unusual to find people in everyday life describing themselves as being in a David and Goliath struggle with somebody. We delight in the underdog overcoming the favourite, the minnow outwitting the big fish, the victim standing up against the bully. But our British love for the underdog too easily clouds our understanding of what made David so successful against Goliath and what the author of 1 Samuel intends us to learn from it.

1 Sam 17:1-3 the Israelite and Philistine armies lined up against each other either side of a valley. Neither army wanted to abandon the advantage of higher ground. It seemed like stalemate.

1 Samuel 17:4-11 – the role of a champion, Goliath's height and armour, his defiant shout

The use of champions was supposedly to resolve conflicts without large-scale warfare. Found in epic poetry and myths of ancient and medieval periods (e.g. Achilles and Hector in Homer's *Iliad*). Notable real historical examples:

4. Battle of the 300 Champions (Greece, 546 BC) between Sparta and Argos
5. Battle of the Clans (Scotland, 1396 AD) 30 men each from Clan Kay and Clan Chattan

The benefit of a champion was the people didn't need to fight. A champion fought on their behalf.

Relevance for us: *There's a powerful spiritual point to this when you consider seeing Jesus as our champion. He goes into battle against the forces of evil, so that we do not need to. Rather than just seeing Jesus as our teacher, example or leader, which still leaves us having to do all the heavy lifting, seeing him as our champion frees us from this onerous burden. And when our champion wins, it leads us to joy and celebration.*

Goliath was no ordinary soldier. His height of ~3 metres / 9ft 9 ins is probably not an exaggeration. See references in OT to giants in the promised land (Num 13 - Nephilim, the descendants of Anak. See Gen 6:4. Also known as Anakim, Rephaites or Rephaim in Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Job and Psalms. More significantly, they were people who specifically opposed God and His ways. But remember God told Samuel not to be impressed with someone's appearance or height (ch16)

Take note of Goliath's challenge (v10); 'This day I defy the armies of Israel. Give me a man and let us fight each other.'

17:25-37 David's response

v26 'Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God.'

This is the first thing we've heard David say since we first met him. Now, David injected a much-needed heavenly perspective into a situation that otherwise seemed desperate.

The Israelite soldiers saw Goliath as someone clearly bigger and more powerful than any of them, who was defying their nation of Israel and making their lives a misery.

David on the other hand saw Goliath as defying not just Israel but the living God. He was not prepared to let someone get away with brazenly challenging the authority and power of God.

David believed the living God was far more powerful than Goliath and the Philistine gods. He saw the likely outcome of an encounter with Goliath much more positively (v36 and again in 45-47).

Relevance for us: *Are we the same? What is our reaction when we hear someone pour scorn on the Church? Are we more stirred up about the insult to us than about the insult to God? Does what people think of us matter more to us than what they think of God?*

The honour of God mattered deeply to David. He didn't think people should be allowed to get away with insulting God. But he also believed God would not let people get away with it.

That was what gave him the confidence to go into battle with Goliath. Look at his declaration in v36-37. It was not David's courage or skill that saved him from the lion and the bear when he was guarding the sheep, it was God who delivered him. And the same God would do it again when he went up against Goliath.

17:41-50 What Goliath saw and what David saw

When Goliath looked at David all he saw was a young boy, glowing with health, handsome and carrying a stick. He saw David as a totally inadequate opponent for someone as powerful as him.

What David saw was someone who had 'defied' (the word occurs 6x in this chapter) the God of the armies of Israel. He saw Goliath as deserving judgment for such arrogance and rebellion against God. He was totally confident God would deliver the Philistine into his hands – so that (v46) not just David, but the whole world would know that there was a God in Israel.

17:45-47 What God uses to achieve His purposes

Goliath relied on the things our world considers strengths, but that is not how God wins. He uses what our world would consider weakness to show that he is God Almighty.

Relevance for us: *In a world where political and business leaders use their apparent strengths to seek to dominate others they consider weaker, and we feel inadequate to do anything about it, we'd do well to remember the God we profess to follow and trust.*

18:1-20:43 Saul becomes the enemy

David's victory over Goliath produced different reactions in different people.

As we can see in the next few chapters, whatever relief Saul might have felt at seeing off the Philistines soon gave way to suspicion and jealousy of David.

When Saul heard what the women were singing about David (18:6-9), 'This saying displeased him' (literally) 'This thing was bad *in his eyes*'. Continuing theme of what Saul saw. From then on 'Saul was *watching* David with crookedness' (*avon* - sin)

At first, Saul's intentions didn't appear to be murderous, and it is not until the start of chapter 19 that David was overtly warned by Jonathan that his father wanted David dead. However, we are made aware of the true nature of Saul's feelings halfway through ch18 (v12-17).

Saul's way of dealing with David was to offer his daughter Merab in marriage to him. Which he was due anyway (see 17:25). But the price was that David had to remain a soldier. Saul hoped the Philistines would one day succeed in killing David, saving him the trouble (18:17b).

The marriage offer could've indicated God was opening the door to David becoming king. But he refused to see it that way (v18). God had promised him the throne, and he would only take up that position when God made it clear Saul's time was over (a theme repeated in the next 12 chapters).

Saul may have taken David's response as saying that David couldn't afford the bride price. When Saul discovered his younger daughter Michal was in love with David and so offered her instead, David demurred again, on the basis that he was 'a poor man and little known' (v23),

So Saul cannily set the bride price at the foreskins of 100 dead Philistines (v25), thinking David couldn't resist the temptation to prove his success in fighting. Which was true (v27). Was this the first hint of a weakness in David? Did he relish the challenge of defeating God's enemies so much that he risked jumping in without looking first to God for wisdom on the right thing to do?

The reason for David's success was that the LORD was with him (v28). God was protecting him even when (or especially when) David wasn't aware of how much danger he was in. God had chosen David as the future king and nothing would be allowed to alter that plan.

Relevance for us: *Is this why many of the characters in the Bible still experienced God's blessing even when they did things that are sinful? Think of Moses killing an Egyptian in a moment of anger (Ex 2:11-14). Or Abraham lying about his relationship with Sarah when he felt his life was in danger (Gen 12:1-20 & again 20:1-17). Or when David committed adultery (2 Sam 11). We may wonder why we bother trying to live a holy life when God still blesses people who fail so spectacularly. But we would do well to remember two things:*

- iii) *God always has a much bigger picture in mind than we do. He's working out His purposes and freely chooses the people through whom He will do that. Their failings as human beings are not going to get in the way. We may wonder how God can continue to bless the ministry*

of Christian leaders when they have serious moral faults that only become obvious over the course of time, but that is God's choice.

- iv) *We should take heart that God doesn't drop people the moment they let Him down. Because, even if we think we've lived a more godly life than some more prominent people in the history of the Church, we too will probably let God down many times. We should be deeply grateful that God doesn't immediately cast us out and choose to work through someone else but comes to meet us in His Son and call us to repentance and renewed faith. He gives us a second chance, and a third, and a fourth.*

So, let's be grateful that God does not deal with us the way we might deal with others.

18:1-4 David and Jonathan – a deep and lasting friendship

So, David had slain Israel's greatest enemy, the Philistine Goliath, only for Saul, the king of Israel, to become his personal enemy and the greatest threat to his life. But the slaying of Goliath also resulted in the growth of David's greatest friendship.

Saul's eldest son, Jonathan, became one in spirit with David and he loved him as himself (cf. Lev 19:18)

There are highly significant words in these verses.

Firstly, Jonathan made a 'covenant' (a binding agreement) with David. We find many covenants mentioned in the Bible and they're not all the same.

One-way covenants: e.g. the one made after the flood with Noah, his sons and every living creature with them (Gen 9:12). Initiated by God. He alone made any promises. There were no conditions to be complied with for the promises to be fulfilled. Other one-way covenants were made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Two-way covenants: e.g. the one made between God and the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Initiated by God. He made promises to be with them and be their God. Fulfilment of the promises was conditional upon the Israelites obeying commandments about how they lived, how they related to Him and to each other. Note the conditions were set by God alone. There was no negotiation.

The covenant between Jonathan and David was different again. A two-way covenant. Initiated by Jonathan. But both parties made promises and stated their firm commitment to one another.

To mark that commitment Jonathan took off his robe, and his tunic and even his sword, bow and belt and gave them to David. In that culture, clothes were an indicator of a person's status. By handing his clothes and weapons to David, Jonathan was effectively renouncing his position as the king-in-waiting and committing himself to the man God had chosen to take Jonathan's place. That must have taken a lot of love and humility on Jonathan's part.

At that time, in that part of the world, any other prince would have got rid of any threat to their succession. That's why Saul was angry with Jonathan for supporting David (20:20-31).

Likewise John the Baptist surrendered his position as someone people flocked to see and instead encouraged his disciples to follow Jesus. 'He must increase and I must decrease.' (John 3:30). And Jesus surrendered his place at His Father's side, to 'empty himself' (Phil 2:7) in order that we might be saved. And Paul considered everything about his past, his status and achievements as 'a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ' (Phil 3:8).

Relevance for us: *Are we prepared to surrender whatever we might consider to be our rights or our status among our friends and family in order for others to flourish and so that God might get the glory?*

Jonathan would find himself having to choose between his commitment to David and his loyalty to his own father. Every time he chose to side with David, even though David was the reason Jonathan would never himself be king.

Jonathan went behind his father's back to warn David when he was in particular danger from Saul's anger (19:1-3). He also spoke up for David in front of Saul (19:4-7) which put Jonathan at considerable risk of antagonising his father further.

Jonathan was well aware that, once David did become king, he might do what many other usurpers of the throne would do in those days and arrange for all of Saul's family to be wiped out. So, he urged David to reaffirm their oath of friendship and commitment to one another (20:12-17).

Jonathan appeared again at a critical moment when David had been on the run from Saul for some time and had been betrayed by others. He somehow found David's hiding place in the wilderness and came to encourage him (1 Sam 23:15-18). Still today God comes to meet us and encourage us when we're feeling most abandoned and hard-pressed

Relevance to us: *The Jonathan-David saga is a powerful picture of the depth of commitment God calls us into, first of all with Himself, but also with other members of His family. It is because God has covenanted with us that we, from that position of being sure of God's love for us, are able to offer that same love to others, regardless of how that love is received.*

We could do with encouraging more of that sort of mutual commitment within the Christian family. To covenant/bind ourselves to one another under God, to be there for each other.

Some people have sought to make out that the relationship between Jonathan and David must have been a homosexual one because of the statements of their deep love for each other. But that is to impose modern values and views of sexuality on a 3,000-year-old friendship. And it is a sad reflection of the degree to which our approach to and expectation of deep, meaningful, non-sexual friendships has been seriously weakened over the past 100 years.

Session 3 – David on the run

It's not clear how long David was a fugitive. Based on the likelihood David was in his late teens (i.e. too young for military service) when he defeated Goliath and aged 30 when he became king (2 Sam 5:4), it's likely he was on the run for between 4 and 15 years. Which raises the question...

Why did David spend so long running from Saul, when God had promised he'd be king?

First (19:18) David fled to Samuel in Ramah a few miles N of Saul's hometown of Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin - probably to seek God about what to do next. From there David and Samuel went only a short distance to Naioth - a community of prophets. A 'comic' narrative in 19:19-23 tells how God's Spirit came upon groups of soldiers repeatedly sent by Saul to arrest David, such that they started prophesying. It even happened to Saul himself. Confirmation God was protecting David every step of the way. Maybe all the answer he needed.

Bible commentator Dale Ralph Davis: *'sometimes the clearest evidence God has not deserted you is not that you are successfully past your trial but that you are still on your feet in the middle of it.'*

See Psalm 59 written by David about this time - esp v9: As in his encounter with Goliath, David knew how to use his experience of God's protection to strengthen his faith for the present.

Relevance for us: *We may not have the significant role in God's purposes that David had, but we do still follow David's God. Do we, as His family, live under the same overall protection? Something to ponder as we continue through David's story.*

David's first mistake?

From Naioth, David went to Nob (21:1), a town for Levite priests (see Jos 21). David requested food and a weapon (v3&8) from the priest Ahimelek but lied (v2) about why he was there. That lie would lead to all the inhabitants and livestock of Nob being killed on the orders of Saul (22:6-19).

David's lie may have won him some protection but ultimately cost a lot of lives. Wouldn't God have protected David anyway, without David having to put the people of Nob in mortal peril?

Relevance for us: *While God will protect his own in order for His purposes to be fulfilled, that doesn't absolve us from responsibility for our actions. If we act contrary to God's ways, there will be negative consequences, which may affect others, if not ourselves. We should remember that before we jump too quickly to try to protect ourselves, or to try and solve our problems, without talking to God about them first.*

The real bad guy in all of this wasn't David, it was both Saul and Doeg the Edomite. Saul ordered the deaths. The king of Israel had become a monster prepared to massacre the people he was meant to care for and protect. And Doeg was the only one willing to carry it out.

From Nob, David fled to Gath (21:10) - Goliath's home city (17:4)! To pre-empt the Philistines taking revenge, he feigned insanity. See Psalms 34 & 56 for where he truly sought refuge:

Ps 34:8 'Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him'

Ps 38:11 'Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies.' (Had he learned that telling lies to save his skin was not the way to go?)

Ps 56:9 'my enemies will turn back when I call for help. By this I'll know that God is for me.'

But Achish king of Gath, had no desire for David to be there, mad or not. And so, David was forced to flee yet again (22:1) to the cave of Adullam back inside Israel in the territory of Judah.

From Psalms 57 & 142, written by David about this time in his life, you can feel the desperation and anguish in David's words. But he told himself to remain steadfast.

Ps 57:8 'Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.' commanding himself to worship God despite his troubles, reminding himself God is loving and faithful.

In the cave of Adullam David was finally joined by others (22:1-2). There were a motley crew of family, friends, outcasts and dissenters – but at least David was no longer alone.

David moved on again (22:3-4), this time to Mizpah in the kingdom of Moab. His aim was to ensure his parents were safe from Saul (David's great-grandmother Ruth had been a Moabitess). David wanted his parents to stay in Moab until, 'I learn what God will do for me'. Not at all sure how he was ever going to become king, but still expecting God would show him when the time was right.

So, where was God during this period of David's life and what was He doing?

David knew he had to wait for God to reveal how it was going to work out. And while he waited, he realised he was going to face severe testing of his character and his trust in God.

Such testing in the wilderness was experienced by many in the biblical accounts:

Adam & Eve - banished from Eden into a wilderness where childbirth and working the land became much harder, testing their trust in God (Gen 3).

Abraham & Sarah - endured years of nomadic life in the wilder places of Canaan, waiting for God to fulfil His promise to provide them with a son and permanent home (Gen 12-25).

Hagar, maid servant of Sarah - tested in the wilderness when she fled after mistreatment by Sarah and then again with Ishmael after the birth of Isaac (Gen 16 & 21).

Moses and the Israelites – 40 years in the wilderness of Sinai after escaping from slavery in Egypt, having to learn to trust God's protection and provision (Ex 16-34 and Lev-Deut).

David – tested regarding his trust in God's protection in the wilderness in his early life as a shepherd (1 Sam 17:28), on the run from Saul (1 Sam 23-26), and when he fled from his rebellious son Absalom (2 Sam 15-17).

Elijah – learning to trust God again in the wilderness of Judah after defeating the prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel and then fleeing from Ahab & Jezebel (1 Kings 19).

The Jews in the time of Jesus – learning afresh about repentance from John the Baptist in the Judean wilderness (Mark 1).

Jesus – whose sense of identity and calling as God's Messiah was severely tested by the Devil while fasting in the wilderness (Luke 4).

Life in the power of the Spirit is not one great march of victory. It's a life-long struggle with times of testing in what can feel like a desert. But the wilderness doesn't only represent testing for the people of God, it also represents the presence, provision and protection of God.

For David, God was there every step of the way; ready to speak into his life when he asked for guidance; ready to form in him the character of a man after God's own heart; ready, in the face of whatever happened, however people treated him, to help him act with justice and love with mercy.

Relevance for us: *The concept of God testing our faith is not one we often discuss and yet seems to be a key part of how God works with those who seek to follow Him. We should expect our faith to be tested. When we experience times of stress and hardship, maybe we should be asking ourselves, 'What aspect of my trust in God might He be testing here and how might God want me to respond? How can I lean more on God through this, rather than try to work my own way out of the difficulties?'*

David learned from his experience with the city of Nob (ch 21). When the Philistines attacked the Israelites in Keilah, not far from where David was hiding (23:1-2), he first 'enquired of the LORD' about whether to go to their rescue. And again when his men were concerned about the risk (v3-4). And yet again when Saul planned to besiege Keilah in order to kill him (v10).

Relevance for us: *Should we expect to get the same immediate and explicit guidance that David got? Not necessarily. David's part in God's plan of salvation was far greater than yours or mine. But, David's God is the same God we follow.*

Our expectation of how God will guide our lives needs to be thoroughly rooted in a humility that recognises our role in God's purposes is not that of the major characters in the Bible. But we should also aim to root our lives in a habit of looking to God for what He wants to do each day. To be asking God at the start of the day, 'Is there someone you want me to pay attention to today?' 'Is there anything in particular you want me to do?'

David recognised the risk of being betrayed by his own people, and that relying on others for his protection could put them at risk. By seeking God's guidance, his actions spared the city (v13).

Saul pursued David, but David pursued God

David continued to move from place to place to avoid being captured (23:13). Saul was constantly seeking David, though 'God did not give David into his hands' (v14).

While Saul sought David, according to Psalm 63, David was 'earnestly seeking God... thirsting for God in a dry and parched land where there is no water... thinking of him through the watches of the night... singing in the shadow of his wings'. David used his time and energy to pursue God.

Relevance for us: *What or whom are we pursuing? How much time and effort do we put into seeking to be satisfied with God?*

Saul could not find David, but somehow Jonathan did and declared (v16-17), 'Don't be afraid. My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You shall be king over Israel, and I will be second to you.' God had chosen David as king and nothing would prevent that. But, there was no guarantee Jonathan would be second in the kingdom. Yet it seems Jonathan was looking not only for friendship with David but also the security and status that would come from being the best friend of someone so clearly blessed by God.

Relevance for us: *How often do we make assumptions about what will happen to us because of connections or friendships we've made? Such things count for little compared to what God has in mind.*

David's place of hiding was again made known to Saul, this time by the Ziphites, another Israelite clan (23:19-23). In Psalm 7 David agonised over such betrayal and whether it was because he had sinned against those who pursued or betrayed him. Yet he believed he'd acted rightly. He called on God to vindicate him and bring an end to the violence of the wicked. In Psalm 54:4 he declared 'Surely God is my help, the Lord is the one who sustains me.'

David refused two opportunities to kill Saul

When Saul stepped into a cave in which David was hiding, his men wanted David to seize the apparently God-given opportunity to kill his enemy (1 Sam 24:1-4).

Despite the fact he had spent many months, if not years, fleeing from Saul's anger, unable to trust even his fellow tribesmen not to give away his location to Saul, forever perilously close to being betrayed and killed, and despite God apparently giving David a promise to 'give your enemy into your hands to do with as you wish' (v4) David declared, 'The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lay my hand on him, for he is the anointed of the LORD' (v6). All the pain he had suffered still did not give him the right to act in that way.

This was another test of David's trust in God and his willingness to wait for God to bring Saul's reign to an end - and again, he passed it. This was why he was known as a man after God's own heart – he did not presume to bring about by his own actions what God had promised.

Compare this with the example of his forefather Abraham who made the mistake of trying to bring about God's promise of a son by having a child through Sarah's servant Hagar (Gen 16 & 21). Abraham learned through painful experience that doing so would not achieve God's purposes.

That understanding comes out clearly in David's second chance to kill Saul which came soon afterwards (ch26). Again refusing to seize the opportunity David declared 'the LORD himself will strike Saul, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed' (v10). Let God decide how Saul would die.

In-between these two stories of David sparing Saul's life is a rather different story (ch25). David encountered a wealthy but surly and mean Israelite called Nabal who refused to show the kind of hospitality to David and his men that was expected among the people of God.

In his anger at such rudeness, David planned to take revenge on Nabal, with 400 armed men to back him up. His tiredness, frustration and hunger spilled over into a fit of rage. Understandable perhaps. But coming between the two accounts of David refusing to do anything to endanger Saul's life it is a powerful reminder that holiness in how we relate to one person does not always translate into holiness in all our other relationships.

Nabal's wife Abigail was quick to intervene and prevent David from killing Nabal. What marks David out is that he was quick to admit and correct his faults when they were brought into focus.

First, he praised God for being the one behind Abigail's actions (v32).

Second, he prayed a blessing on Abigail herself for 'her good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed and for avenging myself with my own hands' (v33).

Relevance for us: How often, when others point out a weakness in us, do we respond with praise to God and warm feelings towards the one who has critiqued our behaviour?

So grateful was David for Abigail's actions that when Nabal died suddenly from a heart attack after hearing what his wife had done, David asked her to become his wife.

David back among the Philistines

Had he given up on ever being king of Israel?

He asked for a town where he and his men could shelter and was given Ziklag. To endear himself to the Philistines, he attacked enemies of Israel (Geshurites, Girzites & Amalekites) while telling the Philistines those raids were against Israelites and friends of Israel (27:8-12).

David's strategy appeared to backfire on him when the Philistine king ordered David and his men to join him in attacking Israel's army. Yet David trusted that God would show him a way out (28:2).

In the end it was the Philistine commanders who got cold feet over David being in their midst (v4), and so spared David having to go into battle against his own people.

But David's challenges were far from over. In his absence the Amalekites had attacked and destroyed Ziklag and taken all their wives and children captive. David's men talked of stoning him. But David 'found strength in God' (28:6) and again his response to difficult circumstances was to enquire from God what he should do.

An Egyptian slave helped them in their pursuit of the Amalekites in return for David swearing he would spare the slave's life. They defeated the Amalekites and rescued all the people and plunder that had been taken. David ensured everyone who'd helped him, not just in fighting Amalekites, but also in all the time he'd been in the wilderness evading Saul, got a share of that plunder. Such was his concern for people and sense of justice and generosity.

The Philistine army won their battle with the Israelites at Mount Gilboa and Saul and three of his sons (including Jonathan) all died. David learned of their deaths from an Amalekite who'd escaped from the Israelite army camp. The man claimed he'd been responsible for killing Saul at Saul's request. The claim was false, but David didn't know that. However, David ordered the death of the Amalekite for having no fear in lifting his hand to destroy the LORD's anointed (2 Sam 1:14).

To kill or not to kill?

Repeatedly, throughout his time on the run, David had had to address the issue of 'To kill or not to kill'. Twice with Saul, once with Nabal and his household, then with the Egyptian from the raiding party on Ziklag, and again with the Amalekite who reported Saul's death. There was also the issue of whether David's actions risked the death of the priests of Nob and the people of Keilah.

David was being tested by God. Would he look to God again and again for what he should do? Would he listen and obey God's instructions? Would he trust God to judge those who made life difficult for him, rather than taking it into his own hands? Would he cause bloodshed without God's approval? And would he patiently wait for God to fulfil the promises made to him?

Relevance for us: *Did God need to know the answer to these questions about David before he could be made king? Maybe. But then God probably already knew David would learn the right lessons and respond with repentance and faith.*

So, what is the point of God's testing? In David's case, perhaps it was so he knew God was at work in him, shaping him over time into a suitable person to carry out God's purposes. And perhaps also so that David knew himself better and lent more on God as a result.

The reasons God tests us may be similar. Will we, like David, learn those lessons and allow God to shape us into the person He wants us to be and through whom He can work?

Session 4 David made king

At last, after years of running from Saul and living dangerously amongst the Philistines, with Saul and his sons now dead the way had become clear for David to become king.

What kind of king was David going to be?

A man who

- knew the value of waiting and relying on God to bring about His purposes (1 Sam 22:1-5)
- had learned what it meant to be protected by God and experience His provision in times of real need (1 Sam 19:1-23; 25:1-39)
- cared about and rewarded those who'd aligned themselves with him (1 Sam 30:21-31)
- knew the value of deep friendships and the importance of loyalty (1 Sam 20:1-42)
- could resist advice and pressure from those close to him when he believed they were not advocating what God wanted (1 Sam 26:1-13)
- had learned that people close to him wouldn't necessarily support or protect him (1 Sam 23:1-13)
- was not afraid to kill the enemies of God/Israel, but knew not to take the life of anyone God had placed in authority over Israel, even when they disobeyed God and made David their enemy (1 Sam 17:1-53; 1 Sam 24:1-22; 2 Sam 1:19-27; 4:1-8)

What self-control and sense of right and wrong must it have taken for David to demonstrate such concern and respect for those who'd made him their enemy. Surely, it was a deep work of God in his life. A work that protected him from descending into bitterness, hatred or a desire for revenge.

Relevance for us: *If God could do such a remarkable work in David's life, He can do something similar in yours and mine – no matter what we may have experienced, however badly treated we may have been, and no matter what may lurk in the darkest corners of our heart and mind, He can bring about a transformation of mercy and love.*

God's work in David's life was to teach him to honour God above anyone and everything else.

Relevance for us: *Have you and I learned that too? Are we at least allowing God to redirect our hearts and minds towards that end?*

David had learned not to put himself in the place of God. He knew he was under God's authority and needed God's direction before committing himself to act, even when it seemed the obvious thing to do..

David king of Judah before he became king of Israel

Even with Saul dead David initially only became king of Judah rather than all Israel (2 Sam 2:1-9). It would be another 7½ years before he'd become king over all 12 tribes.

The choice of Hebron as his 'capital' city in Judah was significant. It was

- where Abraham & Sarah, Isaac & Rebekkah, and Jacob & Leah were all buried (Gen 49:31)
- granted by Joshua to Caleb after the Israelites entered the Promised Land (Jos 14:13-15)
- a Levitical city and city of refuge (Jos 21:11-13)
- strategically placed on a major route between Jerusalem and Beersheba

Abner, Saul's military commander, arrogantly thought he could play kingmaker on David's behalf. (2 Sam 3:9-11). God alone would bring that about. David had learned that lesson, Abner had not.

Joab, David's commander, murdered Abner in revenge for him killing Joab's brother, Asahel (2 Sam 3:22-27). But David made it very clear he strongly disapproved of Joab's actions (v28-39).

Relevance for us: *How do we react when our closest friends act in ways we disapprove of? Do we hide our disapproval out of fear of upsetting them or losing their friendship, or because we don't like the idea of them possibly doing the same to us? Or do we lovingly and with humility confront them with what we see as wrong and encourage them to put things right?*

King of Israel at last

At last, elders from all the tribes of Israel anointed David as their king (2 Sam 5:1-4). Over the next 6 chapters we get two different pictures of David the king. The first (in 2 Sam 5, 8, 9 & 10) focuses on David's military victories over the enemies of Israel. The second (in 2 Sam 6 & 7) focuses on David's concern for the house of God and God's concern for the house of David.

David the victorious king and extender of Israel's territory and influence

The Jebusites of Jerusalem thought their city impregnable. That didn't stop David (2 Sam 5:6-12).

You might think David's success was due to local intelligence about the city's water shaft (5:8). But that would be to miss the point of Gen 15:21. The Jebusites were among those whose sins (in Abraham's time) had not yet reached their full measure, but would eventually incur God's wrath. Their defiance in declaring the blind and lame could prevent David entering their city is a small illustration of that sin.

David also saw the past failure to take Jerusalem as a reminder the Israelites hadn't taken seriously God's command to take the whole promised land. David was still committed to obeying that command.

Relevance to us: *We too might ponder which direct commands of God we've neglected to obey – particularly those to do with the purity of what we look at, what we talk about, who we talk about and the way we talk about them, and what we allow our minds to dwell on. We'd do well to take a leaf out of David's book, repent of our disobedience and seek God's help in changing our habits.*

Despite appearances, 'the blind and lame will not enter the palace' (5:8) is not discrimination against the disabled. See David's treatment of Saul's grandson Mephibosheth (4:4 and 9:1-13). It's likely the proverb was never targeted at the actual blind and lame, but instead referred to those, like the Jebusites, who are defiant and arrogant towards God and His people – they are excluded from the king's/God's house.

After defeating the Jebusites, David went on to overcome the Philistines, noticeably after enquiring of the LORD whether he should attack (2 Sam 5:17-25) and being told God would strike the Philistine army. It was all to do with God's activity, not that of the Israelites.

Relevance for us: *When we're successful, do we see it as a result of us doing the right things? Or perhaps, if we're surprised by our own success, do we see it as a sheer fluke? Or do we see it as the work of God in our lives? Who really gets the glory?*

David would never have achieved what he did as king without the intervention and help of God in his life. How much more is that true in our own lives? Do we give God the credit for that?

David also defeated

- the Arameans (2 Sam 8:3-8 and 10:16-19)
- the Ammonites (2 Sam 10:1-14)
- the Moabites who became subject to him and brought him tribute (2 Sam 8:2)
- the Edomites (2 Sam 8:12-14)
- the Amalekites (2 Sam 8:12)

David's military victories were substantial, yet also a potential snare for him. In 2 Sam 24 (see also 1 Chr 21), David instigated a census of all Israel - to determine how many men of fighting age there were. Why? Maybe to be able to boast to the kings of other nations. Maybe to give him a sense of security.

Whatever the reason, such a census was displeasing in the eyes of God (1 Chr 21:7). David quickly regretted what he'd done, admitting he had sinned against God. David had not shown his trust was in God alone. He'd allowed a great strength to become a dangerous point of weakness.

Relevance for us: *The same can be true for us. We may often be aware of our greatest weaknesses as reasons for us needing to trust God more. But what about the areas we consider our greatest strengths? Where might pride or fear in those areas be a fatal chink in our armour? Are we alert to the dangers, and do we remind ourselves frequently that we are still dependent on God however confident or competent we may feel?*

David's victories were over all the nations surrounding Israel. The territory over which he apparently held influence covered the land from the Wadi of Egypt in the south to the River Euphrates in the north and from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to the lands of Gilead and Bashan across the Jordan in the east.

David the king who foreshadowed the Messiah

The enlarging of Israel's territory under David would have raised expectations that the Israelites were entering a stage in God's plan foretold in the stories in their Torah and the words of their prophets.

- Gen 15 & 17 God promised Abraham (and Isaac & Jacob) a land stretching from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates
- Num 34 the boundaries of the land had been laid out more specifically - now matched by the territory under David's control
- Deut 17 God spoke about the kind of king needed to rule over that inheritance
- Deut 18 God promised a prophet like Moses who'd tell the people everything God commanded

Over time this expectation of a prophet was combined with the promise of a Messiah who would rescue the Israelites from their enemies and rule over them with justice and righteousness.

Many in David's day would've been asking – is David that promised prophet-king?

At that time, if you'd read the words of **Psalm 18** written by David (also in 2 Sam 22), you might have asked that question too. Throughout the psalm David writes of:

- being rescued by God from death (4-19)
 - v17 – 'being drawn out of many waters' was later compared with the Jonah being rescued from the sea - itself used by Jesus as a picture of his own resurrection from the dead
- how that rescue was because God delighted in him because of his righteousness (19-24)
- how God gave him victory against his enemies and made him head of many nations (32-49)
 - v49 – 'praising God among the nations' was seen by Paul in Rom 15:9 as confirming the gospel of Jesus would go out to the Gentiles resulting in praise to God's name
- how God shows unfailing love to his anointed, to David and his descendants for ever (50)

Any thoughtful reader of the OT would have been constantly asking themselves, 'Is this or that person the One whom God had promised even as early as Gen 3 that would defeat the forces of evil?' Was it Abraham, Isaac, Jacob or Joseph? Was it Moses or Joshua? Was it Saul or David or Solomon?

After David, the prophets increasingly saw David as the key prototype for the one who was yet to come - see Jer 30:9 & Ezk 34:23. David's life foreshadowed someone even greater.

David the priest-king

Note 2 Sam 6, when David brought the ark into Jerusalem - the city built on the mountain on which Abraham had met with the mysterious priest-king Melchizedek (Gen 14). Also where Abraham went to sacrifice his son Isaac, only for God to provide a substitute sacrifice (Gen 22). As David brought in the ark/tabernacle he was dressed as a high priest and made sacrifice to God and blessed the people.

So, in David you get this powerful merging of the concepts and characteristics of both priest and king.

Unlike Saul, judged and rejected by God for acting like a priest when that was not his God-given role, David was commended by God and given a new promise regarding a future king from his one line.

Note Ps 110. Is David not this promised king? And yet, as Jesus himself pointed out, David talks about this king as 'my lord', implying this is someone to whom even David will bow in obedience.

Session 5 David and Bathsheba

2 Sam 11 - The second most remembered story about David after his fight with Goliath.

Where did he go wrong? There's a vicious spiral of attitudes & behaviours that led to David's fall.

It starts in v1. Why didn't David go to war with his men? Tired of fighting & bloodshed? Desperate for a bit of 'me time'? Avoiding what was expected of him opened the door to everything that followed.

Relevance for us: *How familiar does that sound? It's when we're tired, when we feel we deserve a break from what is expected of us, when we have nothing specific to occupy our thoughts, that we can be most vulnerable to the distractions and temptations of the world around us.*

What was he doing on his bed in the late afternoon?

Why didn't he avert his eyes when they chanced upon a woman bathing? He allowed his appreciation of her beauty to swell into lust for her body.

We're told nothing about Bathsheba's thoughts/feelings - the focus is on David's responsibility for what happened – he saw, he sent for, he slept with her. All he could think about was having her for himself.

Relevance for us: *How often do we find ourselves driven by a desire to do something that we know deep down is wrong, but do not allow that knowledge to stop us from satisfying that desire? We've decided we must have what we desire. That we need it in order to cope with the other feelings going on inside us – our need for love, for being wanted, for being appreciated, for feeling good about ourselves, for not allowing others to get the better of us, for proving we're right and others are wrong, for relief from the stresses and struggles of everyday life.*

How frequently have you heard the phrase 'I couldn't help it'? That may be true for those who live their lives with no regard for God. They are slaves to their own passions. But it is not true for us as Christians. Christ has broken the power of sin that drags us further and further down its vicious spiral. We now have the Spirit of God within us to help us resist those temptations. We have a God who is eager and ready to help us choose the better way if only we will let Him.

David's actions had consequences - 'I am pregnant' (v5).

David could have brought an abrupt end to the vicious spiral down into greater sin. He could have called Uriah home from the battle front and confessed to him what he had done. But he didn't.

Uriah the Hittite was no stranger to David - but one of David's 'mighty men' (2 Sam 23:39; 1 Chr 11:41). (see also 2 Sam 11:3, 16:23 and 23:34 regarding Bathsheba's father & grandfather).

Relevance for us: *We may be attracted by all sorts of people we happen to see in daily life and on the screen. But we're most likely to entertain satisfying those feelings with people we know and meet day-to-day. We need to be on our guard most around the people we rub shoulders with.*

Contrast Uriah's attitude and actions with those of David. Uriah showed integrity and faithfulness to his fellow soldiers and to David's own policy that, when away from home, the men refrained from sex (1 Sam 21:5; see also Lev 15:18 & Deut 23:9-11,14). David failed to show the same level of faithfulness.

At this point David was in real jeopardy. If exposed his adultery was punishable by death.

So, we reach the most sordid part of the whole episode - the plan to get Uriah killed. Idleness had led to lust, lust to adultery, adultery to deception, and deception to conspiracy to commit murder.

Joab chose not to leave Uriah exposed and alone to be killed. Perhaps he was nervous about what the Israelite soldiers would think. Perhaps he didn't want to implicate himself in Uriah's death. Or perhaps he wanted to protect David from accusations that Uriah was deliberately allowed to die.

David was also nervous of what Joab would think and tried to placate Joab's anger by playing down the seriousness of what he'd done. The Hebrew in v25 means 'Don't let this thing be evil in your eyes.'

How has David, a man we've come to know as someone who knew the difference between good and evil, who turned to God frequently for a true perspective on weighty matters, ended up calling evil good.

David could've got away with it, with no witnesses or evidence to prove him to be in the wrong. But God knew and was not pleased (2 Sam 11:27).

Relevance for us: *We should remember that whatever we do, however much we might try to cover up our misdemeanours, God always sees and knows the truth. Nothing is hidden from him. We might initially find that thought scary, but it's actually the most reassuring, comforting thing you could imagine – as we will soon see in the case of David.*

God sent Nathan the prophet to bring David face to face with that realism - by telling a story (a typical approach in Middle Eastern culture cf Matt 21 and Lk 20).

Taking a poor man's only sheep to feed a guest would've been a gross betrayal of the high regard for hospitality in that culture.

David's declaration that the rich man deserved to die might sound excessive, but remember how David wanted to kill Nabal when he had refused to feed David and his men when on the run from Saul (1 Sam 25:1-22). David then revised the punishment to what the law required (Ex 22:1, see also Lk 19:8).

The reference to David being given Saul's wives (12:8) is a reminder David had many wives and concubines after he'd become king (2 Sam 5:13, see also 1 Chr 3:1-11). What was he doing with so many wives? Is this another weakness in David? (see Deut 17:17).

God would've given more, if he'd only asked (v8). Instead David had taken, without reference to God.

Compare Nathan's question (v9), 'Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes?' with what David had said to Joab about the killing of Uriah (11:25 'Don't let this thing be evil in your eyes'). God was saying to David, 'It was evil in my eyes.' (Compare God's condemnation of David here with that of Saul in 1Sam 18:8).

David had not only despised the word of the LORD (the commandments) but also God himself (v10)

There would be serious consequences of David's actions. His household would pay for what he had taken and the penalty would match the crime (v11). Note again the reference to what can be seen with the eyes (see John 3:18 and Eph 5:11).

Relevance for us: *Much as we might want to avoid light being shone on the things we'd rather people didn't know about us, actually bringing them into the light is the best thing for us, because it is then that God is able to help us overcome them. So be grateful for the Nathans of this world who are bold enough to call us out when we stray from God's ways. Welcome the chance to repent of our godlessness and receive the Spirit's help in turning away from such ways.*

David's reaction (v13) was immediately to confess he had sinned against God and that was where his repentance and restoration needed to begin.

Relevance for us: *The same is true for us. Until we have acknowledged our actions or attitudes have been against what God requires of us, any attempt to reconcile with those we've harmed will either prove inadequate or beyond us.*

The road to redemption

This was the moment David's vicious spiral downwards into dark thoughts and deeds was abruptly halted, when his eyes at last turned back to God and his restoration could begin.

Psalm 51 expresses David's thoughts and feelings at this critical moment . What strikes you most?

Notice: accepts the desperateness of his sin; confident of God's cleansing; no sense of self-pity, or attempt to justify his actions. Just an admission of guilt and a desire for cleanliness and a pure heart.

Nathan confidently declared 'The LORD has taken away your sin' (12:13). The lawful punishment of death for adultery and murder would not apply. God's grace is big enough to cover even the worst of sins. God was willing to make David clean. The same was true for the people of Israel – and for us.

But because David's actions had shown utter contempt for the LORD, the child would die.

David pleaded with God for the child's life - with great seriousness - but the child still died. The servants thought David would take it badly – the Hebrew literally says 'he may do something evil.' But David got up and worshipped the LORD - even before he took any food. He accepted the boy's death as God's will and chose to move on in light of that. (cf Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane - Matt 26:39-42). It is a wise person who freely chooses to submit to the Father's will, rather than fight against it.

Relevance to us: *How do you deal with sin in your life? Is it with feelings of guilt, thoughts of self-pity or self-loathing, resignation to a life that falls short of what you wish it could be?*

Or is it with humility before God, a readiness to admit your weaknesses and need for God's help, confidence in God's amazing grace and forgiveness, and with genuine repentance and commitment to live differently?

Why did God continue to bless David after he had sinned so drastically?

Maybe because David not only admitted he'd sinned against God, but also quickly sought to change his behaviour thereafter. God found David to be someone with whom he could continue to work.

Relevance for us: *Had we messed up as David did, some of us might have been so devastated by our personal failures that we could never forgive ourselves or believe that God could forgive us ever again. Some might have sought ways to justify their behaviour and so drifted further and further away from God's ways. But David was eager to seek after God and return to the right path as soon as possible after becoming aware of his sin. We would do well to imitate him.*

David's life from then on was not all blessing. His family life became a source of stress and pain to him. The subsequent actions of his son Absalom owed much to the failures he'd observed in his father.

Relevance for us: *Our actions have consequences and, while we know that God's forgiveness is complete and his restoration of us is unbounded when we turn back to Him, we cannot expect to so easily escape from the impact of those consequences. They act as a continuing reminder of our need for God.*

But God also continued to work through David because He'd determined, long before Israel became a nation, that His purposes for the world would be fulfilled through Abraham and his descendants.

Relevance for us: *God often rebuked Israel and disciplined them and urged them to repent and return to Him. God will not ignore sin, but He also will not allow sin to prevent what He has already purposed and through whomever he chooses. See Romans 9.*

That God continues to work through people even when they fail spectacularly points us to the simple truth that this life is far more about what God can and does do than about our own achievements and failures.

Session 6 David's family troubles

David's adultery and its aftermath is followed straightaway by the sad impact it all had on David's family. That impact was the outworking of God's word to David through the prophet Nathan.

David's eldest son commits rape

Amnon, David's eldest son and heir was obsessed with his half-sister Tamar. Yet Israelite law meant he was too close to be permitted a sexual relationship with her (Lev 18:11; 20:17; Deut 27:22).

But with the encouragement of 'wise' Jonadab (13:3) he went ahead and raped her (see Gen 34:2-3,36 for a similar occurrence). This is not godly wisdom, but the world's.

In contrast, Tamar is portrayed as a virtuous woman (compare 13:12 with Gen 34:7). She behaved impeccably compared to all the men in this chapter, and yet she was the one who suffered.

If a man had sexual intercourse with a virgin who was not pledged to be married to anyone, then Israelite law demanded he care for her by marrying her and pay a financial penalty to her father (Ex 22:16-17; Deut 22:28-29). By ordering Tamar out of his house Amnon demonstrated he'd no intention of fulfilling either responsibility. Tamar warned him he was making things worse. He didn't care.

Relevance for us: *Like Tamar, we may do everything we can to live a godly life, but that doesn't guarantee we will not get ignored, used, abused, despised, even ruined as she was. But that is not a reason to give up seeking to live righteously. Tamar's virtue was a light to her fellow Israelites, as it still is to us. She alone came out of this as the example to follow, the one we should listen to.*

Fall-out from the rape - Absalom's scheming and David's failure to discipline his sons

Absalom took Tamar under his wing. But he chose, for the time being, to suppress the hate he felt towards Amnon and urged his sister not to dwell on the matter.

David was furious (13:21). What could he do? He could have insisted on applying Dt 22:28-29, but that would have gone against Lev 18:11. A fine of 50 shekels (the price of a small plot of land) would have achieved nothing. Paying it to Tamar's father, David would have been ridiculous.. So, David did nothing.

Why does David not even rebuke Amnon, or urge repentance? Was he too soft on his first-born?

Absalom sat on his hatred for Amnon for 2 years before plotting revenge (13:23-24). He was gambling. If David accepted the invitation, killing Amnon would have been impossible. But he was hoping David would say no, leaving the door open for Absalom's real request, for Amnon to come in David's place.

Note, there is no mention of David consulting the LORD over whether he should go.. He'd been much more cautious about the people of Keilah (1 Sam 23:1-13), but this was family. And David loved his sons.

Absalom managed to persuade his men to seize Amnon and kill him 13:28-29 (remember how David had been so principled about not killing anyone from King Saul's family).

Relevance for us: *We may think we're not as scheming or violent as Absalom, but how many of us may have sat for years on feelings of resentment or anger towards someone else? We may not have turned those feelings into drastic action, but have we allowed them to fester and permanently distort the way we relate to that other person? It is neither healthy for our relationship with them, nor with ourselves. And it is certainly not healthy for our relationship with God. It's time to allow God to bring those feelings out into the light and allow Him to deal with them. If that seems too much, then talk in confidence to one of the clergy about it.*

The judgment of God delivered to David in ch12 about 'the sword not departing from your house' had begun. This was a consequence of David's sin worked out through the will of God.

Absalom fled to Geshur, east of the Sea of Galilee. because his mother, Maacah, was the daughter of Talmi the king of Geshur (1 Chr 3:2). He stayed there for 3 years in self-imposed exile.

David's attitude to Absalom remained negative. According to most English translations, 2 Sam 13:39 says David was consoled regarding the death of Amnon and longed to go to Absalom. The Hebrew is not as clear or positive as that. The verb translated 'longed to' means more like 'had come to an end'/'was used up'. One commentator renders the whole clause as 'the king's enthusiasm for marching out against Absalom was spent.' And there is no verb to 'long for' in 14:1. It actually says Joab knew the king's heart was 'upon' or 'against' Absalom (i.e. he was thinking about him or remained hostile to him).

David reminded of God's character from an unexpected source

Joab used a 'wise' woman from Tekoa to try to persuade David to bring Absalom back from exile..

The woman had the temerity to accuse the king of not following God's ways (14:14). What she said about God's character was true. God desires reconciliation more than judgement as David needed reminding. But God's judgement is the spur to bring about that reconciliation.

Relevance for us: *We often need to be reminded of God's character when it comes to the issue of forgiveness and reconciliation. But we tend to veer towards one of two extremes. Either, like the woman, for the sake of harmony, we want to grant forgiveness too cheaply, with no expectation of repentance and change in the other person. Or, like David, we do not seek reconciliation at all, preferring to hold onto our grudge against them. In either case we ignore the way God deals with sin, grants forgiveness and seeks reconciliation.*

There are difficulties with the woman's story. Her plea relied on her having only had 2 sons and losing the second meaning her family's inheritance would go to those only distantly related to her. David had many sons and his inheritance would stay within the immediate family whatever happened to Absalom. Also, no one was trying to kill Absalom at this point and his exile was not the result of being banished.

David had become too easily persuadable into following courses of action that were unwise (13:24-27; 14:13-14, 21). He was reacting rather than ruling. He was not seeking God's perspective. Perhaps he accepted it as God's judgment of his failures. But he could and should have stuck to his principles.

Relevance for us: *In our desire for avoiding conflict among family and friends, we too can be tempted to relax rules and values we claim to hold. Going soft to ensure there is peace has its own consequences – and they are often not good ones.*

David agreed to Absalom returning to Jerusalem but would not allow him to see his face – further evidence David was not reconciled with Absalom, but neither would he insist on repentance.

After another 2 years Absalom persuaded Joab to make a further plea to David, saying 'if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death' (14:32). A classic sign of an unrepentant heart, and a phrase beloved by public figures accused of wrongdoing. Not 'I admit what I did was wrong and I'm sorry for the hurt I caused', but 'I'm sorry if people chose to take it that way.' It's an accusation my accusers are too weak and sensitive to cope with real life, with a defiant implication I've no intention of changing my ways.

How different things might have been if at this point Absalom had copied his father in humbly admitting 'I have sinned against the LORD.' (2 Sam 12:13)

Relevance for us: *How often, when challenged about something we've said or done, do we offer only a half-hearted apology and go on telling ourselves we haven't done anything wrong?*

Better it to own up to our failings and take responsibility for them. It means swallowing our pride and asking others to forgive us. But that is a far better route to genuine reconciliation.

Absalom was also challenging David's commitment to the law. He was banking on David's reluctance to pursue justice and his readiness to let Absalom return showed he wouldn't demand justice now.

Absalom's continued scheming and manipulating

Absalom cannily persuaded those coming to the king for justice would only get it if he were appointed judge in the land (15:1-6). He 'stole the hearts (literally 'the minds') of the people of Israel.'

He kept that up for four more years before making his fateful move to seize the kingship from his father. His deceitful request to go and fulfil a vow to the LORD at Hebron played on two things dear to David's heart. What irony hangs on David's blessing on Absalom, 'Go in peace' (15:9).

Since the fateful day Tamar was raped by Amnon, Absalom had waited 11 years for this moment. Killing Amnon was not enough to deal with the hate burning inside him, so it shifted from Amnon to his father.

'The conspiracy gained strength and Absalom's following kept on increasing' (15:12). Such moments are not uncommon in history when, to those with a godly perspective, it can seem events have frustratingly and worryingly played out to the advantage of greedy, wicked people. But God had other plans.

David on the run for a second time

David's reaction to Absalom's treason might seem like that of a coward. But he'd already seen the way innocent people can end up in the firing line when his enemies pursue him.

David's flight from Absalom (ch 15-18) was punctuated with meetings with several people. They reinforce how God was continuing to provide for and protect David every step of the way. Ittai the Gittite and his 600 men provided devoted support (15:18-22). Zadok, Abiathar and the Levites provided spiritual perspective and a chance to learn what Absalom was plotting (v24-29).

To David, the ark was not some kind of guarantee of God's protection. He knew God was not restricted to exercising power through man-made objects, however sacred. David had recovered his dependence on God's grace and a willingness to surrender to His will (v25-26). He knew his future depended not on 'whether he had Yahweh's furniture, but on whether he had Yahweh's favour' (Dale Ralph Davies).

News that his chief adviser Ahithophel had deserted him for Absalom led David to offer up an arrow prayer to God (v31). God's answer was the immediate arrival of David's trusted friend Hushai.

Relevance to us: *How often do you send a lightning prayer up to God when faced with sudden upset or a situation that is out of your control? Apart from anything else it is an expression of our dependence on God, rather than trying to solve things on our own.*

The meeting with Ziba, servant to Mephibosheth grandson of Saul, provided more food, drink and donkeys, though with a dubious story about his master's reasons for staying in Jerusalem (16:1-4).

Only the encounter with Shimei appears negative (16:5-14). Yet David was prepared to accept his curses as only what David deserved from God (v10). But his understanding of God's character went deeper still. The Hebrew of v12 is better translated as '*Perhaps Yahweh will look at my iniquity and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today*'. David understood cursing would not be God's last word for those He'd chosen and through whom He continued to work out His purposes. God intends grace and blessing. When God's people sin, His discipline is a necessary step on the road back to that place of grace and blessing. Knowing this, David was at peace.

Relevance for us: *Today, we can be even more confident than David of this apparent paradox in the character of God. Because of the cross of Jesus, we know that God has thoroughly dealt with the horror of our sin. For us, it's not just a possibility that God will forgive us, the cross guarantees it. Amazingly, we can expect blessing rather than cursing and it should turn us to thankfulness and worship that we have such a God.*

God brings Absalom's rebellion to an end but not its consequences

The outworking of David's arrow prayer about Ahithophel (15:31) can be seen in 16:15-17:22. God did not frustrate Ahithophel's first advice that Absalom should reinforce his claim to be the rightful king by sleeping with David's concubines in broad daylight (16:20-23). But that was because it was to fulfil what He had declared to David through Nathan (12:11-12).

Ahithophel's advice about attacking David while he was weary was more dangerous (17:1-4), but God was still in charge and working through Hushai to influence Absalom and David's future (v5-14)..

Relevance for us: *God is still working out His plan for the whole of creation. Whatever human beings may plot or scheme, ultimately God will not allow them to destroy His Church or prevent His victory. In a world that seems to be dangerously chaotic, we'd do well to remember that.*

By favouring Absalom over David, Ahithophel defied not just God's anointed king, but also God himself and made himself an enemy of God's kingdom. His death was a consequence of that choice (v23).

When the two sides finally met, David commanded his men 'be gentle with Absalom for my sake' (18:5).

Absalom's death was a consequence of his love of long hair (see 14:25). His concern for his own appearance proved his undoing.

Relevance for us: *Beware of being overly concerned about appearances – either our own or those of others we might be attracted to follow. The world around us may think appearances matter more than most, but we should know God sees things differently.*

Despite David's clear command, Joab made sure Absalom was killed. David's reaction to his son's death was profound grief and regret (18:31-33), so much so that it almost cost him the continued loyalty of his own troops and those who had supported him (19:1-8).

The sharp disagreement that developed between David's tribe of Judah and the other Israelite tribes (except for Benjamin) over who was the first to bring David back as their king would grow deeper over the next 40 years. It led to the breakup of the Israelite kingdom, just ~100 years after it had begun.

Yet, all of this was within God's greater plan for Israel and for a far greater kingdom under Jesus.

Session 7 David and the psalms

We started the course with two over-arching questions.

Why is David revered as a man after God's own heart and as Israel's greatest king?

What are we meant to do with what we read about David in the Bible?

Rather than examining David's character for what we can copy, perhaps the key to learning from his life is to look at the character of the God he believed in and the impact that belief had on his actions.

The best place to do that is probably through the psalms.

Knowing God as our stronghold

Ps 18:2 - God as our rock, fortress, deliverer, shield, stronghold, the one in whom I take refuge.

When David was on the run it was not the deserts, canyons & caves that were his security - God was.

David wasn't indifferent to danger. He remained alert to what his protector-God was saying to him. The safest place, whatever his situation, was to be in close relationship and communication with his God.

(See also Ps 3:3; 12:7-8; 18; 27; 28; 31; 34; 59; 62; 71; 142; 144).

Is that the God we've put our trust in? Who do we look to when we don't feel safe, when life is giving us a battering, when the world seems to be increasingly chaotic and dangerous? Do we truly recognise God is our rock, our fortress and our deliverer? Do we look and listen to Him?

Knowing God as the faithful provider of all that we need

Ps 16:2 'You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.'

Ps 16:5 'Yahweh, you alone are my portion and my cup.'

Ps 54:4 'Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me.'

God provides the same protection to His Church. He will never let the flame of His Church be extinguished. He is faithful to the promises made to His people.

Ps 31:5 'Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Yahweh, my faithful God'

Ps 86:11 'Teach me your way, Yahweh, that I may rely on your faithfulness'

Knowledge of that faithfulness was probably what prevented David from killing Saul and Nabal (1 Sam 24-26) and enabled him to rise and worship God when his new-born child died (2 Sam 12)

(See also Ps 21; 23; 37; 61; 63; 65; 68; 108; 138; 143; 145)

We often sing of God's faithfulness in church. Do those words ring true in your head and heart? Do you cling to that awareness of God's faithfulness even when circumstances don't suggest it?

Trust in God's faithfulness gives us hope for the future and motivates our pursuit of a righteous life. Such persevering obedience is worth it for the sake of gaining all God has promised..

Knowing God hears our prayers and answers them

David prayed fervently for his child's life to be spared (2 Sam 12:14-23) because he believed God was worth praying to, even though the outcome was not always what he wanted..

Ps 3:4 'I call out to Yahweh, and he answers me from his holy mountain'

Ps 5:3 'Yahweh, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.'

David knew he could not make God give him what he wanted by praying. God's ways are not man's ways, nor God's timing what we might think it should be.

Ps 139:6 'You have searched me Yahweh and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Yahweh, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and lay your hand on me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.'

(See also Ps 4; 17:16; 20; 40; 61; 66)

We don't know all that God knows, so don't expect Him always to act how you think He should. Continue to lay your requests before Him, but let Him act as He sees fit. Allow Him to still be God.

Knowing God can be trusted even when evil appears to triumph

David expressed anguish about the way the wicked seem to prosper. And yet he still saw God as a God of holiness and justice who would not allow violence and deceit to have the ultimate victory.

Ps 11:3-4 'When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? Yahweh is in his holy temple; Yahweh is on his heavenly throne.'

Ps 5:5-7 'The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong; you destroy those who tell lies. The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, Yahweh, detest. But I, by your great love, can come into your house; in reverence I bow down towards your holy temple.'

David's eyes moved from gazing at a world gone wrong to gazing at the throne of God. Doing the same can help us regain a proper perspective on what is true and certain – what we can live for expectantly.

David also knew God could cope with his strongest emotions (Ps 6:1-7) but believed God would act against those who persist in doing evil (v8).

Ps 4:8 'In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Yahweh, make me dwell in safety.'

(See also Ps 6; 7; 9; 12; 13; 22; 31; 33; 36; 37; 54; 55; 56; 57; 64; 73; 109; 140; 141)

Is that true for you too? Is your view of God big enough to trust Him with all the things that worry you about the way the world is?

Knowing God delights in our pursuit of purity

Ps 15:1-3 'Yahweh, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain? The one whose way of life is blameless; who does what is righteous; who speaks the truth from their heart'

Ps19:7-14 David loved God's commands

Is that how you view what God requires of us, His people? Does the thought of God's commands thrill you with the character of the God who introduced them?

David believed his pursuit of holiness delighted God and it spurred him on to holy living (Ps 18:20-28).

(See also Ps 24; 26; 51; 73:1; 101; 141)

Knowing God is gracious and eager to forgive even our worst sins when we return to him

Ps 51:1-17

Take each verse of Ps 51 slowly and ponder the meaning and implications of each part.

David's understanding of the outrageous graciousness of God is what drove his desire to turn away from his own sinful ways and live righteously. He knew for sure that he would be met with love not anger.

Oh, that the same would be true of us.

(See also Ps 32; 38; 41; 51; 103)

Knowing we are nothing compared to God and we depend utterly on Him

Ps 8:3-6

David did not get carried away with his own importance in relation to God, which is why he so often looked out for the people who had helped him when his life was in danger.

David knew he was a servant of God, dependent on Him for everything.

Ps 145:1-21 God's character and works are beyond anything we can lay claim to - we depend on Him.

Ps 131, 'My heart is not proud, Yahweh, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have calmed and quietened myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content. Israel, put your hope in Yahweh both now and for evermore.'

(See also Ps 22; 59)

The remarkable promise God made to David

Perhaps because of David's deep understanding of God's character, God made a promise to him.

2 Sam 7:5-16 - remarkable promises with layers of meaning:

- To make David's name great (v9) - was partially fulfilled already, but would become far greater .
- To provide a home for his people Israel (v10) - they were not yet free from disturbance or oppression, nor are today. So is a bigger horizon in mind?
- To establish a house for David after he'd died (v11-13) - what is that 'house'?

God was saying the building is not the critical thing, nor necessary to guarantee God's favour.

Relevance for us: *We'd do well to remember that the glory of the building is worth little if the heart of the people isn't focused on the glory of God.*

The 'house' God promised David was a 'family' or 'household' - a dynasty. An obvious reference to Solomon but, again, is another horizon in mind, (v13b)?

Who is the 'he' in v13-15? See v12. Could just refer to Solomon. But Hebrew for 'offspring' is 'seed' - used in OT to refer to a line of descendants. So could refer to all the kings of Judah.

An individual king was less important than the office of the king as a whole. Kings would be bad, but the line and the kingdom would last (v16). Nothing could bring it to an end; not David's death, nor his descendants' sin, nor even time itself.

Given the history of Israel since then, how can God's promise to David possibly be true?

Jesus is the 'seed' from the line of David (see Matt 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38) - he is ultimately the king and his is the kingdom spoken of in vv12, 13, & 16.

Did David realise the full extent of what God was promising? He sat before Yahweh (v18), overwhelmed

- by God's humility in not expecting a temple (v19)
- by God's grace in carrying out His purposes through faithless Israel and flawed David (v23)
- by God's faithfulness in ensuring the kingdom of His people would last for ever (v24).

All David wanted was to be forever in His presence and under His blessing (v29).

Is that what you yearn for too?

Last words

1 Kings 2:2-4 God remained faithful to His promise such that today Jesus, son of David, rules over a kingdom that will last forever – all who trust in Him get to share in that kingdom with Him. Alleluia!