

TEACHING SERIES // April-June 2021***King's Heart: The Life, Love, and Legacy of King David* / 1 and 2 Samuel**

We're living in a time when heroes are in short supply. #MeToo and cancel culture have greatly narrowed the available roster of people we are permitted to admire. Our nation's founders are hopelessly flawed, presidents once thought great are in fact evil, and even many accomplished artists, scientists, and cultural icons—male and female—have committed unpardonable sins that disqualify them from receiving any commendation whatsoever. Where is all this coming from? Is it a full-scale assault from prideful religious snobs, Pharisees who can't resist looking down their noses at the unclean masses? No. It appears to be an onslaught from the secular saints of society, heirs of the French Revolution who, not long ago, were in the faces of the religious, saying, "You ought not to judge." O the ironies of moral posturing!

Thankfully, in the grand scheme of things, all this recent hoopla is but a tiny blip on the screen of history. Most people, religious or not, understand no period of history gives us perfectly blameless heroes, and every period of history has its glaring sins which are much more easily highlighted with the passage of time. Only the most short-sighted and arrogant among us believe the fantasy that we have made so much moral progress a handful of the self-righteous can weed the garden of history and anoint themselves as the perfect flowers of all that's good. Every time you witness the kind of moralizing mischief taking place in our culture right now, you can be fairly certain it can be traced to a denial of the fall of man and the incalculable damage it has done to each and every human heart. If the cancel culture delights in selective condemnation of sinners, the Bible ups the ante and snares all of us in its net!

The Scripture says "there is none righteous, not even one" and reminds us "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10, 23). Does this mean *everyone*? Yes! Even those who have managed to stay in the good graces of cancel culture by their frenzied attempts at virtue signaling cannot escape the penetrating conviction of God's Word. Jeremiah the prophet makes it clear that, despite all our ability to look good on the outside, the heart is another story: "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" (Jeremiah 17:9, NLT)

This leaves us in a quandary as far as heroes are concerned. If the entire human race is indelibly marked by sin (and it is!), then why stop with the list of offenders our modern secular inquisitors are after? Let's purge every last name from our history books regardless of color, creed, or supposed credentials! Away with selective morality. We all know it's just one big heap of hypocrisy anyway. Except we all know this won't work. There would be no such thing as history! And to whom could we look for inspiration and encouragement—as well as example—of what to avoid?

We desperately need some heroes right now. But what we need are fallen, flesh-and-blood heroes who have experienced both stunning successes and miserable failures. We need heroes whose lives are an open book, revealing both righteous as well as unruly passions. In other words, we need heroes whose lives are within our reach, whose sins and imperfections have affected but not defined their lives. Anyone come to mind?

King David is one such hero. One of the most beloved characters in the Bible, David fits all the above criteria. How so? Is it because he was a giant killer and a valiant warrior? Is it because he led such a morally commendable life? No, not at all. With adultery and murder on your resume, you are not going to win any cleanest-hands-and-heart awards. Enoch, Joseph, and Job all carry records less tarnished by moral failure.

No. David is a notable person not because he was courageous, nor because he was sinless. David was remarkable because he was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22).

If you've heard this phrase "a man after God's own heart," you may have perhaps asked yourself, "What does this mean?" To the best of my knowledge, there is no clear-cut definition. In fact, the phrase seems to defy a definition! What, after all, is a person after God's own heart? It sounds as if this would be a very good person; and most of us probably assume instinctively the phrase refers to a person whose life is free of scandalous behavior. At the very least, we would think a person after God's own heart is one whose passion for God outweighs the catalogue of his sins. A little reflection, however, will reveal it is not quite so simple as this.

Given the New Testament attribution of this phrase to David (by no less than Paul the Apostle in Acts 13:22), and given the record of David's moral failures in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, we can most certainly rule out the notion that a person after God's own heart is one who has never engaged in serious immoral behavior. We can also say a person after God's own heart is not one who lives unsullied by the questionable cultural and political influences of his time. David, a fierce warrior, polygamist, and absolute monarch could be manipulative, downright dishonest, and calculating when it came to protecting himself and consolidating his power for political purposes. In addition to all this, David was far from anything like an ideal father; Absalom, his son, is exhibit A for lack of success in this regard! So if David failed morally, absorbed the less-than-savory influences of the culture of his day, and flunked as a father, how could he be called a man after God's own heart?

To understand, it is helpful to compare David with his predecessor, King Saul. Both men were anointed to be king by the prophet Samuel. Both men were impressive in appearance. Both men, early on in their careers, demonstrated humility. Both men committed serious sins. And both men were confronted about their sins by prophets: Saul by Samuel and David by Nathan. Here, however, the similarities end. When Saul was confronted by the prophet Samuel for his disobedience, rather than owning his sin, Saul attempted to rationalize it. When David was confronted by the prophet Nathan for his adultery and murder, he owned his sin and was broken over it. How broken was David? He writes an entire song, Psalm 51, about his sin and the effects it had on him! Who does this sort of thing, especially a public figure as prestigious as a king? Who composes a song about his own hideous sin for the nation's worship hymnal? The answer? A man after God's own heart!

This, I believe, is what endears David to us. He hides neither his sin (Psalm 51) nor his passion for God (Psalm 63). And in this he appears to be a bundle of paradoxes and contradictions, just like us! Except we don't always readily admit this, do we? Why not? For many of us, passion for God and confession of sin are incongruous. We tend to think they just don't (or shouldn't) go hand in hand. After all, if one is passionate about God, why would there be any need for confession? Passion for God provides all the evidence needed to demonstrate the level of my devotion to God, right? It is my badge of orthodoxy. In this way of thinking, passion rather than obedience becomes proof of my love for God. Yes, believe it or not, something as subjective and unreliable as our own feelings about our intentions spares us from the humbling experience of owning and confessing our sins. This appears to have been the thinking of Saul, who tried to justify his disobedience by appealing to his intentions to offer a sacrifice.

Skewed as this thinking is, it should not come as a surprise. Our present culture has been operating at toxic levels of sentimentality for some time now. What we *feel* about what God says and what we *feel* about our

relationship with God are assumed to be more accurate indicators of our spiritual health than how seriously we take his Word and our own lack of obedience to it.

Think about this. As passionate a man as David was in his pursuit of God, when confronted with the true condition of his heart, he accepted the uncovering of his sin and responded with godly sorrow. He saw himself as God saw him—not a victim needing therapy, recovery, and acceptance, but a violator of God’s law needing mercy, forgiveness, and restoration. It is this absolute dependence on God at every challenging and ugly turn in one’s life that I believe comes closest to describing a person after God’s own heart. It is the person who, conflicted though he or she may be by sin, nevertheless owns it, and in owning it, discovers the path that leads to God’s amazing grace. It is that humility, without which one will not enter the kingdom of God. It is the humility that asks again and again, “God, what do You want? What is Your will?”

So was David a good man? No. According to Jesus, there is only One who can be called good, and this One is God (Luke 18:19). Was David a man after God’s own heart? Yes. He composed many beautiful psalms that give us a window into his heart for God. And though his life was marred by sin (adultery, murder, and pridefully disobeying the Lord by numbering his army, among other things), in the end, he always came back to his only Safe Refuge. Crushed by the weight of his sin, he would always return to the Lord. He would always come back to the One who would come into this world one thousand years later as the God-man, a descendant of David according to the flesh, to bear the weight of all our sins.

Over the next few weeks, we are going to study the life of David, this fascinating man with whom God made a covenant (Cf. 2 Samuel 7:8-17; Psalm 89, especially verses 19-37). He is distant from us in that he lived 3,000 years ago in an entirely different culture. He is close to us in that he struggled with sin, feelings of alienation from God, people who betrayed and mistreated him, and a host of questions we’ve all wrestled with, such as, “Where are You when I need You, God?” The dictionary says a hero is “someone who’s admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievement, or noble qualities.” I can’t speak for you, but as for me, I want to be a man after God’s own heart. In this, David is my hero—a hero in his own time, and in ours.

April 11, 2021 / *An Extraordinary Life* / 1 Samuel 13:14, 1 Samuel 16:1-13 (Scott)

Here we show how David was selected to be king, give an overview of his life, and discover what made him a man after God’s own heart. Passion for God and confession of sin with utter dependence on God set David apart. While Saul his predecessor, and so many kings after him either ignored or disregarded the Word of God given to them by the prophets, David wanted to know God’s Word and His will. (Much from the above introduction will be included in this lesson.)

April 18, 2021 / *Never the Underdog* / 1 Samuel 17 (Chris)

We all love a good underdog story! Rocky. Frodo Baggins. Forrest Gump. Rudy. The Miracle on Ice. They fill us with hope and possibilities. There is no greater underdog story than David and Goliath. But is David and Goliath really an underdog story? I guess that depends on your perspective. The armies of Israel could not help but see their personal stature and abilities vs. Goliath’s. But David compared the stature and strength of Goliath not to his own, but to his God’s, the Covenant God of Israel. In this historical story, David accomplishes two things. First, he proves he is the rightful king of Israel (the anti-Saul), and second, he

becomes the picture of Jesus, the warrior who has gone to battle to defeat the giants in our lives. It is truly the power of our mighty God that is the source of true hope and possibilities.

April 25, 2021 / *Love and Envy* / 1 Samuel 18 and various passages (Scott)

How would it feel to be the object of intense love and bitter envy, with both emanating from the same family? This is what David experienced from Jonathan and his father King Saul. In this lesson, we will see how loyal love is more powerful than the destructive force of envy.

May 2, 2021 / *Man on the Run* / 1 Samuel 21-24 (John)

Running is hard enough when you're doing it just for exercise. Imagine running because someone is trying to kill you—and that someone won't stop until he has succeeded. In these three chapters of 1 Samuel, we find David frantically running from Saul with no safe haven in sight. Saul and his army are hot on David's tail, and David has few allies he can trust. He is just trying to stay alive! Over and over, it seems that David is trapped with no way out. Yet each and every time, God provides an escape for David. Temptation relentlessly chases us and it feels inevitable that it will overrun us. So, what happens when we're cornered by evil, when we feel the only option is to give up or give into sin? Even in the most unbearable moments of temptation, God provides an escape so that we can keep running and keep living in holiness.

May 9, 2021 / *My God* / 1 Samuel 30:6 (Scott)

Where do you turn when others turn against you? David was distressed and appeared to be in a no-win situation. Surrounded by danger and distrust, he encouraged and strengthened himself in the Lord his God. In this lesson, we will explore the blessing of knowing God is our God, and what this means for us in those terrifying times of life where we are uncertain about our future.

May 16, 2021 / *God's Vision is Bigger than Your Own* / 2 Samuel 7:8-17 (Chris)

There are not many texts more important in all the Old Testament than this one. It is the pinnacle of David's kingdom and David wants to do something for God. But in all of David's good intent, God has different plans. God refuses David's great personal plans and dreams. Rather than David doing something great for God, God promises to do something great through David. Through David's kingdom comes the eternal King and kingdom, which is not just David's hope, but our great hope as well.

May 23, 2021 / *Love Your Enemies* / 2 Samuel 9:1-13 (Scott)

The kindness of God holds no grudges. No, it goes far beyond this! David's care for Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan and grandson of Saul, is one of the most touching pictures of God's kindness and grace in the Bible. In this lesson, we will see how gracious acts of love and caring for the marginalized truly bring glory to God.

May 30, 2021 / *Secrets Exposed* / 2 Samuel 12:5-7 (John)

Think of that horrifying moment when you realize your secrets have been exposed, when those close to you know everything that you want no one to know. David had committed multiple unimaginable sins and thought he had hidden them well. But for David, there was no hiding his shameful secrets. All that he had done would be publicly revealed. David's actions were met with heartbreaking consequences but also immeasurable grace. God knows our deepest secrets, so the question becomes what should we do with what we're hiding? Will we bring our sins to the light or will God be the one to openly expose them?

June 6, 2021 / *Rebellion* / 2 Samuel 15:1-12 (John)

Speaking from the heart of a father, it is hard to imagine a greater pain than a rebelling son. Absalom's insurrection runs far deeper than simply walking away to do his own thing. He tries to take for himself what God has given to another; Absalom leads a coup to take the throne. This passage serves as a stark reminder that there is an enemy at work that leads to active rebellion against God. Even when the currents are hidden, its force must be guarded against until the day it will be ultimately defeated.

June 13, 2021 / *Uncommon Devotion* / 2 Samuel 15:13-21 (Scott)

The Philistines were enemies of Israel, right? Would it surprise you to discover they were also some of the most loyal defenders of David in the darkest moments of his life, when he was on the run from his own rebellious son Absalom? In this lesson we will consider both the kind of person David was that he could make even his enemies his defenders, and the beautiful picture of dedication and selfless service found in David's friend, Ittai the Gittite.

June 20, 2021 / *Look Back and Celebrate!* / 2 Samuel 22-23:7 (Chris)

Now an old man, David looks back at all that God has done and how the Lord has blessed him. David's experience with God is not theoretical. It is very personal—and it pours out in praise! David could have looked back and seen his failures and have those failures define his life. He could have looked back and seen his accomplishments and have those accomplishments define his life. Rather than be filled with empty regret or puffed-up pride, David is filled with joy and celebrates the intimate care of the living God! What an example for us! What opportunities we have throughout our lives to pause and celebrate the continual goodness and intimate love and care of our God!.