

LIFE OF DAVID 3

Honor

Honor is a slippery word. Merriam-Webster defines it as “a keen sense of ethical conduct: integrity. For example, ‘a man of honor.’ Or: one’s word given as a guarantee of performance. For example, ‘on my honor, I will...’” Honor, like integrity, is the decision to do the right thing for the right reason, regardless of the benefits or consequences you might receive.¹

Pre-Article Questions:

1. How have you seen someone honored really well in your lifetime?
2. How have you seen someone dishonored in your lifetime?

The writer of 1 and 2 Samuel presents a beautiful picture of David as an honorable man in his dealings with Jonathan and Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son. The story begins with David fleeing from Saul after the king attempted to kill him twice. In his distress, he seeks out Jonathan, his best friend, and asks him to find out whether or not Saul will relent. Despite Jonathan's knowledge that David will succeed to the throne instead of him and Jonathan's sworn loyalty to his father as the king, he agrees to go on behalf of his friend.

Jonathan's willingness to help is remarkable and honorable in its own right. He could easily have given David false information to retain his right to the throne. He also faced immense pressure from Saul who reminds his son, “As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!”² Instead, Jonathan promised to send David away safely if Saul intended to harm him. In return, he asked David to swear to “show... unfailing kindness like that of the Lord as long as I live... and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family – not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David’s enemies from the face of the earth.”³

The kindness David swears to show is “hesed” in the Hebrew text. “[Hesed] has theological significance throughout the Old Testament, denoting the life-sustaining grace of God bestowed on humans and making it possible to have a loving relationship with Him.”⁴ To fulfill this promise will require sacrificial love “like that of the Lord.” This covenant “would later lead David to defy conventional wisdom regarding the elimination of potential rivals to the throne.”⁵ Jonathan asked David to make an oath to him because of their friendship, but acting on that oath could have endangered David’s kingship.

In 2 Samuel 9, David’s kingdom has finally been established and his enemies vanquished. “After all he had suffered at the hands of Saul, it would have been understandable if David conveniently forgotten his promise to Jonathan.”⁶ However, David asks Ziba, a former servant of Saul, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”⁷ No one is holding David accountable for the covenant he made. Jonathan is dead and yet he is intentionally working toward fulfilling the promise he made at least 20 years before.

Ziba, one of Saul’s former servants, informs David of the existence of Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s crippled son. 2 Samuel 4 helps us understand this man’s beginnings: “He was five years old when the news about Saul

1. “Honor.” Merriam-Webster Dictionary online. 14 January 2013.

2. 1 Samuel 20:31

3. 1 Samuel 20:14-15

4. The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel p. 301

5. The New American Commentary. p. 215

6. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: 1 & 2 Samuel. p. 241

7. 2 Samuel 9:1

and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became crippled.”⁸ Mephibosheth had a rough time of it. He was crippled, through no fault of his own, and if he wasn’t orphaned when his father was killed, then he was likely raised in a single parent home. Not only that, but we also learn in 2 Samuel 9 that he had been living with his wife and son “in a self-imposed internal exile... in Lo Debar.”⁹ This guy needs some serious inner healing. He’s been wounded and broken both physically and emotionally in his childhood and is living in Lo Debar or, literally “no word.” He has removed himself from any possible relationship with the king.

Doubtless, the summons of King David struck fear into the heart of Saul’s grandson. Knowing how other kings exterminated potential rivals, Mephibosheth could not have expected any benefit from the meeting. But against all custom and even common sense, David acts extremely honorably, saying, “Don’t be afraid, ...for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.”¹⁰ It would have been wise in the world’s eyes for David to eliminate Mephibosheth and keep Saul’s wealth for himself. It seems absurd that he would invite this broken man to eat at his table, a place of prominence, where the princes sat and affairs of state might have been conducted. But, in accordance with his vow, he not only spared Jonathan’s son, he also blessed him generously with wealth, position, and a relationship with the king himself.

While David was often sinful and allowed his flesh to trip him up, in this situation he truly shines as a man after the Father’s heart. We are, in a sense, Mephibosheth – broken wounded people who have removed themselves from relationship with the King of kings and deserve to be eliminated. But God, against all custom and common sense offered His Son in our place and offers us a place of honor at His table. How great is the Father’s love toward us that we should be called His sons!

The honor David demonstrated required him to disregard the potential hurt of fulfilling his promise and to scorn the benefits that could be kept by breaking his word. It requires men today to do the same. There is a severe lack of honor in our nation: politicians are unreliable; professional athletes abuse their fame exploiting others to get what they want; CEOs try to gain all they can financially, without a thought for their employees or customers. Those who keep their word do it only if it benefits them. “We tend to keep covenant with those who will repay us in some way. Such calculated covenant faithfulness manifests our falseness rather than our integrity.”¹¹ We must be willing to act honorably and mercifully just as the Lord deals with us if we are to shine His light into the darkness of this world.

1 Samuel 20:1-15, NIV

Then David fled from Naioth at Ramah and went to Jonathan and asked, “What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to kill me?”² “Never!” Jonathan replied. “You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn’t do anything, great or small, without letting me know. Why would he hide this from me? It isn’t so!”³ But David took an oath and said, “Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, ‘Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.’ Yet as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death.”⁴ Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you want me to do, I’ll do for you.”⁵ So David said, “Look, tomorrow is the New Moon feast,

8. 2 Samuel 4:4

9. The New American Commentary. p. 354

10. 2 Samuel 9:7

11. The NIV Application Commentary. p. 510

and I am supposed to dine with the king; but let me go and hide in the field until the evening of the day after tomorrow. 6 If your father misses me at all, tell him, 'David earnestly asked my permission to hurry to Bethlehem, his hometown, because an annual sacrifice is being made there for his whole clan.' 7 If he says, 'Very well,' then your servant is safe. But if he loses his temper, you can be sure that he is determined to harm me. 8 As for you, show kindness to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the Lord. If I am guilty, then kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?" 9 "Never!" Jonathan said. "If I had the least inkling that my father was determined to harm you, wouldn't I tell you?"

10 David asked, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?" 11 "Come," Jonathan said, "let's go out into the field." So they went there together. 12 Then Jonathan said to David, "I swear by the Lord, the God of Israel, that I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? 13 But if my father intends to harm you, may the Lord deal with Jonathan, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away in peace. May the Lord be with you as he has been with my father. 14 But show me unfailing kindness like the Lord's kindness as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, 15 and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family—not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."

2 Samuel 9:1-11, NIV

David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" 2 Now there was a servant of Saul's household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" "At your service," he replied.

3 The king asked, "Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?" Ziba answered the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet." 4 "Where is he?" the king asked. Ziba answered, "He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar." 5 So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel. 6 When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, "Mephibosheth!" "At your service," he replied. 7 "Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table." 8 Mephibosheth bowed down and said, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?" 9 Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul's steward, and said to him, "I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. 10 You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master's grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table." (Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.) 11 Then Ziba said to the king, "Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons.

Scripture Questions:

1. What are the promises Jonathan and David made to one another? How might these have violated custom?
2. What kind of kindness does Jonathan make David promise to show? Why is this important?
3. What do we know about Mephibosheth? Why is it significant that he is the recipient of David's kindness?
4. What does David promise Mephibosheth?
5. How does David's extension of mercy and grace to Mephibosheth mirror the Father's heart for his people?

Application Questions:

1. Look back at the definition of honor in the article. How did David exemplify this in his actions towards Mephibosheth? What commitments to others have you made that need to be acted on?
2. What are some areas in collegiate life that we see a lack of honor? Give some examples. (Making excuses for late homework, lying to professors, lying on applications, not showing up to student organizations you have committed to be a part of, broken promises in personal relationships, etc.) In what areas do you find it most challenging to act honorably?
3. How does God act with hesed, or covenant love and kindness? In what way have you experienced God's hesed?
4. What commitments have you made to the Lord to show hesed in your relationship with Him and in your relationships with others? Have you wavered in fulfilling them because of potential embarrassment, loss of personal time, etc? How can you fulfill those commitments? Is there ways that we as a small group can support you in these commitments?

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Memory Verse:

1 Samuel 20:14-15, "But show me unfailing kindness like the Lord's kindness as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, 15 and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family—not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."

Read 1 Samuel 20, 2 Samuel 9, 16, and 21

Please meet with your prayer partner from this week to discuss the following questions on the chapters assigned for this week:

1. Do you think David weighed the potential consequences of his covenant with Jonathan? Do you think he wavered in deciding to fulfill his promise? Why or why not?
2. How does God act with hesed toward His people?
3. Are there promises you have made that may be difficult to fulfill because of the potential consequences? How can you choose to be honorable in those situations?