

## **HOW TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**

### **1 SAMUEL 16:1-13, PSALM 51**

I get both amused and annoyed by our celebrity fascinated culture. One example is the Kardashian family that has had a reality show on TV now for several years. The new season is premiering just next month- whoopee! In the past, it seems to me that people achieved celebrity status in our culture by actually accomplishing something. At least, you were a star in some sport. You acted on TV or in movies. You were a gifted singer. You were a political figure. However questionable, there was at least something possibly to admire. Not anymore! Can someone please explain to me what the Kardashians have contributed or accomplished that millions of people should follow their every move? Why should we care what they do or what they think? What's to admire? And yet they earn millions by carefully crafting a cult of celebrity. Amazing!

Does the Bible have celebrities? The Bible is full of stories about many different human beings, but the purpose in telling us about them has nothing to do with celebrity. I've always liked the insight that God alone is the hero of the Bible. That being true, the Bible tells us about human beings because in doing so it tells us something important about God or about how people relate to and with God. Would it surprise you to learn that more has been written in the Bible about a man named David than any other character? Abraham has some fourteen chapters dedicated to his life and so does the Old Testament character of Joseph. Jacob has eleven. Elijah has ten. Do you know how many chapters in the Bible are dedicated to the story of David's life? Someone has counted sixty-six, and that doesn't include some fifty-nine references to his life in the New Testament. Clearly, we should get to know more about David but not because he was some kind of spiritual celebrity. As we'll learn over the next nine Sundays, David – like every other human being who has ever lived – had both strengths and weaknesses. The real value is learning how to have a relationship with God as we look through the lens of David's life experiences.

So, let's get started by reading the beginning of David's story. Like many people God uses in extraordinary ways, David started out life as kind of a nobody. Even his father forgot about him for a moment! But he went on to serve in the royal court, kill a giant named Goliath and eventually become the king of Israel himself. Historians tell us that at the height of his forty year reign, David was perhaps the most powerful ruler in the world of his day. David was both remarkably gifted and deeply flawed. He had great successes and awesome failures. He was a fine musician and poet. Most of the psalms in your Bible today were written by David. He developed into an outstanding leader – a great military general, a wise administrator and a gifted organizer. He had an innate charisma that made him easy to love and easy to follow.

But the most important thing to remember about David is what God said about him. On two occasions, we read something of key significance about David. In the first reference, Samuel, a great leader in Israel is rebuking King Saul, David's predecessor, on the throne of Israel. Samuel says to Saul, "But now your kingdom must end, for the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart. The LORD has already appointed him to be the leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command." (1 Sam 13:14 NLT) And then over in the New Testament, we read again about Saul, "But God removed Saul and replaced him with David, a man about whom God said, 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart. He will do everything I want him to do.'" (Acts 13:22 NLT) What a compliment! I would love for God to say that about Rick Breusch, "Now there's a man after my own heart." And yet the Bible is careful to reveal David's darker side, too. He committed both adultery and murder. Yes, David had a heart for God. But at times, he had a heart very much against God. Now today, I want to do sort of an overview of David's life from that perspective and then next week, we'll start to look at some of the specific highlights of his life. First of all, David's life provides ...

## **THE LESSONS OF A HEART AFTER GOD.**

What was God talking about when he called David a man after His own heart? Well, first of all, David had a thankful heart. David expressed gratitude to God habitually. He would invite everything – the wind, ocean, mountains, stars, animals, people everywhere – to praise God with him. The universe wasn't big enough for David when it came to praising and thanking God. The best evidence for David's thankful heart is all those psalms he wrote. "I will praise the LORD at all times. I will constantly speak his praises. I will boast only in the LORD; let all who are helpless take heart. Come, let us tell of the LORD's greatness; let us exalt his name together." (Ps 34:1-3 NLT) God loves a thankful, praising heart. Why? Because it reveals that at some level you finally get it. God alone is worthy of ceaseless praise and thanksgiving. You're valuing what is truly valuable – God. You're recognizing that life is all about God and knowing Him. It's not about you and pleasing yourself.

Have you ever realized that a thankful heart is a humble heart? The Masai tribe members in West Africa have an unusual way of saying thank you. They put their foreheads on the ground and say, "My head is in the dirt." When members of another African tribe want to express gratitude, they sit for a long time in front of the hut of the person who did them a kindness and say, "I sit on the ground before you." Thanksgiving is ultimately an act of humility.

Secondly, David had an authentic heart. He had the ability to bring his doubts and fears to God and not hide behind a religious façade. David was real and honest before the Lord. He never attempted to be something he wasn't in God's presence. Yes, he could express gratitude to God, but he could also ask God the tough questions in life. Again, it's primarily in the psalms that you see this

personal transparency and authenticity revealed. By way of example, David told God what he thought of his enemies. “O God, declare them guilty. Let them be caught in their own traps. Drive them away because of their many sins, for they have rebelled against you.... Let death stalk my enemies; let the grave swallow them alive, for evil makes its home within them.” (Ps 5:10, 55:15 NLT) To paraphrase, David is saying, “Nuke ‘em, in the name of Jesus!” Now, let’s be honest! Haven’t you felt way that about some people in your life? Sure you have! But do you tell God about your anger, your rage, your dislike, even your hatred of other people? A life lesson: David could and did. So should you.

David wasn’t hesitant to tell God when he was disappointed in God! “O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand?” (Ps 13:1-2 NLT) Haven’t you ever felt disappointed in or let down by God? One Christian in the Middle Ages who was going through a particularly tough time reportedly said to God, “If this is how You treat your friends, it’s no wonder You have so few!” David was all about telling God when he was discouraged. He never felt like he had to offer God some kind of fake rejoicing. “I am sick at heart. How long, O LORD, until you restore me?... I am worn out from sobbing. All night I flood my bed with weeping, drenching it with my tears.” (Ps 6:3, 6 NLT) Whatever was going on with David, he was in a world of hurt and he told God all about it. A life lesson: God welcomes and appreciates a real, transparent and authentic heart.

Thirdly, David had a loyal heart. He truly loved God and identified with God. Yes, David was capable of great sin and profound personal failure. But his heart was never weaned away from God. So many of Israel’s other kings and leaders actually began to worship other gods. David never went there. You see that single-hearted loyalty to God very early in his life. Here’s what he said to the giant, Goliath, before he killed him. “You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of Heaven’s Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. Today the LORD will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head... and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel!” (1 Sam 17:45-46 NLT) That was the essence of David – not perfection, but deep, personal devotion to the Lord. When David died, people didn’t remember his sins and failures. They remembered that unshakeable loyalty to God alone. A life lesson: what will people remember about you?

I expect to hear of the death of Billy Graham one day very soon now. He’s very old and very frail. You don’t hear much about him these days. Someone asked Billy’s mother why her son had made such an impact on the world. She said, “I don’t know. I can’t explain it. I know there are preachers who preach better than him. I know there are people who can organize better than him. I know there are many people who could do everything he does better than he can. But I know this: I know that when Billy gave himself to God, he gave all there was to give.” David was like that. How about you, my friend?

So what does a heart after God look like? It doesn't mean perfection, but at the very least, it does mean having a thankful heart, an authentic heart and a loyal heart before God. Sadly, David's life also teaches us some life lessons in the exact opposite way. In other words...

## **THE LESSONS OF A HEART AGAINST GOD.**

Here's the first lesson. Sin still has destructive power even in the life of someone who loves God with all of his or her heart. The Bible clearly and boldly reveals David's greatest personal failure. We'll take a closer look at this story in June, but we have to mention it today. On one occasion, David was in his palace while his army was off waging war on some enemy. He got idle and bored. Have you ever noticed that you're much more susceptible to temptation in your own life when you're idle and bored? David happens to see a beautiful woman taking a bath on her rooftop and lust just takes over. He summons her to the palace and sleeps with her. Her name was Bathsheba and she happened to be married to one of David's military leaders, Uriah. Bathsheba gets pregnant and David decides – wrongly, of course - that his best response is to cover it up.

So, he implements Plan A. He sends for Uriah and tells him to go right home for a little rest, relaxation and hopefully some normal marital, sexual activity between Uriah and Bathsheba. That way everyone would think Uriah was the father. But Uriah has to go and get all principled! He tells David, "No, thanks, it wouldn't be right for me to go home while my fellow soldiers are in battle." David moves on to Plan B. David invites Uriah to the palace and gets him stone, cold drunk hoping he goes home and sleeps with Bathsheba anyway. Uriah gets drunk all right, but refuses to go home. In desperation now, David adopts Plan C. He writes a letter to Uriah's commander and orders him to put Uriah intentionally in as vulnerable a position as possible in the very next battle. So, Uriah goes back to the front, goes into battle and gets intentionally abandoned by his fellow soldiers at a critical moment. Uriah is killed. Upon receiving the news, David marries Bathsheba and she gives birth to a son. The Bible says, "...But the LORD was displeased with what David had done." (2 Sam 11:27 NLT)

How could such a thing happen? The man after God's heart became the man against God's heart. That's the awful, destructive power of sin. Here's a good man – David sincerely loved God, worshiped God, sang praises to God – falling into the blackest pit of sin and failure. Nobody is beyond sin's power – not David, not you and not me. It has incredible power to deceive you. Nothing so blinds you to your sin than the simple fact that it's your sin. Sin has this incredible power to blind you. God finally had to send a prophet by the name of Nathan to get David to see the horror of his own sin. Nathan tells David this parable about injustice and David gets all hot and bothered with righteous indignation. Nathan then points his finger at David and says, "You are the man." Sometimes the hardest thing that the Holy Spirit has to do is to get you or me to face our own

sin. We want to rationalize it, excuse it and justify it. God wants you to confront it, reject it and turn away from it forever.

Secondly, David's story teaches you that sin has inevitable consequences even in the life of someone who loves God. What were some of the consequences of this sin in David's life? David lost any sense of a personal, inner fellowship with God and he was wracked with guilt for about a year. The child that David and Bathsheba conceived died a few days after birth as an act of judgment by God on their sin. Since David had willingly destroyed another man's family, God allowed him to reap what he had sown. David had one son who raped his half-sister and was then killed by another brother. That son, Absalom, led a coup d'état against his own father that almost succeeded. Absalom was killed in that attempt. Another son, Adonijah, was killed by yet another son, Solomon, who eventually followed David as king of Israel. What a mess!

But didn't God forgive David? Yes, fully and absolutely. But God didn't suspend the consequences of David's sin. God has set up the physical universe to run in a certain way subject to certain laws. One law is gravity. If I decide to climb up and jump off of our church's steeple after today's service, God will forgive my stupidity. But God doesn't suspend the law of gravity. There's no doubt that if I follow through on such a foolish act, I'm going to break something! God has made this universe to run by certain spiritual laws as well. God's Word says, "... you may be sure that your sin will find you out." (Num 32:23 NLT) It also says, "Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant." (Gal 6:7 NLT) How much each of us need to know and remember those warnings before we give into the temptation to lie, to steal, to hate, to gossip, to have sex outside of marriage, to covet, to give into pride, to despise the poor or to reject someone of another race. Of course, God will forgive any and all sin, but He doesn't always remove the consequences. Your sin will hurt you and it will hurt others – especially those whom you love.

But there's a final, greater and gracious life lesson when you consider David's heart against God. Forgiveness is always available to someone who truly loves God. It requires sincere, honest repentance and David gives us a marvelous example of true repentance. Repentance is always more than just feeling bad about what you've done. Repentance goes much farther than that. Repentance does start with deep regret – feeling great sorrow over what you've done – but it never stops there. Repentance asks God to forgive that sin. Repentance accepts the need to change. Repentance allows the Holy Spirit access to your life to make those changes. At the end of the day, repentance is all about change. David wrote about his repentance in a wonderful psalm – Psalm 51. Please turn with me there as I bring this message to a close today. Nothing I could say this morning better illustrates heartfelt and authentic repentance. Let's read that psalm now. David's relationship with God was broken and in shambles for an entire year. But because of God's great mercy, the man against God's heart turned back and became a man after God's heart. So can you and I.

In November of 2008 one of the greatest masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance was restored to its original splendor and returned to its home at a gallery in Florence. The Madonna del Cardellino was painted by Raphael in 1505 for the wedding of his friend, a wealthy Florence merchant. It portrays Jesus' mother, Mary, with two children who are playing with a bird. The children are John the Baptist and his young cousin Jesus. The bird that feeds among thorns is interpreted as representing Christ's future suffering.

But something happened to this painting. It was painted in 1505. Forty years later, there was an earthquake at the house where this painting hung, and the painting was shattered into 17 different pieces. It had been painted on wood and the wood was all smashed up. Another artist tried to patch the pieces together with long iron nails. Then he tried to paint over it to conceal the breaks and make it look whole again. But over the years, there were so many layers of paint added and so much dust and grime over this painting that the original colors, the original art, was completely obscured.

The most recent restoration project fixed the shattered areas and removed layers of paint and dirt to get the colors back. It was a team effort. It took fifty people ten years of working on this painting, and the result is stunning. The cracks are gone. Centuries of brown film and grime are gone. The dulling veneers and patches have been stripped away, and the finished product glows with all of the deep colors: the reds, and blues, and golds of the original work of art. Given how badly it was damaged, the restoration of Raphael's painting is arguably even more amazing than the painting itself. The original was splendid, but the miracle of restoration makes it even more beautiful and spectacular.

The Lord wants to accomplish a far greater masterpiece of restoration in your life and in mine. Tragically, the beautiful design of who God created you to be has been marred by an earthquake called sin. Layers of grime and dirt have collected. Maybe you've felt them and sensed them in your life. You thought you could paint over the damage. The patches and the veneers that you applied just made things worse and the cracks are showing. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus has the power to make all things new. A heart that has turned against God can indeed be turned back so that it is for God and after God.