

WHO IS DAVID?

**SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:
THE STORY OF DAVID.**



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Paul Taylor
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How do you summarize a person's life? At the end of a life, it is customary to write something on the headstone of a person's grave. This epitaph can be a way to capture the essence of what this person was all about. Thomas Jefferson was the third president of the United States, but wrote his own epitaph and omitted that accomplishment. Instead, he wrote,

*"Here was buried
Thomas Jefferson
author of the Declaration of American Independence,
of the statute of Virginia for religious freedom,
and father of the University of Virginia."*¹

The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote,

*"Free at Last, Free at Last
Thank God Almighty
I'm Free at Last."*²

Some people summarize their life with humor. Mel Blanc, the famous entertainer and creator of porky pig, wrote, "That's all folks."⁴ Winston Churchill, the British statesman, has written,

*"I am ready to meet my Maker.
Whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal
of meeting me is another matter."*³

And Spike Milligan, a British comedian and author, simply wrote, "I told you I was ill."⁵

How do you summarize a person's life?

Over the next ten months, we are going to do our best to understand the life of one man who lived three thousand years ago. Today we're officially kicking off our series that we've called "A Life of Passion: the Story of David." It may seem like ten months is a long time to spend on one person, but this morning I'm hoping to convince you that it will be worth it.

We know a lot about David. His story is longer than any other single character in the Old Testament. The psalms that are attributed to him reveal his interior life. In fact, there is more material about

David than any other figure in all of ancient literature: think Odysseus, Achilles, and the like. All told, there are almost two thousand verses describing the life of David, not counting his Psalms. For the sake of comparison, all four gospels add up to just shy of four thousand verses.

And yet, in a lot of ways, David remains a mystery to us. His motives aren't always clear. At the end of day, we have a hard time deciding whether to honor him, despise him, or pity him. One commentator summed up his story this way: "After all is said and done, we are still left with Samuel's greatest enigma, the figure of David himself." (Fox 37).⁶

We're beginning this sermon series by asking what sounds like a simple question: "Who is David?" It's a question that is asked throughout his story. Saul asks this question after David kills Goliath. Nabal, the fool, asks it when David encounters his men. And David himself asks it when Saul honors him. 1 Samuel 18:18, "Who am I ... that I should be son-in-law to the king?" This is the question that will pester and provoke us for the next ten months.

One of the most common ways of answering this question is with the phrase that shows up before we even meet David. In 1 Samuel 13:14, we are told that "The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart." Later in the New Testament, David is described by the same phrase. If David had an epitaph, this might be it.

But all throughout his story, we wonder, "What does that mean?" What was it about him that made this true of him? Was this true of him when he danced before God and his people? Was it true when he slept with another man's wife? Was it true when he couldn't figure out how to reconcile with his son? Was it always true of him?

If you're hoping for a simple answer to questions like these over the next ten months, I think you're going to be disappointed. If you want a formula to become a man or a woman after God's own heart, I don't think you'll find it in this story.

Not because we don't know enough about David. It's just that life doesn't work that way. We are all complex and mysterious. We have moments of

brilliance and times of stupidity. Sometimes our faith is strong; sometimes we wander in the dark. Our hearts are noble and generous one moment but dark and selfish the next.

That's why I think we're going to like David. He is just like us. He is good and evil, brave and cowardly, brilliant and stupid. But he is a man after God's own heart. Whatever that means, it is true of him. And the important thing for us to do is not to answer the question of what that means, but to keep asking it.

If we answer the question, then we lay it aside. I know what it means for David to be a man after God's own heart. Now I can move on. But if we keep asking it, every time we see David in some new situation, then we keep asking it of ourselves. What does it really mean to follow Jesus in this situation? Did David act honorably here or cowardly here? Was he trusting God or acting on his own?

Along the way we'll ask those same questions of ourselves. Am I a man or woman after God's own heart?

For our time this morning, I'd like to suggest three ways that the life of David will help us as we ask these questions. We're going to see how this life of passion helps us to look back on our history as the people of God. We're going to see how his life helps us to look within ourselves and wrestle with our own choices. Finally, we're going to see how his life helps us to look up to Jesus and understand who he is in a much richer way.

Who is David? Why is he so important? Let's see if we can answer those questions.

Look Back and Remember

The story of David begins, just as it does for all of us, before he is even born. That is the story we've been hearing about for most of the summer. The book of **Ruth in chapter 4, verse 17**, concludes with the revelation of why this Moabite widow is so important.

And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Most stories of great people begin with a birth narrative. It usually highlights some remarkable aspect of their lives that can be seen traced back to their very earliest days. Think about Adam being created from dust; Moses who was rescued from a basket in the river; Samuel, whose mother was barren until God had mercy on her. And of course, Jesus, whose mother was a virgin.

For all the attention given to David in the Scriptures, he has no birth narrative. We meet him as a youth, not an infant. Some have suggested that the entire book of Ruth serves as a kind of birth narrative for David. This is how it began for David: with an outcast woman of extraordinary faith who meets a tender and clever man.

But it isn't just the book of Ruth that looks forward to David. You might say that the entire Old Testament before David looks forward to him as Israel's king.

When we meet Melchizedek, the king of Salem (later Jeru-salem), in Genesis 14, we think forward to David, who established Jerusalem as the capital of God's people. When we hear about the kind of king that Israel must have in Deuteronomy 17, we anticipate David filling that role better than anyone else. And when we hear the refrain from Judges 21:25 that "there was no king in Israel," we know that a time is coming when there will be a king in Israel, reigning from the city of David.

And if much of the Old Testament looks forward to David, then many of the stories after his life look back upon him. Let's see how his life is summarized when it ends. What is said of David when he dies? Here is the summary of David's life from **1 Chronicles 29:26-30**:

Thus David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel.²⁷ The time that he reigned over Israel was forty years. He reigned seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem.²⁸ Then he died at a good age, full of days, riches, and honor. And Solomon his son reigned in his place.²⁹ Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the Chronicles of Samuel the seer, and in the Chronicles of Nathan the prophet, and in the Chronicles of Gad the seer,³⁰ with accounts of all his rule and his might and of the circumstances that came upon him and upon Israel and upon all the kingdoms of the countries.

David reigned over Israel for forty years. He died a successful king. His dynasty was continued by his son. His acts had incredible significance "upon Israel," but also "upon all the kingdoms of the countries." David was the model king of Israel.

Years later, the kings that came after him would be judged by his standard. It would be said of some, like Hezekiah, "he did what was right in the eyes of

the LORD, according to all that David his father had done" (2 Kings 18:3).

It would be said of others, like Ahaz, "he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God, as his father David had done" (2 Kings 16:2).

The prophets would remember David and his days as those of peace, prosperity, and singing. And the later prophets would speak of a time to come when someone like David would once again reign on the throne in Jerusalem. Ezekiel will go so far as to say that there will come a time in the future when once again,

"...my servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes" (Ezekiel 37:24).

The story of David is the hinge of the Old Testament. What comes before leads up to it. What comes after follows from it. David tells us the story of our people. He shows us the high point of our history. David helps us to look back and remember.

One of the problems of the modern age is that we have a tendency to understand ourselves in isolation from our history and context. It's as if we think we just plopped down here in Palo Alto in the 21st century. But of course that isn't true. We came from somewhere. People went before us, and they shape a lot of what we do and think and expect about what things will look like moving forward.

James Baldwin is quoted as saying, "Know from whence you came. If you know whence you came, there are absolutely no limitations to where you can go."⁶

When I do pre-marital counseling, we always spend quite a bit of time talking about families of origin. We look at the Scriptures to find out how God designed men and women to love each other as partners in marriage. But we have to look at the models that we've been exposed to. We have to deal with our history if we are going to move forward.

If you believe in Jesus, you are part of the people of God. But the people of God have a history that began thousands of years ago. If we want to know what it means to follow Jesus as one of his people, we have to understand where we came from. A huge part of where we came from has to do with David, the king of Israel.

So if we're going to understand today, we have to look back. But looking back helps us to look forward. Ultimately, the stories of David aren't just history. They resonate with us today.

Look Within and Reflect

One of the most powerful things about the life of David is that he is not just an ancient king, our spiritual forefather. He is so much like us. He is incredibly relatable. We resonate with some of his choices. We sympathize with his motivations.

After one of David's most significant failures, he wrote a psalm expressing his desire for God to change his innermost being. Listen to **Psalm 51:9-12**:

**Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.**

**¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right[a] spirit within me.**

**¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.**

**¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.**

God refers to David as a man after his own heart. But here David asks God to give him a new kind of heart: a clean heart. David's heart is a big deal. He is not just a man who acts. He is not just a king who leads. He is a whole person, with a rich and complex inner life. As we study his life, we can't help but be fascinated by his heart. And we'll find that getting to know the heart of David turns into a beautiful but dangerous invitation to look into our own hearts.

What's so great about studying the life of David is that we will find ourselves in his life, in many places. When we look into David's heart, we will recognize what we find because the same mixture of good and evil, pure and vile is within our own hearts. David will help us to look within and reflect.

When we see David refusing to kill the crazy, paranoid despot who is hunting him down, the purity of David's heart will lead us to ask whether we would act so nobly in such a situation.

When we see David abuse his power to sexually assault a married woman and murder her husband, we will wonder whether the darkness in our hearts could be capable of such deeds.

When we see David look back at the end of his life and wonder what went wrong, we will be humbled by the state of our hearts, and pray for God to lead us.

David is all the things that we are. He is the true everyman—an ambitious young man, a confused parent, and a regretful elder. David is everything we hope to be. But he is also everything that we are afraid of becoming.

Think about all the words that we might use to define David: poet, son, brother, warrior, friend, lover, husband, musician, dancer, leader, follower, mystic, strategist, captain, archer, hunter, adviser, diplomat, actor, worshiper, builder, cheater, planner, killer, soldier, liar, protector, companion, penitent, victor, bureaucrat, judge, avenger, coward, hero, aggressor, messenger, mourner, hothead, politician, conspirator, refugee, guerrilla, invader, preacher, singer.

David shows us virtually every aspect of life. Every role. Every temptation. Every success. Every failure. As we study the life of David, we've divided it into five main sections that correspond to the arc of his life.

In the beginning, David is a Shepherd. He is a nobody. He isn't looking for fame or power or prestige, but somehow he is given some opportunities. We will see him respond to the doors that God puts before him and get catapulted into a very different kind of life.

Many of us have lived in this place, just doing what seems to come next; not sure where it is leading. We have opportunities and challenges and decisions to make about how we will live faithfully to where we are. David as a shepherd will help us in that season.

David becomes more and more successful, and this threatens the person that David works for. So David is forced to run and become a Fugitive. He tries to escape the murderous intentions of King Saul. This is David's wilderness time. He's been anointed king, but he has no power. These are the dark and frustrating days of David's experience. Someone else is making his life difficult.

We've lived in this place too. We're trying to do our best, but the circumstances around us make that difficult. The people in charge don't seem to understand. We aren't treated like we deserve. Things are confusing and dark. We know we could be more if we were just given the chance. But nothing seems to work. If you haven't spent time in the wilderness, you will. David's time as a fugitive helps us to find God when things are confusing.

But then everything falls into place. It's not the way David thought it would happen, but King Saul dies and all of sudden, David is King. At first, being king isn't what he thought it would be since the kingdom splinters for seven years. But then he rules over a united kingdom and things are good. Everything is clicking. David beats his enemies. His people love him. The kingdom is strong. David is on top of it all.

Many people here have experienced a lot of success. You've figured out how to make life work. Others look at you and see an image of strength and achievement. You have arrived. Things are going well. And sometimes this is the hardest season in which to find God. Success can be far more dangerous for your heart than failure. It's hard to depend on God when you seem to be doing a decent job of it on your own. But even when you're king, you know that within your heart lies something that can make everything come crashing down.

That's what happens to David. In the midst of his success, he makes a terrible mistake. The story turns from David as a king to David as a Father. He has found himself in a position of power and he abuses it. That single decision leads to a cascade of consequences in his family. His life as a husband and as a father is riddled with his own failures. He can't seem to get out from under them, though he keeps trying to do the right thing. In the wilderness, David's life was made difficult by the failures of others. But now it is his own failures that plague him.

We've all been here, too. We try as hard as we can and things just don't work. We know where we are weak. We try to compensate, but we just can't overcome our own inabilities. We are forced to admit that we aren't the people we thought we were. Our success fades and life gets complicated. David's season as a father makes us reflect us on our positions of authority and leadership, where it is our own selves who get in the way. As we see David struggling, but struggling with God, we will learn to embrace those times and fall back on the God who continues to accept us.

And then finally, David nears the end of his life. He becomes the Elder, thinking about the future of his accomplishments and his kingdom. He passes things down to his son. He worries about his reputation, making mistakes as he does so. And he sings of God's goodness to him throughout all the seasons of his life.

This season will help us to see where we are headed. How will we reflect on our lives as we near the end? How well do we pass off responsibility to others, even when we are young? Do we worry about our reputation or our impact? What does it mean to end a season of life well?

Each of these chapters of David's life will offer something unique to us. Each story will connect with a different thing that we've encountered or will encounter. And through all of them, we will be lead

to look within and reflect on our own hearts and our own relationship with Jesus.

David finds a lot of darkness when he looks within, but what is remarkable about him is that he always finds God. When he wins, he finds God. When he loses, he finds God. When he ignores God, he returns in repentance. When he rejects God, he weeps in sadness.

This is the remarkable thing about David's heart. I suspect this has something to do with why he is described as "a man after God's own heart." Somehow, through his successes and failures, brilliant decisions and stupid mistakes, he is fundamentally oriented toward God.

David will ask us to look within. How is your heart? Are you even willing to go there? What mix of darkness and light will you find? But most importantly, how is your heart toward God?

Look Up and Worship

David helps us to look back at our history. It's important to remember. David helps us to look within at our hearts. Regardless of what we find, we have to reflect. But David is not just an important ancient figure that we can relate to. He plays an incredibly important theological role.

A thousand years after David lived and died, a young teen girl receives a visit from an angel. This angel tells her that she has been selected for an important purpose. Listen to what this angel says to her in **Luke 1:31-33**:

³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Many of us are very familiar with these words. We might hear them every December as we prepare to celebrate Christmas. We all know they mean that Mary is pregnant with Jesus. And we all know that Jesus was born and he died to save us from our sins. But notice what this angel says that Mary's son will do.

God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob—that's a way to refer to the united people of God. And he will

establish a kingdom that will last forever. What does this angel say to Mary? He says that her child will be the new David. Jesus will sit on David's throne.

If Jesus sits on David's throne, we can't fully understand Jesus without understanding David. A few weeks ago, Corrie Gustafson made the argument that as democratic Americans, we don't really understand monarchy. If we are going to understand the kingdom of God, we need to understand the idea of kingship. Along the same lines, if we are going to understand Jesus as king, we need to understand whose kingdom it is. When Jesus comes, he inherits David's kingdom.

If Jesus is our king, we need to know David.

David helps us to look back on our heritage. David helps us to look within at our hearts. And David helps us to look up at our savior. David helps us to see Jesus as our king. David helps us to look up and worship.

I suspect that most of us don't all too often think about Jesus as our king. Jesus is our friend. He is our Savior. Popular worship songs often portray Jesus as our lover. But it's hard to conceive of Jesus as our king. Most of us have never really seen a king in action.

In ten months, that won't be true anymore. We are going to see a king in action. King David will demonstrate to us how great a king can be and how dangerous a king can be. We will see the best and the worst of what it means to be king in the life of David.

So how does that point us to Jesus? There's an interesting paradox here. Jesus is David's son—he comes after him. But Jesus is also David's creator and Lord. Read how Jesus explores this in **Matthew 22:41-46**:

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, ⁴² saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." ⁴³ He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"?"

⁴⁵ If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" ⁴⁶ And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

I think I'd be speechless too. The main question here is how a son can surpass his father. In a culture where family authority structures are incredibly

important, this makes no sense. Nowhere is a son more important than his father. Nowhere is a son above his father.

I'm at this great stage as a father where my kids are old enough to do the things that I like to do with them. But they aren't old enough yet to do them better than me. I know that's a very brief window. I'm enjoying it while I can. It won't be long before my kids are better than me at all sorts of things.

But for kings, this isn't how it worked. So how do we make sense of the fact that Jesus surpasses David? And what good is it to study David if Jesus is better anyway? I think this is one of the most brilliant ways that God has built the power of examples into us. God gives us models for better and for worse.

What that means is that when we see David shining in bravery and wisdom, we know that points us to Jesus. This is a glimmer of who Jesus is as our king. A human picture of how great divine kingship can actually be.

And when we see David miserable and weak, we know that this is what Jesus redeems. This is the counterexample that Jesus fulfills. These are the gaps that only the divine King can fully fill in.

Ultimately, all of this leads us to worship. To be honest, I'm not really sure yet about all the ways David will point us to Jesus. But I know he will. And even if we accomplish nothing else, then this whole journey will be worth it.

Remembering is important. Reflecting is helpful. But worshipping is everything. David will point us to a greater king: the king of kings. And if there is anything we need day by day, it is to be pointed toward Jesus. If there is one thing that defines the people of God, it is worship. Only in worship do we really find God.

In David, we see Jesus. David helps us to look up and worship.

How do you summarize a person's life? It's really difficult. But in this case, it's really important. We're going to spend the next ten months asking this one simple question: Who is David? Who was this man, this king, this father, this success, this failure?

I'm convinced that there are two questions that everybody in the world asks almost every day, often without realizing it. They are the fundamental questions of human existence. The first has to do with us: Who am I? What does it mean to be human? Why am I here? The second has to do with something greater: Who is God? Is there anything else besides what I see? If there is a God, how does he feel about me?

As it turns out, asking this simple question about David will help us with these two great questions about life.

Asking, "Who is David?" invites me to ask: Who am I? Am I like David? What is within my heart? What would I have done? And asking about David forces us to ask: Who is God? What does it mean that David is a man after God's heart? How does David show us Jesus? What does David reveal about God?

All throughout this journey, we will be asking those questions: Who is David? Who am I?, and Who is God? I hope you're as excited as I am. It won't always be easy. Sometimes we'll walk away with more questions than answers. But I'm convinced it will be worth it. This life of passion will lead us deep within our own hearts and deep with the heart of God.

(Endnotes)

¹ "Watson, Stephanie and the Editors of Publications International. "20 Memorable Epitaphs" *HowStuffWorks*. HowStuffWorksWeb. 13 August 2015.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Fox, Everett. *David, Saul & God*. Paul Borgman. Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.