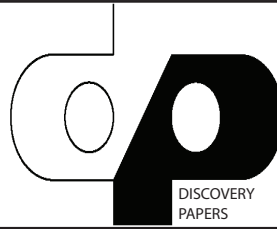


A BEAUTIFUL GUY

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



Catalog No. 20160626
Various Scripture
Final Message
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June 26, 2016

Various Scripture

Ten months ago, when we embarked on our study of the David story, Paul Taylor asked the question, “Who is David?” Now, having lived with David for almost a year, we are in better position to answer the question. The answer is a matter of no small significance, because it has very much to do with how we relate to God. For when we ask the question “Who is David?” we might also want to ask the question, “Who am I?”

Years ago, I was involved with a group of men who were studying the David story. At the conclusion of one of our studies, one of the brothers leaned back, sighed, and said of David, “What a beautiful guy.” I don’t remember which part of the David story we were studying.

Maybe it was 1 Samuel 17, when David, responding to Goliath’s taunts, told the Philistine giant, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied” (1 Samuel 17:45).

Or maybe it was 1 Samuel 20, when David, fell on his face, bowed three times, kissed Jonathan, and wept with him before departing for the wilderness (1 Samuel 20:41-42).

Or maybe it was 1 Samuel 24 or 1 Samuel 26, when David had seemingly divinely orchestrated opportunities to kill his enemy, Saul, the king of Israel, but resolutely refused to reach out his hand against “the Lord’s anointed” (1 Samuel 24:10, 26:11).

Or maybe it was 2 Samuel 1, when David lamented not only the death of Jonathan but also the death of Saul: “You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, / who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet, / who put ornaments of gold on your apparel” (2 Samuel 1:24).

Or maybe it was 2 Samuel 6, when David brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem and “danced before the Lord with all his might” (2 Samuel 6:14).

Or maybe it was 2 Samuel 7, when David prayed, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?” (2 Samuel 7:18)

Or maybe it was 2 Samuel 9, when David told Mephibosheth, the crippled grandson of Saul, “Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always” (2 Samuel 9:7).

Or maybe it was 2 Samuel 15, when David, leaving Jerusalem because his son Absalom was rebelling against him, walked barefoot up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went (2 Samuel 15:30).

Indeed, what a beautiful guy.

I’m pretty sure we weren’t studying 2 Samuel 11, when David ogled Bathsheba, violated her, and then ordered the murder of her husband.

I’m pretty sure it wasn’t 2 Samuel 13:1-22, when David’s son, Amnon, raped Tamar and David became “very angry” but did nothing about it (2 Samuel 13:21).

I’m pretty sure it wasn’t 2 Samuel 13:24-39, when David’s son, Absalom, avenged the rape of Tamar, his sister, by murdering Amnon, whereupon David mourned but, again, did nothing about it (2 Samuel 13:37).

I’m pretty sure it wasn’t 2 Samuel 16:1-4, when David was duped by Ziba and granted him the land that he had previously granted Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 16:4).

I’m pretty sure it wasn’t 2 Samuel 18:1-19:7, when David bewailed the death of his rebellious son Absalom and demoralized his people by treating victory as defeat, prompting his commander to tell him, “You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters and the lives of your wives and your concubines, because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you” (2 Samuel 19:5-6).

I'm pretty sure it wasn't 2 Samuel 24:1-9, when David, against the counsel of his commander, sinned against the Lord by ordering a census (2 Samuel 24:4).

I'm pretty sure it wasn't 1 Kings 1:1-27, when David, old and advanced in years, failed to arrange for his son Solomon to succeed him and didn't know that his son Adonijah had declared himself king (1 Kings 1:18).

No one studying such passages would lean back and sigh, "What a beautiful guy."

As a mixed bag, David is easy to relate to. Who among us isn't a mixed bag? Who is David? He's a mixed bag. Who are we? We're a mixed bag. And yet, that's not how the Lord sees David.

What does the Lord see?

We have walked with David through the chapters of his life: shepherd, fugitive, king, father, and elder. Mostly, he impresses us in the first two and one-half chapters and depresses us in the final two and one-half chapters. The turning point is when he abuses his power as king, violating Bathsheba and ordering the death of Uriah, her husband. It's as if David climbs a mountain but, having reached the top, falls off on the other side.

Who is David? Is he the courageous shepherd or the derelict elder? The generous fugitive or the pathetic father? The brilliant king or the abusive king?

Before we even meet David, the prophet Samuel envisions him to be, in contrast to Saul, a man after the Lord's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). What makes David's heart different from Saul's? Moreover, is David a man after the Lord's own heart only part of the time—mostly, for the first part of his life—and not all of the time?

Later, the Lord told Samuel, as he was about to anoint David, "For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). When the Lord looks into David's heart, what does he see? Does he see something different in the first part of David's life than in the last part? Or is David a man after the Lord's own heart from start to finish?

The Lord doesn't look on our outward appearance; he looks on our hearts—even into our hearts. When the Lord looks into our hearts, what does he see? And he sees everything by the way: "And no creature is hidden

from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). What does he see?

Who is David? To fully answer the question, we will revisit four stories that each depicts David at both his worst and his best. Finally, we'll revisit David's poem in 2 Samuel 22, where he assesses himself.

Abigail confronts David

David, while on the run from Saul, guarded the interests of Nabal in the wilderness and then, through his men, approached Nabal to ask for provisions. Nabal, however, refused David and even ridiculed him.

Enraged, David marshaled his forces, vowing, "God do so to the enemies of David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him." Abigail, Nabal's wife, who is described as "discerning and beautiful," gathered up provisions for David, courageously confronted him, and pulled him back with a brilliant speech, concluding that if he doesn't attack Nabal, then he will have "no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause" when he becomes king.

David relented and told Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand!" (1 Samuel 25:32-33)

Nathan confronts David

When David became king, instead of going out to battle, he stayed home, walked around on the roof of his palace, ogled Bathsheba, and sent for her, whereupon he violated her. David impregnated Bathsheba, then encouraged Uriah, her husband, to take a break from the battle and go home—in order to make it appear that Bathsheba became pregnant by her husband.

Uriah, however, refused to lie with his wife while the rest of the troops were camping in an open field. David even got Uriah drunk, but he still did not go in to his wife. Finally, David sent Uriah back into battle with instructions for Joab, the commander, to send him to the front lines and withdraw from him. Uriah was then killed in battle.

The prophet Nathan, however, told David a beguiling story of a rich man with many flocks and herds who stole a poor man's lamb. In response to the story, David concluded that the rich man deserved to die, whereupon Nathan told David, "You are the man!" David said, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 11-12).

Joab confronts David

When David's son Absalom rebelled against him, David was torn. He told his commanders, as they marched off into battle, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom" (2 Samuel 18:5).

When David heard that his troops were victorious and that Absalom had been killed, he neglected his responsibilities as king and made a public spectacle of himself, mourning the death of his son. The narrator comments, "So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people, for the people heard that day, 'The king is grieving for his son.'"

Joab got in David's face, accusing him of shaming his troops, loving those who hate him, and hating those who love him. He told David, "For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you, for today I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased" (2 Samuel 19:6b).

David responded to Joab and stepped up to his responsibilities as king (2 Samuel 18:1-19:8).

Similar and different

The three stories are similar in that they feature sin, confrontation, and repentance. The three stories are different in that they feature vastly different types of confrontation coming from vastly different types of people. Moreover, the confrontations become increasingly difficult to hear. Scholar Paul Borgman comments:

*"It is one thing to stop dead in one's dastardly tracks at the vision of an intermediary as lovely as Abigail, a beauty whose wise words match her outward appearance. Still another to captured by a tale well told by God's designated word-bearer, Nathan. But here is Joab, who on occasion has proved too ruthless and harsh for David to bear."*⁴¹

In each case David responds to the truth, no matter the messenger and no matter the form.

David confronts himself

Finally, David sins by ordering a census (though the narrator does not explain what's sinful about taking a census). After taking the census, however, David's heart "struck" him and he said, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done" (2 Samuel 24:10). The Lord, through the prophet Gad, informs David that there will be consequences for his sin. He gives David three options, but instead of choosing one of the options, David casts himself on the mercy of the Lord. By measure of sheer consequence, ordering the census is the worst of David's sins, for it results in 70,000 deaths as a plague ravages Israel.

The Lord calls off the plague and spares Jerusalem as David intercedes before the Lord: "Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father's house" (2 Samuel 24:17).

With the fourth story, the pattern breaks. What's missing? Sin is present: David ordered the census. Repentance is present: David confesses. But there's no confrontation. No one confronts David. Instead, David confronts himself. Borgman again:

"No one helps David come to his moral senses No lovely Abigail cajoles David with gracious and godly words, no Nathan charms him with a melodramatic tale, no rough-hewn Joab admonishes him with straight talk. David confronts David"

A good person doing well is no surprise; a great person doing heroic deeds provides no shock. But a powerfully good but sometimes dastardly king and completely pathetic father who rises to this kind of self-awareness, with no intermediary finger-pointing, is remarkable and the stuff of very high drama, beyond anything in ancient literature, including the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures."²

A man after the Lord's own heart

What makes David a man after the Lord's own "heart"? In 2 Samuel 24, the last chapter of the books of Samuel, David's "heart" struck him after he completed the census. David shows that he is a man after the Lord's own heart in his remarkable capacity, from start to finish, to respond to the truth, even hard truths about himself. He is not a man after the Lord's own heart in his moral purity (he sinned big-time!) but in his honesty: his willingness to look at himself and say, for example, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done." David consistently took full responsibility for his sin, repented,

and cast himself on the mercy of the Lord. David is a man after the Lord's own heart not simply part of the time but from start to finish—in his triumphs, in his failures.

It was never said that Saul's heart struck him, although it was said that David's heart struck him after he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe (1 Samuel 24:5). Unlike David, Saul refused to take responsibility for his actions. Saul was insincere and unrepentant (1 Samuel 15:24, 30). David is different. He is a man after the Lord's own heart, sensitive to the truth.

What a beautiful guy.

When the Lord looks into David's heart, he sees a man after the Lord's own heart because David is honest with himself and with God. Therefore, be honest with yourself and with God. We become—we are—men and women after God's own heart based not on our moral purity but on our honesty: our willingness to look at and respond to the truth.

Who does David think he is?

If a poem is imbedded in a narrative, then the point of the narrative is imbedded in the poem. Toward the end of the David story, in 2 Samuel 22, the narrator features a long poem by David. In the central section of that poem, David says this:

**The LORD dealt with me according to
my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands
he rewarded me.
For I have kept the ways of the LORD
and have not wickedly departed from my
God.
For all his rules were before me,
and from his statutes I did not turn aside.
I was blameless before him,
and I kept myself from guilt.
And the LORD has rewarded me
according to my righteousness,
according to my cleanness in his sight.
(2 Samuel 22:21-25)**

David thinks he's righteous. David thinks he's clean. David thinks he has kept the ways of the Lord. David thinks he hasn't departed from God. David thinks he hasn't turned aside from God's rules and statutes. David thinks he's blameless. David thinks he's kept himself from guilt.

In view of his sins, where does David get off describing himself in such a way? How can a sometimes-abusive king and a completely derelict father make such claims? If we were to look on David as humans look on David, "on the outward appearance," we would deem David's claims ludicrous, even offensive. Ah, but the narrator has allowed us to see what the Lord sees: we see into David's heart. What do we see? We see sensitivity to the truth, and such sensitivity to the truth makes him blameless.

Who does David think he is? David thinks he's blameless. David is right. Who is David? David is blameless.

Borgman again:

"Far from an achievement of perfection, blamelessness includes an acknowledgment of hidden error, of one's potential for willful sins, and a prayerfulness regarding both hidden error and willful sins."³

Blamelessness is not perfection; blamelessness is confession. Guiltlessness is not keeping oneself from wrongdoing; guiltlessness is being forgiven for wrongdoing. To be blameless, paradoxically, is to admit wrongdoing. If you admit wrongdoing, then you're blameless. Why? Because God loves truth. If the Lord sees into David's heart, David sees into the Lord's heart.

Leonard Cohen, in his classic song, "Hallelujah," sings:

*Now I've heard there was a secret chord
That David played, and it pleased the Lord.
But you don't really care for music, do you?
It goes like this
The fourth, the fifth
The minor fall, the major lift
The baffled king composing Hallelujah.*

With apologies to Cohen, and in great appreciation for him, I like to think that David's secret chord that pleased the Lord was his honesty. In the last verse of the song, Cohen sings:

*I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you
And even though it all went wrong
I'll stand before the Lord of Song
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah.⁴*

Sounds like something David would sing.

Love the truth

On the one hand, the apostle Paul writes that God reveals his wrath against humans because they, in their unrighteousness, “suppress the truth.” Humans by and large would rather live in denial—especially denial about their sinful condition. On the other hand, Paul also writes that the Gospel message reveals “the righteousness of God”—that is, God’s saving activity in Christ: his death and resurrection (Romans 1:16-19). Moreover, he writes that the gospel comes to men and women “in power and in the Holy Spirit,” thus changing their hearts so that they are able to respond to the truth—in the first case, the truth of their sinful condition and the truth of God’s provision for them in Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

If you have responded to the truth of the gospel, do you know what you are? Again, listen to Paul: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (Ephesians 1:3-4). You’re blameless.

The Holy Spirit, who accompanies the Gospel message and enables us to believe it, then takes up residence in us. Three times Jesus calls him “the Spirit of truth.” Jesus told his disciples that the Spirit “will teach you all things” (John 14:26). The Spirit helps us on an ongoing basis to face into the truth, connect with the truth, and respond to the truth, whatever form the truth takes, even and especially the truth of our failures. Jesus told his disciples, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth . . .” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit helps us to be honest with ourselves and with God.

God loves the truth. Shouldn’t we love it, too? If you love the truth, then you will be a man or woman after God’s own heart. If you want to be a man or woman after God’s own heart, love the truth: be honest with yourself and with God. Don’t suppress the truth in fear. Instead, face into the truth in trust.

The gift of the Psalms

To do so, spend some time with David in the Psalms. Look at how honest he is with himself and God. Look at how courageous he is. He opens his heart before God. He not only confesses to God, as in Psalm 51 (“Against

you, you only, have I sinned / and done what is evil in your sight”), he also laments to God, as in Psalm 22 (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). Learn to be honest with yourself and with God by reading the Psalms.

Be honest with yourself and with God not only in spoken prayers but also in written prayers. Find words for what you feel and put them to paper. Write them down in a journal, or write your own psalms. Words unlock feelings. Sometimes, you don’t know what you think until you find the words for what you think.

David not only opens his heart before God, he also opens his heart before the people of God: he not only writes psalms for himself, he also writes them for Israel.

Earlier this year, I taught an eight-week course on the Psalms and offered those who took the course the opportunity to write their own psalms and share them with the class. In the tradition of David, the writers were honest with themselves, they were honest with God, and they opened their hearts to us, thereby inspiring us to be similarly transparent. They are men and women after God’s own heart.

Be honest with yourself and God by reading the Psalms, putting pen to paper, and sharing your heart with the people of God.

From start to finish

Who is David? From start to finish, through breathtaking triumphs and gut-wrenching failures, David is a man after the Lord’s own heart, which means he’s a lover of truth, which makes him blameless. What a beautiful guy.

Who are you? As I stand here today, looking out on a church full of men and women who love the truth, who come here each week to open their hearts to the truth, who take seriously the call to be honest with themselves and with God, I say, “What beautiful people. What a beautiful church.”

Endnotes

¹ Borgman, Paul. *David, Saul, & God: Rediscovering an Ancient Story* (New York: Oxford University Press). 210-211.

² Borgman. 213.

³ Borgman. 191.

⁴ Cohen, Leonard . “Hallelujah” (Columbia Records, 1984).