

2 SAMUEL—WEEK 5

THE HEART OF GRACE



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Bathing Bathsheba by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – 1656)
On display in the Neues Palais in Potsdam, Germany*

David responds to the LORD's great blessing by going before the ark and praying an effusive prayer of thanksgiving. He then marches off and conquers all Israel's enemies, expanding their territory and instituting an era of peace.

David then shows incredible grace to Mephibosheth and his servant Ziba, displaying true shalom.

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1 2 Samuel 7:18–29 (ESV)

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD and said, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord GOD. You have spoken also of your servant’s house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord GOD! And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord GOD! Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness, to make your servant know it. Therefore you are great, O LORD God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods? And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O LORD, became their God. And now, O LORD God, confirm forever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken. And your name will be magnified forever, saying, ‘The LORD of hosts is God over Israel,’ and the house of your servant David will be established before you. For you, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, ‘I will build you a house.’ Therefore your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. And now, O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. Now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you. For you, O Lord GOD, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever.”

David recognizes the promises made in the preceding verses as a covenant, and he’s overwhelmed with his unworthiness. So, he sits *before the LORD*, (i.e., in front of the ark) and prays this prayer of thanksgiving.

This passage feels like David is crying. He says, “*O Lord GOD*” (literally “Lord Yahweh”) or “*O LORD God*” (literally “Yahweh God”) a total of eight times. He’s just blubbering on and on. He even speaks of having *found courage to pray this prayer to you*.

This is typically how people talk when they’re pleading for mercy. Talking like this in thankfulness is rare. David is so overwhelmed that he doesn’t know what to say.

The result is purely from the heart, and it’s glorious.

Two highlights have attracted special praise from the commentators. David is making a notable declaration of monotheism with, “*For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you.*”

And David voices a can’t-go-wrong prayer of thanksgiving with, “*O LORD God, confirm forever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken.*”

David pours out his heart. It feels like he had a lot of help from the Spirit.

2 2 Samuel 8:1–8

After this it came to pass that David attacked the Philistines and subdued them. And David took Metheg Ammah from the hand of the Philistines.

Then he defeated Moab. Forcing them down to the ground, he measured them off with a line. With two lines he measured off those to be put to death, and with one full line those to be kept alive. So the Moabites became David's servants, and brought tribute.

David also defeated Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to recover his territory at the River Euphrates. David took from him one thousand chariots, seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand foot soldiers. Also David hamstringed all the chariot horses, except that he spared enough of them for one hundred chariots.

When the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David killed twenty-two thousand of the Syrians. Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus; and the Syrians became David's servants, and brought tribute. So the LORD preserved David wherever he went. And David took the shields of gold that had belonged to the servants of Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem. Also from Bethah and from Berothai, cities of Hadadezer, King David took a large amount of bronze.

This section shifts gears from David's magnificent prayer of thanksgiving to a summary of his military conquests. However, this may not have happened right after the prayer of 2 Samuel 7:18–29.

The defeat of Hadadezer in verse three fits best when viewed as coming after the events at the end of chapter ten. As such, this is Hadadezer's Waterloo. It's an attempt to recover from his defeat in 2 Samuel 10:15–19, and the result is disastrous.

So, this section probably sets up what is to follow logically, not chronologically. Here David expands and consolidates the nation of Israel, initiating an era of peace and prosperity.

David did what Saul could not.

Most importantly, these military victories reversed the tide. Saul was crowned for the purpose of fighting battles; that's why Israel wanted a king in the first place. The Philistines killing Saul and his sons in battle had great symbolic significance.

The encouragement this brought to the Philistines cannot be overstated. They thought it was all over and they had won. They assumed that Israel would be subjugated, that the Philistines would gain the spoils of war, and that Israel would have to pay tribute to its new masters.

But just the opposite happened. The Philistines and their allies end up totally defeated. They are subjugated. Their gold and bronze are hauled away. They are the ones who bring tribute.

And, most importantly, Israel's God is the real one.

3 2 Samuel 8:9–18

When Toi king of Hamath heard that David had defeated all the army of Hadadezer, then Toi sent Joram his son to King David, to greet him and bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer and defeated him (for Hadadezer had been at war with Toi); and Joram brought with him articles of silver, articles of gold, and articles of bronze. King David also dedicated these to the LORD, along with the silver and gold that he had dedicated from all the nations which he had subdued—from Syria, from Moab, from the people of Ammon, from the Philistines, from Amalek, and from the spoil of Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

And David made himself a name when he returned from killing eighteen thousand Syrians in the Valley of Salt. He also put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David's servants. And the LORD preserved David wherever he went.

So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered judgment and justice to all his people. Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder; Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar were the priests; Seraiah was the scribe; Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over both the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were chief ministers.

The peace that followed David's great victories yields many side benefits. *Toi king of Hamath* is thrilled to see his adversary crushed, so he brings great treasure to David.

That treasure, along with the spoils David hauled away back in verses seven and eight, will be useful in the construction of the temple.

Another side benefit is that *David made himself a name*. That had a lot to do with keeping the peace, but it also set up his administration. The list of his “cabinet” at the end shows a well-functioning administration.

David's under-control ego gives him an essential skill—the ability to delegate.

David has escaped the rat race. He doesn't see his life as part of a competition. He's just trying to do the right thing by seeking and following the LORD's will. That's challenging, but one kind of stress is eliminated.

There's a lesson in that. The gospel has a feature we rarely talk about—it's relaxed. It's not competitive. We're all part of a team and we already know who the captain is, so we don't have to worry about that.

The other thing we don't have to worry about is our mess-ups. They happen all too often, and they cause us pain, but they're not the end of the world. Paul explains this brilliantly in his epistle to the Romans.

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. — Romans 7:24–25

4 2 Samuel 9:1–8 (ESV)

And David said, “Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and they called him to David. And the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?” And he said, “I am your servant.” And the king said, “Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?” Ziba said to the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet.” The king said to him, “Where is he?” And Ziba said to the king, “He is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.” Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and paid homage. And David said, “Mephibosheth!” And he answered, “Behold, I am your servant.” And David said to him, “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.” And he paid homage and said, “What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?”

David’s actions here are *absurd*. This is not how monarchies are supposed to work. When the new king is unrelated to the old king, he’s *supposed to* kill off everyone left from the old dynasty. It’s the only way to guarantee peace. A civil war over royal succession is the last thing anyone needs. The people have enough to worry about with internal enemies.

So, everyone expects David to exterminate all potential rivals. Ziba expects it. Mephibosheth expects it. Machir and everyone in his house expect it. Even the name, “*Lo-debar*” (which means no-speak) hints that Mephibosheth is in hiding. Everything in this passage should be seen in this light.

That’s why David reveals his motives up front by saying, “*Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?*”

Even so, it’s a bit surprising that Ziba shows no signs of doubting David’s sincerity. He may have wondered but obeyed anyway. At this point, David is so loved and admired that Ziba just went along.

So, Mephibosheth is fetched, but when he arrives, he acts like his life is in danger. Thus, David starts by saying, “*Do not fear,*” and goes on to explain what he’s doing and why.

Not surprisingly, this confuses the daylights out of Mephibosheth and he asks how this is possible.

David has become comfortable in his own skin. The LORD has blessed him so many times and in so many ways that his faith is an absolute brick.

Thus, his sense of probability and danger is different. He’s not afraid that a rival to the throne will emerge because he knows those things don’t just happen randomly. He is trusting that the LORD really is God of the universe.

David has found shalom.

5 2 Samuel 9:9–13

And the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "I have given to your master's son all that belonged to Saul and to all his house. You therefore, and your sons and your servants, shall work the land for him, and you shall bring in the harvest, that your master's son may have food to eat. But Mephibosheth your master's son shall eat bread at my table always." Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.

Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king has commanded his servant, so will your servant do."

"As for Mephibosheth," said the king, "he shall eat at my table like one of the king's sons." Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Micha. And all who dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants of Mephibosheth. So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table. And he was lame in both his feet.

David does much more than just spare Mephibosheth's life; David follows through on his promise to honor him. Mephibosheth may technically be some kind of rival, but David treats him like a son.

David is also incredibly generous to Ziba. Notice that this passage again refers to Ziba as Saul's servant. This is to emphasize that David has plenty of grounds for not doing anything for Ziba.

Instead, David honors Ziba's relationship with Saul and sets him up to manage Saul's entire estate, which surely is huge.

Ziba and his *fifteen sons and twenty servants* are set.

So, in doing this, does David show weakness or strength? Arguments can be made for both.

Ultimately though, it shows strength. David was under absolutely no pressure to do any of this. Thus, it can't be him caving in to pressure.

This is the heart of grace.

So, we encounter a curious lesson. When you're under pressure to forgive someone or otherwise grant grace, granting it may be perceived as weakness instead of grace. In fact, it may *be* weakness and not grace. It's complicated.

Granting grace is one of the most glorious, most Christian things you can do, but it only works when done from a position of strength. If you're in that position, great. Your choices are unencumbered.

But if not, things aren't so simple. One obvious takeaway is to try to avoid being in that situation. Failing that, don't ignore the element of time. You not only control what you do; you control when.

Don't misinterpret pressure as time pressure.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How is a Spirit-led prayer different?
2. What modern military outcomes appear to have a supernatural element?
3. What does the gospel lift off our shoulders?
4. How are grace and peace connected?
5. Is grace ever a mistake?

Items for prayer: