

## David #8 • God drawn

*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.*

*He makes me lie down in green pastures,*

*he leads me beside quiet waters,*

*he refreshes my soul.*

*He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,*

*I will fear no evil, for you are with me;*

*your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*

*You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

*Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Psalm 23

Today's talk brings us to our eighth and concluding study of David and some of the biblical themes related to his extraordinary life.

We looked at how the Bible treats the theme of kingship, and how David's path to becoming Israel's king are seen as a pattern for how Jesus became the 'king of kings'.

We explored the theme of covenant, a promise, agreement or social contract between two individuals or groups of people, and how God made a covenant with David, to bless him and his kingship and that through David's line would come the greatest king, Jesus, who would bless the whole world.

We looked at faith, how David regularly trusted God to guide him and help him carry out the tasks that God gave him to do. And how he foreshadows the 'son of David,' Jesus, the one who took on and triumphed over the ultimate enemies, sin and death.

We studied the theme of temple, how it represents God's desire to live in relationship his people, and how the ultimate way that God achieved this was through Jesus, the living embodiment of God's temple.

And then we looked at how David, Israel's anointed one, foreshadowed Jesus, the *world's* messiah.

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Today I want to spend some time looking at *why* the Bible writers came to see David as an example of faithfulness and godliness, the primary foreshadowing of the promised messiah.

And it is a question worth asking, because David was a long way from being a perfect human. I was discussing this a while back with a friend, and he suggested a good title for a biography of David would be...

*'David: Guilty as Hell, Beloved of Heaven'*

One of the clues to David's special-ness is revealed while he is shepherding his father's flocks in the hills of Bethlehem.

Saul, Israel's first king, has disobeyed God's instructions, and after hearing Saul's lame excuses, Samuel tells Saul...

*'You have done a foolish thing... you have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command.'*

1 Samuel 13:13-14

David did not seek to be king of Israel. God chose David to be king. David's special-ness is not primarily that he is special, but that God chose him to be special.

as Samuel says...

*‘...the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people...’*

When I say ‘now there goes someone after my own heart,’ I mean someone who I empathise with, someone who has similar values and aspirations to me.

David was ‘a man after God’s own heart,’ someone who had a deep understanding of God’s goodness, love and power, and who possessed a deep desire to live in relationship with God.

God seeks out a man who was himself seeking after God.

When Samuel is sent to David’s family to secretly anoint Saul’s successor, Samuel assumes that Eliab, being the eldest son, will be the one to anoint.

God quickly puts Samuel straight...

*But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’*

1 Samuel 16:7

And the one whose ‘heart’ God saw as ‘seeking his own heart’ was David.

David’s public entrance came before he was crowned king, on the day he went from being Saul’s minstrel to being Israel’s giant killer.

David’s willingness to fight Goliath demonstrated that he was willing to put his faith in Israel’s God into practice, even when it involved risking his life.

But as we discovered in previous talks, the road to David becoming king was not a smooth one.

Once Saul realised that David was more popular than him, he repeatedly attempted to kill him.

David eventually goes on the run from Saul. During that time, David seeks the help of a number of godly men, including Samuel the judge, Ahimelek the priest, and Gad the prophet.

One of David's strengths was that when God spoke to him, he listened.

When David, his family and followers were taking shelter from Saul in a Moabite castle...

*...the prophet Gad said to David, 'Do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah.' So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.*

1 Samuel 22:5

The prophet Gad gives him guidance from God, and David takes it.

Meanwhile, Saul was ordering the slaughter of 85 of God's priests along with their families. (1 Samuel 22:6-23)

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Soon after this,

*...David was told, 'Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing-floors...'*

1 Samuel 23:1

Keilah was an Israelite city, and David's response is...

*...he enquired of the LORD, saying, 'Shall I go and attack these Philistines?'*

1 Samuel 23:2a

David's asks God what to do, almost certainly through a priest or a prophet.

And the LORD answers him...

*The LORD answered him, 'Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah.'*

1 Samuel 23:2b

David's men are not convinced, so David once again asks God. And, graciously, God repeats his assurance that he will give them victory. Which he does.

And this becomes a feature of the young David's life. He regularly consults God about what course of action he should take.

Now this brings up all sorts of questions involving how we as Christians ask for and receive guidance from God, but what we can take away is that David asked God to be actively involved in guiding his life, and God responded to his prayers.

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Another area where David was special is that he had a heart that was deeply grateful to God for his love and faithfulness.

Remember when we looked at the theme of covenant, how the newly crowned king David decides to build a temple in Jerusalem. However, God tells him that this is not his task, and that one of his sons, Solomon, will oversee its building.

David, rather than having a strop, worships God.

*'Who am I, **Sovereign LORD**, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, **Sovereign LORD**, you have also spoken about the future of the house of **your servant** – and this decree, **Sovereign LORD**, is for a mere human!'*

*'What more can David say to you? For you know **your servant**, **Sovereign LORD**. For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to **your servant**.'*

2 Samuel 7:18b-21

Not only did David have a grateful heart, he knew that God is God, and that even though David is a king, it was God who initiated and sustained that kingship. David knew that he was God's servant.

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As we've already seen, David was far from perfect. Even in his earliest days he is portrayed as being headstrong and regularly playing fast and loose with the truth.

When he first escaped from Saul, David went to the unfortunately named town of Nob, and visited a priest called Ahimelek. (*1 Samuel 21*)

Ahimelek asks David why he is alone, and David tells him that Saul has sent him on a secret mission, and that he needs bread.

When Ahimelek says there is only consecrated bread, which is reserved for priestly consumption, David takes it anyway.

So, David lies to Ahimelek, and takes bread that he is not supposed to eat. You can hear the heavenly 'nuh-uh' buzzers going off.

And yet Jesus uses this story to explain the fine balance between knowing God's laws and the knowing the 'spirit' of those laws.

Matthew 12 begins with...

*At that time Jesus went through the cornfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some ears of corn and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, 'Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.'*

*He answered, 'Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread – which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.'*

Matthew 12:1-4

What the disciples were doing wasn't even breaking the Mosaic law, which allowed people to take small amounts of food from farmers' fields to satisfy their hunger.

Jesus could have explained this to the Pharisees, but instead he points to one of the Pharisees' great heroes, David, and how even he didn't always keep to the letter of the Mosaic law.

Jesus goes on to restore a man's shrivelled hand, and to tell the onlookers that the purpose of the Sabbath was not to stop people having good things, but to enable them to have more good things.

I don't think for one moment that Jesus was endorsing David's lying, or his casual attitude to the consecrated bread. What he is saying is that we can sometimes get bogged down in the small details so much that we miss the bigger picture.

Life is messy, people are messy.

The problem is that Pharisees tried to make things better, less messy, by specifying what people *shouldn't* do, and doing their utmost to make sure they didn't do it.

Jesus, son of David, makes our messy lives better by showing us what we *should* do, and giving us the motivation and power to be able to do it. And as we fill our lives with good things, we become more able to handle the messy stuff.

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I think that one of the reasons God saw David as being a man after his own heart is that David understood and displayed something of the breadth and complexity of God's character.

Like the Pharisees, religious people regularly try to make life tidy and predictable, often by making God tidy and predictable.

But the Bible writers portray God as being anything but tidy and predictable.

They write about a God who is untameable, a mighty warrior.

And he is also a passionate artist, speaking an immense and beautiful universe into reality.

And he loves the things he creates, especially humans, who are his 'images.' He loves them so much that he is willing to argue, bargain and haggle with them.

The Bible often portrays him as a frustrated but loving parent, desperate for their child to do the right thing, but unwilling to force them.

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In the book of Exodus, God reveals his 'name', his character, what most defines him, to Moses.

*Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.'*

Exodus 34:5-7

What is striking is that God's character is overwhelmingly faithful, patient and loving towards his people...

Compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands (this almost certainly means thousands of generations), forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

And being good and loving means he hates anything that gets in the way of his goodness and love... including wickedness, rebellion and sin, all negative versions of goodness and love.

But his punishments are tiny compared to blessings. His love is to thousands of generations. His punishments are limited to three or four.

It is no accident that these verses are the most quoted verses in the rest of the Bible, helping us understand God's rich and loving character.

And David 'got' this. For all of his many failings David, however imperfectly, regularly displayed aspects of God's character.

He was a warrior, but he was also a poet. He lived life to the full.

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But despite being passionate, he was willing to listen to wisdom.

When Abigail begs David not to kill her stupid husband Nabal, his response is to praise God and Abigail's good judgment at preventing him from 'avenging himself with his own hands.'

And even when he was in his lowest moral ditch, when Nathan confronts him with his sin of adultery and murder, along with the consequences of his sin, David's response isn't to make excuses, or to have Nathan executed, rather he says...

*"I have sinned against the LORD."*

2 Samuel 12:13b

And when he is told that Bathsheba's child will die, he puts on sackcloth, fasts, and pleads with God for the life of the child.

In his worst moments, David knows that his only hope is God.

As Psalm 13 demonstrates...

*How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?*

*How long will you hide your face from me?*

*How long must I wrestle with my thoughts*

*and day after day have sorrow in my heart?*

*How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

*Look on me and answer, LORD my God.*

*Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,*

*and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"  
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.  
But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.  
I will sing the LORD's praise,  
for he has been good to me.*

Psalm 13

And at his best moments, he knows that God is the one who has blessed and empowered him. As we heard in today's reading...

*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Psalm 23

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So, to repeat my opening question, *why* did the Bible writers come to see David as an example of faithfulness and godliness, their primary foreshadowing of the promised messiah?

What was David's defining quality? What aspects of David would God want us to emulate?

As I wrestled with this, I kept coming up with the word 'anchored'.

But 'anchored' is too rigid. Too legalistic. Like a dog on a lead.

There's no neat word for it, but maybe it's more like gravity, invisibly but consistently pulling us towards a more massive object.

There was something that, no matter how badly David strayed, kept drawing him back to God. And that 'gravity' was God's overwhelming grace and mercy.

Like the prodigal son who wished his dad dead and squandered his inheritance, his instinct is still to return to his father.

This is not because David or the prodigal son are good. It is because the father is good. The father wants to live in relationship with his children.

And when the prodigal son returns home, his father not only accepts him, he abandons all dignity in running to greet him, and risks annoying the 'good' son by throwing a party.

Neither David or the prodigal son are 'good', but they are loved. Their redemption comes not when they become good, but when they allow themselves to be loved and accepted.

David is portrayed as a man after God's own heart not because David was good, but because David knew that God is good.

And we need to learn from him. All too often we act like the pharisees, we become so scared of doing things wrong that we shrink into a world of 'not doing things.' A world of 'don'ts.'

And worse than this, even when we fail at not doing stuff, we become judgmental of people we see falling short of the standards that we know we can't keep to.

Now, of course, there are things that we should avoid doing, and David's life provides us with a long list of them.

But ultimately, God created humans to live in loving and joyful relationship with him, and with one another.

Sadly, Adam and Eve disobeyed God's only negative command, and the human race has been enthusiastically finding new ways to disobey God ever since.

But God's gravity of goodness and love has never failed. And he loves it when people 'get' this. David got it. He didn't always live it. But he got it. And we have what David could only see glimpses of. Jesus. The one who displays God's perfect goodness and love in human form.

Jesus' earthly ministry was filled with positive things. He healed people. He let people know that God loved them. He enjoyed eating and drinking with all kinds of people, so much so that he was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard!

And Jesus's ministry continues, through the work of God the Holy Spirit, making God the Father's love and goodness available to anyone who sincerely asks for it.

David was not perfect. But he knew someone who is. And when he messed up, and he felt the gravity of God's holiness and love pulling him back, he didn't resist.

David allowed himself to be drawn back into God's love, trusting that whether that meant discipline or forgiveness (or both), that being with God was better than being without God.

As David wrote in Psalm 23, 'your rod and your staff, they comfort me,' the rod symbolises discipline, and the staff protection. The good shepherd knows that his sheep require both, in perfect balance.

We are not perfect. But we know someone who is. And we can see him much more clearly than David did.

If you are holding onto stuff you know is keeping you from God, let this be the day you let go of it, and let the gravity of God's goodness and love pull you into his loving embrace.

Jesus can fix every kind of stupid. But we have to be willing to let him.

And if you're sitting there thinking, 'well Brett, things are pretty good between me and Jesus right now.' Hallelujah! Go out from today's service and let your little light shine! Let others feel the gravity of God's love and goodness as you emulate Jesus' generosity and joy in the week ahead.

Amen.