

The Life of David—a Daily Bible Guide, week 5

Special Week 5 ‘Taking It Home’ Instructions

This week in our ‘Taking it Home’ section, things will look a little different. We’re going to delve a little deeper into the life of David by reading his prayers recorded in the book of Psalms. Every day the ‘For you’ section will be a Psalm written by David, perhaps during this very time of his life. While our passages in 2 Samuel tell us much about the events going on in David’s life, the Psalms add a level of richness to the story, as they give us a compelling look at how David responded to the events and reached out to God. Each day, read through the Psalm a few times--paying attention to:

- What strikes you about David’s response in the Psalm in correlation to the story? What can you learn from this?
- How do you resonate with his prayers? Is there a part that sticks out the most to you?

Lastly, try making David’s Psalm your prayer to God for the day.

Monday, April 11th: 2 Samuel 16:1-14

1 When David had gone a short distance beyond the summit, there was Ziba, the steward of Mephibosheth, waiting to meet him. He had a string of donkeys saddled and loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred cakes of raisins, a hundred cakes of figs and a skin of wine.

2 The king asked Ziba, “Why have you brought these?”

Ziba answered, “The donkeys are for the king’s household to ride on, the bread and fruit are for the men to eat, and the wine is to refresh those who become exhausted in the wilderness.”

3 The king then asked, “Where is your master’s grandson?”

Ziba said to him, “He is staying in Jerusalem, because he thinks, ‘Today the house of Israel will restore to me my grandfather’s kingdom.’”

4 Then the king said to Ziba, “All that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours.”

“I humbly bow,” Ziba said. “May I find favor in your eyes, my lord the king.”

5 As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul’s family came out from there.

His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. **6** He pelted David and all the king’s officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David’s right and left. **7** As he cursed, Shimei said, “Get out, get out, you murderer, you scoundrel! **8** The LORD has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The LORD has given the kingdom into the hands of your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a murderer!”

9 Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head.”

10 But the king said, “What does this have to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, ‘Curse David,’ who can ask, ‘Why do you do this?’”

11 David then said to Abishai and all his officials, “My son, who is of my own flesh, is trying to take my life. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the LORD has told him to.

12 It may be that the LORD will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today.”

13 So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt. **14** The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself.

Points of Interest

- ‘steward of Mephibosheth’--Mephibosheth is Jonathan’s son, the one with two broken legs. Out of respect for Saul and love for Jonathan, David sort of adopts Mephibosheth, granting him

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land, the right to eat with the king at the palace, and Ziba's services to take care of all of the heavy labor at the farm.

- 'He had a string of donkeys saddled and loaded'--David left Jerusalem in a hurry without proper provision. Ziba provides for his food and transportation needs.
- 'He is staying in Jerusalem'--Mephibosheth lives in Jerusalem, eating at the king's table everyday. He hasn't, however, evacuated with David. Perhaps he's hoping his family can make a comeback during all of the turmoil.
- 'All that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours'--Mephiboseth's absence contrasts badly with Ziba's thoughtful generosity. David decides that he's been rewarding the wrong person.
- 'The LORD has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul'--actually David did his best to avoid bloodshed in the house of Saul. He did, however, take the throne from the family of Saul. I suppose it would be asking too much to expect this relative of Saul to make the distinction. He's been waiting a long time for David to get his comeuppance. I imagine he's all the more pleased that David has been betrayed by someone from his own household.
- 'If he is cursing because the LORD said to him'--I don't think David is claiming here that God did indeed tell Shimei to do this. He's basically saying that Shimei's cursing is none of Abishai's business, nor even David's; it's between Shimei and God.
- 'It may be that the LORD will look upon my misery'--David knows that public opinion is fickle. Of course, people will curse him when things are looking down. If things make a turn for the better, the cursing will stop on its own.
- 'throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt'--Shimei certainly does take the liberty David has given him to the limit. Abishai is something of a hothead; but in this case I might, along with him, be tempted to take Shimei's head off after a certain amount of dirt was showered on me.

Taking it Home

- For you: Today's psalm is Psalm 3. For some thoughts about how to interact with it, see the note at the beginning of this week.

Psalm 3

1 LORD, how many are my foes!

How many rise up against me!

2 Many are saying of me,

"God will not deliver him."

3 But you, LORD, are a shield around me,
my glory, the One who lifts my head high.

4 I call out to the LORD,
and he answers me from his holy mountain.

5 I lie down and sleep;
I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.

6 I will not fear though tens of thousands
assail me on every side.

7 Arise, LORD!

Deliver me, my God!

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*Strike all my enemies on the jaw;
break the teeth of the wicked.*

8 *From the LORD comes deliverance.*

May your blessing be on your people.

- For your six: Man, was it a good day for Ziba. I imagine it would be like returning home from the office after getting the biggest raise ever and saying “Honey, guess what happened to me today.” Good days—they are just so good, and sometimes hard to come by. Pray that God would come through for your six today in a way that leaves them resolutely feeling, ‘Today was a good day.’
- For our church: David seems remarkably unconcerned about the insults coming his way. He seems to be connected to God in way that gives him such strength, peace, and purpose that the insults don’t matter. Ask God to help our church connect with God in a similar way. Pray that God would give us a sense of our purpose as a church. Pray that we would be so focused on it that we wouldn’t be bothered by small and unimportant things.
- For families: Has anyone ever called you a name or said mean or hurtful things about you? How did that make you feel? Words have great power to lift us up or bring us down, but God is even more powerful than people’s words. Pray that God would tell each of you who he says you are and write down anything you hear. You could even write this up nicely for each person in your family and put it in a little frame in their room. Come back to God’s words for you the next time someone says something that hurts your feelings. Pray that God’s words would be more powerful and would drive out any power that the other words have over you.

Tuesday, April 12th: 2 Samuel 16:15-17:14

15 Meanwhile, Absalom and all the men of Israel came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel was with him. **16** Then Hushai the Arkite, David’s confidant, went to Absalom and said to him, “Long live the king! Long live the king!”

17 Absalom said to Hushai, “So this is the love you show your friend? If he’s your friend, why didn’t you go with him?”

18 Hushai said to Absalom, “No, the one chosen by the LORD, by these people, and by all the men of Israel—his I will be, and I will remain with him. **19** Furthermore, whom should I serve? Should I not serve the son? Just as I served your father, so I will serve you.”

20 Absalom said to Ahithophel, “Give us your advice. What should we do?”

21 Ahithophel answered, “Sleep with your father’s concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself obnoxious to your father, and the hands of everyone with you will be more resolute.” **22** So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he slept with his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel.

23 Now in those days the advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God. That was how both David and Absalom regarded all of Ahithophel’s advice.

17:1 Ahithophel said to Absalom, “I would choose twelve thousand men and set out tonight in pursuit of David. **2** I would attack him while he is weary and weak. I would strike him with terror, and then all the people with him will flee. I would strike down only the king **3** and bring all the people back to you. The death of the man you seek will mean the return of all; all the people will be unharmed.” **4** This plan seemed good to Absalom and to all the elders of Israel.

5 But Absalom said, “Summon also Hushai the Arkite, so we can hear what he has to say as well.” **6**

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When Hushai came to him, Absalom said, “Ahithophel has given this advice. Should we do what he says? If not, give us your opinion.”

7 Hushai replied to Absalom, “The advice Ahithophel has given is not good this time. **8** You know your father and his men; they are fighters, and as fierce as a wild bear robbed of her cubs. Besides, your father is an experienced fighter; he will not spend the night with the troops. **9** Even now, he is hidden in a cave or some other place. If he should attack your troops first, whoever hears about it will say, ‘There has been a slaughter among the troops who follow Absalom.’ **10** Then even the bravest soldier, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will melt with fear, for all Israel knows that your father is a fighter and that those with him are brave.

11 “So I advise you: Let all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba—as numerous as the sand on the seashore—be gathered to you, with you yourself leading them into battle. **12** Then we will attack him wherever he may be found, and we will fall on him as dew settles on the ground. Neither he nor any of his men will be left alive. **13** If he withdraws into a city, then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it down to the valley until not so much as a pebble is left.”

14 Absalom and all the men of Israel said, “The advice of Hushai the Arkite is better than that of Ahithophel.” For the LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom.

Points of Interest

- ‘No, the one chosen by the LORD’--Absalom knows of Hushai’s close connection with David. One way or another, it makes him suspicious--and, as we know from Sunday’s passage, rightfully so--of Hushai’s loyalty. Either Hushai is still working for David, or he’s a turncoat, in which case, what’s to stop him from someday switching sides again? Hushai cleverly answers that nothing has changed; he serves the king, not David, and right now Absalom is the one sitting on the throne.
- ‘all Israel will hear that you have made yourself obnoxious’--nobody wants to pick sides if they think there’s still a good chance that Absalom and David will patch things up. Sleeping with his father’s concubines would be Absalom’s crossing of the Rubicon; there’s no going back from there. People would then know it’s time to back either David or Absalom.
- ‘he slept with his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel’--this fulfills Nathan’s prediction that David would someday understand just what he had done to Uriah (April 6th, 2 Samuel 12:1-14). It also turns Absalom into the very thing he despises. This whole thing starts because Amnon rapes his sister; and now Absalom is raping his father’s wives.
- ‘I would attack him while he is weary and weak’--momentum and the element of surprise are in Absalom’s favor. If he were to make a quick thrust, he could succeed. As time goes by, the fragility of Absalom’s position will start to show, and David will have the chance to gather his strength.
- ‘Summon also Hushai the Arkite’--Absalom’s entire fate hangs on this decision; so he wants to hear as much advice as possible before making a final decision.
- ‘as fierce as a wild bear’ --Hushai evaluates the situation differently. To him, Absalom’s main challenge is David’s fearsome reputation as a general and a warrior in his own right. If Absalom goes for the quick knockout punch and fails, it will only serve to enhance David’s reputation as someone who cannot be defeated; then everyone will defect back to David. Hushai is probably not wrong in this regard. And yet it doesn’t change the fundamental soundness of Ahithophel’s advice. The truth is that Absalom only has one shot, and his chances of success are small

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regardless. However, his odds are somewhat better if he makes the quick punch, as Ahithophel suggests.

- ‘he will not spend the night with the troops’--Hushai reminds Absalom that David spent years hiding in the wilderness. If they go for the quick strike, they can’t even be guaranteed to find him; they’ll have shot their wad for no reason.
- ‘from Dan to Beersheba’--Hushai’s conclusion is that Absalom should aim for overwhelming force instead of going for the quick strike. It sounds like a good idea, except for the tiny detail that Absalom has very little chance of being able to muster overwhelming force.
- ‘The advice of Hushai the Arkite is better’--Hushai’s constant harping on just how fearsome David is--‘Did I ever tell you about the time he felled a giant with just a pebble, and then cut off the giant’s head? I’ve never seen anything like it’--saps Absalom’s enthusiasm for a fight. Suddenly, waiting sounds good. Unfortunately, it’s too late for second thoughts; he’s already crossed the Rubicon. He follows enough of Ahithophel’s advice to get himself into trouble, but not enough to actually see it through.

Taking it Home

- For you: Today’s psalm is Psalm 61. Once again, for some thoughts about how to interact with it, see the note at the beginning of this week.

Psalm 61

1 Hear my cry, O God;

listen to my prayer.

2 From the ends of the earth I call to you,

I call as my heart grows faint;

lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

3 For you have been my refuge,

a strong tower against the foe.

4 I long to dwell in your tent forever

and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.

5 For you, God, have heard my vows;

you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

6 Increase the days of the king’s life,

his years for many generations.

7 May he be enthroned in God’s presence forever;

appoint your love and faithfulness to protect him.

8 Then I will ever sing in praise of your name

and fulfill my vows day after day.

- For your six: Hushai was able to strategically use his position and skills. He recognized that he had influence and saw how he could leverage it for good. Ask God to use the gifts, talents and skills of your six in ways that matter--maybe not as sneakily or deceptively as Hushai did, but with just as much impact. Ask God to make your six aware of the unique influence they have and to give them a sense of their purpose in the world.
- For our church: Ask God to give our church the wisdom to recognize good advice when we hear it. Pray that God would protect us from ruinous advice like Absalom received in today’s passage, instead putting us in the hands of trustworthy people who will help strengthen our church.

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- For families: We all find ourselves in situations where we'd appreciate some good advice. Have you or a family member been in any situations like that recently? What was going on? Who did you turn to for advice? Why did you choose them? Think and talk about the qualities of people who give good advice. Pray that God would continue to give them wisdom and discernment when giving advice, and that God would develop these qualities in you and your family members.

Wednesday, April 13th: 2 Samuel 17:15-18:18

15 Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, "Ahithophel has advised Absalom and the elders of Israel to do such and such, but I have advised them to do so and so. **16** Now send a message at once and tell David, 'Do not spend the night at the fords in the wilderness; cross over without fail, or the king and all the people with him will be swallowed up.'"

17 Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En Rogel. A female servant was to go and inform them, and they were to go and tell King David, for they could not risk being seen entering the city. **18** But a young man saw them and told Absalom. So the two of them left at once and went to the house of a man in Bahurim. He had a well in his courtyard, and they climbed down into it. **19** His wife took a covering and spread it out over the opening of the well and scattered grain over it. No one knew anything about it. **20** When Absalom's men came to the woman at the house, they asked, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?"

The woman answered them, "They crossed over the brook." The men searched but found no one, so they returned to Jerusalem.

21 After they had gone, the two climbed out of the well and went to inform King David. They said to him, "Set out and cross the river at once; Ahithophel has advised such and such against you." **22** So David and all the people with him set out and crossed the Jordan. By daybreak, no one was left who had not crossed the Jordan.

23 When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's tomb.

24 David went to Mahanaim, and Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel. **25** Absalom had appointed Amasa over the army in place of Joab. Amasa was the son of Jether, an Ishmaelite who had married Abigail, the daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruiah the mother of Joab. **26** The Israelites and Absalom camped in the land of Gilead.

27 When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Makir son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim **28** brought bedding and bowls and articles of pottery. They also brought wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils, **29** honey and curds, sheep, and cheese from cows' milk for David and his people to eat. For they said, "The people have become exhausted and hungry and thirsty in the wilderness."

18:1 David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. **2** David sent out his troops, a third under the command of Joab, a third under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai the Gittite. The king told the troops, "I myself will surely march out with you."

3 But the men said, "You must not go out; if we are forced to flee, they won't care about us. Even if half of us die, they won't care; but you are worth ten thousand of us. It would be better now for you to give us support from the city."

4 The king answered, "I will do whatever seems best to you."

So the king stood beside the gate while all his men marched out in units of hundreds and of thousands.

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5 The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.” And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.

6 David’s army marched out of the city to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim.

7 There Israel’s troops were routed by David’s men, and the casualties that day were great—twenty thousand men. **8** The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword.

9 Now Absalom happened to meet David’s men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom’s hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.

10 When one of the men saw what had happened, he told Joab, “I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree.”

11 Joab said to the man who had told him this, “What! You saw him? Why didn’t you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels of silver and a warrior’s belt.”

12 But the man replied, “Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lay a hand on the king’s son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, ‘Protect the young man Absalom for my sake’ **13** And if I had put my life in jeopardy—and nothing is hidden from the king—you would have kept your distance from me.”

14 Joab said, “I’m not going to wait like this for you.” So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom’s heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree. **15** And ten of Joab’s armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.

16 Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them. **17** They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. Meanwhile, all the Israelites fled to their homes.

18 During his lifetime Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King’s Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, “I have no son to carry on the memory of my name.” He named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom’s Monument to this day.

Points of Interest

- ‘Do not spend the night at the fords in the wilderness’--Hushai seems to be a little uncertain as to whose advice, Ahithophel’s or his, will ultimately prevail. Just to be safe, David should put a little space between Absalom and him.
- ‘Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En Rogel’--these are the sons of the two priests. David’s people have set up a little communication network to get news to David without arousing suspicion: Hushai goes to the Tabernacle, ostensibly to make a sacrifice but really to pass a message to Abiathar and Zadok; the priests send a servant on ‘an errand’ out of town; she passes the message along to Jonathan and Ahimaaz; they carry it to David. Despite the precautions, they almost get caught.
- ‘He put his house in order and then hanged himself’--once David crosses the Jordan, Ahithophel knows the game is over. He doesn’t need to stick around to see the end.
- ‘David went to Mahanaim’--Mahanaim was Ish-Bosheth’s capital. I guess, from the fact that both Ish-Bosheth and David choose it as a base, that it must be strategically located for defense, for gathering forces, or both.
- ‘Absalom had appointed Amasa over the army’--Amasa is a cousin of Joab and Absalom and a nephew of David.

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- ‘Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Makir son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim’--now that he has a base of operations, David’s loyalists begin to gather him. Interestingly, one of these significant allies is from Rabbah, the town that David just conquered not so long ago (April 7th, 2 Samuel 12:15-31).
- ‘brought bedding and bowls and articles of pottery’--David’s men left town in a hurry with no supplies or equipment. These allies are helping David gather the necessary provisions from scratch.
- ‘It would be better now for you to give us support from the city’--as it turns out, the fearsome warrior who eats giants for lunch (see yesterday’s passage) doesn’t even participate in the fighting. His generals think it would be too risky. Battle is unpredictable, and if some accident were to happen to David, the whole thing would be over. It’s best just to keep him safe.
- ‘Be gentle with the young man Absalom’--Absalom may be a usurper, but he’s also still David’s son.
- ‘David’s army marched out of the city to fight Israel’--perverse, David ends up having to fight against his own national army. When it gets down to the fighting, Israel’s army is no match for the *ad hoc* forces David is able to gather. Maybe it’s a matter of experience and training, David having retained the loyalty of the most battle-hardened troops. Maybe Israel’s army doesn’t have their hearts fully in it, fighting against their own king as they are. Maybe God favors David. Maybe all of the above.
- ‘Absalom’s hair got caught in the tree’--Absalom is known for his flowing mane (2 Samuel 14:25-26). Embarrassingly, his beautiful head of hair proves to be his downfall.
- ‘I would not lay a hand on the king’s son’--this guy has been paying attention. The man who grieved the deaths of Saul and Abner and Ish-Bosheth, and executed the purported killers of Saul and Ish-Bosheth, is unlikely to be happy with the one who kills his own son, rebel though his son may be.
- ‘I’m not going to wait like this for you’--basically, ‘Look, I don’t have time to argue with you.’ Joab has shown before that he is going to do what he thinks is necessary, come what may.
- ‘Then Joab sounded the trumpet’--Joab’s decision to kill Absalom is not completely heartless. He’s trying to save lives. He suspects that if Absalom were dead, the rebellion would crumble; and he’d like to kill as few of his own army’s soldiers as possible.
- ‘threw him into a big pit in the forest’--Joab may be, from his perspective, simply doing what needs to be done. But he can’t be too proud of it, if he’s trying to hide the evidence of it in the forest.
- ‘He named the pillar after himself’--it strikes me as somewhat less than completely dignified that Absalom commissioned a statue of himself. I think for the monument to have its desired effect it really needs to have been someone else’s idea. Poor Absalom so wants to be remembered--and is so afraid that he won’t be--that he throws his own party. His fears aren’t unfounded, though; in the end, the only trace of him left is indeed the ridiculous sculpture he built for himself. Sadly, he may be better off that way. What could he be remembered for, exactly? Killing his brother? Starting a civil war against his father? Apparently, the only thing truly remarkable about him is his hair--and even that betrays him in the end.

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Taking it Home

- For you: Today's psalm is Psalm 62. As I've mentioned before, for some thoughts about how to interact with it, see the note at the beginning of this week.

Psalm 62

1 Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.

2 Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

3 How long will you assault me?
Would all of you throw me down—
this leaning wall, this tottering fence?

4 Surely they intend to topple me
from my lofty place;
they take delight in lies.

With their mouths they bless,
but in their hearts they curse.

5 Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from him.

6 Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

7 My salvation and my honor depend on God;
he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

8 Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.

9 Surely the lowborn are but a breath,
the highborn are but a lie.

If weighed on a balance, they are nothing;
together they are only a breath.

10 Do not trust in extortion
or put vain hope in stolen goods;
though your riches increase,
do not set your heart on them.

11 One thing God has spoken,
two things I have heard:

"Power belongs to you, God,

12 and with you, Lord, is unfailing love";
and, "You reward everyone
according to what they have done."

- For your six: Pray for your six's relationships with their family members. David and Absalom aren't exactly the picture of a wonderful father-son relationship, and, as we see, that causes more than a few problems for the both of them. Pray that your six's families would be sources of support and blessing and not conflict.
- For our church: I'm impressed by David's ability to lead and delegate well. He is remarkably able to organize his impromptu army and march them into battle quickly and effectively. Ask God to give our church the same kind of efficient, organized system of getting things done. Ask God to

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somehow give us supernatural help in all the coordination that has to happen here week in and week out. If you are part of a Sunday team, a small group, or some other program or ministry, pray for the leaders who have been appointed to oversee that area.

- For families: Ask everyone in your family to share about things they do to help make your home and family run well. Talk about why these things are important. Pray for each person and for what they contribute to your household. If there are areas that are not running well right now, talk about those too, and ask for God's input on how they could run better.

Thursday, April 14th: 2 Samuel 18:19-19:8

19 Now Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, "Let me run and take the news to the king that the LORD has vindicated him by delivering him from the hand of his enemies."

20 "You are not the one to take the news today," Joab told him. "You may take the news another time, but you must not do so today, because the king's son is dead."

21 Then Joab said to a Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed down before Joab and ran off.

22 Ahimaaz son of Zadok again said to Joab, "Come what may, please let me run behind the Cushite." But Joab replied, "My son, why do you want to go? You don't have any news that will bring you a reward."

23 He said, "Come what may, I want to run."

So Joab said, "Run!" Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and outran the Cushite.

24 While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates, the watchman went up to the roof of the gateway by the wall. As he looked out, he saw a man running alone. **25** The watchman called out to the king and reported it.

The king said, "If he is alone, he must have good news." And the runner came closer and closer.

26 Then the watchman saw another runner, and he called down to the gatekeeper, "Look, another man running alone!"

The king said, "He must be bringing good news, too."

27 The watchman said, "It seems to me that the first one runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok."

"He's a good man," the king said. "He comes with good news."

28 Then Ahimaaz called out to the king, "All is well!" He bowed down before the king with his face to the ground and said, "Praise be to the LORD your God! He has delivered up those who lifted their hands against my lord the king."

29 The king asked, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

Ahimaaz answered, "I saw great confusion just as Joab was about to send the king's servant and me, your servant, but I don't know what it was."

30 The king said, "Stand aside and wait here." So he stepped aside and stood there.

31 Then the Cushite arrived and said, "My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you."

32 The king asked the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

The Cushite replied, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man."

33 The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!"

19:1 Joab was told, "The king is weeping and mourning for Absalom." **2** And for the whole army the

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victory that day was turned into mourning, because on that day the troops heard it said, “The king is grieving for his son.” **3** The men stole into the city that day as men steal in who are ashamed when they flee from battle. **4** The king covered his face and cried aloud, “O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!”

5 Then Joab went into the house to the king and said, “Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines. **6** You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead. **7** Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the LORD that if you don’t go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come on you from your youth till now.”

8 So the king got up and took his seat in the gateway. When the men were told, “The king is sitting in the gateway,” they all came before him.

Meanwhile, the Israelites had fled to their homes.

Points of Interest

- ‘You are not the one to take the news today’--this is considerate of Joab. Joab is the one who actually killed Absalom, and he is convinced it was the right thing to do. But he’s under no illusion that David will be happy about it. He doesn’t want young and eager Ahimaaz to bear the brunt of David’s displeasure.
- ‘Joab said to a Cushite, “Go, tell the king what you have seen.”’--while kind to Ahimaaz, this puts the Cushite in a difficult spot. Maybe Joab thinks that this Cushite will be more capable of delivering the news with the required gravity, while Ahimaaz is a bit over-enthusiastic; or maybe he just cares less about what happens to this Cushite. Then again, David’s later interaction with the lookout might indicate that Joab is just trying to get his signals right. If the messenger is someone he knows, David will expect good news; if it’s a stranger, he’ll know there’s bad news involved. If David is prepared well for the bad news, he’ll be less shocked, and perhaps be less likely to do something rash to the messenger. If David is expecting good news, but gets bad news, who knows what might happen? Cush, by the way, is modern Sudan; this man has traveled a long way to end up in David’s army.
- ‘sitting between the inner and outer gates’--for purposes of defense, the outer walls of a city would be quite thick, and there would be a series of gates. I think that here, though, the point is that David is eager to hear the news; he can’t stand to be fully inside the city. It’s like he’s standing by the screen door, waiting.
- ‘If he is alone, he must have good news’--David can’t wait to hear the message, but instead takes his signals from what he can see from a distance. What he sees makes him cautiously optimistic. If the battle went truly poorly, you might see whole groups of soldiers retreating to the city.
- ‘the first one runs like Ahimaaz’--Ahimaaz overtakes the Cushite, which would be more impressive if this were a race. Ahimaaz is a very speedy messenger, but he’s much less competent on the whole message part of being a messenger. David is eagerly looking for news on two subjects: 1) Did his army win the battle? and 2) Did Absalom survive? Ahimaaz has only half an answer for him. Ahimaaz’s very incompetence perhaps saves his life, though. He doesn’t even know the bad news that would give David a nasty shock.
- ‘If only I had died instead of you’--David’s first reaction is as a father, rather than a general; of course, no parent wants to outlive their child.

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- ‘Now go out and encourage your men’--David’s reaction isn’t entirely fitting to the occasion. All of David’s soldiers have put their own lives at stake to protect David’s life, and now--after the fact--he’s saying that he wishes they hadn’t succeeded. The army has done their duty and done it well, but they’re left feeling as if they’ve done something wrong. Joab reminds David that his position doesn’t afford him the luxury of a personal reaction to his son’s death, at least in public. His soldiers’ duty was to fight for him; and now his duty is to congratulate them on a job well done.

Taking it Home

- For you: For those of you just jumping in at this point in the week, in our ‘For you’ section this week, we’re reflecting on and praying from psalms. We have some thoughts at the beginning of the week about how to go about it.

Psalm 143

A psalm of David.

1 *LORD, hear my prayer,*

listen to my cry for mercy;

in your faithfulness and righteousness

come to my relief.

2 *Do not bring your servant into judgment,*

for no one living is righteous before you.

3 *The enemy pursues me,*

he crushes me to the ground;

he makes me dwell in the darkness

like those long dead.

4 *So my spirit grows faint within me;*

my heart within me is dismayed.

5 *I remember the days of long ago;*

I meditate on all your works

and consider what your hands have done.

6 *I spread out my hands to you;*

I thirst for you like a parched land.

7 *Answer me quickly, LORD;*

my spirit fails.

Do not hide your face from me

or I will be like those who go down to the pit.

8 *Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love,*

for I have put my trust in you.

Show me the way I should go,

for to you I entrust my life.

9 *Rescue me from my enemies, LORD,*

for I hide myself in you.

10 *Teach me to do your will,*

for you are my God;

may your good Spirit

lead me on level ground.

11 *For your name’s sake, LORD, preserve my life;*

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*in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.
12 In your unfailing love, silence my enemies;
destroy all my foes,
for I am your servant.*

- For your six: Joab reminds David that regardless of David's own conflicted emotions upon hearing about Absalom's death, all of David's men currently need encouragement from him. Ask God to encourage your six today. Pray that they would feel cheered by good news and hopeful about their circumstances in life. Ask God if there is something you could do specifically to encourage them.
- For our church: David's response to Absalom's death makes me think that David would have gladly forgiven Absalom if Absalom had just come home and said he was sorry. Despite all the competing interests and conflict, we get the picture that David really loved his son. Ask God to make our church one that really, really loves people, even when it's most difficult.
- For families: Is there anything that's happened in your family that is hasn't been forgiven? Whether it's something that's fresh or that has been pushed aside for a while, if it's still bothering you consider bringing it up today and telling your family member how you feel. Ask God for the right words to use in this conversation. Try your best to both give and receive forgiveness. And pray that the air would be cleared between you.

Friday, April 15th: 2 Samuel 20

1 Now a troublemaker named Sheba son of Bikri, a Benjamite, happened to be there. He sounded the trumpet and shouted,

"We have no share in David,
no part in Jesse's son!

Everyone to your tents, Israel!"

2 So all the men of Israel deserted David to follow Sheba son of Bikri. But the men of Judah stayed by their king all the way from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

3 When David returned to his palace in Jerusalem, he took the ten concubines he had left to take care of the palace and put them in a house under guard. He provided for them but had no sexual relations with them. They were kept in confinement till the day of their death, living as widows.

4 Then the king said to Amasa, "Summon the men of Judah to come to me within three days, and be here yourself." **5** But when Amasa went to summon Judah, he took longer than the time the king had set for him.

6 David said to Abishai, "Now Sheba son of Bikri will do us more harm than Absalom did. Take your master's men and pursue him, or he will find fortified cities and escape from us." **7** So Joab's men and the Kerethites and Pelethites and all the mighty warriors went out under the command of Abishai. They marched out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba son of Bikri.

8 While they were at the great rock in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Joab was wearing his military tunic, and strapped over it at his waist was a belt with a dagger in its sheath. As he stepped forward, it dropped out of its sheath.

9 Joab said to Amasa, "How are you, my brother?" Then Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. **10** Amasa was not on his guard against the dagger in Joab's hand, and Joab plunged it into his belly, and his intestines spilled out on the ground. Without being stabbed again, Amasa died. Then Joab and his brother Abishai pursued Sheba son of Bikri.

11 One of Joab's men stood beside Amasa and said, "Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let

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him follow Joab!” **12** Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the middle of the road, and the man saw that all the troops came to a halt there. When he realized that everyone who came up to Amasa stopped, he dragged him from the road into a field and threw a garment over him. **13** After Amasa had been removed from the road, everyone went on with Joab to pursue Sheba son of Bikri.

14 Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel Beth Maakah and through the entire region of the Bikrites, who gathered together and followed him. **15** All the troops with Joab came and besieged Sheba in Abel Beth Maakah. They built a siege ramp up to the city, and it stood against the outer fortifications. While they were battering the wall to bring it down, **16** a wise woman called from the city, “Listen! Listen! Tell Joab to come here so I can speak to him.” **17** He went toward her, and she asked, “Are you Joab?”

“I am,” he answered.

She said, “Listen to what your servant has to say.”

“I’m listening,” he said.

18 She continued, “Long ago they used to say, ‘Get your answer at Abel,’ and that settled it. **19** We are the peaceful and faithful in Israel. You are trying to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel. Why do you want to swallow up the LORD’s inheritance?”

20 “Far be it from me!” Joab replied, “Far be it from me to swallow up or destroy! **21** That is not the case. A man named Sheba son of Bikri, from the hill country of Ephraim, has lifted up his hand against the king, against David. Hand over this one man, and I’ll withdraw from the city.”

The woman said to Joab, “His head will be thrown to you from the wall.”

22 Then the woman went to all the people with her wise advice, and they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bikri and threw it to Joab. So he sounded the trumpet, and his men dispersed from the city, each returning to his home. And Joab went back to the king in Jerusalem.

23 Joab was over Israel’s entire army; Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and Pelethites;

24 Adoniram was in charge of forced labor; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder; **25** Sheva was secretary; Zadok and Abiathar were priests; **26** and Ira the Jairite was David’s priest.

Points of Interest

- ‘a troublemaker named Sheba’--as the last chapter ends, after the collapse of Absalom’s rebellion, all of the tribes are clambering over one another trying to show that they’ve always been loyal to David. They’re all so insistent that they start to get on one another’s nerves:

‘Let me carry the kings’ bags.’

‘No, no. I’ll carry them.’

‘No, I insist, let me.’

Sheba uses the confusion of this moment of bad temper to start yet another rebellion.

- ‘He provided for them but had no sexual relations with them’--these ten concubines have been through a lot. And it would just be too much, for everyone, for them to be passed back and forth between father and son. So, David gives them a quiet retirement.
- ‘the king said to Amasa’--as part of the peace settlement after the battle with Absalom’s forces, the king makes Amasa, Absalom’s general, the commander of the army.
- ‘he took longer than the time the king had set for him’--Amasa’s weakness as a general seems to be slowness to muster. Just as he let David get across the Jordan to a fortified position, he’s now letting Sheba get away.

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- ‘Take your master’s men’--that would be Abishai’s brother Joab’s men. In the reorganization of the military caused by Amasa’s promotion, Joab is made the commander of special forces: the Kerithites, the Pelithites, and the Mighty Men.
- ‘Amasa came to meet them’--Joab’s special forces roll out quickly and catch up with Sheba, but Amasa finally arrives with the bulk of the army before Joab’s men have a chance to engage in battle.
- ‘Amasa was not on his guard against the dagger in Joab’s hand’--Joab is what I call a complicated man: one part voice of reason, one part psychotic killer. He often shows better military and even political judgement than David: he’s the one who brokered the earlier peace between Absalom and David; he kept his head during the whole Rabbah campaign and Uriah incident when David did not; he kept the army together and avoided a wider war during the battle with Absalom. Again and again, he proves himself a good general and statesman. And yet, he’ll murder a personal rival without so much as a blink of an eye. There’s no way he’s going to let this young upstart give him orders.
- ‘whoever is for David, let him follow Joab’--regardless of what David might say about it, Joab regains command of the army.
- ‘Joab came and besieged Sheba in Abel Beth Maakah’--what at first looked like a widespread rebellion turns out to be just Sheba’s own clan. Joab is able to quickly contain him.
- ‘Far be it from me to swallow up or destroy!’--this reminds me of a mafia godfather saying, ‘I’m a family man, a simple importer of olive oil.’ The guy who just poked the king’s son through with javelins and stabbed his rival in the gut with a hidden dagger is saying, ‘Who, me? I’m a man of peace.’ To his credit, though, he has proven willing to avoid unnecessary bloodshed in battle.
- ‘they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bikri and threw it to Joab’--he may be family and all, but in the end, the town is not willing to die for the sake of Sheba’s ill-conceived, slapdash rebellion.
- ‘Adoniram was in charge of forced labor’--the soldiers of defeated armies were often assigned hard labor as a punishment. The point of this paragraph as a whole, by the way, seems to be that David has re-established control. His administration is firmly in place again.

Taking it Home

- For you: As we’ve done all week, we’re responding to today’s passage with a psalm of David. See the beginning of the week for some thoughts about how to use the psalm.

Psalm 5

1 Listen to my words, LORD,
consider my lament.

2 Hear my cry for help,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.

3 In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you
and wait expectantly.

4 For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness;
with you, evil people are not welcome.

5 The arrogant cannot stand

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in your presence.

You hate all who do wrong;

6 *you destroy those who tell lies.*

The bloodthirsty and deceitful

you, LORD, detest.

7 *But I, by your great love,*

can come into your house;

in reverence I bow down

toward your holy temple.

8 *Lead me, LORD, in your righteousness*

because of my enemies—

make your way straight before me.

9 *Not a word from their mouth can be trusted;*

their heart is filled with malice.

Their throat is an open grave;

with their tongues they tell lies.

10 *Declare them guilty, O God!*

Let their intrigues be their downfall.

Banish them for their many sins,

for they have rebelled against you.

11 *But let all who take refuge in you be glad;*

let them ever sing for joy.

Spread your protection over them,

that those who love your name may rejoice in you.

12 *Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous;*

you surround them with your favor as with a shield.

- For your six: You have to think it was rather devastating for David to have Sheba turn on him just as the trouble with Absalom was ending. ‘Who’s next?’ he must have wondered. Ask God to comfort your six over any ways that they have been abandoned by people—whether it was recently or long ago. Pray that they wouldn’t continue to carry that feeling of abandonment, but that God would give them a sense of belonging. Ask God to take away any feelings of loneliness they might be experiencing and to give them a strong community of support.
- For our church: The woman from Abel Beth Maakah becomes an unlikely ally to Joab and his troops. Ask God to give our church alliances with unlikely people, institutions, and sectors of society. Pray that God would make the dream our church has of influencing secular culture a reality, and that he would do so through unique and creative partnerships.
- For families: Take a look at your family’s Leap of Faith poster on the project God is calling you to as a family in this time. Have you already taken any actions on this? How is it going? Ask God to show you any unlikely people that might help you take the next step toward his idea for your family. If you sense that he’s giving you a name, go talk to that person and see what they might offer.

Saturday, April 16th: 2 Samuel 21:15-22:51

15 Once again there was a battle between the Philistines and Israel. David went down with his men to fight against the Philistines, and he became exhausted. **16** And Ishbi-Benob, one of the descendants of Rapha, whose bronze spearhead weighed three hundred shekels and who was armed with a new sword,

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said he would kill David. **17** But Abishai son of Zeruiah came to David's rescue; he struck the Philistine down and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, saying, "Never again will you go out with us to battle, so that the lamp of Israel will not be extinguished."

18 In the course of time, there was another battle with the Philistines, at Gob. At that time Sibbekai the Hushathite killed Saph, one of the descendants of Rapha.

19 In another battle with the Philistines at Gob, Elhanan son of Jair the Bethlehemite killed the brother of Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod.

20 In still another battle, which took place at Gath, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot—twenty-four in all. He also was descended from Rapha. **21** When he taunted Israel, Jonathan son of Shimeah, David's brother, killed him.

22 These four were descendants of Rapha in Gath, and they fell at the hands of David and his men.

2 Samuel 22

1 David sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. **2** He said:

"The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;

3 my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation.

He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior—
from violent people you save me.

4 "I called to the LORD, who is worthy of praise,
and have been saved from my enemies.

5 The waves of death swirled about me;
the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

6 The cords of the grave coiled around me;
the snares of death confronted me.

7 "In my distress I called to the LORD;
I called out to my God.

From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came to his ears.

8 The earth trembled and quaked,
the foundations of the heavens[] shook;
they trembled because he was angry.

9 Smoke rose from his nostrils;
consuming fire came from his mouth,
burning coals blazed out of it.

10 He parted the heavens and came down;
dark clouds were under his feet.

11 He mounted the cherubim and flew;
he soared on the wings of the wind.

12 He made darkness his canopy around him—
the dark rain clouds of the sky.

13 Out of the brightness of his presence
bolts of lightning blazed forth.

14 The LORD thundered from heaven;
the voice of the Most High resounded.

15 He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy,
with great bolts of lightning he routed them.

16 The valleys of the sea were exposed

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and the foundations of the earth laid bare
at the rebuke of the LORD,

at the blast of breath from his nostrils.

17 “He reached down from on high and took hold of me;
he drew me out of deep waters.

18 He rescued me from my powerful enemy,
from my foes, who were too strong for me.

19 They confronted me in the day of my disaster,
but the LORD was my support.

20 He brought me out into a spacious place;
he rescued me because he delighted in me.

21 “The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.

22 For I have kept the ways of the LORD;
I am not guilty of turning from my God.

23 All his laws are before me;
I have not turned away from his decrees.

24 I have been blameless before him
and have kept myself from sin.

25 The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
according to my cleanness in his sight.

26 “To the faithful you show yourself faithful,
to the blameless you show yourself blameless,

27 to the pure you show yourself pure,
but to the devious you show yourself shrewd.

28 You save the humble,
but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them low.

29 You, LORD, are my lamp;
the LORD turns my darkness into light.

30 With your help I can advance against a troop;
with my God I can scale a wall.

31 “As for God, his way is perfect;
the LORD’s word is flawless.
He shields all who take refuge in him.

32 For who is God besides the LORD?
And who is the Rock except our God?

33 It is God who arms me with strength
and keeps my way secure.

34 He makes my feet like the feet of a deer
and causes me to stand on the heights.

35 He trains my hands for battle;
my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

36 You make your saving help my shield;
your help has made me great.

37 You provide a broad path for my feet,
so that my ankles do not give way.

38 “I pursued my enemies and crushed them;
I did not turn back till they were destroyed.

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39 I crushed them completely, and they could not rise;
they fell beneath my feet.

40 You armed me with strength for battle;
you humbled my adversaries before me.

41 You made my enemies turn their backs in flight,
and I destroyed my foes.

42 They cried for help, but there was no one to save them—
to the LORD, but he did not answer.

43 I beat them as fine as the dust of the earth;
I pounded and trampled them like mud in the streets.

44 “You have delivered me from the attacks of the peoples;
you have preserved me as the head of nations.
People I did not know now serve me,
45 foreigners cower before me;
as soon as they hear of me, they obey me.

46 They all lose heart;
they come trembling from their strongholds.

47 “The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock!
Exalted be my God, the Rock, my Savior!

48 He is the God who avenges me,
who puts the nations under me,
49 who sets me free from my enemies.
You exalted me above my foes;
from violent people you rescued me.

50 Therefore I will praise you, LORD, among the nations;
I will sing the praises of your name.

51 “He gives his king great victories;
he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed,
to David and his descendants forever.”

Points of Interest

- ‘he became exhausted’--David isn’t as young as he used to be. He doesn’t have the stamina to fight a long battle anymore. This guy Ishbi-Benob is no Goliath--his spearhead is only half as heavy as Goliath’s was--and yet David can’t handle him on his own.
- ‘These four were descendants of Rapha in Gath’--this chapter feels to me a bit like the tying up of loose ends. David has only four remaining enemies, these sons of Rapha. One by one, they are hunted down and defeated by the Mighty Men. And with the defeat of the last son of Rapha, David finally has complete peace on every side.
- ‘the horn of my salvation’--the horns of an animal are a common image of strength in the Bible’s poetry.
- ‘He mounted the cherubim’--you may or may not remember from the description of the ark of the covenant (2 Samuel 6, Sunday, April 3rd) that cherubim are God’s angelic attendants. Apparently, at least for the purposes of this song, David imagines these angels as being in animal form. Not only are they God’s servants or guardians, but steeds God can ride as well. Some people think that the people of David’s day pictured the cherubim as being like sphinxes or griffins; but we’re not really sure.

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Taking it Home

- For you: Chapter 22 is like a medley of a number of David's psalms, recounting the ways that God has worked over the course of David's life. If you were to compile your own list of the ways God has helped you or the different seasons you've had with God what would it look like? Start at the beginning of your life--or maybe even just the beginning of this week--and reflect on what God has been doing in your life. If you're still in the middle of a season where you haven't seen God 'rescue you' or don't feel like he has brought you into a 'spacious place,' that's okay; it doesn't have to be rosy. Use the time to be honest with God about how things are going, telling God the ways in which you really do need him to rescue you.
- For your six: The image of God reaching down from on high to take a hold of us might be one of my favorites. It's a comforting image of God looking out for us and a reminder that God is the one who willingly and actively pursues us. Pray that God would increase the ways that he is reaching out to your six. Pray that your six would see how God is working, and know that God sees them and is drawing them out of whatever deep waters they may be in.
- For our church: David recounts how God took him from a place of angst, trouble, and heartache to a place that felt spacious, abundant, and resourced. Ask God to give our church a sense of that same abundance. Pray that we wouldn't feel tired, down, over-responsible, and driven, but instead that we would feel connected to the bigness of God's love and generosity. Pray that the decisions we make, programs we run, and initiatives we start would be based upon and would reflect God's abundance.
- For families: Look at the poster that your family made listing your Leap of Faith prayers (if you don't have a poster, just talk about your prayers). Take time to praise God for the things he is doing to fulfill these prayers. Also, take time to praise God for all the other things he is doing that you maybe weren't even praying for or expecting.

Sunday, April 17th: 1 Chronicles 21

1 Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. **2** So David said to Joab and the commanders of the troops, "Go and count the Israelites from Beersheba to Dan. Then report back to me so that I may know how many there are."

3 But Joab replied, "May the LORD multiply his troops a hundred times over. My lord the king, are they not all my lord's subjects? Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?"

4 The king's word, however, overruled Joab; so Joab left and went throughout Israel and then came back to Jerusalem. **5** Joab reported the number of the fighting men to David: In all Israel there were one million one hundred thousand men who could handle a sword, including four hundred and seventy thousand in Judah.

6 But Joab did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering, because the king's command was repulsive to him. **7** This command was also evil in the sight of God; so he punished Israel.

8 Then David said to God, "I have sinned greatly by doing this. Now, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing."

9 The LORD said to Gad, David's seer, **10** "Go and tell David, 'This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.'"

11 So Gad went to David and said to him, "This is what the LORD says: 'Take your choice: **12** three years of famine, three months of being swept away before your enemies, with their swords overtaking you, or three days of the sword of the LORD—days of plague in the land, with the angel of the LORD ravaging

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every part of Israel.’ Now then, decide how I should answer the one who sent me.”

13 David said to Gad, “I am in deep distress. Let me fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is very great; but do not let me fall into human hands.”

14 So the LORD sent a plague on Israel, and seventy thousand men of Israel fell dead. **15** And God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. But as the angel was doing so, the LORD saw it and relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was destroying the people, “Enough! Withdraw your hand.” The angel of the LORD was then standing at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

16 David looked up and saw the angel of the LORD standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell facedown.

17 David said to God, “Was it not I who ordered the fighting men to be counted? I, the shepherd, have sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? LORD my God, let your hand fall on me and my family, but do not let this plague remain on your people.”

18 Then the angel of the LORD ordered Gad to tell David to go up and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. **19** So David went up in obedience to the word that Gad had spoken in the name of the LORD.

20 While Araunah was threshing wheat, he turned and saw the angel; his four sons who were with him hid themselves. **21** Then David approached, and when Araunah looked and saw him, he left the threshing floor and bowed down before David with his face to the ground.

22 David said to him, “Let me have the site of your threshing floor so I can build an altar to the LORD, that the plague on the people may be stopped. Sell it to me at the full price.”

23 Araunah said to David, “Take it! Let my lord the king do whatever pleases him. Look, I will give the oxen for the burnt offerings, the threshing sledges for the wood, and the wheat for the grain offering. I will give all this.”

24 But King David replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing.”

25 So David paid Araunah six hundred shekels of gold for the site. **26** David built an altar to the LORD there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. He called on the LORD, and the LORD answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering.

27 Then the LORD spoke to the angel, and he put his sword back into its sheath. **28** At that time, when David saw that the LORD had answered him on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, he offered sacrifices there. **29** The tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time on the high place at Gibeon. **30** But David could not go before it to inquire of God, because he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

Points of Interest

- ‘Satan rose up against Israel’--this is a surprise appearance. I guess now that all of David’s human enemies have been taken care of, a spiritual one appears. Satan is a powerfully evil spiritual being who is a genius at finding and exploiting character flaws, particularly through temptation and accusation; in fact, his name means, ‘Accuser.’
- ‘incited David to take a census’--it’s a little curious that this, of all things, is Satan’s nefarious plan. A census seems innocuous enough, boring even. I must be missing something, though, because Joab immediately recognizes the census as a foolish and reprehensible idea.
- ‘from Beersheba to Dan’--that is, from the far south to the northern tip.
- ‘May the LORD multiply his troops a hundred times over’--Joab points out that with David, it’s never been about the number of his troops, but about God’s support. Time and again, when he was running from Saul, when he faced Goliath, as far back as the lion and the bear in his

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shepherding days and as recently as Absalom's rebellion, David has been outgunned, but with God's help he has emerged victorious. Perhaps that's why the census is such a bad idea. Having relied on God all this time, David now decides that he'd rather depend on the numbers of his army.

- 'are they not all my lord's subjects?'--counting them doesn't change how many of them there are anyway.
- 'Joab did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering'--he doesn't have the heart for the job and stops before he's done.
- 'Gad, David's seer'--it seems like David has developed a personal staff as well as his government administration. Zadok and Abiathar are the national priests; Ira is David's household priest (verse 26 from yesterday's passage). Nathan is the national prophet; Gad is David's personal prophet.
- 'three years of famine, three months of being swept away before your enemies, or three days of the sword of the LORD'--by taking the census, David has said he'd rather rely on his numbers than God. God is now saying, 'Well, let's see how your numbers stack up against just one of the terrible things that can happen.'
- 'Let me fall into the hands of the LORD'--just as after Uriah's murder, even now, David trusts that God will ultimately prove merciful.
- 'with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem'--David and his councilors come upon something truly terrifying: a huge destroying angel, with a drawn sword, apparently on his way to Jerusalem. What they don't know is that God has just instructed him to stop. They catch sight of him just as he is about to sheath his sword, but it probably looks to them like he is drawing it instead.
- 'I, the shepherd, have sinned and done wrong'--it does seem unfair that the people are paying for David's mistake. However, if you'll remember from the beginning of our story, before Saul, the people didn't have kings, but were governed directly by God. Against God's objections, they insisted that they wanted a king instead. I guess an unavoidable part of the whole monarchy package is that the lives of everyone hinge on the decisions of one man. Even with a pretty good king like David, that can sometimes come back to bite you, as it does in this instance.
- 'let your hand fall on me and my family'--granting what I say above about the inevitable pitfalls of having a king, it's still good to see David respond with humility, sorrow, and a desire to take the punishment for his actions on himself. All along, through his ups and downs, David's saving grace has been that he's a different sort of king. He's generally humble before God, and he usually sees himself as the people's servant rather than their master. With this census, he has momentarily forgotten both of those things. Upon seeing the suffering that results, he snaps back to his old self.
- 'No, I insist on paying the full price'--out of deference to the king and in light of the emergency circumstances, Araunah is willing to cede his threshing floor to David as eminent domain. But David wants to be very certain here not to take advantage of one of his subjects. Assuming royal privilege is what has gotten into trouble in the first place, after all.
- 'with fire from heaven'--by sending fire from heaven, God is dramatically demonstrating acceptance of David's offering.
- 'he put his sword back into its sheath'--I bet everyone breathed a big sigh of relief here.

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- ‘at that time on the high place at Gibeon’--the tabernacle is the tent that represents God living among humans. It’s a little surprising to hear that the tabernacle is at Gibeon. Last we heard, the ark of the covenant was in Jerusalem; and the ark and the tabernacle should go as a set. Did the tabernacle and the ark somehow get separated? Is the ark on tour? Regardless, the reason it’s significant here is that offerings are only supposed to be sacrificed on the altar found in the tabernacle. But the official altar is too far away for David to get to it under the circumstances; you don’t want to keep an angel with drawn sword waiting. Still, breaking the normal rules must have been a bit unsettling. After all, last time they departed from the proper ritual, by carrying the ark on an oxcart, Uzzah ended up dead. In this case, however, it’s the sword-wielding angel himself who suggests the new altar.

Taking it Home

- For you: One last time, we respond to the day’s reading with a psalm. If you need them, you can look to the note at the beginning of the week for suggestions about what to do with the psalm.

Psalm 38

*1 LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath.*

*2 Your arrows have pierced me,
and your hand has come down on me.*

*3 Because of your wrath there is no health in my body;
there is no soundness in my bones because of my sin.*

*4 My guilt has overwhelmed me
like a burden too heavy to bear.*

*5 My wounds fester and are loathsome
because of my sinful folly.*

*6 I am bowed down and brought very low;
all day long I go about mourning.*

*7 My back is filled with searing pain;
there is no health in my body.*

*8 I am feeble and utterly crushed;
I groan in anguish of heart.*

*9 All my longings lie open before you, Lord;
my sighing is not hidden from you.*

*10 My heart pounds, my strength fails me;
even the light has gone from my eyes.*

*11 My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds;
my neighbors stay far away.*

*12 Those who want to kill me set their traps,
those who would harm me talk of my ruin;
all day long they scheme and lie.*

*13 I am like the deaf, who cannot hear,
like the mute, who cannot speak;*

*14 I have become like one who does not hear,
whose mouth can offer no reply.*

*15 LORD, I wait for you;
you will answer, Lord my God.*

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*16 For I said, “Do not let them gloat
or exalt themselves over me when my feet slip.”*

*17 For I am about to fall,
and my pain is ever with me.*

*18 I confess my iniquity;
I am troubled by my sin.*

*19 Many have become my enemies without cause
those who hate me without reason are numerous.*

*20 Those who repay my good with evil
lodge accusations against me,
though I seek only to do what is good.*

*21 LORD, do not forsake me;
do not be far from me, my God.*

*22 Come quickly to help me,
my Lord and my Savior.*

- For your six: I'm impressed by David's ability to stay in it. He is kind of like a marathon runner, who just keeps at it. In the face of his own mistakes, God's punishment, and incredible pain and frustration, David just keeps pressing in and connecting with God...even when he might not be on the best of terms with God or at all like what God is doing. Pray that your six would have the same endurance to push through to connection with God. Pray for any ways that your six have been hurt by churches or people of faith or have had troubling experiences of God that make it hard for them. Ask that God would be with them through their struggles and questions and that he would reveal himself to them.
- For our church: Pray that God would give our church the tenacity to plead before him, like David did. Pray that collectively as a church we would lift up large concerns and boldly ask God to come through for us, for our city, and for the world. Ask God to raise up people who feel specifically called to help lead our initiatives to pray together.
- For families: It can be easy to want to rely on how things look in this world rather than exercising faith in what God can do. Talk with your family about things you each want to see happen, things that seem impossible based on the numbers or facts of this world. Then talk about some things God has come through on in the past that have seemed impossible. Pray together that God would give you the faith to believe for this thing you want regardless of how it might look on the outside.