

## **Group Study: The Servant and the King (1 Kings 2:1-4)**

### Discussion Questions

1. What does David's final advice to Solomon reveal about his understanding of kingship?
2. Why do you think the Bible includes both David's spiritual wisdom and his worldly advice?
3. How does this passage highlight the tension between God's ways and human ways?
4. What does this passage teach us about our own reliance on God versus our own strategies?

### **Good Faith Bible Study**

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**"The Servant and the King"**

**1 Kings 2:1-4**

**<https://goodfaithmedia.org/bible-studies>**

In the final lesson for this issue, we consider “covenant” through David’s story at the end of his life. In this podcast, we’ll look at David’s character—both his strengths and failures—and how God’s covenant faithfulness runs like a thread through his messy, magnificent story.

Our focal passage, 1 Kings 2:1-4, is a short passage, but it gives us a glimpse into David’s heart, into what he thinks really matters—both to him and to God.

David is one of the most written-about figures in the Bible. There are more chapters dedicated to David than to any other human figure, and dozens of mentions in the New Testament.

What does that tell us? Simply put, David matters. And more than that, David is presented to us not as a one-dimensional hero, but as a deeply human figure. He’s a poet. A warrior. A king. A sinner. A worshipper. A man after God’s own heart ... and a man who could break hearts and laws in equal measure.

In other words, David shows us what it looks like to follow God ... and fail ... and then return ... and to fail again ... and yet still be held in the grip of God's promise.

This is part of what makes David such a compelling case study for covenant.

Let's revisit the arc of David's story. He begins as a shepherd boy. He's unexpected. He's overlooked, even by his father. Seemingly unqualified. But God chooses him, not based on strength or outward appearance, but based on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). From the start, David's story is about God choosing covenant partners not because they're perfect, but because God is faithful.

Before long in the biblical story, David meets King Saul. He calms Saul when the king is mentally disturbed (1 Samuel 16), and he defeats Goliath, trusting in God's presence among God's people (1 Samuel 17). David is loved by the people of Israel, but so much so that Saul becomes murderously jealous, and David flees from Saul's court.

In 1 Samuel 22, we learn that men rally around David, even when he's a fugitive. They become known as David's "mighty men." David and his men live in caves. They move among hostile territories, and they negotiate, protect and maybe sometimes intimidate local groups in exchange for resources. They sometimes walk a pretty fine line between protection and extortion, leading some scholars to compare this period to the activity of ancient warlords or vigilante groups.

We find the story of David, Nabal and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25. David and his men provide some unsolicited protection for Nabal's shepherds and flocks in the wilderness, essentially serving as uncontracted "security." When Nabal refuses to compensate them, David sets out to kill him and his entire household, but Nabal's wife, Abigail, intervenes with gifts and wisdom. David justifies his violent plan as deserved payment for the protection, but Abigail reminds him of God's justice and restrains him from shedding blood out of anger. This story reveals to us both David's capacity for rash vengeance, and his willingness to listen.

During his time as a fugitive, perhaps we see David in his own personal wilderness, being shaped much like the newly freed Hebrews were shaped during their wilderness wanderings. He's making mistakes, but he's also learning restraint, how to listen to correction, and how to trust God.

Later, as king, David receives from God the covenant promise in 2 Samuel 7 (we spent time with this text in the June 15 lesson). God will establish David's house forever. This promise sets the stage for messianic hopes that are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, who is, of course, called the Son of David.

But that promise isn't made because David is righteous in all things. In fact, it's often in the face of David's failures that God's covenant stands out the most clearly.

I think it's important that we don't sanitize David. His sins are not minor.

The story of Bathsheba—or more accurately, the assault of Bathsheba and the murder of her husband—is horrific. David abuses his power. He manipulates truth and eliminates opposition. Because of this sin, David's family suffers terribly. In 2 Samuel 13-18, we hear the story of David's son Amnon, who rapes his half-sister Tamar. David knows about it, and he fails to come to his daughter's defense. Tamar's brother Absalom kills Amnon and later stages a rebellion against David. David weeps when Absalom dies, devastated by the death of his son.

David's faithfulness can sometimes seem overshadowed by his failures ... but it's important to note that the Bible does not erase the tragedies of David from its story. It's extraordinary that the history of God's people preserves the failures of Israel's most famous and beloved king. Psalm 51, a psalm of repentance attributed to David, stands as one of the most honest and vulnerable expressions of contrition in Scripture.

Here is a key point for this week's Bible study: The covenant is not based on our perfection, but on God's steadfast love—God's *hesed*, if you'll remember from the June 15 podcast. That word that means loyal love, covenant faithfulness and enduring mercy.

Even when David fails, God's covenant remains.

The tension we find this week in David's words in 1 Kings 2:1-4 is real. David is both covenant partner and a calculating politician. He is a man of prayer and a man of manipulation. That contradiction is not something that we can resolve. It's preserved in scripture, so I think we should hear it for what it is.

In your Bible study, this tension can open up some rich discussion:

- What does it mean to live faithfully in the “real world?”
- Can we trust God's promises and still take matters into our own hands?
- Where do we find ourselves following God's law of love, and where do we just do what we think has to be done?

David's story helps us wrestle honestly with those questions. And again, his story reminds us that the covenant doesn't rest on us getting it right, but on God's refusal to give up on us.

So what do we take away from this scene at the end of David's life, especially as we wrap up these lessons focused on Covenant and the People of God?

Here are a few suggestions:

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**First, we should practice honesty in the face of complexity.** David shows us that faithfulness and failure often coexist. So let's resist the urge to create heroes or villains, even today. Real faith lives in tension. This week, I encourage you to hold space for nuance. Sit with the tension of David's life—and maybe your own life, too. Push past easy moralizing and ask deeper questions: What does returning to God look like after failure?

**Second, trust in God's *hesed*.** God's covenant love persists, even when we fall short. That's the backbone of this entire story, and it's the good news.

**And third, there is hope for covenant people.** We are invited, again and again, to walk in the ways of the Lord. Not perfectly, but persistently. And we do so not in fear, but in the confidence of God's faithful, covenant love.

In many ways, David is a mirror. His life shows us the best and the worst of human potential. But even more, David's story is a spotlight. He illuminates the faithful love of a God who does not give up.