

DAVID: A MAN OF PASSION AND DESTINY

STUDY FIFTEEN

Grace in a Barren Place

2 Samuel 9

David, the king, out of sheer love for Jonathan, demonstrated grace to the crippled man. So God, out of love for His Son, Jesus Christ, and the debt He paid, demonstrates grace to the believing sinner.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT comes to mind when you hear the word *grace*? A ballet dancer gliding across a stage? All the dignity and majesty that adorns royalty? A quick prayer you say before enjoying a delicious meal?

While each of these examples paints an accurate picture of grace, Scripture presents the concept in a much more dynamic way—one that is God-centered and self-giving. But too many people miss this rich, biblical definition of grace. And understanding this single word will change your life!

So, this *Searching the Scriptures* study will answer one simple question: *What is true, biblical grace?* Few events paint the picture more vividly than when King David showed amazing grace to a crippled nobody.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

God's grace saturates every page of Scripture. It's grace everywhere you turn! Read [Psalm 36:5–9](#), and pray to God, thanking Him for His grace.

*Your unfailing love, O LORD, is as vast as the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your justice like the ocean depths.
You care for people and animals alike, O LORD.
How precious is your unfailing love, O God!
All humanity finds shelter
in the shadow of your wings.
You feed them from the abundance of your own house,
letting them drink from your river of delights.
For you are the fountain of life,
the light by which we see.*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

David's journey from pasture to palace brought him down many difficult roads. Yet David always had close friends nearby to guide him along the right path—the path toward God. One such friend was Jonathan, King Saul's son. Even when Saul turned against David, Jonathan remained loyal to his friend because of his trust in God's plan.

Read [1 Samuel 20:14–17](#). In light of David and Jonathan's closeness, what request did Jonathan make to his dear friend should he become king? How did David respond?



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When one ancient dynasty overtook another, the new king customarily sought out and executed all the remaining family members of the previous king. If the old king had no surviving family members, then no one could question the legitimacy of the new king's right to the throne.

When David encountered one of Saul's descendants in 2 Samuel 9, would he follow this custom to protect himself? Or would he honor his word to Jonathan and Saul and extend grace?



Observation: The King and the Crippled Man

Scripture contains a wide variety of literary genres: narrative, poetry, prophecy, letters, and more! Each genre communicates God's truth in a unique way. Letters, for example, often directly *tell* the readers an essential truth and then move on to show how to apply that truth. In narrative, such as 2 Samuel 9, authors prefer to *show* God's truth in action.

But before a student of the Bible can determine and apply this truth, he or she must first determine what the passage says.¹ Read [2 Samuel 9](#), and briefly summarize the flow of events.

According to [9:1](#) and [9:3](#), why was David looking for a descendent of Saul? What did David intend to do when he found this descendent?



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I think it's worth noting that David asks, "Is there anyone?" He doesn't ask, "Is there anyone qualified?" Or "Is there anyone worthy?" He asks, "Regardless of who they are, is there anybody still living who ought to be the recipient of my grace?" Unqualified acceptance, unconditional love. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

According to Saul's old servant Ziba in [2 Samuel 9:3](#), which descendent of Saul still lived? How did Ziba describe him? Cross reference [4:4](#) to see what had happened to him.

Ziba explains in [9:4](#) that Mephibosheth was from Lo-debar. This locale sat nestled in the far northeastern reaches of Israel. Mephibosheth likely moved to this remote region when he discovered that his father and grandfather had died. It would only be a matter of time before David came for him, and from his perspective, it seemed like that time had finally come.

When Mephibosheth came face-to-face with the king who replaced his grandfather in [9:6](#), how did he react? (See also the beginning of [9:7](#).)



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What did David offer Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9:7–11?

Although Mephibosheth expected a sword to strike his neck, David's words of grace struck his heart. The once-ostracized crippled man had joined the table of the king!



Interpretation: Grace on Display

Scattered throughout the original Hebrew of this passage are interpretive breadcrumbs that modern translations have some difficulty communicating. However, with the help of *Bible study tools*, anyone can follow the trail to a sound understanding of this passage's rich meaning.

The original audience of this passage would have paused when they read or heard the name Mephibosheth because it means “destroyer of shame.” The author's first mention of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9:6 foreshadows what takes place next. What was shameful about Mephibosheth's position in life?

Another key Hebrew term used throughout this account is *hesed*, often translated as “kindness” in 9:1, 3, and 7. This is the same word Jonathan used in 1 Samuel 20:14–15 when he asked David to preserve his bloodline. The Old Testament authors used this term to describe God's grace, faithfulness, commitment to His promises, and loyal love for His people.



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In light of his previous interactions with Saul and Jonathan, what specifically did David do to reflect God's *hesed* to Mephibosheth in this account? How did these actions destroy Mephibosheth's shame?

How did Mephibosheth's disposition change after experiencing David's grace (2 Samuel 9:6–8)? What can followers of Jesus today learn from his example?

Grace isn't picky. Grace doesn't look for things that have been done that deserve love. Grace operates apart from the response or the ability of the individual. Grace is one-sided. It is God's giving Himself in full acceptance to someone who does not deserve it and can never earn it and will never be able to repay. And this is the beautiful story of David.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: Saved by Grace through Faith

The apostle Paul penned one of the most magnificent treatises on God's grace in his letter to the believers in Ephesus. Read [Ephesians 2:1–10](#), and as you read, write down the words or phrases that correlate with the presentation of *hesed* in 2 Samuel 9?

Summarize how God's grace transforms believers through faith in Jesus Christ. What did they look like before they trusted Jesus? What do they look like after trusting Christ?

What parallels do you find between a believer's changed state in God's eyes and Mephibosheth's changed state in David's eyes?

Grace is positive acceptance in spite of the other person. Grace is a demonstration of love that isn't deserved and can never be repaid. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: Comparing Two Examples of Grace

Pastor Chuck Swindoll noticed several parallels between David’s act of grace toward Mephibosheth and the grace God showed humankind when Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the price of sin. Take a few minutes to look over the parallels recorded in the chart below.

David and Mephibosheth	God and Humanity
Mephibosheth once enjoyed uninterrupted fellowship with King Saul and Jonathan.	Adam and Eve once enjoyed uninterrupted fellowship with God.
When Mephibosheth fell, he became physically crippled.	When Adam and Eve fell into sin, humankind became spiritually crippled.
David demonstrated grace to Mephibosheth out of sheer love for Jonathan.	God demonstrates grace to believing sinners out of love for His creation.
Mephibosheth had nothing, deserved nothing, and did nothing to earn the king’s favor.	Humans have nothing, deserve nothing, and can do nothing to earn God’s favor.
David restored Mephibosheth from a place of barrenness to a place of honor.	God restores believing sinners from a place of barrenness to a place of honor.
David adopted Mephibosheth into his family, and he became the king’s son.	God adopts believing sinners into His family, and they become His children.
Mephibosheth’s limp was a constant reminder of the grace David showed him.	A believer’s struggle with sin is a constant reminder of God’s grace and forgiveness.
When Mephibosheth sat down at the table of the king, he was treated as one of his sons.	One day, believers will feast with God, and they will be treated as His children forever.



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What parallels do you find in this chart between yourself and Mephibosheth? How has God shown you His *hesed* throughout your life?

What are some practical steps you can take to respond in gratitude to God for the unending grace He's shown you?

Sin has broken the soul of every person. Everyone, like Mephibosheth, runs and hides from God for fear of His punishment. Yet God is the God of grace, and He welcomes sinners into His throne room and invites them to sit at His table as His own children. All you need to do is accept the invitation.



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A FINAL PRAYER

Wrap up your study today by reading the following poem by Julie Martin.² Put yourself in the seat of Mephibosheth and offer these words of gratitude to the King.

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I was that Mephibosheth
Crippled by my twisted pride and
 hiding from You in a barren place
 where You could not find me
 where You would not give me what I
 deserved
But somehow You found me and
I don't understand why but You
 gave me what I *do not* deserve
You not only spared my desolate life but
 You made it bountiful
And here at Your table
I will thank You my
 King.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Julie Martin, "Grace in a Barren Place," as quoted in Insight for Living Ministries, *David: A Man of Passion and Destiny Bible Study Guide* (Anaheim, CA: Insight for Living, 1997), 126.

