



This devotional belong to:

Welcome Impacters!

We are so glad you opened up this devotional and are beginning this incredible journey with our Impact church body. The most difficult part of any journey is starting it. There's always a daunting but exciting unknown to every journey—they require us to say goodbye to things or people or rhythms as we begin the new adventure. Over the next 7 months we will journey together through the life of David. We are calling this series "*The Shadow King*." If you are unsure why, you'll find out in the coming weeks!

I hope and pray this season and this series is a fresh start for each of us. A fresh start of spending time in God's Word and in His presence, diving into this devotional and/or journaling, coming weekly to weekend services, and getting into community. Maybe not all of these will be a part of your new rhythm, but we hope each of you are encouraged and challenged to take your relationship with God, and our church body, to the next level. We have a 4-fold approach to engaging with God and community for "*The Shadow King*."

1. **Weekend sermons:** We encourage you to come worship with us during weekend services and hear the message that God is laying our teaching teams heart.
2. ***The Shadow King* book/journal:** We have partnered with Our Daily Bread Ministries to create this custom book and journal - exclusive to Impact Church! *The Shadow King* is the complete Scripture from 1 Samuel 16 through 1 Kings 2, but it reads more like a book because the verse and chapter numbers have been removed. Follow the daily reading plan and utilize the blank pages for journaling as you go. Journaling creates space to spend time contemplating what God is speaking to you through His Word. If you're new to journaling, we suggest using the four questions/prompts on page 4 of *The Shadow King* book or the specific passages to SOAR on page five of *The Shadow King* devotional. Either way, you can journal right in the book!
3. ***The Shadow King* Devotional:** Follow along during the series with this devotional—produced "in-house" by our Impact Devotional Writing Team. Each week contains three days of devotional material including: Bible readings, commentary, and questions/reflections that all correspond to the upcoming weekend sermon.
4. **Life Groups:** Join a series-based life group to dig deeper into the material you have been studying all week long and enjoy connecting in community with other Impacters.

Whether you participate with one, or all four of these options, we are praying for you as you take this journey with the Lord through the life of King David. David's life, in many ways, reflects our own lives. He was an incredible person who lived a remarkable life that was filled with moments of great victory, courage, strength, wisdom, and reliance on God. But, he also demonstrated moments of cowardice, epic failure, heartache, family turmoil, backstabbing, and so much more. Yet somehow, through all of it, *he was a man after God's own heart*. Let's comb the pages of the Bible and the story of David together. Let's grow and learn, and become more Christ-like. It is a journey worth taking and one that will impact your life for years to come!

Affectionately,
Jake Heitman
Discipleship Pastor

Introduction: From Creation to The Shadow King

Let's take a high-speed journey through Scripture—from creation to the arrival of David, son of Jesse. Having a broad view of the biblical narrative will help make sense of the stories and events we'll explore in David's life.

God created a flawless world and gave humanity—the only creation made in His image—authority to rule. But Adam and Eve disobeyed by eating the forbidden fruit, introducing sin and death. This created a separation between God and humanity, and from that moment, the Bible unfolds God's plan to redeem and restore people to Himself.

After the fall, things spiraled quickly. God sent a flood to wipe out everyone except Noah's family. Later, Abraham entered the scene. God promised him land and a massive family—eventually called the Israelites, Hebrews, or Jews. Abraham's descendants grew into twelve tribes and later found themselves enslaved in Egypt. After 400 years, God miraculously delivered them through Moses (cue the plagues and Passover), and they began their journey through the wilderness.

In the desert, God gave the Law, established the Levitical priesthood, and instructed them to build the tabernacle—a portable dwelling for His presence. Despite this, the Israelites rebelled and wandered for 40 years. Eventually, Joshua led them into the long-awaited Promised Land.

After many battles, the people settled in the land God had promised. Yet sin persisted. The people did what was right in their own eyes, so God raised up judges to lead them. But the people wanted a king like the surrounding nations. Samuel, the final judge, warned them that wanting a human king was a rejection of God as their true King—but the people insisted.

So, Saul became the first king. He looked the part—tall, dark, and handsome—but on the day of his coronation, he hid among the supplies, a sign of his insecurity. Soon after, Saul sinned grievously, and God rejected him as king. When Samuel confronted him, Saul lied and then tore Samuel's robes in anger—a glimpse of his unstable character. From that point on, Samuel never saw Saul again, and God's Spirit departed from him.

Samuel mourned, but God's rescue plan was still unfolding. A new figure was about to enter the story—David, son of Jesse - The Shadow King. Though imperfect, David was a man after God's own heart. From his line would come the ultimate Redeemer—greater than Moses, greater than David, greater than all the prophets—the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Self Inventory

Before starting this devotional, take time to reflect on the following questions. These questions will be asked again at the end of *The Shadow King* devotional.

1. How/where am I experiencing spiritual victory?
2. How/where am I currently challenged spiritually?
3. Where have I seen God working and moving in this season?
4. Where do I feel a lack of awareness of God's presence in this season?
5. What would I like to see change in my relationship with Jesus?

WEEKLY IMPACT JOURNAL PASSAGES

<u>Week</u>	<u>Day 1</u>	<u>Day 2</u>	<u>Day 3</u>
1 - Read:	1 Samuel 16:1-23	1 Peter 2:1-12	John 15:1-17
1- SOAR:	1 Samuel 16:7	1 Peter 2:12	John 15:1-2
2 - Read:	1 Samuel 17:1-16	Ephesians 6:10-13	1 Samuel 17:17-31
2 - SOAR:	1 Samuel 17:16	Ephesians 6:13	1 Samuel 17:30
3 - Read:	1 Samuel 17:31-37	1 Samuel 17:31-40	Ephesians 2
3 - SOAR:	1 Samuel 17:34-36	1 Samuel 17: 38-39	Ephesians 2:10
4 - Read:	1 Samuel 17:41-51	Proverbs 3	Hebrews 11
4 - SOAR:	1 Samuel 17:47	Proverbs 3:5-6	Hebrews 11:1-2
5 - Read:	1 Sam 17:57-18:4 & Matt 22:36-40	1 Sam 18:1-4 & Acts 2:42-46	1 Sam 18:3-5 & John 15:12-15
5 - SOAR:	Matthew 22:39	Acts 2:46	John 15:13
6 - Read:	1 Sam 18:5-16, Prov 29:5, Gal 1:10	1 Sam 18:5-16 & Gal 6:1-10	1 Sam 18:5-16, Prov 14:30, 2 Pet 1:3-11
6 - SOAR:	Galatians 1:10	Galatians 6:4-5	2 Peter 1:8
7 - Read:	Matthew 5:10-12	Josh 2:1-6 & 1 Sam 19:12-13	Phil 4:6-7, Isaiah 26:3-4, Phil 4:6-7
7 - SOAR:	Matthew 5:12	1 Samuel 19:12-13	The verse that speaks most to you
8 - Read:	1 Sam 20 & Isaiah 43:1-7	1 Sam 20:30-34 & Psalm 43	2 Corinthians 7:8-13
8 - SOAR:	Isaiah 43:1-2	Psalm 43:1	2 Corinthians 7:9-11
9 - Read:	1 Sam 21:1-9 & Prov 12:17-22	2 Samuel 11:26-12:14	John 14:5-7 & Psalm 34:12-14
9 - SOAR:	Proverbs 12:22	2 Samuel 12:13	Psalm 34:13-14
10 - Read:	1 Sam 21:10-15 & James 1:2-4	1 Sam 22:1-5 & Acts 16:25-34	1 Sam 24:1-7 & Matt 14:13-21
10 - SOAR:	James 1:2-3	Acts 16:31-32	Matthew 14:15-16
11 - Read:	1 Sam 25:1-44 & 1 Tim 6:17-19	1 Sam 25:14-44 & Isaiah 41:10-14	1 Sam 25:1-44 & Psalm 37:7-17
11 - SOAR:	1 Timothy 6:17-19	Isaiah 41:11-13	Psalm 37:7-9

If you are journaling and have questions on how to SOAR, scan the QR Code for instructions.



The Shadow King - **Week 1**

Monday, September 29th - Character and Calling: David vs. Saul

Hello! Welcome to our study on the life of King David. If you haven't already, flip back a page or two and read the welcome letter and introduction to this devotional. They'll help you acclimate to the biblical and historical context of David's story. It will be much easier to follow the storyline and understand the significance of different events if you have some background information before David takes center stage.

Read: 1 Samuel 8:1-22, 1 Samuel 10:17-26, 1 Samuel 15:1-35, & 1 Samuel 16:1-23 (I know this looks like a lot, but it's all just narrative of the story, it reads really easy— and it sets the stage for our entire study. You can do it!)

Let's unpack what's happening as David enters the biblical storyline. By the time we are introduced to David, Samuel is a hot mess of a man. Samuel was still grieving. He was mourning over King Saul. Time had passed since Samuel's last (and unfortunate) encounter with Saul, but it was clearly time for Samuel to move forward. In essence, God gently said to him, "Samuel, enough is enough. Wipe your tears and pack your bag. I'm not done yet. The rescue plan is still in place." Samuel's response was a bit surprising. He had direct, audible, one-on-one conversations with God almighty, (what we all wouldn't give for that!) and yet he was still hesitant to obey. Why? Because he was afraid of Saul! Saul's true colors had been exposed, and they were not pretty!

I can't help but wonder what might have been going through Samuel's mind while he traveled. Fear of King Saul? Yes. Looking over his shoulder and startling at the rustling in the bushes along the road? Probably. Perhaps replaying the events of Saul's appointment to king in his mind? What a fiasco that was. The strikingly rugged young man, who not too long ago was enthroned over Israel, had now caused mayhem and evil. Did Samuel wonder if the same dynamics were about to play out with this next guy? Maybe.

As he arrived in Bethlehem, the sons of Jesse began to file in. I can imagine sweet ole' Samuel surveying the boys as they entered. Looking them over. Sizing them up. Squinting past his bushy white eyebrows to catch every detail. Then, after taking them in, Samuel reverted back to this default assumption: the next king would fit the same mold as Saul- tall, dark, and handsome. (Because that got them a long way the first time!) Samuel laid eyes on Eliab, the standout amongst the brothers, and immediately designated him as the one who would receive the anointing oil. How wrong he was. And here's why...

God wanted His people to be *set apart*, consecrated. God chose them as His holy people. They were to do things differently, live differently, and act differently from the pagan nations around them. But the Israelites didn't want that, and they made it very clear. They had demanded a king. They demanded a figurehead to look the part. They *wanted* to look like the surrounding nations, which was the exact opposite of how God was leading and guiding them. And they ended up with Saul. Saul, who fit all the cultural expectations of a king, right down to his character and integrity (which wasn't good!).

What would make this time around any different?

David. David would make it different. While Scripture does indeed describe him as a healthy and good-looking fella, we also learn that he was tending sheep - stinky, smelly, stupid sheep. But he guarded them fiercely and faithfully. We learn that he hadn't even been called out of the field when the renown man of God

showed up on his family's homestead. David didn't complain or get angry about this, but instead continued with his work. His father didn't consider him a candidate— not even when every single one of his brothers had been paraded in front of Samuel and passed over. David was the underdog. He was unassuming. He had no reason to believe he would ever become anything more than the youngest (and least important) son of Jesse. David wasn't what the people asked for. He wasn't what they expected. He wasn't even what Samuel expected. But God had different plans. He looked at David's *heart*, and this set David apart.

1. What was wrong, sinful, or rebellious about Israel's demand for a human king? (1 Sam 8:1-22)
2. After reading the accounts of both Saul and David's call/anointing to be king, what differences stand out to you the most?
3. In what ways are you seeking (intentionally or unintentionally) to be like the "nations" around you? In contrast, how are you "set apart" from the people/environment around you? What is one specific thing you can focus on in the weeks to come that will show that you are a part of God's chosen people?
4. As you begin this devotional, what do you hope to learn? Also, write out two goals that you would like to meet over the next several months as you commit to engaging with God's Word through this study. Close in prayer asking God to shape you more and more into His image as you seek Him in His Word.

The Shadow King - **Week 1**

Wednesday, October 1st - Character and Calling: Who God Chooses

First impressions usually make a big impact, don't they? As much as we might try not to, when we meet someone, we judge them. We draw some conclusions about them— warranted or unwarranted. We take them in, size them up, and make assumptions (generally based on our own bias, opinions, or life experiences). Then we decide if they are someone we want to get to know. We don't do this to be mean (generally!); it's just a natural part of meeting new people— processing our encounter with them and assessing the feelings and emotions that accompany that first interaction.

However, we also know these aren't always fair conclusions or an accurate assessment of the person in front of us. We've all experienced meeting someone and then later find ourselves pleasantly surprised by how much we enjoy them— or, the exact opposite, being unpleasantly surprised that they were nothing like we first thought or hoped. First impressions aren't always reliable. We know this. But, why? Why aren't we able to accurately categorize people right from the get-go? God has something to say about this as David is introduced into the story that will redeem humanity.

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13

David was the last person on his father's mind when Samuel showed up. Well, that's not true. Let's be honest. David wasn't on his dad's mind *at all*. Ouch, that must have been more than a slight bit hurtful to David's heart and pride. But David was on God's mind. The only one on God's mind actually. He knew just who He was looking for. Just the man for the job. The one everyone else had overlooked. Their first impression was their final impression. To them, David was just the one who tended the noisy livestock. He was the youngest and therefore the farthest from anyone's mind who would ever be designated for something important, let alone extraordinary. But God knew David. God knew David long before we see this young boy enter the biblical story. He saw how David tenderly cared for the sheep and how he willingly obeyed and submitted to his earthly father. God saw David's heart. He saw his character.

1. Why did Samuel assume Eliab would be the one God chose to be the next king of Israel? How did God respond to Samuel's conclusion? How does this challenge your way of assessing the people you meet from day to day? What needs to shift with how you approach meeting new people?

2. How does David's story make you think about the impression YOU make on others? How do people perceive you? Are you more concerned with what they think about how you look and how you carry yourself or with how they perceive your character and integrity? (Be honest with yourself here, what motivates how you engage others?)

3. **Read 1 Peter 2:9-12.** Believers in Jesus make up God's chosen people. His followers are the recipients of the promises He made to Abraham and David. Christians are redeemed, set apart, anointed, and called. According to verse 12 of this passage, what should be the goal of our interactions with others?

4. **Read 1 Corinthians 12:14-19.** Every part of the body of Christ is needed. Including you. Including that person who rubs you the wrong way even though you know they love Jesus very much. Close today in prayer asking God to give you courage and confidence in your own calling. Pray that He would change and soften *your* heart towards that particularly challenging brother or sister in Christ so that you can see *their* heart, not their outward appearance. Write out your prayer (or the highlights of it) below.

God had big plans for David. God knew he had the chops. But at the same time, David still had a lot of growing up to do. A lot of preparation before he would become king. He was anointed and called, but then he had to be prepared, shaped, and cultivated before he was ready to take on that mantle. We'll talk about this tomorrow as we wrap up this week's study.

The Shadow King - **Week 1**

Friday, October 3rd - Character and Calling: Developing Readiness

Read 1 Samuel 16:13-14

1. What significant contrast now exists between David and Saul? How do you think this will impact every aspect of their lives moving forward?

Read 1 Samuel 16:14-23

In verse 13, we are told the Spirit of the Lord *came upon* David in power. In sharp contrast, verse 14 tells us that the Spirit of the Lord *departed from* Saul. Saul careens headfirst down the path to destruction. David however, embarks on a journey of allowing God to prepare him for the specific calling and anointing on his life. God perfectly orchestrates the details of David's life to further shape him for his destiny as king.

Just prior to this part of the story, we see Samuel, who at the very thought of anointing a new king, trembles in fear of King Saul's reaction to this news. And then, just a few verses later, Saul unknowingly summons this very successor into his personal chamber. How like God! He had already been preparing David for this unexpected turn of events. David's musical skills must have been honed and practiced for countless hours for his reputation to have reached the ears of the king's advisors. David's character and integrity were clearly remarkably noteworthy if the king's men knew of his valor and bravery. Otherwise, how would this obscure shepherd boy from the tiny little town of Bethlehem have caught their attention?? God's how. He had been preparing David for his calling as king well before he was anointed.

It seems clear in the biblical narrative that Saul was utterly clueless as to who David was. To him, David was just a country bumpkin who played a mean fiddle. I can picture the deranged Saul responding to his men's suggestion in desperation... "A shepherd? From Bethlehem? Ew! Are you kidding me?! Ugh! But, what do I have to lose?? Go! Now! Bring him to me!"

The courage it must have taken for David to mount that donkey and then march himself into the king's throne room. All Saul told Jesse was to send his son. Nothing else. Who knows what was racing through David's mind as he journeyed to see the king. Was the king about to eliminate the competition?? The amount of faith that was required of David! The amount of trust and obedience! That alone would have caused most of us to run in exactly the opposite direction! Samuel nearly did. I think I probably would have! But not David. Off he went. Without complaint. Without hesitation.

Can you imagine his shock when he came in the king's door and a harp was thrust into his hands?? I'm sure he was just as flabbergasted when he was enrolled as one of the king's armor-bearers too. This wasn't your run of the mill grunt job. This was a position of great honor and trust, one that was privy to the leader's plans and strategies, one that was reserved for men who were distinguished and committed. David? He was just some young kid!

So, what on earth drew Saul to him so quickly?? What set David apart? His humility and loyalty, for sure. But even more so, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the anointing on his life. The Spirit was working and moving in and through David. Unbeknownst to Saul, the very thing that had been stripped from his life and that now rested with David, was what would bring about his own demise and David's humble rise to kingship.

God positioned David just where he needed to be. The lessons David must have learned while sitting in Saul's court. The insight into the ways of war and battle that he must have listened to. The ins and outs of royalty. Seeing what was "behind the curtain," so to speak. Learning the good, the bad, and the ugly of Saul's reign (and it seems there was a lot more bad and ugly than good!) God knew what David needed to learn. He knew what was to come in the days ahead. David was God's chosen one. But for now, David had to be content to wait. To wait for the throne and allow God to work out His plan. It took time (and lots of it!) for David to be ready to take the crown.

2. Many Bible scholars believe that it was upwards of 15 years from the time David was anointed as king until he actually took the throne. What stirs in you as you think about the amount of patience, faith, and training this required from David? If you apply this notion of waiting on the Lord's training and timing in your own life, how do you respond? Where have you sensed the Lord's calling but haven't seen it come to fruition yet?

3. **Read John 15:1-2.** In what areas of your life can you see and feel God shaping, forming, and pruning you for the future? Are you bearing fruit? Are there dead branches that need to be cut off? Have you been receptive or resistant to this?

The presence of the Holy Spirit in your life is critical. If you have already accepted Christ as your savior, how are you allowing the Spirit to lead, guide, and shape you? If you haven't made the decision to put your faith in Jesus, what's stopping you? (If you have questions about what this means, questions about faith, the Bible or God, please reach out to our discipleship team- Jake Heitman- jake@impact.church or Kate Throop- katet@impact.church. They would be honored to connect with you!

The Shadow King - **Week 2**

Monday, October 6th – Resistance: Facing your Goliath

Read 1 Samuel 17:1–16

The battle lines have been drawn, the army assembled, the air ripe with anticipation of what's to come. Everything seemed to be in place... including a giant. Outfitted in layers of bronze armor, laden with huge weapons, he must have been fearsome to behold.

But before David ever picked up five smooth stones, before he ran to the battlefield, there was a long silence. Forty days, to be exact. Forty days of fear. Forty days of a giant shouting with a voice that echoed through the valley. Forty days of Israel's army frozen in place.

Goliath wasn't just a man—he was resistance in the flesh. A 9-foot roadblock shouting insults and planting doubt. Goliath didn't kill anyone. Not yet. He just stood there—big, loud, intimidating. But it worked. Israel froze as confidence gave way to dismay and terror.

Resistance isn't always loud. Sometimes it's the quiet voice that whispers doubt.

Goliath may not be a giant in armor anymore, but the resistance is just as strong. Sometimes your Goliath looks like a diagnosis, a debt, a dream that feels too far gone, a sin pattern that keeps resurfacing, fear of rejection or being seen.

The question isn't whether you have a Goliath. The question is whether you've let him stand for 40 days unchecked. Have you allowed doubt to creep in where determination should reign? Have you allowed fear to paralyze your progress?

Have you ever wondered what was *Goliath* afraid of?

Goliath's tactic wasn't fighting—it was fear. Even Goliath was vulnerable. Deep down, he knew that if someone believed they could defeat him, he might fall. So, he used his words to paralyze Israel before the battle even began, just like a playground bully.

For 40 days this went on. Why did God allow it to last 40 days? The number 40 in Scripture often represents a period of testing, preparation, or transition:

- *40 years in the wilderness*
- *40 days of rain in the flood*
- *40 days of Jesus fasting in the wilderness*

Maybe the 40 days weren't a delay – maybe they were the setup for someone who would dare to start. David didn't wait to be perfect. He just moved.

Resistance fears your movement. The moment you take the first step—write the first page, apologize, start that ministry, open the door—resistance starts losing.

1. What is the thing you feel called to do/be/accomplish?

2. What or who is your Goliath?

3. Ask yourself: what's one step I can take today that resistance doesn't want me to?

The Shadow King - **Week 2**

Wednesday, October 8th – Resistance: Stopping Your Start

We are not alone when we face resistance “stopping our start.” Many powerful passages in Scripture speak directly to resistance, fear, and the courage to begin.

Read each of the following stories/passages:

Read Exodus 3-4

Moses resisted his calling with a litany of insecurities. His fear wasn't about Pharaoh—it was about himself. Resistance often hides behind self-criticism. But God's answer wasn't to boost Moses' ego; it was to promise His presence: *“I will be with you”* (Ex. 3:12).

Read Jeremiah 1:4-10

Like Moses, Jeremiah's resistance was rooted in fear of inadequacy. God's response? *“Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you”* (v.8). The enemy of your start frequently cloaks itself as humility, but it's often fear in disguise.

Read Jonah 1:1-3

Jonah's resistance was willful. He didn't feel unqualified—he just didn't want to obey. Resistance sometimes manifests as avoidance, perhaps wrapped in busyness or distraction, or just flat out rebellion. But even the belly of a fish can't hide us from God's plan.

Read 1 Kings 19:1-18

Elijah had just faced down false prophets—then fled. Fear hit after the victory. God didn't rebuke him but met him with a whisper. Sometimes resistance comes after a high moment, when fear creeps back in. God restores us quietly and gently.

Read Matthew 14:22-33

Peter *did* start - but fear hit when he took his eyes off Jesus. Resistance sometimes waits until you've already stepped out. The key? Keep your eyes locked on Jesus, not the chaos around you.

Read 2 Timothy 1:6-7

Paul reminds Timothy that fear is not from God. When we delay or doubt, it's often resistance in spiritual form. But the Spirit equips us with power, not paralysis.

Read Ephesians 6:10-13

Sometimes resistance isn't just internal—it's spiritual. Paul says to stand—that's your start. Equip yourself with spiritual armor so you're not surprised when resistance pushes back.

1. Which of these examples speaks strongest to you personally?
2. What underlying factors are contributing to the resistance you feel?
3. How does seeing victory in the example you chose help you take on your Goliath?
4. Close today in prayer asking God to give you courage and strength for the days to come. Write some of the key things that the Holy Spirit brings to mind as you pray.

The Shadow King - **Week 2**

Friday, October 10th – Resistance: Stirring, Belittling, and Family Resistance

Read 1 Samuel 17:17-29

Centered on a familiar, yet often overlooked dynamic in David's story, this passage not only sets the stage for David's encounter with Goliath but also reveals one of the earliest and most personal obstacles to his calling: resistance from those closest to him. This is a key tactic of resistance: belittling the stirrings God places in our heart. Often, the first voices to question your calling are not strangers, but those closest to you—people who think they know you best.

Before David ever faced Goliath, he faced something far more familiar and wounding: the resistance of his own family. Sent by his father to bring provisions to his brothers, David was stirred in his spirit as he witnessed Goliath taunting the armies of Israel. But just as David begins to move toward his divine appointment, the resistance rises—not from enemies, but from his older brother, Eliab.

Resistance often comes at the *start*. The enemy knows that if he can stop you *before you begin*, he can derail your destiny without a battle. Sometimes that resistance sounds like family minimizing your gift, leaders overlooking your potential, or friends misunderstanding your passion.

But when God calls you, the stirring within will not go silent—even when the voices around you try to shut it down. David wasn't just moved emotionally—he was stirred spiritually. What he experienced in that moment was the initial ignition of his divine calling to be a deliverer, a defender of Israel, and ultimately, a king. Scripture doesn't say that David heard a voice from heaven here, but his reaction to Goliath's taunt was born from a *holy discontent*. He saw injustice, dishonor toward God, and cowardice among God's people—and he couldn't stay silent.

Two Hebrew words stand out in this passage in particular:

- דָּבָר (*dābār*) – "word, matter, cause, thing, purpose." (1 Sam. 17:29)
- סוּר (*sûr*) – which means "to turn aside, to remove, to depart from a way." (1 Sam. 17:30)

Dābār can refer to a matter of significance or a word from God. David is essentially saying, "Isn't there a God-ordained matter that needs answering? In other words, *"Can you not sense the spiritual weight of what's happening?"* This is not youthful arrogance; it's spiritual awareness.

The Hebrew verb for "turned away" is סוּר (*sûr*) — This word is used throughout Scripture when people *intentionally* redirect their path—away from evil, or toward God.

David refused to engage in arguments with someone who couldn't see what God was doing. He turned aside from the voice of resistance in order to stay aligned with the voice of calling. Sometimes turning away from resistance is the first step toward your calling.

The Shadow King - **Week 3**

Monday, October 13th - Identity: Who am I?

David and Goliath - could there be a more iconic story ever told? This story transcends genre, religion, culture, and time. It's embedded into our very DNA - the underdog story.

I grew up fully immersed in the world of sports - both playing and watching sports incessantly. I remember watching Super Bowls, World Series games, NBA Championships, and NCAA tournaments, always cheering for the underdog. Commentators would often call these moments Cinderella stories or "David vs. Goliath" moments—the Diamondbacks upsetting the Yankees in the 2001 World Series, the Pistons shocking the Lakers in the 2004 NBA Finals, or the Eli Manning-led Giants toppling the juggernaut Patriots in Super Bowl XLII. These moments etched themselves into our memories. We love rooting for the unlikely victor.

So, as we hike the foothills of one of the greatest stories ever told—not just in the Bible, but in all of literature—we must realize that *identity* is a thread woven throughout. This story is about so much more than just an underdog defeating a giant. It's about a young shepherd boy realizing the calling laid on his life. Let's look at what truly gave David the courage to face Goliath.

Read 1 Samuel 17:31-37

31 What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him. 32 David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." 33 Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth." 34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, 35 I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. 36 Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. 37 The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you."

1. What stands out to you as you read this passage of Scripture?

Identity is core to who we are and foundational to everything in life. It's the bedrock upon which we build our lives, hopes, and dreams—especially when our identity is rooted in Christ (more on that soon). Identity is what sets this entire story in motion. We never get to David vs. Goliath without David first knowing who he was and who God created him to be.

Though it's still early in getting to know the story of David, we already see glimpses of his identity. He's a shepherd boy - a protector - being shaped into a warrior. While we don't get all the details, we can see enough to draw a few important conclusions.

2. What parts of this passage speak to David knowing and understanding his identity?

David was the youngest son in his family—likely just 14 to 17 years old at the time of this story. And yet, when he was even younger than this, he describes taking on lions and bears as a shepherd. Seriously—who does that? I don't know anyone, boy or man, who would willingly take on a lion or bear without it being caged or without some heavy artillery. Could you imagine an animal at the very top of the food chain "turning on you"? But David says that he "seized it by the hair" then "struck it and killed it"! David is a bad man (or boy)—in the best way!

But this wasn't random bravado. This courage was built over time. You don't just wake up one day and fight an apex predator because he stole one of your sheep. You start small. Maybe he first took on snakes, jackals, or even harsh weather as a shepherd - maybe flash floods or the stress of being the lone caretaker for a fragile flock. Over time, those experiences shaped him—prepared him. God used them to build David's courage and trust.

David didn't just become brave—he became faithful. He trusted God in the *small* things, so when it came time for something *big* (even giant sized), he didn't flinch. What looked insane to others looked normal to David because he knew who he was and who God was.

3. How have you seen God's faithfulness in the small things?

4. Has trusting God in the small things made it easier to trust Him in bigger things? What big things have you entrusted to God?

The Shadow King - **Week 3**

Wednesday, October 15th - False Identities: The Real Giant

David regularly spent ample time with God when he was a shepherd to his father's flock. We know this from the rich poetry and songs he wrote in the book of Psalms. It was during this time with the Lord that he realized his identity. He was a poet, a protector (which led to a warrior), and eventually, a king. God solidified this protector/warrior identity as David protected the sheep by defeating the sheep's enemies—bears and lions. A young, small shepherd boy has no business taking on bears or lions unless the Lord is truly on his side and calling him to do so.

David's confidence came not from his own strength but from the Lord's ability to show up in times of battle. This gave David the courage to face even the scariest foe of all—a trained, man-killing giant! The only thing that could have stopped David from facing this giant was *fear*. After all, fear was what stopped all the other Israelite soldiers from facing Goliath.

We are meant to discover and live out our true identity. The problem? We have an enemy who does everything he can to keep us from living out that identity by labeling us with *false identities*. Other people label us too, and we often have our own doubts and insecurities whispering lies—telling ourselves we aren't good enough, that we are stupid, unworthy, useless, a mistake, or good-for-nothing. The enemy tries to twist and manipulate our identity however he can—and he can be awfully successful.

Read 1 Samuel 17:38-39

38 Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. 39 David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. "I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off.

By now, David has a firm understanding of his identity, but Saul attempts to have him try on a different, false identity—the king's armor. Fortunately, David realizes it does not fit him.

1. What false identities have you tried on for size, only to realize that was not who God was calling you to be? Were you able to recognize the misalignment right away way, or did it take some time?

2. What false identities do you need to shed right now?

No one in the Israelite army was willing to face the giant, Goliath. Why? They (and all of us) are conditioned to self-protect and self-preserve. Our innate ability to do this is remarkable—and in many ways, by design. But we have muddled the intention behind that design.

As much as we are meant to protect ourselves (stay alive), we are more-so meant to lay down our lives for others. We are to serve rather than be served (just look at the life of Christ and the apostles). This is part of our true identity, but far too often we live out a false identity driven by *fear*! I would argue that one of the biggest things that stops us from living in our true identity is fear. Fear is an absolute bugger and often stops us from trusting God. Here's the thing: if we fully knew our identity in Christ and who He created us to be, it would be easier to trust Him with the harder parts of our lives because we would know He created us with a purpose.

False identities are rooted in self-protection and self-preservation—focused on *me, me, me*—but we are meant to focus on God and others. Here are a few examples of fears that kept men from living out their true identities for a portion of their life:

- Adam was called to tend the garden with his helper and wife Eve, yet he and she acted out of a false identity—fearing God was holding something back from them—so they ate the forbidden fruit.
- Abraham was called to the promised land, but when famine hit, he responded in fear by settling in Egypt and lying about Sarah being his sister. His false identity led to sin, which caused heartache in the moment and for years afterward (we are still experiencing the aftermath today!).
- God chose Jacob, the younger brother, but Jacob feared God's plan, so he used lies and deception. Living out a false identity that he thought would help him fulfill his true identity. Instead, it led to sin and wreaked havoc in his family for most of his life.
- Moses was called to bring Israel out of Egypt. He took matters into his own hands by killing an Egyptian who was beating an Israelite. Out of fear, he lived in exile for forty years before God called him back to Egypt to fulfill his true identity.

The list goes on. Spoiler alert: David's life also includes moral failures as he gave in to fear and lived out of false identities—having an affair, committing murder, and more.

Take a moment to work through this identity exercise below. One thing to note, the exercise says it's for those "suffering depression," but it's not just for those of us who are struggling with depression or anxiety. We all need to hand over our false identities and let the Lord speak into our real identity!

3. Scan this QR code and work through this identity exercise. (You will work through another one of these exercises - episode 1 next week.) Journal what you felt like God was sharing with you. Write down what God spoke to your heart regarding your identity, we will talk more about that tomorrow.



The Shadow King - **Week 3**

Friday, October 17th - Living Out of Your Identity

Read 1 Samuel 17:38-40

38 Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. 39 David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. "I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off. 40 Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag, and with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

David's life is well documented in the Bible and written about by a number of authors - many of which speak to his identity of being a warrior, poet, and king. We begin to see in this very passage how being both a warrior and a king (facing Goliath which King Saul should have done) is part of David's identity. But David doesn't jump the gun to get there. God, over time, helped him overcome the small things before he would overcome the big (giant!) things. Those who have been trusted with little will be trusted with much (Luke 16:10). This is how life works, folks! The problem is that we live in the "Insta-world." We want everything at any given instant, and waiting more than one minute drives us up a wall. We don't want to have to go through tedious, difficult, or humbling work before getting that promotion, finding a spouse, or raising a child. No, we want it instantly. We think that because we listen to a Joe Rogan podcast (or any other for that matter), we become experts. Endless information is available at our very fingertips. But information doesn't equal transformation. Information more often equals pride inflation. I can assure you, David didn't just go from timid boy one day, to killing a bear and a lion the next day. David likely saw God's hand during his shepherding days when he faced difficult situations that required bravery and a warrior-like heart. We are a people who build on what has come before. Trust grows from trust, mastery from practice, faith from faith. And knowing our identity in Christ deepens as more and more of our identity in Him is discovered and embraced.

What seemed absolutely insane to Saul and David's brothers (and to everyone else!) — the little old shepherd boy taking on Goliath—seemed absolutely commonplace to David. It's like it's woven into his DNA, into the very fibers of his being (see Psalm 139). That's what it feels like to live out of your identity. What might seem crazy or insane to one person feels normal to you because that's what God created you for. This is where we find our purpose.

For we are God's masterpiece. He created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. - Ephesians 2:10 NLT

1. What stands out to you in this passage? In what ways are you encouraged that you were created on purpose for a purpose?

I was meeting regularly with a guy who knows and follows Jesus. At one point he said that life was about finding a good job, providing for your family, retiring, and dying. How sad! This is not the life that Christ calls us to! That's the cheap version of living that the world calls us to – meaning and value based upon safety, security, and comfort. The world tries to lull us to sleep, avoiding any type of risk or conflict or resistance. Comfort really is a slow death, like a frog in a pot of heating water. If you feel like this is describing you in this season of life, don't despair. This has been a part of the enemy's plan for countless years, and our world embraces and celebrates it.

For some of us, however, we have begun to develop an understanding of our true identity in Christ. Occasionally identity is taught within our Western Christian context, but it's not always focused on. When identity is spoken of, it's often from a perspective of being a "Child of God," "Son or Daughter of God," "Loved by God," or "Friend of Jesus," etc. These titles and identities are true and powerful and impactful. They help us understand that we have a new identity in Christ – that we are adopted into His family. But, our identity in Christ goes even further. We were each made with unique gifts, abilities, talents, and passions. God uses these things so we can partner with Him on the mission and calling that He has laid on our life.

2. Reflecting on the identity exercise from Wednesday, along with today's reading, how do you feel like the Lord is speaking to you about your identity in Him? Spend a few minutes asking God about this in prayer. Feel free to work through the identity exercise from yesterday again if needed.

3. What parts of what He is revealing resonates with you? What parts make you uncomfortable? Why?

Identity matters! It is what gives you purpose, what wakes you up in the morning, what keeps you moving forward, what helps you take Kingdom risks. That's why David could take his staff, five smooth stones, and a sling, and with the Lord by his side, take on a giant. Living out who Christ created you to be is your *superpower*. If we don't know our identity, life feels a lot less meaningful and sin seems a lot more tantalizing. Your story isn't the same as David's story. You won't be wielding a sling any time soon! But, the giants in your life will begin to fall as you embrace the Creator's design and purpose for your life.

The Shadow King - **Week 4**

Monday, October 20th - Battle and Belief: Who is God?

Read 1 Samuel 17:41-51 - with a focus on the verse below.

47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

Last week we talked extensively about David's identity, and our own, in Christ. This week, we get to see David fully put his identity into practice.

My wife was once an art teacher for 1st through 5th graders. She would tell stories of how great it was to be an art teacher for grade school students because all of them just wanted to paint *something*— anything really. After learning about painting, mediums to paint on, and how to paint, a student gets to hold a brush in her hand and finally paint whatever her imagination has in store. There is a similar feeling to this in all of our stories. Once we go through the work of knowing and understanding our identity—who God created us to be—we get to go out into the world and live that out with confidence. It feels like nothing can stop us. With the Lord's guidance and direction, we get to paint a beautiful picture of our life. That's the story of David and Goliath.

But we need to pause for a moment. In fact, we need to rewind a bit. We've actually worked through some of this *backwards*. David knew *his* identity, but largely because he knew the character of God. David knew it from God's Word—His precepts, His laws, the Torah (the first five books of the Bible)—but he also learned it because of his experiences with God.

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."
- A.W. Tozer

Whether you believe this quote by Tozer or not, it's true. As image bearers of our Creator, we must have a right view of God in order to fully understand ourselves and our identity (or anyone else's for that matter, too!) The older I get, the less I try to define things that God has already defined. Including what He says about me. I must remember that my identity (and yours!) is already defined by our Creator. Did you know God also defines His own identity? Check this out:

And he (God) 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." - Exodus 34:6-7a

What more can I say?! This is pure poetry. This is the God who created *everything*, in all the universe— and we get to worship Him. What a privilege! You think David understood this? I know for a fact he did. He actually wrote a Psalm about it. Look at what he wrote:

*The Lord is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.
The Lord is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.
- Psalm 145:8-9*

When you think about God, what's the first thing that comes to mind? Be honest about it - it's ok, God can handle whatever it is. It might be a feeling, a picture, a memory, a description, a word...

Listen and work through this prayer exercise by scanning the QR code. Journal what this experience was like and/or key things the Holy Spirit brought to mind.



The Shadow King - **Week 4**

Wednesday, October 22st - How I Fight My Battles: Trust in the Lord

Read 1 Samuel 17:41-51

As you gain a right understanding of God, it shapes what you believe about Him and yourself. Over time you begin to more readily trust Him and His plan for your life. We can trust that God is who He says He is—compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love and faithfulness. Even in moments that do not make sense, we can rest assured that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). If that is the case (which it is!), we can begin to instill more and more trust in the Lord. Is this a fast or easy process? No. Definitely not. But is it true? Absolutely. David trusted in the Lord. You see it all throughout this story—both in the text from last week and this week. David's trust and faith in the Lord grew over time.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.
-Proverbs 3:5-6*

Sometimes it's hard to trust in the Lord. We live in an ultra-independent society. We've been raised, developed, even groomed, to depend on no one but ourselves. In our culture, relying on others is often viewed as weakness. We are told at church, "You need to rely on the Lord," but we rarely ever practice it.

Who is the first person you contact when something goes wrong? Who/what is the first person or thing you turn to when you are in need? Is it really the Lord? Do we really trust Him in both the big things and the small things? Sometimes we treat God like a genie in a bottle—our last-ditch effort to right the ship. Don't get me wrong, I do this too. But there is a much better way to address these things in our lives.

*"To trust is to lean your weight on something. When you step out onto a bridge, you trust. You can do that with God. You lean your weight—your hopes, dreams, aspirations, all you are—on Him. He can take the weight."
-John Mark Comer*

At times I view God like a bridge— an old, rickety one (if I'm being honest!). A bridge that spans across a large canyon with raging waters below, and I gently take a step onto that bridge, wanting to trust Him, but waiting to see if a board will give way. Watching closely to see if a rope begins to unravel. Listening with keen awareness for the twang of a cable, expecting it to snap. We're skeptical. We've been conditioned to be.

Knowledge is king in our Western culture. We listen to countless podcasts and books, watch reels, and follow so-called "experts"—all in search of... you guessed it: KNOWLEDGE. We want everything to be backed by years of evidence, case studies, and "facts"—yet somehow, facts change. And they change quickly. For the longest time, the earth was flat... until it wasn't. Everything revolved around the earth... until it didn't. Vitamin D from the sun was the best thing for you... until it wasn't and it caused cancer. Eggs are the best food for you this week, but next week they'll kill you, and the following week they'll be good for you again. We are skeptics to our core because the so-called "facts" keep changing. And yet, the one thing we can and should trust in—the one thing that never changes—God and His Word—is where we often find ourselves the most leery of all. Intentionally or not, questions race through our minds. Does God have my best interest at

heart? Does God actually care for me? Did God actually create all of this? Did He really send His Son to die for me?

1. What things do you find hard to entrust to the Lord?

2. When was a time when you entrusted something to the Lord, and He showed Himself to be faithful?

One of my favorite stories in all of Scripture comes from Mark 9:14–29 (give it a read). A man wants Jesus to heal his son who is possessed by a spirit. The spirit makes the boy seize and go into convulsions, often trying to throw him into fire or water to kill him. The father desperately wants Jesus to heal his son. The man says to Jesus, *“If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”* Jesus replies, *“If you can?”*... *“Everything is possible for one who believes.”* The man responds, *“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”*

What I love about this story is that it speaks to the very heart of all of us—fickle, forgetful, flighty. I couldn’t begin to tell you how many times I’ve prayed that exact prayer: *“Lord, I believe; help me with my unbelief.”*

This sentiment seems contradictory, yet somehow both can be true. And God honors that prayer. He understands us in the cry of that prayer. He wants us to trust Him, but He also wants us to be honest—not sugarcoating things or squirting honey in His ear. He wants us to be real, brutally real.

God can work with faith and trust the size of a mustard seed. That’s what a loving God does. He meets us right where we are. He will prove Himself to be faithful. That doesn’t mean everything will turn out the way we want. But He will work everything out for good—even if we can’t see it right now.

3. What things are you facing right now where you trust God but are struggling with unbelief, doubt, or fear?

4. In what ways do you need to get real with God and ask Him to help you with your unbelief – repairing a relationship, overcoming sin (secret or otherwise), a diagnosis, a label, shame, guilt, forgiveness, etc.?

The Shadow King - **Week 4**

Friday, October 24th - How I Fight My Battles: Confidence in the Lord

Trust and confidence are not the same. You can trust in something but not be entirely confident in it—similar to the bridge illustration from earlier this week. As we look one last time at the story of David and Goliath, we begin to see a shift in 1 Samuel 17. David moves from trusting the Lord—who had proved Himself faithful throughout David's life—into being *confident* in God.

Read 1 Samuel 17:41-51 - while focusing on the following verses.

46 This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. 47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

Do you see the confidence oozing out of David? You would've thought *he* was the giant! But this confidence wasn't in himself—it was in God. David no longer saw the bridge as old and rickety. That bridge now looked like the mighty Mackinac Bridge! He knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that it would hold even the heaviest of weights. Goliath didn't stand a chance! David's faith had grown from a mustard seed into a full-grown mustard tree. And with that faith, he went out and slayed the giant—not just with a sling and five stones, but more importantly, with the Lord going before him.

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. - Hebrews 11:1-2

If someone were to write about Christian hope and faith in today's culture, I wonder how it would be interpreted two thousand years down the road...might it sound something like this? ...*"Faith is confidence in our own abilities, and assurance that we can figure it out. That's how the ancients were led into pride and narcissism."*

If we want to move from skepticism to trust and confidence, and ultimately to faith, we must give God the opportunity to show up in radical ways! How many times do we rob God of doing something crazy cool, because we don't give Him the opportunity to show up in miraculous ways? I was reminded of this recently.

As I write this, I've just returned from taking 18 students and 6 leaders backpacking in Colorado through some of the most beautiful places in all of creation—a truly breathtaking trip. As stunning as the mountains, streams, lakes, skies, sunrises, sunsets, and wildlife were, there were also moments of terror, panic, and trepidation for all of us—especially for those new to backpacking.

Elevation hits you like a suffocating rag over your mouth, never allowing you to catch your breath. It often leaves you nauseous and light-headed with a splitting headache. For a few of our team it caused debilitating panic attacks. Here's the deal: some of the days we looked like dead men and women walking—students and leaders alike. People were ready to give up and go back. Usually, we experience that around day two or three, but this year it was day one, mile one. A student—homesick and struggling mightily with elevation sickness, hauling a pack heavier than anything she'd ever carried, hiking at an elevation her Michigan-flatlander legs were not ready for, was ready to bow out, call it quits, go home.

The trail guide, my wife, and myself, tried to encourage her, tried to convince her not to give up—telling her she could do it, that it would get better, that it would be worth it... but we quickly realized even the best used-car salesman couldn't make this deal work. So, we did what we should have done from the start: connect creation to the Creator. We prayed with her and asked her to say her fears out loud to the Lord. After she did that, we asked God to speak into those fears.

The result? God spoke to her—as her Creator, God, and Father. She was beside herself with excitement. She became the epitome of Psalm 34:5, *“Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces.”* She went from not being able to hike—throwing up every fifteen minutes, crying, and shaking—to beaming with joy and excitement. Hiking one foot in front of the other, still battling elevation sickness, but now filled with hope. She went from not knowing how to pray and feeling like she had never really prayed before—to being the one most often leading our group in prayer each night. How did this happen?

We shared our faith with her, and then God gave her her own faith and confidence in Him. She realized that if God heard her prayer—in her mind her first real prayer—then He would hear all of her prayers. So she boldly and unabashedly began praying for any and every student at any and every opportunity, because she was confident. She had faith that God would hear and respond. Just a few days of being with God in the mountains and her rickety, wooden bridge had been transformed into concrete.

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about confidence in God - His character, faithfulness, provision, etc.?

2. Take a few minutes and write down a list of all of the things that God has brought you through to show Himself faithful and trustworthy.

3. Write a prayer asking the Lord to give you complete confidence Him.

4. Who is God calling you to share your faith with right now? Who needs to “borrow” some of the faith and confidence that you have in God?

The Shadow King - **Week 5**

Monday, October 27th - Connection

Making a Connection

I was a nervous wreck the first time I put my kindergartner on the school bus. I wasn't worried about whether she would be well-behaved, or if she would get overwhelmed, or if she would like her teacher. My one biggest prayer that day was that she would make a friend, "*Just one connection, Lord!*" to wipe away the nervous apprehension of walking into a building full of strangers. One connection to give her the courage to face any challenge. I know the power of a genuine connection, and I wanted that for her more than anything.

How do we make connections? Do we initiate or wait for others to go first? Is it felt immediately or does it grow over time? Is it triggered by monumental events or the quiet moments that pass us by each day? The answer is "yes." To all of the above. But David happened to make a deep connection in a truly monumental way.

Read 1 Samuel 17:50-18:4

Is this how *you* make friends—suddenly, definitively, and all-in? Perhaps, but more often than not, friendships grow over time, forged with great intentionality through shared spaces and experiences. One researcher calculated the average time investment required to reach "best-friend" status—over 200 hours! The first 50 hours are just for moving from an acquaintance to a casual friend. Deep connection isn't generally instantaneous, and developing trustworthy, loyal friends can feel impossible at times.

Yet, Scripture encourages us not only to seek good friends but to *be* good friends. Friendship is a vital part of our flourishing as followers of Christ. Connection changes everything—to be seen, welcomed, and encouraged. It gives us the confidence to engage with others and pursue what God has called us to do.

One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.
- Proverbs 18:24

1. Take a moment to reflect. Name some of your acquaintances, a few of your friends, and then your closest friends. Reflect on how you met them, and how your relationships have grown over time.
 - a. Acquaintances:
 - b. Friends:
 - c. Closest friends:
2. What are the main differences between your closest friends and other friends?

Going Deeper

Jonathan and David likely knew each other as acquaintances before the Goliath event. Go back to 1 Samuel 18:1: "After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself." What created such a deep bond between them?

Let's step back into the story. In 1 Samuel 17, the Israelite army—including David's brothers and Jonathan, the king's son—had been facing the Philistines for forty days and forty nights, paralyzed by fear of Goliath's taunts. Then, a young shepherd boy named David arrived. Hearing the men's concerns and filled with the Spirit of the Lord, he delivered a compelling message. Put yourself in the position of an eyewitness to this moment.

Read 1 Samuel 17:45-47

After this declaration, David proceeded to slay Goliath and cut off his head. Have you ever witnessed something completely and undeniably of God? If so, did you feel a certain bonding with the people you shared that experience with? Shared experiences, where God is clearly present, have a way of imprinting on us and drawing us closer to one another.

Oftentimes, a bond isn't a single event but a gradual build. Yet, 1 Samuel 18:1 says, "Jonathan became one in spirit with David," as if it wasn't even a conscious choice. The Spirit of God was on David, and Jonathan was compelled to align with him. He simply knew he had to follow David through anything.

3. Is there anyone in your life you feel indelibly bonded to? What bonded you? Was there an event, shared experience, or significant act of God that advanced your relationship from acquaintance to forever friend?

4. Do you truly love anyone as yourself (Lev. 19:18)? What does it look like practically, in everyday life?

5. Is the Spirit of God evident in you in such a way that it compels others to connect with you? How so? Or why not?

Deep personal connection often comes through a shared mission or experience, especially within the community of believers. If you are feeling a lack of connection, ask yourself if you are putting yourself in positions to build those kinds of connections. Are you serving alongside other believers? Are you following God with such intention that it attracts others to follow you as you follow Christ? Are you praying for connection?

God showed up that first day of kindergarten for my daughter. In fact, her first words as she stepped off the bus that afternoon: "*Mom, I made a friend!*" What a gift to my heart! Instantly, I knew she would be okay, because connection and belonging give us the staying power to get through any challenge before us.

The Shadow King - **Week 5**

Wednesday, October 29th - Proximity

Staying Close

It's more than just the amount of time spent with people that cultivates deep friendships. I have had the same boss for 15 years. While I feel a deep bond with her because of the highs and lows we've navigated together, there is still a boundary that keeps us from the kind of deep connection the Bible calls us to. For one, we are coworkers in a corporate environment, and for two, we live seven hours apart.

Physical proximity plays a huge role in staying close in a relationship. It provides the small, unplanned moments between scheduled events. It's the sharing of life, laughter, and perspective that keeps us deeply bonded. This explains why friendships can become really deep really quickly on a mission trip or a college campus. Deep connection relies on sharing who you are, inviting others into your life, and investing in theirs.

1. What seasons of life have you felt your relationships have deepened quickly? What are some notable circumstances that fortified those relationships?

Read 1 Samuel 18:2-3

It was King Saul who decided to keep David at his home, but this decision was likely a great asset to David and Jonathan's friendship. Living near each other would have given them the opportunity to get to know one another better and share in the mission of what God was doing in their lives. At this point in the narrative, David had been anointed as the future king of Israel, but this was not yet public knowledge. All Jonathan saw was the Spirit of God upon David and a conviction to be joined with him. There are a multitude of benefits in sharing time and physical space with other believers as we advance God's plans.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another [daily].

- Hebrews 10:24-25

2. What are some practical ways you can cultivate deeper relationships with the people who live, work, or worship near you?

We tend to think, act, and talk like the people we spend a lot of time around. How valuable it is, then, to spend time with people who are moving in the same direction as us - united in Christ.

I appeal to you...in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

- 1 Corinthians 1:10

Committing Long-Term

Jonathan made a covenant with David. Covenant relationships are modeled for us throughout Scripture, such as God's covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:11–13), Abraham (Genesis 17:7), and Israel (Exodus 19:5–6). Most notably, we live under the new covenant that has granted us forgiveness of our sins through Jesus (Jeremiah 31:31–33).

Not every relationship is rooted in covenant. This level of relationship is used sparingly in Scripture, set apart for a specific purpose. We are not called to make a covenant bond with every friend we have. We don't even have the capacity to offer that level of commitment to everyone in our circle. It is suggested we have the capacity to hold 50 acquaintances, 15 people in our "village," and only 5 best friends. We may not even be able to say we love our best friends as ourselves—let alone make a covenant commitment to them. Despite this however, there are still characteristics of covenant relationships we can draw from and apply to our own lives.

3. Look through the examples of covenants referenced below and record the elements of the covenant. Who initiated the covenant, what was promised, and what was the proof that it would be upheld?
 - Genesis 9:11-13 [Noah] -
 - Genesis 17:7 [Abraham] -
 - Exodus 19:5-6 [Israel] -
 - Jeremiah 31:31-33 [Jesus] -
 - Genesis 2:22-25 [marriage] -
4. Who are your most loyal friends, and what characterizes their loyalty? What similarities to the covenants in Scripture do you see in these relationships?

Covenants carry long-term ramifications and are sealed with a promise and a symbol, act, or gift. Tomorrow we will look more at how Jonathan sealed his covenant with David.

The Shadow King - **Week 5**

Friday, October 31st - Sacrifice

Marking Friendship

How do you know if a friendship is still thriving versus fading into memory? There are usually sign-posts that indicate if a friendship is advancing: intentionality about getting together, consistent communication, expressing interest in one another's lives, and generous giving of time, attention, or resources. Covenant relationships in Scripture were also marked with signs: a rainbow in the sky, generational inheritance, salvation. How did Jonathan mark his covenant friendship with David?

Read 1 Samuel 18:3-4

Jonathan gave David gifts—tangible items of great value that outwardly represented what he was experiencing inwardly. Symbols of friendship do not have to be physical items or be monetarily costly, but they should be meaningful. Your friends should be able to feel your commitment to them through your speech and actions. Friendship should also go both ways. Are your friendships balanced, or is one side giving more than the other?

1. What do you give to your friends through your time, attention, or resources?

2. What do your friends give you through their time, attention, or resources?

Sacrificial Giving

Jonathan's gifts to David weren't just generous or practical; they were sacrificial. Because he loved David as himself, Jonathan offered his most meaningful possessions. It wasn't just a simple robe. Jonathan was heir to the throne, so his robe was symbolic of his royalty. By giving it to David, he was, in effect, relinquishing his royal position next to his father, King Saul. He put David above himself in recognition of God's presence and plan. Because a robe is visible, it also served as a public proclamation that Jonathan honored David, and others should follow him.

Additionally, Jonathan gave David his sword, bow, and belt. These items were battle-tested and likely personally fit for Jonathan. Yet, by this act of giving, he gave up his military leadership and authority, submitting to David. Jonathan didn't sacrifice his physical life, but he gave up all that was planned for his life and offered it to David.

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

-John 15:13

The similarities to Jesus' sacrificial act of leaving His heavenly throne and coming down to live among us cannot be overlooked here. While Jesus retained His holy authority, He modeled His covenant commitment to us by submitting Himself to a human life and a brutal death— all on our behalf.

3. Have you ever given or received a gift or act of love so significant that you were overwhelmed by what motivated it?

4. Consider the gift of Jesus and how much He loves you, that He would lay down His physical life for you and call you His friend. What does this truth stir up in you?

Read John 15:1-17

5. What does this section of Scripture say about the topics we have walked through this week?
 - The Benefit of Proximity (v.1-8):

 - Loving Another as God Loves (v.9-12):

 - The Cost of Friendship (v.13):

 - The Gift of Friendship (v.14-17):

The Consequence of Friendship

This week's study has been a real high point in the story of David. After his mountaintop experience with Goliath and finding a deep connection with Jonathan, it appears that things are really looking up for him. 1 Samuel 18:5 even tells us that after receiving Jonathan's weapons, David was successful in every mission he went on.

But stay vigilant as the story continues, because there can be consequences of friendship when outsiders look at such a good thing with envy.

The Shadow King - **Week 6**

Monday, November 3rd - Jealousy and Insecurity

Read Samuel 18:5-16

1. Take a minute to write down what makes you feel insecure. Try to focus not just on *what* you are insecure about, but what you think *causes* that.

For most of us, this list can get crazy long, but I would imagine a lot of these insecurities, at their core, stem back to the idea of being passed by or replaced. If we are honest with ourselves, the idea that we could be replaceable is kind of scary. But there will almost always be someone or something better, newer, or fresher.

It feels good to be at the top. It's just in our nature to want that, right? Most of us aren't working hard to be second best or play supporting roles. We want to stand out. We may not want the spotlight, but we want to feel special. We ask ourselves, "What makes me unique or different from your average Joe?" Then, when (and if) we figure that out, it can be heartbreaking when someone comes along and is just *better*. The worst is when they're better without even trying.

That is the story of Saul. He was *the* man. "The most handsome in all of Israel." Can you imagine? Not to mention that he was a head taller than everyone else. That alone gives him a "head" start. But then imagine this new, young buck just meanders onto the battlefield, fresh off the shepherding field, and takes down the giant that everyone, including yourself, is too scared to fight. Even though you have the latest and best armor and sword, this prepubescent boy only needed a measly slingshot. You've got to be kidding, right? So, rather than feel threatened, you think, "Wow, I could use this guy on my team." But as soon as he joins your team, you start hearing things like this...

- *"David is glowing with health, has a fine appearance, and handsome features."* - 1 Samuel 16:12
- *"He can play the lyre, he is brave and a warrior, a great communicator, and the Lord is with him."* - 1 Samuel 16:18

Sounds like a threat. Saul was once the GOAT (greatest of all time), but now David is in town... and not only is he all the things Saul is, he can also play the harp, really really well. Then the arrow hits, and the people chime in:

- *"Saul has slain thousands, and David his tens of thousands."* - 1 Samuel 18:7

The people. Saul stopped listening to God and began listening to the people. God had told him to wait for Samuel to offer the sacrifice before battle, but the people were antsy and pressured Saul. In that moment, he cared more about pleasing the people than pleasing God. The irony? The sacrifice was meant to be all about pleasing God, but Saul was only doing it to please the people. After Saul had disobeyed and sacrificed in haste, Samuel said, "Obedience is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam 15:22).

Read Galatians 1:10 and Proverbs 29:25.

2. Have you found yourself wrestling with this at times? In what area of your life do you see this most?

And now, even after trying to win the approval of the people, Saul sees them more pleased with David than with himself. After hearing the people praising David, "Saul thought to himself." He repeated in his mind what the people were chanting and then allowed the threat to move in. How we process our thoughts is critical to how we respond. What we allow to be on repeat in our minds is going to be the thing that dictates our self-worth and our beliefs.

3. Have you ever had something said to you or about you that plays over and over in your mind like a broken record? What was it? How has it affected your view of yourself? Sometimes these can be good thoughts, too.

Read Philippians 4:8

4. What are the different filters Paul gives us to process our thoughts through? Try processing the thought that tends to be on repeat through each of these filters. How does this shift your perspective?

I wonder if Saul had taken that moment with the crowd, celebrated David's wins, and moved on - would he have been able to maintain some sanity? Instead, he allowed the perceived threat to move in and create insecurity. Saul began his reign desperate for God. Remember when he was about to be presented to the people as king, and he was nowhere to be found? He was hiding because he was afraid. The one who appeared to have everything going for him was paralyzed by fear. He doubted himself, but in his desperation, he leaned into God for wisdom and strength.

Saul's problem didn't start when David came along and flexed better. His problem began when he displaced his trust and value. He began trusting the people and placing his value in their approval and praise (or lack of praise) over obedience to God and trusting Him.

I've been through this enough in my own life that I can say with confidence: when my worth is placed in my trust in God, it's easier to brush off the things that come along that try to shake me up. But, when my worth is dependent on people, I crash and burn quickly. It's ugly.

5. Ask God to show you what part of your worth is dependent on people. Then surrender that to Him, asking Him to speak into that from His heart to yours.

The Shadow King - **Week 6**

Wednesday, November 5th - Comparison Breeds Insecurity

And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David. - 1 Samuel 18:9

This one thing was shattering for Saul. Do you identify? It feels ugly to admit, but I think it's something we've all wrestled with at one time or another. That person comes along, and you can't help but keep an eye on them. They walk in the room, and it's *game on*. Comparison bulldozes any traces of contentment that remained.

- *In the gym...he lifts heavier and can run forever.*
- *In the office...she can keep attention longer; her ideas are better.*
- *At the big event...she's perfectly put together.*
- *On the court...he's taller, faster, and more consistent.*
- *At church (yes, even at church)...they are a better musician, communicator, or leader.*

And what about on socials? Some of you choose to stay off, but most of us are on Facebook or Instagram. They're great tools for staying connected and sharing memories with friends and family, but as we've all seen over the years, they can also be soul killing. Imagine if Saul had been on Instagram. He'd be searching @David_JessesBoy and discovering he already has more followers, more likes, more comments, and more tags. He's just...more. It's like pouring gasoline on a fire.

Theodore Roosevelt said, "Comparison is the thief of joy." It's so true! We've all experienced it and seen it.

In Matthew 20:1–16, Jesus tells a story of a landowner who hires workers for his vineyard. Some start early, others later, and some only work a couple of hours, but they all get paid the same. Seems unfair, right? But the workers who started early had agreed to their wage. There was no issue until they compared. Comparison led to envy, which led to ingratitude.

Remember the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15? He runs off with his inheritance, squanders it, and returns hoping to be accepted as a servant. But the father welcomes him back, kills the fatted calf, and throws a party. The older brother was fine until he compared. Again, it seems unfair. But he was measuring love and worth by looking sideways instead of trusting the love the father had always shown him.

One of my core memories is from when I was about three years old (a very, very long time ago!). My babysitter came bearing gifts. She gave me a monkey stuffed animal. Awesome! Until I saw what she gave my sister: a huge Cookie Monster from Sesame Street. I threw the biggest fit! My parents were horrified. All because I looked at what I had...and then looked sideways.

I'll be the first to admit that sometimes it's hard not to notice the massive gaps or the feeling of being slighted; or even the opposite, wondering why I got what I got when others didn't. Why did I get incredible parents, while people close to me had horrible ones?

The Bible is full of comparison stories, and it never ends well:

Cain and Abel. Jacob and Esau. Rachel and Leah. Sarah and Hannah. Mary and Martha.

Read Philippians 4:12–13.

I just love this. Paul is saying he's been on both sides, having it all, and having so little he didn't know where his next meal would come from. Whether life is going great or falling apart, whether we have everything or nothing at all, we draw strength from Christ, not from our circumstances.

1. In what areas of life do you find yourself comparing to others the most (appearance, success, faith, relationships, kids, talents...)?

2. What emotions do you experience when you compare yourself to others (jealousy, insecurity, pride, discouragement...)?

3. How does comparison affect your relationship with God?

4. Do you believe that God's plans for you are good even if they look different from someone else's?

Read Ephesians 2:10 and Galatians 6:4–5

5. How can you apply this?

6. Jeremiah 29:11 gets a lot of attention, but read on to verses 12 and 13. End today by asking God to free your heart and mind from the comparison trap. Trust His perfect plan for YOU.

The Shadow King - **Week 6**

Friday, November 7th - Insecurity Breeds Jealousy

"Jesus came to give us life. Life to the full. The enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy." - John 10:10

The enemy is crafty. He's creative in how he strategizes to take us out.

Insecurity always whispers lies. It tells us someone else's victory means our loss. It tells us that God doesn't have enough favor to go around. That if we don't stay on top, we'll be forgotten.

Insecurity is the breeding ground for jealousy. It often grows from comparison but can also be born from hurt, rejection, failure, and more. Satan loves it because it messes with our joy and peace. When that gets thrown off, it affects our effectiveness and ability to fulfill the purpose God has called us into.

Read Proverbs 14:30

1. When have you felt envy creep in and literally cause you to feel physically off? Like a pit in your gut?

We know envy is wrong. It feels bad. No one wants to feel it. But how do we just make it go away? It's not as simple as saying "no" to something.

Step One: Put others first. (Don't be self-centered.)

Love does not envy. - 1 Corinthians 13:4

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, count others more significant than yourselves.
- Philippians 2:3

Putting others first is hard. We want what we want, we don't want to wait, and we don't want others to have what we want.

2. Think of a situation that has caused you to wrestle with envy. Using the verses above as a filter, how can they begin to shift you away from jealousy?

Step Two: Be grateful.

Philippians 4:12 talks about being content. **Read Philippians 4:6**. What posture does Paul tell us to have?

3. A heart of gratitude has a hard time co-existing with envy. Take a minute and write out the top five things you are most thankful for.

Step Three: Replace jealousy by choosing fruits of the Spirit.

You may have heard that when we remove something unhealthy from our diet, we need to replace it with something nutritious so we don't fall back into the old habit of eating empty calories. Likewise, if we are going to remove jealousy from our hearts, we need to replace it with something else in order to keep it from creeping back in.

Read 2 Peter 1:5-8

4. What traits can we replace jealousy with?

5. Write out Galatians 5:22

Read through each step again. By disciplining ourselves in each step and putting this into practice (even when we don't feel like it) we will be able to freely celebrate others, and the more we practice it, the more natural it will become.

Jonathan, Saul's son, responded in stark contrast to his father. He technically should have inherited the throne, but instead, David was chosen by God. Johnathan had countless reasons to become jealous or even angry. Saul tried to pit Jonathan against David, telling him that as long as David lived, Jonathan would never receive what was his. But Jonathan chose to celebrate David, to follow and trust God's plan, and to surrender his will, entrusting his identity and purpose to God alone.

6. When have you let jealousy cloud your ability to celebrate others?

7. Where might insecurity be driving your thoughts or behaviors today?

God's calling on someone else's life doesn't diminish His calling on yours. The cure for jealousy is not hiding from the wins of those around us, but rooting ourselves deeper in God's love, finding our identity in Him, and pursuing His specific purpose and plan for us, which is ultimately to become like Him and represent Him to everyone we encounter. Take a minute to review the four steps to working toward conquering jealousy.

If this is an area you struggle with, commit to praying through these four steps daily.

The Shadow King - **Week 7**

Monday, November 10th - Seeing God in Your Sob Story

Read 1 Samuel 19:1–17

David's life reads like a series of sob stories:

- *Rejected by Saul*
- *Chased through deserts*
- *Forced to flee friends and family*
- *Betrayed by those close to him*

But God was shaping a king in the shadows.

David was anointed but not yet appointed. He lived as a king in God's eyes but remained in the shadows—hunted, betrayed, and nearly killed. His story in 1 Samuel 19 isn't just one of escape; it's the story of a God who walks with us through the shadows of fear, betrayal, and uncertainty.

In verses 1-3, Saul tells Jonathan and all his officials to kill David. David had done nothing wrong—in fact, he had only served faithfully—a reminder that favor with God doesn't exempt you from becoming a target. Sometimes, your calling *provokes* conflict.

Defying his father's orders, Jonathan defends David—risking his own position to plead for his best friend. God often sends unexpected advocates. You may not see Him, but He is working behind the scenes, softening hearts, raising allies. Yet, despite Saul's behavior, David returns to serve Saul—and is nearly pinned to the wall by a spear. A near-death moment...again. Still, God delivers him. God's faithfulness is not proven by the absence of danger, but by His *presence* in the danger.

Michal, Saul's daughter and David's wife, helps him escape. She uses deception—placing an idol in bed—and buys David time to flee. The rescue is clumsy, human, imperfect—yet God still uses it. God doesn't always use miracles; sometimes He uses messy people and unexpected methods. Don't dismiss the help just because it's not neat.

The shadow season isn't your punishment—it's your preparation. You may feel like you're surviving, not thriving, but even in your narrow escapes, God is building your testimony.

1. Share a time when you have felt the "spears" of judgement, heartbreak, or rejection in a season when you expected promotion.

2. Who has God placed in your life to stand in the gap for you? Who are you advocating for?

3. Are you trusting God even when the help doesn't come the way you hoped? If not, write out a prayer expressing your fears and doubts and asking God for confidence.

4. How is God building your character in the shadows?

The Shadow King - **Week 7**

Wednesday, November 12th – Faithful Allies in a Fearful Season

In 1 Samuel 19, David's survival hinges on the bold, costly choices of two people: Jonathan and Michal, Saul's own children. Their actions are more than familial affection—they are acts of courage, conviction, and covenantal faithfulness. Through their faithfulness, we can see God's provision, the cost of loyalty, and what it means to stand with someone in their calling—even when it's dangerous.

Reread 1 Samuel 19: 1–7

1 Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan had taken a great liking to David and warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there. 3 I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I'll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out."

4 Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. 5 He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The Lord won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?"

6 Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: "As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be put to death."

7 So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

Jonathan, the crown prince of Israel, has every reason to view David as a threat. By all human standards, David's rise means Jonathan's fall. But Jonathan recognizes something greater than status—he sees *God's hand* on David. Instead of resisting God's plan, Jonathan aligns with it.

Jonathan's loyalty wasn't passive; it was active *resistance* against his father's sin. His faithfulness wasn't just to David, but to God's purpose. True friends don't just love us—they help us walk in God's calling, even when it costs them something.

Reread 1 Samuel 19: 11–17

11 Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed." 12 So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped. 13 Then Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed, covering it with a garment and putting some goats' hair at the head.

14 When Saul sent the men to capture David, Michal said, "He is ill."

15 Then Saul sent the men back to see David and told them, "Bring him up to me in his bed so that I may kill him." 16 But when the men entered, there was the idol in the bed, and at the head was some goats' hair.

17 Saul said to Michal, "Why did you deceive me like this and send my enemy away so that he escaped?"

The Shadow King - **Week 7**

Friday, November 14th – Seeing God in the Heart of a King

Read 1 Samuel 19:4-9

The danger and chaos surrounding David's story seems unbelievable at times. Rejected by his king, pursued in defense of his life, forced to flee from all he held dear, betrayed by those he trusted... and yet he returned. Once again, David serves Saul and Israel faithfully as a musician and military commander. Again, David goes to battle and returns victorious. And once again, Saul attacks.

In the spirit of honesty and transparency, I must confess I struggled with understanding David's choice. It seems baffling at first: Saul had just tried to kill David, and yet when Jonathan intercedes and temporarily pacifies Saul, David returns. Why?

Several key factors may have influenced David's decision to return:

A Heart of Honor and Submission

David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). One of the defining marks of that heart was his radical honor—even toward a king who was actively trying to kill him. David never tried to seize the throne, though he had the anointing. Returning to Saul's court was a demonstration of submission and loyalty, not just to Saul, but to God's appointed structure.

Trust in Jonathan's Mediation

In 1 Samuel 19:4–6, Jonathan gives a heartfelt, public defense of David to Saul, and Saul relents—at least for the moment. David likely believed that Jonathan's advocacy had genuinely softened Saul's heart. He had deep trust in Jonathan, who had proven to be a covenant-keeping friend. It's possible David wanted to honor that trust and show faith in reconciliation.

Faith in God's Sovereignty

David consistently showed that he believed God was ultimately in control—even over wicked leaders. By returning, David wasn't being reckless; he was resting in divine sovereignty. He had experienced God's protection before and believed that God's plan would not fail, even if Saul's actions were unstable.

Desire to Fulfill His Role and Serve

David's service wasn't merely political—it was ministry. He played music to soothe Saul's tormented spirit. He was also a warrior who led Israel's army in battle. He fulfilled these roles with excellence and humility, even when unrecognized and unappreciated.

A Pattern of Forgiveness

David's life was marked by mercy toward those who wronged him—a trait that would later be seen in his dealings with Absalom, Mephibosheth, and even Shimei. Returning to Saul's court shows an early example of that gracious, forgiving spirit.

Sometimes, we are called to step back into hard places—not because we’re weak or a glutton for punishment, but because God is still working. Like David, we’re called to trust God's timing, honor His order, and serve faithfully even when surrounded by uncertainty.

1. Would you return to a place of betrayal if God asked you to? What situation comes to mind?
2. Reflect on a time when, like David, you had the courage to choose obedience over comfort, mission over fear.
3. Sometimes, God calls us to difficult places not because they are safe, but because He is sovereign. Think about how David's return to Saul's court reveals a powerful spiritual truth: Our peace isn't found in the absence of danger, but in the presence of purpose. Write down what God brings to mind.

The Shadow King - **Week 8**

Monday, November 17th - Behind Closed Doors: Family Conflict and Wounds - The Backstory

Over the past few weeks, we've read about the growing friendship between David and Jonathan and the growing jealousy and insecurity of King Saul. This week, we reach a tipping point in the family dynamics. Jonathan is in a really, really tough situation. His dad is the current King of Israel. His best friend is the future king of Israel, who also happens to be his brother-in-law! I don't envy Jonathan! And while Jonathan shows unwavering loyalty and commitment to David, he is also torn. He wants to think the best of his dad, too. He wants him to be an upstanding guy. Let's parse out the progression in today's passage.

Read 1 Samuel 20

1. After reading today's story, does Jonathan's behavior/line of thinking surprise you? Why or why not?
2. What part of the narrative did you find confusing?
3. What part of the story stood out the most to you?

So much drama! In the opening scene today, David is trying to get a handle on the situation we read about last week with his wife, Michal, and he's gone back to Jonathan to piece the mess together. It's remarkable that Jonathan is still in utter denial about his father's intentions. It's clear from verse two and verse nine that Jonny-boy genuinely believes that Saul is absolutely *not* a threat to David's life. To prove this, Jonathan comes up with quite the plan to confirm that Saul's intentions hold no ill will. Jonathan was sure he had judged the situation correctly. David was sure he hadn't. Regardless, with the plan fully hatched, David went out into the field to wait to see what would unfold between Jonathan and King Saul.

What transpires is not good. Not good at all. Without David there to be the target of his rage, Saul turns on Jonathan. The vitriol words that pour out of Saul's mouth—unfathomable. Saul screams derogatory and cruel remarks at Jonathan. He needed to be the next king of Israel, and how dare he befriend the very one who was usurping the crown!? Saul then commands Jonathan to summon his very best friend for the sole purpose of bringing him to his execution. Poor Jonathan. What a horrible encounter with his father. He tries to stand up to Saul, tries to defend David, asks for an explanation, and attempts to reason with the king...only to be the continued target of Saul's rage. Saul meant to kill his son when he threw that spear. Meant to pierce him through the heart. But—wait? Hadn't Saul, just moments before, insisted Jonathan take the throne!? Saul was irrational, utterly delusional. He had quite literally lost his mind.

This story makes me cringe... Goodness. This is a lot like a soap opera, isn't it?! (Maybe script writers get some of their ideas from Scripture!) All joking aside, it's clear that this kind of dysfunction has been a part of humanity from the very moment of the fall. We see this kind of brokenness over and over in the biblical story line. And while that's not a warm and fuzzy thing to become aware of— there is a certain comfort in knowing that God doesn't gloss over hard and broken things. Even in His Holy Word. God leaves in the dirty and ugly details of people's lives and families. He is intentional in this. He shows us that there is hope and healing even in the mess.

4. What other dysfunctional relationships can you think of from stories or people in Scripture?

5. What relationships in your life could you relate to this kind of toxicity? Does seeing biblical examples of this relational brokenness comfort or discourage you? Why?

6. Today's story is quite a downer. Not a whole lot of feel-good emotions go along with this part of the narrative. **Read Isaiah 43:1-7.** How does this give you courage and/or encouragement as you consider hard or unhealthy relationships in your life?

7. End today by praying through Isaiah 43:1-7. Pray this out to the Lord with praise and gratitude. Jot down a few parts to your prayer below that you want to remember.

The Shadow King - **Week 8**

Wednesday, November 19th - Family Conflict and Wounds: Jonathan in Denial

Read 1 Samuel 20:30-34

Ugh. My heart feels heavy for Jonathan. It seems easy, on this side of the story, to recognize the complete dysfunction pouring out of Saul. But Jonathan couldn't see it. As we read yesterday, Jonathan was adamant that Saul was *not* a threat to David. How could Jonathan possibly land in that head space? How could he come to that conclusion with all of the evidence that so clearly said otherwise?

Jonathan was a young man when Saul became king and served in his army right from the start. He witnessed his father irreverently offer unlawful sacrifices meant for priests. Saul condemned Jonathan to death for tasting honey (only spared by the soldiers' outcry). His dad lied and shifted blame about the Amalekite battle. Jonathan saw Saul's rage when Samuel rebuked him, and he watched his dad's disturbing behavior under torment from the evil spirit. He knew of Saul's attempts to skewer David to the wall, knew of the outrageous and dangerous bridal price Saul demanded for his sister, and was even directly ordered to murder David himself. So how, despite all this, did Jonathan still go to bat for his father?

Lies. Manipulation. Unpredictability. Gaslighting. Abuse. This was Jonathan's reality. This was what he experienced day-in and day-out with King Saul. This relationship was the epitome of toxicity. These types of behaviors, from the outside looking in, seem so obviously unhealthy, but to those entrenched in that environment—it becomes their normal. It becomes so integrated into the regular patterns of their life that it is incredibly difficult to call it what it is: Toxic. Dysfunctional. Abusive. The confusion and disorientation that results from this type of treatment is profound. We see it in Jonathan. His cognitive disconnect was immense. The games Saul played were insidiously planned and orchestrated. (And this behavior didn't stop with Jonathan. We'll see it again and again as David's story continues).

Read 1 Samuel 19:1-7

This is a prime example of what caused so much confusion for Jonathan. Jonathan was not naive or intentionally turning a blind eye. Saul promised—looked his son in the face and took an oath. Jonathan wanted to believe him, to put stock in his words. Wanted all the bad to be wiped away by this change of heart. Wanted his dad to be a good man, to be the father he always dreamed of. And this seemed like the moment he was waiting for. An oath was a big deal. Especially from the king! And here is where manipulation and lies kept Jonathan stuck in this abusive and toxic cycle. Jonathan bought it; hook, line, and sinker. This is why he declared so strongly that Saul would “never!” try to kill David. But the truth? There was no change of heart in Saul. Not at all. It was just a ruse. Saul's actions did not line up with his words. What he said he valued was not reflected in his behavior and choices.

If you resonate with Jonathan, if you completely understand how he could still hope to see something good in his dad, even after so much evidence of Saul's toxicity, perhaps you know the confusion and disorientation of being lied to, manipulated, or gaslit. If you have walked through this personally, I am so sorry. I'm so sorry that you were taken advantage of, mistreated, and abused. It was not okay. It's still not okay if you're currently experiencing that.

This grieves the heart of God. His heart breaks for what you have gone through at the hands of another. This is the direct result of sin and death. This is the direct result of Satan's attacks to bring as much pain and suffering as possible to God's most treasured possession: You. Me. Human beings. This is why God went to such great lengths to rescue us. This is why God the Son took on flesh and went to the cross. To pay the price for sin, to take on the punishment for sin, and to set us free. If this is your story, or the story of someone whom you dearly love, there is hope. And there is healing. It may not come as quickly as you'd like. It may not look the way you want it to on this side of heaven. It may be harder than you ever expected. But God is a promise keeper. He is faithful.

1. Today's passage is heavy. The topic of manipulation and broken trust is brutally hard to face. What dynamics in your life (in your own story or someone close to you) surfaced while you worked through today's reading?
2. Look up the following passages and pray them over yourself or your loved one. Pick one or two verses to write out and post where you can see it on a regular basis this week, so you can continue to speak truth and life into that situation. Also note the verse you pick below.
 - a. Psalm 43:1-5
 - b. Isaiah 41:8-14
 - c. Romans 12:17-21

If you need further help processing through the dynamics that have been brought up today, our Spiritual Restorations Team (SRT) is ready to step into conversations with you. Contact our Spiritual Restorations pastor, Lindsey Burton at Lindsey@impact.church. Or scan the QR code to complete an intake form to meet with an SRT member. Tomorrow we will discuss more ways to find help and healing.



The Shadow King - **Week 8**

Friday, November 21st - Family Conflict and Wounds: Jonathan Coming to Terms

Read 1 Samuel 20:35-42

Things take a sharp turn in the story today. Jonathan's eyes were finally opened. The scales fell off, and he saw his dad for who he truly was. This was the final straw. There was no unseeing and no unknowing. No going back and no more excuses. It hit Jonathan like a ton of bricks. And he grieved, deeply.

Grief is brutal. Often, we think of grief only in terms of losing a loved one to death, when in fact, grief washes over us due to loss of many kinds. In today's reading, Jonathan experienced the loss of his dad, not in physical death, but the death of the man Jonathan thought his father was. Grief. Immense and heavy grief. Jonathan progressed through the stages of grief in quick succession. There are five widely accepted stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

1. **Denial:** Jonathan stood up for his dad and refused to believe he could be so awful
2. **Bargaining:** Jonathan argued with Saul and tried to convince him to be reasonable
3. **Anger:** Jonathan burned with anger at Saul's behavior during the feast
4. **Depression:** Jonathan mourned and fasted, weeping over the reality of Saul's intentions
5. **Acceptance:** Jonathan accepted that his father truly was ill-intentioned. He moved forward with allegiance and commitment to David, and not the current king.

These stages don't happen in a particular order and a person can go back and forth between the different stages during the grieving process. Grief can be intense and overwhelming, long and drawn out, and it generally ebbs and flows during the healing process. But, *each* stage is indeed a *necessary* part of healing. We see this in Jonathan. All of these steps were necessary for him to break the cycle of abuse and manipulation. He had finally come to terms with who his dad was. He accepted the truth about Saul and fully committed his allegiance to David. In David, there was health: consistency, love, and integrity. The exact opposite of King Saul.

That kind of "heart" work is hard work. It was hard for Jonathan, and it's hard for us too. It is also very much worth the time and effort it requires. There is life and hope on the other side of grief and dysfunctional relationships. Some relationships can find reconciliation, change, growth, and healing. Others cannot. And while it can be incredibly difficult to know when a relationship is beyond repair, we don't have to make those decisions alone. God designed us to be in community, to have the support, encouragement, and accountability from the other people doing life alongside us.

1. When have you experienced grief? Are you in a season of grief right now? Reflect on the various stages of grief- which have been the most difficult or prevalent for you?

2. Is there a relationship in your life right now that needs work? Not every hard relationship is toxic or abusive, but it may still very well need significant attention to get healthy. Who can help you process through some of the dynamics of this relationship in a productive way?
3. Addressing unhealthy aspects of a relationship is uncomfortable. We often do anything we can to avoid conflict. But handling these things the right way is important. **Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-13.** What good came from Paul addressing the issues at hand with the church in Corinth?
4. **Read Psalm 68:4-10.** As you think about the areas of your life (or the life of a close loved one) that are negatively impacted by toxic or abusive dynamics, how does this passage bring you comfort?
5. Close in prayer today by reflecting on **Psalm 126.**

This topic is heavy. Breaking free from toxicity and abuse, then allowing the stages of grief to unfold, requires ongoing commitment and effort. We want to come along side you in this journey of healing. You don't have to do it alone. You aren't meant to do it alone. However, you have to be the one to take the first step in committing to doing the hard work. Perhaps joining one of Impact's healing groups is exactly what God has in store for you (or your loved one) in the upcoming season.

Grief Share: Support after the death of a loved one

Divorce Care: Support during or after separation or divorce

Grace Groups: Support in mental health challenges (anxiety, fear, depression, and more)

Pain to Purpose: Discovering how God brings purpose from struggle, hurt, loss, and trauma

Life Groups: Community, accountability, encouragement, and friendship in your faith journey

Spiritual Restorations Team: (see contact information at the conclusion of yesterday's reading)

Follow this QR code to find sign ups for the groups listed above. Or contact our life group director, Kate Throop at katet@impact.church



The Shadow King - **Week 9**

Monday, November 24th - Lies & Deception

Are you the same person under stress as you are under pleasant circumstances? I don't mean emotionally, but in terms of your character. Do you operate with the same values whether you are stressed and afraid or calm and relaxed? How we respond under pressure matters a great deal.

The company I work for uses an assessment survey to understand how employees think both under normal circumstances and under stress. My results show I score very high on analytical and systematic thinking, and very low on interpersonal and imaginative thinking, normally. What's interesting is that under stress, I think even *more* systematically and even *less* interpersonally. In both circumstances, my motive is the same- I want my team to deliver an excellent product- even if my approach isn't always the most personable. This is different than when our stressful circumstances drive us to choose between compromising our values or upholding them, as when we have the choice of telling the truth or a lie. Our split decisions under pressure often reveal our true posture toward God and His plans.

1. Are people more likely to say you are a person of your word, or that they can't trust what you say?
2. What kind of situation tempts you the most to hide, stretch, or skew the truth? Is it when your personal pride or acceptance is on the line, when someone you love is in trouble, when you are afraid, or something else?

Any of these situations can lead us to present skewed realities, deceptions, or outright lies. For some of us, lying feels more natural than telling the truth, while for others, it brings shame and embarrassment. At this point in David's story, he is desperate and on the run with King Saul's men actively hunting him. Stretched thin and afraid, he enters the town of Nob without consulting the Lord.

Read 1 Samuel 21:1-9

The Lie

David tells the priest that he is on a top-secret mission for King Saul. The truth? He is running from Saul. He lies about his men meeting him at a certain place, even though he is alone. He then collects the consecrated bread and a weapon.

The Motive

David is on a mission of self-preservation. He is afraid and does not trust God to provide for his basic needs. Rather than tell the priest his true situation, he chooses to deceive him.

The Consequence

David got what he needed from the priest and went on his way. In the following passage, David stops in the town of Gath and pretends to be insane before escaping to a cave. What is going on here? Is Scripture condoning David's lying?? At first glance, it seems like there were no immediate negative repercussions.

Read 1 Samuel 22:6-23

3. Who betrayed David, and how did he know what happened? Who paid the ultimate price of David's lie?

There is always a consequence for sin. It may come immediately or later. It may impact you directly, or it may affect others. Even our small acts of deception have consequences that often ripple far beyond our immediate intention or understanding. The truth is, we are all like David. In our moments of stress and panic, we are tempted to manipulate circumstances to serve our own safety and comfort. We justify our lies, telling ourselves they are harmless or necessary.

The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy.

-Proverbs 12:22

4. What might David's truthful statement to the priest in chapter 21 have sounded like? Would it have changed the outcome?

Perhaps if David had told the truth, the priest would still have given him the bread and sword, and the exchange might have been passed off as an act of mercy for someone in need. Instead, the lies that Doeg the Edomite overheard were used to position the exchange as a deception against Saul, leading to the massacre of the priests.

God is clear on His stance on lying; He takes it very seriously. But God also demonstrated His mercy in this passage. It was unlawful for David to eat the consecrated bread, yet the priest gave him the sustenance he needed. Later, in Matthew 12, before healing a man on the Sabbath, Jesus referenced this story among examples where mercy superseded the law. Additionally, David leaving with Goliath's sword was a reminder of God's past provision for him in battle.

God shows mercy and uses imperfect people to accomplish His plans. Still, He desires that we be people of integrity, whose words are as trustworthy in moments of crisis as they are in times of peace. He wants us to lean on His strength and provision, trusting that He will provide for our needs even when the path of truth seems more dangerous.

5. As we close, confess to the Lord an area of your life where you are struggling to be truthful or authentic. Ask for His wisdom in how to navigate this situation.

The Shadow King - **Week 9**

Wednesday, November 26th - Cover Up

The Slippery Slope of Lying

David's lie to Ahimelek the priest in Nob was not his first, nor was it his last. His pattern of small lies in 1 Samuel escalated into the elaborate cover-up of his adultery with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11-12, a deception that involved the murder of her husband, Uriah. Even though David repented and the Lord forgave him, he still had to endure the painful consequence of his son's death. This illustrates a sobering truth: small lies can become big lies if we don't remain rightly oriented toward the Lord. David knows he is the anointed heir to the throne, yet he still resorts to lying to protect himself. But not only does he lie, the people who love him lie for him as well.

Lying for Those You Love

Last week, we saw Saul's anger at the dinner table in 1 Samuel 20. Did you notice that David set up Jonathan to lie for him, even telling him exactly what to say? David used the trust of their covenant friendship to convince Jonathan to do as he asked.

Read 1 Samuel 20:4-8

1. Have you ever told a lie not for your own benefit, but to protect someone you love?

A parent lies to protect their child, a friend lies to shield another from harm, a spouse lies to spare their partner from a difficult truth. In these moments, our heart is motivated by love, but our actions involve deception. Jonathan's lie was not about saving himself; it was about saving his friend. David and Jonathan had a covenant, a sacred promise to one another. Consider the conflict Jonathan faced. He was caught between his loyalty to his friend, David, and his loyalty to his father. To honor both was impossible.

2. How is Jonathan's lie to his father different from David's lie to Ahimelek the priest? Do you believe the motive makes a difference?

Consider even before this event, when Michal, David's wife, stages a cover-up to protect David from Saul's men. In 1 Samuel 19:11-14, Michal lets David escape through a window and then puts a household idol in the bed, pretending it's David. When the assassins come, she lies about his whereabouts. Michal lies to protect a life. Jonathan and Michal are both caught between loyalty to Saul, their father and king, and loyalty to David.

3. Who receives your deepest loyalty in difficult situations? Is it someone you love, someone you are related to, or God?

Scripture is often *descriptive*, telling what happened, not always *prescriptive*, telling us what to do. How do we know the difference? Let's compare different lies recorded in Scripture and see if different motives lead to different outcomes. Remember, God has always worked with imperfect people, but His desire is for Truth.

Read the following passages and answer questions A, B, and C about each.

A: What was the lie? | B: What was the motive? | C: What was the outcome?

Genesis 12:10-20 [Abraham]

A.

B.

C.

Genesis 37:19-36 [Joseph's Brothers]

A.

B.

C.

Exodus 1:15-20 [Hebrew Midwives]

A.

B.

C.

Joshua 2:2-14 [Rahab]

A.

B.

C.

The Shadow King - **Week 9**

Friday, November 28th - Jesus Models Truth

Jesus Sets the Standard

David's lie to Ahimelek the priest, like Abraham's deception in Genesis 12, was an act of self-preservation born of fear. In some instances, like with Rahab the prostitute and the Hebrew midwives, Scripture seems to praise those who, in great faith, act to be honorable even when the stakes are huge. In our study, we've seen how fear, loyalty, and the need for self-preservation can lead even a righteous person to deception. We have to wonder: is there ever a way to navigate a broken, sinful world without compromising our integrity? Is it possible to speak the truth in all circumstances?

We find the answer in the life of Jesus. While others faced the difficult choice between lying and preserving a life, Jesus' life was the embodiment of truth, a living testament to a way of being that is wholly aligned with God's will.

Read John 18:1-14

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus demonstrates His integrity and loyalty both to His identity and to His friends. In the face of betrayal and the risk of arrest, Jesus stood up and protected His disciples.

1. Our stakes are not generally this high, but still, what do you see in Jesus' words and actions that you can apply to your circumstances?

Read John 18:33-37

In this passage, Jesus stands before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, and is questioned about His identity as a king. The stakes are immense: His life is on the line. Yet, Jesus does not deceive, manipulate, or hide. He doesn't offer a "white lie" to escape the cross. Instead, He speaks with clarity and integrity, declaring that His kingdom is not of this world. He even tells Pilate that he was born "to testify to the truth."

Pilate's cynical response, "What is truth?" is a question that echoes through the ages. He is speaking from a worldly perspective, where truth is a subjective, fleeting concept often bent by power and politics. But Jesus had already answered that question for His disciples in John 14:6: "I am the way and the truth and the life." He is not just a person who speaks the truth; He is the very source and definition of truth itself.

2. How does Jesus' response to Pilate compare to David's response to Ahimelek the priest in 1 Samuel 21? What are the main differences?

3. Think about a time when you were afraid of the consequences of telling the truth. How might Jesus's example encourage you in such a situation in the future?

Fearing Man vs. Fearing God

Return to David's situation. After he fled with his consecrated bread and Goliath's sword, feigned insanity to escape those who recognized him in Goliath's old town, and fled to a cave, he wrote Psalm 34. As you read it, consider his circumstances - his fear and deceit - and where he turned in the midst of it all.

Read Psalm 34

Even in his moment of fear-driven deception, David's heart turned back to God in praise and gratitude. He recounted his desperate state and God's deliverance:

I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.

—Psalm 34:4

This psalm, written right after David's failures, reveals a man who, despite his human weakness, still knew where to turn for true deliverance. David's experience reminds us that our lies and deceptions, born from the fear of man, will always fall short. True peace and deliverance only come from seeking and trusting God—a truth Jesus embodied perfectly.

If you have fallen into your own pattern of lies and deceit, or are even facing the temptation of it, turn to the words in Psalm 34 and ask for the Lord's provision and guidance in seeking truth.

4. Select a verse from Psalm 34 that stands out to you and write it below.

5. Write out a prayer to God, telling Him what this verse means to you, and asking Him to help you apply or believe what it says. Or, praise and thank Him for the words in this verse.

Thank you, Jesus, for willingly facing death to set us free from the bondage of sin and deception. You told us the truth would set us free (John 8:31-31), and we believe you. For you took the consequences of our lies, so that we could be made right with God and live in freedom.

The Shadow King - **Week 10**

Monday, December 1st – A Messy Life

You're on the run. The only sounds are your pounding footsteps and the ragged rhythm of your breath. The ground is uneven; you stumble, sharp rocks slicing your ankles. You arrive at a desolate place — a shadowed, damp refuge.

The cave of Adullam.

Not long ago, you were someone—doing good, moving forward, on your way to a grand life. Look at you now.

As you step inside the cave, darkness swallows you. It cuts off your connection to the outside world. There's nothing left to do but collapse, place your head on a cold stone, and listen to the slow, steady dripping of water beside you.

Drip. Drip. Drip. A narrow escape from death.

Drip. Drip. Drip. You will never see your wife again.

Drip. Drip. Drip. Your best friend and your spiritual guide are both gone.

Drip. Drip. Drip. Your career has been stripped away.

Drip. Drip. Drip. Moments ago, you feigned insanity and, with it, lost your dignity.

Everything earthly has been stripped from David, except for his life. This, without question, is the lowest point he's ever known. What David doesn't realize yet is that his journey mirrors the forging of a sword. He's in the first stage—the shaping of the blade—where the metal is thrust into fire, then hammered again and again. His life is being heated, beaten, and molded. Not broken, just refined. Curious about how he responded to his refining? Read the song he composed during his time of cave dwelling.

Read Psalm 142

1. What stands out to you about David's heart for God in this passage?

2. In what ways does David's response to suffering differ from your natural response—and which part is hardest for you to adopt?

Scholars believe David was “on the run” for several years and lived in the cave of Adullam for many months. Despite his unwavering focus on God, this was a long, drawn-out season. At this stage, David is in the second phase of “life forging”—the quenching and tempering process. This phase is often slow, monotonous, and tedious. A sword that cools too quickly becomes brittle and weak, but when cooled slowly, the blade is resolute. So too, David's strength will be forged in the quiet and in the waiting.

If you find yourself in a similar rock-bottom place, where change feels nonexistent or exceptionally slow, consider David's example—cry out to God, and be still. This difficult season may very well be part of God's refining work, producing perseverance and preparing you for what's ahead. In David, the cave wasn't his end; it was preparation for the throne. And in your story, and mine, there is hope woven through the waiting—if we keep our eyes fixed on Him.

Read James 1:2-4

3. Do you feel God stripping things away in order to reshape your life? What are you holding onto instead of Him?

4. As you reflect on your past, what has God taken away, and what new growth resulted from those losses?

Read 1 Samuel 22:1-2

"David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him."

David arrived at the cave in deep distress—but he didn't stay that way. He cried out to God, humbled himself, and kept his eyes fixed on the One who hadn't abandoned him. And then, something unexpected happened: God began to send people his way.

Now pause and picture this. You're at your lowest point: physically, emotionally, spiritually. Then, out of nowhere, your estranged family shows up... followed by hundreds of other distressed, desperate people. It's hard to imagine David standing on a rock, giving an inspiring TED talk about how life had knocked him down and what bold dreams he still had for the future. But David faced a choice—open up and be vulnerable, or send this ragtag group of misfits away.

Let's be honest—we usually try to *hide* our mess, not *lead* from it. We want others to think we've got it all together. But here's the truth: people don't connect with perfection—they connect with authenticity. Looking back, I can see that some of my darkest seasons gave birth to my deepest friendships. A traumatic experience unlocked a passion for a group of people I had once overlooked. Have you considered that your "cave" moments might become someone else's map out of darkness? *God wastes nothing*. Even your pain can become a platform for healing and hope. If you find yourself in a cave right now, don't isolate yourself. Look around you. Others may be gathering. This could be the place where growth begins.

5. How might God use your past and present "cave" experiences to shape the lives of others? Consider sharing that experience with your group this week.

The Shadow King - **Week 10**

Wednesday, December 3rd – Messy Discipleship

Messy. Dysfunctional. Complicated.

These aren't the words anyone hopes to use when describing discipleship. But they are the words that best capture the kind of discipleship my family has found ourselves in. For ten years, a neighbor boy has wandered through the dense tree line that separates our two properties—first in soggy diapers, now in worn clothes and unkempt hair— and made his way to our front door. Neglect is complicated and extremely hard to watch unfold. Over time, we have observed neighbor after neighbor cut him off for reasons that were, in many ways, understandable. Long-term neglect can give rise to difficult behaviors- lying, stealing, lack of boundaries, and anger. The day he took a metal gardening hoe and pierced the liner of our above-ground pool, watching the water drain out, was the day I, too, wanted to throw in the towel.

Boundaries have been set—and broken. Authorities involved. New rules drawn in the sand. Retaliation from parents. More boundaries. Cameras installed. So many difficult conversations. Ten long years of messy, dysfunctional, complicated discipleship. But God has continued to nudge our hearts, and allow him to remain in our lives.

Read Acts 16:16-34

Did you notice the recurring theme of “unexpected” throughout this passage? Sometimes discipleship looks like that—what we “expect” or have planned for our day, turns into something unexpected. People we didn't seek out, and perhaps wouldn't have chosen, suddenly find their way into our lives.

1. Who's been showing up in your life lately that you didn't expect – and might not have chosen?

Read 1 Samuel 22:1-2

This holds true for David's story. I doubt he “expected” God to bring him such a struggling group of people. We need to remember that these weren't 400 guys showing up with notebooks in hand after signing up for a men's Sunday morning Bible Study. No—these were *the distressed, the in debt, and the discontented*. This was messy. Complicated. The fallout of failed leadership across the land. All the while, David certainly hadn't earned a PhD in “How To Be A Great Leader” and had virtually no resources at hand. And somehow...this group became one of the most loyal, courageous bands of men throughout scripture- individuals referred to as “*The Mighty Men of Valor*”.

2. What fears or insecurities are keeping you from stepping into someone's life with the love of Christ?

God planted the seed, and David was obedient in watering it. Let's take a closer look at some of the character traits David displayed—qualities that we can strive to incorporate into our own discipleship journey.

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. - 1 Samuel 17:45

David was bold in his faith and declared it for all to see.

3. Name a time that you were bold in your faith.

David made room for others to grow. He didn't require proof of past church membership or spiritual maturity. The cave transformed from a dark place with disoriented people to a stronghold filled with empowered people.

4. *Does your home invite people to "come as they are"? Do you welcome people with messy stories, or only those who seem to have it all together?*

David placed his confidence in God's power rather than his own. This trust is evident in the fact that he did not turn the men away when they came to him. Had David believed he alone was responsible for saving or leading them with his own strength, the group's dynamic and mission would likely have failed. After all, individually discipling and mentoring each of the 400 men on his own would have been an impossible task. *He became their leader, and God worked out the rest.*

In the times I've felt frustrated with my own discipleship journey, it's usually for one of two reasons. First, I don't always want to interrupt my day with anything "unplanned." When I'm not careful, my schedule can get so packed that I leave very little room for anything unexpected that God might bring my way. Second, I tend to rely on my own abilities instead of God's. I carry the full weight of discipleship as if it's all up to me—from start to finish. I begin looking too far ahead and find myself overwhelmed, rather than trusting that God will guide, equip, and work through both me and the person I'm walking alongside.

But David's story reminds us that it doesn't begin with a detailed plan—it begins with a simple, powerful "Yes, God." We don't need to know how it will all turn out. We aren't required to swoop in and "save" the person. We just need to take that first step of obedience and let God do the rest.

5. Are you intentionally making space in your week to invest in others, or just hoping discipleship fits in somewhere? Name a few simple steps you could take to support God's calling on your discipleship journey.

The Shadow King - **Week 10**

Friday, December 5th – Jesus in the Mess

We sat in the front row, tissues in hand, still stunned by the loss of one of our favorite people on earth. There was no fanfare—no crowds lining up to pay respects, no towering piles of flowers. Just a few voices sharing the story of a life that mattered—deeply and profoundly. One man spoke about how Uncle John would drive his old van across town every Friday for years, picking up himself and six other boys—each from a troubled home, each with an absent or neglectful father. Now those boys have grown into fathers themselves, and their children are blessed by one man’s simple “Yes” to God’s call for Friday fun nights. As Charles Swindoll once wrote, “Never underestimate the power of one totally dedicated life.”

The Core of Discipleship

Read 1 Samuel 24:1-7

David began as just one man, living a simple life as a shepherd. His obedience to God set him apart, and through faithfulness and perseverance, he gathered a following and rose to become a great leader. Now, let’s turn to the greatest teacher of all time—Jesus—and explore another powerful example of discipleship found in the New Testament.

Read Matthew 14:13-21

(v.13) - Jesus had just received news of the death of His dear cousin, John the Baptist. Scripture tells us He withdrew to a solitary place— clearly grieving and deeply affected.

1. Are we waiting for perfect conditions before stepping into what God has already called us to do? What might obedience look like right now, even if everything isn’t in place?

(v.14) - Jesus sees the crowds and is moved with compassion. He doesn't turn away—He draws near. Discipleship isn’t about waiting for people to first “get it all together”— it’s about meeting them where they are and walking with them toward healing and purpose.

2. How does our compassion (or lack of it) reflect our understanding of grace?

(v.15) - After a long day, the disciples come to Jesus with a plan to send the people away. It makes sense — they’re tired, the people are hungry, and the day is nearly over. It’s a practical, well-meaning solution...except it isn’t God’s solution.

3. Can you think of a time when you had a well-meaning plan, but it didn't align with God's plan? What did that experience teach you about trusting His guidance over your own ideas?

(v.16) - Jesus didn't turn people away because they were messy—He welcomed them. He didn't send them away because their brokenness was out in the open for everyone to see.

4. When we see a need, is our first instinct to send it away – or to ask Jesus how He might want us to step in?

(v.17) - How often do we let the word "only" limit us? "I only have a small apartment— I couldn't possibly host a life group." or "I only have a low-level job— how could I be a leader?" or "I'm only 19 with no real experience— how could I make a difference?" But God doesn't call us based on what we lack. He invites us to use the resources He's already given us.

5. What "only" do you need to give to God and trust Him to multiply?

(v.18-20) - Jesus gave the food to the disciples, and *they* gave it to the people. Then the disciples gathered the leftovers. Jesus could have made food appear instantly in front of everyone or told them all to clean up after themselves, but instead, He involved His disciples in every step. As disciples ourselves, we are part of the process—not just spectators. We need practice, patience, and active participation. When discipling others, teaching and including them is key. Giving money or resources is good, but real spiritual growth happens when we roll up our sleeves and serve.

6. Do you get your hands dirty serving God's work, or do you prefer to watch others do the manual labor?

7. Do you teach those you disciple that we're not just observers, but active servants in God's mission? If not, what changes could you make to teach and model this?

The Shadow King - **Week 11**

Monday, December 8th - An Exploration of Nabal

Read 1 Samuel 25:1-38

Nabal was a rich Calebite, described as harsh and surly. In the cultural customs of the day, landowners would host lavish parties during events like a sheep shearing in honor of their neighbors or for those who had protected their family and land. They would shower these esteemed people, such as David and his men who had guarded their loved ones and their property, with elaborate gifts of food and drink. Giving these presents was seen as just and rightful compensation in return for their protection. Many of these customs continue today.

In verse 10, Nabal says, “Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse?” He downplays and dismisses the immense importance of the protection David had provided. Nabal simultaneously displays his own prejudices by referring to David in the same manner as King Saul.

In arrogance and foolishness, Nabal allowed his own prideful presumptions to guide his decisions, ultimately costing him his life as a result. Nabal displayed presumptuous disdain toward David, which directly affected how David and his men were received. Nabal’s arrogance was evident even in the tone of his response to David’s men, and it was further seen when he continued forth with celebrating to the point of drunkenness, seemingly without concern for the consequences.

When I read Nabal’s reaction in this account, I wonder what he had previously heard about David? I wonder if Nabal had great loyalty to King Saul and his nation? I wonder if he felt David himself was a threat to the blessed life he was living under Saul’s reign? I wonder if the foolishness came from fear of what David could do to dismantle the nation that held Nabal’s allegiance? Maybe it wasn’t politics that drove him at all. Perhaps the wealthy, well-established Nabal looked at David as too young to deserve his respect. Some scholars believe David was between 24 and 28 at the time of this story. I wonder if Nabal treated David so disrespectfully because he made assumptions about his age?

The truth is, we don’t know what Nabal was thinking in this interaction. What we do know is his foolishness and the dire results that came of it. We know there was a dangerous lack of self-control and cultural awareness underlying Nabal’s assumptions, pride, and allegiances. And if we are honest, we also realize we experience our own versions of dangerously subtle pride and judgment. Of the three leading players in this accounting (Nabal, David, and Abigail), Nabal is the one we wish to identify with the *least*. As much as we want to read this story and associate ourselves with the actions of David or Abigail, we must explore our hearts and minds and consider how we actually might relate to Nabal. There is much to be learned from Nabal to prevent those predilections from taking root and causing disastrous results in our lives and in the lives of those around us. The first step is to *recognize it within* ourselves.

1. How have your own actions, driven by unchecked emotions or assumptions, had a detrimental or draining effect on your life?

2. Have you been drawn into the political waters of our time and found yourself drowning in the pressures of anger, fear, or the unknown?
3. When have you treated someone younger (or older) than you differently because of their age? What did you learn during this experience?
4. Take some time now to come before the Lord in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal your dangerous assumptions, prideful thoughts, and/or unhealthy allegiances. List the things the Lord brings to your mind.

Share at least one of these with a trusted person in your life. Accountability is vital! To bring these into the light, we must say them out loud. After we do that, we can develop a plan of action to combat them in the future.

5. In Nabal's situation, the power of generosity would have played a life-changing role. Had Nabal simply acted with a generous spirit, knowing full well that David and his men had been incredibly generous toward him, the results would have been vastly different.
6. **Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19** and list the ways you are rich in this world:

The Shadow King - **Week 11**

Wednesday, December 10th - Abigail's Confidence in the Lord Her Redeemer

Read 1 Samuel 25:14-35

Abigail is a girl after my own heart—a woman of faithful, just action. She saw the injustice done by her husband and immediately acted on behalf of her entire household. She knew the likely impact of Nabal's actions and that something needed to be done to protect the lives of everyone around her. In verse 8, it says she "lost no time." Abigail heard the accounting from the servant and immediately took action in pursuit of justice.

We should pause here and talk about "justice." This is a word tossed about frequently in our society and often used as a buzzword to get more likes and social media engagement. It is rarely used in a way that lines up with the true meaning of the word. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines justice as: "the maintenance or administration of what is just, impartial adjustment of conflicting claims, or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments." Abigail found herself facing an injustice that had to be righted before David doled out his own version of just punishment for Nabal's actions.

How often do we hear about—or even witness—a situation where we could make a direct impact, yet instead of acting, we stop to think, weigh, and consider... and never take action? There can be real consequences when we ignore the prompting of the Holy Spirit stirring our hearts toward action.

Sometimes we read stories like this and think, "Well, that doesn't happen in my life. I don't have a household of servants or fields of shepherds whose well-being depends on my choices." But, I want to challenge you not to fall into that trap. Let's bring it closer to home.

What everyday injustices do you see where you could make a difference? Think about the cashier at the grocery store who was demeaned by the customer ahead of you. In that moment—when the cashier needed it most—did you speak up? Could you say, "She's a person just like you and me; please don't speak to her as if she's beneath you"?

I believe that's exactly what Abigail would have done. And I'm certain it's what Jesus would have done too.

1. Take a moment in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to bring to mind an experience over the past few days in which you witnessed an injustice you could have influenced. Write in the space below what you did, or wished you had done, in the face of that situation.

The danger in acting without thought or foresight should not be overlooked here. The point of Abigail's role in this story is not to run headlong into every whim and thought you may have. Rather, it is to deepen your relationship with the Holy Spirit so you can discern His promptings and immediately take action. Abigail's prompt obedience displayed confidence in the Lord's love of justice. In her actions and how she addressed David, it's clear she knew the character of God. That knowledge gave her the confidence to take bold action in pursuit of something He loves—justice—trusting that He would guide and protect her steps. And indeed, He placed her directly in David's path.

Justice often requires bold actions well out of your comfort zone. I am certain Abigail was a ball of anxiety while she gathered the food and drink and rode out to meet David. Women of her time did not take action such as this. While there were exceptions, women were not heard or valued in this culture. They held a lesser position than men and rarely acted publicly. But Abigail moved forward with confidence, knowing the Lord was on her side.

When was the last time you moved forward in bold action knowing the Lord was on your side? Abigail had no guarantee that David wouldn't exact retribution on her and her servants the moment he saw her. She had no assurance that her actions would lead him to show mercy. But she knew she had a Mighty Redeemer who loves justice, and with that confidence, she moved forward boldly in its pursuit.

2. **Read Isaiah 41:10-14** and consider the following:
Are you willing to take bold action, stepping into a situation that could appear to the world as failure—simply because you know the Holy Spirit is leading you there? If not, what is holding you back?

3. Prayerfully consider specific actions you can take to remember the encouragement of Isaiah 41, and write them below. Don't underestimate the power of making a plan to grow closer to the Lord—this deepened relationship will help you move quickly and confidently to pursue justice, trusting that He is guiding and protecting you.

4. Now take this encouragement and these actions and share them with your people. Take this first step forward toward a deeper relationship with the Lord and swifter actions for justice. List who you will share with below:

The Shadow King - **Week 11**

Friday, December 12th - David's Anger and Soft Heart

Read 1 Samuel 25:1-44 (Use a different translation today, this can be really insightful!)

One of my favorite things about David is how perfectly imperfect he is throughout his life. He has amazing highs in life and faith, but also some really rough lows. What we see of David in this chapter is a man following cultural customs who leans into vengeance rather than godliness. All the while, however, he maintains a heart soft enough to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit in Abigail's entreaties... and he relents. Praise God!

David enters this conflict after he's already been on the run from King Saul for quite some time. More often than not, he was living a life of violence. Because of this, and his position leading his own group of warriors, David's instinct was to turn to violence when he felt wronged. David's request for Nabal to share food and drink with his group of men was customary. Although his swift response of vengeance would not have been uncommon for a warrior in his position, it's important to remember that vengeance is not synonymous with justice. His vengeance included killing the innocent in Nabal's household. That is not justice, far from it. That is a warrior's unbridled anger at being slighted and disrespected.

David let his anger get the best of him, but unlike Nabal with his hard heart, David's heart retained a softness from his years of walking with the Lord. When David came upon Abigail and heard her plea, this softness of heart showed past the anger to the truth of the situation.

Have you found yourself in a situation like David, where you were wronged and then took action out of anger? Do you remember the Lord placing someone or something in your path, offering a chance for reflection, before you carried out those vengeful thoughts? Just as the Lord provides radiant light to help us grow out of our dark places, He also gives us opportunities—like He did for David—to pause and reflect on our emotional and mental state of being. We must intentionally cultivate a soft heart so these pauses can shape both our attitudes and our actions.

The truth David found over and over throughout his life was that the Lord's retribution was always better than any man's. This story with Nabal is no exception. David immediately recognized the blessing of Abigail's presence as an interruption, bringing him back to the ways of the Lord. As a result David witnessed justice served for Nabal's hard-heartedness and wrongdoing—from Nabal's death to David inheriting all of Nabal's wealth through his marriage to Abigail. While we may not be able to relate to this precise scenario, we can all relate to allowing our emotions to get the best of us in the heat of the moment. Do we have the softness of heart or the closeness with the Holy Spirit to be sensitive to the reminder He sends our way— that vengeance is His? How often do we fail to recognize the harmful emotions that fuel our actions? It was anger for David. For some of us, it may be jealousy or fear that has gotten the best of us, and these things continue to distract us away from the Truths we know about our Lord.

Read Psalm 37:7-13 (David wrote this in his old age. Consider the wisdom it represents as we learn from experiences just like this one recorded in 1 Samuel 25.)

In this Psalm, David displays a picture of how to handle our emotions— starting by being still before the Lord and waiting on Him. When we develop this skill and truly understand God’s character - as a God of justice, mercy, and redemption, we can confidently rest in the assurance that He is always watching over us.

Emotions are an indicator to examine, not a ruler to guide decisions. David learned this over and over throughout his life. He discovered that the remedy for allowing his emotions to rule his thoughts and actions was to be still before the Lord. The truth of the matter? You don’t just wake up one day and decide you are no longer going to allow emotions to rule your decisions— particularly in moments where you feel wronged, attacked, harmed, or in danger. You develop this skill of stillness and contemplation just as you would develop your physical muscles— with intentionality and practice over time.

1. Take time to reflect on the state of your “stillness muscles.” Where are you at in that journey?
 - a. What’s going well?
 - b. What are you still struggling with?
 - c. What can you do to build those muscles?
2. Ask the Lord to show you the emotion(s) that tend to run the show in your life. Write down any that come to mind. (This is a stillness practice in quieting your heart before the Lord and listening for His voice.)
3. After reflection, come back to your answers above and explore how the emotion(s) you struggle with can be combated with your ideas to build “stillness muscles.” Consider finding an accountability buddy. Just as having a workout partner can change your fitness journey, so can having a spiritual accountability partner. At Impact, we often talk about the importance of community– and for good reason. It is in community where we find the most growth, so find your buddy (and join a life group after the holidays!) and continue growing together today.

Self Inventory

Reread your self inventory from the beginning of this series, then reflect on these questions again.

1. How/where am I experiencing spiritual victory?
2. How/where am I currently challenged spiritually?
3. Where have I seen God working and moving in this season?
4. Where do I feel a lack of awareness of God's presence in this season?
5. What would I like to see change in my relationship with Jesus?

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