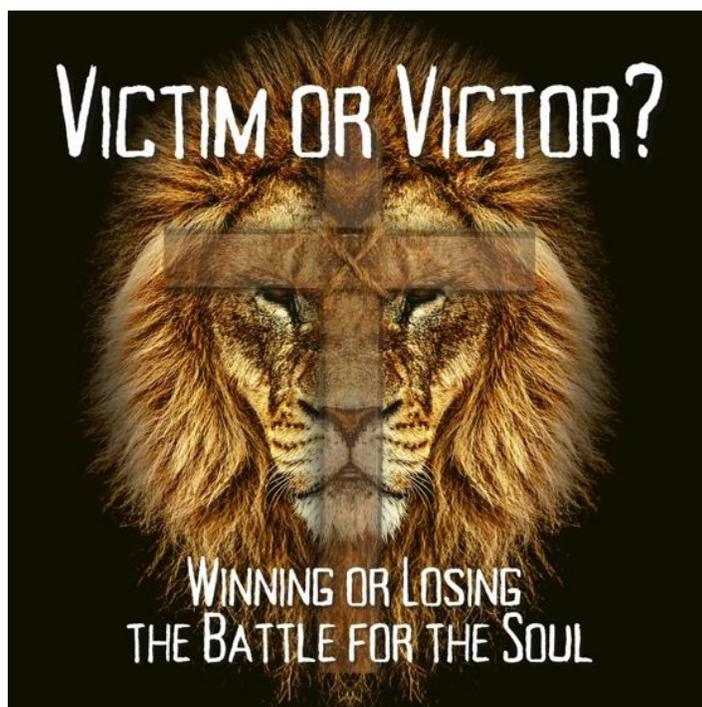


Basic Training Bible Ministries Presents



Character Studies from the Life of David By Gene Cunningham

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Victim or Victor? Character Studies from the Life of David

*“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors
through Him who loved us.” Romans 8:37*

“Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.” – Thomas Paine

“Do not act like a victim in a problem you created.” – Toby Mack (Christian singer)

The culture of victimhood has been systematically taught in this country for the last 40 to 50 years. There are many in this country in middle age who have never learned to take responsibility for their decisions and actions. They have been indoctrinated to believe that self-control and hard work are demeaning, that everyone should get a prize, that their weaknesses and shortcomings are the fault of their environment, their heritage, or other people, and that it is the job of government to see that they do not suffer any adverse effects from them. The rallying cry of this generation is “No one should reap what they sow.” – G.C.

Introduction: The Victory of Faith in Christ

The statement of Romans 8:37 is true of all who trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. They have, by faith, overcome Satan, sin, and death. Spiritually they are made alive, risen, and seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:4–7; Col.3:1–4). The Apostle John tells us that all who believe in Jesus Christ have overcome the world (1 John 5:4–5).

However, all these victories “in Christ” are positional in nature. They have to do with our union with Christ—not our character and conduct, which is the practical side of our faith. I hear pastors speak of “winner” and “loser” believers. I do not like to call any believer a loser, simply because of the truths stated above. However, what we are by our position in Christ ought to be increasingly reflected by our practice in daily life.

This is possible only by our continual growth in the knowledge of the Word of God, and the consistent application of that knowledge to our lives. Genuine spiritual growth consists both in spiritual knowledge and spiritual conduct. Just as the Spirit of God gives us illumination into the understanding of God’s Word (John 16:13–14), so He also empowers those who rely on Him to walk by His power in faith and obedience (Rom. 8:1–4; 2 Cor. 3:17–18; Gal. 5:16).

The following character studies are a challenge to us all to never give up the pursuit of being transformed into the likeness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They will also remind us that, no matter how long we have been a believer or how much we have grown, it is so easy in a moment of time to revert from being a victor, to becoming a victim.

Victors respond to God and His Word in simple faith and obedience. Victims react to circumstances and situations. The eyes of victors are ever on the Lord and His will. But victims are always looking for the approval of others, or for some form of personal gain.

It was A.W. Tozer who said (paraphrasing), “In every Christian heart there is a cross and a throne. Whichever we choose to take, our Lord will take the other.” This makes perfect sense of Jesus’ words, “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me*” (Luke 9:23).

The story of David, and the many lives associated with him, covers a great swath of Scriptures. We will not be able to go into all of them. It is hoped that serious and devoted students of God’s Word will take the time to go through these notes, and look up the references, and benefit from the many truths revealed therein.

STUDY ONE:

Samuel and His Sons (Selfless vs. Self-Serving)

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” (Rom. 12:1)

“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”
(2 Cor. 5:14–15)

Read: Psalm 15: Abiding in Christ demands obedience and service (John 15:4; 1 John 1:7).

Note: In the Psalms, we see how much the issue of spiritual character was on the mind of David.

Samuel: Profile of Selfless Service (1 Sam. 7:3–17; 12:1–5, 13–14, 19–25)

Samuel was the last of the judges (1 Sam. 7:6, 15–17) and the first of the prophets (1 Sam. 3:19–21; 9:9). Previously, the few, also called prophets, were known as “seers” (8:9).

1. **Samuel’s early life** (1 Sam. chapters 1–3).
Here, we see his birth in answer to the prayers of Hannah, and his dedication to the Lord from a young age. He served Eli in the tabernacle and was faithful from childhood.
2. **Samuel’s first prophecy, when he was a child (1 Sam. 3:11–18)**.
It is interesting that what happened to Eli, according to Samuel’s prophecy, was very similar to what would happen to Samuel’s own sons (see later profile). This prophecy is also interesting in that it parallels what happened to David’s sons as well.
3. **Samuel’s greatest contribution was his devoted prayer life** (1 Sam. 7:8–12; 12:19–25).
Samuel declared that failure on his part to pray for the children of Israel would be a sin against God (**1 Sam. 12:23**).
4. **Samuel’s entire life was one of humble, selfless service (Read: 1 Sam. 12:1–5)**.
a) Samuel anointed Saul, then David, as Israel’s first two kings (1 Sam. 16:1).

- b) His life from childhood was an open book of faithfulness and integrity (1 Sam. 12:2)
- c) His ministry, according to the witness of all Israel, was free of greed, bribes, or oppression of any kind (vv. 3–4).
- d) All this was testified before Saul, the newly anointed king, as an example and a warning of the kind of king he was to be (v. 5).

5. Samuel is one of the truly unique men of all Scripture.

Read 1 Samuel chapters 1–12 and you will see a servant of servants to the people of God (Adapted from Jeffrey Kraus):

- a) He was a miracle child, an answer to his mother’s prayer (chapter 1).
- b) His name, given by Hannah, means, “*Asked from the LORD*” (1:20, 27).
- c) He was of the tribe of Levi (1 Chron. 6:16–30).
- d) He was the last judge (1 Sam. 7:15) and the first prophet (3:20, after Moses).
- e) He anointed, at God’s command, the first two kings of Israel (10:1; 16:13).
- f) He was a Nazarite for life (1:11, 27–28; Num. 6:1–21); the only others being Samson and John the Baptizer.
- g) He held the last Passover till the time of Josiah (2 Chron. 35:18).
- h) He was a great prayer warrior (Psa. 99:6; Jer. 15:1) and in every way a hero of the faith (Heb. 11:32).

The Sons of Samuel: Profile in Self-Interest (1 Samuel 8:1–3)

Although Samuel’s sons, Joel and Abijah, were the opposite of their father, the son of Joel, named Heman, was appointed by David to lead the Levitical choir (1 Chron. 6:31–33). God’s grace is always available if we will only receive it.

“He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This is also vanity.” (Eccl. 5:10)

1. Like the sons of Eli (2:12–17; 27–30; 3:13), the sons of Samuel departed from his sterling example (8:1–9), which led to Israel’s disobedient request for a king. One great difference between the sons of Eli and those of Samuel, is that Eli had never rebuked or restrained his sons (3:13), while Samuel is not charged with any such indictment.
2. Though they did not sink to the level of Eli’s sons, they were corrupted by greed for gain and took bribes to pervert justice (8:2). This is one of the most common areas of corruption for those in positions of service to the people of God. Pastors who enrich themselves, at the expense of poor, faithful believers who give sacrificially, only to have their gifts enrich the pastor.
3. One of the primary requirements for those seeking positions of service in the Church is given in 1 Timothy 3:3, “*not covetous,*” and in Titus 1:7, “*not greedy for money.*”

Jesus’ Chief Lesson in the Upper Room (John 13)

“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Matt. 20:28)

In the Upper Room in **John 13:1–17**, the Lord Jesus gave one of His greatest examples and lessons on humble and sacrificial service. He took the place of the lowest slave, to wash the feet of His self-centered and self-promoting disciples. The following great truths set the standard for true service to God.

Summary: Selfless Service

1. Jesus did what He did, based on what He knew about Himself, His Father in Heaven, and the mission He had been given (John 13:1–4).
2. His cleansing of the disciples' feet was not only the task of the lowliest slave, but it was also intended to show that He is always ready to cleanse and purify our lives if we will let Him (vv. 5–7).
3. Our refusal to receive His cleansing is what breaks our fellowship with Him, and results in loss of power and effectiveness in our lives (v. 8).
4. This foot-washing incident was designed to teach the difference between our salvation cleansing (being wholly bathed) and the need for daily cleansing (foot washing) (v. 9–11). Our daily cleansing comes from confession of sin (1 John 1:9), and correction from His Word (Eph. 5:26).
5. His example that night should also teach us how we are to deal with one another in the family of God (vv. 12–16).
6. Jesus declares this single principle of sacrificial service to be the key to being blessed in the plan of God (v. 17)—not just knowing but doing!

Quotes

“God did not save you to be a sensation. He saves you to be a servant.” – John E. Hunter

“The best exercise for strengthening the heart is reaching down and lifting people up.”
– Horace Traubel

“Obedience to our Heavenly Father starts with our loving service to a needy brother.”
– William A. Ward

Better said: Obedience to our heavenly Father begins with the filling of the Spirit, the serious study of His Word, prayer, then service (spiritual priorities are important!).

“If you wish to be a leader you will be frustrated, for very few people wish to be led. If you aim to be a servant, you will never be frustrated.” – Frank F. Warren

STUDY TWO:

David and Saul (Humility vs. Arrogance)

In Saul and David, the first two kings of Israel, we see the great contrast between humility and arrogance, and the effects of these attitudes on their decisions and actions. It is most interesting

that Saul started out humble, and later became arrogant. In reality, the same thing happened to David. The difference is, he was corrected by his discipline, where Saul was not.

“Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble.” (Prov. 3:34)

*“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble ...
Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord,
And He will lift you up.”* (James 4:6, 10)

Read: Psalm 25:4–5, 8–10 God teaches and guides the humble.

Saul: His Great Beginning, and Sad Decline.

1. In his youth, Saul was both humble and faithful.
 - a) He was young, handsome, and strong but faithful (1 Sam. 9:1–10).
 - b) Saul’s humility was genuine and evident (**1 Sam. 9:21; 10:22–27; 15:17**).
2. Saul’s elevation to power came in three stages:
 - a) First, Samuel anointed him to be king (10:1).
 - b) Then He was then publicly proclaimed king to the people (10:17–27), at which time Samuel explained his duties (10:25). Note his humility in 10:22–23.
 - c) Finally, there was a great coronation (12:6–18).
3. Once elevated to office, however, Saul became willful and disobedient.
 - a) Samuel had originally warned the people that the king they desired would become demanding and tyrannical (8:10–19).
 - b) Saul’s first major act of disobedience was when he offered a sacrifice in Samuel’s place, in direct disobedience to Samuel’s command (**1 Sam. 13:8–15**). It was at this point Samuel told him:
 1. His kingdom, which could have been a permanent dynasty, would not last (13:13–14), and
 2. that God would seek *“a man after His own heart”* to be king (13:14).
 - c) He then began making foolish vows, which hindered his army (14:24) and which almost cost Jonathan his life.
 - d) The final failure that cost him the kingdom was his failure to kill King Agag and destroy all that belonged to him (**15:1–9**).
 - e) It was at this point that God rejected him, and Samuel declared that his disobedience was as grievous as the sin of witchcraft (15:17–23, 26–28).
 - f) After David was anointed by Samuel (16:1–13), the Spirit of God departed from Saul (16:14), and he became oppressed by an evil spirit.
 - g) His envy of David, as God continued to bless him, led him ever deeper into self-induced misery and madness (18:6–9, 17, 21, 25; 19:9–10), leading finally to the incident with the witch at Endor, and his death on Mt. Gilboa (28:3–19; chapter 31).
Note: That Saul was a believer is evident from the words of Samuel to him when he was called up from the dead (28:15–19). **This shows the depths to which even a believer can fall when in rebellion against God!**

David: The Man after God's Heart

We do not have time or space to cover the whole of David's amazing life. Let us be content to survey, specifically, his humility in contrast to the path taken by Saul.

1. David's humility, indicated by his occupation, is the lowest in Israel (1 Sam. 16:1–13). Shepherds were considered one of the lowliest occupations. They were trained from a young age, being given a lamb that they had to follow everywhere, and care for. The pure and simple faith of David as a youth is indicated by two things:
 - a) the commendation of him by the Lord (13:14), and
 - b) the purity of faith expressed in Psalm 23—the Shepherd Psalm. We do not know when this Psalm was written, but if in older age, it expressed how he thought as a shepherd boy.
2. The faithful conduct of David, as Saul's persecutions intensified, show not only his humility, but his devotion to God and His Word (18:7–8, 14–15, 28–30).
3. Further proof of both his faith and his humility, is how he spared Saul again and again, because he was the anointed of God (24:6; 26:9, 11).
4. Even in his great sin with Bathsheba, and in the murder of Uriah, David was confronted by the prophet Nathan and repented (2 Sam. 12:1–14).
5. It is worth also taking note of the fact that after the child of Bathsheba died, David devoted himself to comforting Bathsheba (2 Sam. 1 2:24–25).

The Humility of Jesus Displayed

*“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, **for I am gentle and lowly in heart**, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28–30)*

1. The humility of Jesus caused Him to step down into this world to die for sinners (Phil. 2:5–9).
2. Because He was humble before His heavenly Father, He was also humble in His dealings with men. There are no situation ethics in true humility!
3. Even in the face of the blasphemous malice and slander of the Pharisees, Jesus displayed genuine humility (John 5, 8, 10).
4. The nature of God compels Him to extend grace to the genuinely humble, but He resists the arrogant (James 4:6, 10; 1 Pet. 5:5; Prov. 3:34).
5. God is always at work in our lives to teach us humility (Deut. 8:2–3, 16).

6. An attitude of humility is essential to an effective prayer life (2 Chron. 7:14; Psa. 9:12; 10:12, 17; 1 Kings 21:29).

Summary: Humility is the path to blessing from God (Prov. 22:4; Isa. 57:15; Matt.18:4; James 4:6, 10). The only way up in the economy of God is down!

Quotes

“Humility is the ability to see ourselves as God describes us.” – Henry Jacobsen

“Life is a long lesson in humility.” – Sir J.M. Barrie

“He that is down need fear no fall. He that is low, no pride.” – John Bunyan

“Humility is to have a just idea of yourself.” – C.H. Spurgeon

*“Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble.
Do not be wise in your own opinion.”* – Paul, Romans 12:16

STUDY THREE:

David and Saul (Courage vs. Cowardice)

It is inevitable that humility tends to produce courage, while arrogance produces cowardice. Like Saul, the arrogant are boastful and domineering, which is an expression of their inner insecurity. The humble are brave, not because they are fearless, but because they value honor and stand for the truth.

“The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.”
(Prov. 28:1)

“I will not leave you nor forsake you ... Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”
(Josh. 1:5b, 9)

Read: Psalm 27:1–5 David learned to face many dangers through the courage of faith.

The Cowardice of King Saul (1 Samuel 17:1–11, 38–39)

Saul was a tall, stout, and handsome young man when he became King (1 Sam. 10:23–24). When he was humble, he had amazing victories on the battlefield. Then, his arrogance began eating away at what greatness he might have attained, leaving him an empty shell.

Question: Why did Saul display such cowardice when challenged by Goliath? **Read 1 Samuel 17:1–11.** As the acting king, it was Saul who should have answered the challenge of Goliath. If not himself, he ought to have selected a champion to fight.

Principle: Spirituality looks in faith to the invisible things of God (1 Sam. 16:7; 2 Cor. 4:18; Heb.11:27), but carnality sees only what is visible.

The Tragic Spiritual Decline of Saul

1. When he was anointed king by Samuel, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, just as he did later with David (1 Sam. 10:6–7, 9–11).
2. After his anointing, Saul won a great military victory over the Ammonites (1 Sam. 11).
3. However, his position and power began quickly to corrupt him, and he committed a series of disobedient acts against God:
 - a) He usurped the place of Samuel when he offered a sacrifice (13:6–14). By this act he insured the demise of his kingdom and his rule. Here Samuel first indicates God’s choosing of “*a man after His own heart*” (v. 14).
 - b) He imposed a foolish vow of abstinence from food on his fainting army (14:24), resulting in 1) endangering Jonathan, who ate some honeycomb (vv. 27–30), and 2) the hungry soldiers eating raw meat with blood (vv. 31–32).
 - c) His next failure was the outright disobedience in sparing Agag and the spoils of the Amalekites (15:1–16). This resulted in Samuel’s most severe rebuke (vv. 17–29), “*Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice ... for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft ... and idolatry*” (vv. 22–23).
 - d) The word “*witchcraft*” (above) refers to divination, the seeking of guidance from demons or other gods. This was the final act of rebellion by Saul, when he went to the witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28:6–19).
 - e) Saul had followed a downward path from being empowered by the Spirit of God, to witchcraft and seeking demonic aid. And he did all this as a believer, as is clear from Samuel’s final words to him (28:19).
 - f) This explains Saul’s cowardice when faced with Goliath (1 Sam. 17).

Doctrinal note: The downward path of spiritual decline for rebellious believers is documented by Paul in Galatians 5:1–7, Ephesians 4:17–19, and Hebrews 3:12–19.

The Courage of David (1 Samuel 17:12–37, 40–58)

Whereas Goliath terrified Saul in his carnality, David, being guided by the Spirit, saw the promise and power of God, not the size of the giant. Surrender to the Spirit of God was the secret of David’s great victories.

The Four Great Victories (Battles) of David

1. David’s three older brothers, who had witnessed his anointing as king, were in the army of Saul (17:12–13). They had disregarded him as God’s choice.
2. David comes in humble obedience to his father’s command (17:17–22). To become a good leader, one must first be a faithful follower!

3. The **first battle** David had to fight was within, when he was treated with scorn by his oldest brother Eliab (17:22–29). This was Satan’s attempt to get David to become subjective and defensive. David passed the test. Had he stepped from spirituality into carnality, he would have lost the power of the Spirit.
4. His **second battle** was against the dismissive attitude of Saul (17:31–33).
5. David responded to this slight by reviewing his experience in relying on the power of God (17:34–37). Note that he gives all credit to “*the living God.*”
6. The **third battle** David had to win was reliance on Saul’s armor (17:38–39). This was a slick attempt by Saul to be able to take credit for the victory.
6. By winning the first three spiritual battles, the **fourth and final battle** against Goliath was assured. David won the inner/spiritual victories before he could win the outer/physical battle (**17:40–51**)!

Principle: The inner battles of life are the most difficult. Win them and you win all.

There’s no defeat in life
 Save from within.
 Until you’re beaten there
 You’re bound to win!

Gethsemane: Jesus’ Courage in History’s Greatest Battle

In **Luke 22:39–46** we see how intense was the battle to keep Jesus from the cross. Here, Jesus displays the greatest act of courage in all human history.

1. Jesus had asked for the prayers of his disciples (Matt. 26:38), and warned them against temptation. As with every time Jesus asked something of men, He was denied their support.
2. His natural desire was to avoid the judgment of the cross (Matt. 26:42). He knew full well what was coming, yet in humility surrendered to the Father’s will (Phil. 2:8).
3. The fact that angels ministered strength to Him suggests that He was being assailed by demonic forces (compare Dan. 10:10–14, Matt. 26:53 and Col. 2:15 with a view to angelic involvement, both elect and fallen).
4. The physical phenomenon of sweating “*like great drops of blood*” is an outward evidence of the intensity of the inner conflict of His soul.
5. Jesus’ victory over the inner struggle, which no other human being can comprehend, is displayed when He rises with poise and peace to fight the battle of the cross.
 - a) He had won the battle of disappointment in His disciples’ indifference.
 - b) He had won the battle of self-will, the desire to avoid the cross.
 - c) He had won the tremendous assault of evil forces seeking to instill fear.

- d) He had won the battle of complete surrender—and so went to the cross for our so great salvation!

Quotes

“Blessed are the valiant that have lived in the Lord.” – Thomas Carlyle

“Courage is the mastery of fear, not the absence of fear.” – Mark Twain

“Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway.” – John Wayne

“Success is never final, and failure is never fatal; it’s courage that counts.” – Anonymous

“Courage is doing what you’re afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you’re scared.”
– Eddie Rickenbacker

“He who loses wealth loses much; he who loses a friend loses more; but he that loses his courage loses all.” – Cervantes

“It is better to live one day as a lion than a hundred years as a sheep.” – Italian Proverb

STUDY FOUR:

Jonathan and Michal (Loyalty vs. Duplicity)

Although they were brother and sister, Jonathan and Michal chose two different spiritual paths. Both observed Saul’s decline from a humble young king to a scheming and tormented old man. Jonathan learned from his father’s errors; Michal chose to follow in her father’s path.

“A double-minded man (is) unstable in all his ways.” (James 1:8)

“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity [single-minded devotion] that is in Christ.”
(2 Cor. 11:3)

Read: Psalm 133 Loyalty and faithfulness are honored by the Lord.

Jonathan’s Loyal Love for David (1 Samuel 18:1–4; 20:12–16, 20:31–34, 41–42)

1. Jonathan had already demonstrated his great courage and fighting ability by attacking the Philistine garrison, with only his armor bearer with him (1 Sam. 14:1–14).
2. No doubt when he saw David defeat Goliath (1 Sam. 17), he had both a warrior’s appreciation for the deed, as well as a sense of being in the presence of a superior.

3. In their initial covenant (**1 Sam. 18:1–4**), Jonathan, in essence, relinquished his right to the throne to David. It is entirely possible that most had heard of his anointing by Saul by this time. Jonathan gave David three significant gifts:
 - a) His robe and garments—these marked Jonathan as a member of the royal family.
 - b) His sword (with the girdle including a sheath)—one of only two in all Israel (13:22).
 - c) His bow, Jonathan’s chosen weapon (note point 6). David’s tribute to Jonathan was to compose “*the Song of the bow*,” a manual for training in its use (2 Sam. 1:18).
6. Jonathan remained loyal to David through all the persecutions of Saul (read 1 Sam. chapters 19–20).
7. Jonathan would have been present on the two occasions that David spared Saul in the wilderness (1 Sam. 24 and 26). How shamed he must have been over his father’s continual slide into demonic oppression.
8. Jonathan’s loyalty to David was fully reciprocated by David. After Jonathan’s death, David composed *the “Song of the Bow”* (2 Sam. 1:17–27), in honor of Jonathan’s favorite weapon (1 Sam. 18:4; 20:36–38). It is in this song that David says

“I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women.”
(2 Sam. 1:26)

Though this statement has been used in an attempt to excuse homosexual relations, nothing of the kind is meant. Just ask any warrior who has been through intense combat how they feel about their brothers in arms. You will quickly find there is nothing of perversion involved here.

9. In the end, Jonathan’s loyalty resulted in his death. While he should have left his father and followed David, his loyalty even to his deranged father could not be shaken, and so he died by his father on Mount Gilboa (1 Sam. 31).

Michal’s Fickle Love for David (1 Samuel 18:20–30; 19:12–17; 2 Samuel 3:13, 4:16–23)

1. In Michal, the daughter of Saul and sister of Jonathan, we have a great contrast to the loyalty of Jonathan.
2. Michal is said to have loved David (**1 Sam. 18:20**); this was after his victory over Goliath, and while the maidens were singing of David’s valor (**1 Sam. 18:7**). Her love proved to be little more than passing infatuation.
3. When David had to flee from Saul, she defamed him by saying he had threatened to kill her (**1 Sam. 19:17**), to cover up that she had helped him escape.

4. While David was fleeing from Saul in the wilderness, Saul gave her to be the wife of another man (1 Sam. 25:44). He later actions indicate that she was happy with this arrangement.
5. When David became king, he demanded that Michal be returned to him (2 Sam. 3:12–16). When she returned to David, the actions of Palti, her husband, indicate that they were very compatible.
6. We see her true fickleness and duplicity in **2 Samuel 6:15–23**. Here, she treats David with a scorn and contempt that would be unheard of in that day. We also see the judgment of God on her in v. 23.

Jesus' Loyal Love Shown to His Disciples (John 3:36–14:6)

In the lead-up to Peter's denial, the Lord Jesus clearly tells him of his coming duplicity and denial. But by reading on into chapter 14, we see that the loyal love of Jesus remains the same. By the way, it was not just Peter, but all the disciples who made this boast (Mark 14:27–31). In the Old Testament, we read of the lovingkindness of God. The word being translated is the Hebrew *chesed*, which speaks of the faithful and loyal love of God for His people, often simply translated "kindness" or "lovingkindness."

*"For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth ... For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I Hid My face from you for a moment; but with **everlasting kindness** I will have Mercy on you, says the Lord your Redeemer."* (Isa. 54:5, 7–8)

Summary: Loyalty is the Expression of a Single-Minded Heart

"A double-minded man [is] unstable in all his ways." (James 1:8)

Quotes

"Grant stood by me when I was crazy, and I stood by him when he was drunk, and now we stand by each other." – W.T. Sherman

"It is better to be faithful than to be famous." – Theodore Roosevelt

"We are all in the same boat in a stormy sea, and we owe each other a terrible loyalty."
– G.K. Chesterton

"Often loyalty consists of keeping your mouth shut." – Anonymous

STUDY FIVE:

Abigail and Nabal (The Wise vs. the Fool)

In the story of Nabal and Abigail, we see the contrast between the wise woman and the foolish man. The whole book of Proverbs is based on this contrast of the wise man and the fool. It should be the prayer and desire of every one of us to receive and to live by the wisdom of God, in a world of fools.

“Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matt. 7:24)

Read: Psalm 19:7–14 God blesses the hungry heart with wisdom.

Nabal: The Fool Personified (1 Samuel 25:1–13)

1. In vv. 2–3, we learn several important facts about this man Nabal:
 - a) He was a very rich man.
 - b) His name, “Nabal” means “fool.”
 - c) His wife, Abigail, is wise and beautiful.
 - d) Though he had a wonderful heritage, being in the line of Caleb, he was a harsh and evil man.
2. In vv. 4–13, David sought to take advantage of the custom at shearing time. Very much like the time of harvest (Ruth chapter 3), this was a time of feasting and celebration. Usually, the shepherds who had cared for the sheep could be given a bonus if they had cared well for the flock.
3. When David sent his men to receive gifts, after they had guarded both Nabal’s shepherds and sheep (vv. 7–9, 14–16), Nabal treated them with contempt (vv. 10–12).
4. David was outraged and prepared to kill Nabal and all of his sons (vv. 21–22). Here, David is reacting emotionally to the insult and is making subjective decisions. Had it not been for the wisdom of Abigail, he would have murdered innocent people.

Abigail: The Wise Woman (1 Samuel 25:14–44)

1. As soon as Abigail is informed of Nabal’s insult to David, she takes wise action (vv. 14–20).
2. It is worth noting here that she is acting contrary to Nabal’s will. The command to obey those in authority (Rom. 13:1–2), and for wives to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22–24), does not mean we have to participate in their evil, or stand by idle when evil is being done.
3. Though Abigail acts without Nabal’s permission, note that she takes full responsibility on herself (vv. 24–26, 28), though she acknowledges his evil nature.

4. Her wise counsel matches her deeds (vv. 29–31) and delivers David from great sin.
5. David recognizes her wisdom (vv. 32–35) and gratefully receives her gifts.
6. We can often read something of the mind of God in the outcomes of Bible stories (as with Michal, 2 Sam. 6:23). Here, we see the judgment of God fall on Nabal, and Abigail is honored to become David’s wife (vv. 36–44).
7. The mention of Ahinoam of Jezreel (v. 43) shows that there was method behind these marriages, as one was in the North, the other in the South, so David is consolidating power and support for his future kingdom. Whatever his motives were, the perfect plan of God remains:

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh ... Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Matt. 19:5–6).

Wisdom Personified in Jesus

In Proverbs 8:1–36, wisdom is personified as calling out to men to receive her instruction. Wisdom is also seen as sharing in the work of creation (vv. 22–31). This is the Old Testament equivalent of John 1:1–14, where Jesus is presented as the Word who creates and saves. In every story about Jesus, we see the wisdom of God working in the God-Man, who demonstrated in every thought, word, and deed, what wisdom is and how it acts, even in this fallen and sinful world.

Quotes

“Wise are they who have learned these truths: Trouble is temporary. Time is a tonic. Tribulation is a test tube.” – Anonymous

“Committing a great truth to memory is admirable; committing it to life is wisdom.”
– William A. Ward

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom.” – Proverbs 4:7

“For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her.” – Proverbs 8:11

“The words of the wise are like goads and the words of scholars are like well driven nails; given by one Shepherd.” – Ecclesiastes 12:11

STUDY SIX:

Uriah and David: (Faithful Love vs. Selfish Lust)

To study the life of David is always to see a man of great contrasts. He was at times the best of the best, and at others he was as bad as the worst. One thing, however, never changed—his heart was always seeking the way back into a right relationship with his LORD and Savior. In this story, we see David at his worst, and there are many lessons for us.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8)

Read: Psalm 105:17–22 God tests our faith and our faithfulness.

David: The Mighty King Who Became a Slave to Lust (2 Samuel 11:1–5)

Here, the story of David’s sin with Bathsheba is quickly told. Yet, how thankful we ought to be that God records this incident for our edification.

1. David is in the wrong place at the wrong time (v. 1). At a time when kings were to lead their armies into battle, David abdicates his duties to Joab, his nephew (1 Chron. 2:16).
2. David is sleeping through the day (v. 2), which indicates that he was slack in his discipline, and the duties of the palace.
3. That he saw Bathsheba bathing was not difficult to imagine, as in those times (as today in many parts of the world) people had walled in courtyards, where they would bathe. The question is, did David go up to the roof expecting to see her?
4. Once he saw her, all he had to do was turn away. Not only did he continue to “*behold*” how beautiful she was, but he also then “*inquired about the woman*” (v. 3).
5. When he found out she was the “*daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah*” (v. 3), he knew that both those men were with the army, and she was alone.
6. His final step in this downward spiral was to send for her. The phrase “*and took her*” could be construed as a royal demand, which Bathsheba could hardly avoid.
7. In the course of time, Bathsheba informs him she is pregnant, her husband is in the field, and David will soon be found out.

If we sow a thought, we reap an act
If we sow an act, we reap a habit
If we sow a habit, we reap character
If we sow a character, we reap destiny.

Uriah: Mighty Warrior and Loyal Friend (2 Samuel 11:6–17)

Uriah's Integrity (vv. 6–13)

David's whole purpose in calling for Uriah was to get him to go home and have relations with Bathsheba, so it would appear the child was his. God was not going to let David pull off this devious deception.

Uriah spent at least three or four days in Jerusalem (v. 9, 12–13), and in all that time he refused to go to his home, choosing instead to sleep in the barracks. Even when David got him drunk, he still maintained his integrity. As I heard one preacher say, at a church in Nairobi, Kenya, "Uriah was more honorable drunk than David was sober."

The Murder of Uriah (vv. 14–17)

Being one of David's mighty men (2 Sam. 23:39), Uriah would be expected to be placed in the most dangerous places in battle. However, to have the rest of the army retreat from him, made it certain he would be overwhelmed by the enemy.

It is especially disgusting to see David's hypocrisy (v. 25) when he is informed that Uriah is dead.

But we always reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7–8), and God always has the last word, "*But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord*" (v. 27). That, I think, is an understatement!

The Lovingkindness (*chesed*) of the Lord (2 Samuel 12:1–25)

Just a few highlights are worth pointing out here, for the purpose of our study:

1. God is faithful to confront us, and discipline us, for our sins (v.1–4; Heb.12:3–11).
2. In Matthew 12:37 Jesus said that we will be acquitted or condemned by our own words. As we judge, we will be judged (Mat.7:1–2).
3. David's response to the parable of Nathan is to proclaim his own judgment. He would indeed pay fourfold for the sin he committed.
 - a) First, the child with Bathsheba will die (v.v 15–20).
 - b) Second, his daughter Tamar would be raped by his son Amnon (chapter 13).
 - c) Then, Absalom will murder Amnon (13:23–29).
 - d) Finally, Absalom would revolt and be killed by Joab (18:9–15).
4. The only reason David did not die the sin unto death (1 John 5:16) is because when Nathan confronted him, he confessed his sin (12:13–14; 1 John 1:9), and wrote three Psalms recording his confession to God (Psalms 6; 32; 51).
5. David was forgiven by God and restored to fellowship and usefulness. However, the consequences of this sin followed him to the day of his death.

Summary: In this story, we see that even the most mature believer can fall to the greatest depths of sin. Our sin nature is not changed at the moment of salvation. Whenever we choose to live in the power of the sin nature, we are capable of great evil. How thankful David and Bathsheba must have been to know that God forgives and cleanses! And let us not forget, that it was Bathsheba who wrote Proverbs 31 about the virtuous woman (Prov. 31:1, "*Lemuel*" is believed to be a name or title applied to Solomon).

Quotes

"And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins."
– 1 Peter 4:8

"God loves each of us as if there were only one of us." – Augustine

"Love looks through a telescope, envy, through a microscope." – Josh Billings

"You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving." – Amy Carmichael

"God's love elevates us without inflating us and humbles us without degrading us."
– B.M. Nottage

STUDY SEVEN:

Mephibosheth and Ziba (Gratitude vs. Greed)

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful." (Col. 3:15)

Read: Psalm 100 Thankfulness is a form of worship to God.

Mephibosheth: The Cripple Whose Gratitude Made Him Great (2 Sam. 9, 16:1–4; 19:24–30)

1. Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, the grandson of Saul.
2. On the day that Saul and Jonathan died on Mt. Gilboa, the nurse of Mephibosheth was fleeing with him, fell and shattered his ankles (**2 Sam. 4:4**). As a result, he was crippled for life.
3. Because of the covenant David and Jonathan had made (1 Sam. 20:14–16), David sought out Mephibosheth to show him kindness for Jonathan's sake (2 Sam. 9:1–13). Take note of Mephibosheth's attitude to himself, his self-worth (**2 Sam. 9:8**).
4. By the kindness and example of David, Mephibosheth would become a victor, rather than a victim.

Ziba: The Schemer Who Would Never Have Enough

1. Ziba was a servant in the house of Saul. At Saul's death he had "appropriated" the inheritance of Mephibosheth (**2 Sam. 9:2–5**). Note that Mephibosheth is forced to live in the house of some benefactor (vv. 4–5).
2. David restores the inheritance of Mephibosheth, and makes Ziba and his sons his servants (2 Sam. 9:9–12).
3. When Absalom revolted, Ziba saw an opportunity to betray Mephibosheth, and ingratiate himself to David (**2 Sam. 16:1–4**). Here, we see even David slip into an attitude of subjectivity, by which he made a hasty and wrongful decision.
4. Upon his return to Jerusalem, after the victory over the forces of Absalom, David is made aware of Ziba's treachery (2 Sam. 19:24–30).
5. But all the while that David was in the wilderness, Mephibosheth was in the palace. Every day, he faced Absalom, not as a friend, but as a reminder of David's greatness. And in the end, though wounded as a small child, crippled for life, cheated out of his inheritance twice, Mephibosheth is now a spiritual warrior. Though his grandfather Saul stood head and shoulders above all the men of Israel (1 Sam. 9:2; 10:23), yet now Mephibosheth stood taller than anyone of the house of Saul—a true victor on the battlefield of life!

On this world's broad field of battle
In the dark bivouac of night
Be not dumb, driven cattle
Be a hero in the fight.
– Longfellow

How God Makes Trophies out of Broken Vessels

*“And Jesus went about all Galilee, **teaching** in their synagogues, **preaching** the gospel of the kingdom, and **healing** all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.” – Matthew 4:23–24*

*“Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, **teaching** in their synagogues, **preaching** the gospel of the kingdom, and **healing** every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was **moved with compassion** for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” – Matthew 9:35–36*

1. Just imagine what a life-long impact the ministry of Jesus had on so many.
2. Think of His encounter with the woman at the well (John 4), and what a lasting effect it must have had for her, and for all the people of her village.
3. Imagine the man who had laid by the pool of Bethesda for 38 years (John 5), who was healed by Jesus. What a ministry he might have had for the rest of his life!
4. How about the woman taken in the act of adultery (Joh.8) to whom He showed grace and forgiveness. What might the rest of her life have been like?
5. When the grace of God overwhelms our selfishness, our sin, and our sorrows, what can we do but live lives of gratitude and thanksgiving?

Summary: The power of gratitude to transform a life is immeasurable.

Quotes

“Gratitude to God makes even a temporal blessing a taste of heaven.” – William Romaine

“Thou who hast given so much to me, give one thing more—a grateful heart.” – George Herbert

“In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”
– 1 Thessalonians 4:18

“... Be filled with the Spirit ... giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” – Ephesians 5:16b, 20

STUDY EIGHT:

Ahithophel and Hushai (Objectivity vs. Subjectivity)

In turbulent and difficult times, it is imperative to try to stay objective. Objectivity looks at the facts from an impassive point of view. We fall into subjectivity when we allow our emotions to overwhelm our thinking. Objectivity is impersonal, while subjectivity is a personal reaction to what is happening.

Ahithophel and Hushai were two of David’s most trusted advisers. The greater of the two was Ahithophel, until he allowed his subjective reaction to David’s sin to make a fool of him. Then it was that Hushai became the greater of the two, because he remained objective through it all.

Definitions:

1. Objective—Uninfluenced by emotions or personal prejudice. Unbiased; based on facts.
2. Subjective—Sees reality through the lens of personal perspective and preference.

The subjective person sees everything from the standpoint of how they feel about it. Subjective thinking is the emotional reaction to reality. Because subjectivity distorts the truth of what is happening, its response is never the solution to the problem it seeks to solve.

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints ...” (Eph. 1:17–18)

Read: Psalm 146:8 Objectivity changes everything in life.

Ahithophel: The Wise Man Who Became a Fool

1. Originally, both Ahithophel and Hushai were David’s trusted counselors (1 Chron. 27:33). But the counsel of Ahithophel was most valued.

“Now the advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God.” (2 Sam. 16:23)

2. After David’s sin with Bathsheba, Ahithophel rejected David and became counselor to Absalom (**2 Sam. 15:12**).
3. When David heard that Ahithophel was with Absalom, he prayed that God would turn his counsel into foolishness (**2 Sam. 15:31**).
4. We can piece together the forces at work in Ahithophel’s subjectivity, by which he became a fool.
 - a) In 1 Sam. 11:3 and 2 Sam. 23:34, we learn that Bathsheba’s father, Eliam, was one of David’s mighty men.
 - b) We also learn in 2 Sam. 23:34 that Eliam’s father was Ahithophel! Bathsheba was Ahithophel’s granddaughter.
 - c) We also learn in 2 Sam. 23:39 that Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, was also one of the mighty men of David. He and her father Eliam would have served together in many dangerous engagements.
5. No doubt Ahithophel was personally outraged both by David’s involvement with Bathsheba, and with the “convenient” death of Uriah. Because of his emotional reaction, he chose to align with Absalom. In so doing he turned against God’s anointed king. Later, when Ahithophel’s counsel was rejected, and he knew that the Absalom revolt would fail, he went to his home and committed suicide (2 Sam. 17:23).

Hushai: Splendid Example of Objectivity

1. It is always a terrible shock when prominent leaders fall into sin. This is especially

true when it happens to spiritual leaders. David was both a spiritual and a royal leader. However, our shock says more about our illusions than about the leaders.

2. If we truly believed what the Scripture says about all men (Rom. 3:10–18) we would be less surprised and much more objective. We are only able to be disillusioned when we have been living under illusions.
3. Hushai, though less prominent than Ahithophel, remained unfazed by the sin of David. He knew that all men are sinners, and that sinner's sin. Often the greater the man, the greater are his sins. He did not react emotionally, therefore he did not become subjective. Also, he would have known of David's genuine repentance.
4. God sent Hushai to David right after he prayed that God would turn the counsel of Ahithophel to foolishness (**2 Sam. 15:32–37**). Hushai would be God's answer to the prayer of David.
5. Hushai, working as a double agent, was able to convince Absalom to ignore the counsel of Ahithophel (2 Sam. 17:5–14), and by countering Ahithophel's advice, he engineered the defeat of the Absalom revolt.

“So Absalom and all the men of Israel said, ‘the advice of Hushai the Archite is better than the advice of Ahithophel.’ For the Lord had purposed to defeat the good advice of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring disaster on Absalom.” (2 Sam. 17:14)

6. The objectivity of Hushai made him a great man in the continuing kingdom of David. The reactionary, subjective attitude of Ahithophel led to his own self-destruction.

Jesus on Objectivity

*“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”
(John 7:24)*

1. This was said to the Pharisees, who had reacted to Jesus' healing of a man on the Sabbath (John 5:1–15).
2. In their emotional reaction to what they perceived as a violation of Moses' law, they were plotting to kill Jesus (John 7:19, 25, 30, 32).
3. Jesus pointed out to them that the law of Moses itself, and not their reaction to an event, ought to guide their response (John 7:22–23).
4. Victors are objective, while victims are subjective. Victors deal with life based on the unchanging principles of God's Word. Victims deal with life based on emotional reaction to ever-changing circumstances.

Summary

In each of these studies, simple as they are, we see that there are essentially two paths that stand before us each day. There is the path of the victor in Christ, choosing to follow in the path of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to reflect His character.

Then there is the path of the victim, one who reacts to life's inequities, rather than responding to the Divine certainties found in God's Word.

We are even now heading into a most unusual time of historical crisis. We may see things ahead that we never dreamed would come upon us. We will all be tempted to take shortcuts, whether for comfort, or safety, or convenience. This is how we become victims of the devil's fallen world.

Our challenge from these studies is to know that others have lived in perilous times as well, and they have not succumbed to the downward pull of spiritual inertia. They have lived by faith, as Hebrews 11 shows us, and brought honor to God and a bright witness to men, that God is faithful, and because of this we are able to be overcomers in life.

It is my earnest prayer that somehow (that "somehow" always belongs to the Holy Spirit), these brief and simple vignettes of lives well lived, or of lives wasted, will compel us to challenge the evil trends of our times, and take our stand with those "*of whom the world was not worthy*" (Heb. 11:38).

There is a time, we know not when
A place, we know not where –
That marks the destiny of men
For glory or despair.

There is a line, by us unseen
That crosses every path.
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and His wrath

Character

*"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, **character**, and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." – Paul (Rom. 5:1–5).*

"Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved." – Helen Keller

“When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost;
when character is lost, all is lost.” – Billy Graham

Thank God, that Jesus came “*to seek and to save that which was lost.*” (Luke 19:10)

“Character is simply habit long continued.” – Plutarch

“Your character is built by what you stand for, your reputation by what you fall for.”
– Anonymous

“A man’s character, like rich topsoil, can erode so gradually you don’t notice till its gone.”
– Country Parson

“God is more concerned about our character than our comfort. His goal is not to pamper us
physically but to perfect us spiritually.” – Paul W. Powell