

The Life of David

From the Pasture to the Palace—and From Failure to Legacy

Main idea

David's life teaches us that God can prepare us in obscurity, preserve us through opposition, establish us in purpose, correct us after failure, and use our lives to leave a godly legacy.

Primary biblical record

- 1 Samuel 16–31
- 2 Samuel 1–24
- 1 Kings 1–2
- 1 Chronicles 11–29
- Selected Psalms

Learning goals

By the end of this lesson, I will be able to:

- Identify five major periods in David's life.
- Explain how David's private experiences prepared him for public victories.
- Understand the difference between being anointed and being appointed.
- Identify David's strengths, weaknesses, victories and failures.
- Explain how David's choices affected his family and kingdom.
- Understand why David was called a man after God's own heart.
- Apply lessons from David's life to my own relationship with God.

Opening Discussion: Which David Do You Know?

When you hear the name David, what comes to mind?

- David the shepherd
- David the musician

- David the giant killer
- David the fugitive
- David the warrior
- David the king
- David the worshiper
- David the sinner
- David the father
- David the repentant servant
- David the ancestor of Jesus Christ

My response

Which part of David's life do I remember most, and why?

David's life cannot be understood through one victory or one failure. His complete story reveals a person who was chosen by God, developed through difficulty, elevated into leadership, damaged by sin, corrected through consequences and preserved through repentance.

Period One: David's Preparation and Anointing

The pasture, the oil and Goliath

Read

- 1 Samuel 16:1–13
- 1 Samuel 17:32–50

1. God saw what other people overlooked

1 Samuel 16:7

“But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.”

Samuel initially believed that David's older brother Eliab must be God's choice. Eliab looked like a king, but God was examining something deeper than his appearance.

Complete the statement

People look at the outward _____, but God looks at the _____.

2. David was serving before he was selected

1 Samuel 16:11

"And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep."

While David's brothers were being considered by Samuel, David was caring for his father's sheep.

The pasture taught David:

- Responsibility
- Courage
- Patience
- Worship
- Protection of the vulnerable
- Faithfulness without recognition
- Dependence upon God

The pasture was not punishment. It was preparation.

3. David was anointed before he was appointed

1 Samuel 16:13

"Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward."

David was anointed in 1 Samuel 16, but he did not immediately become king.

What is the difference?

Anointed

Appointed

God identifies the calling. God releases the person into the position.

The promise is revealed. The promise becomes visible.

Preparation begins. Public responsibility begins.

David receives the oil. David receives the throne.

Between the oil and the throne, David experienced service, warfare, rejection, waiting and character development.

The anointing announced David's future, but the process prepared David to survive it.

4. David defeated Goliath with proven faith

1 Samuel 17:37

"The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."

David's confidence came from remembering what God had already done.

1 Samuel 17:45

"Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts."

David's greatest weapon was not his sling. His greatest weapon was his faith in the name of the Lord.

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think David was left in the pasture while his brothers were presented to Samuel?

-
2. What did shepherding teach David that he would later need as king?

-
3. Why might God reveal a person's calling before releasing that person into it?

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4. What previous experience has God used to prepare you for a greater challenge?

Personal reflection

Am I being faithful in my present assignment, even when nobody is applauding me?

Key lesson

God often develops publicly powerful people through privately faithful service.

Period Two: David's Persecution and Wilderness Years

Serving Saul, fleeing Saul and refusing to seize the throne

Read

- 1 Samuel 18:6–16
- 1 Samuel 24:1–12
- 1 Samuel 26:7–12
- Psalm 57:1–3

1. David's success attracted hostility

1 Samuel 18:8–9

“And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him... And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.”

David's victory over Goliath made him famous throughout Israel. Instead of celebrating David's success, Saul became jealous and began treating David as a threat.

Sometimes opposition does not come because we have done something wrong. It comes because someone is threatened by what God is doing through us.

2. David continued serving Saul

Even while Saul mistreated him, David:

- Played music to comfort Saul.
- Fought Saul's battles.
- Served in Saul's army.
- Honored Saul's position.

- Refused to organize a rebellion.
- Refused to kill Saul.

3. David learned to depend upon God

Psalm 57:1

“Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.”

During the wilderness years, David could not depend upon the palace, a title, a permanent home or Saul’s approval. He had to depend upon God.

Word study: Refuge

A refuge is a place of protection, safety and shelter.

What does it mean to make God your refuge?

4. David refused to kill Saul

David had at least two clear opportunities to kill Saul:

- In the cave at En-gedi—1 Samuel 24.
- In Saul’s camp—1 Samuel 26.

1 Samuel 24:6

“The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD’S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him.”

David believed God’s promise, but he refused to use an ungodly method to obtain it.

David trusted God to give him the throne that he refused to steal.

5. David was still growing

David did not handle every wilderness moment perfectly. At different times, he:

- Became discouraged.
- Made decisions based upon fear.
- Deceived others.
- Sought protection among the Philistines.

- Nearly killed Nabal's household in anger.
- Needed Abigail to stop him from making a destructive decision.

God was developing David, but David still needed guidance and correction.

Think and discuss

1. How can we remain faithful when someone misunderstands or mistreats us?

-
2. What is the difference between trusting God's promise and forcing it to happen?

-
3. Why did David refuse to kill Saul?

-
4. What did the wilderness produce in David that the palace could not?

-
5. Has God ever used another person to prevent you from making a harmful decision?
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Personal reflection

Am I willing to wait for God, or am I tempted to force what He promised?

Key lesson

How we behave while waiting may determine whether we are prepared to carry what God promised.

Period Three: David's Coronation and Reign

From king of Judah to king over all Israel

Read

- 2 Samuel 1:11–17
- 2 Samuel 2:1–4
- 2 Samuel 5:1–12

- 2 Samuel 6:12–15
- 2 Samuel 7:12–16

1. David mourned Saul

2 Samuel 1:11–12

“Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them... And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son.”

David did not celebrate Saul’s death. He mourned for Saul, Jonathan and Israel.

David did not allow Saul’s treatment of him to determine his character toward Saul.

2. David asked God what to do next

2 Samuel 2:1

“David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?”

David had already been anointed, and Saul was dead. Nevertheless, David did not assume that he knew what to do next. He asked God for direction.

Complete the statement

God’s promise does not eliminate my need for God’s _____.

3. David became king over Israel

2 Samuel 5:3–4

“So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron... and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years.”

David reigned:

- Seven years and six months over Judah.
- Thirty-three years over all Israel.
- Forty years altogether.

4. David established Jerusalem

During his reign, David:

- Captured the stronghold of Zion.
- Established Jerusalem as the City of David.

- Defeated surrounding enemies.
- Expanded Israel's territory.
- Organized the kingdom.
- Brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.
- Desired to build a house for God.
- Received God's covenant concerning his descendants.

5. David brought the Ark to Jerusalem

2 Samuel 6:14–15

“And David danced before the LORD with all his might... So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting.”

David understood that Israel needed more than military strength and national organization. The presence of God had to remain central.

6. God made a covenant with David

2 Samuel 7:16

“And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.”

God's covenant with David pointed toward Jesus Christ, the Son of David and everlasting King.

Think and discuss

1. What does David's response to Saul's death teach us about handling people who mistreat us?

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2. Why did David seek God's direction after Saul died?

-
3. Why was bringing the Ark to Jerusalem important?

-
4. What should a person do with the influence God gives them?

5. How did David's kingdom point forward to Jesus Christ?

Personal reflection

If God increases my influence, how will I use it to honor Him and help others?

Key lesson

The purpose of elevation is not merely to increase our influence. It is to establish God's will and make room for His presence.

Period Four: David's Sin and Family Turmoil

Bathsheba, Uriah, Amnon, Tamar and Absalom

Read

- 2 Samuel 11:1–17
- 2 Samuel 12:1–13
- Psalm 51:1–12
- 2 Samuel 13:1–22
- 2 Samuel 15:1–14
- 2 Samuel 18:31–33

1. David remained home during the battle

2 Samuel 11:1

“At the time when kings go forth to battle... David tarried still at Jerusalem.”

David's fall began before he saw Bathsheba. He was absent from a place of responsibility. When David stopped fighting the battle he was assigned, he became vulnerable to a battle he was not prepared to fight.

2. David's sin became a progression

Number the events in the order that they occurred:

- ___ David attempted to conceal his actions.
- ___ David saw Bathsheba.
- ___ David arranged Uriah's death.
- ___ David inquired about Bathsheba.
- ___ David committed adultery.
- ___ David learned that Bathsheba was pregnant.

David's sin progressed through several stages:

One unrestrained decision opened the door to additional sins.

3. Nathan confronted David

2 Samuel 12:7

"And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man."

After hearing Nathan's parable, David pronounced judgment upon the guilty man without realizing that Nathan was describing him.

2 Samuel 12:13

"And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD."

4. David repented

Psalms 51:10–12

"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit."

David did not merely ask God to protect his reputation. He asked God to change his heart.

Repentance includes:

- Accepting responsibility.
- Agreeing with what God says about our actions.
- Turning away from sin.
- Seeking forgiveness.

- Allowing God to transform us.
- Making changes where possible.

5. Trouble affected David's family

Following David's sin:

- The child born to Bathsheba died.
- Amnon violated Tamar.
- David became angry but failed to respond decisively.
- Absalom killed Amnon.
- Absalom fled.
- David allowed family distance to remain unresolved.
- Absalom stole the hearts of Israel.
- Absalom rebelled against David.
- David fled Jerusalem.
- Absalom was killed.
- David was overwhelmed by grief.

2 Samuel 18:33

"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee."

David could defeat a giant and lead an army, but he struggled to confront the pain and dysfunction within his own family.

6. Forgiveness and consequences are not identical

God forgave David, but forgiveness did not immediately remove every consequence of his decisions.

Forgiveness

Restores our relationship with God. May continue after forgiveness.

Removes guilt before God.

Is available through repentance.

Consequences

May affect us and other people.

May require responsibility and repair.

Forgiveness

Demonstrates God's mercy.

Consequences

Reminds us that our choices matter.

Think and discuss

1. What warning do you see in the statement that David remained at Jerusalem?

2. How did David's first sinful choice lead to additional sins?

3. How was David's response to Nathan different from Saul's response to Samuel?

4. Why is it sometimes difficult to confront problems within our own families?

5. What is the difference between being forgiven and avoiding consequences?

6. How should families address serious problems with both truth and grace?

Personal reflection

Is there anything God has been confronting in my life that I need to acknowledge honestly?

Key lesson

God's grace can forgive our sin, but wisdom requires us to recognize that our choices may still affect other people.

Period Five: David's Final Years and Legacy

The census, the threshing floor, Solomon and the Temple

Read

- 2 Samuel 24:1–25

- 1 Chronicles 22:1–19
- 1 Chronicles 28:1–10
- 1 Kings 2:1–4

1. David numbered the people

2 Samuel 24:10

“And David’s heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done.”

The census reflected a dangerous shift toward trusting measurable strength instead of trusting God.

David began looking at:

- The size of his army.
- The strength of his kingdom.
- The number of available warriors.
- What human power could accomplish.

Personal question

What might people count today as proof that they no longer need to depend upon God?

2. David refused to give God a costless offering

2 Samuel 24:24

“Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing.”

Araunah offered David the threshing floor, wood and oxen without payment. David refused because his act of worship and repentance needed to cost him something personally.

David’s place of repentance became the next generation’s place of worship.

3. David prepared for a Temple he would not build

1 Chronicles 22:5

“And David prepared abundantly before his death.”

God did not permit David to build the Temple, but David gathered resources so Solomon could complete it.

David prepared:

- Gold and silver.
- Brass and iron.
- Timber.
- Skilled workers.
- Organizational plans.
- Spiritual instruction.
- Encouragement for Solomon.

Mature leadership is willing to prepare something that another person will finish.

4. David gave Solomon a final charge

1 Kings 2:2–3

“Be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man; and keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways.”

David wanted Solomon to inherit more than a crown, palace and wealth. He wanted Solomon to inherit a commitment to God.

5. David’s life pointed toward Jesus

Luke 1:32–33

“The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

David was an important king, but Jesus is the perfect and everlasting King.

David

David defeated Goliath.

David established Jerusalem.

Jesus Christ

Jesus defeated sin and death.

Jesus established an everlasting kingdom.

David

Jesus Christ

David desired to build God a house. Jesus is building His Church.

David's reign ended.

Jesus' kingdom will never end.

David was an imperfect king.

Jesus is the perfect King.

Think and discuss

1. Why could counting the army have represented misplaced confidence?

2. What does David's refusal to give God a costless sacrifice teach us?

3. How can a place of failure become a place of worship and ministry?

4. Are you willing to prepare something that another person may complete?

5. What should we pass to the next generation besides money and possessions?

6. How does David's imperfect life help us appreciate Jesus more?

Personal reflection

What spiritual legacy am I preparing for the people who will come after me?

Key lesson

A godly legacy is built by returning to God, preparing the next generation and pointing others toward the true King.

David's Life at a Glance

Period	Key passages	What David experienced	What we learn
Preparation and anointing	1 Samuel 16–17	Pasture, anointing and Goliath	God prepares us privately.
Persecution and wilderness	1 Samuel 18–31	Saul’s jealousy, caves and waiting	Do not force God’s promise.
Coronation and reign	2 Samuel 1–10	Judah, Israel, Jerusalem and the Ark	Use influence for God’s purpose.
Sin and family turmoil	2 Samuel 11–20	Bathsheba, Uriah and family conflict	Sin carries consequences.
Final years and legacy	2 Samuel 21–24; 1 Kings 1–2; 1 Chronicles 21–29	Census, sacrifice, Temple preparation and Solomon	Finish by preparing others.

Why Was David a Man After God’s Own Heart?

David was not called a man after God’s own heart because he never sinned. David committed serious sins and made painful mistakes.

However, David:

- Loved God.
- Valued God’s presence.
- Worshiped during victories and valleys.
- Trusted God for deliverance.
- Refused to seize the throne unlawfully.
- Received correction.
- Confessed his sin.
- Sought restoration.
- Returned to God after failure.
- Desired to establish worship.
- Prepared the next generation.

- Pointed toward the coming Messiah.

David's greatness was not that he never fell. His greatness was that, when God confronted him, he did not make rebellion his permanent residence.

Final Personal Assessment

The pasture

Am I faithful where God has placed me?

The wilderness

Can I wait for God without forcing His promise?

The throne

Will I use influence to honor God or exalt myself?

The broken house

Will I confront my sin and its effects honestly?

The final years

What am I preparing for the generation behind me?

My Next Step

After studying David's life, what is one action God is calling me to take?

Closing Declaration

Lord, prepare me before You promote me.

Preserve my heart while I am waiting.

Keep me humble when You elevate me.

Correct me when I wander.

Restore me when I repent.

Help me finish faithfully.

Let my life prepare the way for those who come behind me.

Above every earthly crown, let Jesus remain the King of my life.

Final thought

David's life moved from the pasture to the palace, from victory to failure, from correction to restoration, and from personal success to generational legacy. Through every season, God was preparing the way for Jesus Christ—the everlasting King.