

Nov/Dec 2021

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew

CHRISTMAS  
190

*Silent Night, Holy*

*And there were...shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch*

1. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, All
2. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, Shep - herds
3. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, Son of God
4. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, Was born

Round yon vir - gin most ex - cept  
Glo - ries stream from heav - en  
Ra - diant beams from Thy face  
With the an - gels

## Songs OF CHRISTMAS

ten - der and mild, Sleep in heav - en  
Al - le - lu - ia, Christ the Son of God  
deem - ing grace, Je - su, King of the  
to our King, Christ the Son of God

ALSO: TRAVELING WITH DAVID

Dear Friends:

Good stories are full of twists and turns and ups and downs—not to mention lots of surprises. The story of King David has all of the elements of a *really* good story. Indeed, the Bible stories about David include heroism, love, conflict, danger, jealousy, betrayal, friendship, and enemies. Sometimes we applaud David for his courage and daring feats. At other times, though, we scratch our heads at how a man “after [God’s] own heart” could act as David does.



For the month of November, Reggie Smith explores the complicated and often messy episodes in the story of King David. David’s life story teaches us some important lessons about following God, and it gives us comfort and assurance of God’s love and faithfulness in dealing with who we are—both the good and the bad. Even more importantly, we see God carrying out his wider, gracious purpose through David’s family line to bring the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sins.

For the month of December, Brian Kuyper uses Christmas hymns and carols to help us explore the meaning of Christmas. For many Christians, singing is a highlight of the Christmas season, so this can be a fitting way to meditate on the wonder and joy of Christmas. This focus on songs—ancient and modern, many well known and some less familiar—aims to deepen our appreciation of God’s gracious love in sending his Son to bring “Joy to the World”!

May God’s Word refresh, refocus, and renew you each day!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

—Kurt Selles

# Today

Nov/Dec 2021

**refresh, refocus, renew**



**"Traveling with David"**  
**Reginald Smith**



**"Songs of Christmas"**  
**Brian Kuyper**

**Managing Editor:** Jeff Bulthuis  
**Executive Editor:** Kurt Selles

TODAY (USPS 185-140),  
Volume 71, Number 6,  
published bimonthly by  
ReFrame Ministries, formerly  
Back to God Ministries  
International, at 1700 28th  
Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI  
49508-1407. Periodicals postage  
paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan,  
and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes  
to Today, 1700 28th Street SE,  
Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407.

Copyright © 2021, Reframe  
Ministries. Printed in U.S.A.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture  
quotations in this publication  
are from The Holy Bible, New  
International Version®, NIV®.  
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984,  
2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by  
permission. All rights reserved  
worldwide.

Cover photo: Aaron Burden/  
Unsplash



**ReFrame**  
**Ministries**

is the new name of  
Back to God Ministries International

# november

## Traveling with David

Reginald Smith

Stories are a vital part of being human. We tell stories in our families, at work, and in our communities. Children beg for stories at bedtime. Teacher, pastor, and author Eugene Peterson wrote that a story “doesn’t just tell us something and leave it there—it invites our participation” (*First and Second Samuel*). For example, God’s great story to us in the Bible draws us into the human-making business of God. And there we see God at work in the lives of real, everyday people—all in the midst of sin, love, betrayal, and grace.

This month let’s enter into David’s story in the Bible. David became a great king in Israel, but in many ways he was like one of us. He lived in an atmosphere of ordinariness. He had to deal with sibling rivals. He made friends, and he had enemies. He also had to deal with jealousy as God called him to serve and lead. David often had to make important choices while standing at a crossroads in his discipleship journey with God. He needed to discern which way God was leading him—and sometimes he made terrible mistakes. Shall we travel with David on this journey, and see what the Lord can teach us too?

*Reginald Smith serves as director of diversity for the Christian Reformed Church in North America. He has also served as director of the CRC offices of Race Relations and Social Justice, and as a church pastor in Illinois, New Jersey, and Michigan. Reggie and his wife, Sharon, have three daughters.*

## FAMILY CONNECTIONS

*Perez was the father of Hezron . . . Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.*  
—Ruth 4:18-22

The first mention of David in the Bible comes in the book of Ruth. David's story was part of God's much bigger story. Through the lives of David and many others, God was shaping and molding a people for himself. God called men and women into a relationship of grace, responsibility, and adventure.

The story of Ruth included disappointment, death, and discouragement. But as God worked in the lives of Ruth and Boaz, encouragement, joy, and hope began to shine through. Ruth and Boaz became ancestors of David.

Family connections anchored David's life, making his family story an important part of his identity. As Eugene Peterson noted, "The genealogy shows that the story of Ruth and Boaz wasn't simply a small love story into which they had accidentally fallen; rather it was

a sprawling love story of epic proportions. For through the union of Ruth and Boaz came David" (*Conversations*).

Genealogies show us, in part, how God works in the world. Jesse told his children the stories of Perez, Hezron, Ram . . . Ruth and Boaz, and Obed as reminders of God's faithfulness throughout the generations. And the thread of those stories went farther back to a couple named Abraham and Sarah, whom God had called into a relationship with himself (Genesis 12). This was part of the inheritance David had even before he was born.

Lord and God, thank you for your faithfulness and for calling me into a relationship with you as part of your story of life for us all. Amen.

## DEMAND FOR A KING

*The LORD told him: "... It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king."*  
—1 Samuel 8:7

What kind of world did David enter into? He entered a world built by Israel's obsession to be like the nations around them. They did not want the prophet Samuel to lead them anymore. In their eyes, it was not enough to have God as their King, leading the people through his prophet, Samuel. To be like other nations, they wanted to have a human king.

Samuel was worn-out and tired when the elders of Israel came to his place in Ramah. Maybe he knew this day was coming. His sons were not faithful to God or to the people. The elders came with a demand: "Appoint a king to lead us, such as all the nations have." They saw other nations that were making a difference and gaining power. Those nations all had a king who could make things happen and take over weaker nations. They

wanted a king they could see, touch, hear, and follow.

Israel's demand for a king would give them King Saul. Saul had all the visible features of success (tall, dark, and handsome), but he would soon turn against God and do things his own way (1 Samuel 9-15).

This was the kind of world that David entered—a world poisoned by a people who wanted a visible, untested king rather than the wise, loving, and faithful God they could not see.

O Spirit of God, I admit that I lean too much on what I can see right in front of me. Help me to see all of your faithfulness working in the background of my life. In Jesus, Amen.

**MY WAY**

*[Saul] said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering.*

—1 Samuel 13:9

"Saul was thirty years old when he became king," and he was probably at the peak of his physical and mental abilities. Saul's world was filled with possibilities and potential. The young, tall, handsome man was just what Israel wanted as their king—a model leader for their times.

Along with that, nothing promoted national unity like a good war. In the interests of security and possible kingdom expansion, the young king knew that victory could bring glory and fame. Besides, their old enemy, the Philistines, would serve as the perfect villain in the fight for good over evil. Patriotism grew, and the young men of Israel signed up for battle by the thousands.

But the Philistines came with a vast army and chariots, and "all the troops with Saul were

quaking with fear." So Saul took matters into his own hands. Samuel had said he would be there to make an offering and to ask God what they should do, but Saul did not want to wait any longer. His troops were beginning to run away. So Saul decided to make the offering himself. He decided that he was in charge and that they didn't need to do things God's way. But when Samuel arrived, he told Saul, "You have done a foolish thing. . . . Now your kingdom will not endure . . . because you have not kept the LORD's command."

Dear Lord, in times of uncertainty, I too have taken matters into my own hands. Help me to trust in you at all times, and to follow your way rather than insisting on my way. In Jesus, Amen.

## OBEDIENCE

*The LORD [said] . . . "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions."*  
—1 Samuel 15:10-11

God gave instructions to attack the Amalekites because they had ruthlessly attacked his people coming out of slavery from Egypt (Deuteronomy 25:17-19). Setting up an ambush, Saul attacked Amalek with great speed and force. Saul's army gobbled up territory without much pushback. They destroyed the Amalekites and took their King Agag alive.

Saul looked at the Amalekites' good livestock and decided to keep them alive too. What could be wrong with that? Saul simply believed he could make better decisions based on his knowledge of war than on God's knowledge of obedience.

When Samuel came, he was shocked to see two things: alive animals and an alive King Agag. And because of this,

God had said he was greatly disappointed with Saul.

Israel's first king had chosen his world over God's world. The Amalekites were not the only ones who dishonored God as he worked to lead his people. Saul too had worked against God and tried to take advantage for his own gain.

No wonder Samuel cried out to the Lord. Maybe both the Lord and his prophet cried together that night.

My Lord and God, help me to obey you instead of going my own way. I need godly people to speak into my life. Open my ears and heart to your wise counsel today. In Christ's name, Amen.

## TIME FOR A CHANGE

*The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king . . . ?" —1 Samuel 16:1*

In his book on change, William Bridges slyly wrote, "It isn't the changes that will do you in [as a leader], it's the transitions" (*Managing Transitions*). In other words, moving from an old situation to a new normal takes tremendous emotional work when you have grown used to (and fond of) doing things the old way.

Even though Samuel had not wanted Israel to have a king at first, he had grown used to the idea. Samuel had wanted the king to do the right things for the sake of God and the people. And he had put enormous effort into guiding the young King Saul. So Samuel mourned about the man who could have been great but turned out to be a poor leader of God's people.

Grieving that loss was appropriate. But then Samuel got stuck in that depressive place. So God said, "How long will

you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king . . . ? . . . I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king." God understood Samuel's feelings, but it was time to move on, and he called Samuel to move with him.

Samuel obeyed. And as he looked first at one and then another of Jesse's sons, he learned that it was not all about appearance, but about the person's heart. So he kept saying, "The LORD has not chosen this one." Then finally, after Jesse called his youngest son in from tending the family's sheep, Samuel anointed David to be the next king.

Lord, when I get stuck, help me to change my perspective to your way of seeing things. Amen.

## IN THE KING'S SERVICE

*David came to Saul and entered his service.*

—1 Samuel 16:21

The Spirit of God had departed from King Saul, leaving him to go his own way. Saul had built his world with lies, arrogance, and ambition. He had done everything in his power to build a world where he was king. So there was little room for God's way and a life of holiness, obedience, and community. Israel was supposed to be a light to other nations, pointing the way to God. But with Saul as king, that did not happen.

The writer of 1 Samuel does not want us to miss these important words: "David came to Saul and entered his service." David's transition to leadership in Israel included entering the service of a mad and corrupt king. This would shape David's life in profound ways. It meant that David would serve at the pleasure of King Saul, and he did not have a choice. Still, as he served Saul, David could

honor and serve the Lord, the true King.

Today we can see that David entered into Saul's service so that God could show his people that he knew how to pick a leader after his own heart (see 1 Samuel 13:14; 16:7).

There's always more going on in life than what we can see in front of us. David and others may not have seen it, but God was working in the background to make his purposes known.

Lord God, being in service to you requires my whole heart. Help me to see your ever-working power behind the scenes of my life. Guide me to live faithfully for you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

## SHOWDOWN

*Goliath . . . shouted to the ranks of Israel, “. . . Choose a man and have him come down to me.”* —1 Samuel 17:8

Award-winning writer and professor Joyce Carol Oates wrote a memorable book titled *On Boxing*. She wanted to capture the essence of two men fighting in a ring. She went into the history of boxing, developed by the Romans. The boxers then were often called gladiators. Oates wrote that if they could show they were winners in the public arena, they would establish for themselves “a kind of immortality.”

Back in Saul’s day, a battle between two armies was sometimes decided by two champions who would square off and fight. That way, fewer people would die in battle. And the winning champion would claim victory not only for his nation but also for his god.

The Philistines had a champion named Goliath, a giant who stood nine feet tall. Each day he came and threatened Saul’s

army, saying, “Choose a man and have him come down to me.” But Saul and his army were terrified. The Valley of Elah became the public arena between the God of Israel and the god of the Philistines. Which one would prevail?

At that time David was working with his father’s sheep, and sometimes he would bring food to his brothers on the front lines in the war with the Philistines. One day, he heard Goliath taunting Israel, so he asked, “Who is this . . . that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

Lord, keep my eyes and heart focused on your truth, way, and life. Help me to face whatever challenges may come, in your strength. Amen.

## LEAD ME, GUIDE ME

*"The LORD . . . will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine."*

—1 Samuel 17:58

Goliath mocked the Israelite army and their God. With swagger in his walk and talk, Goliath had an air of superiority that Saul's soldiers had not seen. Fear gripped everyone, including the tall, handsome king who stood above most of his soldiers.

David heard that Saul had offered great wealth to anyone who would take on the giant. That brave person would also be exempt from taxes and receive the king's daughter in marriage. But no one had stepped forward to fight the great warrior.

Without any military testing or time spent in Saul's army, David said he would fight Goliath. And when Saul objected, David told about his work as a shepherd. He described amazing scenes of protecting vulnerable sheep against animal versions of Goliath. To protect the

sheep under his care, David had to go out and fight lions and bears. David spoke with such confidence that no one, not even his brothers, challenged his story. Then David said, "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."

David trusted in the Lord, and the Lord guided David to bring down that arrogant giant with a stone from a sling.

What lessons can we learn here for our living today?

Lord, "lead me, guide me along the way" to full life with you. May I never back down from fear or enemies that aim to threaten my walk with you. In Jesus, Amen.

## WHAT WINNERS AND LOSERS DO

*Saul was very angry. . . . And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David.*  
—1 Samuel 18:8-9

Jonathan became a close friend of David. The Bible describes their friendship as becoming “one in spirit.” And “Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.”

As the son of King Saul, Jonathan had every right to oppose his father’s best warrior. But maybe Jonathan had seen things in his father that he did not want to imitate. Jonathan saw David as someone who had the same human hopes, dreams, and aspirations that he had. Jonathan did not dehumanize David as an enemy. Instead of looking with wary eyes of jealousy and suspicion against the young warrior, Jonathan extended generosity of heart, openness of mind, and a spirit of charity.

David rose through the ranks like a stunning rookie rushing through minor-league baseball.

Soon people were not praising King Saul anymore; they were raving about the young sensation who was breaking records left and right. David changed the game. His victories went viral in Israel.

All of this made Saul boiling hot with jealousy. All he could see was that David was a threat to his throne. Saul dehumanized David and tried to kill him.

But God had other plans, and if Saul tried to oppose them, he simply could not win.

Lord, you made me a friend when I was your enemy. Help me to care about and love people who seem to be my enemies. Help me to live like you. Amen.

## REALITY CHECK

*David said to Saul, "Who am I, and what is my family or my clan in Israel, that I should become the king's son-in-law?"*

—1 Samuel 18:18

I remember watching my Chicago Bulls play the Los Angeles Lakers in the 1991 NBA Finals. It was the first Finals series for Michael Jordan as he led the Bulls. For the Lakers, Magic Johnson had topped the championship mountain a few times and knew how to win. The Lakers managed to steal the first game from the Bulls on their home floor. But in the second game, Jordan tore through the Lakers' defense. Johnson admitted his light was dimming as Jordan's skill led Chicago to its first of six championships. Johnson knew his better days were behind him, not in front of him.

King Saul refused to admit that his kingdom was sinking. He was jealous and afraid of David, because the Lord gave David victory after victory—and the people loved him. To try to buy David's loyalty in

future warfare, Saul offered his daughter Merab to him. And at the same time Saul thought, "Let the Philistines kill him!" But David politely refused, saying that he was not worthy to be Saul's son-in-law. David might also have sensed that he should not be in debt to Saul. He couldn't trust Saul.

Later on, David did accept Saul's offer of another daughter, Michal—for a price. And when Saul saw that Michal loved David and the Lord continued to be with David, Saul grew even more afraid, jealous, and angry. Saul just couldn't let go, and he remained David's enemy.

Lord, mold me to live your way, not mine. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

## GOING AGAINST TRADITION

*Jonathan [said] . . . to Saul . . . "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly."*  
—1 Samuel 19:4

King Saul believed he had the right to command everyone to obey his wishes. He told his son Jonathan and everyone around him to kill David.

In this way Saul tested his family members' loyalty. Often in situations like this, as the saying goes, "Blood is thicker than water." Family members were expected to support their blood relatives more than their friends or in-laws.

Perhaps Jonathan noticed his father's attendants nodding in agreement with Saul. But Jonathan was clearly concerned as he heard his father say that David was to be killed.

Jonathan gave no indication of turning against his father. But as soon as he left the king's presence, Jonathan wasted no time in warning his friend that Saul wanted to kill him. And instead of going along with his

father, Jonathan assured David that he would speak with Saul and support David for the sake of their friendship.

Saul's daughter Michal, who was now David's wife, also protected David from her murderous father.

These events mark a crucial point in the decline of Saul and the rise of David. Two of Saul's own children chose to help David rather than making the traditional choice of supporting their father.

Lord and God, too often I have biases and blind spots, and I follow traditions rather than listening to your wisdom. Help me to trust and obey your direction and guidance. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## CHANGING SIDES

*Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you."*  
—1 Samuel 20:4

David thought it might have been his fault that King Saul was trying to kill him. Did he offend the king unknowingly? Did he not fulfill his duties or make a disloyal gesture in Saul's presence? David could not figure out why Saul was against him.

David had tried to serve the king faithfully, even though Saul had tried to kill him several times. No wonder David was confused and upset.

Jonathan was also confused at this point, probably thinking that Saul had kept his vow not to kill David (see 1 Samuel 19:6-7). Jonathan didn't seem to realize that Saul had again tried to kill David and to hunt him down (19:10, 15). But David said, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death."

Everything hinged on Jonathan's response. David would have been completely vulnerable and exposed if he could not trust Jonathan. But Jonathan was not motivated by his own ambitions. He realized now that he could not trust his father. And with a heart of love, Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you."

In this way Jonathan changed sides. And he and David pledged their friendship to one another, calling upon God as their witness.

Lord, I marvel at Jonathan's courage to change sides despite his family ties. When you challenge me to change sides for your sake, please help me to be faithful. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## LEFTOVERS

*The priest gave him the consecrated bread . . . that had been removed from before the LORD. . . .* —1 Samuel 21:6

David was a fugitive. He was on the run from King Saul, who was jealous and felt threatened by David's great success as a warrior.

David fled to Nob, where he found Ahimelek the priest. The old priest was shocked to see David alone, without any troops around him. David did not know whom to trust because anyone could become a spy for Saul. So he lied to the priest, saying he was on a secret mission. David also asked for bread, or whatever food the priest might have on hand.

Ahimelek had holy bread that was offered to the Lord in worship. The bread had been replaced by fresh loaves, so it was available for the priests to eat. It was not supposed to be eaten by anyone else, but Ahimelek had nothing else, so he gave that to David.

Ahimelek became the giver, and David the receiver, of leftovers in the house of God. The priest also gave David the sword of Goliath, whom David had killed in the Valley of Elah (1 Samuel 17).

In the book *Leap Over the Wall*, Eugene Peterson wrote that David's life wasn't "an ideal life but an actual life. We imaginatively enter the [story] of David not to improve our morals but to deepen our own sense of human reality." We all live at the crossroads of sin and grace.

Dear Lord, every good gift comes from you, but I sometimes struggle to honor that in my actions. Give me a heart of humility and gratitude when you provide for my needs today. In your sufficient name I pray. Amen.

## HOLY RESTRAINT

*"You are more righteous than I," [Saul] said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly."* —1 Samuel 24:17

Movies about revenge are often top sellers. People cheer when villains get what's coming to them. There's something satisfying about getting back at someone who has done you wrong, especially if you did nothing to provoke it.

The writer of 1 Samuel gives us the "director's cut" of the scene in the Desert of En Gedi. David has been living in exile, trying to hide from King Saul, who wants to destroy him. With three thousand men, Saul appears to have the upper hand in the drama.

But the king doesn't know that David and his men are hiding in the cave where he goes in to relieve himself. Sometimes the Bible even includes a bit of humor as the plot thickens.

The setting is perfect. The unsuspecting king believes he is alone in the cave. So David

can sneak up and kill Saul with the same sword he used on Goliath.

But, instead, David merely cuts off a corner of the king's robe. David does not try to satisfy the thirst for revenge. He practices holy restraint, saying he could not do such a thing to his "master, the LORD's anointed."

Saul is humbled and says, "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly."

David has modeled something that Saul could never achieve. How about you?

Lord, stop me from nursing anger and seeking revenge. I need help in handing my pain and anger over to you. Vengeance belongs to you alone, O God. In Jesus, Amen.

**FOOL**

*"Pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name – his name means Fool. . . ." —1 Samuel 25:25*

David and his fighting men had been living in the wilderness for a while. They had been watching over the countryside and protecting farmers and shepherds from thieves and raiders. A servant recalled, "These men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. Night and day they were a wall around us. . . ."

But Nabal took no notice of David's protection, and he had no interest in hospitality. He only wanted to go about business as usual: what was good for him alone. When David asked for some food and supplies, Nabal did not even offer a simple thank-you to David. In the culture of that day, this kind of response was an insult. It was unforgivable. Nabal

had to be taught a lesson, and David was willing to teach it.

Nabal's wife, Abigail, had more sense. She knew that Nabal's foolish ways were about to cost him his life. So she worked quickly to go and bring gifts of food to David and his men on the road.

Abigail's wise actions restored humanity to David. She reminded him of who he was and what the Lord had called him to be. There was no reason for him to be a fool like Nabal, and David thanked her for keeping him from taking vengeance into his own hands.

Lord, it's easy for us to act foolishly when we are angry. Help us to listen to wisdom, and help us honor you in all we do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## LIVING AMONG ENEMIES

*David lived in Philistine territory a year and four months.*

—1 Samuel 27:7

David lived by his wits in the wilderness. He knew that going back to Israel would be too dangerous because Saul was hunting him again. Where could he go for safety? Who might provide the kind of anonymity he needed for protection?

David decided to live among his former enemies, the Philistines. What? Wouldn't the Philistines remember that he had killed their champion Goliath? We aren't told all of the details, but it seems that living with the Philistines was the safest way for David and his men to stay alive at this time.

Making his plea to Achish, the king of Gath, David was given refuge in Ziklag. David, along with his 600 men and their families, made no attempt to harm the Philistines. They kept their word to leave them alone and to wage war on their

surrounding enemies. While David was in Philistine territory, Saul stayed away. David flourished in the last place he really wanted to be.

During this time, something amazing happened—the king of Gath trusted David. David had shown himself to be trustworthy. He had modeled the kind of behavior that can turn an old enemy into an ally. In this way we can see that the Lord protected David even while living among his people's enemies.

Lord, I prefer living among friends rather than enemies. But I know you also call me to go outside my comfort zone, even into places where there might be enemies. Help me to honor and trust in you wherever I am. Amen.

## WHEN THE ANSWER IS NO

*[Saul] inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him. . . .*  
—1 Samuel 28:6

Saul had to fight with Israel's enemy the Philistines again. And when he saw the opposing army, "he was afraid; terror filled his heart." He wanted to ask the Lord about what he should do, but the Lord did not respond to him. Saul needed advice, but old Samuel the prophet was dead. So Saul decided to use a medium, a spiritist, to try to communicate with the spirit of Samuel from the dead.

Saul persuaded a medium at Endor into conjuring up the spirit of Samuel for him. Though God had told his people not to do this (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6), Saul did it anyway.

Old Samuel told Saul that the Lord had torn the kingdom from him and given it to David. The Philistines would crush Israel, and Saul and his sons would die. When Saul heard

this, he fell to the ground, "filled with fear because of Samuel's words."

God's no to Saul was an attempt to wake him up and turn him away from trying to get his own way. But would Saul listen?

Oftentimes for us too, the Lord's no might be his way of trying to get our attention to repent from destructive choices and choose a different path. What will it take for us to trust and obey God?

Lord, I don't like to hear that my plans won't work out. Forgive me for pushing for my own way. Help me to receive your no as a yes to your plans that will give me a purpose and a future that honors you. Amen.

**SEEK THE LORD'S ANSWER**

*David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?"*  
—1 Samuel 30:8

David's refuge at Ziklag was attacked and burned while he and his men were away. And all their wives and children were taken by the Amalekites. Everyone wept and lamented over this destruction, and David was in deep distress. It seemed his men were about to turn on him because they lost all their loved ones, but "David found strength in the LORD his God."

What should they do? David knew that the best way to seek guidance was from the Lord. So he went to Abiathar the priest in order to ask God what to do next. The Lord's answer would be the only answer that mattered.

"Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?" David asked. The Lord's answer was positive. God gave David the go-ahead to rescue everyone's families and all the

plunder that the Amalekites had taken.

The Lord had provided victory over the Amalekites, and when some of the men wanted to keep the plunder for themselves, David declared, "All will share alike." Everyone was entitled to a share, whether they had stayed back to guard the supplies or they had advanced to fight in the battle. After all, said David, all of this had been given by the Lord, who protected them and gave them victory. David also shared some of the plunder to people in the surrounding towns as well.

Lord, every good and perfect gift comes from you alone. Help me to promote sharing and inclusiveness rather than exclusion. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## MOURNING FOE AND FRIEND

*David took up [a] lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan. . . .*  
—2 Samuel 1:17

King Saul and his son Jonathan had died in battle with the Philistines (1 Samuel 31:1-6). So David composed a song of lament to honor them.

How could David mourn for Saul? Saul had tried to kill David several times, and he had spent considerable time hunting David down with his army. Because of that, David had become a refugee in the land of their enemies the Philistines.

Even so, the report of Saul's death grieved David. Why? Saul had been chosen by God to be the people's first king. David honored that out of respect for the Lord, and he often called Saul "the Lord's anointed."

David's mourning for Jonathan made sense. He was the first member of Saul's family to stand up for David. He made a covenant of friendship with

David against his own prospects for the throne. Jonathan pleaded with his father to see David as a blessing to Israel, not a threat.

Saul had shown David what not to do as Israel's leader. And Jonathan had shown how a person can be a true friend. David found no paradox in mourning both of these men. They each gave him something that made him alive to God's purposes and plans.

Lord of all things, I need to give due honor to the people you have placed in my life. I give you praise for those who have shown me love and friendship, and I recognize the lessons I have learned from others. Help me to honor you in everything I do. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

## DAVID BEGINS TO BE KING

*They anointed David king over the tribe of Judah.*

—2 Samuel 2:4

Some years ago, when I was a pastor, someone told me that even though I was chosen as pastor by their congregation, I was not *their* pastor. The words shocked me. The person remained a member of my church but never allowed me to pastor them. Over time, several other members told me the same thing.

As a leader, David was not accepted by everyone either. The Lord had approved of David's becoming king over Judah after the death of Saul. The Lord had been with David and had anointed him for this role many years earlier. David had also proven his leadership through successful military campaigns and wise decision making, in which he sought to honor the Lord.

At the same time, not everyone had declared David as their king. The Lord's people

were split into two camps. Saul's general, Abner, wanted Saul's kingdom to continue, so he made Saul's 40-year-old son Ish-Bosheth king over Israel.

So David's rule began in the midst of disunity.

These are the conditions in which sin and grace stand in tension in this world. They are not comfortable conditions, but God uses them to do some of his best work in us—to help us grow to live fully, with his wisdom and love.

Lord, I would like the conditions of life to be smooth and perfect. But I understand that you are working to shape and mold me to be like Christ. Help me to live with wisdom, love, and grace for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## CONVERSION

*"Make an agreement with me, and I will help you bring all of Israel over to you."*  
—2 Samuel 3:12

"The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time" and established the conditions of conflict between God's people. We read of the births of David's sons as a sign of the growth and strength of his royal household. The silence about Saul's household points to the fading influence of Israel's first king.

But the house of Saul refused to go down without a fight. Abner, who had been Saul's military commander, believed he could restore the house of Saul, so he made Ish-Bosheth king. Abner also tried to secure his own position by taking one of Saul's concubines. But Ish-Bosheth didn't want to share power with Abner, so Abner turned against him and supported David instead.

Abner's answer could not be clearer: "May God deal with [me], be it ever so severely, if

I do not do for David what the LORD promised him on oath and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David's throne over Israel and Judah." The rise of David was under way.

God can use strange turns of events like this to establish his plans for us. Sometimes he will even use our enemies to help.

Has that ever happened to you?

Father, I am leery of my enemies. But I know that when I was an enemy to you, Jesus died so that we could become friends (Romans 5:10). Help me to keep my heart open to your surprising work in my life and in your kingdom. In Christ, Amen.

## UNDESERVED GRACE

*The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months. . . .*  
—2 Samuel 6:11

Have you seen some of the Publishers Clearing House commercials on TV or the internet? A happy group of people jumps out of a van with flowers, balloons, smiles on their faces, and a huge fake check. They approach the home of an unsuspecting person with the news of winning large amounts of money for the rest of their lives. And the person responds with shock, surprise, and excitement.

Obed-Edom had no idea that the ark of the covenant would show up at his door. And the circumstances were sad and shocking. Uzzah had tried to make sure the ark would not fall from the cart when the oxen stumbled. But that violated the holiness of the ark, and Uzzah paid with his life.

This puzzling event brought fear into the hearts of David and all the people. David

halted the procession and took the ark to the house of Obed-Edom, where it stayed for three months. It must have taken Obed-Edom by surprise to have the ark of the presence of the Lord at his house.

As Obed-Edom and his family saw the blessings of God pour out on them like manna from heaven, his heart must have swelled with gratitude for the opportunity to be God's servant. It was all by undeserved grace that he and his household were blessed.

Dear Lord, I am surprised by your gifts of undeserved grace. Help me not to take for granted the abundance of relationships and material blessings you have brought into my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## ROYAL WORSHIP

*Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the LORD with all his might.*  
—2 Samuel 6:14

I grew up in the African American church. I saw people run up and down the aisles in worship services with shouts of joy and peals of thanksgiving. In my church, the service went for two hours straight with dancing, singing, and shouting. I miss those energetic moments of worship where people danced before the Lord.

David heard the news of how God had blessed Obed-Edom's household because the ark of the Lord's presence was there. David had been troubled with anxiety and fear, but now that turned to jubilation. So he brought the ark to Jerusalem. The parade from Obed-Edom's house to the City of David was a sight to see. Stopping after six steps, they offered worship with sacrifices and shouts of praise and music and dancing.

David danced before the Lord wearing an ephod, a priestly

garment. Apparently this also meant he had taken off his royal robes so that they would not hold him back in his dancing before the Lord. In this way David showed that he could worship with a focus on God as his only audience. Not the Levites, or his military commanders, or even his family members were going to stop him from showing his deep love and devotion to the Lord, who had been with him since day one. David and all of God's people had a worship celebration on the road.

Lord, David's dancing before you is surprising and uplifting. May your name be praised! Lead me to show my love and devotion to you because of all you have done for me in Christ. Amen.

**UNDIGNIFIED**

*"How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked. . . ."*  
—2 Samuel 6:20

Michal had grown up in the house of Saul, Israel's first king. Maybe she never saw her father acting in a way that seemed "unkingly." Maybe she thought that royalty should distinguish themselves from the common people. Perhaps Michal wanted David to act like the father she knew rather than the man he was.

She seems to have been embarrassed that her husband the king was dancing in such an undignified way. After all, shouldn't David think about her reputation as well?

David did not miss a beat in his response. Perhaps with a sparkle in his eye and a sly voice, he said, "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD's people Israel—I will celebrate before the LORD." He

also declared that he would become even more undignified—and even humiliated—if that's what it would take to celebrate and honor the Lord while serving as king.

In this way David put the Lord first when even a close family member criticized him. Sometimes people do not know how to handle the joy of the Lord. David showed that he believed it was right to celebrate with all your heart in the worship of God. As the early church leader Irenaeus put it, "The glory of God is a human fully alive."

Father God, thank you for giving us David as a model to follow in celebrating you. May we not give in to bullies of cynicism or decorum in showing our exuberant love for you. Amen.

## THE PROMISE

*"My love will never be taken away from him."*

—2 Samuel 7:15

King David had time to reflect on things after his palace was built and God had given him "rest from all his enemies around him." Maybe he felt a tinge of shame that the home of God's ark of the covenant was merely a tent.

Through the prophet Nathan, though, God revealed that he had bigger plans to share with his servant.

David's (and our) plans are often much too small. God told Nathan that nothing in the heavens above or on the earth below could be big enough to house the Lord. He is the God who moves with his people wherever they might go, wherever they might be. Actually, he is the God who is everywhere at once. How could a mere building be the Lord's residence?

In the book *Leap Over the Wall*, Eugene Peterson notes that

God is the first-person subject of 23 verbs in the message that he gave Nathan to share with David. The Lord is the active, working, speaking, being, promising, establishing, eternal God who is faithful forever.

God promised that his love would never leave David. The Lord's promise to be the father of his offspring would be fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ as the heir to David's throne. The statement "I will be his father, and he will be my son" set the stage for the coming of Jesus as God's Son, our Savior. That's real love.

Lord and God, your work of salvation is vast and comprehensive. Help us to embrace the tremendous gift of your faithful love for us in Christ today. Amen!

**THANK YOU, LORD!**

*"Do as you promised, so that your name will be great forever."*

—2 Samuel 7:25-26

In the book *A Grace Revealed* Jerry Sittser tells about the tragic deaths of his wife, mother, and daughter in an auto accident. He wondered what could come out of such a horrific ordeal. He settled on *redemption* as the word that brought him hope: "[God] wants the harsh conditions [of life] to shape us and eventually the whole world into something extraordinarily beautiful. Redemption promises to transform, so completely."

David endured family squabbles, death threats, and many military battles before he experienced a time of rest and peace as Israel's second king. Through it all, he knew "the Lord was with him." And now the Lord had made a promise that his kingdom would endure and his throne would be established forever. The king knew he had to obey God's

Word and seek to follow God's will, reminding his people every step of the way. David knew that Israel was "the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself and to make a name for himself." God was working to make something out of David's life and out of this nation for his good purposes all the nations.

Similarly, we are never beyond the redemptive work of David's descendant Jesus in his desire to make something out of us today.

Lord, may I trust your redemptive work of always pruning, encouraging, and molding me to serve your good purposes. In Christ's name, Amen.

## KINDNESS

*"Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?"*  
—2 Samuel 9:3

Social psychologist Nour Kteily has said, "Many people strip each other of humanity with a shocking lack of self-awareness. . . . Dehumanization silences empathy" (Jamil Zaki, *The War for Kindness*).

David could have destroyed all of Saul's family after becoming the king over Israel. But he didn't.

It's remarkable that David chose to act with grace instead of malice. As he tried to do "what was just and right for all his people," David honored his friendship with Jonathan and showed mercy to the house of Saul.

Through a servant of Saul's household, David learned that Mephibosheth, a son of Jonathan, had survived and that he was lame in both feet.

Showing kindness to Mephibosheth must have turned some heads among David's subjects.

People were likely shocked when David restored all of Saul's land to Mephibosheth and invited him to eat at the king's table.

In this way David went beyond the boundaries of friendship with Jonathan's son. Despite his disability and his tarnished pedigree, Mephibosheth was included "as one of the king's sons." David showed kindness that went beyond tolerance. David knew what dehumanization had done to him, and he aimed to live God's way instead.

Lord, prompt me to show kindness to everyone and to do what is right in all my relationships. Remind me of my own need for your grace, and help me show your love to others. Amen.

## POWER PLAY

*In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent . . . out . . . the whole Israelite army. . . . But David remained in Jerusalem.*  
—2 Samuel 11:1

David likely had a lot of time on his hands as he stayed in Jerusalem rather than leading his armies to fight the Ammonites. Though he was a warrior, David seemed not to have much appetite for battle at this time.

Late one evening he went out for a walk on the roof of the palace, and he saw a woman bathing. Could David have closed his eyes and walked back inside? Yes. Why did he linger, watching a woman who was not his wife? Why did David send for her even after he learned that she was married to Uriah, one of his top soldiers?

David had become used to having power, and he seems to have thought he was entitled to do as he pleased. He was the king. No one said no to him.

In this story we see that David lost touch with his humanity and that he dehumanized people who got in his way.

One bad decision led to another, and another—and eventually David put Uriah on the front lines of battle so that he would be killed. Then David brought Bathsheba, who was now pregnant, to the palace to be his wife.

But God was displeased with what David had done.

Every decision shapes our heart for service for God or for ourselves.

Father, the thirst for power can be intoxicating. Help me to nurture a heart that seeks to serve you. I need your help today. In Christ alone, Amen.

## SURPRISED BY TRUTH

*Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"*

—2 Samuel 12:7

I told the Lord that I was not interested in becoming a pastor. I'd had a dream in which God called me to be a pastor, but I tried to ignore that and focus on other things. A few weeks later, a minister at my church in Chicago preached a sermon about the call of God. I squirmed in my seat. I had not talked with him about this topic at all. After the service, he made a beeline toward me. He asked me what the sermon meant for me. I was stunned that the Lord was able to use him in such a way to get my attention.

Nathan was David's pastor. Nathan knew David pretty well. He knew his secrets. He knew his personality. He knew that accusing or coaxing David would not work. But he knew that David would listen to a story. Stories bypass our defense mechanisms to deflect

and defeat rational arguments. David listened to Nathan's power-play story and saw the villain for what he was.

Then Nathan called him out as the villain, saying, "You are the man!" And suddenly David had to face the truth about himself and what he had done to Bathsheba and Uriah. What's more, the child born to Bathsheba would die, and calamity would come to David's household. These consequences happened to David because he had treated God with contempt.

Merciful God, I have blind spots, and I have sins that I hide from others. But I cannot hide anything from you. Let your truth set me free today in Jesus' name. Amen.

## HELP FOR DYING WELL

*“Observe what the LORD requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands. . . .”* —1 Kings 2:3

As a pastor, I have been present at many deathbeds over the years. Some people knew how to die well, and others did not. Dying well can be one of the best examples of letting go of this broken world and reaching out for God’s hand to bring us to live with him. People witnessing the transition can be changed by it.

David faced many struggles toward the end of his life, and some of those were problems of his own making. Some of the results were tragic and devastating. But when David realized he had done wrong, he repented of his sin, and God showed mercy.

What can we learn from David’s life? For one thing, we can learn from David’s mistakes and try to avoid the terrible sins he committed. But, more importantly, we can trust God to guide us, and we can

call on the Lord for mercy and forgiveness.

As David lay dying, he passed along some important advice to his son Solomon, who would be the next king: “Observe what the Lord requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his . . . commands.”

God had promised to establish David’s throne (2 Samuel 7), and God kept that promise by sending his Son, Jesus, born as a descendant of David, to be the Savior of the world. As we celebrate Jesus’ coming in the month ahead, let us remember that God is faithful, that he loves us, and that he calls us to share this good news everywhere!

Faithful Lord, in your strength help us to live for you. May we live and die faithfully for our Savior Jesus’ sake. Amen.



**A Spirit-led marriage and family ministry and online community.**



**Discover encouraging articles,  
ebooks, supportive social media  
groups, and live retreats.**

**FamilyFire.com**



RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED  
PORT DE RETOUR GARANTI

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew



## ReFrame Ministries

is the new name of  
Back to God Ministries International

3475 Mainway  
Burlington, ON L7M 1A9  
P.O. Box 5070, STN LCD 1  
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8  
905-336-2920  
[info@todaydevotional.com](mailto:info@todaydevotional.com)  
[www.todaydevotional.com](http://www.todaydevotional.com)  
[facebook.com/todaydevotional](https://facebook.com/todaydevotional)

Periodicals postage paid at  
Grand Rapids, Mich., and at  
additional mailing offices.

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew



**ReFrame**  
Ministries

is the new name of  
Back to God Ministries International

---

1700 28th Street SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407  
800-626-3060  
[info@todaydevotional.com](mailto:info@todaydevotional.com)  
[www.todaydevotional.com](http://www.todaydevotional.com)  
[facebook.com/todaydevotional](https://facebook.com/todaydevotional)

---