

# The Life of David

## Week 14: David's Mighty Men: Loyal Devotion

2 Samuel 23:8-13, 39

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Well, good morning again. We're going to look at 2 Samuel 23 if you want to go to your Bibles and meet me there. You're going to see in the life of David that there are several stories in his biography that are iconic examples of what it means to be fully devoted to Jesus Christ. There are stories that give us a picture of what it means to become like Christ in a particular area of life.

And today in 2 Samuel 23 there is a beautiful portrait that we don't want to miss out on. By chapter 23, the biographer has finished the storyline, and now he's trying to draw an end to his in-depth biography of David, and wants to include as many details as possible. So, in chapter 23, he inserts one of the psalms that David wrote, because that's essential to knowing David—knowing that he's a songwriter, a musician.

And then after that there's a whole section—the largest part of chapter 23—which is dedicated to a list of the soldiers who served with David. Because David wasn't just a songwriter and he wasn't just a soldier; he was a brilliant military commander. And the author—this historian—wants us to know that David, while he was there to help the kingdom transition from a cardboard fort to a fortified city, he did not do that alone. And so, the biographer says, *Okay, I want you to know—if David's reign is Camelot, then these are the knights of the Round Table.* And it lists thirty-seven names of men who served by David's side. And the name in Hebrew of these warriors is *Gibborim*. I just love that word. I don't know a lot of Hebrew words, but *Gibborim*—mighty men—David's mighty men.

Each one of them earned a silver star and a few are Medal of Honor recipients. These men were faithful to David all the way back to before he was king, before he was famous. And they were from all throughout the kingdom of Israel—actually, even beyond the borders of Israel, where people who were outside the borders of Israel but wanted to be part of the *Gibborim*, the mighty warriors, lived.

## David's Three Musketeers

They were thirty-seven, the mighty men. And of the thirty-seven, there were the three. These are David's Three Musketeers. These are the warrior's warriors. Even the other thirty-four are compared to the three. They each have a story.

Abishai is the first who is mentioned here. He was the minister of war, and he didn't win his five stars by pushing little pieces around a map in some boardroom somewhere. He earned that title on the battlefield. As a matter of fact, it's said that he has the highest kill ratio of a spear-thrower in the world. It says that he killed 800 men with one spear—it's still the record of the number of men killed by one spear.

Eleazar is the second one mentioned, and he's a brilliant fighter as well. There's a wonderful story about how he and David were leading the Israeli troops against the Philistines. And after Eleazar and David mock and taunt the Philistines, the Philistines rush towards the Israeli army. And the Israeli army is mostly all farmers. These two men turn around and see that the army is running back to the farm. And so, these two men fought day and night and defeated the Philistine onslaught. And at the end of the fight (this is probably the story that David likes to tell) Eleazar's hand had cramped around his sword. It was almost frozen to his sword. He couldn't get it off his hand.

The third of the three is Shammah. His story is that he was in a field with some other Israeli soldiers and they were protecting the field, because that was life sustenance for the village. And the Philistines came upon them, and it was fight time. And the Israeli soldiers did what they did best, and that is to run home. So, this warrior singlehandedly defeats those Philistines and chases them, wee-wee-wee-wee, all the way home.

These are David's mighty men ... and the three. I think one of the reasons there's a list and stories about these thirty-seven men is because the author wants us to know what kind of company David kept. You can judge a person by the company they keep. And you can also see the quality of David's leadership, because you can tell the quality of a leader by the quality of the people who are loyal to him. David—I'm sure he was president of the choir—but he was the commander of these men. These are snake-bit, battle-torn men that served their king and served their God in deep ways. And they were deeply loyal to David and committed to following him wherever he went.

## David Sighs for Water from Bethlehem

That loyalty is the point of the story here. The author wants us to know how loyal these three were. So, he tells us, *I've got a war story for that. Let me tell you about this.* So, he harkens back to the day, a season back, when David was anointed the king of Israel—the future king of Israel—but in this season he's on the run from the current king, Saul. He was hunted like a dog. And it's also when the Philistines were ruling that geography at the time.

And David has found himself in the caves of Adullam. That's about seven miles south and west of Bethlehem (that's important—it comes up later). And David is living the life of a fugitive, not the life of a promised king. And something happens in that life of living in a cave where he wasn't just literally in a cave; he was emotionally in a cave. He was going through a very dark place. He was growing weary. And when we grow weary we get nostalgic. And in that nostalgia, David sighs.

Here's what the passage says: “And David sighs and says, ‘Wouldn't it be wonderful to just have a drink from that well inside the gates of Bethlehem?’”

You know, when we grow tired, when we grow weary and we're away from home, we get nostalgic. We get all sentimental, often about food or drink, thinking, Oh, if only I could go back to better times.

On mission trips, sometimes when they're long and you know they're going to go long, you have to initiate up front a law, a rule: no talking about food from back home until two days until the end of this trip. If you start talking about the food back home on day two, all the days become dog days. And not only are they longer and more miserable, it can wreck the whole morale and wreck the culture of the trip and crash the mission trip. So, you can't talk about it until two days before it's wheels up.

I would tend to harken back to Nau's Pharmacy. It's no longer in Austin—it's out of business—but boy, Nau's Pharmacy ... It was downtown in Clarksville and we would start our summers by loading up the kids and taking them down there. We would have a greasy hamburger or a grilled cheese, but it was just all trying to get to the end when we could have an old-time malt. You knew it was summer. Those were the good old days when you would have a malt at Nau's Pharmacy. It would take you back to a different time. It's romantic, okay ... I

know it's romantic. We were young, dumb, and broke. But the kids were just cubs. We could still outweigh them. I'm harkening back.

And that's what is happening to David. He's tired, he's weary, and he's nostalgic. *Oh, boy, when I was a shepherd boy, I'd get out in the hot sun, I'd come home, and I'd go to that well just inside the gate of Bethlehem. And that water ... there was nothing sweeter, nothing purer than the water from that well.*

It wasn't just nostalgia, though. David's also harkening to a promise. Because God had promised Israel the land of Israel. And He had promised that David would be a king of that Israel. And David is now living in hiding in the caves of Adullam, looking and saying, *Okay, how about the promise of that land when the Philistines aren't occupying it, but we are? How about when I'm going to be king?*

So, his heart goes to the good old days of nostalgia and his mind goes to the promises of God. But they both end up in the same place: that well inside the gates of Bethlehem. *Mmm ... the water would be sweet there.*

So, he sighs and reminisces. And one of the three hears him. And he says to the other two, *Hey, did you hear? Did you hear what David just said?*

*No.*

He tells them the story and says, *Well, what are we doing today?*

*Nothing.*

So off they went, seven miles in the heat of the Palestinian sun, up to Bethlehem, crashing through, figuring out some way to get that water from that well that's inside the gate. Know this—when you own a city, you fortify at least two things. One, the gate, keeping the right people in and out. And two, the water source—that's life. And these three musketeers sneak their way through, fight their way through. They get inside the gates, two of them are holding off all the bad guys while the other one is filling this water skin with water.

*We got it. Let's run!* They go back seven miles to Adullam in the heat of the desert. That is a story of loyalty, a story that shows us what's it's like to be devoted—not loyal, not devoted, but loyal devotion. That's what this story is about. It's loyal devotion.

## The Hebrew Word *Hesed*

There's a Hebrew word for loyal devotion. It's the word *hesed*. And this is a picture of *hesed*. *Hesed* means steadfast love, lovingkindness. This is it. This is what it means: covenant loyalty. It's a word in Hebrew that is so rich that we need nineteen English synonyms for *hesed*. Loyal devotion. We usually save that for a family member or a person in our clan. Because it's not just mercy; it's mercy that a person can count on. It's mercy or love that is independent of conduct. It's undeserved.

And as Christ-followers we're supposed to be giving this and receiving this in regular doses. And when we do—when we give this kind of *hesed* to other people—we find out attributes of *hesed*: that it's costly, selfless, loyal mercy, expressed in actions—not in words alone, but in actions.

I found a great quote from a Hebrew scholar that said, "*Hesed* is loaning someone else your strength instead of reminding them of their weakness." If you've received *hesed*, it changes your life. It alters your identity.

At this church, we say that grace transforms, because of the power of grace. If we spoke Hebrew, we would say *hesed* transforms.

And in Israel—you can go to Israel today and you'll see that *hesed* is such a powerful word that people acknowledge that. They have it embroidered on their clothing. There are foundations named after *hesed*. People get it tattooed on their skin permanently.

If you want to see how *hesed* is expressed, here's some homework. Read Psalm 136 and look at the thirty-six different ways Jehovah God shows *hesed*, this loyal devotion, to the entire world, to you and to me.

## David Pours Out the Drink on the Ground

All right, let's go back to the story, now that we know the loyal devotion of these three. The three return with their prize. It's like three kids emptying their piggy banks to buy one gift to give to their dad. Here it is. They tell the stories of their crazy exploits of getting there and fighting their way in and fighting their way out and bringing it to David.

David looks at this gift and now he's just flushed with gratitude for what these men have shown. And then he takes that water skin and pours it out on the ground. Puddles, right in front of the four of them. And then the ground drinks it up.

I mean, were they thinking, *What did you just do? Why did you just do that? Did you miss the stories from six minutes ago when we told you what it cost to get that?* No, they knew. They knew what David was doing.

The passage says that the pouring out of the water was a libation. That's a church word that no one in church even uses. So, you'll see other translations say that it was a tribute or a sacrifice. It was a drink offering. It was a way of giving to the Lord. In other words, he's pouring it out for God to drink—this wonderful water from that well inside the walls of Bethlehem.

David is saying, *The loyal devotion that you're giving me—I want you to see that I'm giving that same loyal devotion to the Lord God. Your ultimate loyal devotion here is not to me.* He says, *Look behind me, look above me. That's where all of this is going.*

And those men knew three things. They knew that at that moment the single most precious possession in David's life was that water sack filled with water from the well inside the gates of Bethlehem—the most precious thing that David owned.

They also knew the extreme expense that was paid for that water.

They also knew this third thing; that David was giving his most precious gift to the Lord. And they looked at each other and said, *That's why. That's why we give you our loyal devotion. You're the type of person who would do that very thing. You, David, a man after God's own heart. This is why we love you so much. Who else would pour it out? They would drink it down. This is why we give you our loyal devotion.*

That's what the quality character of a leader looks like. The contrast to that is a selfish leader, a taker.

Decades ago, *60 Minutes* did somewhat of a documentary on the city of Washington, D.C. And the topic was why there was so much corruption in that little bitty town, and why does *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* still make us wonder why there aren't more Mr. Smiths. And one insightful reporter who had been there decades said, *Here's why. When people end up getting to Washington, they look at that as the prize that they earned. They don't come to serve the people; they come saying, I did this. I got myself here. And so, they look at it as if it were the spoils of battle—and "I can do whatever I want as much as I want." And they look at the water that is given to them and they analyze it and say, "Where's the ice? Is this all?"* They're takers. They're Philistines.

**Application: We are to take all loyal devotion as:**

- 1. A gift from God**
- 2. A way to point to God**

And this passage is David. Be like David. Every bit of loyal devotion you might have coming your way, one, is a gift from God. That's not on you. That's on God's mercy. And two, every bit of that loyal devotion that you receive is a means for you to point behind you, above you. Pour it out. Say, "Your loyal devotion is directed to the Lord God Almighty." That's what David is doing here.

You can see that Paul does that in the New Testament. Paul is on one of his many missionary journeys and he's writing a thank-you letter to the Philippians. And the Philippians were endearing towards Paul, and Paul was endearing towards them. They were loyally devoted towards him. And every time that they saw that his ministry account was getting low or bottoming out, they would be the first ones to respond to any kind of needs that he might have. And they were regular and often givers, and generous givers at that. So, Paul, because of their expression of faithful and loyal devotion, writes a letter to them. It's called Philippians.

**Philippians 4:18**

**This gift of yours was a fragrant offering to God, it was an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to Him.**

Listen to how he pours out a list of their gifts to him as an offering to the Lord. He says, "This gift of yours was a fragrant offering to God. It was an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to Him." *That money that you sent me—I'm giving it to the Lord.* He's pouring it out. It's a drink offering to God. *It's not about your loving devotion to me, your loyal devotion, your covenant love to me. It's your covenant love to the Lord.* That's what he's doing.

## Uriah is One of David's Mighty Men

In 2 Samuel 23 we see this power of *hesed*. What's interesting in the chapter itself is that after these stories about the three, it goes on to list the rest of the men, thirty-seven *Gibborim* — thirty-seven mighty men of God. And the last one that's mentioned—just end at thirty-six—the last one, the last words in chapter 23, are “Uriah the Hittite.” Why not just—okay, he was a mighty man of God—why not just bury his name somewhere in the middle and it would look like it was just another name in a phone book? The author wants us to know how important this particular *Gibborim*, this warrior, is and how he played an instrumental part in David's life and in our understanding of what *hesed* means—devoted loyalty.

His name is attached to the story when David was at the height of his fame and his ego. And in the spring when all the other kings went to war, David stayed back in Jerusalem. And in his idleness he spots a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, who is married to another man. He calls for her and has her and impregnates her. David, always the man in control, can fix this. And he calls the husband of Bathsheba back from battle into Jerusalem, because he knows that this soldier will go home and be with his pretty, young wife. And after they sleep together, they'll just assume the pregnancy was because of him. It's a perfect plan.

Except he brings home the husband, whose name is Uriah the Hittite. And he's a *Gibborim*. He's not like other soldiers. Instead of going home he stays and works as a sentry to the palace. And when David asks him about it, he says, *Well, I can't go home and have a home-cooked meal and enjoy my wife. I can't. I'm loyal to my men, and they're living in a open field. They're eating sea rations. I'm loyally devoted to my men. I'm loyally devoted to you, David. I'm loyally devoted the kingdom of God. I can't do that.*

And what does David do with the loyal devotion of Uriah the Hittite? Does he pour it out as an offering to the Lord? No, he chugs it down. He asks, *Where's the ice? Is this all?* He sends Uriah the Hittite and a number of the men that were probably in his platoon straight into an ambush.

“Thy shall not covet thy neighbor's wife. Thy shall not murder.” Wow. David is working his way through the Ten Commandments.



## **Psalm 51:1**

**Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your *hesed*;  
Your unfailing love; Your loyal love; Your steadfast love; Your  
loyal devotion.**

When he's finally confronted on these grotesque sins, he repents. And he knows that there's no sin offering for this kind of high-handed sin. These are two capital offenses. And so, when he confesses to the Lord and asks for forgiveness in Psalm 51, listen to what he appeals to. He appeals to the only hope he could possibly have. Psalm 51:1 says, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your *hesed*"--*Your unfailing love, Your loyal love, Your steadfast love, Your loyal devotion*. It's covenant loyalty that he's appealing to.

Why does God forgive David? No, a better question—how? How is God even able to forgive David? Because David appeals to the nature of God's *hesed*, His loyal love. David is saying, *Look, I need You to be loyal to Your own mercy. Jehovah, I'm calling on You to be loyal to Your own love. I want You to be loyally devoted to me.*

In all the books I've read for this whole series, one Hebrew scholar said that there's one thing you can be certain about in the life of David, and that is God's unfailing love towards David—His loyal devotion. That's what David appeals to. That's the point of the whole chapter—it's the power of *hesed*, the power of the loyal devotion from God himself. And the author wants us to understand that it includes any of our stories where there's a Uriah the Hittite in the story. Even the Uriah the Hittite in your biography is not going to keep the unfailing loving devotion of God from loving you. He'll never leave you. He'll never forsake you.

### **Insight #1: What Loyal Devotion Looks Like in Us**

There are two insights into this chapter that I wanted to bring to our attention. The first one is that if you've ever received *hesed*, this kind of unmerited mercy, either from God himself or through the works of Jesus Christ dying on the cross to make you right, and being raised from the dead to prove that God does in fact accept you, based on His work, not on your work—that's one way to receive it.

Another way to receive it is when we give it to our brothers and sisters. If you've ever been on the receiving end, if you've ever walked with Christ for a while, you're going to receive

*hesed* sometime—unmerited love and loyalty. And when you receive that, the point is that it changes your whole identity. It rewrites your history. It bathes your future in destiny. Because now you're involved in a covenant of grace—a grace covenant. The Gospel has the power to absolutely alter us. It will change each and every one of us into *Gibborim*, mighty men and mighty women of God. And here's why. Because it changes the fuel that your soul runs on. It alters what empowers your body, soul, and spirit. It changes what is going on. Now, if you receive this loyal love, it changes why you do what you do.

Think about this in the story that we went through today. David does not order the men to go get him some water: *Hey!* And they say, *Yes, chief, whatever you say.* He doesn't even suggest it: *Boy, it would be great if someone got me some water from Bethlehem.* It doesn't even talk smack: *Anybody Gibborim enough to go to Bethlehem? Inside the gates there's a well.* He just sighed. He was caught daydreaming. And the three *Gibborim* said, *Your wish is my command.*

It's love. The men love David, and whatever David loved, they made sure he had it. That's the power of love. There is no change agent stronger than love. If you love someone, you listen for the sighs in his or her life. After a while, I heard a sigh—it had been going on for quite some time. Melinda loves flowers. And if she loves flowers, I can love flowers. And every year we have an adventure. At least once a year we go looking at flowers. And every time we go on a walk and there's a hydrangea, we're going to stop and look and talk about that hydrangea, because she sighs for that. And that power of my love for her wants me to love her life to be filled with what she enjoys.

I love this story. It's a beautiful portrait of the difference between a religious person and a Gospel-transformed person. A religious person is always asking, *What do I have to do to get to heaven? What do I have to do to get God to answer my prayers?* And that person is living his or her life like God is a boss. They work for God. *How do I get promoted? Just give me a list. Tell me what to do. I'll just obey.*

And a Gospel-transformed person, a person who is overwhelmed by the *hesed*, the loyal devotion that God has given him or her, that faithful love—that soul is running on a progressively deepening love for God, you see. That person is just falling deeper in love with Jesus Christ. And the deeper he or she falls in love, the more in tune their ears are to hearing His

sighs. They just want to hear, *What do you love? I want to make sure I can do that for You. I'm going to make that happen for You.*

In chapter 23, verse 15: “And David sighed ...” Chapter 23, verse 16: “And the men broke through.” The further we grasp what we’ve received in God’s covenant loyalty and covenant love for us, the better grasp we have and the more we hear these sighs, and the more we want to live, motivated by the love of God because He first loved us. And when we look around and see what grieves His heart in this world, the more we say, *We want to be part of fixing that. I'll cross into enemy lines. I'll do what You tell me to do.*

### **Insight #2: David Is Like Jesus ... Jesus Is Like David**

That’s the first insight. The second insight is this. Jesus is all over this chapter. He’s everywhere. He’s playing all the major characters here. Because Jesus hears the sighs of the Father at the state of mankind, fallen and broken and totally depraved. And we can’t fix what we have broken. And He hears the sighs of the Father and says, *Your wish is my command. I will do what no one else can—what nothing else can. I will.*

And it says in Philippians 2 that He humbled himself to the point of becoming man. And He doesn’t hold onto His divine attributes for His own well-being. It says He humbles himself and becomes a slave. Why? To get through enemy lines, to help get something that the Father desires—our salvation. And it says that He humbles himself to the point that He becomes a slave, and becomes a slave to the point of being human—not just human, but He dies a criminal’s death. He humbles himself to the point of death—death on the cross. That’s His loyal devotion to the Father—because the Father sighed. And the Father sees that He says, *Well, let me give this to you.*

### **Philippians 2:9-11**

**Therefore, God elevated Him to the place of highest honor and gave Him the name above all other names,<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

And then in Philippians 2:9-11, “Therefore, God”—he’s referring to the Father—“The Father elevated Jesus to a place of the highest of honor and gave Him the name above all names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will declare, confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

See how Jesus shows himself to be a *Gibborim*? And the Father says, *I’m going to bless you with this: every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.* And then Jesus takes that and pours it out and says, *Oh, no, look behind me, look above me.* And it says that “every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” Even Jesus points to someone else in the Trinity.

### **Philippians 2:2-3**

**Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.<sup>3</sup> Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.**

And so, that’s how we’re to live as well. When Paul is using this as an example, the *Gibborim* of the New Testament, Jesus, showing in himself this loving devotion, he says, *How do you and I apply His example in our lives?* He just writes it. I’m not making this up. It preceded it. “Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other. Love one another, working together with one mind and one purpose. Don’t be selfish. Don’t try to impress others. Just be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.”

Can I change that and say, “Show *hesed*. Show devoted loyalty to other people, because *hesed* transforms”? Grace transforms. And it radically changes a person’s identity. He says to

pour out your life as a drink offering. Let your body be a living sacrifice to the Lord. You're involved in a grace covenant, so live out the grace covenant.

It's a great chapter, is it not? It tells us a lot, not just about David, but about Jesus. It tells us about who we are in Christ. It rewrites our history and redirects our destiny.

Let's thank God for that.

*Lord, this passage snuck up on us. Who would have thought? What a beautiful story about loyal devotion towards men and women of integrity. But even those men and women of integrity are constantly pointing to You. Lord, I'd ask that You would help us to understand, first and foremost, that we are not working for You like You're our boss or taskmaster; that we are in a loving family relationship. And I'd ask that You would help us become deeper in love with You, that we might hear Your sighs and enjoy bringing You what You desire; that Your commandments would not be burdensome to us, but would be expressions of love.*

*Help us. Many of us are just driven in so many ways by duty. I'd ask that You would compel us by hesed, that we would understand how much we received in Your grace and mercy so that we might be energized and fueled by that grace and mercy, that we might overflow into other people's lives with that very grace and mercy, that loyal devotion.*

*I'd ask that You would help us to live up to our namesake, that we would be a grace covenant church that gives out grace covenants. We pray this in Jesus' holy name. Amen.*