

# David Administers Justice and Kindness

Printed Text • 2 Samuel 9:1–12

Devotional Reading • Proverbs 18:24

## Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE David’s kindness toward Mephibosheth as an act of justice and equity, REFLECT on the value of keeping our word, and SHOW radical kindness to someone in need.

## In Focus

Carl and Eddie had been best friends since seventh grade, when they were the only two Black kids in their suburban junior high. They stuck together through high stakes tests, team try-outs, and asking out the prettiest girls. The boys promised they would always look out for each other. Always.

After high school, Eddie joined the Navy like his dad had. Carl earned an academic scholarship to a good college, where he studied robotics. As they entered adulthood, it was harder and harder for Carl and Eddie to stay connected, but they would send each other birthday and Christmas cards at least.

Just as Carl had established himself in a good company, tragedy struck. Both Eddie and his wife died in a car wreck as she picked him up to come home after a long deployment. Eddie’s young son, Junior, was suddenly orphaned. Carl was heartbroken and prayed to God asking what he should do. God moved him to show his friend’s child the most kindness he could.

“Junior,” Carl said to the youngster. “I want you to come home with me. I’ll adopt you and raise you as best I can.”

Junior was having trouble sorting it all out. “Why would you do that? You have your own kids to raise.”

“I made a promise to your father,” Carl said. “We were always going to look out for each other. I couldn’t help much before. No way I could stop that truck from hitting them. But I can help now. I can help you. It’s the least I could do for Eddie.”

*How has God ever moved you to show great kindness?*

## Keep In Mind

“And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” (2 Samuel 9:1, KJV)

## Words You Should Know

**A. Kindness (2 Samuel 9:1)** - chesed (Heb.) Love, grace, mercy

**B. Father (v. 7)** ab (Heb.) – Male parent or ancestor

## Say It Correctly

**Ammiel.** AM-ee-uhl

**Lo-debar.** Loh-DEE-bar

**Mephibosheth.** Muh-FIH-bo-sheth

## KJV

**2 Samuel 9:1** And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?

2 And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he.

3 And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.

4 And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lodebar.

5 Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar.

6 Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant!

7 And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.

8 And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?

9 Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house.

10 Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.

11 Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons.

12 And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth.

## NLT

**2 Samuel 9:1** One day David asked, "Is anyone in Saul's family still alive—anyone to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

2 He summoned a man named Ziba, who had been one of Saul's servants. "Are you Ziba?" the king asked. "Yes sir, I am," Ziba replied.

3 The king then asked him, "Is anyone still alive from Saul's family? If so, I want to show God's kindness to them." Ziba replied, "Yes, one of Jonathan's sons is still alive. He is crippled in both feet."

4 "Where is he?" the king asked. "In Lo-debar," Ziba told him, "at the home of Makir son of Ammiel."

5 So David sent for him and brought him from Makir's home. 6 His name was Mephibosheth; he was Jonathan's son and Saul's grandson. When he came to David, he bowed low to the ground in deep respect. David said, "Greetings, Mephibosheth." Mephibosheth replied, "I am your servant."

7 "Don't be afraid!" David said. "I intend to show kindness to you because of my promise to your father, Jonathan. I will give you all the property that once belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will eat here with me at the king's table!"

8 Mephibosheth bowed respectfully and exclaimed, “Who is your servant, that you should show such kindness to a dead dog like me?”

9 Then the king summoned Saul’s servant Ziba and said, “I have given your master’s grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family.

10 You and your sons and servants are to farm the land for him to produce food for your master’s household. But Mephibosheth, your master’s grandson, will eat here at my table.” (Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.)

11 Ziba replied, “Yes, my lord the king; I am your servant, and I will do all that you have commanded.” And from that time on, Mephibosheth ate regularly at David’s table,] like one of the king’s own sons.

12 Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica. From then on, all the members of Ziba’s household were Mephibosheth’s servants.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Lameness.** People who did not have able bodies in David’s day would almost always become beggars. Families would not have the resources to care for them properly, and they could not do most kinds of work that was available, which was usually agricultural work. Even though today we know to care for those who need physical accommodations, in David’s day any physical abnormality was seen as a mark of shame. In neighboring cultures, they would be laughed at and ridiculed just for being differently-abled. Even in Israel, the Law prohibited people with some forms of disfigurement from acting as priests (Leviticus 21:16–23), or even worshiping in the assembly (Deuteronomy 23:1). Other kings might not even allow differently able people into their presence. By welcoming Mephibosheth to his own table, David is showing conspicuous kindness to this young man whose feet never supported him.

**Dogs.** In David’s day, there were some breeds of hunting hounds that people kept, but most of the dogs were strays. These animals were nearly feral, and might surround and attack people (Psalm 22:16, Jeremiah 15:3). Dogs were considered extremely unclean (Isaiah 66:3), and were thought to be especially stupid animals (Proverbs 26:11). Calling someone a dog was a supreme insult.

## Background

After returning the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, and establishing himself as king over Israel, David set about subjugating his enemies. David conquered the Philistines, the Moabites, the Syrians, and the Edomites, giving Israel control of land as far as the Euphrates (2 Samuel 8). David was at the height of his power. Still, he remembered his close friend, Jonathan.

David and Jonathan had grown to be the closest of friends. Though Jonathan was Saul’s biological heir, he recognized that God’s hand was on David to be the next ruler. Jonathan even stopped his father Saul from taking David’s life (1 Samuel 19:1–7). Jonathan had been fully devoted to David, and David was fully devoted to Jonathan in return. This devotion continued even after Jonathan’s death.

### At-A-Glance

1. David Inquires (2 Samuel 9:1–3)
2. Mephibosheth Appears before David (2 Samuel 9:4–7)
3. David Establishes Saul’s Legacy (2 Samuel 9:8–12)

## In Depth

### 1. David Inquires (2 Samuel 9:1–3)

In addition to being a fierce warrior and a capable administrator, David proved himself to be a kind and just king. He sought to honor the pledge he made to Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:14–15), where he agreed to treat Jonathan’s family with faithful love. Once established in his reign, David inquired after the descendants of Saul to whom he could show the kindness of God because of his love for Jonathan.

David consults with Saul’s land steward who informs him that a son of Jonathan still lives. His name was Mephibosheth. Unfortunately, Mephibosheth was crippled and living in the obscure village of Lo-debar. The name Lo-debar is thought to mean “without pasture.” This was not choice land by any means. Mephibosheth was only five when his father Jonathan was killed. David was in exile during that time and knew nothing of Mephibosheth.

David’s inquiry about the descendants of Saul demonstrates a profound devotion to Jonathan and his memory. It also reveals something about David personally. He had achieved great success, and he still felt it important to show kindness.

*Is it always best to withhold the fulfillment of a promise until you are able to do so in a big way?*

### 2. Mephibosheth Appears before David (2 Samuel 9:4–7)

Upon learning Mephibosheth whereabouts, David sends for him at once. Mephibosheth appears before David bowing low to show him utmost respect. Mephibosheth is afraid when he approaches David, and with good reason. It was customary for a new king to wipe out any remnants of rival dynasties. David acts quickly to allay his fears, however (v. 7).

David tells Mephibosheth not to be afraid because David intends to show him kindness to honor the memory of Jonathan. Saul’s family estate had fallen to David either through Michal, his wife, or the rebellion of Ish-bosheth. David intends to restore Saul’s property to Mephibosheth and offers him a place at the king’s table.

Mephibosheth responds with great humility. He had been afraid of finding his own destruction, but now Mephibosheth realizes that David had summoned him so he could honor him and restore his family’s land. He became the stunned beneficiary of a pact David had made with his father years before.

*How do you react when showered with unexpected praise or reward?*

### 3. David Establishes Saul’s Legacy (2 Samuel 9:8–12)

Restoring Saul’s family estate was an act of extreme kindness. Saul’s ancestral lands would become Mephibosheth’s. David then goes even further, establishing a means for Mephibosheth to collect an income for years to come.

Ziba, the land steward, is appointed to manage the land for Mephibosheth. In exchange, he would receive half of the proceeds of the land. The rest would go to Mephibosheth. Ziba himself has fifteen

sons and twenty servants. This is mentioned to show that Mephibosheth would be honored like one of the king's sons.

Finally, Mephibosheth also had a son. This son would carry on the name and preserve the memory of David's dear friend Jonathan.

*How is your legacy protected for future generations?*

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. Why does David inquire after Saul's descendants (2 Samuel 9:1, 3)?
2. How does Mephibosheth respond when he learns that David intends to restore his ancestral lands instead of killing him, as dictated by custom (v. 8)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

This passage describes an extraordinary turn of events for Mephibosheth. He was the recipient of restoration so profound that it forever changed his life and that of his descendants. As illustrated in this passage, God is the God of radical restoration. God seeks to restore individuals, communities, and the world.

*How can we ask God to restore us so that we may show His Love and kindness to others?*

### **Liberating Lesson**

The story of David and Mephibosheth is a story about kindness, restoration, and justice. However, at its core, it is a story about relationship. David had a very close friendship with Jonathan. Years after Jonathan's death, David was still devoted to him. Upon hearing about Mephibosheth, David restored Saul's family estate. In addition, David offered Mephibosheth a place at his own table. Instead of passing his days in Lo-debar, he ate at the table as if he were David's own son.

Similarly, we can show God's kindness and justice to the world around us. David's kindness to Mephibosheth was rooted in relationship. We should demonstrate kindness and justice to those around us, bringing them into a right relationship with us and pointing them toward a right relationship with God.

### **Application for Activation**

The church provides a number of opportunities to grow in community and to form meaningful relationships. Look for someone to disciple and grow in friendship. The church also provides opportunities to work together to serve as agents of God's love. Also, look for opportunities to show the kindness and justice of God to the wider community at large. God cares deeply for the poor and marginalized. Mephibosheth was physically impaired, but there are several people groups that are marginalized.

Women, ethnic minorities, the elderly, the poor, people suffering from mental illness, and people in numerous other groups can be marginalized, as well. They need to receive God's kindness and justice, just as Mephibosheth did.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### 2 Samuel 9:1–12

“Out of sight, out of mind,” so goes a common saying. Not so with David. After all the injustice and persecution he had suffered at the hands of Saul, it would have been understandable if David had conveniently forgotten his promise to Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:14–16, 42). However, the passage of time has not relieved him of faithfulness to the oath he swore to Jonathan. As such, it was one of David’s strengths that he did not forget what he had undertaken, even though many years had passed since that covenant had been made. Mephibosheth, who now has a young son himself (v. 12), was five years old at the death of his father Jonathan (2 Samuel 4:4). He probably was not aware of the covenant between David and Jonathan.

David had seen his enemies defeated, his throne secured, and his capital established. He was therefore in a position to fulfill the obligation he had undertaken to show loyalty to Jonathan’s descendants. In this chapter, we see David as the supreme Israelite example of covenant faithfulness, the highest virtue in Hebrew society. Judged by David’s own demanding criteria (cf. Psalm 15:1, 4), the king proved himself worthy to live on the Lord’s holy hill by keeping his oath to Jonathan even though it ran the risk of hurting his own dynasty. The story, then, is not so much about undeserved charity as it is about loyalty.

**1 And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan’s sake? 2 And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he. 3 And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.**

Established on the throne in Jerusalem after having effectively put down both internal and external opposition, David was now in a position to fulfill his commitment to “the house of Saul” (v. 1). He casts the net wider than his promise to Jonathan demanded, extending his generosity to any of Saul’s surviving sons or grandsons. His sole motive is to show kindness (Heb. *khesed*, KHEH–sed) for Jonathan’s sake, for he remembered how much he had owed to Jonathan. The word *khesed* means more than a charitable deed; it is love and faithfulness. David’s inquiry shows his uncertainty or lack of awareness of whether Jonathan had left behind him a son. However, there was a servant who had information. Ziba had probably taken care of Saul’s property in the tribe of Benjamin. He had been a

steward for Saul, and after his master's death, he had continued in possession of the estate. He was a man of some standing, with twenty servants of his own (v. 10).

David sends for him not because he expected to hear of a son of his dear friend Jonathan, but because he was ready to show kindness to any representative of the fallen monarch. The repetition of David's question in verse 3 (cf. v. 1) is in fact significant in establishing the theme of this chapter. It underscores that David was not an enemy of "the house of Saul" (v. 3); in fact, he was an agent of God's kindness (*khesed*) working to benefit Israel's former dynastic family.

Mephibosheth's condition was caused when he was a five-year-old child. News of Saul and Jonathan's death in battle reached Saul's household, and everyone scrambled to flee the turmoil of an uncertain royal succession. In her haste, Mephibosheth's nurse dropped him. This twisted his feet in such a way that he was "lame" (Heb. *nakeh*, *naw-KEH*), meaning smitten, the rest of his life. This might have referred to a stumbling or limping gait, since Mephibosheth is also described as "lame" (Heb. *pasakh*, *paw-SOKH*), meaning halting or wavering (2 Samuel 4:4).

**4 And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lodebar. 5 Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar. 6 Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant!**

Through his inquiry, David learns that there was "still a son of Jonathan" (v. 4) apparently living with a wife and son (cf. v. 12) in a self-imposed seclusion "in the house of Machir, son of Ammiel, in Lodebar." Not much is known of Lo-debar; it is only mentioned here and in 2 Samuel 27:17, both times only as the abode of Machir. The name probably means "no pasture," which does not sound like a likely place to settle in an agrarian economy. Machir, mentioned here for the first time, was a wealthy and powerful individual living east of the Jordan in the river valley of Gilead. Later he proved to be one of David's most loyal supporters (cf. 17:27-29). He provided for the needs of David and his followers at a crucial time, during the rebellion of Absalom. He may have taken charge of Mephibosheth at Jonathan's death. His name suggests that he was from the tribe of Manasseh (Numbers 32:39, 40).

Mephibosheth was "crippled in both feet" (v. 3) as a result of an accident in early childhood (1 Samuel 4:4). David summoned him for appearance at the royal court. In a manner befitting a king but nonetheless awkward due to his condition, Mephibosheth bowed before the king. In the customary manner of communication between a social superior and an inferior, David calls out Mephibosheth's name. Mephibosheth, in turn, refers to himself as "your servant."

**7 And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually. 8 And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldst look upon such a dead dog as I am?**

Despite the close relationship between his father and David, Mephibosheth had never before been to the court of the king, and it would hardly be surprising if he felt both fear and resentment at the summons he had received. Mephibosheth probably expected the typical fate for members of a dethroned dynasty in the region. In other words, he might have been afraid that David hunted him out to put the previous king's relatives to death. Later in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, each new line of usurpers put to death every male relative of its predecessor (1 Kings 15:29, 16:11; 2 Kings 10:17, 15:25). Mephibosheth seems to have lived in hiding in Lo-debar.

But David tells him not to fear this fate. The king called him there to show him kindness on behalf of Jonathan, his “father” (Heb. ’ab, AV) and to restore to him lands that had belonged to Saul, his “father” (Heb. ’ab, AV). In a single sentence, David uses the same word to refer to a father and a grandfather. Here we see how fluidly the Hebrew word ’ab is used for one’s direct male parent or for an ancestor one or several generations back.

In addition, David promised to turn over Saul’s private estate in Gibeah, which passed to David’s possession when he came to the throne (12:8). The property of the previous regime would have come into David’s possession, and to restore that property to a member of his predecessor’s family was to run the risk of encouraging thoughts of usurping the throne. In returning the possession to Mephibosheth, David was not only magnanimous, but also taking a risk because what was intended as a generous gesture without any ulterior motive could in this way backfire.

Here we find a reversal of fortunes indeed, and that in a positive way. Mephibosheth—who had apparently been dependent up to this point on the hospitality of a generous individual— suddenly became a rich man, the owner of wealth-producing property. David probably restored to Mephibosheth not only the lands at Gibeah, which Ziba had managed to hold, but Saul’s estates generally. David’s promise that Mephibosheth would eat at his table ensured not only a place of honor at court, but also access to those who were directing the affairs of state. He would now be in the know.

His reference to himself as a dead dog is unnecessarily disparaging, and reflects what would now be regarded as a morbid self-image, induced perhaps by his disability. It is interesting to note that Mephibosheth described himself in terms similar to those used by David of himself to Saul (1 Samuel 24:14). However, he probably meant no more than to express great gratitude, and also to acknowledge the disparity of rank between himself and the king.

**9 Then the king called to Ziba, Saul’s servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master’s son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. 10 Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master’s son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master’s son shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.**

It was all very well to bestow property on Mephibosheth, but it required management, hence the involvement of Ziba as chief steward, a man of substance who would realize what was required. Ziba had evidently thrived, for, beginning as a slave in Saul’s household, he had now several sons and many slaves of his own, and had become a person of considerable importance. He would still remain so, now serving his former master’s grandson.

Though Mephibosheth ate at the king’s table, he would have a household to maintain—for he had a wife and son—and other expenses. His having “food to eat” (v. 10) includes everything necessary, as does our prayer for “daily bread.” He would live in Jerusalem as a nobleman, and Ziba would cultivate his estates, paying (as is usual at the time) a fixed proportion of the produce’s value to his master.

**11 Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king’s sons. 12 And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth.**



Ziba took over this responsibility as requested, and Mephibosheth lived at court like one of the royal princes, for whom the arrangement could have proved irksome. By sheer repetition, the account lays stress on Mephibosheth's lameness, his place at the king's table, and on the servants he needed. David's kindness involved a cost, to others as well as to himself. There was one other relevant factor: Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. This son of Mephibosheth became the representative of the house of Saul, and had numerous offspring, who were leading men in the tribe of Benjamin until the Babylonian Captivity (see 1 Chronicles 8:35–40; 9:40–44). In Christian preaching, this story has often been used as an illustration of unmerited grace. The great king goes out of his way to bring even a lowly cripple to eat at his table, granting the marginalized great honor. Mephibosheth's name even means "dispelling shame." Although that application may be correct, that is not the thrust or core of the story. It is about covenant faithfulness. The story neither begins nor ends with this chapter. David's act of kindness arose from his friendship with Jonathan; more than that, he was fulfilling a promise made long before to Jonathan (cf. 1 Samuel 20:15). To "show kindness" (v. 1) is not precisely what the Hebrew phrase means; the noun includes the idea of loyalty, and so picks up the theme of the covenant between David and Jonathan. So the chapter begins by recalling David's duty to his dead friend; and it ends with Mephibosheth in an honored position at court. The story, then, is not so much about undeserved charity as about loyalty.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **MONDAY**

Death of Saul and Jonathan Mourned  
(2 Samuel 1:1-12)

## **TUESDAY**

A Lament from a Just Heart  
(2 Samuel 1:17-27)

## **WEDNESDAY**

A Cry for Justice  
(Luke 18:1-8)

## **THURSDAY**

Mercy from the Son of David  
(Matthew 20:29-34)

## **FRIDAY**

David Made King Over All Israel  
(2 Samuel 3:1-5; 5:1-5)

## **SATURDAY**

The King Rejoices in God  
(Psalm 21)

## **SUNDAY**

David Shows Kindness to Saul's Descendant  
(2 Samuel 9:1-7, 9-12)