

The Life of David: What will be your Epitaph?

Acts 13:36

We are starting a look through the Scriptures at the most written about person in the Bible. Other than God the father, Son, and Spirit, there are more chapters recorded about David's life than any other Biblical figure.

We know more about David than the New Testament church planting missionary Paul; and more than on the chief apostle Peter; and more than about father Abraham, or Daniel. God has chosen to give us David: examined from more directions, recorded in more situations, and captured in more passages than anyone else.

Why would God devote so much of His Book to this man? Think about how often you go to the Bible and see the verses but then say: yes but I am alone, or single, or unemployed, or old, or tempted, or super-successful, and so on. And think, but the Bible doesn't speak directly to me.

But that can never be said about David. He was all those things and so much more; and God's record of his life covers every era and age he went through. There are Psalms from his youth and boyhood, from his prime and peak, and from his older and fading years. God covers all the bases with a man and young man who lived in each era of his life "after God's own heart".

Serving God in Every Season of Life

This means that a study of the Life of David leads us on a journey that will show us what God wants us to know about ***Serving God in Every Season of Life***. No matter who you are today, you can relate to David.

- How about all the challenges of ***being a teenager***? David was the youngest of 8 boys in a tough family. He was overlooked, ignored, mistreated, misunderstood, and even neglected. David was a man's man, he had every passion and drive that a man can have, and yet he demonstrates what God wants to see in a teenager. God had him write from the heart and mind of a teenager what a teen after God's own heart would act like, think like, and talk like.
- If you are ***alone and single***, so was David and from that time God speaks through him to each of us who have ever been alone and single, and tells us what will please God from our life in that season.
- If you are ***out of work***, have lost your job, and have expenses unmet and family

to support, David went through that very situation. God had him write down the meditations of a man who loves God but is unemployed, and the lessons are profound.

- How about when you are ***so busy you can't think***? David writes about how he followed and served the Lord as the wealthiest man on Earth, the most successful soldier of all time, and a best-selling author and musician.

David lives God and serves God's purposes in every stage of life. He sees God's Hand in each situation, and he learns how to please the Lord no matter what he faces. That is the key to his life. Pleasing God, doing what God wanted.

When we get to the final New Testament explanation of David's life we find something amazing. The last time God explains David's life He tells us that David served God as His SLAVE.

One word that sums up David's life, is captured by God in Acts 13:36. God says David SERVED as a SLAVE the purposes of God. David served God as His slave. Listen to this summary:

*Acts 13:36 (NKJV) "For David, after he had **served** his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption;*

David served literally means he acted as a slave. The actual word describes one of the types of slaves that were around in Christ's time.

Bond-slaves of God

We have softened the New Testament word used to describe David, and also used by Jesus over and over to describe us. The word is SLAVE. A servant in Christ's time was a person who could be hired, paid, and could quit (and grumble) like the parable Jesus told in Matthew 20.

But a slave in Bible times was **bought**, so he was totally owned by another and had to serve. Slavery means giving up all independence, losing all freedoms, and abandoning personal rights. The slave was totally dependent upon the owner for all provisions.

Turn onward to I Corinthians 6:19-20:

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

We all have an appointment to stand before Jesus Christ and watch Him sift through all the days of our lives. He will be looking for what we did in our lives as His servants.

When our lives are finished, God has said He will sift each moment of our life into two piles: moments connected to God and lived to please Him; and moments connected to anything but God that were not lived to please Him (I Corinthians 3:10-13). The parts of life disconnected to God burn up.

Since most early believers were poor and many slaves, their lives were nearly empty of discretionary time. That is why Paul says, "Whether therefore you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do ALL to the glory of God " (I Cor. 10:31). Paul encouraged those early believers with the truth that they could do their work for their masters and be rewarded in Heaven, if they did all for the Glory of God.

When we do something for the glory of God we are attaching what we do to Him. We are redeeming the time. So Acts 13:36 explains how David did what he did. David was a life long slave to God. Now, think about this truth.

One thing will matter more than anything else at the judgment seat of Christ, and that is—who you attempted to please with your life.

Now look at who gets the prizes in Heaven. Jesus explained that in Matthew 25:21-23:

*His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful **servant**; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'* 22 *He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.'* 23 *His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful **servant**; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'*

Life Reduces to Two Choices

A camp director friend of mine has a chant for each year's staff. They keep repeating this chant until it sinks in, and then starts to come out in every choice they make. It goes something like this:

"Only two choices on the shelf, pleasing God or pleasing self!"

Jesus once knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was crushed under the weight of the sin of the world, and was sweating great drops of blood. The words of His prayer are short and to the point. He explains that life has two choices, and He had made His choice. Look at what He said:

I often take pilgrims to this very spot. There by an olive tree I encourage them to kneel and read this passage, and then actually do what Jesus did. Affirm to God that they have two choices each day: pleasing God and doing His will, or pleasing self and doing my will.

Luke 22:40-42 When He came to the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." 41 And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."

Verse 42 starts with the word saying, in Greek this is a present active participle which is a big way to say that He was repeating this over and over. Jesus didn't say once that He wanted God's will, not His own: Jesus repeated that over and over.

I would encourage you to be like Jesus. Say over and over as you go through life, Your will not mine. I want to please You Lord, not myself.

It really is as simple as that. There are only two choices for each of us on the shelf of life: pleasing and serving ourselves or pleasing and serving God. We please the one we serve; and we either go through life thinking and seeking first what we want, or what the Lord wants. That takes us to David's life and the question—

What Do You Want on Your Tombstone?

This fall we spent time as a family in New England's colonial towns. We spent an hour in one old cemetery in Vermont reading the inscriptions on some of the weathered, two hundred year old grave stones.

One of the most fascinating branches of history is the study of tomb inscriptions or epitaphs. Most famous among these are the Pharaohs and their pyramids and their gilded remains among intricate inscriptions hidden away among the rock hewn tombs in the Valley of the Kings.

ep·i·taph [noun] Definitions: 1. **inscription on a tombstone:** an inscription on a tombstone or monument commemorating the person buried there; 2. **speech or writing commemorating a dead person:** a short speech or piece of writing celebrating the life of a recently deceased person.

What would you like to have written as the epitaph of your life, on your tombstone? When people remember your life and mine—what would we like for them to remember?

If God sent down and order to write out an inscription to the monument company—what would He send? God's epitaph for David is written down in Acts 13:36. These words are the marker that summarizes David's entire life lived on planet earth--9 words God wrote to sum up what made David such a good and faithful servant.

The essence of a servant is that they do the will of another. David wanted to do the will of God. God was David's Master, David served God, and so should we. This life-long choice David made, to do the will of God, to please God from his heart by doing the purposes of God, was why God rewards David so highly.

Note the seven key words of Acts 13:36.

*Acts 13:36 "For when **David had served God's purpose in his own generation**, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed.
NIV*

The Life Most Noticed By God

There are almost three thousand biographical portraits in the Bible. Most of the lives recorded in the Bible are only mentioned by name, but some are very clearly examined and analyzed by God. Those deeply explained lives give us great reasons to pause and listen to what God may have to say about them. After all He took the time and went to all the effort to capture these portraits for us and then delivered them to us in a forever settled in Heaven book—the Bible.

But top on the list is David. There are more chapters (141) devoted to the life of David than any other person next to God Himself—in all of His Word. That is a profound truth.

We know more about David's words, thoughts, fears, strengths and weaknesses—than anyone else who has ever lived.

And we know about all that from God Himself, and from His perspective. But that's not all. We also know one very important thing for sure—it is God Himself who tells us about David. Look back at v. 22.

*Acts 13:22 And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also **He gave testimony** and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, **a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.**' NKJV*

David is the most described man in the Bible for a reason—God has made him our prime Old Testament example of the life of God's servants. Today I'd like for you to study God's Word with me and see how David chose to be God's Servant.

A Choice that Can Impact Your Life Forever

Jesus once said where our treasures were, that's where our hearts would point. As we now turn back to I Samuel 17, the David and Goliath chapter, we enter one of the best known portions of the Bible, and here we find David serving God—right where he was, and with what God had given him. Here is a simple choice to serve God. This choice can change each of our days from being one more day that sped by and we can't even remember what happened, into a day that was invested in serving God.

Choice #1: David Wanted To Dedicate His Trophies to the Lord

God is glorified when His servants dedicate their trophies to Him.

This next point is one of the more moving lessons for people who go with me to the Holy Land each year. Join me in your Bibles on a hunting trip. We are looking for what David did with the hottest trophies of his day. Much like gold medals in the Olympics, the armor and sword of Goliath after the Valley of Elah were indeed great treasures. If we compare two passages we can find an incredible spiritual lesson about what made David tick, and what it was that God wanted so much for us to see in his life. First here in the David and Goliath account, look at v. 54:

*1 Samuel 17:54 And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but **he put his armor in his tent.***

Now turn to chapter 21. Just a few years later, where were those very special trophies carefully stowed away?

Were they kept for personal purposes on display in David's room, on his wall for all to see and point to him as the greatest warrior? No way—he had taken it to the tent of God, the place most associated with the Lord on planet earth. His treasures were on deposit with God!

*1 Samuel 21:9 So the priest said, "**The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod.** If you will take that, take it. For there is no other except that one here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."*

David took the sword of Goliath, the ultimate trophy of the day—but he didn't take it to show off how great he was. David had started a habit of pointing the glory to God. Any trophy David ever received in all his years of undefeated conquests, he seems to always give back to the Lord as an honor to Him! David was God's servant and so he gave his trophies to God all the way through life. He measured life from God's perspective.

*1 Chronicles 18:11 **King David also dedicated these to the Lord**, along with the silver and gold that he had brought from all these nations—from Edom, from Moab, from the people of Ammon, from the Philistines, and from Amalek. NKJV*

David made this a life long habit. As God gave him great victories, and David was given greater and greater trophies—he just kept giving them back to the Lord. There is no limit to what God will do with a life that keep being given back to Him!

*1 Chronicles 28:9 "As for you, my son Solomon, **know the God of your father, and serve Him** with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. NKJV*

ACTION/APPLICATION: Now we need to move from hearers to doers.

- What treasures do you have in life? Time: is it given to God? Money: is it offered to God for His best use of it? Your children: are they dedicated to the Lord?
- Did you know the only thing that you can take to Heaven are people? You can send money and worship ahead, but we can only take people out of this world. Who are you taking with you to Heaven? Who have you shared the Gospel with, given a verbal witness to, offered a Gospel tract to? Who have you disciplined in Christ's Name, multiplying your life forever through them? Soul winning and discipleship are to be a part of our lives while we await Christ's coming or calling.

Have you made the choice to dedicate your treasures to the Lord? We should because-- God is glorified when His servants dedicate their trophies to Him. Always remember we have:

ONLY ONE LIFE TO OFFER

Probably many of us in this room have heard the famous life's motto that the great missionary Charles Thomas Studd (1860-1931) lived and died by—

*"Only one life,
'twill soon be past;
and only what's done for Christ—
will last."*

However, few of us realize when it was that he said those words. It was on his deathbed with his precious family gathered around him. He had already told each of his children that he wished he had something to give to them, but he had nothing left, so he said, "...I gave it all to Jesus long ago."¹

This spiritual giant actually gave his children more than anyone could imagine. His children had seen their father grow year by year in the Lord.

- They saw his personal devotion to the Word of God.
- They watched him refined by constant health problems, reoccurring weakness and bouts with intense pain.
- They had watched his tireless devotion to the Lord that carried their frail dad to the remotest and most dangerous spots on earth—all to share the glorious Gospel of Christ.
- In the end, every one of his children served the Lord to their last days. They saw and followed the example of his great dedication to God.

¹ Elisabeth Elliot, *Passion & Purity*, Fleming Revell, p. 43

When Avis B. Christiansen (1895-1985), the wife of the Vice President of Moody Bible Institute, heard about these precious words spoken by C.T. Studd at his death, she began to ponder them.

A few years later in 1937, she wrote a now famous hymn, "**Only One Life to Offer**".

Listen to her reflections that turned into a prayer of devotion to the Lord she also served with all her heart (hymn # 378):

*Only one life to offer--
Jesus, my Lord and King;
Only one tongue to praise Thee
And of Thy mercy sing;
Only one heart's devotion--
Savior, O may it be
Consecrated alone to Thy matchless glory,
Yielded fully to Thee.*

*Only this hour is mine, Lord--
May it be used for Thee;
May ev'ry passing moment
Count for eternity;
Souls all about are dying,
Dying in sin and shame;
Help me bring the message of Calv'ry's redemption
In Thy glorious name.*

*Only one life to offer--
Take it, dear Lord, I pray;
Nothing from Thee withholding,
Thy will I now obey;
Thou who hast freely given
Thine all in all for me,
Claim this life for Thine own to be used, my Saviour,
Ev'ry moment for Thee.*

Today we have seen from God's Word that David's spiritual secret was a heart to serve God's purposes.

Now it is our turn to respond. Either we can go on our way today and forget about this message in a few hours or even minutes, or—make a choice today to offer our life back to God to serve His purposes.

1. Have you made the choice **to magnify God's Hand in your life** by humbling yourself and exalting Christ in your conversation so that it is less and less about you and more and more about Him? We should because-- *God is honored when His servants remember His Hand in their lives.*

2. Have you made the choice **to honor God's Name** by getting into the Word? We should because-- *God is glorified when we honor His Name.*

3. Have you made the choice **to dedicate your treasures of time and money** to the Lord? We should because-- *God is glorified when His servants dedicate their treasures to Him.*