

Hanging out With Heros

DAVID

Honoring God in
Spite of Big Mistakes



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Contents:

A Goal Worth More Than Six Points

God's Honor Society

Bomb the Fib Factory

Racing Without a Reason

The Price of a Promise

A Secret Sin That Everyone Knows About

Give the Gold Medal to the Coach

Scripture References:

New International Version of the Bible

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DAVID: HONORING GOD, IN SPITE OF BIG MISTAKES

Introduction

What should be the main goal of your life? How do you get back on track after you've sinned? By studying the life of David you'll find the answers to these two important questions. The Bible devotes much space to David, who ruled the nation of Israel at the height of its power. In the midst of such great success he failed miserably, but the life of David will teach you how to honor God. It also will show you the value of true repentance for sin.

Waiting a Long Time for His Ship to Come In

David, a son of Jesse (a grandson of Ruth), grew up as a shepherd in Bethlehem. When David was young, the prophet Samuel visited Jesse's family and poured oil on David's head in a ceremony, indicating that David would be the next king of Israel. David, unlike most people, did not get bigheaded or try to take things into his own hands. He simply went back to caring for Jesse's sheep.

Soon the Philistines came to invade Israel, and David's older brothers joined the army. Jesse sent the teenaged David to visit them and take them some food. When David arrived at the army camp, he saw the giant Goliath challenging any one of the Israelites to a duel, and David remarked that nobody should get by with ridiculing the armies of the living God. Someone told King Saul what David had said. In desperation the king sent David to fight Goliath. And to everyone's surprise, David killed him.

Defeating the giant, and thus delivering Israel, made David a hero, so the women composed a song about him that undoubtedly made the top ten. Before long David was living at the palace and playing his harp to sooth Saul's frazzled nerves. But Saul was jealous of David's popularity.

Feeling threatened by David's popularity, Saul became downright nasty to David. He did not fulfill his promise to give his daughter in marriage to the man who killed Goliath, and instead had her marry somebody else. Saul then offered David the chance to marry his younger daughter – if David would kill one hundred Philistines. Saul, of course, was hoping David would die in the process. But, to Saul's dismay, David fulfilled his part of the bargain and became the king's son-in-law.

David soon realized that Saul wanted to kill him, so he ran away. The first time he found safety with Samuel the prophet. The second time he made his own plans; having no food and no weapon, he paid a visit to a priest, Ahimelech. David knew no man would dare help him escape from the king, so he lied, saying he was on a secret mission for King Saul and needed bread and a weapon. When Saul found out that Ahimelech had helped David, he ordered the priest and his family killed.

David lived for years as a fugitive from the king, hiding in the barren hills of Judah and in the land of the Philistines. Saul frequently led his best troops out to capture David. During these years David twice had the opportunity to kill Saul but didn't because Saul had been appointed king by God. Honoring God was more important to David than gaining his rightful place on the throne. He trusted that God would fulfill His promise without any human "help." And, of course, it happened just that way. When Saul and his son Jonathan were killed in battle, the men from David's tribe made David their king. Later, Saul's last son was killed and all Israel crowned David king.

After David became king, he captured the fortress of Jerusalem and made it the capital city. He then systematically defeated the enemies of Israel, bringing peace and prosperity to the land. But he did not forget his last promise to his best friend – Jonathan the son of Saul, a promise to show kindness to Jonathan's descendants. David found one son of Jonathan still alive, a lame man named Mephibosheth, and David invited him to live in his palace and eat at his table.

Just When Everything is Going Well, He Blows It

After reaching the pinnacle of success, David fell deep into sin. He had decided, one spring, to stay home and relax while General Joab took the army out to fight the enemy. One evening while strolling on his roof to relieve his boredom, David saw something that intrigued him; a beautiful woman bathing in a neighboring house. Even though she – and he – was married, he slept with her, and she became pregnant. So, David arranged that her soldier husband be sent to the most dangerous spot in the battle where he was sure to be killed – allowing David to marry the widow. David had now committed both adultery and murder.

In his pride, David tried to keep his sin secret. God, however, because of His great love for David, sent the prophet Nathan to accuse him. David repented fully and came back to God. The consequences of that sin, however, stayed around to haunt David. The child of that love affair died and another son rebelled against him. David showed himself to be a man of humility and tenderness as he passed through these trials.

David soon realized that, although he lived in a sumptuous palace, God was

still being worshiped in a tent, so he decided to build a great temple for the Lord. The prophet Nathan, however, said the temple would be constructed by David's son, Solomon. Instead of feeling hurt that his idea was rejected, David went ahead and gathered all the materials he could to make Solomon's job easier. Here again, David showed that his highest desire was to honor God.

David is remembered not only as the best king Israel ever had, but as the writer of dozens of psalms that have blessed millions of people. He wrote these psalms as he experienced both mountain peaks of glory and deep valleys of suffering and despair. Troubled people who read his psalms recognize the words of someone who has suffered as they have and has seen God's deliverance.

But David is remembered best as a man who loved God intensely, even though he sometimes disobeyed God in horrendous ways. God therefore called him "a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do" (Acts 13: 22). Would you like God to say the same of you? Learn from David.

A Touchdown Worth More Than Six Points

"The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.' Samuel did what the Lord said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, 'Do you come in peace?' Samuel replied, 'Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.' Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord.' But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things that man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.' Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, 'The Lord has not chosen these.' So he asked Jesse, 'Are

these all the sons you have?’ ‘There is still the youngest,’ Jesse answered. So he sent and had him brought in. David was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, ‘Rise and anoint him; he is the one.’ So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power” (1 Samuel 16: 1, 4-7, 10, 12, 13).

The real motive comes out sooner or later. It shows up immediately in little kids. If you have a younger brother or sister, or have babysat, you understand this. The spilled milk or the poorly drawn tree or the grimy face isn't important. The attitude (the motive) is. Selfishness is shown by the kid who intentionally spills his milk because he wants Coke, or who purposely smears chocolate all over his face. On the other hand, a desire to please and win the parent's heart is shown by the child who tries to follow instructions but, due to lack of coordination does the same things as the insolent brat.

God feels the same way about His children – He has a special place in His heart for those who really want to do His will. He says about David, “I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do” (Acts 13: 22). What a vote of confidence! Yet David was far from perfect. He sinned terribly and made serious mistakes. But in spite of gross imperfections, his ultimate desire was to honor God and do His will. And this pleased God.

Maybe you avoid living the Christian life by making excuses such as, “I can't be a goody-goody; I like to goof around and have fun,” or, “No saint ever started out with an explosive temper like mine,” or, “Other people can give thanks for everything, but grumbling is more my style.” Rather than drowning in such details, however, get to the central issue; scoring a touchdown in life – one worth more than the six points you get for reaching the end zone in football. If you, like David, decide your goal is to do God's will instead of your own, God will start to change you.

Doing God's will requires admitting your sin, repenting (turning away from sin), receiving forgiveness, and continuing to follow God. Sometimes, by deceiving you or exploiting your ignorance, Satan can get you off the track. He can lay some clever snares, often by using your well-developed skill of

self-justification. But if you do sin, hope isn't gone. The key to recovery is repentance. David knew the value of true repentance and practiced it. That made all the difference in his life.

Once you realize that you have sinned, the goal of living to do God's will can save you. Instead of planning a clever cover-up, you'll admit it, confess it, and turn around and go the right way. You'll realize that you deserve the consequences of your actions and face them squarely. You'll do everything possible to keep from falling into the same trap again.

Doing God's will also means receiving His forgiveness. If you've sinned or made a bad mistake, wallowing in self-condemnation will not help God's cause. For example, suppose your friend Jim comes over, and, while demonstrating his karate chops, accidentally kills your favorite pet, Henrietta Hamster, who didn't know enough to stay out of the way. Jim begs your forgiveness and tells you he's sorry so you pardon him totally. Jim, however, never accepts your forgiveness and mentions Henrietta every time you get together. He calls himself a murderer and never acts at ease in your presence. You would feel very hurt that Jim refused to accept your forgiveness, and his attitude would put a strain on your friendship.

It's the same with God. When God says He will forgive you, He means it. If you fall into sin, be a David. Confess it, forsake it, receive God's forgiveness and go on living for Him. Determine to be a person after God's own heart, a person whose goal is to do God's will.

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you” (Psalm 51: 1, 2, 7-13).

1. List all the things David prayed for.
2. Did David expect to do penance (self-punishment) or to go around for a while condemning himself so God could forgive him and use him again?
3. Which part of this prayer shows that David was primarily concerned with doing God's will?
4. Do you know how to receive God's forgiveness? Do you live as a forgiven person?

God's Honor Society

“Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine. Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. He looked David over. David said to the Philistine, ‘You came against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me ... and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.’ So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him” (1 Samuel 17: 40, 41, 45-47, 50).

You probably were just a little tyke when you first heard the exciting story of David, the shepherd boy, killing big, bad Goliath, the giant. You may even recall the pictures in your Bible storybook. As a child, however, you probably missed the point of the incident. David was not trying to play hero by showing off his bravery; rather, he was applying a spiritual principle: God defends His honor.

Despite their failures, the Israelites were God's people, and everybody knew it. But that didn't bother Goliath. He had no respect for the God of Israel. His boldness and size had the Israelites shaking in their sandals, and this spurred

him to further mock God – the God who had divided the Red Sea, leveled the walls of Jericho, and used Gideon’s 300 men to defeat an entire army. The Israelites had forgotten the God of miracles; and their lack of faith prevented God from acting. But then Goliath met David, who believed God could do anything and who believed God's reputation was not a laughing matter.

It happened this way: David, taking food from his father to his older brothers in the army, overheard soldiers saying that the man who killed Goliath would marry the king’s daughter and free his own family from paying taxes.

Desiring to make conversation, David asked a question about these rewards. He then immediately changed the subject to the disgrace Israel was suffering and the dishonor God was receiving from big-mouthed Goliath. David knew God wanted Goliath dead; the Law of Moses commanded, “When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you. When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army. He shall say: ‘Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be faint-hearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory’” (Deuteronomy 20: 1-4). David knew he could depend on God's power if he did God's work in God's way. Therefore, he boldly told the giant he would kill him so “the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel” (1 Samuel 17: 46).

David’s attitude after killing the giant further proves that the honoring of God was his true motive. Even when he became famous in Israel – the women even made up a song about David’s amazing feat – he remained humble. When Saul gave to someone else the daughter he had promised to David, David said nothing. When Saul exploited his younger daughter’s crush on David by offering David her hand in marriage if David killed 100 Philistines, David only said, “Do you think it is a small matter to become the king’s son-in-law? I'm only a poor man and little known” (1 Samuel 18: 23). David never got bigheaded about his accomplishments.

Because God's honor was so important to him, David had no time to think about himself. He had no time to get scared of Goliath who was much larger

than he was. He had no time to bask in the glory of being a national hero. He had no time to nurse a grudge against Saul who would not reward him. Instead, he contentedly waited for God's reward – something well worth waiting for.

God doesn't forget those who put Him first. He promises, "Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life" (Proverbs 22: 4). God honors those who honor Him. It's worth the effort to become a member of God's Honor Society.

"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me? Says the Lord Almighty ..." (Malachi 1: 6).

"Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine" (Proverbs 3: 9, 10).

"... Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained" (1 Samuel 2: 30).

"Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me" (John 12: 26).

1. Why does God deserve to be honored?
2. How can you honor God?
3. What promises are given to those who honor God?
4. Has honoring God been your top priority? Ask God to point out areas in your life where changes need to be made.

Bomb the Fib Factory

"David answered Ahimelech the priest, 'The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, "No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions."' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain

place. Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.’ So the priest gave him the consecrated bread ... David asked Ahimelech, ‘Don’t you have a spear or a sword here? I haven’t brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king’s business was urgent.’ The priest replied, ‘The sword of Goliath the Philistine ... is here ... take it.’ ... Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelech ... Saul said to him, ‘Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today? ... You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and your father’s whole family’” (1 Samuel 21: 2,3, 6, 8, 9; 22: 11, 13, 16).

It escapes from your lips too quickly – that “No, I didn’t” when Mom scolds you for not double-locking the front door when you came home last night, or when your teacher accuses you of passing a note to the kid across the aisle. You know you’ve lied, but exaggeration creeps into your speech just to make a better impression. The big lie that seemingly could get you off the hook in a tough situation tempts you fiercely.

Lying, unfortunately, dishonors God in several ways: First, it defies His commandments. Second, it implies God can't be trusted to get you out of a tight spot, or to guard your reputation. So you try to lie your way out. Rather than being content with what God has given, you exaggerate so others will think your life is a little more exciting than it really is.

David fell into the lying trap. True, he was running away for his life and the pressure was on, but when the same thing had happened before, David had gone to the prophet Samuel for help. When Saul came to kill David, Samuel and the other prophets provided such an awesome display of God's power that Saul and his men forgot all about chasing David. If David had again sought safety with Samuel, the lying could have been avoided. David ignored the first principle of bombing his fib factory; Get direction from God in the first place so you don't get yourself into a how-will-I-ever-get-out-of-this-one situation.

Because David hadn't asked God what to do, he found himself fleeing from an army, with no food to eat and no weapon to defend himself. So he stopped

to ask a priest for food. The priest was suspicious because David was travelling alone. His skepticism gave David another chance to tell the truth but he blew it. David knew it was treason to help someone escape from the king, so he lied.

A lie eventually backfires. David's lie caused the deaths of an innocent priest and his family. What dreadful consequences a few words can cause! The Christian student who lies to his non-Christian teacher will raise one more barrier between that teacher and God. The boy who lies to his parents widens the "generation gap." The girl who lies to her friends loses their respect. Lies hurt other people and you. Do something about your fib factory.

Some of the most harmful lies are the ones you tell yourself. God's Word says you can do everything through Christ who gives you the strength (Philippians 4: 13); so, when you say, "I can't ever do anything right." You're lying to yourself. God's Word says, "He who hates correction will die" (Proverbs 15: 10); so, when you say, "Nobody's going to tell me what to do," or, "I don't need any advice, thank you." You are hurting yourself. God's Word says, "Overcome evil with good" (Romans 12: 21); so, when you say, "I've got a right to get even with him," you are convincing yourself to disobey God's command.

Lies dishonor God, hurt other people, and destroy you. But how can you break the habit? By replacing each lie with the truth – God's Word. God's truth, like a B-52 bomber, will demolish the fib factory that's still operating in your life.

"Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment ... The Lord detests lying lips, but He delights in men who are truthful" (Proverbs 12: 19, 22).

"Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body" (Ephesians 4: 25).

1. What does God say about liars?
2. Will lying benefit you in the long run?

3. Have you been under the impression that a little lying isn't such a big deal? Have you changed your opinion?
4. In what situation have you found lying especially easy? Ask God to help you change the next time you face that temptation.

Racing Without a Reason

“So Saul went down to the Desert of Ziph, with his three thousand chosen men of Israel, to search there for David. Then David set out and went to the place where Saul had camped. He saw where Saul and Abner son of Ner, the commander of the army, had lain down ... So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him. Abishai said to David, ‘Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice.’ But David said to Abishai, ‘Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the Lord lives,’ he said, ‘the Lord himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go’” (1 Samuel 26: 2, 5, 7-11).

Before the invention of the telegraph or telephone, messages were often carried by runners. In 2 Samuel 18, after a battle, the commander ordered a runner to tell King David what had happened. Another man, Ahimaaz, asked if he could run too. The commander tried to discourage Ahimaaz, because he had nothing to report. But Ahimaaz insisted on running – and he won the race. His message to the king was less than enlightening; when David asked specifically how his son Absalom was, the runner blurted out between gasps, “I saw a great confusion ... but I don't know what it was” (2 Samuel 18: 29). No wonder the king asked him to step aside and waited for the second messenger.

Before you laugh at this race without a reason, look at yourself. Are you running aimlessly without specific instructions from God? Does “lots of commotion, little progress” sum up your life? Are you, as Ahimaaz did, covering lots of miles but actually getting nowhere?

Ahimaaz, the marathon man of our story, was the faster runner; he won the race even though the other guy had a head start. And when King David heard who was running toward him, he remarked, “He’s a good man.” No doubt Ahimaaz had faithfully delivered messages before. But he had one weakness: He hated to wait. By acting before he had clear instructions, he wasted time and energy.

Maybe you should stop and get instructions from God before rushing into a new job or joining every club on campus. Even if you know something is God's will, wait to discover God's timing and God's method before going ahead. After all, God has done a great job of running the universe for who-knows-how-many years; it is rather logical that He not only can tell you what to do but can arrange the perfect timing as well. And by letting Him plan the details of your life you honor Him.

David waited for God's direction amazingly well. Because he made honoring God his top priority, he handled a long, difficult time of waiting for God to fulfill His promise. As a teenager (the Bible doesn't tell his age, so he may have been even older), he had been anointed the next king of Israel. (The Israelites had a ceremony of pouring oil on the head of the person who was to be king.) Then he returned to caring for his father's sheep. After he killed Goliath, and later when he married Saul's daughter, the goal seemed within reach at last. Because of Saul's jealousy, however, David had to flee for his life, and then hide in the barren hills of Judah for years. During this time, he had two chances to kill King Saul easily. David could have reasoned that having a madman for a king was bad for the country, that Saul was a terrible spiritual leader, and that God had promised the throne to David anyway. But he didn't think that way. He knew God had anointed Saul as king, so David waited for God's timing to remove Saul from office. Even after Saul's death he waited until all the people decided to make him king (the ten northern tribes took seven years to decide), but the long wait was worth it. David could reign knowing this was God's will and timing.

Because God's blessing was on his reign, David accomplished more than any other king of Israel. He captured Jerusalem and made it the capital. He defeated the enemies of Israel and brought peace and prosperity. He organized musicians to sing and play for worship services in the temple. He wrote many of the psalms in your Bible.

If God gives you a glimpse of His plan for your life, as He did to David, don't get in a rush. Let God fulfill that plan in His way in His time. I once read the letter of a young couple who had gone out as missionaries before they were ready. They had to come back. Many people could tell you of heartaches they've had from rushing into marriage or going ahead of God in another area. Learn to wait for God. Nobody wins great prizes for racing without a reason.

"I am still confident of this; I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord" (Psalm 27: 13, 14).

"But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always" (Hosea 12: 6).

"Do not say, 'I'll pay you back for this wrong!' Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you" (Proverbs 20: 22).

1. Why is it easy to go ahead with your own solutions instead of waiting for God to act?
2. What promises are given, in the above verses, to those who wait for God?
3. What are you rushing into right now? Take some time to find out what God thinks about it.

The Price of a Promise

"(David) asked, 'Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?' Ziba answered the king, 'There is still a son of

Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet.' When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, 'Mephibosheth!' 'Your servant,' he replied. 'Don't be afraid,' David said to him, 'for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table'" (2 Samuel 9: 1, 3, 6, 7).

You make promises every day:

"I'll be there at 8:00 o'clock sharp."

"I'll send you a picture later."

"I'll pay you back at the end of the month."

"I'll do all the assignments tonight and hand them in tomorrow."

"I'll do the dishes every night for a month if you'll let me go on the camping trip."

How much are your promises worth? Is the price of your promises going up or down? Do you consider keeping your promises important, or are you in the same category as Willie Wishewashie and Sandy Semi-Reliable? Maybe you never realized that sticking by your word is an important part of honoring God.

David went to great lengths to fulfill a promise he had made years before to Jonathan, son of King Saul. Although Saul was very jealous of David's popularity and success, Jonathan considered David his best friend. Jonathan didn't care if David became king instead of him; he told David, "You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you" (1 Samuel 23: 17). Then they promised each other lasting friendship and kindness to each other's descendants. (This was quite a pledge because in ancient times a new king customarily killed all members of the former royal family.)

David was hiding from Saul when he learned that Jonathan had been killed in battle. Seven years later he became king over all of Israel. He then had to defeat the enemies of his nation, capture Jerusalem, and set up his capital city there. But David did not forget his promise. As soon as he had a little rest, he went all out to find any living relatives of Jonathan. When he found

Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, he gave him all the land that had belonged to his grandfather Saul and invited him to live at the palace and eat at his table. In keeping his promise, David wasn't just doing a good deed in memory of his best friend; he was honoring God.

You see, God always keeps His promises; He says, "But I the Lord will speak what I will speak, and it shall be fulfilled without delay" (Ezekiel 12: 25). God's children should resemble Him in faithfully keeping promises. Parents are honored when their children are complimented for reflecting some of their good characteristics. God is honored when his children reflect His character.

If you don't keep your promises, you make a mockery of the God who based His entire revelation to man on His promises. Consider this: "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant (pact, promise) of our fathers?" (Malachi 2:10). Breaking promises cheapens the whole idea of a covenant being a permanent promise. If you are sloppy about keeping your word, you'll have difficulty putting your faith in the promises of God and living by them. You'll tend to value God's promises as you value your own.

What's the price of a promise? If your perspective is right, a promise should be your most valued possession.

"Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He ...who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the Lord, who keeps his oath even when it hurts" (Psalm 15: 1-4).

"Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it" (Ecclesiastes 5: 2, 4, 5).

1. Do you make every promise as if in the presence of God?
2. Why should you be very careful before making any kind of a

promise?

3. What must you do, even if you have made a promise that is very hard for you to fulfill?
4. Are you too quick to make promises? Have you made some promises that you haven't kept? Ask God to show you how to make right (today) one of those un-kept promises.

A Secret Sin That Everyone Knows About

“In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, ‘Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?’ Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her ... Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, ‘I am pregnant’” (2 Samuel 11: 1-5).

Do you realize how important your actions are? Each brings either honor or dishonor to God. David’s adultery with Bathsheba shows this clearly. Because of what David had done, his subjects could excuse their sins with, “Well, even the king doesn’t obey the Ten Commandments.” David’s sons could justify their disrespect for their father with, “Who are you to tell me what to do? Look what you did.” Even people today use David’s sin to absolve themselves; it’s the old argument that says, “See, people who claim to be religious don’t live any differently than anyone else.”

God will forgive if you sin, but He can't dissolve the dishonor you've brought to God and His kingdom. How sad if your gossip or sarcasm or anger causes someone to say, “If that’s Christianity, I don’t want it.” How heartbreaking when people observe that a young adult who says he knows Jesus acts no differently than others. God has given you His Holy Spirit to provide all the power necessary to live above sin. Your job is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

Apart from your depending on Jesus, you are capable of terrible things. The Apostle Paul wrote, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature” (Romans 7: 18). You are to live, not according to the desires of your old self-centeredness (that was crucified with Jesus on the cross), but by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8: 4). God has planned for you to be victorious over sin by letting the Holy Spirit live through you. Beware, however, for any pride or yielding to the self-life will lead to a David-like disaster.

David fell into sin because of spiritual laxness, and God included David’s blunder in the Bible so you can learn from David’s mistakes. Several areas of laxness led to his downfall. First, he became careless about his work and his spiritual life. Jesus warned His disciples, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation ...” (Matthew 26: 41), but David dropped his guard. He deserted his responsibilities (by handing over command of the army to Joab), then became so bored that he was pacing back and forth on the palace roof – where temptation struck.

Idleness and boredom have sent many teens looking for excitement in all the wrong places. Ask God each day what work you should do and what useful projects you should tackle in your free time. Don’t let the devil find you with nothing to do and out of communication with God.

Second, David had been disregarding one of God's commands for a long time. The Law of Moses stipulated that the king of God's people “must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray” (Deuteronomy 17: 17), but David had married several women, just as the kings in surrounding countries did. This disobedience paved the way for his great sin with Bathsheba.

You'll often be tempted to ignore one or more of God's commands, simply because no one else seems concerned about it. Don’t be fooled. One sin always leads to more. Strictly obey the Bible, even if everyone around you seems to be going against it.

Third, David didn’t guard his eyes. He didn’t have to look a second time when he saw Bathsheba bathing. Although he couldn’t help the first look, the second look was sin. Rather than taking another peek, he should have gone downstairs.

You can't avoid some temptation. When you drive or shop you'll inevitably see billboards or magazine covers that will tempt you – but you don't have to look twice. God expects you to guard your eyes. Temptation is often unavoidable, but sin is never accidental. As someone once wisely said, "You can't keep a bird from flying over your head, but you can keep it from building a nest in your hair."

Fourth, David misused his power in order to cover up his sin – he had Bathsheba's soldier husband positioned in the battle so he would be killed. Then David could legally marry the widow carrying his child.

You're probably thinking that was a terrible thing to do, but there may have been times when only your lack of power kept you from doing something equally bad. Do you take advantage of being older and smarter than your little brother, or are you always fair to him? Do you exploit your seniority at work by joining the plot to make the new employee do all the dirty work? Do you speak loud and long in your own defense every time you're cornered? Consider carefully how you use the power entrusted to you.

When David finally came to his senses, he repented fully and God forgave him. But his secret sin became world news – people are still reading about it in their Bibles. And David, whose heart's desire was to honor God, realized what a terrible example he had been.

Learn from David's mistakes. The story of David and Bathsheba doesn't need any modern reruns.

"See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (Hebrews 12: 15).

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12: 1, 2).

"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching” (1 Timothy 4: 12).

“In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us” (Titus 2: 7, 8).

1. What can keep you from being a bad advertisement for Christ?
2. What can you do to be a good example to others?
3. From where does the power come to be a “model Christian”?
4. What kind of example have you been lately? What area of your life should you work on improving today?

Give the Gold Medal to the Coach

“David said, ‘My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the Lord should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations. Therefore, I will make preparations for it.’ So David made extensive preparations before his death. Then he called for his son Solomon and charged him to build a house for the Lord, the God of Israel. David said to Solomon: ‘My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the Lord my God ... Now ... the Lord be with you, and may you have success and build the house of the Lord your God, as he said you would. May the Lord give you discretion and understanding when he puts you in command over Israel, so that you may keep the law of the Lord your God’” (1 Chronicles 22: 5, 7, 11, 12).

Someone has wisely observed that great things can be done for God if no one cares who gets the credit. You honor the Lord when you gladly do His work *whether or not anyone notices*. This sounds easy but beware of the subtle pitfalls: If no one says anything nice about your solo, are you content just because you sang to praise Jesus – or are you worried that everybody thought something was wrong with it? If you volunteered to help clean the church, and no one else who volunteered shows up, do you stay late to finish, even

though you miss the NFC championship game on TV? But what if no one says the church looks nice, or commends you for missing the game to keep your promise? Face it: You like to see your name in print, but you're not very good at working without recognition.

When David got the idea of building a beautiful temple for God, the Lord told Nathan the prophet that David's son, not David, would construct it. Instead of being disappointed and asking why, David accepted God's answer. Then he proceeded to gather many of the materials Solomon would need to build it. David didn't say, "I need some time to relax. Let Solomon do the work for a change," or, "Solomon's going to get the credit. Let him do all the work." David wanted God's work to go forward. He wanted the God of Israel to have the most beautiful temple in the world. And he was willing to help make it a reality, without getting recognition.

You need to acquire David's attitude, to learn there are no big "I's" and no little "u's" in the kingdom of God. All believers are on the same team and the Coach is the only one who deserves any credit. After all, without God what could anybody do?

Once you get this straight, you'll eliminate many other problems. Since all the glory goes to God, from whom you got everything anyway, you'll see how ridiculous it is to be jealous of "spiritual giant" Christians. Instead, you'll pray for them and encourage them in their work. Also, you won't need to put down anybody to make yourself look good, because any credit goes to God, not you. In addition, such an attitude will save you from the pride that "goes before destruction" (Proverbs 16: 18).

When you want only to honor God, you won't be upset by those who try to be "big wheels" by acting super-important. You won't try to compete with them. You'll just go ahead and be an example of a person whose only goal is to further God's kingdom. And you won't get down on yourself for failures. You'll be trusting God for all you need, and He will provide. When you're a member of God's team, all the gold medals rightly go to the Coach.

"Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God" (2 Corinthians

3: 5).

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15: 5).

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1 Corinthians 15: 10).

“I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ...” (Ephesians 3: 7, 8).

1. Where does every ability you have come from?
2. Where does the strength to serve God come from?
3. Where does the vision and wisdom to do something out of the ordinary come from?
4. Is there any place for comparing yourself with others, trying to be better than others, or feeling jealous of others?