

## JUSTICE AND KINDNESS

DEVOTIONAL READING: 2 Samuel 9:1–7, 9–12

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Samuel 9

### 2 SAMUEL 9:1–7, 9–12

**1** David asked, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”

**2** Now there was a servant of Saul’s household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?”

“At your service,” he replied.

**3** The king asked, “Is there no one still alive from 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 lame in both feet.”

**4** “Where is he?” the king asked.

Ziba answered, “He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.”

**5** So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.

**6** When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.

David said, “Mephibosheth!”

“At your service,” he replied.

**7** “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.”

.....

**9** Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul’s steward, and said to him, “I have given your master’s grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. <sup>10</sup> You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master’s grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table.” (Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.)

**11** Then Ziba said to the king, “Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do.” So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table like one of the king’s

sons.

<sup>12</sup> Mephibosheth had a young son named Mika, and all the members of Ziba's household were servants of Mephibosheth.

## KEY TEXT

*David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"—2 Samuel 9:1*

# JUSTICE, LAW, HISTORY

## Unit 1: God Requires Justice

### LESSONS 1–4

## LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the history behind David's kindness to Mephibosheth.
2. Evaluate David's motives in doing so.
3. Make a commitment to show kindness to a marginalized person in the week ahead.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

A. Kindness from Memory

B. Lesson Context

I. A Promise Remembered (2 Samuel 9:1–4)

A. David's Search (vv. 1–3a)

B. Ziba's Knowledge (vv. 3b–4)

*Enabled to Aid*

II. A Promise Fulfilled (2 Samuel 9:5–7, 9–12)

A. Mephibosheth's Arrival (vv. 5–6)

B. David's Declaration (vv. 7, 9–10)

C. The New Normal (vv. 11–12)

*Healing Through Helping*

### Conclusion

- A. Kindness from Experience
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## HOW TO SAY IT

Ammiel	<i>Ah-mih-el.</i>
Ish-Bosheth	<i>Ish-Bo-sheth.</i>
Lo Debar Low	<i>Dee-bar.</i>
Makir	<i>May-ker.</i>
Mephibosheth	<i>Meh-fib-o-sheth.</i>
Mika	<i>My-ka.</i>
theocracy	<i>thee-ok-ruh-see (th as in thin).</i>
Ziba	<i>Zih-bah.</i>

## Introduction

### A. Kindness from Memory

Khaled Hosseini’s 2004 novel *The Kite Runner* is a gripping story of childhood friendship, betrayal, and the search for redemption. Set in Afghanistan, the story traces the life story of Amir, the young son of a wealthy family, who befriends Hassan, the underprivileged son of his father’s servant. The boys become friends, but the difference in status between them leads to a grueling separation that haunts Amir for many years. Some decades later, following Hassan’s death, Amir searches for Hassan’s son in order to rescue him from abuse and show him kindness for his father’s sake.

Similar themes of friendship, redemption, and rescue arise in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel through the story of David and Jonathan. Long after he could no longer enjoy a friendship with Jonathan, David remembered his promises and looked for the chance to show kindness to his friend’s son.

### B. Lesson Context

In the Christian arrangement of the Old Testament, 1 and 2 Samuel are part of the historical books (Joshua–Esther). They record the transition from being governed by the Lord (theocracy) to an earthly king (monarchy, beginning around 1050 BC). The man Samuel, after whom the books were named, was a pivotal figure: the last of the judges and the first of the

prophets (see [Acts 3:24](#); [13:20](#)).

While Samuel was well respected throughout the land, his sons did not enjoy the same esteem ([1 Samuel 8:1–3](#)). The Israelites, tired of the abuses of Samuel’s sons, demanded that Samuel give them an earthly king “like all the nations” ([8:5](#)). This flew in the face of God’s desire for Israel to be a priestly, holy nation under his rule ([Exodus 19:6](#); [1 Samuel 12:12–16](#)). But the Lord did as they desired, choosing Saul to be king. But Saul did not faithfully carry out the Lord’s commands ([13:7–14](#); [15:1–35](#)). The Lord rejected Saul and had Samuel anoint David to be Saul’s successor ([13:14](#); [16:1](#)).

Though Saul was initially fond of David and took him into his court ([1 Samuel 16:21–22](#)), the king knew that David was chosen to succeed him ([20:30–31](#)). He grew fearful and even murderous when David’s renown started to surpass his own ([18:6–16](#), [25](#), [29](#); [19:9–10](#); [23:7–8](#); [26:1–2](#)).

Yet for all of Saul’s paranoid attacks on him, David consistently refused to harm or retaliate against Saul ([1 Samuel 24:6](#); [26:11](#); [2 Samuel 1:16](#)). In spite of his complicated interactions with Saul, David’s most loyal and trusted friend was none other than Saul’s oldest son, Jonathan ([1 Samuel 18:1–4](#)). Their friendship resulted in a covenant that obligated both parties. Jonathan would protect and support David, while David pledged to show kindness to Jonathan’s family ([20:12–17](#)).

Material in 1 and 2 Samuel is sometimes arranged thematically rather than chronologically. So the relationship between events in David’s life can be hard to determine. This is especially true of David’s ordering the deaths of several of Saul’s sons ([2 Samuel 21:1–9](#)). It seems at first glance that the incident in [2 Samuel 21](#) must have occurred after our story (see [9:1a](#), below). But it also could have been included in the latter chapters of 2 Samuel to fit with other stories about David’s fallibility (example: [24:1–17](#)).

Clues from the surrounding material place today’s text some 15 to 20 years after David began his reign in 1010 BC. David had spent much of his time solidifying his control as king over all Israel by defeating enemies both within and without (examples: [2 Samuel 2:8–32](#); [5:6–25](#)). Saul and Jonathan had been dead for some time ([1 Samuel 31](#)). Another of Saul’s sons, Ish-Bosheth, ruled in the northern tribes until his own death, at which time David began his rule over all of Israel ([2 Samuel 5:1–5](#)). But the tribes had shown their preference for a descendant of Saul on the throne ([2:8–9](#)). In situations such as this one, it was often top priority for a king from a new ruling family to kill off all members of the previous king’s household, thereby eliminating any rivals (examples: [1 Kings 15:29](#); [16:11](#)).

## I. A Promise Remembered

([2 SAMUEL 9:1–4](#))

## A. David's Search (vv. 1–3a)

### 1a. David asked, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul

David had vowed against destroying Saul's house, both to Saul and to Jonathan (1 Samuel 24:20–22; the circumstances of 2 Samuel 21:1–9 did not constitute unfaithfulness to his oath). In spite of potential threats to his rule, David determined to keep his promises and spare the lineage of his friend and his former king.

How could David not know whether anyone of Saul's household still lived? For one thing, he had been busy with wars, establishing Jerusalem as his capital, and trying to move the ark. How was he meant to keep track of who died in those years? But the answer may be even simpler than that: Saul's family was hiding. Knowing that David had been crowned king first in Judah and then over all Israel, any remaining sons of Saul would have to fear that they would be executed to prevent their trying to regain the throne.

### 1b. “to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?”

Some have said that David's motives here may have involved keeping his enemies close, so as to make sure they did not plot his overthrow (compare 1 Kings 2:36–38). Or similarly, he may have thought that being kind to Saul's family might score him political points with any remaining supporters of Saul's dynasty. Knowing that people rarely have pure motivations, it is possible that David valued both keeping potential usurpers close *and* scoring points with Saul's supporters. But his main motivation was neither of these things.

David's pledge to Jonathan went so far as to ensure continual *kindness* to the same, even after “the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth” (1 Samuel 20:15). Second Samuel 8 details David's military defeat of all Israel's surrounding enemies (2 Samuel 8:1–14). It is fitting that after we hear of David's enemies being cut off from the face of the earth, we hear of his determination to find someone to care for *for Jonathan's sake*.

This kindness often describes acts of loyalty or trustworthiness within the context of a promise (example: Joshua 2:12). The same Hebrew word is frequently translated “love” when referring to God's actions within the covenant (Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 7:12; etc.). Kindness like this is built into the character of God (see Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:19).

Covenants were struck in situations where a power imbalance existed. At the time that David and Jonathan committed to their own covenant, Jonathan was the heir to Saul's throne and David was a soldier, albeit a very popular one. By the time David was looking for an opportunity to act on this covenant, Jonathan was dead and David himself was king instead. David's adherence to the covenant years later depended solely on his faithfulness toward Jonathan, not to any possible falling out of their friendship.

*What Do You Think?*

Under what circumstances should you promote memorializing a fellow servant of God?

*Digging Deeper*

What guardrails would you suggest for helping keep that memorialization focused ultimately on Jesus?

**2. Now there was a servant of Saul’s household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?” “At your service,” he replied.**

*Ziba* held high position among the servants in Saul’s *household* even after Saul’s death, demonstrated here by his being the one called into David’s presence. He was the manager of Saul’s estate at this point and had become wealthy as a result (see [2 Samuel 9:10](#), below). Other episodes affirm Ziba’s continued status ([16:1–4](#); [19:15–30](#)). Ziba would be sure to know all about Saul’s remaining descendants.

Referring to himself as being *at* [David’s] *service* identified Ziba as being loyal to David. This was important to establish if Ziba worried that David might take revenge on the house of Saul, despite the king’s claim to want to be kind to someone in the family. However, David had shown time and again that he did not desire to wipe out Saul’s family or his soldiers (examples: [2 Samuel 3:6–4:12](#)).

**3a. The king asked, “Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God’s kindness?”**

David restated his question (see [2 Samuel 9:1](#), above), now to a man who should have known the answer. Although the question would not be redundant to Ziba, who was hearing it for the first time, the repetition emphasizes for the reader David’s urgent desire. The slight difference of showing *God’s kindness* (rather than “for Jonathan’s sake” in verse [1b](#)) recalls God’s favor expressed through and as a result of his covenant with Israel (examples: [Exodus 15:13](#); “love” in [Deuteronomy 7:7–9](#)).

*What Do You Think?*

What are some ways to ensure that God gets the credit in your acts of kindness?

*Digging Deeper*

What texts in addition to [Mark 9:41](#) and [Luke 17:10](#) inform your answer?

## B. Ziba’s Knowledge (vv. [3b–4](#))

**3b. Ziba answered the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet.”**

The first mention of this *son* comes in a passing note in [2 Samuel 4:4](#). He was five years old when Saul and *Jonathan* died in battle. At that time, his nurse fled with the boy, likely think-

ing that David would come to eliminate him (compare the similar story of Joash in [2 Kings 11:1–3](#)). Unfortunately, though, the boy fell during the flight and suffered permanently crippling injuries. As *Ziba* spoke, that child would probably be in his early to mid 20s.

Ziba did not mention the child’s name in his reply to David, but seems quick to have mentioned his disability. Maybe he knew David would immediately know which son Ziba was referring to. Perhaps he sought to reassure David that Jonathan’s son was no threat, so that David would not seek to kill him. Or perhaps he hoped that David would do exactly that, relieving Ziba of any obligation to provide for him (see [2 Samuel 9:7](#), below).

#### *What Do You Think?*

How should a person’s disabilities affect your responses to the previous two questions, if at all?

Why?

#### *Digging Deeper*

Considering [2 Samuel 16:1–4](#); [19:24–30](#), how should you deal with third-party reports that bring up questions of worthiness?

**4. “Where is he?” the king asked. Ziba answered, “He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.”**

*Lo Debar* was a village east of the Jordan River, in Gilead and associated with the tribe of Gad ([Joshua 13:24–28](#)). It was located much closer to Ish-Bosheth’s political center, Mahanaim ([Joshua 21:38](#); [2 Samuel 2:8](#)), than to David’s capital, Jerusalem ([5:5](#)). Although *Makir* had probably been a supporter of Saul originally, we later learn that he supported David and his men during Absalom’s revolt ([17:24–29](#)). The outcome of David’s inquiry here may have changed the man’s loyalties (see [9:9](#), below).

Nothing more is known about Makir’s father, *Ammiel*.

### **ENABLED TO AID**

I often saw her, bent nearly in half, making her way down the street in the Ukrainian city where I lived. One day we started talking. She told me about surviving the Holodomor, a horrifying famine in Ukraine in the 1930s. In an effort to stifle Ukrainian resistance to Soviet rule, Stalin enacted policies that resulted in widespread starvation; at least 3.9 million Ukrainians died as a result. My new friend was left with debilitating disabilities caused by severe malnourishment in her childhood.

Over the next few weeks, I learned she had few family members to care for her. But one day when I knocked on her door, a stranger opened it. My friend had found some boarders to share her small apartment and care for her. They provided comfort and much-needed finan-

cial help to this woman who had seen so much tragedy.

Though my Ukrainian friend sought out help, there are many others who need us to ask after their well-being and take initiative to help. What step can you take today to give aid and comfort?

—L. M.-W.

## II. A Promise Fulfilled

(2 SAMUEL 9:5–7, 9–12)

### A. Mephibosheth's Arrival (vv. 5–6)

**5–6.** So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel. When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.

*Mephibosheth* immediately honored *David* and addressed him with the deferential language appropriate when speaking to a king, echoing Ziba's words (see 2 Samuel 9:2, above). As a potential rival to the throne—being *son of Jonathan*, who was the firstborn *son of the dead King Saul*—Mephibosheth must have felt the tension in this moment. Accordingly, his first aim was to assure David that he was not a threat to his throne.

### B. David's Declaration (vv. 7, 9–10)

**7.** “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.”

Given the practice of familial annihilation discussed above, Mephibosheth may have expected to receive anything but kindness from David (compare 2 Samuel 19:28). But *David* immediately offered reassurance to Mephibosheth that he need not *be afraid*. David's summons was not, as it turns out, a ruse to flush Mephibosheth out of hiding. Instead, David wanted to show him *kindness for the sake of [his] father* in order to keep his covenant with *Jonathan*. Mephibosheth would eat at the king's *table*, just as David had once eaten at Saul's table (1 Samuel 20:24–27).

David's desire to *restore* to Mephibosheth the estate of his father suggests that David had gathered additional information beyond what is stated in these verses. Mephibosheth's living in Lo Debar in Makir's house makes clear that he wasn't living on any of Saul's lands, whether or not he was seeing any other benefit from the properties. Having *the land* restored cemented that Mephibosheth would receive whatever wealth was to be made from his grandfather's holdings.



### What Do You Think?

What criteria will you use to decide which of your acts of kindness will be done anonymously and which will be a public witness?

### Digging Deeper

What texts in addition to [Matthew 5:14–16](#) and [6:1–4](#) help you resolve this tension?

Mephibosheth seemed sincerely and humbly grateful for David's kindness to him (compare [2 Samuel 9:8](#), not in our printed text). Mephibosheth no doubt knew of his father's friendship with David and probably heard stories of Jonathan's aid to David.

**9. Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul's steward, and said to him, "I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family.**

David had come to possess Saul's land (see [2 Samuel 12:8](#); also [lesson 10](#)), whether because of his marriage to Michal (compare [Numbers 27:8](#)) or as forfeiture to his throne after the failure of Ish-Bosheth's brief reign. By returning Saul's property to Jonathan's son, David executed not only kindness but also restorative justice ([Leviticus 25:23–28](#)). Perhaps Ziba had taken advantage of Mephibosheth's disabled condition and commandeered Saul's estate for himself. His motives are not analyzed here, but later events suggest this would be in character for the *steward* (see [2 Samuel 9:10–11a](#), below).

**10a. "You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master's grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table."**

Although *Mephibosheth* would *eat* in David's house, *the land* would provide for the rest of Mephibosheth's family (see [2 Samuel 9:12](#), below) and for the servants supported through their own work.

**10b. (Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.)**

*Ziba* had apparently grown wealthy as a result of his control over Saul's estate, having *twenty servants* of his own, as well as *fifteen sons*. His work on the land would continue to support his own household as well as Mephibosheth's.

## C. The New Normal (vv. 11–12)

**11a. Then Ziba said to the king, "Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do."**

Once again *Ziba* emphasized his loyalty to David, calling himself his *servant* twice. Though he did not protest David's decree, he nonetheless looked for an opportunity to have it annulled. His chance came years later when David fled the palace during Absalom's rebellion

(see [2 Samuel 15:37–16:4](#); contrast [19:24–30](#)).

**11b. So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table like one of the king’s sons.**

Whereas Jonathan had “loved [David] as himself” ([1 Samuel 18:1](#)), now David would care for Jonathan’s son as his own son. David’s care for *Mephibosheth* yields a more satisfying conclusion to the story of David and Jonathan, which otherwise would have had a disheartening end.

### *HEALING THROUGH HELPING*

Rick and Samantha’s son was 19 when he died. Just as he was growing into a man, he was stricken with a rare disease that killed him quickly. His parents spent months in shock, mulling over what had happened—wondering if they could have seen the signs earlier, gotten him treatment earlier, somehow prevented his dying.

Then Rick and Samantha began to think about how to help others. In their grief, they met other families with children suffering from the same disease their son had. They began raising money for research, sponsoring fund-raising events and banquets. Their network of friends expanded as they supported others in similar situations. In the process of helping other families heal, Rick and Samantha have found healing themselves.

Similarly, David no doubt found healing from the loss of his friend Jonathan by reaching out to Jonathan’s son. Think of your own vulnerabilities and emotional pain. How can you move toward healing by helping another?

—L. M.-W.

**12. Mephibosheth had a young son named Mika, and all the members of Ziba’s household were servants of Mephibosheth.**

Jonathan’s grandson *Mika* would carry on the family (see [1 Chronicles 8:34–35](#), where Mephibosheth is called Merib-Baal).

Though one might expect David’s sons to have some feelings about Mephibosheth’s new role in their family, no hostilities between them are noted here or elsewhere.

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Kindness from Experience**

When I was a poor college student, times were tight financially and I received many kindnesses from God’s people who helped me through. Small gifts paid for meals, books, and gas and always seemed to come when I needed them most. Now that I’m older, employed full-time, and the tables have turned, I try to remember those days and give some help to poor

college students when the opportunity arises.

For David, the idea that he would help others based on his own remembrances and experiences is a running theme throughout today's text. He showed kindness and justice to Mephibosheth, partly because David had pledged to do so but also because he had received the same from Jonathan. And David remembered the ordeals he suffered at the hands of an unpredictable Saul and sought to rectify the misdeeds of that predecessor. But most of all, as a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22), David sought to display in his kingship the characteristics of divine justice that were required of Israel as a whole. He knew that he must fear, serve, and love God with all his heart and soul (see Deuteronomy 10:12; also lesson 1).



Visual for Lesson 2. Point to this visual while discussing verse 1, and ask volunteers to give examples from their own friendships.

The same is true today. We are called to remember the kindness that God has shown us—especially through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection—and show that kindness to others. This may mean providing for the needs of others in our community; it could mean making

restitution for wrongs that we did not commit. Justice and kindness call us to go beyond loving our friends to loving even those people who may be enemies ([Matthew 5:43–48](#)). In this way, we demonstrate the covenant kindness of our God.

*What Do You Think?*

Which principle in today's text will you have the most problem integrating into your life?

*Digging Deeper*

What action will you take this week to resolve this problem?

## **B. Prayer**

Father, you have shown us many kindnesses and given us examples to follow in your Word. May we show your love, kindness, and justice to others in return. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## **C. Thought to Remember**

Show God's kindness—keep your promises.

## **INVOLVEMENT LEARNING**

*Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

### **Into the Lesson**

Before class begins, write on the board several of the following sentences with words scrambled.

*Justice leads to kindness.*

*True justice is sometimes surprising.*

*Not everyone wants justice.*

*It's never too late to be kind.*

*It's possible to ignore justice.*

Allow a few minutes for learners to unscramble the sentences. Ask for them to be read aloud. Ask volunteers to tell whether they agree or disagree with a given sentence and to

share an example of why they believe it's true or not.

*Alternative 1.* Create a handout to distribute for small-group work.

*Alternative 2.* Before class, place at each chair a copy of the “Why Be Kind?” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Students can begin work on as they arrive.

Make a transition by saying, “How are kindness and justice connected? David’s actions today give us some insight into this question.”

## Into the Word

Recruit three volunteers to explain the background material for this week’s lesson by preparing a 90-second story beginning with one of these phrases:

*Let me tell you about Saul*

*Let me tell you about Jonathan*

*Let me tell you about Mephibosheth.*

After their presentations, have the text read aloud, then distribute handouts (you create) with the following nine sentences on all handouts. Form groups of three or four to put the sentences in the correct biblical order.

- 1–David promised to restore to Mephibosheth all the land that had belonged to his grandfather Saul.
- 2–David promised that Mephibosheth would always eat at his table.
- 3–Ziba, a servant of Saul’s household, appeared before the king.
- 4–David summoned Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth to appear before him.
- 5–Mephibosheth had Ziba and all his sons as his servants.
- 6–Ziba promised to follow David’s orders.
- 7–David asked whether anyone from Jonathan’s family line was still living.
- 8–David told Ziba that Mephibosheth would receive everything that had belonged to Saul and his family.
- 9–Ziba told David that Jonathan’s son was still alive.

After several minutes, ask the groups to report (*expected order: 7, 3, 9, 4, 1, 8, 2, 6, 5*). Discuss by asking how the five sentences that opened the class apply to today’s story.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “[www.Ziba&Mephibosheth.edu?](http://www.Ziba&Mephibosheth.edu?)” exercise from the activity page. Allow study pairs several minutes to complete the activity before whole-class sharing.

## Into Life

*Brainstorming.* Write this header on the board

*Victims of Injustice*

Give class members 90 seconds to call out responses; list them under the heading. Then write a second heading beside the first:

*How Kindness Could Help*

Discuss how each example listed could be remedied by acts of kindness. As learners share, make a list under this second heading. Ask the class how they as individuals or as a group could begin to show kindness in one of the examples. Close with prayer for participants to commit to pursuing at least one idea from the second list.