

In a world of the 24-hour news cycle, filled with headlines of violence, war, and hatred, kindness cuts through the noise and offers a different picture of reality. In Hebrew, the word most commonly translated as kindness is the word *hesed*. It is a word rich and pregnant with theological depth. It denotes, kindness, love, loyalty, and mercy. Most commonly, it is used to describe the relationship between God and humans. It is a deeply relational term meant to remind us of the love between God and humanity. *Hesed* describes the special relationship God has with his covenantal people, and as such, can be a difficult word to translate. Different translations have used: ESV - steadfast love, RSV - loyal love, NET - covenant faithfulness, NLT - unfailing love, and KJV - loving-kindness.

This Old Testament word for love is far richer and deeper than any word English can conceive of love. *Hesed* is a steadfast, rock-solid faithfulness that endures forever.

**“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.” - Isaiah 54:10**

*Hesed* is often used in the Biblical revelation to designate God's love. *Hesed* is love without regard to shifting circumstances, hormones, emotional states, and personal conveniences. This is the kind of love with which 'God so loved the World.' This is the kind of love to which we aspire when we take marriage vows to love, "in sickness and health, till death do us part." In later Hebrew writings, *hesed* is linked with the concept of justice. Listen to the words of Jeremiah.

**“...but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness [*hesed*], justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord.” Jeremiah 9:24**

**“Continue your love [*hesed*] to show who know you, your righteousness [*justice*] to the upright in heart.” Psalm 36:10**

**“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy [*hesed*] and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8**

We are going to look at the intersection of justice and kindness. Because this intersection represents the posture in which the church takes to live in this world today. In one sense, this kindness [*hesed*] is what we have experienced from God. Unconditional, extravagant love regardless of circumstance. But this is never the end of the story. The story has always

been that we are loved to love, blessed to bless. As we receive this kindness [*hesed*], we, in turn, seek to embody this love in the world around us. In doing so, we witness the beauty and reality of God's movement in this world, and our need to be reconciled to him.

We are going to continue our series entitled, "Reroute." The idea is that all of us are headed somewhere; we have plans, dreams, concerns, etc. But what happens when you find yourself in a situation in which you need to reroute. Things didn't go as you planned; God had other strategies. Maybe you are just going through a change or a transition that you need to reroute where you intended to go. There are joyful passages, and there are painful transitions. But ultimately, our plans take different shapes and turns.

This morning we are going to dive back into the life of David and look at a way in which David reroutes the plans of a man named Mephibosheth. Where his actions give shape to a new horizon and radically change the expectations and perspectives of a man with a difficult path in life. We are going to read the unfamiliar story of David and Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 1-8.

It could be argued the story we are looking at takes place at the height of David's reign over Israel. In some sense, it is his greatest hour. While troubled times are coming on the horizon for David, right where we pick up things are at a peak.

Chapter 1 - Saul and his son Jonathan die in battle. Remember, Saul was one who continually was hunting David to kill him because he was a threat to the throne. But David responded to this differently. David believed that Saul was anointed by God to be King and respected that. Despite having multiple opportunities to kill Saul, David never did so because of his respect for God and for Saul. So, upon hearing the news of Saul's death, David was in mourning. He mourned the loss of Saul and his beloved friend Jonathan. But the death of Saul meant the throne was vacant. And so immediately the house of Saul was reeling and began to battle with the house of David.

Chapter 2-5- A violent struggle erupted between the house of Saul and the house of David. There were a few remaining children of Saul that made claims to the throne of Israel. The first five chapters of 2 Samuel are a bloody account of the battle for the throne. It recounts the struggle between Saul's house and David's house. "The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker." - 2 Samuel 3.1

But ultimately, David was anointed King over Judah and eventually is anointed King over all of Israel.

Chapter 6 - David begins to administer the kingdom of Israel. He is making things the way they should be. After making Jerusalem the political capital of Israel, he seeks to make Jerusalem the spiritual capital of Israel as well by returning the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem.

Why is all of this military history and political struggle important for you, because it is in that turmoil and struggle that we meet the central character of our story, Mephibosheth. Hold this in your mind and imagination as we read this text.

Follow along with me in 2 Samuel 9:1. The house of Saul was defeated, and the Philistines were subdued. For the first time, David was able to sit back and relax for a moment, to dream, and to consider what should happen next. And this is the first thought that comes to his mind

**“David asked, ‘Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul...’” 2 Samuel 9:1**

“The house” simply means the lineage of that royal family. Now, in ancient history, when one dynasty replaced another dynasty, it was common practice to slaughter all of the remaining family members who would have had any claim to the throne in an attempt of the new regime to prevent any uprising and revolts to their new found power. This was a common practice that would have been considered the natural question. It was a perfectly normal question.

“Is there anyone else left?” And it would have been assumed that he was asking for the sake of the follow-up question, “so that I can kill them, so they don’t challenge my rule.”

But instead he said,

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

This word here, “kindness” is the word *hesed* that we explored earlier. It is closest to the word *agape* in the Greek, meaning that unconditional love God has for his people. It is in reference to divine love. It is God’s peculiar, audacious, unmerited love. It is God showing his love to humankind.

And so David asked, “Is there anyone left? Search far and wide so that I can show this *hesed*. Because David wants to demonstrate this sort of love, the love of God for the enemy. The kindness of God himself, to anyone left in the house of Saul. This would have been a radical departure from the traditional model and understanding of the transition of power from one house to another.

But David was a different sort of king. He was a king that lived out a different sort of ethics. He was to embody the rule of God for an alternative kingdom to what the world knew. Earlier in the story of David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:42), the friends made a covenant with one another that they would demonstrate kindness and peace between each other and each other’s descendants. And so, David is seeking to uphold his end of the covenant, even though Jonathan has died.

**“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. 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.’ ‘Where is he?’ the king asked. Ziba answered, ‘He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.’” vv. 2-4**

Now here is the first mention of the man Mephibosheth in our text. But notice that Ziba doesn’t even name the man. Rather, Ziba identifies Mephibosheth by his disability, “there is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet.” So before we get too far ahead of ourselves, let’s turn back a few pages and to the first time this Mephibosheth enters the story in 2 Samuel chapter 4:4 in order to understand why he is crippled in his feet.

**“Jonathan Son of Saul had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became disabled. His name was Mephibosheth.” 2 Samuel 4:4**

Now, Jezreel was the place in which Saul and Jonathan had been killed. Word was coming back throughout the kingdom that they had both been killed in battle. As the news arrived to in Saul’s palace panic set in immediately throughout the palace. The immediate threat was the Philistines who were ruthless, with Saul and his sons dead, the palace was slated for destruction. There would be no mercy to anyone connected to the House of Saul. Along with the impending concern of the Philistines, David’s group was at large. And without Saul or Jonathan, who David both respected and loved alive, there was nothing preventing David from coming in and cleaning house.

And so naturally, everyone in the house began to flee. And it is here that we meet little Mephibosheth. At the age of five, he certainly had no idea what was taking place. But his nanny scoops him up in the chaos and attempts to flee. The nanny dropped him, and both his feet were severely broken. He was carried away with some of the household servants, and they escaped to a place called Lo Debar. Lo Debar literally means “No word” or “No bread.” It was a desolate place.

And so, at age of five Mephibosheth went from a life of privilege, crawling around in the palace, to a crippled boy who would spend the rest of his childhood in obscurity. Mephibosheth was the only living heir to the once great house of Saul, but nobody knew it. Because, if this information had been made public, his life would be in danger, he grew up with his royal identity suppressed and all of his royal privileges denied. None of this was his own fault; it was all done to him before he was of age to have any responsibility for it.

Mephibosheth grew up in Lo-Debar as a part of an exile community that had fled the palace for their lives. It is easy enough to imagine that Mephibosheth grew up hearing stories of the former days, of the glory days of living in the palace, and how he was in line to claim the throne. His nanny certainly would have sung songs and told stories of how great a king he would have been. And without a doubt, David’s name would

have been worked into all of these discussions. Ultimately, it was because of David that Mephibosheth's father and grandfather were killed by the Philistines.

If it wasn't for David, there would have been no accident, no crippling disability. And it was David's fault they were living in obscurity out in Lo-Debar. From the age of five, Mephibosheth was living with these stories, building hatred and villainizing David.

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

So David, hearing about Jonathan's surviving kin, the one who had the rightful claim to the throne, sends his men to bring him to the palace. Again, for the assumed purpose of having him killed. Now imagine, the years have passed, and you are Mephibosheth, sitting somewhere in isolation from the rest of the world, and then some strangers arrive in Lo-Debar asking for Mephibosheth. After finding him, they let him know that the King would like to see him in Jerusalem

The summons to go and see the King would have only evoked fear within Mephibosheth. He would have assumed the worst in the summons, that with each step toward Jerusalem, Mephibosheth would have assumed it was one step closer to his execution. David had suffered much from his grandfather's enmity toward David, and surely David was seeking revenge, and to extinguish any challenges to the throne.

**“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.” v. 6**

Again, imagine the scene, place yourself in the shoes of Mephibosheth. His blood had boiled for years thinking of what David had taken from him. He had grown up in obscurity, lame, and had the privileges of his royal identity stripped from him. He had lived in fear and hiding his entire life. His status had dehumanized him. Notice that earlier when Ziba was answering David's question, he doesn't even refer to Mephibosheth by his name, he simply refers to him as the one who is “lame in both feet.”

**“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.” Mephibosheth bowed down and said, “What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?” 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. 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.) 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. Mephibosheth had a young**

**son named Mika, and all the members of Ziba's household were servants of Mephibosheth. And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table; he was lame in both feet. vv. 7-13**

You can see this disparaging mindset seep into Mephibosheth's self-confidence in verse eight when he refers to himself as a “dead dog.” But it is here that for the first time in the text Mephibosheth is referenced by name, Both by the narrator and by a character in the text. Remember that earlier, Ziba simply referred to him as the one who was lame in both feet. But with all the fear of Mephibosheth's life hanging in the balance, David assuages the fear by calling him by name. Imagine what this must have felt like for Mephibosheth. It was beyond his wildest dreams that he was being treated as such. Mephibosheth was there to be the recipient of David's love for the other. What Mephibosheth didn't realize is that he was in the presence of a different sort of king. A king that wasn't marked by vengeance, arrogance, and power trips. One who humanized his enemies, who was marked by love for the other, and ruled in a different manner.

**“David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people...” v. 15**

David was different than the way of the world. He chose to use his power and privilege for the sake of others. Marking his kingship were acts of love and embracing of the other rather than hatred and fear. Certainly, David had his moments, as we will see in weeks to come.

David emerged here as a lover. His rule was already marked by justice, fairness, and equity. However, without one additional element, the two are left lacking. What constitutes the unique alternative reality of the people of God is the work of justice and equity held together by the power of *hesed*; the power of love.

*Hesed* is often used in the biblical revelation to designate God's love. It is the steadfast, loyal love of God, in the midst of all circumstances that loves regardless of the response that marks the people of God.

As we are loved by God, so we are to embody the love of God for the world. We have all been Mephibosheth, undeserving, lacking, fearful, etc. But we have been shown the love of God as David showed Mephibosheth. This has always been the story from the beginning of the scriptures. We are blessed to be a blessing; we are loved so that we can love. As we experience the *hesed* of God, we embody that *hesed* for a broken and hurting world, living into an alternative reality that is breaking through in this very moment. This is life in the present kingdom of God in the Bay Area as it is in heaven. This was the first act of David as King that would lay a foundation for where his kingship was heading. Having accomplished the bloody and violent transition of power from the house of Saul to the house of David. There were wars to be fought, borders to be established, and finally, David was ready to do the work of a king, and for David, it began with love.

What marked David's reign was justice and equity. This is what marks the work of the people of God. The pursuit of justice and kindness. It is at the intersection of justice and love that the people of God work in

this world, bringing about a new alternative kind of kingdom to what the world is familiar with.

**“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” v. 7**

The nature of David’s love is clarified in verse seven, “Don’t be afraid.” It is a disarming type of love. A disarming kindness that recognizes the power differential between Mephibosheth and David. This is a common phrase in the scriptures, often spoken because there is much to fear in this world. In particular, we are coming across a moment in which the power differential between David and Mephibosheth is significant. Most commonly, this phrase is spoken when someone comes into a direct encounter with an angel or with God. When we encounter God, the concern is that we are facing someone with immense power, far beyond anything we could imagine. How will God use this power? Will God choose to be benevolent, or harsh?

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

Ultimately, this is the climax of the story. David allowed Mephibosheth to enter into the family. It was the restoration of an outsider to the inner workings of the family. It is risky, difficult, challenging ways that we love.

Eugene Peterson wrote this in his reflections of the story of David and Mephibosheth:

**“The gospel miracle is that human beings like us from time to time evade the temptations of power and the brittleness of success and actually manage to vulnerably love another person who has all the potential of turning on us and rejecting us. Every time such love is ventured, another piece of the gospel is proclaimed, and the Kingdom of God is made credible.”**

So how does this shape the way we live as the people of God. We too are to be marked by the love of hesed. We practice the uncomfortable less efficient love that seeks out the other. All of us have been given a level of power, a space that we have influence and sway over. We have been given an amount of privilege that we are called to manage.

### **Love Intentionality**

David sought out Mephibosheth. He was looking for “the other” to love. He moved beyond comfort and privilege and sought to reach out to one who he had every right, according to human logic to ignore. He reached out to Mephibosheth, his enemy, and loved him, regardless of circumstances.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

### **Love in Specific**

David’s first words to his enemy was his name. David humanizes the enemy, refusing to allow anything less than the dignity of humanity in him. Even though Mephibosheth could have been seen as a threat to the throne. He wasn’t a nameless exile; he wasn’t merely a victim; he was a person. David knew he was a person and treated him as such.

### **Love in Action**

David’s love was not just in word; it was not simply in a heartfelt response; it was in practical action.

**“I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.” v. 7**

David put content into the word love by turning over to Mephibosheth all that belonged to his grandfather Saul so that he would have independent income. He assigned Ziba to manage the farms on Mephibosheth’s behalf and to take care of all affairs. Most extravagantly, David invited Mephibosheth into the family.

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

### **Love in Perpetuity**

The restoration of Mephibosheth to the royal table meant that daily arrival of Mephibosheth to the King’s table. It reordered the daily family life; it disrupted the mundane routine. Day by day, it demonstrated a manifestation of the hesed that David had for Mephibosheth.

This is the way love looks not just feels - generous, extravagant, uncalculating. The love that germinated in the covenant between Jonathan and David came to fruition in the intentionality of seeking out the other, the specificity of humanizing the enemy, the practical action of restoring.

I’m reminded of the familiar words of the Prophet Micah.

**“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy [hesed] and to walk humbly with your God.” - Micah 6.8**

Church, this is our call! This is our challenge. To embody the hesed of God, the love of God, so we can go in love. We are to be a people that live in an alternate reality to the way of the world. In short, to “act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.”

It is our calling to live at the intersection of justice and love, working to manifest the present reality of heaven in the Bay Area as it is in heaven. But this is difficult work. Life at that intersection is difficult, messy, and challenging.

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