

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 17: David Mourns Saul and Is Made King of Judah

2 Samuel 1:1–3:39

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The aim of this lesson is to let the class watch God form a king's heart in the furnace of grief, patience, and political violence. David mourns Saul rather than gloating, honors God's anointed, waits for God's timing at Hebron, and keeps his integrity through a long and bloody war. Lead the class to see that the same God who shaped David's heart is shaping ours, and that these graces, grief without bitterness, patience, and integrity, are the very character of Christ.

Press the counter-cultural center of the passage: David refuses vengeance and refuses to rejoice at his enemy's fall. This runs straight against our instinct to savor the downfall of those who wrong us. Connect it to the Lord's own teaching to love our enemies and to leave vengeance to God, and to the Son of David who wept over the very people who would crucify Him.

Handle the bloodshed of these chapters honestly but carefully. Abner and Joab are men of their violent age, and David's restraint shines against that backdrop. Do not read New Testament specifics anachronistically into David's life, but do draw out the abiding truth, written for our instruction, that God's people are to keep their hands clean of treachery and vengeance and to trust Him to establish what He has promised.

Question 1

Student Question:

When David learned of Saul's death he mourned rather than rejoiced and executed the man who boasted of killing the LORD's anointed (1:1–16). What does David's response reveal about how God regards His anointed and the taking of vengeance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The lesson opens with a test of David's heart disguised as good news. An Amalekite arrives claiming to have dispatched the wounded Saul at Saul's own request and to have brought David the crown and bracelet (1:1–10). His story conflicts with the account of chapter 31, where Saul fell on his own sword; the young man has likely invented or embellished his role, hoping to ingratiate himself with the man he assumes has been waiting for Saul's death.

He has profoundly misjudged David. Instead of reward, David and his men tear their clothes and mourn, weeping and fasting until evening for Saul, for Jonathan, and for the people of the LORD fallen by the sword (1:11–12). David's grief is real and immediate; there is not a flicker of triumph in it.

Then David turns to the messenger and asks, “How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?” (1:14). On the strength of the man's own boast, David has him executed. Whatever the truth of his story, the Amalekite had assumed that lifting a hand against the LORD's anointed was a thing to be rewarded; David held it to be a thing to be feared.

Here is the conviction that had guarded David through all the cave-and-wilderness years, the same conviction that twice stayed his hand when he could have killed Saul. The anointed of the LORD was sacred to him. He would not seize the kingdom by another man's bloody hand, and he would not let such a deed go unanswered. God's anointed king pointed forward, dimly, to God's true Anointed, His Christ, against whom no hand may be lifted with impunity.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- David regarded the LORD's anointed as sacred, refusing to profit from his death (compare 1 Samuel 24 and 26).
- Vengeance and the taking of life belong to God's order, not to opportunists seeking advantage.
- David's grief was genuine and immediate, with no trace of triumph over a fallen enemy.
- The Amalekite's fatal error was assuming everyone shares the world's appetite for a rival's death.
- God's anointed king foreshadows God's true Anointed, the Christ; this is written for our instruction (Romans 15:4).

Discussion Prompts

- Discuss why David executed the messenger rather than rewarding him.
- Ask what it means to regard what God has set apart as sacred.
- Explore how David's reverence for the LORD's anointed had guarded him for years.

Question 2

Student Question:

When you hear that someone who wronged you has suffered, what is your honest first reaction, and what would it take for grief to replace gloating in your heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question moves David's response from the page into our own chests. Be honest with the class: when we hear that someone who wronged us has stumbled, lost a job, suffered a setback, even fallen ill, a small voice inside often whispers that they had it coming. The flesh savors the downfall of those who hurt us.

David shows us a different heart entirely. He had every earthly reason to be relieved at Saul's death, yet his honest, immediate reaction was grief. That did not come from nowhere; it came from years of refusing bitterness, years of leaving Saul in God's hands, years of trusting God's justice rather than nursing his own.

The Scripture is blunt about our instinct: "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth" (Proverbs 24:17). And the Lord lifts the standard higher still, calling us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). Gloating is not a small, harmless indulgence; it is the opposite of the heart of Christ.

The road from gloating to grief runs through forgiveness and trust. We grieve rather than gloat when we have genuinely released the offense to God and have come to love the offender's soul more than we love being proven right.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The flesh naturally savors the downfall of those who have wronged us.
- Scripture explicitly forbids rejoicing at an enemy's fall (Proverbs 24:17–18).
- Grief replaces gloating only when an offense has truly been released to God.
- Loving our enemies is the command of Christ, not an optional ideal (Matthew 5:43–48).

Discussion Prompts

- Ask members to name, honestly, their first reaction when someone who hurt them suffers.
- Discuss what forgiveness has to happen before grief can replace gloating.
- Explore how loving an enemy's soul changes our reaction to their troubles.

Question 3

Student Question:

In his lament David honored both Saul and Jonathan, calling them "the beauty of Israel" and refusing to rehearse Saul's faults (1:17–27). What does this teach us about the way God would have us speak of others, even those who hurt us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

David's lament, the Song of the Bow, is one of the most generous poems in Scripture (1:17–27). Over a man who hunted him for years, David sings, "How are the mighty fallen!" He calls Saul and Jonathan the beauty of Israel, recalls Saul's victories, and tells the daughters of Israel to weep for the king who clothed them in scarlet.

What is striking is what David leaves out. He does not rehearse Saul's jealousy, his spear-throwing, his pursuit through the wilderness, his slaughter of the priests at Nob. In his grief David remembers the good and leaves the wrongs unspoken. He honors Saul's office and Saul's better days rather than settling scores in song.

This is not dishonesty; it is the generosity of love, which does not parade another's faults. There is a time to name sin plainly, but the graveside is a time for mercy, and David chooses mercy. His tenderness for Jonathan is its own deep stream, but even toward Saul his words are kind.

The Spirit later teaches that love thinks no evil and does not rejoice in iniquity (1 Corinthians 13:5–6), that we should speak the truth in love, and that our words should minister grace (Ephesians 4:29). David's lament is a picture of a tongue tamed by a heart that has forgiven.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Love does not parade another's faults but covers and honors where it can (1 Corinthians 13:5–6).
- There is a time to name sin and a time for mercy; David chose mercy at the graveside.
- Honoring a person's office and better days is possible even when they have wronged us.
- Our words reveal whether our hearts have truly forgiven.
- Speaking graciously of others is a mark of a heart conformed to God (Ephesians 4:29).

Discussion Prompts

- Discuss what David deliberately left out of his lament, and why.
- Ask how to honor someone's good without excusing their wrong.
- Explore the difference between necessary truth-telling and score-settling speech.

Question 4

Student Question:

How do you tend to speak of those who have failed or opposed you, and how might David's generous lament reshape your words?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns David's gracious lament toward our own speech. Few things reveal the state of a heart faster than how we talk about people who have failed us or opposed us. The same offense can be told as honest concern or as a relished indictment, and the difference is in the heart of the teller.

Most of us, when we speak of those who have wronged us, instinctively rehearse the wrong. We catalog the offense, we recruit sympathizers, we make sure the other person comes off badly. David does the opposite, and his example exposes how much of our talk is really self-justification dressed as reporting.

The discipline David models is to remember the good, to honor what can be honored, and to leave the wounds unspoken where speaking them serves no godly purpose. This is not pretending; it is refusing to let our tongues do the work of revenge.

Ask the class to consider a specific person and a specific recent conversation. Would our words have ministered grace, or would they have quietly tried to even a score? The reshaping starts there, in the next sentence we speak about someone who has hurt us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- How we speak of those who have wronged us exposes whether our hearts have forgiven.
- Rehearsing others' faults is often revenge disguised as honest reporting.
- Gracious speech refuses to let the tongue do the work of vengeance.
- Our words should minister grace to those who hear (Ephesians 4:29).

Discussion Prompts

- Ask members to recall a recent time they spoke of someone who wronged them.
- Discuss the line between honest concern and relished indictment.
- Explore one relationship where more gracious speech is needed this week.

Question 5

Student Question:

David did not seize the throne but “inquired of the LORD” and waited to be anointed king over Judah at Hebron (2:1–4). What does this teach us about trusting God's timing rather than grasping for what He has promised?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

With Saul gone, the throne might seem to be David's for the taking. Instead, David's first move is to ask: “David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD said unto him, Go up” (2:1). Even now, with the prize within reach and the promise already given through Samuel's anointing years before, David will not move without God.

He goes up to Hebron, and there the men of Judah anoint him king over the house of Judah (2:4). Notice what David does not do. He does not march on the rest of Israel, does not press his claim by force, does not hurry God's promise along. He receives the part God gives him and waits for the rest.

This patience had been forged through long years of waiting. David had been anointed as a youth, then spent years as a fugitive, hunted, hiding, refusing twice to take Saul's life or seize the kingdom by his own hand. He had learned that a promise from God does not entitle us to grab it on our own schedule.

There is deep instruction here. God's promises are sure, but they unfold in God's time, and the waiting is not wasted; it is where the character to hold the promise is built. The flesh wants to seize; faith inquires, receives what God gives, and waits for the rest, trusting the One who promised.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- David inquired of God even when the promised throne seemed within reach (2:1).
- A promise from God does not entitle us to seize it on our own schedule.
- God's promises unfold in God's time; the waiting builds the character to hold them.
- David received the part God gave (Judah) and trusted Him for the rest.
- Patience is forged in long seasons of waiting, as David's years as a fugitive show.

Discussion Prompts

- Discuss why David asked God before going up, when the throne was already promised.
- Ask what the years of waiting had built into David's character.
- Explore the difference between trusting a promise and grasping it prematurely.

Question 6

Student Question:

Where are you tempted to grasp for something good before God's time, taking matters into your own hands? What would patient waiting on God look like there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses David's patience into our restless hearts. Most of us have something good that we believe is coming or ought to be ours, a position, a relationship, a recognition, a resolution, and the temptation is to reach out and take it before God's time, to help the promise along by our own scheming.

Grasping usually wears a reasonable face. We tell ourselves we are only being responsible, only doing what anyone would do. But beneath it is often a quiet distrust that God will come through if we simply wait and obey. David could have rationalized seizing the whole kingdom; he was, after all, the anointed one. He waited instead.

Patient waiting on God is not passive. David inquired, obeyed the partial answer, governed Judah faithfully, and trusted God for the rest. Waiting on God means doing the next faithful thing in front of us while refusing to force the door God has not yet opened.

Invite the class to name one specific area where they are tempted to grasp, and to consider what it would look like to wait on God there, doing the next right thing and leaving the timing in His hands.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We are tempted to seize good things before God's time when we quietly distrust His timing.
- Grasping often disguises itself as mere responsibility.
- Patient waiting is active: doing the next faithful thing while not forcing God's hand.

- Trusting God's timing rests on confidence in His faithfulness to His promises.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask each member to name one area where they are tempted to grasp prematurely.
- Discuss the difference between responsible action and grasping ahead of God.
- Explore what active, faithful waiting would look like in that area.

Question 7

Student Question:

Through the long war between the houses of Saul and David, and the murders of Asahel and Abner, David refused to sanction treacherous bloodshed and openly mourned Abner (3:22–39). What does this reveal about God's call to integrity even amid the violence of others?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapters 2 and 3 plunge into a long and ugly conflict. Abner makes Saul's son Ishbosheth king over the rest of Israel, and “there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David” (3:1). The fighting is brutal. Abner kills the swift young Asahel in self-defense; later Joab, avenging his brother Asahel and protecting his own influence, murders Abner treacherously after David had made peace with him (3:22–27).

Through all of this, David keeps his hands clean. He does not order Abner's death; in fact he had just received Abner in peace and sent him away safely. When Joab commits the murder, David is horrified and grieved. He publicly distances himself: “I and my kingdom are guiltless before the LORD for ever from the blood of Abner” (3:28).

David then leads the nation in mourning Abner, weeping at his grave, fasting, and composing a lament for him, so that all Israel understood the king had no part in the killing (3:31–37). He even confesses his own present weakness against the ruthless sons of Zeruiah, leaving their reckoning to God: “the LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness” (3:39).

This is integrity under enormous pressure. David's path to the throne runs through a swamp of other men's violence, and he refuses to wade in. He will not let Joab's bloody shortcuts become his own. Without endorsing every detail of that violent age, we see the abiding truth: God's servant keeps his own hands clean even when surrounded by treachery, and trusts God to repay evil.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- David refused to sanction Abner's treacherous murder and publicly disavowed it (3:28).
- Integrity means keeping our own hands clean even when others around us do not.
- David led the nation in genuine mourning for Abner, a former enemy.
- He left the reckoning of Joab's evil to God rather than seizing private vengeance (3:39).

- We must not read New Testament specifics anachronistically into that violent age, yet the call to integrity is written for our instruction.
- A leader's clean hands matter both before God and before the people.

Discussion Prompts

- Discuss how David kept clear of Joab's bloodshed without controlling Joab.
- Ask what it means to leave another's evil to God's reckoning.
- Explore how a leader publicly maintains integrity when associates do wrong.

Question 8

Student Question:

When you are surrounded by others' compromises and wrongdoing, how do you keep your own hands clean, and where is that hardest for you right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question brings David's integrity into our own compromised environments. Most of us spend our days among people who cut corners, shade the truth, and pursue their ends by means we know to be wrong, at work, in business, sometimes even in family or community life. The pressure to go along, or to benefit quietly from others' wrongdoing, is constant.

David was surrounded by it. The sons of Zeruiah were ruthless and useful, and David himself admitted they were too hard for him to control. Yet he drew a clear line: he would not order treachery, would not profit from murder, and would publicly own that line so no one could mistake it.

Keeping our hands clean often costs us. It may mean a slower rise, a lost advantage, an awkward distancing from people whose methods we cannot endorse. David paid in exactly that coin, his consolidation of the kingdom was slower and harder because he would not take the bloody shortcuts.

Ask the class where this is hardest for them right now. Where are they tempted to benefit from, or quietly tolerate, a wrong they did not commit? Integrity is not only refusing to do evil ourselves; it is refusing to let others' evil become our gain.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We are surrounded by others' compromises and pressured to go along or benefit quietly.
- Keeping clean hands often costs us advantage, speed, or comfort.
- Integrity refuses both to commit evil and to profit from another's evil.
- Drawing a clear, public line can prevent others from mistaking our silence for consent.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask members where they feel pressure to tolerate or benefit from others' wrongdoing.
- Discuss the cost David paid for refusing bloody shortcuts to power.
- Explore one specific situation where clean hands are hardest for them now.

Question 9

Student Question:

David said of Joab's murder of Abner, "I and my kingdom are guiltless before the LORD," and let his grief and his words distance him publicly from the deed (3:28–39). What does the whole sweep of these chapters, grief without bitterness, honoring God's anointed, and integrity amid political violence, reveal about the kind of king, and the kind of heart, God was forming?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The heaviest question gathers the whole sweep of these chapters into one portrait. Step back and look at the David of 2 Samuel 1 through 3 as a single picture. He grieves an enemy rather than gloating. He honors the LORD's anointed and avenges the offense against him. He waits on God's timing rather than seizing the throne. He keeps his integrity through a long, bloody war and disavows treacherous murder, leaving vengeance to God. This is not a collection of unrelated virtues; it is a heart being shaped.

God is forming a king. Israel had asked for a king like the nations, and Saul had given them exactly that, impressive, self-willed, and finally ruinous. Now God raises up a different kind of king, one whose power is restrained by reverence, whose grief is wider than his ambition, whose hands stay clean while the kingdom is being handed to him. The throne is being given, not grabbed, and the man receiving it is being made fit to hold it.

These graces, grief without bitterness, honor for God's anointed, patience, and integrity, are not natural to fallen people; they are the fingerprints of God on a yielded heart. They point forward to the greater Son of David, the true King, who when reviled reviled not again, who committed Himself to the One who judges righteously, who wept over the very city that would crucify Him (1 Peter 2:21–23; Luke 19:41).

And here is the wonder for us: the same God who formed David, and who gave us the perfect King in Jesus, is forming us. He is teaching us to grieve instead of gloat, to honor instead of revile, to wait instead of grasp, to keep clean hands in a dirty world. The character of the King is the character He is patiently building in every disciple.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- These chapters show God deliberately forming a king's heart, restrained by reverence and wider than ambition.
- David is the opposite of Saul, the king like the nations; David is the king after God's own heart.

- Grief without bitterness, patience, and integrity are God's fingerprints on a yielded heart, not natural virtues.
- David's character points forward to Christ, the greater Son of David and true King (1 Peter 2:21–23).
- The throne was given, not seized; God establishes His king in His own way and time.
- The same God forms this very character in every disciple of Jesus.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask the class to name the cluster of graces God was building in David.
- Discuss how David, the king after God's heart, contrasts with Saul, the king like the nations.
- Explore how these graces point forward to Christ and are formed in us.

Question 10

Student Question:

Name one specific way the Lord Jesus, the greater Son of David who wept over His enemies, is using this passage to form your heart toward grace, patience, or integrity right now.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question makes the whole lesson personal and present. We have watched God form grace, patience, and integrity in David. The point of the study is not merely to admire David but to be changed, for the same Spirit who recorded these things is at work in us through the greater Son of David.

Jesus is the One David only foreshadowed. He wept over Jerusalem, the city that would reject and crucify Him (Luke 19:41). He, when reviled, reviled not again, but committed Himself to God who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23). Every grace we saw in David shines in full in Christ, and Christ now forms that same character in His people.

Ask each member to name one specific way the Lord is using this passage right now. Perhaps it is to release a grudge and grieve instead of gloat. Perhaps it is to wait on God for something they have been tempted to seize. Perhaps it is to keep clean hands in a compromised situation, or to speak more graciously of someone who hurt them.

Spiritual formation is concrete. It happens as we let a specific truth do specific work in a specific corner of our lives. Encourage the class to leave with one named place where they are surrendering to the shaping hand of the Son of David.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goal of the lesson is transformation into Christ's likeness, not mere admiration of David.
- Jesus, the greater Son of David, embodies in full the graces David foreshadowed (Luke 19:41; 1 Peter 2:23).

- Christ forms grace, patience, and integrity in His disciples by His Spirit and word.
- Spiritual formation is concrete, named, and present, not abstract.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask each member to name one specific way Jesus is forming them through this lesson.
- Discuss how Christ embodies the graces David only foreshadowed.
- Close in prayer for hearts shaped into grace, patience, and integrity.