

SI: We’re studying the life of King David because we want to know David’s Son.

INTRO: I read an article recently about two Americans, David and Susan Cohen. The Cohen’s only child, their daughter Theo, was killed in the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland over 30 years ago.

The Cohens were determined to get justice for their daughter.

They wrote a book about the Lockerbie bombing.

They refused to let this event disappear from public consciousness.

They pushed and pushed the United States government to punish Libya and Muhammad Kaddafi and had some limited success.

Their determination and focus was admirable.

But the detail about their story I want to highlight is how they described their grief.

Susan said when she heard the news: If I had had a gun I would have shot myself.

But all I could do was cry, scream, and crawl along the floor.

The Cohens took up this cause of getting justice, but in terms of their grief, they were never able to get up off the floor.

Susan wrote decades after her daughter’s death:

To hear the talk about closure just made me want to throw up. All these homilies about loved ones going to a better place. I just hate that. The politicians said eight million meaningless things. As if that could help. As if any of that could help. . . . I’m not the same person. There is not a day that will ever go by that is not filled with what happened. I’m living. But there’s an enormous hole, a hole so huge it’s the size of the Grand Canyon. It’s never the same. It can never be the same. The pain will not go away, it will never go away.

When David knew his child was dying he went down on the ground.

His emotional pain was so great he collapsed physically.

Crawling on the floor for seven days and nights, not eating, lying on sackcloth.

The elders of the court came and tried to get him up off the floor,

but David wouldn’t get up.

And then his child dies and everyone is whispering, worried.

King David has collapsed in grief over his son’s fatal illness,

what is he going to do when he is told the child has actually died?

He might do something desperate. He might kill himself.

But when David finds out he gets up off the ground.

He bathes, he dresses, and then he goes into the house of the LORD and worships.

Then he comforts his wife.

This is not just a chapter in the Bible, it's a chapter in real life.

Sometimes things happen that are so painful that people fall to the ground and never get up. It becomes a permanent, dark, hopeless mark on life.

Like it was for the Cohens.

But for believers this chapter shows there is a way for to get up off the floor.

There is a way for us to get up and go into the house of the Lord and worship.

And not just get on with life, but even be able to comfort others in their sorrow.

This chapter doesn't say anything about a timeframe.

When David got up after seven days on the floor, that doesn't mean his grief was over. Some griefs, even for believers, may last a lifetime.

But his grief was no longer a paralyzing and debilitating force in his life.

He was up and worshipping.

Also, this chapter also doesn't answer all the questions about suffering

In fact, even the Bible as a whole doesn't answer all the questions.

Suffering is like a dark room.

The Bible doesn't shine a light into all the corners.

But it does give you enough light to walk by.

So let's look at this chapter under three points.

They're a little long, I'll give them to you as we go.

MP#1 You're able to get up off the ground when you accept that what happened to you is not retribution, it's sanctification

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.

But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die."

You can't help reading that and saying: What?

I forgive you. Now, I'm going to make you suffer for what you've done.

That seems to be a contradiction. Let's think about it a verse at a time.

David confessed his sin: I have sinned against the LORD.

Nathan, speaking for God says: The LORD has taken away your sin.

What does that expression mean? The Lord has taken away your sin.

Sin isn't a physical object. It's not something that can be moved.

Obviously, this is a way of saying David is forgiven, but why expressed this way?

Let me read a few similar verses.

Psalm 103:12

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

This envisions God taking our sins an impossible distance away from us.

East is east and west is west and never the twain shall meet.

Isaiah 43:25 God says to his people: I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.

Obviously, this doesn't mean he's literally forgotten. God is omniscient.

It means he no longer holds it against us.

That's what Nathan meant when he told David the Lord had taken away his sin.

God's not going to pay you back for what you did.

He's not going to demand retribution.

He has removed your sin an impossible distance.

He doesn't even remember your sin.

Those are all ways the Bible expresses God's forgiveness.

And to make that crystal clear, Nathan adds: You are not going to die.

David deserved death according to the law. Adultery and murder, capital crimes.

And in terms of God's ultimate justice, that's what he deserved.

The absolute proof he's forgiven is that his life is spared.

So then, what about the next verse?

But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son

born to you will die.”

That sounds like retribution. That sounds like payback.

But it's not. It's sanctification. It's spiritual surgery on David's heart.
This is God's way of healing David.

Some Bible translations says that by doing this David made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt. Others say, David himself showed the Lord contempt.

There's some difficulty translating the Hebrew text.

But whichever translation is correct, it amounts to the same thing.

Something was badly wrong with David's relationship with God.

God says in vs. 9-10, you despised my word, and you despised me.

The Lord was no longer important for David.

Imagine what David's prayer life had been like over the previous 9 months.

Do you think he prayed when he found out Bathsheba was pregnant?

Lord, help my plan work. Let Uriah sleep with his wife so he thinks the kid his.

Lord, that didn't work. Please make plan B successful, get Uriah killed in battle.

And these 9 months after the coverup, was David close to God?

Was he writing Psalms about his relationship with the Lord?

Of course not. His heart was getting harder and farther from God all the time.

In taking the life of this child, God was doing spiritual surgery.

He was drawing David back into humble dependence on him.

The Lord once again loomed large in David's life. He needed God again.

Now, we need to be very careful at this point.

When other believers suffer, we shouldn't think we can figure out what specific area of their lives and hearts God might be sanctifying and draw connection.

I think God's trying to tell you this or that. Probably shouldn't say that.

I'm not even sure in this story how the death of this child connected with the changes that needed to happen in David's heart.

Maybe in that culture, with the high value placed on sons, David saw the birth of this son as vindication of his affair. I'm able to build my dynasty myself.

Sometimes we don't even know exactly what God is doing in our own hearts.

A friend of mine suffering said: I think I know what God might be telling me, but if I'm right, there are lots of less painful ways he could have sent message.

But we can know this. It's not retribution. It's not payback. It's sanctification.

God is doing something good that we need—that helps you get up off the ground.

MP#2 You're able to get up off the ground when you accept that things you wish were different but can't be changed are from the Lord.

Sometimes faith is best expressed by resignation.

That might strike you as unspiritual, but it's true.

Sometimes faith says, Lord, I don't like this, I very much wish things were different, but I know it's not ever going to change.

So, I accept this as from your hand.

There are many times in life we don't have to accept the way things are as from the Lord. It's right to pray and persist and never give up trying to change things.

It could be the conversion of an unbeliever or the poor health of a friend or persecuted believers in a repressive country or some sinful behavior in us—no matter how long those things have gone on, you keep praying and pressing, even if you don't see an answer in this life.

Years ago, Allison and I had a friend who was in love with a woman, we were all in the same church together.

She not only refused to go out with him, she said he was a good match for her older sister and kept trying to get him to ask her sister out on a date.

But he refused to take no for an answer and she finally she said yes to a date and then she married him.

And that's a great picture of what should be true in many ways in our lives—refusal to take no for an answer in a great many circumstances.

But it's not faith to refuse to take no for an answer if God is the one who says No!

Sometimes there are Christians who refuse to accept that God has said no to their recovery from a disease. And they continue to behave like healing is just around the corner when everybody knows the end is near.

God has spoken that there will be no healing this time.

They should be saying: The Lord has numbered my days and they are at an end.

The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.

Instead, they seem to be unwilling to submit to God's will—

they may not think that's what they're doing, but they are.

Sometimes there are Christians who don't seem to be willing to accept that a loved one has died.

Unlike David, they aren't willing to get up and wash faces, eat, and get on with life. They pine and grieve as if God didn't know what he was doing when he took their loved one away.

It doesn't have to be situations that involve death.

There was a case in our Presbytery where a Session, all the elders, were told they needed to step down. They didn't and it fatally harmed the church

These men all claimed it was faith that was keeping them at their post.

But God had clearly said no to their leadership.

True faith would have been to leave quietly and cheerfully to make it easier for the men who would lead the church after them.

Sometimes Christians refuse to accept God's no about their vocation.

They keep working at something not suited to their talents or experience, or it's not providing for family when there is some other viable option that would.

Sometimes Christians refuse to accept God's no about something good that he has not provided, maybe romance or a certain standard of living.

But instead of admitting that it doesn't seem to be God's will, they complain or blame others or take steps to get it in a way that is forbidden by God's moral law, like a Christian marrying an unbeliever.

This concerns real issues that touch our hearts. This concerns things that we believe are necessary for our happiness and sense of fulfillment.

Many things happen in life we strongly wish had not happened, and many things never happen that we strongly wish would happen.

As Christians we have to confess that our disappointments are also from our heavenly Father's hand. And knowing that, we have to live accordingly.

We have to honor him as sovereign God and accept his will as good and right.

But God is sympathetic.

He doesn't require us to act like these things are easy to accept.

That's why I used the word resignation a minute ago.

This is not fake cheerfulness. This is saying: I don't understand why God brought this hard thing that cannot be changed into my life, but I trust him.

Job said: Though he slay me, I will trust in him.

The televangelists say that faith is naming and claiming in confidence that we will receive what we want from the Lord. Ok. That's sometimes true.

But greater faith is accepting unwelcome developments as also from God's hand.

Faith is confessing that we trust the Lord to do what is right because we believe his way are far above our ways.

When Isaac Watts was dying, he said to his friend Augustus Toplady:

"The business of a Christian is to bear the will of God as well as do it."

MP#3 You're able to get up off the ground when you accept that God extends grace to you through forgiveness, heaven, ordinary blessings, and Jesus Christ

David's servants asked him a question:

When your child was dying, you were down on the ground, weeping, fasting.

Now he has died and you get up and eat?

David says: While the child was alive, I fasted and wept because I thought,

Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.

But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?

Let's stop there and ask a question.

Was David saying: I thought the Lord might be gracious, but he obviously wasn't?

Because if God is a gracious God, then he would have spared my son's life.

No. David wasn't saying that at all. He wasn't saying that the proof of God's grace rested on this one issue, whether or not he answered David's prayer for healing.

He was saying, God has not seen fit to extend his grace to me in this particular way.

I accept that and I find comfort in the other ways he has shown me grace.

It was David's acceptance of God's grace that got him off the floor.

What, grace specifically?

The first big one was the grace of forgiveness.

One thing that sometimes keeps people on the ground is guilt.

Especially if you're responsible for the bad thing that happened or if you have regrets. That paralyzes some people.

David says in Psalm 51, which is the Psalm he wrote later about this episode, that there was a time he felt like his bones were being crushed.

But even though God said no to this prayer, David knew he was forgiven.

He wasn't getting what his sins deserved, and that lifted him.

When you're on the ground, don't let guilt keep you there. You're forgiven.

Let that assurance into your heart.

Another grace of God that lifted David was the hope of heaven.

David said about his son: I will go to him, but he will not return to me.

You're going to have to trust me on this, because we don't have time to go into detail, but mountains of commentaries have been written on this verse.

And the most convincing interpretation, that takes into account all the biblical data is that David is not fatalistic. He's not saying, He's dead and I'm going to die too.

David is expressing the hope of heaven and seeing his son there.

That hope that God will one day set all things right and wipe away every tear

from our eyes and make up in a second for all the years of sorrow—
that got him up off the ground.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, they are grieving because church members
have died. He reminds them of the resurrection and Christ's coming and being
with him forever and he says: Comfort one another with these words.
If you're going to get up off the ground, accept God's grace, the hope of heaven.

But heaven is invisible to us now.

God is mindful of that, so he gives us another grace that also lifted David.

I'm going to call it the grace of ordinary blessings.

David gets up bathes, puts on lotions, get dressed.

Then he goes to church and worships. Then he eats and converses.

Continues his marital and family life with his wife.

I didn't read the last part of the chapter, but David picks up his sword again.

And he goes back to work as a warrior king, against the Ammonites.

For an unbeliever who is on the ground after a great tragedy, the ordinary rhythms
of life are oppressive, they are absurd. Dressing, working, conversing—
there's no help in those things, they are empty reminders of what's lost.

But for believers, those ordinary things aren't empty. God is in them.

He soothes and comforts us through them.

I've told this ten thousand times, but it reminds me of Elisabeth Eliot's story of her
father dying when she was 14, and after the funeral throwing herself on her bed in
grief, fear and confusion.

But then hearing her mother's broom sweeping the kitchen floor, and realizing
God is with us, in the ordinary tasks and blessings of life.

Finally, there's God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Where is Jesus in this story? In the birth of Solomon.

It's incredible, but the Lord gives David and Bathsheba another son.

They name him Solomon, which means Peace. Peace with God.

God sends a message through Nathan. This child has another name, Jedidiah.

Which means, loved by the Lord.

And it is through Solomon, that David's line will continue.

Solomon becomes the ancestor of the Messiah, not the son of any of David's
other wives, but the son of Bathsheba.

God took this ugly episode in David's life and the pain of his loss and redeemed it
by connecting it to Jesus Christ.

And that's exactly what God promises to do for you if you are in Christ.

If your life and your faith is bound to Jesus, then God is going to redeem your

suffering and loss. He's going to work all things for your good.
And the proof of that is the resurrection.

God took the death of his Son and he redeemed that death by raising him from the dead so that by his death and life, we can live.
Jesus died and rose, and it's that grace which ultimately gets you up off the ground as you believe in him.