

## SURPRISED BY GRACE

## 2 Samuel 9

*“O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell in your holy hill?”* David begins **Psalm 15** with these probing questions. The body of the psalm answers these opening questions. It describes that character and conduct of the person who pleases God. The last line of **Psalm 15:4** states that a godly person is one *“who swears to his own hurt and does not change.”* He keeps his word even when it costs him. She keeps her promises no matter what. Godly people are promise keepers. David teaches that in **Psalm 15**. David exemplifies this in our text. **2 Samuel 9** is a part of what scholars call THE SUCCESSION NARRATIVE OF DAVID; a detailed account of Israel’s transition from Saul’s rule to the establishment of David’s reign. By **2 Samuel 9**, David has accomplished great military victories and is enjoying peace, power, and prosperity. During this period, David lavishes kindness on a crippled man named Mephibosheth.

There are two seasons of life that test and reveal a person’s character: seasons of adversity and seasons of prosperity. This season of success clearly demonstrates that David was man after God’s own heart. I want us to look at David’s heart as revealed in his kindness to Mephibosheth, so that through it we might see God’s kindheartedness toward you and me. STEVE JONES comments: **“Just as x-rays pass through the human body and reveal an accurate picture of the heart to the physician’s trained eye, there are some important ways in which the actions of David revealed the heart of God. We get some of those x-rays in the remarkable story of Mephibosheth.”** **2 Samuel 9** is a historical event that functions as a parable to teach us that the grace of God is a wonderful surprise that is too good not to be true.

In his book *What’s So Amazing About Grace*, PHIL YANCEY writes of a friend who overheard a conversation on a bus one day. A woman was reading. And the man sitting next to her asked what she was reading. She told him. It was M. SCOTT PECK’S bestseller, *The Road Less Traveled*. The man asked what it was about. Admitting she had just begun the book, she answered by reading him the chapter titles from the table of contents. When she mentioned the section on “Grace,” the man interrupted and asked what grace was about. She replied, “I have gotten that far yet.”

The same thing can be said about the Bible. No matter how much scripture you read, study, or memorize; you have not gotten far into scripture if you do not know what grace is about. Without oversimplifying the message of this expansive library of sixty books, the bible is about the glory of the grace of God. It is everywhere in the Bible. And it is not boring grace. It’s always a wonderful surprise of amazing grace. In **Genesis 3**, when Adam and Eve ate of

the forbidden fruit, God did not strike them dead on the spot (**sparing mercy**). And he clothed them in coats of skin to cover the guilt-induced shame of the nakedness (**surprising grace**). And throughout scripture, God keeps surprising us with grace. Of course, the biggest surprise of grace is the virgin birth, perfect life, atoning death, and glorious resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. But David's kindness to Mephibosheth illustrates the grace of God that seeks us, welcomes us, and enriches us through Jesus Christ.

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## I. THE GRACE OF GOD REACHES OUT TO THE LOST.

**2 Samuel 8** describes David as being in a place in his life where he did not need anything. But in **2 Samuel 9**, the one who did not need anything was searching for something: **SOMEONE TO SHOW COVENANT KINDNESS TO**. Verse 3 makes it clear that David understood that his kindness was a derivative of the kindness of God. In other words, David wanted to be kind in order to imitate God, who is a kindhearted sovereign, seeking and searching for someone to be gracious to. Because we can only see reality through the limited perspective of our personal experience, Christians often speak of conversion to saving-faith in Christ in terms of seeking God. But **Romans 3:10-11** says, "*None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.*" Unrighteous people do not seek God. Every sinner does what the first sinners did. Adam and Eve tried to hide from God. And every unconverted sinner is a convicted fugitive on the run from divine justice who is only saved because of the personal missionary work of almighty God.

**One day, an entire police force mobilized to catch a thief who had stolen an old, beat-up Volkswagen Bug. They even broadcast radio bulletins to find this suspect. These great efforts were made to catch this thief because the owner of the car informed the authorities there was a box of crackers in the front seat that he had laced with rat-poison to kill some rodents in his house. So the police desperately searched for the man, not to lock him up, but to save his life. That is how the grace of God operates. In Luke 19:10, Jesus says, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."**

### A. GOD REACHES OUT TO US BECAUSE OF WHO HE IS.

Nothing forced David to seek out Mephibosheth. No one pressured him to do it. Something within David moved him to reach out and act in kindness. Likewise, God does not owe you good anything. God owes each of us divine justice, holy wrath, and eternal punishment. This is why grace is such a wonderful surprise. God has not treated us as our sins deserve. Instead, he has reached out to us with sparing mercy, saving grace, and steadfast love. **Ephesians 2:4-5** says: "*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.*"

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## B. GOD REACHES OUT TO US FOR THE SAKE OF ANOTHER.

The external reason why David sought out someone to show kindness to was because of Mephibosheth's father, Jonathan. Jonathan and David were best friends. Jonathan loved David so much that he protected him from Saul's wrath and supported his ascension to the throne of Israel, even though he was Saul's son and rightful heir to the throne. In **1 Samuel** chapters **18** and **20**, David and Jonathan entered into covenant with one another. David promised to be kind to Jonathan's house after his promotion and Jonathan's death. In **2 Samuel 9**, David sought someone from the house of Jonathan to whom he can show the loyal love of God. David was gracious to Mephibosheth for the sake of another – **JONATHAN**. God is gracious to us for the sake of another – **JESUS**.

**In the movie *The Last Emperor*, the young child who is the last emperor of China lives a magical life of luxury with a thousand servants at his command. "What happens when you do wrong?" his brother asks. "When I do wrong, someone else is punished," the boy emperor replies. To demonstrate, he breaks a jar, and one of the servants is beaten.**

Jesus Christ reversed this pattern: When the servants erred, the King was punished. **Isaiah 55:4-6** says, *"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."* **2 Corinthians 5:21** puts it this way: *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

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## C. GOD REACHES OUT TO US IN SPITE OF US.

**ZIBA** was Saul's servant who administered his master's estate. When David summoned him and inquired about the surviving members of Saul and Jonathan's family, Ziba singled out Mephibosheth – even though there were others he could have mentioned. But he did not mention Mephibosheth by name. In verse 3, Ziba introduced Mephibosheth by his condition: *"he is crippled in his feet."* According to **2 Samuel 4:4**, Mephibosheth was just five-years-old, when Saul and Jonathan died. When the news reached the royal family, they fled. Mephibosheth's nurse dropped him as they fled, leaving him permanently crippled. It seems that Ziba reports Mephibosheth's condition to say that he was not worth David's time. He could neither help nor hurt the king.

Undeterred by Ziba's unflattering description, David replied, "Where is he?" Ziba reported that Mephibosheth was hiding out in the home of benefactors in Lo-debar. The name *LO-DEBAR* means "no pasture." We do not know much about Lo-debar. But scholars agree that its name was meant to indicate that it was a barren, unfruitful, terrible place. Mephibosheth was a crippled man from a fallen dynasty living in a horrible environment. Yet David reached out to him in kindness. Verse 5 says that David sent for Mephibosheth and brought him from Le-Debar. That is what grace does for us. God reaches out to us in spite of us. **Ephesians 2:8-9** says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

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## II. THE GRACE OF GOD WELCOMES IN THE ENEMY.

When the king's soldiers knocked at his door and carried him to Jerusalem, Mephibosheth must have seen his whole life flash before his eyes. He knew how it went. When a new king arose, the family of the previous dynasty was put to death so there would be no revolts or rebellions later. So Mephibosheth must have entered David's presence like a cornered enemy. But David embraced him like a long, lost friend. David's warm welcome teaches us two important things about grace.

### A. GRACE MEANS THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE AFRAID OF GOD'S WRATH.

Can you imagine the sense of terror that must have consumed Mephibosheth when he met King David? He thought he would be brutally tortured and executed. And there was absolutely nothing he could do about whatever was about to happen to him. Imagine his surprise when King David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will show you kindness..." David's kindness removed Mephibosheth's fear. And God's grace does the same for us. We can confidently sing, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (**Psalm 27:1**)

One day, President Thomas Jefferson was riding horseback cross-country when he and his companions came to a swollen river. A wayfarer stood at the banks as the group passed by. But when Jefferson approached, he hailed him and asked if he would carry him across the river on his horse. Once on the other side, one of the group asked why he selected the president to ask this favor of. "The president," said the man with surprise. "I didn't know he was the president. All I know is that on some of the faces is written the answer 'no' and on some faces is written the answer 'yes.' His was a 'yes' face."

That's a good definition of grace. Grace is the smiling face of God. It communicates God's acceptance, approval, and affirmation. God's grace means that we do not have to fear the judgment, wrath, and condemnation of God. In

**John 10:28-30**, Jesus says: *“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father’ are one.”* Praise God that you don’t have to be afraid of death, hell, and the grave

WHAT HAVE I TO DREAD? WHAT HAVE I TO FEAR?  
LEANING ON THE EVERLASTING ARMS  
I HAVE PERFECT PEACE, WITH MY LORD SO NEAR  
LEANING ON THE EVERLASTING ARMS.

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**B. GRACE MEANS THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE ASHAMED OF YOUR WEAKNESS.**

David promised to show kindness to Mephibosheth. David vowed to restore Saul’s estate to Mephibosheth. And David assured Mephibosheth a permanent place at the royal table. These overwhelming gifts made Mephibosheth skeptical. Verse 8 says, *“And he paid homage and said, “What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?”*” One of the most degrading things you could call a person in David’s day was a dog. And for a person to call himself a dog would be a great act of self-deprecation that expressed humble submission before a superior authority. But note that Mephibosheth does not just call himself a dog. He calls himself a *dead dog*. That’s how Mephibosheth saw himself. Less than nothing. Worse than the worst. Lower than rock bottom. But that’s not how David saw him. And that’s not how God sees you.

There is a sociological concept called **“the theory of the looking-glass self.”** It suggests that we have a way of seeing ourselves through the eyes of other people and we incorporate their views of us into our own self-concept. This is why so many of us have such a perverted view of life. We only see ourselves through the lens of other people’s opinions of us. But grace leads us to look at ourselves through the lens of God’s amazing grace. There, we don not have to be ashamed of what we see. Faith is to accept God’s acceptance of you. I know you are crippled. And I know that you may be in Lo-debar. But God loves you. There is nothing that can make God love you more. And there is nothing that can make God love you less. In **Romans 8:38-39**, Paul says, *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

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**III. THE GRACE OF GOD LIFTS UP THE FALLEN.**

Verses 6-8 record David's conversation with Mephibosheth. Verses 9-11 record David's conversation with Ziba about Mephibosheth: *"Then the king called Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson. And you and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him and shall bring in the produce, that your master's grandson may have bread to eat. But Mephibosheth your master's grandson shall always eat at my table."* Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. Then Ziba said to the king, *'According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so will your servant do.'* So Mephibosheth ate at David's table, like one of the king's sons." These verses illustrate three ways in which the grace of God lifts up the fallen.

#### A. GOD'S GRACE GIVES UNDESERVED RICHES.

That's what David did for Mephibosheth. He restored to him all the land of Saul and Jonathan. David did not have to do that to keep his promise to Jonathan. He could have just put Mephibosheth on a kind of royal welfare system and kept Saul's estate for himself. But David gave it all to Mephibosheth. It was so great that verse 10 says it would take Ziba's fifteen sons and twenty servants to care for the land. With one decree from the king, Mephibosheth went from living in someone else's house in Lo-debar to owning his own royal estate. This is what grace does. God's grace enriches us. **Matthew 5:3** says, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God."* **2 Corinthians 8:9** says: *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."* **Ephesians 1:3** says, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."*

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#### B. GOD'S GRACE GIVES UNCONDITIONAL FAVOR.

Four times in this chapter - verses 7, 10, 11, and 13 - we are told that David gave Mephibosheth a permanent place at his royal table. This was not a subtle form of house arrest to keep an eye on Mephibosheth. And it was not a handout to meet his physical need for food. David had given Mephibosheth so much land that it would take more some thirty-five people to care for it. So this was not about food. It was about favor. Verse 11 says that Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. David adopted Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth was not just a guest at the royal table. He was a member of the royal family. Verse 13 says, *"So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king's table. Now he was lame in both his feet."* Mephibosheth remained crippled. But his crippled feet were hidden under the king's table. That's what grace does. It covers us. **Romans 5:20** says, *"Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, graced abounded all the more."*

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### C. GOD'S GRACE GIVES UNENDING SECURITY.

**2 Samuel 21:1-7** illustrates David's ongoing protection of Mephibosheth. Saul waged an unjust war against the Gibeonites. But the punishment for Saul's sin did not fall on Israel until David's reign. A three-year famine struck the land. And when David prayed about it, God told him about Saul's sin. So David went to the Gibeonites to make restitution. And the Gibeonites demanded that David hand over seven of Saul's sons that they may hang them. David agreed. But **2 Samuel 21:7** says that David would not give them Mephibosheth.

**A certain man sought to adopt a troubled teenager. As the process of adoption was going on, the young girl did a terrible thing to break the man's heart. His family and friends warned him that he should end the adoption process. "After all," they argued, "she's not really your daughter." But the man resolutely replied, "I know. But I told her she was. And I am not going to change my mind."**

This is how the grace of God treats us. **Lamentations 3:22-23** says: *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."*

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How should you respond to the grace, goodness, and generosity of God? Let me answer with another episode from Mephibosheth's life recorded in **2 Samuel 19:24-30**. David's kingdom was threatened by a political and military revolt led by his own son, Absalom. During this conflict, David became a refugee in exile from his beloved city of Jerusalem. Ultimately, David prevailed. Absalom was defeated and killed in battle. And David finally returned to Jerusalem. Upon his arrival, David confronted Mephibosheth. When David fled Jerusalem, Mephibosheth remained behind. Ziba told him that Mephibosheth stayed behind because he had turned against the king and sided with the enemy. When David returned, Mephibosheth who had not bathed or shaven since his departure met him and his side of the story. Ziba left him. And being crippled, he had no other means of escape. Not knowing whose story to believe, David split Saul and Jonathan's estate evenly between Ziba and Mephibosheth. But in **2 Samuel 19:30**, Mephibosheth says, *"Oh, let him take it all, since my lord the king has come safely home."* We ought to give our all to the Lord who has given so much to us.

**I HEAR THE SAVIOR SAY, "THY STRENGTH INDEED IS SMALL!  
CHILD OF WEAKNESS, WATCH AND PRAY. FIND IN MY THINE ALL IN ALL."  
JESUS PAID IT ALL, ALL TO HIM I OWE  
SIN HAD LEFT A CRIMSON STAIN - HE WASHED IT WHITE AS SNOW.**