



## LAST WORDS

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After several weeks of looking at chapters from his life, we are bidding farewell to David this morning. I'm sure we'll meet up again with him soon, but for now, we will be parting ways. Next week we start a new series called Street Level Faith, which will be a look at the book of James. James is a no nonsense, very practical book that will make us think hard about how our faith intersects with our life, and I'm excited to jump into it with you.

But today it's all David. We've covered a lot of territory with him, from the first time he was chosen to be the next king, to his battle with Goliath, to his friendship with Jonathan. We saw him living in fear and on the run, as well as being a king with his priorities straight, worshipping God with his whole heart. And we saw what happened when he fell down and God picked him back up. Now he has placed his son on his throne as his successor, and it's time to say good bye.

Good byes have been on my mind this week. It's been the last week of school for my kids. Annika had a few tears the night before her last day of kindergarten as she thought about saying good bye to her teacher. I'm thinking about good byes for myself as well. Most of you know that July 1<sup>st</sup> is the day when I go full time with New Day. I am very excited and looking forward to be able to focus and devote more of my attention to the church. I'm so grateful for the opportunity.

But it does mean an end to another very significant chapter in my life. I've been at my current job for more than 15 years. It feels like that's where I've grown up. They're throwing a little party for me this week, and to tell you the truth, I'm kind of dreading it. Because I'm never good at knowing what to say at those kinds of things. It feels like I should give a heartfelt speech or share some profound wisdom with my coworkers. But it's hard to boil 15 years down to a few words. When you write ads for a living, you would think it would be easy to come up with the good lines, but sometimes there's just no adequate way to say what you want to say.

That's when you need to be a poet like David. He always seemed to know what to say. Not only that, we've actually got a poem or song in the Bible that says this at the beginning:

### **2 Samuel 23:1**

*These are the last words of David...*

When somebody says, “This is the last thing I’m going to say,” it makes you want to pay attention. It adds weight to whatever follows it, telling you that it’s something this person feels strongly is the most important thing to know.

Most of us won’t have the luxury of identifying our last words in life. They’ll be out of our mouths before we even know that there won’t be more to follow. You rarely are aware that you’ll never get a chance to say more.

A friend of ours once gave us a kids book that was all about the last time you do things. It pointed out that we always pay attention to the firsts – the first steps, the first words, the first tooth -- but we hardly even notice the lasts. The last time your child needs help doing something. The last time they say a word a funny way. The last time you pick them up to reach the sink.

It’s a terrible book. It makes you sad just to realize how quickly it all goes and how much we take for granted that there will always be one more time of something.

Life is so short. It makes you wonder: If you knew that the next words you said would be your last, what would you most want to say? In the final analysis, if you had to sum up your existence in a few sentences, do you know how you would do it?

It’s the “What’s the meaning of life?” question on a very personal basis. “What’s the meaning of MY life?” “What have I discovered that matters in the long run?”

David’s conscious effort to commit some thoughts to posterity as his final words gives us a good opportunity to do a little personal reflection. Let’s take a look at what he chose to be his swan song:

## **2 Samuel 23:1-7**

*These are the last words of David:*

*"The oracle of David son of Jesse,  
the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High,  
the man anointed by the God of Jacob,  
Israel's singer of songs:*

*"The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me;  
his word was on my tongue.  
The God of Israel spoke,  
the Rock of Israel said to me:  
'When one rules over men in righteousness,  
when he rules in the fear of God,  
he is like the light of morning at sunrise  
on a cloudless morning,*

*like the brightness after rain  
that brings the grass from the earth.'*

*"Is not my house right with God?  
Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant,  
arranged and secured in every part?  
Will he not bring to fruition my salvation  
and grant me my every desire?"*

*But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns,  
which are not gathered with the hand.  
Whoever touches thorns  
uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear;  
they are burned up where they lie."*

Occasionally at work, we've had to create scratch and win cards for promotions that our clients have done. They're like lottery tickets. On the surface of the card there's a waxy, silver ink that you can remove with a dime or a key. Underneath, it tells you what (if any) prize you've won. When you first look at the card, it's a nice, shiny looking card, but you have no idea of the value until you actually scratch it up a bit and see what's underneath.

This short psalm is like a scratch card. Because I'll admit -- the first time I read through it, I thought it sounded nice, but I didn't immediately get a whole lot from it. It's short and only takes about a minute to get through it. There didn't seem to be much there. But then I stopped and started scratching, reading it over and over, thinking about it, praying about it, trying to get at what was underneath. And the more I dug into it, the more value I could see under that surface. That's the amazing thing about the Bible. The more you spend time with it, the more things you see.

David has learned a lot about the meaning of life and what is important and he lays out for us what he sees as mattering most. Let's go back to the beginning and start scratching.

*"The oracle of David son of Jesse,  
the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High,  
the man anointed by the God of Jacob,  
Israel's singer of songs:*

David begins his psalm with a brief biography. He has come to terms with who he is, and I think one of the keys David has discovered at the end of his life is the importance of

### **Owning my story**

The very first thing out of David's mouth when he describes himself is that he is Jesse's boy. He's a guy from the country with a dad who's a farmer. David has lived a big life

and been a lot of places, but he has still not forgotten that in the end, he's the same person he was in the beginning. He is connected with his history. He hasn't tried to pass himself off as being more important than he was. Kings of other countries in those days would claim they had descended from the gods or the sun to give themselves an aura of mystery and power. But up until the end, David managed to hold on to the authentic story of where he had come from.

I don't know how many times I have wanted to make my own story sound more important or impressive. We all carry around a degree of shame over our past – whether it is our family history, bad choices we've made, a lack of credentials, a lack of experience, a lack of money. We want it to sound not quite as bad as we think it is. So we fudge the resume a bit. We inflate our titles and pad our history so it looks better.

We're missing the point when we do that. The goal is to be more in touch with who we really are – not less. And that means being honest with ourselves and the rest of the world. We don't need to be ashamed of where we came from – it defines us to this day. Paul said this:

### **1 Corinthians 1:26-30**

*Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus.*

Paul says it's good to think about where we were. It helps us see what God is doing. That's why we need to stay grounded in our own story, because it makes us realize that God is the source of our strength and our hope – not our own incredibleness.

David's very next line said this:

*The oracle of the man exalted by the Most High.*

To be exalted means to be lifted up, to have your dignity and power raised. And David knew that came from God Most High – not his background. It didn't matter that he didn't come from royalty. God didn't care that he was the youngest of all his brothers and the one nobody thought would amount to anything. There was no need for David to pretend he was something he wasn't, because God was the center of the story and not him.

Are you constantly comparing yourself to other people? Do you get angry when you don't get the credit you feel you deserve? That could indicate that God isn't the center of your story and you're still thinking you have to airbrush yourself a bit.

No matter where you've come from or what you've done in the past, you don't need to spruce it up for God. In fact, the more real we can be about our story and own it, the more we will see God's hand in bringing us to a new place.

David's story didn't just end with his past. He owned his present identity as well.

*the man anointed by the God of Jacob,  
Israel's singer of songs:*

When David had said that he had been exalted by God, he wasn't exaggerating. He went from a shepherd to become a national hero when he killed Goliath. From there, he became king and reigned 40 years. He had a long and impressive military career. When you look at a map, you can see just how much he had done for Israel, expanding the kingdom to several times larger than Saul's had been. His list of accomplishments was long.

But how did he choose to identify himself? "Israel's singer of songs." Isn't that great? He knew that what defined him wasn't his title of king. It wasn't that string of victories he'd won or the wealth he had accumulated. It was something far deeper than that. God's anointing of him went beyond simply the job of being king. His was an anointing of the heart. God wanted him to give expression to thoughts and feelings that all of God's people would benefit from. Clear down to this day, David's lasting legacy has been that of the psalms that he wrote – not the battles he fought. They have been a huge comfort and encouragement to millions and millions of people.

What an amazing calling. It's the same God we have today. The God of Jacob, who was the God of Abraham and Moses was also the God of David, and he's the God of Jeff and he's the God of Ed and the God of John and the God of Kae. The God of history is your God, and he works the same way he always has – calling people and giving them new identity. He has a purpose and plan for you, and he has placed you in this world to impact people for him.

He may have made you an engineer, but your calling goes way deeper than your job. He may have made you a stay at home mom, but your identity is much bigger than your house. He may have made you a teacher, but his purposes for you go beyond shaping young minds. Every Christian has that inner calling like David did. I like the way the Message version translates 1 Corinthians 12:

### **1 Corinthians 12:7-11**

*Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful:*

- wise counsel
- clear understanding
- simple trust

- *healing the sick*
- *miraculous acts*
- *proclamation*
- *distinguishing between spirits*
- *tongues*
- *interpretation of tongues*

*All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what, and when.*

That's not an exhaustive list. Paul was just giving examples to show the huge variety there is in the types of anointing God places on people. David was a singer of songs, but maybe you are a prayer of prayers. Other parts of the Bible talk about the gift of hospitality, or the gift of service, or the gift of mercy, or the gift of leadership or the gift of administration.

When we talk about owning our stories, this is an important part of it: being aware of what God has given us and what he expects us to do. Do you know what that is for you? Knowing how God has wired you is fundamental to owning your story. We have many people in this church who quietly come week after week and have things ready for when everyone else gets here. They are glad to do it. That's the gift of service.

Other people have told me they love to organize things. I think they're crazy, but they have the gift of administration. I was talking with someone yesterday who feels a passion for facilitating small groups, because they have the gift of leadership. Owning that piece of our story, being in touch with what God would have us do is one of the most rewarding and challenging pursuits anybody can have. And it's a tragedy to reach the end of life and look back NOT knowing that piece of our story.

David knew where he had come from and he knew who he was. He owned his own story. He also showed in his last words that he valued

## **Relating to God**

You can see it in the next section of the psalm:

*"The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me;  
his word was on my tongue.  
The God of Israel spoke,  
the Rock of Israel said to me:*

All the words show a close communication. A little side note here: If you've ever wondered if there's any reference to the Trinity in the Old Testament – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, many scholars see this as being one. David mentions the Spirit of the Lord, the God of Israel (which would be God the Father) and

the Rock of Israel. In 1 Corinthians 10:5, Paul identifies that rock with Jesus. Speaking of the Israelites, Paul says

**1 Corinthians 10:4-5**

*...for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.*

David may or may not have been aware of such a concept, but the point is that David had a very close relationship with God. He describes the Spirit's words as being on his tongue. He talks about God speaking directly to him. There was an intimate level of communication there that made a difference in his life.

It was a two way conversation that you can see playing out all through the psalms David wrote.

**Psalm 5:3**

*In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice;  
in the morning I lay my requests before you  
and wait in expectation.*

This is probably the single mark of David's life that made him a man after God's own heart. Whether it was his highs or his lows, he pulled all his experiences into a dialogue with God. He talked to God about everything, things he was happy about, things he was mad about, things he was sorry for, things he didn't understand.

That kind of ongoing relationship with God is something he has made available to every one of us. Jesus has made it possible for us to not just be saved from hell, but to have a Father that we can talk to about anything. The God of Christianity is not just a belief system – he's a person who loves us. We can talk all we want about him, but he wants us to talk TO him. He wants to have a personal conversation and relationship with us on a daily basis.

That may not sound so unusual, because we've heard it so often, but it is a uniquely Christian concept to say that God is love. For example, did you know that the Muslim Koran never once mentions the word love in connection with Allah? He is to be feared and obeyed, but the warm, conversational relationship isn't there. You won't find anything comparable in Hinduism or Buddhism either.

Even in Christianity, we tend to overlook it. Philip Yancey has written many Christian books and speaks at a lot of Christian conferences. He was on his way to one conference when he got stuck for five hours in O'Hare airport in Chicago. There was a woman there who was going to the same conference, so they talked for the whole time about all kinds of things, including the latest book Philip was writing. After listening for a long time, the woman said out of the blue, "Philip, do you ever just let God love you? It's pretty important, I think."

Philip Yancey wrote, "I realized with a start that she had brought to light a gaping hole in my spiritual life. For all my absorption in the Christian faith, I had missed the most important message of all. The story of Jesus is a story of a celebration, a story of love."

Over the course of his life, David had found just how vital it was to be in communication with the God who loved him. And as he listened to God, here is the message he felt God told him:

*'When one rules over men in righteousness,  
when he rules in the fear of God,  
he is like the light of morning at sunrise  
on a cloudless morning,  
like the brightness after rain  
that brings the grass from the earth.'*

### **Leaving a bright shadow**

One of the most basic human needs is to feel that we make a difference, to feel like our existence matters. By the time he was an old man, David was confident that God was saying, "You want to know the best way to count in life? It's to do the right thing and demonstrate that you fear (or totally respect) me. Then you'll really impact the world in a positive way."

That's not normally how I think of righteousness and the fear of God. Those words make me think of starchy people who frown a lot and make everyone uncomfortable because they're so holy. They sound repressed and judging.

God has a much different perspective. He says if we're really going about it right, we'll have just the opposite effect. According to God, living that way makes us like the first light of morning in other people's lives. It makes us as refreshing as sunshine after a rain storm. It makes us as encouraging as baby grass coming up in the spring.

I like that imagery. It's so positive. Our actions can cast a bright shadow instead of a dark one.

I saw an example of that just this week when I had lunch on Friday with Ed. Ed works for a commercial tire company. He goes around to different companies and services the tires on their delivery trucks, checking to make sure all the tires are in good shape and filled properly. In a job like that, there can be a lot of pressure to invent problems, because the tire company makes more money when there are more things to fix. It's kind of the industry standard to fake some issues. But as a Christian, Ed made a conscious decision to not do that. He knew it wouldn't be righteous or fearing God. And although that choice hasn't always been popular with his supervisors, it has had an impact on his customers. They see the difference and don't want to work with anyone else. They've been burned by other technicians. So Ed is like a refreshing ray of sunlight.

That's no small thing. Each time we make the decision to do the right thing, we're expanding on the picture of Christ for people. Because Jesus is THE light. Whatever little light we shed is a taste of the light that he gives.

Interestingly enough, Jesus tied himself back to David when he said,

### **Revelation 22:16**

*I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.*

He's the one David was referring to. He's the one who shines and takes away the darkness. He's the new dawn breaking on the horizon. Our actions have the ability to show more of him and have an effect on the world. And that's the best kind of legacy we could hope to leave in our wake.

The final important point David sees as mattering most in life is

### **Having a solid hope**

*"Is not my house right with God?  
Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant,  
arranged and secured in every part?  
Will he not bring to fruition my salvation  
and grant me my every desire?"*

It's a strange rhetorical question at the beginning. "Is not my house right with God?" Because from all external appearances, the answer would be, "Umm...no." David's house was a mess. His sons were killing one another and plotting against him. There was fighting and deception and betrayal.

But our individual hearts are also referred to as God's house, and in that sense, David's house was in order. He certainly wasn't perfect, as we've seen. But he allowed God full access to it, and God put it in order.

God made a covenant with David that was forever. David said that God "secured it in every part". So David knew that God would save him in the end. It depended on God's faithfulness – not his.

Oswald Chambers once wrote, "Sin is red-handed mutiny against God. Either God or sin must die in my life." It comes down to that clear of a choice when we examine our own "house." But we don't have to take care of the sin on our own. If we give God access, he'll come in and deal with it for us. And his salvation for us is secure in every part, because it depends on him – not us.

### **1 John 5:13-14**

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.*

We can know. We can have confidence that we're on good terms with God. Do you have that sense of security in your relationship with him? It sounds simplistic, but he makes it available to us through Jesus. God did the hard work of taking care of all that stands between us and him. When Jesus became a man and died for us voluntarily, something profound and wonderful happened. He took our guilt in exchange for his innocence. When we put our trust in him, he gives us a solid hope for all eternity.

Life is short. David's last words hammer home the need to take the important stuff seriously. Where are you at with those issues? Ask yourself:

1. Am I owning my story? Am I trying to hide or recreate my past? It's good to be real. Can I own my history? And how well am I connected to God's purpose for me in the present? Do I know how he has gifted and wired me?
2. How is my conversation with God going? Is God just an abstract concept, or am I seeing him as the personal, loving Father that he is? Am I bringing all my experiences into dialogue with him?
3. Is my life shedding any light? Are my choices demonstrating that I care about God's opinion more than anyone else's? Is the way I'm doing it angry and pious or encouraging and refreshing?
4. Is my house right with God? What's gotta go? Am I ready for a secure, solid hope? Do I know for sure that I have it?