

## 2 SAMUEL 9:1-13

### HOW CAN I LIVE WITH MY HANDICAP?

“David said, ‘Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?’ Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and they called him to David. And the king said to him, ‘Are you Ziba?’ And he said, ‘I am your servant.’ And the king said, ‘Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?’ Ziba said to the king, ‘There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet.’ The king said to him, ‘Where is he?’ And Ziba said to the king, ‘He is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.’ Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and paid homage. And David said, ‘Mephibosheth!’ And he answered, ‘Behold, I am your servant.’ And David said to him, ‘Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always.’ And he paid homage and said, ‘What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?’

“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. And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba’s house became Mephibosheth’s servants. So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king’s table. Now he was lame in both his feet.”<sup>1</sup>

**L**Lynda was nearly in tears. Our middle daughter was serving as a volunteer coach for Special Olympics, and the community in which we lived was hosting a track and field meet for the Special Olympians. Lynda and I encouraged our daughter in this labour of love. Accordingly, when opportunity was presented, we went to cheer on her eager athletes.

Reflecting on what it meant to live in a nation that demonstrated compassion for those who were not able in areas that we often take for granted left Lynda in a reflective mood. As we talked about the uniqueness of our Canadian experience contrasted to the sweep of human history, we swelled with pride for our nation and found ourselves giving thanks to God who had shown this nation such mercy. The evidence of divine mercy is the heritage of compassion demonstrated by national consensus. However, that kindness was not accidental.

If you doubt that assertion, ask yourself how many charities exist worldwide that were not initiated by Christians. In lands dominated by secularism, or dominated by any of a number of other religions, the least within society are seldom treated with compassion—they are cast aside or shunned. However, wherever the Christian Faith has prevailed, inevitably various charitable institutions are found, often preceding even the establishment of congregations for worship. Hospitals, hospices, orphanages, rescue missions and a multitude of other, specialised ministries of compassion give evidence of the presence of the followers of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

This charitable heritage for our nation is neither impulsive nor merely a lucky break; rather it is part of the cultural DNA that is woven into the warp and woof of the fabric of the Faith. It is natural that those who have discovered the love of God will themselves reveal that love. Take it as a given that when you do not see grace and mercy in an individual's life, it is likely because that individual has never known the love of God. One instance of kindness that stands out, among the many that are presented in the Word of God, is that which is recorded of David who sought out the last living descendant of his friend Jonathan. That man, whom David sought out, and David's kindness toward him, serve as the focus of our study for this day.

**THE STORY BEGINS WITH A MEMORY OF KINDNESS.** The text indicates that the immediate genesis of the story was an act of kindness that was shown to David before he ascended to the throne. However, undergirding the kindness David sought to demonstrate was the prompting of the True and Living God. Let's go back into the historical record to refresh our memories.

David had been chosen by God while he was tending sheep as a young lad. The divine choice had no immediate impact so far as anyone could tell. David continued to tend sheep; as the youngest son, he was assigned to this task. His brothers, in the meantime, were conscripted into the army to wage war against the Philistines. So far as the world could tell, it was one of those cases of mere happenstance, serendipity that David just happened to be in camp delivering food to his brothers and a gift for their commanders at the precise moment when a giant, the champion of the opposing forces shouted out his challenge to the Israelites.

Incensed, the young man began to ask why no one would respond to the insults hurled at their lines. Word of this brash youngster reached the ears of Saul, King of Israel, who called for David to appear before him. The conversation turned to Goliath, the Philistine champion, with David stating that he would slay him if no one else was willing to face him.

Of course, you remember the story. David did kill Goliath, God guiding the stone he threw from his sling. To ensure that the task of dispatching the bully was complete, David beheaded Goliath with his own sword. Of course, the young shepherd instantly became the hero of the nation, and was shortly thereafter promoted to a position of oversight for the army.

In order to provide background for the message today, it is important to note that David was immediately befriended by Jonathan, the King's son. Listen to the account. "As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armour, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him, so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants" [1 SAMUEL 18:1-5].

Jonathan made a covenant with David because of his deep admiration of this young warrior. The friendship would only intensify with the passage of time. David was a young man, perhaps a teenager at the time of this account. Jonathan was likely approaching middle age. I see them as men separated in age by twenty years or so. Jonathan, the experienced warrior and commander, saw in David the qualities that would make him a great leader. Faced with the obvious capabilities of the younger man, Jonathan could have felt threatened and sought to hinder David's advance. However, he opted to invest his life in David to bless him with friendship and to enable the younger man to achieve greatness. In this way, Jonathan would honour God and prove that his influence would extend beyond his own time.

Soon after conscripting David to lead his forces, Saul was seized by jealousy of David. The occasion of this jealousy was because of some common doggerel that someone composed and that the people sang.

“Saul has struck down his thousands,  
and David his ten thousands.”

[1 SAMUEL 18:7]

Saul focused on the fact that David was ascribed with killing more enemy than had he himself. The knowledge that he had to share the glory of Israel's victories drove him into depression, and ultimately into rage. The more embittered Saul became, the more gracious Jonathan became toward the younger man. Saul's rage led him to seek to enlist others to assist him to kill David, but Jonathan became aware of the plan and warned David. He also intervened to plead with his father to reconsider his rash plan. But the respite for David was only temporary.

Soon enough, Saul again became intent on killing David, whom he saw as a pretender to the throne. David fled to Samuel, where he was protected by the intervention of the LORD. When Saul ratcheted up the pressure, David turned once again to Jonathan for counsel.

Listen as I read the account from the Word of God. “Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah and came and said before Jonathan, ‘What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?’ And he said to him, ‘Far from it! You shall not die. Behold, my father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me. And why should my father hide this from me? It is not so.’ But David vowed again, saying, ‘Your father knows well that I have found favour in your eyes, and he thinks, “Do not let Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved.” But truly, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death.’ Then Jonathan said to David, ‘Whatever you say, I will do for you.’ David said to Jonathan, ‘Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit at table with the king. But let me go, that I may hide myself in the field till the third day at evening. If your father misses me at all, then say, “David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city, for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the clan.” If he says, “Good!” it will be well with your servant, but if he is angry, then know that harm is determined by him. Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. But if there is guilt in me, kill me yourself, for why should you bring me to your father?’ And Jonathan said, ‘Far be it from you! If I knew that it was determined by my father that harm should come to you, would I not tell you?’ Then David said to Jonathan, ‘Who will tell me if your father answers you roughly?’ And Jonathan said to David, ‘Come, let us go out into the field.’ So they both went out into the field.

“And Jonathan said to David, ‘The LORD, the God of Israel, be witness! When I have sounded out my father, about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if he is well disposed toward David, shall I not then send and disclose it to you? But should it please my father to do you harm, the LORD do so to Jonathan and more also if I do not disclose it to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. May the LORD be with you, as he has been with my father. If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the LORD, that I may not die; and do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.’ And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, ‘May the LORD take vengeance on David's enemies.’ And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

“Then Jonathan said to him, ‘Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. On the third day go down quickly to the place where you hid yourself when the matter was in hand, and remain beside the stone heap. And I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I shot at a mark. And behold, I will send the young man, saying, “Go, find the arrows.” If I say to the young man, “Look, the arrows are on this side of you, take them,” then you are to come, for, as the LORD lives, it is safe for you and there is no danger. But if I say to the youth, “Look, the arrows are beyond you,” then go, for the LORD has sent you away. And as for the matter of which you and I have spoken, behold, the LORD is between you and me forever”’ [1 SAMUEL 20:1-23].

David fled. The divine text relates how he was pursued so relentlessly that he finally was forced from the land. After this, David saw Jonathan one final time. While he was at Horesh in the wilderness of Ziph, Jonathan sought him out to encourage him, or, as the divine Word states, “to strengthen[] his hand in God” [1 SAMUEL 23:16]. This visit is sufficiently important to our understanding of subsequent events that it merits our reading.

Jonathan is recorded as saying, “Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this.” Then, we read that “the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home” [1 SAMUEL 23:18]. David never again saw Jonathan, but he did not forget him.

For the purpose of our study today, note that Jonathan made a covenant with David. Shortly after he became aware of David, Jonathan made a covenant with David [1 SAMUEL 18:3]. The details of that covenant are not given; undoubtedly, the details are not critical for our understanding. That particular covenant did commit Jonathan to treat David with kindness, a point to which David appealed [1 SAMUEL 20:8]. At this meeting Jonathan made another covenant with David—one that included the appeal to God, “May the LORD take vengeance on David’s enemies” [1 SAMUEL 20:16], after which Jonathan led David to swear again his love for his family. Then, Jonathan and David made a covenant before the LORD.

Quickly note a couple of crucial points. First, the covenants that were made were each grounded in love for one another. We live in a fallen world in which many seem capable only of seeing love as sexual in nature. However, the love that is in view is that deep affection marked by respect and appreciation for one another. It is akin to the sense of camaraderie that is shared by warriors that have depended upon one another in combat. There is a sense of respect and affection that marks individuals when they have depended upon one another in the time of trial.

The longer these men shared danger amid combat, the deeper their respect and appreciation for one another. The deeper their confidence in one another, the stronger the bond they shared. It is a harbinger of the deep love we have for the Saviour. The longer we share His life, the deeper our love for Him. The more we stand amid the conflict, the greater our confidence in His love for us.

There is a second point concerning Jonathan and David, and that is that the covenant they made was made in the presence of God. Covenants mean little in contemporary society. It has not been that many years ago when we would say of an individual that his word was his bond. My dad needed a loan from the bank to purchase his blacksmith shop; no papers were signed. He gave his word, and that was acceptable to the banker who advanced the moneys. Try that today. Collateral must be provided and insurance purchased before a loan is advanced. It is assumed that many, perhaps most, people will not fulfil their word. Even among the professed people of God, how often do we witness an excuse for failure to keep a promise?

Covenants are not seen as sacred in this day. We make vows before the True and Living God to maintain the bonds of matrimony. We identify the marriage union as “holy matrimony.” Yet, if the statistics within modern society mean anything at all, it is that matrimony is not sacred. We seek to unite with a congregation, pledging our commitment before the Lord. However, it is not at all uncommon that a church should see so many as half or more of the congregation absent from the service on any given Lord’s Day. What we mean, in the best-case scenario, is that we will “try” to do what we say we will do.

Jonathan and David “made a covenant before the Lord.” This was a sacred commitment of friendship and mutual loyalty. However, during a final conflict with the Philistines, Saul was killed. At the same time, three sons, including Jonathan, were also slain. When he was informed of their deaths, David mourned and composed an elegy which he commanded should be recited by Israel in honour of Saul and his sons [see 2 SAMUEL 1:17-27].

### THE OBJECT OF DAVID’S COMPASSION WAS A SEVERELY CRIPPLED INDIVIDUAL.

Mephibosheth was crippled. The account of how he was crippled is given early in 2 Samuel. “Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth” [2 SAMUEL 4:4].

When the Israelite Army was defeated, the populace was panic-stricken. There was the very real possibility of full-scale invasion of the cities and towns with wanton destruction and slaughter. Certainly, the families of nobility would be targeted. Thus it was that a nurse grabbed up the child and attempted to flee. Tragically, as she fled with the child in her arms, she dropped the child and he was injured. It would seem that he suffered a broken leg, or perhaps it was a broken hip or a knee. Whatever the case, the child was incapacitated. Without the availability of orthopaedists and surgeons such as we take for granted in this day, the bone did not set properly. Consequently, Mephibosheth was crippled from that point forward in life. Now the boy was grown; he was married and had a child of his own. However, through the transition of reigns, he was deprived of the family lands that had once belonged to his grandfather and father.

Perhaps he recognised the name, but David did not really know Mephibosheth. Nevertheless, he remembered the rich friendship which grew out of the dangers he had once shared with Jonathan. David was determined to show this man “kindness for Jonathan’s sake.” So, he brought him into the palace where he would be the guest of the king always. Moreover, he restored all the lands that had once belonged to his grandfather, Saul. Ziba, erstwhile servant of Saul, was appointed, together with his sons, to tend the land that was given Mephibosheth.

The more common treatment of families of vanquished or deposed monarchs was terrible indeed. For instance, a later Assyrian king named Assurbanipal wrote of some whom he deposed, “I fed their corpses, cut into small pieces, to dogs, pigs, *zību*-birds, vultures, the birds of the sky and (also) to the fish of the ocean.”<sup>2</sup> The Bible describes instances of ruthless treatment of the families of vanquished rulers. “Then Judah ... fought against [Adoni-bezek] and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. Adoni-bezek fled, but they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes. And Adoni-bezek said, ‘Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me.’ And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there” [JUDGES 1:4-7].

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<sup>2</sup> J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Princeton, NJ 1969), Quoted in V. Philips Long, **Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament), Volume 2: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel**, John H. Walton (ed.) (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2009) 453

Certainly, foreign kings would be treated in such a violent manner, but the Bible points out that even some of the kings of Israel acted the same way toward rivals. When Baasha killed Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, he dispensed rough justice against the former king's household. "As soon as he was king, [Baasha] killed all the house of Jeroboam. He left to the house of Jeroboam not one that breathed, until he had destroyed" [1 KINGS 15:29].

In fact, Mephibosheth would have been twelve years old when his uncle, Ish-bosheth, was murdered. Not only was he crippled from early childhood, but he had witnessed the violent deaths of almost his entire family. When David sent for him, it must have caused great apprehension for this man. He could not know the intent of the king. All history pointed to a poor outcome of appearing before the sovereign. That uneasiness becomes apparent when we observe his approach to the throne of David.

"Mephibosheth ... came to David and fell on his face and paid homage." There is obvious concern, perhaps even terror in his approach. However, the king acknowledged his presence when he spoke his name, "Mephibosheth!" Note Mephibosheth's response to David's acknowledgement. "Behold, I am your servant." He abases himself, I suggest out of fear—fear which must have been apparent to David, for the king spoke comforting words when he said, "Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always." Mephibosheth seems only somewhat assuaged, for "he paid homage and said, 'What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I'" [2 SAMUEL 9:6-8]?

David's actions were not in keeping with what was apparently normative in that day. His gracious acts arose from respect for his friend and commitment to honour the LORD. David not only showered him with wealth, but he brought into his own house a potential rival for the throne. Though Mephibosheth himself might not have been able to ascend to the throne, he did have a young son who could lay claim to the throne. It is evident that David is fully focused on fulfilling the covenant he made with Jonathan, and thus honouring his friend.

All this has been background. The writer of this account is careful to point out that Mephibosheth was "crippled in his feet" [verse three]. Then, as though we might miss the import of what was presented, he again says, "he was lame in both his feet" [verse twelve]. Undoubtedly, David's remembrance of the covenant he made with Jonathan is important. Undoubtedly, the Word of God stresses the compassion and kindness expected of the servant of God. However, the Word does not fail to stress the fact that Mephibosheth was crippled—he was handicapped. Or, according to the politically correct language, he was mobility impaired. Nevertheless, he had provided for himself and his family.

**LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM MEPHIBOSHETH.** Mephibosheth had created a life for himself. Undoubtedly, he had learned to depend on God. However, there are some lessons that are applicable to us as we review this story of Mephibosheth and David. Let's make some general observations and some specific applications. What is a handicap? A handicap refers to a limitation that renders us incapable of meeting the norm for a particular standard. Since none of us excel at every facet of life, it means that we each know some limitations.

**MEPHIBOSHETH REPRESENTS ALL OF US TO SOME EXTENT.** What I mean is that in one way or another, each of us is handicapped. To be certain, our limitation may be physical, or it may be emotional. It is possible that our limitation is severe, or it may be more of an irritant because of its nature. The handicap that plagues us may be one that can be corrected; or it may be impossible to change. Whatever the condition, there are deficits defining aspects of each life.

Some are born with handicaps; for others, limitations are expressed only after a period of time. We live in a fallen world and the effects of the sin of our first parents touch each of us. Tragically, even the innocent suffer because of that fallen nature. The Master seems to refer to this when he said, “There are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” [MATTHEW 19:12]. The effect is the same, whether one was born with the condition, whether one suffers as result of others’ choice, or whether the limitation in question is self-chosen.

Among the areas of research that attracted me in my scientific career was that of inborn errors of metabolism—the study of enzymatic deficits that were almost always fatal to children born with these biochemical defects in essential bodily function. The studies were especially tragic because there was little hope that could be offered to the parents of these children. Assuredly, no little child chose to be born with such tragic condition. Some of these conditions, when understood, could be addressed through dietary adaptations; but they could not be cured.

Of course, any physical aspect life is capable to being flawed; and the flaw, when expressed, can limit and individual so severely that recovery is impossible. Again, these limitations can be of such a nature that a person develops coping mechanisms. Perhaps you have watched some of the television shows that follow the lives of women born without arms and legs, or of men born without legs. We marvel because we witness them marry, have children, hold down jobs and function with a measure of normalcy.

As we age, we begin to discover limitations in each of our lives, many of which can never be changed. Few of us will ever be great basketball players, regardless of how much we may love the game. Height disadvantages ensure that such will never be a viable career choice. Again, a career as a mathematician may be out of reach of many of us because we are unable to make the commitment to study, or because we haven’t the ability to comprehend the complex nature of the studies required.

Our limitations may be such that it is a mere nuisance, or it may be severe. It may cause great and persistent pain, or it may cause a transient loss of happiness. As we age, there are new limitations that are expressed in each life. Contrasted to what we once did, we are handicapped. Handicaps define life as we know it. How we respond to the handicaps that mark each life defines us as people.

The Apostle wrote, “To keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’” [2 CORINTHIANS 12:7, 8].

We can’t speak with certainty of the Apostle’s handicap, for which we should be grateful. Any of us can speculate that what he experienced defined the challenge we face. Perhaps he suffered from a loss of vision and was unable to see clearly. If that is the case, it would explain a couple of comments made in his letter to the churches of Galatia. As he writes those saints, at one point he asks, “What then has become of the blessing you felt? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me” [GALATIANS 4:15]. Then, as he draws that letter to a conclusion, he again infers a limitation related to his eyes when he says, “See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand” [GALATIANS 6:11]. These verses could indicate that Paul has a serious vision deficit. There were no opticians or ophthalmologists available, and so eye problems could not be cured.

Perhaps it is equally likely that Paul struggled with a spiritual deficit. In light of a passage in his letter to the Roman Christians, I advance this possibility. He writes, “I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” [ROMANS 7:21-25].

Though we cannot know what Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was, we do know how he coped. His method of coping was to turn to the Lord, resting in His strength. “I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” [2 CORINTHIANS 12:9, 10].

If Mephibosheth does not represent a physical or emotional deficit for us, there is no question but that he is a type of our spiritual condition. We are imperfect, broken individuals. We cannot make ourselves acceptable to God. If we will be blessed, it will be because we are recipients of His grace. Of course, that is precisely how God approaches us. We deserve judgement; we are offered grace and mercy in Christ Jesus the Son of God. This is emphasised in a wonderful statement the Apostle makes as he writes the Roman Christians.

“Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

“But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many” [ROMANS 5:12-15].

There are some aspects of Mephibosheth’s life that are less obvious, but nevertheless important in light of the attitudes prevalent in our modern culture. For instance, it is obvious that **MEPHIBOSHETH HAS PROVIDED FOR HIMSELF**. He does not appear to have played the role of a victim. Rather, he accepted his handicap and worked within the limitations of his life. He married, had a child, and in some way was able to provide for his family. Our modern culture has created a major industry that is focused on creating victims. I really became aware of this when I was injured many years ago in an auto crash. Repeatedly, as I moved toward recovery, well-meaning individuals attempted to convince me I was a victim. There were limitations arising from the injuries sustained in that crash, but my goal was to again assume pastoral responsibilities. There were a multitude of voices arguing that it was “impossible” to take on such responsibilities because of the severity of the injuries.

I am convinced that God’s people are to be compassionate. We are to be generous toward those who are in need. However, our generosity must not destroy initiative; neither may we encourage sloth. We are taught in the Word to combine compassion with responsibility. Paul instructs the believers in Thessalonica, “We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:14]. To be certain, the believers were to be compassionate, providing assistance to those who had need. However, assistance was always meant to be temporary, assistance for the needy was never meant to become a lifestyle.



Listen to a more extended instruction concerning this issue. “We command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labour we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living” [2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-12].

***MEPHIBOSHETH WAS UNDESERVING OF THE GRACE HE RECEIVED.*** No one owed Mephibosheth grace. From a human perspective, he posed a threat to David. However, because of his respect for God, David was generous toward this man; and his generosity extended throughout his life, even after a severe conflict with his own son over the throne.

Spiritually, we do not deserve grace; that is what makes it grace. We did not seek God; He sought us. This is the import of the justly notable verse that tells us, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” [JOHN 3:16]. This statement of God’s love must have informed the Apostle of Love when he wrote, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” [1 JOHN 4:10].

***DAVID DEMONSTRATES THE GRACE THAT WE SHOULD SHOW TOWARD THE HANDICAPPED.*** Reviewing David’s response to the covenant he made with Jonathan, we realise that he acted as we would expect a follower of the Lord God should act. His was not mere show, or an attempt to buy off his responsibility by sending some money; he was prepared to invest himself in the life of Mephibosheth for the sake of Jonathan. Take a moment to ponder this truth. True compassion does not lead us to merely throw money at a need; it compels us to roll up our sleeves and get our hands dirty. Godly compassion impels us to get involved with individuals!

This compassion grows out of the instruction of God Himself. Speaking of Himself, God has said, “The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing” [DEUTERONOMY 10:17, 18]. Thus, because God executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and because He loves the sojourner and provides for him, He expects His people to reflect His character.

When Isaiah confronts the wickedness of ancient Israel, calling them to repentance, he writes:

“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;  
remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;  
cease to do evil,  
learn to do good;  
seek justice,  
correct oppression;  
bring justice to the fatherless,  
plead the widow’s cause.”

[ISAIAH 1:16, 17]

To be certain, they were called to repentance; but repentance would mean that they changed their response to the needs about them. They would be concerned for the fatherless and for the widow—the vulnerable within society. There is no call to care for the idle; but there is responsibility to be concerned for those who are truly in need.

Nor should we imagine that this compassion is an occasional matter with the prophets; it is integral to repentance as Jeremiah emphasises. “If you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever” [JEREMIAH 7:5-7].

Such true compassion is echoed by the Minor Prophets as well, as shown in this passage. “Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgements, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart” [ZECHARIAH 7:9, 10].

That requirement to be compassionate if we follow the Son of God becomes evident from the instruction James provides when he writes, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” [JAMES 1:27]. It is not a case of either/or when we consider social ministries and evangelism; it is a necessity of both/and. We dare not say that because we have a soup kitchen or a clothing closet that we are serving God if we fail to address personal holiness. Neither must we imagine that we are pleasing to God if our separation from sin does not lead us to seek to address the needs of the vulnerable within our community.

Perhaps it is that we witness this conflict between social ministries and personal holiness because we know little of the True and Living God. If we knew Him, we would endeavour to be more like Him. Perhaps it is that among the professed people of God are many who have never been born from above; they are pretenders to grace. I pray that such is not the case for you. If you are a child of God, the mercies of Christ the Lord will mark your life as you seek to honour Him with a life that reflects His grace and His goodness.

If your compassion is forced and occasional, is it possible that this is because you have never known Him? If that is true, your first need is to be born from above and into His Family. You may know the words and yet not know the melody. You may know all about Christ, though you don’t know Christ. You may have heard of the grace of God without experiencing His grace. If that describes you, turn to Him today.

God’s Son took the punishment you deserve upon Himself. He offered His life as a sacrifice because of your sin. The Good News is that He did not remain in the tomb. He conquered death and was raised from the grave. He then ascended into Heaven where He is seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding for those who have received His grace. This is the reason we are invited to come to life in Him as the Word of God says, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father, and with the mouth one confesses and is set free.” That passage continues by quoting the prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].<sup>3</sup> May you know the grace of God as you receive the life of Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Author’s Translation