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A Place at the Table 2 Samuel 9:1-13; 16:1-4; 19:24-30

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A little background is helpful for understanding the story about King David and Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan and grandson of King Saul. The prophet Samuel anointed Saul as king of Israel (1 Samuel 9 and 10). Later, when Saul proved unstable and unfaithful, the Lord sent Samuel to anoint David as the one who would eventually succeed Saul on the throne. As Saul's mental health and decision making continued to deteriorate he grew increasingly insecure and sought to kill David forcing him to become a fugitive. Complicating matters, Saul's son Jonathan, was David's best friend and Jonathan helped protect David even warning him to flee from the wrath of his father. The depth of their friendship is revealed in the emotionally loaded 1 Samuel 20:1-42 in which they swear their loyalty to each other. Eventually, David spares Saul's life not once but twice (1 Samuel 24 and 26). Jonathan, two of his brothers, and King Saul all die fighting the Philistines (1 Samuel 31) and this opens the door for David to be anointed king over Judah (1 Samuel 2). However the violent power struggle between the houses of Saul and David continued with murder being used by both parties in an attempt to consolidate power. The stories in 2 Samuel 3 and 4 sound frighteningly similar to some of the terrible scenes that have taken place in the Middle East in recent years. By the time of 2 Samuel 9 David was king over all the tribes of Israel, the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem, and God's promise was revealed to David through the prophet Nathan. David led the nation to victories over a number of neighboring peoples bringing a level of stability and a chance for David to remember the promise he made to Jonathan. That leads us to today's scripture in 2 Samuel 9:1-13.

“David asked, *“Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show **kindness** for Jonathan's sake?”*

Now there was a servant of Saul's household named Ziba. They called him to appear before David, and the king said to him, *“Are you Ziba?”*

*“Your servant,”* he replied. The king asked, *“Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can **show God's kindness**?”* Ziba answered the king,

*“There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet.”*

*“Where is he?”* the king asked.

Ziba answered, *“He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.”*

So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel. When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.

David said, “*Mephibosheth!*” “*Your servant,*” he replied.

“*Don’t be afraid,*” David said to him, “*for I will surely show you **kindness** for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and **you will always eat at my table.***”

Mephibosheth bowed down and said, “*What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?*”

Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul’s servant, and said to him, “*I have given your master’s grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master’s grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, **will always eat at my table.***”

(Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.) Then Ziba said to the king, “*Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do.*”

**So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table like one of the king’s sons.**

Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica, and all the members of Ziba’s household were servants of Mephibosheth. And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because **he always ate at the king’s table**, and he was crippled in both feet.”

David is a very complicated man. He is courageous, passionate, gifted in music and worship as well as in war. He is described as a man after God’s own heart yet he also has moments of impulsive and destructive selfishness. David commits acts of violence and betrayal as well as loyalty and kindness. David can be brutal and ruthless but also gracious and steadfast. This is the case with Mephibosheth, the son of his best friend, Jonathan to whom he swore an oath of loyalty forever. In verses 1, 3, and 7 the Hebrew word “*hesed*” is used three times and it’s translated as kindness and also carries with it a sense of loyalty and obligation. David after most of the descendents of Saul who might challenge his claim to the throne are dead, now wants to know “*Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show **kindness** for Jonathan’s sake?*” If there is anyone left it likely will be someone who is unknown, weak, and politically insignificant. Ziba, the servant of Saul, thinks so little of him that he doesn’t even identify him by name, but merely as “*a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet.*”

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a Septuagint; Hebrew *my*

He is a no name, he is handicapped, he doesn't matter. Summoning him to David is sort of like when a politician today goes into a poor neighborhood to show he or she is "one of the people" and hasn't forgotten the poor and politically powerless. They do their photo op and leave. David has something else in mind. But can you imagine what the poor son of Jonathan thought was going to happen? He must have been terrified to come to David's court because this same David had all but exterminated his family.

David understands what's going on in the scared man's mind and his first words are, "*Don't be afraid,*" and then David says a pretty amazing thing. "***I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.***" David kindness is demonstrated in providing a good income by restoring his grandfather's property to him, welcoming him at his table and honoring Mephibosheth like one of his own sons.

What David does for Mephibosheth, God does for us. Compared to God we are small, powerless, weak, insignificant, and undeserving yet we are shown kindness, and given a place at the Lord's Table. It's as if God says, "I will show you kindness, I will restore you, and you will always eat my table." We are welcomed as one of the family. Jesus says in Luke 6:35-36, God "*is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*"

God's desire and expectation is that we will be kind to others as God has been kind to us. God's word encourages repeatedly about the importance of showing kindness.

### **Our Kindness**

Even if we are operating from selfish motives, as some suggest David was with Mephibosheth, it is wise to be kind. Job 6:14 says, "*Those who withhold **kindness** from a friend forsake the fear of the Almighty.*"

Proverbs 11:17, "*Those who are **kind** reward themselves, but the cruel do themselves harm.*" Practicing kindness usually results in our feeling better about ourselves because we know we've brightened someone else's day, we've helped to share their burden, or to give them hope. People who are cruel do others and themselves harm as the news reveals everyday.

Many times when the word "**kind**" is mentioned in the Book of Proverbs it used in reference to the poor, to those who may need kindness more than others. Plenty of people are willing to be kind to the rich or at least to pretend to be for the sake of a

monetary reward. The poor, the struggling, the homeless are often more likely to be hassled than helped. God's word about showing kindness to the poor is crystal clear. Proverbs 14:21, 31, *"Those who despise their neighbors are sinners, but **happy are those who are kind to the poor. Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him.**"* The prophet Zechariah (7:9-10) sums up how kindness looks in daily living, *"Thus says the Lord of hosts: render true judgments, **show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.**"*

As a church and as members of the human race, these are important words of scripture to remember. Poor Mephibosheth couldn't get much of a break, his life was totally turned around through the grace he received from David, he had gone from the outhouse to the penthouse and then later Ziba, the servant who along with his sons and servants were working all the land betrayed him making him look disloyal and ungrateful and telling King David that Mephibosheth was hoping that the revolt under Absalom would lead his family back to the throne. Given the powerlessness of Mephibosheth, David should have seen through this power play in a minute but he doesn't and impulsively tells Ziba that everything that belonged to Mephibosheth's is now his. David in the stress of the moment dealing with the revolt led by one of his own sons, didn't see that a long-time servant of King Saul with many sons and servants was surely a greater threat to him than a crippled young son of his best friend. (See 2 Samuel 16:1-4).

Word of what happened reaches Mephibosheth and in 2 Samuel 19:24-30 we hear of his encounter with David. "Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, also went down to meet the king. He had not taken care of his feet or trimmed his mustache or washed his clothes from the day the king left until the day he returned safely. When he came from Jerusalem to meet the king, the king asked him, *"Why didn't you go with me, Mephibosheth?"* He said, "My lord the king, since I your servant am lame, I said, *'I will have my donkey saddled and will ride on it, so I can go with the king.'* But Ziba my servant betrayed me. And he has slandered your servant to my lord the king. **My lord the king is like an angel of God; so do whatever pleases you.** All my grandfather's descendants deserved nothing but death from my lord the king, **but you gave your servant a place among those who sat at your table.**

So what right do I have to make any more appeals to the king?"

The king said to him, *"Why say more? I order you and Ziba to divide the fields."*

Mephibosheth said to the king, *“Let him take everything, now that my lord the king has arrived home safely.”*

Mephibosheth recognizes that he is totally dependent upon the grace of the king for his very life and his appearance is of a person in mourning. He deserved death but was given life and a place at the king’s table. Again that describes our situation with God. We are totally dependent upon God for our very life, we have been given a new life and a place at the Lord’s Table.

I’d like you to think about a few things for a moment.  
What was the most recent kind thing someone has done for you?  
What was the most recent kind thing you did for someone else?  
What was the most recent kind thing you did for someone who you didn’t know or who was not kind to you?

Part of growing in Christ-likeness is that we are kind to others even when they are not kind to us; this is a mark of Christian spiritual maturity. The Apostle Paul explains how this contrasting behavior looks in our lives in 1 Corinthians 4:12-13, *“When reviled, we **ble**ss; when persecuted, we **endure**; when slandered, we speak **kindly**.”* I don’t think it is a coincidence that **patience and kindness are next to each other** in the list of the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 and that they often go together in many other passages (such as 2 Corinthians 6:6, Colossians 3:12).

1 Corinthians 13:4 *“Love is **patient**, love is **kind**.”*

Love is patient and kind especially when it is hard to be patient and kind.

Even pastors and teachers are admonished in 2 Timothy 2:24 to remember that, *“the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but **kindly to everyone**, an apt teacher, **patient**.”*

William Barclay said, *“More people have been brought into the church by the **kindness of real Christian love** than by all the theological arguments in the world, and more people have been driven from the church by the hardness and ugliness of so-called Christianity than by all the doubts in the world.”*

Throughout my entire life, growing up in a pastor’s family, and in almost 17 years of ministry as a pastor, my family and I have been the beneficiaries of incredible kindness, generosity, and love by countless Christians. People have done many things for us, both large and small. It touches us deeply and we are thankful to you and grateful to God for all your loving kindness.

We don't have to be spiritual giants to practice intentional kindness; we just have to act and speak kindly on a consistent (not random) basis, to all people, at all times. Kindness doesn't have to be expensive or elaborate, although it can be. Kindness can be as simple as committing ourselves to speaking encouraging words, sending a note, making a call, baking some cookies, sharing some time, offering physical assistance, cooking a meal, helping clean up, assisting with a car or project, the list is endless.

If we need incentive for being kind we can remember the words of Proverbs 21:21, "*Whoever pursues righteousness and **kindness will find life and honor.***"

Mother Teresa wrote, "***We will never know all the good a smile can do. We speak about our God who is good, merciful, and compassionate. Are we a living token of that reality? Those who suffer – can they perceive in us that goodness, that forgiveness, that living understanding? May no one ever come to you without going away better and happier. Everyone should see kindness in your face, in your eyes, your smile.***"<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes we may think or feel that some spiritual things are beyond us or we just don't get them. We look at a person like a Mother Teresa and think, "I could never reach that level." But the beauty of **kindness** is it takes no formal education or specific training or expensive preparation. It simply requires being kind and kindness often leads to more kindness. The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness.

Mephibosheth was so overcome by David's kindness that he doesn't care about property or fields or anything else, he is just glad to see David home safely.

God has kindly provided a place at the table for each of us and for God's sake we can show kindness and provide places for others. This week let's strive to be kind.

Blessing:

***May no one ever come to you without going away better and happier.***

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<sup>1</sup> Mother Teresa, Heart of Joy: The Transforming Power of Self-Giving, (Servant Books, Ann Arbor, MI, 1987, 67.