

2 Samuel 21 — Sin's Consequences and Teamwork

January 14, 2024

Good morning, CrossWinds Church! If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are grateful to have you. In all honesty, since it is -18 degrees this morning, with -42 degrees wind chill, we are grateful to have anyone this morning. I also want to give a special shout-out to those keeping warm and watching online.

This morning, we continue our studies in 2 Samuel. We are in 2 Samuel 21. After today, there are only three more chapters until we finish the book. This morning's study is not business as usual. So far, each chapter of 1 and 2 Samuel tells the next part of a story. 1 Samuel was the story of King Saul's life. 2 Samuel is the story of King David's life. That is not the way the final four chapters of 2 Samuel work. The final details of David's life ended last week in 2 Samuel 20. The story ended with an old David getting his kingdom back after Absalom's attempted coup.

The problem was that while David retained the title of king, he didn't have all the control of the king. The general of the army, a man named Joab, acted as if he were the king. Against David's orders, he killed people in cold blood. He didn't hesitate to kill an entire city of Israelites to get one person in the city. In David's kingdom before his sin with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, David's kingdom was described as a place where he ruled with justice and equity. That was not true in David's restored kingdom. While David had the title of king, Joab acted like he was the king. Justice and equity were not something that concerned

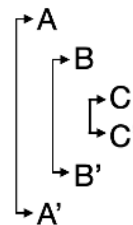
him. Chronologically, David's story picks up in the book of 1 Kings. That book begins with an elderly David passing the throne to his son Solomon.

That leaves us wondering about the last four chapters of 2 Samuel. What are they about?

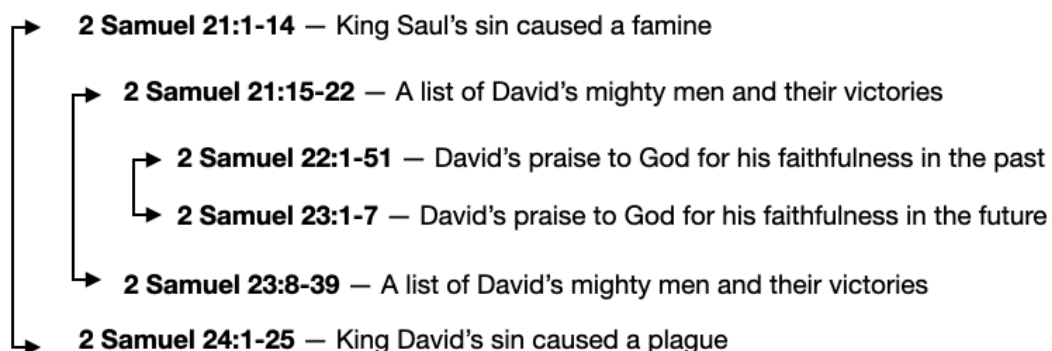
The final four chapters summarize David's reign and reflect on his kingdom. While earlier part of the book were arranged chronologically. The final four chapters are arranged thematically. They pull lessons from history and David's life to teach us about David's kingdom.

The final four chapters are arranged in what is called a Hebrew inclusio. As soon as I used that, your eyes glazed over. Pastor Kurt, it is -18 degrees out. It was hard enough just getting to church. Don't teach me Hebrew in church. Don't worry. A Hebrew inclusio is a simple concept. Once you understand it, you will see them all over the Bible. Understanding an inclusio is the key to understanding these final chapters.

An inclusio is a mirror structure where the beginning and end are related, as well as each layer inside the inclusio. In the center of the inclusio is the point that is being made.



That is the way the final chapters are organized. Let me show you.



You can see how the final four chapters are in an inclusio, where one side reflects the other, and the central message is in the middle.

This morning, we are going to cover chapter 21, which is points A and B in the inclusio. Let's begin.

King Saul's sin led to famine and death.

The first 14 verses of this chapter are considered by some Bible scholars to be the most difficult verses in the Bible. It is not that they are difficult to understand. It is they are difficult to accept. They involve unjust war, natural disasters, and death.

One of the big lessons from these verses is that if we understood how much suffering our sin brings into other people's lives, especially those we love, we would run from sin rather than be drawn into it.

This section was also written to demonstrate that David was not guilty of any wrongdoing regarding the death of Saul, his son, and his grandsons. In 1 Samuel, we read numerous times that David refused to put his hand out against Saul, the Lord's anointed, to take his life. He had many opportunities to kill Saul, but he refused to lift his hand against him.

David was also not at Mt. Gilboa when Saul and his sons died at the hands of the Philistines. Here we learn that when it came to the demise of additional sons of Saul and even his grandsons, David was also not responsible for their deaths. If anyone was responsible for their deaths, it was Saul himself who brought about their demise through the way he lived his life.

[Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year... 2 Samuel 21:1a \(ESV\)](#)

“In the days of David,” tells us this event took place sometime during David’s reign, which means it happened sometime after 2 Samuel 5 when David took the throne. Later, we will read of Mephibosheth — Jonathan’s son. He will be mentioned. This famine occurred sometime after 2 Samuel 9 when we first met Mephibosheth.

The famine Israel faced was a natural disaster. People were hungry. Some were starving to death. Animals were dying of starvation. Everyone in Israel looked like the famine children from a child support poster. What was happening?

David knew what many of us forget: that God is in control of the universe. Weather, storms, famines, and natural disasters, even bitter cold mornings like we have today, do not happen by chance. God is connected to them, and he uses them for a purpose. Sometimes, natural disasters come from God pouring out some of his wrath against our sins.

In David’s case, after three years of famine, David wondered if the famine was God’s wrath being poured out against Israel for their sin. David was not aware of anything. He hadn’t done anything. What had the nation done to bring about God’s fatherly discipline?

The passages I am about to read applied to ancient Israel then. They don’t directly apply to us today. God still may discipline our nation because of our sins, but every natural disaster may not be an act of God’s discipline on our nation, in the same way, there was a clear connection in these things for ancient Israel.

“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.... blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit

of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock....
Deuteronomy 28:1–6 (ESV)

God also promised to bring famine, natural disasters, and captivity on his people if they broke God's law and walked away from him.

“But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you... cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock.... 28:15–19 (ESV)

If we go a little further into Deuteronomy 28, we see famine was one of the ways God disciplined his people for their sins.

...and the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron. The LORD will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed. Deuteronomy 28:23–24 (ESV)

David realized there must have been something God's people did that brought God to the point where he refused to bless his people. Instead, he disciplined his people by sending no rain and allowing his people to die of hunger.

In that day, David would have gone to the priest to find out the source of the problem. The priest would hear from God and give David an answer. David did that. God was quick to respond.

...And the LORD said, “There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death.” 2 Samuel 21:1b (ESV)

God was very merciful. He didn't keep David in the dark. He told him the source of the suffering. King Saul, David's predecessor, attempted to genocide the Gibeonites. As a result, King Saul and his house, were guilty of murder.

Who were the Gibeonites? Some of you may remember their story from Joshua 9. When Joshua conquered the Promised Land, the Gibeonites came to Joshua asking to make a peace treaty with him. The Gibeonites claimed they were from a distant country. They had worn-out sandals and moldy bread from a distant journey. Joshua and the elders of Israel quickly decided to make a peace treaty with the Gibeonites. They didn't bother to ask God before they made the decision. It turned out the Gibeonites lied. They were not from a distant land. They lived next to the Israelites. They were trying to find a way not to die because Joshua was conquering the Promised Land. They didn't want to be the next people group to be destroyed. Even though they deceived the Israelites, the Israelites were bound to keep their word. They didn't kill the Gibeonites but had them work as public servants, drawing water and cutting wood for the people.

King Saul, for whatever reason, violated the promise Joshua made generations before. He attempted to kill them. Not just one of them, but to kill off all of them.

Why did he do this? I don't know, but I have an idea. The act of King Saul and his family attempting to genocide the Gibeonites doesn't appear to be an act he did as king. It was a personal act. The home town of Saul and his family was Gibeah. These people were the original inhabitants of the land called Gibeonites. I guess that King Saul viewed them as unimportant people who were holding land in his community. King Saul and his family attempted to kill these people off so they could take more land for themselves in the community. This was pure greed. The Bible doesn't explicitly say this, but it seems like a fair assumption.

This is why not just King Saul, but his entire household, was guilty of this sin.

This also gives us a window into King Saul's character. He had a problem with killing people. He didn't kill the people he was supposed to eliminate, and he killed the people he should have protected. He had it backward. Early in his reign, when God commanded him to kill the Amalekites for their sin, he didn't do his job. He spared them. In 1 Samuel 22, Saul killed the priests of Nob when they were innocent. If you want to get on God's bad side, kill all the clergy when they did nothing wrong. In this case, he tried to kill off an entire people group, even though the Israelites were sworn protectors of them for several generations.

While Saul killed the wrong people, David found himself in a position where he needed to figure out how to make things right.

So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them... 2 Samuel 21:2a (ESV)

Before we listen to that conversation, the Bible fills in some of the Gibeonite background.

...Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites. Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah. 2 Samuel 21:2b (ESV)

Saul pictured the Gibeonites as an easy target because they were defenseless. He was trying to get more of the Promised Land for, not just Israel but for himself. In doing this, he broke the Promise Joshua made to them before God generations before.

And David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?" 2 Samuel 21:3 (ESV)

David took the initiative. How could he make things right with the Gibeonites? King Saul was dead, but the guilt of his genocidal murder still hung as over God's people and the land.

The Gibeonites said to him, "It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel."... 2 Samuel 21:4a (ESV)

The Gibeonites recognized this was not a matter of gold or silver. In other words, there was no monetary value that could be given to cover the loss of life. Simply giving them \$5 or \$5 million to cover the hundreds to thousands of dead Gibeonites would trivialize their death. There is no monetary value you can put on loss of life. The only acceptable response is capital punishment. Look what the Bible says about this.

Moreover, you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death, but he shall be put to death. Numbers 35:31 (ESV)

Capital punishment, not a monetary fine, is the only just response to murder, especially mass murder.

In addition, the Gibeonites recognize they do not have a right to seek revenge. Even though King Saul killed thousands of them, they did not have a right to take it upon themselves to act like terrorists and kill Israelites. Today, Islamic terrorists think this way. If, in the distant past, a Christian or a Jew killed or oppressed a distant relative, they have no problem taking it upon themselves to kill a Jew or a Christian today as what they believe is just payment for something that happened in the distant past.

The Gibeonites realize that only David, as the king, can choose to make things right.

...And he said, "What do you say that I shall do for you?" 2 Samuel 21:4b (ESV)

David said, "How do you suggest I make things right?"

They said to the king, "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give them." 2 Samuel 21:5–6 (ESV)

This is where the story gets hard. Seven male descendants of Saul were to be handed over to the Gibeonites to be put to death. This doesn't feel fair. Before we object to this, let me make a few observations. First, it was not just King Saul who sinned against the Gibeonites by attempting to wipe their entire people group off the face of the earth. It was King Saul, along with his family. There was family guilt, not just personal guilt. Second, the Gibeonites asked for only seven of King Saul's sons to be put to death. That is a small number compared to the hundreds, possibly thousands, who died by the swords of King Saul and his family. The reason they requested seven is probably because seven represents a number of completeness. It was not a one-for-one ratio. Saul killed thousands of Gibeonites as he attempted to pull a Hitler and exterminate the Jews. The Gibeonites only asked for seven.

The Bible also tells us that murder polluted God's Promised Land, and the only way to atone for the murder, especially mass murder, is by the blood of the one who shed it.

You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. Numbers 35:33 (ESV)

King David didn't have much of an option. He couldn't pay the Gibeonites off. Capital punishment was the only just response to murder. While King Saul

led in these murders, he was dead, but his family was also involved, so they bore guilt for what was done.

Before we get to the executions, there is a brief line that shows us while us that while Saul was a promise-breaker, David was a promise-keeper.

But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. 2 Samuel 21:7 (ESV)

Unlike King Saul, David was careful to keep his promise. Now we get to the seven sons of King Saul, who died for murder.

The king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; and he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the LORD, and the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest. 2 Samuel 21:8–9 (ESV)

David chose two sons from one family and five from another. The mother of the two was Rizpah. We first met her in 2 Samuel 3:7 where we learned she was King Saul's concubine. Interestingly, she named one of her children Mephibosheth, the same name Jonathan chose for his son Mephibothsheth. These are two different Mephibosheths. Don't confuse them.

In addition, David delivered to the Gibeonites five grandsons of King Saul, all born to his daughter Merab. They were not named.

If you were disturbed by what we just read, it gets worse.

Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell upon them from the heavens. And she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day, or the beasts of the field by night. 2 Samuel 21:10 (ESV)

For a long time, Rizpah, Saul's concubine, placed herself in pure hell. The death of these men took place at the beginning of the Barley harvest, which was in April. She stayed with the bodies, chasing away the vultures and wild animals that tried to eat their flesh until the rainy season, which was in October. That is crazy.

Why are we told about this? First, to honor Rizpah and her radical motherly devotion to her sons and the other grandsons of King Saul. Second, it is to help us better understand how our sin affects people we love in ways we would never expect. Saul's sin against the Gibeonites first touched hundreds to thousands of Gibeonite families as so many died. Second, it touched the entire nation as they suffered and died in three years of famine. Third, it touched his sons and grandsons, as seven of them died for the sins he could have avoided. Fourth, it hurt Rizpah so deeply that she spent six months outside protecting the dead bodies of the sons and grandsons she loved. Now that Saul was dead, those bodies were all she had left of her family.

When David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa. And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan; and they gathered the bones of those who were hanged. And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father. And they did all that the king commanded. And after that God responded to the plea for the land. 2 Samuel 21:11–14 (ESV)

When David heard about Rizpah, and the honor she showed to her sons and the five grandsons of King Saul, he was touched. He went out of his way to honor even the bones of King Saul and Jonathan by having them dug up from

where they were in Jabesh-Gilead, then making sure they were interred together with the bones of his sons and grandsons in their family cemetery.

After all this, God relented and sent rain.

What can we learn from this?

1. **David was not responsible for the death of Saul's sons.** In 2 Samuel 16, you may remember a man named Shimei cursing David as David fled Jerusalem during Absalom's rebellion.

The LORD has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul, ... See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood." 2 Samuel 16:8 (ESV)

Shimei accused David of trying to kill off the house of King Saul. Did David do that? No! As we saw at the end of 1 Samuel, David had nothing to do with the death of King Saul and his sons when they died at the hands of the Philistines. The death of these seven happened because of Saul's sin and the curse he brought on the nation. David didn't want to kill them. He had no choice but capital punishment. If anything, David, was especially honorable to them to Saul, his sons, and grandsons by giving them a proper funeral.

2. **Sin brings great suffering to others around us, especially to those we love most.** King Saul didn't expect his attempt to genocide the Gibeonites would lead to 3 years of famine and death for his own nation. He didn't foresee this would lead to the death of seven of his children and grandchildren. He didn't plan to break Rizpah's heart. He didn't plan to be the reason five of his daughter's sons were killed. If he could have seen the pain and suffering his sin would bring to his family, he would have never done it.

The same is true for us. When we sin, we tend to believe that if there are

consequences, we will be the only ones to pay them. That is not true. Those we love the most will usually pay the most.

Think of this from the angle of David. When he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, Uriah, he was told he would pay four-fold. His murder of Uriah led to the death of four of his children. His infant son with Bathsheba died. Amnon, his oldest son, died. Absalom rebelled against him and died. At the beginning of 1 Kings, Adonijah rebelled and died. The consequences of our sins are always far worse than we realize, especially for the people we love. If we could see all the consequences beforehand, we would run from our sin rather than allow ourselves to be seduced into it.

3. **The personal sins of a leader cannot help but lead to the suffering of his/her people.** For three years, an entire nation suffered famine because of King Saul's family's sin of attempting to genocide the Gibeonites. The same is true today. We see political leaders and business leaders living wicked or even illegal personal lives. When people approach them about their character, they say, "My personal life has no impact on my public duties." That may be true on paper, but it is not true regarding how God handles a leader. A leader's personal life has a big impact on their public performance. Those under a leader whose leadership is known for holiness will be blessed. Those under a leader who is known for wickedness will suffer.
4. **When we make a promise before God, God takes it seriously.** When Joshua promised to protect the Gibeonites, even though it was made generations before King Saul, God expected it to be kept. God expects us to

keep our promises, especially the ones we make before God when we ask him to be our witness. This is a reminder that when we make a marriage promise in God's house with God as our witness, God expects us to keep that promise even if it was made 30 years ago.

David needed a team.

In the next section of the inclusion, we learn David did not win his great military victories alone. He was surrounded by loyal and effective warriors who served and protected him. David is so prominent in this book that it is easy to think he did everything alone. In reality, God gave him a great team. They were the secret of his success.

In 1 Samuel, while David was only a boy, David killed Goliath, a super-sized Philistine giant. Did you know Goliath wasn't the only giant in the Promised Land? There were many giants, and David wasn't the only person to kill one.

The death of Ishbi-benob

There was war again between the Philistines and Israel, and David went down together with his servants, and they fought against the Philistines. And David grew weary. 2 Samuel 21:15 (ESV)

We don't know when this took place. Most likely, it took place when David was getting older. When he was young, we never hear about him getting tired. If you remember our studies in Absalom's rebellion, David wanted to go to battle, but the people asked him to stay behind. He was getting older.

David still thought of himself as young and strong, but everyone knew he wasn't as young as he once was, nor as strong and athletic as he used to be. At this time, an older worn-out David was exhausted in the battle and probably had his hands on his knees.

And Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze, and who was armed with a new sword, thought to kill David. 2 Samuel 21:16 (ESV)

Ishbi-benob was another giant. He had his big spear which was half the size of Goliath's, and a spanking new sword. He saw David sucking wind, trying to catch his breath, and he thought this was an opportunity for the kill.

But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid and attacked the Philistine and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, "You shall no longer go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel." 2 Samuel 21:17 (ESV)

You will remember Abishai. Abishai and Joab were sons of Zeruiah. Zeruiah was David's sister. Joab was David's army commander. Abishai, his brother, was second in command of the army. As we learned earlier, Abishai was like Liam Neeson in Taken. He was really good at one thing, killing people. In 1 Samuel 16 and 2 Samuel 16, Abishai tried to kill people, and David had to stop him. This time, Abishai's deadly talents came in handy as he saved David's life.

The Death of Saph

After this there was again war with the Philistines at Gob. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who was one of the descendants of the giants. 2 Samuel 21:18 (ESV)

Next we move 20 miles west of Jerusalem and meet another giant. This one was named Saph. Sibbecai killed him. In 1 Chronicles 11:29, we learn Sibbecai was another commander in David's army right behind Abishai. The best way to get promoted in David's army was to kill a giant, just like David did. It was almost a right of passage.

The Death of Goliath's Brother

And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, struck down Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. 2 Samuel 21:19 (ESV)

Here we meet Elhanan. He stuck down Goliath the Gittite. If we skim through this, it like like we have another obscure name. There is more to this than we realize. There is a problem. Goliath the Hittite was the name of the giant David killed when he was only a boy in the early chapters of 1 Samuel. How could Elhanan kill him again?

A little background will help. In this verse, there is a textual variant. When it comes to the Hebrew for the word Bethlehemite, some ancient manuscripts have this word beginning with a “B,” while others do not. If the “B” is there, it is the word Bethlehemite, and it describes where Elhanan was born. If the “B” is missing, it is not a place name but a person’s name, the name Lahmite. I may be wrong, but I think the manuscripts without the “B” on this word are correct. This means it is referring to a person’s name, not to Bethlehemite as a place name.

The reason I think this is because if we go to 1 Chronicles, we find a parallel passage to this one that tells us the same information, but it reads clearer. There are no textual debates on the 1 Chronicles 20 text.

And there was again war with the Philistines, and Elhanan the son of Jair struck down Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver’s beam. 1 Chronicles 20:5 (ESV)

This guy's name was Lahmi. He was Goliath’s brother. He met Goliath’s fate.

The Death Of Six Fingers

And there was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number, and he also was descended from the giants. And when he taunted Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David’s brother, struck him down. 2 Samuel 21:20–21 (ESV)

This conflict was 10 miles south of the last one, inside Philistine territory. We have another giant. This giant wasn't just extra big, but he had extra fingers and toes. He taunted Israel, just like Goliath did years before. Taunting the God of the universe is a recipe for disaster. It doesn't end well. That is what happened. Jonathan, the son of David's older brother Shimei, finished him off in a jiffy.

These four were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants. 2 Samuel 21:22 (ESV)

What can we learn from this list of David's mighty men and their exploits against the giants?

Application

1. **David didn't work alone. He needed a faithful team to accomplish the work God gave him to do. In the church, we are no different.** This is incredibly important. It is easy to focus on David and all that he did. This section reminds us that for David to accomplish the work God gave him to do, he surrounded him with courageous and faithful men who ultimately did many of the same great deeds David accomplished. This reminds me of the Christian life. We were never meant to live the Christian life alone. To accomplish the work God gave us to do, he put us into teams called churches. When people in the church work together, they can accomplish far greater things for God's kingdom than any of them could on their own. As we apply this to our lives, first, I want to thank those of you who are part of the CrossWinds team. You may be on staff. You may serve as an elder or deacon. You may serve on the worship team. You may serve in construction

or technology. Without you playing your role, CrossWinds could not accomplish its mission of reaching people with Jesus. Thank you! Don't think of yourself or where you serve as second-rate. Just as God did great work through the lives of David's men when they served in David's army, he will do great work through your life as you faithfully serve Jesus in the church. Lastly, I want to challenge those of you who join us for worship and study at CrossWinds, but have never taken the step to get off the bench and into the game. Today is the day. Now is the time to put your shoulder to the wheel and help us reach people with Jesus. When you do, expect God will accomplish amazing works through your lives, just as God did amazing works through the lives of the men in David's army.



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