Good morning, Moon Valley!

As you may have surmised from the new video, we are starting in brand new sermon series. The music in the video is a modern Hebrew rendition of Psalm 7, written by David. It is fitting because the new series is a study through the book of 2 Samuel, whose main character is none other than David.

Last year, we finished off our study of 1 Samuel in which David was chosen by God to be the next king of Israel, succeeding King Saul. David is destined to be a greatest king of Israel ever, setting a standard by which all other kings are measured.

David will be a unifier, bringing divided tribes of Israel together.

David will be a developer, establishing an efficient government and organizing the Jewish priesthood.

David will be a warrior, mobilizing an army that scarcely loses a battle.[1]

But at the end of 1 Samuel, David is not yet king. And at the beginning of 2 Samuel, he still is not. And, as we are going to see, David's ascent to the throne is peppered with problems and pain, hence the title: The Ascent Was a Mess.

The biblical text we're studying today is ▶ 2 Samuel 1:1-27. From this text, I draw the following big idea: ▶ Integrity seeks God's way all the way.

We are going to spend the rest of our time unpacking what this means, what it looks like in real life, and how we can apply it to our lives.

[1] Wood, Leon J., *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 217.

Integrity comes from the Latin word "integer," which means whole or complete. In math, an integer is a whole number as opposed to a fraction. As such, integrity is the state of being undivided.

- A person of biblical integrity is one whose heart is undivided in its allegiance to God.
- A person of integrity is one whose thoughts, words, and actions are completely aligned with God, both privately and publicly.
- A person of integrity speaks the whole truth, without managing information or twisting a few facts to create a false impression.
- A person of integrity seeks God's way, not his own way.
    - He seeks God's way all the way, not part way.
    - He seeks God's way wholeheartedly, not half-heartedly.

In Scripture, David is distinguished as having integrity. In ▶ Psalm 78:72, David's leadership is described this way:

> NAU Psalm 78:72 So he shepherded them according to the *integrity* of his heart . . . [emphasis mine]

The original Hebrew word translated "integrity" also carries the same idea of undivided completeness.[2] A heart of integrity is one without guile, without hidden agendas, without duplicity.

In the story of our text, there are two main characters. One is David, who is the example of integrity. The other is an unnamed messenger who is the contrasting opposite. We are going to go to school on these two men, with an eye toward examining our own level of integrity.

If you are like me, you are in for a few surprises along the way.

But before we dig into the text, some background is needed.

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[2] TWOT.

You may recall from our study of 1 Samuel that, in the later years of Saul's kingship, he becomes insanely jealous of David, whom he recognizes as his God-appointed successor. In fact, Saul tries repeatedly to kill David, who becomes an innocent fugitive in his own country.

David has at least two opportunities to strike down Saul, which would have eliminated the danger to himself and expedited his ascent to the throne. He could have rationalized it as self-defense.

But David steadfastly refuses to lay a hand on Saul, on the thinking that it would not be right in God's eyes for him or anyone else to murder a king of Israel whom God has chosen. David reasons that, if it is God's will for him to ascend to the throne, it has to be God's way all the way. David seeks no selfish scheme or short-cut. It must in God's timing and on God's terms, not his own.

Eventually, David runs for his life to the Philistines, enemies of Israel, where he finds favor with King Achish of Gath, who gives David, his men, and their families the small town of Ziklag as a place of refuge.

In the closing chapters of 1 Samuel, the Philistines are about to go to war with Israel, and David finds himself in a dilemma. The Philistine king Achish wants to enlist David and his men to fight against their own people, the Israelites. Of course, David does not want to do this. But neither does he want to fall out of favor with Achish by refusing.

By the providence of God, David is spared the dilemma when, on the brink of battle, the Philistine military commanders distrust David and persuade Achish to send him and his men back home to Ziklag.

So, David and his men return to Ziklag, only to face another dilemma. Some Amalekites have raided it, plundering and burning the city, and taking their wives and children captive.

By God's grace, David and his men are able to chase down the offending Amalekites, defeat them, recover everything, and return to Ziklag.

While David and his men are fighting with the Amalekites, the Israelites are fighting with the Philistines. Israel is routed and Saul and his sons die.

We need to review specifically how Saul dies because it is going to come into play in our text for today. So, pay attention. There will be a quiz. The account of Saul's demise is recorded in ▶ 1 Samuel 31:3-6. It says,

> ESV 1 Samuel 31:3 The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was badly wounded by the archers.
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> ▶ ESV 1 Samuel 31:4 Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mistreat me." ▶ But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword and fell upon it.
>
> ▶ ESV 1 Samuel 31:5 And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him.
>
> ▶ ESV 1 Samuel 31:6 Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, on the same day together.

So, just to summarize what will be on the quiz later, Saul is badly wounded by Philistine arrows. He knows that he is about to be overtaken by the Philistines, and he doesn't want to be tortured by them. So, he unsuccessfully tries to get his armor-bearer to put him out of his misery.

When the armor-bearer refuses out of respect for the life of the king, Saul ends up killing himself by falling on his own sword.

So, that is the cheery background to our text. It begins in ▶ 2 Samuel 1:1, where it says,

> ESV 2 Samuel 1:1 After the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.

At this point, David has no idea that Israel has been defeated. He has no idea that Saul is dead. Nobody has posted reels of the battle. But he is about to find out. ▶ Verse 2 continues.

> ESV 2 Samuel 1:2 And on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. And when he came to David, he fell to the ground and paid homage.

The appearance of the man portends bad news. In that day, torn clothes and dirt on the head were common expressions of grief. We have reason to suspect that the man's appearance is contrived for dramatic effect. He wants to give the impression that his sympathies lie with Israel.[3]

The man falls on the ground and pays homage to David, as though David were king. Indeed, the man seems to know that David is the God-appointed successor to Saul and that Saul has been out to kill David for a long time. Paying homage to David is an ingratiating set-up for what the man believes will be good news he is about to deliver to the would-be king.

▶ Verse 3 continues.

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[3] Tsumura, David Toshio, *The Second Book of Samuel*, ed. by E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 47.

> ESV 2 Samuel 1:3 David said to him, “Where do you come from?” And he said to him, “I have escaped from the camp of Israel.”

This is the man’s way of saying to David, “I’m on your side. I came from the camp of Israel. I’m a good guy.”

▶ Verse 4 says,

> ESV 2 Samuel 1:4 And David said to him, “How did it go? Tell me.” . . .

David is anxious to hear what happened in the battle between his people and the Philistines. In the last part of ▶ verse 4, the man delivers the news, short and to the point.

> ESV 2 Samuel 1:4 . . . And he answered, “The people fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead, and Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead.”

The man thinks this is going to be good news for David because he can now ascend to the throne. We know this because later in 2 Samuel 4:10, when David recounts this story, he says the man thought he was bringing good news.

The inclusion of Jonathan among the casualties is significant because he is the biological heir to Saul’s throne, so the way is clear for David.

The man may not know that Jonathan is David’s best friend, who himself is a man of integrity. Years earlier, Jonathan recognized that God had chosen David to be the next king. As such, Jonathan willingly set aside his own prerogatives as the biological heir to wholeheartedly support David.

Integrity seeks God’s way all the way.

Upon hearing this news, David wants more information. ▶ Verse 5 says,

> ESV 2 Samuel 1:5 Then David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?"

The term, "young man" here describes a young fighting man or soldier.[4]

Up to this point, this young man has reported the news accurately. And given the brevity and gravity of his initial report, he probably expected David to ask for more details, and he does.

It is in the details that the man gets creative.

Here's the quiz I told you was coming. As I read the man's account of how Saul died, your assignment is to identify the differences between his version and the factual account we already reviewed back1 Samuel 31. Here is the man's explanation in ▶ verses 6 through 10.

> ESV 2 Samuel 1:6 And the young man who told him said, "By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning on his spear, and behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him."

> ▶ ESV 2 Samuel 1:7 "And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' 8 And he said to me, 'Who are you?' I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.'"

> ▶ ESV 2 Samuel 1:9 "And he said to me, 'Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers.'"

[4] Tsumura, David Toshio, *The Second Book of Samuel*, ed. by E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 48.

▶ ESV 2 Samuel 1:10 “So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord.”

That is the young man’s version of what happened. His story is close enough to the true story that he is most likely a witness to what happened. And his presentation of the king’s crown and armlet is as good as a death certificate.

But there are some significant contradictions in the man’s story.

Extra credit if you noticed that the man mentions chariots closing in on Saul in verse 6, when no chariots are mentioned in the account from 1 Samuel 31. To be sure, chariots were important weapons of the Philistine army.

But Saul dies on Mount Gilboa. It is likely that he retreated to Mount Gilboa to get away from the chariots because they are ineffective in mountainous terrain. So, when the man says, “the chariots . . . were close upon him,” it is probably an embellishment intended to spice up the story.[5] It is the first small clue he is making stuff up.

We have no way of knowing whether David, himself a seasoned soldier, picks up on the incongruity of chariots on Mount Gilboa. But it doesn’t really matter.

The most important discrepancy is that the man fictitiously inserts himself into the story as the one who finishes off King Saul. It is a lie. We know that Saul offed himself.

[5] Tsumura, David Toshio, *The Second Book of Samuel*, ed. by E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 49.

The lie is intended to curry David's favor. The man assumes that David can't wait to get Saul out of the way so he can be king. The man thinks he is casting himself as the hero to be rewarded for facilitating David's ascent to the throne.

Although David has no way of fact-checking anything the man says, his possession of Saul's crown and armlet confirms that the king is dead. David believes the man's story. ▶ Verses 11 and 12 record David's response.

> ESV 2 Samuel 1:11 Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him.

> ▶ ESV 2 Samuel 1:12 And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

This grieving is a reflection of David's integrity. This connection may not have occurred to you. Let me explain.

Remember, integrity seeks God's way all the way. David's heart is undivided in its loyalty to his people, his country, his king, and his God. Any selfish personal political gain that might come from this defeat is not on David's radar. David's focus is squarely on God's interests, not his own. God's chosen king and his chosen people have been crushed. God's kingdom has suffered a blow. David is devastated by the news.

That David's men are also devasted is a testament to David's influence on them. For quite some time, they have been in the trenches together, facing adversity, running from Saul. It seems that David's men have become like him in integrity.

I am reading a leadership book just published titled *Multiplier* by Dave Ferguson. The thesis of the book is "you reproduce who you are and what you do."[6] David is an example. Out of a heart of integrity, he mourns and weeps and fasts. And his men do the same.

The young man who brought the partly fake news was not banking on such rare integrity. He figured David was looking out for number one, just like everybody else he knows. He pegged David for a guy angling for personal gain who would celebrate the death and defeat of his countrymen as long as it benefited him individually.

Some things haven't changed much. In our culture today, integrity is still rare. When a glaring lack of integrity in one our leaders comes to light, it draws a collective yawn. Lying, cheating, spinning, managing information, posturing, and manipulating to gain personal advantage are just assumed to be the norm for getting your way.

The painful truth is that Integrity is the exception, even among—perhaps *especially* among—those who are supposed to be leaders. In our story, integrity is the exception the young man did not bank on.

In the midst of mourning, David probes the young man further. ▶ Verse 13 says,

> ESV 2 Samuel 1:13 And David said to the young man who told him, "Where do you come from?" And he answered, "I am the son of a sojourner, an Amalekite."

David asks the exact same question he asked back in verse 3, but probably with a different meaning and tone. "Where do you come from?" now seems to be the equivalent of "Who are you?" And that is how the young man takes it.

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[6] Ferguson, Dave, *Multiplier: How Healthy Leaders Create Lasting Impact* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2026), xi.

The man confesses that he is an Amalekite, which is ironic. The Amalekites did not have a good reputation among Israelites to begin with. Furthermore, what the man most likely does not know is that it was Amalekites with whom David and his men had just been fighting. It was Amalekites who burned Ziklag and abducted their families.

This is what they call bad timing.

He tries to distance himself from ill repute by saying, "I am the son of a sojourner." A sojourner had less status than a native but greater status than a foreigner. A sojourner was a resident alien afforded both privileges and responsibilities. He enjoyed the protections of community law in Israel. He was also subject to many of the legal obligations and penalties of the law.[7] A sojourner was expected to know and keep that law, much like a resident in American who is not a citizen but has a green card.

Since the young man is the son of a sojourner, he was likely raised in Israel and would have been thoroughly familiar with the Israeli culture and system of law. He is Israelized.

With that in mind, ▶ verse 14 continues.

> ESV 2 Samuel 1:14 David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?"

David is aghast. This is David's way of saying, "If you are indeed the son of a sojourner, how is it that you had no qualms about committing a capital offense? How is it that you dare to assassinate our King, the Lord's anointed?"

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[7] Tsumura, David Toshio, *The Second Book of Samuel*, ed. by E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 50-51.

Apparently, the excuse that Saul was going to die anyway and the man was just putting him out of his misery in compliance with the King's request carries no weight with David. David does not seem to support euthanasia.

But he does support justice. ▶ Verse 15 says,

> ESV 2 Samuel 1:15 Then David called one of the young men and said, "Go, execute him." And he struck him down so that he died.

This may shock our modern sensibilities. Nevertheless, in that time and place, the swift execution of one who assassinated the king was noble and just.[8] There is no double standard here. David applies to the man the very same rule he has lived by himself: The life of the God-anointed King is sacrosanct.

It is called integrity.

▶ Verse 16 rewinds a bit to highlight something else David says before the execution.

> ESV 2 Samuel 1:16 And David said to him, "Your blood be on your head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the LORD's anointed.'"

That's David's way of saying, "You have testified to your own guilt. You are responsible for your own demise."

Then David writes an elegy in which he expresses his grief lyrically. ▶ Verses 17 and 18 explain,

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[8] Baldwin, Joyce G., *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 190.

ESV 2 Samuel 1:17 And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son,18 and he said it should be taught to the people of Judah; behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar. . . .

The Book of Jashar is a nonbiblical piece of literature which is lost to us. But it doesn't matter because we have the lyrics right here in verses 19-27. We're not going to study these; we're just going to feel them.

Hebrew poetry relies heavily on assonance and wordplay, some of which cannot be reproduced in an English translation.[9] The loss in translation notwithstanding, the elegy is beautiful. Let's read it.

▶ ESV 2 Samuel 1:19 "Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen!"

▶ ESV 2 Samuel 1:20 "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult."

▶ ESV 2 Samuel 1:21 "You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor fields of offerings! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil."

▶ ESV 2 Samuel 1:22 "From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty."

▶ ESV 2 Samuel 1:23 "Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles; they were stronger than lions."

[9] Ibid, 191.

▶ ESV 2 Samuel 1:24 "You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel."

▶ ESV 2 Samuel 1:25 "How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! "Jonathan lies slain on your high places."

▶ ESV 2 Samuel 1:26 "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women."

▶ ESV 2 Samuel 1:27 "How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

That David is genuinely grieved is obvious. One scholar notes, "Such a magnanimous attitude on the part of one who had suffered so much at Saul's hand is incomprehensible apart from a deep commitment to the Lord . . ."[10]

David exemplifies our ▶ big idea: Integrity seeks God's way all the way.

David is certainly the man of integrity in this story, but he is by no means perfect. We have seen him stumble before, and he will stumble again.

We all fall short of integrity's ideal.

The thing that makes David extraordinary is not his achievement of perfect integrity, but his unflagging determination to pursue it.

When David does stumble, he owns it. He grieves it. He humbly seeks forgiveness. And he pursues once again God's way all the way.

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[10] Ibid, 190.

My heart rejoices and my admiration soars for the rare person who contritely owns their stuff. Grieves it. Begs forgiveness. And turns back to God. Our culture takes this as a sign of weakness, when in God's economy, it is a mark of strength.

And integrity.

I am riled by those who, under cover of God talk and perhaps crocodile tears, unrepentantly spin false narratives to cast themselves as heroes to be rewarded or victims to be coddled at the expense of others.

I want to say, "How is it that you are not afraid to do this before God?"

Then I realize I myself am one or two bad decisions away from moral shipwreck. Integrity must be continually cultivated and guarded. Proverbs 4:23 warns us to guard our hearts.

David is again an example here. He invites God to examine his heart to identify and remove any impediments to integrity, any slivers of division. In ▶ Psalm 139:23-24, David prays to God,

> ESV Psalm 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

In applying this sermon to our own lives, it would certainly be appropriate to adopt this prayer as our own. To ask the Lord to show us where our hearts may be divided. To make us whole. To help us be people of integrity who seek God's way all the way.

Let's pray.

Search us, O God, and know our hearts. Try us and know our thoughts. And see if there be any grievous way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting! Amen.