

(MOMENT OF SILENCE)

SERIES SLIDE

During England's Victorian era, there were two bitter political rivals- William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli. They competed and argued about everything. There's an old story about Winston Churchill's mom- Jennie Jerome- who once attended a dinner with both Gladstone and Disraeli.

She spent some of the dinner seated next to William Gladstone- and then changed seats and spent the rest of the dinner next to Ben Disraeli.

When the dinner was over she commented. **“When I spoke with Gladstone, I thought he was the most interesting man in England. But when I sat next to Disraeli- I left thinking I was the most interesting woman in the world.”**

We've all been here before - sitting across from a person rambling on and on about their grandma's cat or crypto or their latest European vacation. While you want to be nice and smile and nod, you also DESPERATELY want to leave the conversation.

On the other hand, have you ever been in a conversation with someone who's more interested in you than themselves? They ask pertinent questions to your life, actively listen and affirm what you're saying. Reminds a lot of Mike Moore, whose last name is above the Reed Moore room - he was known to say a simple yet powerful phrase: “Be interested, not interesting.”

In his incisive book *How to Know a Person*, New York Times writer and author David Brooks puts these people into 2 categories: illuminators and diminishers.

Diminishers are the ones who are taking all the air that you're supposed to be sharing in your conversation. They make a habit of criticizing, belittling, or diminishing others.

Ultimately, “they see other people as things to be used, not as persons to be befriended. They stereotype and ignore. They are so involved with themselves that other people are just not on their radar screen”

Illuminators, however, “have a persistent curiosity about other people” They are looking to illuminate the value in others, not spotlighting their own merits.

When we talk with diminishers, we leave the conversations exhausted and frustrated. Illuminators bring encouragement and life.

A Seat at the Table: How Faithful Love Makes Us Illuminators - 2 Samuel 9

Throughout our time in 2 Samuel, David, the central figure of the story, is no stranger to being diminished. Whether it was by his older brothers while he tended sheep or by King Saul's jealous rage, David knew what it meant to feel slighted and unseen.

Yet David also found life in being illuminated by God through Samuel and by God himself as we saw last week in chapter 7. Even after rising to power and kingship, David still found value in being seen by God.

Today I want to show you how being illuminated by God leads to illuminating others. After loads of turmoil and relational drama, we find David taking a beat and looking to show a deeper kind of love to an unlikely person. And in this short yet powerful story, we catch a glimpse of a life that we are meant to live (cue Switchfoot!).

So if you have your bibles, we'll be in 2 Samuel chapter 9. If you don't have a bible, please take one as our gift to you. You can find them at the welcome desk right outside these doors. Take it, read it, and we would love to help you understand it at a deep level. In the meantime, the words will be on the screen behind me. Here we go, 2 Samuel 9

2 Samuel 9:1-13 CSB

David asked, "Is there anyone remaining from the family of Saul I can show kindness to for Jonathan's sake?" 2 There was a servant of Saul's family named Ziba. They summoned him to David, and the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?"

"I am your servant," he replied.

3 So the king asked, "Is there anyone left of Saul's family that I can show the kindness of God to?"

Ziba said to the king, "There is still Jonathan's son who was injured in both feet."

4 The king asked him, "Where is he?"

Ziba answered the king, "You'll find him in Lo-debar at the house of Machir son of Ammiel." 5 So King David had him brought from the house of Machir son of Ammiel in Lo-debar.

6 Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, fell facedown, and paid homage. David said, “Mephibosheth!”

“I am your servant,” he replied.

7 “Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “since I intend to show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all your grandfather Saul’s fields, and you will always eat meals at my table.”

8 Mephibosheth paid homage and said, “What is your servant that you take an interest in a dead dog like me?”

9 Then the king summoned Saul’s attendant Ziba and said to him, “I have given to your master’s grandson all that belonged to Saul and his family. 10 You, your sons, and your servants are to work the ground for him, and you are to bring in the crops so your master’s grandson will have food to eat. But Mephibosheth, your master’s grandson, is always to eat at my table.” Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.

11 Ziba said to the king, “Your servant will do all my lord the king commands.”

So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table just like one of the king’s sons. 12 Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Mica. All those living in Ziba’s house were Mephibosheth’s servants. 13 However, Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem because he always ate at the king’s table. His feet had been injured.

TRANSITION:

And that is the word of the Lord from 2 Samuel 9. Through this passage, I want to show you that God is calling us to be illuminators that show a love that moves beyond affection into action, trades competition for compassion and makes room at the table for others.

So here we go, first point:

1) Illuminators Act on Love.

After all his success, David is looking to show kindness to Saul’s house. Just as a refresher: if we look back at 1 Samuel, Saul is looking to kill David multiple times. Saul’s jealousy and anger ultimately brought great strife to David and led to Saul’s tragic death.

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Vs.1

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A good place to start is the word "kindness" here. Now "kindness" has become quite trendy - you see it on bumper stickers ("Cultivate kindness", "Show kindness to somebody"), you hear it in songs like "Treat People with Kindness" - which is great! Not hatin'!

But if we're honest, we're just asking people to be decent and not jerks to one another. It's unfortunate we have to even ask that of people but it's where we are!

But the word "kindness" here is the Hebrew word "Hesed" which means unconditional love, covenant love or committed love. This isn't a love that hangs its hat solely on feeling - it may start there but it really shines in action, no matter if the person is deserving or not.

I would argue that this is one of the most crucial words to understand in the entire Bible because it encapsulates the true depth of God's love for His people.

One of the first occurrences of the word Hesed is in Exodus 34 when the Lord reveals Himself to the Israelites:

Exodus 34:6-7a CSB (put "faithful love" in bolded letters both times)

The LORD passed in front of him and proclaimed:

The LORD—the LORD is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, 7 maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin...

And boy, did God show that "faithful love" to His people or what! Even when God's people turned their backs on Him, he never turned his back on them.

Back to vs. 1

So David is wanting to show that same faithful love to Saul's house for whose sake? Jonathan's.

Though he was Saul's son, Jonathan was David's best friend. "David had loved Jonathan with all his soul--you remember that Jonathan, as Saul's *oldest* son, should have felt entitled to be the next king, but Jonathan recognized God's hand on David and selflessly stepped aside so David could be King

In a way, today's passage was foreshadowed in 1 Samuel when Jonathan is protecting David from getting killed by Saul. Look at what Jonathan says:

1 Samuel 20:14-15 CSB (put "kindness" in bolded letters)

If I continue to live, show me kindness from the LORD, but if I die, 15 don't ever withdraw your kindness from my household—not even when the LORD cuts off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."

There's that hesed love again, that lovingkindness we're talking about.

"And so, now that David is King, he wants to see if there are any relatives of Jonathan's still alive that he can show kindness to *for Jonathan's sake*.

So--they go on this nationwide search to find a relative of Jonathan and finally they locate an old servant of Saul's--a man named Ziba-- and they ask him if Saul has any descendants still alive." Enter Mephibosheth.

2 Sam. 9:3

We're first introduced to Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 4 through a story of his nanny dropping him "during an enemy raid while she was trying to escape, and that fall broke both of Mephibosheth's legs, which left him permanently disabled."

Mephibosheth's name literally means "spreader of shame". And that's only the beginning of Mephibosheth's plight.

At that time, being lame in both feet meant you were at the bottom rung of society - basically, you were considered useless. While, I know, that sounds horrible to us, this was a military and agrarian society so since he couldn't fight in battle or work the land, he had no value.

But David still seeks him out.

Vs. 4-5

After David asks where Mephibosheth lives, we find out that he lives in Lo-Debar which in Hebrew literally means “no-place” or “nothing”. Mephibosheth brought nothing to the table for David’s gain.

I want us to see that this action isn’t a photo-op for David. He’s making good on the promise he made to Jonathan even if it costs him time and resources to bring Mephibosheth to the table.

Back to point 1

Though David’s relationship with Mephibosheth brought no material or personal gain to him, he still moved toward him in committed, hesed love. Even though David suffered physical and psychological harm at the hands of Saul, he didn’t quit on Saul’s family or go back on his promise.

At the end of our services, we read one of our six City Church pillars as part of our benediction. Today’s pillar is “Don’t Quit When It Gets Difficult. That’s How You’ll Grow.”

Our pillars are the things we promise to do with and for God and each other. This pillar exists because we’re aware of how difficult it can be to show committed love to one another. It’s not always mimosas over brunch, y’all; sometimes it’s as uneventful and mundane as showing up.

It’s sitting with a friend in grief, not trying to fix anything. It’s showing up to community group and intentionally engaging that person who gets on your nerves. It’s sitting across the table and simply being interested in your adult son or daughter who has walked away from faith.

These actions aren’t motivated by a “what’s-in-it-for-me” mentality. It doesn’t settle for just loving the person when they’re easy to be around. In an age where relationships are reduced to “goods” to be consumed, committed, faithful love is present both in the highest of joys and the deepest of sorrows.

This all sounds great until we realize how this hesed love can limit us. For example, when we say ‘yes’ to serving on Sunday mornings, we’re saying ‘no’ to sleeping in or taking a slow morning for ourselves. When we say ‘yes’ to a weekly coffee with someone in grief, we say ‘no’ to a much breezier conversation we might prefer in the moment.

But it is in those limits that we catch a glimpse of the faithful love God shows us.

Instead of living a life of consumption and going after every fun experience possible, you begin to see that life is found in committing yourself to a God who doesn't leave you, to a people who will show up for you even when things get messy.

TRANSITION:

It can be easy to read this story and think, "That was real nice of David to do." Don't get me wrong, it is, but this demonstration of love was risky and countercultural. Yet David was willing to take that risk.

2) Illuminators trade Distance and Competition for Closeness and Compassion

Once he is brought to David, Mephibosheth falls facedown not only in reverence but in fear. Why is that?

Since he was Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth was technically an enemy. You see, in those days, when a new king came to the throne, it was time to clear out the old regime.

A new King wouldn't want anyone of the previous king's family left alive, because there could be a chance that relatives of the former king would mount a revolt against the new king. So it was common practice for new kings to "clean house" by taking out any potential threats.

Essentially, killing Mephibosheth was the key to making David's time as king secure and safe. And if he would've done so, he could've justified it in the name of political or social stability and no one would've batted an eye (just to be clear: the bible doesn't condone this action, it's just simply depicting that this is the way things were done.)

This is why Mephibosheth is quick to call himself a "dead dog". He's certain he's going to get killed.

Vs. 6-8

But when we look at verse 7, David is both showing compassion AND he's resisting the competitive cutthroat patterns that had been pervasive within monarchies past.

Not only is David letting Mephibosheth live, which already would've been viewed as generous, he's empowering him through giving him Saul's land back and he's essentially adopting him through inviting him to eat at his table.

David's generosity is also a response to the grace He's been shown by God himself. Last week, we saw in 2 Samuel 7 that David's aspirations to build God a temple were surpassed by God reminding him of his faithfulness.

Look at verse 8 and 9 in chapter 7, God says:

2 Samuel 7:8-9 CSB

8 "So now this is what you are to say to my servant David: 'This is what the Lord of Armies says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, to be ruler over my people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have destroyed all your enemies before you. I will make a great name for you like that of the greatest on the earth.'"

David's generosity to Mephibosheth is born out of promise and presence - the promise he made to Jonathan and the presence of God refreshing him, reminding him of how it's really God's mighty hand who has brought him this far.

This is what gives David power to show compassion and not give into the vicious competition that was typical in his day. He responds to God's generosity by stepping towards Mephibosheth's brokenness, not shielding himself from it.

While this was a bold move on David's part, we find a distinct part of the biblical ethic being lived out: loving our enemies.

Jesus puts it this way in Matthew 5

Matthew 5:44-45 CSB

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous

Now this passage can be misunderstood to mean "make it easy for your enemies to sin against you" - that's not loving. no, sometimes the loving thing to do is to confront those who are pitting themselves against you.

What Jesus is saying is to engage in that confrontation or prayer from a place of love and gentleness, not vengeance or hate. So when it comes time for you to engage your

enemies, you're not just seeking their demise or pain, you're seeking restoration from a genuine place of love for them.

Back to 2

But we can't love our enemies if we don't at some point seek proximity to them. Many of us are great at making enemies for ourselves from a distance.

We just reduce people down to their most controversial social media post, the way they dress, and who they're voting for and decide they don't deserve our deference or our love. In other words, our enemies tend to be no more than caricatures we create in our heads.

But through Scripture, God is calling us as the church to live with one another in community, illuminating each other with compassion and closeness. Instead of sizing each other up based on our socioeconomic status or voting preferences, we are to come together around a table for a meal, seeing each other as brothers and sisters.

Why? Because all of us were once enemies of God and he still brought us close through Jesus. Like Mephibosheth, we were broken before God, but he gave us a seat at the table.

I love how Paul puts it in Romans - he says:

Romans 5:10 CSB

For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.

When we remember that God desires to be reconciled with us, we can truly become an illuminator to those around us.

3) Illuminators make room at the table because they were given a seat.

David was the recipient of faithful love and then he got to show that same kindness to Mephibosheth. Notice that this passage never says "David showed Mephibosheth kindness because he deserved it."

We don't know if he did or didn't! All we know is that Mephibosheth went from literally nothing to sitting with the King because of the hesed love David showed him - look at verse 11 again.

2 Samuel 9:11b

So Mephibosheth ate at David's table just like one of the king's sons...

"Just like one of the king's sons" - I love this detail because it doesn't make us question the extent of David's generosity; we have a clear picture of faithful love being lived out and received.

While this is a beautiful moment for David, he is ultimately not the savior so many thought he was going to be. Our main character falls short but God doesn't give up on him or his people.

The word "hesed" that we saw in 2 Samuel is represented in the New Testament by the Greek word *e/eos*, which means mercy. In his mercy, God sent Jesus as the greatest demonstration of his committed, loyal, faithful love.

Like Jonathan, Jesus laid his royalty aside, giving up his position so we could experience the gift of righteousness.

Like Mephibosheth to David, you and I had NOTHING to offer God. No birthright or family name or power made us any less broken or sinful before him. And like God's people in the Old Testament, we continually turned away from God to choose a life of sin and rebellion.

But look at Romans again

Romans 5:8

But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus' body was broken so we could have a seat at the table.

Back to 3

City Church, do you ever get weary of the brokenness you feel in this world and in your own life? Me too.

Our sin lets us down - our broken bodies let us down - our loved ones let us down - and at times, it can feel like suffering in this world is all there is. I imagine this is how Mephibosheth felt a lot of times.

If we're feeling that way this morning, I want to remind you of two things: our identity and our future.

Jesus isn't offering us a life of knowing ABOUT him - no, it's something much better: he wants to call us his own, to be with Him.

Church, this is who we are:

Galatians 4:6-7 CSB

“And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father!” 7 So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir.

Now for our future: there will be a day when Jesus returns to bring a new heavens and a new earth. It's described in the book of Revelation as the “marriage feast of the Lamb” - where Jesus, the groom, comes to be with his bride, the church.

And we're going to dine with King Jesus for the rest of our days - because He carried our broken selves to the table.

Back to 3

So where does that leave us, church? How do we take all this to become illuminators to those around us?

Well, I'd like to riff on Mike Moore's adage a little bit:

Jesus is interested in you...so you don't have to be interesting.

I would argue that much of our diminishing of others begins with comparison and living in our own heads, thinking “I have to make sure people think I'm interesting so I'm going to start a rumor or make fun of this person who people seem to be really interested in.”

But because we've been adopted and called sons and daughters of God, we have nothing to prove!! Because Jesus has called us his own, we're freed to be genuinely interested in those around us and not try to prove ourselves to be the most interesting.

We all have illuminator and diminisher tendencies warring within us - we're often not as good at illuminating as we think we are.

But thank God for the grace he gives us to keep trying - to keep showing up for people, to keep saying "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you" - so that people can hopefully walk away from talking with us thinking, "I know Jesus is interested in me because the people of City Church make me feel like the most interesting person in Murfreesboro."