

# Facing Your Giants – Tough Promises

2 Samuel 9:1-7

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## INTRODUCTION:

Our Lord is a covenant-maker and covenant-keeper.

I enjoy western movies. I grew up watching Roy and Gene ride across the silver screen on Saturday afternoons. I read that the most watched made-for-TV movie was the western “Crossfire Trail”: In the story the hero travels hundred of miles to keep his promise to his dying friend. The main “bad guy” in the film laments that his plans are being destroyed by the hero’s arrival and states: “What kind of dinosaur upends his whole life to keep his promise to a dying man?” Keeping promises creates heroes. Are you a promise keeper?

**King David kept his promise to Jonathan.**

## I. DAVID – A PROMISE KEEPING KING

King David’s life couldn’t be better. Just crowned. His throne room smells like fresh paint, and his city architect is laying out new neighborhoods. God’s ark indwells the tabernacle; gold and silver overflow the king’s coffers; Israel’s enemies maintain their distance. The days of ducking Saul are a distant memory. But then David remembers a promise he made to Jonathan. When Saul threatened to kill David, Jonathan fought to save him. Jonathan succeeded and asked David to show loving kindness to him. If he died, Jonathan wanted David to show loving kindness to his family (1 Sam. 20:14-15).

Jonathan died. But David’s promise did not.

To David, a covenant is no small matter. When you catalog the giants David faced, be sure the word promise survives the cut and makes the short list.

The husband of a depressed wife knows the challenge of a promise. As she daily stumbles through a gloomy fog, he wonders what happened to the girl he married. Can you keep a promise in a time like this?

The wife of a cheating husband asks the same. He’s back. He’s sorry. She’s hurt. She wonders, He broke his promise...Do I keep mine?

Parents have asked such a question. Parents of prodigals. Parents of runaways. Parents of the handicapped and disabled. Even parents of healthy toddlers have wondered how to keep a promise. Honeymoon moments and quiet evenings are buried beneath the mountain of dirty diapers and short nights.

Enter Mephibosheth. Advisers summoned Ziba, a former servant of Saul. Did he know of a surviving member of Saul's household? Take a good look at Ziba's answer: "There is still a son of Jonathan who is lame in his feet" (2 Samuel 9:3).

Ziba mentions no name, just points out that the boy is lame. We sense a thinly veiled disclaimer in his words. "Be careful, David. He isn't – how would you say it? – suited for the palace. You might think twice about keeping this promise."

When Mephibosheth was five years old, his father and grandfather died at the hands of the Philistines. Knowing their brutality, the family of Saul headed for the hills. Mephibosheth's nurse snatched him up and ran, then tripped and dropped the boy, breaking both his ankles, leaving him incurably lame. Escaping servants carried him across the Jordan River to an inhospitable village called Lo Debar. The name means "without pasture." Picture a tumbleweed-tossed, low-rent trailer town in an Arizona desert. Mephibosheth hid there, first for fear of the Philistines, then for fear of David. Victimized. Ostracized. Disabled. Uncultured. He is brought to the palace and fearfully enters. David restores to him everything that belonged to Saul and his family and gave him a place in his palace and at his table.

Faster than you can say Mephibosheth twice, he gets promoted from Lo Debar to the king's table. Good-bye, obscurity. Hello, royalty and realty. Note: David could have sent money to Lo Debar. A lifelong annuity would have generously fulfilled his promise. But David gave Mephibosheth more than a pension; he gave him a place – a place at the royal table. The kid who had no legs to stand on has everything to live for. Why? Because he impressed David? Convinced David? Coerced David? No, Mephibosheth did nothing. A promise prompted David. The king is kind, not because the boy is deserving, but because the promise is enduring.

Absalom's Rebellion Fifteen years later Absalom leads a rebellion and forces David to flee Jerusalem. Ziba leaves with David. Ziba tells David that Mephibosheth sided with the enemy. After Absalom dies and David returns to Jerusalem, Mephibosheth gives David another version of the story. He said that Ziba left him behind. Who is telling the truth? We don't know because David never asked. Why? It doesn't matter. His place in the palace depends, not on his behavior, but on David's promise.

Transition: Why? Why is David so loyal? And how? How is David so loyal? Mephibosheth brings nothing and takes much. From whence does David quarry such resolve? Were we able to ask David how he fulfilled his giant-of-a-promise, he would take us from his story to God's story. God sets the standard for covenant keeping.

## II. THE LORD – A COVENANT KEEPING GOD

"Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments" ([Deuteronomy 7:9](#)).

**God makes and never breaks His promises.** The Hebrew word for covenant, *beriyth*, means "a solemn agreement with binding force". His irrevocable covenant runs like a scarlet thread through a tapestry of Scripture. Remember his promise to Noah? Every rainbow reminds us of God's covenant. Curiously, astronauts who've seen rainbows from outer space tell us they form a complete circle. God's promises are equally unbroken and unending.

Abraham can tell you about promises. God told this patriarch that counting the stars and counting his descendants would be equal challenges. To secure the oath, God had Abraham cut several animals in half. To seal a covenant in the Ancient East, the promise maker passed between a divided animal carcass, volunteering to meet the same fate if he broke his word.

God takes promises seriously and seals them dramatically. Consider the case of Hosea. Seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute named Gomer. (If her profession didn't get you, her name would.) Still, Hosea obeyed. Gomer gave birth to three children, none of whom were Hosea's. Gomer abandoned Hosea for the equivalent life of a call girl at a strip club. Rock bottom came in the form of an auction pit, where men bid on her as a slave. Lesser men would have waved her off. Not Hosea. He jumped into the bidding and bought his wife and took her home again. Why? Here's Hosea's explanation. God ordered him to buy her back as an example of the way God loves His people (Hosea 3:1-2).

Need a picture of our promise-keeping God? Look at Hosea buying back his wife. Look at the smoldering pot passing between the animals. Look at the rainbow. Or look at Mephibosheth. Or look in the mirror. Were you not born as a child of the King? Have you not been left hobbling because of the stumble of Adam and Eve? Who among us hasn't meandered along the dry sand of Lo

Debar?

But then came the palace messenger. A fourth-grade teacher, a high school buddy, an aunt, someone from church. They came with big news: “You are not going to believe this,” they announced, “but the King of Israel has a place for you at the table. The place card is printed, and the chair is empty awaiting your presence. He wants you in his family.” Because of your IQ? Your retirement account? Your organizational skills? Your good works? Sorry. Your invitation has nothing to do with you . . . and everything to do with God. Your eternal life is covenant caused . . . covenant secured . . . and covenant based. You can put Lo Debar in the rearview mirror for one reason – **God keeps his promises.**

## **CONCLUSION:**

I don't for a moment intend to minimize the challenges some of you face. You're tired. You're angry. You're disappointed. This isn't the marriage you expected or the life you wanted. But looming in your past is a promise you made. May I urge you to do all you can to keep it? To give it one more try?

Why should you? So you can understand the depth of God's love.

When you love the unloving, you get a glimpse of what God does for you. When you keep the porch light on for the prodigal child, when you do what is right even though you have been done wrong, when you love the weak and the sick, you do what God does every single moment. Covenant keeping enrolls you in the postgraduate school of God's love. God wants you to illustrate His covenant-love. David did with Mephibosheth. David was a walking parable of God's loyalty. Hosea did the same with Gomer. He wardrobeed divine devotion.

Illustration: A fellow-preacher wrote: My mother illustrated covenant love with my father. I remember watching her care for him in his final months. ALS had sucked life from every muscle in his body. She did for him what mothers do for infants. She bathed, fed, and dressed him. She placed a hospital bed in the den of our house and made him her mission. If she complained, I never heard it. If she frowned, I never saw it. What I heard and saw was a covenant keeper. “This is what love does,” her actions announced as she powdered his body, shaved his face, and washed his sheets. She modeled the power of a promise kept. God calls on you to do the same. Illustrate stubborn love. Incarnate fidelity. God is giving you a Mephibosheth-size chance to show your children and your neighbors what real love does.

## **God's Plan for Man's Salvation**