

April 1

When the Israelites again did evil in the eyes of the LORD, he delivered them over to the Midianite army. When they finally cried out for help to God, he raised up a judge named Gideon. Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to hide from the Midianites when the angel of the LORD appeared to him, saying, "The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior." Gideon wanted to know how the LORD could be with them when they were being oppressed. He wondered where was God's power that he had shown in the past in delivering the people from bondage in Egypt. Do we ever wonder why God doesn't act in the same way that we read about in the stories of the Bible? The angel of the LORD told Gideon to go in his might and deliver the people from the hand of Midian. Like Moses, Gideon protested that he was not important, but God said that he would be with Gideon. Do we realize our own inadequacy and that our power comes from the fact that God is with us? God told Gideon to take his father's second bull and pull down the altar to Ba'al and cut down the sacred pole beside it. That night, because he was afraid, Gideon did so. Are we ever afraid of what people will say if we obey the word of God? Do we, like Gideon, obey anyway?

Gideon raised the army that God told him to call out, but when he saw the Midianite army, doubts arose in his mind. He asked God for two signs: Let dew appear on a fleece but not on the ground, and then vice versa. God gave him those signs to relieve his doubts. Do we ever have doubts about what God says? Do we look for signs instead of looking to his word?

After Jesus had fed the five thousand, the Jews followed him looking for more food. He said he was the bread from heaven. In teaching the Jews, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 54 and said, "And they shall all be taught by God." He said that everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to him. Who are our teachers? Is God our teacher? Do we learn from his word? Does that word point us to Jesus? Do we measure our human teachers against what God's word says?

April 2

Gideon told the men of his army that if any were afraid, they should go home. Twenty-two thousand men took him up on this and left; only ten thousand stayed. God said that was still too many; the Israelites would take the credit when they win instead of giving it to him. When things go well, do we take credit for it instead of giving the honor to God? By watching how they drank at a stream, God narrowed the number of men down to three hundred and said he would win with these few. He told Gideon that if he were still afraid, he could sneak down to the Midianite camp, and he would gain faith. There he overheard a dream interpreted that he was going to win. He divided the men into three companies of one hundred, carrying trumpets and torches in jars. They surrounded the camp and about ten o'clock at night, they shouted, blew the trumpets, and broke the jars, exposing the torches. The Midianites woke up and in a panic started killing one another in the dark. One might think that this was a brilliant tactic on the part of Gideon, but the text says that the Lord was behind it. Do we see God at work behind the scenes in our daily lives? When Gideon chased the Midianites across the Jordan River, the men from the tribe of Ephraim guarded the river crossing and were angry with Gideon for not calling on them at first. He praised them for what they had done and they were satisfied. As Proverbs says, a gentle answer turns away wrath. When we are confronted with people upset with us, do we give gentle answers? Or do we want to argue?

Jesus was an exciting teacher and a large number of people followed him. However, a number among them did not believe in him. Perhaps they were curious. When he taught about how he was the bread of life, they complained that this teaching was hard to understand. Then many of his disciples turned away and stopped following him. When he asked the apostles if they too would leave, Peter said, "To whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." Do we believe that Jesus has the words of eternal life? Do we stay with him? Jesus said that his teaching came from God. If someone wants to do God's will, he or she will know where the teaching comes from. Do we want to do God's will?

April 3

After Gideon had led the people of Israel in victory against the Midianites, the people wanted to make him king, but he said, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you." He was quite popular with the women, however, and like a king had many wives, who bore him seventy sons. He also had a secondary wife, a concubine, who named her son Abi-melech, that is, "My father is king." Who is king of our lives? Is it God or someone or something else? After Gideon died, many Israelites abandoned the worship of God and turned to worship Ba'al-berith, that is, master of the covenant. Abi-melech went to his relatives at Shechem and convinced them to make him king. They gave him money from the temple of Ba'al-berith, and with it he hired worthless men to be his followers. They killed Gideon's seventy sons with the exception of Jotham, the youngest, who escaped. Jotham uttered a curse against Abi-melech and the men of Shechem for repaying Gideon with ill for good by killing his sons. They had put family relations above doing what is right. Do we put family above what God says to do? People who conspire to do wrong often cannot get along afterwards. God brought about discord between Abi-melech and the men of Shechem. After having him king for three years, they could no longer stand him and wanted to get rid of him. In retaliation his band of men attacked Shechem and destroyed the city. When people retreated to a tower, he set fire to it. Then he went to the neighboring city of Thebez to do the same thing. He planned to burn down that city's tower, but a woman threw down an upper millstone and hit him on the head. As he was dying, he had one of his young men kill him so people would not say that a woman killed him. However, his death became proverbial and was repeated in Israel. Do we suppose that people will forget the wrong that we do? The writer of the book of Judges says that God brought punishment on Abi-melech and the men of Samaria because of the evil they had done to the sons of Gideon. Do we realize that God is still at work in the world? He works in the hearts of leaders and their followers to bring about justice. Even so, there will be more justice rendered at the judgment when Jesus comes again.

April 4

Jephthah was born to a prostitute. As adults, his brothers drove him out of the region of Gilead, saying that he should not share in the inheritance. Do we look down on people because of their parents' sins? Jephthah became a leader of a raiding band of followers in the land of Tob. At the same time, the people of Israel turned from the worship of God to the worship of idols. God brought the Ammonites against them to conquer them. When the people of Gilead wanted relief, they brought Jephthah back as their leader to fight the Ammonites. He pointed out to the king of the Ammonites that the land they were trying to conquer had belonged to Israel for three hundred years and the Israelites had taken it from the Amorites. But the king of the Ammonites came to fight him anyway. To secure a victory, Jephthah made a rash vow to the Lord. He said he would give God whatever came out of his house to meet him as a burnt offering. Do we think through the consequences of the promises that we make? Jephthah apparently did not. God gave him the victory he wanted, but when he arrived home, his only child, a daughter, came out to meet him. Both he and she felt he must keep his vow although she asked for a couple of months to mourn her fate. Do we consider it important to keep our vows and promises? What about our marriage vows? They are important.

Jesus said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." Sometimes we quote only the last half of the sentence, as if knowing the truth will make us free. But those are the results of continuing to do what Jesus' word teaches. If we do not continue in his word, how can we know the truth? Truth is not just something that is learned in the head; it must be learned by living it. Only then is it real, and only then is it truly known. Are we truly Jesus' disciples? Do we really know the truth? Do we continue in his word? Jesus said that those who do not accept his word have the devil as their father and do their father's desires. The devil is a liar and the father of lies. One may say that God is his or her father, but for it to be true, one needs to do the will of God, not of the devil.

April 5

The men of Ephraim were upset that they did not get to fight the Ammonites with the men of Gilead, and so they crossed the Jordan River to fight the men of Gilead. Are we sometimes so upset about things that we do something that can only be called stupid? The Ephraimites lost the battle and began to flee back home. The men of Gilead guarded the fords of the Jordan River to catch and kill those fleeing. When an Ephraimite was asked if he were from Ephraim and he denied it, he was then asked to say the word "Shibboleth." Since the dialect of Hebrew spoken in Ephraim did not have the "sh" sound, he would reply "Sibboleth," thus signing his death warrant. How we speak says something about who we are. Peter was found out as a disciple at Jesus' trial by his accent from Galilee. But it is not just a matter of dialect and accent that gives us away. Can people tell we are Christians by the way that we talk? Do we avoid profanity, obscenity, and coarse joking? Do we talk about Jesus and God's word? Or is our conversation only about secular interests?

When the Israelites turned again to evil, God gave them up to conquest by the Philistines. This lasted for forty years. God planned the deliverance by the hand of Samson, but that took twenty years for him to be born and grow up. God works on his own time schedule and sometimes we become impatient waiting for him to work. Do we ever think that God is not answering our prayers when he takes what seems to us a long time to answer?

Scripture says that revenge belongs to God, but he used Samson to take it. Samson had married a Philistine woman, but the guests made her tell the answer to his riddle. He left upset and she was given as wife to his best man. In revenge he set fire to their fields using burning fox tails. They then killed his wife and father-in-law. In revenge he killed many. Then they came to arrest him, but he slew a thousand of them with the jawbone of a donkey that he found on the ground. Are we tempted to take revenge, but it just leads to back and forth violence?

April 6

Samson fell in love with a Philistine woman named Delilah. It is questionable whether she really fell in love with him. The five lords of the Philistines each offered her eleven hundred pieces of silver to find out what would make him weak. Three times Samson misled her about the source of his strength. Finally, she nagged him so much that he foolishly told her that he was a Nazirite who never cut his hair. She cut his hair and got the money, and the Philistines captured and blinded him. There are things that are best left untold. Jesus did not trust himself to tell all the things about himself to any person. There are secrets that can end up hurting not only ourselves, but others as well. Are we people who have to tell every secret that we know? Do the tidbits of gossip that we hear burn within our hearts to be shared? Do we think about who we might hurt by sharing them?

When Jesus was discussing Abraham as father with some Jews who did not believe in him, they resorted to name calling, saying that he was a Samaritan and demon-possessed, neither of which was true. In the same way, when the Pharisees were questioning the man born blind whom Jesus had healed and they couldn't answer his arguments that Jesus must have come from God, they accused him of having been born in sin. When people hear sound arguments that go against what they have always believed, they sometimes react with fanciful accusations. What about us? Are we open to what the scriptures teach? Or do we strike out verbally against those who point out that we may have misunderstood? It is sad to think that one has no more to learn.

Jesus says that he is the good shepherd. He calls his sheep by name. If we are sheep of Jesus' flock, then he knows our names. That should be a comforting thought. The shepherd knows who each of us is. As a shepherd he cares for us, both collectively and individually. Jesus came to give us abundant life. If we listen to him, we must follow him to have that life. Do we consider ourselves as sheep in Jesus' flock? Do we listen to what he says and follow him?

April 7

The appendix to the book of Judges tells the horrific story of the events leading up to the decimation of the tribe of Benjamin. A man of Ephraim and his concubine were traveling through the land of Benjamin when they stopped for the night at the city of Gibeah. The only one there who would offer them hospitality was a fellow Ephraimite who lived there. The men of Benjamin who lived there wanted to rape the man, but he offered his concubine instead. They raped and murdered her. When the other tribes of Israel heard of this, they asked the people of Benjamin to turn over those criminals for punishment. The men of Benjamin, however, decided to protect them because the criminals were from their people. This led to war and the ultimate destruction of most of the people of Benjamin. Do we stand up for those who are like us in race or nationality even when they are wrong? Can God be pleased with such partiality? He told the other tribes to fight against Benjamin. At first it seemed like they were losing the war, suffering defeat in two battles. But they finally won a decisive victory in the third battle. Do we give up when it seems that things are not going the way we understand that God would want them to? Or do we persevere?

When Jesus called God his Father, the Jews were going to stone him for blasphemy. They said that he was making himself God because he called himself the Son of God. They understood that in Jewish idiom the son of something is that thing. A son of man is a man. Jesus called himself Son of man because he was human. But he also called himself the Son of God because he was God in the flesh. Sometimes it is hard to imagine that God is both the Father and the Son. But scripture teaches this. Do we believe that the One who died on the cross was more than human? The removal of our sins came at a great cost!

When Jesus went to visit Martha and Mary after Lazarus died, they both told him that their brother would not have died if he had been there. But Martha added that God would answer his prayer even now. She whom Jesus had rebuked for being busy while Mary listened now showed faith.

April 8

When the other tribes of Israel fought against the tribe of Benjamin, they won the third battle in a decisive way. They had arranged an ambush, and as the main army fled before the warriors of Benjamin, those hiding in ambush attacked the city of Gibeah and trapped Benjamin's warriors between two forces. They tried to escape the slaughter, but only six hundred warriors managed to make it to the Rock of Rimmon for refuge. In the heat of the battle, the Israelites turned on the land of Benjamin and destroyed everyone, women and children included. After the battle was over and the heat of anger had cooled, the other tribes regretted that they had almost completely destroyed one of the tribes. After four months, they made peace with the six hundred at the Rock of Rimmon and found wives for them so that the tribe of Benjamin could rebuild. Are we ever caught up in a conflict so much that we later regret what we have said and done? Can the damage really be restored after a while?

When Jesus came to the tomb of his friend Lazarus, he was deeply moved and shed tears. Some people reacted by commenting how much he loved Lazarus. Other people found fault with him by saying that he could have healed Lazarus but didn't. How do we react to people who are hurting? Do we look for the good or find fault? Jesus said to roll away the boulder covering the mouth of the cave where Lazarus was buried. Martha, who a short time before had shown the faith that Jesus could raise her brother to life, said that after four days the body had the odor of death. Jesus told her that if she believed she would see the glory of God. He prayed to the Father and called for Lazarus to come out of his tomb, and Lazarus did so. This caused some people to believe in Jesus, but others went to tell the Pharisees what had happened. Are we people who grow in faith? Or are we those who like to stir up trouble?

On the Saturday before Jesus died, Lazarus' sister Mary anointed him with expensive perfume. Judas complained about the waste of money, but Jesus rebuked him. Do we find fault with how people honor Jesus? Hypocritically, Judas was taking money from the common money box.

April 9

Because of a famine in the land of Israel, Naomi had gone with her husband and two sons to live in the land of Moab, a region in the present day country of Jordan. In the ten years that she lived there, she suffered a triple tragedy: her husband and two sons all died. Her sons had married Moabite women and she was left with only her two daughter-in-laws, Orpah and Ruth. She was a believer in the God of Israel, but believing is no guarantee that everything will go right for a person in this world. Tragedy can strike believers as well as unbelievers. Do we let tragedy in our lives shake our faith in God? Naomi heard that the famine was over in Israel, so she started back with her daughter-in-laws. On the way she told them that they needed to return to their parents' homes where they could find new husbands. Orpah decided to do so and vanished from further history. But Ruth loved Naomi and had learned to believe in the God of Israel. She declared that she would never leave her. Do we live our lives in such a way that those around us come to have the same sort of faith in God that we show?

To read the book of Judges we see that these were dark days of worshiping false gods. The book of Ruth, however, shows us that even in these evil days there were people who believed in God. When Boaz greeted his workers, he said, "The LORD be with you." They answered, "The LORD bless you." In a time when Ruth could have been molested as she gleaned in the field, Boaz made sure that she would be safe in the fields that he owned. In the midst of an evil world, do we hold on to faith in God? Or do we let the majority drag us down into sin?

Jesus said that when he was lifted up from the earth, he would draw all people to himself. He was lifted up on the cross. Are we drawn to Jesus? Not everyone believes. After seeing God on his throne, Isaiah wrote that people had blind eyes and hard hearts. Are our eyes open to the light of Jesus? Or are our hearts tuned to our own stubborn ways? Some rulers believed in Jesus, but they would not confess it because they were looking for human glory, not the glory that comes from God.

April 10

Naomi realized that Ruth no longer had a father or brother to negotiate a marriage, so she instructed Ruth how to go about finding a husband herself. Boaz was one of the men who was next-of-kin who were responsible in that culture to keep Eli-melech's inheritance intact. So she had Ruth go to Boaz and ask him to spread his cloak over her, a way of asking him to exercise his right as next-of-kin and marry her. When it seems that ordinary ways of accomplishing things for God are not possible, do we take initiative and start something ourselves? Boaz said that all the people knew that she was a worthy woman and agreed to marry her. That is how Ruth became the great-grandmother of David. Do we live our lives in such a way that people would say that we are worthy people?

On the night before Jesus died on the cross, he met with his disciples to celebrate the Passover meal. At this time the devil had already put it in Judas' heart to betray Jesus to the Jewish leaders. Jesus knew that he had come from God and was going to God, and so he set an example for his disciples. He put on a towel in place of his clothes and washed the feet of his disciples. The usual practice was to provide water for people to wash their own feet. Only in a rich man's house would there be a slave who was tasked with the lowly job of washing someone else's feet. Jesus set the example of being a servant. Are we willing to serve others by doing jobs that are considered lowly? Or do we have to have the important positions? Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray him that night, and yet he still washed the feet of Judas. How do we treat those who we think are opposed to us?

Jesus said that everyone will know that we are his disciples by the love that we have for one another. Do we show that love for one another so that people can tell that we are disciples of Jesus? Peter bragged that he would lay down his life for Jesus, but Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself. Jesus told him that before the night was over he would deny him three times. Do we really know ourselves or just think we do?

April 11

Korah, the cousin of Moses, had led a rebellion against Moses and was killed when fire came out from the altar and killed two hundred fifty Levites offering incense. One of his descendants named Elkanah had two wives: Hannah, whom he loved but was childless, and Peninnah, who had children. When the family would go to worship at Shiloh, where the tabernacle was, Peninnah would verbally bully Hannah for not having children. Hannah would cry and refuse to eat. Are we people who cause pain to those that we are jealous of? Peninnah disappears from further history and no one names their daughter Peninnah today. Hannah went to the tabernacle to pray and poured her heart out to God. She prayed silently, moving her lips, and the priest Eli thought that she was drunk. When she protested that she was only distressed, not drunk, he blessed her with the statement, "May the God of Israel grant your petition." Do we offer words of blessing to those who feel distress? She had promised God that if he would give her a male child, she would give him back to God as a Nazirite for life. The next year she gave birth to a son and she named him Samuel because she had asked for him from God. Do we believe that God will answer our prayers? When the child was weaned, she took him to Eli to grow up serving God in the tabernacle, the portable temple. Then she gave a prayer of thanksgiving to God, praising him. Do we thank God when he answers our prayers?

Jesus told his disciples that the Father's house had many dwelling places in it. He said he would go to prepare a place for his followers and return to take them there. Do we look forward to being with Jesus in his Father's house? He told Thomas that he was the way and the truth and the life, that no one could go to the Father except by him. And he said that he would do whatever was asked in his name so that the Father would be glorified. Do we pray in the name of Jesus expecting our prayers to be answered? Then Jesus told the disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Do we show our love for Jesus by doing what he said? Also, he promised that he would not leave us orphaned, but would send his Spirit to be our Helper.

April 12

The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were scoundrels. They abused the priesthood by demanding the best cuts of meat from the sacrifices. They slept with the women who served at the tent of meeting. Do we ever abuse the trust that is placed in us for our calling? Their father rebuked them, but he failed to remove them as priests and let them continue their abuse. God sent a prophet to tell him that his family would experience evil because of his failure to discipline. He had put his family above the things of God. Do we ever put family first and let God's concerns be less important?

In the early days of Samuel the word of God coming through prophets was rare; there were few visions from God that people had. Sometimes we think that the Bible is full of miracles and prophecies. We fail to realize that it covers a long period of time and the miracle stories were infrequent events. When God first appeared to Samuel as a boy, he did not understand what was happening. He thought that Eli was calling him. Finally, Eli told him to say, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." God speaks to us through the scriptures. Are we listening? Do we even bother to read it to see what God wants from us? God told Samuel that he was about to bring on Eli's family all the things he said he would. Do we believe God when he says punishment is coming?

The Israelites lost a battle to the Philistines, so they called for Eli's sons to bring the ark of the covenant to help them win the next battle. They thought they had God in a box. Do we ever put God in a box in our lives and only open it when we need him? Does that box contain an unopened Bible? The Israelites suffered a massive defeat, Eli's sons were killed, and the ark of God was stolen by the Philistines. But God was not helpless. They put the ark in the temple of the false god Dagon and his idol bowed down to God's ark. They set it back up and it bowed down again, breaking off his head and hands. A plague came on the Philistines until they sent the ark back to Israel. Do we believe in a God who can show his power in the circumstances of life?

April 13

When the Philistines returned the captured ark of the covenant to the Israelites, they placed it together with an offering box containing golden objects on a cart pulled by two milk cows. They sent it down the valley that leads to Beth-shemesh (House of the sun). The people of Beth-shemesh were excited to see it and offered the cows as a burnt offering on a large stone using the wood of the cart for the fire. But then their curiosity got the best of them. They lifted the gold lid and looked into the ark, wanting to know what was in the box. Even the Levites were not allowed to touch the ark. They had to carry it by the poles hung from the rings on the side of the ark. At least seventy of the men of Beth-shemesh died. Are we ever tempted by curiosity to do something that God says not to do, just wondering what it would be like? It will not turn out well. Sin has a way of making its own punishment.

As Samuel grew up, he became not only a prophet but a judge in Israel. He called the people together at Mizpah (Watchtower). When the Philistines heard about it, they prepared to attack. The Israelites were afraid. Samuel sacrificed a lamb and prayed to God. God sent a roaring sound against the Philistines, and they became afraid and fled before the Israelites. Samuel set up a stone of commemoration there and named it Eben-ezer (Stone of help). Do we pray when we are afraid? Do we see God as our solid rock who will help us in our time of need?

The people of Israel wanted to have a king like all the nations around them. Samuel was upset by this, but God told him to anoint a king for them. Even so, Samuel was to tell them what a king would do to them. Do we ever look for government solutions to problems that are religious (or maybe lack of religion) in nature? Do we look at what others are doing to be like them? God told Samuel that the man he had chosen as king would come see him the next day. Saul came looking for Samuel to help him find some lost donkeys. Samuel anointed him as king. Saul was very humble at this time; he wasn't expecting this. Are we humble when God calls us to a task that he has chosen for us? Or are we proud?

April 14

After Saul left Samuel, God gave him another heart, and the Spirit of God possessed him. When we receive God's Spirit, do we also have a change of heart? When the people of Israel gathered to anoint a new king, Saul was chosen by lot, but when they looked for him, he was hiding among the supplies. Although he was a head taller than most of the people, some men despised him. But other warriors whose hearts God had touched went home with him to Gibeah. Are we people with open hearts that God can touch? Saul was coming in from the field behind some oxen when he heard that the Ammonites were besieging the city of Jabesh in Gilead. He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout the land of Israel with the message that anyone who did not come after him and Samuel to save the people of Jabesh would have his oxen killed like this. He was willing to sacrifice his oxen to gather the army. Good leaders sacrifice their time, money, and effort to set an example for those who follow. What are we willing to sacrifice to do God's will? Jesus paid the ultimate price in sacrifice, giving his life for us. Saul led the Israelite army against the Ammonites in a surprise attack before dawn. The Ammonites were defeated and scattered. Some people wanted to kill the men who had despised Saul, but he said that no one would be put to death that day because God had provided deliverance. He thus both showed mercy and gave God the glory for the victory. Are we forgiving of those who speak against us?

Samuel gathered the people and they anointed Saul a second time. Then he stated that as judge he had not taken a bribe or defrauded anyone. He asked if there was anyone who could accuse him, but no one could. Do we live our lives in such a way that no one has a cause against us?

Jesus asked God to sanctify his followers in the truth. Then he said that God's word is truth. He prayed that his people would be one just as he and the Father are one. It seems that there are many divisions among the followers of Jesus these days. Is this because we follow our own ideas in addition to the truth of God's word? Do we need to repent of that?

April 15

Saul tried to have a standing army of three thousand warriors. He kept two thousand with himself at Michmash and one thousand with his oldest son Jonathan at his home in Gibeah. Jonathan made a raid on the Philistine garrison at Geba and defeated the warriors there. This upset the Philistines and Saul called out the people of Israel to join him at Gilgal. Many of the Israelites hid and the troops became afraid when the Philistines encamped at Michmash. Samuel had told Saul to wait for him seven days at Gilgal, but he was late in arriving. Saul's troops began to leave him, so he sacrificed a burnt offering, something only those from the tribe of Levi were supposed to do, but Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. Samuel, who was from the tribe of Levi, arrived just after the sacrifice. If Saul had been just a little more patient, Samuel could have made the offering. Do we ever lose patience with others? Do we lose patience with God? Isaiah says that those who wait on the Lord will mount up like eagles on wings. God doesn't work on our time schedule. Samuel was upset with Saul because he had done what the law said not to do. Saul wanted to have God's blessing, but he had made up his own way to worship God instead of following God's law. Do we ever make up our own way of worshiping God and hope that he will be pleased with what we do?

Saul was now left with just six hundred warriors. His son Jonathan took his armor bearer to confront the Philistines. He said that God can save by many or by few. He suggested a sign: if the Philistines said wait there, they would wait, but if they said come to us, it would be a sign that God had delivered them into their hands. The Philistines said, "Come up to us, and we will show you something." So Jonathan and his armor bearer climbed up the hill to the Philistines and attacked them. As they began to kill the soldiers, the Philistines panicked, and God caused an earthquake that increased the confusion. Saul's army saw what was happening and attacked and a great victory was won. Do we have the kind of faith that Jonathan showed? Or do we consider with timidity how God's kingdom can be expanded?

April 16

Jephthah was not the only one to make a rash vow. Before he led his warriors into battle against the Philistines, Saul took an oath cursing any soldier who ate food that day before he was avenged on his enemies. His son Jonathan was already fighting the Philistines and did not hear his father's oath, so when he came on some honeycomb as he chased those fleeing, he took some honey to eat. Another soldier told him about his father's curse, and he said that it was not good because it was causing the warriors to become faint from hunger. At the end of the day, Saul wanted to continue the chase, but the priest said let's ask God first. God would not answer, so Saul said someone has done wrong. He had the priest draw lots using the Urim and Thummim, and it was determined that the problem was with Jonathan. He swore to kill Jonathan for violating his oath, but the people would not allow Jonathan who had led the victory to be killed. Do we ever say rash things without thinking through the consequences? Do we insist that what we said was right even if it appears to be the wrong thing?

God sent Samuel to tell Saul to lead the Israelite army against the wicked Amalekites and completely destroy them, all the people and all their livestock. They were not to keep any spoils of war. So Saul led the army against the Amalekites, but he spared the king, capturing him, and all the best cattle and sheep. God told Samuel that he regretted having made Saul king. Samuel went to find him, and Saul told him, "I have obeyed the command of the Lord." Samuel wanted to know what then was the sound from all these animals. Saul said that he had killed the people and captured the king (a capture to him was as good as a kill), and the people had kept the best animals to sacrifice them to the Lord. Of course, they would get to eat some of the sacrifice. Saul had tweaked the commandment of God to fit what he liked. Do we ever tweak God's commands to our liking? Samuel said that to obey is better than sacrifice, and rebellion and stubbornness were as bad as divination and idolatry. God would take away the kingship from Saul. Do we ever stubbornly excuse our changing God's commands to fit the modern age?

April 17

When Samuel told Saul that God had rejected him from being king, he turned to leave, and Saul gripped his robe and tore it. Samuel said that God had torn the kingdom from Saul. Saul confessed that he had sinned but asked Samuel to go with him to worship God so that he would be honored before the elders of the people. He was more concerned with what people thought about him than what God thought about him. It seems like his confession of sin was rather hollow; it was to please people rather than God. Are we more concerned with what others think about us than with what God thinks? Do we say things just to be pleasing to the people around us?

Samuel was grieved over Saul, but God told him to get up and anoint a new ruler for Israel from the sons of Jesse in Bethlehem. Since he was afraid of Saul finding out, God told him to go there and sacrifice a heifer. He invited Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice and had Jesse present his sons one by one. When he saw the firstborn Eliab, he was impressed with his looks and his height. God, however, said that he had rejected this one as king. He did not look at the outward appearance as mortals did; rather, he looked at a person's heart. David was later said to be a man after God's own heart. How are our hearts? Are they in tune with God's heart? Do we judge people by how they look or by how much their hearts are in tune with God? The saying is, looks can be deceiving. All of the seven sons that Jesse brought were rejected by God as king. Samuel asked him, "Are all your sons here?" He said the youngest was keeping the sheep. Samuel had him bring him also, and God told him to get up and anoint this one as king in front of his family. God's Spirit came on David, but it left Saul. In its place an evil spirit came on Saul. He was advised to find someone who could play the lyre well, and the spirit would leave when it heard the music. A man in his court said that he knew that one of the sons of Jesse could play the lyre well, and so Saul sent for David to come, not realizing that God had chosen him as Saul's replacement. Was this merely a coincidence? Do we see the hand of God in our lives from what seem to be coincidences?

April 18

The Philistines met the Israelites for battle at the valley of Elah. But instead of engaging in battle, they had one of the giants of ancient Gath named Goliath to challenge the Israelites to one-on-one combat. For forty days no Israelite would agree to take the challenge. When David, the youngest son of Jesse, visited his brothers at the Israelite camp, he heard the challenge and said he would fight the Philistine giant. Saul asked how such a youth could fight a trained warrior; David said that God had helped him kill lions and bears who attacked his flock and God would help him kill the giant as well. He went into battle with only a staff and sling and five smooth rocks from the dry creek bed in the valley. Sometimes we imagine these rocks as mere pebbles, but slinger stones were the size of small fists. Goliath was insulted at the stick in David's hand and cursed him by his false gods. David replied that God would deliver all the Philistines to Israel once he killed Goliath. He ran forward with his sling and hurled a rock right into the giant's forehead, knocking him unconscious to the ground. He took Goliath's sword and cut his head off. The Philistines fled at the sight and the Israelite army chased them all the way to Gath and Ekron. Do we have the kind of faith in God that David had that God would protect him?

Saul took David into his army and made him a leader. But when the Israelite women sang songs praising David more than Saul, he became jealous and wanted David dead. Do we become jealous when someone does something better than we can? Do we wish they would go away if not die? Once when David was playing the lyre for Saul, Saul threw his spear at David, but David escaped. Even though he didn't know that Samuel had anointed David, Saul imagined that David was trying to take the kingship away from him because everyone seemed to love him and he was afraid. Do we let our imagination run wild when we are afraid? Saul planned to have David killed in battle with the Philistines, offering his daughter as a wife if David would fight, but David won the battles. When he planned to have David killed, his son Jonathan calmed his father down. If we see someone upset, do we try to calm them down?

April 19

After Saul swore to his son Jonathan that he would not kill David, an evil spirit came on him and he threw his spear at David. David escaped, but that night Saul had men at David's house to arrest him. His wife Michal told him that he needed to flee or her father would have him killed. She helped him escape out the window and put an image in his bed, claiming that he was sick in bed. Michal helped David escape, but she did not go with him. She was too used to being a king's daughter to want to be on the run with her husband. Do we choose the pathway of comfort rather than the hardships of the Christ? David fled to Samuel and told him what had happened. Undoubtedly, this was not what he expected when Samuel had anointed him as God's next choice for king. Do we have great expectations when we believe that God has chosen us for a special task? When those expectations are not fulfilled right away, are we discouraged? Saul tried to get to David at Samuel's, but God sent a spirit of frenzy on him and he stripped off his clothes and lay naked before Samuel. David again fled to his friend Jonathan who could not believe that his father was once again trying to kill David. But he arranged with David to test it out and let David know his father's true intentions. David was not at his place at the new moon feast and Saul asked Jonathan where he was. When Jonathan made an excuse for David, Saul became angry and cursed at his son. He told Jonathan that he would never succeed him as king as long as David was alive. Jonathan was upset, not wanting to be king at the cost of his friend's life. He met with David and told him that he must flee from Saul. Are we true friends who tell our friends the truth? Or do we try to keep the truth from them in hopes of keeping them as friends? David fled to the priest Ahimelech and asked for bread and a sword. The only bread available was the old holy tabernacle bread, and the priest gave it to him on the condition that he had kept himself holy. David then tried to flee to Gath, but his life was in danger there, so he fled to the southern wilderness. About four hundred discontented men joined him there, and he became their leader. Do we sometimes find ourselves in what we might consider a wilderness? God is still with us even there.

April 20

When David fled to the priest Ahimelech at the city of Nob, a certain Edomite named Doeg was there detained before the Lord. Based on subsequent actions, it would not seem to have done him any good. Perhaps his heart was not in it. Do we ever feel like we are being detained before the Lord at church services? If so, are our hearts really in the worship of the Lord? As Saul was complaining to his servants about David, Doeg volunteered that Ahimelech had given David both bread and a sword. Saul called for Ahimelech and all the priests of Nob to come to him, which they did. He accused Ahimelech of helping David to escape. Ahimelech protested that he knew nothing of David, the king's trusted son-in-law, being unfaithful to Saul, but Saul refused to listen. Do we listen to the side of those we have heard rumors about? Or do we hold to preconceived ideas and ignore their answer? Saul ordered the guards to execute the priests for their treason, but they refused to kill the priests of the Lord. However, when he ordered Doeg to do the same, this Edomite not only killed the priests but attacked the city of Nob and destroyed everyone and everything there. Only one priest, Abiathar, escaped to David, taking the sacred ephod with him.

David and his men heard that the Philistines were attacking the city of Keilah. He inquired of God whether he should go help and God said go. So they went and rescued the city from the Philistines. When Saul heard that David was at Keilah, he raised an army to attack him there. David heard that Saul was planning to come, and he asked God if the people of Keilah would surrender him to Saul. God said they would, so David and his men returned to the wilderness. Are we like the people of Keilah who quickly forget what good someone has done for us?

Saul and his army chased David and his followers through the wildernesses of Ziph and Maon. In the latter, Saul was chasing David around a mountain, closing in on him when news came that the Philistines were attacking, and Saul had to go fight them. Do we see God's hand at work in our lives by the circumstances that happen to us?

April 21

Saul and his men followed David and his men into the wilderness of Engedi (spring of the goats). He went into a cave to relieve himself, but it happened to be the same cave where David and his men were hiding. David's men encouraged him to kill Saul, but he refused to kill the Lord's anointed king. He himself had been anointed as king and he laid down this principle. Ironically, Jesus was the anointed king who was killed. David did sneak up to Saul and cut off the corner of his robe. When Saul left the cave, David followed him out and pointed out to him that he was no threat to Saul. He showed the corner of the robe as evidence that he could have killed Saul, but he didn't. Saul was overcome by this revelation and quit following David at this time. By not taking vengeance on Saul, David was left in peace. Are we people who insist on vengeance? Do we take revenge into our own hands?

David and his men guarded the flocks of Nabal (whose name means fool), and when Nabal threw a feast at sheep shearing time, David sent men to ask to share in the feast. Nabal rebuffed them, saying, "Shall I take my bread and my water and the meat that I butchered for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" His focus was on himself. Do we focus on ourselves and refuse to help others? David planned to take revenge on this rebuff and led his men to attack Nabal. The wife Abigail heard what Nabal had done, and took a share of food to meet David. She said he should not take revenge on Nabal; otherwise, he would regret having taken revenge himself. He thanked her for stopping him from taking revenge. Do we want to take revenge ourselves or leave it to God? When Nabal heard what had happened, he had an attack (a stroke?) and died ten days later. David then sent men to Abigail to ask her to be his wife, and she agreed.

Once again, Saul tried to catch David, but while he and his men were asleep, David came into his camp and took Saul's spear and water jug. Again, Saul realized that David could have killed him but didn't. Do we, like Saul, harbor ill thoughts that keep coming back? It is not wise.

April 22

Although God had providentially saved David from Saul a number of times, David decided that he needed to move to Philistine territory to be safe from Saul. Perhaps this was a loss of faith in God's protection. Or maybe he was just worn out from being chased by Saul. Are we ever so worn out by life crises that we forget God's care for us? David took his men and returned to King Achish of the city of Gath. He asked Achish for a city to stay in, and Achish gave him the city of Ziklag. He and his men made raiding sorties against the peoples of the south, but he told Achish that he was raiding cities of the Israelites. Do we ever put ourselves in situations where we feel we have to lie to be safe? When the Philistines decided to go to war against Israel, Achish told David that he and his men were expected to help the Philistines. David replied with the double meaning answer, "you will know what your servant can do." Do we ever give double meaning statements in order to leave the wrong impression? Is that another form of lying?

Now Samuel had died some time before this, so when Saul saw the Philistine army, he became afraid. Even though he had tried to rid the country of mediums like God wanted him to, he decided to consult a medium himself. Do we ever turn around and do the very thing that we have told others is wrong? He went to a woman at Endor who had a familiar spirit and asked her to conjure up Samuel for him. When Samuel's spirit appeared instead of her familiar spirit, she was shocked. Samuel told Saul that he and his sons would be with him in death the next day, leaving Saul terrified. Do we ever choose the wrong path, thinking it is the only way, but finding out that it makes things worse?

When the other lords of the Philistines saw David and his men, they insisted that they would be sent back home. When they returned to Ziklag, they found the city burned to the ground with their wives and children captured. They pursued the Amalekites (whom Saul had said he destroyed) and rescued their families. David had depended on God for help. Do we depend on God in times of trouble?

April 23

When David and his men returned from rescuing their families from the Amalekites, the four hundred who went all the way did not want to share the spoils of war (the flocks and herds) captured with the two hundred who had been too exhausted to continue and had stayed with the baggage at the Wadi Besor. David said this was not right. God had provided the victory. All of his warriors would share in the spoils, those who watched over the baggage as well as those who attacked. Are we people who are willing to share? Or do we greedily want to hold on to everything that God blesses us with? David shared the flocks and herds with the elders of the cities in Judah where he had been hiding.

The battle on Mount Gilboa against the Philistines did not go well for the Israelites. Saul's oldest three sons, including Jonathan, were killed, and Saul was gravely injured. Rather than be captured and perhaps tortured by the Philistines, Saul committed suicide, falling on his own sword. The depression that came about from disobeying God finally took its toll. The next day the Philistines found his body, beheaded him, and hung his body and those of his sons on the wall of Beth-Shan. When the men of Jabesh in Gilead (who had earlier been rescued by Saul) heard of this, they marched through the night and took the bodies back to Jabesh for burial. They remembered the earlier good deed of Saul. Do we remember the good of those who die even when not all of their life was good? Or do we focus on the bad they did?

Ironically, a young Amalekite (Saul was supposed to destroy those evil people) going over the battlefield found Saul's body and took his crown and armlet. He brought them to David, and apparently hoping to get a reward, made the claim that he had killed the injured Saul leaning on a spear. This did not go well with David since the man claimed he killed the Lord's anointed king. David had this admitted killer executed. Then he composed a song, a lament, about Saul and his good friend Jonathan. He genuinely cared about Saul as well as Jonathan. Do we care about those who are opposed to us? Can we grieve over their passing?

April 24

After the death of Saul, David and his men moved to the city of Hebron. The people of the tribe of Judah came and made him their king. Even though David had been anointed by Samuel as God's choice of king, he was not immediately king over all Israel. Instead, Saul's cousin and general, Abner, took Saul's surviving son Ish-ba'al (man of the master, also known as Ish-bosheth, man of shame) and made him king over the other tribes at the city of Mahanaim. This led to a war between the supporters of David and the supporters of Ish-ba'al. Are we surprised when there is political opposition to what God says should happen?

David's side was led by his sister Zeruah's three sons, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. His warriors met with Abner's forces at Gibeon and they proved to be the stronger army. Asahel decided to chase the leader Abner, an experienced warrior. Abner tried to warn Asahel to fight someone else. When Asahel would not listen, Abner struck him with the back end of his spear and Asahel died. Do we ever fail to listen to good advice? Joab emerged as the leader of David's forces and they chased Abner's men until the sun was setting. Calling a truce, both sides traveled home throughout the night. But Joab held a grudge against Abner because he had killed his brother in the battle. Do we ever hold grudges against others?

Ish-ba'al was upset with Abner because Abner had sex with Saul's concubine Rizpah. Since only the king was to have the king's women, Ish-ba'al saw it as a move by Abner to overthrow him. Abner was upset with Ish-ba'al for this accusation and resolved to make David king over all Israel as God had intended. Do we ever find ourselves regretting decisions that we have made that go against what God wants? Are we willing to change them if possible? Abner sent a message to David asking to make a covenant with him if Abner could bring the other tribes to him. David agreed but only if Abner would return his original wife Michal to him. She had stayed with her father Saul when David fled and been given to another husband, a situation that would hurt David's reign.

April 25

Abner came to Hebron to talk with David about having all the tribes of Israel proclaim him as king and to bring his first wife Michal, the daughter of Saul, back to him. Joab, David's leader of his warriors, was away at the time, and Abner left before Joab returned. When Joab did return and heard that Abner had come and gone, he told David that Abner only came to spy on David. Do we sometimes imagine what other people are doing when we don't have all the facts? Joab sent messengers to bring Abner back and pretended that he wanted to secretly talk with him. However, when they were alone, he murdered Abner in revenge for killing his brother Asahel. David was upset about this, but because of the power that Joab had, he felt powerless to punish Joab. All he could do was place a curse on him and have him wear sackcloth for taking revenge in peace time for a killing that happened in war. David buried Abner in Hebron, weeping over his grave. Do we ever feel powerless to do anything about injustice that we see? Sometimes all we can do is mourn. But David did not forget Joab's crime and decades later asked his son Solomon to punish Joab. Some crimes merit punishment in this world, even if they are cold cases.

With Abner dead, Ish-ba'al lost courage. One day while he was taking an afternoon nap, two of his captains came into his house and killed him. He had ruled only two years. They cut off his head and took it to David in Hebron. Since David and Ish-ba'al had been at war, they thought that David would be pleased. David, however, saw them as murderers of a righteous man, his brother-in-law, and was not powerless to execute justice on them. He had them killed and hung their bodies up as public display with hands and feet cut off. Do we, like them, ever misjudge what other people's reactions will be to what we do?

With Abner's death, it took five years for the leaders of the other tribes to come to David and make him king of all Israel. He took his army and captured the Jebusite city of Jerusalem and made it his capital. He realized that God had made him king, fulfilling Samuel's prophecy.

April 26

The ark of God had been at the house of Abinadab since the time of Samuel. David resolved to bring it to his new capital of Jerusalem. They put it on a new cart, and David and the people went before it with dancing and singing and playing musical instruments. But at the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen pulling the cart stumbled, and Uzzah the son of Abinadab reached out his hand to steady the ark. The ark was sacred and not to be touched, as the men of Beth-shemesh had found out. Uzzah died at that place. The ark was more than a respected, gold-plated wooden box; it was the sacred throne of God on earth. Do we have a sense of the sacred? Do we see the Lord's Supper as cracker and grape juice or as the body and blood of the Crucified One to us? David was upset about the death of Uzzah, and he left the ark at the house of Obed-edom. When he heard that God was blessing the house of Obed-edom, he decided to bring the ark to Jerusalem the correct way, with it being carried on the shoulders of Levites by the poles attached to it. They offered sacrifices before the ark, and David danced in front of it.

David's wife Michal saw him dancing in front of the ark as it came into the city, and she despised him in her heart. She went out to confront him and accused him of shamelessly dishonoring himself by his dancing. How had she gone from being in love with him in her youth to despising him now? That marriage had not turned out as she had imagined it would. Do we hold our spouses in marriage to our ideals, or do we take them as they are, for better or for worse?

David put the ark in a tent, but he wanted to honor God with a house for it. But God told the prophet Nathan that David would not build a house for him, but his son would. Rather, God would build a house, that is, a lineage, for David. In one sense, the son of David who built the house of God, the temple in Jerusalem, was Solomon, who followed David on the throne of Israel. But in a deeper sense, that son of David was Jesus the Messiah who established his church, that spiritual temple where God's Spirit dwells. Do we see ourselves as part of that temple?

April 27

David wanted to show kindness to some of Saul's family because of his friend Jonathan. He was told by Saul's servant Ziba that Jonathan had a son who was crippled named Mephibosheth (or more properly, Mephiba'al). David called for him and told him that he was restoring Saul's land to him and that he would eat at David's table. Do we try to show kindness toward the family of those who have tried to hurt us? Or do we keep a feud between families going for generations?

The Ammonites had insulted David by abusing the messengers he sent to their new king. They then prepared for war with the Israelites by hiring the Arameans to help them. But both armies fled before Joab's troops. The next spring Joab's warriors surrounded the capital Rabbah. David stayed in Jerusalem. One afternoon as he was walking on the flat roof of his palace, he saw a beautiful woman bathing in the city below. He asked who she was and found out that she was the daughter of one of his mighty men, Eliam, and the wife of another one, Uriah. That is when he should have stopped, but he sent for her and committed adultery with her. Do we know when to stop when we are tempted by various desires? The woman Bathsheba became pregnant, and David tried to cover up his sin. Do we try to hide our sins? He had Joab send Uriah to him to report on the war and tried to get Uriah to go home and sleep with his wife. Uriah refused to go home since his fellow soldiers were not with their wives. So David added sin to sin by sending a letter to Joab that said Uriah should be killed in battle. Joab put Uriah at the front line, and he was killed in the fighting. Then when Bathsheba had finished a time of mourning for her husband, David took her as another of his wives. God was not pleased. He sent the prophet Nathan to David to accuse him of murder and stealing the man's wife. Do we have the courage of Nathan to confront those who do wrong? David admitted his sin, and Nathan said that God forgave him, but still the child must die. David fasted and prayed when the child became sick, but worshiped and ate when the child died. He said that he could go to where the child was now, but the child was not going to come back to him by praying.

April 28

God may forgive our sins, but the earthly consequences remain. Such was the case with David and his subsequent influence on his sons. His son Amnon became infatuated with his half-sister Tamar, a beautiful young virgin. He had a cousin who suggested a plot to him by which he could be with her. It seems there are always people around who will encourage us to do wrong. Do we listen to those who suggest doing wrong? Their advice comes from the devil. Amnon pretended to be sick, and when David came to see him, he asked for his sister Tamar to come and make her heart-shaped cakes for him. David sent Tamar to Amnon, not realizing the plot for sin. When Tamar made the cakes, Amnon wanted her to feed them to him. He grabbed her and, in spite of her pleas, forced her to have sex with him. He now hated her and sent her away. It had been lust, not love. This was the crime of rape and incest. When David heard about this, he was very angry, but Amnon was his firstborn son whom he loved, and he failed to discipline him. This had been the case with Eli and Samuel before, and the failure to discipline led to the death of Amnon. Do we discipline our children as we should? Do we want to see them live healthy lives? The failure to discipline will lead to problems for them.

Tamar's full brother Absalom hated Amnon because he had raped his sister. After two years he devised his own plot. He invited all the king's sons to a feast at sheep-shearing time. When he saw that Amnon had too much wine to drink, he had his servants kill him. Are we tempted to take revenge into our own hands when the rule of law doesn't seem to work? Absalom then fled to his grandfather, the king of Geshur, where he stayed for three years. David was upset with him, but after a while he missed his son Absalom. Joab had a woman pretend that she was a widow with two sons, one having killed the other. When David ruled that the living son should not be killed, the woman accused him of being inconsistent. Are we consistent in what we say and do? He had Joab to bring Absalom back, but for two years he refused to see him. Finally he did see him and forgave him. Do we forgive others as Jesus says to do?

April 29

Once Absalom was back in the good graces of his father David, he set about to make himself important. He got a chariot and fifty young men to run in front of his chariot. He stood by the city gates, and when anyone came for judgment by the king, he would tell them that if he were their judge they would win their case. He became very popular with the people this way. Are we influenced by those who flatter us so we will think they are important? After four years he staged a rebellion against his father. He asked David for permission to go to Hebron to fulfill a vow he had made while in Geshur. But he sent secret messengers throughout Israel saying that Absalom was king in Hebron. He was joined there by Ahithophel, David's wise counselor and Bathsheba's grandfather. Was he upset over what David had done with Bathsheba? Is this another consequence of David's sin? Do we suppose that our sins will have no consequences?

When David learned that people were favoring Absalom as king, he left Jerusalem with those who followed him. He told the priests that the ark of the covenant should stay in Jerusalem, and if God were pleased with him, he would return to it. But he also said that their sons should bring him word of what was happening. He ascended the Mount of Olives, weeping with his head covered. When he heard that Ahithophel was with Absalom, he prayed to God that he would turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness. When we are in trouble, do we pray to God, asking him to fix the problem? At the top of the mountain, he met his friend Hushai and asked him to pretend to be loyal to Absalom and defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. God immediately provided a means to answer David's prayer. Hushai told Absalom that he would serve the king that God and all the people had chosen. Absalom was so vain as to think that Hushai was talking about him rather than David. Do we let our own vanity get in our way? Ahithophel counseled Absalom to have sex on the rooftop with David's ten concubines that he had left to take care of his house. Thus Nathan's prophecy was fulfilled that although David had sex in secret, another would have sex in the open with his wives.

April 30

Ahithophel asked Absalom for twelve thousand men to chase David and kill him right away. Absalom asked Hushai if this is good advice. It is usually wise to ask for a second opinion on anything important. Hushai said that Ahithophel's counsel was not good. David was a great warrior and angry like a wounded bear. If Absalom's forces fled, he would lose support. Rather, he counseled Absalom to raise a great army and attack David's men in force. Absalom and his officers thought that Hushai's plan was the best. God had caused them to think this so that David would have time to escape. Do we see God behind the scenes influencing national leaders today? Can we see his purposes unfolding? Sometimes hindsight is better than foresight in these cases. Hushai sent word to David by the sons of the priests, and David and his followers crossed the Jordan River that night. Ahithophel realized that Absalom's army could not defeat David's warriors in an open battle, and he went home and committed suicide. Suicide is never right, but it is usually the result of having made poor choices. Ahithophel was an intelligent man, but he was not looking out for what God wanted.

Absalom raised an army and crossed the Jordan River into Gilead to fight David's men. His army was led by his cousin's son Amasa. David divided his forces into three groups, one each led by Joab, his brother Abishai, and Ittai the Gittite, a warrior exiled from Gath. He told the three leaders to deal gently with his son Absalom. Even though Absalom wanted to kill his father, David wanted to spare his son. Are we forgiving toward those who wish us harm? David's forces routed the army of Absalom. Much of the battle was in the forest and many were killed trying to escape in the woods. Now Absalom was known for having long hair, and as he rode his mule through the forest, his head got caught in a tree apparently with his hair tangled in the branches, and he was left hanging as his mule kept going. A man saw him and told Joab. Joab realized that Absalom represented a danger to David, and he and his men killed Absalom. Is it ever best to do something for someone's own good that they would not like but needs to happen?