

Open Heart

2 Samuel 12:15b-23

I. While I Wait v.15b-17

- a. Inquired- to request
- b. Fasted - the action of an individual: —a. in lamentation Ps 35:13; —b. as penance
 - i. David's self-denial and self-abasement probably should be interpreted as a demonstration of his remorse for the sins he had committed, carried out in an effort to gain a reprieve for his son.
 - ii. they may have been an effort to demonstrate to God that the child's recovery was more important to him than either food, comfort, or pride.
- c. Went and Lay on the Ground
- d. Despite people's insistence he continued
 - i. David persisted in his actions in spite of the efforts of "the elders of his household" (v. 17)—probably his royal counselors, who "stood beside him to get him up from the ground."

II. God Decides 18-20

- a. Seventh Day Child Dies
- b. They were Afraid to tell him
- c. He might do Himself Harm
 - i. David had inflicted so much pain on himself during the time of the child's illness that his "servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead." They feared that when he learned that his efforts to win a reprieve for his son had failed, "he may do something desperate" (Hb. *rā'ah*; lit., "evil, harm").

III. I accept

- a. He Arose from the Ground
- b. Washed
- c. Anointed
 - i. Anointed - and the Scriptures indicate that such nonreligious practice was also a part of Israelite customs (2 Sm 12:20; Ru 3:3; Mi 6:15). In fact, failure to anoint or perfume oneself indicated mourning or distress (2 Sm 14:2; Dn 10:3; Mt 6:17).¹
 - ii. Changed his Clothes
- d. Came to the House of the Lord and Worshipped
 - i. Worshipped In a manner appropriate for a priest (cf. Exod 30:20; cf. Ps 110:4) David first washed himself and then "went into the house of the LORD and worshiped." In losing his son, David sought more than ever to gain a deeper relationship with his Heavenly Father. It is significant that David did not break his fast until after he had worshiped God; David's

¹ Robert D. Culver, "[Anoint, Anointed](#)," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 116.

hunger for a right relationship with God exceeded his desire for culinary delights

e. Then he went home

i. Ate

IV. **My Reason**

a. I inquired

i. Gracious - more favor **gracious**, to be kindly disposed or to show favor and mercy to someone, usually by a person of superior position and power to a person of inferior position and power

ii. He knew that Yahweh was a God of great compassion and mercy (cf. Exod 34:6) who sometimes relented from executing harsh—but just—judgments; therefore, it was possible that the Lord would “let the child live” (v. 22). In order to encourage God to spare the child’s life, therefore, the king had “fasted and wept” (v. 22

b. God has answered

i. No reason to Fast.

ii. I can’t do anything

1. The child’s death did not mean that God was unjust or unloving; on the contrary, it meant that the divine word spoken through the prophet was trustworthy (cf. v. 14)—a fact that must have provided a measure of comfort to the king.

2. The Lord’s word had not changed, and the Lord himself had not changed; divine grace was just as real after the death as it had been before. Neither David’s sin nor the child’s death had changed God’s nature. Therefore, now that the child was gone David could and must get on with his life

iii. I will see him but on God’s terms

Word Studies

Struck – injure with illness

Inquired- to request

Fasted- the action of an individual: —a. in lamentation Ps 35:13; —b. as penance²

Lay all night on the ground –

Washed- bathed

Anointed-Anointing, however, had more than religious or ritualistic significance. Both the Egyptians and the Syrians practiced anointing for medical and cosmetic reasons, and the Scriptures indicate that such nonreligious practice was also a part of Israelite customs (2 Sm 12:20; Ru 3:3; Mi 6:15). In fact, failure to anoint or perfume oneself indicated mourning or distress (2 Sm 14:2; Dn 10:3; Mt 6:17).³

Worshipped –

Wept-

Who Knows -

Gracious – more favor **gracious**, to be kindly disposed or to show favor and mercy to someone, usually by a person of superior position and power to a person of inferior position and power⁴

Can I bring him back? –

Commentary Studies

² Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1012.

³ Robert D. Culver, [“Anoint, Anointed.”](#) *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 116.

⁴ Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, [Harper’s Bible Dictionary](#) (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 358.

12:15–17 After making the grim pronouncement in the king’s presence, Nathan went home. To emphasize the immediacy of God’s judgment, the writer reports no intervening events between Nathan’s departure from the royal court and the time when “the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife had borne to David” (v. 15). The sober reality that this child was the product of a sinful union is highlighted by the fact that his mother was referred to as “Uriah’s wife.” Immediately the newborn son “became ill.”

David the man of prayer (cf. Ps 109:4) “pleaded with God for the child” (v. 16). David’s efforts on behalf of his beloved infant were intense, fueled both by a father’s natural compassion for a sick child and by a profound confidence in God’s mercy. Without hesitation the king “fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground.” David’s self-denial and self-abasement probably should be interpreted as a demonstration of his remorse for the sins he had committed, carried out in an effort to gain a reprieve for his son. Alternatively, they may have been an effort to demonstrate to God that the child’s recovery was more important to him than either food, comfort, or pride. David persisted in his actions in spite of the efforts of “the elders of his household” (v. 17)—probably his royal counselors, who “stood beside him to get him up from the ground.”

12:18–19 “On the seventh day” (v. 18)—that is, when the child was seven days old—he “died.” The fact that the child died on the seventh day of his life is of great significance when considered in light of the Torah. Sons were not to receive circumcision, the physical sign of identification with the Lord’s covenant, until the eighth day of their life (cf. Lev 12:3; also Luke 1:59; 2:21; Phil 3:5). David’s son was conceived as a result of David’s contempt for the Lord’s covenant (cf. v. 9), so it was painfully fitting that the child should be permanently excluded from Israel’s covenant community (cf. Gen 17:14). This seventh-day death may also explain why the child is never referred to by name; perhaps the child never received a name, since under normal circumstances naming might not occur until after the child received the covenant sign (cf. Luke 1:59–62).¹¹⁵⁶

David had inflicted so much pain on himself during the time of the child’s illness that his “servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead.” They feared that when he learned that his efforts to win a reprieve for his son had failed, “he may do something desperate” (Hb. *rā’ah*; lit., “evil, harm”).

The servants’ fears, however, proved unjustified. David, ever the astute interpreter of others’ actions (cf. 1 Sam 20:1–3), “realized the child was dead” (v. 18) when he “noticed that his servants were whispering among themselves.” His conclusion was confirmed when he asked the servants a direct question.

12:20–23 David surprised everyone, however, by his reaction to the news. Instead of doing something reckless and injurious, David ended his humiliation before the Lord and prepared to worship.¹¹⁶⁷ Even as David’s unnamed son was being prepared for burial, David was grooming

⁵¹¹⁶ Of course, this passage states nothing about the spiritual destiny of the unnamed child. Physical circumcision or the lack thereof would not have affected the infant’s eternal destiny (Gal 6:15).

⁶¹¹⁷ Hertzberg suggests that David accepted the child’s death as a sacrifice (*I and II Samuel*, 316). This position cannot be justified on the basis of explicit scriptural statements.

himself for a new life. And this new life would begin exactly where the king's earlier life had found its success and strength, in the presence of the Lord.

In a manner appropriate for a priest (cf. Exod 30:20; cf. Ps 110:4) David first washed himself and then "went into the house of the LORD and worshiped." In losing his son, David sought more than ever to gain a deeper relationship with his Heavenly Father. It is significant that David did not break his fast until after he had worshiped God; David's hunger for a right relationship with God exceeded his desire for culinary delights.

David's servants were mystified by the king's actions and boldly asked him why he was "acting this way" (v. 21). Whereas others rolled in the dust when a family member died, David had chosen to "get up"; though others might fast (cf. Ezra 10:6), David ate.

David, whose life found its focus and fundamental motivations in God, explained his actions theologically. He knew that Yahweh was a God of great compassion and mercy (cf. Exod 34:6) who sometimes relented from executing harsh—but just—judgments; therefore, it was possible that the Lord would "let the child live" (v. 22). In order to encourage God to spare the child's life, therefore, the king had "fasted and wept" (v. 22). However, the child's life expired.

God had acted, and the child was "dead" (v. 23), never to be brought "back again." The child's death did not mean that God was unjust or unloving; on the contrary, it meant that the divine word spoken through the prophet was trustworthy (cf. v. 14)—a fact that must have provided a measure of comfort to the king. The Lord's word had not changed, and the Lord himself had not changed; divine grace was just as real after the death as it had been before. Neither David's sin nor the child's death had changed God's nature. Therefore, now that the child was gone David could and must get on with his life. Though David was now bereft of his son, the separation would be only temporary. There is to be heard a note of consolation in David's words "I will go to him."⁷

15b. This is one case in which Scripture associates illness with the sin of a parent (cf. John 9:2), but, as in the case of the man born blind, the purpose was the glory of God. The biblical writer does not hesitate to attribute directly to the Lord the sickness of this child, in accordance with the prophet's word.

16–18. There is nothing merely perfunctory about the prayer of David on this occasion. His love for the child, who is not even named, is so great that he will fast for a week and go without

⁷ Robert D. Bergen, [1, 2 Samuel](#), vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 374–376.

sleep in order to give himself to prayer. This passionate man understood the meaning of the word 'love' in the light of the Lord's love to him, and longed for the baby to be spared. When the child dies, for his prayer receives a negative answer, no-one dares to tell him the news for fear of his reaction, but they had misinterpreted the king's mind.

19–20. Once he had established that the child was dead, David, instead of going into mourning, resumed his normal way of life; which his servants had tried unsuccessfully to induce him to do during the previous week. **He even went into the house of the Lord, and worshipped in the tent where the ark of God had been installed (2 Sam. 6:17).** This proves that David had accepted the Lord's judgment, despite his week of mourning, when he had given expression to his great grief in advance, as it were. Now that the death has occurred, he is able to break with convention, even to the extent of worshipping the God who has taken back the child. **That done, he breaks his fast and asks for food.**

21–23. The servants need an explanation of such topsy-turvy behaviour. David's answer to them has enabled every generation of readers to appreciate his reasoning. *Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me ...?* shows David's conviction that he was in touch with the God who deals with his children as individuals and responds to their faith. Thus, as he listens to the word of the Lord through Nathan (v. 14), he does not accept it fatalistically, but rather in the way a child hears the statement of a parent, who sometimes changes his mind about a punishment if the child behaves acceptably. David has understood an important element in prophecies of judgment, and one expressed by our Lord as he contemplated the coming judgment on Jerusalem: 'How often would I have gathered your children together ... and you would not (i.e. were not willing)!' (Luke 13:34). The Lord has blessings in mind for those who ask, and David is not going to miss them because he has not asked (Jas 4:2).

Now that the child is dead, however, the answer is final: *I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.* David comes to terms with his own mortality, and even in that finds hope, because he looks forward to being reunited with his child. The Lord who had sent Nathan to David had had the last word and, though David was bereft, he was content.⁸

12:15–23. Shortly **after** the interview with **Nathan ... the child** became terminally ill. Despite David's intense fasting and prayer the baby **died** within a week. Only then did **David** cease his mourning, wash, worship, and eat, contrary to custom and much to the amazement of **his servants**. David's response is classic: **While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept.... But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?** David attested to the irrevocability of death—its finality renders further petition absurd. **I will go to him**, David said, **but he will not return to me.** This reflects his conviction that the dead cannot return to life as it was. Rather it is the living who go to the dead.⁹

⁸ Joyce G. Baldwin, [*1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 8, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 256–257.

⁹ Eugene H. Merrill, [*"2 Samuel,"*](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 468.