

Living in Lo-debar

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2 Samuel 9

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Grandpa Joe was a coalminer in the hills of eastern Kentucky. By all accounts he lived hard, worked hard, and drank hard most of his life. When he was sober, he was easy to love. He told wonderful stories, and the grandkids loved to sit on his lap. But when Grandpa Joe was drinking, he would disappear for weeks at a time.

Late in his life, Grandpa Joe contracted liver disease from the alcohol and black-lung disease from the coalmines. His 19 year old granddaughter, who was a brand-new Christian, went to visit him in the hospital. She cared about him and wanted him to know that God loved him. She wanted him to have the chance to respond to the forgiveness available in Christ. So she sat by his bed and gently outlined the message of the gospel to Grandpa Joe.

After listening politely to her presentation, Grandpa Joe looked up and said, "I don't believe I've ever sinned." She was shocked, because the whole family knew about his lifestyle. She said, "But Grandpa, we've all done bad things. Can't you think of just one thing you've done that was wrong?" He thought for a minute, and then said, "I take it back, I take it back. I have sinned - once. I voted Democrat one time."

Unlike Grandpa Joe, I, on the other hand, am fully aware of my sin, and maybe you are as well. The guilt and shame seem to get worse with time. You compare your life with those around you, and you are convinced that no one else in church struggles like you. No one else has such a blemished past. No one else is ashamed of the haunting memories. No one else is identified by their mistakes. Does anyone else know what I'm talking about here? You're afraid to get close to others because they just might find out who you really are. You're afraid they might find out about the things you've done in your life. And, you are afraid to get close to God. As a matter of fact, you're just waiting for the day He punishes you for that long list of offences. As you stand among those who seem to have their life in perfect order, you feel like a cripple. You feel like *Mephibosheth*.

I know, you're setting there thinking *Mephibo - who?* Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, grandson of King Saul. We're introduced to this young man in 2 Samuel 4. *(Saul's son Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth, who was crippled as a child. He was five years old when the report came from Jezreel that Saul and Jonathan had been killed in battle. When the child's nurse heard the news, she picked him up and fled. But as she hurried away, she dropped him, and he became crippled.)*¹ (2 Samuel 4:4) The brackets in this verse are not a mistake. The Bible mentions this boy almost as an afterthought. And it seems that the boy was constantly being identified not by who he was, but by what happened to him in the past. "You know, Mephibosheth, the cripple"? One accident. One mistake that marked him for life. And it seems that the mistake was all anyone could ever see.

The nurse panicked because Saul and Jonathan had been killed. And it was customary for the new king to execute any surviving members of the royal family. That way a surviving family member could not one day try to take back the kingdom. So this nurse surmised that with Saul and Jonathan gone, David would naturally take over the throne and then come after poor little Mephibosheth.

For nearly 20 years this young man would grow up not only broken physically, but also emotionally. Can you imagine spending nearly 20 years living in fear? 20 years with people reminding you of your past. 20 years of people telling you to be afraid of the king. So Mephibosheth ends up hiding in the barren city of Lo-debar (literally "not a pasture). Can you identify with this man yet? I can.

As I've shared with some of you, I don't take much pride in my past. The depth of my Christianity ran quite shallow until my early 20's. And even then my faith was not to the level it needed to be. I remember distinctly the evening the Holy Spirit washed through me. He opened my eyes and my heart to the realities of God and His word. But see, I knew my past. I knew the times I had blatantly denied my Savior. Fearful of the King, I never really drew near to Him, for I worried that if I got too close, I would suffer His wrath. Oh, I loved God, and in my head I knew Christ had forgiven me. But my relationship with the King remained crippled.

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

I suspect there are many of you who still feel the same. You know that God loves you. You know that Jesus has forgiven your sins. But you still keep your distance from God. You're still fearful of what may happen if you get too close to your King. So did Mephibosheth. But look what happens one day when his king calls Mephibosheth to the throne. **(Read 2 Samuel 9)**

For nearly 20 years the boy had been hiding in fear. For nearly 20 years people had been whispering in his ear ("Avoid the king. He'll kill you for sure"). Mephibosheth had heard these words so often that execution is what he expected. But Mephibosheth did not take into account that his king was a king of grace. His king would keep his promise.

I love the way the New Century Version translates verse 4. "Where is this son?" is reads. For the first time in who knows how long, Mephibosheth is identified without any reference to his past. The handicap goes unnoticed and unmentioned from the mouth of the king. Only a reference to the promise made. I can only imagine the look that must have been birthed the moment David started mentioning the blessings Mephibosheth would receive. "Why me, Lord?" he asks. I am not worthy this level of grace. And he certainly wasn't. Tell me; was not Mephibosheth part of Saul's family? Was he not the descendant of the King's enemies? But this king has made a promise.

You know, our King has made the same promise as well. He has promised life to those who embrace the Son (John 3:16). We, who are crippled because of our past, will find grace at His throne (Romans 8:1). And we, who would be content just with life, will find ourselves treated like part of the royal family (Revelation 21:7). But see, chances are that you know these things. What I'm wondering is whether or not you've experienced these things. That's what made the difference to Mephibosheth and to me. We both came before the throne and walked away. He received more that he could have imagined. I received grace when none was expected.

I wonder. How long will you avoid our King? How long will you stay at this barren place in your life living in fear; living crippled? When will you finally come before His throne and experience His grace?