When I began working on this sermon several weeks ago I knew the main focus would be the different ways people respond to death. What I did not know then was that on January 2, 2005, the focus of the whole world would be on death, thousands, tens of thousands of deaths. The tsunami of 2004 will probably go down in history as the most destructive natural disaster known to man, with the exception of the great flood.

How do you respond when someone dies? A rough estimate of annual deaths worldwide is 60 million, or about two deaths a second. The knowledge of this may impact you for a while but if you are like me, you will forget it pretty soon. Who knows how the tsunami of this past week will affect this annual death rate?

It is difficult to narrow the focus from the Indian Ocean to Wichita, and then to our church family this morning, but within the extent of our own congregation 38 deaths occurred in 2004. Maybe one of these deaths occurred in your immediate family. It would be safe to say that all of us were impacted by at least one death last year. How did you respond when that death occurred?

Death and the response to death, called grief, is a topic that I have studied for many years, partly as a result of my own loss history. This morning our scripture text describes several responses to death.

How you respond when someone dies is determined by several factors, including the nature of your relationship with the deceased. The closer you were to them geographically, physically, relationally, and emotionally the more profoundly their death will affect you. It makes a difference if the deceased was a casual acquaintance, a close friend, or your best friend. Was the relationship you had with them a difficult one? Was there conflict of some kind in your history with the deceased? Were they a person you loved and respected, or a person you loathed? If you can, compare and contrast how you felt when:

- Your favorite grandparent died
- Ronald Reagan died
- Yasar Arafat died

As you can see from the outline we are returning to our “A Man after God's Own Heart” series, a study of the Life of David. Pastor Mike finished the first half of this series on September 5. with a sermon that drew from I Samuel 27 – 30. Today we will read and study the account of the deaths of King Saul and his son Jonathan. As we examine the differing responses to these deaths, I invite you to think of your grief responses in the past.

You may recall from our study of this book that King Saul was bitterly jealous of young David, and knew that eventually his throne would be given to David.

For the better part of a decade David has been running for his life from King Saul, like an outlaw with a price on his head, hiding in caves in the Judean desert and living on food he has to beg from the likes of Nabal the fool. Twice, David had the opportunity to kill Saul, but he refrained from “lifting his hand
against the Lord's anointed.” Yet Saul continues to pursue him. As a last resort David decides to escape to the Philistine territory; it is the last place Saul would think to pursue him. And this proves to be the case. When Saul hears of this, he quits searching for David.

During his time there, David made killing raids against the Philistines on the sly. While away on one of these forays, the Amalekites raided Ziklag, the city where David was dwelling, taking captive all the women and children. David took 400 men and pursued the Amalekites and successfully recovered every missing person, including children, and all the goods that had been taken in the raid.

After this victory David and his men returned to Ziklag and waited for further instructions from the Lord.

Meanwhile, Saul and his sons were engaged in a very heavy battle with the Philistines, so heavy that the Israelite army began to retreat up into the hills. We pick up the story in chapter 31.

1Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell slain on Mount Gilboa. 2The Philistines pressed hard after Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua.

We do not know from the text if Saul was aware his sons had been slain. But he had been told this would happen in this battle and that he too would die. When Saul had consulted the witch at Endor, and she had called up Samuel from the grave, here is what Samuel prophesied to Saul (1 Samuel 28:17,19).

17The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. 19The LORD will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines.”

Can you imagine Saul's terror now, as he realizes the prophecy is coming to pass before his eyes. Let's continue now reading in chapter 31, verse 3.

3The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically. 4Saul said to his armor-bearer, “Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me.” But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it. 5When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. 6So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day.

Saul's armor-bearer refused to “lift his hand against the Lord's anointed” just as David had when he had opportunity to kill King Saul. But not everyone had this respect for King Saul, alive or dead. This chapter and the first chapter in 2 Samuel records the reaction of several groups and individuals to the death of Saul and his sons.

1) The Victorious Philistine Army (1 Sam. 31:1-10)

a) Predictable
Following the death of Saul and his three sons, the first group on the scene were the victorious Philistines. Their response to Saul's death was quite predictable, and not unlike any winning army in a battle situation. They came to strip the dead of anything worth taking, and to get their trophies of battle, including the head and armor and weapons of the conquered king. They took his body and those of his three sons and
impaled them upon hooks on the wall of the city for all to see. The news of the victory was spread throughout the land.

The response of the Philistines to Saul's death was:

b) Customary
Before you think ill of these Philistines for beheading Saul, remember that David removed Goliath's head and took his weapons to his own tent as trophies from the battle. This was the custom of war, whether the participants were Jehovah-worshiping Israelites or pagan Philistines.

c) Celebratory
I do not believe the Philistines felt any grief at Saul's death, nor for the death of his sons, or the soldiers who fought and died with them. Their response is celebratory, such as yours may have been at the capture of Sadam Hussein, or the death of Tim McVey, the Murrah Federal Building bomber. Someday we may celebrate the capture and death of Osama Ben Ladin. How did you react when you heard about the death of Yasar Arafat?

I can understand the response of the Philistines to the death of Saul. But how about this next response?

2) The Enterprising Amalekite (2 Sam. 1:1-16)
For our next case study we must move to 2 Samuel 1. Follow along as I read beginning with vs. 1.

1After the death of Saul, David returned from defeating the Amalekites and stayed in Ziklag two days. 2On the third day a man arrived from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and with dust on his head. When he came to David, he fell to the ground to pay him honor.
3“Where have you come from?” David asked him. He answered, “I have escaped from the Israelite camp.”
4“What happened?” David asked. “Tell me.” He said, “The men fled from the battle. Many of them fell and died. And Saul and his son Jonathan are dead.”
5Then David said to the young man who brought him the report, “How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?” 6“I happened to be on Mount Gilboa,” the young man said, “and there was Saul, leaning on his spear, with the chariots and riders almost upon him.
7When he turned around and saw me, he called out to me, and I said, 'What can I do?'
8“He asked me, 'Who are you?' ‘An Amalekite,' I answered.
9“Then he said to me, 'Stand over me and kill me! I am in the throes of death, but I'm still alive.'
10“So I stood over him and killed him, because I knew that after he had fallen he could not survive. And I took the crown that was on his head and the band on his arm and have brought them here to my lord.”

Having just read the account of Saul's death in 1 Samuel 31, it is easy to see that these two accounts are not in agreement. In a book entitled Hard Sayings of the Bible an article is written on this very text. Despite many attempts to harmonize these contrasting accounts, this trustworthy source says:

“The simplest answer is that the Amalekite was lying, because he thought David would give him a reward.

Apparently the Amalekite came upon Saul before the Philistines did because the Amalekite made off with the crown and armlet, and the Philistines took the armor.”
As we look at his response we see first that it was:

**a) Self-serving**

This self-serving man saw the death of King Saul as an opportunity to ingratiate himself with the new king. He took a chance that David did not know that Saul had died, and therefore would not know the circumstances of his death. He was correct in this assumption. He did not express personal grief at the death of Saul, but rather viewed it as an opportunity for gain, and maybe a position in the new king's court. His action was not unlike that of the Philistines in that he too took trophies (evidence to give proof to the truth of his account). He did not take care of the body of the slain king but left it to be mutilated by the enemy. He could not have been more wrong in his estimate of David's response to the news about Saul's death.

Instead of receiving a reward for serving David's interests, the Amalekite was held responsible for “lifting his hand against the Lord's anointed”. His reward was not silver but a sword. See the text in vs. 14:

David asked him, “Why were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?”

Then David called one of his men and said, “Go, strike him down!” So he struck him down, and he died. For David had said to him, “Your blood be on your own head. Your own mouth testified against you when you said, 'I killed the LORD'S anointed.'”

His response was:

**b) Irreverent**

The phrase, “Your blood be on your own head”, means, “the blood you have shed is the cause of your own death”. David had spared Saul's life on two previous occasions out of reverence for the one whom the Lord had chosen and anointed. Neither David nor any other human being had the right to end the life of the anointed of the Lord, and so force the Lord's hand.

The Amalekite was wrong on at least two accounts. First, he misjudged David's respect for the one God had placed on the throne, and his error cost him his life. Secondly, he misjudged David's response to the news of Saul's death. Hadn't he done David a great favor, by killing his enemy who had placed him on a hit list?

Do you recall the response of all the inhabitants of Oz when they realized Dorothy's house had fallen on and killed the Wicked Witch.

**Ding Dong! The Witch is dead. Which old Witch? The Wicked Witch!**

Ding Dong! The Wicked Witch is dead.

Wake up - sleepy head, rub your eyes, get out of bed.

Wake up, the Wicked Witch is dead. She's gone where the goblins go,

Below - below - below. Yo-ho, let's open up and sing and ring the bells out.

Ding Dong' the merry-oh, sing it high, sing it low.

Let them know, the Wicked Witch is dead!

But this is no fairy tale where the wicked king dies and the prince who was banished from the kingdom returns to claim his inheritance. No, this is a sad day in the history of Israel. Her first king is dead. The grand experiment is a dud. Not quite a complete failure, but there is much more to do if it is to succeed.
Finally, the response of the Amalekite was:

c) Inappropriate
No sooner did the Amalekite tell his story than he realized his mistake. David didn't respond with the joy he anticipated. Instead he responded with profound grief. Being a 'man after God's own heart', David's personal ambition was secondary to God's timing. This death that the Amalekite has reported is a great defeat for the people of Israel. And not only has Saul died but so has Jonathan, David's great friend and companion.

David and all of those with him tore their clothes as a sign of deep mourning. They began weeping and mourning and this display of grief continued until evening.

A helpful lesson we can learn from the Amalekite is not to prescribe or presume another person's response to death. We don't know how they will react because we don't know the relationship that they had with the deceased. If we assume we know, we will probably be wrong, and either say something inappropriate or conduct ourselves in a manner that causes confusion and embarrassment for them and ourselves. It is better to remain quiet, and be there with them.

Some things not to say are:

- They are in a better place.
- God must have had something better for them to do.
- At least now their suffering is over.

The safest thing to do is express your sympathy, and say nothing more. Your presence with them says you care, and that is really what you want them to know.

3) David, the King Elect (2 Sam. 1:11,12, 17-27)

a) Unexpected (vs. 11, 12)
This brings us to David, and his unexpected reaction to the news of Saul's death. The sense of relief, maybe even subdued celebration one might expect never develops. Instead of a great victory celebration, we find David composing a lament, a funeral poem in honor of Saul and Jonathan. David's thoroughly patriotic and unselfish character is strongly marked here. He looked upon the death of Saul, and the defeat of Israel by a pagan foe, with unmixed sorrow, even though it opened to him the way to the throne, and removed his mortal enemy.

For Jonathan he mourned with all the tenderness of a loving friend. David is an example of how to grieve well.

b) Exemplary (vs. 17, 18)

By unanimous consent this is considered one of the most beautiful poems in the Bible.

David's poem is so significant that the editors of the canon, rather than placing the poem in the collection of the psalms, left it in the narrative portion of Samuel so that future generations would take time to pause
from the story and enter into David's grief. Perhaps this was to respect David's instructions given in vs. 17, 18:

David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan, and ordered that the men of Judah be taught this lament of the bow (it is written in the Book of Jashar): (2 Sam 1:17-18, NIV)

Being with someone who is in grief is a holy act. Because David is so transparent with his grief we can learn much about how we too should grieve. David didn't deny, ignore, or bury his grief: he faced it and embraced it. Before David assumed the throne of Israel, he had work to do, grief work. Join me as we look into David's heart through this lament. He begins by summarizing the disaster in one grand statement.

"Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights. How the mighty have fallen!

David's expression of grief is:

c) Inclusive (vs. 19-21)

i) All Israel

This headline-like announcement calls the nation to recognize what has happened. He summons them to climb to Mt. Gilboa and look at the battlefield carnage, to see the slain soldiers, the now dead king, the remnants of glory now departed from their nation.

Very few people want to go to the scene of a death, in fact many people resist looking at the deceased in the casket. When my good friend Jim Roth was killed in a plane crash, along with his brother Stan, near Marion, KS, I was invited to join the family and other mourners at the crash sight to comb the area for any remnants of their personal effects. It was the last thing I wanted to do less than a week after his death. I didn't go then, and I have never gone in the six years since. But in my mind I have imagined the charred area where the business jet did a nose dive at a speed of more than 500 mph. I just don't want to actually go and see it.

Did you go to OKC and view the bombsite before it was made into a memorial and monument?

Mt. Gilboa, the battlefield, is such a terrible sight to the poet that he cannot bear this for longer than one verse. Then he uses a refrain that will be used twice more – How the Mighty have Fallen.

After the opening line and the painful image of the slaughtering field, David cries out in anguish in vs. 20,

"Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice."

Israel's worst fears were realized. Their king was dead. He had been left unprotected, abandoned by God. His body was defiled, dismembered and placed on display by the enemy. The painful irony is that Israel's king suffered the same fate as Goliath. Now the news would spread to Gath, Goliath's hometown. If we try we can almost hear the jeers and gloats of the victorious army on their homeward march, to be greeted with the cheers and songs of the Philistine women whose "good news" is the defeat of Israel. Earlier the
Israelites were the victors, and their women sang (recorded in I Samuel 18:6,7) 

*When the men were returning home after David had killed Goliath, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes.*  

As they danced, they sang:

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“Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his tens of thousands.” (I Samuel 18:6,7)
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Now the Philistines were the victors. Their women were singing, while the Israelite women were weeping (v. 24). The unthinkable had happened. The good were slain and the wicked lived to fight another day.

### ii) All Creation

In verse 21 David makes an anguished plea to the creation to join with him in his grief.

"*O mountains of Gilboa,*
may you have neither dew nor rain,
nor fields that yield offerings [of grain].
For there the shield of the mighty was defiled,
the shield of Saul--no longer rubbed with oil." (1:21)

If the height of Gilboa was the place where God turned his back on his anointed, and the shield of the mighty was defiled, then David wants that to be a place where all of creation laments forever. He calls on the heavens to hold back their blessings of rain so that in that desecrated place worship will never again be carried out.

When we are overcome with grief, we long for all of creation to groan with us in our pain. Sometimes stormy, even rainy days for funerals are a comfort, a sign to us that God weeps with us in our grief. On the other hand when death is seen as a blessed relief for an elderly or terminally ill person, the sunshine can be understood as God smiling upon us, and welcoming our loved one to glory. We see next how David's response was:

#### d) Gracious (vs. 22, 23)

At the center of the poem David places his eulogy; his comments about Saul and Jonathan at their best. He pictures them as invincible warriors in magnificent splendor. See verse 22…

"*From the blood of the slain,*
from the flesh of the mighty,
the bow of Jonathan did not turn back,
the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied.

"*Saul and Jonathan --*
in life they were loved and gracious,
and in death they were not parted.
They were swifter than eagles,
they were stronger than lions." (1:22-23)
When they went out to battle the weapons of Saul and Jonathan always accomplished their aim. Overpowering all opponents, they were swifter than eagles and stronger than lions. But now these once glorious images are forever ravaged by tragedy. Every image which once evoked praise and awe—the archer's accurate bow, the penetrating sword of the king, the spilled blood of the slain, the eagle's speed, the lion's strength—now becomes a painful reminder of how Saul and Jonathan died on Mt. Gilboa.

Early in Saul's reign he was seen by all as loved and gracious. It was only after the evil spirit entered when God withdrew his spirit from Saul that his temperament changed so radically. But remember this is a funeral eulogy, and sometimes it is hard to recognize the deceased by what the preacher says.

Eulogy (Illustration-Humor)

The old man had died. A wonderful funeral was in progress and the country preacher talked at length of the good traits of the deceased, what an honest man he was, and what a loving husband and kind father he was. Finally, the widow leaned over and whispered to one of her children, "Go up there and take a look in the coffin and see if that's your pa."

David is honest before God about all the tensions in his soul. By the use of images he gives his grief a voice. He gives voice to every feeling we have ever experienced but did not think we had permission to express. Yet David says it with a courageous honesty, in the holy presence of God. David's lament invites the release of emotions:

e) Emotional (vs. 24)
Still playing the part of the eulogist, in vs. 24, David invites the women of Israel to express their grief for King Saul,

"O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul,
who clothed you in scarlet and finery,
who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold." (1:24)

Through the poem David gives Saul the gift he always wanted in life: the praise and respect of the "daughters of Israel." Ironically, this was the very thing that provoked Saul's enmity and fueled his obsession to kill David, when the women first sang, "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands" (1 Sam 18:7). But now David has no trouble giving Saul the praise of women. Here we see the healing power of David's lament to give expression to his grief, to give vent to his pain, and be bathed from bitterness, all so that he might be able to love.

So David speaks to the daughters of Israel who sang the victory songs for him after his military exploits. David would have these women tear their scarlet garments as he did his, as a sign of deep mourning for their dead king. Our world tries unsuccessfully to numb its pain by partying, but David recognizes that weeping is a very appropriate response to the pain of grief.

I know from personal experience that there is no greater gift in a time of loss than to have friends come to stand by your side and weep with you. This is the gift of love that David gave to Saul, the one who formerly tried to kill him.

f) Personal (vs. 25-27)
With the repeat of the theme in verse 25, “How the Mighty have Fallen”, this lament for his dead king takes a very personal turn for David.
“How the mighty have fallen in battle!
Jonathan lies slain on your heights.
I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother;
you were very dear to me.
Your love for me was wonderful,
more wonderful than that of women." (1:25,26)

David speaks in the first person and brings us to the destination to which he has been driving throughout the poem: the chance to speak a final word to his friend. One of the most moving moments at a funeral is when the living speak directly to the dead.

As I think of funerals I have attended I recall words spoken by a grandchild to a deceased grandparent, by a son to his now dead father, or words read on behalf of a spouse to their departed mate.

David speaks to Jonathan as if he were present, raised from the dead, and shares his deepest expression of love for his dear friend. He describes Jonathan's love for him as dear and wonderful. Sadly, some commentators with a corrupt lens and narrow life view take this to refer to an inappropriate kind of male love. This interpretation is ludicrous. In actuality this word wonderful means inexpressible, extraordinary, something so extraordinary it is seen as miraculous, unexplainable except that God has designed it. It demonstrates God's care for those he loves. David praises God for the nature of Jonathan's love for him, a love that can only be understood in terms of the miraculous.

The kind of love David speaks of is love that sacrifices career and family relationships for another person, and eventually gives one's life blood that someone else might succeed. It is a love that is best seen in the character of God.

Jonathan, heir to the throne, had not clung to his rights but had voluntarily renounced them in favor of David, whom he had protected and encouraged through the years. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Because of the wonder of this love, David admits that Jonathan's death affects every part of him. He will never be the same.

Each time he places the crown on his head will be a reminder that it came at the high cost of Jonathan's blood. And as we pause and weep with David, how can we not be equally as affected by the gift that God gave to us, in his Son? “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son….”

“How the Mighty have Fallen!”

It is not too much of a stretch to think of Christ in his pre-incarnate state with the Father. He, like Jonathan of old, gave up all for us. Look at how Paul expresses it in Philippians 2:5, (read with me)

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to death—

ev en death on a cross!

_How the Mighty have Fallen!_

In a few moments we will remember Christ and his death for us by partaking of the Lord's Supper. But as we conclude this message I want to encourage you to reflect upon the most recent death that impacted you in a significant way. Was your response like David's? Were you able to grieve openly, personally, emotionally?

If your loss was recent, I invite you to attend “Good Grief” a helpful support group we offer twice a year at First Free. Our next session begins this Tuesday evening at 7:00 in the Hospitality Room. You may sign up at the Welcome Center following this service.

Now if those who are serving us will come, we will share the bread and the cup in thanksgiving for the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ