



MICHAL

(1 Samuel 15-16, 1 Samuel 18:20-28, 1 Samuel 19:10-17,

2 Samuel 3:12-16, 1 Samuel 31:1-6, 2 Samuel 6:1-23)

MICHAL THE DAUGHTER OF SAUL

When it comes to marriage, you aren't just getting a spouse; you're getting a family. I'm fortunate that when I married into the Bream clan I got dozens of new in-laws who are basically a dream come true. There are no undermining or sneaky plots from in-laws to disrupt my marriage. It's a family full of faith, delicious food, and adventures. They cheer each other on and make me feel like I've always been a part of their tight-knit, devoted family. Now imagine the complete opposite of this situation and that's where we start with the story of Saul, his daughter Michal, and her husband, David. It should actually bring us comfort how often the Bible highlights troubled families (and individuals) and God's ability to carry out His plans despite their flaws and sin.

This family had as much drama and intrigue as an episode of *Downton Abbey*. Michal was a woman who found herself torn between two kings, in the middle of a terrible family struggle between her father, King Saul, and her beloved husband, David. This daughter not only chose not to participate in her father's

sin, but she also actually undermined his nefarious plans. Michal was forced to choose between loyalty to her father and the vows she had made to her husband, David. This wasn't a misunderstanding or gray area; Saul wanted to kill David—and tried multiple times! (Your in-laws are sounding pretty good right about now, right?)

It wasn't always that way between Saul and David. Saul was Israel's first king, the one they demanded from God. The prophet Samuel had tried to push back against the people's wishes for a king; but God assured Samuel He had a plan—and that included Saul as king. Like so many others in the Scripture, Saul had times when he followed the Lord closely and other times when he followed his own whims. As we mentioned in the history leading up to Esther's story, Saul directly disobeyed an order from God to wipe out the Amalekites. It was at that point we saw that God's hand of blessing over Saul was removed, and Saul became very troubled. We're told even Samuel, who had anointed Saul at God's direction, mourned over him. In the midst of Samuel's moping, God told him to get it together and go visit Jesse—a man with eight sons.

It's during the interaction between the prophet Samuel and Jesse that we get one of the most well-known verses about how God perceives people and how He expects us to view them. Upon seeing Jesse's eldest son Eliab, Samuel was impressed and thought Eliab was the one chosen by God to be Israel's next king.

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the

outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

One by one Samuel looked over Jesse's sons, but God had not chosen any of them. Samuel asked Jesse if there were any more? Well, the father admitted, there was his youngest one out there tending sheep. Jesse had David brought in and God made it clear this was His choice.

So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. (1 Samuel 16:13)

God had chosen David, and Samuel had anointed him as the next king of Israel. Tiny issue: Saul still thought he was the king. Saul no longer had God's backing or guidance, but he was still ruling over the nation of Israel. As Saul struggled with his sometimes explosive emotions, his servants had the idea of getting a musician to play harp music for him, to calm him. Saul commanded them to find someone, and David was suggested.

One of the servants answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the lyre. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him." (1 Samuel 16:18)

Saul sent for him, and we're told the first time they met that Saul so admired him he made David one of his armor-bearers. Saul asked Jesse for permission to keep David on, and whenever

Saul was troubled, David's harp music soothed him. David also became best friends with Saul's son, Jonathan.

So far so good for the future in-laws, right? Why wouldn't Saul want David to marry one of his daughters? At the time of Michal's first appearance in the Old Testament, David's star was on the rise in the court of King Saul. David had slain Goliath in spectacular fashion, he and had become the darling of Israel. And what started out as Saul's admiration for David had turned into a growing, dangerous jealousy. We read in 1 Samuel 18 that David was successful on every mission Saul gave him. So much so, that the people increasingly took notice.

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 timbrels and lyres. As they danced, they sang:

"Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his tens of thousands."

Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David. (1 Samuel 18:6-9)

Saul also tried to kill David by throwing a spear at him as he played the harp in the royal court. Sometime after that Saul hatched a plan. He offered David his older daughter, Merab, in

marriage in exchange for David's commitment to fight on Saul's behalf. If David were the king's son-in-law, then he would be bound to Saul by family obligation, and if Saul ordered him to go fight, David could not refuse. Perhaps Saul thought it would serve him better to let the Philistines take out David, instead of the king doing it himself. Did he also think it would be useful to have his daughter reporting back to him on David's movements, as well—a spy in his enemy's household? Of course, the tragedy is that David was not Saul's enemy; he had sought only to serve the king. Saul created his own enemy, and that eventually left David no choice but to move against him. David essentially turned down Saul's offer to marry Merab, responding that he and his family were too humble to join the royal family. So Saul married off his daughter to another man instead of David.

Now enter Saul's younger daughter Michal. She's the only woman I can remember seeing in the Bible who openly professes her love for a man. She had fallen hard for this handsome, successful warrior, but we never see any indication that David reciprocated her feelings. Michal's love for David, the Bible hints, was unrequited. And as we'll see, David's later actions appear to back this up. Saul had his servants reach out to David and offer a second chance to become the king's son-in-law. David again protested, "I'm only a poor man and little known" (1 Samuel 18:23). There's plenty of scholarly speculation out there about what was really going on. Was David concerned about his ability to pay a customary price for his bride? Was he worried about getting caught up in one of Saul's schemes? I mean, the man had tried to murder him! In any case, Saul saw a golden opportunity. He told David the only thing he wanted in return for Michal's hand in marriage was the foreskins of one hundred

Philistines. Yikes! Saul's motive was even worse than the barbaric request itself:

Saul's plan was to have David fall by the hands of the Philistines. (1 Samuel 18:25)

In a cunning ploy, Saul offered David a path to prove his worthiness by killing a hundred Philistines, which was a catch-22 offer worthy of an evil genius. If David said no, he risked looking like a coward in front of the very crowds that were exalting him for his heroism. But if he said yes, the odds were that he would be hurt or killed trying to bring down that many enemy warriors. From Saul's perspective, it was a win-win situation. There was a decent chance David would be killed fighting the Philistines, *but* there was also the possibility that Saul would be afforded esteem and honor if David survived and joined the royal family. Either way, Saul was hoping to neutralize the threat to his kingship.

I have to admit, my own husband, Sheldon, had suspicions that my dad was out to get him from the moment I first took him home to meet my family. My father was a big fan of pyrotechnics. He didn't need July Fourth in order to set off a near-professional display of fireworks. He relished getting his hands on the good stuff and looked for any excuse to light up the sky. The very first night Sheldon met my dad we had a cookout, and you better believe fireworks were part of the postdinner plan. As they started popping and crackling, something went wrong. One of the rockets tipped over and aimed right at Sheldon's head! As it whooshed by it hit the side of Dad's brick house behind Sheldon and exploded. As soon as it was clear Sheldon was unscathed,

my dad doubled over in laughter and apologized profusely. Everyone else's shock quickly turned to chuckles too. My dad was slightly mortified, and we all knew his multiple apologies were genuine. That's because my dad loved me and consistently took actions to make sure I was happy, safe, and had everything I needed. Poor Michal had the antithesis of that in Saul.

Michal was crazy about David, and her father knew it. Yet he plotted to get the man killed. Saul had planned to use his older daughter as a pawn, and he was apparently willing to crush his younger daughter's heart too. How could a father be so selfish and completely unfazed by the enormous grief his direct actions could cause his own child? With no regard for his daughter's feelings, Saul hoped to take advantage of her love for David to finally push through a marriage.

If we can stop and look beyond the struggle between these two powerful men, we see Michal—really see her. It's not surprising that she would have fallen in love with David. After all, as a princess of the royal court she would have had a front-row seat to David's heroism when he took on Goliath. She would have been a witness to all his heroic exploits, and she would have lived alongside him at the court. David had become the close friend of her brother Jonathan, and he probably seemed like a member of the family already. He was a dashing, heroic young man who had saved her whole nation.

None of this mattered to Saul. He saw Michal's feelings only as a tactical advantage, and ruthlessly plotted to exploit them. Michal might have thought her father was doing a loving thing for her, when he proposed her marriage to David. Did she know—or suspect—that her father had ulterior motives? Saul wanted his daughter to be a “snare” to her husband (1 Samuel 18:21). He also

wanted to use Michal to further endanger David. But once again God's spirit and protection were on David as he went out to fulfill the price Saul had requested for Michal's hand.

So before the allotted time elapsed, David took his men with him and went out and killed two hundred Philistines and brought back their foreskins. They counted out the full number to the king so that David might become the king's son-in-law. Then Saul gave him his daughter Michal in marriage. (1 Samuel 18:24-27)

If Saul had feared the adulation people gave David before, then handing David yet another opportunity to prove himself as a warrior had not been a wise move. He must have thought it was worth it for the possibility that David would be killed in the process and his problem erased, but that wasn't what happened. David survived, his hero's luster burnished even more, and he married Michal. He was at last the king's son-in-law.

Being raised at the royal court, Michal probably witnessed not only David's exploits, but also her father's initial greatness and ensuing downward spiral. She very likely knew what kind of man her father was—or rather, the kind of man that her father's jealousy of David had turned him into. What a terrible thing it must have been, to watch the descent of her noble father into madness and evil. Saul was the king of Israel, a man chosen by the people and anointed by the prophet Samuel. He had had everything going for him—wealth, power, and the favor of God—and then he lost it by his own disobedience and poisonous jealousy. How difficult that must have been for Michal to watch.

Michal experienced the tragic pain of watching a loved one drift irrevocably away, and she likely experienced a deep sense of powerlessness. There probably wasn't anything she could have done or said to recall her father to health and wholeness. How difficult it is to be the child of a parent who is making destructive choices. Parents are usually authority figures for us, so what do we do when a parent becomes the one who needs guidance or some straight talk? There would be real friction between Saul and Michal, but not just yet. First, the celebration of a wedding.

MICHAL THE WIFE OF DAVID

If Michal had been hoping that her marriage would ease her father's irrational hatred of David, she was soon disappointed.

When Saul realized that the LORD was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David, Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days. The Philistine commanders continued to go out to battle, and as often as they did, David met with more success than the rest of Saul's officers, and his name became well known. (1 Samuel 18:28-30)

Saul apparently realized that his plan to use Michal against David was not going to work. She persisted in her love of her husband, though once again—perhaps tellingly—nothing is said of David's feelings toward her. Instead of softening his attitude toward her husband, her father was now confirmed in his hatred, and had become, in the chilling phrase, "his enemy the rest of his days" (1 Samuel 18:29). David continued to flourish, as did

his good fortune in battle. Michal's father continued sinking into sin and despair.

Even though David's relationship with his father-in-law continued to deteriorate, his bonds with the rest of Saul's family became even closer. Michal was devoted to David, and his friendship with Saul's son Jonathan was deeply rooted. Jonathan even tried to advocate for David with his father, assuring Saul that David had no designs on the throne and was no threat to him. But Saul was too far gone in his jealousy to believe it. Once again Saul tried to kill David. There would be no reconciliation.

Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed." So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped. Then Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed, covering it with a garment and putting some goats' hair at the head.

When Saul sent the men to capture David, Michal said, "He is ill."

Then Saul sent the men back to see David and told them, "Bring him up to me in his bed so that I may kill him." But when the men entered, there was the idol in the bed, and at the head was some goats' hair. (1 Samuel 19:11-16)

Torn between the man who gave her life and the man she loved, Michal chose to protect her husband. She must have known of Saul's wickedness and his numerous attempts to kill her husband—both directly and indirectly. Not only did she help

her husband escape, but Michal also cooked up her own scheme to give David a head start on his getaway.

Her father was displeased, but when he confronted Michal, she wasn't ready to take credit for exactly what she'd done.

Saul said to Michal, "Why did you deceive me like this and send my enemy away so that he escaped?"

Michal told him, "He said to me, 'Let me get away. Why should I kill you?'" (1 Samuel 19:17)

Now that her husband had safely gone, Michal could pretend that she had been on her father's side all along. David, she claimed, had threatened to kill her! It would have been an easily believable lie. Saul would likely believe the worst of the man who'd become the center of his obsessions. So David escaped and Michal was also safe—back in the palace, where her deception was unknown and everyone assumed her real loyalty was to her father. Michal did not consent to participate in her father's sin of attempted murder, and thus saved him from the greater sin of actual murder. Michal saved David that night, but she also saved Saul.

Politically, Michal was caught between being the daughter of the king and the wife of the (presumed) future king. It was not only a dangerous place to be, but also an emotionally harrowing one. Michal was torn between her father and her husband. It seems neither of them loved her in return, nor showed regard for her intrinsic value as a human being or a woman. Her father used her as a pawn in his war with David and gave her no further thought. The Bible tells us nothing of her husband's feelings for her, even

though she saved his life. Just as in Esther's story, with Michal we see a daughter presented with a very difficult choice: whom to follow? Esther chose to be loyal to her Jewish father, instead of to a pagan king. But Michal was left with what probably felt like a no-win situation. On the one hand an evil father who was hell-bent on killing her husband, and on the other hand a husband who didn't seem to return the love she showered on him.

Unfortunately, Saul's scheming regarding his daughter's life continued. When next we hear of Michal, Saul has treated her marriage to David as though it did not exist. In fact, Saul married her off to another man! We have no indication that Saul ever sought Michal's feelings on the matter. The Bible tells us simply, "Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim" (1 Samuel 25:44). David had also taken a new wife—two of them, in fact. While in hiding with his men in the wilderness, slowly gathering more forces loyal to him, David married Abigail, widow of the wealthy Nabal, as well as Ahinoam of Jezreel. Michal's love story with David appears to have ended—the husband of her dreams gone from the palace, collecting other wives, and no prospect of their reunion because her father had married her off to someone else.

Likely none of us have experienced what it is like to be the daughter of a king married to someone vying to become the future king. But many of us do know what it is like to experience tension between the family we were born into and the family we establish. Conflict between fathers-in-law and sons-in-law is as old as human history. Fathers want to protect their daughters, and they often regard outsiders with suspicion—hopefully because they want the best for their child, not because they are murderous connivers like Saul. How many of us have made some

of the same emotional choices Michal did? She did not invite conflict with her father. She did not defy him. She did not say, *I love David and there's nothing you can do about it!* She was careful not to antagonize her father. In Michal's case, that was because her father could have had her put to death for such defiance. In our own lives, being estranged from our family can feel like a death. Often it is the shrewder choice to avoid antagonizing anyone, and for women, that is something many of us are taught from a young age. It is often assumed our role is to make peace in a family, to make sure everyone is getting along. At its best, that can be a beautiful affirmation of the vocation of womanhood. At its worst, that expectation can place an unfair emotional burden that means we end up internalizing everyone's conflict.

Michal tried to have it both ways, but it's hard to see what other options she had. If she had chosen David she would have had to flee with him. There would have been no one to divert the soldiers and give David those crucial hours in which to make his escape. David might have been caught and killed. But if she had chosen Saul, it likely would have meant David's death. The only way Michal could maintain her loyalty to her husband was by appearing to be loyal to her father. It seems she made the best of an impossible situation.

As life unfolds, we sometimes find ourselves with circumstances that defy a simple answer. That is when I place myself at God's feet. Not only to cast my cares on Him as He instructs us to do in 1 Peter 5:7, but also because He is the ultimate source of wisdom.

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (James 1:5)

When we're caught between people we love, prayer and heavenly wisdom are two of our best tools. No one wants to be in these situations, but they do arise. Seek the Lord's guidance and He will be faithful to guide you through life's most challenging decisions. I also often turn to more mature Christians, people with life experience and a track record of being trustworthy. Their insights can offer valuable advice when you most desperately need it.

NO LONGER A DAUGHTER

If Michal's heart wasn't already broken, after being used by her father and essentially abandoned by David, she was about to face an even more bitter twist. Saul was killed in a disastrous defeat. His son Ish-Bosheth ascended to the throne, propped up by Saul's cousin and general, Abner. But then David finally caught a break: Abner defected to David, and he agreed to swing the war in David's favor. For Abner to prove his intentions, David asked one thing of the general:

"Good," said David. "I will make an agreement with you. But I demand one thing of you: Do not come into my presence unless you bring Michal daughter of Saul when you come to see me." Then David sent messengers to Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, demanding, "Give me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins." (2 Samuel 3:13-14)

David's request was a shrewd one. If Abner was going to defect, he needed to show David that he meant it. He needed to show David that even if he wanted to, he could not go back to

Ish-Bosheth. What would be one thing that would prove that? Taking Michal, Saul's "possession," from right under his son's nose and leading her back to David. Michal was clearly the emotional battleground on which this battle between David and Saul was fought. In the list of Saul's unjust actions, this shows us that maybe it was taking Michal away from him that rankled David the most. The stage seems set for a romantic and loving reunion between David and Michal. But what happened was far more disturbing than that.

So Ish-Bosheth gave orders and had her taken away from her husband Paltiel son of Laish. Her husband, however, went with her, weeping behind her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go back home!" So he went back. (2 Samuel 3:15-16)

Poor Paltiel! His reaction to losing his wife is the mirror of Michal's love for David in earlier chapters. It's heartbreaking to read. This is the only time in the Bible that we see a man weeping like this for the love of his wife. And it happens here, of all places! Did Paltiel have a choice in his marriage to Michal, any more than Michal did? It is impossible for us to know. But he seems devastated here, and his powerlessness in the face of the larger events reminds us of the human cost of scheming and sin.

Once again, Michal was treated like a pawn. Did she enjoy a few years of happiness with Paltiel? Or was she still yearning for David? The Bible offers us an interesting commentary on love here. Sometimes love is reciprocated, but sometimes human love is directed at someone who can't or won't love us in the way we desire. The Bible shows us people living real lives with real, com-

plicated human emotions. The love of Michal for David, and the love of Paltiel for Michal, shows us that ordinary human yearning has a place in the Bible too.

There's so much we cannot know about Michal. Was she pleased to marry another man when she realized that David wasn't coming back for her—and that he had taken other wives? Or was she heartbroken by being used by her father yet again? Given the chance to return to the palace and assume the position of queen, was she all too eager to leave Paltiel and return to David? In those days, Michal may have had none of the autonomy necessary to make those decisions, and we're left to wonder about how she felt about being shuttled between households and relationships.

Michal experienced so much instability in her life: her father's shaky mental health, the uncertainty of his reign, the insecurity of her own marriage. With David's final victory, the balance of power shifted. But because her life was tied to both her father and her husband, the rise of one meant inevitably the fall of the other—and more anguish for Michal. David was able to move into a position of power and demand his wife back because the leaders of the house of Saul, the king and his son Jonathan, had already been killed:

Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell dead on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines were in hot pursuit of Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malki-Shua. The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically.

Saul 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. When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day. (1 Samuel 31:1-6)

What an unimaginably devastating loss for Michal. On the same day, she lost her father and three of her brothers, including Jonathan. The personal loss must have felt overwhelming, even without considering the political power struggle going on in her country. No matter what her disagreements were with her father—and they were profound—Saul was still her father, and he afforded her the protection of being a princess of Israel. There was always the possibility of repentance, that he would come back to himself and repent of the wrong he had done against David and Michal. But with Saul's death, all possibility of repentance was gone, along with any protection she might have had.

It is as though the sin of murder that Michal's deception had prevented earlier came to fruition here. The irony is that Saul had been longing to commit murder for years, and he had attempted to kill David many times. He was ultimately unsuccessful, and Saul himself ended up being the target. Michal was in no position to save him. Saul's greatest victim was always, in the final analysis, himself. His efforts to use Michal—and others—to elevate himself had finally failed for good.

NO LONGER A WIFE

So Michal was returned to David, as a sign of his final triumph over the house of Saul. What the personal state of their relationship was, the Bible does not tell us. We have no window into the conversations that took place between David and Michal until a few years later, when David finally retrieved the Ark of the Covenant and brought it in triumph to the temple in Jerusalem. For the first time since we were told of her love for David, we see Michal's feelings.

Now King David was told, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God." So David went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the LORD with all his might, while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart.

They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD. After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD Almighty. Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person

in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes. (2 Samuel 6:12-19)

MICHAL

This moment, more than any other, symbolized David's final triumph as king of Israel. His military successes were one thing, but this showed that he truly had the favor and blessing of God. He went so far as to bless the people in God's name, acting in an almost priestly capacity. He blessed them "in the name of the LORD of Heaven's Armies" or the Lord of Sabaoth, as older translations render it (2 Samuel 6:18). It was a way of referring to God as the commander of the armies of angels, just as David himself was commander of the armies of men. The message was clear: as above, so below. God was king in heaven, and David was king on earth, a parallel of the divine king.

Clearly, Michal did not approve of David's spirited dancing or of his less-than-formal wardrobe choice. The Bible indicates that she was "filled with contempt." It would have been hard for any onlooker not to contrast David's exultation and joy in God with Saul's disobedience and estrangement. God, after all, had withdrawn His favor from Saul back when Saul had disobeyed him. And how had Saul transgressed? By assuming a religious role that was not his to assume. When the armies of Israel were about to go into battle against the Philistines, Saul offered the sacrifices to God in the sight of all his army so that they would not lose heart while they waited for Samuel to show up (1 Samuel 13:1-14). But Saul also followed up this ceremonial transgression by lying about its purpose. Saul had told Samuel he wished to seek the Lord's favor, but it seems his real motivation was fear of the people. In contrast, David's sacrifices were an expression of his faith, offered with joyful abandon.

THE MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS OF THE BIBLE SPEAK

Just a couple of chapters later, Samuel reminded us of what matters most when he chided Saul for, once again, failing to obey God's directions.

Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
as much as in obeying the LORD?
To obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
he has rejected you as king. (1 Samuel 15:22-23)

Did Michal struggle to understand what may have looked to her like real inconsistency? God had punished Michal's father for pushing his kingly way into matters of religion, telling him that he would one day lose his kingdom for his transgressions. Yet here was David, her husband, assuming a religious role at the head of the procession of the Ark. No fire came from heaven to smite him. He was the favored of God. Meanwhile Michal's father and brothers were dead, her family bereft of the kingdom. The injustice of it must have rankled her and filled her heart with grief and anger. She had sacrificed so much to side with David—perhaps even the trust of her father. Maybe in some part of her heart she thought that if David had just stayed a shepherd, none of this would have happened: her father's madness and death, her brother Jonathan's destruction, the fall of the house of Saul. Michal's feelings must have been deep and complicated.

MICHAL

When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!"

David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD's people Israel—I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor."

And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death. (2 Samuel 6:20-23)

What a toxic stew of resentment had brewed in Michal's heart. Her father used her, and it appears the man she once loved was willing to treat her as a political pawn as well. She lashed out at David and he saw right to the heart of what Michal was really getting at: the contrast between her own family and him. David reminded Michal that he was in fact the chosen of the Lord, not her father or her family. If we had any doubts about the state of relations between the two, it appears there was no reconciliation in the cards. Scholars differ on why Michal was childless—whether it was because she and David were never intimate again as husband and wife, or whether God withheld children from her as some form of judgment. In any case, that childlessness meant no descendant of Saul could ever be heir to the throne of King David.

Our marriages do not exist in vacuums. As women, so often we're torn along these very same lines: love for our birth family and loyalty to our new family. That can spark misunderstandings, hurt, and suspicion. For Michal, it gave birth to a lifetime of pain, confusion, and resentment. It all started with a selfish, ego-driven father who never seemed capable of cherishing and protecting his own daughter. That may be the reality for some of you reading these words. It's difficult to trust that our heavenly Father is completely different from the flawed human beings who've been our earthly parents, but He is. If you haven't had a father who modeled trust and acceptance to you, there is healing in God's unwavering love and grace. He knows we are all flawed and that we can deeply wound each other, especially when there's a broken sense of security. God does not guarantee us a Hallmark Channel life (oh how I wish He would!), but He always gives us his presence. We find that in prayer, and it's also right in the pages of the Bible—full of real people with difficult struggles who find peace under their heavenly Father's wings if they choose to rest there.

Lord God, grant us the strength to see You in the clashes and conflicts within our own families and in our own failures. When we are caught between people who dislike or don't trust each other give us the strength to choose love. Help us to show love to those who seem incapable of giving it. Guide us to the truth of Your never-failing presence in our lives. Please bless our own complicated families in all their struggles, and when conflicts arise, grant us the courage and wisdom to face those conflicts with You at our side and in our hearts.

Michal Study Questions

1. How poisonous was Saul's jealousy over David? What does it say about him as a father that Saul was more than willing to use his own daughters to try to destroy David? How difficult must it have been for Michal to be caught between her husband and her father? Have you experienced family conflict that stretched your loyalties? How did you resolve it, or are you managing it to keep the peace?
2. How did Saul's plans to use Michal backfire? (1 Samuel 18:28-30)
3. How did Michal try to play both sides of this potentially murderous family conflict? (1 Samuel 19:11-17)
4. How do you imagine Michal must have felt when Saul upended her life again? (1 Samuel 25:44) How did Saul's selfishness and paranoia end up impacting lives far beyond his own?
5. Is David just as guilty of selfishly using Michal, as her father had, without regard to her feelings or wishes? (2 Samuel 3:13)
6. How did bitterness destroy Michal? (2 Samuel 6:20-23) Can we blame her? How can we prevent the seeds of resentment from rooting in our own lives when we've been treated badly?