



## David and Military Grace

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*The element of grace as a proponent within traditional military leadership demonstrates a conviction in which moral and ethical decisions connect to a spiritual principle. Grace can be examined in biblical models such as David, a man after God's own heart. The concept of military grace allows for a deeper exploration and careful analysis towards understanding God's grace as it relates to life as a military leader. This chapter seeks to assess military grace through the lived experiences of David during distinguished periods of his military career, including before and during the early portion of his kingship. Applying historical intertexture allows for examination and careful analysis of the text in understanding God's grace as displayed in David's life as a military leader. Before examining the historical account of King David, the chapter begins with the definition of grace in accordance with both the Old and New Testament scriptural meaning. The chapter also provides a definition of military leadership applied to the profession of military leaders during military service. Lastly the chapter identifies seven areas of military grace —selfless service, responsibility, courage, victory, generosity, honor, and*

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*kindness—and how such areas align with the application of grace extended within the capacity of military leadership.*

The element of grace as a proponent within traditional military leadership demonstrates a conviction in which moral and ethical decisions connect to a spiritual principle. The concept of military grace allows for a deeper exploration and careful analysis as it relates to life as a military leader. King David's lived experiences reveal graced lessons that may serve as an understanding within the role and responsibilities of military leaders. There is a divine connectedness towards biblical military leaders and grace that is relevant for today's community of military leaders. This chapter uses David as the biblical exemplar and examines areas of his extensive military leadership before and during his kingship. David's character helps to understand grace and its reflection within the profession of military leadership. The quest for understanding David as King begins with his profession as military commander and leader.

This chapter examines grace through the lived experiences of David during his military leadership with an in-depth historical intertexture analysis of chapters within 1 and 2 Samuel. Applying historical intertexture allows for examination and analysis towards understanding God's grace as it relates to David's life as a military leader. Historical intertexture identifies and provides perspective of seven principles of military grace—selfless service, responsibility, courage, victory, generosity, honor, and kindness. Although there are many attributes that contribute to David's military leadership, these seven principles are revealed throughout the historical intertexture analysis and his applied military grace. Before examining the historical account of King David, the chapter begins with the definition of grace in accordance with both the Old and New Testament scriptural meaning. The chapter also provides a definition of military leadership, as it relates to military leaders in the profession of leading others into and during military service.

## GRACE

The story behind the song *Amazing Grace* is globally recognized and memorable by its lyrics and melody. Passed down from generation to generation, and crossing denominations and music genres, Christians turn to sing its lyrics in times of unity to express faith, hope, and solidarity (Turner, 2002). Newton, the author of the song, penned the lyrics to

promote the faith and comfort available to his spirit after his spiritual conversion. The song also represented the tension between the working of grace in Newton's life as a slave trader and the confidence that grace would overshadow all of his life. The impetus for the lyrics of *Amazing Grace* was during a severe storm at sea in the Atlantic Ocean. Moments of distress and fear during the four-week ordeal became the foundation of the song, written with the theme of salvation through the undeserved favor of God.

Roehrs (1952) highlighted grace as undeserved kindness and the unadulterated goodness of one whose authority is above the recipient. Ramsey (2019) stated that, "the grace of God gives undeserved access to unearned blessings." Grace overcomes and is constant to the point of sustained faithfulness (Kolodiejchuk, 2007). Reflection on the biblical context of grace within the Old Testament reveals an unmerited, favored relationship that proceeds unidirectionally between God and the people of Israel. It is holy and gracious. Grace in the Old Testament is God's contact and covenant with people, and only exists because of God's graciousness (Roehrs, 1953). Sanders (1983) brought scholarly understanding to the attention that Judaism is a religion of grace. The covenant that bound God to Israel and the election of Israel as God's chosen from all other nations was an act of divine grace (Sanders, 1983).

In the New Testament the prominent focus is that Jesus becomes the mediator and sacrifice. The Apostle John testified that the Law was given to Moses, but that grace is given through Jesus (Jn. 1:17–20). New Testament grace reveals that God does not punish in the face of human disobedience, albeit the punishment onto humanity is taken upon God through Jesus (McCann, 2003). Apostle Paul is the dominate voice on the topic of grace throughout the New Testament. His life represents a premise that what Christ graciously did for humanity far exceeds what the Law could ever do for the nation of Israel (deSilva, 2004). Consistently, Paul extended grace to the reading audience at the opening and closing of the epistles, (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3). However, it was Paul's teaching of the dispensation and gospel of God's grace and, grace as a gift of forgiveness for all (Acts 20:24; Rom. 5:15; Eph. 3:2) that has become an element of Christian theology. Paul inspired the spiritual revelation that grace is for everyone who believes and accepts the hidden power of grace through Christ (Payton, 2010). The mixing

of belief, faith and revelation becomes the power of grace that changes a willingness to be grace-like towards others.

## MILITARY LEADERSHIP

Unique qualities of military leadership are distinctive during stages of combat and noncombatant settings (Burns et al., 2004). Military leadership involves an expressed interest towards followership, values, ethics, and an element of caring for humanity (Townsend & Gebhardt, 1997). Burns et al. (2004) likened military leadership to transformational leadership because it requires change in motivation and convictions to support a willingness for combat over self-preservation (Burns et al., 2004). Immelt (2009) declared leadership as the essence of what military officers would do as a part of their profession.

The United States Army (2017) defines military leadership as the ability for those in position to, “influence others by providing purpose, direction, and motivation, while operating to accomplish the mission and improve the organization” (p. 1). Historically, military leadership represented a hierarchical culture within secure organizations (Kuronen & Huhtinen, 2015). In essence, military leadership is designed to ensure unit cohesion, intellectual compliance, and an ethical sense (Bass, 2008a). Traditionally, better-led militaries are victorious in leading men and women into military conflict (Bass, 2008b). The expectations, actions, and behaviors of leaders within the military carry high implications and prospects. In essence, military leadership is understood in the context of leader and followers. Military warriors seek leaders and great warriors challenge leaders to their best leaving little room for error and practically no room for grace (Pressfield, 1999). Leadership in the military amounts to identity and intellect (Monroe, 1984). Throughout the centuries, military leaders possessed a set of values innate to their leadership qualities and influences. At the very least, military leadership represents an idealized senior rank level of authority in a society and an approved culture that sends youth into battle (Kuronen & Huhtinen, 2015). At its very best, modern day military leadership represents characteristics of honor, commitment, courage, and generosity towards humanity.

## HISTORICAL INTERTEXTURE

Socio-rhetorical analysis is an exegetical approach that is interested in the nature of the sacred text as social, cultural, historical, and ideological discourse (Robbins, 2016). Intertexture is one form of Robbins' socio-rhetorical model that concerns the relation of data in the text to a phenomenon outside the text, through oral-scribal, historical, social, and or cultural analyses. Intertextual analysis examines the world outside the text to interact with historical events, customs, values, and roles for contextual perspective (Robbins, 1996). Being attentive to occurrences within the text and sensitivity to importation outside the text from other resources adds dimensions for analysis (Baron, 2011).

Historical intertexture focuses on the influences of a period or event in order to provide contextual background (Henson et al., 2020). These influences include events and experiences that occurred prior to the text's writings (Robbins, 1996) It serves as a careful analysis of the historical events unfolding in the text (Robbins, 1996). Historical information is derived from biblical characters through their lived experiences and events and contributes to historical analysis. Historical intertexture involves an understanding of the cultural and social setting, as an integral part of the interpretation (Robbins, 1996). The Bible accurately preserves the oldest Hebrew traditions of ancient Israel—military leaders being one such tradition (Kirsch, p. 76). The Bible is the only primary source that provides archived information of David's career as a soldier and as a king. Examining David's military leadership and time as a soldier prior to becoming the king of Israel through historical discourse yields examples of grace extended towards David by God or David's extended grace towards others.

### *Selfless Service: 1 Samuel 16*

Within modern military culture, selfless service is associated with an intrinsic commitment to community and organization. Military leaders concede selfless service as an indicator of value, loyalty to people, and sacrifice of time and effort for the good of humanity (Dunwoody, 2015; Powell, 1995). Selfless service considers the best interest of others and places the leader in a position of extreme humility and vulnerability (Lloyd, 2019).

David was a man who lived his life serving others. Several leadership styles can be associated with David, however, what could be considered as his military leadership style represented a characteristic of selfless commitment towards others. The selfless motivation and commitment towards others were witnessed from the very beginning of his story in 1 Samuel 16. David, the eighth and youngest son of Jesse the Ephrathite (1 Sam. 16:11) and not yet old enough for military service, enters the Hebrew Bible at the beckoning of his father for a family gathering in the presence of Samuel the prophet. David was serving in a selfless posture—tending the family sheep (1 Sam. 16:11). He was already a shepherd leader, responsible for the health and welfare of sheep flock. Biblically, shepherds faced human threat (Job 1:14–15), thievery (Jn. 10:1), and animal predators (Amos 3:12). Daily movement, isolation from others, demands of the flock, and adjustment to elements of nature are all characteristics of a shepherd and characteristics of military leaders preparing for war (Bass, 2008a; Laniak, 2006). After David was recognized and anointed by Samuel as the next king of Israel, he would submit to an unexpected occupation as a musician serving directly for King Saul (1 Sam. 16:16–18, 23). These accounts in the text suggest David’s devout commitment of selfless service towards others at a very early age. This posture of service would prepare David for his future military roles and King of Israel lineage.

The calling of God is a selection, with a specific anointing, for an assigned gifted work. It is not merited, or warranted, however it is a choosing from God. David was identified by God and directed Samuel to, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, 1 Sam. 16:12). The Spirit of the Lord took control of David from that moment throughout his history. This Spirit, this anointing, this unmerited favor and divine communication of gifts and grace were spiritual and would follow David all of his days (Henry, 1991).

### *Responsibility and Courage: 1 Samuel 17*

The first account of David serving as a military man is his encounter with the uncircumcised Philistine, Goliath (1 Sam. 17:26–58). This encounter is one of the most compelling and dramatic stories preserved in the Bible about human responsibility and courage in battle (Bergen, 1996; Kirsch, 2000). There are significant references in the text that speak to warfare, biblical military culture, battle gear, and geography, which is significant to military positioning and strategy. The passage is the longest description in

the Old Testament of military combat attire, weaponry, and soldier physicality (1 Sam. 17:5–7). For example, archaeologists suggested that the description of the spear shift and weaver’s beam allowed for the throwing of the weapon with force and accuracy (Yadin, 1963).

The story is of war between cultures; a race of giants from Gath (1 Sam. 17:4) and the chosen people of Israel. The battle is geographically set in a dry riverbed (1 Sam. 17:3) also referenced as the Valley of Terebinth or the Valley of the Tree (Bergen, 1996). During warfare of ancient societies, champions were selected to taunt the enemy with provocations of verbal abuse as a strategic tactic (Kirsch, 2000). Identified as Gath’s champion, Goliath’s stature, outfitted presence, and insulting speech caused even the Israelite leader Saul—a war hero in his own right—to lose courage (1 Sam. 17:11). Goliath’s behavior of mockery, strategic posturing in the valley, provoking, and insults continued for a period of forty days, creating a strain on Israel’s resources and manpower.

The shift in the narrative is unique to David’s future responsibility as a leader. First, David’s genealogical history is stated in the text (1 Sam. 17:12). This would suggest that more focus of responsibility would be placed on David and away from King Saul. Second, Israelite warriors may not have been accustomed to a forty-day stand-off during previous conflicts with the Philistines, so the need for rations on the battlefield was necessary for warrior sustainment. David’s father gave David the responsibility of replenishing resources and rations for his three older brothers who were present at the battle (1 Sam. 17:17–18). Thirdly, David left the responsibility for his flock in the hands of another gatekeeper—a metaphorical image of a good leader who provides a comforter that will guide in His absence (Jn. 16:10–15). This is recognized as a small characteristic, however, over time a developed leadership trait throughout his military and regal calling.

It appears that David, who would eventually become the victor in the text, was mostly offended by the verbal ridicule of his eldest brother Eliab (1 Sam. 17:28) and repeated reproach from the Philistine against the ranks of Israel (1 Sam. 17:10, 23). What he heard from Goliath and what he witnessed in his brothers’ behavior caused David to speak out in courage that even Saul noticed the youth’s courage and granted David approval, to, “Go, and the Lord be with you!” (*ESV*, 2001/2016, 1 Sam. 17:32–37).

Goliath psychologically insulted David's unconventional fighting weaponry and "cursed David by his gods" (ESV, 2001/2016, 1 Sam. 17:43), which was culturally demeaning. David challenged the uncircumcised enemy with verbal courage and employed resources including the name of the Lord and memory of Yahweh's deliverance of Israel in the past (1 Sam. 17:26, 45–47). Longman and Reid (1996) identified that David discerned spiritual purpose and direction in warfare. Old Testament armed conflict was a religious event and only when willed or ordained by God did David engage (2 Sam. 5:23–25).

Spiritual momentum and physical speed, eyewitnesses account on the fortieth day that it was not by sword or by spear that the Lord saved, because every battle is the Lord's (1 Sam. 17:45; Zech. 4:6). David had an unusual warfare style that did not seem culturally practical or tactically sound to the Israeli military. Speed, agility, vigor, and accuracy contributed to David striking the Philistine dead with one rock blow to the head. The argument that God was in the middle of the victory over Goliath is heightened by Josephus' (1900, 10:196) account that David was accompanied by an invisible ally—none other than God.

David displayed military grace demonstrated in moral responsibility and physical courage that would be central to his succession as a military soldier. The story is compelling for the military leader in understanding that power and might on the battlefield is not simply equated to sword, spear, and javelin, but that responsibility and courage has its place within military structure.

### *Victory and Generosity: 1 Samuel 30*

David was still very young when his military career began shortly after the Philistine campaign. With no training, preparation, or leadership development, David was assigned a command over one-thousand military men, equivalent to what would be a legion of troops in today's military. Yet, God was with him. He defeated the Philistines (1 Sam. 19:8), escaped the hands of Saul, who had turned against him, on numerous occasions (1 Sam. 19:18; 1 Sam. 21:10), was extended grace from enemies he once defeated (1 Sam. 21:10–15; 22:1–5), and extended grace to others in need (1 Sam. 22:20–23; 23:1–6), including his enemies (1 Sam. 29). All the while David strategically maneuvered through wilderness experiences and still prospered because of his obedience to what Bergen (1996) defined as the Torah warfare regulation.



The account of 1 Samuel 30 introduces the reader to a strategically mature commander and military leader, David. Yet he and his warrior men are up against another military fight which is extremely tragic and personal. On their arrival home to Ziklag, they found the city burned, their possessions destroyed, and their families carried away in captivity (1 Sam. 30:1–3). Ziklag was under Philistine control when the Amalekites raided and burned it down (1 Sam. 30:1). Finding their homes invaded and families taken left David and his warrior men in deep distress, and many were angry towards David (1 Sam. 30:6). David found strength in his faith with the Lord through prayer and worship (1 Sam. 30:6–8). After great mourning and prayer David and four-hundred men pursued the Amalekites all within a twenty-four-hour period.

God's grace during moments of personal and emotional defeat and loss can be culturally overwhelming during times of war. Moore and Galloway (1992) shared some of the grief-stricken stories of the Battle of Ia Drang where shortly after the engagement between the United States Army and the North Vietnamese Army, soldiers from both sides would find themselves back in battle, with no time to mourn and emotional defeat at its peak for many units. In three areas of the Biblical text, David extended generosity prior to a victorious moment. Where he could have destroyed those who started the verbal mutiny against his military leadership, David instead showed generosity towards every man that he was leading and turned towards his faith as he recovered from grief (1 Sam. 30:4–6). Secondly, David showed generosity towards an Egyptian straggler (1 Sam. 30:11–14) taking an opportunity to feed and care for him despite his association with the Amalekites and his participation in the destruction at Ziklag (1 Sam. 30:13). It takes a great deal of personal intestinal fortitude to not deliver a blow to the individual who had a hand in warfare and homeland destruction. Yet to provide generosity towards an enemy is a remarkable leadership virtue. Military traditionalists would possibly see this as a form of strategic intelligence, recognizing that "strategic power commands men in battle." (Tzu & Pin, 1996, p. 63). This is not in any way a violation of biblical semantics, but instead an awareness that strategy is not owned by man alone. In the history of David, his relationship with God was his strategy in defeating the enemy. His concern for God's voice and direction allowed for clarity in guidance for his military effectiveness.

The third form of extended generosity is very compelling and speaks of David's humanity. Upon victory over the Amalekites, the troops received a large amount of the spoils (1 Sam. 30:20). Hebrew custom for the

warring victors was that the spoils were divided, bartered, and traded among the warriors, yet all winnings were a gift from the Lord who had protected in the process of winning (1 Sam. 30:23). Of the two-hundred men who were stricken and overcome in emotion having to turn back (1 Sam. 30:10), the other four hundred did not want to share the spoils. As all military leaders do when there is internal disagreements, David's intervention, council, and wisdom reminded them of the grace of God in giving them the victory (1 Sam. 30:23). An ethical component for military leaders during war is that when battles are won, the entire unit is victorious, personal protection of everyone is affirmed, and generosity is extended to and for everyone involved. David demonstrated this military grace.

### *Honor and Kindness: 2 Samuel 9*

In contemporary military communities there is a genuine commitment towards honor of fallen warriors and compassionate kindness towards their family members. U.S. President Lincoln set the example of a nation's commitment to fallen warriors and their families as a nation's act of kindness that is still resonant in contemporary society. Lincoln offered a meditation for the nation's recovery from years of civil war that prescribed a responsibility and obligation:

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.  
(Lincoln, 1865)

The narrative of the text focuses on familial support and a commitment towards compassion. The scripture indicates that David wanted to, "show...kindness for Jonathan's sake" (*ESV*, 2001/2016, 2 Sam. 9:1) as a symbol of their deep friendship and despite Jonathan's father wanting to kill him. The Apostle Paul described David as, a man who had "served the purpose of God in his own generation" (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Acts 13:36). This suggests that regardless of his sphere of influence, David extended grace towards others in his leadership role and capacity as military commander and now as King. Throughout the history of David's

anointed life, he showed kindness and honor towards the family members of the house of Saul. He had served Saul since his youth both as a psalmist and military commander. He married Saul's daughter Micah (1 Sam. 18:17–28) and established a covenant with Jonathan, Saul's son (1 Sam. 20:16). This level of honor continued after David became King in seemingly unusual forms such as death to those who presupposed their own judgment towards the innocent family members after the death of Saul (2 Sam. 4). Even after death, David honored God's anointed—Saul the king (1 Sam. 26:9; 2 Sam. 1:27) expressed through the act of kindness towards relatives of the house of Saul (2 Sam. 9:1).

Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, also known as Merib-Baal, was in the genealogy listing of Saul (1 Chr. 8:34). Mephibosheth had been crippled since the age of five (2 Sam. 4:4). He was the only successor of the house of Saul still living at the time of David's request. Vargon (1996) noted, David's contempt for the physically challenged, during the siege of the city of Jebus (2 Sam. 5:6–8). Ackroyd (1977), Segal (1964) and Smith (1898) suggested that the mention of the blind and lame expounded on the disqualification under Levitical law, where those with a physical defect were not eligible to render the Lord's offering (Lev. 21:17). Other scholars suggested David's request to Mephibosheth was a political act for the safeguarding of his kingship and government alignment with the tribe of Benjamin (Garsiel, 1975; Luria, 1970). Deeper analysis of the text reveals that Mephibosheth also had a son, Micha (2 Sam. 4:12). Because of this multilayered generation of Saul decedents, Kirsch (2000) concluded David had a more calculated, strategic reason for keeping the last survivor of the house of Saul within intimate reach. Regardless of numerous historical analyses, David's moral and spiritual accountability overcomes all the aforementioned due to his covenant commitment to God. David's actions communicated acts of unmerited kindness and compassion as a result of his desire to uphold the covenant with Jonathan (Vargon, 1996).

In three areas of the text, David mentioned his desire to extend kindness (2 Sam. 9:1, 3, 7). David's actions were an aspect of honor and kindness in that it speaks to the character of the leader. His act of kindness reflected in giving Mephibosheth back everything that belonged to his ancestors, including land, servants, and crops (2 Sam. 9:7, 9). In addition, Mephibosheth and his son Mica were favored a seat to eat at the table with king David and his family (2 Sam. 9:10). Henry (1991)

suggested that this act of kindness was due to the charitable and forgiving disposition of David.

Military leadership and grace represent a balance of the ethical and intellectual, a fusion of effective and affectionate (Reichberg, 2016). Aquinas catalogued that military command and leadership is a virtue of *prudentialia militaris*, a form of moral prudence. Bonadonna (2017) suggested that the two elements cannot be separated in matters of war and if so, would not be successful for the affective nor considered moral prudence. Reichberg (2016) inferred that prudence with immanent action is a will towards good, needful at both the senior and most junior level of leadership for modern warfare. Acts of kindness are a virtue of morality. Kindness represents a conviction towards a moral obligation. Kindness reflects a type of virtue demonstrated through the rightness of an end (Kelly & Nelson, 2003). Ultimately it should all “reflect the working of God’s will in the world of mortal men” (Kirsch, 2000).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated through historical intertexture analysis attributes of military grace. The analysis suggests that although David was arbitrarily assigned from musician to military commander he grew in grace and relationship with God. David also continued to grow in military knowledge and strength. Those who receive grace also reciprocate the action of grace towards others. David was blessed with unmeasurable grace towards others. What this chapter has demonstrated through the historical intertexture analysis is that grace in military leadership is: (1) the act of selfless service in preparation roles of advancement and supervision; (2) responsibility and courage have its place within military structure; (3) generosity towards an enemy and victory shared amongst team members; and, (4) acts of kindness and recognition through honor are virtues of morality.

The scriptures describe David as a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). Although flawed as he was, such biblical language represents affirmation and redemption. The quality of courage that comes with having faith in God is a characteristic of military leadership (Feldman, 1982). It is through this historical account of David that the reader understands that there is no fear in innocence and single-handed courage that was experienced in the early life of David.

Aquinas best summed up the collection of thought regarding grace and military leadership, suggesting that:

sustaining personal attacks for the sake of the highest good which is God is not alien to the acts that concern war, thus they [military leaders] are said to have been made courageous in war....who by faith conquered kingdoms. (ST II-II, q. 123, a. 5, ad1)

This is a testament that God’s presence develops people in leadership roles that are unfamiliar, yet through the process they, “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (*ESV*, 2001/2016, 2 Pt. 3:18). By looking through the historical intertexture lens, one can learn of grace attributes such as selfless service , responsibility , courage , victory , generosity , honor, and kindness—all of which David displayed throughout the scriptures during his military leadership.

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