

WOMEN & GOD

chase study.



chasing after the heart of **God**

jennie allen

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THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them.

hosea 2:7 NIV

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introduction

I was eighteen years old. I felt paralyzed in my relationship with God. I knew God was real, but my fancy prayers and daily devotionals were not cutting it. I was doing everything right, but it felt all wrong. Yet I thought I was giving God what He wanted.

I began to question—and this good little Bible-belt girl somehow missed the rules for wrestling with her God. As I surveyed my life, I realized doing all the right things had won me the admiration of everyone but God. And I felt empty and prideful. It was worse than rebellion: being good with no God. It was beginning to occur to me maybe God was after something else.

Maybe I was chasing the wrong things.

And then I stumbled across a phrase in 1 Samuel 13.

David was “a man after [God’s] own heart” (v. 14).

The phrase intrigued me because I knew David committed murder and adultery—he was no missionary or priest. I saw this man as both completely sold out for God and completely broken. He was in love with God. He lived with an acute awareness of his need for Him.

The closer I have gotten to the life of this man, David, the more my ideas of what God wants from me have been shattered. David had one life and two eyes and one heart, just like me, but they were all laser-focused on the heart of his God . . . my God. David was in love with Him.

And, yes, David sinned and wrestled, just like me. But while he was not so concerned about appearing godly, he was terribly concerned about knowing God. He was a man who saw past his circumstances, past himself, past this life to the heart of God.

We gather together to discover the heart of God.

I am terrified we get it wrong a lot of the time. We rarely, in our busy lives, stop and see Him, *really* see Him. We are so busy doing things for Him and for everyone else we altogether miss Him. He wants *us*.

As we chase after His heart together for these few short weeks, we will explore the life of David, a man who knew the heart of God. We will look into their passionate conversations. And whether you are running from God or working your tail off to please Him, David's journey will challenge your view of God.

The story of David's life and his prayers fill God's Word. It's as if God was saying, *When you open My Word, look at this man, look at his prayers, look at his life, look at his mistakes, look at his faith, and you'll see Me, My heart.*

Let's chase.

A handwritten signature in a cursive script that reads "Jennie". The letters are connected and fluid, with a prominent loop on the "J" and a long tail on the "ie".

instructions and expectations

What do you hope to get out of this study?

Engage with Your Small Group

An important part of personal growth is community. We are going to deal with the way we view God and how our hearts can change to be more like His. This could be a painful process and it will certainly reveal sin in all of us. Make sure you have a group of women to walk through this process with you.

Commit to Being Consistent and Present

The nature of life makes it nearly impossible to follow through with a thorough examination of our hearts and Scripture—not to mention the devil's desire to interfere with it. Commit to being present at your group meetings, barring an emergency, and arrange your schedule so you do not miss any part in this journey. Have your lesson and projects finished when you come to the group meeting.

Ground Rules for Group Discussion Time

- :: *Be concise.* Share your answers to the questions while protecting others' time for sharing. Be thoughtful. Don't be afraid to share with the group, but try not to dominate the conversation.

- :: *Keep group members' stories confidential.* Many things your group members share are things they are choosing to share with you, not with your husband or other friends. Protect each other by not allowing anything shared in the group to leave the group.

- :: *Rely on Scripture for truth.* We are prone to use conventional, worldly wisdom as truth. While there is value in that, this is not the place. If you feel led to respond, please only respond with God's truth and Word, not "advice."

- :: *No counseling.* Protect the group by not directing all attention on solving one person's problem. This is the place for confessing and discovery and applying truth together as a group. Your group leader will be able to direct you to more help outside the group time if you need it. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Study Design

In the first meeting, your groups' study guides will be passed out and you will work through the Getting Started lesson together. After that, each lesson in the study guide is meant to be completed on your own during the week before coming to the group meeting.

These lessons may feel different from studies you have done in the past. They are very interactive. The beginning of each lesson will involve you, your Bible, and a pen, working through Scripture and listening to God's voice. Each lesson will conclude with four projects you can do to help you further process how to live God's Word. Don't feel as if each lesson has to be finished in one sitting; take a few blocks of time throughout the week if you need to.

The goal of this study is to dig deeply into Scripture and uncover how it applies to your life, *to deeply engage the mind and the heart*. Projects, stories, and Bible study all play a role in it. You may be drawing or journaling or interacting with the homeless. At each group meeting you will discuss your experience in working through that week's lesson.

Terrific Resources for Further Personal Study

<http://www.biblegateway.com/>

<http://www.bestcommentaries.com/>

Who Is David and Why Does He Matter?

A. Who was David in history?

1. David was the second king of Israel.
2. He is said to have lived around 1040–970 BC.
3. His reign lasted a total of forty years.
4. David made Jerusalem the capital of Israel after he defeated the Jebusites who inhabited it.
5. David's reign can be divided into two segments. For the first seven years he reigned over Judah because the nation of Israel had been divided into two parts: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Eventually, the kingdom was reunited and David reigned over it for thirty-three years.

B. Who is David in Scripture?

1. David is a king in the Old Testament. His life is primarily documented in 1 and 2 Samuel, concluding in 1 Kings.
2. At first, David was a shepherd, the youngest son of Jesse. However, God withdrew His favor from the current king, King Saul, and chose David to be the new king. God accomplished this by sending His prophet, Samuel, to choose a new king from among Jesse's sons.

-
3. David became Saul's armor-bearer. He then made a name for himself by defending Israel against the Philistines and defeating Goliath.
 4. David became commander over Saul's armies and married Saul's daughter, Michal. He rose in popularity and Saul became jealous.
 5. Saul plotted David's death, but David was warned by Saul's son, Jonathan, and fled into the desert. It was during this time in the wilderness that David penned many of the Psalms.
 6. Both Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle against the Philistines, and David returned to be crowned as king of Judah.
 7. The second half of David's life was marked by tragedy after he committed adultery with Bathsheba, had her husband killed, and was rebuked by the prophet Nathan. As a consequence of his actions, the first child born to David and Bathsheba died.
 8. Bathsheba's second son to David would be Solomon. Solomon became the next king and was reputed for his wisdom, wealth, and power. Solomon also wrote Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

C. Who is David in God's plan?

1. David revealed God's character and plans for Israel.
 - a. The story of David is part of a larger story that begins in Genesis and recounts the history of Israel. As Israel developed into a nation and established its identity, it continually chose an identity apart from God. Israel chose an earthly king as its ruler (a symbolic rejection of God and His sovereignty), so God used David to display His character and plans.
 - b. "Thus Saul, designated by God at the people's insistence, must be rejected in favor of David, the one whom God chose freely."¹
2. David's life ultimately pointed to Jesus Christ.
 - a. During David's reign, God made a covenant with him, promising that He would establish the house of David eternally: "Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16).
 - b. This covenant was fulfilled through Christ, who is referred to as the "Son of David" (Luke 18:39), "the root of David" (Revelation 5:5), and "the Offspring of David" (Revelation 22:16 NIV).
 - c. David is an ancestor of Jesus Christ through both Mary and Joseph.

Summary: Scripture paints for us a picture of a complex man who was heroic and merciful yet “adept at clothing his power-seeking and self-interest in the rhetoric of piety and morality.”² It is clear from David’s actions, however, that he was not chosen because of his inherent goodness. David was chosen because of God’s goodness. God is able to use anyone redemptively that He so chooses.

David’s Psalms: Where Did They Come From? What Are They?

General Info

- :: The word *psalms* is derived from the Greek word *psalmos*, which is translated from the Hebrew *mizmor*. *Mizmor* “signifies music accompanied by stringed instruments.”³
- :: The word *psalm* later came to mean a “song of praise.” In the Hebrew Bible, the title of the book of Psalms is *seper t’hillim*, which means “Book of Praises,” referring to their content rather than their form.⁴
- :: The Psalms are the largest collection of ancient lyric poetry in existence. Lyric poetry “directly expresses the individual emotions of the poet.”⁵
- :: “They reveal all the religious feelings of the faithful—fears, doubts, and tragedies, as well as triumphs, joys, and hopes.”⁶

- :: The Psalms formed the “hymnal” of the temple, which is why they often celebrate ordinances of the sanctuary.
- :: Types of psalms: lament, thanksgiving, and descriptive praise.

David's Psalms

- :: Seventy-three of the psalms are credited to David.
- :: David was a musician. Scripture tells us David was a singer of songs and the primary organizer of musical guilds for the sanctuary (1 Chronicles 15:3-28; 16:4-43; 23:1-5; 2 Samuel 6:5). He famously soothed King Saul with his music (1 Samuel 16:17-23).
- :: The Psalms were forged amidst David's varying life circumstances. Consistent with the lyric poetry genre, the psalms express the deep emotions of David. They are often raw and angry, but they are also honest and faithful.
- :: Walter Brueggemann says: “The Psalms transmit to us ways of speaking that are appropriate to the extremities of human experience.”⁷

1 Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds., *The Oxford Guide to People & Places of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 53.

2 Ibid., 52.

3 Allen P. Ross, “Psalms,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 2004), 779.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 27.

getting started :: chase



*After chasing everything the world has to offer,
nothing is more satisfying than God.*

What Do We Chase?

Tell me how to please God.

There are days my mind and heart race anxiously at the thought I may be terribly off track in that sincere pursuit. Most days I want to please God. I believe He is real and I believe a day is coming when I will face Him. I want, more than any other thing, for that day to go rather spectacularly. I don't want to be shocked when I am looking into the face of the God of the universe to find I actually missed the point.

One of the great fears of my life is that I would get to the end of my life and realize I lived for the wrong things.

But there are also the days I forget that all the invisible stuff is real, and pleasing God is far from my thoughts and I just chase whatever I want, whatever seems to feel right in the moment. I seek happiness through friends or food or my kids or the approval of people or wasting minutes on Facebook or catching up on shows on Hulu. There are unending distractions to chase.

And then there are the days when I am not chasing meaningless distractions, I am flat-out running from God, arms full of sin.

This study is a story about our God using a man who not only questioned Him but also sinned so atrociously most present-day Christians would avoid him. Yet David at the same time unmistakably possessed the favor of God and chased after His

heart in a way that pleased Him. We are going to discover why God's favor rested on a sinful man.

David was not remarkable apart from God. God moved around him and through him in the most powerful stories. But something about the way David saw God transformed the way he lived. He saw God differently than everyone else around him. He loved God and he lived like he loved God. We are going to study the qualities David possessed as a result of what he believed about his God.

What Pleases the Heart of God?

David began as a shepherd boy and became a king. God chose him, the youngest of his brothers, to be the king of Israel, and ultimately His eternal kingdom was realized through David's lineage in the birth of Jesus Christ.

We observe that David dealt more intimately with God, the Father, than any other person did in Scripture, except for Jesus Christ. David's personal prayers were recorded in the Psalms, and in them we get to see a relationship between a sinful man and a perfect God.

What Is the Heart?

As Samuel is about to choose David as the next king, God reminds Samuel, "For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7, emphasis added). Throughout Scripture God seems to care more about the state of this unseen place in us, our hearts, rather than what everybody else can see in our behavior. While we judge

each other by what we can see, God looks deep inside of us to see what nobody else sees. This is the place in us that holds what we love most . . . what we crave . . . what motivates us. This is the place that actually defines who we are.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, our lives are motivated by our hearts. So what we love determines how we live.

Honest

My son, Conner, came home from fifth grade one day and told me his teacher was teaching him to pray like David. Curious what that meant, I asked, “How did David pray?” Conner said, “David didn’t tell God what God wanted to hear, he told God what he was really feeling.”

Today let’s start there. Let’s honestly bring our hearts to God and to each other. If any of you are like me, most of the time I don’t have any idea how the deepest parts of me are doing. So just take a minute and pray before you move ahead. Ask God to give you insight to narrow down how you are doing right now.

Project

Take a few minutes alone before God and answer these questions. Then come back together and discuss.

When your heart moves fast, what are you excited about?

When you feel disappointed or sad, what is it usually about?

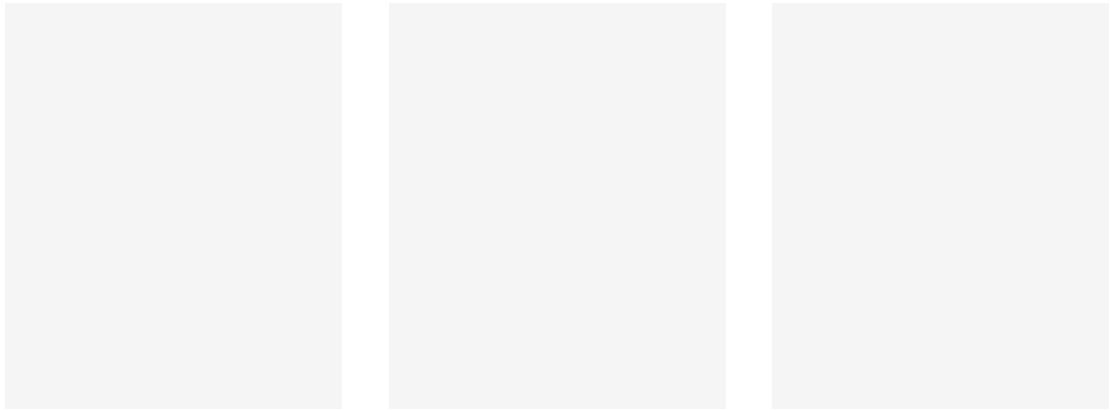
When you feel content and most happy, what is it usually about?

What are the things you think about most?

For God to be pleased with you, what do you think you should be chasing?

Describe God. Answer as if He is one of your friends and you are telling someone about Him.

What is your heart chasing most?

Three empty rectangular boxes arranged horizontally, intended for writing answers to the questions above.

Don't leave this first week with fear or guilt; we just need a starting place, enough honesty and self-awareness to know where we are beginning. If today you are just realizing your heart may be off-track, remember that God has known it well before today. And He is deeply pleased if you recognize it too.

The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

psalm 145:18

I pray these weeks would redefine the way you view God. I pray this time draws you into the most passionate relationship with your Creator. He is so ready to engage our souls.

notes

Lined area for writing notes, consisting of 25 horizontal lines.

identity :: 1



The identity we are all chasing has already been given to us by God.

What Is Identity?

Identity is found in the distinct characteristics that set us apart or give us worth.

We want to matter and to make a mark on the world. It feels selfish, even arrogant, to admit it. But every one of us has this need for a significant identity. This need possibly lies at the root of every human interaction and achievement. We all need to know why our life counts and what sets us apart, since life is short and there are a lot of us on this planet.

In the space below describe yourself. Who are you? What do you do? What is your personality like?

Feet Down

I was innocently sitting in science class my sophomore year of high school, waiting for class to start, when two guys known for bullying turned around and decided it was the day to make me their target. I don't remember what they said, but I still can picture where I was sitting and what I was feeling. I felt like I was spinning and could not put my feet down. I could not land on what was true. As they laughed about who they perceived me to be, all I could think was,

“Who am I?”

I knew they did not know me and what they were saying was careless and untrue, but I did not know me and I did not know what was true. It wasn't long after that experience that I met God. And it wasn't until He began to undo me and define me that I finally could put my feet down and stop spinning. But even now, there are still plenty of days I spin, even with God in me.

No matter our age, we often find ourselves with feelings like those I had in high school. We have an identity crisis because we build our identity on things that move—things that aren't dependable or constant.

The list of what we build our identity on goes on and on:

family / bank accounts / friends / personality
comfort / house / marriage / leadership / job
vacations / children's success / relationships
future / abilities / clothes / acceptance / love
respect / morals / church / behavior / purpose

David lived a life unconcerned with appearances and image, rooted in a secure identity. Yet those of us who have put our faith in Christ live with the same identity; we just forget.

Let's begin this journey to discover where David's confidence and worth was rooted.

study ::

read 1 samuel 16:1-13

study

Even though very little is said about David's life directly in these verses, note some of the things we learn

about his life . . .

about his relationship to his father and brothers . . .

about where and how he likely spends his time . . .

about his heart . . .

about his new identity . . .

“And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward” (1 Samuel 16:13, emphasis added). This single fact would go on to define every moment of the rest of this man's life, every psalm he would write and every obstacle he would overcome. What did it mean for David that the Spirit of God was on him?

Read these verses and consider how those of us who know Christ have a calling similar to David's.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

ephesians 1:11-14

What does He say you are?

What does that mean to you?

study

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 peter 2:9-10

What does He say you are?

What does that mean to you?

Defining Myself

As long as we try to find our significance and worth in ourselves, we will feel disappointed. Self-esteem only works if we have a self worth esteeming. I am so sinful and selfish that I don't want to put my hope in myself.

Understanding these two truths keeps me from building my hope in myself:

1. We are all lost and pretty messed up, and
2. God in His grace rescued us.

As long as I am looking into myself for my identity, I will either be self-righteous about how great I am, which would be inaccurate, or distraught by the reality of the wreck I actually am.

The gospel steals all self-esteem:

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.

romans 7:18

Defined by God

“Nothing good” dwells in us. This statement in Romans is depressing if you don’t hear the rest of the gospel. The whole story, the truth of the gospel, is we get something infinitely more sturdy and fulfilling than self-esteem. For those of us who know Christ, we stand on the unchanging reality that we have been so loved by our God that He purchased us with the blood of His Son. See, we have worth, but it doesn’t come from within us—it comes to us from the One who made us. We share in a destiny and the calling David received that day. We have been rushed by the Spirit of God too. We will rule as sons and daughters of God someday. We have an insane calling, an insane identity.

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!
And that is what we are!*

1 john 3:1 NIV

If our true worth and significance and identity come from something so solid and eternal as God Himself, we don’t have to pretend when we are imperfect. We don’t stand on our accomplishments and personality and performance. We stand securely on the nature of an infinite, loving God. We don’t have

to manage our image or pretend we are okay, when we are really broken and imperfect. The grace God gives us in defining who we are changes everything.

Uniquely Broken

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

2 corinthians 4:7

Christ's Spirit is this treasure inside of our broken lives, in us, moving and working in powerful and unique ways. Imperfect jars of clay each shaped uniquely to hold the Spirit of God for different purposes, each with unique marks and cracks and broken places. And through those spaces God shines out. The shameful places are torn down and become the places that are most useful to God.

The gospel strips us down to nothing but builds our hope in a secure, reckless, passionate God who loves us and saved us in spite of our messed-up selves. And then He uses those wrecked places to show His glory.

He is that good and, yes, we are that bad. All of us . . . especially those of us who think we aren't.

study

Our value comes from God; it can never be found in how we measure up. So whether you feel worthy or ashamed, this news should probably undo you. It is the character of God that gives us worth, not anything we have done or will do.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

ephesians 2:8–9

There is freedom in accepting our unworthiness and receiving God's worth. But self-esteem dies hard, especially for those of us who stand on a great performance.

The work of Christ steals all shame but it also steals all of our pride.

Respond

The years David spent in the hills tending sheep birthed a familiar psalm that has comforted every generation since. As you read the psalm, respond to the Lord through the two questions on the next page.

psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow
of death,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

study

&

Who are you, Lord?

What do you want for me?

God desires for you to know His heart. He wants to lead you beside still waters and to restore your soul. He wants you to embrace your identity as His child. These are my hopes and prayers for you this week as you take time to reflect on His Word through these projects.

be.

Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

psalm 46:10

It is hard to make the time and the space and to make our worlds quiet. We have to fight for it. It was in the quiet of the hills that an intimate relationship between David and God was born. It was when David was alone.

Get alone with God, with no agenda. Go outside and sit; turn off your phone. Pray and be with God. Confess your dependence. Thank Him. And listen.

I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come?

My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

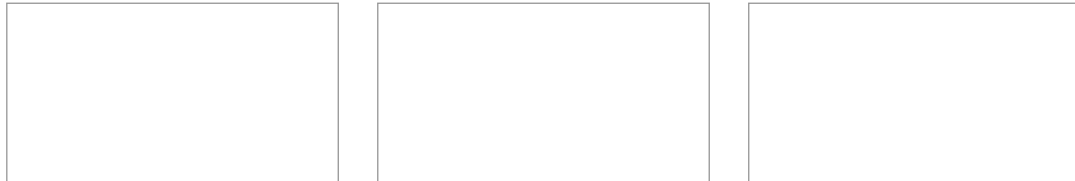

psalm 121:1-2

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

ephesians 2:19-20

consider.

These blocks represent the things you have used to construct your identity. What have you built your identity around? On each block write something you have used to define yourself. (For example: kids, job, appearance, abilities, friends.)



We all know these things are inadequate. But we are still building our lives and our worth on them.

How do you feel if the things you listed are threatened?

Who are you if you lose all of this?

risk.

How much are you trying to control your image or what others think of you? Answer these questions:

Do you freely confess your current struggles to close friends?

When someone accuses you of something, do you immediately get defensive?

Are you quick to condemn when you hear about someone else screwing up? And do you feel like you are above making massive mistakes?

Do you get frantic when you feel misunderstood?

Do people think you have it all together?

There is freedom in understanding we are all equally and completely messed up, selfish, and prideful. We belittle the God of the universe whether we have an affair or we just worry He won't provide. None of us is above messing up, even in what some might consider small ways. We all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. There is no way anyone can live as though they are better than someone else. God is our only hope, our Defender, our Definition, our Righteousness. Apart from Him there is no good thing.

Conclusion

The right answer is to rest our identity in the God who created us and defines us. He gives us our identity. The right answer sounds amazing and even potentially fulfilling. But most days it feels impossible to believe in an invisible kingdom, in an invisible God who actually loves us. So we attach ourselves and our worth to things we can see. We try to control our image, since what is inside feels impossible to fix.

This is the war that often consumes our lives; here lies the root of insecurity. But also on a good day when we feel our image is intact, there lies the root of pride. And neither insecurity nor pride serves as a fulfilling basis for our identity.

These questions matter, since they lie at the core of our hearts and navigate our lives.

Who am I?

How am I finding my identity in things outside of God? Is it working?

How do I align my identity around God's character?

Do you want to know why David lived so confidently, so boldly? He actually believed this stuff. David believed God is who He says He is and what God said about him was true. David's God was real. David was God's and David knew it.