

The Exchange - 16 August 2014



1. Think about the ways we use “substitutes” in every day life - substitute teachers, “subs” in a sporting game - refers to somebody taking the place of somebody else - a replacement or a stand-in (not the original person). Have you ever been a substitute? Was it your choice, or were you appointed by someone else? How does it feel to stand-in for somebody else? How do you feel if someone faces a difficult situation in your place?
2. David himself took on a heroic role of substitute when he went out to face Goliath - he was representing the entire Israelite nation as their champion. Yet he was very quick to point out that he did not stand alone, God would rescue him (and Israel). David is also considered to be one of Israel’s greatest kings and described by God as ‘a man after my own heart’ (Acts 13) - from David’s lineage (and Solomon’s), many generations later, Jesus is born. How do you reconcile these portrayals of David with his less heroic actions, such as adultery and murder?
3. Sin has consequences - and often these consequences affect more people than just ourselves. Can you think of a time when someone was negatively affected by an action or choice that you made? How did that make you feel - was it worse than if you were suffering yourself? How does it feel to see someone innocent suffer?
4. David’s sin was explained to him by Nathan (the role of the prophet itself another ‘substitute’), in a story where the characters were “substitutes” themselves, enacting out a parallel of David’s sin. After hearing the story, David “burned with anger”, and was quick to place judgement and demand retribution (calling for the man’s death and saying that he must pay “four times over”) - why do you think David was able to immediately recognise the actions in the story as wrong and yet seemingly did not apply this same logic to his own guilt? Is this a trap we fall into also?
5. How we react to the consequences of our actions can reveal a lot about our character. Although David pleads with God, he doesn’t blame God. To what degree is judgement and/or justice shown in this story? How do you reconcile this with your understanding of God and forgiveness?
6. Although, like David we have free will which leads us to sin, yet like David’s child, we are also born into a world already riddled with sin as a result of decisions and actions made before our birth. Sin automatically condemns us to death. Jesus became a willing substitute for the forgiveness of the world - how much more power does it have if a substitute is willing?
7. Critics of Christianity, such as Richard Dawkins, have asked why God requires Jesus to suffer the agonies of crucifixion before He can forgive our sins, labelling it a form of ‘cosmic child abuse’. Why can’t God just forgive without the need of a substitute?
8. Could God have healed David’s child? Is God more concerned with His reputation than our happiness?