

King David and Kendrick Lamar (2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33)

## **Hip-hop's origins go back farther than the 1970s.**

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*I remember you was conflicted  
Misusing your influence  
Sometimes I did the same  
Abusing my power, full of resentment  
Resentment that turned into a deep depression  
Found myself screaming in the hotel room  
I didn't wanna self destruct  
The evils of Lucy was all around me  
So I went running for answers  
Until I came home*

Kendrick Lamar is a singular talent, some say one of the most profoundly original hip-hop artists ever. These bars, from his wonderfully complex album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015), make two things crystal clear: Kendrick Lamar (or “K-Dot”) was heavily influenced by King David of Israel, and hip-hop’s origins go back farther than the 1970s in the Bronx, as far away and ago as ancient Israel.

2 Samuel 18 offers a similar lament. David has heard about his son Absalom’s death—a death he orchestrated—and now is plunged into despair. The writer even takes the time to spell out the “lyrics” of David’s cry: “O my son Absalom!” This is remarkable on its own, and more so when we consider that even Jesus’ lament after

losing his friend is deemed skippable by the author of John's Gospel (two words: "Jesus wept").

This is no mere filler in the life of David. It is worth our time to pay attention to his grief.

David's story is such that you wonder whether Kendrick was talking directly to him instead of to 2Pac. They are all alike in that a meteoric rise to power and fame was followed—in each case, almost immediately—by stunning insecurities and lapses in judgement. But David's cry should not be chalked up to the sensitivities of artists. No, look deeper and you will see

- a man who viewed his identity as *king* as more important than his identity as *father*
- two people (Absalom and David) who allow their ambition and desire for revenge to overtake their faithful judgment
- how thousands of lives are swept up in the bickering of a powerful few
- how grief is about loss *and* what we lost long beforehand to bring this loss to bear
- the danger of "hanging between heaven and earth"—that is, what happens when we want all that the world has for us *and* all that God wants for us?

These are considerations and questions evoked by the tragic poetry of this text. In this time of deep grieving over what has been lost across the past year and a half, using this text to lift up the many layers of grief may be a path to a more faithful life.

If nothing else, spending time with David will make you appreciate hip-hop more for its inherent, beautiful, and biblical complexities.