

HEROES OF THE FAITH
DAVID: THE PROBLEM OF FAMILY
II Samuel 18:28-33

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For nearly a hundred years now Americans have paused on the third Sunday in June to honor their fathers. There are about 66 million of us fathers in the United States. Either out of love or obligation, people will spend one billion dollars buying us 100 million neckties. It's Father's Day.

There is a father whose name appears in the Bible more than any other name. That man is David. Jerusalem is called the City of David. Jesus is called the Son of David. He was a man of great accomplishment although burdened with a lot of problems. He was a leader. He was a lover. He was a man after God's own heart. Today, I want us to catch a glimpse of the life of this great king of the Old Testament about which more is written than any other character in the Bible. All of I Samuel, all of II Samuel, most of Chronicles and throughout the New Testament you hear his name called, King David.

DAVID: A MAN OF GREAT POTENTIAL

When it came time for Samuel to anoint a new king from the sons of Jesse, David, the youngest of the boys, didn't even get invited. He was out in the fields tending sheep. He spent his time writing songs and slinging rocks, hardly the boot camp expected for a warrior king.

After Samuel had interviewed Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah and four others, he says to Jesse, "Don't you have any more sons?" Jesse replies, "Well, there is one—he's the youngest of the clan. He's back home, taking care of the sheep." Samuel said, "Go get him." When he arrives on the scene, just a kid out of the fields, the Lord speaks. You can read this in I Samuel. "Rise and anoint him; he is the one."

Potential is not always perceivable from résumés. Potential is not always evident to the observer. A résumé will tell you about degrees earned, positions held, and experiences accumulated. But potential is a matter of the heart. The Lord looks at the heart.

In unlikely places, David had been preparing to lead a nation. In the desert he learned how to fight a bear and kill a giant. As a shepherd he learned how to play the harp. With time on his hands out in the fields, he put thoughts into words; words like "*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters.*" Those were David's words and those words have brought peace and comfort and help for people century after century. Never underestimate what God can do for the shepherd boy who has time to reach his potential.

Max DePree once said "Life is not a matter of reaching our goals. It is a calling to reach our potential. Nothing else is good enough."

We struggle with the tendency toward mediocrity. We park our lives in moth balls, smother our impulses with activities and drown our passions with conformity until we gradually retire from life neatly wrapped in plastic and cellophane. That's not the way it was meant to be. If David could go from leading sheep to leading a nation, by the grace of God you can become all you were made to be.

DAVID: A MAN OF GREAT POWER

Richard Foster says, "Nothing touches us more profoundly for good or ill than power." Power can destroy or create. Such negative and positive forces of power are dramatically played out in the lives of King Saul and King David.

Power makes Saul narcissistic, controlling, paranoid, vicious, depressed, and suicidal. Power makes David patient, humble, free, joyful, and visionary.

Anthony Mayo at Harvard Business School back at the turn of the 21st century did a study on "What Makes a Good Leader?" There were the expected characteristics like vision and integrity, perseverance and courage, hunger for innovation and a willingness to take risks.

But Mayo discovered something else. He discovered great leaders like Henry Ford, Estée Lauder, and Bill Gates of the last century "had an innate ability to read the forces that shaped the times in which they lived and to seize the resulting opportunities." He coined a word for it. He called it "contextual intelligence."

King David had contextual intelligence. He knew how to wait for his time. He was a teenager when Samuel anointed him. At the depths of Saul's depression, David was called to the King's house to play the harp to try to soothe his sadness. He knew how to wait for his time to come.

He knew how to love his enemies. When the crowd began to sing "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands," Saul went insane with jealousy. He couldn't stand it. Nobody should have that kind of recognition. That day Saul set out to kill young David. The story unravels again and again in that contest when David runs to get away. The tables turned more than once as the story unfolds so that David could have taken the life of Saul but he refuses to take advantage of his king. *'This is my king and I will honor my king.'* He knew how to love his enemies.

David was 30-years-old when he became a king. After seven years he united the north and the south. He made Jerusalem the center of political and cultural activity for 40 years. He had a vision for the spiritual life of the country. He had a vision to build a temple saying, *"The house to be built for the Lord should be a great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all nations"* (1 Chronicles 22:5).

DAVID: A MAN WITH MANY PROBLEMS

This man, after God's own heart, had his problems. His family was a source of

constant sorrow.

David had multiple wives and numerous concubines. The Bible says he had 19 sons and one daughter called by name in the Scriptures along with others that go unnamed. I have one wife and two sons and that's enough problems. I can't imagine what it's like to have numerous wives and dozens of children to deal with. No wonder David had problems.

Everybody knows the sordid story of that moonlit night when David spots Bathsheba bathing naked in the courtyard pool. She was beautiful. David sent for her. A one-night-thing produces an unwanted pregnancy. To make matters worse Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, is off to war. So in a cover up that makes Bill Clinton look saintly by comparison, David has Uriah killed in battle. Many of David's problems were his own darn fault.

Robert Burney says dysfunctional families are the product of an emotionally dishonest, shame-based patriarchal society based on beliefs that do not support loving yourself and others. Whatever the diagnosis, David had problems with his kids. His son, Amnon, rapes his half-sister, Tamar. Absalom leads a civil war against his father. That's the little excerpt we read today. Absalom, in his rebellion, leads a fight against the kingdom. And just outside of Jerusalem the final battle takes place and Absalom is killed.

News comes: We've won the battle! That's not what's on David's mind. How is Absalom? The first messenger can't bear to tell him. The second messenger comes. Good news! Good news! We've won the war! David says, "How's Absalom? How is my boy? Rebellious as he is, how is my son?" They break the news to him, that Absalom was killed. This lament in Samuel 18 can only be understood by a parent who has lost a son or a daughter. In the Scripture read for today, David laments the death of his son. "*O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you. O Absalom, my son, my son!*" He was a man of sorrow.

DAVID: A MAN OF DEEP PRAYER

David knew how to say, "I was wrong; I am sorry." It's been said that those are the six hardest words in the English language. They stick in an average man's throat; they cause a woman to blush. "I was wrong. I am sorry." Do you know those words? Do they ever come to your lips?

You know the story; you know the setting. God's not going to let David off the hook; he is a man after God's own heart. So, Nathan the prophet confronts David the king with one of the most remarkable parables that you can find in the Bible. Nathan says, 'Let me tell you a story about a rich man who had all kinds of livestock and cattle and sheep, everything you could imagine. He had an abundance of them. There was a poor man who had a tiny little pet lamb. The lamb lived in the house; they held it at night.' I can see the pet lambs I used to raise as a kid when I read that story.

Then Nathan lowers the bomb. 'The rich man had some company come to town.

Instead of picking a sheep out of his huge flock he goes over and takes that little pet lamb from the poor man and cooks it for supper.’ David says, “Nobody should be able to do that. Whoever that is, I’ll bring him to justice.” Nathan lowered his eyes and said, “Oh David, you are the man.”

Now David could have had Nathan killed. David could have denied it. He had the power to get out of this. But that’s not what he did. If you read carefully in II Samuel 12:13 you will discover what David said. *I have sinned against the Lord. I was wrong; I am sorry.*’ Do you know how to say those words to your family, friends, co-workers? I was wrong; I am sorry.

David knew how to pray. He knew how to say, “Lord, have mercy on me.” Psalm 51 is considered to be David’s prayer of confession. Listen to its words. *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love;. . .blot out my transgressions.. . .Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.... Restore to me the joy of your salvation.*

God will hear a prayer like that. I don’t care what you’ve done, how far you’ve missed the mark, how great is the failure, how embarrassing is the sin, God will honor a prayer like that.

“Walk a little slower, Daddy,” said a little child so small.
“I’m following in your footsteps and I don’t want to fall.

Sometimes your steps are very fast; sometimes they’re hard to see;
So walk a little slower, Daddy, for you are leading me.

Someday when I’m all grown up, you’re what I want to be.
Then I’ll have a little child who’ll want to follow me.

And I would want to lead just right, and know that I was true,
So, walk a little slower, Daddy, for I must follow you!”

Through our joys, through our sorrows, through our triumphs, through our defeats there are those who watch our steps. May we walk wisely and follow closely to our Lord. Amen.