

Lessons on the Life of David

Taken from the 1st & 2nd Samuel and various Psalms

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Dedication

To the memory of John B. and Lillian V. Hendershot – who taught us to “pass
it on.”

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Look on the Heart - (1 Samuel 16)

We begin a series of studies in the life of David, King of Israel. In this study of his early life, we shall see that God does not look upon someone as we do, but can see the very heart.

Background

My father was born on the wrong side of the tracks - literally. He was born in the little town of Lima, Ohio. In such a town everyone knew who your father was, knew who you were - and your place in society. My grandfather had been a major league baseball player ("bum" in those days). Dad came from the wrong side of town, and that was that. His father taught the men's Bible class at the local Church of Christ (average attendance about 300) but it mattered not at all: you were what you were born.

Dad moved to California after retiring from the Army. I once asked him why; he gave me two answers:

- ✚ You could buy a drink on Sunday
- ✚ People didn't care where you were born.

That's how people look at it. Sometimes that hurts. In the story of King David we find someone who had the same kind of beginnings, and by God's grace and power he rose to greatness.

Ancestry

It takes a little digging through those lists of genealogies to find all this, but you have to think that David's family - and he was the youngest (read "least") son in this family - was not all that respectable:

- ✚ The story of his grandmother is told in the Book of Ruth - for Ruth was his grandmother. Recall that she was broke, a foreigner (not good in Israel) and reduced to gleaning grain when she met Boaz. It's a great story of love and redemption, but it's keyed by the fact that Ruth was an out of town nobody.
- ✚ You might wonder why Boaz could have paid any attention to her. His dad, Salmon, married Rahab the prostitute from Jericho.

We may have some generations missing in the genealogies here; but this is what was *recorded*. It's important to see that humility would best describe David's ancestry. He raised his family to the point that one of Jesus' favorite titles was "Son of David."

Prophecy

This was not an accident. God planned it this way. Even as early as the Exodus, we see that God told Israel that such a king would arise. Indeed, it is often hard to distinguish where the prophecies of David end and those of Christ begin.

- ✚ On his deathbed Israel foretold the kingship to one in Judah. He prophesied that his nation would have one dynasty from the coming of this king until the coming of the Messiah - and it did.¹
- ✚ The hireling prophet Balaam prophesied the same, and that king's conquests over the local people.²

¹ Genesis 49:10

It is interesting that when the people selected a king, they selected Saul - of the tribe of Benjamin. God rejected that. Saul looked good; a head taller than anyone else around. David was a runt. But from David came both Joseph and Mary, and her son Jesus was Son of David indeed.

Early life

From David's own words we have a description of his early life - that of a shepherd in the wilderness, defending his flock from wild predators. There are three virtues we should see:

- ✚ Courage - this is a man who has engaged both a lion and a bear in hand to hand combat.³ Physical courage is perhaps the least of courage, but David displayed it from his youth.
- ✚ We see also diligence - he cared for that flock. He could have said, "It's only a sheep." But he didn't.
- ✚ Also, we see endurance. The life of a shepherd is a hard life. David's descriptions of being a shepherd in the deserts of Palestine do not include air conditioning. By this God trained him for hardships to come.

The Anointing

(1 Sam 16:1-13 NIV) The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king." {2} But Samuel said, "How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me." The LORD said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' {3} Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate." {4} Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in peace?" {5} Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. {6} When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the LORD." {7} But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." {8} Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." {9} Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the LORD chosen this one." {10} Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The LORD has not chosen these." {11} So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered, "but he is tending the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives." {12} So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one." {13} So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power. Samuel then went to Ramah.

Man's view

It's interesting to make the comparison between how mankind sees things and how God knows them. Saul was chosen by Israel; David by God. We see some reasons for the difference here.

² Numbers 24:17-19

³ 1 Samuel 17:34-37

- ✚ *The elders.* The elders trembled as Samuel approached. We can hardly blame them. First, Samuel was a judge of Israel, and Bethlehem is a small town. What's the big man doing here? Next, all Israel knew that Samuel had told Saul that he was not going to remain king. Would you want to get into the middle of a battle like that?
- ✚ *Samuel.* It does seem typical of the prophets that they like to explain to God all the good reasons they have for *not* doing what God commands them to do - after all, it's risky. What would Saul do to me? Even when Samuel arrives, he still looks on the outside, not recognizing the man as God did. His saving virtue is this: obedience. No matter how reluctantly, no matter with what little vision, he did what God commanded.
- ✚ *Jesse.* You would think that David's own father would have the sense to have the boy in the group. He thought so little of David that he was sure this one could be left with the sheep.

God's Way

There are two things we can see here about the way God deals with such things:

- ✚ First, he does not look at appearances as we do. Every young man looking at a young woman should learn this lesson. It wouldn't hurt some of us old geezers either.
- ✚ When God moves, he gives the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament this was a sign of special favor, and often prophetic of Christ to come.⁴ How much more, then, should we take this to heart in our day, when the Spirit comes into every believer's life?

Comparison

Man still looks upon the appearance today - whether it be the physical appearance of people or the political appearance of the situation. God tells us that this is the wrong view.

- ✚ Obedience brings God's results - no matter what the opposition or the situation looks like.
- ✚ God examines the heart - so the hypocrite needs still beware.
- ✚ Remember - it is "not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit" - says the Lord.⁵

Beginning: David and the Harp

(1 Sam 16:14-23 NIV) Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him. {15} Saul's attendants said to him, "See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. {16} Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the harp. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes upon you, and you will feel better." {17} So Saul said to his attendants, "Find someone who plays well and bring him to me." {18} One of the servants answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the harp. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him." {19} Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me your son David, who is with the sheep." {20} So Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them with his son David to Saul. {21} David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul liked him very much, and David became one of his armor-bearers. {22} Then Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, "Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him." {23} Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

⁴ Isaiah 11:1-3

⁵ Zechariah 4:6

Character as seen

Even before David comes to the camp, his reputation is known. One of Saul's servants evidently knew the boy, and he points out three virtues to recommend him (while recommending his musical skills):

- ✚ He is brave. Courage is still the foundation of virtue, and in a military camp it is even more important.
- ✚ He speaks well. We are told to have a ready defense of the Gospel, and yet so many of us are tongue tied about it. David was ready.
- ✚ Why? Because - as all could see - the Lord was with him. You know people who don't have to tell you that they are Christians - they broadcast it in every action.

Character in action

In David's own action we can see essential elements of his character:

- ✚ He is polite - and manners are the lubricants not only of civilization but also of human communication. He brings the customary gifts to one who is his acknowledged superior.
- ✚ He does not presume upon God, but rather he waits upon him. David has already been anointed king. He could have flaunted that fact in front of Saul, and relied upon God to save him from the king's wrath. Instead, he waits for God to act. What does he do while waiting? The thing at hand! He is called to play; play he will. We might ask how someone could maintain such patience for the Lord. The answer remains as it always has been: God's grace is sufficient.

Character as revealed

In one of the most unusual moments in Scripture, we find that Saul likes David. Here's the man who will eventually take his place as king, and Saul can't help himself - he likes the kid. Indeed, he likes him so much as to make him one of his armor bearers - in other words, a man who is always around you. Saul himself pays tribute to David's character in this way.

When David plays that harp, however, we see character revealed indeed. The Holy Spirit is with David, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit the evil spirits must give way. It is a sign of God's favor that this happens. I cannot but wonder, however, if David did not experience some frustration at the fact that this evil spirit kept returning. Teachers often get that feeling.

Summary

Let's sum up what we can see in young David:

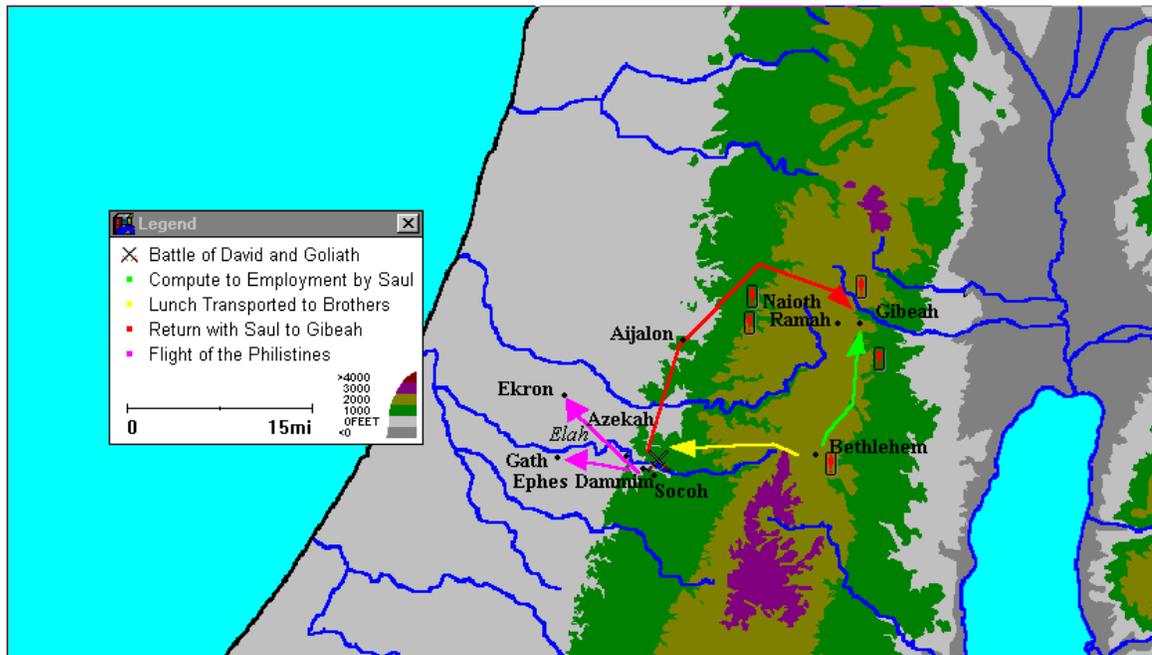
- ✚ He who is faithful in a little will be faithful in much. David shows courage, diligence and endurance in the shepherd's wilderness, and he will show the same as king.
- ✚ We need to see things God's way - not looking at appearances or taking account of today's political pressures, but seeing things as God would have us see them. We need to be obedient.
- ✚ David lived in the Holy Spirit. He was ready to speak, giving honor to those to whom it was due, waiting upon the Lord. He did the little things at hand as God would have him do - and so become ready for great things to come.

Spiritual Warfare - Five Smooth Stones - (1 Samuel 17)

No other episode in the life of David gets the attention of his battle with Goliath. A little background might make the story a bit clearer for those of us living three thousand years later.

Geography

It helps to know who lives where:



As you can see, the Philistines live in the plains by the Mediterranean Sea. The Israelites live in the hills. That has important consequences.

- ✚ The Philistines therefore control the trade by sea - which is quite important in that tin, a vital ingredient in bronze, is a trade good.
- ✚ Evidently it also assisted the Philistines with their technology - for they know how to work iron, and the Israelites do not.

The site of the battle is interesting too - it's one of those long valleys leading up into the hills. The Israelites are on one side, the Philistines the other. So let's read the story; it's a familiar one.

(1 Sam 17 NIV) Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Soch in Judah. They pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Soch and Azekah. {2} Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. {3} The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them. {4} A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. {5} He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels ; {6} on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. {7} His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him. {8} Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me.

{9} If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us." {10} Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." {11} On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified. {12} Now David was the son of an Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah. Jesse had eight sons, and in Saul's time he was old and well advanced in years. {13} Jesse's three oldest sons had followed Saul to the war: The firstborn was Eliab; the second, Abinadab; and the third, Shammah. {14} David was the youngest. The three oldest followed Saul, {15} but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's sheep at Bethlehem. {16} For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand. {17} Now Jesse said to his son David, "Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. {18} Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them. {19} They are with Saul and all the men of Israel in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines." {20} Early in the morning David left the flock with a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry. {21} Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other. {22} David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and greeted his brothers. {23} As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. {24} When the Israelites saw the man, they all ran from him in great fear. {25} Now the Israelites had been saying, "Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father's family from taxes in Israel." {26} David asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" {27} They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him, "This is what will be done for the man who kills him." {28} When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle." {29} "Now what have I done?" said David. "Can't I even speak?" {30} He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before. {31} What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him. {32} David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." {33} Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth." {34} But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, {35} I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. {36} Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. {37} The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you." {38} Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. {39} David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. "I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off. {40} Then he took his staff in his

hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine. {41} Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. {42} He looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him. {43} He said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. {44} "Come here," he said, "and I'll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!" {45} David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. {46} This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. {47} All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands." {48} As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. {49} Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground. {50} So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him. {51} David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the scabbard. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword. When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran. {52} Then the men of Israel and Judah surged forward with a shout and pursued the Philistines to the entrance of Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Their dead were strewn along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron. {53} When the Israelites returned from chasing the Philistines, they plundered their camp. {54} David took the Philistine's head and brought it to Jerusalem, and he put the Philistine's weapons in his own tent. {55} As Saul watched David going out to meet the Philistine, he said to Abner, commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is that young man?" Abner replied, "As surely as you live, O king, I don't know." {56} The king said, "Find out whose son this young man is." {57} As soon as David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with David still holding the Philistine's head. {58} "Whose son are you, young man?" Saul asked him. David said, "I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem."

You know what the problem is with this passage? There are just too many good ideas in here. I've selected one: this is a model for spiritual warfare. Let's take a look at our own spiritual struggles using this story as a model.

Trouble, Trouble

Whenever you talk about spiritual warfare, it brings up visions to some of chanting, anointing things with holy oil and such. That's not what we're going to be studying here. We are interested in the principles behind the warfare.

The size of our problems

One thing is certain. Our problems always look BIG to us. Certainly Goliath did so to the Israelites. But what else should we expect from warfare with Satan?

✚ We should expect it on a daily basis - Satan is certainly persistent. And it will go on as long as we will let it.

- ✦ Taunting. This is one of Satan's chief tactics - telling us each day how weak we are, that we dare not face him.
- ✦ Demoralization - the feeling that no matter what we do, it just won't be good enough. This is a struggle of the will.

The enemy is prepared

Goliath was a warrior from his youth. We should expect our enemy Satan to be prepared, and we should be also. But note his preparations:

- ✦ He is prepared with the weapons of this world. Goliath has the best the technology of the day can provide. He was expecting to meet the same weapons in combat. David defeated him by using God's weapons. We should do likewise.
- ✦ Goliath has help. He has a "shield bearer" - a guy to carry the heavy stuff out onto the battlefield. So often we see that Satan's forces are numerous and we look to be alone. That's usually the time we need to ask God to open our eyes so that we can see. Remember Elisha?

Our fears

We will certainly have no lack of fears - or sources to obtain them.

- ✦ Our friends and family will be sure to tell us how weak we truly are. David's brothers here are sure he's just come down to watch. Do our friends and families magnify our fears? Should we listen?
- ✦ The enemy too will add to those fears - usually by telling us just how insignificant we are.
- ✦ But consider God's paradox: he chooses the weak of this world so that the world might see his strength. When friends, family and enemies tell you that "You can't," remind them all that "God can."

Settling for a tie

Most of us react to such situations by hoping that nothing gets worse. Indeed, it is interesting that *both* armies stand still for forty days. No doubt the Philistines were confident of their technology - but, after all, why not let Goliath do it? The Israelites may have felt comfortable holding high ground - but not advancing into the plain below.

We're like that at times. Spiritual warfare is for experts, we say. What do I know about it anyway? And besides, I think I'm in such a tight corner that even Satan can't dig me out. Perhaps he can't; perhaps that's where he wants you. Bottled up and ineffective, he can ignore you.

David's Preparation

It's interesting to see how David has prepared - and been prepared - for this moment. It is his moment of opening fame, the stepping stone to rule. We have already commented upon his choice of weapons. How else did he prepare?

Submission and obedience

Despite having been anointed by Samuel as king, there is no trace of arrogance to the man. In fact,

- ✦ He is obedient to his father, taking food to his brothers. It is in the course of this obedience that his opportunity comes - and this is no accident. Victory in Christ comes to those who are obedient.

- ✦ He is even obedient to Saul - despite knowing that God has chosen him to succeed Saul. That submission, as we will see later, is based upon the fact that Saul is the Lord's anointed. David does not presume upon God.

Faith

It sounds almost trite to state the obvious: faith is essential to spiritual warfare. But faith here is held up by two other things:

- ✦ David's experience - his past victories over the bear and lion - are recalled. Likewise, we can recall that we too have been victorious. Most of us learn from our mistakes. In spiritual warfare, you must also learn from your successes.
- ✦ There is also the power of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came upon whom he pleased. Now, all Christians have the Spirit - and we forget sometimes that greater is He who is in me than he who is in the world.

Principles of Preparation

David shows us here some principles of preparation in spiritual warfare:

- ✦ Don't presume upon God. You must do your part as well. David came with five stones; God granted victory with the first. Had David come with one, he would have been trying to put God in a corner. I suspect he would have missed. "Excuse me, Mr. Goliath, I'll be right back?" Let God know that you're ready to do whatever he commands you to do.
- ✦ Remember that the courage of one person can inspire many. Most people are hanging back looking at Goliath and wondering when David will show up. Courage is required. Resist the devil; he will flee.
- ✦ The battle is the Lord's. He grants victory. Just make sure it's his battle you're fighting. Spiritual warfare results in failure when you're in it for your own greed.

Our Spiritual Warfare

Why?

Most of us, when we hear the phrase "spiritual warfare," think this is something that someone else does. So why should I do it?

- ✦ Zeal. As you grow in Christ, there will come a time when his name becomes so important to you that you must engage in combat. If you don't care that much about God, what kind of warrior would you make? Beware of being lukewarm.
- ✦ Reward. God promises reward - just as Saul promised great reward for anyone who would stand up to Goliath.
- ✦ Obedience. Sometimes God puts you in a situation in which there is no other choice but to conduct spiritual warfare, or disobey his commands. Remember that David was obedient - and was rewarded for it.
- ✦ Calling. For a select few, spiritual warfare is a calling. Sometimes these are those who are physically infirm; sometimes it's just the call of God. But however he arranges it, do not reject his call.

Five Smooth Stones

In searching through Nave's Topical Bible under the heading of Spiritual Warfare, I found these five references in the Psalms of David. I call these the "five smooth stones" of spiritual warfare. From the heart of the poet who was a man after God's own heart, we have these:

- ✚ *Seek his face.*⁶ So often when confronted with spiritual warfare we remember our sins and try to hide from God. We retreat into the mountains to defend ourselves, instead of going boldly. First go to God in prayer, laying your combat before him, confessing your sins.
- ✚ *Wait for the Lord.*⁷ Often, in our impatience, we do not allow the Lord the time to say, "Stand still, and know that I am God." Pray fervently, pray consistently - and wait.
- ✚ *When afraid, trust in God.*⁸ What do we usually do? We count our own strength - and watch it diminish in fear. Remember that God has chosen the weak things of this world to show his strength. We are those weak things. When the warfare is overwhelming, abandon trust in yourself. Trust only in Him.
- ✚ *Call God to your aid.*⁹ How often we forget this! We will pour out our troubles to God and end the prayer with, "I don't know how I'm going to handle this." We tell him our problems but don't ask for his help! Confess your weakness, and call on God to help you.
- ✚ *Praise Him in victory.*¹⁰ How soon after the victory do we forget to whom it was due. When you triumph in spiritual warfare, do not fail to praise the God who has given you the victory. After all, you might need to ask him for help again someday.

New Testament thoughts

I cannot forbear to add one thought on spiritual warfare from the New Testament. It is Paul's thorn in the flesh.¹¹ Often God will give you some disability to keep you humble before Him - so that his power may be shown in your weakness. Remember His grace is sufficient for you, too.

Remember too the words of Christ in Revelation: to him who overcomes, I will give - the right to eat from the tree of life, not to be harmed by the second death, hidden manna, the white stone with a new name on it, authority over the nations, acknowledgement before the Father, the right to be a pillar in the Temple of God and to sit on his throne with Him.

There's a war going on out there. The victory is sure. Don't hang back in the hills, but pick up a few stones - and follow Him.

⁶ Psalm 27:8

⁷ Psalm 27:14

⁸ Psalm 56:2-4

⁹ Psalm 35:1

¹⁰ Psalm 35:18

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 12:7-9

Envy - (1 Samuel 18)

Envy has lately developed a good name - when applied in politics. It seems that if one class of people has something, and another class does not, then the obvious solution is to take it away from the first. Often, this is seen as justice. It is usually envy. So it is that envy has taken on the sheen of virtue. But it is still a sin, and we shall examine it in the person of Saul, and the man he envies - David.

(1 Sam 18 NIV) After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. {2} From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house. {3} And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. {4} Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt. {5} Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people, and Saul's officers as well. {6} When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. {7} As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." {8} Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" {9} And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David. {10} The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand {11} and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice. {12} Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had left Saul. {13} So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns. {14} In everything he did he had great success, because the LORD was with him. {15} When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him. {16} But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he led them in their campaigns. {17} Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab. I will give her to you in marriage; only serve me bravely and fight the battles of the LORD." For Saul said to himself, "I will not raise a hand against him. Let the Philistines do that!" {18} But David said to Saul, "Who am I, and what is my family or my father's clan in Israel, that I should become the king's son-in-law?" {19} So when the time came for Merab, Saul's daughter, to be given to David, she was given in marriage to Adriel of Meholah. {20} Now Saul's daughter Michal was in love with David, and when they told Saul about it, he was pleased. {21} "I will give her to him," he thought, "so that she may be a snare to him and so that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." So Saul said to David, "Now you have a second opportunity to become my son-in-law." {22} Then Saul ordered his attendants: "Speak to David privately and say, 'Look, the king is pleased with you, and his attendants all like you; now become his son-in-law.'" {23} They repeated these words to David. But David said, "Do you think it is a small matter to become the king's son-in-law? I'm only a poor man and little known." {24} When Saul's servants told him what David had said, {25} Saul replied, "Say to David, 'The king wants no other price for the bride than a hundred Philistine foreskins, to take revenge on his enemies.'" Saul's plan was to have David fall by the hands of the Philistines. {26} When the attendants told David these things, he was pleased to become the king's son-in-law. So before the allotted time elapsed, {27} David and his men went out and killed two hundred Philistines. He brought their foreskins and presented the full number to the king so that he might become the king's son-in-law. Then Saul gave him his daughter Michal in marriage. {28} When Saul realized that the LORD was with David and that his daughter Michal

loved David, {29} Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days. {30} The Philistine commanders continued to go out to battle, and as often as they did, David met with more success than the rest of Saul's officers, and his name became well known.

The Main Characters

There are three main characters in this drama: Saul, his son Jonathan and David. We shall spend most of our time with Saul, but the other two make an interesting contrast.

Achievement

It's important to note that Saul is not a failure. Both he and David are doing what the Lord commands - driving out the people from the promised land. There is no disgrace in Saul's military performance. Note also that he is, in fact, the king - as even David acknowledges. David is his servant. So why is Saul so upset?

- ✚ He has forgotten just who is king here. In his heart of hearts, Saul probably knows that he is not worthy to be a king - he's been promoted to the level of his incompetence, so to speak. That can gnaw at a man.
- ✚ He sees David as a competitor, not a servant. How many times have you met a manager in business who had to be the smartest person in the room - no matter how ignorant he was?
- ✚ This may be Saul imagining palace intrigue. He may be thinking that David is a man just like himself - and he knows what he would do in David's place.

Hurling the spear - twice

Envy often simmers in the dark - but when coupled with anger, it produces action. This is one reason why we think of envy as such a little sin, or no sin at all - if we don't have the chance to act, and the anger to make us act, "nothing" comes of it. Nothing but the rot of the soul.

Send him away

Saul then resorts to his next trick. He sends him out on campaign. There are two reasons for this:

- ✚ Like many people struggling with their own egos, he figures "out of sight, out of mind." If I don't have to watch the man perform, I won't be reminded of how envious I am.
- ✚ Also, he has figured out a way to dispose of the lad. He'll let the Philistines do it for him. (Sadly, David will remember this trick - with Uriah). One of the key characteristics of envy is that it is embarrassing - we don't want others to see what we consider to be our inadequacy. So we intrigue to bring the target down by someone else's hand.

Snare - the woman

Saul's next tactic is to give him Michal, his daughter, in marriage. Perhaps he knew that she was a nag - she certainly nags David when he dances before the Ark - but whatever the reason, he thought he was fastening a lead weight to David's neck. Michal, however, loved David and even saved his life from the hand of her father. It is interesting to speculate on what must have been going through Saul's mind when he thought this one up. I leave it as an exercise for the reader. But it doesn't say much for Michal's mother, does it?

Contrast: Jonathan

Jonathan is a righteous man, and as such he cannot help but rejoice at David's success. It is one of the finest marks of a truly humble and righteous man, that he sees in someone who surpasses him in God's own work not a rival but a friend.

Contrast: David

David is a man of action, and we see his actions here:

- ✦ He acts in humility - considering that he has already been anointed king, he thinks it a big deal to become Saul's son-in-law.
- ✦ He acts with courage.
- ✦ He acts in forgiveness - Saul threw that spear twice.

Envy - Definition and Cause

Just what is envy? Most of us have felt it, but it helps to have it laid out in definition so that we can see what we are dealing with:

- ✦ Envy is first the sin of the "have-nots" against the "haves." It says, "Why should he have so much when I don't?" (If you want the right answers, you have to ask the right questions. Here's a wrong question.)
- ✦ The mediaeval theologians that it is sorrow for another's good. In other words, it's when I'm unhappy that you are happy.
- ✦ In mathematical terms, your good = my evil. This is why we often mistake envy for righteous anger. The logic goes that you stole what was rightfully mine. But consider: were these victories of David rightfully Saul's? Or did he stake a mental claim on something that was not really his?
- ✦ In a twisted sense (and Satan cannot create, he can only twist to evil) envy is the recognition of good. If I envy you, then what you have must be something I consider good. It's just that I don't want you to have it. I want it for myself.
- ✦ Envy is intensely personal. As Walter Hilton pointed out, in envy we hate a person - not the good things they have. As such, envy is hatred without just cause.
So how do we get into this mess? What causes us to envy?
- ✦ Sometimes envy is the wrong reaction to God's disciplining me. If God prevents me from being rich, for example, is that not for my own good? Should I not take my complaint to him, rather than envying you?
- ✦ The Scripture tells us that disputation produces envy.¹² If you're the type that loves to argue, envy is a likely result. You can't win them all.
- ✦ Envy is a form of love for this world. If I want you to be as poor as I am, then I must think being rich is worth rotting the soul. That's love for this world, falling in with the world's system.
- ✦ Envy is often mixed with fear, as with Saul here. Fear amplifies envy.
- ✦ First and foremost, envy comes from not giving Christ first place in our lives. For if we gave him first place, we would not desire the rewards of the wicked, and would praise him for the successes of the righteous.

¹² 1 Timothy 6:4

Envy - of the good and the evil

Envy comes in two flavors: envy of those who are evil, and the things they have, and envy of those who are good, and their possessions.

Envy of the evil

The finest example of this is found in the parable of the Prodigal Son - in the story of the older brother. It's interesting to note that none of the servants went to tell the older brother that his wayward brother was home; nobody wanted to bear that bad news - they knew the reaction. But it does bring up a question:

- ✚ Was he envious of the forgiveness that the younger brother received? Remember that the first shall be last and the last first!
- ✚ Or was he really envious that the kid "got away with it?" How appealing in the mind to think that I can have all the pleasures of this world (sex, drugs and rock and roll) and still have God's mercy; how galling to those who have walked the straight and narrow, yearning for the wide and crooked.

Psalm 37 shows us the envy of the rich - which is what we most commonly use as the example of envy. Note, please, that this is the wealth of the evil that we're seeing here.

Envy of the evil is one thing. Envy of the righteous is another - for that is where Satan himself started, when he said, "I will be like God."

Envy of the righteous

We see many examples of this in the Scripture:

- ✚ In Esther, we see that Haman envies Mordecai - for this is the one man who has the integrity not to cozy up to Haman's power.
- ✚ In Daniel, the satraps know that only in Daniel's religion will they find a chance to accuse him.
- ✚ Even among the disciples of Christ, envy breaks out. But Christ has the answer to this: (John 21:20-22 NIV) Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") {21} When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" {22} Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

A story is told by one of the great preachers of the 19th century, F.E.B. Meyer. He took over a church in London. Within a two mile radius of that church were congregations pastured by three of the greatest preachers of the day. A friend visited Meyer, and found him deeply depressed, presiding over a half-empty church.

Two years later the friend returned to find a buoyant Meyer presiding over a packed church. His friend asked what happened. Meyer confessed that God had convicted him of the sin of envy, and taught him to pray for the other churches. "I prayed that God would fill their churches to overflowing," said Meyer, "and out of the overflow he has filled mine."

Is this really serious?

Most of us think of envy as a trivial sin, if we think it a sin at all. We are not taught that it is a sin, other than from the direct reading of the Scripture. I cannot recall ever hearing a sermon on the

subject. One reason that it seems such a light thing is that its object is a good thing. We see something that we think is good in the possession of another. How could wanting a good thing be wrong? (I am indebted to St. Augustine for the point.) But envy is not the wanting of a good thing - it is the wanting that such a thing should not be in the hands of another.

Because we think it trivial, we do not fear it. (St. Cyprian taught me that). We underestimate the enemy of our souls! Is it so trivial? No, I think not:. The Roman Catholic church teaches that it is a mortal sin, for it is opposed to love - because love does not envy.¹³

In envy, we hate a person, and do the opposite of love.

The results of this are most serious. Consider simply two passages:

(Prov 14:30 NIV) A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.

(James 3:16 NIV) For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

There you have it from Old Testament and New: envy rots you and destroys those around you. Have you not seen this in your own experience?

Fortunately, there is help. Ultimately envy comes of not putting Christ first, but putting him first pushes envy aside. As Thomas à Kempis put it,

He who desires glory in things outside of God, or to take pleasure in some private good, shall many ways be encumbered and straitened; but if heavenly grace enter in, and true love, there will be no envy, neither narrowness of heart, neither will self-love busy itself, for Divine Love overcomes all things, and enlarges all the powers of the soul.

Or as Christ put it, "What is that to you? You must follow me."

¹³ 1 Corinthians 13:4

God is My Refuge - (1 Samuel 19; Psalm 59)

At the head of Psalm 59, which David wrote concerning the events found in 1 Samuel 19, is a Hebrew word: Miktam. It is variously translated as "golden" or "secret treasure." It means a writing that is so precious that it must be engraved on stone with letters of gold. David names six of his poems with this phrase; this is one of the precious poems.

"Now it is a strange thing, but things that are good to have and days that are good to spend are soon told about, and not much to listen to; while things that are uncomfortable, palpitating, and even gruesome, may make a good tale, and take a deal of telling anyway." (*JRR Tolkien, The Hobbit*) So let us hear the tale as it is told to us:

(1 Sam 19 NIV) Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan was very fond of David {2} and warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there. {3} I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I'll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out." {4} Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. {5} He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The LORD won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?" {6} Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: "As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death." {7} So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before. {8} Once more war broke out, and David went out and fought the Philistines. He struck them with such force that they fled before him. {9} But an evil spirit from the LORD came upon Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. While David was playing the harp, {10} Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall. That night David made good his escape. {11} Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed." {12} So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped. {13} Then Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed, covering it with a garment and putting some goats' hair at the head. {14} When Saul sent the men to capture David, Michal said, "He is ill." {15} Then Saul sent the men back to see David and told them, "Bring him up to me in his bed so that I may kill him." {16} But when the men entered, there was the idol in the bed, and at the head was some goats' hair. {17} Saul said to Michal, "Why did you deceive me like this and send my enemy away so that he escaped?" Michal told him, "He said to me, 'Let me get away. Why should I kill you?'" {18} When David had fled and made his escape, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went to Naioth and stayed there. {19} Word came to Saul: "David is in Naioth at Ramah"; {20} so he sent men to capture him. But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came upon Saul's men and they also prophesied. {21} Saul was told about it, and he sent more men, and they prophesied too. Saul sent men a third time, and they also prophesied. {22} Finally, he himself left for Ramah and went to the great cistern at Secu. And he asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" "Over in Naioth at Ramah," they said. {23} So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth.

{24} He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why people say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Then let us see what David had to say in the Psalm he wrote on this occasion:

(Psa 59 NIV) For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." Of David. A miktam. When Saul had sent men to watch David's house in order to kill him. Deliver me from my enemies, O God; protect me from those who rise up against me. {2} Deliver me from evildoers and save me from bloodthirsty men. {3} See how they lie in wait for me! Fierce men conspire against me for no offense or sin of mine, O LORD. {4} I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me. Arise to help me; look on my plight! {5} O LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, rouse yourself to punish all the nations; show no mercy to wicked traitors. Selah {6} They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. {7} See what they spew from their mouths-- they spew out swords from their lips, and they say, "Who can hear us?" {8} But you, O LORD, laugh at them; you scoff at all those nations. {9} O my Strength, I watch for you; you, O God, are my fortress, {10} my loving God. God will go before me and will let me gloat over those who slander me. {11} But do not kill them, O Lord our shield, or my people will forget. In your might make them wander about, and bring them down. {12} For the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, let them be caught in their pride. For the curses and lies they utter, {13} consume them in wrath, consume them till they are no more. Then it will be known to the ends of the earth that God rules over Jacob. Selah {14} They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. {15} They wander about for food and howl if not satisfied. {16} But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. {17} O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.

Introduction

What of our troubles? Do they not usually come in person - that is, in the form of other people?

Our assailants

If there is any one thing the Christian should see in his assailants, it is that they enjoy persecuting the innocent. It seems as if this is the definition of the wicked - not that they are content to be wicked, but that they must persecute the innocent as well. We should expect it; they crucified Christ, if you will recall. But there are two other aspects David gives us, here and in the Psalm:

- ✚ "Who can hear us?" Have you ever noticed that the wicked think very little of their own words? "Hey, what are you so upset about?" They think words trivial - and presume that God does also. The Christian should know better.
- ✚ No one was ever assaulted by the weak. This is one reason God prefers to keep us that way - so that we are not tempted to assault others. But who are the strong? Are they only those in the flesh - physically strong - or are they not also the ones who think themselves morally strong. (If you think not, who calls us intolerant?) This is yet another reason to "judge not."

What should we ask for, when oppressed?

David is not shy about asking God for help, as we shall see in the Psalm. He asks for defense and deliverance. But we might add a few things as well:

- ✚ Deliverance? Yes, but also from temptation.

- ✚ Deliverance from the corruption of our own hearts - the thought of vengeance.
- ✚ And David asks that his enemies be made an example - a beautiful expression of his desire for God's will¹⁴ and also care for God's people - that they might see and learn.

God's Providence

It is interesting to see how God provides for David in this circumstance - by the same methods he will provide for us today:

Friends

God has given David his Jonathan - one to uphold him and warn him.

- ✚ Do our friends warn us? Do we listen, or do we go our own way?
- ✚ Recognize too, that there are limits to this. Jonathan reasons with his father, and it works - for a while.

Michal

God often uses family in his providence. In this instance, he has used Michal as a shock absorber - one who slows up the enemy. We often see this in the wrong light - Michal "failed." Not so; she did what God intended - she slowed the men up just enough for David's escape. Do you believe in "coincidence?"

Samuel

How often we run to one who is strong in the Lord! This is wise. Note that Samuel can provide no security; he commands no troops. But his strength is in counsel and wisdom, and these are most necessary. God Himself will provide the power.

God provides the deliverance

It is fascinating what God does; here is an almost perfect picture of God's way:

- ✚ First, he turns evil - and evil men - into good. The wicked come; they go back as prophets!
- ✚ Note that God triumphs not by the weapons of this world - but by his own Spirit.
- ✚ Even so, Saul persists - and so will our enemies. But who is eternal but God?

The names of God

David's life with God can be seen in the names and titles he uses for God:

- ✚ *LORD God Almighty* - the word "Almighty" here really means "Lord of Hosts" - and the capitalized "LORD" is Jehovah. So the title is personal, carrying the name of God, and powerful, as the commander of the armies of heaven. Do we really know our Lord that closely? Do we really believe in his power? Or is it just hoping in hope?
- ✚ *God of Israel* - that is to say, the God of the covenant relationship. We too have a covenant relationship with God. David knows, and we should too, that when we remain in that relationship God remains faithful to us. He is eternal; he cannot change.
- ✚ *My strength* - really, think about it: is your own strength adequate to the trials of this life? You must choose between the two: your strength or his.

¹⁴ Proverbs 17:13

- ✦ *My fortress* - the word literally means a specific high tower on a mountain in Moab. It's the kind of spot where an army could surround you - but not get in. We might say we had a hole to crawl in and pull in after us. He is our security.
- ✦ *My loving God* - that's the modern translation; the older versions more accurately translated "loving" as merciful. He is the God of forgiveness, the one willing to welcome the sinner home.
- ✦ *Our shield* - the word has two uses. First, it is used for the small shield, sometimes called a "buckler," which is used in hand to hand combat. It's also used for a crocodile's hide! It's not a passive word, but implies that He is what we use in hand to hand combat with the enemy - and the enemy is looking at an angry crocodile.
- ✦ *My refuge in times of trouble* - the word means a retreat , a fleeing - a way out. Sometimes it is all so overwhelming that you just need a place to run to. The world may overwhelm us - but never him.

The end of the matter

It often appears to the Christian that life is a series of desperate adventures, one crisis after another. Only by knowing the end can we keep our faith strong and courage up.

David shows us, symbolically, how this is done. He runs from the court of Saul - a symbol of the world - to the house of Samuel, whose name means "Asked of God." We must turn from the world and its comforts and ask of God the comfort that comes from him, the peace that passes all understanding.

It is fascinating, is it not, that the end of David's Psalm is this:

{16} But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. {17} O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.

The trials of the child of God are many and long; the power of God is supreme, and the end of the matter? To praise God, and love him forever.

Friendship - 1 Samuel 20

In 1971 an earthquake struck the Sylmar area in California. My parents' home was in the center of the most heavily damaged area. For many weeks they were without water and electricity.

One weekend we came out to help with the cleaning, and there was a precious sight: a small, wiry man, carrying cinder block from our fallen wall in the street back into the yard. He separated the broken pieces from the good ones, and we were glad to see him. His name was Bob Macy, a friend indeed. I once camped on his driveway for seven weeks, and his unflinching friendship is a cherished memory.

Today we shall see the greatest friendship in the Bible - David and Jonathan.

(1 Sam 20 NIV) Then David fled from Natioth at Ramah and went to Jonathan and asked, "What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to take my life?" {2} "Never!" Jonathan replied. "You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn't do anything, great or small, without confiding in me. Why would he hide this from me? It's not so!" {3} But David took an oath and said, "Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, 'Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.' Yet as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death." {4} Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you." {5} So David said, "Look, tomorrow is the New Moon festival, and I am supposed to dine with the king; but let me go and hide in the field until the evening of the day after tomorrow. {6} If your father misses me at all, tell him, 'David earnestly asked my permission to hurry to Bethlehem, his hometown, because an annual sacrifice is being made there for his whole clan.' {7} If he says, 'Very well,' then your servant is safe. But if he loses his temper, you can be sure that he is determined to harm me. {8} As for you, show kindness to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the LORD. If I am guilty, then kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?" {9} "Never!" Jonathan said. "If I had the least inkling that my father was determined to harm you, wouldn't I tell you?" {10} David asked, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?" {11} "Come," Jonathan said, "let's go out into the field." So they went there together. {12} Then Jonathan said to David: "By the LORD, the God of Israel, I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? {13} But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. {14} But show me unflinching kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, {15} and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family--not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth." {16} So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD call David's enemies to account." {17} And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself. {18} Then Jonathan said to David: "Tomorrow is the New Moon festival. You will be missed, because your seat will be empty. {19} The day after tomorrow, toward evening, go to the place where you hid when this trouble began, and wait by the stone Ezel. {20} I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I were shooting at a target. {21} Then I will send a boy and say, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say to him, 'Look, the arrows are on this side of you; bring them here,' then come, because, as surely as the LORD lives, you are safe; there is no danger. {22} But if I say to the

boy, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' then you must go, because the LORD has sent you away. {23} And about the matter you and I discussed--remember, the LORD is witness between you and me forever." {24} So David hid in the field, and when the New Moon festival came, the king sat down to eat. {25} He sat in his customary place by the wall, opposite Jonathan, and Abner sat next to Saul, but David's place was empty. {26} Saul said nothing that day, for he thought, "Something must have happened to David to make him ceremonially unclean--surely he is unclean." {27} But the next day, the second day of the month, David's place was empty again. Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, "Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?" {28} Jonathan answered, "David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem. {29} He said, 'Let me go, because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away to see my brothers.' That is why he has not come to the king's table." {30} Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? {31} As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!" {32} "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father. {33} But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David. {34} Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David. {35} In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him, {36} and he said to the boy, "Run and find the arrows I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. {37} When the boy came to the place where Jonathan's arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, "Isn't the arrow beyond you?" {38} Then he shouted, "Hurry! Go quickly! Don't stop!" The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master. {39} (The boy knew nothing of all this; only Jonathan and David knew.) {40} Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, "Go, carry them back to town." {41} After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together--but David wept the most. {42} Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

David

Before we look at Jonathan, the great picture of a friend, we can learn a bit from David.

God is preparing David

It is a tough time for David - and in tough times you find out who your friends really are. God is showing David three things:

- ✚ He is teaching him who to trust - and who not to trust.
- ✚ He is building about him a core of friends who will see him through his life.
- ✚ He is teaching him restraint and discretion - a most notable requirement for a king.

David - a model friend

David shows us some of the characteristics of a good friend:

- ✦ Note that he shows the proper respect for Jonathan - who is a Prince Royal. He bows three times; he does not presume upon the friendship.
- ✦ He approaches him in humility. He asks what fault he might have committed; he begs the chance to make it right. He doesn't begin with his own righteousness, but admits that he might be wrong.
- ✦ In his dealings with Jonathan, he promises to show kindness not only with Jonathan but also his descendants. In Ishbosheth, he certainly fulfills this promise.
- ✦ David is not afraid to point out to Jonathan that Saul is out to kill him - despite the fact that such a message could hardly be welcome. Proverbs teaches us the value of such a friend:
(Prov 27:6 NIV) Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.
(Prov 27:9 NIV) Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.
David is a man whose counsel and "wounds" are indeed faithful.

Jonathan

It is sad that Jonathan did not live to an old age with David - it would have been fascinating to see this develop. But we can begin with Jonathan's character:

Character

Jonathan is, first and foremost, an honest man. Because he himself is honest, he cannot picture his father being either irrational or treacherous. There is no treachery in Jonathan, and therefore he cannot imagine it in Saul.

Indeed, he is so honest that he assumes that if his father had any evil intent towards David, Saul would have mentioned it by now! You cannot cheat an honest man - but you can fool one. This says much for Jonathan's honesty; Saul's actions say much about the depravity of man.

Marks of a friend

- ✦ The first, and greatest, mark of a friend shown by Jonathan is this: he has everything to lose by being a friend of David. David has been anointed King; if he is king, Jonathan is not. Saul understands this clearly; so does Jonathan, I suspect. It's just that he knows that harming David is unjust - and also that David is his friend. What he might lose - doesn't matter.
- ✦ Jonathan is generous with his help - he doesn't seek the least he could do, but the most. He tells David (v. 4) he will do whatever David wants him to do. The commitment is not a limited one.
- ✦ Jonathan does not send help - he goes himself, at his own risk. His attendant - the small boy - is not really involved. Jonathan takes the risk himself.
- ✦ Jonathan is a man who can keep a confidence. He holds David's plans in his own mind.¹⁵
- ✦ Jonathan also "covers over the offense." Rather than repeat his father's words - and make David that much more fearful and angry - he holds the matter privately and keeps it from being a burning sore.

Bound in the Lord

The secret of such a friendship is simply this: they are bound in the Lord. Jonathan can hold David in such friendship because they both hold the Lord as God.

¹⁵ See Proverbs 11:13

- ✦ We see that by the oaths they take - they bring God to witness to the truth of what they are saying.
- ✦ Like most friendships, they share a common cause - the cause of God.
- ✦ Because they are God's servants, their relative ranks - in a society which made much of this - mean nothing to them, either way.

Seven Tests

A lesson should have its practical points. So I propose to you seven tests of friendship:

- ✦ Are you a friend even when it will cost you greatly? It would cost Jonathan the kingship of Israel, and yet he loved David.
- ✦ Are you a friend even after there is no more benefit to be gained from the friendship? Joseph of Arimathea boldly claimed the body of Jesus - at risk to himself, with no possible thought of gain.
- ✦ Will you tell a friend the hard truth? David had to give Jonathan the painful news about what his father was really like. Can you?
- ✦ Are you a friend "without limits?" Do you say, like Jonathan, "Whatever you want, I will do for you?" Or is friendship really a limited partnership?
- ✦ Are you a friend in person? Or do you send someone else to do what should be done only by a true friend?
- ✦ Are you friend enough to "cover the offense?" Jonathan did not repeat his father's remarks, but let it go, so that peace might be given the chance.
- ✦ Can you share your friends tears? David wept the most, for he was leaving family, friends, worship, comfort - all for a life in the wilderness. But Jonathan wept too.

Epilog

Sometimes we say, "I wish I could do those things - but it's too late." May I share something with you about that? My sister has a good friend, Jill Goddard. Jill is quite an artist, and upon hearing of my father's death offered to produce the memorial cards for the funeral. As it happened these had been ordered, so Jill instead produced a bookmark souvenir. Here's what it said about my dad:

During his 20 years of service as an Army Finance Officer, John and his wife Lillian helped friends and acquaintances in times of trouble. In turn they were helped by others, such as the time they needed to fly a critically ill baby from the Aleutians to the mainland. They knew they could never repay those who helped so they did the next best thing; they helped others. This became known to the family as "Pass It On." John remained true to this tradition all his life.

To have a friend, be a friend. Freely you have received? Freely give. Pass it on.

Growing in Adversity - (1 Samuel 21-24; Psalms 32, 54, 57)

(Note: for the sake of space the text of 1 Samuel is omitted.)

IT IS good for us to have trials and troubles at times, for they often remind us that we are on probation and ought not to hope in any worldly thing. It is good for us sometimes to suffer contradiction, to be misjudged by men even though we do well and mean well. These things help us to be humble and shield us from vainglory. When to all outward appearances men give us no credit, when they do not think well of us, then we are more inclined to seek God Who sees our hearts. Therefore, a man ought to root himself so firmly in God that he will not need the consolations of men.

(Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Book 1, Chapter 12). Old Thomas was right: no matter how much we dislike the process, we grow in adversity. We grow closer to God, and that's the direction that counts. In this section we shall see how David does just that - starting by relying in his own strength and actions, and ending in the exaltation of being completely dependent upon God - and loving it.

David relies on his own means (1 Samuel 21)

David is not immune to the temptations that all of us face. He is overwhelmed with trouble, and he does what most of us do: he tries to handle it himself. In this way he shows us the folly of doing so:

- ✦ He takes the sword of Goliath - and this is symbolic of what he is doing. He is using the weapons of the world.
- ✦ He lies to the priest. He no doubt justified it in his mind that it was lie or die - but the Lord would show him better than that. This would prove to be a very costly lie, for the priests. Was this lie justified? Could he have foreseen the consequences? Perhaps this is one reason we should tell the truth and trust God.
- ✦ He runs to the enemy of his enemy - again, the world's way of doing things. Was he surprised to find fear there to greet him? Perhaps. But note that running to the obvious source of help didn't work. God had other plans.
- ✦ David now stoops to outright deception. No longer is this a "little white lie;" David is desperate. He feigns insanity - and then, in God's mercy, Abimelech kicks him out of the palace. He is now a nut case wandering the streets as a homeless man.
- ✦ "God's mercy sometimes reminds us of our sin" (Spurgeon). God, in this unlikely way, rescues his servant and gently reminds him that he has been doing it the wrong way.

David, the poet, tells us his reaction to these lessons in this Psalm.

(Psa 34 NIV) Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left. I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. {2} My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. {3} Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together. {4} I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. {5} Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. {6} This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. {7} The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. {8} Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. {9} Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. {10} The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing. {11} Come, my children, listen to me;

I will teach you the fear of the LORD. {12} Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, {13} keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. {14} Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. {15} The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; {16} the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. {17} The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. {18} The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. {19} A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; {20} he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken. {21} Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned. {22} The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.

Hear the thoughts of one who has learned of the Lord:

Bless the Lord (v.1-3)

- ✚ Bless him at all times in all places - not just when the going is good.
- ✚ Boast in him - not in your own strength
- ✚ Do so publicly - so that others in similar circumstance may hear and learn, and join (and encourage) you.

Seek the Lord (v. 4-7)

- ✚ Seek him, and be delivered both from your fears and the cause of your fears.
- ✚ David tells us (v.5) that this is not just his experience - he sees it around him.
- ✚ He attributes deliverance to the angel of the Lord (perhaps a reference to Christ) - which certainly means we should look for deliverance in unexpected ways and places. God's providence is sometimes amusing but always sure.

Taste and see (v8-10)

- ✚ This is a matter of experience - try it yourself!
- ✚ Fear God - then you have nothing else to fear.
- ✚ Others may lack, but you will not - God will provide. "I have never seen the righteous forsaken."

Advice to Children (v11-14)

- ✚ "Watch what you say!" Opening your big mouth can get you in a lot of trouble - David discovered that with his first lie.
- ✚ "Depart from evil" - in other words, don't be where evil lives! Watch your steps! (Have you ever told that one to your children?)
- ✚ Rather, what should you be doing? You should seek peace. For those who love a good fight (and David is a warrior) this is often unwelcome advice.

How the Lord deals with the evil and the righteous (v15-22)

- ✚ How often we forget it, but - God does know what's going on.
- ✚ He listens to the *cry* of the righteous - not the whining. The broken and contrite heart is still the key to an audience with God.
- ✚ The wicked will still be with us - for a while. Patience, child of God.

David and the evil man (1 Samuel 22)

David has grown, but the consequences of his actions - in this instance borne by others - have yet to be completed. But we can see from his actions the change in his relationship with God:

- ✚ David gathers around himself the malcontents of his society - the debtors about to be sold as slaves, and others. There is something here which rings of redemption. The outcasts of society heard Christ, the Son of David, far more readily than the leaders.
- ✚ David acknowledges his fault, and guilt, to Abiathar, the surviving priest. He also takes him in, sheltering the persecuted. Evil is not overcome by saying, "tut, tut."
- ✚ But most important: David now asks God for guidance, in this instance via the prophet, Gad. He also gives us his thoughts here, found in Psalm 52 - mostly about the evil man, Doeg.

(Psa 52 NIV) For the director of music. A maskil of David. When Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him: "David has gone to the house of Ahimelech." Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man? Why do you boast all day long, you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God? {2} Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. {3} You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. Selah {4} You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue! {5} Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin: He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah {6} The righteous will see and fear; they will laugh at him, saying, {7} "Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!" {8} But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever. {9} I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope, for your name is good. I will praise you in the presence of your saints.

The evil man's words (v. 1-4)

There are three words in particular to which I would call your attention:

- ✚ "Boast" - how often have you heard this? It's a sure sign of the division between the righteous and the evil - the righteous boast in the Lord; the evil boast in themselves.
- ✚ "Deceit" - David has learned the folly of this! But do we not know the evil man by the fact that his word cannot be trusted?
- ✚ "Destruction" - here is a key. Do you take pleasure in the downfall of others? Does it please you to see a rival fail? Then see where you fit!

Ultimately the evil man is destroyed - but note please (v.5) that this is not by the hands of the righteous, but by the power of God. The evil trust in their own strength, but all human strength eventually wanes. The righteous? Again there are three words:

- ✚ "laugh" - a child of God should be so confident of God's power, justice and love that he will laugh at such men. It is an attitude we don't see very much.
- ✚ "endure" - this is the true method of handling evil: endurance. Do what is right, and wait for God to deliver you. Wait patiently, but in hope.
- ✚ "praise" - and as you wait, praise God for what he has done - and what you know he will do.

David learns to trust God completely (1 Samuel 23)

David's attitude has certainly changed in two chapters. See what happens here:

- ✚ David might regard the invasion of the Philistines as a good thing - distracting his enemy. He does not. He remembers the command of God, and goes after them.
- ✚ He does so after inquiring of God. No longer does he depend upon his own wisdom.
- ✚ Indeed, he encourages his followers by this. It's not a private faith; he makes it clear to all who his Guiding Star is.

- ✚ When chased by Saul - and it's a narrow escape - he remains confident. He relies on God's guidance to avoid Saul.
- ✚ Ultimately, he is delivered by the Philistines! God provides.
Again, David has given us his reaction to this - here's the Psalm he wrote when hiding in that cave.

(Psa 57 NIV) For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." Of David. A miktam. When he had fled from Saul into the cave. Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. {2} I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me. {3} He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; Selah God sends his love and his faithfulness. {4} I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts-- men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. {5} Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. {6} They spread a net for my feet-- I was bowed down in distress. They dug a pit in my path-- but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah {7} My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. {8} Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. {9} I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. {10} For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. {11} Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.

The first thing we must note is the transition: David has gone from low understanding to high exaltation. Some thought pictures which echo even to this day:

- ✚ He takes refuge "in the shadow of your wings." The most obvious reference (Christ used it of Jerusalem) is to a hen and chicks. But perhaps David also saw the wings of the cherubim, covering the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant. Either way, note that it is not the wings - but the merest shadow which provides refuge. God's shadow is stronger than the world's light.
- ✚ He acknowledges that God will work *his purpose* and do so in *his way*. He sends from heaven, not from earth. It is not David's purpose that is fulfilled, but God's. Some of us are so concerned with our wants that we can't see His will.

There is an echo in here. Can you see it?

My troubles?	God's Echo
I'm in the midst of the lions	Let God be exalted
They're spreading a net for me	My heart is steadfast

In praising God comes our own strength, for God inhabits the praise of his people.

David now soars; he will "awaken the dawn" with his praise. And what will he praise?

- ✚ Love
- ✚ Faithfulness

✚ Glory of God

Perhaps we should see his reaction to stress.

David shows his heart: Saul's robe (1 Samuel 24)

It is without doubt that the Lord will spare us if we will spare our enemies. ("Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.") We see in David's actions the work of a man after God's own heart:

- ✚ Note that he rebukes the advice of his friends. They see things the world's way - Saul's in his hands. But David has learned to trust God.
- ✚ Trust God - to the point that just cutting a corner off his robe makes David conscience-stricken. It's a small thing - but even the small things are important to the man of God.
- ✚ The secret of this attitude? Obedience. Such is his obedience that he will not touch "the Lord's Anointed." David now realizes that Saul is God's problem, not his.
- ✚ And see what happens! God's weapon - conscience - is powerful against Saul. He has David cornered in that cave - and cannot do anything but confess his sin and beg that David will care for his family when the time comes.

Walking with God - the way David is walking here - shows us three things:

- ✚ When you walk with him, he will provide for you - his providential care, in his way, in his time, for his will, is always there.
- ✚ As you walk, your faith will grow. More and more you will depend upon him, not upon yourself.
- ✚ And as you do, the sense of exaltation grows. Soon you will cry, like David,
Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord,
among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the
heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your
glory be over all the earth.

His love, his faithfulness, his glory - our God.

Bundles and Slings - (1 Samuel 25)

Every man needs a woman to remind him of just what a hot-tempered idiot he can be. Here's David's:

(1 Sam 25 NIV) Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David moved down into the Desert of Maon. {2} A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. {3} His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings. {4} While David was in the desert, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. {5} So he sent ten young men and said to them, "Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. {6} Say to him: 'Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours! {7} "'Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. {8} Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favorable toward my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.'" {9} When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited. {10} Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. {11} Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?" {12} David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. {13} David said to his men, "Put on your swords!" So they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies. {14} One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. {15} Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. {16} Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. {17} Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him." {18} Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. {19} Then she told her servants, "Go on ahead; I'll follow you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal. {20} As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them. {21} David had just said, "It's been useless--all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. {22} May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!" {23} When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. {24} She fell at his feet and said: "My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. {25} May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name--his name is Fool, and folly goes with him. But as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my master sent. {26} "Now since the LORD has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, may your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal. {27} And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my

master, be given to the men who follow you. {28} Please forgive your servant's offense, for the LORD will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the Lord's battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live. {29} Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the LORD your God. But the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. {30} When the LORD has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel, {31} my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the LORD has brought my master success, remember your servant." {32} David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. {33} May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. {34} Otherwise, as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak." {35} Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, "Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request." {36} When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk. So she told him nothing until daybreak. {37} Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone. {38} About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died. {39} When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Praise be to the LORD, who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. He has kept his servant from doing wrong and has brought Nabal's wrongdoing down on his own head." Then David sent word to Abigail, asking her to become his wife. {40} His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, "David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife." {41} She bowed down with her face to the ground and said, "Here is your maidservant, ready to serve you and wash the feet of my master's servants." {42} Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five maids, went with David's messengers and became his wife. {43} David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both were his wives. {44} But Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

Customs of the time

To understand this story correctly, we must know some of the customs of the time. Nabal's flocks graze between two wilderness areas - and David is in one of those areas. He has protected these flocks from local marauders - even to this day such activity is considered normal in some parts of the world. So, from a social point of view, Nabal is in some sense obligated to David. Such social obligations were usually required at harvest or shearing time, when a great feast would be held. (Remember - no refrigeration. Slaughter the sheep, better be ready to stuff yourself.)

Nabal doesn't see it that way. Perhaps he's aware that Saul's headquarters are at Gibeah, only 30 miles away. Whatever the cause, his reply is, in the custom of the time and place, extremely insulting. It is an insult almost certain to provoke a man to action - and it does.

Nabal

The man's name means "fool" in Hebrew - with a particular connotation of being harsh and irascible. But no one is ever a total loss; he can always be a bad example.

- ✦ Tevey (in *Fiddler on the Roof*) complained that if "riches are a curse, smite me!" But it's not always a good idea, for riches may indeed be a curse. Perhaps Nabal obtained his riches by being stingy. Thinking himself rewarded for his mean spirit, he decided to keep things that way. It is a sad way in which to live. A poor miser is one thing; a rich one much worse.
- ✦ Some think that courtesy - as Nabal denies it here - is trivial. It is not so. Courtesy is often the accumulated wisdom of people who know how to deal with other people. Practice it; do not ignore it.
- ✦ How secure we think ourselves when we have money - and especially when we are drunk as well! Does this not tell us much? If Nabal was really secure in his wealth, would he not have been so when sober?
- ✦ God hands us a lesson here also. Nabal has a stroke, evidently, and lives another ten days. Why the ten days? Perhaps even fools must be given a chance to repent

Right way for the rich

The rich are frequently condemned in the Bible - but almost never for being wealthy. Rather, they are condemned for what they do with the wealth they have, and in that there are lessons for all of us.

- ✦ The rich, more than most, are to practice hospitality. This makes sense, for often a church needs a place in which to host a visitor - or a mendicant. What better place than the home of a rich man? This indeed is fruitful service.
- ✦ They are also to give liberally, thus putting up treasure in heaven. If the poor are the children of God, then the rich are lending to them so that God might repay.
- ✦ The simplest and greatest advice to the rich: seek first the kingdom of heaven. All else is trivial.

Right reaction for the poor

We don't see it mentioned here, but the reaction of the poor is often to envy the material things of the rich. To them too the advice is the same: see first the kingdom of heaven.

David

One thing you have to like about David: if it's in his heart, it will be coming out of his mouth any minute. Unfortunately, this time it's the wrong reaction.

Wrong reaction

Let's understand this quickly. David's pride has been wounded. This is a case of male ego being offended. Nabal's words were designed to do just that - and they struck home.

But consider: did Nabal "owe" David anything? Only by the tests of social courtesy and custom, not by agreement or contract. While this imposes an obligation, rightfully, upon Nabal, it should not create an expectation in David. Sometimes we need to do an "expectations check."

Indeed, David's reaction is opposite to that of God - who causes his rain to fall on the just and the unjust, who returns blessing for cursing. David is about to see that lesson in human form.

Anger

David's reaction is obviously one of anger. No doubt he justified it to himself by repeating, over and over, how good he and his men had been to Nabal and his people. But there is a sure test to tell

wrath from righteous anger: is it self-serving? It's one thing to be angry over ill-treatment of someone else; it's entirely another to have the same anger over being ill treated.

Worse, it is needless. God has been teaching David to depend upon him, and here David, in a flurry of rage, forgets it. Instead of being "after God's own heart," he lowers himself to the same level as the man who insulted him. David, in short, is acting like the fool he's mad at.

Lead us not into temptation

In times like this, it is helpful to remember that vengeance belongs to the Lord. It is not wise to take vengeance, for when you do you are stealing what is his. And he doesn't like it.

How did David fall into this trap? He set his expectations into certainty.

But note something: did God provide? Certainly. He sent Abigail (as David acknowledged). Just remember this: she had to get all that stuff from somewhere - say, the feast that Nabal was having prepared for him? God will use the things of the wicked to provide for the righteous.

David, when rebuked

God will sometimes point out our sins to us in the person of another. David's reaction to Abigail - and her rebuke is the mildest of such - is heartening. Hear how he learns his lesson:

- ✚ First, he admits the fault. No more bluster, no more ego - just, "You know, you're right."
- ✚ He then - and this is crucial - praises God for the rebuke. He doesn't grumble at it, he accepts it and thanks God for it.
- ✚ And - unlike modern practice - he blesses, rather than shoots - the messenger.

Abigail

(Blessed are the peacemakers)

One of the funniest things I've encountered in preparing this lesson is this: at least half the reference sources I have spend a goodly amount of time on female submission as the primary topic. They wouldn't want you to get the wrong idea that what Abigail did here is to be taken as an example! I think that misspoken. Abigail is, as Scripture proclaims, one with her husband, and as such she acts as her husband should have.

Penitence

Abigail approaches David in an attitude of penitence. Indeed, it is well that she does, for the approach seems the only one that would work. Note:

- ✚ She is swift about it. She does not wait to see what will happen, but takes action quickly. How many of us have let wounds fester, only to find that healing them takes much longer?
- ✚ She shows her penitence by bringing a gift. This is an example of atonement, in the Christian sense. She, by her actions, is taking the blame for her husband, just as Christ bore our sins at the Cross. By taking the consequences upon herself, we see in her the highest form of love. It is impressive.
- ✚ Shows her penitence by word. Verse 29 is particularly eloquent; she has the bundles of food before her and remembers David's sling, all in one sentence. Her eloquence even presumes David's

forgiveness - in that the Lord "has kept" him from vengeance. She reminds him of the "staggering burden" of "needless bloodshed."

- ✚ Why "needless?" Because, as she reminds him, the affair is not just between Nabal and David, but between David and God. She throws herself upon the grace of God - knowing him to be gracious.

A trophy wife

The woman is a gem, and David sees it.

- ✚ She does not insist upon her "rights." She could have argued with David that she never had a chance, aren't you being a little unfair, etc. She didn't. She never mentions her righteousness, but rather deals with his anger.
- ✚ She is not being rebellious against her husband (despite all those Baptist preachers to the contrary). She's covering his rear. Had she been a self-serving, liberated woman she would have seen David as just the man to get rid of this lout.
- ✚ Her integrity in marriage is such that, after she accomplishes her task, she goes back to her husband. Even then she waits until he's sober to tell him what she's done. David might have taken her in as a runaway - but he would not have respected her.

How God treated Abigail

Got a problem with your lout of a husband? Give God ten days or so, see what happens.

Abigail's greatest show of character - and hence greatest reward - comes in this. After Nabal dies, David is so impressed with her (remember, she doesn't inherit anything from Nabal, his sons get it all) that he proposes to her. The offer is not promising, on human terms. The man is on the run from the king; it's a life in hiding in the desert.

Abigail accepts - even to the point of accepting the lowest of servant's duties, the washing of the feet. If we suffer with Him, we shall reign with Him.

We know very little of Abigail after this. She evidently dies before David takes Jerusalem. But the couple does have one son (whose life was evidently also quite short). The son is named Chileab - which is Hebrew for "restraint."

Christian Leadership - (1 Samuel 30)

When I was a young man just starting out in the business world, my late father took me aside to give me some good advice. The advice took the form of an Army Field Manual on Leadership. Most of the advice was not worth the hearing, but I noted that my father, a captain, had underlined two passages and written in the margins, "All NCOs will read and initial." Those two passages said simply this:

- ✚ Leadership is not a popularity contest.
- ✚ You take care of the troops, the troops will take care of you.

We're going to see King David's version of this in our lesson today.

(1 Sam 30 NIV) David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, {2} and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way. {3} When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. {4} So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. {5} David's two wives had been captured--Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. {6} David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God. {7} Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him, {8} and David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?" "Pursue them," he answered. "You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue." {9} David and the six hundred men with him came to the Besor Ravine, where some stayed behind, {10} for two hundred men were too exhausted to cross the ravine. But David and four hundred men continued the pursuit. {11} They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave him water to drink and food to eat-- {12} part of a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins. He ate and was revived, for he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and three nights. {13} David asked him, "To whom do you belong, and where do you come from?" He said, "I am an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me when I became ill three days ago. {14} We raided the Negev of the Kerethites and the territory belonging to Judah and the Negev of Caleb. And we burned Ziklag." {15} David asked him, "Can you lead me down to this raiding party?" He answered, "Swear to me before God that you will not kill me or hand me over to my master, and I will take you down to them." {16} He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah. {17} David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled. {18} David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. {19} Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back. {20} He took all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock, saying, "This is David's plunder." {21} Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow him and who were left behind at the Besor Ravine. They came out to meet David and the people with him. As David and his men approached, he greeted them. {22} But all the evil men and troublemakers among David's followers said, "Because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered.

However, each man may take his wife and children and go." {23} David replied, "No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us. {24} Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike." {25} David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this. {26} When David arrived in Ziklag, he sent some of the plunder to the elders of Judah, who were his friends, saying, "Here is a present for you from the plunder of the Lord's enemies." {27} He sent it to those who were in Bethel, Ramoth Negev and Jattir; {28} to those in Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa {29} and Racal; to those in the towns of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites; {30} to those in Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athach {31} and Hebron; and to those in all the other places where David and his men had roamed.

Handling Adversity

If you are a leader in any endeavor, expect adversity. This is particularly true if you are a leader in the church. Do you think that David thought his life would be smooth sailing? So often we think ours should be; yet the Scripture warns us that this is not so. We sometimes think ourselves defeated by the power of Satan - when in fact we are defeated by our ignorance of the power of Christ. Let us examine the attack, and the defense of the Christian.

Satan's attack

- ✦ *Severe loss.* The loss in this instance is both physical, in terms of possessions, and personal - those we love. We go through life blithely thinking that these things are ours forever - and we should know better than that. Satan then says, "Where is God now?"
- ✦ *Mental and physical strain.* The men have been on the march for several days. They are nearing the end of their strength. We are amphibians; partly spirit, partly flesh. That which affects the flesh affects the spirit, and vice versa. Satan waits until the limits of strength are near, and then brings up a new demand for strength, saying, "See - you cannot go on. You're a failure."
- ✦ *Being alone.* David and his men expected the warm fires of home; they got the burned ruins of their homes. David in particular, as leader, must have felt terribly alone at this time. So often we count noses instead of listening to God.
- ✦ *Reaction of others.* The fabled Monday morning quarterback is ever with us. You can imagine someone telling David, "we should have stayed home." It's the leader's fault, whatever it is. If the group is large enough, there are always those who are willing to throw stones. Roast preacher, for example, is an old recipe.

The resource of the Christian

- ✦ *The presence of God.* David found strength in the Lord. If you are alone, he is with you. Do others criticize? He is the one you need to please. Strength at an end? Mount up on the wings of eagles, and renew your strength. Your losses are severe? Who is the giver of all things?
- ✦ *The people of God.* God knows that we are not built to handle things alone. David seeks out Abiathar, the priest. He goes to the man of God for counsel and help.
- ✦ *Prayer.* If you acknowledge God, you should inquire of Him. If your path is not clear, ask him to clear it. Ask him explicitly to show you the way you must go. Often, this will surprise you (it certainly did me in coming to Eastside).
- ✦ *Relying on God.* David not only listens to what God says, he relies upon it. He doesn't contemplate it, he acts. In so doing, he displays the calm which comes from God's peace - a calm which lets him rule over the souls of the anxious in his men.

In the Presence of the Enemy

The mark of a mature Christian is not how he treats his friends - it's how he treats his enemies. We are at war, like it or not. We are those who fight the Lord's battles, just as much as David did - and like him, we need to know which weapons to use. We must use the Lord's weapons, not the world's. All should see that there is a fundamental difference between the way a Christian treats his enemies and the way the world does.

The slave in this passage can see it. His master has left him for dead in the wilderness. This is the ruthlessness which is so prized in our business world - "looking out for the bottom line." The plunder was sufficient that they could have carried him along in one of those 400 camels. They threw away a human life - which God then redeemed.

There is a parallel to that today for the Christian leader. How many times have we seen someone come in who looks "hopeless?" We need to realize that God calls the hopeless to come to the Hope of the World. David is quickly rewarded for his kindness!

The sins of the enemy turned against them

It often appears that the world's way of doing things is much more profitable - but the books are not yet closed. Greed and ruthlessness seem to be unstoppable. In one sense they are. Left to themselves, they consume those who practice them. We see it here with the Amelekites - they're partying when they should be standing watch. So it is that the sin of the enemy is often his downfall.

God's weapons, God's way

We must remember that David achieved this victory against great odds - after all, the runaway survivors numbered as many as David's entire force! Most of us would be pleased at that point to think of ourselves as military geniuses; David has learned better. He gives credit for the victory to the Lord. How does he see that?

- ✚ First, from his prior experience.
- ✚ Also, he sees God's providence. That slave saved David's men an awful lot of tracking.
- ✚ He can also see the principle that God's power is made perfect in weakness. The 400 were tired too; the Amelekites outnumbered them and were better fed. To God be the glory.

Taking care of the troops

David now shows us the reason he is one of the great leaders of Israel. We can see in his handling of the spoils of war the principles he uses.

Principle: Give God the glory

It would have been tempting to take the credit for the victory. After all, they were outnumbered. The men coming back refer to the spoils as "David's spoils." This is coming from the same mouths that wanted to stone him three days earlier.

By giving God the glory, David avoids all wrangling over credit, who did what, and other things that only give rise to damaged egos. God gave us the victory; we will use the spoil as He would intend. It helps to know your place.

Principle: care for the troops

David has a small bunch of malcontents to deal with. The unfortunate thing about malcontents is that they are also a vocal bunch. They tend to become an alternative to the leadership. They're easy to identify: just look for the ones who are causing divisions in the body of Christ. It won't take long to find them.

How did David deal with this?

- ✚ There was certainly enough to go around. He recognizes the problem right away - it's greed, pure and simple. This is not a case of sharing something that is scarce.
- ✚ He emphasized that the victory belonged to God - and therefore the spoils did too. In so doing, he reminds one and all that fairness is required.
- ✚ He makes it a "lasting ordinance." It isn't just a decision, it's policy. We're not going to have this problem again.

It's not certain how the 200 left behind felt, but any team leader understands the problem. You're either on the team, or you're not. If you are, you share in the victory. In God's plan, there is a place for everyone.

Principle: fairness and wisdom

David's real problem is - what to do with all this stuff? He solves it this way:

- ✚ He distributes it generously. There is more than enough to go around.
- ✚ He distributes it fairly - with an eye to team harmony.
- ✚ He distributes it to those who will benefit him in the future - and who have protected him in the past. (Those towns kept Saul in the dark).

This isn't rocket science. But it does require courage to stand up to the malcontents and say, "No, we will do it God's way."

Civil War - (2 Samuel 1-5)

In a series of events which bear a striking resemblance to the American Civil War, David eventually becomes king of a united Israel with his throne at Jerusalem. This establishes Jerusalem as the city in which the Temple to God's Name (prophesied 500 years earlier) will be built. This progression to the throne is not an easy one. David spends over seven years as king - in Hebron. He is king only of Judah, and from this division will later arise the division into two kingdoms under his grandson. The divisions in our own land are still with us almost 150 years after the event. The parallels are rather striking, and we shall be using them to illustrate some of the lessons learned. David is to be king over a united Israel; if so, during the civil war he must so behave that there will be a united Israel to be king over. We shall see how he does it, and perhaps learn a bit about handling our own disputes at the same time.

Honor during the conflict

A story is told about Ulysses S. Grant. He rarely lost his temper, but another general recalled one such instance.

"One day on the march he came across a straggler who had stopped at a house and assaulted a woman. The General sprang from his horse, seized a musket from the hands of a soldier, and struck the culprit over the head with it, sending him sprawling to the ground." It is said that such crime was rare in the Civil War, but whenever Grant encountered it, he showed no mercy to the culprit.

Grant had a passion for justice. David shows us a similar passion in these chapters in two instances:

- ✚ In dealing with the Amalekite who claimed to have killed Saul, David could have praised him for ridding David of an enemy. Instead, David chose to see this as killing the Lord's anointed. (Note how this passion will help David later on - respect for the Lord's Anointed includes him!)
- ✚ Even more so we see this passion at the execution of the murderers of Ishbosheth. These men thought they were doing David a favor by assassinating his rival, Saul's son, and bringing his head to David. David named them for what they were: murderers.

Here there is an example for us. When we are involved in family feuds, do we seek justice? Even when such justice seems at odds with our own faction in the feud? It is tempting to seek justice only when it benefits us. But remember, someday the feud will be over. The just will still be the just, and honored for it.

In all this we see a reverence for the authorities that God has set up. God provided the anointing. In our own family feuds, should we not also respect that which God has provided? One of the secrets my own father taught me was how to disagree with him without being disrespectful.

Willingness to sacrifice for what is right

David's forces are led by Joab; Ishbosheth's by Abner. When Abner decides to betray his king, David brings him into the camp, feasts him and his men, and makes an agreement with him. This seems to be a contradiction of David's character, but consider that by this agreement the war would be ended - and the two sides reconciled. It is that reconciliation that David seeks.

But not without righteousness. David - and his wife Michal - have been wronged. The price of this agreement is the acknowledgment of that. Michal is to be taken from her husband (who is rather unceremoniously told to go home and cry there) and returned to David. This stroke unites the house of David with the house of Saul again, and also proclaims the restoration of righteousness. David will pay a great price for this when Joab murders Abner - but because all can see that he made the agreement in righteousness, sacrificing material gain but not honor, even that murder does not disrupt the process of reconciliation.

So often we are so concerned with getting our way, and soothing our feelings, that we forget righteousness. When we argue, we want to win. When the argument leads to the counselor's office, the first question is almost always, "Tell him/her that I'm right." Often, we must choose between being right and winning. God honors those who choose wisely. Listen to a story about Robert E. Lee:

At the close of the Civil War, stockholders of the infamous Louisiana Lottery, approached General Robert E. Lee and tendered him the presidency of the company. Lee was without position, property, or income, but regarded this offer as the gain of oppression, and on the ground that he did not understand the business and did not care to learn it, he modestly declined the proposition. They then said, "No experience is needed. We know how to run the business. We want you as president for the influence of your name. Remember the salary is twenty-five thousand dollars a year." Lee arose and buttoned his old gray coat over his manly breast and replied, "Gentlemen, my home at Arlington Heights is gone, I am a poor man, and my people are in need. My name and influence are all I have left, and they are not for sale at any price." Rather than receive the gain of oppression, he taught the young men of the South the principles of right living at a salary of one thousand dollars a year.

Dealing with your enemies during the conflict - and reconciliation after

It is extremely noteworthy that David's favor often rested on those who had been most loyal to Saul. Lincoln had that same characteristic - he valued those who were loyal and trustworthy, whether they were on the Union side or not. One night a young lady came to Lincoln in the company of some politically powerful friends, seeking a pass to visit her brother who was a prisoner of war. Her friends warned her not to reveal her loyalty to the Southern cause. Lincoln asked, "You are loyal, of course?"

"Yes, loyal to the heart's core - to Virginia."

The president said not another word, but wrote out this pass:

"Permit the bearer, Miss Neilson, to pass in and make inquiries about her brother; she is an honest girl and can be trusted."

David does much the same thing for the men of Jabesh-Gilead, who buried Saul and Jonathan. He rewards them for their loyalty. Richard the Lionheart rewarded his chief foe, John the Marshal, with the regency - figuring that if he was loyal to Henry II, he would be loyal to Richard as well. He was. By such measures do we reach out and heal the wounds of civil strife. It would be well to examine our own conduct in this, and see how we measure up.

Heartfelt sympathy for others.

LaSalle Corbell Pickett, the wife of Confederate General George Pickett (Pickett's charge at Gettysburg) relates this story about the fall of Richmond:

The day after the fire, there was a sharp rap at the door. The city was full of Yankees, and my environment had not taught me to love them. The fate of other cities had awakened my fears for Richmond. With my baby on my arm I opened the door and looked up at a tall, gaunt sad-faced man in ill-fitting clothes. He asked, "Is this George Pickett's home?"

With all the courage and dignity I could muster, I replied: "Yes, and I am his wife, and this is his baby."

"I am Abraham Lincoln"

"The president!" I gasped. ... "No; Abraham Lincoln, George's old friend."

(Lincoln had been instrumental in getting Pickett an appointment to West Point.) Lincoln was worried about the family; he came in person to see if things were all right.

Recognition that healing must come

So often we go on like the feud must continue forever. It is not so. All wars come to an end, and we must realize (as my father told me) that the war is not over when the battle is won. The war is over when your enemy is your friend.

David shows us that in his lament for Abner. Joab murders him - there is no other way to put it - and the politics are such that David must not start the blood bath again. But he does the best he can. He becomes the chief mourner at Abner's funeral. He calls down a curse on the house of Joab for this deed. He proclaims that he is weakened by his death.

Israel sees, and approves. It is a gesture of healing. It would have been easy enough to have seen Abner (and Joab) for what they were - opportunists looking to wind up on the winning side. But David chose not to do that.

"With malice toward none, and charity toward all..." said Lincoln. There's a lesson in that.

Relationship to God

Underlying the honor during the conflict and the care for one's enemies is one fact: a relationship to God. It is the key to understanding everything that David does during this time.

- ✚ David acts out of a sense of responsibility to God. He knows that God has anointed him; all that he does is now undergirded with the question, "What does God want?" I would wonder aloud: how often do we, in our conflicts, ask the same question?
- ✚ David does not just meditate on this. He inquires directly of the Lord. His continuing practice is to ask God what to do, and he does this more than once. How many of us think to do this - only when we're in trouble so deep we can't see our own way out?

✚ David trusts God for his future. This period in David's life is over seven years long. During that time David is king - in Hebron. Not until he takes Jerusalem does he become king indeed. But the lessons learned in this time will serve him well in ruling this fractious kingdom.

We might well ask ourselves these same questions. Even if your conflict is only that between husband and wife, you could ask:

✚ What does God want? Is my "winning" so important that He must lose?

✚ Have I inquired of the Lord - or am I just shooting my mouth off?

✚ Am I trusting God for my future - or trying to make it on my own?

Good questions - for king of Israel or king of the house.

The Awesome God - (2 Samuel 6)

Ever since Indiana Jones brought it to our attention in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the Ark of the Covenant has held a fascination for modern readers. Much of this fascination comes from the power that seems to reside in the ark - a power which is clearly displayed in this text.

(2 Sam 6 NIV) David again brought together out of Israel chosen men, thirty thousand in all. {2} He and all his men set out from Baalah of Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark. {3} They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart {4} with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. {5} David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals. {6} When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. {7} The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God. {8} Then David was angry because the Lord's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah. {9} David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, "How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?" {10} He was not willing to take the ark of the LORD to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it aside to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. {11} The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household. {12} Now King David was told, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God." So David went down and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. {13} When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. {14} David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, {15} while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets. {16} As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart. {17} They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD. {18} After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD Almighty. {19} Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes. {20} When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!" {21} David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel--I will celebrate before the LORD. {22} I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor." {23} And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.

The Ark

History

It must be remembered that the ark is about 500 years old at this time. Its history is a bit unusual - it seems to go in and out of the memory of Israel.

- ✚ It was made at the time of the exodus, at the direction of God. This was a time at which the Law was being given, and some of that law concerned the ark as well. But in the time of Moses and Joshua, the ordinances seem to have been followed strictly.
- ✚ The ark was seen as the visible symbol of God's power. In its presence the Jordan stops flowing at flood stage; at its presence the walls of Jericho fall down flat. Whatever else might be thought, here is power.
- ✚ Even the Philistines know this. They capture the ark (because of the evil of the sons of Eli, the priest.) Things immediately start going wrong for the Philistines. They put it in the temple of Dagon; Dagon falls flat on his face before the ark. The Philistines are smitten with a plague - of hemorrhoids. They shift it from city to city, and finally send it back to Israel on a newly made cart, with gold offerings for atonement. When the Israelites get it, some look into it - and are killed. This thing is dangerous.
- ✚ It sits. For almost 75 years it is practically ignored by Samuel and Saul. It is not until David remembers the legendary power of the ark that it comes into the history of Israel again.

Rules

God seems to be rather strict about this piece of hardware.

- ✚ While in transit, it is to be covered so that no irreverence may be done to it.
- ✚ It is to be carried on poles - so that God will ride above the backs of the people, not behind them like a captive in a cart.
- ✚ Only certain people - the descendants of Kohath - can carry it. God chooses, not us.
- ✚ And - interestingly - when the High Priest went into it, he was to use so much incense (a symbol of prayer) that it clouded over the top of the ark, called the Mercy Seat.

Political Significance

David is an astute politician. He knows that he is ruling over a country of tribes, and the ark does two things for him:

- ✚ By having it in his possession, he connects himself with the Moses and Joshua of legend - completing his image in the minds of the people as a man after God's own heart. Here is a symbol of power.
- ✚ More than that, it is a symbol of the unity of the twelve tribes. There are twelve tribes, but only one ark. He who possesses it can legitimately claim to be the ruler of all Israel.

Spiritual Significance

Of far more importance to us, however, is its spiritual significance. There are three very important aspects:

- ✚ It is the "ark of the Testimony." It, by its very existence, testifies both to the miraculous deliverance of the Jews from the land of Egypt (a type of sin) and their own sinful ways, which God dealt with in the wilderness.

- ✦ It is said to carry the "name of the Lord." To a society in which a man's name was much more than a label, it was the one item which at this time could be said to represent God in physical form.
- ✦ It is at the mercy seat that God met Moses. This was not unique; Samuel met him there also. This is the one spot on earth where God speaks to the prophets. This is, literally, the voice of God.

Lessons Learned, Part 1

So then, what can we learn from David's handling of the Ark?

Doing the right things the right way

It is important to do the right things. It is also important to do them in the right way - for the ends do not justify the means. David learns that here.

- ✦ The Philistines - who knew no better - put the Ark on a cart. They try their best to please this powerful God. The cart is new; the oxen have never been yoked. The cart contains their atonement offerings - golden models of rats (representing the plague carriers) and hemorrhoids. They are each five in number, for the five cities of the Philistines. That's not bad for people who had no instructions whatever. But it's not good enough for the people of God - who should be reading the instructions given to them. God has a stricter standard for those of us who know the Scripture.
- ✦ The Ark must come to Jerusalem, for it bears the name of the Lord, and that is the city where God will place his name, as prophesied. So the end of this quest is completely justified. David makes the mistake of assuming that he need think no further.
- ✦ When God's wrath is revealed, David stops. He lets the matter sit for three months, and in that time inquires of the priests and Levites as to the Law. They enlighten him - and he now does it God's way.

The Wrath of God

The wrath of God is not a popular subject, but it is a necessary one. God's wrath is his permanent, fixed reaction to evil. We might look at this incident and say, "Why is God being so picky?" But consider:

- ✦ God is completely pure and holy. If you will, his standards must be much higher than ours, for he can tolerate no sin in his presence.
- ✦ Our reaction comes from the fact that we are sinners. We say, "Who are you to be so fussy? You're not perfect." But God is perfect.
- ✦ Do you remember that Christ welcomed the tax collectors, prostitutes and other sinners - but cleansed the Temple? He was zealous *for the things of God*. If this were somebody's hope chest, the reaction would be unreasonable. But this chest belongs to God. It is holy. To mistreat the possessions of another human being is one thing; we are all sinners. To mistreat the things of God is entirely another.

Joy in Worship

So often we find worship to be dull. It should not be; David sets us an example here. If God is worth worshiping, he's worth everything we can put into it.

- ✦ As Athanasius taught, it's in such times of music that we are closest to God - for it is only then that we worship with all our heart, all our souls, all our minds and all our strength.

✦ We, like Michal, might see this as undignified. But let me ask a question: does that dignity come from our respect for God - or from our own pride at being such righteous people? To "let go" and make a fool of yourself for God is to say that He is worthy - and I am not.

It would be convenient to end the matter here. There is one more thing to be learned, and that from David's wife Michal.

Michal - and the primacy of God

There is something utterly tragic about Michal. If ever a woman had a reason to complain of being ill-used and treated with a complete lack of respect, it is Michal.

✦ When we first meet her, we see she is a woman in love. She has a crush on this young warrior David.

✦ But she's already second fiddle. Saul was going to give his daughter in marriage to the man who defeated Goliath - but the daughter in question was her older sister Merab. Michal is the kid sister, and even her own father doesn't really respect her.

✦ He respects her so little that he uses her as bait. David is to die at the hands of the Philistines collecting those hundred foreskins as a bride price for Michal. It doesn't work - but how would you like to be nothing but bait in your dad's trap for another man?

✦ When David flees, Saul "marries" her off to Paltiel - this after she saves David's life. For the next ten years David evidently has no contact with her at all - he has abandoned her, evidently. She is now just a political pawn.

✦ She is a pawn again when David comes into the kingship, for David tells Abner to bring her from her husband to him. She is the symbol of David's triumph and the unity of the house of Saul with the house of David - and she is now wife number seven instead of wife number one. David has acquired six other women.

✦ Despite this, we see her waiting at her window. You might miss the significance of this. It is the pose of the wayward wife in Proverbs; it is the picture of the temple prostitute in ancient times; even today in Europe it is used by houses of prostitution to lure customers. The woman is waiting for her lover to come home, and she is letting him know of her passionate desire for him. After all this, she is still desperately in love with David, and wants him very much.

There is the sadness of it all. She wanted nothing more than to be his lover and wife; she got everything but that for most of her life. She dies childless. Why?

✦ Perhaps it was God's doing, as we shall see below.

✦ Perhaps it was David's anger at her.

✦ Perhaps, even, it was her anger at David.

But there is one thing certain. She missed the point. No matter what has happened to her, God still comes first. If ever a woman was ill treated, Michal was that woman. If ever a woman should have had her husband's love - my gosh, she saved his life - Michal was that woman. She even has justification for her attitude in the Scripture, for the king was not to multiply to himself wives.¹⁶ She had, by our standards, every reason to be angry. But she missed the point. David was dancing before the Lord, and the Lord comes before your marriage.

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 17:17

It is tragic. It is a high, holy moment, and Michal could have shared it with the man she loved. She forced him to choose between God and herself. She paid for it the rest of her days.

We do not often think of the God of Wrath, the God who must be worshiped, the God who is above all things. But perhaps we should, lest we put our own wrongs above his righteousness.

Plans, Promises and Prayers - 2 Samuel 7

One of the temptations for the intelligent Christian is to give good policy advice to God. We are so convinced that we know best. David does something like that in our Scripture today:

(2 Sam 7 NIV) After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, {2} he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent." {3} Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you." {4} That night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying: {5} "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?' {6} I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. {7} Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'" {8} "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. {9} I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. {10} And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning {11} and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.' "The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: {12} When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. {13} He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. {14} I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. {15} But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. {16} Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me ; your throne will be established forever.'" {17} Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation. {18} Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? {19} And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD? {20} "What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Sovereign LORD. {21} For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant. {22} "How great you are, O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. {23} And who is like your people Israel--the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? {24} You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you, O LORD, have become their God. {25} "And now, LORD God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised, {26} so that your name will be great forever. Then men will say, 'The LORD Almighty is God over Israel!' And the house of your servant David will be established before you. {27} "O LORD Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, 'I will build a house for you.' So your servant has found

courage to offer you this prayer. {28} O Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. {29} Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, O Sovereign LORD, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever."

Plans

So many of us start with this assumption: "If my motives are good, and my plans are careful, God will honor those plans. I don't need to talk to him about it." We think that if our motives are pure, then God will "play along." It is not so:

- ✚ *Good idea vs. God's idea.* David looked at his magnificent palace of cedar and thought God would like one too. But we need to realize that whatever we plan on our own, it is tainted by the fact that we are sinners. We cannot conceive what God can do. His plans are always greater than our own, and we need to recognize that fact.

- ✚ *Approval by the people of God.* Often, to "verify" our thoughts, we will consult with another Christian. If David had asked me, I would have said, "Great idea!" What I should say is, "Have you talked to the Father about this?" Even the most mature of Christians needs the guidance of God. It is condescending on our part to presume that God would approve.

David was actually proposing what would be a fundamental change in the way Israel would worship - though he might not have realized that. David's changes, however, were trivial to the changes God wanted. We see some side notes about worship here:

- ✚ We often say that we don't need a building in which to worship. We say, "I can worship God amidst the trees just as well as in church." As Teddy Roosevelt replied to that, "Yes - but you won't." You need the sense of place.

- ✚ The greatness of God is not confined to the spectacular. Sunsets and stars remind us of his creation, but so should the still, small voice.

Our plans and God's plans

- ✚ Our plans tend to be *superficial* - "Let's build a temple." God's plans are *significant* - the Temple was to symbolize that which was to come.

- ✚ Our plans tend towards security; God's plans make us trust in him.

- ✚ Our plans are for the temporary - things in our own lifetimes. God plans for eternity, and we may be just a small link in his golden chain.

Considering the difference, it was mighty gracious of God to stop David before he had spent a lot of money on this.

God's plan

The magnificence of what God wanted to do is seen here. In this short passage God reveals two of the most significant developments in the Old Testament.

- ✚ He reveals the *Davidic Covenant* - his agreement with the house of David that this line of kings would always be the rulers over Israel, and from his line would come the Christ. (That's why those genealogies in the New Testament are so important.)

- ✚ He reveals the *plan of the Temple* - which symbolically foreshadows the coming kingdom of God. Would you want David's small plan to get in the way of God's magnificent one?

Promises

Just what did God promise David?

- ✚ He promised to make his name great - and this certainly has happened.
- ✚ He promised to provide a place of safety for his people Israel. This has yet to be fulfilled.
- ✚ He promised that Solomon would build the Temple, which he did.
- ✚ He promised that his throne would endure forever. Punishment to the wicked was promised, but never again would God take his love from the house of David. In the history of Israel there were many dynasties; Judah had only one.
- ✚ Most important was this: he promised a father/son relationship between God and David's descendant. This was fulfilled in Christ, the Son of God.

David's reaction

Perhaps it amused God to reveal all this to David. "David wants to build *me* a house? I'll build him a house." The general reaction is one of astonishment. David had no idea what great plans God had for him.

- ✚ He "sat down" before the Lord- a gesture of great respect.
- ✚ He didn't complain (which is most unusual - but David is a man after God's own heart).
- ✚ Most of all, he expressed his gratitude to God in praise and adoration.

Claiming the promises

David gives us a superb example here. God has promised, and it seems that David is going to hold him to it. We need to examine this in more detail. Consider these questions:

How do I know that God will keep these promises? David gives us three very good reasons, all based upon the character of God, which never changes:

- ✚ He will do it for the sake of his word. God said it; he is truth and it will be done.
- ✚ He will do it because it is his will. He is not like man who changes his mind.
- ✚ He will do it for the sake of his great name, which should not be insulted. So that we may praise the name, he will deliver his promises.

How do I claim these promises? David gives us two ways to claim the promises:

- ✚ In verse 21, he treats the promise in the past tense. He talks like it has already happened.
- ✚ Elsewhere, he explicitly claims the promise, "in God's name" and "by his word." He relies on God's unchanging nature and sworn word.

Why would God want me to do this? C. H. Spurgeon put it this way:

"Nothing pleases our Lord better than seeing his promises in circulation." It's as if you can take that note to the bank.

- ✚ First, it is an act of faith, trusting God to do what he says.
- ✚ Next, it is an act of obedience, for he commands you to do it.

(One reason we read Scripture diligently: you can't stand on the promises if you don't know what they are.)

Prayers

With such a great blessing, David goes to prayer.

Relationship with God

We need to see the relationship between David and God:

- ✚ It is a personal relationship. God is not some force in David's life; he is a person with characteristics to be learned and loved, not equations to be plotted.
- ✚ It is based upon David knowing, "Who am I?" - in comparison to God.
- ✚ It also rests on the fact that God knows David - completely.
- ✚ See how David acknowledges God's sovereignty - and this is from a man who is king, and ought to know!
- ✚ Finally, cherish this: the revelation of God has brought courage to David. When God speaks, David is emboldened. When God is silent, he withdraws.

Attitude of Gratitude

This is first and foremost a prayer of thanksgiving. But thanksgiving must be done in the proper way. Your mother taught you to write thank-you cards for a reason.

- ✚ His gratitude is anchored in the grace of God. This is not God paying David for services rendered, and David knows it.
- ✚ He thanks him for favors past, present and future.
- ✚ He thanks him for favors not only for himself, but for all those for whom he has responsibility - his people.

Is it not the case that our greatest blessings come not from our own labors, but from the hand of God? Mine certainly do.

The glory of God

All this is done for the glory of God. God's glory, eternal, constantly in harmony with his will, is the focus of this prayer. God is glorified here in

- ✚ His word - which is true.
- ✚ His will - which is perfect
- ✚ His name - which is holy.

So I end with some questions for you:

- ✚ Who's making the plans for your life - you, or God?
- ✚ Are you claiming the promises God has made to you? Are you relying on him to deliver?
- ✚ As he does, do you go to him in prayer, thankful and giving glory to his name?

Anatomy of a Murder - (2 Samuel 11)

Few incidents in the Old Testament have been used as often - and tell as good a story - as David and Bathsheba. We'll take it in two parts; this lesson will deal with just how David got himself into the mess. Next time we'll deal with how God got him out of it.

(2 Sam 11 NIV) In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. {2} One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, {3} and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" {4} Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home. {5} The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant." {6} So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. {7} When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. {8} Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. {9} But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house. {10} When David was told, "Uriah did not go home," he asked him, "Haven't you just come from a distance? Why didn't you go home?" {11} Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" {12} Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. {13} At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home. {14} In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. {15} In it he wrote, "Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die." {16} So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. {17} When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died. {18} Joab sent David a full account of the battle. {19} He instructed the messenger: "When you have finished giving the king this account of the battle, {20} the king's anger may flare up, and he may ask you, 'Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall?' {21} Who killed Abimelech son of Jerub-Besheth? Didn't a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you get so close to the wall?' If he asks you this, then say to him, 'Also, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.'" {22} The messenger set out, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had sent him to say. {23} The messenger said to David, "The men overpowered us and came out against us in the open, but we drove them back to the entrance to the city gate. {24} Then the archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall, and some of the king's men died. Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead." {25} David told the messenger, "Say this to Joab: 'Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.' Say this to encourage Joab." {26} When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. {27} After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.

Start to Checkpoint

It's interesting to see how David got into this mess:

- ✚ If you look into the preceding chapters, you will find that this is a time of triumph in David's life, both personally (his care for Jonathan's son) and militarily (his defeat of the Ammonites). We often think Satan attacks when we're down. It is not always so.
- ✚ David is in the wrong place at this time, for this is the season "when kings go out to war."
- ✚ His eyes are wandering into the wrong places, too.
- ✚ Why? Perhaps it is because he has so many wives. Is his mind preoccupied with sex - especially since the palace business is really happening with the army in the field? Too much leisure time and too many women to occupy it, perhaps? At the very least, we can fault his attitude towards women - toys to play with.

Next step: involve others

David will not commit this sin alone. Isn't it interesting that even the most "private" of sins - adultery - always seems to require a little help from our friends?

- ✚ First, there is the messenger who finds out who she is. No doubt he laid a little groundwork for the king.
- ✚ Then he sends messengers to take her to the palace.
- ✚ Finally, later, he will connive with Joab.

Why do we seem to need to involve others in such sin?

- ✚ We know it's wrong, but we feel better if we get someone else involved - and they don't object. After all, if it was *really* all that bad, they would say something, wouldn't they?
- ✚ We often use them to do what we consider the risky part. After all, if this was discovered half way through, it was just some servant, right?
- ✚ Sometimes, we like to think that we have laid some of the guilt on them as well. This may be, but it doesn't lessen our own.
- ✚ For people like David, it gives a sense of power and particularly control. It says, "I can handle this situation. Nothing can go wrong; I'm in complete control."

Adultery

About the adultery itself there is little to say. This is a Bible lesson, not a Hollywood epic, so we'll skip the sex scenes. It is sufficient to note that the sin began when David put his eyes on Bathsheba and decided that he had to have her. The sin starts with the eyes, goes through the heart and evidences itself in the body.

In our time we take adultery very casually; it is worth remembering that it was a capital offense in Israel. Of course, we would say that this is a result of sexual repression - in a country where the king has dozens of women, and in any number of neighboring towns you can find temple prostitutes. We see it in the light of "if it feels good, do it." David more likely saw it as forbidden fruit.

Whatever the view, sin has consequences. She's pregnant.

Cover Up

This is our most common tactic in dealing with sin. A new wrinkle has come up with Christians today. There seems to be an attitude that says that if I confess my sin to God (and do nothing else) that this should be sufficient. God seeks reconciliation for us; we seek a band-aid.TM Why?

- ✦ "Out of sight, out of mind."
- ✦ We can safely ignore God; we can always ask forgiveness from him. The important thing is that no one else finds out.
- ✦ After all, we're in control of events, aren't we? We can pull the strings to make it happen, right?
- ✦ And since we're covering up, all those friends we've connived with will want to cover up too. There's no one to bring it to mind.

Checkpoint: Uriah the Hittite

God often gives us a chance to figure out what we should do on our own. One way he does this is to send us a checkpoint - a person or event which sharply reminds us of what we *should* be doing. Uriah the Hittite is David's checkpoint.

- ✦ You have to remember that Uriah is not an Israelite - he's a Hittite, which means that his devotion to David is not from family reasons.
- ✦ He's listed as one of David's thirty "Mighty Men" - his personal bodyguard, the toughest of warriors who have been with him from the earliest days. He's a good friend and servant to David; they've been through a lot together.
- ✦ Look at his attitude. It's a perfect example of the servant not being above the master. His buddies, the army, the ark are all in tents - and he's going to go home and relax?
- ✦ This is also a man who is accepting of what God has given him. The campaign means hardship, but he does not reject it or squirm out of it.

Uriah should have been an example to shame David into repentance. David didn't see it that way.

Gangrene

David has a choice at this point: repent, or go all the way in the cover up. He chooses to complete the cover up. His partner in crime is Joab:

- ✦ David has chosen a man to whom murder is no stranger. Once before Joab has murdered; then for revenge, now as a favor to the king (and a point of blackmail, perhaps?)
- ✦ He's a conniver, a man who plots.
- ✦ Notice Joab's "wink" in his instructions to the messenger. He doesn't know why David wants the man dead, but he's sure it's not a legitimate execution. You can almost see the wink in the words.
- ✦ David winks back in his reply, and spirals deeper into sin.

The magnitude of the sin - man's view

The sedate language of the Old Testament sometimes soothes our ears so that we do not recognize the gravity of the sin:

- ✦ First there is adultery - a capital offense then. We think little of it now; our reaction would be something like "Why didn't she get an abortion?" This is a measure of our depravity. Adultery is deadly.

- ✦ Then there is murder. About this we care! But note that this murder has no real redeeming circumstances about it. There is no revenge, or other motive. It is the murder of a loyal, long time friend who did absolutely nothing to deserve it.
- ✦ Consider for a moment Bathsheba's view: how would you like to find out that your second husband murdered your first one - to get you?
- ✦ In all this there is a great sense of betrayal - a betrayal of a loyal friend, a betrayal of trust, a betrayal of the kingship itself.
This is slime.

The magnitude of the sin - God's view

- ✦ First, there is the sheer ingratitude of the man. Look at what God has done for him - and if that wasn't enough, how much more would have been!
- ✦ More than that, he has dragged God's name in the mud. The enemies of God all around can now point to David. As today, when a prominent Christian is found out to be so wicked, the cry is, "They're all hypocrites." And if God produces nothing but hypocrites, what kind of god is he?

Lessons for Us

All this happened a long time ago, but human nature hasn't changed that much. There are lessons in here for all of us.

Lead us not into temptation

- ✦ We must remember that we are not immune to temptation, no matter who we are. This especially applies in the high moments of our lives.
- ✦ We need to ask ourselves "Where am I supposed to be, and what am I supposed to be doing?" We should do this frequently.
- ✦ We should check our attitudes towards other human beings. David thought women to be playthings. Is there someone in our lives that we esteem too lightly - and sin against too quickly?
- ✦ We must check our attitude towards God - if we see him as the easy mark for forgiveness, with no thought of the awesome, holy God, we are in for a big surprise.

Deliver us from evil

But once we start down the trail, what can we do then? Aren't we trapped by our own actions?
Not at all:

- ✦ If you know someone is an evil person, a conniver, then stay away. Don't ask their help; ask the help of the righteous.
- ✦ The best method of cover up is: don't start it. Confess quickly before the splinter goes into gangrene.
- ✦ When God presents you with a check point, *listen!*

Hallowed be thy name

Remember, in all these things, you bear the name "Christian." This is not something that is about "just me." It is a matter which reflects upon the church itself. When (I did not say if) your sin is found out, the enemies of God will have a fine time telling the world just how rotten those Christians really are. God's name in the mud!

Do you care?

The Way Home - (Psalm 51; 1 Samuel 12:1-25)

The story of David and Bathsheba has one particular disadvantage for the teacher: it is so beautifully done that there is very little to add. Let us begin by looking at how God deals with David's sin:

(2 Sam 12:1-25 NIV) The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. {2} The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, {3} but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. {4} "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him." {5} David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! {6} He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." {7} Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. {8} I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. {9} Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. {10} Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.' {11} "This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. {12} You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'" {13} Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. {14} But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die." {15} After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. {16} David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground. {17} The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them. {18} On the seventh day the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, "While the child was still living, we spoke to David but he would not listen to us. How can we tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate." {19} David noticed that his servants were whispering among themselves and he realized the child was dead. "Is the child dead?" he asked. "Yes," they replied, "he is dead." {20} Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate. {21} His servants asked him, "Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!" {22} He answered, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.' {23} But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me." {24} Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave

birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him; {25} and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.

Action!

The common belief of Christians is that God will "do nothing" about our sins. Somehow, we have convinced ourselves that sin has no divine consequence. Indeed, some of us extend this to "no earthly consequences." But see the truth portrayed clearly here.

Why God Acts

God moves in this instance for two reasons:

- ✚ First, to show that hidden sin cannot remain that way. So many of us think, like David, we are so clever that no one will ever find out. It is not so. Even if it comes out only during the Judgment, it is not so.
- ✚ Next, in this instance, to show us that no one is exempt from the consequences of sin. No one - not the rich and the powerful, for David is a king. No one - not even the one who walks so closely to God that he was called a "man after God's own heart." Past service is no cover to present sin.

How God Acts

God has a particular style.

- ✚ He likes to work by means of a messenger. This is fitting for most of us, because it gives us the choice: repentance or defiance. Defiance is easy when the messenger is human like we are; and God will not force us to repent. He sends his messenger in frail human form so that the choice will be ours - alone.
- ✚ He sends a clear indication of the sin. It is not just some vague mention that the books are a little out of balance; it is specific to the case. Often, this is our conscience; here it is the prophet.

Consequences of Sin

We like to justify our sins on the ground of "nobody got hurt - it's a victimless sin." God does not work that way; sin has consequences.

- ✚ *The consequences are parallel to the sin.* David commits adultery, a sin against faithfulness and sexual purity. For this he will get Absalom's revolt, in which his own son will betray his father for the crown - and this will come from a case of rape in his own household. David commits murder, and therefore the sword will never leave his house.
- ✚ *What is done in secret will be seen in public.* God understands that we tried to hide it; therefore, He will expose it.
- ✚ *There will be consequences to the innocent as well as the guilty.* The child, for example, dies - for what fault of its own? Think how Bathsheba must have felt when it was told to her that her first born child was dead. Indeed, the consequences go far beyond his household. The enemies of God hear about it, and pronounce him a hypocrite - and thus are barred from learning about the one true God.

One thing is crucial in understanding the consequences of sin: David repented. These are the consequences of sin on a *man who repented*.

- ✦ So many of us think, "All I have to do is pray for forgiveness, and nothing bad will come of it." Do you think that God is so easily fooled? Do you think he will neglect your instruction? Do you think he will neglect the instruction of those around you?
- ✦ This is the consequence for a man who repents. Think, then, of what God would need to do for one who refused to repent.

It is our great good fortune and gift that David is a poet; his repentance is documented for us in Psalm 51 - the way home.

The Way Home

(Psa 51 NIV) For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. {2} Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. {3} For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. {4} Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. {5} Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. {6} Surely you desire truth in the inner parts ; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. {7} Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. {8} Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. {9} Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. {10} Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. {11} Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. {12} Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. {13} Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. {14} Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. {15} O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. {16} You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. {17} The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. {18} In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. {19} Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Asking Mercy and Pardon

The first step - and it is only the first step - is to go to God and ask his mercy and pardon. This should not be a formality, however. You are not entitled to it.

The basis for asking for pardon is simply this: God is merciful, and God is compassionate. We ask for pardon based upon his character. What you must not do is to ask pardon on the basis of your own merit (what is your righteousness to God?).

Nor should you ask pardon of God on the basis of your circumstances. You may feel that you have much in the way of mitigating circumstance. Perhaps you do; the Lord is just and will consider these things. But you have no standing to use them as basis for pardon - only his love and compassion bring that.

Note how David phrases this: he asks to be "washed" or "cleansed." The metaphor is a very powerful one. It is as if sin is so much dirt and stain clinging to what should be an immaculate soul. Indeed, this is the nature of the fallen world. Man was created good; sin has stained him.

David asks for the "joy of your salvation" - some sign that God has indeed forgiven him. Do you take God at his word in this? David did, and was given Solomon as a sign of the return of God's favor.

Acknowledge the Sin

Most of us are good at asking pardon - but we would just as soon not mention why. See how David does it here:

- ✚ *Sin is against God.* He is the one who is righteous; any sin is an offense against him. Because he is the one who is completely righteous, he is the one who can judge us with justice. Because he is completely righteous, he is the one who will hide his face from us until we do repent.
- ✚ *Sin is a result of our nature.* Acknowledging the fact that he is a sinner, indeed from his birth, David does not try to deceive God (as we so often do). There is no sense of "I'm really a good guy" here. He admits that he is so much a sinner that there is nothing he can do to atone for it (verse 16). So often we try and "make it up to God." It won't work. He will not bargain with sin - or the sinner.
- ✚ *David names the specific sin.* We are often good at confessing that we are sinners - but no details, please. That's as useful as going down to the police station and turning yourself in as a criminal - but for no specific crime. David calls it bloodguilt (verse 14) and so it is.

Restoration of spirit

The mercy is asked; the sin confessed, now we must have restoration - a return to the fellowship of God. There are two key attributes of this:

- ✚ *The pure heart.* Notice that David asks God for this. No matter how hard we try, we cannot create a pure heart in ourselves. It's like restoring virginity. The clean heart is a steadfast one, full of the joy of salvation. How does God do this? Notice in verse 11 one of the rare instances of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. He is the agent of God's cleansing. In the New Testament we see him sent to convict the world of sin and judgment; here we see him as the one who creates the pure heart.
- ✚ *The Broken Spirit.* If the Holy Spirit is to reside within you, creating that pure heart, he must have no rivals. Your own spirit should not be there to proudly resist him. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It is because the poor in spirit, the broken in spirit, do not resist the Holy Spirit. The poor in spirit have the love of God as their first love - and love him with all heart, soul, mind and strength.

Return to the work

If repentance produces no action, I would question its reality. If you are forgiven, you will do something about it. As the old Scottish motto has it, "Saved - to Serve." David mentions the two aspects of the return to service of the sinner:

- ✚ *Sinners being turned.* This would correspond to evangelism for us. Is there any greater testimony than that of a repentant sinner?
- ✚ *Righteous sacrifice.* For the Christian, this would represent the good works of charity and other service to be performed.¹⁷

¹⁷ Romans 12:1

Appeal

Some as you read this will think, "That's nice. A very concise view of the chapters in question." You will have missed the point if you do.

My purpose here is to point out to you the way home. If I may, let me be your "Nathan" this day, though I know no details. Like Nathan, I would point out to you that no sin can remain hidden forever - and that no one, whether by past service or circumstance, is exempt from the righteous judgment of God.

I would ask you, then, to do these four things:

- ✚ Go to God, basing yourself upon his mercy and grace alone, and ask his pardon. If you are able, show him you mean it by asking the pardon of the one you might have offended. David didn't have that chance with Uriah. Take advantage of it if you can.
- ✚ Acknowledge your sin as being against God, who is the fountain of righteousness. Do not excuse yourself; do not offer to make it up to him; just be specific and admit it.
- ✚ Ask him for his restoration. We are to be ambassadors of reconciliation for Christ, and his reconciliation will come first to us. Crush your proud spirit; ask his Holy Spirit in to rule in its place.
- ✚ When he grants your plea - when, not if - then turn with gladness to the work he gives you. Reach out to the lost, telling them your story not as one who is proud of righteousness but rather one who is glad of forgiveness. If it is given to you to do good works, do them acknowledging the one who forgave you.

The Mechanics of Sin - 1 Samuel 13

Today's passage is painfully instructive of the "mechanics" of sin. By mechanics, I mean the mechanisms by which sin gains its control over us. We can learn much by the failures in today's story:

(2 Sam 13 NIV) In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David. {2} Amnon became frustrated to the point of illness on account of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her. {3} Now Amnon had a friend named Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab was a very shrewd man. {4} He asked Amnon, "Why do you, the king's son, look so haggard morning after morning? Won't you tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." {5} "Go to bed and pretend to be ill," Jonadab said. "When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'I would like my sister Tamar to come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I may watch her and then eat it from her hand.'" {6} So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. When the king came to see him, Amnon said to him, "I would like my sister Tamar to come and make some special bread in my sight, so I may eat from her hand." {7} David sent word to Tamar at the palace: "Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him." {8} So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, made the bread in his sight and baked it. {9} Then she took the pan and served him the bread, but he refused to eat. "Send everyone out of here," Amnon said. So everyone left him. {10} Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. {11} But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister." {12} "Don't, my brother!" she said to him. "Don't force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing. {13} What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you." {14} But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her. {15} Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, "Get up and get out!" {16} "No!" she said to him. "Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me." But he refused to listen to her. {17} He called his personal servant and said, "Get this woman out of here and bolt the door after her." {18} So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing a richly ornamented robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore. {19} Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went. {20} Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet now, my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart." And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman. {21} When King David heard all this, he was furious. {22} Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar. {23} Two years later, when Absalom's sheepshearers were at Baal Hazor near the border of Ephraim, he invited all the king's sons to come there. {24} Absalom went to the king and said, "Your servant has had shearers come. Will the king and his officials please join me?" {25} "No, my son," the king replied. "All of us should not go; we would only be a burden to you." Although Absalom urged him, he still refused to go, but gave him his blessing. {26} Then Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon come with us." The king asked him, "Why should he go with you?" {27} But Absalom urged him, so he sent with

him Amnon and the rest of the king's sons. {28} Absalom ordered his men, "Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, 'Strike Amnon down,' then kill him. Don't be afraid. Have not I given you this order? Be strong and brave." {29} So Absalom's men did to Amnon what Absalom had ordered. Then all the king's sons got up, mounted their mules and fled. {30} While they were on their way, the report came to David: "Absalom has struck down all the king's sons; not one of them is left." {31} The king stood up, tore his clothes and lay down on the ground; and all his servants stood by with their clothes torn. {32} But Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother, said, "My lord should not think that they killed all the princes; only Amnon is dead. This has been Absalom's expressed intention ever since the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar. {33} My lord the king should not be concerned about the report that all the king's sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead." {34} Meanwhile, Absalom had fled. Now the man standing watch looked up and saw many people on the road west of him, coming down the side of the hill. The watchman went and told the king, "I see men in the direction of Horonaim, on the side of the hill." {35} Jonadab said to the king, "See, the king's sons are here; it has happened just as your servant said." {36} As he finished speaking, the king's sons came in, wailing loudly. The king, too, and all his servants wept very bitterly. {37} Absalom fled and went to Talmai son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. But King David mourned for his son every day. {38} After Absalom fled and went to Geshur, he stayed there three years. {39} And the spirit of the king longed to go to Absalom, for he was consoled concerning Amnon's death.

External Mechanics

Let us first consider the external factors that work upon us to keep us in sin.

Children learn best by example- even bad examples.

It is a truism among parents that we say, "Do what I say, not what I do." We all know that this does not work, but we keep using it because we think we have no other choice. (We do, as we will see later.)

- ✚ David chased after a forbidden woman (Bathsheba); his oldest son does likewise, his step-sister Tamar.
- ✚ To cover the crime of murder, Absalom gets Amnon drunk - just as David got Uriah drunk.
- ✚ To cover his sexual sin, David resorted to murder. Absalom resorted to murder to revenge a sexual sin.

In a sense, the sins of the father are being "visited upon" the children - by example.

Sin increased by having the wrong friends

Your mother told you to be careful in picking your friends. Amnon was careless. He had his cousin Jonadab for a friend.

- ✚ Jonadab was a "sin enabler." He relished getting other people into trouble. Have you ever had a friend who was quick to find ways for you to get into trouble? That's no friend, is it?
- ✚ Jonadab is a smoother, a man of glib tongue. When the first reports are brought in, he's the one who says, it was only one son. This is a man who minimizes sin, who covers it in a blanket of soothing words - and thus sin continues to increase.
- ✚ Jonadab is also a flatterer - Amnon is the king's oldest son, and presumably heir, and this guy hovers around him. When you have power, this is a particular danger.

The spiral of revenge

One of the most powerful external mechanics of sin is revenge. Taking revenge is sinful in and of itself, but it also tends to increase the sin of others. Sadly, as Machiavelli said, "Men avenge slight insults, not grave ones." Here is a counter example, but for most of us our revenge is confined to trivial insults. But once our pride is engaged, the power of revenge is awesome.

Have you ever seen an office feud that went on for years? That's revenge. The original argument is long forgotten; only the latest offense counts. There is always a "latest offense," on both sides.

Internal Mechanics

The starting place of sin, however, is the human heart. The sad fact is that our prior evil deeds give Satan a handle with which to grab us. We see in this passage how David's guilt and pride combine to render him helpless in a matter which should be a major concern. The remarkable feature of this passage is not what David does - it is what he does *not* do.

- ✚ Why did David grant Amnon's request in the first place? Was it possible that he did not see the potential danger? It certainly wasn't for any medicinal reason! Perhaps he understood Amnon's intentions quite well, but wasn't prepared for this result.
- ✚ After the rape, did David punish Amnon, as the king should? No; he got angry - and did nothing. Was this not because it would appear so hypocritical to do so? David's pride would not let him appear as such.
- ✚ Indeed, David did nothing for Tamar, his daughter. The Old Testament Law forbids such marriage, but Tamar was right in saying that David would grant this, for this too is the Law. When a girl who is not betrothed is raped, the man is forced to marry her, with no possibility of divorce. This was to take away the disgrace of not being a virgin. David did not even do this.
- ✚ When Absalom asks for Amnon to come to the shearing, David is suspicious - but doesn't push it. Perhaps this is because he didn't press the question when Amnon came with his strange request.
- ✚ Finally, after the murder, David does not pursue, or even send pursuit, of Absalom. How does a man guilty of adultery and murder chastise another murderer?

Forbidden Fruit

Parents have known for years: "No, you can't have broccoli. It's an adult treat. You can't have it." That's the method you use to get your kids to try broccoli. It relies on a constant of human nature: If it's forbidden, we want it. It's been that way since the Garden of Eden.

The Old Testament Law prohibits Amnon from marrying his step-sister Tamar - and she therefore is forbidden fruit. Consider two things about such:

- ✚ The problem here is not in Tamar's beauty but in Amnon's eyes. The lust is there.
- ✚ But - if the fruit is forbidden, doesn't that mean there is a reason? Does God forbid what is good and right?

Guilt must be transferred

Of all the drivers behind sin, this may be the most insidious. Why did Amnon's lust, which he described as love, turn so suddenly into hate? Was it not because the enormous guilt inside him had to

go somewhere? Since he could not live with it, it must be her fault - look at the mess she got him in! So he compounds his sin to deal with his guilt - just as David added murder to adultery.

The cure for the mechanics

There is no sense describing the problem if you are not willing to tackle the solution. This entire episode is full of things which someone did *not* do. There is a very compact example of the right way to handle these things in the New Testament, the much neglected book of Philemon. If you will recall our study on that, you will recall its three characters and how they worked together to break the cycle of sin.

Philemon

- ✚ Philemon was a generous man; because he was not one to hoard his wealth, he could forgive one who stole from him.
- ✚ Philemon was a man of prayer, and in his time of prayer he could know the heart of forgiveness the Lord desires.
- ✚ Philemon was an example of the faith; his righteousness now gives birth to further righteousness.

Onesimus

- ✚ Onesimus was a man willing to repent at the call of Christ.
- ✚ Onesimus was willing to go back to his master - and take the risk of not being forgiven.

Paul

- ✚ Paul avoided the problem of his own sin by publicly acknowledging it, putting it on display - and therefore gave no handle for Satan.
- ✚ Paul was not disturbed either by the sin or the sinner, but kept his eyes on Christ.
- ✚ Most important, Paul was willing to seek forgiveness for Onesimus from Philemon - at Paul's expense.

Sin abounds; but we can break the cycle of sin if we try. As Paul taught us:

(2 Cor 5:17-21 NIV) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! {18} All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: {19} that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. {20} We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. {21} God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

David did not enter into the ministry of reconciliation - and paid dearly for that failure. May it please God that we should not make the same mistake.

Heartache- (2 Samuel 14-20)

Of all the tales of the Old Testament, none is sadder than the revolt of Absalom. The picture of David weeping over his beloved - and rebellious - son is one of great tragedy. It is also the source of our lesson today, as we examine the conduct of David's enemies and friends, and then his own. From that we hope to draw some lessons for our own time.

Enemies

David has no shortage of enemies here. We shall consider but three, beginning with the obvious one, his son Absalom.

Absalom

Absalom is the one character here who is most like most of us. We can see this in several ways:

- ✚ Vanity. Think about that hair! He was so proud of his appearance; some commentators hold that this was turned to his downfall, for tradition has it that his hair held him in that tree at such a length that he could not reach the branches. If so, it was a fitting end for so vain a man. But we see it in other actions too. He has sex with his father's concubines - in public. No doubt he thought they were the lucky ones to have him. But the real clue to this vanity is simple: not once, in all this story, does Absalom consult with God. He trusts his advisors, but will not speak to God. It is his downfall.
- ✚ Selfish ambition. How do we see this? It is fairly obvious. The first characteristic comes when he undercuts the king's justice, subverting what is right for his own ambition. The second test of ambition is this: did he do this in secret? Selfish ambition almost always needs conspiracy.
- ✚ Rebellion. This is what makes Absalom most like us. We, as sinners, are in rebellion against God. Rebellion is simply defined: to see **legitimate** authority and defy it. Legitimate authority comes from God - whether government or parents - and therefore this is a sin directly against God.

Ahithophel

Ahithophel has something of a motivation to strike at David; he's Bathsheba's grandfather¹⁸. He is esteemed as a wise man - but he is a traitor.¹⁹ He is the Judas of this piece. We see his flaws revealed here, by way of warning to us:

- ✚ First, he is a man who counsels sin to make a point. He's the one who tells Absalom to sleep publicly with the concubines.
- ✚ Next, he's a string puller. He imagines himself as the power behind the throne.
- ✚ His self importance is shown in his suicide. If his strings break, he's finished.

Shimei

He comes across to us as a little man, a man of weak character. Why?

- ✚ He's an opportunist. King David is down - so he kicks him.
- ✚ But when fortunes are reversed, he's the first to kiss hindquarters and beg for forgiveness. Expect such; they are always around.

¹⁸ Compare 2 Samuel 11:3 with 2 Samuel 23:34.

¹⁹ See Psalm 55:12-14 for David's comment.

Friends

"A thousand friends, it is too few; one enemy, more than enough" (Hafiz, by way of Rudyard Kipling). We shall examine three:

Ittai the Gittite

The funny thing about this guy is that he's from Gath (hence Gittite) - the home town of Goliath. Through some arcane bit of local politics, he's come to David for refuge, and found this mess. Here is a test for the man, and he passes:

- ✚ His key virtue is loyalty. He came to David, with David he will stay. When you find a friend like this, value him highly!
- ✚ David does indeed - he finds Ittai faithful in little, and later will appoint him to be faithful in much, a third of his army.

Zadok the priest

Every one needs at least one "religious" friend - someone who's in tight with the Lord God Almighty. That's Zadok. See how he aids David:

- ✚ He intercedes with God (by way of sacrifices at the ark) for David. Do we pray for our friends in trouble?
- ✚ He will take the ark back to Jerusalem, keeping the things of God where God puts them. This thirst for righteousness is the key to his character.
- ✚ His assistance, however, does not stop with prayer and intercession; he is also able to provide worldly assistance.

Such a friend is a true blessing. Would that we would all be such a friend.

Joab

Joab is a friend of David's of long standing, and a man of contradictions. We will focus entirely on his acts of friendship here.

- ✚ First, he fights for David.
- ✚ More than that, he hears David's heart - what a gift! - and arranges a way to bring Absalom home.
- ✚ When he can, as in the matter of the runners to tell David, he spares his friend as much grief as he can.
- ✚ But when needed - as when David is ignoring his troops for his grief - he rebukes him and brings him back to his duty.

A flawed friend, to be sure, but in these aspects we should imitate him.

Reaction

In David's reaction to these people we can see the heart of Christ, for David is a man after God's own heart. In so doing, we can also see how we, the imitators of Christ, should react to our own adversities.

To his enemies

How does David react to his enemies? Not like we would expect for most of us.

- ✦ He yearns for the return of the rebel - for he loves him. His desire is not to crush the rebellion but to bring the rebel back into the household. He intends to overcome evil with good.
- ✦ He appeals to the sovereignty of God to overthrow the advice of the string puller. In this, he acknowledges that God is in control, and it is his aid that must be sought - not the current powers of the land.
- ✦ He forgives - even the opportunist who cursed him and pelted him with stones.
- ✦ In time of distress, he endures the hardship and insult with the thought that perhaps God has ordained this, and he should willingly accept at God's hand both blessing and disaster.

To his friends

What does David do for his friends?

- ✦ He rewards the faithful, for those who are faithful in little will be faithful in much. God does the same with us.
- ✦ Even if it costs him, he cares for his friends. He tells Ittai the Gittite that the hospitality will be a lot better with Absalom.
- ✦ He listens to those who hear the voice of God, accepting their counsel and asking their aid.
- ✦ Ultimately, he listens to the rebuke of his friends, not reacting in anger but in sorrow - and turns to his duty.

In this way he keeps friends.

Lessons for us

There are many things we could glean from this story. Here are a few to go home with:

- ✦ Forgiveness - we need to be willing and able to forgive our enemies, for this marks us as the children of God.
- ✦ Endurance - as we go through the tough times, we need to count on God to prevail, not the string pullers of the world.
- ✦ Reward - for those who have been good friends, we should be liberal and swift with reward.
- ✦ Rebuke - when our friends come to us with rebuke, we should soften our hearts and listen, for from them may come the word of God.
- ✦ Sovereignty - in all things, acknowledge (and count on) the sovereignty of God.

David's Victory Song - (2 Samuel 22)

David now nears the end of his life. He has been placed back on the throne, gone through many troubles, and like many other old men, writes down the meaning of it all. It is his victory song.

Theme

The theme of the song is simple: the Lord is my rock, my savior, my deliverer. David says it this way:

(2 Sam 22:1-3 NIV) David sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. {2} He said: "The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; {3} my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior-- from violent men you save me.

In this short passage there is much from David's life.

"my rock"

The word literally means an inaccessible crag in the mountains. It is a word picture of God:

- ✚ God is inaccessible - no matter what we do in our own strength, we cannot reach him, for good or evil.
- ✚ God is high above us - his ways are not like ours.
- ✚ God is a place to hide - if we hide in him, we cannot be reached by the world. (Seek first the kingdom.)

"my fortress"

The word, interestingly, means not only a fortress - but a snare, as well. This too is a word picture of God:

- ✚ The fortress cannot be taken; our salvation is assured.
- ✚ The fortress is built to withstand assault. Whatever the world may do, God's kingdom will endure it.
- ✚ It is a snare - for the enemies of God. How often have we seen the world go on the attack against God, proclaiming that (like Rousseau), "after me there will be no church." Rousseau is dead; God lives.

"my deliverer"

The word means one who carries me out of danger. It shows a God who actively intervenes in my situation, changing it for good.

"my shield"

The word is most interesting. It means a small shield (sometimes translated "buckler" in the King James Version); it also means a crocodile's hide! This too is a word picture of God:

- ✚ As a shield, he is both impenetrable and terrifying to his enemies.
- ✚ His shield is not just to hide in - but to use in personal combat.

And the sum of all this: I will take refuge in him. Other versions show this as I will trust him.

Danger, Cry and Deliverance

David now amplifies:

(2 Sam 22:4-20 NIV) I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies. {5} "The waves of death swirled about me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. {6} The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me. {7} In my distress I called to the LORD; I called out to my God. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came to his ears. {8} "The earth trembled and quaked, the foundations of the heavens shook; they trembled because he was angry. {9} Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it. {10} He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet. {11} He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. {12} He made darkness his canopy around him-- the dark rain clouds of the sky. {13} Out of the brightness of his presence bolts of lightning blazed forth. {14} The LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. {15} He shot arrows and scattered the enemies, bolts of lightning and routed them. {16} The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at the rebuke of the LORD, at the blast of breath from his nostrils. {17} "He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. {18} He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. {19} They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support. {20} He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.

Danger

David now uses two word pictures to show us how he felt in danger. The first of these is drowning:

- ✚ Do you remember the scene in I Love Lucy where Lucy was in the chocolate factory? How the chocolates she was supposed to box came on so fast she couldn't - and how she tried every which way to cope? That's the sensation here.
- ✚ If you've ever been in a fast moving river, you know the power of flood currents. You feel so helpless, as if the river didn't even feel your efforts.
- ✚ That's the feeling here: drowning in troubles, too many troubles coming too fast.

The second word picture is the cords of death:

- ✚ Is there anything more menacing (in the cinema, anyway) than the tentacles of the wicked octopus? (Actually, I'm told they're rather shy - but we see them as gripping horrors.) That's the sensation here.
- ✚ The word also can mean "snares" - rope traps for animals.²⁰ Have you ever had the feeling that you're trapped and can't get out?
- ✚ The picture is vivid: you are tied down, trapped and helpless.

Cry

David cries for help. It is interesting to see his cry:

- ✚ It is a cry that comes from distress. Sometimes God uses this method to get our attention!
- ✚ It is also a reflection that David, the king, can't handle things. Some of us refuse to admit that.

²⁰ See also Job 36:8

And God answers him. But see the phrasing: "from his temple." Solomon's temple is not yet built; this again is a word picture:

- ✚ It is a picture of the holy and separate nature of God. God does not sin as we do; he is holy.
- ✚ It is also a picture that God is not like man, for God is sovereign.

Deliverance

David now begins a series of hyperbolic metaphors - fantastic descriptions of God. Why? David is a poet; we cannot imagine these descriptions to be visibly factual. David is trying to convey his impression of the awesome God, and we shall need to learn from it in the way he intended.

We begin with the glory of God:

- ✚ Smoke, fire, coals - these are the symbols of the wrath of God. We don't like to remember this - but God has a permanently bad attitude towards sin.
- ✚ Darkness - the symbol of the fact that we cannot comprehend everything about God; there is too little in us and too much in him.
- ✚ Cherubs and winds - these represent both the rational and irrational sides of creation - both of which are subject to God.

Next we see the works of God. We begin with his power:

- ✚ Are the channels of the sea and the foundations of the earth laid bare? This is a sign of the omniscience of God.
- ✚ Likewise, the arrows and lightning signify the omnipotence of God.

Finally, the care of God:

- ✚ All this - from smoke to arrows - is for one purpose: to deliver me. In all this he reaches down to rescue me. As high as is his glory and power, so is the depth of his care.
- ✚ Note, please, that this is not without effect. It is not just to display who God is; it results in my deliverance. A small thing for him, perhaps - but of some importance to me.

The parallel to God's love in sending Christ is striking.

The basis of deliverance

Why would God do all this? David outlines this as being because of his (David's) righteousness. We need to see three things in this: just what that righteousness entails (and does not); God's reaction to righteousness and his reaction to wickedness.

David has told us the what; now we will get the how.

(2 Sam 22:21-46 NIV) "The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me. {22} For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I have not done evil by turning from my God. {23} All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees. {24} I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin. {25} The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in his sight. {26} "To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, {27} to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. {28} You save the humble, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them low. {29} You are my lamp, O LORD; the LORD turns my darkness into light. {30} With your help I can

advance against a troop ; with my God I can scale a wall. {31} "As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. {32} For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God? {33} It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. {34} He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights. {35} He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. {36} You give me your shield of victory; you stoop down to make me great. {37} You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn. {38} "I pursued my enemies and crushed them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed. {39} I crushed them completely, and they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet. {40} You armed me with strength for battle; you made my adversaries bow at my feet. {41} You made my enemies turn their backs in flight, and I destroyed my foes. {42} They cried for help, but there was no one to save them-- to the LORD, but he did not answer. {43} I beat them as fine as the dust of the earth; I pounded and trampled them like mud in the streets. {44} "You have delivered me from the attacks of my people; you have preserved me as the head of nations. People I did not know are subject to me, {45} and foreigners come cringing to me; as soon as they hear me, they obey me. {46} They all lose heart; they come trembling from their strongholds.

David's righteousness

David puts it this way:

- ✦ He has "kept the ordinances." In other words, that which he knew was right to do, he did.
- ✦ He did not turn aside to wickedness. In other words, if he was sure it was wrong, he didn't do it. Note that David makes no claim of being perfect in his knowledge of either.
- ✦ But what about Bathsheba? By its absence we may infer something else: that God deals with us in righteousness as we are forgiven as well as when we keep his commands.

God's reaction to our righteousness

"What goes around, comes around." Remember that bit that David made no claim to perfectly understand God's commands? Have you ever been in a situation where you weren't sure what was right and wrong? Here's something of an answer: How God reacts to our righteousness.

- ✦ *Loyalty* - when you don't know what's right, but you stick by those who've stuck by you, God rewards that.
- ✦ *Blameless* - you may not know what is right - but you often know what isn't right. If you avoid that, God rewards your actions.
- ✦ *Pure* - you may not know where to go or what to do - but you know what you ought to be. That's purity, and God rewards that too.

God's reaction to wickedness

God reacts to the wicked in a predictable way as well:

- ✦ Those who think themselves shrewd soon find out that God cannot be fooled. There is a myth about that one who is righteous must be a fool, and God therefore the greatest fool of all. God makes it readily apparent that this is a grave misconception.
- ✦ To the proud - those who defy him - he reacts by crushing them. Many have stood up proclaiming themselves to be most powerful. All but the latest are gone, and he will leave any day now.

God my strength

David sees God in three ways:

- ✚ *God is my lamp* - he lights up my path. He shows me the way I should go, and makes things clear to me.
- ✚ *God is my strength* - David gives us two types of strength here. The first is courage, always necessary for spiritual combat. But the second is more subtle: training. God, by sending us small adversity, prepares us for larger adversity.
- ✚ *God is my help* - this two has two aspects. First, that God specifically stoops down to help me, specifically. He aids me in overcoming my difficulties. More than that, he smoothes the path before me - he makes it easier for me to triumph.

All in all, David proclaims God's strength in him like this; God expects David to do the work; David knows that God will give the victory in it.

Praise God!

(2 Sam 22:47-51 NIV) "The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God, the Rock, my Savior! {48} He is the God who avenges me, who puts the nations under me, {49} who sets me free from my enemies. You exalted me above my foes; from violent men you rescued me. {50} Therefore I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations; I will sing praises to your name. {51} He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever."

David concludes his song by praising God:

- ✚ He praises him for salvation
 - ✚ He praise him for victory
 - ✚ He praises him for his unfailing kindness
- All taken together, we should be willing to do the same.

Lessons:

There are four key lessons we can learn here, to take with us through the week:

- ✚ David's successes - and ours - are ultimately God's doing. If you are not being successful, look to your relationship with God.
- ✚ David's successes - and ours - are brought about by affliction and adversity. It is no success to triumph over no opposition. The Harlem Globetrotters play for comedy, the Lakers for victory.
- ✚ God's rescue comes from his wrath; it is his hatred of sin that causes the defeat of those who would sin against us.
- ✚ God is our refuge and strength; therefore, what have we to fear?

Cost of Sacrifice - (1 Chronicles 21)

The episode in today's lesson is little remarked upon by commentators. It is a pity, for it is a rich passage at the end of the life of David.

(1 Chr 21 NIV) Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. {2} So David said to Joab and the commanders of the troops, "Go and count the Israelites from Beersheba to Dan. Then report back to me so that I may know how many there are." {3} But Joab replied, "May the LORD multiply his troops a hundred times over. My lord the king, are they not all my lord's subjects? Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?" {4} The king's word, however, overruled Joab; so Joab left and went throughout Israel and then came back to Jerusalem. {5} Joab reported the number of the fighting men to David: In all Israel there were one million one hundred thousand men who could handle a sword, including four hundred and seventy thousand in Judah. {6} But Joab did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering, because the king's command was repulsive to him. {7} This command was also evil in the sight of God; so he punished Israel. {8} Then David said to God, "I have sinned greatly by doing this. Now, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing." {9} The LORD said to Gad, David's seer, {10} "Go and tell David, 'This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.'" {11} So Gad went to David and said to him, "This is what the LORD says: 'Take your choice: {12} three years of famine, three months of being swept away before your enemies, with their swords overtaking you, or three days of the sword of the LORD--days of plague in the land, with the angel of the LORD ravaging every part of Israel.' Now then, decide how I should answer the one who sent me." {13} David said to Gad, "I am in deep distress. Let me fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is very great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men." {14} So the LORD sent a plague on Israel, and seventy thousand men of Israel fell dead. {15} And God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. But as the angel was doing so, the LORD saw it and was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who was destroying the people, "Enough! Withdraw your hand." The angel of the LORD was then standing at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. {16} David looked up and saw the angel of the LORD standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell facedown. {17} David said to God, "Was it not I who ordered the fighting men to be counted? I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? O LORD my God, let your hand fall upon me and my family, but do not let this plague remain on your people." {18} Then the angel of the LORD ordered Gad to tell David to go up and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. {19} So David went up in obedience to the word that Gad had spoken in the name of the LORD. {20} While Araunah was threshing wheat, he turned and saw the angel; his four sons who were with him hid themselves. {21} Then David approached, and when Araunah looked and saw him, he left the threshing floor and bowed down before David with his face to the ground. {22} David said to him, "Let me have the site of your threshing floor so I can build an altar to the LORD, that the plague on the people may be stopped. Sell it to me at the full price." {23} Araunah said to David, "Take it! Let my lord the king do whatever pleases him. Look, I will give the oxen for the burnt offerings, the threshing sledges for the wood, and the wheat for the grain offering. I will give all this." {24} But King David replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing." {25} So David paid Araunah six hundred shekels of gold for the site. {26}

David built an altar to the LORD there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. He called on the LORD, and the LORD answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering. {27} Then the LORD spoke to the angel, and he put his sword back into its sheath. {28} At that time, when David saw that the LORD had answered him on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, he offered sacrifices there. {29} The tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses had made in the desert, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time on the high place at Gibeon. {30} But David could not go before it to inquire of God, because he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

People

We begin with a look at the people in this passage.

David the sinner

It is not immediately clear from the passage exactly why taking such a census would be considered a sin. It is clear that Joab (who has never been too particular about righteousness) considers it such, even to the point of being repulsive. He clearly knows it's wrong, and tries to persuade David. There are two possibilities:

- ✚ First, David is doing this without taxing the people the half shekel commanded by Moses.²¹ That money was for atonement; so, somehow, God connects a census with sin.²²
- ✚ More likely it is this: David, by counting his warriors, is attempting to rely on his own strength. Joab has it right: it doesn't matter what the count of warriors is - they are all his anyway, and it is God who gives increase.

David, the repentant

The cycle of repentance is seen here:

- ✚ David first sees the punishment of God. He does not call it "bad luck" or "movement in the stock market." He knows God's hand when he sees it.
- ✚ He - and this time without prompting - repents. He confesses to God that he has done evil, and asks that it be remedied.
- ✚ Wisely, when God offers him those three choices, David chooses to be punished at God's hands. Why? Because at God's hands he will be disciplined as a son, for God is merciful.
- ✚ David is the sinner. Since the Atonement has not come, David the sinner must offer a sacrifice.

Araunah

What motivates this man to want to give away land, oxen and wood?

- ✚ It could be fear. The man has seen the angel of the Lord, and this could be, "Take whatever you want, I'm leaving."
- ✚ It could also be that he is a generous man, and has made the connection with the plague on Israel. It would be a public work, of sorts.

²¹ Exodus 30:12-16

²² Marjorie Seifert raised an interesting speculation about this: is it just a coincidence that Jesus was born in Bethlehem because of a census? Or is it related to the Atonement?

✚ Araunah is a Jebusite, one of the people who were conquered when David took the city. It could be that he's trying to curry favor with the king.

Whatever the reason, David rejects his offer. The "why" of this carries our lesson.

I will not offer a sacrifice that costs me nothing

My father put it this way: "If a man's principles don't cost him anything, they aren't worth very much." David here lays out the principle that governs sacrifice. It must be costly. In Old Testament Law it had to be a perfect, unblemished animal that was sacrificed - the kind that brings top payment. David understood that.

Example of sacrifice: the Temple gold

David, at the end of his life, provides a little gold for Solomon to use in constructing the Temple:

(1 Chr 29:3-4 NIV) Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple: {4} three thousand talents of gold (gold of Ophir) and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings,

That sounds like a lot of gold. But notice the phrase "over and above?" David has already contributed:

(1 Chr 22:14 NIV) "I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the LORD a hundred thousand talents of gold, a million talents of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone. And you may add to them.

Over a hundred thousand talents of gold! But what's a talent? At this time (it changes quite a bit later) a talent is about 75 pounds. I'll save you the math; at the rates current when this lesson was written, that's over \$26 billion dollars in gold. *To overlay the walls of the Temple.* Over three thousand tons of gold. That's a sacrifice.

But sacrifice is not confined to the rich.

The widow's mite

(Mark 12:41-44 NIV) Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. {42} But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. {43} Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. {44} They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on."

May I point out just three things in this very rich text?

✚ First, note that Christ esteems her gift differently that we would. We see poverty and uselessness; He sees rich giving.

✚ Second, this is a mark of love on her part.

✚ It is also a mark of faith - that God would provide even after these coins were gone.

Sacrificial, devotional giving

May I give you the three defining characteristics of true sacrificial giving?

- ✦ First, in the world's view, there is no practical purpose to it. The gold goes to line the walls of the Temple; the widow's coins were almost worthless.
- ✦ Second, the cost to the giver is very great.
- ✦ Third, the giver could have given less. It's a choice. Even the widow had two coins.

Lessons for us

Sacrificial giving is the Imitation of God

- ✦ Look at those three characteristics, and examine the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. It is foolish in the world's view; it cost Jesus his very life - and he could have called down the angels of heaven. Such giving is an imitation of Christ himself.
- ✦ Such giving cannot be motivated by fear, or by the compulsion of duty - but must spring from the love in the heart. "For God so loved the world..."
- ✦ Sadly, for most of us, our giving is almost never sacrificial. We give out of our abundance; He gives all he has.

Why we give only out of our abundance

Whether rich or poor, we tend to give only out of our abundance, not sacrificially. Why is this?

- ✦ *Lack of faith.* We just don't believe that if we sacrifice, God will provide.
- ✦ *Lack of love.* So many of us have a business relationship with God. When you love someone, sacrifice is not hard. ("He ain't heavy, he's my brother.")
- ✦ *Lack of regard for God's majesty.* We think he will not miss anything we could sacrifice, nor will he care. But the awesome God is sovereign, and cares very deeply.
- ✦ *Low estimate of his mercy.* We think we have been forgiven little, and therefore we love little. We need to see the much we are forgiven.

K-Mart or Nordstroms Christianity?

Look at it this way: if it was your birthday present, would you rather the gift box say K-Mart or Nordstroms? How then do you think God values your leftovers? Indeed, just what do you bring to him?

- ✚ "Oh, my gift would be so small it would be useless." Not to the Christ who praised the widow's mites.
- ✚ "I don't think you know how much that would really cost me." That's why they call it a sacrifice.
- ✚ The choice, as always, is yours. God compels no one, and I would not add to that. Just remember the example of the Cross - which tells you how God made his choice.