

Lessons from the Life of David

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Introduction

In 2004, Michelangelo's famous sculpture, David, went through an extensive cleaning and restoration process in celebration of its five-hundredth birthday. Half a millennium of grime has been removed to once again reveal the majestic splendor with which the masterpiece sparkled when it was first placed in the Piazza Signoria in Florence, Italy. This famous marble statue has often been noted as a most perfect depiction of the human body. And we often think of its subject -- the biblical David -- as being perfect as well. However, the wonderful thing about the Bible is that it tells the truth -- even about its greatest heroes. They are presented to us as uncovered as Michelangelo's subject, with the only difference being that the Bible depicts its subjects with all their warts, mid-rib bulges, scars, and other defects. We often have a tendency to assume that all our biblical heroes are supposed to be perfect. Granted, we remember that David had a bout of failure when he noticed Bathsheba bathing; however, we fail to remember that he also made a serious blunder when he left his camp at Ziklag unprotected (I Samuel 30:1), when he allowed Tamar's incestuous rape to go unrequited (II Samuel 13:21), when he banished his son Absalom (II Samuel 14:24), when he shamed his warriors by lamenting over Absalom's death (II Samuel 19:6), and when he took a census of the fighting men rather than trusting God as his defense (II Samuel 24:10). The wonderful thing about the Bible is that it is historical, accurate, and honest. It doesn't portray its heroes as perfect

superhumans. A careful reading of David's story as God has had it preserved for us gives us a picture of a man who was far from perfect but was a spiritual giant regardless. Actually, this is quite a relief for all of us imperfect humans -- now we have a model of a man who, though as imperfect as we are, was still favored by God. Though David was as human as the rest of us, he maintained the testimony that he was a man after God's own heart. (Acts 13:22)

Though we want to be cautious not to err on the side of trying to be too honest and focusing too strongly on his defects, I think that we can benefit substantially by reviewing David's faults as well as his triumphs.

Affair with Bathsheba

The one failure that comes to mind immediately when we think of King David is his moral failure with Bathsheba. The eleventh chapter of II Samuel records the story of how David spied her one evening as she bathed on the roof of the neighboring villa. Some students of the scripture and history have suggested that there might be more to the story than we notice on the first reading. They have suggested that this was not just her regular evening bath but was rather a special monthly ceremony she practiced to cleanse herself after her menstrual period. Assuming this to be the case, these scholars go on to surmise that David may have noticed this practice and even made a mental note of when to expect her next “performance.” These students of the ancient culture then go on to suggest that David had actually planned to be there for the next “curtain call.” They offer this as the explanation as to why David did not go out to battle with his men as was the custom of the kings (II Samuel 11:1) and the practice he followed until the very last days of his life when his men insisted that he remain behind for his own protection (II Samuel 21:17). Regardless as to whether this was a monthly or a nightly ritual with Bathsheba, the possibility remains that the fateful evening that has become a part of history was not the first time the king had noticed his neighbor’s beauty. If this is the case, we see that the trap into which the king fell was one of his own making. Jesus taught us that looking upon a woman to lust after her is as great a sin as actually committing adultery with her. (Matthew 5:28) Notice that He didn’t say “look upon a woman and lust after her,” rather He said, “look upon a woman to lust after her.” The implication in His wording is that there is a difference between premeditated lust and instantaneous lustful thoughts that come when caught in a surprise situation. Did David know what he could expect to see when he looked over his portico that evening? Did he schedule his evening walk just so that the timing would be right

for the “opening act”? Did he stay home from the battle because he wanted to be in town for the “next scheduled performance”? We will never know for sure; however, if this is what happened, we see that the king was subject to a premeditated lust that destroyed him.

Yet even if the lust was not something that the king had scheduled into his life, the episode exposes a serious flaw in David’s moral fiber. An old saying tells us that we can’t stop the birds from flying above our heads, but we can stop them from building a nest in our hair. Even if this was the first time he had ever noticed his voluptuous neighbor and this was the first time he had ever had wondering eyes, he was still guilty of not shooing away the birds of lustful thoughts before they had a chance to build a nest in his heart. James 1:14-15 tells us that sin is the result of temptation that is the product of lust. He adds that we are “drawn away by our own lust,” suggesting that lust is not so much an external temptation as it is an internal motivation. At first sighting of the maiden washing herself, he could have quickly turned away and gone back to bed; however, he chose rather to take a second glance, then a longer more intense look, then a stare, then a gaze before he returned to bed -- unfortunately, he was not alone when he finally fell asleep again. David had followed the predictable pattern of allowing a temptation to take root inside his heart and develop into a lustful attitude that eventually resulted in acted out sin. David’s most famous flaw was his moral failure with Bathsheba -- the outgrowth of his lack of personal discipline over his thought life.

Intimately linked with his moral failure with Bathsheba was his gross failure in the arena of loyalty as demonstrated in his dealings with Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband. Uriah, one of David’s most able and dependable warriors, was away at battle at the time of the incident between his wife and the king. When David learned that Bathsheba was pregnant, he called her husband home from the front in order to make it appear that he was the father of the child. The scriptures record a remarkable story of Uriah’s loyalty to the troops when he

refused repeated offers to be with his wife, stating that he could not enjoy privileges that his men were being denied. What a picture of contrast between Uriah who refused his legitimate benefits in respect for his suffering troops and the king who indulged in not only his legitimate privileges but extended into illegitimate pleasures while his men suffered deprivation at the front. The end of the story is that when David could think of no other solution, he had Uriah killed and married Bathsheba with the hopes that no one would count to see if there were nine months between the royal wedding and the birth of the baby. In the most heinous deed of his career, David sent his loyal servant back to the front bearing his own death warrant.

Closely tied to his loyalty failure is David's failure with all his men. As we have already noticed, this episode in the life of David occurred at an point when he did not lead his forces into battle. These were the men whom he had taken when they were the misfits of society and had turned them into mighty warriors. They were ones whom he had personally transformed into heroes, yet this time their mentor was showing an example of a man who was more interested in his own personal leisure than their need for leadership. He had tragically failed them by abdicating his position of personal leadership before them at the front.

One other victim of this tryst is spoken of in Psalm 55:12-21. Although this passage may seem at first to refer to how someone else betrayed David, a little study of the historical background of the verses will show us a totally different side to the story.

For it was not an enemy that reproached me;
then I could have borne it: neither was it he
that hated me that did magnify himself
against me; then I would have hid myself
from him: But it was thou, a man mine equal,
my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took
sweet counsel together, and walked unto the
house of God in company. Let death seize

upon them, and let them go down quick into hell: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them. As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice. He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me: for there were many with me. God shall hear, and afflict them, even he that abideth of old. Selah. Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God. He hath put forth his hands against such as be at peace with him: he hath broken his covenant. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords.

In this passage David expresses his overwhelming anguish over being betrayed by a close friend and confidant -- one who had been a counselor to him and had shared the intimacies of life with him, even including worshiping together. Most Bible scholars conclude that this Psalm refers to Ahithophel who had been one of David's most trusted counselors but turned traitor when Absalom mutinied against his father. (II Samuel chapters 15-17) Certainly, we can relate to the emotional trauma David would have experienced when he learned that such a close associate had turned against him. However, there is another side to the story that we must also understand. Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather. In II Samuel 11:3, we learn that Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam, and II Samuel 23:34 tells us that Eliam was the son of Ahithophel; thus Ahithophel was her grandfather. Apparently he had held a secret grudge against the king for many years and finally found a way of taking his revenge. If we can empathize with the sorrow in David's heart over the betrayal of Ahithophel, I believe that we can just as equally relate to the

gnawing turmoil in Ahithophel's heart over the way David had violated his innocent granddaughter. The difference between David and Ahithophel is that David submitted his disappointment to God for healing, but Ahithophel bottled it up until it eventually drove him to suicide.

On top of all this, we see a failure against his position as king, his entire constituency, and himself in that he dishonestly tried to cover up the whole event. It was only when the prophet Nathan exposed the sin (II Samuel 12:7) that David was willing to admit and address his flaws.

Yet, his faults against Bathsheba, Uriah, his troops, Ahithophel, and the nation he was called to lead were not nearly as serious as his failure toward God. David himself realized this when he framed the prayer recorded in Psalm fifty-one in which he repented for these atrocities. In verse four, David says, "Against You and You alone have I sinned," indicating that he realized that the incidents involving adultery with Bathsheba, the murder of Uriah, his disloyalty to the troops, his betrayal of Ahithophel, and his disregard for the people he was commissioned to serve were only outward manifestations of the inward sin he had committed against God Himself. Apparently, David had slipped away from the intensity in his fellowship with and worship of God. He ends the psalm with a renewal in his commitment to worship, suggesting that he realized that his basic flaw was failing to pursue after the heart of God. When he spoke of his sin against God, David's word for "sin" can be interpreted with either meaning -- "to miss the mark" or "to rebel." In essence, he had missed the mark by failing to intently follow after God's presence resulting in a rebellion against His ways.

I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my
soul; for I have sinned against thee. (Psalm
41:4)

But David's failure toward God can also be seen as a failure toward himself. Through this sin, David came dangerously close to experiencing the Holy Spirit's departing from his life because of his rebellion against God and society.

The prayer he prayed for restoration after these heinous sins reveals how close he had come to slipping over the edge. But first, let's take a quick look at exactly what happened inside David's soul during this ordeal.

Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto
God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp
will I praise thee, O God my God. (Psalm
43:4)

“God, my exceeding joy” -- what a wonderful way to express our relationship with God! To David, the Lord was not a source of joy or his reason to be joyful -- but joy itself. Additionally, it was not what God did for David, or even the fact that they had a relationship, that made him joyful; it was God Himself that was the Psalmist's joy. On top of all this, God was not only David's joy; he was his exceeding joy -- joy beyond measure. Yet David's life was not always characterized by joy. In the Psalms, he often speaks of sorrow and anguish. (verses 13:2, 38:17, 39:2, 55:10, 107:39, 116:3, 119:143) At one point, he even described his internal agony as so severe that he said that his tears figuratively made his bed to swim. (verse 6:6) In Psalm 38:3, he mourns, “There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin.” In Psalm 32:3, he laments that, his very bones grew old through his “roaring” (loudly vocalized agony) all the day long. In what seems to be a contradiction of terms, he says that the reason behind these internal roarings is his external silence. His silence was his refusal to confess the sins he had committed during this snowballing escapade. (verses 1-2) His silence about his sin filled him with sorrow, causing him to roar with agony and float his bed with his tears. His whole problem was that he was cut off from Joy Himself. His reconciliation prayer describes how he renewed his relationship with God and was restored to joy.

Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the
bones which thou hast broken may
rejoice...Cast me not away from thy
presence; and take not thy holy spirit from

me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.
(Psalms 51:8, 11-12)

In another psalm, David seems to have realized where he had gone wrong and requested divine protection to guard himself against being trapped by the same pitfalls again. The Living Bible translation of Psalm 25:21 reads, “Assign me Godliness and Integrity as my bodyguards, for I expect you to protect me.” Interestingly, these are the same two bodyguards that God instructed David’s son Solomon to employ. (I Kings 9:4) Having a bodyguard means the difference between life and death. When President Abraham Lincoln’s bodyguard stepped out of the box in the Ford Theater, our sixteenth President was vulnerable and soon lay on the floor subject to John Wilkes Booth’s bullet. President Ronald Reagan, on the other hand, survived an assassination attempt upon his life in 1981 when James Brady bravely threw his body as a human shield in front of John Hinckley Jr.’s bullet. When Godliness and Integrity were lacking, David was subject to the enemy’s attacks.

The term “integrity” means completeness. It implies a harmony or complete relationship with oneself. A person of integrity is one who is in harmony throughout his total personality. He doesn’t think one thing and say another. He doesn’t act one way and feel another. Integrity doesn’t allow you to be dishonest or compromising. The term “godliness” may better be translated “uprightness,” meaning equity. It means to be truthful and fair to all men. Godliness demands that you live like God in front of your fellowmen, not treat them like the devil. While integrity is being honest with yourself, godliness is being honest with others. These two traits in David’s lifestyle would have kept him safe from the assassination attempts of the world, the flesh, and the devil. In Psalm 119:11, he adds that the way he intended to ensure his protection against future sin was to hide the Word of God in his heart. Certainly, the engrafted Word of God produces integrity and uprightness.

When the king's wandering eyes brought his neighbor's wife to David's bedroom and his scheming heart sent his neighbor to his grave, the prophet Nathan declared that the sword would never depart from David's house as a punishment for his sins. (II Samuel 12:10) As a result of this sin, David was never able to know peace from his conflicts and conquests, a factor that kept him from being able to fulfill one of the greatest of his dreams -- that of building a temple in Jerusalem to house the Ark of the Covenant. (I Kings 5:3; I Chronicles 22:8, 28:3) The impact of this story is that David had drawn up all the plans for the temple and collected billions of dollars worth of gold, silver, and building materials for this project, but he was forbidden from initiating the actual construction. (I Chronicles 15:12, 22:14, 28:11-21, 29:2-3) His sin of internally allowing his heart to be turned away from God resulted in David's being disqualified from the one project that would externally demonstrated his passion for Him.

And the Innocent Perish

More tragic than the personal disappointment of not being able to build the temple is the fact that David's misdeeds injured and even took the lives of those who followed him. There are at least four such episodes in David's life in which his rebellious, senseless, or disobedient actions cost innocent people their lives.

Of course, the immediate victim was Uriah, Bathsheba's husband. The innocent Uriah died because of David's gross sin of self-indulgence and his feeling of being above accountability. He could have turned his head the first time he noticed Bathsheba on the neighboring roof, or he could have changed his plans when he was told that she was a married woman. Instead, he pushed headlong with his evil desires and plan, knowing that no one in the royal court would dare to speak out against him as he pursued his carnal gratification -- a sin that even snowballed as he knew that no one would challenge his demand to send Uriah in the heat of the battle with the deliberate intent of abandoning him to be slaughtered. Additionally, he knew that neither Bathsheba nor anyone in the palace would try to stop him from immediately taking her as his wife and that no tongue would dare to speak a word about the fact that the baby was coming long before the necessary nine months.

When those in leadership are able to live without accountability, those whose lives they are responsible for are the ones who suffer.

Yet this wasn't the first time David had jeopardized the lives of others. When he was still serving in the courts of King Saul, the monarch realized that David was destined to be the next king. Interpreting this as a threat to himself and his posterity, Saul set out to take David's life. As a result, the young warrior had to flee the palace and fend for himself while in hiding. The first place he stopped was at the house of Ahimelech, the priest. Here, David presented himself as being

on a mission from the king and requested that the priest help speed him on his way by providing food and a sword. (I Samuel 21) When Ahimelech countered that the only bread available was the loaves that had been sanctified for use in the tabernacle, David convinced him that -- under the present conditions -- it was acceptable that the food be given to him. He also took the sword that had been confiscated from Goliath on the day that David defeated the giant in the Valley of Elah. The unfortunate outplay of this brief encounter with the priest at Nob was that once King Saul caught wind of the fact that Ahimelech had assisted the fleeing David, he executed Ahimelech and eighty-five members of his family along with all their animals. (I Samuel 22:18-19)

David set up the conditions that brought about the deaths of so many innocent people simply because he couldn't tell the truth. Understandably, he feared the consequences of revealing the fact that he was a fugitive, fleeing from the king. However, his deception implicated the trusting Ahimelech in a very dangerous way. Essentially, he took advantage of the priest's blind trust, got what he wanted from the innocent man, and ran off leaving him to fend for himself when the truth was revealed.

Even though those in leadership may not present outright lies, it is all too common that they present the truth in a limited or skewed manner in order to get what they want from the Body of Christ. Regardless, the ones who suffer are the innocent who have been deceived. The Apostle Paul warned us of this potential pitfall in leadership.

Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. (II Corinthians 8:21)

In II Samuel chapter six, we read the enigmatic story of David's attempt to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. After the Philistines captured the ark, they discovered that it brought nothing but trouble to their cities. The idol of their god crashed to the ground, the men suffered from hemorrhoids, and the cities were apparently infected with mice.

Eventually they decided to return the ark to the people of Israel and did so by sending it back on an oxcart. (I Samuel 6:2) Months later, David decided that the ark should be housed in the new national capital; so, he made plans to move it to Jerusalem. Unfortunately, he followed the pattern of the Philistines by placing the ark on an oxcart as he headed to the city. (II Samuel 6:3) Along the way, the cart hit a pothole and started to tip. Uzzah reacted immediately by reaching out to steady the ark before it tumbled to the ground. Instantly, the innocent attendant collapsed dead on the pavement. (II Samuel 6:7)

At first reading, it may seem that God unjustly took the life of Uzzah who tried to steady the ark as the oxcart jostled along the unpaved roadway. Yet, careful study of the passage will reveal that it was not a random, senseless act on God's part; rather, it was another of David's flaws that resulted in this innocent man's death. David had failed to understand the anointing of God. Just as Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, had been struck dead because they presented strange fire in the tabernacle (Leviticus 10:1, Numbers 3:4, 26:61) and just as the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain because they desecrated the altar (I Samuel chapters one through four) and just as the Philistines had suffered severely when they held the ark in their pagan temple and cities (I Samuel chapter five), David should have understood that he was endangering himself and anyone with him who would improperly approach God's sacred presence manifest in the ark. Instead of taking precaution and showing holy reverence for the sacred object, David handled it much like any other piece of furniture, resulting in the tragic loss of a well-intentioned bystander. David's lack of recognition of and respect for the anointing of God certainly hurt him personally but more seriously hurt those for whom he was responsible.

After a period of mourning for the tragic loss of an innocent man and awe over the vengeance of the Almighty, David decided to proceed with his plan to relocate the ark. This time, he was careful to follow the biblical pattern that

God had shown to Moses concerning how the ark was to be handled. (I Chronicles 15:15, Exodus 25:14) He had it transported on the shoulders of the Levitical priests.

David's failure could have been avoided if only he had the Word of God hidden in his heart. Had he remembered Deuteronomy 10:8, he would have never placed the ark on an oxcart as did the pagan Philistines but on the shoulders of the priests as did Moses. The surprising truth is that Deuteronomy 17:18 commands that the kings of Israel handwrite their own personal copy of the Law. Had he been diligent to put it in his heart as he was committing it to paper, he would have diverted his own failure and the death of an innocent citizen. Had David taken the time to study the scriptures rather than follow the worldly pattern, he could have prevented the death on the highway that afternoon. David could have avoided the death of this innocent man, by allowing the scriptures to be the sourcebook and guide for running his life -- a principle that he eventually implemented.

I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word. (Psalm 119:16)

When Nathan the prophet confronted David after the Bathsheba incident, he reminded the king that God had prospered him with incredible gifts and then went on to declare that He was willing to give David even more. But in the middle of all this prosperity and increase, David desired to have -- and took -- the one thing that God was not willing to give him, his neighbor's wife. It is interesting that the story is explicit in depicting Bathsheba's residence as being so close to David's home that he could see her clearly from his terrace. In other words, she was literally his neighbor. Thus, he defied the commandment against coveting one's neighbor's wife in a literal sense as well as in the figurative sense in which the passage is intended. (Exodus 20:17)

And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover

have given unto thee such and such things.
(II Samuel 12:8)

However, this malady was nothing new with David. In fact, it dated back to the very Garden of Eden where God was willing to give Adam and Eve every tree in the garden and all the fruit that they bore; however, they wanted the fruit of the one tree that God did not give them. God had promised to give the bounty of the Promised Land to the Israelites, but Achan wanted the goods from the one city that God had said was taboo. Ahab could have had any vineyard in the country, but he could not be satisfied without the one that belonged to Naboth.

The lesson is simple: if we will just curb the greed that makes us crave those things that do not belong to us, God is willing and able to give us even more than we can imagine. Fortunately, David learned this lesson and reaped the abundant benefits of God's blessings.

Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. (Psalms 52:7)

The unfortunate reality is that it is all too easy to forget even after we have learned the truth about God's sufficiency in our lives. Toward the end of David's life he called for a census of the fighting men available to serve under his command. (II Samuel 24) The scriptures record that God's anger was kindled against David as a result of this request. At first, we might question why the Lord would respond so adamantly against this seeming innocent request. After all, the Old Testament is filled with the enumerations of the tribes, clans, and families of the people and the reports on the size of the fighting forces in Israel. Just think of the over-the-top lists given in the book of Numbers. But before we try to analyze why this count was so different from all previous polls, let's take a look at what happened next. God told David that there would be consequences but allowed the king to be the one to determine what they would be: seven years of famine, three months of

conquest by their enemies, or three days' of pestilence in the land. David chose the latter because he knew that it was better to suffer at the hand of God than at the hand of man. However, by the time the plague neared Jerusalem, seventy thousand innocent men, women, and children had already succumbed to the epidemic. At that point, David determined to intercede for the plague to stop. Under divine direction, he went to the spot that eventually became known as the Temple Mount to make a sacrifice. Although he was offered the land, animals for the sacrifice, and materials for the altar for free, David refused and demanded that he pay full price for everything. It was then -- and only then -- that the hand of the death angel was stayed.

When David later wrote, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him," (Psalm 126:6) he was setting forth the very valuable truth: if we are going to have a harvest that causes us to celebrate, we must plant precious seed -- something that hurts us when we sow it. By refusing Araunah's offer of the threshing floor, oxen, and equipment needed to make a sacrifice, David was planting a costly seed in anticipation of a joyous reward.

And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. (II Samuel 24:24)

Now, for an explanation of the Lord's anger. The problem was not because the census in and of itself but because a change in the heart of David. In Psalm 20:7, David had boasted, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God." In other words, he had proclaimed that his faith was in God regardless of the number of soldiers -- or lack of soldiers -- on his side.

Through calling for the census, he was demonstrating that he had fallen from that original trust in God.

Tragically, we see the same change of heart in so many of our leaders today. Men who once boldly forged forward in faith in and dependence upon God now calculate their every move based on their donor base or church membership. In the process, those who suffer are the innocent who depend upon faith-filled ministry.

Now we have to ask the big question: “Why did God allow seventy thousand eighty-seven innocent victims to perish because of one man’s rebellious, senseless, or disobedient actions?” Perhaps we can find the answer in the very first introduction we have to David. In I Samuel chapter sixteen, we read the story of Samuel’s visit to Jesse’s house looking for a replacement for King Saul whom God had rejected. In the process of the selection, Jesse presented each of David’s seven older brothers for the prophet to inspect. After carefully reviewing all the candidates and finding that none of them cut the spiritual muster set by God, the prophet asked if there might be another son that he had not yet met. The criterion that God had set was that the prophet should stop looking at the outward appearance of the candidates because He was judging them by their hearts. (I Samuel 16:7) God was desirous of a leader who had a heart after His own heart. (I Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22) In this simple distinctive, I believe we see why God dealt with David with so much longsuffering. The Lord knew that -- in spite of all his stupidity, insensitivity, and self-determination -- David would eventually turn back to the right way because deep inside his heart actually beat with the same pulse of God Himself.

We see this truth demonstrated in the prayer that King David composed after his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. In Psalm chapter fifty-one, David prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.” (verses 10-11) Even though this may seem like a simple prayer of repentance, it actually reveals David’s secret to spiritual

success. Even though he prayed for forgiveness of his sins, he realized that the real issue was that his heart was no longer sensitive to the inner prodding of the Spirit of God. The definitive phrase of this prayer is found in verse four, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." Even though he had violated a virtuous woman and murdered a noble warrior, David knew that the essence of his sin was not against these humans but against his heart relationship with the Lord. For us today, we must realize that the most important thing in life is to guard our heart relationship with God so that we don't endanger the innocent around us through our foolish or rebellious actions.

Even though our study so far has focused on David's major blunders that not only blotched David's own life but also left a trail of destruction in his wake, we need to realize that all through the time that he was wreaking so much damage he was also raising up a team of powerful men who made a difference in the world they lived in.

Escaping from the threats of King Saul, David hid in the cave of Adullam where a sizable group of misfits collected around him. (I Samuel 22:1-2) These followers were all men who were being chased by the law, men who were in debt, and general riffraff and troublemakers. However, they dedicated their lives and futures to David and his campaigns. As a result they became essentially superheroes who accomplished unimaginable conquests. (I Chronicles 11) Such heroic stories are the result of what these men received from spending time with this man who -- as we have seen -- was in many cases nothing more than a disaster looking for a place to happen.

How could this happen? The simple answer is that they learned from his heart more than from his actions. One significant story depicts what must have taken place. As David was fighting in the valley of Rephaim, he remarked that he longed for a drink from the well at Bethlehem. When his warriors heard his comment, they fought their way through the enemy lines to get him the water that he desired and then fought their way back through the enemy forces to bring it back to their commander. When they presented the water to

David, he did something that at first would seem totally unthinkable -- he poured out the water rather than drinking it. His comment was that the water was really the blood of his warriors and that he wanted it to be given as a sacrifice to the Lord. (II Samuel 23) To make sense of the story, we can understand that he gave the water to God rather than taking it for himself because he realized that the inspiration that caused the men to risk their lives was not really his life, but the life of God that resided inside him. The only way for our leaders today to have a positive impact on the world and the Body of Christ is live so that the life of God shows through their faulty flesh.

The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

A Perfect Heart

Let's fast forward several generations to get a remarkable picture of how this heart quality in David continued to affect the course of history long after he had passed on to his eternal reward.

His eyes glaring and nostrils bulging, the messenger screamed out his threats. He recited a litany of his victories in one ravaging campaign after another, horrifying the people and belittling their ability to defend themselves against his mighty war machine that was camped just outside the city gates. Mockingly he threatened that any assistance that could possibly be summoned from their allies would be like trusting in a paper tiger to come to their defense. His terrorization continued by ridiculing their faith in God to save them and even suggesting that it was God Himself who had sent him to destroy them. Everyone in the range of his voice knew that his threats were valid; after all, their nation was already buckling under the iron fist of his tyrannical rule to the point of robbing every gold and silver coin from not only the public treasury but also the coffers of the temple and even to stripping the gold plating from the sanctuary doors to satisfy the aggressor's greed and avarice.

Only one man out of the whole nation -- an otherwise faceless, voiceless, unknown "nobody" of history -- was chosen to go out and face this raging bully. But on this one occasion, Eliakim the son of Hilkiah stepped out of the shadows to take a significant place in the forefront of the saga of his country's destiny. Eliakim stood squarely in the face of the aggressor and challenged him to stop speaking in the Hebrew language but to rather use the native language of the Assyrians because all the top officials of Israel understood the tongue of their oppressor. Rabshaken retorted that it was his deliberate intention to speak in the language of the common foot soldiers in order to strike fear into them as well as to intimidate the executives and bureaucrats. He even punctuated his decree

with the prediction that by the time his dastardly deeds were done these poor men would be reduced to eating their own dung and drinking their own urine. Then, in an apparent attempt to incite rebellion and insubordination, he offered the soldiers the option of desertion from the ranks and surrender to his forces with the promise of a peaceful, prosperous life.

Eliakim returned to King Hezekiah and testified of the desperate plight that loomed over the nation. Quickly upon the heels of his report came a letter from Rabshaken's potentate, King Sennacherib of Assyria, spelling out the certain destruction that he planned to carry out upon Jerusalem. It was at that moment that the prophet Isaiah stepped forward with a word of comfort that was soon fulfilled as an angel of the Lord waged supernatural war against the Assyrian army, taking out one hundred eighty-five thousand of them and causing the decimated remnant of the army to retreat without even touching the sacred capital.

Even though nothing earthshaking, pivotal, or miraculous took place during the small part that Eliakim played in this episode of Israel's history, it still seems significant that he was chosen to be the one man who marched boldly onto center stage as this drama was unfolding. And we must ask ourselves why he was chosen and what was the import of the role he played. The answer can be found in the words of the same prophet who foretold the decimation and withdrawal of the Assyrian army:

And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a

sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons. (verses 22:20-24)

In this prophecy, it becomes clear that the reason Eliakim became the man of the hour at this particular moment in history was that he -- much like Jesus walking on the stormy waters of the Sea of Galilee -- had a unique God-given, level-headed, unwavering confidence and trust in God in the face of the tumultuous situation. The importance of his role was to establish a sense of stability in the people, and the unique quality or characteristic that qualified him for this role was that he was the one with the key of David. Eliakim's historic role is recounted twice -- in II Kings chapters eighteen and nineteen and again in Isaiah chapters thirty-six and thirty-seven. In both records, the specific reason given for the deliverance of the city was that it was for the sake of David. (II Kings 19:34 and Isaiah 37:35) In some way, Eliakim stood in the stead of David and held his key. Eliakim's significant contribution was the stance he took against the Assyrian messenger who tried to intimidate the people of Jerusalem into surrendering to his army. Eliakim stood up to this intimidator with faith and confidence in God until the Lord caused the invading army to miraculously retreat.

Though the scriptures do not specifically identify what the key of David was, it is easy for us to look back into the life of David and find one characteristic that seems to stand out that could have made the difference between him and any other who lacked this quality. It is likely that we need not go any further than the criteria set for his selection for the throne of Israel. After Samuel had surveyed the seven older sons of Jesse without finding a worthy candidate, the Lord revealed to him that he was looking at the wrong score card when evaluating his options. God made His point that the heart of

the matter is actually the matter of the heart.

But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. (I Samuel 16:7)

David obviously understood that this was his key to success and determined to keep his heart in a perfect relationship with his God. "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." (Psalms 101:2) Even after he sinned with Bathsheba and had her husband killed, the king's prayer was that God would re-establish his heart before Him. (Psalms 51:10) Consequently, the New Testament characterizes David as being a man after God's own heart. (Acts 13:22)

King David desired to pass this spiritual key on to his son Solomon who was to succeed him on the throne. First Chronicles 28:9 records David's instructions to Solomon that he should serve the Lord with a perfect heart. In verse nineteen of the following chapter, we find David in prayer for his son, interceding that the Lord will give him a perfect heart. Unfortunately, the biblical summation of Solomon's life is that "his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father." (I Kings 11:4)

Second Chronicles 25:2 records that Amaziah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not with a perfect heart. He was passionate in his campaign to stamp out idolatry, yet he failed to passionately pursue the Lord Himself. Because of this he, like Asa before him, failed to obtain what is likely the greatest promise in the scripture: "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." (II Chronicles 16:9) This is the universal blessing and promise of intervention by God that can only be unlocked with the key of David -- a perfect heart before the Lord.

It was the promise extended to the church at Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7, which says that the key of David was activated upon their behalf. One unique quality that we notice about the church at Philadelphia is that of all seven churches addressed in chapters two and three of the Apocalypse they are the only one indicated as having any relationship to the Word of God. Not only that, they are twice commended for their faithfulness to God's Word. (verses 3:8, 10) Though all seven churches are admonished to hear what the Spirit is saying, apparently only this one listened and heeded. Like David, they recognized that the key to having a perfect heart was to hide God's Word in their hearts. (Psalms 119:11) For them -- and for us -- the key to the kingdom is a passionate love for the Word of God.

Eliakim apparently had the same heart attitude of love for and confidence in God -- the key of David. With that key, he could stand squarely in the face of terror and have faith until he saw the enemy retreat in defeat, humiliation, and terror. David was considered to be a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22) even though he had so many moral failures. His prayer of repentance in the fifty-first Psalms explained why. His plea before God was that the Lord would not take the Holy Spirit from him and that He would renew a right heart within him. Apparently David understood the necessity of what Paul would later describe as the seal of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 4:30) -- the quickening work of the Holy Spirit that constantly reminds the sensitive believer of the validity or lack thereof of his every thought, motive, and action.

Fighting Goliath

It was this uniquely God-oriented heart that first got David “on the map” when he took the field against the Philistine giant Goliath. For King Saul to be willing to put his whole nation at jeopardy in the hands of a little boy who had shown up from nowhere was an unheard-of act of bravery -- or foolishness -- on the part of the ruler. Why was he willing to “put all his eggs in one basket,” especially such an unlikely basket as a shepherd boy who said that he was going to confront the ironclad behemoth of a man with just a simple slingshot? Obviously, the king was able to see something more than David’s boyish outward appearance. He must have been able to discern that there was a real difference in this young man -- something that imitated form within his heart.

Perhaps the answer lies in the report that had occasioned the lad’s entrance into the king’s field operations tent. When David had showed up at the battleground, his whole intent was to bring a care package from his father to his three senior brothers who were enlisted in the king’s battalions and to collect a little news about his brothers’ wellbeing to bring back to the father upon his return. His brothers -- embarrassed by their cowardice before the giant’s threatenings -- ridiculed the boy, claiming that his objective was to badmouth them when he got back home.

David’s response was that he had no evil intent and then questioned their own motives with the enquiry, “Is there not a cause?” Interestingly enough, he was told on at least three occasions that King Saul had put up a generous bounty for anyone who would go up against the giant -- his daughter’s hand in marriage, tax-exempt status for his family, and a huge monetary reward for the warrior. Still, none of the king’s men was motivated by even such a generous prize that awaited their bravery. David, on the other hand, seemed unaffected by the allurements of the reward money or status afforded to the victor. For him, there was a cause that far exceeded the price tag

attached to the bounty placed on Goliath's head. His concern was that the giant had defied the army of the living God. With God's reputation at stake, the little shepherd boy had a motivation that could not be found in the hearts of any of the other men gathered in the Valley of Elah that day. The love he had for the object of the psalms he had composed as he wandered about the hillsides of Bethlehem was more intense than anything that could be bought with a royal bride, tax-free living, or a bulging purse. Something more powerful burned inside his soul and spirit -- something that when it was reported to the king made the ruler certain that he had found the necessary element for facing the giant's challenge. The thing that burned inside David's young heart was divine purpose.

That purpose of defending the honor of his God separated David from all the other men on the field that day. For forty days, the entire army had cowered before the threats of the giant, yet David boldly stepped forward to take on the over-sized challenge. Why? There are several hints in the passage that tell us how David's perspective was different from that of the rest of the army. In verse eight, Goliath looked at the army and called them "the armies of Israel" and "the servants of Saul." In verse ten, Goliath said, "I defy the armies of Israel this day." In verse nineteen, they are called "the men of Israel," designating a political state to which the men owed their lives. Verse twenty-four states that "the men of Israel" fled from Goliath and were dreadfully afraid. In verse twenty-five, "the men of Israel" spoke of the man who had come up to defy "Israel." Everyone continued to see himself as part of a natural, physical kingdom. However, in verse twenty-six we see a turn.

And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?

It is only David who sees himself as a member of the “army of the living God.” That personal relationship with God gave the little shepherd boy a confidence that none of the trained soldiers could muster. No matter how much we acknowledge His omnipotence, if we don’t recognize that He is in a personal relationship with us and is, therefore, willing to act on our behalf, we will not be able to appropriate that omnipotent power for our own personal situation.

David showed up with a different vision of himself and the people to whom he belonged; he saw himself as a soldier in the army of the Most High God -- not as just part of a human effort led by a mortal king in a natural nation. By standing up and asking the question, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” David made a quantum leap into a new dimension and broke the month-long stalemate between the opposing armies. His question became the catalyst for Israel’s victory. Even as a teenager, David was able to make a difference because he dared to see himself differently. He saw himself and the situation he was facing through his heart relationship with God.

In this story, we see an example of a young man who was able to move in the spirit in contrast to people who were moving in the soulical realm. All the members of Saul’s army looked at the physical size of Goliath -- who was almost ten foot tall. They looked at the physical weight of his spear with the javelin head alone weighing thirteen pounds. They looked at this mighty warrior who had been a champion and a longstanding hero among his people. And they decided that it would be impossible for them to fight him. When David asked about the reward for the person who would go out to fight this man, they immediately began to give him soulical responses. Nobody other than David looked at anything from a spiritual perspective!

David was the only one who was able to divide between the soul and the spirit. Everybody else was seeing things according to their natural perspective. They saw Saul as their leader; they saw Israel as their allegiance. It was only

David who looked into the spiritual realm and saw the situation as a conflict with an uncircumcised Philistine who was defying the army of the living God. In verse thirty-six, David declared, “Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God,” and in verse forty-five, he addressed the giant, “Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.”

David was able to see that he was in the army of God because he had gotten out of the soulical realm and into the spiritual realm. He had a different perspective on life. To him, it wasn't important that he would be able to marry the king's daughter. To him, it wasn't important that he was going to be exempted from taxes. To him, it wasn't important that he would be given great wealth. The only thing that was important to him was that the God of Israel had been defied; David would be able to uphold and justify the name of his God, the living God.

When the others looked at Goliath, they saw at him with an exclamation point: “He's big! He's mean! Look at that spear and that sword and that armor! Wow! Look at the record he has fighting!” David is the only one who came out against this man -- not with an exclamation point but with a question mark: “Who is he? Who does he think he is to defy the army of the living God?” With his spirit man, he had Superman x-ray vision. He was able to look beyond that shield and behind that man's armor to see something that nobody else had noticed about the man. Nobody else called him “an uncircumcised Philistine;” only David was able to see his spiritual condition. David saw that Goliath was not part of a covenant with God; therefore, it didn't matter how big he was, or what kind of record he had as a warrior, or how much armor he had, or how strong he was. None of that was going to be important because he was not in a covenant with God. David had the total advantage because he was in a covenant.

This young lad had a spiritual perspective and could see that he had the upper hand.

In Genesis chapter twelve, God promised Abraham that anyone who cursed him or his seed would be cursed. David knew that this was part of his covenant heritage. He knew that he was blessed by God and that whoever came against him would be cursed. The moment Goliath had defied the army of the living God, he had placed himself under a curse and was, therefore, subject to David. As long as Goliath was defying the army of Israel, he could probably win. As long as he was defying the servants of Saul, he probably could win. But when he said, "I defy the army of the living God," David saw that the covenant was called into play and, therefore, David was the victor and Goliath was the victim.

David also knew from the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy 28) that if he would diligently obey the voice of the Lord to observe carefully all His commandments that the Lord would set him above all the nations of the earth -- whether they were pigmies or giants. David understood that he was in a covenant and that he was, therefore, predestined to be seated high above all principalities and all opposition. He understood that he was predestined to be a success and not be defeated. He understood that he had an inheritance and that he was able to reach into it because he was living in the spirit and not the soul. His emotions looked at the big Philistine and said "Whoa!" But his spirit looked at the covenant and said, "Go!" David had a circumcision mark that proved that he was in covenant with God and that he had the authority to take on the challenge.

Now, let's read between the lines in an attempt to look beneath the surface for clues to what made David able to attack and take down his nemesis. When we do, we will see that there are several clues hidden in "plain sight."

The first detail that is hidden in plain sight is the difference between the ways everyone else and David assessed themselves. As we've already noted, there are at least nine places where the Israelites and Philistines alike referring to "the

men of Israel,” “the servants of Saul,” “the army of Israel,” and simply “Israel.” (verses 2, 3, 8, 10,11, 19, 21, 24, 25) Yet when David looked at the situation, he saw it from a totally different perspective; he saw himself as part of “the army of the living God.” (verses 26, 36) While everyone else had only a natural vantage point from which to evaluate the situation, David was able to see it from a divine perspective. From a human’s point of view the giant was huge, but from a heavenly perspective the giant was no big deal. In this same context, there is a totally different perspective in the way David looked at the king’s reward for fighting the giant. When the young shepherd boy appeared on the scene at the Valley of Elah, he was told by three different sources that the king had issued a monetary reward, the privilege of marrying his daughter, and tax exemption to anyone who would fight and kill Goliath. (verses 25, 27, 30) Yet, for David neither the money, the bride, nor the tax exemption was a significant cause. In fact, the following chapter suggests that David did not claim his prize money in that he sent a message to King Saul indicating that he was too poor to pay the marriage dowry. (verse 23) The very fact that a dowry was required suggests that the king had actually reneged on his offer of tax exemption. In addition, David’s question, “Who am I...that I should be the son-in-law of the king?” (verse 18) proves that the marriage promise had been forfeited. Otherwise, David would have readily acknowledged that he was due the honor as a result of having confronted the giant. Instead, for David the stimulus for taking up Goliath’s challenge was that an uncircumcised Philistine had defied the armies of the living God. (verses 26, 36) Here again, David was different from the others in that his motivation and purpose were not on the human level of money, marriage, or taxes -- but on the divine level of defending the name and reputation of the living God.

There is another truth that is totally concealed in open view in this story -- David had a scripturally inspired plan of attack. When he confronted his adversary, he announced that his intention was to cut off the giant’s head and to feed his

flesh to the birds of the air. (verse 46) Although the story does not specifically tell us how he developed this plan, I feel confident that it must have been inspired by the promise in Deuteronomy 28:7 that when our enemies come against us one way they will have to flee seven directions. Certainly, David was impressed that, although there were thousands of Philistines on the field that day, only one was challenging him. While there was the possibility of attacks from a thousand different directions at once, his opponent was coming at him from only one angle. Surely, such a scenario must have quickened the biblical promise in his heart. Next, the young shepherd must have questioned how the singular opponent could flee away in seven different directions. Then the answer flashed into his mind, “If I cut off his head and let his body fall to the ground, that will be two directions. And if the birds of the air that consume his flesh fly away to the north, south, east, west, and straight up into the air, that will be five more directions. The total will be seven different prophetic directions!”

Yet there is one more factor to be discovered in the giant-conquering story, and it is again hidden in plain view in the story. This detail has to do with what David held in his hand as he challenged the giant. Since I made this discovery, I’ve asked audiences all across Asia, Africa, and both North and South America to tell me what the shepherd boy had in his hand when he went after Goliath, and no one has ever given me the correct answer. Everyone mentions the sling, and most mention the five smooth stones, but no one has ever told me that he also held a stick. Interestingly enough, it is the stick in his hand -- not the sling or the stones -- that is actually intended to be the focus of attention in this part of the story. (verse 40) In seeking the significance of the stick in David’s hand, we must go back to the story of another shepherd who was sent out to fight another giant and do exploits for the Lord. As Moses wandered through the desert, caring for his father-in-law’s sheep, he encountered a burning bush from which he heard the voice of God Himself sending him off to single-

handedly face the emperor of the mightiest nation on the planet -- an even more formidable foe than the one who stood before David in the Valley of Elah. When Moses replied that he simply couldn't take on such a gargantuan task, the Lord asked him one unpretentious question, "What is in your hand?" (Exodus 4:2) When Moses answered that it was stick, God directed that he throw it on the ground -- and when Moses obeyed, the stick turned into a snake. After God revealed to Moses that there was literally supernatural power in his hand, Moses actually changed the name of his stick to "the rod of God." (Exodus 4:20, 17:9) It was with this stick in his hand that Moses made his appearance before Pharaoh and began to challenge the most powerful government and army on the planet. It was with this rod in his hand -- and occasionally in the hand of his spokesman Aaron -- that Moses brought plagues and devastation upon the resistant nation, opened up the Red Sea as a way of escape for the Israelites, and even brought water out of a rock. (Exodus 7:19; 8:5-6, 16-17; 9:22-23; 10:12-13; 14:16; 17:6) Undoubtedly, the young shepherd took a lesson from the life of the older shepherd as he determined to take his staff with him when he went into battle with the giant. Notice that the story in I Samuel actually focuses on the stick in David's hand in that it was only the stick, not the sling or stones, that Goliath noticed as the shepherd boy approached. (verse 43) Having mentioned the stick, Goliath then proceeded to curse David in the name of his pagan gods. David's response was that even though the Philistine came against him with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, he was coming against the giant with the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel. Then for good measure, he added that it was the God whom Goliath had defied. In looking at the parallels set up in the conversation between the antagonist and the protagonist, it seems obvious that David perceived the stick in his hand to be symbolic of the power of God just as Moses had realized that his staff demonstrated the authority of God in his conflict with his foe. The stick in David's hand was his connection to the supernatural power of

God needed to guide his sling and hurl his projectile to its target.

Even as an adolescent, David had an awareness of the power of identifying with the name of the Lord -- an awareness that made him unique among the warriors of Israel. Whereas everyone else identified with the name of the king and nation, David proclaimed the name of his God -- a name that he would not use in vain; instead, it was the name that he knew would invoke victory as the Lord defended His reputation. David would later express what must have been in his heart that day when he penned the words of Psalm 20:7, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God."

It was not only the Philistine in the Valley of Elah who has met his Waterloo at the name of the Lord, but also every giant throughout history has learned to fear the authoritative power of the name of the Lord. In Acts chapters four and five, the first Christians were imprisoned for preaching the gospel. When they were brought to trial, they were offered what might have been the original plea bargain in that they were to be released if they would agree to never preach in "this name" again. (Acts 4:17) There was no concern about their preaching, healing, or doing any other sort of ministry -- as long as they didn't use the name of Jesus in the process. The Goliaths all through history have feared the name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9) because that know that at that name they must bow down powerless (verse 10). The wise Solomon wrote of his revelation concerning the authority of the name of God with the words, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." (Proverbs 18:10) He may have been taking a clue from his father David who had opened his twentieth psalm with the words, "The name of the God of Jacob defend thee." The term he used for "defend" could easily have been translated, "set thee on high." Thinking back on the methods of warfare at the time that these men wrote, the relationship among the terms "tower," "set on high," and "defend" is obvious. Since the weapons in use were spears,

arrows, and swords, the person on the high ground had all the advantage. Standing at the bottom of a tower aiming up with a bow and arrow or a spear could be more destructive to oneself than to his enemy since gravity would be pulling down on the arrow or spear. Eventually, everything that went up would come down -- possibly striking the one who sent it up. Our position of defense in the strong tower of the name of the Lord insures that no weapon formed against us will prosper. (Isaiah 54:17) In fact our enemies' weapons may even prove to be their own undoing as with Haman's gallows that was built for Mordecai (Esther 8:7), the pit that the culprit dug to ensnare his neighbor but fell into himself (Proverbs 26:27), and even Goliath's own sword that was used to cut off his head (I Samuel 17:51). On the other hand, the person at the top of the tower had gravity's force working for him rather than against him. Any projectile he hurled at the enemy would accelerate with the force of gravity, yielding it much more powerful as it impacted its target. So it is when believers use the name of the Lord. He adds His powerful authority to any energy we have exerted so that the impact is infinitely more forceful than we could ever initiate on our own. When challenged by sickness or disease, we can make our stand in the name of Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals all our diseases. When threatened by financial lack, we call upon the name of Jehovah Jireh, the God who supplies all our needs according to His riches in glory through Christ Jesus. If we are troubled, we can stretch forth the rod labeled Jehovah Shalom, the God of our peace. When lonely, depressed, scared, or anxious, we can present the stick etched with the inscription Jehovah Shama, the God who is ever present and who will never leave us nor forsake us.

Surely this message is what David had in mind when he penned the words,

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)

Relationships

As we've already learned, David's influence changed the lives and destinies of not only his own immediate acquaintances but also left an enduring effect on generations to come. Let's take a closer look at the circles of influence he demonstrated.

The first area of influence anyone has is upon himself. This may seem all too obvious, but we can see a dramatic example of this truth in the life of David. In I Samuel chapter thirty, we read the story of the devastation that David encountered at Ziklag. With their wives and families taken captive, their city burned, and their possessions stolen, David's men had turned against him and were speaking of stoning him. Standing alone with no one left to support him, David knew of only one thing he could do -- he encouraged himself in the Lord. (verse 6) He recognized that the first area of influence he had was over himself. Before he could muster his men to pursue the marauders and free their kidnapped families and take back their stolen goods, he knew that he had to bolster his own faith and willpower. His son, the wise King Solomon, would later pen the words, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he," (Proverbs 23:7) which seem to depict the truth that permeated his father's being that day. Solomon lets us know that it is not what we think about, but the way we think about it that determines our destiny. On that fateful day with his future and the future of his men and the nation as a whole hanging in the balance, David had no choice but to think about his loss and that of his men; he had no choice but to think about those men who had served him loyally through thick and thin but were today threatening mutiny. However, he did have a choice concerning how he was going to think about these things. He made a choice to think about reclaiming the losses inflicted by the invaders rather than to hang his head in defeat; he made a choice to remember the extreme bravery and dedication his men had displayed over their time of service in

his ranks rather than to distress himself with their present threats. As the Apostle Paul would note in the New Testament some one thousand years later, he chose to think on things that were of a good report. (Philippians 4:8) He determined to have a positive influence over himself -- the first circle over which he held sway.

The next outstanding area of David's was how he related to the people who are above him. He had what could have been a major challenge in his life in dealing with the person who was above him -- King Saul. Have you ever noticed that David told King Saul three times that he had killed a lion and a bear? (I Samuel 17: 34, 36, 37) This simple fact may not be very meaningful until we read the words of David's son Solomon in Proverbs 28:15, "As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people." It's amazing that the wise king chose the exact two wild beasts that his father so bravely faced to describe a wicked king. It also seems as no coincidence that it was only to King Saul -- the wicked king who would eventually pursue and try to kill David -- that the shepherd told his story of having killed these threatening predators.

As the story of David unfolds, he had occasions in which the life of King Saul was in his hands, yet the righteous David refused to take his prey. He had the opportunity to take the life of the wicked king just as he had taken the lives of the lion and the bear, yet he rejected the occasion because he knew one other principle: vengeance is in the hand of the Lord, not in the hand of His people. Even though Saul had wronged David and would continue to seek to destroy him, David knew that his role was to allow God to deal with the enemy. In fact, I'm pretty sure that there was a reason that God let him slay the lion and the bear -- so David would know that he could take on Saul even though he was not supposed to.

O LORD God, to whom vengeance
belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance
belongeth, shew thyself. (Psalm 94:1)

Thou answeredst them, O LORD our God:
thou wast a God that forgavest them,
though thou tookest vengeance of their
inventions. (Psalm 99:8)

To execute vengeance upon the heathen,
and punishments upon the people. (Psalm
149:7)

Although David had done nothing to oppose the king, the young man became the target of the older man's violent hostilities. In addition to being an officer in the king's army and the king's personal musician who played calming music when tormenting spirits harassed Saul, David was also the king's son-in-law and the closest friend of the king's son. In each of these relationships, Saul lashed out against his servant. As an officer, David found himself under the king's ire because the people celebrated his victories more than they did those of Saul. As the minstrel, he found himself the target of the king's javelin when the spirit enraged him. As the son-in-law and friend of the king's son, David found that the king tried to involve both his wife and friend in attempts to capture and kill him. Even though Saul acted irrationally and unjustly toward his loyal servant, David committed to never retaliate or take vengeance into his own hands.

On at least two occasions, David had opportunity to take Saul's life and ascend to his throne. (I Samuel 24:1-22, 26:1-25) Once when Saul had pursued him into the wilderness, David happened upon Saul in a cave. He stealthily slipped behind the king and cut off a strip of his garment. On another occasion, he happened upon him and his bodyguards as they all slept. This time he took Saul's javelin (perhaps the same one that had been hurled at David previously) and his water bottle. Rather than taking his life, David simply took a token to prove to Saul that he actually had the king within his power. On both of these encounters, Saul was forced to acknowledge that David was acting righteously toward him while he was acting out of unjustified anger.

When David was only a little shepherd boy, the prophet Samuel had anointed him as the next king of the nation. Even though he lived for many years with this promise from God burning in his heart, David knew that it was not his place to try to take the throne by climbing the corporate ladder -- as we would say in our modern society. We think that to get up the ladder, we must pull down the one who is above us. David, on the other hand, had apparently learned early in life the principle that he later recorded in the book of Psalms, "Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south, but God is the judge; He puts down one, and sets up another." (verses 75:6-7) Even though, the Spirit of God had departed from Saul and had anointed him, David determined to continue to show total respect and loyalty to the man as long as he sat on the throne where God had originally placed him.

The next relationship that we must understand is how to deal with the people who are below us. This principle is illustrated in the lives of the men who came seeking refuge with David when he had to flee from the king's court. These men were described in the Bible as "everyone who was in distress, every one who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented." (I Samuel 22:2) In our modern vernacular, they were riffraff, outcasts, never-do-wells -- in general, square pegs in a society made up of round holes. It is incredible what David did with these square pegs; he whittled them into shape so that they not only fit into society, but also actually stood out as superior to their peers. Chapter twenty-three of II Samuel recounts how this band of riffraff became notable warriors who accomplished feats of strength, valor, and cunning that would easily win them recognition by The Guinness Book of World Records and Ripley's Believe It or Not. Unlike the contemporary philosophy of "I look tall when everyone around me is small," David knew that it was his responsibility to help those under him to become all they could be. As he tried to pull them up the ladder, he had to step up to the next rung himself. Without focusing on climbing the corporate ladder,

he found himself getting closer and closer to the top each time he tried to help those under him achieve.

David's own father didn't call him to the interviews with the prophet because he couldn't see what was inside the lad. (I Samuel 16:7) Had Jesse been able to discern his young son's spirit, he would have called this little shepherd to the front of the line from the beginning. Unlike his father, David was able to look at the external evidence that would label these recruits as misfits; instead, he was able to discern the warriors that were inside of them. As Christians, we are commanded no longer to see one another according to our outward appearance -- by gender, color, race, creed, or ethnic origin -- but as the new men we are in Christ. (Colossians 3:9-11) We must look beyond what we see externally and discern what can become of those we are given an opportunity to mentor.

The Bible speaks many times about the importance of investing in the lives of others. In the parable of the banquet, the servants were sent out to the highways and hedges to find people who needed an investment made into their lives. (Luke 14:23) David learned that planting into the lives of others was of ultimate importance -- even when these other individuals were social outcasts and misfits. (I Samuel 22:1-2) The men that he took under his wing in the Cave of Adullam turned out to be the brave ones who protected him when he had to flee from Absalom. (II Samuel 15:14-15)

Developing leadership is a vital part of the faith. Moses imparted leadership into Joshua. (Numbers 27:18-20) Elijah developed the ministry of Elisha. (I Kings 19:19) Jesus nurtured the apostles. (Matthew 10:1) Peter mentored Mark. (I Peter 5:13) Paul raised up Timothy as a son in the faith. (I Timothy 1:2) These biblical leaders understood that developing leadership perpetuates the gospel and enhances ministry. When Jesus told the disciples that they would do greater works than He did (John 14:12), He was likely not saying that they would do more powerful acts than His but that their ministries would spread all over the world while His ministry was limited to one geographic location. When

Barnabus took Saul of Tarsus under his wing, he was probably aware that his own ministry and legacy would actually pale in the shadow of that of his young protégé. (Acts 11:22-26) Leaders in the Body of Christ must not be intimidated by the fact that their disciples may wind up doing what have done done -- or that they can actually do it better! David killed one giant, but his disciples killed four. Today's pastors must also determine to develop stronger leadership under their care to work along side them and to eventually succeed them. In addition, the pastors must instill the same spirit of mentorship in their trainees so that they become more aware of ways they can help the volunteers under them to develop their ministries.

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. (II Timothy 2:2)

The principle of mentoring was evident in the lives of many of the leaders in the Old Testament. In fact, the Old Testament is very clear concerning the power of such mentoring. There are several examples given of when the spiritual sons were responsible to finish their spiritual fathers' work. In the case of David, it was his son Solomon who built the temple that was in his father's heart. (I Kings 5:5) Probably the most revealing example is the story of how God gave Elijah three mandates in I Kings 19:15-16 -- to anoint Elisha, Hazael, and Jehu. The prophet fulfilled the first mandate immediately by anointing Elisha as his successor. (I Kings 19:19) Many Bible teachers declare Elijah to be a failure since he did not accomplish the other two parts of his mission. However, if we understand the principle of fruitful multiplication, we will see the story in a new light. Because the elder prophet Elijah adopted the young prophet as his spiritual son, he was able to pass on the commission to him. When Elisha fulfilled the second mandate (II Kings 8:13), it was essentially a spiritual extension of the ministry of Elijah even though the senior prophet was not physically present. But the plot thickens even more when we see that the third part of

Elijah's mission was accomplished by an unnamed disciple of Elisha. (II Kings 9:1-10) What a thought to mediate on -- the ministry was passed on to a third generation, but it was still fulfilled as if it had actually been done by the hands of Elijah. Interestingly enough, we don't even know the name of this third-hand recipient of the mandate, signifying that he as an individual was not nearly as important as the fact that he was the recipient of the blessing that was upon the original prophet. The same principle is of utmost importance for our success in ministry -- it must be passed on to subsequent generations through the raising up of disciples who will carry on the vision, mission, and message. Disciples must be trained to do what their mentors do -- and to do it even better.

Two other simple thoughts must also be considered in terms of our relationships with those who are below us. First, we must treat everyone equally and fairly. In the story of David's conquest of the Amalekites in I Samuel chapter thirty, he gave equal portions of the spoil to the ones who remained to watch over the camp and to the ones who actually went out to battle. (verse 24) Everyone received the same, no matter what he did. Next, we have to learn to listen to and take counsel from those who are under our leadership. Because they are actually in the spot where the "rubber meets the road," they may actually have a better vantage point than we do. Bathsheba averted an uprising and secured the throne for Solomon by persuading King David to declare his intent that Solomon was to succeed him as the next king. (I Kings 1) This was an excellent case of the wife being the neck that turns the head while the husband remains the head of the household.

The next level of relationship that we must develop is illustrated in David's relationship with Jonathan -- the relationship we must develop with those who are beside us, our peers. Jonathan and David were apparently about the same age, they were both accomplished warriors, and it seems that they shared many of the same interests. There was, however, one possible bone of contention between them: Jonathan, who was captain over one third of the army while Saul's two other sons

were not given any positions of leadership (I Samuel 13:2, I Chronicles 10:6), was the heir apparent for the throne while David was the one anointed by the prophet to ascend to the royal seat. These two young men could have seen each other as rivals rather than friends. David and Jonathan, however, determined to support rather than challenge each other. They both seemed to know that God would ultimately decide who would be the next to wear the crown and that there was no purpose in their contending with each other for it.

Too often, we fail to see our peers as conveyors of God's blessings; instead, we tend to see them as contenders for the blessings of the Lord. The story of two local pastors illustrates this point dramatically. One pastor had a very large, exploding congregation; the other had a small, struggling group of followers. When the pastor with the growing congregation was forced to relocate to a larger facility, he bought a plot of ground just a few blocks from the other pastor's church. As soon as the construction began, the pastor of the smaller church began to feel very threatened by the fact that the larger congregation was moving into his "turf." He was afraid that the larger church would suck all the members out of his church and swallow him up. When the new pastor learned of the other pastor's concerns, he graciously asked him to lunch. He reached across the restaurant table and reassured the troubled pastor, "Please don't view me as an opponent. See me as a partner together with you. We're on the same team, doing the same task of bringing the gospel to this community. You know that every Sunday there are going to be thousands of people who will drive past your church on their way to visit my service. The thing you may not know is that when they get there, there will be hundreds who do not want to come back again. Some won't like my sermon; some won't like our music; some won't like worshipping in such a large group -- but for one reason or another, they will not be happy at my church. Many of them will remember seeing your building as they came to mine and will decide to try visiting your service the next Sunday. And many of them will stay after they visit with you

once.” With this little pep talk, the young pastor won the older pastor’s confidence and they became partners rather than opponents. The result was that the smaller church doubled in size within the first year that the big new church was open!

David also had winning relationships with his supporters, those who were behind him. We often use the expressions like, “I’m behind you all the way,” or “I’m behind you on this one,” or “I’ve got your back,” to register our support of a person and his projects. In David’s life, it was the ones who had started out under him who became the ones who were so powerfully behind him. We’ve already made reference to one story from the chronicles of David’s might men, but it is worth revisiting it here because it so poignantly illustrates the relationship between the king and his men. In the heat of battle one day, David made one of those wistful comments we often make when we long for the better times we remember of the past, “If only I could have a drink of water from the well at Bethlehem!” I’m certain that any water would have served to slake his thirst, but his soul cried out for the cool, clean waters of the community well outside the village gates because of the association with the blissful days of his childhood when, as a shepherd, he would draw deeply from that well to refresh himself and his sheep. When his bodyguards heard his sigh, they secretly broke from their ranks and fought their way through the enemy lines to get to the well. Once they had filled their flasks with the precious water, they again fought their way through the thick of the battle to bring the offering to their commander and chief. When David was offered the flask, he was surprised that his men had risked their lives to push through the fray in order to satisfy his whimsical request. Awestruck by their bravery and sacrifice, he refused to drink the water; instead, he poured it on the ground as a libation before the Lord. The key principle in this lesson is that he understood the love and dedication of his men as being inspired, not by himself, but by the life of God they saw in him. Therefore, he presented the water as an offering to God -- the one who really deserved it. For those who are behind us, we

must learn to recognize that any good they are attracted to in us is not of ourselves, but of Christ who lives inside us.

In the same fashion that we have supporters behind us, we will certainly have opponents in front of us -- the “in your face” sort people who challenge and accuse us. The classic example in David’s life was Shimei who openly accosted and ridiculed David as he fled Jerusalem during the attack by his son Absalom. On what was already likely the most humiliating day of David’s life, this rogue scoundrel made the most unthinkable spectacle of the king by chasing along side him as he fled before the advancing army led by his own son and slandered him publicly -- calling him every nasty name imaginable. Later, when David returned to Jerusalem in triumph, Shimei came bowing before the king to apologize for his foolishness and unwarranted accusations. Although David’s men wanted to kill the slanderer, David spared the culprit’s life. The king knew that, just as his supporters favored the life of God they saw in him, it was the manifestation of God inside him that had stirred up a manifestation of the demonic forces within Shimei.

For those who affront us with an “in your face” challenge, we must learn to realize that they are not so much attacking us but are fighting the Spirit of God inside us. At that point, we must remember Ephesians 6:12, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” For the individuals we must pray as Jesus did for those who drove the nails into His flesh, “Father, forgive them for they don’t even know what they are doing.”

When David was encompassed by a multitude of enemies, he cried out as to where he should look for help. His mind questioned if he could look to the hills as a place of refuge from his pursuer, but his spirit immediately retorted that he must look unto the Lord for that was his only source of help.

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. (Psalm 121:1-2)

Couple that with the story we learn from I Samuel 30:6, “And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God,” and we can see what a radical difference the presence of the Holy Spirit can make. No matter how desperate the circumstances may be, it can be changed through the edification that we can receive from the allowing the Holy Spirit to manifest Himself. Like David, God was ready to prepare a table for us -- even in the very presence of their enemies. (Psalm 23:5)

David also wrote of brethren living and functioning together in unity but used what seems at first glance to be a most unusual illustration to get his point across.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore. (Psalm 133:1-3)

If we understand the functionings of the Body of Christ, we can see why David wrote as he did. Unity within the body can only result when each individual finds his place and supplies his part. Paul said that the entire body would be edified in love when each member functions in the proper way. The imagery of the precious ointment speaks of the anointing oil poured over Aaron when he was commissioned into his position as high priest. This oil is symbolic of the presence of the Holy Spirit spoken of in I Corinthians 12:7 as the

“manifestation of the Spirit.” David goes on to say that the oil runs from Aaron’s head, to his beard, and all the way to the fringes of his skirt. This speaks of the flow of God’s anointing throughout the properly submitted Body of Christ from the Head Jesus Himself -- through the called ministers to the total body -- so that no one is excluded in the manifestation of the Spirit. As Paul said, “It profits withal.” Everyone in the church is blessed when we all function in our spiritual gifts under the motivation of the love of God the Father.

David next mentioned the dew that flows from Mount Hermon. This reference brings to mind a beautiful illustration of how important it is to be God’s pipeline in our ministries. The water that flows from Mount Hermon forms the Jordan River that flows into two different bodies of water. One is the Sea of Galilee that is teeming with life; the other is the Dead Sea, which as its own name depicts, sustains nothing in its waters. The difference between these two seas is that the Galilee receives and gives -- it is a pipeline. The Dead Sea has no outlet -- it is only a taker. Because it does not relate to others, it is dead. The only way to keep spiritually alive is through properly relating to others -- above, beneath, beside, behind, and in front of you.

Capturing Jerusalem

Until David took the city of Jerusalem, it had never been captured. When Joshua came into the Promised Land, he defeated the king of Jerusalem, but the city itself was never taken. (Joshua 10:23-24, 15:63) The Jebusites boasted that Jerusalem was so secure that its guards were the blind and the lame men. (II Samuel 5:6) Its natural position made it virtually invincible; therefore, it was unnecessary to position the able-bodied soldiers there. These strong warriors were used elsewhere while the rejects defended the city. The city actually “defended itself” since it was built on the top of high cliffs with deep ravines surrounding it. When an attack would come, all these handicapped soldiers had to do was to simply push boulders over the edge of the cliff upon the approaching forces -- they did not need to be marksmen or skilled warriors.

David outfoxed the Jebusites by sending some men up the water duct to take the city from the inside. After David took the city, Jerusalem then became his stronghold. (II Samuel 5:7-9) From the city of Jerusalem, we learn a lesson concerning strongholds: their power is in their natural position. You don't have to have a strong warrior inside a stronghold to be able to protect it because the stronghold itself is its own protection. Let's apply this principle to our own lives -- especially our thought lives. The devil doesn't have to be strong to have a powerful control over us. He could be blind and crippled -- but if he gets inside our stronghold, he can exercise tremendous authority. He doesn't have to have real strength or ability as long as he has a controlling position in our thought life. When the devil gets inside our thinking and begins to feed us with lies and deception, he saps whatever energy and power was already inside us. Sometimes the devil tries to trick believers with the lame idea that he (the devil) has no power, making the believer lethargic in his spiritual life. Other times, he deceives them with the lame idea that that he (the devil) has lots of power, scaring the believer into retreat.

Regardless of his approach, every thought that the enemy inspires is a lie that is totally void within itself. The power that it carries is simply the authority that we give it by allowing it a place inside our minds.

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. (Romans 8:20)

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Romans 1:21)

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind. (Ephesians 4:17)

On the other hand, the truth can get inside our stronghold and make it just as strong a fortification for the truth as it was for the devil's lies. The power of our mind is incredible. When we believe the evil thoughts of defeat, we are defeated. When the thoughts of God get into our minds and our spirits and fill us with thoughts of success, we are successful. Just as David transformed the city of the Jebusites into his prized capital, Jesus is intent upon taking the strongholds of Satan and making them His treasured show places. One interesting side note is that when David took the city of Jerusalem, he armed it with his mighty men -- not the lame and blind men as did the Jebusites. In like fashion -- when Christ takes over our minds and hearts, He fortifies our strongholds with the powerful truths of the Word of God! The verb translated "keep" in Philippians 4:7 literally means to build a fort. In Christ, we can fortify our minds with powerful truths that declare and determine victory.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. (II Corinthians 10:3-5)

For many years when I read this passage, I thought that the “things that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God” were things like atheism that says there is no God. I thought that Paul was saying that the weapons of my warfare were for the purpose of destroying the arguments of the people who say there is no God. In actuality, this is not at all what this passage is saying. Our weapons are strong enough to destroy all the arguments against any area of the knowledge about God. There are lots of things that we should know about God; however, for some reason, we don't because there is an idea that has gotten into our heads that keeps the true knowledge of God from getting into us. We know that God exists, but we fail to attain the true knowledge of who God is and what God does. God is Jehovah Tsidkenu, which means that He is the God of our righteousness. The day that Jesus came into our lives, His righteousness came into us. However, the devil will come to each and every one of us with accusations to combat our righteousness consciousness. If that lie penetrates into our minds and we agree with it, he begins to build a stronghold against the knowledge of God's righteousness within us. God is also Jehovah Rapha -- the God who heals all of our diseases -- but the devil wants to plant lies inside us saying that our ailment is either too big for God to heal or too insignificant for Him to notice. The truth is that God is just as willing to heal the little aches and pains as He is willing to heal cancer. He is just as able to heal the most dreaded plague, as He is able to cure a minor ailment. We can go through all the redemptive names and qualities of God to learn what we should be thinking about God. Anytime we allow thoughts contrary to these truths into our hearts, we have permitted the enemy to use his deceit to begin a stronghold in our minds.

A number of years ago, a contestant in a beauty contest knew that she was going to lose to one of the other participants, so she decided to resort to dubious means to defeat her. Her tactic to get the girl out of the completion was to curse her by telling her that every time she looked in the mirror, she would see how ugly she was. The curse worked, and the front-runner dropped out of the completion. In fact, she totally dropped out of life and spent the rest of her life as a recluse in her house. She spent all of her fortune on beauty products and cosmetic surgeries. No matter how many people tried to convince her that she was still a gorgeous lady, she never overcame the lie that had been planted in her mind during that pageant. It was a lame idea, but it took root in the stronghold of her mind and destroyed her future and life.

One of the unique characteristics of strongholds is that they are positioned so that in the event of an attack, enemies would actually bring destruction upon themselves. In Sri Lanka, I have climbed to the top of Sigiriya, the spectacular “Lion Rock” fortress on top a gigantic rock whose sheer walls rise about twelve hundred feet above its luscious green jungle surroundings. This fortress, built in AD 473, was surrounded by huge slabs of stone that were triggered with rope mechanisms so that an avalanche of destruction would instantly engulf any intruding army. In Israel, I was able to climb the equally impressive fortress of Masada that was built by King Herod. This encampment poised atop the thirteen-hundred-foot precipice became the last bastion of the Jewish people against the Roman invasion. When the legion laid siege to the fortress in AD 72, the Romans realized that the only way to take the stronghold was to build a circumvallation wall to allow them to approach the plateau. They forced Jewish slaves to haul in the thousands of tons of stones and earth that it took to build the ramp because the attackers knew that the Jews in the fortress would not kill their national brethren. Otherwise, the Jews hold-up in the fortress would have pummeled their attackers to death with their arsenal of rocks. From my vantage point perched atop Sigiriya or Masada, thinking of the

sheer insanity of launching an attack against either of these strongholds, I began to gain a perspective of how well defensible our position is Christ can and should be if we only renew our minds to become strongholds of truth rather than citadels for the enemy's blind assumptions and lame ideas.

Let's examine how David out-tricked the Jebusites when he took the city of Jerusalem from the lame and blind guards. According to II Samuel 5:8, the attack approach was through the water canal. In Ephesians 5:26, Paul uses water as a symbol of the Word of God. If this symbol can also be applied to the story of David's conquest of Jerusalem, we can see that the lesson exactly parallels biblical truth -- the only way we are to take control of the strongholds in our lives is to infiltrate them with the truth of the Word of God -- the weapon that is more powerful than the enemy's lies. One interesting footnote to this story is that the King James translation of this verse says that he sent his men into the city through the gutter. What a powerful thought -- what had been a gutter, filled with the garbage thoughts of this world, became the avenue through which the renewing and life-giving truths of God could invade!

Perhaps that is the reason David wrote that he had hidden the Word of God in his heart so that he would not sin against God (Psalm 119:11) and prayed that the Lord would search his heart to see if there was any evil way in it (Psalm 139:23). His son Solomon followed with his own admonition concerning the importance of the heart when he said in Proverbs 4:23, "Keep (guard) thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

We are repeatedly instructed that God searches the hearts of men (I Kings 8:39, Psalm 44:21, Psalm 139:1-2, Acts 1:24, Romans 2:16, Hebrews 4:13 -- to list only a few); yet we are faced with a real problem in that sometimes we don't even know our own hearts. Jeremiah instructed us concerning this inherent danger of the heart when he said that it is so deceitful that it may even fool the individual himself. (Jeremiah 17:9) But the Apostle Paul offered us a word of consolation that

through the human spirit enlightened by the Holy Spirit we can have a true knowledge of our hearts. (I Corinthians 2:11, Romans 8:27) David gave us an example of how to pray for our hearts in Psalm 19:14 when he said, “Let the words of our hearts and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” At this point, it is apparent that there is a real connection between the words of our mouths and the thoughts of our hearts -- a truth confirmed by Jesus’ declaration in Matthew 15:18 that those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart.

Actually, one of the best ways to really know our hearts is to listen carefully to the words that come out of our mouths before we have time to contrive a response -- when we hit our thumbs with the hammer, when someone pulls in front of us in traffic, or when someone offers us an interesting bit of gossip. An excellent illustration of this principle occurred on national television a few years ago when a contestant on a game show was awarded a brand new car. Before she had time to offer a prepared response, out of her mouth erupted the words, “I can't take that car! I work for their competitor!” Of course, everyone on the show was stunned -- even the winning contestant. After a few seconds, the host gained enough composure to carry on with the show and questioned the lady about what she had said. It was true, she was turning down a prize worth thousands of dollars because inside her was loyalty to her employer. It wasn't her brain that made the response; it was her heart. As Christians, we must have our hearts so full of the truth of God and the life of God that we will automatically respond with God's Word and nature from the heart.

In Psalms 141:3, David expressed his desire to guard his mouth and acknowledged that his lips were a gateway. “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.” However, it is in the following verse that we see that the true heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. “Incline not

my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity.”

In Psalm 19:14 we find a powerful key, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” David prayed that the words of his mouth -- the sayings he initiated and the things that he repeated from others -- would be acceptable unto the Lord. Let me suggest that David likely used the same filter that is described in the New Testament as a screen for eliminating words and thoughts that would have been displeasing to God:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Here Paul listed eight criteria that must be met before any thought qualifies to be meditated upon. Simply being true does not make it eligible to become part of our thinking process. Once it passes the truth filter, it then must be subjected to the filter of justice and the honesty filter, followed by the purity filter, then the filter of loveliness, the good-report filter, the virtue filter, and the praiseworthiness filter. If it makes it through all these filters, then -- and only then -- is it acceptable for a Christian to think or meditate on.

So what does this say about the bad news reports that we hear? How should they affect us? First of all, we need to determine if they are true. Quite simply, much of what is published today -- especially in tabloids and on the Internet, but even in many reputable news sources -- simply is not true. In that case, ignore it unless you have an opportunity to correct the misinformation in order to protect other innocent subjects. Next, we must apply the just and honest filters to determine if what is said is presented with a bias that is distorting the truth. The kernel of truth that inspired the gossip may be true, but

what about the assumptions or exaggerations that came along with it? An old expression goes, "Figures don't lie, but liars figure." For example, all of the scientific evidences that have been presented as proof of evolution actually have another story to tell -- one that proves the instantaneous creation of the universe by an intelligent being. However, the scientific publications as a whole are unjust and dishonest in the way they report this information. Since the reports have failed the next layers of filters, we have to discard them from our meditations unless we have the ability to correct the interpretations into honest and just concepts. Other filters include purity, loveliness, praiseworthiness, and virtue. These filters readily disqualify any kinds of reports that slander and harm others. Obviously, when people are in error, they need to be corrected; but slander or "getting even" are not correction! Therefore we must not meditate on these aspects of the issue. Rather, we must meditate on a positive quality associated with their wrongdoing -- the fact that Jesus came to redeem falling man and that He gave us the ministry of reconciling these wayward men to Him.

One other test is the good-report filter where we have to ask ourselves if the report is good as well as true. If what we hear is true but negative in nature, it does not qualify as a tenant for space in our hearts and minds. That doesn't mean that we ignore the truth; it simply means that we are not to meditate on it. In an economic downturn, for an example, it would be foolish to ignore the fact that the economy is in serious difficulty; however, to allow that negative report to become a focal point in our thoughts would be disastrous. My own personal experience when our country entered a financial crisis demonstrates how this principle can work. The newspaper reported the results of a study that showed that giving to non-for-profit organizations had fallen off around twenty percent during the first months of a major economic setback. At the same time, a number of ministries I knew of were forced to lay off employees due to lack of funding. All this happened just at a time when I was making the most

aggressive faith decisions in our ministry. These news reports were true reports that I could not -- and did not want to -- ignore. However, these reports were not good reports, so I knew that I could not allow them to become the focus of the meditation of my heart. Instead, I found another report that I also knew to be true but also passed the good-report test: "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19) This passage became the focus of my meditation even when I acknowledged the currently prevailing economic difficulties. I knew that I couldn't ignore the facts, but I also knew that I could not focus my attention on them. With full awareness of the financial strain, I chose to focus on the fact that I had a God who would supply all my needs -- not according to the present economy, but according to His riches. Almost as soon as I made the decision to focus on the good report of Philippians rather than the negative report of the media, I was faced with a major request. A pastor I had been assisting in Burma contacted me with a need. Revival was spreading through his area, and he had seen a major influx into his church. In fact, it was so great that he needed to expand his facility. He asked me to help him with the cost of this expansion. Had I been focusing on the news reports, I would have told him that I was sorry; however, I was focusing on the good report that my God would supply every need. Because of that, I was able to promise him in faith that I would help. Not long afterwards, I went to Africa on a mission trip and was given a huge offering which covered the pledge I had made toward his building. Who would ever have thought that I would receive an offering on the mission field, much less one generous enough to undertake a building project! Imagine -- even while we were experiencing an economic downturn in America, God supplied for a church in Asia by an offering in Africa!

The Power of the Secret Place

Did you ever realize that no one was watching when David slew the lion and the bear, but the whole world watched when he killed Goliath? While the rest of the army of Israel trembled for forty days without even trying to fight, David “stepped up to the plate” and did something no one else could do. David was able to slay the giant in public because he had slain the lion and the bear in secret. His secret victory over the wild beasts was the secret to his victory over the giant!

Even though David knew and demonstrated the power of winning battles in the secret place with God so that his victories could be manifest openly before men, he had one secret moment in which he forfeited this intimacy with God for intimacy with Bathsheba by bringing her into the secret place where he lost the personal battle of integrity. The ultimate result was not only public exposure but also a scourge that was never lifted from his family. (II Samuel 12:10) His public giants wouldn't fall because he had failed to subdue the private lion of greed and the secret bear of lust.

The Ten Commandments fall into two major categories: offences against man -- which are public -- and sins against God -- which are private. These two distinct categories evoke two significantly different responses. Public repentance is usually because we are caught in our exposed actions against men; private repentance may actually be because we are sorry that we have sinned against God in the secret place of our hearts. Again, we can turn to the life of David to see implications of these two levels of repentance. David originally tried to avoid public repentance by hiding his wrongdoings against Uriah and Bathsheba. However, when Nathan exposed David's sin and elaborate cover-up scheme, the king went further than a simple public repentance; he made a private penitence in which he acknowledged that his sin was not simply against the innocent couple but ultimately against God Himself. (Psalm 51:4) Why? Because he knew that he must go

back and deal with his private failures against his lions and bears in the secret place (Lamentations 3:10) if he ever hoped to again have public victories against the giants that awaited him.

In Matthew chapter six where Jesus addressed the necessity of developing a strong secret life, He actually showed how the secret place relates to our total personality. He first spoke of our giving -- representing our physical personality (the body). He then spoke of fasting, which although it has to do with our bodies is actually a soulful function in that it is literally afflicting the soul. (Isaiah 58:5) Finally, He turned to our spiritual man when He spoke of prayer in that this is our communication with God Himself. In each one of these dimensions, the Lord showed us that there are battles that must be won in private in order for there to be victories manifest in the open. If even non-Christian philosophers can acknowledge that character is who we are behind closed doors, how much more must we as believers realize that our destinies are determined in the secret places. If we want to slay giants in public, we must contend with the lions and bears in our private lives.

The tenth commandment, which spoke to the hidden heart attitude of covetousness, was essentially a sneak preview to the New Testament connection between the secrets of the heart and their public manifestations. (Matthew 5:27-28, II Peter 2:14) Just as lust hidden in the secret place of the heart is as destructive as open physical sin of adultery, so is covert covetousness to the overt sin of stealing. This "stealth attack" of the inner man was apparently the sin that Paul personally struggled with (Acts 20:33, Romans 7:7); yet, he apparently dealt with it and won a victory so that it never hampered his public ministry (Acts 23:1, 24:16; Romans 9:1; I Timothy 1:5, 1:19, 3:9; II Timothy 1:3).

We can also see the power of secret victories when we observe that people with strong private prayer lives get big results with very short prayers. Jesus needed only three words to bring a man back from the dead after four days of

interment; yet, He prefaced this short prayer with the acknowledgment that He had laid the foundation in His undisclosed private prayer time. (John 11:41-42) Elijah needed only two sentences to call fire down from heaven, but we also know that his personal life was characterized by a lifestyle of intercession. (I Kings 18:36-37, James 5:17)

Joel prophesied that young men would see visions (verse 2:28), a prophecy that was repeated in the first sermon in the newborn church (Acts 2:17). It seems to me that this visionary nature of young men may be linked to their ability to overcome the obstacles and challenges of the enemy. (I John 2:14) In other words, if we want to be victorious, we must visualize ourselves as victorious. Our internal secret revelations bring external public manifestations.

David did just that when he went out to fight Goliath. Notice how he answered the giant when the big bully challenged him, “This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.” (I Samuel 17:46) To get the full impact of this statement, we have to consider the fact that David didn’t even have a sword when he declared that he was going to cut off the giant’s head. There was no way he was going to use what he had in his hand -- a stick, five smooth stones, and his sling -- to take off Goliath’s head; yet he was able to see beyond the natural to the supernatural. Just as he had taken on the lion and the bear without a natural weapon, he could visualize God’s provision even during the struggle. Just as Samson had found that when all he had was a jawbone, it was all he needed; David knew that when the name of the Lord was all he had, it would be all he needed. We, too, must visualize ourselves victorious with God’s supernatural weapons that are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. (II Corinthians 10:3)

One all-important key when taking a challenge bigger than yourself is to refuse to see yourself small in your own eyes.

When the spies saw the giants in the Promised Land, they saw themselves like grasshoppers; and the scriptures record, “and so they were.” (Numbers 13:30) On the other hand, David refused to be intimidated by any of the demeaning circumstances in his life -- right up to facing a giant that had held the entire army at bay for over a month.

When the prophet came to his house to anoint a new king, David’s own father didn’t even call him for the lineup because he didn’t consider him worthy to even be considered. This Cinderella discrimination and two-ugly-sister favoritism has destroyed many potentially great men and women -- but not David because he refused to see himself as the diminutive, ruddy, insignificant, kid brother. When he showed up at the encampment, his oldest brother “let him have it with both barrels,” accusing him of coming out to the battlefield to make trouble. Out of pride and naughtiness in his own heart, Eliab attempted to demean his little brother’s place in the family business by referring to his “few sheep in the wilderness.” Yet, David didn’t even bother to answer these railings; instead, he went directly ahead to the matter at hand -- sizing up the giant task he was to challenge. When he was brought to the king’s tent, this little shepherd boy refused to be intimidated by the monarch’s discouraging words, “Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.” Finally, he met Goliath himself with total confidence that he was big enough for the challenge.

Although we always refer to this story as “David and the Giant,” to get the real meaning out of the story, we need to drop the word “and” from the title. Actually, this is a story about “David, the Giant.” This little narrative shows how this little boy proved to be bigger than any number of obstacles that were thrown in his path. First of all, he was bigger than criticism. The first thing that David encountered when he showed up at the encampment was his oldest brother’s scorn -- accosting that would have been enough to discourage most of us. But not so with this giant-hearted shepherd boy! Next, he

proved to be bigger than the reward. Although the king had offered a bountiful ransom to anyone who would step forward to fight the Philistine, David seemed totally unmoved by the reward. His question, "Is there not a cause?" showed that he was motivated by the cause, not the cash. Next, we see that he was bigger than the situation. Though his challenge was a giant, he didn't shrink back; instead, he actually ran to the conflict. As soon as the giant collapsed before the miniature warrior's slingshot, David proved that he was bigger than himself because the entire army -- who had cowered before the giant for forty days -- instantly sprang into action and routed the enemy. Lastly, we can conclude that David was bigger than time. Had David not arrived on the scene, the story would have ended with just the forty days that the Israelite army stood hopelessly in the corner, but David stepped into history with a story that is still recounted in every Sunday school class some three millennia later! He became a giant in history because he was a giant in the secret place of his own heart.

David wasn't intimidated by the shadow cast by the menacing giant; rather, he was standing in the very shadow of the Almighty because he had spent time with Him in the secret place.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the
most High shall abide under the shadow of
the Almighty. (Psalm 91:1)

When David was fleeing from King Saul, he had a special hiding place in the Cave of Adullam in En Gedi. It was likely this physical hideout that inspired his words in this passage and also in Psalm 32:7 and Psalm 119:114 in which he referred to God Himself as that place of protection. An interesting flipside to that coin is found in the story of King Saul's retreat into a cave in En Gedi (possibly even the same cave that always provided safety for David) yet this trip into the cave could have proven fatal to King Saul because it wasn't the cave itself -- but rather the Lord who covered him with His wing while in the cave -- that was David's protection. (I Samuel 24:1-22) The secret place that David described in this psalm is

a place where one can relax from his own vigilance because he knows that God is watching over him and protecting him. It is a place of intimacy where one can fellowship with the Almighty and be rejuvenated by that relationship. It is a place similar to the Tent of Meeting where Moses retreated from society so that he could advance with God.

There are three powerful secret places in each of our lives: one is the inner secret place of our heart, another is the secret place of God's intimate presence, and third is the private physical place of separation that draws the first two together. Paul found that secret place in the desert of Arabia where he went for three years to seek the face of God concerning the perplexing situation he found himself in after his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. He had to somehow reconcile himself with this revelation that he had been so certain was contrary to all the Old Testament and Jewish tradition he had always honored. (Galatians 1:18) He returned with an unshakable revelation that propelled him throughout the then-known world and gave birth to the gentile church and a major portion of the New Testament writings. Jesus found His secret place in the desert where He fasted for forty days and then faced Satan head-on in cosmic conflict. (Luke 4:14) He came out of there in the power of the Holy Ghost to minister healing, deliverance, miracles, and salvation. Suzanna Wesley found her secret place every time she pulled her apron over her head to block out the clamber of her house full of children. She came out from there with the inspiration and ability to plant the passion for ministry in the hearts of her sons who would eventually become two of the most important figures in modern church history -- Charles and John Wesley. David found his secret place in his bed in the middle of the night.

At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto
thee because of thy righteous judgments.
(Psalm 119:62)

This verse paints a beautiful picture of the relationship we can have with the Lord. David said that he rose up at

midnight, indicating that he cannot sleep because something is so strongly on his mind. Generally, we have sleepless nights because we are anxious or worried about something. However, the Psalmist made it clear that the reason he could not sleep was because he was overwhelmed with thankfulness. I can imagine that he must have awakened in the night with such feelings of gratitude for God's graciousness toward him that he just couldn't lie in bed and say a prayer of thanksgiving; he had to get up and take his pen in hand to write a psalm to express his emotion. He defined the reason for his gratitude as the righteous judgments of God. The dictionary definition of the Hebrew word he used is "a formal verdict (favorable or unfavorable) pronounced judicially, especially a sentence or formal decree, including the act, the place, the suit, the crime, and the penalty." From the context of the verse, it seems that the judgment he is referring to is a favorable pardon for David rather than an unfavorable sentence against his enemy. In that case, the full definition really brings life to the incident. David could recite exactly what he did, where he was when he did it, all the conditions surrounding his offense, and exactly how his action was in violation to the divine law of God; yet, God ruled favorable and pardoned him. No wonder he had to get out of bed in the middle of the night to write a psalm of thanks!

Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I
might meditate in thy word. (Psalm 119:148)

It might seem that David suffered from insomnia. However, I doubt that this was really the case. Notice that he says in this verse that he prevents the night watches, which seems to indicate that he made a deliberate attempt to stay awake. The Hebrew verb can mean to anticipate, and a number of versions translate the passage with that meaning. If we interpret the passage with these two thoughts in mind, we get a picture of David lying in his bed making a deliberate choice between two options: falling asleep or using the quiet hours of the night to contemplate the Word of God. Even if the deliberate aspect of the verse is eliminated since it is only implied, the verse still presents David as lying in his bed

making a deliberate choice between tossing and turning in an attempt to fall asleep and using those solitary moments to fill his heart with the truths of God's Word. Either way, we see an inspiring portrait of the man after God's own heart. (Acts 13:22) If it worked for David; certainly, it will work for us.

We may find our secret place in our cars as we crank up the worship CD while commuting to work, along the jogging trail as we pray in tongues while doing our morning exercise, at a retreat where we have gone to separate ourselves in fasting and prayer, beside our beds when you kneel in intercession and worship, at the church altar as we bow before the majesty of the Almighty, in our favorite arm chairs as we pore over the pages of God's precious written Word, or in the sanctuary as we drink in the anointed proclaimed Word of God. Regardless of where it is and how it happens, we must find and sanctify that secret place where we meet and have intimate fellowship with God. It is the key to our success as Christians. It is the thing that we have that the rest of the world doesn't have that lets us be someone the rest of the world will never be and accomplish things that the rest of the world will never achieve. It is our secret to victory. It is a matter of spiritual -- and sometimes physical -- life or death!

The seed that produces life is the Word of God. David hid the Word in his heart that he would not sin. (Psalm 119:11) This constant flow of the Word of God renews the believer so that he is able to more readily manifest the nature of his heavenly Father. Keeping the valve open of our spirit man through the entrance of the Word of God brings life. (Psalm 119:130) Of course, there is always the other side of the coin for those who do regard iniquity in their hearts. Jesus summed up their lives in Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."

We must diligently guard our secret place because if we protect it God will protect us in His secret place.

For in the time of trouble he shall hide me
in his pavilion: in the secret place of his

tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me
upon a rock. (Psalm 27:5)

At this point, I would like to take a look at the concept of the treasures that we store in our secret place because they are the litmus test as to what is valuable in our lives and how we really regard our secret place. In Isaiah 45:3, we see that even God stores His treasures in secret places. In Luke 12:34, Jesus taught us that our treasures and our hearts always wind up in the same place. In other words, whatever has a real priority in our lives will be the thing in which we invest your treasures. Because the two most important commodities in modern society are time and money, it has been said that if we can take a look at a person's check book and his daily planner we can know exactly what is important to that person. If we see that he has written numerous checks to his church and to ministry organizations, we know that his faith has a high priority in life; however, if country club fees and sporting goods stores dominate his expenditures, we know that something else is at the top of his list. If we see that he has blocked out plenty of time in his schedule for regular church activities and volunteer service, we know where his priorities lie; however, if his tee-off times and his business lunches are the most prominent entries on his calendar, we can rethink his commitments.

As we have already seen, the other valuable commodity we store in our secret place is our thoughts. Just as money and time can be employed to help us produce desired results, our thoughts can be inestimable resources of change -- sometimes positive and sometimes detrimental. The thoughts that we allow to abide in the secret place of our hearts can be our most valuable assets, or they can become our most formidable foe. David warned us in Psalm 10:8-9 that the enemy waits in the secret place, which verse eleven shows to be the heart, to snare and destroy his prey. It is his desire, as with Ananias and Sapphira, to fill our hearts with vanity, lies, and negative thoughts because he knows the scriptural truth that a man becomes exactly like what he thinks about in his heart.

(Proverbs 23:7)

Several years ago, a dear friend of mine was diagnosed as having an advanced case of one of the most aggressive forms of cancer. In fact, when the doctor gave her the report, he advised her to go straight from his office to the airport and catch a plane to a special cancer clinic in Texas. He insisted that there was no time to delay -- even to stop by her house and pack a suitcase for the trip. As believers, my friend and her husband determined that they would first have prayer before going for the specialized treatment. Their pastor called all the elders of the church together for a special prayer meeting and laid hands on my friend; however, she could sense doubt behind their prayers "of faith." She told her husband that she could hear what they were saying with their lips but could also read what they were thinking by looking at their eyes, faces, and body language -- and the two did not agree. She told him, "These people are not going to heal me; they are going to kill me! Please get me to a place where people really believe what they say!" When he promised to take her anywhere an airplane could fly, she asked to go to Indiana to be with my wife and me. I arranged for special prayer by two great apostles -- our pastor, Dr. Lester Sumrall, and the pastor of the church that was at that time the world's largest congregation, Dr. Yonggi Cho. She then spent the next three days in our home and received a constant diet of faith-filled words that came with confidence out of our hearts, not just words out of our heads. When she did check in at the cancer clinic, the doctor refused to admit her with the explanation that theirs was a specialized facility and only people with cancer could be treated there! For my friend -- and for each of us -- the treasure that is stored in the secret place of the heart was the difference between life and death. In Mark 11:23, Jesus emphasized that not doubting in the heart coupled with the positive confession is the key to a successful faith life. Paul also spoke of the power of coupling heart belief and the oral confession in Romans 10:10, while James 1:8 described the futility of having a heart and mouth that were not in agreement

and Isaiah 29:13 concluded that such disagreement is abominable to God.

Because David had a revelation of his victory in the secret place of his heart and then spoke it out publicly he was able to set destiny into action. So can we!

David's Covenant

At the height of his career as Israel's second king, David desired to build a monument to the God who had so spectacularly blessed him. When David presented his plan to build a temple in Jerusalem to his spiritual advisor Nathan, the Lord's response came that David was not to build a house for God but that He would build a house for David. God, in His divine humor, used a play on words to establish a new line of blessing. God had brought a new factor of reality into the movement of human destiny. David was not to build a building for God, but God would establish a family lineage for the king whom God recognized as a man after His own heart. The Lord further promised that it would never fail that one of David's descendants would sit on the throne in Jerusalem. From that moment on, a new covenant was in force. Psalm eighty-nine is a poetic description of this covenant, which was to be passed on to one son at a time throughout all generations.

My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah. (verses 34-37)

Solomon was the first heir to David's throne. It was during his reign that Israel reached her zenith in all areas. Israel actually became the focus of all human interest because of Solomon's wealth, wisdom, and wonderful architecture. However, Solomon failed tragically in his responsibilities to God. Of the seven-fold job description for the king of Israel spelled out in Deuteronomy chapter seventeen, Solomon violated all but two -- and these were two that were the ones that were impossible for him to break:

1. He had to be a Jew.

2. He had to be called by God.
He blatantly violated the other five.
3. The king was not to acquire numbers of horses.
First Kings 10:26 declares that Solomon maintained fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen.
4. The king was not to make treaties with Egypt and buy horses there. Second Chronicles 9:28 declares that he did just that.
5. The king was not to take many wives. First Kings 11:3 lists Solomon's wives as being seven hundred plus three hundred concubines.
6. The king was not to acquire large amounts of gold and silver. First Kings 10:27 astounds us with the fact that Solomon made silver as common as stones in Jerusalem.
7. The king was required to make a copy of the law for himself and read it daily to continue to revere the Lord and obey His decrees. First Kings 11:9 records Solomon's tragic failure on this point.

Upon the death of Solomon, his son Rehoboam came to the throne. Jeroboam (an officer under Solomon who had been charged as a dissident) pleaded with the new king to lessen the taxes and deal more generously with his subjects. Rehoboam refused and, instead, decided to increase the tax rates. His foolishness led to the division of the kingdom -- a consequence that had been prophesied would come because of Solomon's wickedness. Now, the covenant people were no longer one; they were two separate nations -- Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The histories of these two nations are quite diverse, mainly because of the covenant made with King David. Because Judah contained the city of David, Jerusalem, the promise of the Davidic line rested in that nation. The northern kingdom experienced nothing of this stability or blessing. From the very beginning of the separate state of Israel, the nation plunged into idol worship. Not one of its

kings came from the Davidic lineage. Only two dynasties ruled for more than two generations. At least half of her kings were murdered. Most of the monarchs served short reigns, with one on the throne for only seven days.

The history of the southern kingdom is not devoid of its failures, sins, and backsliding; but it does bear one amazing characteristic: twenty-two kings from the same family with over four centuries of unbroken leadership. Many times, the leadership was wicked and an abomination in the sight of the Lord, but it was still the house of David in power. Each time God said, "I've had enough," He remembered His covenant with His friend David and held back judgment in favor of grace. Let's take a quick overview of the reign of the Davidic dynasty.

There were several occasions when God was ready to bring total annihilation to the people and king of Judah, but His hand was stayed because of His vow to King David. Scripture records several of these instances. First Kings chapter eleven recounts the story of how Solomon's wives turned his heart from the Lord and he began to worship the pagan gods that they had introduced into Israel. The anger of the Almighty was kindled against Solomon, and He proclaimed that the kingdom would be torn away from Solomon's hand. "Yet," God added, "for the sake of thy father David, I will not do it during your lifetime. And for the sake of My servant David, I will give one tribe to your son to continue your lineage." (I Kings 11:12-13, 32-34) In the days of Abijam, God considered removing the lamp of the Davidic line from Jerusalem; again, because of His vow to David, God showed mercy and extended the house of His servant. (I Kings 15:4) When Jehoram brought the wicked Athaliah into the royal family, God considered total destruction of Judah; yet, His promise to King David again stayed His hand. (II Kings 8:19) When the Assyrian general Sennacherib surrounded the city of Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah, it was, again, for the sake of David that God spared the city and the Judean king. (II Kings

19:34 and Isaiah 37:35) Hezekiah's life was also extended because of God's covenant with David. (II Kings 20:5-6)

Finally, the situation became so blatantly wicked that God did release His wrath upon King Jehoiachin (Coniah). God ultimately declared that no man of his seed would ever sit on the throne of his father David. (Jeremiah 22:28-30) Had God finally forsaken His promise to establish the house of David? No! Read on. Only five verses later, the prophet declares:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD,
that I will raise unto David a righteous
Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper,
and shall execute judgment and justice in the
earth. (Jeremiah 23:5)

The prophet Amos reaffirmed this promise when he spoke of the restoration of the tabernacle of David (Amos 9:11-12), a promise confirmed in the New Testament to be a prophecy of the coming of Jesus (Acts 15:16).

When we open the New Testament, we are immediately confronted with the title verse to the book of Matthew.

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ,
the son of David, the son of Abraham.
(verse 1:1)

Of course, it is obvious that the order of the New Testament would be that it should begin with the story of Jesus; however, I have always found it interesting that God chose Matthew to be in first place in the lineup of the gospels. Had I been in charge, I would have started with Mark that seems to be the oldest of the Jesus biographies. Most people would have chosen John since it seems to be the one most people relate to and is the one most new converts are directed to read first. However, God -- in His infinite wisdom -- saw to it that the first evangelist's work in the roster was to be Matthew's. Thus, the opening verse of Matthew's gospel -- and, therefore, the introductory verse to the whole of the New Testament -- presents Jesus as the son of David and the son of

Abraham. Notice the particular use of the articles in this sentence. Jesus is not a son of David or a son of Abraham. In both cases, it is specifically said that He is the son. The two great covenants of the Old Testament were both designated to a coming son. Now, the wait is over! Jesus has arrived as the final heir and recipient of both of these covenants. With this one passage, the final fulfillment of all of the Old Testament has come to into focus. And God specifically engineered the New Testament so that this climactic verse would strategically be the opening passage of the New Testament.

The fulfillment of all that God spoke to King David culminated in the person of Jesus. However, the finalization of these promises will only be manifest in the Lord's return at the Second Coming. At that point, the re-establishment of Jerusalem and the temple will mean the re-establishment of the house of David.

The LORD also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify themselves against Judah. In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, and the angel of the LORD before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of

Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart. In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. (Zechariah 12:7-14, 13:1)

Finally, we see the fulfillment of Nathan's words to King David -- there will be a temple in Jerusalem and there will be an everlasting kingdom of David's seed ruling from the city of David. The following chapter of Zechariah's prophecy describes the utter defeat of a global move to challenge the Jerusalem-based kingdom and the ensuing universal rule of the Davidic king. But to truly understand the covenant concerning the establishment of the house of David, we must also understand the house he was not allowed to establish -- the temple.

With the same breath in which God established David's household, He also made another promise that became the perpetual desire and longing of the covenant people -- that there would be a temple to God in Jerusalem. David desired to build a temple on the sacred mountain, but was forbidden by the prophet Nathan.

Thus says the Lord, Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. In all the places that I went with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I

commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, why have you not built me a house of cedar?...Moreover the Lord declares to you that thy Lord will make you a house. (II Samuel 7:5-7)

Here the stress seems to be on the fact that the political unity -- the house of David -- should be secured before the temple was built. After David's reign, his son Solomon did establish a temple in Jerusalem. But we must not overlook the significance of David's role in making the temple a reality.

And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the LORD must be exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death. Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the LORD God of Israel. And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God: But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. (II Chronicles 22:5-8)

When David spoke to Solomon about building the temple in Jerusalem, he explained that he could not build the sanctuary himself because of the blood that was on his hands. The wording he used seemed to indicate that the issue at hand had to do with the many wars that David had fought during his reign. In fact, this is exactly how Solomon understood the conversation. We can see this from the explanation he gave to King Hiram when he asked his assistance in supplying materials for the construction of the temple.

And Solomon sent to Hiram, saying, Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent. (I Kings 5:2-4)

However, the true blood that was on David's hands was that of Uriah. Because of this blood, God never allowed David to be at peace, resulting in his not being able to build the temple.

Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. (II Samuel 12:10)

In order to grasp the significance of the paradox demonstrated here, we need to consider one of the perplexing questions concerning the personality of David. When we read the psalms, we see a picture of an ecstatic worshipper; yet, when we read the historical books, we get a very different picture of a bloodthirsty warrior. As a preface to the explanation of the seeming dichotomy in David's life, let me first make reference to one of today's leading theologians who has said that missions exist because worship does not. The premise of his statement is that, when we get a glimpse into the throne room of heaven in the book of Revelation, we see that the activity of heaven is worship. Life in heaven is not centered around all the activities we know here on earth; rather, it seems to be solely focused on worship. The twenty-four elders, all of the heavenly hosts, and all the redeemed from every segment of the human family are continually before the throne, adoring God and the Lamb and proclaiming their great deeds. Since not every human has been given the chance to choose to join in this eschatological chorus, human activity

must be first directed to recruiting choir members -- thus, missions or whatever other activity we are involved in! Until we understand this principle, David will remain one of the biggest conundrums in the Bible. He seems like a schizophrenic with his psalms filled with beautiful, poetic adorations to God while the narrative of his life is violent slaughter and conquest. The two sides of this great figure seem almost irreconcilable. Even in the midst of his melodic compositions, we occasionally find a gory rant against his enemies. How can all these radically different pieces fit together logically? The answer is in the centrality of worship. Actually, David was worship leader first and king and warrior second. His battles were to eliminate the worship of false gods, and his government was to establish a people under a theocratic society that put worship in preeminence. All the wealth he accumulated through taxation of the people, his entrepreneurism, and the conquests of pagan lands was dedicated to the funding of the temple that his son would eventually build as a monument to worship. In other words, his life was centered around worshipping God -- and one of the main focuses in that worship was the erection of the temple. Every other activity, no matter how foreign it might seem, was in one way or another to culminate in worship, especially temple worship.

The prophets and historians alike testify to the role exuberant worship played in David's physical life and in the eschatological reestablishment of his lineage and kingdom.

And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. (Acts 15:15-17 referring to Amos 9)

The reference to the tabernacle of David speaks of a special tent that the king constructed in Jerusalem to house the Ark of the Covenant when he brought it back after the Philistines had captured it. (II Samuel 6:17) David's tabernacle was different from both the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon in that it did not have the thick curtain of the Holy of Holies surrounding the ark to keep it out of sight and out of reach. In both the former and latter situations, only the High Priest could approach the ark -- and that was only once a year under very exacting conditions. In David's tent, the ark was visible and accessible to all. When the ark was placed in this tabernacle, David danced with all his might and celebrated so extravagantly that his wife was embarrassed. Undeterred by her criticism, David declared that he could continue and even intensify his worship. (II Samuel 6:12-22) One significant fact about the arrangement that David made concerning this tabernacle was that there was continuous worship in the presence of the ark. (I Chronicles 16:37-40) This worship was of staggering proportions with some four thousand worshippers regularly serving before the tabernacle. (I Chronicles 23:5) To get a perspective, we need to realize that the forty largest orchestras in the world today employ only about three thousand five hundred musicians -- still several hundred short of the number employed for this singular praise ensemble! After all, David did say that it was with music that he entered into the very presence of the Lord. (Psalm 100:2) It is likely that the repetitive nature of music reaffirms the truths of the lyrics by the same principle that meditation solidifies the truths of the scriptures as we repeat and recite them. Praise and worship music seems to actually be spiritual in its very nature. In fact, the very origin of music is described as having been incorporated in Lucifer, who was at that time the anointed cherub who covered the very presence of God. (Ezekiel 28:13) Thus we see music closely associated with the intimate presence of the Lord. On a side note, it seems that when Lucifer became the devil he perverted the quality of music and turned it into an instrument to bring his servants

into closeness with him. Music -- both sacred and diabolical -- gets into the human spirit and also sets the atmosphere -- either for the Holy Spirit or demonic spirits. We see this principle demonstrated in the fact that David was able to calm the evil spirit that was in Saul when he played his harp. (I Samuel 16:23)

One of David's major accomplishments as king of Israel was to turn the former Jebusite city of Jerusalem into the focal point of Jewish life. Under his direction, the city became the center of the military, the politics, the culture, the education, the administration, the economy, and most of all the religion of the nation. Although Solomon would be the one to build the temple and import so much wealth that the city would be coined "Jerusalem of gold," David made the city to prosper in every physical dimension and established it as the focal point of spiritual life. The denial of his desire to build the temple illuminates another aspect of David's true leadership character. The test of real leadership is whether we are willing to do all the work and let our followers get all the credit. David drew up all the blueprints for the temple and worked hard to raise all the money to build it -- all the while knowing that the temple would forever be remembered as Solomon's Temple! Somewhere along the line during this process of preparing for a temple that he would never set foot into, David wrote, "I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the LORD.'" (Psalm 122:1) In this verse, he was celebrating the fact that his followers had become leaders because they had caught what their leader had taught. His leadership had come to fruition as they had gotten hold of his spirit and his spirit had gotten hold of them! True leaders rejoice when they no longer must lead but know that their vision is guaranteed through their followers.

The writings of David show how significantly the temple figured into his spiritual mentality. It is often easy to read biblical passages with certain images in our heads and not take the time to consider if those mental pictures are accurate. For example, many of us have a misconception that has

somehow slipped into our imagination of King David standing, kneeling, or even whirling about in exuberant worship inside the courts of the temple. After all, he mentions the sanctuary fourteen times (verses 20:2, 63:2, 68:24, 73:17, 74:3, 74:7, 77:13, 78:54, 78:69, 96:6, 102:19, 114:2, 134:2, 150:1) and the temple ten times (verses 5:7, 11:4, 18:6, 27:4, 29:9, 48:9, 65:4, 68:29, 79:1, 138:2). However, it may take a genuine reality check to place these psalms in their proper chronological context -- the period before the temple was even built! How is it that David could write so explicitly and so eloquently describe his emotions as he worshipped in a temple that didn't even exist? The answer is simple -- he was there in the spirit. He had entered into the faith realm to the point that he was experiencing the yet-to-be-built temple as genuinely as if he were in the actual building. He was experiencing the sanctuary prophetically in preparation for the fulfillment of the vision. Andrew Wommack described his experience of walking through the unfinished building of his headquarters when it was nothing more than an empty shell. As he walked through the open cavern, he imagined every wall and door that was yet to be built as he cautiously avoided walking through the "solid" walls and was careful to turn the handle on each door as he went through it. He said that he was actually less excited when he walked into the finished building than when he "experienced" it by faith.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple. (Psalms 27:4)

One really perplexing statement that David penned about the temple is found in Psalm 74:7-8.

They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground. They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together:

they have burned up all the synagogues of
God in the land.

These verses can be very perplexing at first glance because they refer to things that didn't even exist in the time of David. Verse seven talks about the burning of the sanctuary, an apparent reference to the Babylonian destruction of the First Temple followed centuries later by the razing of the Second Temple by the Romans -- which incidentally occurred on the same calendar date, the Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of the Jewish month of Av. Verse eight refers to synagogues, which grew out of the period of the Babylonian Exile. The reference to the synagogues is easily explained in that the actual Hebrew term used here is a word that simply means "appointed." David was referring to any place that was appointed as a place of worship. It could have been as simple as a family altar in a home or as well established as a national site such as Gibeon where Solomon worshiped before the construction of the temple or at the tabernacle where David housed the Ark of the Covenant. The destruction of the temple referred to in verse seven must be seen in light of the prophetic gift that resided in the Psalmist. Even though David could see into the future and understand the temple he was drawing the blueprints for and raising funds for would wind up in ashes, he knew that he had to follow through with preparing for its construction. In our own lives, we can learn a simple lesson from this passage: do it anyway. Even though some of our efforts may face challenges and possible defeat, we can't just sit idle and do nothing.

Although the Bible is full of teaching concerning the prophetic importance of the temple to covenant life, allow me to conclude our discussion with what is likely the most foundational passage -- the dedication prayer uttered by Solomon when the first temple was inaugurated. Notice how the influence of David permeates the significance of the temple and its prophetic role.

And Solomon stood before the altar of the
LORD in the presence of all the
congregation of Israel, and spread forth his

hands toward heaven: And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart: Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day. Therefore now, LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him, saying 'There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel; so that thy children take heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me. And now, O God of Israel, let thy word, I pray thee, be verified, which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which thy servant prayeth before thee today. (I Kings 8:22-28)

Parenting

Although King David left an indelible impact on all of human destiny, we can see that he essentially “missed the boat” in one specific area of influence where he should have focused his attention. In this one arena of life -- his parenting skills, well actually, his lack of them -- David teaches us a number of lessons the hard way.

The Bible records that David fathered at least nineteen sons and one daughter through his nine legitimate wives. We are left no record of the offspring from his concubines, and we know that he kept at least ten such mistresses. We know the life stories of six of these progeny, and each story spins a tragic yarn.

Let’s begin by looking at the illegitimately-conceived son born from David’s illicit relationship with Bathsheba. Even before its very first breath, the child was marked for death through Nathan’s prophecy. Yet, the great king fasted and prayed for several days as the baby lingered in the balances between life and death until finally the death angel snatched the child’s soul away and David conceded in his battle for his life. This baby’s short lifespan painted the picture that the Apostle James described centuries later: lust conceives sin that ultimately produces death. (verse 1:15) David’s lust for Bathsheba produced the sinful acts of adultery, deception, intrigue, and murder with the end product of the baby’s death.

The next son we should study would be Amnon who became lovesick for his half-sister Tamar. When David visited his son after having heard of his illness, Amnon asked that Tamar be sent to her brother’s apartment to serve him dinner in bed. The Bible records a horrid story of how Amnon was actually feigning the sickness as part of a plot to get more than dinner in bed from his unsuspecting sister. Each time I read this story, I think of a magazine ad that shows a pre-teen lad with a rather challenging look on his face and the wording:

LEAVE ME (Okay, it may seem like I hate

my parents, but I'm really demonstrating what a therapist would call "asserting my identity," so I can grow up to be a well-adjusted individual. Sure, I say I want freedom, but without parental supervision, I'm much more likely to smoke pot and stuff. I hope my parents don't try to act like my friends. What I really need is parents.)
ALONE.

The message it intends to communicate is that parents need to learn to read between the lines of what their children are saying. David failed to do this. He heard what the young man said with his lips, but he failed to hear what he was saying with his emotions. It would seem that only the dumbest man would not discern that something much more involved than a simple plate of food must have been on the son's mind. How would a meal by any certain cook have any effect on the boy's malady? Certainly, the father could see that there was testosterone involved and that the young man was up to no good. David failed to pick up on whatever signals the son was sending and fell right into the lad's plot by directing the girl to bring the food.

When Amnon followed through with his sordid plan, the young girl's life was ruined forever, but the father seemed insensitive to the whole situation. Certainly, he could not undo what had happened, but he could have done something to prove that he cared for the girl and that he disapproved of the son's action. Instead, he seemed to ignore the problem in hopes that it would go away. However, as all humans -- and especially parents -- should know, problems don't just go away by being ignored.

David, with his nation to run, failed to stop long enough to raise his own children. In doing so, he failed in two of the greatest requirements of parenting: he did not give Tamar respect, and he did not involve himself in the life of either Tamar or Amnon. It is too easy for parents to see their children as just kids and fail to realize that they are complete

human beings -- just like anyone else. They are no less due respect and attention than any adult, even the important people who would frequent the office of the nation's monarch. As his children, Tamar and Amnon needed and were entitled to their father's special mentoring and care -- not just his provision and position.

The story of Tamar's assault doesn't end with just the half-brother who abused her; it spreads throughout the family as Tamar's full brother Absalom determined to avenge her rape. He waited a while to cover up his motive and to conceal his plot. Finally, the proper time to execute his scheme presented itself, and the vengeful brother staged a great party as a ploy to entrap his sibling. Next, he approached his father requesting that all his brothers be directed to attend the festivities. When David declined that request on the account that it would be too expensive for Absalom to host all seventeen of his brothers, the unknown siblings by the concubines, and their guests, Absalom responded by insisting that Amnon be sent even if no one else could attend. Again, David revealed his lack of discernment by not realizing that something was awry when Absalom singled out as his special guest the one brother against whom he had been waging a cold war. Certainly this request was an ominous harbinger of calamity to come, yet David walked full tilt into Absalom's snare just as he had done with Amnon's trap.

The short version of the long story is that Absalom murdered Amnon -- but the crime was left without proper closure by the dysfunctional father. David's reaction was that he distanced himself from the murderous son by banishing Absalom from Jerusalem for three years. When he finally did allow him to return to the city, it was with the stipulation that he would not be permitted to see his father -- an alienation that continued for the next two years. This isolation was a dramatic display of his desire to punish the son but at the same time a glaring demonstration of his inability to correct him. David failed to recognize the major difference between punishment and correction: the former condemns the sin, while the latter

reforms the sinner. David's refusal to see or even receive communication from his son was a rather flagrant statement of condemnation; whereas, a willingness to receive his son and mentor him through a rehabilitation process would have been an affirmation of his role and responsibility as a loving father.

The wounds in Absalom's soul and spirit become glaringly evident as we follow the story as it is spun in the scripture. One of the first clues that he has never fully healed from the scars of Tamar's abuse is that he named his own daughter after his beloved sister -- a sign that this injury is always fresh in his thoughts. His attempt to seize the throne away from his father is the most blatant sign of the turmoil and hostility raging inside his unsettled soul. One especially flamboyant act in the coup seems to herald the full message; when Absalom invaded his father's palace, he had a pavilion erected on the roof and made a public display as he copulated with all ten of his father's concubines. In an act of retaliation for the assault on his sister's virginity, Absalom tried to even the score with the man who had done nothing to correct the injury to her. This blatant act of disrespect was also a headline statement to the father who had not shown him acceptance, love, respect, and guidance.

Because David failed to properly handle his sons' criminal actions, he lost one of his sons at the bloodthirsty hands of the other and then lost his own concubines and almost lost his kingdom at his hands as well. With Amnon, David failed to punish his sin at all; with Absalom, he failed to correct rather than punish; and with both sons and the daughter, he failed to heal the injuries resulting from the wrongs inflicted and the punishment imposed.

In the chaotic moment after Absalom was executed, David wailed and clamored dramatically that he would have rather died than to see his son killed. How tragic it is to see this sudden revelation of the soul of the king. Buried inside the heart of this seemingly utter failure of a father was a deep-seated love for his son. The ironic thought is that even though he would have been willing to have died for him, he had never

demonstrated a willingness or ability to live for him!

Dr. Lester Sumrall used to say that success is not a success until it produces a successor. If this is the case, we see again that David was a failure as a father. Although there seems to have been a private understanding between the king and Bathsheba that their son Solomon was to succeed him on the throne, no acknowledgment of this arrangement was ever established as part of public record. This failure to establish a formal last will and testament resulted in the demise of another of his sons. When David was old and in rapidly deteriorating health, his son Adonijah staged an attempt to take the kingdom by having himself named to the throne. When this news reached David, he gave the directive from his deathbed that Solomon was to be proclaimed as the next king. He later followed up with a public coronation of the chosen son. The scripture records that David stood up on his feet at the ceremony, suggesting that it was an almost heroic act considering his frailty. In those last few hours of his life and with the last ounces of strength he could muster from his worn-out body, David conveyed his vision and the responsibility of the position as king to his son. He then challenged and commissioned Solomon to fulfill them. Certainly, this was a noble conclusion to his long and extensive political career; on the other hand, it was a pitiful comment on his career as a father. He had waited until the last minute of life to impart himself into the life of the son whom he should have been mentoring every day of his life.

Two points from the life of Solomon seem to indicate the impact that this last-minute father-son quality time had upon him. The first is positive -- although it seems to be a counteractive attempt to the lack of mentoring during his formative years. Solomon not only personally instructed his son, but also authored the book of Proverbs that records the instructions he gave him concerning practical daily living. It also contains chapters of wise counsel concerning the role he was expected to fulfill as king and gives instructions concerning the responsibilities associated with the position. Apparently,

the short lessons David gave him in his dying moments awakened Solomon to what he had missed during his developmental years and inspired him to a lifetime of instruction for his own son. The second result in Solomon's life was very negative -- his turning to idols. David, it is said, was a man after God's own heart -- but this heart attitude was something he could not pass on to Solomon in a few short sessions together. Although David was able to communicate some instructions to his son in those last fateful minutes together, he was not able to impart his heart to him. (I Kings 11:4) That's something that takes a lifetime of living together, not just a few minutes of classroom time together.

Adonijah, even though he was deprived of the throne, still had an ambitious design to gain some bid at the crown. By asking permission to marry the Shunammite woman who had cared for David in his old age, he felt that he might gain some leverage to displace Solomon -- a scheme that ended in his execution. Because his father had failed to give this son direction and guidance, his life was doomed to failure. This tragic demise could have been averted if David had properly parented his sons and taught them throughout their lives how to share and to work together rather than against one another. The whole scenario could have been short-circuited if the father had instilled into his sons his personal vision and will for their personal lives and their places in the kingdom he had built.

It has been said that the beauty of the Bible is that it presents its heroes with their warts and all. In the story of David, we are certainly able to see, as Dr. Lester Sumrall loved to say, that even great men have clay feet. This great champion failed as a parent in many ways: discerning the needs of his children, involving himself in their lives, giving them proper respect, administering correction and healing rather than simply punishment, providing guidance and direction, establishing a successor, imparting his very heart to them, and - - in general -- being there for them. The baby he fathered with Bathsheba was unconnected; Tamar was unprotected; Amnon and Absalom were uncorrected; Adonijah and Solomon were

undirected. However, in spite of his personal failures, David did have an insight into the importance good parenting. Notice his comments in the book of Psalms:

We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. (Psalm 78:4)

Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come. (Psalm 71:18)

Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3-5)

Our children are our future to direct. God has given us His Word as a sword for our present hand-to-hand conflicts (Ephesians 6:17); but for future, long-range combat, He has also given us our children as arrows. However, arrows must be aimed if they are to secure victory; therefore, it is our responsibility to carefully train them for their godly destinies. In II Kings 13:14-19, we read an interesting story that teaches an important principle concerning the direction of the arrows God has placed in our quivers. The prophet Elisha called King Joash to his bedside just before he passed out of this earthly life. "Take bow and arrows," the old prophet commanded, putting his hand on top of the king's hand as he aimed the arrows. Next, he directed the king to shoot the arrows out the open window, proclaiming, "The arrow of the LORD's deliverance." Then he directed the king to take the arrows and strike the ground. When the king struck the ground three times, the prophet rebuked him, reprimanding him for not

striking five or six times to symbolize total destruction of his enemy. Similarly, godly parents are required to direct their children as arrows toward the target and then do everything in their power to propel and empower them toward their goals in life. The king's final visit with his mentor the prophet proved to be bittersweet. Victory was ensured, but there was no guarantee for total peace. We must realize that our children can be a reservoir of joy or a source of sorrow (Proverbs 23:24, 17:25), and we must never stop short of "striking the ground" with them, anticipating the very best.

Solomon is often spoken of as the wisest man in history. The Bible specifically says that he surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom (II Chronicles 9:22) and that his wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country and all the wisdom of Egypt (I Kings 4:30), and Solomon himself confessed that he exceeded all that preceded him in Jerusalem (Ecclesiastes 1:16). In fact, the scripture goes so far as to declare that God gave Solomon wisdom that exceeded the sand on the seashore. (I Kings 4:29) Every Sunday school child can tell the story of how Solomon asked for wisdom rather than riches or power when God gave him the opportunity to ask for anything that he desired (II Chronicles 1:10-12) and the story of the visit of the queen of Sheba who was overwhelmed with his exceeding wisdom (I Kings 10:4-24, II Chronicles 9:3-23). Solomon made at least seventy-nine direct references to wisdom in the writings that we still have preserved today, and we have no way of knowing how much more he might have said in the literature that has been lost over time. (I Kings 4:32, 11:41) He unambiguously declared that he desired wisdom more than rubies (Proverbs 8:11) and gold (Proverbs 16:16) or military strength (Ecclesiastes 9:16) and weapons (Ecclesiastes 9:18). However, there is one aspect of Solomon's wisdom that is often overlooked -- its source. Solomon was actually instructed to seek wisdom by his father, King David. First Chronicles 22:6-19 records the story of how David passed the vision of building the temple to his son with the words, "Only the

LORD give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God.” (verse 12) Actually, David gave some very significant teaching on wisdom that became the foundation for his son’s proverbs (Psalm 49:3, 51:6, 90:12, 104:24, 105: 22, 111:10, 136:5), with Solomon actually quoting one of his father’s maxims verbatim (Psalm 111:10). The impact of this solitary father-son discussion led Solomon to repeatedly admonish his own son to diligently seek wisdom. (Proverbs 3:21, 5:1)

David's Final Legacy

Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah. (Psalm 39:5)

In this psalm, David reminded himself of the brevity of man's life and summed up his thoughts with the idea that no matter how long or how well a man lives, his life is actually nothing in comparison to the eternal scope of God's plan. Interestingly, David was the one who made the calculation that a man's lifespan was seventy years unless he might gain a few extra because of exceptional health (Psalm 90:10), and he was exactly seventy years old at his death (II Samuel 5:4). It also seems noteworthy that the Psalmist prayed for the favor of good health in his old age, "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth." (Psalms 71:9) It might be assumed that he was hoping for those extra ten years he predicted in the passage from Psalm seventy-one; yet, it seems that he did not obtain this divine favor of good health and extra years. (I Kings 1:1) Some biblical scholars believe that this was the result of the lingering effects of his sin with Bathsheba. (Psalm 32:3, 38:3)

David's son Solomon, apparently aware of what happened to his father, gave us a remedy for the physical maladies that can result from sinfulness.

Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. (Proverbs 3:7-8)

Dying is the great equalizer of all men. In I Kings 2:2, King David summed up his life with these simple words, "I go the way of all the earth." David had fought lions, bears, giants, and mighty armies. He had served his nation as their king and brought it to dominance in the entire middle-eastern political area. He had amassed a staggering personal fortune and forged

his country into a world financial leader. Yet, as he neared the end of his life, he realized that he was no different from any other man on earth. He was going the same way that all men go. There was no special plan for the politically powerful, the decorated military hero, or the financial tycoon. Every man, no matter what status he may have held in life, has the same status in death.

Our only comfort will be in the fact that the One who has conquered death is with us as we meet our destiny. The twenty-third Psalm instructs us that only those who have the rod and the staff of the Good Shepherd -- well, actually the Good Shepherd Himself -- can walk through the valley of the shadow of death without fear of evil. Regardless of the tranquil picture it presents, this psalm -- one of the most comforting scriptures as we face the reality of death -- was not written when David was quietly tending his flocks on a green mountain meadow. Instead, it was penned while David was under constant threat of death by his pursuing enemy.

Like David who could write of the peaceful guardianship of God even while death was breathing down his neck, Christians need not fear the process of dying, the experience of death, the judgment that follows death, or hell that finalizes death in what the Bible calls the "second death." Death to a Christian is not the end; it is actually a new beginning. In speaking of His own death, Jesus described it as a change of address. He said that He was going away and that He was to return to bring us to be with Him at this new address. (John 14:1) If we view death this way, there is no more to fear or dread about it than the simple act of moving from one home to another. The Apostle Paul saw himself in a strait between two -- to stay or to go. He felt that to die would be for his personal gain, but to stay would be beneficial to the believers he was ministering to. As soon as he was certain that he had done all that he needed to do here on earth, he was ready to move on to his new home.

If we were to look carefully at the scripture, I believe that we might see a principle of progression concerning the

promises of God; they become prayers and then prophetic proclamations. Let's take just a minute to trace this development concerning one specific promise. In Numbers 14:21, the Lord declared, "But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD." This promise became a prayer -- in fact, King David's final prayer in Psalm 72:19-20, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." The prophets established it as a proclamation when Daniel affirmed that a stone cut without hands would smite the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and then become a great mountain that would fill the whole earth. (verse 2:35) Isaiah and Habakkuk more specifically echoed the original promise when they said that knowledge of the Lord (or knowledge of the glory of the Lord) would fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:9, Habakkuk 2:14) With the confirmation of two or three witnesses, this promise was unequivocally established. (Deuteronomy 19:15, Matthew 18:16, II Corinthians 13:1) One explanation as to why Jesus was introduced in the New Testament as the son of David and the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1) is that He fulfilled David's dying prayer that the glory of the Lord would fill all the earth as He fulfilled the prophecy that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's seed. (Genesis 12:3) Even as he was facing his own personal end through death, David prophetically prayed the future into being!

Conclusion

If you don't mind, I'd like to end the study of David's life by looking at the beginning -- his initial calling into the Lord's service. Let's think back to the time when the prophet Samuel was directed to Jesse's house to anoint the next king of Israel. (I Samuel 16:1-13) We all remember how the prophet wanted to choose Jesse's first son because he was so tall, handsome, and strong. However, God said, "No." God continued to veto each decision the prophet desired to make as he called the next son and then the next and then the next until he had seen all seven of the brothers who had been called to the feast. At that point, the prophet questioned the father if there were any remaining sons. Of course, David -- the lad who was so unlikely for the throne that he hadn't even been beckoned to the interview -- was the one whom the Lord selected.

David's call was quite unlike what we normally think of a calling from God -- burning bushes, blindingly bright lights on the road to Damascus, and angelic visitations. In fact, it is so different that it is almost hard to believe. David's call didn't even come to David himself. It actually came to the prophet-judge Samuel who then told David that God had called him. I choose to conclude with this story so as to leave you with one simple -- yet life changing -- thought: we must not view David as anyone out of the ordinary. Certainly, he was anointed and prophetically chosen; however, he never experienced the dramatic supernatural visitations that we often associate with being "called by God." In fact, it is amazing that David was actually anointed three times before he realized that he had a heart issue that needed to be corrected. (I Samuel 16:13, II Samuel 2:4, II Samuel 5:3) If David could change the world without having to have otherworldly encounters, so can we. His secret was simply his determination to maintain a right heart relationship with God -- a simple principle and lifestyle at all of us can decide to adopt.

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