

David

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David; shepherd boy, musician, warrior, king. His story is a classic: we keep returning to it to learn more about God and about us. It tells of *blessing given, lost and restored*.

He reminds us of something central about human beings: that our capacities for good and evil are inextricably entwined- Hebrew thought calls it the good impulse, *yetzer hatov* and the evil impulse, *yetzer hara*. And with the increase of personal power our capacities to do good and to do evil increase.

What saved David even amid the sin and wreckage of his life was this: he had “a heart after God’s own heart.” It is what saves us too.

## I

The story begins with David as a boy. He loved watching over his father’s sheep. In the solitude he would write songs inside his head. That was when he was most himself.

He was the youngest son of his family, number 8, and still a young man when the story begins.

Under God’s instruction the prophet Samuel came to Jesse’s house to anoint one of the 8 sons the future king of Israel. The kingship under Saul had not worked out as God had hoped.

As Samuel entered the house and announced why he was there, he asked to see each son. Eliab came first, the first-born son. He was impressive, tall and strong, like King Saul, but God said, No, he

is not the one. “You look on the outside; I look on the inside,” God said. You could preach a whole sermon on that.

One by one, in order of their birth, they came before Samuel, but God did not give Samuel the go-ahead to anoint any of them. After the seven came, Samuel asked, Is there another son? Yes, said Jesse. David who is out watching the sheep. “Go, get him”, said Samuel. When young David walked in, Samuel knew he was the one. He anointed him with oil, and the text says, “And the Spirit of the Lord blew mightily upon him from that day on.”

The text comments, “He was red headed, had beautiful eyes and was handsome.” From the beginning Israel could not take their eyes off him. Moses they respected, Abraham they admired, David they loved.

## II

We could call the first chapter of David’s life, “Life Under Blessing.” David’s joy was his strength and his strength was his joy. As Nehemiah wrote: “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”

It came out in his songs. Psalm 18, one of David’s early psalms, goes: “I am in love with you Yahweh!” Such was his spiritual passion.

This early life was indeed life under blessing. David seemed charmed. King Saul had terrible headaches. The servants called young David to play his harp for the king, and as he did Saul’s pain eased.

We all remember the story of Goliath. The war between the Israelites and the Philistines had come to a stand off. The offer was made: let each side choose a champion. The two would fight, and whoever wins would win the victory for their nation.

The only problem was that the Philistines had Goliath who looked like a giant on steroids recently released from a high-security prison. He was nine feet tall, his armor weighed 220 pounds, the shaft of his spear was like a fence post and the tip of the spear weighted 30 pounds.

When Goliath appeared a Hebrew volunteer was nowhere to be found. For forty days Goliath made his challenge, and for forty days the Israelite soldiers shuffled their feet and looked around in vain for someone to step forward.

Just then young David showed up at camp with some food for his brothers. He saw what was going on and went to King Saul to volunteer. Saul was incredulous. It was like sending Barney Fife to challenge Hulk Hogan, or Sammy Davis Jr. to fight Mohammed Ali- with no points given for singing and dancing.

Saul relented, and David went to face Goliath with no armor, armed only with a slingshot and a few round stones.

When Goliath saw him, he trash talked him and roared, “What?! You think me a puppy dog and you come with a switch? Come on young man, and I’ll feed you to the birds and beasts.”

David returned with his own sanctified trash talk: “You come to me with sword and spear, but I come to you in the name of the Lord.” Then before Goliath could move, David slung a stone, hit Goliath in the forehead, and killed him.

It was like that for David.

After David’s defeat of Goliath, and after his exploits as a warrior in Saul’s army, Saul grew insanely jealous of David. People began to sing in the streets: “Saul has slain his thousands, David his ten thousands”.

Anthropologists have discovered a six note musical line that is transcultural. It is a taunt in most every culture. Featuring a descending minor third it goes:

Nyah, nyah, nyah, nyah, nyah, nyah

We use the same descending minor third to taunt at basketball games: Air Ball!

I don't know the tune the people used to sing their little song, but I bet it sounded something like this in Saul's' ear: (sing)

“Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands!”

Saul tried to have David killed by sending him to the front lines in battle, but David returned a war hero.

This part of David's life ended when Saul and his son, Jonathan, whom David loved, were killed in battle, “How the mighty have fallen” cried David in his heart breaking lament after Saul and Jonathan's deaths.

### III David the King

When David was made king he moved the capital to Jerusalem, a brilliant and shrewd political move that united all Israel behind him.

When the Ark of the Covenant- containing the Ten Commandments- was brought into Jerusalem, David stripped to his gym shorts and danced before the Lord. “Praise the Lord in dancing,” Psalm 149:3 would say, and dance he did in ecstatic praise of God. His wife Michal was not happy at this display. Neither was the Board of Worship. But the singer of Israel had become the dancer of

Israel, critics be damned. God is to be praised with all we are, not politely appreciated as a piece of art people say you're supposed to like.

#### IV

But now the shadow comes. Blessing lost. David had begun to lose his way. II Samuel 8 records his heady rise to power with this ominous combination of verbs: *smite, take, subdue, make holy* (or dedicate). It is the language of holy war, of sacred violence. Too much bloodshed; too many lives and too many resources were forced into the service of war. These realities would later prohibit David from realizing his dream and building God's temple.

But there was another episode, this one more intensely personal. David was at home in the palace while the troops were out fighting- that in itself was uncharacteristic of David. He was in the wrong place, where sin often begins. As he arose and walked around the palace walls, he saw an image so beautiful it overwhelmed him: a woman bathing below. He might have just praised God for her beauty, but his best and truest self was not in view. He knew when he saw her that he must have her.

Discreetly but plainly, the scene is laid out, captured in the verbs. David *arose*, and *walked* and *saw* (parenthetically, "she was beautiful") he *sent*, he *inquired*, he *sent*, he *took*, he *lay*, she *returned*.

And a child was conceived. There are some things even a king cannot control. Then comes the attempted cover-up and the murder of Bathsheba's husband Uriah. He tried to entice Uriah to take a weekend furlough from the war and spend it with his wife. Uriah. Out of loyalty to his men he would not leave his post. Then David, taking a trick from Saul's playbook, had him sent to the front lines of the battle, where he was killed. 2 Samuel 11:32 says it bluntly "But the thing David did was evil in God's sight."

The Lord loves this man, David loves the Lord, the people love David. But David did what was evil. And if David can, so can we all.

The tragedy unfolds. Nathan the prophet comes to David with a parable about a king who had many flocks but who took a lamb from a poor man for his dinner. David condemned the king. Then Nathan said, “Thou art the man!” David broke down and acknowledged his sin. His heart after God’s own heart was still pliable to the truth and to God. Sometimes our hearts are not so pliable. They grow hard and mount defenses and justifications. But David cried out, as in Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God,

According to thy steadfast love.

For I know my transgressions

And my sin is ever before me.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,

And put a new and right spirit within me.

God’s forgiveness saved David’s life. But it did not take away the consequences of his sins. Not direct punishment from God, but life’s unswerving consequences.

David’s life is full of tragedy. The child conceived dies, there’s a rape in the family, his son Absalom mounts an armed rebellion against his father and himself is killed in battle.

The child born to David and Bathsheba lived only seven days. David prayed for the child to live, to no avail. The text reports David’s actions in nine consecutive verbs: he *arose*, *washed*,

*anointed* himself, *changed* his clothes, *went* to the house of the Lord, *worshipped*, *went* to his house, *asked* for food and *ate*.

He went to Bathsheba to console her in her grief. His act of consolation became an act of physical love as they consoled each other with their bodies. And in the act of consolation another child was conceived, named Solomon, which means “Peace”. After so much sinning and heartbreak, *peace*. God is a God of mercy, and gives us a future no matter the past. Solomon would build the temple David dreamed of building.

## V

As we look back over David’s life the questions come. What does it mean to have a heart after God’s own heart? And what new thing about God does God reveal in the story?

About having a heart after God’s own heart, we’ve seen his passionate love for God- “I am in love with you Yahweh,” and seen his pliable heart even after he had lost his way.

Here are two more episodes.

Earlier in his life he was going to make a sacrifice at the threshing floor of a man named Araunah and offered to buy the man’s oxen, land and wood for the sacrifice. When the man recognized who he was, he insisted that he give David the ox, the land and the wood for the sacrifice. But David said, “No, I will not offer the Lord my God that which costs me nothing.” And it was on that very spot on which the temple would be built- and with that spirit.

A second story. David was fleeing Jerusalem with his priests as his son had mounted a revolt to capture the throne. As they fled the priests came carrying the Ark of the Covenant. It was the

symbol of God's power and protection. Every military leader wanted the Ark with him as they went into battle. It was like the national flag and the Bible rolled into one.

But David said, "Carry the Ark back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of God, he will bring me back and let me see it in its habitation. But if God says, 'I have no pleasure in you', behold here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him."

It was a free, full yielding of himself to God, Not presuming God's will nor trying to force God's hand.

It was like Jesus who prayed in Gethsemane: "Abba, Father, all things are possible with you. Remove this cup. But not what I want, what you want."

And what about the new thing God reveals about himself in the story? It's found in 2 Samuel 7. Nathan is here again, not in judgment but in consolation and hope. He speaks God's word to him. I paraphrase.

"I took you as a shepherd boy and made you king. I have been with you always. You may not build me a house (i.e., the temple). But I will build you a dynasty and will establish that kingdom forever. When your descendents commit iniquity I will chasten them with the rod of men (that is the human outworking of their sin). *But I will not take my steadfast love (my hesed) from you.*"

There it is: you may mess up badly and make a mess of your life, but I will not take my steadfast love from you. Grace will abide.

Sarah Groves' song says it so beautifully.

You will lose your baby teeth.



At times you'll lose your faith in me.

You will lose a lot of things

But you cannot lose my love.

You may lose your appetite

Your guiding sense of wrong and right

You may lose your will to fight

But you cannot lose my love.

You will lose your confidence

In times of trial, your common sense.

You will lose your innocence

But you cannot lose my love

Many things can be misplaced

Your very memories be erased

No matter what the time and space

You cannot lose my love

You cannot lose

You cannot lose

You cannot lose my love.

One thousand years later Jesus came preaching that same grace. As he entered Jerusalem, people waved palms and said: “Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

He comes still... into our lives today.