

A PERSON AFTER GOD’S OWN HEART

1 Samuel

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The theme of my message today is “A Person After God’s Own Heart.” We have been sharing together out of 1 Samuel. After I looked at the last several chapters of 1 Samuel, which dealt with battles and Saul’s suicide, I felt the leading of the Spirit that we had now reached the concluding time of the book, and I should move on to other parts of God’s Word. But we should highlight one key part of 1 and 2 Samuel—to concentrate a few minutes on the life of David, a person after God’s own heart.

Nobody else in the Bible bears this name. He alone has the name David. His story spans from 1 Samuel 16 through 2 Samuel, into 1 Kings 2:12, and also 1 Chronicles 11–29. That’s a total of fifty-eight and a half chapters. That much of the history portion of the Old Testament deals with his life and career. Out of the 150 Psalms, he writes seventy-three of them. In all, 10 percent of the chapters of the Bible are devoted either to this man’s life or to his writings. His name is mentioned fifty-nine times in the New Testament, and it’s never mentioned once disapprovingly. He’s a monumental person, in whom God puts His Word, so we might get some insight, encouragement, and strength for our own life.

It’s been said that David’s life was much like the instrument he played—the harp. In contrast to Moses’ life, which was the trumpet of Sinai—one long note. David’s life has a greater variety. None of the other great men of Scripture pass through the course of so many changes—none of them touched human life at so many points. None of them were so tempered and polished by swift alteration of heat and cold—by such heavy blows. These quick transitions of fortune and

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wide experiences are the many colored threads of which this rich web of David's psalms is woven.

The thing that unifies his life, however, is the text by which he's introduced to us in human history. The words which Samuel first quoted to Saul in 1 Samuel 13:14 referring to David, "The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart" (NIV). That's what God looks for first—not a musician, not a warrior, not a king. Instead, a person after His heart. That title was never taken from David, in spite of all of his failures. In fact in Acts 7, Stephen—the New Testament deacon who is approaching martyrdom—says of David, "He enjoyed God's favor." David—a man after God's own heart.

Yet, he made critical mistakes. Isn't that a word of encouragement to us? You might say, "A person after God's own heart equals perfection. Therefore, since I'm not perfect, I cannot be a person after God's own heart." David, as you know, was not perfect. There are fundamental flaws in his life. He was, on occasion, a situational ethicist. He made up lies to protect himself. He had multiple marriages and not in serial sequences either. They were all at once. He was a polygamist. His most grave failure was his adultery with Bathsheba and the consequent murder of Bathsheba's husband. He also had a failure we don't commonly remember—the failure of incomplete forgiveness toward Absalom. David ostensibly brings Absalom back to Jerusalem, but David does not forgive him for two solid years Absalom is in Jerusalem, and David never sees him face-to-face. David never really forgave—he did not establish face-to-face communication. The tragedies of incomplete forgiveness are seen in the consequences David reaped.

Alexander the Great used to be depicted on the coins of his realm with his chin resting in his hand. The reason for this was Alexander had a scar on his face which he preferred to hide by

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placing his chin in his hand. When the Scriptures show us people, they show us the real scars and the real blemishes. God could have glossed over the negatives. He could have airbrushed out those debilitating factors of David's life. He could have given us a sanitized press release on David. But He gave us the real person—warts and all. And he dares to say to us, "Here's a man after My heart."

What does it mean to be a person after God's own heart? In David, you can see some things. The first one I cite is not necessarily the one I'd identify as the most important. But it's certainly the first one you see chronologically in examining his life.

I. David strove for excellence.

He was not a person of halfway measures. We see him as the shepherd boy—not growing up in a western society where he'd have been forced to attend school six to eight hours a day. He had a lot of free time. I've seen children like this in third world countries. Your heart goes out to them. David has the very menial task of being a shepherd. But what is he doing out there with all this time on his hands, lonely, and watching sheep on the hillside? He is learning to play a string instrument—a harp. That was akin to our guitar in size. He's learning to throw stones. He could sling a stone and hit a target within a hairbreadth. He put to use his idle time very well. His playing was so good that he could lift depressed spirits. He learned to compose songs under the night sky when the stars came out. There's no region in the world that has as many stars. In that area, David is talking with his God and learning to play and to sing.

What excellence do we seek for in life? We may never have the skill of someone who is proficient in a talent. But we should seek to develop our potential to the fullest level possible. David did that. That's part of God's purpose in putting us on this earth. In Genesis, in creating man and woman, He said, "I put you in this garden, and you're to have dominion over it." To the

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students here, if you've got the capacity to be an excellent student, don't settle for something that is less than best. Apply yourself. Also, whatever you do, seek excellence in relationships. That's an attribute of God. Do things well, not sloppily—not half heartedly.

II. Another thing, David relied upon the Lord—he had confidence in the Lord.

He had tremendous faith, trust, and reliance on the Lord. We see this the first time we meet him in a public confrontation. He's going to take out Goliath—1 Samuel 17. We noted when we looked at that chapter how the defeat was in everybody else because no one else was talking about the Lord. Everyone just accepted the fact that the external situation was so opposing and so forceful—they thought it couldn't be overcome. They didn't talk about what God could do.

David comes onto the scene, and he's immediately talking about God. He's saying, "The Lord is with us. Do not be afraid." He moves out in that tremendous confidence in the Lord, and things happen as a result. David exercises that reliance of confidence all through his life. He was not simply an Easter believer who, one day out of 365, expressed some kind of lip service to God. In the everyday fabric of his personality, he relies upon God.

We see it clearly in his engagement with Saul. Twelve times, Saul sought his life. Two times, David had the opportunity to kill Saul. Yet, each time he resisted because he knew if God had called him to the throne, he could wait for God's time. He would not have to use wrongful methods.

Sometimes, in our pursuit of something we think is God's will, we force God's will by prematurely getting involved in the scene ourselves. We cannot use wrong means to achieve godly ends. It was God's will for David to become king, but it would never have been right if David had used the wrong methods or the wrong means. God is concerned, not as much of where we get to, but how we get there. David relied upon God to take care of him and to keep His

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promises to him. I've come to a basic, elementary definition of temptation by looking at the situations of David and Saul. Simply, that is—temptation, most of the time, is an invitation to a shortcut.

It's like Jesus turning stones into bread. It was all right for him to eat bread, but the temptation was a shortcut. "Shortcut from your humanity. Skip over to your divinity, and do it quick. Don't go through the process of baking."

So many temptations in life are just shortcuts to get somewhere. For David, his shortcut is, "Kill Saul. You have a right to kill him." But he refuses to take the shortcut of anger, bitterness, revenge, and retaliation. He'll take the long way around—forgiveness always takes longer.

Tenderness, compassion, long-suffering—it's exactly that, long-suffering. Not short-suffering.

When we short-circuit those processes by letting our behavior and our character get out of God's will, then we step outside of our reliance and confidence in God. David shows himself to be a man after God's own heart by not doing this. In fact, his words of eulogy in regard to Saul's death in 2 Samuel 1 are the most immortal in all of literature. He says, "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives."

You know, Saul had not been lovely and pleasant. But David, because he relied upon the Lord, harbored no bitterness toward this man. He was able to say at his death honestly, "I found him pleasant." In David, we gain a great picture of the mercy of God. And we see that it pays to do things God's way. Every person has their Saul—their nemesis. Whether it's an actual personality or problem, we all have a nemesis. David committed his enemy—his nemesis—to God's keeping. In doing so, he became a man after God's own heart.

III. Thirdly, David really made a difference.

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While preaching in the synagogue at Antioch, Paul said, “David served God’s purpose in his own generation.” I can’t think of any more wonderful phrase to be said about your life than, “In your lifetime, you served God’s purpose.”

Frequently, when I dedicate a baby, I pray the child will live in such a way as to fulfill God’s purpose. We all have purposes for our children, and our children will grow up to have purposes for themselves. But the most important question is, “What was God’s purpose for sending us?” David, by God’s will, served God’s purpose in his own generation. What a rich purpose he served. He was a shepherd boy—the representative of the toiling classes. He was a musician. He was a soldier—the conqueror of Goliath. He was a king. He was a priest—substituting a broken and contrite spirit for the blood and sacrifice of bulls and lambs. He was a prophet—proclaiming with his very last breath his kingdom would last forever. He was a poet—most of the Psalms were called by his name. He made a difference—a multifaceted difference.

The story is told that when Thomas Edison died in the 1920s, President Herbert Hoover wanted to find a fitting way to acknowledge the contribution Thomas Edison had made to humanity. He explored with his advisors the possibility of a presidential proclamation—a proclamation to shut off electricity nation-wide for one minute at noon on the day of Edison’s funeral to honor him. They soon discovered it couldn’t be done—too many hospitals couldn’t afford to go without electricity, too many essential services needed electricity. I expect that until Jesus comes, the world will never again be without the efficient use of electricity. Edison did that. He made a contribution, and it was so mammoth that we couldn’t go without it for sixty seconds!

I couldn’t last without David’s psalms. When I’m down, I need those things. I put them again in my heart. When I think I’ve failed God in such a significant way—that God wouldn’t want to do

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anything with me again—I just have to get out David's life. Then I realize what a difference God had him to be for us.

We're ordinary people here. None of us are going to make the quantitative contribution David made. But that doesn't excuse us—we cannot make no contribution. I may, in some way to some person in some place, make a difference. That's where God calls me to. God calls me to make a difference. God calls you to make a difference. That's part of why we're the church. Just giving a cup of cold water makes a difference, and it counts. We're to live life with purpose and meaning.

IV. The fourth and final thing about David—when he sinned, he sought God's forgiveness.

And he did sin. And there was great travail in his life because he sinned. But then, he did the right thing. You can sin, and if after that you don't make things right with God, that's

compounding the wrong. But when we sin, if we come to the Lord and admit honestly before

Him our failure and ask His forgiveness—that's doing the right thing. David did the right thing.

“Be merciful to me, O God.” In Psalm 51, when David is praying, he says, “If You would accept the blood of bulls and goats, I would offer it.” But David knew his Old Testament law. He knew

for first-degree premeditated murder, there was no atonement under the Old Testament system.

You couldn't offer an animal sacrifice if you had committed first-degree premeditated murder.

That's why David says in Psalm 51, “If the blood of bulls and goats would do it, I would do that.

But, O God, a broken spirit and a contrite heart, you will not despise.” David found a new way of forgiveness.

There's a lot of confusion these days about forgiveness. What forgiveness does is it repairs our relationship with God. It does not always repair our relationship with other people. Nor does it always reverse the consequences of our sin. For example, although David was forgiven by God, he couldn't reverse some of the consequences his sin had set in motion. His son, for example,

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died. His credibility was never again what it was prior to his sin. You function in a leadership position by integrity. When the integrity is gone, you can no longer have the same degree of influence. It just isn't there. David found that to be the hard truth. He had to live with that consequence. He had to live with the consequence that his capacity to govern declined. Indeed, shortly after his sin rebellion, a revolution breaks out in his realm and things are really never the same after that. Then he had to face the fact that the sword did not depart from his own household. Shortly after his affair with Bathsheba, his children had such poor relationships among themselves that his daughter is raped by her half-brother. In turn, the full brother of the rape victim turns around and murders his half-brother who raped her. These things began to happen in David's life because in one moment, he blocked out service to God and family, and he substituted the priority of other concerns for himself.

He was forgiven. But forgiveness does not necessarily obliterate human consequences. What forgiveness does is it spares us breakage with God. God forgives David completely. And David came to find the truth of words he had written years earlier as a shepherd boy, "He restores my soul."

God's forgiveness of David is not meant to lead us to a belief of cheap grace that says, "Go out and do anything you want to. You can always be forgiven by God." David's story reminds us when we go out and do anything we want to, we can sure be forgiven by God, but there may be consequences that even God himself is unwilling to unwind. The consequences are there, and David knows that. He experiences them.

But David knows another side to God. He knows that God will have relationship with people that have done the most scummy things imaginable. God will get down into the gutter with David. God got down into the grime of David's failure and said, "No matter what you've done, I still

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love you.” David knew that forgiveness wasn’t cheap, and it wasn’t easy. He humbled his heart, and he broke in God’s presence. I don’t think the experience David received from God was like a formal handshake. I think it was accompanied by much shaking in his spirit and soul. But he pursued God for forgiveness, and he got it. Whatever and wherever we have failed in our life, we can get to the same God for forgiveness.

Nobody but God could see the potential in the shepherd boy of Israel. In the hands of anybody other than God, David would have been ruined. But in God’s hands, he became something. He left a legacy.

None of us ought to think that because we’ve failed in our life that discredits us from ever being used by God or being forgiven by God. God knows what He’s doing as He works on us. If we’ll yield ourselves to Him, He will complete His masterpiece in us. It’s the same with the real David as it is with you and me. God’s going to work in us. The gouge of the flaw in our life may be severe. And in the hands of anyone other than God, we would be ruined. But God seeks to carve us and mold us.

Closing Prayer

Lord, today we place ourselves anew in Your hand. Unlike the piece of marble that has no response and cannot say “no” to the sculptor, we are a living block of marble. We can say “no.” We can frustrate Your purposes. Or we can concede to them and agree to them. You seek to do something wonderful and profound in our life. I pray that we would be people after Your own heart.

I pray for persons in this congregation today, who in their life, need to reach out for excellence—to become an excellent member of the body of Christ. However that word “excellent” can apply to us, may we be excellent. For You have not appointed us to that dim and dreary region of

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average. But You've called us to a high calling—to be transformed to the image of God's own Son, Jesus—to have excellence in our spirit, excellence in the fruit of our life, excellence in character, and excellence in forgiveness. Give to us a spirit of excellence.

May we too rely upon You in every moment of life. There are some here today who are scared and frightened by the circumstances they currently find themselves in. Those who have trusted You will never be put to shame. Help us to learn that from David. Help us, Lord, to make a difference. Where we have sinned, grant us forgiveness.

There may be one here who had the experience of abortion, and they've not forgiven themselves. And they have never experienced Your forgiveness. Do that for them. Forgive the person who has had harmful thoughts and habits, or the one who has defrauded another person, or the one who has lived a life of such lackadaisical qualities in Your presence—there's not any one really bad thing they've done, it's just an accumulation of nothingness, of doing nothing over the course of a lifetime about their discipleship and their call to follow You. Forgive us for all this as we reach out to You. Make us Your people. Thank You for never giving up on us, Lord. Thank You for finding us—the lost and the last. Thank You for coming to us and wanting to do something splendid in our lives. Thank You for Jesus Christ, who loves us above all others. Thank You for forgiveness. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.