

Behaving Wisely

The Singer, Part 3

1 Samuel 18:1-30

The Celtic religions believed their goddess created it; ancient Romans believed it came from Minerva; for several thousand years now the Hindu's believe it came from their goddess, Saraswati.

The Greeks believed it came from Zeus.

For generations, not only has mankind struggled with the idea of the origin of the human race – and everything else – but they struggled with what human beings uniquely have above all other created beings.

In a word – wisdom.

Where did wisdom come from – the ability to rationally consider the past, present, and future; the ability to constructively create civilizations with justice, equity, grace and law; the ability to apply knowledge with insight in relational, ethical, financial, moral and spiritual matters.

Where did this common sense come from that isn't so common anymore.

The Greeks believe that Zeus found out his wife was going to give birth to a girl and he became so enraged that he swallowed his pregnant wife whole. Somehow she remained alive and when it came time for her to deliver the baby girl, Zeus got a terrible headache which he cured it by taking an axe and hitting himself in the head.

That makes sense, doesn't it?

Anyway, through that opening in his head emerged a fully grown daughter, Athena.

And because Athena came from the head of Zeus, she became known as the originator and definer of wisdom. Athens would be named after this goddess of wisdom. In fact, Athenians built the Parthenon in her honor.

As most gods and goddesses in the Greek and Roman world, they were represented by an animal. Athena was represented by an owl as her sacred bird.

This gave rise to the popular belief that owls were wise birds. That superstition exists to this day and we use the phrase about being wiser than an owl.ⁱ

In fact, a group of owls is not referred to as a flock of owls but as a parliament of owls. And to

this day, parliament is the word used for the gathering of wise men and women – wise owls.ⁱⁱ

According to the Bible, wisdom comes from two sources. The word wisdom simply refers to applying the knowledge you believe.

It can be positive or negative – godly or unholy.

The Apostles James defines the differences as he writes, ***“If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast . . . this is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*** Then he contrasts this earthly wisdom by adding, ***but the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere (James 3:13-17)***

Listen, I can't think of a better, clearer, flesh and blood illustration of what James writes about than in ***1 Samuel 18.***

So turn there as we continue in the biography of David, Israel's singer, shepherd, King.

Now in this particular chapter, following David's defeat of Goliath, you're going to watch as David progresses – demonstrating godly wisdom, while King Saul digresses – demonstrating the wisdom of earth.

And as we go through this chapter, what I want to do is ask and answer the question - what does it mean to walk in wisdom? What exactly does it look like?

That concept is going to appear several times here . . . ***1 Samuel 18*** will answer that question with at least three defining characteristics.

Let me give you the first characteristic.

First, walking wisely means:

1. Responding to promotion with humility – verse 1-5

Now, keep in mind that when you arrive at ***chapter 18***, David has just gained instant popularity . . . he is an overnight celebrity . . . he's the young giant killer. His head must have been swimming.

He'd left his father's flock to deliver some cheese to his brothers and within 48 hours, he became a hero.

He has won American Idol, Who Wants to be a Millionaire, Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune all in the same day.

He'd be making a guest appearance on Duck Dynasty – wearing camo . . . showing those guys how to hunt with a sling shot.

The truth is David is on everybody's mind . . . he has become a national hero.

I agree with one author who wrote that very few people would be able to take all that in stride.ⁱⁱⁱ

It would be easy to let it go to his head . . . but it didn't.

And what happens next only adds to the remarkable rise of David. Notice **verse 1**. *As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul . . . skip to verse 3. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. 4. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.*

This was symbolic of several things; first and foremost a deep friendship was formed.

As David was introduced as having risked his life for the glory of the God of Israel – Jonathan effectively said, “That’s my heart too . . . that’s my soul . . . that’s my desire.”

By the way, the foundation for a deep friendship isn't compatibility or chemistry, but character and shared faith and trust in the living God.

That's one of the reasons you can love people you hardly know as you meet them anywhere in the world – you find out they share your faith and your love for Jesus Christ and immediately you are brothers and sisters.

By the way, for those who would shamefully twist this text into something sexual, because we're told that Jonathan loved David, all you have to do is read the rest of the chapter.

This same word for love shows up four different times.

- in **verse 16** we're told that *all Israel and Judah loved David*;
- in **verse 20** and **28** we're told that *Michal loved David* – and that was before they married;

- and in **verse 22** the verb shows up again where we read that *all the servants of the king loved David*.

The point is obvious, isn't it? Everybody loved David.

Furthermore, this particular Hebrew word for love has a political overtone to it. It can actually mean to tie together or conspire.^{iv}

You need to understand that when Jonathan took off his robe and gave it to David – when the servants of Saul and the daughter of Saul loved David – there was every reason to read into their love an effectual transfer of loyalty to the heir apparent.

Later on in **chapter 20**, Saul will condemn Jonathan for as much as handing the kingdom over to David when what he ought to be doing is what all the other kings of the world did in this regard and put their rivals to death.

What we could really be doing in this study is exploring the incredible humility and faith and courage of Jonathan, one of the most overlooked truly heroic characters of the Bible. Everybody loves David . . . he's the young man who killed the giant.

If anybody should have grown envious, it should have been Jonathan. If anybody should have given David the cold shoulder as he moved his gear into the King's palace, it would have been Jonathan.

An old Puritan author by the name of Blaikie wrote of that moment when David and Jonathan were introduced, No shadow of jealousy darkens Jonathan's brow. Self-seekers and self-pleasers look at him – and be ashamed. Never were hands more cordially grasped; never were congratulations more warmly uttered.^v

Now notice **verse 5**. *And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him.*

Stop for a moment – that translation, *was successful* is from the Hebrew verb *sakal* which is often translated walking wisely.

Success in the Bible has nothing to do with money, or fame or position – it has to do with walking with wisdom.

Samuel the prophet is actually telling us, *And David went out and behaved wisely wherever Saul sent him.*

The same word will show up again in **verse 14** – *look there – And David – there it is – behaved wisely in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him.*

So what does Saul do with such a wise, courageous, humble, loyal man? **Verse 5, the**

middle part tells us that Saul set him over the men of war.

David rises the level of commander – he just soars to the top of the heap.

And nowhere in this chapter will you find David admiring his own reflection.

He doesn't send a message home to his brothers – especially Eliab who demeaned him only days earlier by telling him he was effectively no good at anything but watching a few sheep.

What do you have to say now, Eliab? Na na na na na!

Listen, walking wisely means you are able to discern what moment is the perfect time to keep your mouth shut.

The trouble is, everybody *else* is talking here.

Notice **verse 6**. ***As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine; the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments.***

This was common in ancient times; victory celebrations were normally led by women, who came to meet the triumphant warriors with dancing and tambourines.

This singing is actually antiphonal chanting – going back and forth between groups of women.

And according to historians, these women aren't out there randomly doing the shuffle, or the two-step or the disco twirl.

They are actually well organized, like a parade, and they are dancing the war dance of Israel; dances and details that have not survived the centuries.

But typical of every culture, there are symbolic, culturally rich songs and dances that embody the heart and soul of the nation.

In the western world, we have national anthems which stir our hearts; but in these days – and in this culture – there was a national anthem and a choreographed dance.

By the way, as a side note, this was the issue at hand in **Judges 16** where the Philistines had captured Samson and then made him ***entertain them*** – the King James translates it, “made sport of him.” It's the same verb used here in First Samuel for these women dancing and singing.

In other words, the Philistine crowd at that banquet forced blind Samson out into the courtyard near supporting pillars and then made him dance the war dance of Israel and chant the Israeli victory song.^{vi}

And then they laughed at him and mocked him as he danced and sang – they reveled in the fact that he was singing and dancing the national anthem of his defeated nation and more than that, his defeated God.

And they laughed and jeered until Samson brought the house down; see God wasn't vindicating Sampson's sinful stupidity; God was judging the Philistines utter blasphemy.

So here in First Samuel you have a victory parade and the singers begin chanting back and forth their freshly composed lyrics – this is definitely new – ***notice verse 7, and the women sang to one another as they celebrated,***

“Saul has struck down his thousands, And David his ten thousands.

Oh my . . . talk about raining on Saul's parade . . . that did it!

Look at verse 8. And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said (to himself, by the way), “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?” 9. And Saul eyed David from that day on.

Whether David picked up on Saul's suspicion or not, we're not told.

What we do know from this chapter is that David isn't saying anything. I'm sure David isn't humming that tune around the King either . . . don't you love that new chorus . . . I love those lyrics . . .

Behaving wisely means responding to promotion with humility

2. Secondly, behaving wisely means tolerating the weaknesses of others with grace – verse 6-11

Notice verse 10, The next day, a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day.

Now stop for a moment because this needs to be better understood. God hasn't worked out a deal with some demon to plague Saul.

The word spirit can be translated breath. This is the breath of God.

The word *evil* or *harmful* can be translated ***unpleasant*** or ***miserable***.^{vii}

The words ***rushed upon Saul*** or ***fell upon Saul*** is from a word that means ***to overwhelm***. Job even

used this word in his despair where it's translated *terrify (Job 3:5)*^{viii}

What's happening to Saul is nothing more than deep, despairing, terrifying, miserable, depressing conviction over his sin; including his failed self-made plans and his failed kingdom and the promise of Samuel that his throne would go to someone outside his family.

And now he's contending with the rise of a young man who may very well be the man to take his place.

The day after the parade he is in a dark cloud . . . the words of that new song are ringing in his ears – they are tearing away at his pride – they are eating him alive.

Aristotle wrote, "An envious man feels pain at everyone's success."^{ix}

Francis Bacon wrote, "Envy is the worst of all passions . . . it never takes a holiday."^x

So what do you do to try to silence a guilty conscience? What do you do when your sin remains unconfessed and your self-made plans turn up empty?

I know . . . turn up the music, right?

Get something to distract you . . . to make you forget . . . just about anything will do.

I'll never forget hearing Howard Hendricks talk about his neighbor who owned a boat and he spent every spare moment on his boat . . . he'd spend his day off waxing and polishing waxing that boat. He would come over when Hendricks walked out to the car and say, "Howie, I've got 37 coats of wax on my boat." And Prof would look at us and say, "I never disparaged him . . . because I knew that my neighbor's boat was his only form of anesthesia to deaden the pain of an empty life."

Saul is overwhelmed with the convicting, misery inducing, breath of God."

Where is that musician? I need to drown out my guilty conscience.

The only problem is Saul recognizes the musician.

Notice *verse 10b. And he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre* – a small hand held harp – the forerunner of the guitar – *and Saul had his spear in his hand. And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David evaded him twice.*

This is a shocking scene as it is . . . but that last word is mind blowing. Twice!

In other words, David didn't dodge one spear but two. More than likely, this phrase summarizes the

fact that Saul threw a spear two different times at David.

Later on, Saul will throw a spear at his own son, Jonathan.

Here's the downward progression of unchecked envy:

*Hurt . . . which leads to
Hate . . . which leads to
Hostility . . . which leads to
Harm^{xi}*

Hurt – hate – hostility – harm.

But again, no word from David . . . no angry retaliation . . . no speech about the ungrateful king.

I mean what do you do when somebody throws a spear at you?

Well, first – **duck.**

And then . . . just as importantly, make sure you don't pick it up and throw it back.

Listen, there are plenty of people out there that are skilled at spear throwing . . . don't learn that art from them.

Don't join them in that progression downward . . . it'll never take a holiday.

And the one most harmed, in the end, are those who throw the spears.

Now don't rush to a wrong interpretation here. David is unaware of Saul's true intentions . . . *the chapter bears this out.*

Evidently in the minds of the people in the court and in David's mind these spear throwing incidents are categorized as one of Saul's raving fits – it must be the pressure – or, he's in a black mood today . . . or, he can't help it – or, he doesn't mean anything by it.

One author said that everyone would have believed King Saul to be dangerous, but not malicious.^{xii}

Only *the reader* is given the inside scoop – we know what's going on.

But what this means is that David graciously made allowances for Saul – even when he was used for target practice.

David is the kind of person who is insulted and then says, "They don't really mean it . . . they're just bothered by other things."

This is exactly the grace of Jesus Christ who said from the cross, "They don't fully know what they're doing!"

This isn't naivety, this is a willingness to offer someone the benefit of the doubt . . . this is the oil of relationships . . . this is the salve of grace.

The truth is, we want people to give us the benefit of the doubt; we want people to allow us our bad days, we want people to cut us some slack . . . just do it in return.

And when you do, you are walking in wisdom. Behaving wisely means:

**Respond to promotion with humility
Tolerating the weaknesses of others with grace
There's one more characteristic I want to point out.**

3. Behaving wisely means surrendering to the providence of God without complaint.

So far, David's rise has been a Cinderella story. Apart from a crazy king who throws spears, David is now in the palace; his closest friend is the King's own son; he's traded in his shepherd's tunic for first class royal robes. He's training in the art of battle and every time he leads his men he wins.

But in the remainder of this chapter, David encounters some serious setbacks.

a. First, he's demoted.

Observe the subtle difference between verse 5 and verse 13.

In *verse 5*, David is placed *over all the men of war* – no doubt under the trained eye of General Abner – but effectively in command of the entire army.

But in *verse 13*, *Saul removes him from his presence and makes him a commander of a thousand.*

In other words, David loses his seat with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and he's given a single regiment of men.^{xiii}

b. Secondly, David is denied the King's daughter

There is some space of time in this chapter to allow for several campaigns against the Philistines. Saul has no doubt delayed the promised prize for the one who defeated Goliath – at this point he's hoping that David will get killed in battle.

But *verse 14 informs* us that *David walks wisely in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him – next verse – 15 and when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him, but all Israel and Judah loved David for he went out and came in before them.*

That's military terminology for going out in campaigns and returning successfully.

Saul's thinking to himself, "David just won't die!"

And David in his humility tells the king he doesn't deserve to be his son-in-law.

And notice *verse 19, But at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the . . .* I'd read the rest of this verse if I had time.

She's given to another man – the Meholathite – I practiced.

David's demotion and now the denial of the King's daughter is spelling trouble and tribulation for David.

Everybody loved David, but now everybody knows that *not* everybody loved David.

And David purposefully resists the urge to get even . . . to strike back . . . to demand his due . . . to defend his honor.

In fact, by now, David could have probably mounted a coup . . . Saul has been embarrassed by Goliath; he's lost his reputation among the palace elite with his raving, spear throwing attacks; everyone knows that God is with David and David is succeeding in every campaign.

But just about the time Saul thinks David is yesterday's news, look . . . Saul's youngest daughter falls for David – *verse 20. Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him.*

Why?

Well, you don't have to wonder for long; *verse 22. And Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David in private and say, 'Behold, the king has delight in you* (never mind the spears stuck in the wall – that's in Hebrew), *and all his servants love you. Now then become the king's son-in-law.*

David effectively asks, "How?" I'm a poor man.

Evidently the King hadn't fulfilled another promise to the one who killed Goliath by giving him riches.

I'm poor . . . I can't pay the mohar – the bridal dowry.^{xiv}

No problem, David . . . the King's going to you do what Caleb of old did by giving his daughter to a champion of war.

Just go kill 100 Philistines, cut off their foreskins and bring them to the king and that'll be payment enough.

In my research, I found that on the wall of one of his temples, Ramses III commissioned scenes depicting the counting of hands severed from his

enemies; and a pile of male genitals collected for the same purpose.^{xv}

Go kill 100 pagan Gentiles and prove you didn't just kill harmless Israelites, but Philistine men.

Saul assumes David won't make it out alive.

And what does he do? *Verse 27* informs us that David doubled the king's demand.

Here's a hundred, King Saul . . . and here's another hundred for good measure.

By now, David is wise to the King . . . *the text implies* that David publically lays out his scalps, so to speak, and the king is entirely boxed in.

Saul is stripped of all his excuses; he's shamed by David's bravery; he's caught by his own promise before his court and he's forced to give his daughter to the man he dreads more than anyone else in the entire world.^{xvi}

Look at *verse 29*. ***Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually.***

Don't miss that last line . . . it isn't a throw-away line, and it's easy to downplay the implications.

Saul was David's enemy continually.

And he won't stop, by the way, until one of them is dead.

In one of his books, Lloyd John Ogilvie retells an ancient Greek legend. In an Olympic race, a proud, young athlete came in second place. He was devastated.

He had trained long and hard, and he believed himself to be a superior athlete. His memory was haunted by that day; the race he should have won; the face of his opponent, the crowd cheering and chanting the victor's name. They both had come from the same town and when they returned, the city fathers agreed to commission a statue carved out of granite, made in the gold medalist's likeness.

It was completed and positioned on a towering base so that the city's most revered athlete stood some 20 feet high, in the center of the town square.

Corrosive envy ate away at the young man who's lost; he couldn't bear the daily reminder of his failure to be first. So he decided to destroy that statue and a plan took shape in his mind.

Late each night, when the city square was empty, he snuck out to that towering statue and as quietly as he could, chiseled away at the base hoping to weaken the foundation so that eventually – perhaps in some pounding driving rain or wind storm, it would topple over and break into a dozen pieces.

One night, as he chiseled away with more anger and envy than ever, he went too far. The heavy statue suddenly toppled over and killed this young man. The villagers found him the next morning, crushed beneath the statue of the one he had grown to hate.

Obviously, **the moral of this Greek legend** lies in the fact that this man, in reality, had been dying long before, inch by inch, chisel blow by chisel blow until he became the victim of his own envy.

What a picture of King Saul.

By the end of this chapter, Saul should have been happier and David should be eaten alive with resentment and anger.

But just the opposite is true.

Saul is eaten up with envy and fear and hatred and David is a newly married member of the royal family.

And verse 30 ends with the same phrase that began this chapter. ***David had more success – there's that word again – David walked more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed.***

Walking in wisdom is:

- Responding to promotion with humility
- Tolerating the weaknesses of others with grace
- Surrendering to the providence of God without complaint

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/19/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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iv *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 3*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Zondervan, 1992), p.707

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- xiii Keller, p. 97
- xiv Expositor's, p. 711
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