

All the King's Men

Little Shepherd Boy – Part XII

II Samuel 23

Introduction

Today is Father's Day. Do you know what that means? It means that today, there will not be as many telephone calls as there are on Mother's Day. The Illinois Bell Telephone Company said that calls are more prolific on Mother's Day than on Father's Day. However, there will be more collect calls on this day than on Mother's Day. This is because fathers do not have a lot of money and fathers are calling their fathers, right?!

Someone once defined a father as a person who carried pictures around in his wallet where his money used to be! That is probably true!

I came across something in a magazine that I thought you might enjoy. This magazine ran a contest called, "My Pop is Tops," in which children were asked to send in the reasons they thought their dad was a "Top Pop". Let me read some of the results.

- "My dad is tops because he lets me help him work in the garden, even when I don't want to."

I do not know how he figured this out, but this dad is smart.

- "My dad is tops because he lets me take accordion lessons and practice outside. When I practice outside, he goes inside. He says he can tell better from a distance."
- "My dad is tops because he is never too tired to sit in his easy chair telling stories while we wash the dishes."

Finally, the next kid started out okay, but he ended a little confused!

- "Every child should love their father because if it was not for their father, where would they be? Nowhere, that's where they'd be. If it wasn't for my father, you wouldn't see hardly no children around Milwaukee."

Okay!

I want to address the subject of not only fathers, but men in general, today. I happen to be a firm

believer that society has the need for godly, committed, ethical leadership from men – not just from fathers, but from all men.

Unfortunately, I believe we are experiencing the trauma of the vanishing male. When a society loses its male compass, it will lose its moral character because men are to provide this. A society that loses its compass and character will eventually, become disillusioned, disinterested, dispirited, and finally, disgusted with itself.

The church is a society, not unlike society in general, in that it has been designed by God to have and provide male leadership. However, in churches, as well, there is the vanishing male, who claims to know and follow Christ.

Kent Hughes, in his book entitled *The Disciplines of a Godly Man*, quoted the results of a recent study conducted by a mainline Protestant denomination. They found that of the subscribers to their denominational devotional booklet, eighty-five percent were women. In fact, another devotional booklet that is promoted among their ranks, has a seventy-five percent female readership.

This kind of evidence is corroborated across the line as it has also been discovered that the overwhelming majority of books purchased in Christian book stores are bought by women. Women tend to be reading today. Women tend to be the ones who are learning. They are also forever buying books for the men to read, that are never read.

In addition, there is the simple fact that the typical church service has fifty-nine percent women and forty-one percent men. In fact, women who attend church services without their husbands outnumber, by four to one, men who attend church services without their wives.

I heard James Dobson say one time, that his radio program, "Focus on the Family," is geared toward women. The reason is that the listening audience is primarily women.

Now this, in and of itself, is not bad. However, it raises the question, “Where is the man who is learning, who is growing, who is deepening, who is leading society at large and the church specifically?”

Now in the book of II Samuel, in chapter 23, we discover what could be, at first glance, a boring list of names. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

Understand that the nation of Israel, at this point in the record of scripture, is secure. It is experiencing peace at large; its enemies are subdued.

David now seems interested in providing spiritual markers, not only for his generation, but for the generations to come. These markers are symbols of what it means to be godly, what it means to be courageous, in the right sense, in presenting their bodies and giving their objective of faith to God. Then, by this, accomplishing some of the things mentioned in this text.

So David allows his private journal to be made public and has recorded the names of some of his fearless comrades. Their stories go down in time as living legends. This is David’s hall of fame.

This is similar to the Vietnam Wall. Friends and relatives can go and locate the names of their relatives – their brothers; their fathers; their grandfathers – who courageously fought and died for their country.

A generation or two later, some twenty year old can go to David’s spiritual markers and say, “Oh, there’s the name of my grandfather. He was one of David’s mighty men. I want to be like that.”

David was interested in inspiring another generation with what it means to be a man of God. If there was ever a generation that needed the same inspiration, it is ours and it is now.

Six Characteristics of Godly Men

Let us take a closer look, not just at David’s list of names, but at the implicit description of what it means to be a man of God.

The first name appears in II Samuel 23:8.

These are the names of the mighty men whom David had: Josheb-basshebeth a Tahchemonite, chief of the captains, he was called Adino the Eznite, because of eight hundred slain by him at one time;

David and his men probably shortened this man’s name so they could pronounce it! I had difficulty myself!

Adino killed eight hundred at one time by himself. Adino never had a Purple Heart or a Victoria Cross pinned to the chest of his uniform, but he ends up in David’s hall of fame for his courage.

The next name is in II Samuel 23:9.

and after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David when they defied the Philistines who were gathered there to battle and the men of Israel had withdrawn.

In other words, everyone else had chickened out and left. Continue to II Samuel 23:10.

He arose and struck the Philistines until his hand was weary and clung to the sword, and the Lord brought about a great victory that day . . .

I want to draw a couple of principles from these first two men.

1. Principle number one, a godly man is one who perseveres, even when the pressure against him is dominant.

Did you notice, in II Samuel 23:10, that Eleazar kept fighting,

. . . until his hand was weary and clung to the sword . . .

In other words, the battle was over, but he could not unclasp. His hand had grasped the sword, by God’s power, so long and so hard that when the battle was over, he could not let go.

Today, we find it difficult to worship God unless it is convenient, sunny, puts money in the bank, and is spattered with periodic applause. The test of true godliness, ladies and gentlemen, is how easy it is for God to get us on the right path and how difficult it is for someone else to get us off of it.

2. Principle number two, a godly man is willing to pay any price to accomplish the will of God in his life, even if it means his own life.

Someone recently told me about a couple in our congregation. Without giving me their names, he said, “You’ve got to know about this couple who moved to this town and after only one week, something happened. The man took a medical post in a hospital and he and his wife closed on their home. One week

after the closing, his superiors told him to do something unethical. He said, 'No.' The memo came back from his superiors, 'We didn't understand you. Here's what you are to do.' A week after closing on his home, with the support of his wife, the man resigned from his job with no prospect of employment."

The question is, "How much is character worth to you? How much will you pay to do what is right? How much could someone pay you to do something that is wrong?"

This is the point of these principles.

In the last few weeks, a gentleman in our church and I have been spending a lot of time in my family's back yard. We are building a wooden swing set. I would like to say I am building it with him, but in reality, I am sort of holding the light and handing the screwdriver to him, while telling him, "You're doing a great job! Keep it up!"

We have been talking and having a great time together and I have been making a number of trips to the hardware store. I went to a rather large hardware store this past week, to buy a porch swing that two people can sit in. We are going to put it on one end of a beam. It is going to be great! My wife and I will put the kids down and go out there and cozy up in the swing. She will not be able to accuse me of never taking her out! No, that is not true!

At the hardware store, I went to the counter with the swing and the cashier said, "Oh, I bought one of those about a week ago."

I said, "Really? How is it holding up?"

I realized, after I asked, that this was the wrong question to ask this lady – "How is it holding up . . . under the strain?"

She laughed, fortunately, as she could have hurt me, and said, "Oh, it's holding up okay. It's doing great."

She handed the receipt to me and then kind of leaned over the counter and said, "I've got to tell you, the directions call for twelve bolts."

I was thinking, "Why are we whispering?"

I said, "Really?"

She said, "But there's only ten in the box."

I said, "Oh, thank you. I hate buying something and getting home and finding out you're a bolt shy of

putting the thing together or you're missing the one piece that holds everything else together."

I then said, "Why don't you hold the box here and I'll go back and get two more bolts to buy."

Now two bolts cost only eighteen cents.

She said, "No, no, you only need ten."

I said, "Okay."

I thought, "Well maybe she's trying to save me from being confused. The directions call for twelve and there are only ten, but you only need ten."

So I told her, "I wouldn't be confused – I never read the directions anyway, so I wouldn't have known I was missing two bolts! Thanks, I appreciate it."

She says, "No. What you do is – you go home, put it together, bring the directions back, tell the management that it calls for twelve, but you only got ten, and you can get two free bolts."

Wow! Eighteen cents. I can put my kids through college now!

I could not believe it. I was wondering why this check out lady at this store was telling me these things.

I got my receipt and was about to leave and she said, "Oh, one more thing . . ."

I looked around to see if anyone from church was there and thought I knew this woman! I do not know her, in case she has told you the same thing.

She said, "You've got to stain this swing."

I said, "Well I knew that. I could tell from the picture that it is rough wood."

I am good with pictures!

She said, "Well, you only need about a quart of stain and we only sell it by the gallon. So do what I did – I bought a gallon and took it home. I took the lid off real carefully and painted the swing. Then I put it back on real carefully and brought it back and got a refund."

A gallon of stain costs about five bucks. All kinds of things were going through my head to say, but I just kind of stood there, while she continued, "Blah, blah, blah." I had no idea what to say to this woman.

Why in the world did I pick her register to go to?! All I could get out was something like, "Lady, you ought to open a side business and make a killing."

Then I said, “No, I need the whole gallon anyway,” and kind of walked out.

I could not believe it!

As I was walking back to my pick-up truck, I remembered something my father would often say in different situations, but it went over my head at the time. However, I found myself muttering the same thing to myself. I said to myself, “My character is worth more than five dollars and eighteen cents.”

This woman had basically told me that her character was worth less than five bucks and eighteen cents.

How much is your character worth? Are you in the process of selling it? If you are, let me ask you a question, “How much are you getting for it?”

Take a look at Eleazar’s response of courage and faith. He takes the Philistines on single-handedly. Look again at the last phrase of II Samuel 23:9.

. . . the men of Israel had withdrawn.

We know Eleazar is on his own. We then read in II Samuel 23:10b,

. . . the people returned after him only to strip the slain.

In other words, the men of Israel returned to take the booty.

Remember, the Philistines are the arch enemy of the Israelites. They are the massive nation that produced the Goliaths. They have the iron chariots. Israel was literally helpless, except for men who would be men of faith to take the enemy on. Eleazar infused courage into the people who were temporarily afraid.

Let me give another principle along this line.

3. Principle number three, a man of God is one who provides an example of faith when everyone else is afraid.

The faith of some men depends on the majority vote. The character of some men is written by the consensus, the office, the neighborhood, the friends. Such men are still living under the same regime as when they were little and went to their mother and said, “Mommy, can I do this? Everybody’s doing it.”

Hopefully, somewhere along the way, we learn that the simple fact that “everybody is doing it,” does not make it right. Being a man of God means doing what is right, even when you are the only one doing it.

Let us take a look at another solo performance. Notice II Samuel 23:11-12a.

Now after him was Shammah the son of Agee a Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered into a troop where there was a plot of ground full of lentils, and the people fled from the Philistines. But he took his stand in the midst of the plot, defended and struck the Philistines . . .

Now I am amazed at this. I can imagine giving my life for something meaningful, but I cannot imagine risking it for a patch of lentils.

However, there is something else occurring at this point in time. Looking back to the time this event occurred, the Israelites are starving to death. The Philistines had begun the practice of raiding the cabbage patch just when everything was ready and ripe. The Israelites had spent time and energy so that these vegetables would grow, and right at that moment, here come the Philistines to raid the patch. The Israelites would then, literally go hungry.

So Israel is hungry and this man is defending, not just lentils, as it would seem on the surface, but the future of Israel.

4. Principle number four, a godly man’s perspective is accurate, even when the picture is blurred.

The tragic caricature of our society today, is that men are fighting for toys and they are ignoring treasures.

5. Principle number five, similarly, a godly man is perceptive in what is worth fighting for and what is worth giving up.

Now these men, as you can well imagine with their names listed in these verses, would become heroes, and perhaps even idols of the people. So David makes certain that we do not make this mistake by letting us know that they were simply conduits of God’s power. These men were not necessarily impressive in and of themselves, but because they had faith in an almighty God, they were able to do these things with God through them. Twice we read the phrase, in II Samuel 23 verses 10 and 12,

. . . and the Lord brought about a great victory . . .

It is as if David wanted the record to be clear. Yes, these men were great and godly and courageous and fearless, but in the final analysis, they were

simply surrendered as conduits of God's power. As a result, they were able to lead a society in a godly way.

Now let us look at one more section in this hall of fame. In II Samuel 23:13-15, the names of the men are not mentioned; only the details of the story are given. I happen to believe the reason for this is that it is talking about the same three men mentioned earlier: Adino, Eleazar, and Shammah. I am not certain of this, however. Look at these verses.

Then three of the thirty chief men went down and came to David in the harvest time to the cave of Adullam, while the troop of the Philistines was camping in the valley of Rephaim. David was then in the stronghold, while the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. David had a craving and said, "Oh that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate!"

Now, by the way, I happen to believe that this is more than just wanting a drink of water from the well where David often drank as a young shepherd boy in his hometown. I think David is pining for the past. He is wanting the normalcy of home and Bethlehem was home. In other words, he is saying, "Oh, if I could only go back to the time when I was a kid drinking water from that well."

The only trouble is that three of his soldiers take David literally. Look at II Samuel 23:16.

So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water from the well of Bethlehem which was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless he would not drink it, but poured it out to the Lord;

Continue to II Samuel 23:17.

and he said, "Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?"

In other words, "I can't drink this water – this precious gift in this cup. It represents the potential loss of blood or even life that they were willing to give for my sake."

Do you know what impresses me about these men? They are fulfilling, not a command of David, but a wish. David says, "Oh I wish . . ." and his wish is their command.

I cannot help but think of our Commander in Chief, Jesus Christ, who, among many things, has wishes for our lives, but has given us commands. He gave His final command that you and I, as the church of Jesus Christ, are to be reproducing spiritually. This is not given to just me as the pastor/teacher, it is given to the church at large. You and I are to be reproducing ourselves into other people's lives spiritually. This is Jesus' command! Are you and I reproducing spiritually?

Two things about these men earned them a place in the hall of fame.

- First, these men were intensely attached to their leader.

They had loyalty to David's leadership, sympathy for his needs, and the desire to please him. It is no wonder that David was so fond of these men that he called his mighty men.

- Secondly, these men were entirely abandoned to their duty.

In other words, they willingly practiced self-denial, self-sacrifice, even for the wishes, the whims of their leader.

6. Principle number six, a godly man is passionate for God, even when the process is difficult.

Those who enjoy watching NFL football, probably enjoyed watching Mike Singletary play. Do you remember him? He was the perennial all-pro. Two times, he was named "Defensive Player of the Year," and he was on the Super Bowl XX dream team.

His biography records his discipline, however. He would often replay something in the previous game, fifty to sixty times to learn everything he possibly could about where he went wrong or what he might do better. He said that he would take six hours to watch the game film from the previous game. It was his discipline off the field that brought him legendary success. He was a guy who was barely six feet tall and 220 pounds, yet he was an incredible force on the football field.

Those who enjoy art have probably stood before reproductions by Da Vinci and have marveled, as I have, at his clarity. When looking at a picture by him, it is easy to think, "Wait a second! That's a professional photograph. How can he be so clear and life-like?"

We, however, overlook the fact that on one occasion, he drew one thousand hands for practice.

One of the world's great musicians, a violinist who practiced four to seven hours a day, gave a command performance when he was seventy-five. Afterwards, a woman came up to him gushing over his performance. She said, "You are a genius."

He replied, "Madame, before I was a genius, I was a drudge."

My friend, have you ever stopped to consider that to become a great Christian, a godly Christian demands discipline and dedication, in the same way these people became great athletes, great artists, great musicians? We have the misconception that by being a Christian, we will automatically grow to become godly. However, it takes abandonment, self-sacrifice, self-denial; it takes habits of godliness. We do not like to talk about this today, because our society has built into us and into our flesh that we want what is convenient.

A New Testament Challenge

Now please turn to I Timothy 4, as we wrap up our study today. Let me challenge you with words that Paul wrote to his young son in the faith, Timothy. These words, by the way, have unsettling implications for the average Christian. Look at I Timothy 4:6-7.

In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. . .

This is a reference to idle chatter over the backyard fence, as it were.

. . . On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;

This phrase could be translated, "train yourself to be godly". Paul is not referring to moral or religious perfection in this phrase, he is talking about someone being willing to train so they can walk for God in a way that is unhindered; so they can follow God's will without the hindrances that are so typical in our day and time.

In fact, the word "train," in this text, comes from the Greek word "gumnazo," from which we get our word "gymnasium". It is a reference to exercise and training in general.

Kent Hughes writes in his commentary, "Even in Paul's day, it was and is a word with the smell of a gym in it; the sweat of a good workout."

Paul is literally saying, "'Gymnastisize' yourself for the purpose of becoming godly. Hit the gym and sweat it out, if you want to be godly."

This church auditorium is filled with living, breathing human beings. As far as I can see, we are all alive. However, in this auditorium, there is a difference – there are some who are, like me, in terrible shape and there are others who are in fantastic shape. Those of you who are in great shape are disgusting to the rest of us, by the way! The difference is the decision you made to invest sweat into the way you look and feel.

This church auditorium is also predominantly filled, I am sure, with people who claim to know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. However, there is a difference – there are some who are developing the habits, the disciplines of godliness and there are others who are out of shape spiritually. This is the difference.

Paul says, "For everybody who wants to be in good shape spiritually, hit the spiritual gym."

We are going to have to pursue things that are not necessarily convenient.

We have a list in II Samuel, of godly men. Why are they godly? Because they made the decision and they persevered, they paid the price, they provided an example, they fought with a proper perspective, they allowed God to use them, and as a result, they had a passion for God, for His person and His work and His ways.

This does not happen automatically. It comes to those who allow God to draw them to Himself and develop in them the disciplines of a godly man.

Walt Hendrickson, a high ranking leader in the Navigators ministry for years, wrote a classic work entitled *Disciples Are Made – Not Born*. Let me read some of his words.

One day, I sat down and meditated on what would be the most horrible thing that could happen to me as a Christian. The conclusion to which I came was that when I died, God would take me aside and say to me, "Hendrickson, let me show you what your life could have been like if only you had done what I asked, if only you had been faithful to

me, if only you had disciplined your life and made it really count as I'd wanted it to."

A few weeks ago, my wife, our kids, and I were watching the world gymnastics competition for men on "Wide World of Sports". If you were watching, you know that we were fairing rather poorly and, in fact, have for several years. The show included a debate that is raging, concerning what is needed to bring our boys back to a ranking position on the world scene. There were all kinds of varying opinions.

One man sounded a lot like the government as he said, "Well, we just need more funding; we need more money."

Another said, "We need a new conference and exercise facility."

I thought it very interesting, however, and scrambled with my mental pen to write it down, that a former gold medallist in gymnastics, laid down the charge, on television to the public at large, "I can take your men and turn them into medallists. For it to happen, our men will have to make gymnastics their life."

I thought, "If the church ever hopes to bring before Jesus Christ the medals, the honors, the rewards, we are going to have to make His name and His cause our life."

Jesus Christ laid down the charge,

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? (Matthew 16:26)

Jim Elliot echoed this well when he wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."