

DAVID – A MAN AFTER GOD’S OWN HEART

True religion is a matter of the heart and the Bible identifies one man as personifying what it means to have a good heart. We know him as King David – the man after God’s own heart. The Bible makes no effort to hide David’s failures yet he is remembered and respected for his heart for God. What I’d like to do in this article is to have a look at three of the qualities of King David that will help us to understand more about what it means to have a heart like God’s.

To begin with, let’s, first of all, look at the context of where God calls David a man after His own heart can found in 1 Samuel 13. Earlier in the chapter we read that Saul had failed to obey God’s full instructions in the war against the Amalekites. The war was a great military success and, according to my research, liberated Egypt from 400 years of Hyksos domination, yet God did not view Saul as a military hero because He knew Saul’s heart wasn’t right.

In verse 13 we read: “And Samuel said to Saul, ‘You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him *to be* commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”

We need to remember that this famous description of David was said about him when he was still a teenage boy tending his father’s sheep. He must have had a fair degree of maturity as a teenager when God called him a man and not a boy after His own heart.

God rejected King Saul, David’s predecessor, for disobedience. Like many today, Saul preferred to do things his own way. He relied too much on his own human reasoning - apparently not realizing that the way that seems right to man often leads to death (Prov. 16:25). He desired, pursued and trusted in physical things - the trappings of power and the desires of the flesh. David, on the other hand, looked to the Creator God and trusted in Him with his whole heart.

The first and dominant characteristic that motivated God to call him a man after his own heart was his wholehearted commitment and adoration of his Creator. Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God with all of your heart, all of your mind and all of your soul (Matt. 22:37-38). All of one’s heart means with great depth of feeling rather than just a mild interest. All of one’s mind means it is to be an intelligent belief in God based on evidence and not just a blind faith and all of one’s soul has to do with our life and committing our actions to doing God’s will regardless of how we feel.

David had an unchangeable belief in the faithful and forgiving nature of God. He was a man who lived with great zest and devotion to God as one can see from reading the many Psalms which he composed. We can learn much from the passion that He had for God as we read them.

As a young shepherd he discerned that the earth and the heavens were concrete evidence of a great Creator God. He was amazed when looked at the life, beauty and design he saw in the heavens and the world around him and was filled with great awe and respect for the God who created it all. He felt so humbled in comparison and gave his life over to doing God’s will completely and trusted in the God who could do anything.

This is reflected in Psalm 8 where we read: “O LORD, our Lord, how excellent *is* Your name in all the earth, who have set Your glory above the heavens! Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength because of Your enemies that You may silence the enemy and the avenger. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars,

which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him and the son of man that You visit him?"

As a young boy he faithfully tended his father's sheep putting his life on the line at times to do so fighting off a lion and a bear. From such circumstances he developed a courageous faith in God who he knew was the one delivered him, not his own skills.

This courageous faith was exemplified when he willingly took on the giant Goliath at age 17. In 1 Samuel 17:36-37 we read the following: "Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.' Moreover David said, 'The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.'"

We may not face lions or bears or giants but we too can develop this kind of faith to handle big problems that come in our life from time to time if we regularly exercise trust in God. If we keep practicing over and over again with the many little trials of life and we'll be ready for the big ones when they come along.

For most of his life King David was devoted to keeping God's commandments. He meditated on them, marvelled at their wisdom and proclaimed in Psalm 119: "Oh, how love I Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me" (v 97-98).

Now the second quality about King David a man after God's heart was his concern for others. Christ told us in the Sermon on the Mount to love our enemies. King David showed the same concern for both his friends and those who opposed him. After ascending the throne, he actively sought to help the family of Saul. Although this former king had tried to kill him many times, David did not blame his family. And he showed great kindness to Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth which we read of in 2 Samuel 9.

Another example of this outgoing concern is recorded in 1 Samuel 30. While David and his small army of 600 men were absent, the Amalekites overran his camp. All his men's worldly goods and possessions, along with their wives and children, were taken. David and his men pursued the Amalekites, but about a third of them became so fatigued they couldn't go on. David's decision was to leave them behind to guard the baggage. God then gave the victory to David and the 400 fighting men who still accompanied him and all was recovered.

However, many of the victors resented the 200 who stayed behind, and determined to return to them only their wives and children keeping their physical possessions for themselves. But David would have none of this. In 1 Samuel 30:24-25 he declared, "As his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike.' And so it was, from that day forward; he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel"

The third important quality that made him a man after God's own heart was that He accepted responsibility for his mistakes regardless of the consequences. He sinned greatly, committing adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. Worse yet, David had Uriah killed in battle to cover his crime! But when confronted with these horrible sins, he made no excuses. Faced with the reality of transgressing God's law David said, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam. 12:13).

In his famous prayer of repentance in Psalm 51 he begins by saying, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me...(and down in verse 10 he says) Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

This willingness to accept responsibility for his actions and confess his sins was a trait that he shared with his ancestor Judah. The Life Application Bible commentary says this about Judah. "Judah was a natural leader. The events of his life provided many opportunities to exercise those skills. Unfortunately Judah's decisions were often shaped more by the pressures of the moment than by a conscious desire to cooperate with God's plan. But when he did recognize his mistakes, he was willing to admit them. His experience with Tamar and the final confrontation with Joseph are both examples of Judah's willingness to bear the blame when confronted...Judah's offer to substitute his life for Benjamin's is a picture of what his descendant Jesus would do for all people."

To admit wrong or guilt is one of the hardest things we humans do. But if we want to have peaceful relationships and get along with others, if we want to solve problems while they're still small ones we will have to see what part we played in the problem. Why should it be so hard for us to say, "I'm sorry. I was wrong."

The following comment was made in the April 1979 issue of the Readers Digest: "An apology is a friendship preserver, an antidote for hatred, never a sign of weakness; it costs nothing but one's pride, always saves more than it costs, and is a device needed in every home" (p.56).

I vividly remember a comment in a sermon given by Bill Winner many years ago that stuck out in my mind. He said, "If someone is 99% wrong and you are 1% wrong you still have to repent of that 1%".

I am also reminded of a funny Chevy Chase quote from the movie "Fletch Lives". Fletch was in disguise trying to obtain some information about a toxic waste dump when the person he was trying to get the information from pulled him up on a rather obvious mistake. Fletch then says to him, "It takes a big man to admit he is wrong and I am not a big man!"

Some people have a pride where they can't be seen to be wrong. They have to "save face" and not look bad or wrong in front of others. This is why some people aren't prepared to confess and admit they've caused offence sometimes. They have a faulty and irrational perception. They don't want to look bad by admitting they are wrong but they really do look bad in front of others the more they dig in and refuse to admit they've done any wrong.

Politicians are especially guilty of this irrational logic. If they actually admit they've made a mistake and genuinely go over and above in trying to fix the problem the other person or persons will think much better of them.

This paradox is touched upon in Matthew 23:12. Here Jesus says: "Whoever exalts himself (insists he's right when he's not) will be humbled (others will still think less of him), and he who humbles himself (is prepared to confess his mistake) will be exalted (others will think better of him, not less of him).

The way that we respond when people bring things to our attention that need correction and improvement are a reflection of our character. Do we defend ourselves and minimize our problems when we shouldn't? Do we ignore someone who wants to bring something to our attention and sweep issues under the carpet? Do we really try to change and apply any legitimate criticism, regardless of the attitude of the person who brings it to our attention?

We should remember David's example in 2 Samuel 16 when Shimei kept cursing David. One of David's men asked David if he could kill him but David said let him curse and was prepared to accept whatever legitimate criticism Shimei had despite his rather disrespectful attitude.

Our ability to handle correction when it comes to us in all shapes and forms, both harsh and gentle, is a reflection of our character and maturity. The more we respond to correction the more we'll

grow in character because we are prepared to accept the need to change. If we ignore the need to change then how can we grow in character?

In 1 Kings 15:5 we read this summary of David's life – "David did *what was* right in the eyes of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."

The leader of another church organization that I used to attend made a comment on a few occasions, based on this verse, that David's only major sin was the murder of Uriah the Hittite. I personally don't think that is what is meant by this verse when one takes into account the major sin he committed near the end of his life when he numbered Israel. Matthew Henry in his commentary feels that it was the only major sin in that it had lingering consequences for the nation given how it later affected his judgment with his children.

My personal view of what I feel is meant by the exception of the matter of Uriah the Hittite is that it was the only time in his life when he turned his back on his relationship with God for a long period of time. It was only after the child was born from the adultery that he confessed and repented of his sins which meant that he had turned his back on God for close to a full year.

The fact that the Bible calls David a man after his own heart despite his major sins says a lot about God's character. In a documentary that I saw on Lord Nelson, who defeated the French at Trafalgar, one of the commentators made a comment that great men make great mistakes. I found that comment encouraging from the point of view that even if you make great mistakes, of which I know I've made many, you can still go on to do great things for God.

A good example of this is in the faith chapter, Hebrews 11. It's encouraging that when God chose to remember them in this chapter He chose to remember them by their great deeds and not by their faults. Regardless of how spectacularly you may have failed today you always have a fresh start from tomorrow on to become a great success if you learn from your mistakes. In fact, those mistakes may help you to be an even better success.

In conclusion, is your heart like David's? Does your calling and obeying our Creator God mean the world to you? Do you love others with the same kind of genuine concern that David had for his people? Do you accept responsibility deeply for your mistakes and repent when you break God's law? If so, like with David, Christ will give you a part in His Government as a king and a priest in the World Tomorrow. If we can develop these qualities we can be a man or woman after God's own heart!