

Message #34

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Life of David

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DAVID AND DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

2 SAMUEL 20

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Management consultant Travis Bradberry writes (*Entrepreneur Magazine*, 3/14/2017), **“Difficult people defy logic. Some are blissfully unaware of the negative impact that they have on those around them, and others seem to derive satisfaction from creating chaos and pushing other people’s buttons. Either way, they create unnecessary complexity, strife and worst of all stress.”** Most of us have difficult people in our lives. Perhaps some of us are regarded as difficult by others.

A CEO by the name of David Brown identifies common types of difficult people. (*Forbes*, 3/5/2018) While he primarily has a business environment in mind, these difficult people can be found in other walks of life as well. There are the perfectionists. They can’t complete projects unless everything is done perfectly. Perfectionists may be unreasonably demanding of others. There are the control freaks. They want to oversee everything and won’t give up control over even the most mundane details. David Brown says that there are also creative people who are great at coming up with ideas but often prove difficult in getting simple tasks done. Then there are the submissive types whose fear of failure and lack of confidence keep them from ever taking the initiative and stepping out on their own.

In the passage before us this morning King David has several other kinds of difficult people with whom he has to contend. David himself has proven to be a difficult person at times. He started out with a strong faith in the God of Israel. But once he became King of Israel, he had a major mess-up. He committed adultery and tried to cover that up by killing Bathsheba’s husband. God forgave him when he confessed his wrongdoing, but there was division that came to his family because of it. His son Absalom tried to overthrow him and become king before the proper time. David’s forces defeated Absalom and killed him. We saw last week how David sought to restore unity to his kingdom in the aftermath of that victory.

So we pick up the story today in 2 Samuel #20. David has to deal with difficult people in order to get his house and his kingdom in order. We are going to notice not only how David deals with them but more

importantly how God deals with them. In this study we hope to find lessons that will benefit us in learning how to respond to the difficult people in our own lives.

I.

First, we are going to consider ABSALOM AND DIFFICULT FAMILY MEMBERS. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. ABSALOM AND DIFFICULT...) The last seven chapters of this book have focused attention on Absalom, the son of David. He first came into focus when his older brother and the crown prince, Amnon, raped Absalom's sister. David did not do much of anything about that. So Absalom plotted and killed Amnon, which then made him the next in line to the throne.

Absalom fled the country. David did nothing to respond to Absalom's misdeed. General Joab convinced the king that Absalom had to be brought back into the country. David reluctantly allowed that. There was eventually a reunion of sorts. Absalom did not acknowledge any wrongdoing, and David did not give complete forgiveness. So Absalom set out to overthrow his father and to kill him. That might be enough to classify Absalom as a difficult person, don't you think?

David tried to ignore the bad behavior of his son, but the coup forced him into action. His forces eventually defeated and killed Absalom. But the damage that this difficult person created continued to have lingering effects. Part of the problem was traceable to David's failings as a father. He bought into the culture's view of kings and acquired multiple wives. He didn't spend a lot of time with Absalom. He did not discipline him and train him as he should have done.

Often we have difficult family members. Sometimes we bear some of the blame for how they have become difficult people. Sometimes their difficulty is the result of their own choices. In our passage we see lingering effects of the difficult person who Absalom became.

This is especially evident in v. 3. The author tells us there: **"And David came to his house at Jerusalem. And the king took the ten concubines whom he had left to care for the house and put them in a house under guard and provided for them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as if in widowhood."**

The background for this situation involved the consequences of David's own sin with Bathsheba. In #12 God told David that there would be negative consequences for his misdeeds. (2 SAMUEL 12:11) In vv. 11

& 12 we are told, **“Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. (2 SAMUEL 12:12) For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.”**

Absalom’s rebellion was involved in the fulfillment of that prediction. When David fled from Jerusalem, he left ten concubines in Jerusalem to watch over the palace. When Absalom arrived, his advisor told him to sleep with the concubines on the roof of the palace. We read in 2 Samuel #16 v. 22 (2 SAMUEL 16:22), **“So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof. And Absalom went in to his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel.”**

Now these ten women are shut up in the harem and treated as widows. What was David’s thinking in doing this? They were perhaps a source of embarrassment to him. They were a reminder of his own misdeeds and the misdeeds of his son. They could have been regarded as defiled. (LEVITICUS 18:15) In the law of God in Leviticus #18 v. 15 it was written, **“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law; she is your son’s wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness.”** Absalom had taken them as his wives, although they had been David’s concubines before that.

Then also David may have considered the passage in Deuteronomy #24, which spoke of putting away wives. (DEUTERONOMY 24:4) God declared in v. 4 of that chapter, **“... then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord.”** Perhaps after all of these hard times David was trying to follow more closely what God said about the treatment of wives and women.

But imagine the sad situation which these women faced. They had no opportunity for the development of a normal family. Their physical needs were met, but they were cut off and isolated. I realize that in our modern times it is impossible for us to identify with their situation. For how could widows today be told to stay at home because of circumstances beyond their control?

It is called the pandemic. It is a reminder to us and to them to reach out to others. In these modern times we have the advantage of being able to use social media and to talk on the phone. Isolation can be a special problem to the widows and widowers and single people in our midst. Fortunately we Christians are never really alone. We are reminded by the Lord in Isaiah #61 v. 1 (ISAIAH 61:1), **“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted...”** We have a Messiah who cares about the brokenhearted, widows and those who are isolated.

II.

In vv. 4 & 5 of #20 we encounter AMASA AND PROCRASTINATORS. (II. AMASA AND PROCRASTINATORS) Procrastinators comprise another category of difficult people. These are individuals who are chronically late and who put things off. Amasa was part of David's extended family. Absalom put him in charge of his rebel army. David was upset when General Joab violated his orders and killed Absalom. David then put Amasa in charge of the army partly for this reason and also to make it easier for the rebel army to feel welcomed into a united nation.

In response to a new rebellion led by Sheba, we are told in vv. 4 & 5, **"Then the king said to Amasa, 'Call the men of Judah together to me within three days, and be here yourself.' So Amasa went to summon Judah, but he delayed beyond the set time that had been appointed him."** We are not told about the cause of the delay. It may have been difficult to get the additional troops together. It may have been that Amasa was not a good organizer. But Amasa is late, and David sees that as a significant problem.

In my first church where I was a preaching pastor we had an appointment to meet the head of the church board at the church building where he would show us around. He was a half hour late. That was to prove to be typical of this guy's way of being. He was chronically late for meetings and for appointments. He was a nice guy, but his tardiness was a difficulty. I addressed the issue with him, but he seemed incapable, or unwilling, to change. I just had to adjust to his way of being.

Procrastinators can be a problem. An *LA Times* article some years ago (6/21/1987) described an organization called the Procrastinators' Club of America. Founded in 1956 the organization promotes **"the philosophy of relaxation through putting off until later those things that needn't be done today."** The group claims to have 6000 active members, though there are millions more who just have not gotten around to joining. One member was expelled several years ago for sending his Christmas cards on time. I tried to find a web site for the group, but apparently the establishment of a web site is another matter which has been put off until later.

The club celebrates the Fourth of July in January. It once tried unsuccessfully to convince NOW, the National Organization for Women, to change its name to LATER. But among their successes they claim that their protest of the War of 1812 in March of 1967 resulted in a treaty that ended the war. Also they point to their annual January predictions in Last Month's Newsletter that have been completely accurate in predicting the major events of the previous year. Based in Philadelphia, one of the group's first actions was sending a letter to the White Chapel Foundry in the United Kingdom, demanding a refund

for the cracked Liberty Bell which ended up in their fair city. The procrastinators complained, "We got a lemon." The foundry replied, in appropriate fashion, promising a refund if the Philadelphia group would return the bell in its original packaging.

III.

The third character in our passage who proves to be a difficult person is Sheba. Verses 1 & 2 and 14-22 focus on SHEBA AND REBELLIOUS OPPONENTS. (III. SHEBA AND REBELLIOUS OPPONENTS) In #19 David is trying to get his own tribe of Judah back in order. His attention to his fellow tribesmen produces jealous feelings among the other ten tribes. Thus we read in v. 1, **"Now there happened to be there a worthless man, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite. And he blew the trumpet and said, 'We have no portion in David, and we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel!'"** Before David even gets back to Jerusalem, he has another rebellion on his hands. It must have been very discouraging.

We have little background information about this Sheba. He was from the tribe of Benjamin, which was the tribe of King Saul. Perhaps Sheba had connections with that previous administration. We find out later that he was actually living in territory belonging to the tribe of Ephraim.

The author describes Sheba as "a worthless man." The original word meant "stubborn, rebellious, and/or self-willed." He is the kind of person who is tough to deal with in the family, at school, at work, at church, and in the country at large. He is not just the protester, but the rioter and the looter. This is the one who rebels not just against parents and government and church but also against God. In this case Sheba is rebelling against David and against God who has appointed him to be king of Israel.

Sheba's call is for secession. Let's not have any part in this Davidic kingship. From the action that follows it appears that this withdrawal also involves active opposition. But the rebellion here is not as well planned out as it was with Absalom. There is not much evidence of organization.

Verse 2: **"So all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah followed their king steadfastly from the Jordan to Jerusalem."** So the northerners side with Sheba in this rebellion. But the extent of their commitment proves to be limited. They seem dissatisfied with the leadership of Judah and David, but not to the point of wanting to lay their lives on the line.

Skip down to v. 14, where we pick up the story when Joab is leading David's army in pursuit of Sheba. **"And Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Beth-maacah, and all the Bichrites assembled and followed him in."** The consensus of the scholars is that the Bichrites, or the Berites, as some translations have it, refer to the clan of Sheba.

Abel Beth-maacah (ABEL BETH-MAACAH) was in the far north of Israel, near the city of Dan. Sheba apparently goes from Gilgal, where the break from David and Judah happens, to the north through the territory of the other tribes. As he is being pursued by Joab and his army, he is apparently looking for support from the other tribes. He seems not to find very much. He doesn't make any kind of stand until he reaches Abel Beth-maacah, which is a fortified city.

According to v. 15, **"And all the men who were with Joab came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-maacah. They cast up a mound against the city, and it stood against the rampart, and they were battering the wall to throw it down."** Joab's army catches up to Sheba at Abel Beth-maacah and proceeds to lay siege to the city.

(SIEGE RAMP) Most fortified cities in ancient Israel were on a hill. So in a siege it was necessary to build up an earthen ramp to the walls. That usually took time and hard work. Then siege engines of some kind would be rolled up against the wall. Soldiers would fire their arrows and spears into the city. Battering rams would try to knock the walls down.

Verse 16: **"Then a wise woman called from the city, 'Listen! Listen! Tell Joab, 'Come here, that I may speak to you.'"** It is fascinating that in this patriarchal society and in a fortified city of some significance there is a woman who has some kind of leadership role. How she came to this position of leadership and influence we are not told. The one asset she possesses which we know about is wisdom. There is an ongoing archaeological dig at this ancient site. Interestingly enough, two of the three leaders of the expedition are women. (PROJECTOR OFF)

We read in vv. 17 & 18, **"And he came near her, and the woman said, 'Are you Joab?' He answered, 'I am.' Then she said to him, 'Listen to the words of your servant.' And he answered, 'I am listening.' Then she said, 'They used to say in former times, 'Let them but ask counsel at Abel,' and so they settled a matter.'"** Somehow this town had a reputation for solving problems and resolving disputes.

In v. 19 the wise woman continues, **“I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel. Why will you swallow up the heritage of the Lord?”** This wise woman seems not to even know why Joab is laying siege to the city. Apparently Sheba has kept a low profile in Abel Beth-maacah. He must not have been able to acquire much of an army of supporters.

The Old Testament law in Deuteronomy #20 v. 10 (PROJECTOR ON--- DEUTERONOMY 20:10) instructed the leaders of Israel: **“When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it.”** It appears that General Joab has been derelict in doing this.

That Abel Beth-maacah is called “a mother in Israel” probably means that it has smaller towns and villages around it. The woman charges Joab with engaging in an unnecessary destruction. He is destroying God’s country and God’s people. He is in danger of harming the reputation of King David and creating further division in the country. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verses 20 & 21: **“Joab answered, ‘Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy! That is not true. But a man of the hill country of Ephraim, called Sheba the son of Bichri, has lifted up his hand against King David. Give up him alone, and I will withdraw from the city.’ And the woman said to Joab, ‘Behold, his head shall be thrown to you over the wall.’”** This appears to be the first time that the people of the town understand why Joab is attacking it. Again it is fascinating that this woman has the authority, or at least the influence, to provide the solution which Joab is seeking.

Verse 22: **“Then the woman went to all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw it out to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and they dispersed from the city, every man to his home. And Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king.”** Thus is the rebellion ended, and thus Joab is kept from committing an unnecessary destruction. Sheba is proven to be less of a threat than it originally appeared that he might be.

If there is a lesson which we are to derive from this section, it is that it is necessary to deal firmly with rebels. In too many American cities in recent months rioters have been arrested and then let out of jail the next day. It is understandable that in Oregon county sheriffs have declined to come and help law enforcement officials in Portland when the district attorney has declined to prosecute rioters and vandals.

In our families we need to deal firmly with kids who at an early age fight against legitimate authority. That was part of the problem with David and Absalom. David seemed to ignore Absalom's growing rebellion. That led to big problems down the road. Some of us have had kids who just have a more stubborn and difficult temperament than others do. We parents cannot give in to these stubborn streaks. We lovingly, but firmly, need to deal with rebelliousness.

At times we encounter rebelliousness in the church. The Apostle Paul addressed this challenge several times. (PROJECTOR ON--- ROMANS 16:17) In Romans #16 v. 17 he told fellow Christians, **"I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them."** In Titus #3 v. 10 (TITUS 3:10) he wrote, **"As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him..."** Paul has additional warnings about dealing with Christians who stray morally and who promote wrong doctrine. These can be different forms of rebellion

IV.

The fourth character in our passage who proves to be difficult is Joab. I have labeled his involvement in vv. 6-26 as JOAB AND INCONSISTENT TEAM MEMBERS. (IV. JOAB AND INCONSISTENT TEAM MEMBERS) We have already seen in this passage that David has replaced his chief general Joab with Amasa, the leader of the rebellion under Absalom.

Joab has had a mixed record. He was loyal to David in his flight from King Saul. David offered the position as chief of the army to anyone who could figure out a way to conquer Jerusalem. Joab was the one who engineered that. He proved to be a successful military leader. He also served as David's hatchet man when he wanted Uriah killed. But also Joab had been directly disobedient to David on a couple of key occasions. General Abner, the former military leader under King Saul, tried to deliver the northern kingdom of Israel to David. But Joab interfered and killed Abner, because Abner had earlier killed his brother. Then Abner killed Absalom, which was perhaps strategically necessary, but was done in direct defiance of David's order to deal gently with his son. Now Joab becomes involved with Amasa.

Amasa's delay in getting troops together to pursue Sheba produces the situation described in vv. 6 & 7: **"And David said to Abishai, 'Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom. Take your lord's servants and pursue him, lest he get himself to fortified cities and escape from us.' And there went out after him Joab's men and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men. They went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri."** Joab's brother Abishai is now put in charge, but notice that at least part of this military force is referred to as "Joab's men."

According to v. 8, **“When they were at the great stone that is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was wearing a soldier's garment, and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath fastened on his thigh, and as he went forward it fell out.”** (GIBEON MAP) Gibeon was six miles northwest of Jerusalem. It is here where Joab’s sword, or dagger, falls out as he goes to meet Amasa. Perhaps the drop was intentional.

Verse 9: **“And Joab said to Amasa, ‘Is it well with you, my brother?’ And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him.”** The right hand was normally the hand that would be used to wield a weapon. Amasa, his cousin, is not expecting anything but a normal greeting.

Verse 10: **“But Amasa did not observe the sword that was in Joab's hand. So Joab struck him with it in the stomach and spilled his entrails to the ground without striking a second blow, and he died. Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri.”** Joab murders another guy, this time the man whom David had appointed to replace him. Joab takes back the lead.

Verses 11 & 12: **“And one of Joab's young men took his stand by Amasa and said, ‘Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab.’ And Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the highway. And anyone who came by, seeing him, stopped. And when the man saw that all the people stopped, he carried Amasa out of the highway into the field and threw a garment over him.”** Perhaps Joab let the body lay there for a while to convey a message about the danger of opposing him. No one, including Abishai, appears to object to Joab’s return to leadership. Verse 13: **“When he was taken out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.”** (PROJECTOR OFF)

We already looked at vv. 14-22 in our consideration of Sheba. We saw that Joab’s brutality was restrained by the wise woman of Abel Beth-maacah. She provided the head of the rebel whom Joab and company were seeking.

Look again at v. 22: **“Then the woman went to all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw it out to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and they dispersed from the city, every man to his home. And Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king.”** What kind of reception do you suppose Joab received from King David? The king discovers that the man whom he assigned to replace Joab has become another victim of his brutal nephew. Yet Joab has also accomplished the mission that the king wanted done.

Joab is a difficult person. He is not a team player. He seems to accept the kingship of David, but he is uncontrollable. David appears to be unable to replace him. There has been enough division in the nation and in David's family, and Joab clearly has the support of the army. So David seems stuck with Joab. Sometimes there are likewise difficult people in our lives with whom we are stuck. Our only recourse is to entrust the situation to God.

Verses 23-26 provide a summary of the leadership situation at this point toward the end of David's forty year reign: **"Now Joab was in command of all the army of Israel; and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was in command of the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and Adoram was in charge of the forced labor; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was the recorder; and Sheva was secretary; and Zadok and Abiathar were priests; and Ira the Jairite was also David's priest."**

So Joab is still in charge of the army. This is the first time that it is mentioned that there is a forced labor unit. Zadok and Abiathar continue to serve as the chief priests. The suspicion of most commentators is that Ira was not actually a priest in the religious sense but rather a top advisor to David.

Sometimes the Lord puts difficult people in our lives to drive us to Him. David was an extremely capable and gifted individual. He had the blessing of God upon his life. He had unique promises that were given to him. Yet there were people whom God put in his path that forced David to turn to Him for divine resources.

Such may be the reason that God has put difficult people in our lives. Perhaps we have never really connected with Him. The Bible says that God is seeking out people to come to know Him. The way that we can enter into a personal relationship with the God who is there is by recognizing that He sent His Son to become a human being. He came to deal with our sin problem. The Bible says that our waywardness separates us from the holy God who is there. Jesus Christ, who was both God and man, died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. His resurrection from the dead demonstrated that God the Father was satisfied with this ultimate sacrifice. If we will trust in this Jesus, we will have forgiveness of our sins and will receive the gift of eternal life.

The kingdom of God in which David had a leading role is fragile. David, the appointed king, had major failings which seemed to threaten God's program. There were other difficult people, including rebels, who seemed to threaten God's kingdom promises. Yet the kingdom prevailed.

Israel had, and has, a central role in this kingdom program. Israel likewise has appeared fragile. We see in the rest of the Old Testament that the nation became wayward and was eventually dispersed among the nations. There was something of a return. In the time of Jesus there was at least a province in the Roman Empire where the Jews held sway, and there was a temple in Jerusalem. But then after the Jews, for the most part, rejected Jesus as their Messiah, the Romans wiped out Judea and the Jews and Jerusalem. For two thousand years Israel ceased to exist as a nation. God's promises concerning Israel and its possession of a land and a kingdom seemed in doubt. But once again Israel is in existence.

The church of Jesus Christ also at times seems fragile. Its leaders mess up. Christians are severely persecuted in many parts of the world. Local churches fall short of the high standards which they are called to observe. Some local congregations go out of existence. Sometimes they seem to have too many difficult people. Yet the church remains. So, too, does the promise of Jesus Christ who declared that He would build His church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Thus it is that we must keep our focus on Jesus, the head of the church, and His promises. We can't let difficult people keep us from our calling to follow Him.