

Message #32

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Life of David

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DAVID AND DEALING WITH DEPRESSION

2 SAMUEL 18-19:8

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

The National Institutes of Mental Health reports that in an average year 18% of American adults suffer from an anxiety disorder of some type. (US News Online, 3/24/2020) The coronavirus pandemic has made that situation worse. The *Washington Post* (5/4/2020) cites a Kaiser Family Foundation poll that says that almost half of Americans report that the coronavirus crisis is harming their mental health. A federal emergency hotline for people in emotional distress registered a more than 1,000 percent increase in calls in April in comparison with the same month last year.

A *USA Today* article (5/8/2020) reports, “...**a new study estimates related deaths from alcohol, drug overdose and suicide could reach 150,000 [this year].**” Besides concerns about the virus itself and the dangers of joblessness, an additional strain on our mental health comes from public health encouragements to stay at home and to avoid contact with other people. Already the Census Bureau tells us that there are 33 million people in the US who live alone.

If you find yourself a bit down, a bit stressed, a bit depressed, perhaps you can make a connection with King David. Perhaps you will find encouragement from the reality that your situation is not quite as bad as his. Besides the challenges that come from being a king, we have seen from our recent study that David was dealing with division in his family, much of it the result of his own doing. His oldest son Amnon had raped his half-sister Tamar. David didn't do much of anything about that. So Tamar's brother Absalom decided to kill Amnon. That made him the crown prince and next in line to the throne. But Absalom fled the country.

We have seen that General Joab was involved in bringing Absalom back to Jerusalem. Eventually there was some measure of reconciliation between father and son, but there was no complete forgiveness from David and there was no acknowledgement of wrongdoing from Absalom. Absalom was resentful---and ambitious. He organized a coup, which forced King David to flee from Jerusalem. David set up camp on the east side of the Jordan River in a town called Mahanaim where he found support. He also was

able to set up something of an espionage network. One of his advisors, a guy named Hushai, convinced Absalom that he needed to take some time and get a big army together before taking on David and his supporters.

So that battle is brewing. We are going to see today how that conflict turns out and try to find lessons in our passage that may be helpful for us in dealing with stress, anxiety, and depression.

I.

In vv. 1-5 of #18 in 2 Samuel we are going to look at **DAVID, PERSONAL TRAGEDY, AND THE LOSS OF PERSPECTIVE**. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. DAVID, PERSONAL...) [If you would like to follow along in the black Bibles under many of the chairs, you can find the passage on p. 269.] According to vv. 1 & 2, **“Then David mustered the men who were with him and set over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. And David sent out the army, one third under the command of Joab, one third under the command of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third under the command of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the men, ‘I myself will also go out with you.’”**

Their base of operations was a walled city called Mahanaim. (DAVID FLIGHT MAHANAIM) It was several miles east of the Jordan River in territory assigned to the tribe of Gad. King David found supporters there. David was also a man with proven military skills. So he picked this place because he saw it as a defensible base which would give his forces the maximum advantage in taking on the enemy.

David divides up his army among three leaders. Joab was the chief general and David’s nephew. Abishai was Joab’s brother. Ittai the Gittite was a Philistine by background. He was given responsibility over the non-Israelites, which probably included the Cherithites and Pelethites, who are frequently mentioned as being a significant part of David’s military forces.

David wants to take the lead in this attack. He is an experienced general, but he is probably in his late sixties by now. He doesn’t have the option of being near the front in a tank or armored vehicle. He would be right in the line of fire, and his supporters recognize the central importance of keeping him safe.

Thus we read in vv. 3 & 4, **“But the men said, ‘You shall not go out. For if we flee, they will not care about us. If half of us die, they will not care about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us. Therefore**

it is better that you send us help from the city.’ The king said to them, ‘Whatever seems best to you I will do.’ So the king stood at the side of the gate, while all the army marched out by hundreds and by thousands.”

So David reviews the troops as they go off to war. He stays home because his men regard him as being more valuable than they are. How does this fit with our American tradition of all men being created equal? Is that true? Well, yes and no. The Bible tells us that we men and women are all created in God’s image and therefore have infinite value and worth. Yet we also recognize that in God’s plan and in man’s plan some have a more central role than others. Thus people are willing to sacrifice for David, recognizing that God has appointed him to be king. Thus we have Secret Service agents who are willing to die for the President, whoever that person is. Thus also in American legal tradition and in Biblical tradition, we are all accountable to law. American justice is never perfect. God’s justice, in the end, is always right and true.

What was the source of David’s military forces? David appeared to have a standing army which functioned as a palace guard. Originally he had 600 trained and experienced fighters who joined him when he was on the run from King Saul. This group seemed to be the basis for a permanent, standing army. We are told about their officers in 1 Chronicles #11.

There were three Israelite tribes who lived on the east side of the Jordan River. They seemed to be more supportive of David than Absalom. Also we have seen that the nation of Ammon in this region had been defeated by Israel. Their vassal king seems to have sided with David. So probably David got troops from all of these people.

The forces on the side of Absalom were probably more numerous. But they were less experienced and probably not as well trained. David had the battle tested and trained fighters and professional officers mostly on his side.

Verse 5: **“And the king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, ‘Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.’ And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders about Absalom.”** On one level this is a strange and unusual order. Absalom is the leader of this rebellion. He wants to kill David. Absalom is the one who has orchestrated this coup. He is the one who has precipitated this division in the country. He is the one who has forced much of David’s family to flee Jerusalem. He is the one forcing this potentially bloody battle to take place.

Why does David give this order? Absalom is David's son. He is the crown prince. He is the one with whom David has struggled to have some kind of reconciliation. David also recognizes that he has failed to parent Absalom well. He knows that Absalom's actions and his rebellion are largely the consequences of David's sin against Bathsheba and Uriah. David still hopes that there might be some kind of reconciliation with Absalom.

David, however, has lost perspective. There are thousands of other lives which are now at stake. There are thousands of people who are going to war and who are seeking to stop this rebellion and to preserve David's kingship and to save this nation. Absalom is a legitimate target. He needs to be taken down if David's dynasty, as it has been described by the Lord, is going to survive.

In this there is a lesson for us. We have failures in life that may involve a marriage or a child or an employee or a student or a soldier under our command. We may have some responsibility for this failure. But in our effort to achieve reconciliation or to make things right, we can sometimes lose perspective. We can cause harm to other family members or students or employees or soldiers or friends because of our preoccupation with this one relationship. As in the situation with David and Absalom, we need to exercise care that we do not harm other people because of our preoccupation with one relationship.

II.

In vv. 6-18 of #18 we come to ABSALOM, REBELLION, AND GOD'S CERTAIN JUDGMENT. (II. ABSALOM, REBELLION, AND...) We read in v. 6, **"So the army went out into the field against Israel, and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim."** The majority of the Israelites appeared to be backing Absalom in this rebellion. He probably had a larger army than did David. But they were probably less trained and experienced, and David had chosen the field of battle.

That place of conflict is called "the Forest of Ephraim." (DAVID 19 FLIGHT FOREST) We don't know exactly where that was, but it must have been somewhere in the vicinity of Mahanaim. The tribe of Ephraim had been assigned to territory on the west side of the Jordan River. So the best guess is that some Ephraimites over time had moved across the Jordan River and settled in this area. We know from other parts of the Old Testament that there was some movement of the Israelites from their originally assigned tribal areas.

Verses 7 & 8 give us a brief summary of the outcome of the battle: **“And the men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the loss there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. The battle spread over the face of all the country, and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword.”** As a point of comparison, the Battle of Gettysburg was the bloodiest battle of the Civil War. A total of 7000 were killed, 30,000 were injured, and 11,000 were missing. Perhaps most of those missing were also killed.

What does it mean that “the forest devoured more people that day than the sword”? I suspect that this was part of David’s battle plan. His forces had time to scope out this forest. They were able to lay traps and plan ambushes. For an attacking force unfamiliar with this thick terrain, it was harder to keep forces organized. Limited visibility made it harder to understand how troops were deployed and where enemy forces were concentrated. It was easier to get confused and to run into your own forces. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verse 9: **“And Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was suspended between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on.”** Did this incident just happen as the result of chance or bad luck? I don’t think so. The providential hand of God was at work.

How was it that Absalom happened to get in this position alone without any fellow troops to help him? I suspect that he and others were fleeing from the forces of David. When he got caught in this predicament, others with him were concerned more about fleeing for their own lives than about protecting Absalom. Commitment to this coup leader among his forces was not as great as that toward David from his forces.

In Chapter 14 reference was made to Absalom’s pride in his long hair. I suspect that it was his long hair that had something to do with his predicament here. When Absalom’s head and hair got caught in low hanging branches, his royal mule kept going. The first century Jewish historian Josephus claims that it was his hair which got caught in the branches. It was the sovereign work of God that this source of pride for the rebellious Absalom had a part in his downfall. This one who had manipulated the masses for his selfish and evil purposes is left alone, hanging from a tree.

According to vv. 10 & 11, **“And a certain man saw it and told Joab, ‘Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak.’ Joab said to the man who told him, ‘What, you saw him! Why then did you not strike him**

there to the ground? I would have been glad to give you ten pieces of silver and a belt.” Ten pieces of silver was equivalent to about four ounces. In Judges #7 v. 10 a Levite is promised ten pieces of silver as an annual salary for working for a wealthy landowner as his priest.

Joab now comes to have an ironic role in this. Years earlier Joab had helped to bring Absalom from exile back to Jerusalem. He then helped to bring Absalom face-to-face with his father. But Joab has maintained his loyalty to David. He has recognized the evil actions of Absalom and his threat to the nation and to David. He heard David’s charge to the troops, but he has a more realistic view of the situation. He sees the need to get rid of Absalom as the primary threat to the nation.

Thus we read in vv. 12 & 13, **“But the man [the soldier who discovered Absalom hanging in the tree] said to Joab, ‘Even if I felt in my hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not reach out my hand against the king’s son, for in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, “For my sake protect the young man Absalom.” On the other hand, if I had dealt treacherously against his life (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you yourself would have stood aloof.”** No private or corporal or even officer is going to risk a court martial for violating a direct order from the commander-in-chief. This unnamed soldier does not trust that General Joab would even be willing to back him up before the king if he had done something to harm Absalom.

So Joab takes direct action himself. Notice vv. 14 & 15: **“Joab said, ‘I will not waste time like this with you.’ And he took three javelins in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom while he was still alive in the oak. And ten young men, Joab’s armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him and killed him.”**

Joab was probably the only one in David’s army who could get away with direct disobedience to a clear command from the king. He was David’s nephew, and Joab had a long history with David. He did David’s dirty work in having Uriah killed. He had led the army in many successful battles. He was also close enough to the king to understand the political situation. He had been directly involved with Absalom. So he knew the nature of the challenge from him. Joab had witnessed David’s indulgence of Absalom and saw how this had led to this situation. For the sake of the country and for God’s kingdom, Joab recognized that Absalom had to go.

Amnon’s rape of Absalom’s sister was deserving of death, according to the Old Testament law. But it was not Absalom’s place to carry out that penalty on his own. So we could regard his killing of Amnon as murder. The penalty for murder, according to the law, was death. Then also the penalty for rebellion

and incorrigibility toward one's parent was also death. (DEUTERONOMY 21:23) In Deuteronomy #21 vv. 18 & 21 we are told, **"If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father... then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones."** Certainly this was rebellion against Absalom's parents. Death was Absalom's fate. The circumstances of his demise were nothing which any human could have planned out. Clearly the judgment of God was involved in Absalom's death.

(PROJECTOR OFF) Verse 16: **"Then Joab blew the trumpet, and the troops came back from pursuing Israel, for Joab restrained them."** Joab recognized that the destruction of Absalom was the key. He was the center of this rebellion. His army was in retreat.

Verse 17: **"And they took Absalom and threw him into a great pit in the forest and raised over him a very great heap of stones. And all Israel fled every one to his own home."** Such was Absalom's ignominious end. There was no one else to keep the rebellion going.

Verse 18: **"Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself the pillar that is in the King's Valley, for he said, 'I have no son to keep my name in remembrance.' He called the pillar after his own name, and it is called Absalom's monument to this day."** Earlier reference was made to Absalom having three sons. Probably they died before reaching adulthood. Thus Absalom was left with no male heirs. He left only a monument to himself. Such was his motivation in life. Life was to be about him. Pride is the root of so much evil in life. It produces enmity with God and too often, as with Absalom, it leads to rebellion against legitimate authority. It also produces judgment from God. God's judgment upon rebellion against Him is certain, whether in this life or the next.

III.

In v. 19 of #18 through v. 8 of #19 we are going to deal with JOAB, DEPRESSION, AND NECESSARY ACCOUNTABILITY. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. JOAB, DEPRESSION, AND...) There are three primary characters in this passage--- David, Absalom, and Joab. David is largely passive. We have already witnessed the active leadership role of Joab. Now we will see how Joab, on the human level, saves David's kingdom.

We are told in vv. 19 & 20, **"Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, 'Let me run and carry news to the king that the Lord has delivered him from the hand of his enemies.' And Joab said to him, 'You are not to carry news today. You may carry news another day, but today you shall carry no news, because the king's son is dead.'"** Ahimaaz, the son of one of the high priests, had been part of David's intelligence

network. We have seen how he passed along news of Absalom's meeting with the two advisors Ahithophel and Hushai to King David.

Why does Absalom not allow Ahimaaz to bring news of the military victory back to David in Mahanaim? My suspicion is that Joab remembers how David has killed messengers on several occasions who brought back bad news of an Israelite defeat and/or the death of loved ones to him. Joab does not want to risk that with this son of a priest whom he knows.

Verse 21: **"Then Joab said to the Cushite, 'Go, tell the king what you have seen.' The Cushite bowed before Joab, and ran."** The Cushite is a foreigner. He is probably from Ethiopia. Joab is more willing to risk him than to risk Ahimaaz.

Verses 22 & 23: **"Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said again to Joab, 'Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite.' And Joab said, 'Why will you run, my son, seeing that you will have no reward for the news?' 'Come what may,' he said, 'I will run.' So he said to him, 'Run.' Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and outran the Cushite."** Because of Ahimaaz's persistence Joab lets him go. I suspect that Ahimaaz took a longer route than did the Cushite. But because the terrain was flatter and less obstructed, he was able to pass up the Cushite.

Verse 24: **"Now David was sitting between the two gates, and the watchman went up to the roof of the gate by the wall, and when he lifted up his eyes and looked, he saw a man running alone."** We know from the excavation of ancient cities in Israel that there was often an inner and an outer gate of a city. (DAN 2) *[This is a reconstruction of the outer gate of the ancient city of Dan in northern Israel.]* David was probably hanging out between the two gates. (DAN 202) *[Archaeologists found bases at this location between the upper and the lower gate of Dan which they theorize may have provided a canopy for the governor or a visiting king to sit when he was holding court at Dan.]* On the top of the wall or the gate a watchman was looking for a runner bringing news of the battle.

According to v. 25 (PROJECTOR OFF), **"The watchman called out and told the king. And the king said, 'If he is alone, there is news in his mouth.' And he drew nearer and nearer."** Multiple runners might indicate that there has been a defeat and that fighters are fleeing from the scene of battle.

Verses 27 & 28: **"The watchman said, 'I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok.' And the king said, 'He is a good man and comes with good news.' Then Ahimaaz cried**

out to the king, 'All is well.' [The word in Hebrew is shalom.] **And he bowed before the king with his face to the earth and said, 'Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king.'"**

The story continues in vv. 29 & 30: **"And the king said, 'Is it well with the young man Absalom?' Ahimaaz answered, 'When Joab sent the king's servant, your servant, I saw a great commotion, but I do not know what it was.' And the king said, 'Turn aside and stand here.' So he turned aside and stood still."** Verse 20 implies that Ahimaaz knows that Absalom was killed. Perhaps Ahimaaz had not been about told the circumstances of his death. Perhaps he holds back the full story when he sees that the king's main concern seems to be the welfare of Absalom. David continues to have a loss of perspective. Perhaps Joab had warned Ahimaaz about bringing bad news to David about the fate of his son. But surely news of the victory over the forces of rebellion will overshadow news of the death of his son. But will it?

Verses 31 & 32: **"And behold, the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, 'Good news for my lord the king! For the Lord has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you.' The king said to the Cushite, 'Is it well with the young man Absalom?' And the Cushite answered, 'May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man.'"** This Cushite, this foreigner, is more removed from the inner circle of the royal family. He is less aware of how emotionally connected David is to Absalom. He is clueless about how this news will be received by David.

Verse 33: **"And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!'"** David is filled with grief and despair and depression at the loss of his wayward son. He was the crown prince who was expected to become king at the right time.

But more than this, David was remembering God's promise of negative consequences and discipline because of his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. He was remembering that God said that there would be negative consequences in his family which would involve death. David was realizing that David had failed in his parenting of Absalom. He was remembering that he had failed to do anything when Amnon raped Absalom's sister. He was remembering that he had provided only incomplete forgiveness of his son. This father who had a heart for God in spite of his failings was concerned about the spiritual state of his son who had not only rebelled against him, but had rebelled against God. This grief found expression in his wish to have died in Absalom's place. This wish would find a certain fulfillment in the distant future when a son of David would die on the cross in his place and ours.

Moving into #19 we find out how David's grief plays out. According to the first four verses, **"It was told Joab, 'Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.' So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people, for the people heard that day, 'The king is grieving for his son.' And the people stole into the city that day as people steal in who are ashamed when they flee in battle. The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, 'O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!'"** David is filled with grief. He is severely depressed. He has become largely incapacitated, because he is self-absorbed.

As the leader of his nation, David has other responsibilities. No doubt some of his troops have died in battle this day because of their effort to defend the king. There are other wives and mothers and children who are also going to experience grief. The fate of the country is still lying in the balance. David's forces were probably outnumbered. So this victory has been a great military accomplishment. But the benefit of that victory could go to waste. For the king is consumed with his own grief.

Look at vv. 5-7: **"Then Joab came into the house to the king and said, 'You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters and the lives of your wives and your concubines, because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you, for today I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the Lord, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night, and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now.'" Not a lot of warm fuzzies here, are there?**

Joab has a mixed record in regard to David. He is the king's nephew and his chief general. He defied David in killing General Abner when this man had come to David to bring the kingdom together. Joab served as David's hatchet man in having Uriah killed. Here he is demonstrating a certain loyalty to David because he has a clear view of the present circumstances. If David does not act properly now, he may lose the kingdom.

Joab makes three points in his not-so-gentle rebuke of David. First, his loyal troops are being dishonored by the king's preoccupation with his own grief. Second, David's behavior is not showing love to his supporters, but rather to the enemy of his people. Third, David has wrong priorities to have more concern for the welfare of his chief enemy than for his own people. Joab stresses that David must change his behavior now.

Sometimes in the midst of our grief and our depression we need a reality check. We need a true friend to make us aware of how our preoccupation with our grief and depression is having a negative impact upon others, especially if we are in some kind of leadership position.

Our passage concludes in the first part of v. 8: **“Then the king arose and took his seat in the gate. And the people were all told, ‘Behold, the king is sitting in the gate.’ And all the people came before the king.”** Joab’s brutal rebuke prompts David to refocus his concern toward the welfare of his people. There is hope that the kingdom will be preserved.

Certainly there is a place for grief among God’s people. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus proclaimed, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

The reality of life is that depression happens. Often it is related to hard events--- as with David it may be the death of a loved one. It may be associated with stressful events, as with a flu pandemic that restricts our normal social interactions. Some of us are more prone by nature and temperament toward depression. We live in a day when we can get medical help for that. The spiritual temptation and challenge is to think that we are out of favor with the Lord and disobedient when we are depressed. We ought to always be cheerful if we are a spiritual Christian.

David was going through a difficult time in our story. He was wrong to be totally self-absorbed. Joab helped him to get refocused. Certainly David was still experiencing depression. That did not instantly go away. Yet in the midst of his depression David was used of the Lord. If you read any of the Psalms of David you cannot help but notice that depression was a regular companion for David. The scholars categorize the Psalms into several types. The most common category is the Psalm of lament. These are Psalms where David is dealing with some level of depression or sadness or stress. Down through the centuries the people of God have found much comfort in times of depression and stress from reading these Psalms which David wrote.

Last week we looked at Psalm 23. Consider the Psalm which precedes it. (PROJECTOR ON--- PSALM 22:1-2) The first two verses of this Psalm of David read, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.”** Do you suppose that David is dealing with a little bit of depression? Maybe he even wrote these words in regard to some aspect of the situation described in our passage. We don’t know.

Centuries later Jesus would quote these words as He was dying on the cross. Do you suppose that David's words of depression served some eternal purpose? David continues in Psalm 22 to describe in prophetic fashion the future crucifixion of Jesus. But there is still a hint of hope in the ending of Psalm 22. Viewing this Psalm centuries after David and centuries after Jesus' crucifixion we can see glimpses of the resurrection.

In Psalm 22 vv. 21 & 22 (PSALM 22:21-22) we read, **"You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen! I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you..."**

Crucifixion is not the end. Death is not the end. Depression is not the end. The people of God always have reason for hope. For Jesus has conquered death. If we have trusted in this Jesus as our Savior, we will join him one day in resurrection bodies. We are going to heaven some day. Take courage. Be hopeful. He is risen!