

Life Lessons for Leaders



From II Samuel

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Content

Lesson One	Earning Points
Lesson Two	Change at the Top
Lesson Three.	The Death Cart
Lesson Four	Taking the Credit
Lesson Five	Plotting for 'Too Much'
Lesson Six	Where Integrity Stops
Lesson Seven	Stealing Hearts
Lesson Eight	Throwing Stones
Lesson Nine	When Opportunity Knocks
Lesson Ten	Being Number Two

Lesson One

EARNING POINTS

II Samuel 1:1-10

Let's face it—earning points is what any competitive sport is usually about. The more we earn, the better the chance of winning the competition. But the expression “earning points” has also become a derogatory way of pointing out a very venomous method used by some junior leaders in their attempt to climb to higher positions and responsibilities. Trying to “earn points” with the boss has become common language in the workplace. It speaks of a very negative means of trying to find favor with superiors. It means using the wrong means to justify the end. And while it may be a recently contrived expression of language, in reality, it's nothing new at all.

The opening of the Book of II Samuel provides us with a powerful illustration of a major mistake made by a man wanting to earn such points with David, the soon to be crowned king of Israel. This unnamed Amalekite man was sure that he could use the demise of King Saul to bolster his place with the new leadership of David and his men. But in his nefarious efforts to cement a position in David's court or find substantial reward, he paid the ultimate price and was lost forever. Today's leaders in God's great Church should take heed here in this sad story.

Looking for Gain

Saul's sons, Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, had just perished in a battle against the Philistines. Israel had suffered terribly in this conflict in Gilboa, and now King Saul was seriously wounded to the point of asking his armor bearer to slay him before he fell into the hands of the enemy. Afraid, however, of the consequences of such an action, the armor bearer refused to end Saul's life. So, according to I Samuel 31:4, Saul “...took a sword, and fell upon it.” This passage tells us that this ended Saul's suffering as both he and his armor bearer quickly died from their self-inflicted wounds. But another and much different version of the story begins chapter one of II Samuel.

Several days later an Amalekite arrived at David's camp and made a fabulous claim regarding his supposed and benevolent role in the king's death. If we are to believe the account at the end of I Samuel, we have every reason to doubt this man's account. Instead, we are forced to conclude that his real motive in reporting to David was simply to ingratiate himself with the new leader in hopes of receiving something substantial. It seems clear that the crown and bracelet that he claimed were Saul's were indeed taken from the body, but this appears to have been shortly after Saul's

death at his own hand. In other words, the Amalekite had stumbled upon a tragic scene and quickly devised a way by which he could profit from it. Unfortunately, this same mind-set still tempts leaders today. With no witnesses to dispute his version of the story, and by simply injecting himself into an important role in the account, this Amalekite was convinced that he could earn some serious points with David. After all, he had the crown and the bracelet as proof that he was there at the death scene, and therefore he could create any fantastic tale regarding his part in the story of Saul's death. But the temptation in this example is a sword that cuts two ways.

Many a "new" leader has been tempted with self exaltation upon hearing how much better he is than the former leader. It's just so soothing to hear how we handled a situation better than our predecessor. It feeds the enormous ego that so many senior leaders seem to carry with them. It always feels good to hear how others reinforce our self-importance and grand stature; but how foolish all of this really is. More often than not, the junior leader is merely attempting to do what the Amalekite was trying—earning points with the new boss.

The flattery of junior leaders can be very intoxicating to senior leaders. But David would have none of it. Instead, David asked pertinent and penetrating questions in order to discern what kind of response was called for. And the more the deceitful Amalekite answered these questions, the more he became a victim to his own fabrications.

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"It Happened By Chance"

This was the young man's explanation of his being present at the death scene of Saul. II Samuel 1:6 tells us he "happened by chance" to be upon Mount Gilboa at the time. And just by chance he came upon Saul leaning on his own spear and trying to end his life before being captured by the Philistines. According to his account, Saul asked the Amalekite to slay him, saying that "...my life is yet whole in me." Slowly, the man's account of the story was unveiled to David, and with each part he fell deeper into condemnation. If Saul was seriously injured yet alive, why not try and help the king to escape and find help? But verse 10 explains that this Amalekite was "...sure that he (Saul) could not live after that he was fallen." In other words, according to his own account, the young man made the ultimate decision to end Saul's life based upon on his own perception of the situation.

Surely, if any of the young man's stories were true, would it not have been better to try and carry Saul away from the scene and find safe refuge for him? Even if Saul had died on the way, the Amalekite would have done his best to aid the stricken king. But to simply say that he decided there was no hope for the king's survival and that

he therefore ended his life was not what David would have expected from anyone in such a circumstance. David acted swiftly and decisively, calling for the Amalekite to be executed for slaying “the Lord’s anointed.”

For real leaders, things do not just happen by chance. God carefully offers us opportunities in which we may position ourselves for greater and greater usefulness in the work of the kingdom. By seizing such opportunities and discharging our *present* responsibilities, we place ourselves in God’s hands for even greater effectiveness *in the future*.

Discharging present responsibilities means greater effectiveness in the future.

The Amalekite failed to see this principle. Instead, he grasped an opportune time (in his mind at least) in which he might advance his own cause and find favor from senior leaders. But this mentality is doomed to failure. What he had imagined would bring him great gain would bring about his execution.

Killing the Anointing by Presumption

He was “sure” that Saul was destined to die. He presumed that there was no hope. And so he simply killed the man that had been anointed by God to be the king over Israel. Leaders should never presume that the anointing is dead or dying. They should act always with the sense that “...with God, all things are possible.” There is always hope; there is always more; there is always good that will spring out of bad. These are biblical principles that real leaders live by. There is always a chance. A leader knows that he must always remain available to God and His divine purpose. A leader never concludes that killing the anointing is a viable option. Supporting senior leaders at all times in all circumstances should be a junior leader’s first priority. Then, as God sees fit to make changes in leadership above, we can shift our loyalties and support to them.

The foundation of the Amalekite’s version of the story was all assumption. According to him, he presumed that Saul was doomed anyway. And instead of trying to really help the present leader Saul, he devised a way to seek gain from the future leader, David. He was taking advantage of one leader’s misfortune to earn points with his successor. But David saw through it.

What about II Samuel 2:4?

In the second chapter we can see the real truth of the matter and the proof that David discerned correctly regarding this young man’s story. Verse 4 tells us that men from Jabesh-Gilead were the ones responsible for burying the body of Saul. In other words, the Amalekite had simply stripped Saul’s body of his crown and his royal bracelet and then left him in the field of battle. Surely any man that was as concerned as he claimed to be would have done something to either help Saul survive the

grievous wounds if he was still alive, or he would have had the respect and decency to bury the king's body.

In fact, David goes on in chapter 2 to bless these men that buried Saul and encourages them to be strong and sure regarding David's new reign as king. This could have been the promise given to a young Amalekite man, but he failed in the present and destroyed his own future.

Mocking God

The Apostle Paul could surely have had the young man in mind when he wrote in Galatians 6:7-8, *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."* This Amalekite had seen nothing spiritual in the scene on the battlefield. Instead, he spied a carnally inspired strategy and quickly seized upon an opportunity to advance himself in the eyes of others. By doing this, he truly had mocked God. W.E. Vine's Expository of New Testament Words tells us that the word "mocked" in Galatians 6:7 comes from the word for "nose," therefore meaning that men sometimes proudly turn up their noses to God, stubbornly ignoring His counsel and thereby miss specially given opportunities for personal growth.

Proverbs 1:29-31 says the same thing in another way: *"For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."* This Amalekite had been given an opportunity to do what was right. He could have buried Saul and humbly brought the news of his death to David, offering the crown and the bracelet as simple proof of the tragedy. Instead, he turned the opportunity into a calamity. It had not happened by chance at all. It had been ordered by the Lord. Leaders must learn to recognize such occasions. And, even more importantly, they must learn to respond to these opportunities.

When we fail in this, we are in essence mocking God and what He wants to accomplish in our lives and ministries. When leaders choose to ignore the knowledge and fear of God and refuse His good counsel, they are destined to reap destruction. They will certainly choke on their own devices. A man's will is so very, very strong. And leaders must constantly guard against its inherent dangers and become subject to the will of God as it leads and guides us into all truth.

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Right Is Always Right

Even in the death of a king that had proven to be less than what God expected, the young Amalekite should have fulfilled his obligations to treat Saul and his sons with the respect that accompanied their positions of authority. In the place of what was right, however, he had chosen to use the tragedy for his own advantage. Conjuring up a story to make him look good in front of David was intended to earn valuable points. After all, who would know of his deceit? But God is responsible for “sorting out” leadership, and He is always faithful to do so.

Doing what is right is part of a leader’s personal integrity. Doing what appears right in the eyes of others is a poor substitute practiced by so-called leaders who in actual fact are charlatans at best. The Amalekite could have chosen what was truly right, but succumbed to a temptation that lingers even today.

Even Jesus’ disciples suffered such temptations. In Matthew 20:20 we read of the mother of James and John who came with her sons and worshipped Jesus. But the worship only served as an introduction to the real point of the visit—a very special request to the Master. They sought a special place in the kingdom of the Lord—to sit on the right and the left of the Savior as He entered into His glorious reign of the future. In simple terms, they thought that they had earned points with the “boss.” But Jesus’ answer was a profound revelation of true dedication to the divine cause for which He stood. It would require a baptism similar to His: one that included suffering and total commitment. Would they be willing to pay such a price? They quickly pledged that they would, but they had no real idea of what would be required of them in the long run.

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Jesus went on to say that it was not “His” to give out such positions of eternal destiny. If not His then, whose was it? The answer surely lies in the decisions that leaders make every day. These are decisions that carry us further from God and His will for our lives, or decisions that draw us ever closer to an eternal purpose destined for spiritual leaders in the Church. Why were John and James doing what they were doing? Was it for personal reward? Or was it being done because it was the only right thing to do? Leaders are able to make these tough decisions because they understand the “why” behind them. In John 8:50, Jesus simply said it this way, “*And I seek not mine own glory.*” Leaders would do well to remember that verse for their own God-given ministries.

The Final Scoreboard

On the final scoreboard of our lives as leaders, we will find that we have earned no points at all with God. We do not earn our righteousness—we find His. We do not earn holiness—we are filled by His. We will not save ourselves by earning enough points—we will need a Savior. This is not a competition with others or with God. If anything it is a competition with our own will. The words of our great Lord in John 12:24-26 still move us today:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.”

True spiritual leaders will never have to just “look good” in front of others or “keep up appearances.” They will simply do what is right at the right time, knowing that the work of God is furthered and that His name is glorified. Paul, writing to the Church in Philippi in chapter 2, verse 21, wrote these sad words regarding those that had disqualified themselves from spiritual leadership: *“For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.”* And so this young man of the Amalekites was faced with a decision that fateful day: to try and help this wounded or dead king, the anointed of the God of Israel; or to turn a former leader’s misfortune into great gain for his own carnal satisfaction. His choice was the wrong one. What about ours?

Lesson Two

CHANGE AT THE TOP

II Samuel 3:1

One thing that we can all be sure of is that things will change. As we grow, we change. As we improve, we change. Lack of change indicates a static state where necessary modifications and needful adjustments are simply ignored or neglected. Leaders must be aware of the need for meaningful change and also must learn to “experience the change.”

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Understanding the necessity and timeliness of positive change should never intimidate church leaders, yet it often does. Comprehending the dangers and pitfalls of misinterpreting needful leadership changes is important in surviving as a spiritual leader in today’s church context. All too often, however, some leaders believe and act as if change will never visit their personal comfort zone of “remaining the same.” This is a gross fallacy and only dooms these leaders to an ineffective and compromised ministry potential.

Instead, real leaders should expect change, plan for change, and embrace the changes that are implemented to better the overall work. A vibrant and growing church movement will necessitate lots of changes: in leadership positions, in personnel, and in ministry. Leaders can learn to positively understand this and thereby “experience the change.” This should become part of every leader’s personal journey in spiritual growth and ministerial development.

Two Intense Men

The third chapter of II Samuel gives us a view of two men that were, in their own personal ways, very powerful individuals. The first was a man that was intimidating in presence, certain of his authority and responsibility, and loyal to his king in many ways. Yet this man compromised his own future and endangered the influence of the senior leaders with whom he was associated. Instead of understanding and experiencing the change, instead of becoming personally part of the change, and instead of allowing God to shape him according to the need for the change, he resisted the change and thereby eliminated himself from a destiny of further greatness. His name was Joab. But the chapter also tells the story of another man who, despite his intense loyalty to the house of Saul, recognized the need to change to a new and ordained kingdom ruled by David. And his name was Abner.

Abner had served Saul well, even if in the wrong mission. To him, Saul was the first and only king of Israel and nothing would overthrow that. During the long war between the house of Saul and the house of David mentioned in verse one, Abner had savagely defended Saul's kingdom, yet in the end, Saul had perished with his son Jonathan on the battlefield. Abner was left serving in a weakened and ineffective kingdom ruled by another of Saul's sons, Ishbosheth. And as the opening verse of chapter three states, David's house became stronger while Saul's house grew weaker. It had been ordained by the Lord and it was inevitable. And while Abner at first had neglected to comprehend it, he would soon come to realize that his only true and honorable choice was to join with David and ensure that the severely divided nation became one strong power united in a common God-given vision. The only other option would have been to resist David and become doomed to ignominious defeat. His choice was swift and clear as we read in verses 9-10:

"So do God to Abner, and more also, except, as the Lord hath sworn to David, even so I do to him; to translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba."

A drastic change had become necessary for Israel's success: David must ascend to the throne and rule a mighty and God-fearing nation. Abner would not oppose this. Rather, he would experience the change.

Joab, on the other hand, had served in David's army as Abner's equivalent. He was the captain of the host. He was the general in charge. He carried the authority of his king and was feared by all. He also had served his sovereign faithfully and well. But when the change was about to take place that would unite both Israel and Judah under the single throne of David, Joab lost his chance at becoming even greater. He made a cruel and self-condemning choice that would not only hurt his personal ministry, but also compromise David's greatness and God's will for Israel. And the temptation and test that he faced are not at all uncommon among today's church leaders.

When Another Is Promoted

Abner had left Ishbosheth and had decided to join with David and the new regime. He therefore had offered himself in peace as a man that could help David unite all of the tribes and make the nation into a unified and powerful kingdom. David readily accepted the offer. One might wonder at Abner's true motive in all of this, but we can see clearly in verses 17-18 that he planned on carrying through on his pledge,

"And Abner had communication with the elders of Israel, saying, Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you: now then do it: for the Lord hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies."

Somehow he had discerned the will of God concerning David's ascension to the supreme throne of Israel and *had pledged himself to becoming part of the change*. But Joab would have none of this. Upon hearing of this accord made between David and Abner, Joab openly complains to the king in verses 24-25. He is strongly opposed to David's conciliatory approach to Abner's usefulness in the new plan for the nation. And this bitterness and resentment would lead to a terrifying conclusion.

Verses 26-27 describe the murder of Abner by Joab. Joab had taken matters into his own hands, ignoring the leadership of David and acting independently. While verse 27 tells us that the killing was done in revenge of Abner slaying Joab's brother earlier in chapter two, we might also suspect that Joab had become fearful of the possibility of Abner moving up to an equal or greater position in the new kingdom. In other words, instead of embracing and experiencing the change, Joab acted out of a bitter spirit and tried to overthrow the change.

Today's leaders would do well to recognize that leaders will come and leaders will go as the needs and ministries around us are changed and expanded. A leader's self-worth and true value are not based upon the positions that they currently hold. Rather, it is just the reverse. True leaders are promoted to places of authority and responsibility because of who they already are. We must never seek a position or refuse to vacate a position in some vain effort to establish our personal value in front of others. And the only thing worse than this is when leaders try and eliminate the promotion of other leaders that are needful to the overall growth and development of the church's true mission.

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Pure Poison

Hebrews 12:5-17 describes the process of experiencing change in our personal lives and ministries. It serves as a strong admonition against resisting the hand of God as it gently but firmly corrects us in our spiritual journey. To refuse this divine correction means certain destruction. And the writer describes it as the work of the "root of bitterness." This damning root springs up when we decide that we know better than God does. In the leadership context it often shows itself as our suggestions are refused by senior leaders and the opinions of others are more readily accepted. Again, it tries to rear its ugly head when we see others promoted above us. It makes its demands when we are not singled out for reward, but instead must stand by and watch others pushed ever upward. All of this was just too much for Joab to witness as David made peace with Abner and planned to use him greatly in the new regime. But this killer root should not have been completely unknown to Joab.

Much earlier in the Hebrew history, Esau had experienced the same temptation, and had fallen victim to the same poisonous root of bitterness. In fact, it is Esau that is used by the writer of Hebrews 12 as an example of someone who resisted the promotion of another in his place. Having sold his birthright and familial position of authority for a mere morsel of meat, Esau became terribly bitter when his brother Jacob was promoted above him. And this bitterness never lost its grip on Esau. It became so deeply engrained in him that he was never able afterwards to find a true place of repentance. In other words, the root of bitterness, if not carefully and completely weeded out of our spirit, will dominate us and prevent us from total submission to God and His plans for our growth. We will never experience the change as long as we simply connect the change to personal advancement. Instead, our part in the change should be based upon our personal growth and readiness for further usefulness in God's plan. Surely, the story of Jacob's rise and Esau's fall was well known to every Hebrew child. But when it counted the most, Joab forgot this basic life lesson for leaders.

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Looking, yet Losing/Losing, yet Finding

While Joab was busily intent on establishing his place of prominence in the kingdom, he failed to see how in actual fact he was losing it all. And herein we find one of the greatest principles of living and growing in God. Jesus put it this way in Matthew 10:38-39,

"And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

Perhaps, in the context of learning to "experience the change" personally, we could paraphrase Jesus' statement thus:

"And he that refuses to see how I intervene (bring change) in his life will never find true fulfillment and therefore is not worthy of my Kingdom. The one that seeks for personal gain and preeminence in the Kingdom shall only find death. But the one that resigns all to me and trusts in the change that I initiate is the one that finds real life."

Who knows what greater good might have been accomplished if Joab had simply submitted himself to the judgment of the righteous King David and welcomed Abner's promotion and usefulness in a new effort to make Israel great once again? But Joab had stubbornly chosen to resist at all costs the needed change in leadership that God had ordained.

It is not always easy or even possible to understand changes that are made in senior leadership. Some changes are made very discreetly as to not injure or offend people. Some changes are made quietly yet expediently, taking care of urgent needs that arise. Sometimes leaders must merely trust in those that are charged with making such weighty decisions and making such necessary changes. But it is not a “blind” trust that we are speaking of here. After all, we are led by the Spirit. In fact, the Apostle Paul referred to this operation of the Spirit in Romans 8:14-16:

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”

When changes are called for, leaders should expect to be led by the Spirit.

While Paul was speaking here of the baptism of the Holy Ghost as a witness of our sealed faith in the Saviour, we can also see that the Spirit guides us according to God’s divine will and plan for our lives. Therefore, leaders should expect to be led by the Spirit as significant changes are called for, and furthermore, should expect God’s direction made clear in order to experience the change as well. To put it another way, we can become part of the change made and grow thereby. This is what Joab missed, and this is what Abner recognized. Unfortunately, both men were cut off from their further potential – Abner in death, and Joab in rebellion.

Even More Damage

It is equally sad to note that Joab’s resistance to cooperate with change in leadership became the source of even more damage to the situation. This was a crucial time in Israel’s history. After the infamous reign of Saul that failed to manifest God’s glory in the nation, it was time for a change that would breathe fresh life into the kingdom. And David was the man chosen and ordained to lead Israel into its new day.

The peace accord that David had struck with Abner was a significant gesture to all of true reconciliation. David had the mind of God when he made this agreement: to bring back each and every Israelite into a unified country that could once again shine for their God. But Joab had derailed much of the plan before it could even get started. In verse 39 we read David’s own words as he recognized the deep damage that Joab had caused,

“And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: the Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness.”

Yes, David was king by God's own command; but who could trust him for protection if his promise to Abner was so easily undermined by a man like Joab? In a moment of personal revenge and carnal passion, Joab had forgotten that he served as just one member of a strong leadership team. And this team, like our leadership teams today, needed to speak and act with a single purpose and one sole voice. Each team member had a personal obligation to demonstrate a unified front as the leaders responsible for Israel's success or failure. Joab had every right as a senior general and leader of the army to consult privately with the king and openly express his opinion. In fact, David surely treasured the ideas and views that Joab had offered in the past. But once the decision had been made and publicly declared, it was Joab's personal responsibility to cooperate with the new change of plans. After all, he was not the king!

Church leaders should be careful to display a unified front.

It really is no different at all today—the principle still applies in leadership. Leaders can expect to have their opinions sought for by senior leaders. And they should be free to express their views privately to their leaders. But once the decision is made to effect change, all leaders involved should promote the new vision and lead in that direction. In the committee meeting or in the board room, leaders must feel the liberty to discuss and even debate the point. But outside the meeting, the unified front is what should be displayed. That is what Israel needed, but it was not what they saw. Senior leaders are weakened when other leaders act independently and cause division in the body. It is a serious offense and must be dealt with in an equally serious manner.

The Final Judgment

David would not take immediate action against the heinous act that Joab had committed. Instead, he would leave that for his son, Solomon, to carry out. But in the years between David's ascension to the throne and Solomon's enthronement as king, Joab would continue to be a two-headed monster in David's army. At times he would act courageously and rightly. And at other times, he would act completely independently and further weaken and damage the reign of David. In other words, Joab was not a man on which David could completely rely. He was not the kind of man that Solomon could trust, and he was not the kind of leader that the church needs today. Instead he continued as a man that might help or who might harm, depending on his personal view of what changes needed to be made. When threatened with any perceived change to his personal greatness, he acted cruelly, as he did against Absalom in 2 Samuel 18 or against Amasa in chapter 20. In both of these instances, as had been the case with Abner, Joab acted independent of the king. He simply never

learned the lessons necessary for a great leader. And because he never learned, he continued to damage the kingdom and the leaders above him.

So in 1 Kings 2:5, shortly before his death, David instructs Solomon what to do about Joab. And the final judgment is carried out in a most interesting place. Earlier in this discussion we discussed how according to Hebrews 12:17 Esau could never really find a place of repentance “...*though he sought it carefully with tears.*” Doesn’t God respect the tearful prayer of a repenting transgressor? Of course He does, but these tears were shed *because he could not repent*. Esau had reached that miserable place where a man cannot repent; where he knows that somehow he must, yet cannot bring himself to completely surrender once again to God. And it seems that Joab met a similar fate.

Joab’s death is recorded in 1 Kings 2:34. But the spot of his execution is remarkable. After hearing of Solomon’s judgment against his past crimes, Joab ran to the tabernacle of God and “...*caught hold of the horns of the altar.*” This would appear to mean the altar of sacrifice, and it seems that Joab felt that somehow his grip on this altar would bring immunity from the judgment to come. But it was not to be. He died there, at a place dedicated to the repentance of Israel and its citizens, unable to truly change his own ways. In other words, even at the most symbolic place of repentance he still could not bring himself to repent. How can we be so sure he did not repent?

In 1 Kings 2:28 we read, “*Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah...*” Solomon had not been on the throne very long at this time. But already, Joab had thrown his allegiance not toward Solomon, but toward Adonijah, Solomon’s older brother who was complaining that he should have inherited the kingdom from his father. So it would seem clear that Joab never truly learned how to experience the changes that God deemed necessary in his life and for the nation of Israel. Instead, he acted on what was best for him and for his position, rather than acting as a true leader should: unselfishly and for the betterment of the body.

Abner was a powerful man whose life was cut short by the self-seeking ambitions of another. Joab was an equally powerful man that never rose to true greatness as only the will of God can produce. Today’s church leadership should study the character of both men and decide themselves how they will live. Great things await leaders who learn to experience positive change as the Lord leads them ever onward in spiritual ministry.

Lesson Three

THE DEATH CART

II Samuel 6:3

His intentions were certainly good. His motives surely must have been right. But David's actions, however honorable as they were, unintentionally brought about the death of one of his faithful subordinates. One simple act in contravention to the mandate of God's will led to a complicated choice and a deadly outcome for a humble servant named Uzzah. As part of today's church leadership, we should be careful to see and understand how this turn of events unfolded in the sixth chapter of II Samuel.

A New Leader and a New Vision

The famed Ark of the Covenant had stayed many years in the house of Abinadab in Gibeah. Since the miraculous intervention of God in I Samuel 6 which allowed the Israelites to reclaim this symbol of the Lord's divine presence and power, the sacred box had been clearly neglected, if not almost forgotten during the reign of Saul. But now, David, the new and anointed leader of the nation, was making his bid to have the ark brought to a place worthy of such a symbol of the God of Israel.

The planning for the transfer of the ark was elaborate in personnel and in manner of respect. Accompanied by a great throng of singers and musicians, the revered box would be brought up to the city of David with all due adoration. In I Chronicles 13:8 we are told,

"And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets."

David's motive for all of this was clear: the time for including the ark into Israel's worship of and service toward God was long overdue, and his intention was to once again turn the nation back toward God in every aspect of spiritual worship. In other words, the new king had a fresh and no doubt God-given vision for Israel and he fully intended to see it come to reality. But in doing so, he neglected one of the foundational tenets of God's law.

A New Cart

In I Samuel, chapters 5 and 6, we can read the story of how the ark had brought great suffering and distress to the Philistine enemies of Israel after they had captured it in battle. No matter where the Philistines tried to keep the ark, its presence brought disaster rather than blessing. And so in I Samuel 6:7, they decided to put the issue to

a test. Wondering whether it was the God of Israel that was troubling them for holding on to the ark, or whether it was for some other reason that they were seemingly cursed, the Philistines designed a well-thought plan for discerning the truth.

They started by constructing a new cart to be pulled by two milk cows. They then tied the cows to the cart carrying the ark, and tied the cows' calves at home so that the calves could not follow their mothers, and so that the mothers would have to leave behind their calves if they were to carry the ark away from the country of the Philistines. Leaving the cows to choose which way to go (toward their crying calves or toward Israel), the Philistines marveled as they watched the animals slowly begin their journey, taking the ark back toward its true home. Indeed, the Almighty had desired to have the ark safely back in the land of His people.

Many years later, David designed his own plan for moving this sacred box, and unfortunately for him, he leaned on the experience of the Philistines rather than the Word of God. II Samuel 6:3 describes the scene:

"And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the cart."

It may have seemed right; it may have seemed proper and fitting; it may even have seemed elaborate as this brand new cart, never used for any worldly business, was built and put to use in carrying the ark toward its future home. But the plan did not meet the criteria that God had mandated many centuries before in Exodus 25:14,

"And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them."

Numbers 4:1-15 goes on to describe the meticulous manner in which the sons of Kohath would be responsible for transporting the ark and the other holy instruments of the Tabernacle. While the Levites were the ones responsible for ministry in Israel, the specific Levite family responsible for the ark and other sacred vessels was that of the sons of Kohath. On one occasion in Numbers chapter 7, wagons and oxen are distributed by Moses to the families of the Levites, but the Kohathites are specifically excluded in verse 9:

"But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders."

In other words, God was very clear regarding the fact that the ark was to be transported by certain people and only then by properly carrying it as described. Any substitution

***What leaders offer to
 God is not more
 important than how they
 offer it.***

would prove futile at best. In fact, contravening this ordinance was punishable by death, as Uzzah and others watching that day would learn.

A new cart simply would not suffice. While the motive was pure, the obedience was not. And leaders should heed well this principle. While we may possess the best intentions while performing some service for the Kingdom of God, if it is not done in God's way, we will only do damage to the cause in the long run. As Samuel once told Saul in I Samuel 15:22, *"...to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."* To put it simply, what we offer God is not any more important than how we offer it. David's heart may have been pure in what he wanted to do for the Lord, but his way of doing it was not in alignment with how it should have been offered. And so, David's new cart brought about the untimely death of a faithful worker in the kingdom. To put it another way, David's mistake in senior leadership meant death to one of his co-workers.

"What Should I Do?"

We should have compassion for our fellow-servant, Uzzah. David's decision to build and use the new cart had put Uzzah in a very difficult and untenable position. In a split second, Uzzah was forced into making a decision that would cost him his life. And senior leaders must be aware of what David had done.

Clearly, in retrospect, we can observe that the ark should have been carried by the right men of the tribe of the Levites. The new cart was a dangerous proposition. Despite all the fanfare that surrounded the ark as everyone celebrated its movement toward the city of David, the fact that it was borne by the new cart remained wrong. No matter how well we leaders may dress up a poorly conceived ministry, it too will remain wrong in God's eyes.

Uzzah, while simply following his instructions to help drive the oxen forward, found himself having to decide what to do when the oxen stumbled and the ark appeared ready to fall from its special place on the new cart. Once again, a man with the best of intentions reached out to save the ark from possible damage. To see it fall to the ground would surely have meant humiliation to his nation and disobedience to the wishes of his king. And so, in a moment of time, Uzzah extended his hands, simply trying to save the ark. But touching this box was absolutely forbidden. His death was the inescapable result.

Leaders must learn to delegate authority with the utmost integrity.

But what really had precipitated this sad end to Uzzah's life? Was it not David, who had placed the man in such a position that required such a quick and fatal decision? What if the ark had been properly cared for and carried by its ordained

porters instead of resting on this new cart of David's? Would Uzzah have even been involved at all? Proper leadership requires service to the Lord without a doubt. But service without obedience has always proved fruitless. David, the senior leader, had put a junior leader in a place where he had to choose between obeying God and obeying the boss. This never works for anyone. Delegating authority must always be carried out with the utmost integrity and without compromising principles that are God-given and eternal in consequence.

"If It Works for Them..."

It must have seemed obvious to David that building and using a new cart for moving the ark had "worked" for the Philistines many years before. But what works in the world is not always applicable in the spiritual realm. The Philistines had no part or parcel in the blessing of the revelation of the ark's true significance. They had received no mandate regarding its care, including how to move it when necessary. But Israel had. And God would hold David accountable to the law.

*Leaders should be careful
before borrowing
principles from the world.*

Leaders in the church need to use caution when borrowing principles of leadership, management, and administration from the world when they carry out their respective responsibilities. Just because it seems to be working in a carnal context does not mean that we should use it here in the church.

No doubt some would hold David guiltless in not knowing the scriptural procedure for transporting the ark. But a leader must be held accountable for his team's actions. Certainly, Uzzah had no idea of the ordinances involved in the ancient writings regarding the ark. He was simply obeying the wishes of his immediate superior, the king. Unfortunately for Uzzah, he had been put in an impossible predicament, one that carried too much responsibility for such a junior leader. Senior leadership should be sensitive with regard to their team members, and never place them into responsibilities that are either impossible to carry out or which prove too dangerous to engage in. The plan that David had conceived was doomed from the start.

Leaders must have a feeling of certainty that a plan of ministry will see success before implementing it. And this plan for success should include the individual roles that all team members will play. Are they adequately trained? Are they properly qualified? Are they, in fact, able to see the plan through to its completion? Moving the ark was not a minor project at all. Where were the Levite advisors? Where were the descendants of the sons of Kohath to give counsel regarding the handling of this precious spiritual item? A new cart simply wasn't enough to dress up the program and make things "look right." Just because the Philistines had moved the ark with a

new cart did not mean that David could adopt the same style of ministry. Everyone that day must have thought that the ceremony was going to be a great success. But in reality, it was all wrong, and Uzzah would pay the ultimate price.

Pure Doctrine

Leaders must guard against pushing the work forward without first confirming its doctrinal accuracy.

In the final analysis, we can see that David's real mistake lay in not keeping to what the Word of God had proclaimed. In his undeniable zeal to bring the ark and its symbolism back to the forefront in Israel, he had committed a doctrinal error. And today's leaders must be on guard against this insidious temptation: pushing forward the "work" without first confirming its doctrinal accuracy. The Apostle Paul mentioned this same weakness in Romans 10:2,

"For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge."

The nation of Israel at the time of Paul's writing continued to be influenced by religious leaders that missed the bigger picture. While indisputably zealous for what they considered to be their one God, they had failed to see that same God when he robed Himself in flesh to save them from their sins! While ready to fight for their strong beliefs in the Almighty, they could never imagine that the Christ that Paul preached was indeed the Messiah. Instead, they continued in their fanaticism, yet it was a zeal that was not founded upon doctrinal purity. And therefore, instead of helping them forward, their zealous attitude became their antagonist. What about today?

Is it possible that church leaders may sometimes leap ahead in new forms of ministry, urging the work onward with true passion, yet failing to confirm that their ministry is based upon the truths of the Holy Scriptures? While it is undeniably true that *sometimes* we must adopt new approaches to our spiritual work and leave the older ways of doing things behind, this is not *always* the case. In other words, some things just never change. Our holy doctrine is one of those things. Leaders, therefore, must to the utmost extent possible ensure that their work in and through the Church is carried out in accordance to the age old precepts we find to be still true in the Bible.

There is nothing wrong with a newly built and freshly painted cart with which to work. But to carry the ark with that cart would be to transgress the law and break the typology contained therein. We must be careful, therefore, in starting all of our spiritual endeavors at the proper place. In prayer and in study of God's Word we will find the principles that guarantee success. And thereby we will avoid placing other leaders in places where they are destined to fail. No leader should feel the weight of the untimely death of Uzzah on his conscience.

Lesson Four

TAKING THE CREDIT

II Samuel 7:12-13

Although we have taken our opening scripture text from II Samuel 7, the real story and the key life lesson for leaders are found in following up the narrative in I Kings and other Bible passages. And while we study the subject, we must begin by contrasting two of the most well-known leaders of Israel, a father and his son, David and Solomon.

David, of course, had his humble beginnings as a shepherd boy, living a pastoral life as a younger brother in a large family. His rise to prominence as a Hebrew leader was certainly meteoric. His unabashed commitment to God's principles positioned him for personal usefulness like few others had ever experienced. From the sheepfold to the throne was both a difficult and miraculous journey indeed.

Solomon, on the other hand, had grown up as a prince, the son of a great king who had transformed the nation to a mighty presence in the ancient world of the Middle East. On one hand we see David, a man of humility yet very powerful. On the other we find Solomon, a proud leader, abundantly blessed with "wisdom from God," yet subject to gross errors of misjudgment. In fact, in his later years, it would be Solomon who would write so eloquently regarding the "vanity of life." He could accurately describe a life that seemingly had everything a man could desire, yet in reality was merely an empty existence. Solomon would declare without embarrassment that only eternal things should really matter.

David was overjoyed upon hearing of God's promise to him. While a "house for His name" would be built in Jerusalem as David had wished, it would not be built by his hand, however. Instead, God promised that this house would be built by one of David's sons. David naturally assumed this would be Solomon, whom David had hoped would take over his throne one day. And so David instructed Solomon as he grew older regarding this "house" for God that was destined to be built for His honor and glory.

While David saw the promise as an opportunity to humbly bless God in a worthy way, Solomon began to see it as his personal effort to aggrandize both the majesty of God and his own personal greatness. For David, it would be an honor bestowed upon his household to be responsible to build such a temple of worship. For Solomon it became a matter of building something that declared, "Look at what I have done for God."

Both father and son, however, made the same mistake in making a very large assumption—that they would be responsible for building the house promised by the Lord, a house so large and so grandiose that He would no doubt be pleased. Yet the house that God had wanted to build through David and Solomon was not a physical one at all. In this mistake, David and Solomon were together. Neither could have seen that many years later an obscure relative of David's would come as the Messiah, the one that would build a spiritual house for God that would never be destroyed. It would truly be a glorious house in which anyone with faith could find salvation. Jesus, the son of David, was the One that the promise had spoken of. But both David and Solomon had been tempted to take credit for something they did not and could not do. David made the error in ignorance and naivety, while Solomon made it arrogantly and with great pride. Leaders should watch out for both possibilities in their lives and ministries.

*Leaders should always
beware of the temptation
to take credit for
something that God has
done.*

Real Insight

David is remarkable, of course, for many reasons. But one of the most noteworthy, however, is how he was used to symbolize the Christ that was yet to come. Both his words and much of his life prophesied of Jesus and what the Saviour would later do. Many verses in Psalms, for instance, are the words of David that he speaks about his own life and his own experiences of deliverance. But in these verses we find that they speak just as well about the deliverance and promises of Jesus Christ in His life on earth and in the lives of His saints.

And of these verses, perhaps none is as profoundly insightful as in Psalm 40. Here, David writes and sings about the majesty of God as it worked in his life. He extolled the greatness of God in saying that His wonderful works were too numerous to count. Then, beginning with verse 6, David went on to say that God was not desirous of sacrifices and offerings. Rather, He is pleased with a man's free-will offering of himself in total submission to his Master.

This was true spiritual insight, even if not fully understood by King David. Even while David was busy writing the words of this psalm, the priests were busy at the Tabernacle offering the very sacrifices and offerings that David referred to. Did not the law require such sacrifices of animals? Of course it did; yet such an offering without the willing heart of the giver was vain indeed. And that is where David really shined. Verses 7 and 8 go on to speak prophetically of the offering that God would make Himself in the form of humanity on Calvary. Truly David could see intuitively what few others could. And yet he could also mistake the spiritual for the natural,

something that leaders should guard against. Church leadership now, of course, has the advantage of hindsight. We are created after the facts of Jesus' life and ministry on the earth. And we enjoy the writings of the apostles as encouragers to our walk with God. We must be careful not to confuse what God is doing *in us* with what we are doing *for Him*. The first is always spiritually oriented, while the other may sometimes be purely by the flesh.

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Missing the Point

While David humbly anticipated the day when his son would be used by God to build a house worthy for his God, Solomon capitalized on the wealth of his father and his life of ease and presumed to believe that only he could produce such a glorious structure. Though endowed with wisdom from God, Solomon's lack of humility at key moments in his life caused him to lapse into a carnal pride that sometimes led him far from the real target. Arrogance in leadership has always been responsible for much of the Church's woes. Like his father, Solomon had no idea that the house that he would build "for God" was merely a shadow of the real house that was to come—a house that would be built by God's own hands.

Once built, what is historically known as the Temple of Solomon was officially opened with a ceremony that ranks as one of the most ostentatious in the Bible. In I Kings 8:5 we read,

"And King Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude."

What a striking contrast this was to David's words in Psalm 40! With all the untold number of sheep and oxen killed that day, were the hearts of the people of Israel also included in the sacrifice? Was Solomon even humbled at the sight? Indeed, we read of his proud declaration of what he had brought to pass that day in verse 13,

"I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in forever."

Little did he know then about the fate of that grand building! One day in the not so distant future, all of the Temple's grandeur would be reduced to rubble by an invading army. We can see in II Chronicles 36:19 that its demise is concisely detailed:

"And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof."

How easy it is for leaders to declare that what they have done for God will last forever! How easy it is for us to dare to think that no one could do more or no one

could do it better! How easy it is to assume that what we are doing for God is by our own inspiration, rather than expressing a humble willingness to participate in His plan as He builds His own house!

Perhaps Isaiah had the house that Solomon built in mind as he prophesied in the opening verses of chapter 66:

“Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”

Today, leaders must see as Stephen did in Acts 7:44-51 that God had a much bigger picture in view when He allowed and blessed the construction of the Temple. It would serve not only as a meeting place for the Israelites and as a focal point of worship toward Him. The real significance, however, lay in its symbolic representation of what was yet to come – the true house for God, the place where He dwells in the hearts of those that humbly seek after Him rather than resisting His divine will for their lives.

No Image Good Enough or Big Enough

Interestingly, as early as the ten commandments there is an allusion made to the Israelites regarding the fallacy of trying to create something that is worthy for God. Exodus 20:3-4 states,

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”

People often try and quote the first part as not having any gods before “thee.” But it really speaks of allowing nothing to become greater than the presence of God as the leading influence in one’s life. But the second part is even more interesting. They were to make no graven images of things in heaven, in earth, or beneath the earth. In other words, the mere attempt to make something that represented the majesty of God was a gross injustice of His greatness. Any image made could never truly represent His awesome splendor. And for the Hebrews to allow someone to worship such an image would be in effect reducing the “size” of their God. Putting a limit on God’s boundaries is a terrible injustice to commit.

*In humble submission to
 His will, leaders “prove”
 the will of God.*

What God has always really wanted was, as Paul said in Romans 12:1-2, our bodies as “living sacrifices.” In humble submission to His will, leaders “prove” the will of

God. They become part of what He is doing in their lives, and as a result, through their lives. This is true worship. The prophet said it this way in Micah 6:6-8,

“Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

Likewise, Jesus spoke of the true expression of spiritual worship when he spoke in John 4 with the woman at the well. Explaining that the place for worship must change from physical mountaintops to the inner place of a man’s spirit after a real salvation experience, He said in verse 24,

“God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

This is more than just an exhortation to doctrinal purity. It is an expression of where real worship is found. It only comes in complete surrender to God in the spirit, and according to our submission to His will in our lives according to His truth. Anything less for a leader is like rebuilding Solomon’s Temple.

The Still Small Voice of Correction

Even in the midst of the Temple’s construction, God spoke to Solomon with a simple yet profound admonition in I Kings 6:11-12:

“And the word of the Lord came to Solomon, saying, Concerning this house which thou art in building, if thou wilt walk in my statutes, and execute my judgments, and keep all my commandments to walk in them; then will I perform my word with thee, which I spake unto David thy father.”

Leaders should never lose sight of the “why” of working with the Lord.

It was almost as though God were saying, “Thanks for the building, Solomon, but please don’t forget what is really important in building the true house of God.” Leaders would do well to keep their ears attuned to such words of encouragement and correction. They should keep doing what they’re doing, but never lose sight of why they are doing it!

Priorities

The last verse of I Kings 6 and the first verse of chapter 7 reveal something startling about Solomon’s misplaced priorities. While it took seven long years of intense labor

to see the completion of the house he built for God, it took another thirteen years to build his own palace!

The promise that God had made in II Samuel 7:12-13 to David must have been repeated to Solomon many times as he grew up in the king's household:

"And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever."

Perhaps Solomon thought that such a kingdom that would last forever would require a palace that would take a lavish thirteen years in building! In other words, if he would simply build the "house for the Lord" as prophesied, then he would inherit the personal greatness that he deserved. Why should he not make preparations for such greatness and build himself a palace worthy of such a mighty king? And therein lay one of the greatest mistakes that a church leader could ever make.

*Leaders must never
 confuse personal
 usefulness in the
 Kingdom for personal
 greatness.*

Too often, leaders confuse *personal usefulness* in the kingdom with their own *personal greatness*. The "look what I've done" spirit still preys on today's leadership. To participate with God in what He is doing is right and just. But to confuse it as a sign of personal importance and "validate" our value before others is just plain wrong. And after all, God was really prophesying of Jesus' building the true house, not Solomon building the type and shadow!

Taking Credit

Oftentimes, church leaders minister their gifts in a public way. Whether it's a preacher in a pulpit, an elder in a home group meeting, or a hospital visit made by a staff member, it's just too easy to accept credit sometimes for the good things that God does through us. The difficult combination of genuine humility mixed with being powerfully used by the Spirit remains elusive for many of today's church leaders. And yet this recipe is something we must strive for. This is what made Jesus' earthly ministry so impacting. This is what defined the apostles' ministry before the Church. And this is what can mean the difference for us as leaders.

Lesson Five

PLOTING FOR “TOO MUCH”

II Samuel 9:9-10

Jonathan had known it all along. The son of King Saul had recognized the special anointing that rested on the young man, David. As early as I Samuel 18:1-4 we can read how Jonathan began to pledge his loyalty and faithfulness to the shepherd boy that had dared to believe his God in the face of the challenge against the giant, Goliath of the Philistines. Truly there was something special about David, and while King Saul refused to accept it, his son had embraced David with his whole heart. Jonathan was surely a man that recognized divine authority when he encountered it.

An Everlasting Covenant

The bond between the two young men went deeper than most. They leaned on one another for support and relied on each other completely. It wasn't easy for either of them. David found himself pursued by Jonathan's father who seemed bent on executing the young man that

he perceived as a threat to his throne. And Jonathan, while wanting to remain loyal and obedient to his father, knew also that he must align himself with the man that God had unquestionably ordained to replace his father one day. Their affection and allegiance stand as great examples of how a leader should recognize spiritual authority and become both submitted and faithful to it.

Leaders must recognize spiritual authority and become submitted and faithful to it.

In I Samuel 18:3-4 we can see how Jonathan made a covenant with David, an agreement that at first is not revealed fully. But the following verse tells us how Jonathan surrendered to David his robe and his weapons. This was certainly symbolic of the way in which Jonathan recognized the hand of God on David's life and calling to rule. And it clearly demonstrated Jonathan's submission to the authority that God was placing on David's future.

Later, in I Samuel 20 we clearly see the kind of covenant that they made. Here, Jonathan declared plainly that he knew somehow that David would eventually assume the throne of Israel, and he pledged himself to seeing it become a reality. David's part of the covenant toward his friend is a simple and yet profound one. He pledges that he will always show benevolence toward the house of Jonathan. In other words, when David finally would reach the pinnacle of his calling, he would always

remember the faithfulness of Jonathan, and remain mindful of him by demonstrating benevolence to Jonathan's ancestors.

Strengthening the Will of God

In the twenty-third chapter of I Samuel we read something truly extraordinary. At one of the lowest points of David's young life, while being pursued relentlessly by Saul and fearful of his certain destruction, it is Jonathan, Saul's son and rightful traditional heir to the throne that comes to David and encourages him. He finds him in the wilderness and in near despair, but once again pledges his loyalty. When Jonathan could easily have betrayed his friend and helped his father to destroy David and thereby guarantee his own inheritance of the throne, Jonathan did just the opposite. And what he did serves as a very strong lesson for leaders today. We must do our very best to strengthen the will of God. In verses 16-17 we read,

"And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David in the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth."

"Strengthening the will of God" means, first of all, *never giving up on the promise*. David was called and anointed and Jonathan never wavered on that. Secondly, it speaks of *finding the will of God and holding on to it tenaciously*. We must become attached to it. We must, in fact, become part of the promise. Thirdly, it means that when times are so tough that even senior leaders begin to waver and edge toward hopelessness, *true leaders rise up and strengthen one another's hands in the Lord*. And finally, it means that sometimes *we must pledge ourselves to others' leadership roles in our lives and openly reaffirm it to them*. It means that we may be asked to give up what is rightfully ours in order to remain part of God's promise for His Kingdom. Jonathan still stands as one of the greatest examples of this principle. Long before anyone was known as a "Christian," Jonathan became the model of the right spirit for all of us.

Leaders are often called upon to "strengthen the will of God."

Remembering the Covenant

The opening verse of II Samuel 9 shows us that David had never forgotten his pledge:

"And David said, is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

Once the kingdom was unified and David's throne fully established, he turned to one of his top priorities—fulfilling his pledge to his old friend. So David called for one of Saul's servants, a man named Ziba, to enquire about any member of the

household of the former king who might still be alive. And, as it turned out, unknown to anyone at his court, there was indeed a son of Jonathan who had not been slain with his brothers. Mephibosheth, lame since he was a small child, had been hidden for years by his caretakers.

Ziba receives his instructions clearly from David: he is to care for the properties formerly owned by Saul that David is now returning to Mephibosheth. Ziba must become the overseer of those properties and equally share the profits of them with Mephibosheth who would live out the rest of his life in David's royal household. Mephibosheth is awed by David's kindness, and Ziba agrees to the pledge.

Not your average "Servant"

It is noteworthy that Ziba is not what we might consider to be some average household servant of the Old Testament times. Indeed, according to I Samuel 9:10, Ziba was quite financially blessed—having ten sons and twenty of his own servants. It would seem that he was not just a servant to the house of Saul, but more of an overseer and household manager for the former king. At any rate, it appears that Ziba did not live in want. But while Ziba had enough of everything a man could need in those days, it appears that it wasn't sufficient for this avaricious man.

Perhaps Ziba had never felt that "enough was enough" in his life. Perhaps he had been around the king's household so long and seen the extravagance of Saul's lifestyle that he became lustful for the same level of living standard. Whatever the reason, he was taken captive by his own greediness and committed a terrible deed. The Apostle James could have helped Ziba with this good advice in James 1:14-15:

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

Many a leader's death has been the result of wanting "just a little more." Lusting after too much is a leader's enemy and must be dealt with swiftly, and for some, nearly continually. We see the standard of living of others and we are drawn into a feverish desire for the same things. But a happy leader is one who recognizes that God never promised us what we *want*, but rather what we *need*. Ziba just simply wanted more and more. And shortly after the end of the struggle that David had with his son, Absalom, Ziba hatched his plot to satisfy his greedy hunger.

*Lusting after too much is
a leader's enemy.*

Plotting for More

David's exit from Jerusalem was humbling yet necessary to preserve the peace. His rebellious son, Absalom, was attempting to overthrow David and had threatened the

city with destruction if necessary in order to achieve his goals. So David left and his faithful followers would carry the struggle against Absalom and his men in the countryside.

In chapter 16 of II Samuel, we can see the wicked planning of Ziba go into action. Meeting David and his men leaving the city in verses 1-2, Ziba is one of the first to go out of the city to meet David and offer gifts and supplies to him and his soldiers. As David thankfully received these generous offerings, he enquired of Ziba why Mephibosheth (whom Ziba obviously seemed to be representing) was not among those in the delegation. But it is in verse 3 where we see exactly what Ziba had plotted.

Ziba claimed that Mephibosheth had remained in Jerusalem, planning his own ascension to the throne during the confusion caused by Absalom. Ziba convinced David that Mephibosheth had his sights set on reestablishing the kingdom in his own hands as the sole surviving heir of Saul and his throne. In fact, however, Mephibosheth had done nothing of the kind and knew nothing of what Ziba had planned to do! Here, a junior leader (Ziba) takes matters into his own hands and unleashes a terrible lie to the highest authority (David) in order to displace his immediate leader (Mephibosheth.) And, unfortunately, this scene has been played out by leaders far too many times since then!

The plan was simple: discredit Mephibosheth soundly in front of David and all of the household treasures of Saul might fall into Ziba's ownership. Sadly enough, David "fell" for the deception and made a very poor decision in declaring that everything that had been restored to Mephibosheth was now the property of Ziba. Ziba "humbly" thanked David and departed to his new found riches.

Poor Decisions in Tough Times

David made this bad decision at a very tough moment of his life. The stress of Absalom's revolt and the struggle that his own son was putting him through in Israel was nearly unbearable. The humility that David had showed by vacating Jerusalem was both painful and necessary. And at this time when David was carrying such a great burden, Ziba had sprung his attack. Unfortunately, it had worked. But this is something that senior leaders must guard against.

Leaders must be very careful while making important decisions during times of high stress.

Every leader passes through tough times—times of real and nearly tangible pain and distress. In these times, leaders must be careful in their important decision-making. David was being asked to "close out" his account regarding the promise he had sworn to Jonathan. He was being asked to accept the lie of someone with whom he had little background or reason to fully trust,

and act upon that lie in undoing his part of the promise made between him and his dear friend of the past. David's decision was made too quickly and without enough thought, let alone without any real investigation as to its reliability. Ziba had proven himself to be an adversary rather than an ally.

In fact, the plot of Ziba was not unlike the strategy of our adversary many times. He finds leaders that are weighed down by great responsibilities and nearly unbearable burdens and he launches his attack of lies and deceit with a goal of compromising and corrupting the leader's decision-making ability. And, as in David's case, it's often just too natural to make a poor decision in a tough time.

We should remind ourselves of just how important this decision really was! David was going back on an everlasting agreement between Jonathan and himself. And we should remember the symbolism their covenant has for us. It was asking the leader to quit on his pledge, to surrender his grip on his part of the promise, and to weaken the will of God rather than strengthen it. It was simply too much of a decision to make so quickly in such a difficult period of his life. And just a simple investigation could have prevented it from happening as it did.

The Faithful Mephibosheth

Meanwhile, back in Jerusalem, waited the faithful and submitted Mephibosheth. According to II Samuel 19:24, Mephibosheth *"...had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace."* He had simply mourned the tragic situation of his king and guardian, and waited for his safe return. While Ziba had been scheming to get all of the profit he could, Mephibosheth had been more than content with the blessing that David had bestowed upon him. And leaders should take note of these two attitudes.

For Mephibosheth, his physical infirmity had rendered him totally dependent upon David. This dependency also produced a sense of deep contentment once the king had welcomed him to his table. Spirit-led leaders in the Church will find this same fulfillment if they see themselves as they really should. What we have is simply a part of God's grace bestowed upon us. And while we all are truly reliant on Him, our benevolent King has offered us the opportunity to freely dine at His table in His household. What more could we ask for? But Ziba would only be satisfied with having it all: all he could accumulate, either by work or by deception.

For leaders, ambition is a two-edged sword.

Regrettably, there are still leaders placed in positions of spiritual responsibility today that, in the end, reveal by their actions that they were never really led by the Spirit. Rather, they were drawn away and enticed by their own lusts. Ambition is a two-edged sword for sure. It can propel us forward

in our quest to find more of God and more of His direction for our lives. This is surely a good kind of ambition. But the other side of ambition pushes men and women into wanting more and more for themselves alone. This kind of desire is not of God at all. It is a vain attempt to find fulfillment in the things of the world: in power, fame, and fortune. Leaders must be vigilant lest they become ensnared by the wrong side of ambition as they labor in God's Kingdom.

First the Lie, Then the Cover-up

After the victory of David's army over the rebel group of Absalom, the time came for David's triumphal entry back into Jerusalem. But it wasn't a happy day that David celebrated. During the final days of the struggle, Absalom had been cruelly killed. Though he had staged an insurrection against his own father, Absalom had still been loved deeply by David. His death placed a pall over the re-entry in chapter 19. And once again, Ziba took advantage of David's distress to try and further his selfish cause.

With the return of David to Jerusalem, Ziba knew that it was only a matter of time before the king would know the truth about his evil deception regarding Mephibosheth. So Ziba used the moment to stage a "welcoming committee" for the king and his troops. His intent was once again to flatter David and make a case for himself against Mephibosheth before David could find him in Jerusalem. His deception called for a cover-up. But this kind of evil dealing can only last so long in the company of spiritually oriented leaders. Ziba's day of reckoning was fast approaching.

And so David arrived in Jerusalem and found Mephibosheth waiting. David's first question to him was in regards to why Mephibosheth did not see him on the way out of Jerusalem as others had done. Finally, Mephibosheth finds his opportunity to explain the lies and cheating of Ziba. Mephibosheth had asked for a donkey to be saddled and readied for him to go and see David on that dark day when the king had to depart the city. But Ziba had taken Mephibosheth's initiative and used it for his own gain. The donkey which should have been used by Mephibosheth had been inappropriately used by Ziba! How, we might ask, can leaders do such a thing? But it happens much too often. Leaders steal the ideas of others and get the credit for things they never even conceived. But let us notice that in all of this, Mephibosheth had never complained! He had merely waited humbly for the king to once more take his rightful place in Jerusalem, knowing that once that had taken place, all would be restored.

*Sometimes, leaders
 simply have to "wait
 upon the Lord."*

Real leaders never battle for their positions! They are sure of their standing and do not let others derail their spiritual journey. Sometimes, they just have to “wait upon the Lord.” Mephibosheth went on to say that he never raised the issue with David because the king had been so kind to him that he would never have voiced a complaint. He was simply happy with whatever action his leader would take.

Restored

In the end, David happily reiterates his original declaration—that Ziba would have to divide the profits of Saul’s properties with Mephibosheth. But leaders should take a final glance at Mephibosheth’s attitude in his statement in II Samuel 19:30,

“And Mephibosheth said unto the king, yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house.”

The money meant little to Mephibosheth. The privilege of living in the king’s house would always be enough. No matter how much Ziba could try and steal from Mephibosheth, one thing was certain—he could never steal his dignity. He could never deprive Mephibosheth of the promise made between two dear friends. He could never take away the privilege of recognizing his total submission to and dependency on the goodness of his king. For a man like Mephibosheth, fulfillment was found only in the king’s house, eating at his table, and knowing that he was the beneficiary of an eternal covenant. The king was on his throne. Zion was intact. And Mephibosheth was content in finding his place in the kingdom. Should it be any less for today’s leaders?

Lesson Six

WHERE INTEGRITY STOPS

II Samuel 11:2-4

How long does it take to cross the line? How much time is required for a leader to lose his integrity? Is it really as simple as being on the roof of the palace at just the wrong time? And for David, was it really just one of life's coincidences that Bathsheba chose just the wrong moment to bathe? Where does integrity in a leader's life end and corruption begin?

Wrong Place, Wrong Time

The very first of this chapter provides a fascinating insight as to how this whole incident found its beginning:

"And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem."

It was the time of year when a king should go forth to battle. But someone, somewhere had made the decision that, this year, David would remain behind at the palace. David was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Only a few months before, David had led Israel in a furious destruction of the Syrians. But here in chapter 11, he is at ease at the palace while his army is in the field at the time when kings should go forth to battle.

David's chief captain, Joab, had led the army against a city named Rabbah. The name itself tells us that David should have been there along with his troops. Rabbah means "great" or "powerful." It was a place where a "great" and "powerful" victory was destined for the Israelites over their enemies, the Ammonites. If there was ever a place for a senior leader to be, this was it. But the king stayed at home and left the battle for others.

Being a leader in today's Church is a very high and worthy calling. By definition, leaders stand out from the rest of the followers. We are different. We think differently, act differently, and consider challenges differently. We must if we are truly to be leaders in this great body of believers. When a "great" challenge, a Rabbah, presents itself in

*Initiative remains an
important part of any
leader's character.*

a leader's life, the leader rises to the challenge. Real leaders cannot afford to leave the responsibility to others when action is required. Initiative must be part of a leader's character if he is to survive in his leadership role. Without it, we might remain behind as David did and suffer a similar fate.

Delegating or Relegating

Delegation of authority and responsibility is a must in the leadership context. Senior leaders delegate responsibilities to other leaders as a regular part of their ministry. It is a necessary and useful tool in accomplishing more for the Kingdom. But in delegating authority, senior leaders recognize that they remain responsible for the success or failure of what has been delegated to others. The relationship between a senior leader and his team members is a very important one. Someone once said that, in the case when a project succeeds, the senior leader should be careful to divert all the praise toward the team members; while in the case where a project fails the leader should assume all responsibility. While that may be a hard standard to live up to, the example is a good one to aspire toward.

It would seem, however, by the language of II Samuel 11, that David had not simply *delegated* authority to Joab and the army. He might have *relegated* his authority to others instead. Assigning the responsibility to another is more dangerous. One definition of the word *relegate* is "to send or consign to an inferior position, place, or condition." It's the attitude that says, "This is not my job." But this was David's job and remained his responsibility. Sending the army is one thing (and could very well serve as delegation of responsibility.) But giving up the responsibility and remaining at ease in the palace is another. Again, notice the language in verse 2:

"And it came to pass in an eveningtide that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house..."

With no place at the head of his army, and with no important business to occupy his time, did David find himself in a state of lethargy? Did his newly found leisure become a stumbling block to him? We may not fully know what precipitated his transgression in this chapter, but we can rest assured that, had he

been in the pursuit of Rabbah (something great,) he would not have fallen prey to Bathsheba's tempting lure. How many times had David found himself on that roof in that place across the road from her home? Had she seen him there before? Had she planned this herself? Was she looking for the right moment to throw the net to catch a king? Again, we cannot tell if this was of her doing or not. But we can be sure that

When leaders relax in their pursuit of Rabbah, bad things are usually the result.

David's inattention to the important things of his kingdom led him to be in this wrong place at this wrong time.

No Need to Pray

We might wonder about how quickly a genuinely "good" man can become genuinely corrupted. And this should cause a leader to look inside the story and find the occasions where David chooses to compromise on his integrity.

Surely David could remember the exhortation,

"The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his judgments were before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me."

And in another place,

"Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation. Harken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray. My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up."

Surely he could remember these — because he had written these words himself! The words of David in Psalm 18 and Psalm 3 were written by a man that had committed himself totally to the Lord and His will. But how often must that same man make that same commitment? Undoubtedly, David had meant to direct his prayers to God each and every morning. But what if there were less need to pray? Now that David no longer found himself in the wilderness, relentlessly pursued by an evil Saul, was there still the urgency that constrained him to pray for further deliverance? Did the fact that life was suddenly a bit easier actually make spiritual life more challenging?

The first compromise we see here is the failure of David to continue in "looking up." Each morning, when David was younger, he had paused to pray and look up to his Master. Each day had been committed to God in humility and submission. But what about once he became safely situated in the royal palace?

*Leaders recognize
 "valleys" for what they
 truly are: places of
 restoration.*

Leaders sometimes wonder at how difficult life can really be. Present difficulties become "valley" experiences where we walk daily in close submission to the will of God. We know then and there how much we really depend on Him and how much we genuinely need His strength and spiritual vision. While in the valley, we long for the mountaintop experiences where we expect life to be easier. Yet it was David, once again, who confessed that it was in the valley where the Lord restored his soul. And it would be David in Psalm 51:12, who would pray,

“Restore unto me the joy of your salvation...”

No Need to Flee

In I Corinthians 6:18, Paul put it simply, *“Flee fornication.”* According to W.E. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, the Greek word for “flee” is *pheugo*. Interestingly, it is also translated in Matthew 23:33 as “escape” where Jesus asks the Pharisees,

“Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape (pheugo) the damnation of hell?”

The word is a very active one. It speaks of taking action in order to avoid something disastrous. And this was David’s second compromise. Instead of recognizing the temptation at its very earliest stages and actively disconnecting himself from it, he had allowed it liberty in the carnal desires of his flesh. Paul also wrote a message to leaders in Ephesians 5:15-16,

“See then ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

The word for “circumspectly” is elsewhere translated as “accurately” or “diligently.” It speaks of a precise approach to what we do. It causes us to look ahead and consider the future outcome of our present decisions. Instead of fleeing the temptation and its resultant damage which was certain, David had chosen to passively entertain the attraction of Bathsheba’s charms. Leaders must not make this mistake. Instead, spiritual leaders should “redeem the time.” This Greek expression in verse 16 literally speaks of making the best use of the opportunities presented to us as they will never be available again. David miserably failed in that—instead of Rabbah, he chose Bathsheba.

Asking for Trouble

It wasn’t long thereafter that David asked about the beauty he had observed from his rooftop. And finding that her husband was away fighting in the very war that David had ignored, he quickly sent for her to come to the palace. He literally was asking for trouble to come into his house, and this was his next compromise.

*When leaders substitute
 position for submission,
 they are asking for
 trouble.*

Everything clearly pointed to the fact that this would be a disastrous mistake, but he did it anyway. He did it simply because he *could*. He was king. He was feared. He was in authority. He was in control. He could do what he wanted and who could oppose him? When leaders begin to feel immune to the same rules that apply to everyone else, they fall victim to the same lie that snared David. When our positions

replace our submission, we are asking for trouble. When we assume that everything will continue as before, but without the same dedication as before, we are only cheating ourselves. When we start looking for a Bathsheba, she will surely appear!

From reading the passage we might assume that the relationship was a brief one. But transitory as it was, it would have a lasting impact on David's life. Though David had sent her back home (perhaps to try and forget all about it,) Bathsheba soon broke the news to the king that she was pregnant. And this news brought David to his final and most sinister compromise.

The Horrible Cover-Up

One of the saddest parts to this story is that not only does David commit adultery with Bathsheba, but we see the lengths to which David would go to cover it all up. And this is where leaders can see just how far they can fall when integrity becomes nothing more than a memory in their lives.

Integrity is the basis for who we are, what we do, and why we do it. The word speaks of "wholeness," an understanding of our purpose and the fulfillment that follows as we allow God the opportunity to make us "complete in Him." It is what Paul was referring to when he wrote in Colossians 2:10-12,

"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

This relationship was what David sacrificed that day when he invited Bathsheba into his home. And it wasn't the result of just a moment's temptation. It didn't happen in the "heat of the moment." It was simply one more part of something bigger that had begun to take control of a good man's life. It was the fatal step in a series of missteps that David failed to address. It was the gradual loss of his integrity that brought him to this pitiful point in his life. And for a man in such a condition, the only thing left was to cover it all up at any cost. So he arranged for Bathsheba's husband to be killed at the battlefield.

Where does integrity stop and total corruption begin in the life of today's leader? Is there really such a thing as just "a little bit of corruption?" Or is integrity really a complete wholeness that doesn't allow compromise through the door. And that might easily have been Bathsheba's name that day—compromise. As she entered the palace, David's integrity was exiting by the same door.

*Leaders have nothing if
they don't have integrity.*

Lesson Seven

STEALING HEARTS

II Samuel 15:1-6

These six introductory verses should be very well known by every leader in the Church. Perhaps they should be required “memory verses” for leadership classes. But this story serves as the model for one of the most fundamental flaws in a leader’s character. When Absalom “stole the hearts of the men of Israel,” he set before us a clear example of how not to conduct oneself as a leader. So how did he arrive at this place of attempting to overthrow all authority over him and lead a nation into total rebellion? There are several stages that the young man passed through that we, as leaders, should carefully note.

Broken and Angry

Absalom, the third son of David had been through a very traumatic experience several years before we find him stealing the hearts of Israel. His older brother, Amnon, the son of David by a different mother, had committed the heinous crime of raping his half-sister, Tamar. And Tamar was the full sister of Absalom. Curiously, in II Samuel 13:21, we are told that David heard about the terrible act but did nothing about it even though, we are told, he was very angry. For two full years Absalom must have waited for his father, the king, to intervene and pass some sort of judgment on Amnon. But for whatever reasons, David did nothing that we can see in the scriptural account. And of course this began to slowly but surely tear apart Absalom’s young heart. Not only was he hurt by what Amnon had done, but he was broken and confused by David’s failure to act. And so two years passed while Absalom waited to see what his father might do. But eventually, he could wait no longer.

Revenge and Waiting

Absalom unveiled a plot to gather together all of his brothers in one place at one time. There, under the covering of a celebration of the annual sheep shearing, Absalom planned to have his servants get Amnon drunk and then assassinate him. The plot was carried out to perfection. Once Amnon was dead, Absalom escaped to the home of his maternal grandfather, the king of Geshur. There, once again, he awaited the response of David to what had taken place.

We can only wonder at what Absalom thought and felt during this self-imposed exile. We do know that he stayed in Geshur for three years. But we do not know how he came to lose his respect for his father. Was it because David once again did nothing

about the crime? Was Absalom simply waiting and looking for any kind of reaction by his father that would show that at least he cared enough to act? Or was he there knowing that he could get away with his crime because the king of Israel, his father, would never take action against one of his own sons?

In either case, David somehow failed to provide what Absalom so sorely needed. Whether it should have been forgiveness and understanding, or if it should have been a hard judgment, David provided neither. And Absalom felt even more abandoned than before.

A Broken Father

Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, the Bible tells us that David mourned the absence of his son. Every day, David regretted the loss of not only the deceased Amnon, but even more so he missed the living Absalom. Chapter 13, verse 39 says,

“And the soul of King David longed to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead.”

In other words, there was nothing he could do about Amnon, but there was indeed something he could and should do about Absalom. He “longed to go to Absalom” but he did nothing but mourn. What could Absalom have possibly thought about this lack of action on the part of his father? Why would he leave him in Geshur without even as much as an enquiry concerning him? Why wouldn’t his father do anything? A rebuke or a pardon would surely have been accepted, but nothing came from Jerusalem. And the hurt simply went deeper and deeper.

The conflict in David’s heart over the actions of his two sons had certainly left him in confusion. And this confusion left him powerless to act. It took the intervention of his captain, Joab, to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem. Joab had managed to do what David could not—bring the fallen son back to his hometown. It would have been the perfect moment to forgive and heal the wounded hearts of both father and son, but unfortunately, once again we see the king waver instead of act decisively.

Leaders must never allow confusion to render them incapable of action.

Abandoned Again

David agreed to let Joab bring Absalom back to Jerusalem, but then banished him from the palace. In chapter 24:28, we read,

“So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king’s face.”

Senior leaders must do better than that! Leadership requires a certain kind of discernment that is vitally necessary when working with other people. We cannot leave junior leaders with a feeling of total abandonment. We must do our best to help them through their hurtful times and lend a hand for them to find the solutions they need in their times of conflicted feelings. We should never leave them without open channels of communication between them and us. We must hear from them and they must hear from us. And we must not become incapable of acting by reason of our own internal conflicts. Displaying indifference to other leaders when they need us does nothing toward building a team concept in leadership. Truly, the relationship between David and Absalom that we follow in these short chapters is a textbook study in how not to carry out our leadership responsibilities.

Displaying indifference to other leaders when they need us does nothing toward building a team concept in leadership.

Last Chance

The sad story continues in II Samuel 14:29 where we read of Absalom's final attempts to reconcile with his father:

"Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to have sent him to the king; but he would not come to him: and when he sent again the second time, he would not come."

By this time it had become too late to see Absalom's heart easily healed. Seven long years had passed since the time his sister had been raped and his father had continued to do nothing. His heart could only grow harder as each year passed. Seven years had gone by while Absalom was left to wonder if his father cared enough to either help or hurt. And David, the senior leader, provided no direction for the junior. For seven years Absalom had been left to work out his own situation for himself without any guidance from above—guidance which was so desperately needed for so very long. Why, therefore, should we expect Absalom to act in chapter 15 as a leader ought?

While we read in II Samuel 14:33 that Absalom was finally brought to the king, and although David kissed him in a symbolic gesture of acceptance, it is clear when we continue reading in chapter 15 that nothing really had been resolved between the two. The opening verse of the chapter informs us that, almost immediately, Absalom began to assemble an entourage, a group of backers that were loyal only to him. This doesn't sound like the actions of a humble son, nor of a good-spirited leader, but rather an ostentatious display of his arrogance and independence. Again, we might ask ourselves, why did David not think this was a bad sign of things to come? Was this the proper conduct of one of this humble king's sons? Of course, it was not, but David

apparently did nothing to stem the tide that Absalom was forcing on Jerusalem. And the next step reveals the fallen son's motives clearly.

No One in the Gates

We have seen thus far that the emotional condition of Absalom's heart was already turning in the wrong direction. His father had failed in helping resolve the issues that had tormented Absalom for several years. And now we can see the other factors that contribute to his open rebellion.

It was common in Old Testament times to find a judge or a ruler at the entrance to a city. "Sitting in the gates" was an expression used in regards to a local authority charged with handling the enquiries of visitors to the city. Sometimes, judgments were passed at the gates, meaning that these same judges had some limited authority to act in cases of dispute or complaint. But in this fifteenth chapter, we find that there is no one acting in this responsibility in the gate that Absalom claimed as his own.

There are two important aspects here: the negligence on David's part to install someone in such a responsibility, and the presumption of Absalom to elect himself into the position. On one hand Absalom was right in seeing the need to have a deputy in the gates as it should be. On the other, however, he had no granted authority to make himself that deputy! Herein is a very fundamental yet profound leadership principle. When senior leaders fail to recognize real needs and implement relevant ministry toward those needs, forward-thinking junior leaders will act, with or without proper authority. In other words, senior leaders create problems when they fail to properly delegate responsibility in times of genuine need.

Talented junior leaders then will be tempted to impose themselves on the structure and act independently of their leaders. The inevitable result is a horrible friction operating in the leadership structure. The juniors will claim they have the right and the mandate to act when seniors fail. And seniors will criticize the juniors while remaining suspicious of all they do. The solution, of course, is in having qualified leaders in the proper places of responsibility at all times. But Absalom had found a breach in David's leadership approach and started his rebellion by filling that gap and using it to launch his campaign of personal popularity among the citizens of the nation.

"I Could Do It Better"

How often have we heard young leaders say this? Talented young men and women with great potential will often be tempted to proclaim this kind of attitude. And it is not always a negative thing at all. A feeling of self-confidence can be very useful for leaders as they embark on their spiritual journey of personal ministry. But they must be very careful not to confuse their hopes of future significance to the

kingdom with an arrogant view of self-importance. In Absalom's case, there can be no doubt as to his motive in what he did.

From his position at the gates of the city, Absalom let it be known to all, visitor and resident, great or small, old or young, that he could run the country much better than his father! He capitalized on David's failure to appoint someone to this position and used it to establish his importance in the eyes of the people. And the way that he used it was two-fold. He combined his declared ability to properly run the country with comments regarding his father's inability to properly manage the affairs of Israel. And this is where senior leaders should sit up and take notice of the leaders that work under their authority. The Apostle John pointed this principle out in his third epistle, verses 9-10:

"I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church."

*True leadership speaks of
a common effort toward
achieving a common
goal.*

Leadership demands teamwork. It does not consist of individual leaders working independently of each other. To the contrary, it speaks of a common effort toward achieving a common goal. Anything less than that becomes a weakened and splintered attempt at accomplishing what only a true "body ministry" can produce. Junior leaders that denigrate senior leaders in order to promote themselves into places of higher responsibility act in a similar way to the way cancer ravages the human body. Instead of different cells combining their efforts in a comprehensive manner to produce a healthy body, cancer cells dominate all others and grow out of control, wreaking havoc where they are allowed to flourish.

Jesus, however, is a God of healing, and expects us to act decisively in removing these spiritual cancer cells before they inflict their damage. And that is exactly the principal behind what John wrote above. He had discerned the attitude of Diotrephes and recognized its danger to the body of Christ. He would not sit idly by and watch the damage inflicted. Absalom flattered and promised his way to having a following while his father ignored his disingenuous deeds. But ignoring cancer does nothing to help the body. And David did nothing to help Israel by turning a blind eye once more to the actions of one of his sons.

Absalom, the Thief

The verse is perfect in its description of Absalom's strategy to usurp the throne of his father. "...So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." The hearts of the men of

Israel should have belonged simply to Israel as they submitted themselves under the direction of their duly appointed leaders. In this case, the chief leader was David, a man chosen by God to lead that nation to greatness. Absalom, by attempting to steal their hearts, was in effect robbing them of their opportunity to participate in God's will. It was in essence breaking nearly every rule of sound leadership practices.

Tearing down others in order to promote self is the furthest thing from the actions of a real leader. Leaders must allow a constant soul searching to take place in their hearts. What moves us to do what we do? What are our real motives in wanting to start a new ministry, go to a new place, or take a new position? Where

Leaders must allow a constant soul-searching to take place in their hearts.

do we find our fulfillment? Is a simple "well done" from our Master enough, or do we seek the applause of men in order to affirm ourselves in their presence? Is our self-importance more than our importance to the integral health and development of the entire body? Or do we, as Diotrephes did, seek to be number one among them all?

Absalom, indeed, was a thief. He not only stole the hearts of hapless followers; he stole a part of the heart of the entire nation. He split the country into two warring factions that could only be reconciled after much bloodshed. Time and time again this same spirit has tried to tear apart the Church and steal its heart. Throughout the ages, men have neglected the mind of Christ and sought their own means of gaining wealth, fame, and power. But Paul ably reminded us in Philippians 3:17-19:

"Brethren be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)"

Nearly every aspect of the Great Commission demands good and true leadership. And when leaders fail, many are wounded. As senior leaders in this great kingdom, we must not fail to minister to those with whom we work, doing our utmost to see them flourish and discover their true spiritual potential. We cannot leave them wounded and wondering, as David did with his own son. If we fail in this, some men, called to be leaders but neglected by us, will gradually turn cold and try to sway the good people of this Church away from their true Leader and build a kingdom for themselves. But if we really try, then perhaps we can still save Absalom before it is too late.

Lesson Eight

THROWING STONES

II Samuel 16:5-8

A bad spirit had descended upon Israel. Like a plague, it had infected many of those who ignorantly took sides with a few malcontented leaders. Absalom, son of King David, had made his play for the throne, rejecting the spiritual authority of his father and thereby trying to overthrow the authority of God. This misdirected son had gathered his faithful followers through flattery and by promising them that he could run the country far better than his father. Empty boastings and vain promises from a prince had caused confusion and division in the city of Jerusalem and in so doing injected the entire nation with a skewed and prejudiced perspective.

At times like these, only the well-informed or the deeply dedicated could survive. Only those who understood David and who knew the truth of Absalom's discontented drive could remain safe from spiritual harm. Unfortunately, many Israelites had no real understanding of the true situation in the capital city. And they were betting their futures on a new leader that had never been proven in loyalty or vision. His bad spirit had done its damage and the rebellion had commenced. In just a few words, the passage in II Samuel 15:13 makes it easy to see:

"And there came a messenger to David, saying, the hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom."

He had his army assembled; he would march on the city; and he would demand the throne from his father. Absalom was prepared to take control of the country at any cost to him, his men, and to the citizenry of Jerusalem. Nothing was going to stand in his way.

Losing a Reputation, Saving a City

Knowing how far his son was ready to go in pursuing his evil ambitions, David gathered his faithful followers and departed Jerusalem before the battle could be enjoined. He knew that if they tried to defend Jerusalem from Absalom and his men, the city would suffer horribly. Many would die for nothing and the city that David cherished would be reduced to a pitiful plight.

But David knew one other key element in this story. He knew that he was the anointed king, placed on the throne by nothing less than the hand of God. And therefore he would remain the king, whether seated upon the physical throne or safe

in the wilderness. In other words, David knew that his throne was not at all a physical one, but rather a position of responsibility and authority ordained by the Lord for the sake of the nation of Israel.

His reputation may have seemed to be at stake, but the welfare of his charged responsibility was much more important to David. Leaders should take note of this. The welfare of the Church, the spiritual health of the body, and the overall integrity of the work of God are all more important than the personal reputation of any of its individual leaders. Sometimes leaders might look “bad” while actually carrying out the will of God. Sometimes leaders will suffer attacks on their reputations while upholding the work and seeing it go forward. This has always been one of the costs of being a spiritual leader. After all, in Philippians 2:4-9, Paul described the spirit or mindset that should be in God’s Church. In doing so, he pointed us to the attitude that Jesus displayed,

*A leader’s reputation
 may fall under attack
 even while faithfully
 carrying out the will of
 God.*

“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

Jesus was the anointed King. Nothing could strip that away from Him, not even the death of the cross. He went as far as suffering the ultimate loss of reputation, but He did it to save not just a city, but a world. David did it for Jerusalem. Today’s leaders are sometimes called upon to do it for the sake of the advancement of the Church. Let us not forget, however, that Jesus was resurrected in power; David was reinstated in Jerusalem; and leaders will be recognized for their sacrifices. But it still is not an easy thing to suffer!

The Root of Bitterness

During his humbling journey out of Jerusalem, David was met in a village called Bahurim by a man named Shimei. This man was a member of the former King Saul’s family. Saul had done his best from seeing David rise to the throne. Although it was clearly the will of God for David to replace Saul as the leader of Israel, Saul had pursued David relentlessly, bent on murdering whom he perceived as a threat to his throne’s safety. David had humbly endured this persecution and patiently waited for God’s timing, never attempting to usurp authority nor trying to overthrow the sovereignty of Saul’s kingdom.

Undoubtedly, many of Saul's followers and family members heard only Saul's side of things during that difficult time, and therefore felt that David was indeed a rebel that had neither right nor claim to the royal throne. Evidently, Shimei was one of them. He was a family member that had never forgiven David for assuming the throne. He probably somehow blamed the death of Saul on the new king, and at Bahurim, seeing David in "disgrace" only urged him on to hurl insults and accusations David's way.

The real problem described here in the story is what the Book of Hebrews calls the 'root of bitterness.' The passage in Hebrews 12:14-17 tells us,

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright."

In an earlier lesson we saw how Esau had never forgiven Jacob for being promoted above him. He never could reconcile Jacob's gain with his own loss. He could never see God's purpose in doing what He did. And bitterness so consumed him that he could never find a place of repentance. This same root found its way into Shimei's spirit and corrupted him also. To Shimei, David represented everything that had gone wrong for his family. And to now see him deposed as king brought a perverted pleasure to this man in Bahurim.

Leaders must constantly tend their inner "gardens" and be on the lookout for this poisonous root. If not weeded out expeditiously, it is guaranteed to overpower us and leave us with nothing but bitter regrets for how things "should have been." We should often remind ourselves of what the Lord declared in Isaiah 46:9-10,

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

The fact is that only God knows the good that He will bring forth if we only hold on to Him through even the toughest times. When we don't understand the "why" of what He is

doing, our responsibility is simply to wait. In His good time, we will understand and we will see what He purposed. Leaders understand that the above passage from Hebrews 12 follows the passage on the "chastisement" that God visits on His people. Without such correction, we become lost on life's seas. But being corrected sometimes involves pain. To shun the correction because of the pain only invites bitterness.

*Leaders know that
 bitterness only blinds
 them from the truth.*

Shimei had totally rejected the correction that God had brought to Israel. He had refused the will of God and had grown horribly bitter against what he perceived to be totally wrong. But David was in fact exactly who God had needed for this time in the nation. Leaders should recognize that bitterness blinds us from the truth and causes us to see only what we want to see.

Cruel Stones

So Shimei cursed David in full view of the public, throwing stones at the same time at the man that God had sent to save Israel. He made cruel claims against David. He blamed him for stealing the throne away from Saul, and proclaimed that this exodus from the city was simply a payback for what David had done to the former leadership. He told everyone listening that day that Absalom would indeed rule in David's stead because David had so horribly failed as a leader.

Taking advantage of a leader's humility is a dangerous game in God's Kingdom! In the Church, the entire basis of leadership is founded upon submission to spiritual authority. Without it, we will never have proper direction from God. But this is not a "blind" submission to foolish leadership that we are asked to display! We know that Psalm 75:7 tells us, *"But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another."* And we read in Daniel 2:21-22, *"And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding. He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him."*

In other words, when it is time to replace a bad leader, God will reveal it. We must have faith that He will act for us and through us as necessary for the sake of the advancement of His Church. Until such time, we follow! Leaders do not, as Shimei did, reject the present leadership and scorn it publicly in order to further their personal campaigns of self-justification. In failing to see and understand what David did and why he was doing it, Shimei had selfishly taken advantage of David's humility and used it against him. Though totally wrong, Shimei saw what he did as completely right and morally justified. Leaders should watch out here. When we find ourselves thinking poorly in regards to our senior leaders, we should find out why. Is it a personal attempt to justify our bitter and ill-founded conclusions? It may be nothing more than a disagreement of opinions on a strategy or an administrative decision. But it could grow into something much more diabolical if left unaddressed. A humble and private enquiry to David by Shimei could have solved the problem in just a moment of time. But his bitterness prevented him from seeing straight. He was sure of what he did and would listen to no one else. Leaders cannot afford this way of thinking to ruin their ministries.

Two Verses

Two verses come to mind at this point of the story. And these verses follow one another in the Book of Ecclesiastes, one the last verse of chapter 10, and the other the opening verse of chapter 11:

“Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter. Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.”

It’s too bad that these were not available to Shimei in those days. Too bad he could not have seen the warning and the promise in these two little verses of scripture. The warning was clear against cursing something he did not and could not understand. And the promise was certain – what we sow today will come back in plenty later on.

Leaders, of all people in the Church, must understand that they will not always understand what senior leaders are doing or why they are doing it. But they hold on to their submission and patiently wait for the revelation to come. This pays off in the future. Shimei cursed it all, found fault with it all, and paid a heavy price for what he “cast upon the waters.”

After the fall of Absalom and the disbanding of his troops, David made his way back to Jerusalem. And Shimei would now receive his reward. He knew very well the crime that he had committed and now wanted to meet David in supposed humility and subjection – but David knew that the damage had been done long before.

A Leader’s Certainty

In II Samuel 19:16-20, Shimei made his plea to David. He went so far as to “confess” his sin before the king. While the king’s captains were ready to execute Shimei on the spot, David was curiously lenient. But in David’s words, we can see the quiet certainty of which we spoke earlier in this lesson. David had never ceased reigning as king, whether or not he was at the palace in Jerusalem. At the close of verse 22, he declared, “...For do not I know that I am this day king over Israel.” Shimei’s curses had changed nothing!

*Real leaders occupy
places of responsibility
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in character and in
experience.*

This sureness on David’s part is an important part of any leader’s makeup. We are who we are. Aside from our own transgressions, little can change it. Real leaders occupy places of responsibility because of who they are in character and in experience. And despite what others may think and despite whatever accusations they may hurl in their direction, leaders have a quiet certainty that God has placed them in the right place for the right reasons at the right time.

So it seems that David dismissed Shimei's guilt offhand because of his own secure sense of who he was. That much is true but there was more to it. While Shimei's actions did not shake David, they did call for a more thorough inspection of Shimei's character. While David tells him, "Thou shalt not die," David was not promising freedom from execution, only a stay of execution while David remained king. He would leave the final test of Shimei's character for his son Solomon to sort out.

The Final Test

It is much later in I Kings 2 where we read of David giving counsel to Solomon regarding what Shimei had done. In verses 8-9 we read,

"And behold, thou hast with thee Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim: but he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I sware to him by the Lord, saying, I will not put thee to death with the sword. Now therefore hold him not guiltless: for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood."

David knew that Shimei would fail the ultimate test. He had recognized the character faults and he knew that the confession he had made was only to spare him from immediate execution and was not made in sincerity. He knew also that Solomon would provide the means by which Shimei could prove one way or the other his loyalty. And sure enough, Solomon found an ideal way to carry it out.

Shimei's bitterness had carried him outside the proper boundaries of a man of good and trustworthy character. His bitterness still remained and could possibly lead to another call for rebellion against the house of David. He had violated godly principles, was worthy of death, but would be given an opportunity to prove his character once more. He should have been grateful for a second chance! Solomon's request in I Kings 2:36-37 was simple enough: Shimei was to build a house in Jerusalem and stay there, never venturing past the brook called Kidron, the small stream that separated Jerusalem from the road to the east—the very road that led to Bahurim. Violation of this command would mean death, and Shimei readily agreed. Only three years later, Shimei found an excuse to leave Jerusalem and head to the east. Whether or not the excuse was legitimate or not is not the point. He violated the conditions set forth by Solomon and paid the ultimate price.

Leaders must have their own properly set boundaries.

We must all live and work within the limits set by doctrine, by spiritual vision and understanding, and by submission to the authorities that God has placed in our lives. To find excuses to go outside these boundaries means that leaders may be tempted to return to their old bitter ways and entertain thoughts of rebellion. Solomon wanted

Shimei in Jerusalem — where he could be close to the house of God, where he could be mentored, and where he could be observed by the king. But Shimei found an excuse to test those boundaries and he fell. He could have happily lived the rest of his life in Jerusalem but chose otherwise. Leaders need boundaries too. And leaders do indeed need stones — but for building, not for throwing.

Lesson Nine

WHEN OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

II Samuel 15:31

It's "*carpe diem*" in Latin, or "*seize the day*" in English. Whichever way it is said though, the message always seems to be that we should grasp each opportunity that is presented to us and make the very best of it. At first glance, it seems like a very valid and admirable leadership principle. After all, leaders should certainly be efficient and wise stewards of God's abundant grace, using what He gives them for His purpose. But in this lesson, we will look at a man that seized an opportunity that proved to be outside the will of God. It cost him his place in the leadership of Israel, and ultimately cost him his very life.

Leaders must beware of "opportunities" that lie outside the will of God.

There really isn't all that much written about Ahithophel in the Bible. Aside from two brief mentions in I Chronicles, his entire history is recorded in II Samuel. We know that, at first, he was David's counselor. And we know that his counsel was very highly regarded in Judah. In II Samuel 16:23, we read,

"And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom."

The oracle of God refers to a place where God spoke. In other words, when Ahithophel offered his advice and wisdom in those days in Jerusalem, everyone listened and knew it came from a divine source. But for some unknown reason, as we read in II Samuel 15:31, he turned from David and joined with Absalom during his rebellious attempt to steal the kingdom away from his father.

We may never know what drove Ahithophel to make this choice. We do know that he was the grandfather of Bathsheba, the woman that David had torn away from her husband and committed adultery with. Was Ahithophel so deeply wounded by David's actions with Bathsheba that he took the side of Absalom during his revolt? Again, we may not know for sure. But there is one aspect of this story that we can be certain about. Ahithophel seized on an opportunity that would quickly destroy him.

Opportunity or Compromise?

The old expression regarding “opportunity knocking” leaves the impression that we must always answer the door and make use of such a chance. But is it always the right thing to do? Is it always proper for a leader to take advantage of opportunities presented to him or her? Or can what we perceive as “opportunities” actually serve sometimes as occasions for potential compromise?

Our choices and decisions in life shape us and make us who we are. The decisions that we make serve in molding us into true leaders. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:6,

“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”

Simply put, we choose what we serve, we choose how we look at life, and we choose our own destiny by our actions. Later, in Romans 12:1-2, Paul went on to describe how we “prove” the will of God in our lives. And it happens in proportion to the way that we offer ourselves as “living sacrifices.” Carefully choosing what and whom we follow is part of a definitive process in living for God. What made Paul so different from Demas? What decisions defined Simon Peter’s walk with God? And what decisions and choices have we made that have helped define us as today’s church leaders?

Leaders recognize that each day there are indeed opportunities that are laid before us—opportunities to grow by, and opportunities to stumble over. Many a pastor, for example, is faced with the life-changing decision as to when to become “full-time” in the ministry. He may have planted a church while working a job. He may have had little choice other than to work full-time in the marketplace while starting the new work. But eventually, as the congregation grows, the church income will become sufficient to support the pastor if he leaves his secular duties behind and focuses full-time on pastoring the church. But that means giving up the income he enjoyed before. It is a decision that is never easy to make, but one that is absolutely necessary in moving forward and building the kingdom.

But what if the pastor takes advantage of the “opportunity” to remain in his secular position even after the church could support him in a full-time capacity? Isn’t it, after all, an opportunity to have much more money and enjoy a finer standard of living for him and his family? Or, is it simply an opportunity to compromise? This decision is one he will make at some time. And this decision will help define his future role in church leadership and ministry.

Leaders recognize the difference between a true opportunity and a real compromise.

This lesson concerns itself with these types of decisions. And several Bible characters help us to see the difference between a true opportunity and a real compromise.

Mad About Money

Matthew 26:6-13 describes the scene. Jesus, having come to Bethany with the disciples, is met by a woman that empties an alabaster box of ointment on Him. She did it in unadulterated worship of the Master, and one would imagine that those who witnessed this act of love would have admired her for it. But at least one of those present expressed his indignation and scorn toward her offering. To him, it was simply a waste of good money! He could think only of what could have been done with the price of that precious ointment that she had unselfishly poured on Jesus' head.

Judas Iscariot's next act clearly defines his fate. Angry at the way that Jesus received the ointment as an act of worship, and unhappy with the way things seemed to be going for the Lord and His disciples, he made his move and seized an "opportunity" to betray Jesus for just a few pieces of silver. Though the Bible tells us that Judas went to the priests and bargained the price of the betrayal, it would seem evident that a reward was probably being offered for information that would lead to Jesus' arrest and conviction. In other words, there was an opportunity for someone to betray Him. And Judas grabbed this chance to profit himself. Was this truly an opportunity? Or was it simply an occasion to compromise? Nearby Judas stood the great adversary, offering advice concerning which path to choose and which decision to make. And Judas obeyed the tempter. In a moment, his life took the final turn toward certain destruction—and it all came to reality when Judas accepted an "opportunity to compromise."

*Leaders know that
"getting ahead" is not
always the right path to
choose in life.*

Leaders recognize that "getting ahead" is not always the path to choose when living for God. One of God's Kingdom principles remains, "*He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*" While not always easy to live, the principle remains eternally true. Not everything that life offers us is expedient to pursue. Getting ahead financially is not always the answer for a spiritual leader. Sometimes, we just have to say, "No."

The Crowd

Leaders cannot be counted as mere members of the "crowd." They are, by definition, ahead of the crowd. They are, in fact, leading the crowd. They are different

than the crowd members. And listening to the crowd can be either greatly beneficial or very harmful.

Being sensitive to followers is always a necessary part of being a leader. We must know that we are in tune with their thoughts and feelings, thereby becoming more able to help meet their spiritual needs as we lead them forward in their Christian experience. But “going along with the crowd” does not always serve in helping the leader in his responsibilities. In fact, sometimes, listening too much causes leaders to agree with the crowd when they should be taking a completely different approach.

Moses’ brother, Aaron, serves as an example of one who simply went along with the crowd’s carnal desires when he should have stood up and acquitted himself as a faithful leader in Israel. With Moses on the mountain and with no word from him in some time, the population

“Going along with the crowd” is a mistake many leaders make.

of Israel began to look for another god that could serve them. Faced with this fervent and emotional setting, Aaron acquiesced and simply did what everyone else did. Exodus 32:1-6 are sad verses describing a man that could not obey what was just and right, but instead took the opportunity to follow along with the crowd and fall into idolatry. Moses’ probing question to his brother in verse 21 should serve as a warning to leaders everywhere:

“And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?”

Israel had needed a number two man to serve them in Moses’ absence. What they got, however, was a compromiser. Aaron’s answer to Moses simply consisted of a series of weak excuses, blaming the people for forcing him into a place of doing what he did. But we know better than this. He had taken an opportunity to be like everybody else, to remain popular, to give everyone what they wanted and make them happy. This is not, however, a mark of true leadership.

True Opportunities

Fortunately, for leaders, there are numerous examples of men and women who did indeed seize the opportunities that God presented them, and who made a great difference in biblical history. Gideon’s chance to become a great leader and rally the Israelites from insignificance and defeat, David’s answer to the challenges of the enemy Goliath, Nehemiah’s burdened commitment to rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls, and Paul and Barnabas’ answer to the call of missions are just a few of the many stories of spiritual leaders who rose to the challenge and took hold of true opportunities to serve.

Discerning the difference between these genuine opportunities and possible compromises becomes a necessary part of a leader's life and character. And this often requires a deep and soul-searching kind of commitment to God and His will for us. The famous scene in John 6 describes this kind of simple, yet profound dedication.

Jesus had preached about what it would take to follow Him. He explained that "drinking His blood" and "eating His flesh" would be requirements for being counted as among His disciples. The crowd to whom He spoke that day was offended by this. They would have no part of such a radical kind of religious obedience. As they slowly left and returned to their own ways of living and believing in their form of God, Jesus turned to His disciples in verse 67 and asked them the poignant question, "*Will ye also go away?*" What was Jesus offering them that day? Was it an opportunity or a chance to compromise? It was indeed both. They could leave with the rest, or they could stay and see what God might do in them and through them.

Peter's response in the following verse stands as an example of the kind of consideration that leaders today must give to such opportunities to go forward or to retreat backwards. He simply said, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*" There, in just a few simple words, Peter described his personal commitment to follow Jesus no matter what. To slink away with the rest of the unbelieving crowd could never have been Peter's answer to the compromise. Instead, he took the moment as a true opportunity to once again choose "for" the Lord and His will. Leaders should do the same.

Opportunistic Leaders

And so Ahithophel changed sides. He gave up his former allegiance to the man that God had called to become king, and chose to back the rebel son, Absalom. It is interesting to note that when Absalom called for Ahithophel to join him, the counselor was no longer living in Jerusalem. For some reason Ahithophel had left Jerusalem and its environment of faithful dedication to God. Although he had remained a counselor to David, Ahithophel had nevertheless begun to lose his faith and his submission to authority. Again, while we do not know what ultimately turned Ahithophel into an enemy of King David, we can see the process beginning to take hold of him. Had he compromised in leaving Jerusalem? Did he consider it an opportunity to go back to his home town and live as he wished? One thing is clear—he was not in the capital when he received Absalom's offer of a new opportunity. He had turned his back on Jerusalem and distanced himself from David. He had, in essence, positioned himself for an evil offer from the enemy.

Satan surely knows where we reside spiritually. He knows how we position ourselves for usefulness in God's kingdom. He as well knows how we distance ourselves from the will of God by making poor decisions that indeed shape our lives.

He is always ready to attack those that are in a weakened condition by reason of their carnal choices. Like he helped cause the undoing of the great counselor, Ahithophel, he will do his best to compromise today's leaders if only given the chance. His opportunities, therefore, remain in our hands. The Apostle James could not have stated it more concisely:

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Taking advantage of real opportunities to serve others in true ministry is the mark of a good leader.

We give the devil opportunity to work in our lives. He, in turn, gives us the opportunities to compromise and horribly derail our journey with Jesus. It is a partnership that is forged in hell and one that is responsible for wrecking the lives of many former leaders.

"Opportunistic" refers to those leaders who are always on the lookout for chances to move ahead, get more, and further their own interests. This is not just a leader that is taking advantage of an opportunity. It is someone who recklessly plunges forward, looking for ways to exploit any occasion to increase personal status, gain, or position. It is a spirit that senior leaders must watch for when working with other leaders on the team. Ambition is one thing; self-interest is another. Jesus said it plainly in Mark 10:44, *"And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all."* Taking advantage of opportunities by which we may serve others in true spiritual ministry will never be in vain! But this was not at all what Ahithophel had in mind.

Changing Sides

He had one thing in mind: the certainty that Absalom would prevail and would replace David as the king. It was, to Ahithophel, an opportunity to change sides and gain a tremendous advantage. It was the "logical" thing to do. He was, after all, unhappy with David and his politics, and here was the opportunity to turn everything around. He would switch his loyalties and render his wise counsel to the rebellious Absalom. Here was the man that acted as if he were the oracle of God, yet he was unable to discern that Absalom had no legitimate claim to the throne and therefore was destined to fail!

This opportunistic leader had seen a chance to join what he thought was the winning team. He had abandoned all godly principles and accepted an "opportunity" to make himself a prominent figure once again in Israel. And in doing so, he gave up all rights to being remembered as a true and spiritual leader. The passage in I Chronicles 27:33 simply reads, *"And Ahithophel was the king's counselor."* Once he had been greatly used by God, but after his betrayal of David, he became just a figure of the past.

Psalm 41:9 is thought to be a prophetic reference to Judas and his duplicity in giving up Jesus for thirty silver pieces. But Psalm 55:12-13 is thought by some to refer to Ahithophel:

"For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance."

Opportunities or compromises—we choose which every day. Leaders look closely at the choices available and choose very carefully. We must learn from the fall of a great counselor, a good friend, and a spiritual guide. Ahithophel seized on an opportunity and lost everything. When opportunity knocks, how will we answer?

Lesson Ten

BEING NUMBER TWO

II Samuel 20:4-10

We need our “number two” men in the leadership of the Church. They serve in a very important capacity in the delegation of authority and responsibility. Without them, the work will always suffer. And while it may seem to be an easy role to fulfill, in reality it has its own unique and difficult challenges. And for that reason, we find very few that qualify for this profoundly needed role. The choosing of such high level leaders should be made carefully and the men and women for these posts should be developed with genuine care. Good number two leaders do not appear by accident. They are cultivated, groomed, and chosen for their unique contributions to the overall work.

*Good “number two”
 leaders do not appear by
 accident.*

In an earlier lesson we looked at Joab and his faults. We saw how he had resisted needed change in Israel by refusing to become part of the change himself. He had acted independently on more than one occasion, never seeking the counsel of his leader. He had tenaciously clung to his position and found his self-worth tied to his title rather than to his direct contribution to the kingdom. He had cruelly executed Absalom against the orders of his king. And finally, he became a victim of the root of bitterness that had afflicted his soul for so long. This list of personal “failures” is indeed a long one. But sadly enough the list would continue to grow in II Samuel 20.

Joab’s murder of Amasa in verse 10 speaks volumes about the poor character of Joab. Perhaps being a nephew of David the king had tainted his way of thinking. Perhaps he felt he possessed certain privileges that would permit his many transgressions. Whatever the case for his errant conduct, Joab stands as a “good example of a bad leader,” especially one that fills the role of a number two man on a team. So as we look at the challenges that Joab stumbled at, certain principles will emerge that should help enable leaders that serve in this important capacity.

Abiding Number One’s Decisions

While it would be easy to assume that assistants would always be in total agreement with their superior’s decisions, it would also be extremely naïve. It just doesn’t fit reality! In actuality, a number two man will often have to learn to live with senior decisions. A good number one man will always continue to seek the advice and counsel of his junior leaders working with him. And it will remain a good practice

to include junior leaders in any decision-making process. But from time to time, the senior leader will be called upon to make a final decision and he must stand firm in such a decision properly made. The second man must learn to abide such judgments.

Solidarity in leadership is an important factor in the unity of the body. Any sense among the general membership of a group regarding the unanimity of its leadership on a policy or decision can wreak havoc. Rebellious spirits thrive during such times of doubt in the leadership. Many a faction has arisen during times when junior leaders have publicly displayed their unhappiness with a senior's decision. One of the greatest responsibilities of leaders at all levels is manifesting their commitment to the team and proclaiming their allegiance to the overall cause. The time to express doubts and opposite opinions is in the confines of a meeting room where only leaders are invited. Public debates regarding policy serve little in the church realm. Doctrine, administration, and the comprehensive vision for the church's progress remain the responsibility of its leaders.

Joab, however, frequently questioned the judgment of his uncle, the king. This led sometimes to independent solutions to problems that went against the wishes of his superior. This rarely solves anything, and in fact, usually creates confusion in the body.

The channels of communication between senior and junior leaders must, therefore, remain open, frank, and honest at all times. They should be open in the sense of leaders being available to one another for discussion and deliberations. They should be frank in regards to the candidness of one another's opinions, with leaders knowing that they will have a forum in which to freely express themselves. And finally, these communications must be honest, with no hidden agenda attached to the opinions of the leadership. Sincere contributions of opinion and advice should be welcomed in any leadership structure. And these contributions should be made without fear of repercussions.

Communication between junior and senior leaders should be open, frank, and honest.

It is difficult to determine if King David operated with these clear and open channels of communication with Joab. And we might rightly doubt that he did. Nonetheless, Joab's responsibilities toward his submission to David remained the same. And so it is for junior leaders today. It can be very frustrating for them when the senior man does not encourage open communication. But this does not change what the number two man must do. Added to this is our understanding of the Kingdom principles that God has established for His Church. We understand spiritual submission and we must also believe that the Lord will make changes in leadership as He deems necessary. In other words, when number two is right and

number one is wrong, we must leave the rest to God to change! After all, what if in the end the senior leader's decision turns out to be the correct one?

Seeing the Big Picture

Every senior leader knows about the “big picture.” This is what is often seen only by the senior man. It is not always possible to share every aspect of every situation or problem with all of the junior leaders on the team. Sometimes discretion prevents this. Other times, there is not sufficient time to bring every leader on board the decision-making process. For whatever reasons, there will always be those times where the junior staff does not see the big picture as well as the number one man. And at such times, the responsibility of the junior leaders remains the same—trusting and supporting the senior's wisdom and action.

Junior leaders would do well in understanding that senior leaders often see the “bigger picture.”

David had made a huge decision in II Samuel 19:13. He had decided to replace Joab as captain of the host, or as we might term it today, as his senior general. Amasa had been chosen, and David had his reasons. In this case, it would have been useless to consult with Joab regarding his opinion! He certainly would have opposed it, perhaps to the point of fomenting an open rebellion against his uncle, the king.

There was an aspect of correction to David's decision. Displeased with Joab's murder of Absalom, David knew that some kind of sanction against Joab was called for. His replacement with Amasa would serve as such a sanction. But there was more to it than that. Also at stake was the unity of the entire nation. There was the beginning of a division forming between the men of Judah and the men of Israel. The tribes were divided when the tribes of Judah took upon themselves the responsibility of reinstalling David on his throne at Jerusalem after the death of the rebel son, Absalom. The other men of Israel resented this. Added to this was the multitude of warriors that had joined Absalom in his effort to overthrow David. Now, David was calling for the man that Absalom had chosen as his general to become the general for the entire army of Israel. In other words, he was using the promotion of Amasa as a symbol of reconciliation for all the men that had vainly and unsuccessfully supported Absalom. By appointing Amasa to such a position in the kingdom, David was announcing that all could be forgiven as the nation regrouped and reunified. Joab could see none of this.

Joab's spiritual “tunnel vision” caused him to see only what he wanted to see. He had a very selfish perspective on what mattered most. And to Joab, what mattered most was maintaining his position as number two in the nation. If this meant killing Amasa, Joab would carry out this mission himself. In lieu of allowing the change to

take place and then seeing his new responsibilities in the new administration, Joab cut short the work of the senior leader's decision. He ignored the fact there could even be a bigger picture to see.

Church leaders could learn a lot in this one aspect of Joab's failures. Saints frequently wonder at the pastor's decisions because they lack the bigger picture. Pastors sometimes find fault with a national board's decisions because they lack seeing the bigger picture. It happens all too easily when we forget how good leaders discharge their responsibilities. They gather all the information they can on the subject; they seek the counsel of as many other leaders as possible; and they make their decision. Junior leaders must learn to respect this process. This, after all, is one of the very reasons that leadership functions in the body—to see the bigger picture and make relevant decisions based upon that comprehensive perspective of the real state of affairs. By respecting this decision-making process and submitting to senior leadership, junior leaders (especially number two men) position themselves to be useful in the same capacity in the future. They, too, will see the bigger picture one day.

Another's Promotion

An obvious failure in Joab was the jealousy and contempt he felt when he was replaced. Unfortunately for leaders today, this is a very common tendency and is simply "human nature." We all want to be held in the highest esteem and to be rewarded for our efforts. To be replaced by another can become a serious test of real humility.

Leaders should remember that they are in positions of responsibility because they have proven their character and they have demonstrated their loyalty. If neither of those changes for the worse, these leaders can expect to always be useful in the administration and the ministry of the Church. And that should help change a leader's perspective on being "replaced." A good leader knows that, should he be replaced, a new place of responsibility will eventually open for him. Why should their gifts and talents be wasted?

To Joab, however, his position meant everything to him. And to lose it meant losing himself. Too many churches and church organizations have suffered at the hands of leaders that shared this same attitude. Once threatened with being replaced by someone more dedicated, more qualified, or more able to carry out the job, they lash out and destroy whomever they must in order to safeguard their position. We cannot afford this mentality in the revival movement today.

Circumventing Authority

It is hard to say if this problem in Joab's life was the root or the fruit of the tree. Was his lack of submission to authority the cause of the rest of his problems? Or was it the result of the other problem areas in his life? Whichever one it was, we know that Joab acted on his own initiative outside his delegated authority, and he did this more than once. He simply countermanded the decision of the king and carried out his own selfish agenda.

Any senior leader would prefer to engage in deliberations with a junior leader rather than see the number two man execute his own plan independently. We certainly believe the exhortation in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12:

"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken."

***Leaders do not serve with
a view of self-
aggrandizement.***

But this is not speaking of two heads on one body! This is two people working in harmony and under an established relationship which includes boundaries of responsibility. But Joab had created a two-headed monster in Israel—with David declaring one thing, and Joab carrying out another! This kind of action can only go on for so long. Eventually it will be rooted out and dealt with. But the damage may already have been done in the body.

Essentially, what Joab was doing was using David's kingdom to further his own ambitions. And number two leaders must beware of this mistake. We do not serve our leaders with a view of self-aggrandizement. We serve to make others better at who they are and what they do. But Joab had found that his position in David's court gave him a platform for personal gain, and would use royal authority to further his own goals. When this fault surfaces in a leader's ministry, his usefulness begins to diminish. In Joab's case, he had learned that he could use the number two position as a means by which he could act as number one!

A Noble Position

Despite the world's constant assessment that number one is the only acceptable position, the role as a number two man in God's Kingdom is an example of a true Christian spirit. Men of the Bible such as Barnabas, Jonathan, and Joshua fulfilled their responsibilities and did it with grace and humility. These men served others in submission and in harmony. They enhanced the positions of their seniors to the good

of the overall cause. And they did it because they recognized their own strengths, knowing that their function in the body was a vital one that called for extraordinary men. Theirs was not a “backseat” position or a relegation to a level of lesser importance. It was rather a key part of God’s effort to advance His plan on earth.

While it may seem outside the scope of this lesson, the example of Eve’s creation is worth mentioning here. Genesis 2:18 is worth a close look:

“And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”

Unfortunately, this verse is often misquoted and/or misunderstood. Eve was not created as a “helpmate” for Adam, some kind of lesser being that could only be his helper as and when called for. Instead, the Bible calls her a help that was “meet” for Adam. And this word is the key to the meaning of the verse and to her creation’s purpose. Young’s Literal Translation of the Holy Bible translates it as “helper – as his counterpart.” Eve was created to help Adam indeed, but as his equal in importance differing primarily in responsibility and authority, however. This remains true of the number two man in a leadership context. Eve was worthy to be called Adam’s “number two.” And today’s leaders should be spiritually proud to fulfill such an important role. Unlike Joab, they are worthy of our respect and our admiration.

Whatever place of responsibility we find ourselves occupying, let us as leaders give it our best effort, knowing that one day we shall see with our eyes the eternal fruit of our labors. We desperately need men and women of high spiritual caliber to occupy such positions as that of number two in a church or on a board. But few dare to risk their pride, and thereby disqualify themselves from assuming such a key place in the church’s administration. Few step up to the challenge of working in submissive harmony with senior leaders. Too few quietly carry out their respective responsibilities under the authority of others. And of those that do, too few are properly recognized for their contribution to the growth of the body. But this kind of leadership should be highly esteemed and greatly valued. They serve in a vital capacity in the chain of authority that operates in the Church. Without them, how can we ever grow?