

Project Runway

Designer Clothes For Disciples

David: Part 4



Written By
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Reading illustrations the other day on Preachingtoday.com, my jaw dropped when I read this moving story:

In his best-selling book *The Telling Room*, Michael Paterniti shares a true story he heard when visiting his father's ancestral village in Sicily. Every day while he was in the village he saw a very old woman walking with her cane, struggling up a steep road to get to the local cemetery. It was said that at her tortoise pace, the walk from her home to the cemetery and back took about six hours out of her day.

At this point in the story, I started to get emotionally moved by the devotion and love of the old woman. Believe me, that warm feeling didn't last long. Read on and you'll see what I mean:

What grief inspired her difficult daily walk? Was she driven by sorrow over a departed child or a deceased husband, the love of her life? No, the locals told Paterniti that she was driven by *Astio*, or bitter hatred. Her archenemy was buried

in that cemetery. So, rain or shine, the old woman walked up the hill every day to her enemy's gravesite, just to spit on it one more time.¹

Can you imagine the depth of the animosity and hatred this old woman nursed for your opponent in life? Is it not unfathomable?

Maybe you are shaking your head right now and saying, "Unfortunately, Pastor, I have a person in my life like that, an individual who lives to oppose me and make my life difficult. They've been after me for years, and, honestly, they don't have any grounds for their provocative, pernicious, pugnacious behavior, and based on mis-information and false assumptions, they keep up the bold barrage. Believe me, they are wearing me down."

Should this be your life situation, I've got one question to ask you this Father's Day. How should a godly man respond to someone who wears a wardrobe of warfare? Having been in that tough, thorny situation myself more times than I'd like to think about, I'm here today to tell that the stories of saints in the same situation in the Bible contain ample wisdom and insight to help you live a life in the conflict which will mature you and bring God the glory ... and it might even win your adversary to Christ or cause them to grow up in their faith.

David had a heart and deep, abiding love for God, and God had an abiding love for David. This is why God trained his servant to be the king of Israel by testing and conditioning him for his future role by seeing how he'd fare with someone who couldn't wait to spit on his grave, as it were. Would he bend and break? Would he retaliate in anger? Would he stay the course? Would he exhibit Christlike characteristics when falsely and wrongly accused? David would discover the answers to those questions as his life became a "problem" for the most powerful person in the kingdom, King Saul.

We know God tore the kingdom away from Saul based on his disobedience to the Lord's command regarding what to do with their enemies, the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15), while promising to give it to someone else better suited for the position. That person was a young man, a shepherd boy from basically nowhere named David. Samuel anointed him as king, per God's direction, immediately after He promised to remove Saul as king, and the ensuing chapters of 1 Samuel demonstrate the divinely ordained rise of David to throne of Israel and the slow slide and eventual fall of King Saul.

The story concerning these two kings, one chosen of God and one rejected of God, reaches a fever pitch in 1 Samuel 24. Within the inspired lines of this historical narrative we unearth a spiritual principle worthy more than all the riches on the planet:

A Maturing Man Shows Mercy To Menacing Men (1 Samuel 24)

To properly and effectively open up this guiding principle, I suggest we work our way through the rhetorical structure of the passage:

First, we encounter what I call ...

The Conflict (1 Samuel 24:1-4a)

¹ Adapted from Michael Paterniti, *The Telling Room* (The Dial Press, 2013): 175.

What you are about to read is but a small snapshot of the hostile actions Saul took to eliminate David, the competitor to his throne.

¹ Now when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, saying, “Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi.” ² Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats.

Shocking. At a time when his eastern flank along the coast was dealing with fierce enemies, King Saul thought it wise to take 3,000 of his best battle-hardened troops and send them on a search and destroy mission to the east. Who was the dreaded enemy? David, the young boy who had single-handedly taken out and brought down the giant Philistine warrior named Goliath. What was David’s crime? What had he done to warrant the King’s wrath? Why was the King consumed with cornering and killing him ... the hero of the nation and their most courageous and valiant warrior? To answer these questions, we need to back up in the narrative.

After David killed Goliath with his slingshot and one well-aimed smooth stone, King Saul and David took a tour of Israel. He didn’t like what the women sang as they passed through the towns:

⁷ The women sang as they played, and said, “Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands.” ⁸ Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?”
⁹ Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on (1 Samuel 18).

What was King Saul’s problem? We’d label it JEALOUSY. He, the valiant warrior, the physical specimen of a soldier couldn’t bear that David’s one battlefield exploit garnered him more public praise than he’d ever received. His twisted thinking echoed off the walls of his mind: How dare they praise David more than they ever praised him. How dare they, despite all of my years of experience, elevate a young teen above me.”

Jealousy is an insidious, destructive, highly corrosive sin, isn’t it? Jealousy will cause you to chafe against the sovereignty of God. Jealousy will undo you, robbing you a peace. Jealousy will motivate you to do illogical, mean-spirited things toward innocent people. Jealousy will keep you from working well with others. Jealousy is a green-eyed monster with tenacious tentacles which will suck real life out of your spiritual body. Jealousy grabbed ahold of Saul’s heart and he let its grasp grow unchecked.

To read what the inspired author records after Saul heard the song of the women is to see a man out of control, is to watch a man’s life come untethered because of hidden jealousy.

- The next day he threw a sharp spear at David while he played his harp in the King’s presence (1 Samuel 18:10). David escaped this attempt on his life, but I’m sure he was left wondering, “What did I do to deserve that?”
- Saul later appointed David as a commander over some troops and when he flourished as a leader, Saul’s jealousy only grew more powerful (1 Samuel 18:15).

- Saul purposefully set up events to get David killed in action by the Philistines (1 Samuel 18:20-30).
- Saul commanded his son, Jonathan, to personally kill David (1 Samuel 19:1). Don't tell me jealousy won't drive you to commit unbelievable, unthinkable things.
- Later, Saul threw another spear at David after the young man defeated their enemies, the Philistines, in battle (1 Samuel 19:8-10). Again, David must have wondered, "What did I ever do to get on the King's bad side? What has he got against me because I've never done anything to hurt or harm him? What is his problem?"
- Saul sent a secret hit squad to watch and take David out (1 Samuel 19:11), but David's wife tipped him off and he escaped.
- Saul personally traveled to Ramah to eliminate David when his troops failed him (1 Samuel 19:22). Once more, God delivered David.
- Saul executed 85 priests who helped David flee from him, and he, then, turned and wiped out their entire town (1 Samuel 22:11-23). Who says that jealousy isn't that big of a sin? Rouchefoucauld couldn't have said it any better, "The jealous man poisons his own banquet and then eats it."² Sadly, Saul ate a meal which would eventually cost him his life.
- Saul moved south toward the rocky region called Ziph, as one heads toward the Dead Sea, in his quest to kill David, his competition (1 Samuel 23:15ff); however Saul's son, and rightful heir to the throne, Jonathan, warned David, who fled to the desert region north west of the Dead Sea called En-gedi.

Don't you know David and his troops were tired? Don't you know they were confused, after all, they were loyal soldiers of Israel, men willing to lay their lives down for their country ... and their



own King pursued them with intent to kill their leading officer, David. Don't you know many of them would have loved the opportunity to personally take out the mis-guided, menacing King Saul in order to restore sanity to the country?

At En-gedi it appeared they finally had their golden opportunity.

² Tryon Edwards, *The New Dictionary of Thoughts* (Standard Book Company, 1957): 320.

En-gedi is a small, very rocky gorge (wadi) in the hills just a few miles west from the trackless, barren desert leading to the Dead Sea. Walking up this gorge, you can't help but see the steep slopes rising hundreds of feet above your head, nor can you miss massive stones which are so precariously perched it looks like a light wind just might cause them to topple on top of you, and you can't help but see countless caves all over the place. You also can't miss the life-giving water as it



dances off the wet, slippery rocks on its way to the valley floor. Hiking further, you quickly learn how this water comes from a large waterfall which used to run through a massive, darkened cave.

David and his men were hiding from Saul in the recesses of this cave when the King entered without his bodyguard to go to the bathroom. The divinely inspired author sets the stage for what transpired:

³ He came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave. ⁴ The men of David said to him, “Behold, *this* is the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.’” (1 Samuel 24).

We don't have any record of David receiving a prophecy of this nature. Arnold is probably correct when he offers



these plausible alternatives:

“Though we have no such specific promise recorded in the Bible, they may have been offering their own interpretation of the episode of David’s anointing (16:13), of Jonathan’s abdication of his right to rule (18:1-4), or of Jonathan’s assertion that David will certainly become king (23:15-18). At any rate, this seems to David’s men like a divine moment ...”³

How could they not have thought this was David’s moment to settle the score, to vindicate himself, and to put them in a position to walk freely among their people again? All of this makes you stop and wonder: “Lord, if you place the person who is menacing toward me right now in a disadvantageous position for them, but in an advantageous position to me, how should I react in a godly fashion?” Will you end the conflict, or will you place yourself in the hands of God’s perfect, providential leadership?

From this section describing the conflict, we move to ...

The Cutter (1 Samuel 24:4b)

David is the cutter and his actions catch everyone off guard in the cave:

Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul’s robe secretly.

A couple of questions naturally arise from what just occurred.

One, how did he creep up and cut off a section of the king’s robe without the king knowing it? Remember, a waterfall fed this cave. Just the sound of the water falling hundreds of feet into this subterranean structure onto all those rocks would have created a whole lot of diversionary noise.

Two, why didn’t David kill Saul? He respected the king and his divinely ordained office. Getting even or getting revenge when he had been wrongly hunted all over the place was not his call. Removal of a king, no matter how evil he was, was God’s job ... no David’s. That’s why he didn’t kill his “enemy.” Armed with a piece of his royal robe would place David in a position to prove the purity of his motives toward the king, despite what his advisors said or what Saul presupposed in his jealousy.

In taking this merciful action, David acted in a humble fashion and in so doing reflected the image of Jesus, the Christ:

³⁸ You have heard that it was said, ‘AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.’

³⁹ But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. ⁴¹ Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴² Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. ⁴³ You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father

³ Bill Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003): 330.

who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. ⁴⁶ “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (Matthew 5).

What about you? Will you be Christlike toward that person who is demon-like toward you? When they are in a prone position, will you go for the proverbial jugular vein, or will you show them unexpected mercy? This is what maturing men do. They seize the moment for the flesh. They seize the moment for God.

Predictably, David’s largesse isn’t received well by his soldiers. We see this in the next section I label ...

The Conviction (1 Samuel 24:5-7)

What kind of conviction? The kind which comes from the Spirit of God. The kind which comes directly to your conscience, leaving you with clear path God would have you walk on:

⁵ It came about afterward that David’s conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul’s robe. ⁶ So he said to his men, “Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD’S anointed.” ⁷ David persuaded his men with these words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on his way.

No sooner did David climb back up to his shocked troops, than his old conscience kicked into high gear. What is your conscience? Richard Sibbes, the Puritan pastor, defines it well:

It is a register to record what we have done in exact detail (Jer. 17:1). It is the accuser that lodges a complaint against us when we are guilty and a defender to side with us in our innocence (Rom. 2:15). It acts as a witness, giving testimony for or against us (2 Cor. 1:12). It is the judge, condemning or vindicating us (1 Jn. 3:20-21). And it is the executioner, smiting us with grief when our guilt is discovered (1 Sam. 24:5).⁴

David’s conscience convicted him to spare Saul because Saul was God’s anointed king. True, so, too, was David; however, it was not his place to get back at the king even though the king had badly and unjustifiably mistreated him ... and his men. David’s respect for God and his utter humility wouldn’t let him step over that line and mess with the plans and purposes of God Almighty. What a man of God. All of this, of course, merely validates our primary premise: *Show me a man maturing in his walk with God and I’ll show you one who will be merciful toward those menacing, mean-spirited people in their lives.* You just might need to read that sentence one more time to allow it to seep into the soil of your life.

You might also need to ask yourself some personal, probing questions:

⁴ John MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994): 40.

- Am I showing humility toward that menacing person in my life? Such is the way of a maturing, growing saint, and, believe me, there is no better path to be on this Father's Day.
- Is my conscience clear regarding how I respond to those who make my life tough? Don't forget, our goal as believers, according to Paul, is to live each day with a clear conscience (Acts 23:1; 1 Timothy 1:18-19).
- What is my conscience telling me right now, and I'm sure it is telling you quite a bit, isn't it?

David's conscience told him to show mercy, and once he calmed his men down that's just what he did. He let Saul walk quietly out of the cave toward life.

With the next movement of this historical story, we bump into ...

The Clarification (1 Samuel 24:8-15)

This is a lengthy portion of Scripture, but I think we can move quickly and effectively through it by first reading it while offering some timely observations and applications:

⁸ Now afterward David arose and went out of the cave and called after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself. ⁹ David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men, saying, 'Behold, David seeks to harm you?' ¹⁰ "Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD had given you today into my hand in the cave, and some said to kill you, but my eye had pity on you; and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD'S anointed.' ¹¹ "Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life to take it. ¹² "May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you. ¹³ "As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness'; but my hand shall not be against you. ¹⁴ "After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea? ¹⁵ "The LORD therefore be judge and decide between you and me; and may He see and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

Jaw-dropping story, wouldn't you agree? Now, onto those much needed observations and applications.

First, for David to step out of the cave and into the unguarded sunlight was the epitome of courage, plus he put himself and his men in a disadvantageous position because they were in a dead-end ravine with no way out. Makes you wonder, "Lord, in my complex situation, what courageous action do I need to take? What cave do I need to come out where I've been hiding? What things do I need to say to let my so-called enemy that I do not, in fact, have it out for them?"

Second, notice the kind, gentle, respectful language of David directed toward a man consumed with killing him. He calls him, “My Lord.” Later in verse 11 he uses the endearing term: father. Amazing. Don’t overlook the humility which drips from him bowing before the king. David’s name in Hebrew is composed of three consonants:

דָּוִד

The middle letter, reading from right to left, is a *waw*, or our equivalent of the letter “v.” It is a broken letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and the rabbis say it was appropriately placed at the center of David’s name because it represented his broken humility before God. We can readily see that humility in action here in this account, can’t we?

Third, David effectively uses the situation in the cave to demonstrate that despite what Saul has heard, he has never had any evil intention toward the king. The piece of Saul’s royal robe in his hand clearly underscored David’s purity and innocence toward the king. Had he been the subversive, sinister man Saul thought he was he would have naturally killed the king. The proof of his innocence couldn’t have been clearer.

Fourth, twice David states that he leaves the whole throne question to God. He is more interested in God giving him the throne at the right time, than he is of taking it by force. Again, the piece of the royal robe dangling from David’s hand illustrated that truth perfectly.

Fifth, David clarified his position by likening himself to a dead dog or a flea. What could be less threatening? A dead dog isn’t going to bite anyone, and what harm can a little flea do to anybody? Not much. Once more, to take this tact was to diminish himself. If David were all about dethroning Saul, he wouldn’t have spoken like this at all. He would have likened himself to a lion, or a bear, or a mighty stallion. But he didn’t because he was a humble man consumed with walking, by faith, in God’s perfect leadership.

How does this speak to you? I hope it leaves you being challenged to speak in a humble fashion toward those who are making your life difficult. I hope it challenges you to show not only mercy toward them, but to show them the evidence that you are, in fact, not against them, no matter what they think, what they’ve been told, or how they’ve misread various life situations. I hope it moves you to find a moment where you can come out from the cave where you’re hunkered down so you can attempt to lovingly and humbly point the problem person to the facts about how you feel about them. Got anyone in mind? Good. Now get your facts together and wait for the Lord to tell you when it’s time to leave the cave and approach them. Will it be risky? Yes. Will it take courage? You bet. Will it be worth it? Standing up for truth, especially where it intersects with our personal lives, is always worth it. Why? Because we, as saints, as maturing men, are supposed to be about creating relationships of peace, not in feeding their dysfunction.

How did Saul respond to David’s honesty and humility? Read on and you’ll see in the final section I identify as ...

The Confession (1 Samuel 24:16-22)

Whose confession? King Saul’s.

¹⁶ When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, “Is this your voice, my son David?” Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept. ¹⁷ He said to David,

“You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. ¹⁸ “You have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD delivered me into your hand and yet you did not kill me. ¹⁹ “For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day. ²⁰ “Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. ²¹ “So now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me and that you will not destroy my name from my father’s household.” ²² David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

These words came from the mouth of a man who had done everything from trying to kill David with a spear to wiping out an entire town just because it aided David and his escape. What does this tell us? It tells us that merciful action, bathed in humility, and wrapped up in facts can plough the heart of the most menacing man. Sure, Saul returned to his carnal hatred of David later; however, for a brief moment the merciful actions of this humble young man broke through and grabbed the heart of this deeply disturbed and highly jealous man. In time and eternity, it is David’s actions which will be remembered by God.

What will you be remembered for? Better yet, what kind of fathers do we need in our city, country, and world? We are in desperate need of merciful men who abound in humility and seek to bring peace to all the relationships God brings their way, whether they are easy ones or difficult ones. Men who are maturing spiritually are committed to evidencing these traits. Let us be counted with the David types this Father’s Day. Let us, also, be expectant as God will most certainly do some much need ploughing.