

a Heart for God

But King David said to Ornan, “No, but I will surely buy it for the full price; for I will not take what is yours for the Lord, or offer a burnt offering which costs me nothing.”

1 Chronicles 21:24



JUST AS SOME PEOPLE CONFUSE “excellence” with “perfection,” some of us imagine that because God referred to David as “a man after His own heart,” this meant that David enjoyed a seemingly supernatural *similarity* to the Lord. That, however, is not at all what it means. Rather, the designation by God Himself means that, in contrast to the self-interested Saul, David truly had God’s interests at heart.

The twenty-first chapter of First Chronicles offers us two examples of what it means to be a man after God’s own heart.

The Devil Made Me do It

Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.

1 Chronicles 21:1

God’s word is clear: Satan was responsible for moving King David to take an unauthorized census, thus sinning against the Lord. When God caught Saul doing something similar, the king whined and rationalized and blamed others. Yet when confronted, David made no mention of any efforts by the evil one and took full responsibility for his action.

David said to God, “I have sinned greatly, in that I have done this thing. But now, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”

1 Chronicles 21:8

Confession, followed by a plea for for-

giveness and restoration; that was David’s pattern. He was still made of flesh, and from time to time he would sin. But because his heart was for the Lord he kept short accounts, called sin what it was, confessed it, and entreated the Lord to “restore to me the joy of Your salvation.”

Painless Devotion

After the Lord punished David—and Israel as a whole—for his sin, he required the king to build an altar atop Mount Moriah (Ornan’s threshing floor, and site of the future Jerusalem temple) and to offer upon that new altar a burnt sacrifice. The owner of the threshing floor, in deference to his king, tried to give David the parcel of land free of charge, as well as the wood for the fire and the oxen and grain for the sacrifice.

But David was having none of that. Having a heart for God, he understood the true meaning of the word “sacrifice.” How dare he offer a sacrifice to God that cost him nothing! So he paid Ornan the princely sum of 240 ounces of gold for the land.



Sin is the natural byproduct of flesh, and until the believer stands in the presence of the Lord it will be a part of his life. The lesson from David is that when sin occurs, we do not waste time blaming others or rationalizing our transgression, but we call it what it is, deal with it, confess it, and seek—from Him—the revival of our soul.

He restores my soul;
He guides me in the paths of righteousness
For His name’s sake.

Psalms 23:3

The second lesson we learn from David is that the word “sacrifice” is to mean just that. When the Lord codified sacrifice for the Israelites, He told them that only the *best* from their flock would do—not the crippled or maimed. And even in the time of the early church, how did God react when someone skimmed the top of their “sacrifice” and gave the church only what was left over?

“Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.

Acts 5:4b-5

Is what we give to the Lord off the top, or is it only from that which is left over? Is what we place in the offering plate a generous portion of the gross, or only a percentage of what is left after we’ve paid everyone else? Do we give our time and labor to the Lord even when it is inconvenient, or only when we have some spare time on our calendar?

Do we, like David, truly have a heart for God? Is He truly Lord of our life—or just an acquaintance we sing to on Sunday mornings?

