

PREFACE

I was pleasantly surprised by the entry under “humility” in my favorite Thesaurus since 1982 (*The Synonym Finder*, by J.I. Rodale). I was looking for the best one-word label with which to encapsulate this quality of David. I wasn’t sure which was best: humility, obedience, modesty, or maybe there was something better. The entry for humility included all these, but added one more: “godliness.” How appropriate.

AN ABSENCE OF PRIDE

What impresses me the most in the story of David’s early days—say, the period from his anointing by Samuel to his being crowned king in Judah—is his humility. Webster’s defines a humble person as one “in which there is an absence of pride and assertiveness.” The young David did not know it, but he was emulating what would be the character and behavior of the incarnate Son of God—more than one thousand years in the future.

Read Matthew 11:29.

How was this manifested in Christ Jesus? We have the answer in Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

Read Philippians 2:3-8.

Just as in Jesus, his dynastic successor, humility in David was exemplified by his temporarily setting aside his rights as the anointed king. We see this immediately after Samuel departs from Bethlehem. [We are still in 1 Samuel 16](#); look near the end of that chapter.

Question: What did David do right after he was anointed king?

When Saul wanted someone to soothe the evil spirit in him, he sent for Jesse’s son David, *who was already back tending the sheep* (v19). Even though David was described as “...a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the LORD is with him” (1 Samuel 16:18b)—and had already been anointed king—he willingly became Saul’s servant to play music for him to soothe and refresh the king, and to help drive away the evil spirit; he also became his armor bearer, his right-hand man in battle. All this he did for the king he had already been anointed to replace.

Just imagine the level of modesty and humility this would require! How easy it would have been for David to have a spirit and attitude of entitlement. Instead, he set that aside to become a servant. ([sound familiar?](#))

Sidebar: Because this class is not an in-depth, verse-by-verse study of 1 & 2 Samuel, or even David’s life, we will not be investigating and resolving the apparent chronological discrepancies we discover in the text. For example, by my reckoning, David would have been about fifteen when he was anointed. Yet he is already described as “a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech.” All these questions *can* be resolved; we just will not be doing it here.

There was, however, something David did *not* set aside: his responsibility as the youngest to his father and his family. In Chapter Seventeen we learn that his three oldest brothers were soldiers with King Saul, at the battle lines against the Philistines. And v15 tells us that “David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father’s flock at Bethlehem.” So even after Saul had brought him to court, in service to the king, David continued to tend the sheep for his family.

Turn please to Chapter Eighteen.

Brotherly Love

Jonathan, first-born of Saul, was the heir-apparent to the throne of Israel. David was the one God had already chosen and anointed for that same throne. In an age when thrones were obtained through subterfuge, treachery and murder; in a day when brothers would kill brothers to ensure power for themselves, Jonathan and David loved each other.

Read 1 Samuel 18:1-4.

In fact, remarkably, the text emphasizes Jonathan’s love for David. Though it was certainly reciprocated, more is mentioned of the king’s son’s love for David than of David for him. Jonathan himself is a wonderful example of character from which we all could learn. Jonathan *knew* that David was the anointed to replace his father ([1 Samuel 23:17](#)), yet he loved David as a brother. Anyone else would have slain the one he would have seen as a pretender to his rightful place on the throne—but not Jonathan.

From David’s side, if, from a human perspective, there was anyone to stand between him and his God-ordained kingship, it was Jonathan. Yet he loved him as a brother. Both of these young men exemplified, eleven-hundred years earlier, what Paul wrote about our living like Christ Jesus.

Read Philippians 2:1-3.

In their willingness to place the other before themselves, these two men were an example of humility and brotherly love—but perhaps also faith and obedience. There is no clear statement to this effect—especially for Jonathan—but we know from other episodes in his early life of David’s faithful obedience to the Lord God. And this may have played a motivating role in this remarkable friendship.

The Lord had chosen David because of his heart—his heart for God. And someone with such a heart would have—like his forefather Abraham—the willingness to wait.

Read Genesis 15:3-6.

Year after year, as both Abram and his wife Sarai aged, they remained childless. Yet Abraham remained faithful to the Lord; he was willing to wait, because he believed the promise Yahweh had made to him. Likewise David had a heart for the Lord, and as each year passed with Saul still on the throne, he was willing not just to wait for that promised throne, but to love the one who by earthly rights would be due the kingship.

We witness David's humility as well in the numerous times he refused to kill Saul, even though he could have easily. Think of it:

- David had already been anointed king.
- He knew the Lord was displeased with Saul.
- Saul was pursuing him all over the countryside in an effort to kill *him*.

Yet David refused every opportunity to kill Saul. We find David's reason for this behavior in Chapter 24, when the king has to go potty in a cave.

Read 1 Samuel 24:1-8.

Well, *that* had to be pleasant.

Sidebar: lit., to cover his feet; "The Targum is, 'to do his necessities'; and so Josephus (a); and the Jewish commentators generally understand it of easing nature; and as the eastern people used to wear long and loose garments, these, when they performed such an action, they used in modesty to gather them close about them, that no part of the body, their feet, and especially the parts of nature which should be concealed, might be seen" (John Gill).

Not only did David refrain from killing Saul, he later felt guilt about even cutting off a corner of his robe, for this was a sign of disrespect toward the king. Verse 6 is the bottom line—the point David will make repeatedly in the future.

"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."
(1 Samuel 24:6)

It didn't matter to him that he was to replace Saul; he was still the Lord's anointed. Here again we see David's humility combined with patience and moral clarity. From the text, David could have written his Psalm 37 just after this.

Read Psalm 37:1-11.

We are impressed by this behavior, but it gets even better. What typically happens when the old king dies? His successor is immediately found, and there are shouts of "The king is dead. Long live the king!" The successor is at last relieved and filled with joy that he can now mount the throne of the kingdom. But that's not how it happened with David. After Saul and Jonathan are killed in battle, here is what happened.

Read 2 Samuel 1:1-16.

And immediately David voices a lament for Saul and Jonathan, which begins,

**"Your beauty, O Israel, is slain on your high places!
How have the mighty fallen! (2 Samuel 1:19)**

David's response was much the same when in Chapter Four the sons of Rimmon kill the remaining son of Saul, Ish-bosheth, and proudly bring the news to David. He has them immediately cut down for daring to "kill a righteous man in his own house on his bed."

Once more I turn to David Guzik for a splendid application of these scenes in David's life—not just his humility before the Lord, but his patience.

David Guzik: What made David decide, “I won't kill Saul; instead I will just cut off the corner of his robe”? He knew that God's promise said, “You will inherit the throne of Israel.” He knew that Saul was in the way of that promise. But he also knew it was disobedient of him to kill Saul, because God put Saul in a position of authority, and it was God's job to take care of Saul, not David's. David wanted the promise to be fulfilled, but he refused to try and fulfill God's promise through his own disobedience.

Sometimes, when we have a promise from God, we think we are justified in sinning to pursue that promise. This is always wrong. A husband may say, “God has promised me abundant life according to John 10:10. God wants me to have fullness of joy according to Psalm 16:11. I can't have abundant life or fullness of joy being married to my wife, so I am going to leave her because I have found someone who does give me fullness of joy and abundant life. Thank you Lord for Your promise!” This is always sin. God will fulfill His promises, but He will do it His way, and do it righteously. Instead, we need to be like Abraham, who obeyed God even when it seemed to be at the expense of God's promise, willing to sacrifice the son of promise (Genesis 22:1-24). Even more, we need to be like Jesus, who didn't take Satan's offer to “win back the world” at the expense of obedience (Luke 4:5-8).

Many people in David's situation would find many excuses to justify killing Saul. Think of what one might say: “It was self-defense, because Saul was out to kill me.” “It's all right, because God promised me the throne anyway.” “It's all right because I am in the right, and even Jonathan knows that I deserve the throne.” “This is a God-given opportunity and I should take it.” Or even, “I'm just so tired of running and fighting Saul. This can end all of that now.” But David refused to make any such excuses, and had a radical, obedient trust in God instead. David couldn't have read the Book of Romans yet, but he knew its truth better than many who have: Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).

In all this, we see that David knew not only how to wait *on* the Lord, but he also knew how to wait *for* the Lord. “We wait *on* the Lord by prayer and supplication, looking for the indication of his will; we wait *for* the Lord by patience and submission, looking for the interposition of his hand.” (Meyer) David was determined that when he sat on the throne of Israel, it wouldn't be because he got Saul out of the way, but because *God* got Saul out of the way. He wanted God's fingerprints on that work, not his own, and he wanted the clean conscience that comes from knowing it was God's work.