

The Heart of a Leader

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1 and 2 Samuel

I want to talk about leadership tonight. Part of the reason I want to talk about leadership is because I don't know very many people who say, "You know, my goal for life is I want to be a follower my whole life. I just want other people to always call the shots." Are any of you in the place of saying, "I never want my opinion to count. I just want to be a chameleon." Does anyone here pray, "Lord, help me blend in with my environment"?

I've never met a Christian who prays, "God, may my life have no impact anywhere. Please don't use me in my workplace. Lord, make me invisible at school. I just want to disappear in my apartment building or in my family. I pray to just go along with whatever is popular. God, give me no opinion of my own, no convictions, and no beliefs. Just make me an empty box, Lord, would you? Even better, Father, if it be your will, would you turn me into an echo?"

Anybody here just want to be an echo? I know that sometimes we are just echoes of viewpoints of people around us. But is there anyone who says, "I aspire to be an echo. My goal in life is merely to repeat the perspectives, the viewpoints, and the attitudes of everyone around me."

Every single follower of Jesus Christ ought to want to be a leader. Young adults, is it in your heart to lead? Do you want to be a leader and not just a follower your whole life?

Now, listen to what I'm not saying. I'm not suggesting that every one of you ought to aspire to become pastors. Some of you men and women are called to be pastors. Some of you men and women are called to be church planters. Some of you men and women are called to serve God overseas as missionaries.

But God is certainly not calling each of you to paid ministry. When I say you ought to aspire to be a leader, I am not saying that every one of you ought to aspire to be a pastor, church planter, or missionary. When I say every one of you ought to want to be a Christian leader, I'm not suggesting all of you have the same gifts. That every one of you is called to be a teacher, or that you are gifted to lead worship, or that you are gifted to administrate. I'm not even saying that you all have the same temperament type, that you are all extraverted, in your face kind of people. You may be introverted by way of temperament. You may be shy. Your gifts may not be as obvious as the gifts of some others around you.

But if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, I believe that God is calling every one of you to leadership. And by leadership I mean that each one of you is called by

God to influence and impact whatever environment you find yourself in for Christ. You are called to influence and impact your workplace for Christ. You are called to influence your study group, your dorm floor, your roommates, your family, your co-workers for Christ.

In 1 Samuel 16, the Lord sends the prophet Samuel to look for the successor to the rebellious King Saul. Let's pick up the story in 1 Samuel 16:

"The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.'"

Let's look down at verse 6:

"When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab [that was one of Jesse's sons] and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord.' But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'"

Now you should underline that verse because you will find that this verse is a key to understanding the whole Bible. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. You want to understand biblical religion, Judaism in the Old Testament and Christianity in the New Testament, you couldn't do a whole lot better than 1 Samuel 16:7.

Now, let's unpack this verse for a few minutes. What does the Bible mean by the word "heart" when it says, "The Lord looks at the heart"?

You know, the word "heart" is a key word in the Bible and it almost never means the physical organ beating inside your chest. You know, that muscle that contains ventricles and valves and arteries and blood. When we say that the Lord looks at the heart, we don't mean that the Lord is staring at or examining the level of your cholesterol.

By "heart" the Bible is talking about the inner nature of a person, our true self. And we use the word "heart" today very much like the writers of the Bible used the word "heart" thousands of years ago. When we say, "Well, Joe has had a lot of problems recently, and I know he uses drugs and drinks a case of beer every two days, but Joe has a good heart." We don't mean that Joe's pulse rate is 45 beats per minute. When we say that he has a good heart, we mean that Joe is basically a good person. He made a few mistakes, but he is basically a good person and he desires to do the right thing. He is a little troubled right now and he loves to get high, but inside he is a good and decent guy.

When you break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend or when your engagement is called off and you suffer from a broken heart, we don't mean that the ventricles of

your heart move over to one side of your chest and the oracles, the pulmonary artery moves over to the other side of your chest. We mean the real you, the you below the surface, is suffering. A broken heart means that you are in pain. That you are crushed. That your hopes and dreams have been destroyed.

Football players or boxers who are a little light on talent and natural ability, but are really hard to knock to the mat, we say, "Well, that guy has a lot of heart." What we mean is that they give their whole person to this and they are giving it their all. Here is a guy who is not willing to give up.

Or Tony Bennett's song, its a classic. *I Left My Heart in San Francisco*. He doesn't mean, "Oh my goodness, I can't believe it. You know in that Ramada Inn that I stayed at, I should have checked under the bed because I think along with leaving one of my socks and my toothbrush in the bathroom, I think I left my heart there. It is either under the bed or hanging in the shower, this pulsating, beating, bloody mass of muscle."

Just like the writers of the Bible, we use the word "heart" to refer to the whole of our inner person, the God-designed place inside of the human being that decides and discerns and desires, dedicates. So when we say that man looks on outward appearances, but the Lord looks on the heart, we mean that the Lord is always examining your real person, your inner desires, your true motivations, your real basis for decisions, the whole of your personality and not just what you project to the world by way of your appearance. God looks on the inside and he is always looking at your insides. But not your inside physical organs, but your inside choices and your inside motives, inside ambition.

So, I come back to the point that the religion of the Bible is all about the heart. And Jesus told the Pharisees, the religious people of his day, in Mark 7, that they had God pegged wrong because they thought that what God was interested in was externals. What you ate. What a person drank. What you wore on your head. And Jesus said, "You guys don't get it, you religious people." And he would say the same thing to we religious people today. "You don't get it. You are always classifying people based on externals."

You know, what do religious people do? They focus on whether you cross yourself with three fingers or with two fingers or you don't cross yourself at all. Or whether there is a crucifix up inside of the church with Jesus hanging on it or whether the cross doesn't have Jesus hanging on it. Whether you kneel or don't kneel. Or raise your hands or don't to worship. What Bible a person is carrying into church. Do they use the NIV or King James Version. What kind of music do they play here? I can't worship unless a certain band is playing. I hate the worship Sunday morning or Saturday night. I can't worship without Vineyard type songs, contemporary music. Or I must have hymns and the hymns have to be accompanied by a choir and the choir has to be wearing certain kinds of robes. Or how long you pray. Religious people are always so impressed with getting

people to pray a certain length of time or behave according to their list of how scripture must apply to everyone in the group.

That's how most people of religion think about leadership. It's all externals. And God says, "I don't care about any of that. Externals are not important to me. What I care about is what's going on inside of you."

You know, you can do all the right things for all the wrong reasons. Trust me, I've been there a thousand times. You can read the Bible and pray and do your devotions and check off the box feeling really good about yourself because you attend small group unlike some others who are just flaky and who show up half the time. You feel superior.

But you could be a million miles from God in your heart. What God is always asking us is "What's your heart like right now? How's your heart?"

Well, let me ask that question. What's your heart like tonight? You are sitting here, your body is here, but is your heart a million miles from God?

I would also say in looking at a leader the focus of God's attention is on the leader's heart. And, yet, most leadership today is based on not a matter of what I would call internal authority, the character, the integrity, the inner strength and spirituality of the leader, most leadership today derives its fundamental influence from external authority—the external authority of signs and symbols.

You know, in the Army the authority of a person is clearly marked right on their sleeve or shoulder. See how many stripes you have and what is on your collar. We respond to police officers because of their external authority, the authority of their uniform. Native Americans understood external authority by the color of feathers that they wore on their heads and the number of feathers. So much of leadership is how many feathers you have on your head.

There is a classic book in this regard by Michael Korda called *Power—How to Get It and How to Use It*. In the book he describes the symbols of external authority in the American business world. The limousine is a symbol of authority. And he says rented limousines are less prestigious than ones that are owned. Rolls Royce carries more prestige than Cadillacs. And nothing equals the prestige of a Mercedes with the chrome painted black and the windows tinted to make the occupant invisible.

Your parking place, whether you get a company car, what keys you are given in the office, the square footage of your office, the location of your office, your title—all of that concerns external authority. What 1 Samuel 16:7 would call the human focus on appearance and none of it has anything to do with God's understanding of leadership. God's understanding of leadership is almost entirely concerned with the leader's heart, their real person. Underneath the show, underneath the

gifts, underneath the position, once we dig through the veneer of temperament and personality, God wants to know and people who love God want to know “What is the leader like as a human being?” What kind of person are they? What is going on in their heart?

So tonight I am going to talk about “The Heart of a Leader” and each of you are included in this title “leader.” Let’s pray.

In examining the heart of a leader, and we are going to base this on the life of King David, I could have spoken from David’s life about a number of aspects of his heart. We certainly could have spoken about his heart for worship; the heart of repentance shown in David after he was confronted with his sin; we could have spoken about the heart of courage that David had in confronting Goliath. He is said in 2 Samuel 17 to have the heart of a lion. And you see that lion heart, that courageous risk-taking heart when it comes to David’s confrontation with Goliath.

Well, I want to take a few aspects of David’s heart that are not frequently spoken about in any of the literature on leadership, but yet, as I read through 1 and 2 Samuel, the biographical material on David, I found myself struck by certain qualities that David had that are really essential leadership criteria and yet are frequently overlooked when we look at who would make a good leader.

And the first thing that I see in David’s life is that David had the heart of a friend. Let’s look at 1 Samuel 18:1-9:

“After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father’s house. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

You know it has become popular across America in churches today to talk a lot about community. It is particularly popular to talk about community in young adult circles and, I imagine, you hear a lot about community here at JH or in the small group you attend. Community is also the battle cry of postmoderns. Folks are tired of the rugged individualism that characterized modernism.

But I would like to flesh out community because it is so easy for us to get really theoretical about community. For anybody who talks about community as a lofty ideal and then looks around at their small group or JH and becomes disillusioned with other Christians complaining that this is not real community; for anyone who lives in the dreamy world of what Christian relationships ought to be like, let me read to you from one of my all-time favorite books. It is called “Life Together” by

Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I've read and reread this book many times over the last 28 years.

Bonhoeffer lived through the Nazi domination of German life. He was a Lutheran pastor. Just a few days before the end of the war, he was martyred. He was hung on a direct order from Heinrich Himmler. Bonhoeffer wrote, "By sheer grace God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world. He does not abandon us to those rapturous experiences and lofty moods that come over us like a dream. God is not a God of the emotions, but the God of truth. Only that fellowship that faces such disillusionment with all its unhappy and ugly aspects begins to be what it should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it. The sooner the shock of disillusionment comes to an individual and to a community, the better for both. A community which cannot bear and cannot survive such a crisis, which insists on keeping its illusion when it should be shattered, permanently loses in that moment the promise of Christian community. Sooner or later it will collapse. Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive. God hates visionary dreaming. It makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to others in the circle of brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes first an accuser of brethren, then an accuser of God; finally despairing an accuser of self."

Rather than start with lofty conceptions of what community ought to be in JH, why not ask yourself the simpler question: Do I have the heart of a friend? Are you a true friend to other people?

You know, one of the things that I have observed about leaders is that they are men and women with a lot of friends. They do not just go it alone. Good leaders have many friends. And in David's case you see that he was a man surrounded by close friends. Along with Jonathan, who we read about in this story, we are told about three mighty men who risked their lives to get David a drink of water. And then there were 30 others who surrounded him and then hundreds of others. He had many good close friends. Zadak, the priest. He had friends from other countries, like Hiram from Lebanon. Hushi the Arkite. I mean how many of you can count among your friends people with names like Hushi the Arkite? I would love to have a friend like that.

"Rich, on line 4, Hushi the Arkite is calling."

Well, let's underline a few marks of friendship that you see here in the life of David. In verse 1 it says, "Jonathan was one in spirit with David." Literally, the Hebrew says that Jonathan's soul was chained to the soul of David. We are talking about two soul brothers. Two guys who are linked heart to heart. Your inner person and your friend's inner person were bound together. That is part of a leader's friendship—heart to heart, they are bound internally with another person. Man, how few leaders have that kind of friend. So much of what we call friendship out there is purely a functional relationship. We just happen to be in the same small group together. We just happen to be involved at the same office and work out at the same gym or are in the same study group.

It is convenient for us to relate for a season. But it is all centered on a common environment, a common need, external stuff.

True friendship is a matter of the heart. Friendship is one soul chained to another soul. Chained. We are talking about something that continues over the long haul; like in the old marriage vows – "For better or worse; for richer and poorer; in sickness and health." Chained. Not in some sort of legalistic bondage, but rather we are talking about cords of love between one heart and another heart. True friendship is a matter of the heart.

Before you talk about community here, again, you ought to ask yourselves do you have the heart of friends towards each other? Are there people here with whom you could say, "My heart is chained to their heart?"

And it says, "Not only was he one in spirit with David, but he loved him as himself." And you know, our culture is so perverted today that immediately people read into Jonathan's relationship with David some homosexual kind of thing because we have so few models of men who love each other without sexualizing the whole thing. There isn't a hint of homosexuality in this relationship at all. No, this was a relationship if you read about Jonathan—this was a relationship of a guy who loved the Lord, bound together with David, another man who loved the Lord. Their relationship was forged in a covenant. Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as he loved himself. By covenant we are talking about a strong commitment.

A friend is not just someone who we are bound together with heart to heart, it's not just warm fuzzy feelings for each other, friends are bound by a commitment to each other. That commitment to each other, again, is not just functionality. It is not just a public commitment. There is a private commitment to be loyal to this other person in all different kinds of settings.

If you turn to chapter 19, you will see that part of the commitment that Jonathan had with David was to speak well of David. It says in chapter 19 that Jonathan spoke well of David to his father, Saul, and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant, David. He has not wronged you and what he has done has benefited you greatly. He took his life in his hands and the Lord won a great

victory for all of Israel. When you saw it you were glad. Why would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?"

Jonathan's covenant with David extended to all different kinds of settings, not just publicly and not just to David's face, but privately when David wasn't there, even as Jonathan spoke to his father about David. Part of a friendship, then, is commitment to privately speak well of another person, to uphold their reputation, to defend them when there are innuendos made about their characters or their behaviors.

We are talking about private loyalty. Let me ask you a question. Are you a privately loyal person to the people you claim are your friends? When your friends are not around, are you committed rock-solid to speak well of them? No little shading. No innuendos. No "she has a problem here and here, but I just love her, don't you?" You are saying some of the right words, but in your heart you are really disloyal.

I will tell you something. In a church, it is better to speak well of another church member than to have a big advertising budget. We could spend tens of thousands of dollars advertising the Vineyard and we would never get as much mileage out of an advertising budget as just a simple commitment to speak well of each other, to be friends.

So, friends are people bound heart to heart together. Friends are people who are committed to each other, especially to speak well of each other in private. And a third and final aspect of friendship that I want to mention is that a friend is someone who will pay the cost of being a friend even when it is expensive. It says here in 1 Samuel 18:4:

"Jonathan took off the robe that he was wearing and gave it to David along with his tunic and even his sword, his bow and his belt."

In other words, Jonathan, as David's friend, was willing to give up being the prince and the heir to the throne. By taking off his robe and his armor and giving David his sword, he was saying to his friend, David, "David, here is the kingdom. You are the one the Lord has picked. Take the kingdom, its yours."

Do you know that there is a cost to long-term friendship? And the reason why most people don't have long-term friends is because they are not willing to pay the costs? It becomes inconvenient.

"I have a new love in my life, so my friend is now inconvenient."

"My friend is going through a difficult time now. They're kind of a drag to be around right now. They're not nearly as positive or fun as they used to be."

"My friend is not able to put out emotionally the way they were in the past."

"My friend is having marital problems."

“My friend is not popular in the circles I want to advance in.”

“My new friends don’t really like my old friend, so I guess I need to drop them.”

“I guess we weren’t really friends, were we?”

True friendships are expensive. In the case of Jonathan, Jonathan was willing to risk his reputation and his inheritance. In fact, Jonathan was willing to risk his relationship with his own Dad for the sake of continuing friendship with David. And this, by the way, is a wonderful picture of Jesus’ friendship with us. Jesus took off his robe as the prince and laid aside his armor and laid down his sword. Jesus paid the cost of being our friend, the ultimate cost of friendship, by laying down his life for his friends. Even to the point of risking his own relationship with his Father. When he hung on the cross, he suffered what no man has ever suffered, the ultimate horror of God-forsakenness. He said, “I will pay even that and drink the cup of the wrath of God.”

This friendship between Jonathan and David is that type, a picture of the friendship that Jesus offers to us. Leaders have friends. And leaders are friends. To me, my understanding of a friend is somebody who will go to the mat for me and for somebody for whom I would go to the mat.

I have a dear friend in the church, one of the guys I respect the most, who said to me one time, “You know, Rich, as the church is growing, it is becoming more and more the case that you have become the lightening rod for all of the hurt and the upset for individuals in the church because you are the one who always has to say to people, “No. We can’t afford this. We can’t do that.”

This dear friend of mine came along side of me and he said, “Rich, let me be the lightening rod for a while. And if somebody is going to get angry, let them get angry with me.” Now, that’s a friend. Somebody who will share and with whom you will share misfortune. Somebody with whom you will stand when their welfare is threatened. A leader has a heart of friendship.

Well, we are going to turn to the second aspect of the leader’s heart and that is a leader is someone who has a heart of kindness. And if you will look with me to 2 Samuel 9, I just want to look at one verse. 2 Samuel 9:1:

“David asked, ‘Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?’”

Now, the word “kindness” used in verse 1 is like the word heart, a crucial word in understanding scriptural religion. One of the most common words in the Old Testament is this word “kindness.” The Hebrew word is “hesed.” It is sometimes translated “loving kindness.” It is sometimes translated “steadfast love.” The NIV will often translate the word “hesed” as “unfailing love or mercy, grace.”

Kindness is the steadfast love of the Lord toward those who fail or who are in need. When we say that the Lord has hesed, we mean his continuing steadfast unfailing love to people who regularly fail, or who are in great need.

Now, the reason why kindness as a leadership prerequisite is regularly overlooked in all our emphasis on gifting and goal setting is because we fail to see that kindness is the quality most often attributed to God in the Old Testament. There is no term used more often of God in the Old Testament than “hesed”—loving kindness, unfailing love. When the Lord, himself, wanted to tell Moses what he’s like, he said, “Hey, Mo, this is how people will know who I am. Here is what you can tell people about me so that they will have an accurate picture of me.”

In Exodus 34:6: “Tell the people that I am the Lord, compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness.”

This word “love” in verse 6 is hesed. And then he goes on and says, “Maintaining love, maintaining kindness for thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

“Mo, tell the world that my essential character is one of loving kindness.”

And then in Psalm 136 there is a 26 verse Psalm that has the refrain 26 times: “His loving kindness, his unfailing love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love, (his love, his mercy, his kindness, however you want to translate the word hesed) it endures forever.”

So kindness is a requirement of the heart of a Christian leader is because it is the thing in us that most resembles the heart of God. To show kindness to those who fail and to show kindness to those in need, is to express the heart of God to those who fail and to express the heart of God to those who are in need.

So in 2 Samuel 9, David, as a leader who reflects the heart of God, says: “Is there anyone left in the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”

We are going to find out in a moment that Jonathan, by this time, was dead. And I want you to note something here. 2 Samuel 8 reviews for us the great victories of David. When David said, “Is there anyone left that I can show kindness to for Jonathan’s sake” this was on the heels of having experienced some of the greatest victories a man could ever have. David’s kingdom was expanding and expanding. 2 Samuel 8 records David’s victories and shows that the border of David’s kingdom extended to encompass most of modern day Israel, modern day Lebanon, modern day Syria and modern day Jordan. David was not some petty little king over some Pacific island. David, by 2 Samuel 9, was a major world leader to be reckoned with.

Now, here's the principle, kindness is especially required of you when you are top of the world. It's so easy when you are on the top of the world, when your love life is clicking, and you are making money, and you are esteemed by others to want to hang around only with other successful people.

Or to approach it from a slightly different angle, unlike leadership literature that tells the leader to only focus on the big picture, and a leader is someone who is dealing with big things and big projects, and big important people, 2 Samuel 9 balances all of that when David says, "Is there anyone [I will initiate this now]...is there anyone I can show kindness to? Yes, I am on top of the world. Everything in my life is going really well. But I want to show love to somebody who has failed or someone who is in need."

And it turns out that there was a man who was in need. In verse 3: "The king said, 'Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?'"

He recognizes kindness as not being a natural quality of his own, but something that was from the heart of God placed into his heart. It is God's kindness in David's heart. It is always God's kindness in our hearts that makes us kind.

"Ziba answered the king, 'There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet.'

'Where is he?' the king asked."

And then King David brings this crippled boy into his home and cares for him. The story is so touching as you see this great leader, this big shot, reaching out to a cripple. And even beyond reaching out to somebody who is handicapped, David initiates the reach. He is not simply reacting to a request. See, God's heart of kindness initiates a rescue.

I want to quote Psalm 41 where David says: "Blessed is he who has regard for the weak. The Lord delivers him in times of trouble."

Bonhoeffer writes in Life Together, "The exclusion of the weak and insignificant, the seemingly useless people, from a Christian community may actually mean the exclusion of Christ in the poor brother. Christ is knocking at the door."

Let me ask you some questions. What's your heart like towards people who have failed? I'm not asking whether you read your Bible every day or people perceive you to be a really passionate, excited Christian and you are just bubbling over with enthusiasm, or whether you love to tell people you are a Christian. The Pharisees read their bibles every day. They fasted twice a week and prayed more than you ever will. And they were more zealous and

passionate than any of us will ever be. I'm not asking about all those external things. I'm asking you a more probing question tonight. What's your heart like, especially towards those who failed? Are you full of pride? You know, "Thank God that I'm not like that."

"Thank God that I'm smart enough or holy enough, or I've grown enough as a Christian to not do that stupid thing."

See, Jesus wants you, follower of Christ, to imitate his leadership style, to be like him. What would Jesus be like with people who fail? How did Jesus treat screw-ups? How did Jesus treat the people who were not on the top of the world, but who were on the bottom of the heap?

See, these are the real tests of discipleship, friends. It's not can you get along with successful people. Everyone can do that. It is what are you like with screw-ups? For Jesus, mercy always triumphs over judgment.

Now I want you to flip back to 2 Samuel 1 because I want to show you the extent of the heart of kindness that rested in David's heart. And this is the heart of kindness that is to be exhibited, at least to some degree, in Christian leaders. You know, David's kindness not only extended to the weak, but the heart of kindness that was in David also extended to David's enemies. Let me give a little bit of background to 2 Samuel 1.

For 10 chapters King Saul made David's life miserable. Yet David understood that the way to get free from one's enemy was to show them a heart of kindness. Not necessarily trust them. "Here is the key to the liquor cabinet, Mr. Alcoholic." No—but the Bible continually says we get free of someone's domination by kindness. We overcome evil with good. I know that's not the way of the world. That's not the way we naturally think. Don't get mad; get even.

You say, "How did David overcome Saul's evil with kindness?"

Well, at the end of 1 Samuel, Saul ultimately ends up committing suicide. And David's friend, Jonathan, who was the son of Saul, is killed in battle. We read in 2 Samuel 1 that David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan—not just Jonathan his buddy, not just Jonathan his friend, but a lament for Saul his enemy. And he ordered that the men of Judah be taught the lament of the bow. It is written in the book of Jashar, "Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights. How the mighty have fallen."

His kindness is shown to Saul not only by his refusal to lash back in vengeance, but his kindness is shown to Saul in 2 Samuel 1:19 in his refusal to rejoice in his enemy's downfall. He doesn't say as he hears the news of Saul's suicide, "Great! God has avenged himself on my enemy. I knew he was in for a fall, that idiot."

“Isn’t this wonderful? The judgment of God has come on that abusive church, that abusive leader; the boss who fired me, my old boyfriend, my old girlfriend. Get them Lord. Ha-Ha. I warned them and they didn’t listen.”

See, a heart of kindness is the heart that is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 13 where it says, “Love does not rejoice in iniquity.” A kind person does not get their thrills over the misfortune of someone even when that someone is a person who has hurt you in the past. That is the heart of God. It says in Ezekiel 18 that God does not take pleasure in, he doesn’t rejoice in, he doesn’t do a dance of delight, in the death of the wicked. What a test of our hearts. To not rejoice when someone we’ve had a hard time with is now experiencing failure.

The heart of kindness refuses to lash back at their enemy. The heart of kindness refuses to rejoice in an enemy’s downfall. And the heart of kindness insists on speaking well even of an enemy.

2 Samuel 1:22: “From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back. The sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied.”

Let me tell you about Saul, David says. Whatever else you might want to say about him, he was a mighty warrior.

Let me tell you about pastor Jones. Whatever else you might want to say about him, he was a great preacher. He was a good father. At one time, he was one of the great Christian leaders in this town.

Because ultimately the heart of kindness does what David does in verse 23. He says, “Saul and Jonathan, in life they were loved and gracious.”

Saul was gracious? Saul was loved? No. Saul was a mean person. He was a hate-filled person. He consulted with a witch. He was demonized. David, what is the matter with you? Saul was much loved? Is David in some kind of denial here?

You know what the heart of kindness does? The heart of kindness ultimately practices forgetfulness regarding a person’s sins and failures. Have you noticed that the Bible does that? That it seems to practice almost an amnesia, a forgetfulness, regarding people’s obvious sins?

In the New Testament when you read phrases like “righteous Lot” in reference to Lot. You say, “righteous?” This guy was living in Sodom. Or remember the patience or the perseverance of Job. I don’t know if that is patience and perseverance. The one I love, in speaking about father Abraham, the New Testament of Romans 4 says, “He didn’t waiver in his faith regarding the promise.” Didn’t waiver. Now, in my home, if I slept with another woman and she gave birth to a son, an Ishmael, that would be regarded as a waiver.

The New Testament says regarding father Abraham, he didn't waiver in his faith. You say, "What is going on here?"

There is a kindness in the heart of the Holy Spirit as he inspires the New Testament. And that kindness is shown in the act of divine forgetfulness. See, the opposite of kindness is to magnify the mistakes of another person and to minimize their strengths. But kindness magnifies a person's strengths and minimizes a person's weakness to the point of forgetfulness.

Now let me apply this, friends. Some of you don't know the kindness of the Lord because you don't understand this principle of divine forgetfulness. You look at the various areas of sin in your life and as you scrutinize yourself, your self-scrutiny turns into self-condemnation. The only thing you are conscious of is all of the very areas where you fail and fall short, where your plans didn't come about. Where your faithfulness wavered. There might be issues in your life where you look back on and say, "You know, I just can't forget this. How am I supposed to receive kindness, which is based on forgetfulness, some principle of covering sin and overlooking sin. I can't forget what I have done."

Do you know how to practice forgetfulness regarding yourself and your own failures and your own sins? By practicing the remembrance of God's forgiveness. That someone with ultimate authority to forgive sins, someone who has the power to declare a person innocent, namely the Lord, has taken that authority and said regarding you, "You are innocent." You practice forgetfulness of your own sins by practicing more strongly the remembrance of God's forgiveness.

That sin is dialed up? You say, "I can't seem to forget my lapse into immorality."
"I can't seem to forget my failure regarding my abortion."
"I can't forget that stupid thing I did at work for which I was caught and was fired."

Immediately you say to yourself, "Yes, but this I will call to mind. I remember that Almighty God who has authority to forgive my sins has said, 'I forgive you.'"

The remembrance of God's forgiveness drowns out the remembrance of my sins in the same way that the sun drowns out my awareness that the moon is still up in the sky. You know, during the day, the moon is still up in the sky, but the light of the sun is just so bright, I am just not aware of it.

A heart of kindness does that with sin. I just can't seem to forget what this person did to me—this person in a group I'm in, my father, this other pastor, or a family member. I can't seem to forget it. Okay, you can't seem to forget it. But can you call to mind just as strongly or even more strongly the remembrance that you have forgiven them? Can that become the major theme? Can that forgiveness that you have granted, that covering for sin you have granted, so dominate the picture as the sun dominates the noon time sky that the existence that there is a moon up there just sort of fades from your memory?

I believe that David practiced the remembrance of forgiveness so good that he was able to be forgetful of Saul's sin. And the New Testament practices the heart of God's kindness so good, that it is forgetful of Old Testament people's sin. Leaders need to be real good forgetters of people's sins and failings and real good remembers.

And the last thing that I see in David along with a heart of friendship and a heart of kindness, is ultimately a Christian leader is noted by their heart for God. Let me explain what I mean by a heart for God. A heart for God is expressed by an honesty regarding one's desperation. You know those thoughts: I'm not what I should be; not what I could be; the church is not what it could be; what it should be. David's heart for God is shown in Psalm 18 when he says: "I love you, O Lord. You are my strength."

The heart of a leader is ultimately a heart that does love God. For all of David's mistakes, and they were numerous; and when he made mistakes, they were enormous; for all of David's mistakes and sins, anyone looking at David could say, "Here is a man who in his heart of hearts steadfastly pursues the Lord and loves him."

I think that is the ultimate criteria for a Christian leader. You must see in that man or woman a profound abiding steadfast love that ought to be evident to all and that ought to be evident over years.

The apostle Paul said it well when he says, "The love of Jesus Christ has got me hemmed in."

Not only God's love for him in 2 Corinthians 5, but his love for God. And then he goes on in 2 Corinthians 5 and says: "If I am out of my mind, it is for the sake of God. And if I am in my right mind, it is for your sake."

Let's pray.

The Heart of a Leader

Rich Nathan
September 15, 2002
Joshua House
1 and 2 Samuel

I. God Looks at the Heart (1Sam. 16:7)

II. The Heart of a Friend (1 Sam. 18:1-9)

III. The Heart of Kindness (2 Sam. 9)

A. Towards the Weak

B. Towards His Enemies (2 Sam. 1)