

## Walking Wisely In All of Life

The saying “Hindsight is 20/20” is an image about seeing clearly. It suggests that hindsight, looking back, we always see things perfectly clearly. We see what we should have done, what we should have said, what we should not have done. But the difficulty is that when it comes to the present moment, to making decisions, and trying to anticipate the future, we don't have that clarity. We are either short-sighted, and can only see our immediate needs and pleasures. Or we are far-sighted, with our eyes on far future possibilities, but not on the practical realities right here. Or sometimes we are blind to what is really in front of us.

If you've ever spent long periods in regret, feeling the pain of what you did, and rueing the day you did it, or perhaps replaying a scene or a conversation over and over in your mind, thinking of what you should have said, or wishing you hadn't said something, then you know this phenomenon. We see clearly when looking back, but not always in the moment. The ability to know and choose the right path, the right words, the right response in the here and now, so that there are no regrets tomorrow is known as wisdom.

Wisdom is knowing the best response to achieve the best ends. It requires a kind of perspective that sees more and sees further. The reason why the past helps us to see what we did wrong is that we see more, more of what was happening, more of the consequences. But wisdom is the ability to see that in advance: see life from God's point of view, and apply it to your choices now.

In 1 Samuel 18, we learn that wisdom is what characterised David. The mark of the leader who will be a blessing to his people is wisdom. 16 Woe to you, O land, when your king *is* a child, And your princes feast in the morning! 17 Blessed *are* you, O land, when your king *is* the son of nobles, And your princes feast at the proper time-- For strength and not for drunkenness! (Eccl. 10:16-17)

The history of Israel after David is a study in wise and foolish kings. Israel prospered under wise Solomon, wise Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Uzziah, Josiah. But Israel suffered and Judah suffered under foolish Rehoboam, Jeroboam, Manasseh, Ahab and others.

When fools lead, whether it is a country, a business, a church, or even a family, those in it suffer. But when wisdom is present, there is stability, strength, safety, prosperity, and success.

3 Through wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established; 4 By knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches. 5 A wise man *is* strong, Yes, a man of knowledge increases strength; 6 For by wise counsel you will wage your own war, And in a multitude of counselors *there is* safety. (Prov. 24:3-6)

Wisdom: the view from Heaven, is the difference between the life built upon the sand of human foolishness, or the life built upon the rock of Christ and His Word. David was like his descendant, Jesus, of whom Isaiah prophesied, “Behold, My servant shall deal prudently”. Wisdom Himself was born in David's hometown, and came to rule on David's throne.

In three very different circumstances, David showed himself to be the true king by showing wisdom. It was not just in good times, but in difficult, not just in suffering, but also in prosperity, that David showed wisdom characterised him.

We can easily see the divisions of this chapter, because the writer completes each section with the comment, “David behaved himself wisely”.

So David went out wherever Saul sent him, *and* behaved wisely. (1 Sam. 18:5)

And David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the LORD *was* with him. (1 Sam. 18:14)

And so it was, whenever they went out, *that* David behaved more wisely than all the servants of Saul (1 Sam.

18:30)

This phrase *behaved more wisely* translates a phrase which means that David was successful, prosperous. It really means that he chose the correct path, the shrewd option, the best response, and consequently, the Lord gave him outward success. Great outcomes don't always result from wise choices, in a fallen world, but broadly, and generally speaking, they do.

We'll see in this chapter three wise responses to three different things: friendship and fame, envy and enmity, snares and subtlety.

## I. Wisdom in Friendship and Fame

**1 Samuel 18:1** Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. 2 Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore. 3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. 4 And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt. 5 So David went out wherever Saul sent him, **and behaved wisely**. And Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants. (1 Sam. 18:1-5)

This takes place right after the battle with Goliath. Jonathan was about 25 years older than David. He was born in around 1067 BC, when Saul was just fifteen. Jonathan is about 40 at this time. But Jonathan is drawn to David because they share the same affections. David has a love for God, a zeal for God's name, and a self-sacrificial bravery that stirs up the hearts of like-minded men. The words of verse 1 could be translated, "Jonathan's very self became bound up with David's, and Jonathan loved him as himself."

David has gone from despised youngest son to the best friend of the prince, and the king's favourite. David is no longer going to make trips to and from Bethlehem. David is now a permanent member of Saul's household.

Something else incredibly significant happens here. Jonathan makes a covenant with David. What is this covenant? By taking off his robe, his armour and weapons, and giving them to David, Jonathan is pledging to serve David. He is making an oath by which he recognises David will be the next king, and Jonathan is giving him the attire of the Crown Prince. Jonathan is recognising David's anointing, and knows that when Saul goes, the next king will not be Jonathan, but David. By giving him his weapons, this is a symbolic act of surrendering to David's authority, and abdicating his throne to David.

This is an amazing act of humility on Jonathan's part, as well as faith, and submission to God. Compare Jonathan to his father, and how Saul spent the rest of his life protecting his throne.

Saul was obviously not present when David and Jonathan made this covenant, but he eventually found out. 30 Then Saul's anger was aroused against Jonathan, and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious *woman*! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? 31 "For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Now therefore, send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die." (1 Sam. 20:30-31)

David, for his part, was promising to protect Jonathan and his children once on the throne. Instead of there being war and bloodshed between David and the house of Jonathan, there would be peace and mutual care.

David could have taken his new-found status, and puffed out his chest. He could have started to act like the royal favourite, and strut about like the prince's best friend. He could have taken Jonathan's submission as his cue to bump Saul off the stage. He could have called older brother Eliab to the throneroom and humiliated him before the royal court. "You were saying something about the wickedness of my heart and my neglect of those few sheep in the wilderness". But none of this would be wisdom, and David did none of that.

This positive experience of friendship and approval went national, and according to the following verses, David was soon famous. He was soon the general of the army, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants. The word *accepted* means pleasing. People loved David. He was something of a national hero, a court favourite, famous, loved, admired. As we'll see in a moment, some foolish women wrote some very foolish songs about him, which was the beginning of the end of this stage of his life.

But according to the text, David behaved wisely through all this. He responded to this friendship and fame not with foolishness, but with prudence. How do fools respond to popularity? They bask in it. They boast in it, sharing it with others. They feel smug and self-satisfied. They love to be loved, and soon fall in love with themselves, and begin to believe their fans and flatterers.

But Proverbs tells us that the real test of wisdom is when you are praised and admired.

The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, And a man *is tested* by the praise accorded him. (Prov. 27:21)

Jesus also had a time when he was enormously popular in Israel. Before the crowds really understood His message, Jesus was a something of a folk hero: people from all over Israel went in search of Him to see Him, hear Him, experience a miracle. John 2 tells us that Jesus behaved wisely in His time of fame.

many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. 24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all *men*, 25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. (Jn. 2:23-25)

Many Christians do well in the trial of poverty, but terribly in the trial of prosperity. Many do well in the trial of loneliness, but badly in the trial of popularity. Times of distress, and lack and opposition cause many to cry out to God. But in times of ease, and abundance, and fame, many forget God. But David did not do so. He continued to behave himself wisely, in this time of friendship and fame.

Sometimes the question to ask yourself is not "will I trust and obey God during the hard times?" but "Will I trust and obey God when everything seems to be going my way?" If praise humbles us, then God can use us, but if praise puffs us up, we're not yet ready for a promotion.

But these good times did not last very long, maybe just a few years at most. David spends seven years in total in Saul's throneroom, before he is on the run. So maybe three or four years before the turning point.

## **II. Wisdom in Envy and Enmity**

6 Now it had happened as they were coming *home*, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments. 7 So the women sang as they danced, and said:

"Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands."

8 Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed *only* thousands. Now *what* more can he have but the kingdom?"

9 So Saul eyed David from that day forward.

10 And it happened on the next day that the distressing spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied inside the house. So David played *music* with his hand, as at other times; but *there was* a spear in Saul's hand. 11 And Saul cast the spear, for he said, "I will pin David to the wall!" But David escaped his presence twice. 12 Now Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, but had departed from Saul.

13 Therefore Saul removed him from his presence, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. 14 And David **behaved wisely in all his ways**, and the LORD was with him. (1 Sam. 18:6-14)

The fateful day came after a victory, as it so often does. David and Saul were returning to cheering crowds, the ancient equivalent of a victory street parade. And as they walk, some of the women had composed this song which said, Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. Now it's hard to imagine that these women could not have understood that a statement like that is a comparison, and a comparison that reflected badly on the king. Whatever their motive, Saul took it badly. His attitude toward David changed immediately from pride over his favourite general to suspicion.

For a long time, he had fretted over who Samuel was talking about when he said that the Lord had torn the kingdom away from Saul to give it to a neighbour better than him. But Saul had never been able to identify this rival. But now, for the first time, it dawns on Saul that his rival to the throne may actually have been right under his nose all along. David is being sung about as superior to him. What more can he have but the kingdom?

Now Saul is eyeing David, looking upon him to see if he is perhaps conspiring with others, perhaps whispering with Saul's counselors in a corner, perhaps beginning to turn the military commanders against Saul. Saul is now coming under the grip of envy and paranoia. On top of that, he is already possessed by this evil spirit.

On the very next day, that spirit begins to seize him, and Saul is under its control, speaking under its influence, which is what true prophesying does: it is when you are a medium for someone else to speak through you.

Once in this rage, David is called to bring his musical therapy to Saul, but now, for the first time, Saul recognises that his therapist is his rival. We don't know if there was anyone else in the room, likely not. Saul thinks he can make a quick end of David with a spear. What David must have thought, we don't know – if he thought it was a tune Saul really didn't like, or if he realised Saul had figured out who had been secretly anointed by Samuel. David escapes.

But Saul is growing increasingly afraid of David, because David is not slipping up, embarrassing himself, or doing foolish things with his fame and his probably increased fortune.

Now Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him.

So, Saul decides to demote David. He makes him a captain over a thousand, instead of what he was in verse 5 – over all the men of war. David is now a border-unit commander, someone who deals with threats to Israel on the edges of her territory. This at least means that David's popularity can go down: he won't be as visible and won't be as known. David won't get the credit for the major victories. David might even be under the command of some men he was commanding. There'll be dishonour in this demotion.

David has gone from the the noonday of fame and friendship, to the night of envy and enmity. His

boss hates him and wants him dead. He has lost his former job, and now has a harder, less rewarding one. And what has David done to deserve this? All he has done is do right, be wise, remain humble, act with integrity.

A foolish response would have been to fight Saul back, throw spears in his direction. He could have quickly organised a military coup before he was demoted. He could have tried to turn Jonathan against his father. He could have protested and argued and fought. He could have murmured and grown in bitterness, plotting revenge.

But again, what is the comment of verse 14? 4 And David **behaved wisely in all his ways**, and the LORD was with him.

In other words, David kept responding to what was given to him in the fear of the Lord. He kept submitting to authority, not returning evil for evil, not adding sin upon sin, not asserting himself or acting in pride. He thought long term, not short-term. If he had been anointed, he needed to act wisely, not rashly. He could not sacrifice his future for a moment of revenge or impulsive anger. If God had called him, then God would install him. He did not have to get Saul out, or manipulate people in his favour. He could wait on God, avoid flying spears where he needed to, do his duty faithfully, and keep trusting.

The result? God continued to bless him, and give him success wherever he went. Like Joseph, whether you put him in a pit, a prison or a palace, he kept doing right, and coming up blessed. It's hard enough to be wise when you are resisting your own sin nature. But it's even harder to be wise when you haven't done wrong, and are being badly treated, falsely accused, and persecuted! Jesus told us what wisdom looks like in these moments

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matt. 5:11-12)

44 "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matt. 5:44-45)

Jesus lived by that. He had a time of fame, but then it turned to a time of rejection and scorn. 66 From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. (Jn. 6:66)

But He continued responding wisely: eyes on the Cross, seeking not His own will, but that of the Father.

David was Christlike in a time of friendship and fame, in a time of envy and enmity. He also showed

### **III. Wisdom in Snares and Subterfuge**

15 Therefore, when Saul saw that he behaved very wisely, he was afraid of him. 16 But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.

17 Then Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife. Only be valiant for me, and fight the LORD'S battles." For Saul thought, "Let my hand not be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him."

18 So David said to Saul, "Who *am* I, and what *is* my life or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" 19 But it happened at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, that she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife.

At first, Saul had attempted to kill David himself. But now he realises that it won't be good for him to kill a man who has become so popular, so he decides to kill David through subtlety. He will try to have David killed in battle, and then no one can blame Saul. (Sadly, you might remember that much later, David is going to use this very same tactic to get rid of Uriah the Hittite).

So to get David to throw himself into more battle, Saul offers David his oldest daughter Merab, if he will seek out battles with the Philistines and win them.

But Saul doesn't count on the fact that David is not haughty. He is from a fairly common family in Israel, and doesn't see himself as worthy of becoming the king's son-in-law. And then, as if to rub his face in it, Merab is given to another man anyway.

20 Now Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. 21 So Saul said, "I will give her to him, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David a second time, "You shall be my son-in-law today."

Saul comes upon Plan B. He finds out that his younger daughter, Michal loves David. Saul evidently knows what sort of woman Michal is: the kind who will bring David down from the inside. She would be a snare to David. The word *snare* here means bait, lure, snare. She would bait David to risk himself recklessly, and she would also bait him in another way.

In fact, Michal was an idolater. We read in chapter 19: 13 And Michal took an image and laid *it* in the bed, put a cover of goats' *hair* for his head, and covered *it* with clothes. (1 Sam. 19:13) The word for image is *teraphim* "household gods", the same word Samuel used for idolatry. One commentator says Michal was the quintessential rich, good-looking and spoilt bad-girl, who was probably drawn to the pure-hearted David, only to eventually despise him when she saw his true zeal for God.

So Saul got Plan B in motion.

22 And Saul commanded his servants, "Communicate with David secretly, and say, 'Look, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now therefore, become the king's son-in-law.'" 23 So Saul's servants spoke those words in the hearing of David. And David said, "Does it seem to you *a light thing* to be a king's son-in-law, seeing I *am* a poor and lightly esteemed man?" 24 And the servants of Saul told him, saying, "In this manner David spoke."

25 Then Saul said, "Thus you shall say to David: 'The king does not desire any dowry but one hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to take vengeance on the king's enemies.'" But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. 26 So when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to become the king's son-in-law. Now the days had not expired; 27 therefore David arose and went, he and his men, and killed two hundred men of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full count to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. Then Saul gave him Michal his daughter as a wife.

David is again too humble to presume that he is a worthy candidate for the king's daughter. He is not from an aristocratic family, and doesn't have money to pay the expensive dowry to wed the princess. Once Saul hears that this is the issue, he thinks he has the cheese set on the mousetrap. "I don't need money. I just want you to prove your loyalty and to kill the king's enemies, and bring back proof.", says Saul. A rather gruesome thing, but 100 foreskins would be both proof positive that the men were dead, and also a way of asserting Israel the circumcised over the uncircumcised Philistines. Israel who is in covenant with God, symbolised by eighth-day circumcision of every male, and the Philistines out of covenant with God.

To think that David would survive the attempt, even with men helping him, to kill 100 Philistines,

was unthinkable to Saul. This was asking David to drive through a Jihadi machine-gun nest with an Israeli-flag flying from the Jeep.

But once again, the Lord is with David. Destroying Philistines is part of God's plan, it is necessary for the stability of Israel, so David kills not just 100, but 200. We can grimace and imagine the scene, when David returns, and counts out these 200 before king Saul, as his dowry.

The trap of the Philistines didn't work, but he now marries Michal, and a second trap has been set. David is yet to find that out, and if there is one area where we will see David was not wise, it was in the area of wives, women, and parenting. He will go on to marry another seven named women, besides unnamed wives and concubines, and father more children than he can possibly disciple and shape.

28 Thus Saul saw and knew that the LORD *was* with David, and *that* Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him; 29 and Saul was still more afraid of David. So Saul became David's enemy continually. 30 Then the princes of the Philistines went out *to war*. **And so it was, whenever they went out, that David behaved more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name became highly esteemed.** (1 Sam. 18:15-30)

This was not what Saul wanted. He wanted Michal to destroy him, he wanted the Philistines to destroy him, but instead, David behaved wisely.

David did not throw himself recklessly into battle and get himself killed, but wisely continued to do what he had always done. He married Saul's daughter, but as we'll see, David soon found out that she was a liar and cold towards the things of God. She remained childless, which was good, because an heir from her would have been a terrible complication for David later on. David did not walk into traps, but navigated them.

16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16)

This is what Jesus did. When people wanted to make Him king, he slipped out of their grasp. When people wanted him to claim Israel was independent from Rome and didn't need to pay taxes, he slipped out of their grasp. When Pharisees tried to trap him with words, and make him either a political rebel, or a blasphemer, he slipped out of their grasp. He behaved Himself wisely.

Wisdom during the good times of fame and friendship. Wisdom during the bad times of envy and enmity. Wisdom during the dangerous times of snares and subtlety.

This is the call to believers:

5 Walk in wisdom toward those *who are* outside, redeeming the time. (Col. 4:5)

15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,

16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil. (Eph. 5:15-16)

Notice in both of those Scriptures, Paul tells us a walk of wisdom comes when we redeem the time, or buy back the moments. What's the connection? Wisdom is very aware that every choice in time counts. Once again, wisdom seeks the bird's-eye view, or more accurately, the Heaven's-eye view. Every choice has a consequence. Every response will bring another response. Everything thing done now, or left undone now, will affect tomorrow and the next day. Wisdom is getting God's perspective, and then living it out in the here and now, aware of the law of sowing and reaping.

The fool is one who does not think of tomorrow, or even remember his regrets from yesterday. He

lives from his gut – whatever he feels like doing, he does. 3 A prudent *man* foresees evil and hides himself, But the simple pass on and are punished. (Prov. 22:3)

To be like David, and more specifically, to be like Christ, is to desire God's mind for your present choices. So we can go with Romans 12:2 on our hearts: 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom. 12:2)