

LEADING IN ADVERSITY

Text: I Samuel 18: 7 – 12 ⁷“And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. ⁸And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? ⁹And Saul eyed David from that day and forward. ¹⁰And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand. ¹¹And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice. ¹²And Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, and was departed from Saul.”

Overview: What is our response when things go bad? Adversity does not define you – Adversity reveals you. We don't like that. We want to blame something or someone for the problems we face. A person or situation can never take from you what you do not give it. Reaction is always a response to an action. That is why it is called a re-action. As we looked at the failed leadership of King Saul in week 1 of our study, we observed a man who was controlled by what was going on around him. He never looks like he is in control. He looks controlled. Even in our text we see this character flaw. He gets angry, so angry that he tries twice to hurl a spear through David. This is not surprising. It is who he is. However, who someone else is should never determine who we are. As the anointed of God, we are called to a higher calling and expectation. David demonstrates this in the chapters to come. This lesson will look at his actions and the actions of others. From that we will learn lessons on leading in adversity.

Adversity: A state of hardship or affliction; misfortune. A calamitous event. Adverse fortune or fate; a condition or state marked by misfortune, calamity, distress, or unhappiness (American Heritage Dictionary). A state or instance of serious or continued difficulty or misfortune (Merriam Webster Dictionary). **ADVERSITY** ad-vur'-si-ti: In the Revised Version (British and American) exclusively an Old Testament term, expressing the various forms of distress and evil conveyed by four Hebrew words: tsela', "a halting" or "fall"; tsarah, "straits" "distress," "affliction"; tsar, "straitness," "affliction"; ra', "bad," "evil," "harmful." These words cover the whole range of misfortunes caused by enemies, poverty, sorrow and trouble. "Adversity," which occurs once in the King James Version in New Testament ([Hebrews 13:3](#): kakouchoumenos, "ill-treated") is displaced in the Revised Version (British and American) by the literal rendering which illustrates or interprets a common phase of adversity.

Adversary: One that contends with, opposes, or resists: an enemy or opponent. Scripture says that “we have an adversary, the devil, who walketh about seeking whom he may devour.” He is called a roaring lion, a dragon, and a prince of darkness. He is intimidating, frightening, skilled, relentless, and unmerciful. He wears the skin of humanity. He will contend with you in life. He probably already has. He is defeatable.

Today's thought: Adversity is not allowed into your life to make you fail. It is a simple gauge to reveal where you are in your Spiritual journey. What the world calls failures are opportunities to work on areas of life that are not yet fully developed. David was highly developed for such a young age, however, he had weaknesses that are glaring when revealed. Those weaknesses become some of the richest examples of how to deal with our inadequacies.

Purpose: “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” (Newton's third law of motion) In life, we think this justifies our reactions. If someone is mean to us, it is only reasonable that we are mean back. If someone wrongs us, we are justified to wrong them. Believers are not bound by the natural laws of life. We have been called to a greater law – the law of God. We are not overcome of evil. We overcome evil with good. We are of a different nature. We are not of this world. We are called to something better and something greater. How we respond to that calling will be a great determiner in the type of leader we become.

Quote: “To be conscious that you are ignorant of the facts is a great step to knowledge.”

Setting: David is fixing to be thrown into the whirlwind of adversity. He was the golden boy of Israel. The next few years would determine whether the gold was real or not. In I Samuel 18 we find the wrath of King Saul unleashed in the life of David. We find Saul becoming progressively controlled by an evil spirit and as this progression intensifies, so too does his attacks upon David. In these years of trouble, David never initiated the reaction. Four times in I Samuel 18 the phrase is repeated, “David behaved himself wisely.” He did it before Saul began his assaults and he continued to do so after the assaults began.

- **GREAT LEADERS BEHAVE WISELY.** This point cannot be overemphasized. But, what does that look like? Look at the description of our LORD Jesus Christ in 1 Peter 2:23-24 KJV “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” No person has ever experienced a more unrighteous attack upon Himself than did Jesus, but His refusal to react is noteworthy. Make sure that when you are brought before your accusers, the words that must be uttered are those of Pilate in Luke 23:4, “I find no fault in this man.”
- **GREAT LEADERS ARE PREPARED WHEN ADVERSITY COMES.** Benjamin Disraeli – “The secret of success is for a man to be ready for his time when it comes.” David was a shepherd. People who grow up on a farm prepare for eventualities because things change. Smart farmers don’t spend the money in bunker years. They invest and save for the years of draught and pestilence. When those years come, and they will come, they are prepared. The thing that catapulted Joseph to leadership in Egypt was the exaltation he gave to the Pharaoh about preparedness. His counsel was both wise and accurate. Solomon, the son of David, wrote a book on wisdom called Proverbs. Much of the wisdom he wrote about was on preparedness. He wrote about the wisdom of ants and spiders. He warned against laziness and unpreparedness. In my business, Lori and I are diligent about saving and preparedness for what could come. Will it come? No one knows when, but adversity will come. Prepare.
- **GREAT LEADERS KNOW THAT THERE ARE NO VICTORIES WITHOUT BATTLES.** “Champions don’t become champions in the ring – they are merely recognized there.” (Author unknown) Adversity is an opportunity for victory. God gives a promise in I Corinthians 10:13 that should encourage you in the face of adversity – “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape that you may be able to bear it.” God is with you and not against you. He is on your side. Why should you fear what man can do to you? His grace is sufficient for you.
- **GREAT LEADERS DO NOT REACT OR RETALIATE.** Scripture says to be “swift to hear, slow to speech, slow to anger.” In our text we see the lack of reaction from David. This would become a pattern in his life. David was the superior warrior in the room. Everyone knew that. David could have killed Saul and probably been applauded for doing so, but David did not do what is “natural” to do. He took the “supernatural” route. He controlled his emotions. “Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good.”
- **GREAT LEADERS WIN THE FAVOR OF PEOPLE.** I Samuel 18:16 says, “but all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.” David was a reflection of the LORD. Being filled with the Spirit of God was no small thing. It wasn’t happenstance or common in the Old Testament. It is said of few, but the ones it was said about were special in those moments of time where God took control of their lives through His Spirit. Without exception, people followed them and they found favor in the sight of the people. Not everyone is going to love you if you choose to act righteously in an unrighteous world, but the majority will. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit. He is ever-present and never more than an invitation away from being at the center of any adversity you may face in life. The impossibilities you face are but opportunities for Him to shine through you. A shining light is always a welcomed relief in a world of darkness. Shewbread went into the furnace daily, but every day when it

was removed from the furnace it was a picture of the Messiah who was to come. You are a picture of the Messiah who has already come.

- **GREAT LEADERS DO NOT ALLOW THE WILL OF OTHERS TO DETERMINE THE FATE OF THEIR LIVES.** President Theodore Roosevelt said, “It is not the critic who counts, nor the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena. Whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.” Saul was the king, but David did not allow him to determine his fate. Saul tried on several occasions to kill David, but David chose to be the determiner, not the determined. Twice in I Samuel 18 we read that David avoided the assaults of King Saul. As we make our way through the chapters ahead, we will see the relentless pursuit of the king of a nation repeatedly thwarted by the superior intellect and prowess of a common man. Adversity is the world’s way of finding out what you are made of. It has no right to determine your life and cannot if you don’t allow it to. Matt Shaw, a friend and competitive racer, said, “Winning drivers don’t look into the rearview mirror. They are always looking at the track ahead, and the greatest are those who can see the farthest down the track.” If you are leading from the front, the only way those behind you can determine your fate is if you take your eyes off your destination and look backwards.
- **GREAT LEADERS DO NOT HAVE THEIR EYES FIXED ON THE ADVERSITY.** You can always tell the focus of a person’s life. You have those who are always looking down. They are what the world classifies as “downers.” There are those who are looking around them. They are circumstance controlled and what the world would classify as “shallow.” There are those who are focused on the satanic forces of the present age. These people are called “dark.” There are those who are looking inward. In their mind everything revolves around them and they are what are classified as “self-absorbed.” There are those who are focused on the LORD. They shine with a different radiance than others and are classified as “Spiritual.” Then there are those who are focused on a goal and nothing thwarts them from their call. These are those individuals who are known as “Leaders.”
- **GREAT LEADERS STRIKE FEAR INTO THE HEART OF ADVERSITY.** Teddy Roosevelt was a man’s man. He was a wild west cowboy, a safari hunter, and a leader of the Rough Riders in war. He gave 673 speeches while campaigning for vice president under President McKinley. He was once shot in the chest by a would-be assassin in Milwaukee and insisted on giving a speech before going to the hospital to have the bullet removed. It goes without words that he struck fear in the hearts of his adversaries. Saul feared David. It should have been the other way around. But why did Saul fear him? Because David was a better man than he was. He knew it. Everyone in the kingdom knew it. The prophet Samuel knew it. The enemies of Israel knew it. The women who sung the song knew it. The army knew it. David knew it. God knew it which is why He had chosen David to be the future king of Israel. He was with David, and “if God be for you, who can be against you?” When you are the person God has called you to be, you don’t have to prove your superiority. You just are, and the adversities of life fear such people. Be a person that smiles in the face of adversity because it is but an opportunity for victory in life.
- **GREAT LEADERS DO NOT RESPOND NEGATIVELY TO DEMOTION.** Saul demoted David. David had been on the fast track to military greatness, the man all knew would lead the army of Israel. But, to try to silence the inevitable, Saul chose to demote him to a “captain over a thousand.” What was David’s response? He led the thousand. The size of an army does not greatness make. It is the size of the heart. Nothing Saul could do could demote David’s heart. Demotion will come in one shape or another. It is not the determiner of your life. Your response to demotion will speak volumes about the character you possess. Respond well.
- **GREAT LEADERS DO NOT RESPOND IN PRIDE TO PROMOTION.** We would be remiss if we didn’t look at the other side of the same coin. One of the beauties in the life of David is humility. He was

only great in the eyes of others. In future studies we will see pride enter on a few occasions, but we also see how quick the LORD is to remove the pride from David's heart. At this stage of the journey, never do we see David tell anyone about the anointing of Samuel. We also never see David boasting himself about his military exploits. A great Scripture is "Promotion cometh not from the east or the west. Promotion cometh from the LORD.

- **GREAT LEADERS ARE RESILIENT IN THE MIDST OF ADVERSITY.** David is catapulted from sleeping in the palace of King Saul to living in caves as the sworn enemy of the king. He goes from being the darling of a nation to a man without a nation. He is removed from being the leader of God's army to leading the outcasts of society. He is forced to flee without provision or protection. But he was resilient. His zip code was not his determiner. His 401k was not what made him great. The skill and prowess of those who he led was not what made him a great leader. David played the hand he was dealt with skill and resolve. The LORD alone would determine his outcome.
- **GREAT LEADERS ADAPT – THEY DON'T COMPLAIN WHEN ADVERSITY ARRIVES.** Two important things to note in the story before us is that David made the most of his situation and you never see him complaining to people. When you read the Psalms, sometimes you hear him complaining to God, but it is in the privacy of his tent and heart. Even then, he adapts and overcomes. He never holds a pity party. He never uses his plight to bring others down. Complainers are not great leaders. People will listen, but they don't want to be around complaints. It is a downer and will bring all in its presence down.
- **GREAT LEADERS ARE MOTIVATORS, EVEN IN ADVERSITY.** When David was forced to flee to the hills, what was it that caused men to seek him out? Why did the destitute, discouraged, distraught, dismayed, depressed, and indebted of life choose him to be their leader? **HE MADE THEM BELIEVE.** I go back to the story of the Wizard of Oz. Watch Dorothy make people believe. She makes the munchkins believe. She makes the Scarecrow, Lion, and Tinman believe. She made the Wizard of Oz believe. She made the Wicked Witch believe. She made Glenda believe. But maybe the most notable accomplishment along the way was that she began to believe. One of my favorite people in Scripture is Barnabas. He's spoken of very little but he has a large impact on John Mark and Paul. His name means Encourager. Be an encourager.
- **GREAT LEADERS GO THE EXTRA MILE, ESPECIALLY IN ADVERSITY.** In adversity, it is easy to become disenchanted and discouraged. It is easy to only do what is necessary to survive the moment. It is easy to allow the circumstance into which you are forced to beat you up and beat you down. The old saying, **The cream rises to the top** is written about those who succeed in adversarial situations. When David was asked to kill 100 Philistines to appease his adversary, he killed 200 Philistines. Being great is a choice that one makes in their heart. The manifestation of the choice is what you see on the battlefields of life.
- **GREAT LEADERS ARE RESPECTED BY THEIR ADVERSARIES.** Their adversaries do not like them, but they respect them. Ephesians 6 tells us about spiritual adversity and tells us to equip ourselves for what will surely come. In the passage, God tells us to "put on the whole armor of God" so that we will be prepared when our adversary comes. The words of our armor are "truth, salvation, Word of God, gospel of peace, righteousness, and prayer." Interestingly, each of these words can be summed up in one person, Jesus Christ. Romans 15:13 tells us to "put you on the Lord Jesus Christ and be not entangled with the yoke of bondage." Satan fears Jesus. If you walk life in very close proximity to Jesus, Satan will steer clear and go after easier prey. His quest with you will be to get you away from Jesus, for it is there where he can have his greatest success in your life. Adversity is a weapon he uses in that quest because it is effective. Sadly, adversity should be what brings us closer to Jesus, but too often it causes us to run the opposite way.
- **GREAT LEADERS DO NOT BLAME GOD FOR ADVERSITY.** In the story of David, you never hear him blaming God. In Psalms he cries out to God in his distress, he questions God on why He doesn't seem to be present, and he repents of actions that cause disfavor from God, but never does he blame God. Blame is the first default of life. Personal responsibility and the realization that we live in a cursed

environment are resisted in our present reality. Great leaders are like good Marines – they adapt and overcome. The Scripture tells us “we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us.” You are loved by God, not hated. He is for you, not against you. He is your friend, not your enemy. Embrace Him in adversarial times. He is your greatest hope.

- **EVEN THE ENEMY WILL SEEK OUT THE AID OF GREAT LEADERS.** In I Peter 2:11-12 we read these words, ¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” David, interestingly enough, would become the champion of Philistia, the sworn enemy of Israel. His life was such a picture of righteousness, purity, victory, and Godliness that even the people who did not share his beliefs or vision were nevertheless moved by his conduct and lifestyle. Another great leader in life was Joseph, a man living in exile in Egypt who is exalted to the highest office known. Another such example is Daniel, a stranger and foreigner in Babylon and Medo-Persia who would ultimately be the most influential person in both kingdoms. If people are going to bring accusation against you, may it not be because of your conduct. You can win friends on the other side by looking like Jesus.
- **GREAT LEADERS LISTEN TO SOUND ADVICE WHEN THEY ARE THINKING STUPIDLY.** Nabal was a bad man. He was also a very rich man with a thousand sheep and many shepherds. Shepherds and sheep were open prey out in the valleys of the day. But not when David and his men showed up. They protected them and not a single sheep nor shepherd were harmed under their watch. Because of his aid to Nabal’s empire, David asked him for food to help his men. Nabal said no, but he did it in a very ugly way. This was very stupid. Everyone knew who David was and his capabilities, but somehow Nabal thought he was superior to David. He was about to find out differently until Abigail, Nabal’s wife, had the good sense to do what Nabal refused to do. She gathered food and provisions to deliver to David and his men. Through her actions and plea for Nabal’s life, David did not act in the rash manner he intended. God took care of Nabal’s demise. David married Abigail. Things worked out because David listened to sound advice when he wasn’t thinking clearly. “In the multitude of counselors there is wisdom.”
- **GREAT LEADERS KNOW THEIR TIME WILL COME AND THEY WITH PATIENCE WAIT FOR THAT TIME.** David had been anointed king. He knew his destiny. Everyone he encountered verified what Samuel had promised. Patience is a virtue, but maybe one of the hardest virtues of life. It is not easy to wait on what we know is ours. From the time of the anointing to be king until he was actually the full king of Israel was 13 years. That’s a long time to wait for someone who is superior in every respect to the person who holds his position. He never undermined Saul and sought to take the position by coup. He waited on the LORD. “Wait, I say, on the LORD.”

If you find yourself in adversity, be of good cheer, God has overcome the world. Face it. Use it as a catapult to greatness. Learn from it. Recognize it as an opportunity for victory. Do not let it win.

“It’s not the position that makes the leader. It’s the leader that makes the position.” Stanly Huffty