

## 2 Samuel 6:1-14

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One of my favorite quotes of all time was attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt and it is “Life is too short to learn everything you need to learn the hard way.”

I will confess, I have tried to confirm if she really said that and I have found no evidence she did, but the truth of the statement remains. We have so much to learn in life, more than we can learn on our own through hard knocks. We have to learn from other people, from their lives and from their words.

Who is someone who is a mentor to you – someone you know personally or books you have read or someone who you follow on social media – that is encouraging and teaching you?

I have several. I am learning from Paul, Bob, Amy, Lori. We all need to be learning from others. But not only that, Jon Acuff, an author I love, says everyone needs a mentor and an antimentor. Someone you want to be like and someone you don’t want to be like. And I imagine that as I say that someone came into your mind. You don’t want to end up like them.

One person like that for me was a woman in my church growing up, she was old and cynical, young people were bad and only Lutherans were going to heaven. And I have thought of her 100s of times throughout the years. I don’t want to get old and cynical. Well it turns out the old thing is going to happen, but the cynical part doesn’t have to. Thankfully I have met dozens of older followers of Jesus who are not only not cynical, they are growing in love in ways that I admire. I am encouraged that I can partner with God, deal with my anger and disappointments, I can pray for awe and wonder, and by grace I can grow more loving and you can too.

We’ve got so much to learn, we have mentors and antimentors, and for the last month or so in our study of 2 Samuel, David has been an antimentor for us.

He has been filled with lust, been adulterous, a deceiver who kills his friend and takes his friend’s wife to add to his collection. He has been largely clueless as a parent. He is a passive pawn in the evil schemes of his kids and avoids doing justice that would have healed his family. He is emotionally and physically absent from his children’s lives. In the stories recorded in 2 Samuel, it has been close to 20 years, from roughly the age 40 to age 60, since David has done anything worth emulating.

And now David has his worst day in a long time, maybe ever. David's heir, his son Absalom, whose name means father of peace, Abba shalom, stages a coup and David and the rest of his family and servants are forced to run for their lives, before they are killed.

As I was reading the passage, I fully expected David to continue being an antimentor. But instead after years of passivity, and on the worst day of his life, David is loving, wise, honest, and humble. It turns out that God had been at work in David behind the scenes over those 20 years. We are all on our journey of faith with God and David this morning is going to be a mentor, a teacher for us about what trusting God looks like in our worst moments, on our worst days.

If you have a bible or a bible app, will you open it up to 2 Samuel 15 starting with verse 13. There are a lot of strange names in this story and it will help if you have the text in front of you. I will be reading from the New International Version. If you don't have a bible, we will have some verses on the screen.

Our story starts this way: A messenger came and told David, "The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom."

With this one short statement David is told the people who God has given you and you have spent your entire adult life leading, want you out. You gave your life to them and now they want to take your life from you. And your son is leading the way. Pastor Paul said last week that he had never had a day as bad as this one is for David. I cannot imagine a day where my kids would raise a nation against me and try to kill me. It is impossible. Yet for David that is reality. And this is how David responds.

14 Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, "Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin on us and put the city to the sword."

For almost 2 decades, David has been passive and a pawn, but now he is wide awake to life and to God. He acts quickly and decisively and as we will see David trusts God on the worst day of his life. He is a man after God's own heart and we will see that in the 5 meetings he has on the way out of Jerusalem.

But first David gathers his household, he leaves a few of his concubines to take care of the palace, and all the rest of his household and soldiers loyal to him, he leads to the edge of the city. With him are soldiers called the Kerethites. Pelethites, and six hundred Gittites.

Now the Kerethites and Pelethites are likely hired mercenaries who are part of the King's personal guard. The Gittites were also like soldiers of fortune come over from the Philistines.

19 The king said to Ittai the Gittite, “Why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with King Absalom. You are a foreigner, an exile from your homeland. 20 You came only yesterday. And today shall I make you wander about with us, when I do not know where I am going? Go back, and take your people with you. May the Lord show you kindness and faithfulness.”

David says, y’all just got here. I don’t know how this going to end. You are here to make money and I am going on the run. Go back and stay with Absalom or go back home. And then this, “May the Lord show you kindness and faithfulness.”

This is so strange to me, because during the middle of a coup when you are running for your life is a strange time to send troops away. David should be freaking out right now. He should be begging, bribing, and manipulating as many people as possible to protect himself, but he doesn’t. He doesn’t manipulate, but manipulation is easy and super common. Donald Miller’s, in his book *Scary Close*, he says there are five categories of manipulation, 5 different ways David could have tried to control Ittai:

First is The scorekeeper – do you know about score keeping? This is my go to. Keep score of how many times I have done the dishes or changed a diaper or whatever. David could have done that. He could have said Ittai, “I gave you work when there wasn’t any, I have fed you, and you owe me.” But he doesn’t.

The second type of manipulation is the judge. This is the person who has never been wrong and everyone else is always wrong. David could have said, I have never done anything against Absalom. He has been trouble his whole life. Not only that, Ittai, God is on my side, you have to come with me.

Third is the false hero. This is when you say I can provide a better future for you than you can get on your own. This is the person you date who talks about marriage and kids well before they are sure you are the one they want to marry. They offer fake future security. David could have said, stay with me, I will protect you, I will make sure nothing bad happens to you. But he doesn’t. He doesn’t manipulate.

The fear monger is the fourth. This is “if you don’t submit to me, I am going to make your life a living hell”. David could have threatened Ittai.

Finally, The flopper or the victim. David could have said this is so unfair, I have never done anything wrong. Everyone is always against me. You aren’t going to leave me too, are you?

And just to be clear, you cannot manipulate people and love people at the same time. Manipulation and control are incompatible with love. Love requires the ability to choose. And David lets Ittai choose.

On David's worst day, he trusts God so he doesn't have to manipulate Ittai. David also doesn't try to manipulate God. In the next meeting on his way out of town, we see that Zadok and the priests have brought the ark of the covenant out and were offering sacrifices to God while David, his household, and his men left the city.

25 Then the king said to Zadok, "Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the Lord's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. 26 But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him."

David does not take the ark as a talisman into battle. Was he to take the priests and the ark with him into battle, wouldn't God have to go with him? After all the stories we have of the ark, who would want to fight against an army that is led by the ark? Nobody, though maybe for similar reasons David didn't want to the ark with him. But even more, David knows God and David is humble enough to acknowledge that he does not know or control God's plan. It may be God's plan for David to return, it may be God's plan for him to die. David knows that he will only return to the city if he has found favor in God's eyes. David has surrendered his life over to God. David trusts God.

But trusting God for the outcome does not mean he is passive. If you are familiar with the story of the bible, you will know that God's plan for humanity was always to be co-creators with him. God made us and gave us good work to do. We are his children who He has invited into the family business. David trusts God and acts. He appoints two of the priests' sons as spies in the city.

On David's worst day, he refuses to manipulate others or God, he is wise, and in v30 he weeps.

30 But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up.

He is not immune to the pain. He is not detached. He and those with him mourn on the Mount of Olives. When I read this, I couldn't help but think of Luke 19 and Jesus as he approached the city of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives and he too wept for the city as they did not recognize their true king.

Then David was told that "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." Ahithophel was wise and 2 Samuel 16:23 says that his counsel was like a word from God. So David in his distress prays simply and to the point, "Lord, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness." David prays plainly for what he wants.

On David's worst day, he weeps and he prays and God answers his prayer.

As David reaches the top of the Mount of Olives, David's friend Hushai meets him. And David sees that Hushai is the answer to his prayer. He asks his friend to go to Absalom and be a spy for him and help frustrate Ahithophel's advice. And Hushai does just that. God does not always answer our prayers in ways we can see, but we ought to pay attention, because sometimes he does. On our worst days, God help us not to miss you answering our prayers.

David trusts God. He doesn't manipulate, he loves. He weeps and prays and notices God at work. And then again God sends provision.

When David had gone a short distance beyond the summit, there was Ziba, the steward of Mephibosheth, waiting to meet him. He had a string of donkeys saddled and loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred cakes of raisins, a hundred cakes of figs and a skin of wine.

If you remember Mephibosheth was the crippled son of Jonathan who David has provided for 20 years. Now Ziba, the one responsible for Mephibosheth's land and wealth, brings provision just when David needs it. This is great. Except David is suspicious, he asks Ziba, "Why have you brought these?" "For you and your household." Then David asked, "Where is your master's grandson?"

Ziba said to him, "He is staying in Jerusalem, because he thinks, 'Today the Israelites will restore to me my grandfather's kingdom.'"

Imagine that with me. Who is the person you have been the kindest to in your life? The one you have spent the most time helping? A kid, a parent, a neighbor, coworker. Now imagine on your worst day, them celebrating your pain. It is not just David's own family that is looking to steal the kingdom from him. Saul's family is thinking it might be their lucky day. This is insult to injury. Which makes David's final meeting all the more impressive.

Finally, David and his men are approached by a well to do man named Shimei, also from Saul's family, who just starts cursing and throwing dirt and rocks at them.

7 As he cursed, Shimei said, "Get out, get out, you murderer, you scoundrel! 8 The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The Lord has given the kingdom into the hands of your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a murderer!"

Shimei blamed David for Jonathan and Saul's death and a few others, is cursing him as he flees for his life, pelting them with stones, and just being super annoying.

v.9 Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head.”

Understandable. Though is someone cursing you and hitting you with a rock worth the death penalty? No. But when you are having the kind of day they are having, anger is easy. Rage is at the ready.

10 But the king said, “What does this have to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord said to him, ‘Curse David,’ who can ask, ‘Why do you do this?’”

11 David then said to Abishai and all his officials, “My son, my own flesh and blood, is trying to kill me. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. 12 It may be that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today.”

David, on his worst day that kept getting worse, did not let himself be controlled by anger. I probably would have let my anger get the best of me. I need far less provocation to justify my anger.

David was humble and self-controlled, and then this phrase, “It may be that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore me.” In Hebrew, the phrase is something like, “It may be that God will look me into my eyes and see my misery.” David knows God intimately and knows God’s compassion.

Shimei kept cursing and throwing stones until they finally got to where they were staying for the night. To trust God and be self-controlled is exhausting work. But this is what David does. He trusts God, says no to manipulating people and God, he surrenders to God’s plan for his life, is actively wise, he mourns, prays, notices God at work and refuses to take his anger out on other people. Wow. God has been at work in David. David is a man after God’s own heart.

David is our mentor today. This is a glimpse of what life is like or could be like for those of us who trust Jesus and practice following Him over decades. And as we finish I just want to pause and ask you, “What of these things from David’s life stands out to you?” What would you like God’s help with?

Maybe you want to learn your go to manipulation style and begin to notice it and behave differently. Maybe you have been trying to manipulate God and you need to surrender to God’s plan, which is different from yours. Or maybe you need to mourn, to pour out your emotions to God and to friends. Maybe you need to pray simply for what you want. Maybe you need God’s help to see Him at work in your life. Maybe you need to ask for forgiveness for taking your anger out on someone.

Take a minute of quiet with God and if you are drawn to one of these, make a commitment in your mind to ask God to help you with these. Let's learn from David together and ask God to help us trust him in one of these ways. Let me pray.