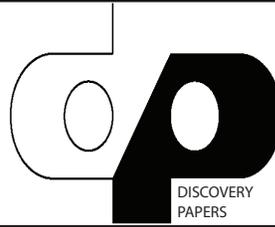


THE PURPOSE OF POSITION

SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:
THE STORY OF DAVID.



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Samuel 2:1-32
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2 Samuel 4:1-5:25

In the movie *Braveheart*, William Wallace, a commoner in Medieval Scotland, admonishes the nobles of the land, who are squabbling with each other instead of uniting against the English: “You think the people exist to provide you with position. I say your position exists to provide the people with freedom.”¹

We all, like the Scottish nobles, or William Wallace, for that matter, occupy a certain position. Who gets the credit for whatever position we occupy? And what is the purpose for our position? In 2 Samuel 4-5, how does David answer these questions?

At the beginning of the narrative, David is king over Judah, in the south, but the northern tribes still haven’t come under his rule.

Another rival eliminated

2 Samuel 4:1-12:

When Ish-bosheth, Saul’s son, heard that Abner had died at Hebron, his courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed. 2 Now Saul’s son had two men who were captains of raiding bands; the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, sons of Rimmon a man of Benjamin from Beeroth (for Beeroth also is counted part of Benjamin; 3 the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and have been sojourners there to this day).

4 Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.

5 Now the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, set out, and about the heat of the day they came to the house of Ish-

bosheth as he was taking his noonday rest. 6 And they came into the midst of the house as if to get wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped. 7 When they came into the house, as he lay on his bed in his bedroom, they struck him and put him to death and beheaded him. They took his head and went by the way of the Arabah all night, 8 and brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron. And they said to the king, “Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life. The Lord has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring.” 9 But David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, “As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity, 10 when one told me, ‘Behold, Saul is dead,’ and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him at Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news. 11 How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood at your hand and destroy you from the earth?” 12 And David commanded his young men, and they killed them and cut off their hands and feet and hanged them beside the pool at Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in the tomb of Abner at Hebron.

Abner, a general in the north, had been in the process of making a deal with David to make him king over all Israel. However, Joab, one of David’s generals, and Joab’s brother Abishai murdered Abner. Before going over to David, Abner had propped up Ish-bosheth, the faint-hearted son of Saul, as king of the northern tribes. With the death of Abner, Ish-bosheth is without his strongman—and what little courage he has fails. David’s hopes of uniting all Israel were threatened when Joab murdered Abner. However, David mourned the death of Abner, convincing the northern tribes that he did not will the death of their general. Nevertheless, the northern tribes, dismayed by Abner’s death and Ish-bosheth’s weakness, are not yet willing to come under David’s rule.

In 2 Samuel 3, David had to deal with two of his men, sons of Zeruiah, who thought they were doing him a favor by killing Abner, a strongman in the north. Now he has to deal with two men from the north, sons of Rimmon, who think they're doing him a favor by killing Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, king of the north. The sons of Zeruiah—Joab and Abishai—didn't trust Abner, so they removed him. The sons of Rimmon—Baanah and Rechab—figured that Ish-bosheth was standing in the way of David's hopes of ruling over all Israel, so they eliminated him. Of course, they only eliminated him because they were political opportunists and thought they could curry favor with David.

People keep misreading David because he doesn't fit the up-and-comer mold. When an Amalekite reported that he had killed a mortally wounded Saul, David's rival, he thought he was bringing David good news. In reality, the Amalekite didn't kill Saul; Saul killed himself. The Amalekite embellished the story to impress David, but David, who was loathe to put out his hand against Saul, the LORD's anointed, ordered the execution of the Amalekite. Likewise, the sons of Zeruiah may well have thought that David would be impressed that they eliminated Abner, but David called down a curse upon them.

Now the sons of Rimmon, claiming to be doing the LORD's work, expect to be rewarded for eliminating Ish-bosheth, a rival. David is intent on winning over the northern tribes instead of defeating them, and embracing the killers of the king of the north isn't going to serve his cause. Therefore, he rewards the sons of Rimmon, all right: he orders their execution and makes a public display of them so that there can be no mistaking his feelings in the matter.

Although David has been responsible for none of these deaths, and has on the contrary been troubled by the demise of Saul, Abner, and Ish-bosheth, his rivals have, in fact, been eliminated. Moreover, another potential rival, Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, is crippled and therefore poses little threat. But have David's lamentations and condemnations sufficiently convinced the northern tribes that they would be well served if they came under his rule?

Northern tribes anoint David

2 Samuel 5:1-5:

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh. 2 In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in

Israel. And the Lord said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.'" 3 So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel. 4 David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. 5 At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

Finally, the northern tribes submit to David's rule. The LORD had commanded the people not to choose a foreigner as their king (Deuteronomy 17:14-20), so they note that he is one of their countrymen, that "we are your bone and flesh". The people recognize that David, before Saul put him to flight, had led them into battle, as a king leads his people into battle. They also recognize that the LORD has chosen David to be a "shepherd" of Israel. When we first met David, he was a shepherd boy; now he's the shepherd king.

The people also recognize that the LORD has chosen David to be a "prince" over Israel. They refrain from calling him "king," a word they applied to Saul, perhaps because they don't yet completely trust David. In fact, the previous king proved untrustworthy. Also, if David is a prince over Israel, then the LORD is the king over Israel—and the king over the prince of Israel. In any event, the elders of the north anoint David as king.

For the third time, David is anointed as king. The first time, when he was just a shepherd boy, the prophet Samuel anointed him in the presence of his brothers (1 Samuel 16:12-13). The second time, the men of Judah anointed him as king of their tribe (2 Samuel 2:4). Now, the elders of the northern tribes anoint him as their king. David's long and arduous journey from shepherd boy in Israel to shepherd king over Israel is complete.

David attacks Jerusalem

2 Samuel 5:6-10:

And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, "You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off"—thinking, "David cannot come in here." 7 Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. 8 And David said on that day, "Whoever would strike the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to

attack ‘the lame and the blind,’ who are hated by David’s soul.” Therefore it is said, “The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.” 9 And David lived in the stronghold and called it the city of David. And David built the city all around from the Millo inward. 10 And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.

David has been ruling from Hebron in the south, but now that the north has also anointed him king, he needs to find a new center. Jerusalem, which straddles the north and south, fits the bill, but it is occupied by the Jebusites. The Jebusites taunt David, claiming that even their blind and lame are strong enough to defend the city against David. The Jebusites say, “David cannot come in here.” (The word translated “thinking” in verse 6 would be more literally translated “saying.” David hears what they say.)

David, in his wilderness years, lived on the run, hiding in caves, so he doesn’t take kindly to being told where he can and can’t go. David makes a statement by commanding an attack against the Jebusites’ lame and blind—understandable, perhaps, in light of the Jebusites’ taunt. But what are we to make of David’s hatred of the lame and the blind? One line of interpretation has it that the blind and the lame refer to two idols of the Jebusites. In any event, David’s supposed hatred will not apply to the lame Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son, who would be an object of David’s kindness (2 Samuel 9). If David in actuality hates the lame and the blind, his hatred is temporary, and is limited to the Jebusites, who provoked his hatred.

What, then, of the saying, “The blind and the lame shall not come into the house”? Which house? David’s house or the house of the LORD? Mephibosheth would enter David’s house. In fact, David would invite him to dine at the king’s table. The meaning of the saying is opaque. We don’t know whether it was a good saying or a bad saying. But we do know this: When Jesus came to Jerusalem, he came not as a conqueror and not with an army. Instead, he came in humility, mounted on a donkey. When he entered the house, the temple of the LORD, the blind and the lame came to him, and he healed them (Matthew 21:14). If any doubt lingers about the LORD’s feelings for the blind and the lame, Jesus clears it up.

In any event, David conquers Jerusalem, which is also called both Zion and the city of David. In 2 Samuel 3:1, the narrator noted that David was growing stronger and stronger. Now he notes that David is becoming greater and greater. Lest there be any doubt about the reason for David’s success, the narrator observes that “the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.” Hosts are angels, especially called such when they fight the LORD’s battles.

The LORD establishes David

2 Samuel 5:11-16:

And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, also carpenters and masons who built David a house. 12 And David knew that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.

13 And David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, after he came from Hebron, and more sons and daughters were born to David. 14 And these are the names of those who were born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shob ab, Nathan, Solomon, 15 Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, 16 Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

On the one hand, David’s increasing greatness is evidenced by the response of a nearby king, Hiram of Tyre, who helps to build David’s house. On the other hand, David is placing himself at risk with a foreign alliance (Isaiah 2:6-8).

The people had recognized David as king. Now David, as king, recognizes the LORD. David credits the LORD for exalting him as king over all Israel. David also understands the LORD’s purpose for exalting him: the LORD has raised him up not for his own sake but for the sake of God’s people.

When the narrator noted David’s growing strength in 2 Samuel 3, he noted, as evidence, David’s growing number of wives and sons. In 2 Samuel 5, David’s increased greatness is evident in his growing number of wives, children, and concubines. For the first time, David is noted as having concubines. What kind of greatness is this? On the one hand, David’s harem signifies his growing power, but on the other hand, resorting to sexual politics makes him ill-prepared for the day of temptation, when he will succumb and grow weaker and weaker.

David defeats the Philistines

2 Samuel 5:17-25:

When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to search for David. But David heard of it and went down to the stronghold. 18 Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim. 19 And David inquired of the Lord, “Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hand?” And the Lord said to David, “Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand.” 20 And David came to Baal-perazim, and David defeated them there. And he said, “The Lord has broken through my enemies before me like a breaking flood.” Therefore the name of that place is called Baal-perazim.[a] 21 And the Philistines left their idols there, and David and his men carried them away.

22 And the Philistines came up yet again and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim. 23 And when David inquired of the Lord, he said, “You shall not go up; go around to their rear, and come against them opposite the balsam trees. 24 And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then rouse yourself, for then the Lord has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines.” 25 And David did as the Lord commanded him, and struck down the Philistines from Geba to Gezer.

David, having survived internal threats to his reign in verses 1-12, now faces an external threat in verses 17-25. The Philistines, feeling threatened by a united Israel under David, mobilize for war. Previously, when David led the Israelites into battle against the Philistines, he was victorious. But the Philistines wouldn't go away. After Saul put David to flight, Saul tried his hand against the Philistines and failed, finally dying in battle. Some enemies are persistent. Now it's David's turn again.

David, inquiring of the LORD and being assured by the LORD, defeats the Philistines. Or, it should be said, the LORD defeats the Philistines, for David observes, “The LORD has broken through my enemies before me like a breaking flood.” Earlier, when the Philistines defeated Israel, they carried off the ark of the covenant, which represented the throne of the LORD (1 Samuel 4:1-11). Now the Israelites turn the tables on the Philistines, carrying off their idols.

The Philistines are nothing if not resilient. They mobilize once again, so David inquires of the LORD once again. Even though the Philistines mobilize in exactly the same way, spreading out in the Valley of Rephaim, the LORD commands David to employ a different strategy: an attack from the rear. Again, David, with the help of the LORD, defeats the Philistines.

In the first battle, David invoked the imagery of a flood in describing LORD's victory. In the second battle, the “sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees” signals the LORD's victory. He is Lord of heaven and earth, of sea and land.

Finally, the Philistines are vanquished: they will not be heard from again in David's reign.

Credit the LORD

The LORD has raised David up, and David knows it: “And David knew that the LORD had established him king over Israel . . .” (2 Samuel 5:12). He credits the LORD. Whoever you are and whatever your position, credit the LORD. Still, there is something within us that wants to take the credit, isn't there? How do we fight that tendency and credit the LORD not simply with our lips but also with our hearts?

David is able to credit the LORD at least in part because he knows his story.

How does a shepherd boy, the eighth and most insignificant son in an insignificant family, come to the court, elude the maniacal pursuit of the king, and watch all rivals get killed off—against his will, by the way—to become king of the land? The LORD did not decree the death of Ish-bosheth, but the death of David's last potential rival removed the last obstacle to his enthronement over all Israel (2 Samuel 4:1-12). David was successful because the LORD was with him (2 Samuel 5:10). David will later pray, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?” (2 Samuel 7:18)

What's your story?

Where would we be without the LORD? We wouldn't be alive, and we wouldn't be alive in Christ. Moreover, the LORD has raised us up, as he raised David up, so that we occupy a certain position in a family, in a community, in the marketplace, in a church. We did not raise ourselves up, nor did we create the position we occupy. There is no such thing as the self-made man or woman. No one is the master of her fate. No one is the captain of his

soul. By the grace of God, we are who we are, and we are where we are. We owe it all to him. Moreover, whatever our position may be, we will lose it some day, for at the very least we can't keep ourselves from dying. We are creatures, not the creator.

Know your story

Somehow, I ended up being a pastor at Peninsula Bible Church. I'm not simply a pastor, I'm a pastor at a particular church, and it is lost on me that this church, and not another church, is right for me. Given my gifts and passions, I don't think I would do well at many churches, but I think I do well here.

Did I know that when I came here? No. I just followed the Lord here. Having followed the Lord here, now I can see something of his artistry. Here's part of it—only a small part, by the way. Space doesn't allow even for the part that I know, and who knows how much space would be required for the parts that I don't know?

I came to Christ as a teenager in the high school youth group at the Union Presbyterian Church of Los Altos. The youth pastor then, Conrad Hopkins, had grown up at PBC and was trained here. He taught us the Scriptures and disciplined us. Later, Conrad went to seminary, and then served as a pastor at two other churches. The second of those churches was Valley Community Church in Pleasanton, in the East Bay. It turned out that he moved to Pleasanton for his new job at the same time that I moved to Pleasanton for my new job, as an editor for the *Contra Costa Times*. Also at that time, I found in myself a burning desire to serve in some capacity—what capacity, I did not know. I approached Conrad, and he invited me to serve in the high school youth group. I began studying and teaching the Scriptures and discipling kids, and I loved it—so much so, that I was hungry to be trained.

I approached Mark Mitchell, who was a pastor at Central Peninsula Church in Foster City (and is still), an acquaintance of mine. (My connection to Mark is quite a story in itself, with links to both PBC and Valley Community Church.) He told me to consider getting trained at Cole Community Church in Boise, Idaho, which had a program to train men and women for ministry. Once in my life, I had considered moving to Boise to work for the newspaper there. Also, I had always had a thing for Idaho, so it made a lot of sense. (My connection to Idaho is quite a story in itself.) The senior pastor of the church was David Roper, who earlier had served as a pastor at PBC. I spent three years in

Idaho, and when it came time to figure out what was next, I found out that PBC was looking for a pastor. (My return to California, and to the Silicon Valley, before I even became aware of the possibilities at PBC, is quite a story in itself.) The elders offered me a position largely based on David's recommendation.

What of Conrad? Not long after starting at the church in Pleasanton, he moved on from pastoral ministry, and he worked in industry up until his retirement two years ago. But he stayed in pastoral ministry just long enough to reconnect with me and launch me in pastoral ministry. He finished, and I began—and I stayed. Where did I stay? Where Conrad started: Peninsula Bible Church. And what am I doing at PBC? The same thing Conrad was doing, as far back as when I was sixteen years old: teaching the Scriptures and discipling people.

That's my story. On second thought, it's not my story; it's God's story. I didn't write it. I couldn't have written it. I just found myself in it, carried along, caught up in the artistry of God. How can I take credit for who I am or for where I am?

Know your story. If you know your story, can you see chapters that you didn't plan, connections you couldn't have made, passions you couldn't have imagined? Can you see that your story is God's story? Credit the LORD.

The LORD raises us up, yes, but for what purpose?

Ask the LORD

The Lord raised David up not for David's own sake but for the sake of the people of Israel: "And David knew that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel" (2 Samuel 5:12). Likewise, the LORD raises us up for the sake of others. He has predestined us to be "conformed to the image of his Son," and his Son, of course, laid down his life for the sake of others—for our sakes (Romans 8:29).

The Lord raises us up for the sake of others, yes, but what are we supposed to do? Notice that David, after the LORD had established him as king over Israel, twice inquired of the LORD. Notice also that though the two situations were seemingly identical (same enemies spreading out in the same place), the LORD answered David differently each time. If the LORD gave us a foolproof formula that worked every time, we'd depend on the formula and not on him, our inquiries would become cursory, and our relationship with him would

molder. Might we even take credit for figuring out the formula? Thank God that in many cases we don't know what to do! For if we did, we wouldn't turn to him.

Embracing unpredictability makes for an exciting way of life, if you believe that a sovereign artist is at work. Who knows what he's going to show you next? Who knows whom he's going to place in your path? Who knows what's going to take your breath away? But you have to watch, don't you? Or you have to listen, as David did for "the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees." Ask and watch—and "wait for the wonder" .

The LORD raises us up for the sake of others

How did Christ Jesus regard his position as God? He did not regard it as something to be grasped—something to be exploited—but emptied himself and became obedient to the Father for our sakes (Philippians 2:5-11). The nobles in *Braveheart* exploited their position for their own sakes. Let it not be said of us. "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). The LORD raises us up for the sake of others. Therefore, credit the LORD and ask the LORD.

Endnotes

¹ *Braveheart* (Paramount Pictures, 1995).

² Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (Colorado Springs, CO, 2009), 209.