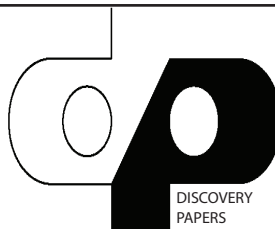


# WARNING SIGNS

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



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## *2 Samuel 8:1-29*

As I was preparing for today's study in the life of David—a study in 2 Samuel 8—I read a sermon by former PBC pastor Bob Roe—a sermon that I highly recommend. For reasons I hope will become clear, when I was reading Bob's sermon, I started thinking about the subject of warning signs—about signs along the road of life that are intended to alert us to the possibility of danger ahead.

Some warning signs can of course be more confusing than others. For example, as I was driving recently near Moffett Field, I saw a warning sign that said, "Speed Limit 35. Watch Out For Low Flying Birds." The problem was, I wasn't sure if the birds in question were seagulls, or, since the sign was near the military runway, if the birds were referring to F-16's coming in for a landing. In either case, I wasn't sure what action, if any, I was being encouraged to take.

To further complicate matters, when I saw the sign, I was reminded of an incident involving our daughter Jessica, when she was driving her truck and encountered a flock of seagulls on the road. As she approached, the birds began to scatter, but the last and slowest seagull took off too late, flew into the side of a car slightly ahead of Jessica and to her left, ricocheted off the car's passenger side, and flew through Jessica's open driver's side window, entering the cab of her truck. Which is to say... Jessica suddenly had a very large and very unhappy seagull flapping its wings in her face.

Thankfully, Jessica didn't crash. Thankfully, too, she managed to shove the seagull back out through the open window, and both she and the bird lived to tell the story. However, when I saw the 'Watch Out For Low Flying Birds' sign near Moffett Field, the incident came to mind, and, bottom line, the only action I could think of taking was to make sure my driver's side window was rolled up. Had the sign been referring to F-16's, well, I suppose a closed window wouldn't have been much help.

Anyway, some of the warning signs along the road can be confusing, some can be missed entirely, and some can be understood but ignored. This is true

not only while we're driving our cars but true for our overall lives as individuals, for our collective life as a congregation, and for our national life as a country. Lives, congregations, and countries can find themselves on challenging roads—roads where we need to remain alert for warning signs so that we don't look back later and wish we'd been paying more attention.

With that in mind, let's transition into today's study of 2 Samuel 8.

As you'll recall, the last two weeks have been primarily mountaintop experiences for David. Two weeks ago, in chapter 6, Paul Taylor taught us about David dancing before the Lord as the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem. Last week, in chapter 7, Scott Grant taught us about David worshipping the Lord—or perhaps even bursting forth in a song of praise—after learning that one of his children would succeed him as Israel's king and that one of his distant descendants would be the messiah. Dancing before the Lord and singing before the Lord are both incredible mountaintop experiences. And yet, as someone observed, be careful when you have a mountaintop experience because all sides are down from there.

In fact, a few chapters from now, in chapter 11, David will reach arguably the lowest point in his life. He'll go from dancing and singing before the Lord to committing adultery with Bathsheba and ordering the murder of her husband Uriah. He'll go from the heights to the depths. The question is, how does he get from here to there? How does he get from dancing and singing to adultery and murder? Indeed, how does moral failure occur in any of our lives, especially if we've had a profound encounter with the Lord?

I believe 2 Samuel 8, 9, and 10 provide some of the answers. They show us some of the warning signs along the way—some of the warning signs that David apparently missed, misread, misunderstood, or simply chose to ignore. Unlike the incident with Jessica and the seagull, moral failures generally don't happen without warning. They don't happen out of the blue. Rather, to switch images slightly, as another former PBC pastor Dave Roper said, "Moral failure is never a blow-out; it's

always a slow leak.” The air can go slowly and almost imperceptibly out of the tire and if we don’t patch the slow leaks—if we don’t heed the warning signs—we’ll find ourselves looking back later and wondering how we could have been so foolish.

As for the warning signs and slow leaks in 2 Samuel 8, on the surface, the chapter mainly contains two lists—a list of battles David fought and a list of political appointments he made. The first, the list of battles, has to do with matters of national security. It has to do with David’s efforts to provide the nation with safety from its external enemies, which is clearly a legitimate function of a leader. The second, the list of political appointments, has to do with ruling the nation. It has to do with setting up a government that will provide the nation with justice and equity, which is also clearly a legitimate function of a leader.

And yet, in the midst of the battles and the political appointments—in the midst of the fighting and the ruling—problems begin to develop. Warning signs and slow leaks begin to appear. This of course can happen to us as well. When we come down from the mountaintop and enter into life’s battles and responsibilities, that’s when most of us tend to get off track. We’re fine while we’re praising God in church on Sunday morning, but Monday morning is another story.

## **Hardness of Heart and Abuse of Power**

As we move into the text and as David enters into the battles of life, I want us to be alert for two warning signs—two warning signs that show up in David’s life and that can also show up in our own. The first warning sign is “Watch Out For Hardness of Heart”. The second, which often follows soon after the first, is “Watch Out for Abuse of Power.”

### **2 Samuel 8:1-6:**

**After this David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and David took Gath out of the hand of the Philistines.**

**2 And he defeated Moab and he measured them with a line, making them lie down on the ground. Two lines he measured to be put to death, and one full line to be spared. And the Moabites became servants to David and brought tribute.**

**3 David also defeated Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to restore his power at the river Euphrates. 4 And David**

**took from him 1,700 horsemen, and 20,000 foot soldiers. And David hamstringed all the chariot horses but left enough for 100 chariots. 5 And when the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David struck down 22,000 men of the Syrians. 6 Then David put garrisons in Aram of Damascus, and the Syrians became servants to David and brought tribute. And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went.**

Before we examine the two warning signs in this passage—the two slow leaks in David’s life—let me first mention a few things about the actual history. To begin with, as I said, David is dealing with matters of national security. He is seeking to make the nation safe from its external enemies. In order to do this, he launches a series of military campaigns. In the first campaign, he attacks the Philistines to Israel’s west. In the second, he attacks the Moabites to Israel’s southeast, and in the third he attacks Hadadezer and the Syrians to Israel’s north. In later verses, we’ll see two further campaigns, one against the Edomites in the south and another against the Ammonites in the east. Bottom line: David eventually defeated Israel’s enemies on all sides. As it says in verse 6, “The Lord gave victory to David wherever he went.”—a phrase that is repeated later in verse 14.

What is implied in these verses, although not specifically stated, is that the Lord used David to transform Israel from a struggling nation into a regional superpower. Under David’s leadership, Israel went from being a weak and beleaguered people, constantly subject to attack, and became a dominant military and political force whose armies were effectively invincible and whose power nearly absolute. With an increase in Israel’s power and influence, came an accompanying increase in David’s own personal power and influence.

These things—power and influence—can of course have their advantages, and in varying degrees, God gives them to each of us. However, as we enter the battles of life, two warning signs—‘Watch Out for Hardness of Heart’ and ‘Watch Out for Abuse of Power’—can begin to appear. As we fight life’s battles with their pain, confusion, and frustration, we will inevitably face the danger that our hearts will become hardened and that we will begin to abuse our God-given powers. Indeed, the one really emerges out of the other—abuse of power emerges out of hardness of heart—and each of us needs to remain alert for any warning signs that this may be occurring.

Specifically, in David's case, I believe hardness of heart and abuse of power can be observed in his particularly harsh treatment of the Moabites. The text tells us that David commanded the defeated Moabite soldiers to lie down on the ground and then, using a measuring line, he commanded two-thirds of the soldiers to die and one-third to live. David did not do this to any of the other armies he defeated, and there is no evidence that God commanded David to do so with the Moabites, even though 250 years later Isaiah will utter a prophecy against Moab (Isaiah 15).

Moreover, David himself was part Moabite, related through his great-grandmother Ruth, so he should have felt a special family connection. Also, there was a larger family connection since the Moabites were descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot. In fact, this larger family connection was this reason God had earlier commanded Moses not to fight the Moabites or take their land as a possession (Deuteronomy 2:9). In addition, as you'll recall, when David was being pursued by Saul, he sent his parents to the Moabites for safety (1 Samuel 22:3-4), so, at least at that point, he was clearly on good terms with them. All of which should lead us to ask, why did David slaughter the Moabite army? Why did he treat the Moabites in such a particularly harsh way?

Unfortunately, when it comes to unraveling the mystery, Scripture is silent. However, the ancient Jewish document the Midrash is not. In the Midrash, we are told that the Moabites, for unknown reasons, eventually murdered David's parents. The Moabites were supposed to have protected David's parents, but they killed them instead. As a result, it appears that David became hardened against them, perhaps understandably so, and then used the Israelite army to settle a personal score—to carry out a personal vendetta.

Admittedly, this is speculative, since the Midrash is not Scripture. However, in a few weeks when we get to 2 Samuel 11, we'll find David using the military to further his own purposes. We'll find him telling Joab to intentionally place Uriah in harm's way on the battlefield so that he will be killed. Moreover, we'll see the hardness in David's heart when he responds to Uriah's death by sending a message to Joab saying, "Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another." (2 Samuel 11:25). "Don't let this bother you. People die in war, that's just the way it is." The warning signs of this hardness of heart and abuse of power may well be appearing in today's passage—in 2 Samuel 8.

In terms of application, the question for us is: have the battles of life begun to harden us as well? Have we, after many campaigns of one kind or another, become increasingly insensitive and harsh, especially toward those whom we believe have wronged us? If so, have we perhaps also started abusing the power God has given us—our power as husbands, wives, parents, children, teachers, students, employers, and employees? I frequently see examples of hardness of heart and abuse of power when I'm counseling people—people who have become hardened toward one another and who have then become abusive, using such things as anger, sarcasm, belittling, character assassination, and worse. Sadly, the effects of such abuse can last a lifetime.

## Pride

Moving forward with this morning's study, in the following verses—verses 7-14—more details are provided about David's military campaigns. However, in these verses, another warning sign begins to appear—a warning sign that says, "Watch Out for Pride".

### 2 Samuel 8:7-14:

**And David took the shields of gold that were carried by the servants of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem. 8 And from Bethah and from Berothai, cities of Hadadezer, King David took very much bronze.**

**9 When Toi king of Hamath heard that David had defeated the whole army of Hadadezer, 10 Toi sent his son Joram to King David, to ask about his health and to bless him because he had fought against Hadadezer and defeated him, for Hadadezer had often been at war with Toi. And Joram brought with him articles of silver, of gold, and of bronze. 11 These also King David dedicated to the Lord, together with the silver and gold that he dedicated from all the nations he subdued, 12 from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek, and from the spoil of Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah.**

**13 And David made a name for himself when he returned from striking down 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. 14 Then he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David's servants. And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went.**

After defeating Israel's northern enemies, Hadadezar and the Syrians, David began receiving international praise and recognition. Toi, who had also been fighting against Hadadezar, was delighted with David's victory and sent his son Joram to bless him and bring gifts of silver, gold, and bronze. To David's credit, the gifts, along with the other spoils of war, were dedicated to the Lord. And yet, as with power, fame also has its warning signs. As another former PBC pastor Ray Stedman once said, "Human beings are the only ones whose heads swell when you pat them on the back." Being lifted up in the eyes of others can have its dangers since it appeals strongly to our pride.

In addition to receiving international recognition from Toi and his son, the text says that David made a name for himself—became famous—when he returned from striking down 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. Interestingly, in the account of this same battle in 1 Chronicles 18:12, it says that Abishai was the actual battlefield general. Which is to say, although David may have been the one overseeing military operations, Abishai was the one doing the actual fighting. Abishai was the one on the battlefield, the one in harms way. In short: without taking any personal risks, David ended up receiving the fame. David ended up receiving the credit.

Again, I may be reading something into these verses that isn't really here—seeing a warning sign or a slow leak where one doesn't exist. However, at the beginning of 2 Samuel 11—the chapter about David and Bathsheba—it says, "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. . . . But David remained at Jerusalem." David sent another general to lead the army and fight the battle while he himself stayed at a safe distance. Perhaps the seeds of this tendency—the tendency to stay away from the battle while still hoping to receive the credit—are already beginning to appear here in Chapter 8.

No doubt, for most of us, international fame is unlikely. In fact, for most people, compliments and appreciation of any kind come infrequently, if at all. As someone said, "Compliments are like diamonds, they owe their value primarily to their scarcity." And yet, temptations to pride come in many forms—temptations to be lifted up in our own eyes—and these temptations increase with fame. In fact, Ray Stedman, who was undoubtedly the most famous of PBC's pastors, would never stand at the back of the auditorium after giving a sermon, recognizing this tendency in himself. When people would tell him how wonderful his sermon was, he found himself thinking, "At last, someone finally noticed!"

As a bit of a side note, when we receive compliments, praise, or perhaps even fame, as David did, how should we respond? What should we do when people pat us on the back so that our heads don't swell? The short answer of course is humility—being humbly thankful that God has used us to bless someone. As John Wesley put it in words that are recorded on a monument in his memory, "Reader, if thou art constrained to bless the instrument, Give God the Glory."<sup>1</sup> We are God's instruments, and we should be deeply thankful for that, but the ultimate glory goes to the One who is working both in and through us, accomplishing His purposes.

## Unwise Compromises

Again, moving forward with our study. With Israel's borders secure—with national security at least temporarily under control—David now assumes the responsibilities of ruling a nation, including the responsibility of forming a government. This includes the important task of making political appointments.

In terms of warning signs, the warning sign associated with these final verses in 2 Samuel 8 might read: "Watch Out For Unwise Compromises".

### 2 Samuel 8:15-18:

**So David reigned over all Israel. And David administered justice and equity to all his people. 16 Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the army, and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder, 17 and Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar were priests, and Seraiah was secretary, 18 and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over[a] the Cherethites and the Pelethites, and David's sons were priests.**

It's wonderful to have a leader who is committed to administering justice and equity for all his people. No doubt, this is what all of us hope for—a leader who can provide national security and administer justice and equity for each and every citizen. Indeed, in the New Testament, this is exactly what we are told to pray for. As Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 2:2, we are to pray for "for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." No doubt this would include the presence of justice and equity.

David's goal is the right goal. He has the right end in mind, the right objective. However, as the old saying goes, "The ends don't justify the means." Simply having the right end in mind doesn't justify using any

means to achieve it. In David's case, it appears that he attempted to achieve justice and equity by including people in his government who themselves were unjust and inequitable. He chose the wrong people to do the right job. Ultimately, this represents an unwise compromise—a compromise in principles, integrity, and godliness—which in effect undermines his overall effort. As Ayn Rand said, "In any compromise between good and evil, it is only evil that can profit."<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, because the names of David's political appointments may be obscure to many people, the tendency can be to merely skim over them and move quickly to the next section. It's the same approach people often use with the Bible's genealogies. When names are unknown or difficult to pronounce, extracting useful information can seem impossible. As a result, the tendency can be to gloss over or even skip such passages and 'get back to the story'—get back to something more understandable.

However, as another old saying goes, "The devil is in the details." The devil is often in the fine print that we might be inclined to gloss over or skip. This may well be the case with the list of names at the end of 2 Samuel 8. Yes, some of the people are unknown, even to scholars, but some of the people are known and of those some are troubling.

First and foremost there is Joab, whom David appointed as chief-of-staff over the military. Joab was a murderer who disobeyed David's orders whenever it suited him. As you'll recall from 2 Samuel 3, Joab disobeyed David's orders and murdered Abner, who had been one of Saul's generals. In 2 Samuel 11, he will obey David's orders and devise a plan to murder Uriah. In 2 Samuel 18, he will again disobey David's orders and murder David's son Absalom. And in 2 Samuel 19, he will murder David's nephew Amasa, whom David had appointed to replace Joab as chief-of-staff. All in all, Joab was not the kind of person who belonged in a government dedicated to justice and equity. His appointment appears to represent a serious compromise—a compromise that was at odds with what David was hoping to accomplish.

Similarly, David's appointment of his own sons as priests (or, as many translations read, advisors) was unwise. Yes, Solomon was a wise choice, but David's son Ammon raped his half-sister Tamar. Tamar's brother Absalom then murdered Ammon and eventually led a rebellion against David. David's oldest son, Adonijah, was upset when David named Solomon as Israel's next king

rather than him, so he attempted to usurp the throne. Which is to say, a number of David's sons were not men whose characters reflected justice and equity, and their positions within his government were very questionable.

Also, the presence of two priests—Zadok and Ahimelech—may (according to Bob Roe) represent another unwise compromise—the inclusion of two competing priestly lines within the same government. Eventually, Zadok anointed Solomon as king, but the priestly line associated with Ahimelech sided with Adonijah in his attempt to usurp the throne. So, whatever compromise David may have been attempting, it appears only to have brought tension into his government and finally failed.

The question of course is: why did David make unwise compromises—compromises in principles, integrity, and godliness? Furthermore, in terms of application, why do we ourselves sometimes make those same mistakes? I suspect that unwise compromises, both in David's case and our own, typically arise from three underlying factors: expediency, fear, or simply wishful thinking. When we act out of expediency, we are seeking to find a shortcut—seeking to find a quicker way of achieving our objective. When we act out of fear, we are seeking to avoid possible pain. And when we act out of wishful thinking, we are seeking to deny reality—seeking to deny the way things really are in favor of the way we wish they were.

In David's case, it's unclear which of these factors led him to compromise—expediency, fear, or wishful thinking. Perhaps it was some combination of all three. And yet, for David, as well as for us, whenever we enter into the responsibilities of life, we need to remain alert for the warning sign 'Watch Out For Unwise Compromises'. We need to remain alert for the temptation to compromise our fundamental principles and integrity—to compromise godliness—which is a temptation often driven by the desire to find a shortcut, avoid pain, or deny reality. Those temptations are warning signs that trouble may lie ahead. They are indications that slow leaks may be developing.

Eventually of course David became willing to compromise everything—his principles, his integrity, and his godliness—in order to satisfy his desire for Bathsheba. He became willing to compromise his relationship with God in favor of an adulterous relationship with his friend's wife. As I said at the beginning, David didn't get there all at once. He didn't

go from the mountaintop to the depths in a single day. His downward journey occurred gradually over time. Warning signs were missed, misread, or ignored. Slow leaks were left unpatched.

The same of course can happen in our own lives, and we're naïve and foolish if we imagine otherwise. It can happen in our lives as individuals, in our life as a congregation, and in our life as a nation. We can end up experiencing disasters—especially moral disasters—that we never thought possible. Yes, that's a serious and sobering message. It's also a message that each of us at times needs to hear. Moreover, it's a message we need to heed, especially as we enter into the battles and the responsibilities of life.

May God help each one of us to remain alert for the warning signs of hardness of heart, abuse of power, pride, and unwise compromises, and may he help us to respond to those warning signs as He would have us to respond. May he also encourage us on the often difficult road of life, and may we take hope in the beautiful words at the end of the letter of Jude (Jude 24-25):

**Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Telford, John. *The Life of John Wesley*. Wesley Center Online. Web. 11 Feb 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Rand, Ayn. *Atlas Shrugged*. New York: Random House, 1992. Print.